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**The Making of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's  
"World Theology"**

**Roberta Llewellyn Cameron**

**A Thesis  
in  
The Department  
of  
Religion**

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy at  
Concordia University  
Montréal, Québec, Canada**

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## ABSTRACT

### The Making of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's "World Theology"

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Concordia University, 1997

This study is an exploration of the manner in which religion historian, W. C. Smith, has attempted to harmonize intellectual discourse with religious discourse. Using his writings, which span a period of fifty years, the evolution of his analysis of the tension between history and religion is traced, along with his new conceptualizations and symbolizations of resolution. At issue is the role of the study of comparative religion seen to be basic. The ramifications of the problem of the polarity between the absolute and the relative, between the One and the Many, are addressed throughout, especially with regard to history seen as process and religions in process of change. The resolution consists in a movement towards a theology in global perspective, diverse yet coherent, encompassing all humanity.

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the writings of Wilfred Cantwell Smith (b. 1916). Smith was educated in Canada, studied in England and the United States, taught in India and came back to teach and to hold administrative posts at McGill and Harvard. His career has been marked by the production of many scholarly publications. Smith is one of the creators of the discipline of comparative religion although his own approach is distinctive.

As a study in the history of ideas, my method will be to look at his work chronologically in order to see the relationship between his thought and the field of comparative religion. This involves identifying his new categories, reconceptualizations and frameworks in their dynamic interconnectedness. Integral to this is a consideration of the progressively changing interrelations between traditional "religious" ideas and those ideas or ideals espoused by whatever group of contemporary humanity and how all these, in turn, relate to the ideal Absolute. The study examines Smith's project to facilitate global human discourse in its religious dimension along with the role of the study of comparative religion in this enterprise.

I first became acquainted with Smith's work through *The Faith of Other Men*, a series of radio broadcasts that presented a challenging interpretation of the religions of the world. This was followed by his book *The Meaning and End of Religion*, a systematized "intellectual history" of the ideas presented in the radio talks. Together they profoundly influenced my thought and my teaching. Smith's

involvement while at university in the Student Christian Movement and the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order, intellectual wings of the social gospel movement in Canada, provided another link of interest and sympathy.

### Literature

Literature devoted to the study and analysis of Smith's corpus grows apace; it includes several Festschriften, essays and many dissertations. Scholars from varied realms of religious discourse, as well as related areas of intellectual endeavour, have made important and valuable contributions to an explanation and understanding of his theories and hypotheses. One of the first critical works to appear was in connection with the printing of a collection of Smith's essays, a work that provides a useful introduction to his thought.

In 1976, Willard G. Oxtoby edited a selection of nine of Smith's pieces under the title *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith*<sup>1</sup> The essays were arranged under the headings: Truth, Modernity and Mutual Understanding, including, under the last rubric, the seminal work entitled "Comparative Religion: Whither--and Why?" which had originally appeared in Eliade and Kitagawa's important volume on the history of religions.<sup>2</sup> Each essay is prefaced by explanatory notes that include references to the particular ambience in which Smith spoke or wrote; the intellectual and religious issues that were being addressed; a history and

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<sup>1</sup>Willard G. Oxtoby, ed., *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976)

<sup>2</sup>Mircea Eliade and Joseph M. Kitagawa, ed., *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1959).

explanation of terminology being used; the political and social context of many of the pieces. The essays are thematically linked where appropriate. In addition, Oxtoby provides a biographical sketch of W. C. Smith and his family as well as "a reader's guide" to the Smith corpus and a bibliography through to 1975.

This is a valuable piece of work for the general public as well as the student because Oxtoby provides many guideposts along the way. He brings together in one collection disparate pieces that are important in their own right and provides comparative critical comment. (This was in 1976). This work has proved a useful model for me in attempting to deal with a fifty-year span of written and spoken material.

The dynamics of Smith's formulations engage Frank Whaling, the editor of a Festschrift volume in honour of Smith.<sup>3</sup> Unlike Oxtoby, who interpreted Smith's vision of religion to be an 'outlook on the world,' Whaling, in the Preface, speaks of the urgency of "harnessing" the *Kairos* that is Religious Studies. The book brings together leading scholars in the field of the study of religion, two of whom deal specifically with Smith; it is their contribution I wish to highlight here.

Whaling makes an extensive analysis of Smith's "twin" concepts of faith and tradition in light of the approaches made by contributors to the Festschrift such as George Huntston Williams, J. L. Mehta, Annemarie Schimmel, Wei-Ming Tu and others. This "welter" of reflection has furnished new understanding: Smith's faith

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<sup>3</sup>Frank Whaling, ed. *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies--Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith*. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1984)

and tradition can be viewed as "symbols with various layers of meaning," twin symbols that belong together within Smith's "basic structure of meaning." Viewed in this way, as Whaling points out, they uncover other levels of meaning not necessarily envisaged by Smith. The two basic axes in Smith's thought are those of 'God' and 'man' joined by his personalism.<sup>4</sup>

There is similarity, according to Whaling, between Smith's notion of faith and Buber's notion of I-Thou; where they differ is the dialectical intertwining between tradition and faith in Smith's formulation. For Buber the emphasis is on the difference between the I-It and I-Thou relationship of encounter. Smith does not theologize about God who, although "given," is an unobservable "something or Someone." Whaling concludes that for Smith, "participation in particular traditions" is how persons learn faith and "apprehend or are apprehended by God."

Another contributor to this collection of texts is the theologian, George Rupp, who reports a growing convergence between theology and the comparative history of religion due, in part, to Smith's endeavours. Rupp provides a critique of corporate critical self consciousness which leads to a recognition of such self-consciousness as a symbol for human, global community. With growing awareness of other religious traditions comes heightened awareness of the need to participate across religious boundaries and to see our group as part of the whole.

These studies explain the "symbolism" of key concepts in Smith's work and demonstrate their coherence. The authors provide a broad "religion" context for

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 10.

the concepts discussed, as well as material on the subject of "encounter" useful for a study of Smith's evolving insider/outsider paradigm. The essays suggest the layers and depth of meaning in Smith's formulations, especially with regard to symbols; they also lay groundwork for understanding developments in Smith's theorizing still to come.

The contribution of three scholars to an exploration of the literature of the history of the concept "religion" provided the focus for a conference on this topic in 1989; the scholars were W. C. Smith, Michel Despland and Ernst Feil. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* served as point of departure for the conference which heard eighteen papers relating to the topic. These have been collected in a French/English publication entitled *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality*.<sup>5</sup> In his paper, Smith's retrospective thoughts give an overview of the growth and development of his original thesis, presented in *The Meaning and End of Religion*, which he still holds to be valid. It represents an orientation best summed up in his oft-repeated "The study of religion is the study of persons."

The essays provide a wealth of scholarly critical comment on many aspects of the problems posed by methodological pluralism in the realm of the study of religion. They are a source of description and evaluation of current research and insights in a field that is constantly proliferating. The evaluative comment throughout constitutes a valuable resource for the student of Smith; also valuable

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<sup>5</sup>Michel Despland and Gérard Vallée, ed. *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality/La religion dans l'histoire: Le mot, l'idée, la réalité*, (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992).



is the exhaustive bibliography of writings by and about Wilfred Cantwell Smith.

The Despland/Vallée volume provides instruction for its readers from a wider provenance than do the others under consideration: thought forms emanate from several cultures in two languages. I shall attempt to incorporate new insights into Troeltsch (Richard); the subject/object conflict (Robertson) and Gadamer's "games" (Robertson) into my commentary on Smith.

"The Study of Religion in the Academy: A Critical Appreciation of the Contribution of Wilfred Cantwell Smith" is the title of a Conference held by the Centre for Religious Studies at the University of Toronto in 1992. Nine scholars from Canada, the United States and Britain presented papers; these appear in a special issue of the journal, *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*.<sup>6</sup> At the Conference, "people talked about what they think he (Smith) said in his voluminous *corpus* of publications, and what they think about what they think he said."<sup>7</sup> This "talk" or critique, commencing with John Hick's assessment of Smith's "place" in the study of religion, is useful for analysis and evaluation of "the *opus* of Professor Smith." "Complementarity," "Perennial Philosophy," "Buddhism and the Divine," and "Scriptures and Histories" are some of the topics addressed in dealing with issues in the "study of religion."

"Religious Pluralism and Christian Theology" is the title of a chapter

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<sup>6</sup>*Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, Vol 4, Numbers 1 and 2, 1992.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, 2.

contributed by Harold Coward to a work<sup>8</sup> honouring the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order which flourished in Canada from 1934 to 1945. Coward claims, in the final section of the chapter, that Smith rejects exclusive Christologies as "violating Christian charity." Salvation for the Buddhist or Hindu or Muslim occurs because, as Smith affirms in *The Faith of Other Men*, God is the 'kind of God' whom Jesus Christ revealed. Coward reports Smith's position to be "thoroughly" theocentric, Christ providing the revelation of God.

Harold Coward discusses Smith's Christology in the context of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order. My aim will be to expand this reference with a discussion of the aims and goals of the FCSO, its understanding of the Kingdom of God, including attempts at effecting an intellectual resolution to the tension between religion and culture, or religion and society. Smith emerged out of this intellectual-religious-personalist background; the influence of the movement and its mentors forms a major field of inquiry in my thesis.

I have been able to locate eleven doctoral dissertations on the thought and teachings of Wilfred Cantwell Smith which are as follows.

Anderson, Brian David. "The Locus and Effect of Divine Revelation among non-Christian Religions: A Critical Analysis of the Views of Karl Barth, Karl Rahner and Wilfred Cantwell Smith." Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1991.

Bollinger, Gary Allen. "Personal Faith and Interfaith Encounter." Claremont Graduate School. Berkeley, California, 1981.

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<sup>8</sup>Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson, ed. *A Long and Faithful March Towards the Christian Revolution' 1930s/1980s* (Toronto: United Church Publishing House, 1989), 193-203.

- Buckalew, Ronald William. "A Return of the Servant: Kenotic Christ and Religious Pluralism in the Thought of Raimundo Panikkar and Wilfred Cantwell Smith." Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1987.**
- Doyle, Dennis Michael. "The Distinction between Faith and Belief and the Question of Religious Truth: The Contributions of Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Bernard Lonergan." Theology, Catholic University of America, 1984.**
- Gualtieri, Antonio Roberto. "Theological Evaluations by Christians of the Religious Faith of Non-Christians." (Kraemer and Smith) PhD. (Divinity) McGill University, 1969.**
- Hughes, Edward J. "The Global Philosophy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: An Experiment in Intercultural Thought." PhD., Philosophy of Religion, Claremont Graduate School, 1985.**
- Jones, Richard J. "Wilfred Cantwell Smith and Kenneth Cragg on Islam: Their Contrasting Implications for a Theology of Religion and a Theology of Mission." Trinity College, Toronto, 1988.**
- Nicholson, Wayne Isaac. "Toward a Theology of Comparative Religion: A Study in the Thought of Hendrik Kraemer and Wilfred Cantwell Smith." The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1978.**
- Rasiah, Iswaradevan. "The Contribution of Wilfred Cantwell Smith to Inter-Faith Understanding." Th.D., Boston University, School of Theology. 1984.**
- Tadsen, Sister Rose. "Jesus Christ in the World Theology of Wilfred Cantwell Smith." Ph.D., Theology, University of St. Michael's College, 1985.**
- Wallace, Raymond P. "Reference, Method, and Religious Pluralism: 'The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics' and 'Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart.'" Ph.D., Graduate Theological Union, 1989.**

From among these, Edward J. Hughes' dissertation, "The Global Philosophy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith: An Experiment in Intercultural Thought" provides a valuable chapter-by-chapter analysis of three central concepts in Smith's work: faith, belief and truth. In his fourth chapter, he portrays "corporate critical self-consciousness" as a new method of comparative religion, replacing the "history

of religions" approach. I agree with this finding in part but suggest that the transition is to a more dynamic and richly dialectical category. The final chapter deals with diverse aspects of the search for a global theology. In my case, I plan to look at the evolution of Smith's concepts by using a chronological approach with the aim of laying bare the emerging dynamics of interrelatedness and, eventually or ideally, transformation of self and/or society.

Raymond P. Wallace has chosen "Reference, Method, and Religious Pluralism: "The Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics" and "Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart" (1989) as the topic of his dissertation. This work provides an historical overview of the development of comparative perspectives as applied to religion. It includes an investigation of the growth of the historico/critical approach that culminated in the construction of two major encyclopedias of religion. The detailed historical survey is invaluable for the study of comparative religion.

#### Conclusion

The distinction between the works already cited and the present study consists in my attempt to relate Smith's Canadian Christian social activist background and his experience in Islamic India before Partition to his more mature thought. I also suggest Islamic components in the ideational framework that undergirds the making of his world theology whose purview is the salvation of the human race.

## **Chapter I**

### **EDUCATION AND CHRISTIAN NURTURE IN CANADA**

According to Wilfred Cantwell Smith, humankind today has the opportunity to give a "conceptual form" to a valid vision of the world. The challenge is to collaborate in building a common world. The genesis of the discernment of these "signs of the times" may be found in Smith's Christian background, education and vocation, including membership in Christian social action movements. This chapter reviews the former in brief fashion and sets forth the goals and worldview of the latter.

Smith was born in Toronto on July 21, 1916 to parents who were active members of the Presbyterian church, although his mother, from whom he received the name "Cantwell," had originally been Methodist. His schooling at Upper Canada College was interspersed, at the age of eleven, by a year's study at the Lycée Champollion in Grenoble, France, and later, at age seventeen, by a year in Spain and Egypt.

At the University of Toronto, Smith pursued classical studies which included the study of Hebrew and Arabic, earning a B.A. in 1938. The following two years were devoted to postgraduate work at Cambridge University: Theology at Westminster College with H. H. Farmer, and Islamics at St. John's College, under Hamilton A. R. Gibb. Later he did postgraduate work at Princeton University where he obtained his doctorate in 1948; the thesis topic was the political and religious

perspectives of the Islamic publication, *The Azhar Journal*.

In the interval, Smith was pursuing his missionary career. In 1941, under the auspices of the Canadian Overseas Missions Council, he was appointed to Forman Christian College, Lahore, India, to teach Indian and Islamic history. His colleagues and associates included not only Christians and Muslims, but also Hindus and Sikhs, for him a happy circumstance, as his writings attest. Smith was also concurrently, from 1941 to 1946, an Extension Work Associate (research associate) at the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies at Aligarh.

It was to the ministry of the United Church of North India that Smith was first ordained in 1944 and to the Presbyterian Church in Canada the following year. Subsequently, in 1961, he was received by ordination into the United Church of Canada.

This brief, preliminary sketch will halt, to be taken up again with Smith's departure from India just prior to Partition, to embark upon two years of graduate work at Princeton University.

#### Membership in Christian study and social action groups

In North America, in the period spanning and overlapping two world wars, many members of university faculty and student bodies evinced keen interest in the propagation of the Christian gospel throughout the world as well as its application to the social scene at home. Several movements grew out of this concern. I wish to highlight two: the Student Christian Movement and the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order. The former, at its inception, was a

Canadian version of the American movement; this was to change. The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order was founded in Canada and remained Canadian. Although these organizations had parallels in the United States and in Britain, the Canadian manifestation was, in some respects, distinctively different. Smith belonged to both; he participated actively in the two organizations and was president of the Student Christian Movement (SCM) at the University of Toronto in 1937, his final year as an undergraduate. I suggest that the worldview espoused by the SCM and the FCSO, and the frameworks in which the Christian message was cast, provided background for Smith's early thought, particularly as reflected in his first publication, *Modern Islam in India* (1943). Whereas the SCM has had a long, uninterrupted existence in Canada, countrywide, the FCSO was relatively short-lived, albeit dynamic. Accordingly, the narrative will start with the SCM.

The Student Christian Movement in Canada came into being at a meeting held in Guelph, Ontario, from December 29, 1920 to January 2, 1921. In effect, students at this meeting separated from the parent organizations of the YMCA and the YWCA of Canada and the Student Volunteer Movement; the latter concerned itself with the study of foreign missions; its aim was to recruit missionaries for fieldwork. The student YMCA and YWCA promoted the "study of the Bible, Missions and social problems,"<sup>1</sup> the work being supervised by the national offices. Protest had been registered by Canadian delegates prior to the 1919 Des Moines

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<sup>1</sup>SCM, *A Brief History of the Student Christian Movement, 1921-1974*, 1975.

Quadrennial Convention, giving expression to the perceived inadequacies of the Student Christian associations of the day, chief among which was the supervision by an organization that was "outside the university" and thus unable to render help to the "peculiar problems of university students."<sup>2</sup> They sought freedom in devising and directing their own programs. However, the purpose of a student association was seen by some to be the "strengthening of the spiritual life of the Association" and by others as

primarily a vehicle for the application of Christianity to the life of the world through Social Service, and as of little worth apart from such activity.<sup>3</sup>

The Basis and Aim adopted by the membership in 1920-21 reads as follows:

The Student Christian Movement of Canada is a fellowship of students based on the conviction that in Jesus Christ are found the supreme revelation of God and the means to the full realization of life...(It seeks...to unite in its fellowship all students in the colleges of Canada who share the above conviction together with all students who are willing to test the truth of the conviction upon which the Movement is founded.<sup>4</sup>

A decade or so later, in 1933, the Basis and Aim is expanded significantly to embrace the peoples of the world by the addition of a third aim:

The Movement desires to share with others the values discovered in Jesus Christ and to join with those of like mind in all lands and of every race and rank in the creation of a world-wide order of society in harmony with the mind and purpose of God as revealed in Jesus Christ.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 8.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid, 9.



The first president, elected at Guelph in 1929, was Dr. Henry Burton Sharman who designed and led an innovative and highly successful approach to Bible study. This study was centered on the Synoptic gospels and, in a group setting, promoted intense interaction between the text and the participant. His handbook was entitled *The Records of the Life of Jesus* and provided primarily for a "historical rather than a critical knowledge of the records."<sup>6</sup> Dr. Sharman was in close contact with the thinking of students and student leaders in Canada from 1912 to 1926 and continued to exert an influence on the SCM throughout the next twenty years through his seminars, in particular, those at Camp Minnesing in Algonquin Park. His method can be seen as a precursor of contemporary inductive "discovery" pedagogical strategies. At any rate, Dr. Sharman, the person and the method, had a profound influence on scores of university students over many years, an influence that has been documented in the booklet entitled *This One Thing*.<sup>7</sup> It can reasonably be argued that Dr. Sharman's contribution came to be reflected in Wilfred Cantwell Smith's initial worldview.

In addition to being President in 1937 of the SCM at the University of Toronto, Smith was an active member of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order (FCSO) which was formed by a group of United Church of Canada clergy and

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<sup>6</sup>*This One Thing: A Tribute to Henry Burton Sharman, B.S.A. (Toronto); Ph.D. (Chicago), 1865-1953. Prepared by a Group of Friends, Student Christian Movement (Toronto: Student Christian Movement of Canada, 1959).*

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid*, 9-91 passim.

laymen in Kingston, Ontario in April of 1934.<sup>8</sup> The Fellowship pledge included the following statement:

Believing as we do that there are no distinctions of power and privilege within the Kingdom of God, we pledge ourselves to the service of God and to the task of building a new society in which all exploitation of man by man and all barriers to the abundant life which are created by the private ownership of property shall be done away.<sup>9</sup>

By 1938, it had expanded to become a national, non-denominational Christian socialist movement. "Mutuality" was seen as "the key insight for grounding ethics and theology in human experience."<sup>10</sup> Many FCSO leaders were associated with the SCM; this association helped them to "come to grips with the inescapable relationship between their Christian faith and their responsibility to become involved in the struggle for justice and brotherhood,"<sup>11</sup> concerns which were shared by Smith. The SCM background also gave students "a critical stance in relation to the church as an institution, and a willingness to ask whether the church was an adequate vehicle for the teachings of Jesus."<sup>12</sup> Gregory Vlastos remarked at the SCM

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<sup>8</sup>Roger C. Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order: A Social Ethical Analysis of a Christian Socialist Movement." Ph.D. diss., Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, 1975, 1.

<sup>9</sup>"The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order," *New Outlook*, X (May 9, 1934), p. 345 quoted by Roger Hutchinson, in *A Long and Faithful March: 'Towards the Christian Revolution' 1930s-1980s* edited by Harold Wells and Roger Hutchinson (United Church Publishing House, 1989), 24.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid*, 2.

<sup>11</sup>Margaret Beattie, "Pressure Group Politics: The Case of the Student Christian Movement of Canada." Ph.D. diss., University of Alberta, 1972, 236.

<sup>12</sup>Hutchinson, Dissertation, 37.

Fiftieth Anniversary Conference at Bolton Camp, Ontario, in August 1971, that

conferences at which Reinhold Niebuhr, King Gordon and others talked about Christianity and the social struggle helped him to see that the way people coped with the problems of existence in their concrete situations is what Christianity is all about.<sup>13</sup>

It was Smith's affirmation that:

To be modern does not mean to live in one particular kind of environment rather than another. It means to live in the environment that one's society has deliberately chosen to construct (or accept) and to do so rationally, self-consciously.<sup>14</sup>

The historian, he believed, can uncover and underscore options for society, raising these into consciousness. It will be seen in the following observations that the FCSO, in sometimes divergent approaches, was attempting to raise the awareness of church people and people at large, to the plight of social justice in Canada and in the world, and to the choices to be made: a call for action.

One plea was for "concrete evangelism." R.B.Y. Scott, in a pamphlet published by the FCSO in 1935, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*, called for a form of piety and a way of knowing God that was not simply an individual matter, nor a special possession of the church; but, as with the Hebrew prophets, an outgrowth of the struggle for right relationships and social justice in the community. A shift from the ideal world to the real world, from eschatology to history, was being enunciated

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 37,n25.

<sup>14</sup>Smith, "The Meaning of Modernization," reprinted in slightly abridged form from Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modernisation of a Traditional Society* (Bombay: Asia Publishing House, 1965), 1-22 in *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* edited by Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Harper & Row, 1976) 77-95; 94-95.

through the FCSO.<sup>15</sup> There was also an emphasis on the social self--the self acquired through interaction with society.<sup>16</sup> In Scott's view, the religion portrayed in the Bible is that of "persons-in-community (which) concerns itself in a frankly realistic manner with the way men live in the here and now."<sup>17</sup> It is to be noted that W. C. Smith expresses astonishment in his article, "Retrospective Thoughts on *The Meaning and End of Religion*," that people don't realize that he means "persons-in-community" when he refers to "persons."<sup>18</sup> I submit that this would be taken for granted by those familiar with the views of the scholars associated with the SCM and the FCSO, and with the writings of the Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray, mentor to the FCSO and to the SCM in Canada.

Gregory Vlastos was a founding member of the FCSO and, along with R.B.Y. Scott, was co-editor of *Towards the Christian Revolution*,<sup>19</sup> a collection of essays by scholars whose social gospel vision was embraced by the FCSO. According to Vlastos, "mutuality" was the law of life. It provided the clue to the nature and

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<sup>15</sup>Hutchinson, Dissertation, 54,n23.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid, 56-57.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>18</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Retrospective Thoughts on *The Meaning and End of Religion*" in *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality/La religion dans l'histoire: Le mot, l'idée, la réalité* edited by Michel Despland and Gerard Vallée (Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>19</sup>R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos, editors, *Towards the Christian Revolution* (Chicago and New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1936; reprint, intro. by Roger Hutchinson, Kingston, ON: Ronald P. Frye, 1989; (page references are to the original 1936 edition.)

will of God, the meaning and direction of history, the role of theology and the church.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore,

God is the patterned ground of value in the world itself. He is the structure of reality which men must discover and express in their ideas in order to conform to it in their action.<sup>21</sup>

In *Towards the Christian Revolution*, Vlastos, along with other contributors to the volume, acknowledged his debt to the Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray. Macmurray had become generally known to the followers of the FCSO through his participation in a 1936 SCM Seminar at Belleville, Ontario and through his many books.<sup>22</sup> Chapter II will take a closer look at Macmurray and Vlastos under the rubric of mentors.

Martyn Estall, also a professor of philosophy, contributed the chapter "The Marxist Challenge" under the pseudonym "Propheticus."<sup>23</sup> He developed the notion of "friendship" in much the same way as Vlastos talked about mutuality,<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Gregory Vlastos, "The Ethical Foundations" in *Towards the Christian Revolution*, 51-74. "Mutuality" is also a key concept in the work of W. C. Smith.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>22</sup>Professor Sheila McDonough has kindly given me permission to convey the following information. Professor W. C. Smith, under whom she was pursuing graduate MA work at McGill at the time, suggested that she include John Macmurray in her reading. A selection of titles published before Smith left Canada, in 1938, to study at Cambridge, include the following: *Interpreting the Universe*, 1933; *Creative Society*, 1935; *The Structure of Religious Experience*, 1936; *Reason and Emotion*, 1936.

<sup>23</sup>Scott and Vlastos, *Towards*, 199-224.

<sup>24</sup>See also Roger C. Hutchinson, "Mutuality: Procedural Norm and Foundational Symbol" in *Liberation and Ethics: Essays in Religious Social Ethics in Honour of Gibson Winter* edited by Amjad-Ali and W. Alvin Pitcher (Chicago: Center

stressing the social context in which religious action and encounter took place. He pointed out that the effort to "delineate the facts of sociology or economics, while remaining resolutely neutral as to the ethical values involved...is...illusory."<sup>25</sup> It was his contention that the Marxist dialectic could throw light on "the changeful continuity of human history and an insistent demand that human thought be geared to direct that change."<sup>26</sup>

According to Hutchinson's interpretation, Estall "shared Macmurray's view that Marxism challenged Christians to rediscover the difference between real and unreal religion."<sup>27</sup> Unreal religion (Macmurray's "pseudo-religion") clouded awareness of "the forces shaping society" and the decisions that needed to be taken.<sup>28</sup> The Christian, Estall insisted, must not allow 'hopes of heaven' to obscure his social vision.<sup>29</sup>

In summary, the FCSO's central concern with mutuality led to a demand for concreteness in thought and action; a desire to discern the essential structure of the social order as a whole, and a recognition of the comprehensiveness

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for the Scientific Study of Religion, 1985), 98.

<sup>25</sup>Martyn Estall, "The Marxist Challenge" in *Towards*, 208.

<sup>26</sup>*Ibid.*, 215.

<sup>27</sup>Hutchinson, Dissertation, 63.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup>Estall, *Towards*, 223.

of the task of transforming the common life.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, mutuality was seen as "the key insight for grounding ethics and theology in human experience."<sup>31</sup> Smith shared these concerns, as evidenced in his participation, while in Toronto, in the interdenominational and international Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions, in addition to the SCM and FCSO;<sup>32</sup> as evidenced also by his acceptance of an interdenominationally supported missionary-teaching post at Lahore; and, concerns that found significant expression in his early writings that precede the Partition of India.

We turn now to Smith's years of study in England, following upon his graduation from the University of Toronto in 1938. As well, the narrative will deal with the thought of philosophers and theologians, representing widely divergent major areas of concern, yet all addressing the Christian cause. Figured among the scholars to be considered as mentors are Gregory Vlastos and John Macmurray.

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<sup>30</sup>Hutchinson, *Dissertation*, 64.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, ii.

<sup>32</sup>See Oxtoby, *Religious Diversity*, x.

## Chapter II

### AWAY FROM CANADA

The previous chapter presented an overview of what may be termed the Canadian matrix of Wilfred Cantwell Smith's thought: his birthplace and home in Toronto; Presbyterian church affiliation; education at <sup>Upper</sup> Lower Canada College and <sup>University</sup> Emmanuel College of the University of Toronto, as well as active membership in Christian social action groups.

#### Studies in England: 1938-1940

Upon completion of the Honours B.A. program at the University of Toronto in 1938, Smith left Canada to embark upon further studies at Cambridge University: Arabic and Islamic studies under Hamilton Gibb at St. John's College; theology under H. H. Farmer at Westminster College. Farmer was successor to John Oman,<sup>1</sup> who had provided the English translation of Schleiermacher's *Christian Faith*. Thus the theological milieu at Cambridge acknowledged the possibility of personal experience providing fundamental and reliable access to God—a congenial ambience for Smith. It was during these years at Cambridge, on September 23, 1939, that Wilfred Smith married Muriel McKenzie Struthers, a Canadian, the daughter of missionaries to Asia.

Two years later, the couple took up residence in Lahore, India, where

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<sup>1</sup>Dr. Sheila McDonough kindly informed me that Dr. W. C. Smith recommended that she read John Oman while she was pursuing graduate studies under his guidance.



Smith assumed the post of missionary-lecturer at Christian Forman College, and where they stayed until 1946, returning for a year in 1949. The biographical narrative will be resumed in subsequent chapters. At this juncture, I wish to discuss the views of some philosophers and theologians deemed to be germane to the development of Smith's thought as expressed in the body of his writings. The second major influence, the Islamic experience, will be addressed in Chapter III.

### Philosophers and Theologians

The scholars I am proposing as mentors, although Christian, are widely divergent in their perspectives, yet analogous in that they incorporate an ontological or metaphysical element in their philosophy/theology. What follows is a reference to those teachings which appear to be reflected in Smith's work, as foundational, or in modified, or perhaps extended form. These continuities and discontinuities will be probed during later discussion of the six proposed heuristic devices or stages. The ordering principle for the selection of material from the following scholars has been 1) historical; 2) personalistic (subsuming the subject-object conflict; and 3) empirical. Because Smith often refers to himself as a historian, by training and by bent, I shall start with Troeltsch whose most enduring contribution may be said to be to the history of religion, in spite of an overriding interest in philosophy and psychology of religion, the sociology of religion, and the philosophy of history.<sup>2</sup> Smith acknowledges this contribution, stating that the "line that led from Schleiermacher

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<sup>2</sup>For an acknowledgment of the scope of Troeltsch's areas of scholarship, see James Luther Adams, "Ernst Troeltsch as Analyst of Religion" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol 1, (Oct 1961), 98.

to Troeltsch...can be transcended now...as we begin, as it were again, with new categories."<sup>3</sup> Indeed, Troeltsch is a towering figure whose work has provided new categories for all people who wanted to rethink the place of Christianity in world history.<sup>4</sup>

Ernst Troeltsch (1865-1923)

Troeltsch contributed significantly to the intellectual fabric of the century. The post World War One situation was characterized, on the one hand, by forms of dogmatism relying upon false absolutes; on the other, by cultural relativism which had emerged as a consequence of the historical consciousness that came to birth in the eighteenth century. In response to this state of crisis, Troeltsch pointed to the tension between the claims of a categorical ideal and the demand, possibilities and ambiguities of ongoing history--the tension between the absolute and the relative. In contrast to his position at the start of his career, he came to place more emphasis upon the "temporality, the historicity, of religion and ethical norms."<sup>5</sup> He came to view as suspect all forms of rationalism, his contention being that "naturalism falls short of being empirical, for it dissolves the qualitative differentiae of religion"; moreover, no empirical science is competent to deal with the question of validity.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 121.

<sup>4</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Michel Despland for this observation.

<sup>5</sup>James Luther Adams, "Ernst Troeltsch as Analyst of Religion" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol 1, No 1 (Oct. 1961), 98.

<sup>6</sup>Adams, "Troeltsch as Analyst", 99-100.

Adams points out that "Troeltsch was not a professional sociologist...(but) viewed sociology as a discipline ancillary to his own frankly normative discipline."<sup>7</sup> Significantly, Troeltsch applied the methods of sociology to his study of the history of Christianity thus opening methodological doors to future scholars including Smith.<sup>8</sup> *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*<sup>9</sup> demonstrates his search for the uniqueness of milieux within which the mutual interplay between idea and institution, between idea and social forces, takes place. Troeltsch recognized that the types of religious association he suggested--church, sect and mystical type--interpenetrated in diverse ways, necessitating his "case to case" approach. Moreover, "Christianity does not possess a political or economic ideal which it can apply directly. It works by means of mediating elements."<sup>10</sup> "Compromise" is his term for the dynamic process whereby universal religion (the

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 103.

<sup>8</sup>Adams quotes Talcott Parsons: (Troeltsch is) "perhaps the most eminent sociologically oriented historian of Western Christianity." In Talcott Parsons *Theories of Society* (New York, 1961), I, 646. In Adams, "Troeltsch as Analyst", 103.

Smith himself writes in *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: University of Princeton Press, 1957; reprint, New York: Mentor Books, 1959): "The empirical reality of any faith is what the symbols actually convey, case by individual case," footnoting the statement with a reference to the fruitfulness of the sociological work done by Troeltsch (and Weber and Durkheim) for the "study of the religions." Smith adds that the academic interpretation of religion must do justice "both to intellectual coherence and to all the observed facts." 16; 16,n5 (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>9</sup>Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches*, translated by Olive Wyon (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster/John Knox Press, Volumes I and II, 1912; 1931; reissue 1992".

<sup>10</sup>Adams, "Troeltsch as Analyst," 105.

great religions of the Orient and the Occident) comes to terms creatively with mediating elements in its environment, and even with elements originally alien to it;<sup>11</sup> a process that needs to be renewed repeatedly.

In the realm of the philosophy of history, Troeltsch made an important distinction between the subjective virtues (relations between individuals and between the individual and God) and the objective virtues that require institutional structures and participation.<sup>12</sup> Christianity, when dynamic and productive in its confrontation with these value systems, has entered into a creative "compromise" of give and take requiring "synthesis."<sup>13</sup> Subject and object are involved in a dynamic continuum. The task of achieving new synthesis entails new decision, new creation and new risk.

In this process, history overcomes history-freedom, fate, obligation, novelty-- become fused according to personal faith and decision.<sup>14</sup>

What Troeltsch wanted, according to Jean Richard, was to "faire la synthèse de la psychologie empirique et de la théorie rationnelle de la connaissance (à l'intérieur de son propre système)."<sup>15</sup> This involves using two research methods, one after the other, in order to grasp "deux niveaux différents du réel: le donné-factuel et le rationnel-nécessaire, le psychologique déterminé par la causalité et le valide perçu

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid.

<sup>12</sup>The distinction was first made in his *Grundprobleme der Ethik* (1902) as reported by Adams in "Troeltsch as Analyst", 108.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Jean Richard "Le concept de religion chez Ernst Troeltsch" in *Religion in History* edited by Despland and Vallée, 88.

par la critique rationnelle."<sup>16</sup>

Standards involved in the process of synthesis

First: Christianity, or any other religion, constitutes a complex or "world" of perspectives in which the believer simply finds himself (true also of the ex-believer who will be related to the same "world"). We cannot, as Hegel did, view history from the perspective of the absolute; we cannot know its telos; it is ongoing. Neither revelation nor a historical tradition, as claimed by the supernaturalist, is "exempt from the processes of history."<sup>17</sup>

Nor may one claim to be oriented to the coming unity of humanity; there is as yet no common cultural experience that men of the planet share and that in significant fashion enables them to transcend the individual totalities that constitute their own local, spiritual habitations.<sup>18</sup>

Thus, history constitutes the only perspective; it is dynamic, ongoing, not teleological.

Second: This should not issue in mere relativism. In his *Glaubenslehre* (1911-1912, published in 1925) Troeltsch rejects every kind of authoritarianism as well as any secularist ethos of autonomy. His "autotheonomy" aims to preserve autonomy in orientation to that which transcends it in the divine promise, demand and support. Radically he contends that Christian faith can be valid "for us" because:

A truth that, in the first instance, is a truth for us does not cease, because of this, to be very Truth and Life. What we learn daily through our love for our fellow-men, viz. that they are independent beings with standards of their own, we ought also to be able to learn

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Adams, 108.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

through our love for mankind as a whole--that here too there exist autonomous civilizations with standards of their own.<sup>19</sup>

Third: The standard that represents validity in the midst of flux must be discerned in the dynamic unfolding and interplay of perspectives. Troeltsch seems to suggest, according to Adams, that obligation and validity confront one in the midst of the process of creative evolution. In the future, the interplay of perspectives may be widened. Troeltsch issues a summons to the future, one might say, to the "history of religion" or "science de la religion", in the lecture cited above which he did not live to deliver:

If each racial group strives to develop its own higher potentialities, we may hope to come nearer to one another. This applies to the great world-religions, but it also applies to the various religious denominations, and to individuals in their intercourse with one another. In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not One, but Many. But to apprehend the One in the Many constitutes the special character of love.<sup>20</sup>

Troeltsch believed that the "science de la religion" should have "une influence interculturelle dans le sens de la paix mondiale, en favorisant une rencontre et un

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<sup>19</sup>Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World-Religions: A Lecture Written for Delivery before the University of Oxford" in *Christian Thought: Its History and Application: Lectures Written for Delivery in England during March 1923*. Translated into English by various hands and edited with an introduction and index by Baron F. von Hugel (London: University of London Press 1923), 34. Robert Bellah reaffirms Troeltsch's "very Truth and Life" in the midst of "plural religions and plural communities, and no absolute or unmediated truth" (only God is at home) in his article "At home and not at home: Religious pluralism and religious truth" in *Christian Century* Vol 112, No. 13 (19 April 1995): 428.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 34-35.

dialogue harmonieux des religions"; <sup>21</sup> his work continues to provide scholars of religion with countless agendas and projects and unanswered questions.

Gregory Vlastos (1907-1991)

Gregory Vlastos was a prominent spokesman for the social gospel movement in Canada during the thirties and forties. He was a founding member of the Fellowship for a Christian Social Order and co-editor, with R.B.Y. Scott, of *Towards the Christian Revolution*<sup>22</sup>, a collection of essays by academics and clerics who supported the movement. Vlastos was then professor of philosophy at Queens, later teaching at Cornell, Princeton and Berkeley. He came to be acknowledged a pre-eminent Socratic scholar.

"Human life is human relatedness" is a recurring theme in the essay "The Ethical Foundations" that Vlastos contributed to the collection.<sup>23</sup> Salient ideas include the following: 'In Christ' is the basis of a new relation, a religious community<sup>24</sup>...community is the ethical ideal <sup>25</sup>...community and personality are

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<sup>21</sup>Richard, "Le concept de religion", 90-91. Troeltsch, "Wesen de Religion und der Religionswissenschaft." *Gesammelte Schriften* (1909), 2, Scientia Verlag Aalen (1962): 452-99; *Writings on Theology and Religion*, translated and edited by Robert Morgan and Michael Pye (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1977) in *Religion in History*, Despland and Vallée.

<sup>22</sup>R.B.Y. Scott and Gregory Vlastos, editors *Towards the Christian Revolution* (Chicago and New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1936).

<sup>23</sup>Scott and Vlastos, *Towards the Christian Revolution*, 51-74.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

strictly correlative<sup>26</sup>...God is the structure of reality which men must discover and express in their ideas, in order to conform to it in their actions<sup>27</sup>...God's transcendence of morality is his immanence in history<sup>28</sup>...the Christian ethic of love announces a revolution—the Kingdom of God is at hand.<sup>29</sup>

It follows, for Vlastos, that the ethic of love is the ethic of the co-operative community...the ethic of the free and equal personality.<sup>30</sup> In a review of the book, Reinhold Niebuhr, while praising Vlastos and the members of the FCSO for their radical activities, observed that

in spite of the conservatism of a typical Toronto or Montreal church, which frequently manages to combine a decadent Calvinism with bourgeois complacency in a sorry compound, the left wing movement in Canada has considerable influence.<sup>31</sup>

Niebuhr stated his position succinctly in the book review:

The crucial problem of every religious radicalism is how to relate the proximate goals of politics and relative values of history to the unconditioned demands of the gospel. If these unconditioned demands are merely reduced to a demand for increased mutuality (after the fashion of John Macmurray, to whom most of the authors express their indebtedness), the result is not only a corruption of the historical meaning of the gospel but also an evasion of the actual human

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 71.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 74.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>31</sup>Reinhold Niebuhr "Towards the Christian Revolution: Review" *Radical Religion* 2 (1937), p. 42 in Roger C. Hutchinson, "Love, justice and the class struggle," *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion*, 10/4 (Fall 1981): 473-79.



situation.<sup>32</sup>

The dialectic between the human/divine, or relative/absolute is and has been a perennial, universal dilemma. For Niebuhr, it is characterized by "the tension in (each) soul between the eternal and the historical, a tension from which all human creativity comes and which also makes the emergence of evil on every level of social existence inevitable."<sup>33</sup>

The differing views of mutuality held by Vlastos and Niebuhr were related, as Roger C. Hutchinson points out, to different understandings of human existence which in turn were related to different concepts of God:

Niebuhr's doctrine of the 'image of God in man' was based on the belief that God "transcends both the rational structure and the arbitrary facts of existence in the universe." Since God is wholly transcendent, the image of God in man is based upon the capacity for self-transcendence; that is the capacity to "stand outside of nature, life...reason and the world."...this produces, according to Niebuhr, a deep sense of anxiety.<sup>34</sup>

Hutchinson points out that Vlastos, on the other hand, "stressed God's immanence and the rootedness of human life in natural and social relationships"; he referred to God as "the patterned ground of value in the world itself: the structure of reality which men must discover and express in their ideas in order to conform to it in their action."<sup>35</sup> In Hutchinson's estimation, Vlastos "balanced Niebuhr's emphasis on

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Hutchinson, "Love, justice and the class struggle," *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion*, 10/4 (Fall 1981): 476.

<sup>35</sup>Vlastos in *Towards the Christian Revolution*, 70.

freedom as self-transcendence with the complementary truth that personal life is possible only in community,"<sup>36</sup> as in these remarks:

These truths are so intimately interdependent that to affirm either without the other leads to distortion. Community without personal freedom issues in the fascist distortion. Personal freedom without community issues in the individualist distortion, which tends to confuse the human self with the isolated self.<sup>37</sup>

Vlastos breaks apart Niebuhr's equation between the "isolated self" and the actual human self, thus:

The selfish man can never love, and without love there can be no relief from anxiety with all its consequences. Then sin is inevitable and freedom is powerless, and the terrible conclusion must be drawn, as Niebuhr draws it, that man's will is not free to choose between good and evil.<sup>38</sup>

Vlastos, however, did not stress the tension in man's soul between the eternal and the historical. The crisis for him was the "tension between a lingering divisive society of economic classes and new possibilities of cooperative community in a classless society."<sup>39</sup> Instead, he envisaged man as a social being, meant for mutuality. Mutuality was the law of life. Mutuality provided the clue to the nature and will of God; the meaning and direction of history, and the role of theology and

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<sup>36</sup>Hutchinson, "Love, justice and the class struggle," 476-77.

<sup>37</sup>Gregory Vlastos, "Sin and Anxiety in Niebuhr's Religion," *The Christian Century*, 61 (October 1, 1941), 1204.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup>Vlastos, *Towards the Christian Revolution*, 72-73.

the church.<sup>40</sup>

We turn now to John Macmurray, the philosopher who "finds the Other in the experience of mutuality."<sup>41</sup>

John Macmurray (1891-1976)

The Scottish philosopher, John Macmurray, was well-known to the social gospel movement in Canada through a seminal lecture given at Albert College in Belleville, Ontario in 1936, and through his extensive writings. During the years that Smith was in England, Macmurray was Professor of Philosophy at London University College (1923-1944). From there he went to Edinburgh University to be Professor of Moral Philosophy (1944-1957).

As a result of his experience as a soldier in World War I, Macmurray embraced pacifism. During the thirties he devoted much effort to an analysis of Marxian thought and a search for a basis of Christian-communist dialogue. It was Macmurray's contention that his own interest in the "principles of communist theory" arose through the discovery of these principles in the Gospel, in the first instance, and the subsequent discovery that they reappeared in different but recognisable form in the philosophy of Karl Marx.<sup>42</sup> His search for a synthesis of Christianity and

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<sup>40</sup>Roger C. Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order: A Social Ethical Analysis of a Christian Socialist Movement." Ph.D. diss., Emmanuel College, University of Toronto, 1975, 59.

<sup>41</sup>Gregory Vlastos, "The Religion of Community; Review of John Macmurray's *The Structure of Religious Experience*," *Christendom*, II, 2 (Spring, 1937), 293.

<sup>42</sup>John Macmurray, *Creative Society: A Study of the Relation of Christianity to Communism* (London: SCM Press, 1935), 91.

Communism led him to the conviction that one element in such a synthesis must be reformation on the part of Christianity as well as Communism. In the former, the dualisms between theory and practice, spiritual and material, individual and community, natural and supernatural, and between ideal and real, are fundamentally a betrayal of the message of Jesus and the prophets.<sup>43</sup> Communism, he observed, is "too apt to think that the form of social organisation is the whole of human reality, whereas it is not even its substance."<sup>44</sup>

In a review of Macmurray's *The Structure of Religious Experience*, Gregory Vlastos wrote:

Macmurray goes to life (in opposition to Reinhold Niebuhr who located the key to specific meaning above and beyond the coherences of nature and history), not organic, biological life, but rational, human life, which is conscious co-operation. He finds the Other in the experience of mutuality.<sup>45</sup>

Macmurray insisted that, in the interpretation of religion, one must determine its empirical reference "to get behind the necessary abstraction of all reflective activity to its anchorage in experience."<sup>46</sup>

The falsification of religion that matters most, even in the sphere of religious thought, is not the ultimate truth or falsity of beliefs, but the

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<sup>43</sup>Frank G. Kirkpatrick, "Toward a Metaphysic of Community" in *Scottish Journal of Theology* 38 No. 4 (1985), 572.

<sup>44</sup>John Macmurray, "Christianity and Communism: Towards a Synthesis," in *Christianity and the Social Revolution* edited by John Lewis, Karl Polanyi and Donald Kitchin (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1935), 518.

<sup>45</sup>Vlastos, "The Religion of Community, review," 293.

<sup>46</sup>John Hoffman, "Religion and religious experience in the thought of John Macmurray: A critique," *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 4, (1974-75), 5.

falsification of the reference of these beliefs to experience.<sup>47</sup>

For Macmurray, the discussion of religion should always begin with the experience which underlies it and come only subsequently to the question of God.<sup>48</sup> The fundamental religious fact in human life is friendship...the thing that makes us human; the rock on which personality is built...<sup>49</sup>

The primary religious assertion is that all men are equal and that fellowship is the only relation between persons which is fully rational or fully appropriate to their nature as persons. In this assertion the whole nature of religion is bound up.<sup>50</sup>

Religion makes the claim that "reality is personal."<sup>51</sup>

According to Kirkpatrick, "metaphysics as a discipline...is simply the attempt to understand reality as it is."<sup>52</sup> He interprets Macmurray's claim to be

that the metaphysical schemes of stasis or rigidity are, in fact, inadequate to our experience of personal relations. What he attempted to do was to provide an alternative, and somewhat novel, descriptive metaphysics based on the ontological primacy of "the relational quality of life."<sup>53</sup>

The foregoing excerpts from Macmurray's work represent his earlier writings. Their publication dates would have made them accessible to Smith before

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<sup>47</sup>John Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience*, (London: Faber, 1936), 91.

<sup>48</sup>Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber, 1935), 227.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 205-06.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibid.*, 213.

<sup>52</sup>Kirkpatrick, "Toward a Metaphysic of Community," 567.

<sup>53</sup>*Ibid.*

his departure for India. These concluding remarks illustrate his perception of the nature and meaning of history. According to Macmurray, God's intention for his creation--for man specifically, is

a universal community of persons, with freedom and equality as its structural principles of relationship...such a relation is not possible unless Man wills it, because the structure of human relationships is the expression of human intentions...God's action in history must then be the creation in Man of the effective intention to realize universal freedom and equality.<sup>54</sup>

The implication is that if man chooses not to will such a relationship, that is, if he denies freedom, he denies himself. Freedom is only possible in mutuality. Kirkpatrick observes that "The dialectic of freedom between human beings and God is the basis for the dialectic of freedom between human persons."<sup>55</sup>

We leave Macmurray, possibly the best known personalist of his day, to consider the final scholar in this survey of mentors, H. H. Farmer, also characterized as a personalist.

H. H. Farmer (1892-1981)

Smith studied under H. H. Farmer, Professor of Theology at Westminster College, Cambridge. Along with John Oman, Alan Richardson, John Macmurray and others, Farmer was an exponent of the "personalist world-view."<sup>56</sup> The opening words of an early book, *The World and God*, provide a succinct

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<sup>54</sup>John Macmurray, *The Clue to History* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers, 1939), 100.

<sup>55</sup>Kirkpatrick, "Toward a Metaphysic of Community," 573.

<sup>56</sup>R. J. Blaikie, "Being, Process, and Action in Modern Philosophy and Theology" in *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XXV (1972), 130.

description of his view:

The conviction that God is personal, and deals personally with men and women, lies at the heart of Christian experience and thought...(especially) in the New Testament...Every category, phrase, doctrine, movement of thought, presupposes and implies the possibility for all, and the actuality for the writers, of a personal relationship to a personal God.,(God) constituting with men an ultimate order of personal relations.<sup>57</sup>

John E. Smith, in an essay on the subject of philosophy and religion, observes that Farmer understands the divine/human encounter, as expressed in his *The World and God*, to be "self-authenticating, able to shine in its own light, independently of the abstract reflections of philosophy."<sup>58</sup>

Experience of God as personal, Farmer insisted, is approached through human personal relationships. What is more, awareness of God as personal is seen to be characteristic of all living religions. He was interested in developing "a world view--one that included the world religions--from the Christian faith."<sup>59</sup>

In the Gifford Lectures (1950) under the title "Revelation and Religion: Studies in the Theological Interpretation of Religious Types," Farmer, while upholding the primacy of the Christian revelation, asserts that "the created order in all its rich multiplicity is a unity." He finds illustration in the words of a Sufi mystical poet:

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<sup>57</sup>H. H. Farmer, *The World and God: A Study of Prayer, Providence and Miracle in Christian Experience* (London: Nisbet & Co., 1935 (1955), Introduction, n.p.

<sup>58</sup>John E. Smith, "Philosophy: Philosophy and Religion" in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, 301.

<sup>59</sup>Robert D. Young, *Encounter With World Religions* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970), 116.

In solitude where Being signless dwelt  
And all the universe still dormant lay  
In selflessness, One Being was,  
Exempt from "I"-or "Thou"-ness, and apart  
From all duality.<sup>60</sup>

He speaks of "moments of transcendence" in the contemplation of "natural beauty" and the possibility of "great music" imparting "a sense of the underlying unity and harmony of things."<sup>61</sup> God is transcendent and immanent in man. Indeed, non-Christian mystical writings may contribute to the apprehension of God as "a personal reality."<sup>62</sup>

The "world view" Farmer espouses includes the world religions, but from a Christian viewpoint. Although he is a theologian within the limits of traditional orthodoxy, he is not an exclusivist because "he is willing to hold on to his dogma as a hypothesis to be proved rather than as a conclusion to be believed."<sup>63</sup> Moreover, this "frontier theology" stresses a vital life of "religious experience" undergirding all religion.<sup>64</sup> An "inward disposition in the personality" underlies intellectual processes in all religions as does a sense of the truth that encompasses the total willing, feeling and thinking human being. At this depth, other "living

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<sup>60</sup>H. H. Farmer *Revelation and Religion: Studies in the Theological Interpretation of Religious Types* (Diswell Place: James Nisbet and Co., 1954 (reprint 1961), 231. Farmer acknowledges his quotation as being "from one of the Sufi mystical poets quoted by R. A. Nicholson in an article on Sufis in E.R.E. XII, pp. 16, 17."

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 234-35.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 238.

<sup>63</sup>Young, *Encounter*, 116.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 117.



religions" can be analyzed in similar fashion to Christianity.

Farmer speaks of the encounter with the divine (Godhead) not as "any relationship of I-Thou" but as a "permeating principle...to be experienced."<sup>65</sup> For Farmer, a distinctive feeling-tone reverberates through the whole being when God is "livingly encountered".<sup>66</sup>

Although Farmer establishes several points of contact among the "living religions," Christianity remains for him the normative faith.

### Conclusion

The scholars selected each enunciate ground- breaking approaches to the realm of religious or intellectual discourse. I contend that their hypotheses and convictions provided background for Smith's intellectual endeavours. The work of each of these mentors complements and at times overlaps the work of the other, exemplifying 1) historical, 2) personalistic and 3) empirical points of view.

Troeltsch saw history as a dynamic continuum: contingent and ongoing. The great religions of the world come to terms with the mediating elements in their environment, even elements originally alien to the environment. A distinction is made between subjective relations (between individuals and between the individual and God) and objective relations (his term is "virtues") requiring institutional structures and participation.

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<sup>65</sup>Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, 130-132, quoted in Farmer, *Revelation and Religion*, 68-69, quoted in Young, *Encounter*, 119.

<sup>66</sup>Farmer, *Revelation*, 76.

Troeltsch sought a synthesis within his own system between empirical psychology and "la théorie rationnelle de la connaissance" (Richard) at two successive levels. Neither revelation nor tradition is exempt from history. History is the only perspective; it is not teleological.

In summary, Troeltsch asserts that "truth for us" does not cease to be very Truth and Life. We have religious diversity: love is needed to apprehend the One in the Many.<sup>67</sup>

Gregory Vlastos underlines again and again the primacy of the "community" and its correlate "mutuality." "Christ is the basis of a new relation, a religious community."<sup>68</sup> Moreover, community and personality are strictly correlative. God is the structure of reality which men must discover and express intellectually and in their actions.

As in Troeltsch, love is key to the apprehension of the One in the Many. Vlastos sees love as the ethic of the cooperative community; the ethic of the free and equal personality.<sup>69</sup> Mutuality is the law of life.

The "relational quality of life" is a recurring theme in Macmurray's work. The discussion of religion should always begin with the experience which underlies it and come only subsequently to the question of God. In his view, the fundamental religious fact in human life is friendship--"the rock on which personality

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<sup>67</sup>Troeltsch, *Christian Thought: Its History and Application*, Lectures written for Delivery in England during March 1923, 34-35.

<sup>68</sup>Scott and Vlastos, *Towards*, p. 64.

<sup>69</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

is built."<sup>70</sup>

God's intention for his creation--for each man specifically--is a universal community of persons, with freedom and equality as its structural principles of relationship. Man must will to carry out God's intention.<sup>71</sup>

Religions may be analyzed in their depth (the inward disposition in the personality; an inner sense of compelling truth) according to Farmer. Moreover, the divine/human encounter is a "permeating principle" to be experienced rather than an "I-Thou encounter."

As can be seen, there are points of similarity as well as divergence between these scholars with regard to history as dynamic process, the relational/personalistic nature of life in its human and divine manifestations and, finally, the conviction that religious experience is empirical.

We turn now to an investigation of the Islamic experience in order to discover how this affected Smith's life and thought.

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<sup>70</sup>Macmurray, *Reason and Emotion*, 63.

<sup>71</sup>Macmurray, *The Clue to History*, 100.

### Chapter III

#### STAGE ONE: THE ISLAMIC EXPERIENCE

Wilfred Smith arrived in Lahore, India, in 1940 at the age of twenty-four to take up his duties as missionary/teacher. His posting was as a lecturer in Indian and Islamic history at Forman Christian College and, later, as representative among Muslims of the Canadian Overseas Missionary Council. In 1949, he left Lahore, now part of Pakistan, to join the faculty of McGill University in Montreal as Professor of Comparative Religion. The period in Lahore was interspersed by an interval of two years devoted to graduate study at Princeton University (1947-1948).

Profound political events took place on the sub-continent between the years 1940 and 1949: as India achieved independence from Britain in August 1947, Pakistan separated from India, achieving the status of an independent Muslim state. The upheavals took place while Smith was a doctoral student at Princeton (1947-1948); nonetheless, their occurrence and aftermath produced an inexorable disruption in the orientation of his own life. The political-religious crisis of the people of the sub-continent correlated with the political-religious crisis suffered by Smith personally; it dominates the narrative to follow. Thus, the Islamic experience will be considered in three parts: the first will have to do with Smith's thought and activity in India prior to Partition; the second will explore his analysis and critique of official Islam as found in the pages of the *Azhar Journal*, a Cairo university

publication and the topic of his Princeton doctoral dissertation; and the third part will chronicle Smith's radical response<sup>1</sup> to the fact and manner of the creation of a Muslim state. This resulted in the emergence of a new view of the resolution of tension between religion and history.

In his two books on Islam, Smith himself provides an analysis and critique of the periods before and after Partition from a religious-political-historical perspective and from his own personal perspective. *Modern Islam in India* was published in 1943 (followed, in 1948, by his dissertation on the *Azhar Journal*); *Islam in Modern History* appeared in 1957 while he was at McGill University. These writings may be seen to be germane to what I am terming "the Islamic experience" and his subsequent intellectual endeavours. Accordingly, the following narrative will cluster around these publications.

## I

Smith's introduction to life in India was as a lecturer in Indian and Islamic History at Forman Christian College from 1941 to 1945. He also served as Research Associate (Extension Work Associate) at the Henry Martyn School of Islamic Studies in Aligarh until 1946. It was during this period that Smith enjoyed an affiliation with the Graduate School of the University of Panjab as Instructor in

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<sup>1</sup>Kenneth Cragg comments on Smith's studies for post-graduate research which emerged in his first published book, *Modern Islam in India* (1943): "Their bias for economic factors as always primary he later deplored as a youthful gesture of enthusiasm eclipsing a more rounded picture. His firm, later confidence in the priority of the 'religious' factor--understood in the terms still to be explored--may be seen as something of a conversion." In *Troubled by Truth* (Durham: The Pentland Press, 1992), 243.

Islamic History (1943-1945). In addition to these duties, Smith became, in 1942, a representative among Muslims of the Canadian Overseas Missions Council at Lahore.

It should be noted that Smith worked as an undergraduate student in Toronto in the Student Volunteer Movement for Foreign Missions (SVM) in addition to his involvement in the Christian social movements, the SCM and the FCSO. In 1943, Smith was commissioned to an interdenominationally supported assignment in India recognized by the Presbyterian Churches who placed him on the roll of ministers for seventeen years. The following year, 1944, Smith was ordained to the United Church of North India and in 1946, to the Presbyterian Church in Canada.

#### Cultural Milieu

The years at Lahore were a time of making significant friendships among Muslims, Hindus and Sikhs, and Christians. Smith was able to cross boundary lines between culture groups, discovering persons much like himself: intellectuals, liberals, humanists, many educated in Britain. This provided for lively discussion and debate of philosophical/religious and political issues, particularly the writings and pronouncements of Iqbal and Nehru. Smith makes repeated allusions over the years to the importance of these friendships; they constituted an essential ingredient in his own personal religious evolution.

Among common rallying points were the poetry and lectures of poet-philosopher, Muhammad Iqbal, who had made his home in Lahore after completing

studies in Europe; it was here that he died two years before Smith's arrival. Smith and his friends also attended closely to the activities and speeches of politician-statesman, Jawaharlal Nehru, taking a keen interest in the socio-economic and political problems of the day. Muslim India was in the process of self-definition throughout the sub-continent; this involved in great part working toward a resolution of the tension between legitimation and validity; law (Shariah) and interpretation; theoria and praxis; unity and diversity; relations between Muslims and others. Germane to this exchange between friends and to Smith's evolving position are certain features of Iqbal's thought to which we now turn.<sup>2</sup>

Muhammad Iqbal (1877-1938) contributed greatly through his poetry, which drew on Persian Sufi sources, and through his arresting book, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, to a new self-awareness on the part of Muslims, coupled with a re-kindled aspiration for political power. Iqbal sought to formulate a scientific form of religious knowledge, that is, a "reconstruction of Muslim religious philosophy" in consonance with Islamic tradition and new developments in "human knowledge."<sup>3</sup> The Qur'an, in his observation, "emphasizes the deed rather than the idea."<sup>4</sup> He elucidates his insight in the final chapter of the

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<sup>2</sup>Smith writes: "The connection with Iqbal was close. For it was in part his thought and work that contributed to enabling me to apprehend, insofar as I could apprehend them, the Islamic vision and the faith of Muslims underlying the beliefs and patterns of the overt Islamic tradition." In "Faith in the Qur'an," Chapter six, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 113.

<sup>3</sup>Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (Lahore (Pak): Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1930; reprinted January 1962), Preface, n.p.

<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*

book in these words:

The ultimate aim of the ego is not to *see* something, but to *be* something. (The ego) discovers his final opportunity to sharpen his objectivity and acquire a more fundamental 'I am,' which finds evidence of its reality not in the Cartesian 'I think' but in the Kantian 'I can.'<sup>5</sup>

In the case of Macmurray, as we have seen above, the Cartesian Cogito is changed into the mode of the "actor" or of personal agency, a degree "beyond" 'I can.'

Throughout the book, Iqbal stresses the creation of the new: "Every act of a free ego creates a new situation and thus further opportunities of creative unfolding."<sup>6</sup> For his purposes, Iqbal redefines *ijtihad*, or independent thought<sup>7</sup> and calls on Muslims "to create a new future through *ijtihad*," literally 'exerting oneself by exercising creative thought within Islamic parameters.'<sup>8</sup> In fact, he invites the whole world, as Rahman puts it, "to join this energizing and ethically positive Islam."<sup>9</sup>

Iqbal came to abandon the monistic approach he held as a mystic-poet,

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 198.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 123.

<sup>7</sup>Marshall G. S. Hodgson defines *ijtihad*, in part, as "individual inquiry to establish the ruling of the *Shari'ah* upon a given point, by a *mujtahid*, a person qualified for the inquiry." In *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization*, Vol. 3, (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1974), 451.

<sup>8</sup>Fazlur Rahman quotes Iqbal in his article, "Muhammad Iqbal," *Encyclopedia of Religion*.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.



discerning "God as both immanent and transcendent."<sup>10</sup> The aim of religion in Iqbal's view is "the transformation and guidance of man's inner and outer life" which means that the "general truths which it embodies must not remain unsettled."<sup>11</sup> Transformation and guidance occur in the encounter with Ultimate Reality or Ultimate Ego. Iqbal is opposed to Platonic idealism; in Islam, he points out, there is an

endeavour of ideal to appropriate the real with a view to absorb it, to convert it into itself and to illuminate its whole being.<sup>12</sup>

When it comes to opposition between subject and object Islam seeks "to absorb" the opposition.<sup>13</sup> Christianity, however, in his view, envisages the opposition between subject and object as "mathematical without and biological within."<sup>14</sup>

Iqbal proclaims the interrelation between the empirical, the experiential, humanity, nature and history; he sees no dysfunction between them; it is the Qur'an that undergirds his understanding: the Qur'an recognizes "that the empirical attitude is an indispensable stage in the spiritual life of humanity"; all regions of human experience, including nature and history, yield "knowledge of the

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<sup>10</sup>Dr. Sheila McDonough, "Buber and Iqbal," paper presented to a Colloquium on Religion held at the Department of Religion, *Concordia University*, November 22, 1990. 7.

<sup>11</sup>Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, 2.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>13</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*

ultimate Reality which reveals its symbols both within and without."<sup>15</sup>

The spirit of the Prophet's revelation "belongs to the modern world" opening up "other sources of knowledge suitable to its new direction"—nature and history, for instance; the inductive intellect; the 'constant appeal to reason and experience in the Qur'an.'<sup>16</sup>

Iqbal gives expression to his political objectives in a letter to Jinnah:

For Islam the concept of social democracy...is not a revolution but a return to the original purity of Islam...(To) solve the "problem of bread" among the Muslims of India, it is necessary to redistribute the country and to provide one or more Muslim states with absolute majorities.<sup>17</sup>

Iqbal upheld the ideal of a non-violent resolution to the intellectual and political turmoil of the day.

The coupling of religious commitment and the plea for social justice were not new to Smith; he had participated in such movements in a small way in Canada, nor were such concerns absent from the British scene while he was at Cambridge. There was a Marxian coloration to all these drives towards religious commonweal. But there were differences as well. Nehru reports Gandhi as saying:

The socialism and communism of the West is based on certain conceptions which are fundamentally different from ours. One such conception is their belief in the essential selfishness of human nature. Our socialism and communism should therefore be based on

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<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 15.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>17</sup>Kalam Siddiqui, *Conflict, Crisis and War in Pakistan* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 45.

nonviolence and on the harmonious co-operation of labour and capital, landlord and tenant.<sup>18</sup>

Gandhi called on the British people, after World War I, to meet British repression with passive resistance or *Satyagraha*. He launched a long campaign of civil disobedience, suffering frequent imprisonment of extended periods, as did Nehru who spent, in all, nine years in prison.

The interplay of forces in India around the time of Smith's arrival in India can only be sketched in very briefly and will be seen as revolving around the aims and goals of Gandhi and Nehru, in particular in their confrontation with the British government and in response to the people of the sub-continent. The two see themselves in common as democrats and socialists. Gandhi writes of himself:

I am not a visionary. I claim to be a practical idealist. The religion of nonviolence is not meant merely for the Rishis and saints. It is meant for the common people as well...The dignity of man requires obedience to a higher law--to the strength of the spirit...I believe absolutely that she (India) has a mission for the world.<sup>19</sup>

Nehru declares himself, in his 1941 autobiography, in the following terms:

India is supposed to be a religious country above everything else; Hindu, Moslem, Sikh, and others take pride in their faiths and testify to their truth by breaking heads. The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate, organised religion, in India and elsewhere has filled me with horror, and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seems to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition and exploitation, and the preservation of vested interests. And yet I know well that there was something else in it, something which

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<sup>18</sup>Jawaharlal Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1941; reprint 1961), 325.

<sup>19</sup>Gandhi, "The Doctrine of the Soul," 1920 in Nehru, *Toward Freedom, Autobiography*, 1941; reprint 1961, 81-82.

supplied a deep inner craving of human beings.<sup>20</sup>

In the introduction to the autobiography, (he was President of the Congress at the time) he calls himself a democrat and a socialist, engaged in the fulfilment of a life purpose that involved the establishment of India's place in the world community.

At the outbreak of World War II, India was committed by the Viceroy to war on Britain's side without consultation of the autonomous provincial ministries. This precipitated a period of uncertain leadership; Gandhi and Nehru did not agree on the role of non-violence in support of the war. The Muslim League, however, did come forward, on March 23, 1940, and adopted the Lahore Resolution which, in Smith's words, "gave political form to the idea of a separate state for the Indian Muslims; but abstrusely. The resolution did not mention Islam, or the term Pakistan."<sup>21</sup>

After the bombing of Pearl Harbor and the subsequent attack of Burma, Britain came forward with new offers for the settlement of the constitutional problem; Gandhi held out for independence and the mission failed. The Congress Party passed the "Quit India" resolution on August 8, 1942; as a result, the entire Congress working committee, including Gandhi and Nehru, was arrested and imprisoned.

Against the backdrop of the interplay of internal and external political events, as well as between leadership factors in India, complicated by diversity of

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<sup>20</sup>Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, 240-241.

<sup>21</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 212,n4.

religious and cultural loyalties and the programs of creative and charismatic leaders, Smith published his first book, in 1943, two years after his arrival in Lahore, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*.<sup>22</sup> His aim, he tells us, is to contribute to the "sociology of religion" and to the social and political understanding of one segment of the world.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, he declares himself, in this Preface, to be a socialist of ethical convictions.

The book is a study of the Muslim community in India and its evolution over the previous seventy-five years, from feudalism to--at least for a minority--the ethos of the British-educated upper class. The focus is on the interplay of "modern" Islam with historical events and with ideology. Smith's basic assumption in this work may be gathered from his own words:

socialism is the putting into practice of the ideals and values of the world's prophets and religions...a truth which the bourgeois followers of those prophets and religions are slow to recognize.<sup>24</sup>

Smith's analysis points to the difficulty of implementing the "ideals and values of prophets and religions" which he shows clearly in the following quotation:

Iqbal, John Macmurray, the Communist Party, and all social progressives, attack traditional religion for the same reason: namely, that by diverting attention by its idealism from the real situation and the real opportunities, it to-day impedes right action.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1943; reprint 1963).

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., Preface, n.p.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 99.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 116.

The stultifying effect of traditional "idealism" on a creative approach to contemporary problems--to life, in fact--is a recurring theme in Smith's writing.

The second part of the book chronicles political groupings and activities. From the cultural data, Smith makes inferences: India should learn from the world-wide depression associated with the West, and pass on from capitalism (and liberalism) to socialism.

But the lesson...being taught is to revert from Western liberalism to a Muslim liberalism; or if that will not suffice, to a Muslim conservatism.<sup>26</sup>

Although Iqbal "elaborated no ethical system," Smith acknowledges that he laid the foundations for a creative approach, calling for action to change the plight of the Indian Muslim society while abjuring imitation of the West, especially capitalism's exploitation and record of oppression.<sup>27</sup> Smith's personal stance at the time comes through in the faults he finds in Iqbal (whom he much admired). For instance, he suggests that Iqbal misses the fact that "spiritual values result from certain material realities, and can be attained only through these." Iqbal is also faulted for "deriving thoughts from thoughts,"<sup>28</sup> implication being that thoughts should arise from empirical realities. However, Iqbal did "raise to consciousness" the problem of Islamic identity; Smith wrestles with the tradition versus modernity dilemma, recognizing that the problem is world-wide; that the conditions of the

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 93.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., 118.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 146.

modern world are so radically new that "to choose real righteousness is to spurn imagined morality."<sup>29</sup>

Smith reports that in the 1940's (the Lahore Resolution came in 1940), communalism for the Muslims has been transforming itself into a new nationalism; "politics has assumed the role of religious service or worship."<sup>30</sup> The religious problem has been postponed; "orthodox and liberal, conservative and progressive, have reunited to demand a separate Muslim state."<sup>31</sup> In these pages Smith records what he discerns to be the direction of the future. No longer tenable is the notion that "true Islam is the service of humanity, that the Muslim task is simply the creation of righteousness in the world." This has been replaced, in general, by the assumption that "the Muslim duty is the creation of righteousness in Pakistan"<sup>32</sup>--that is, in a future Muslim state yet to be formed. Smith, calls this "the contemporary synthesis"<sup>33</sup>--using the language of Troeltsch. In this analysis, Smith reveals himself to be hopeful--Gandhi had raised the hopes of the people of India for a non-violent accord with Britain. However, I suggest that the style of writing--staccato, brusque--underscores Smith's perception that the mediating elements between Islam and society were likely to effect dramatic mutual change in the

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 136.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 170.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 171.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid, the title of Chapter 5, 170-171.

religious tradition and in the culture.

The following year, 1944, Smith published a journal article that further illustrates his sociological approach. It provides an analysis of a segment of the history of the Mughal Empire.<sup>34</sup> He asserts, in "The Mughal Empire and the Middle Class: A Hypothesis," that modern historians concern themselves with "culture, the life of the people, the methods of production."<sup>35</sup> He adds to the list the process of transformation in the life of a country and the interconnection between "specific events" and general developments. However, this revolution has not yet hit India. It is a way of looking at history that is now out of date. What Smith wishes to do is to draw attention to the social evolution underlying one period of India's history, that of the Mughal Empire.

He develops the thesis that significant historical development is accompanied by some economic development;<sup>36</sup> furthermore, the class structure and the class struggles of the people involved impinge sharply on historical development. Thus the rise of the Mughal empire was dependent on the rise of the middle class.<sup>37</sup> The Mughal conquest touched the village economy of India and began to revolutionize it--partly through encouraging a more widespread use of money. "The new economy implies a new prosperity, almost a new world order, for the

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<sup>34</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Mughal Empire and the Middle Class: A Hypothesis." *Islamic Culture* (Hyderabad) 1, 18 (1944).

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 349.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 350.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 352.



commercial middle class."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, according to modern historians, religious developments reflect or accompany basic changes in social processes. His reading of the history of this period indicates "an alliance of the predominantly Muslim upper class with the predominantly Hindu middle class."<sup>39</sup>

Smith's analysis throughout this article may be said to be Marxian, his hypothesis being that the Mughal empire prospered when its policies favoured the middle class; however, when it promoted the interests of the old upper-class, the empire collapsed. His argument centered on the materialist base of values.

Accommodation did not come to the India of the forties. New political entities came into being instead of a socialist decision or a socialist liberation of the workers and the means of production. On August 15, 1947, India and Pakistan emerged as two separate, independent countries. Smith was away at Princeton when these events took place; he experienced a dramatic reversal of outlook which is documented in *Islam in Modern History* (1957). As Smith's doctoral thesis appeared in the interval, in 1948, we shall consider it next.

## II

"The Azhar Journal: Survey and Critique"<sup>40</sup>

The topic of the thesis is the official journal of the *ulama* in Cairo, the centre of orthodox Islam, published on a monthly basis since 1930. Smith's

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 359.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 360.

<sup>40</sup>Doctoral Dissertation, Princeton University, Department of Oriental Languages and Literature, 1948.

examination of the journal covers publication from the years 1930 to 1948 during which time there were two editors, each quite different in his approach.

(F)or the first editor, Islam was a transcendent idea, which it is man's duty to ascertain, and to follow...(for the second), it comes close to being an historical phenomenon, which it is man's duty to defend.<sup>41</sup>

This distinction is developed at length. Al-Khidr Husayn, the first editor, perceives Islam as true, revealed and final. But, for Husayn, "that religion is a transcendent Idea. Man's knowledge of what it really is, is both progressive and fallible."<sup>42</sup> Smith develops Husayn's understandings: what man does as he strives to implement this transcendent Idea is always imperfect; worth is to be ascribed to Islam as such, not to any man-made idealization or attempted embodiment of it. Husayn does not represent the religious tradition as "inviolable" nor "sacrosanct". Smith writes:

His interest is not in the past but in the timeless, and its relation to the present; in the vision of an ideal Islam and in the practical implications of this for today.<sup>43</sup>

In Husayn's eyes, according to Smith, "goodness is inherently attractive;"<sup>44</sup> or, at least,...the Muslim is committed to the will of God once he knows it."<sup>45</sup> In this interpretation, religious education is important. While extolling Husayn's platonic

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>42</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957; New York: New American Library (Mentor Books), 1959), 128.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 128-129.

<sup>44</sup>Iris Murdoch speaks of "the magnetic pull of the idea of perfection" in *The Sovereignty of Good* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), 43.

<sup>45</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 129.

"celestial vision," Smith points out that, though appealing to a minority, it is out of step with modernity: "the problem is that modern men are not platonists."<sup>46</sup>

The second editor, Farid Wajdi, is zealous for the "service of Islam," which translates for Smith into a conception of the need to defend Islam "against materialistic skepticism." Smith observes that for the first editor Islam was a transcendent ideal; for the second, it comes close to being "an historical phenomenon needing to be defended."<sup>47</sup> Smith characterizes Wajdi's assumptions thus: for him, Islam is an institution; a set of ideas in men's minds; a heritage, a society; not a moral imperative. "Attacking materialist philosophy" is one of Wajdi's stated aims.<sup>48</sup> The zeal for the institution ("for the service of Islam") Smith understands to mean--in the discussion of objectives-- "virtually no concern for man and none even with God".<sup>49</sup>

There is a large group among the readership, Smith concludes, for whom "old forms no longer mediate value."<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the Journal itself "exemplifies rather than solves" the problem with which Islam is confronted: those who know the religion have lost contact with the "swiftly-moving modern world"; those in touch with

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<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>47</sup>Smith, Dissertation, 107.

<sup>48</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 138.

<sup>49</sup>Dissertation, 103.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid, 156.

modernity have "lost contact with their religion."<sup>51</sup> Smith provides a telling analysis and critique of the tensions that beset not only Islam but the religions of the contemporary world, to some degree and in varying admixtures.

The article on the Mughal Empire and the doctoral dissertation well illustrate Smith's contention that the scholar of religion is concerned with ideals in 1) "men's minds which, rightly or wrongly, they mundanely hold"; 2) "the idea of Ideals that men form" and 3) "ideals...of transcendent truth."<sup>52</sup> He cautions throughout this discussion against mistaking "ideas of ideals" for transcendent, evolving ideal or truth.

### III

By the time Smith returned in 1949 for his final year, India had achieved independence, Pakistan had come into being, untold atrocities and killings had occurred and millions of Indians had been forced to emigrate from one part of the sub-continent to another, depending on whether the individual was Hindu or Muslim. What had been a vibrant hope for a creative and peaceful solution to the myriad of problems facing all Indians was inexorably crushed. As well, confidence in the communist cause had been eroded by knowledge of reports of excesses coming out of Russia.

This was a difficult time for Smith. Along with his friends and many

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>52</sup>See Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion in General and the Study of Islam as a Religion in Particular" in *Colloque sur la Sociologie Musulmane*, Actes 11-14, septembre 1961, Bruxelles, 224.

others, the presuppositions of their adult lives had been overturned. Smith tells his own story along with that of a religious tradition in his *Islam in Modern History*; his book will be our spokesman in this part of the narrative.

### *Islam in Modern History*<sup>53</sup>

The book emerges out of the events surrounding Partition, the creation of the Islamic state of Pakistan and Smith's disillusionment over the senseless cost in human lives. I have selected passages that record a) his more mature apprehension of the Islamic religious tradition and b) his changed worldview. The approach is therefore thematic.

### History

In the preface, Smith gives an indication of how far he has moved, over the past decade, in his interpretation of history. History is primarily a human activity; the actors are persons, in this case, Muslim. The "conditioning" of historical events is secondary.<sup>54</sup>

### Intention

Smith states that the book is "a contribution to a politico-economic-social study" rather than a contribution to a "sociology of religion" as in the case of *Modern Islam in India* (1943) whose defects he readily admits: "chiefly the inadequate understanding of Islam and also of the crucial role played in history by

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<sup>53</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957; Reissued: New York: New American Library (Mentor Books), 1959).

<sup>54</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, vii.

ideological and moral factors."<sup>55</sup> This book, Smith continues: attempts to correct the defects;... it is fundamentally "a study in religion, comparative and contemporary."<sup>56</sup>

### Comparative Religion Studies

Smith has several innovative guidelines to suggest: a) such studies "in our day...have a function to fulfill in intercommunication;"<sup>57</sup> b) the new "criterion" is "the capacity to construct religious statements that will be intelligible and cogent in at least two different traditions simultaneously."<sup>58</sup> Thus Smith's project is to view "religion" in interaction with another religion and in interrelation with social factors; a third goal c) is that of intercommunicability between religious traditions.<sup>59</sup> The framework is Islam in the contemporary world. Smith admits that he is an "outsider" looking at an "alien" community; he contends that this is a necessary first step towards arriving at mutual understanding and establishing "interrelation."<sup>60</sup>

Smith's changed appraisal of "things Marxian" signals a marked discontinuity from previous writings considered above. For instance, he concludes that the Marxist movement, in rejecting external norms by which to be judged, has

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 212n5.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., vii.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., vii.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., vii.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., vii.

become an "enterprise with no norms at all."<sup>61</sup> Again, communism has failed (morally) because it is "irreligious." It has rejected not merely the name of God but "His reality."<sup>62</sup> And again, in a Marxist state such as the USSR...opposition groups have, in theory and practice, no rights. His observation is that "man in general" does not exist...a person exists only as a member of a social class. This, perhaps, is his most severe condemnation: the human person, in Marxism, has significance as an end "that is given within and by history."<sup>63</sup>

On the other hand, Smith holds that

the Marxist movement began, and is still sustained from the outside, particularly in Asia, as a movement toward a good society; and that its failure to maintain this objective internally has been due at least in part to the false metaphysics of its Weltanschauung.<sup>64</sup>

It follows, for Smith, that Marxism provides "no reason for not killing or torturing or exploiting a human person if his liquidation or torture or slave labour will advance the historical process," an outcome of the repudiation of transcendence.<sup>65</sup> Macmurray observes that "Communist practice defeats its intention and leads to an apotheosis of the State." He continues, "the personal is subordinated to the functional to a point at which the defense of the personal becomes itself a criminal

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 33.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 31.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 31, n22.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 32.

activity."<sup>66</sup>

Pakistan has achieved statehood at a staggering cost: Smith poses the question as to what Muslims consider "good" and how effectively do they pursue it.<sup>67</sup>

He cannot escape alluding to some of what went into the making of Pakistan: an estimated 500,000 people died in the upheaval from starvation, exhaustion, disease, or murder<sup>68</sup> ...riots or massacres.<sup>69</sup> What is more, "immediately after Partition...the Pakistan Muslims massacred and raped and exiled Sikhs and Hindus by the millions."<sup>70</sup>

Religion in general; Islam in particular

Smith explicates the nature of religion in these pages as part of what Slater has termed his "hermeneutics of recovery or discovery, not a hermeneutics of suspicion."<sup>71</sup> For instance, each religion is the point at which its adherent is in touch, through the intermediary of an accumulating tradition, with the infinitude of the divine;<sup>72</sup> religion houses the interplay of these various factors such as those with

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<sup>66</sup>See John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber & Faber, 1957; reprinted with new introduction, New Jersey: Humanities International, 1991), 30.

<sup>67</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 253.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 258.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 265.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 269.

<sup>71</sup>Peter Slater in "Three Responses to *Faith and Belief*: A Review Article" in *Studies in Religion/Sciences religieuses* 10 (1981): 113.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 15.



which anthropologists, psychologists, and others deal.<sup>73</sup> In his judgment, history is uniquely important for Islam;<sup>74</sup> at the beginning, Islam was constituted as an autonomous community; thus Islamic history began.<sup>75</sup> Further,

Goodness is that way of life of which the Qur'an is the revelation and Islamic society the expression. Man approaches God by participating in the Islamic venture,<sup>76</sup> the historical endeavour of the Muslim community to realize the Kingdom of God on Earth.<sup>77</sup>

Smith comes close to stating that history, Islamic history, in particular, mediates the Eternal but modifies this with the assertion that "the mediator between man and God is righteousness."<sup>78</sup> The community is of utmost importance in Islam, as a social group and as a religious body, thereby underscoring his emphasis on "religion as personal."<sup>79</sup> Muslims of India must learn to live with others as equals,<sup>80</sup> throughout the world a new ingredient must emerge, that of compatibility.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 4n, 15.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>76</sup>Smith's terminology, "Islamic venture" (1957) bears a close resemblance to Marshall G.S. Hodgson's *The Venture of Islam*; volumes 1 and 2, which appeared in an early version copyrighted by Marshall G.S. Hodgson in 1961.

<sup>77</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 25.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 26.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 289.

<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 292.

## Human choice

The classical Islamic view is that man chooses (or judges - *hakama*) according to revelation. The second alternative is that man chooses according to his own desires or passions (*ahwa'*). The third alternative, according to Smith, is not fully understood by the representatives of the classical Muslim tradition. This is the Greek philosophical element, rejected by Islamic orthodoxy. Smith's interpretation is that reason is neither subjective nor objective, but is the transcendent immanent in man.<sup>82</sup> The classical Arabic civilization adopted the rationalist tradition of Greek philosophy and science up to a limited point, but refused altogether the humanist tradition.<sup>83</sup>

Smith stresses the importance of ideas and moral values for the development of Islamic society, but, as he points out, this applies to all nations or societies. In the case of Pakistan, "because it is Muslim, its ideals are Islamic;" for other groupings, "ideals take other forms."<sup>84</sup> In this final statement, Smith alters the customary sequence of thought; this logical sequence becomes, for him, a basic assumption. The person (or persons) sees the world through Islamic (or other) eyes.

## Conclusion

This first stage in Smith's career combined Christian outreach with a scholar's knowledge of Islam and training as an historian. His Christian socialist-

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<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 303.

<sup>84</sup>Ibid., 304.

political orientation, nourished in Canada and in Britain, underwent pronounced change. Equally important, although subsumed under the political, was a new, broad emphasis on the "personal" as opposed to the "social," accompanied by a recognition that it was persons (he often stipulated Muslims) who responded to the transcendent Idea in different ways, in different places and times. The problem of the nature of the divine/human dialectic or interrelationship was a central preoccupation.

The "Islamic experience" proved a dramatic catalyst for the analysis and re-evaluation of presuppositions and assumptions. The experience afforded Smith, as Christian missionary, the opportunity to participate in the interplay between his own faith and the faith of new friends: Muslim, Sikh, Hindu, Christian. This provided enhanced understanding and appreciation of the contributions to humankind of leaders as different in background as the poet-philosopher, Iqbal; the saintly Gandhi; and the statesman Nehru.

The interconnection between specific and general events was the topic of his study of one section of the Mughal Empire; this he interpreted from the point of view of socialism which revealed to him the nature and inadequacy of a materialist base of values.

The study of the Journal of the *ulama* made two conflicting approaches to Islam clear.

One: "Islam is a transcendent Idea";<sup>85</sup> "Islam is an idea in the mind

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<sup>85</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 1957, 133.

of God";<sup>86</sup> it is a "moral imperative" and a summons to righteousness;<sup>87</sup> man must strive to make "real" society approximate more closely to the "ideal" one (which Islam proclaims).<sup>88</sup> This is consonant with Iqbal's contention that under the Qur'an "each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors" should be permitted to solve its own problems."<sup>89</sup>

Two: The second approach, in Smith's perception, regards Islam as close to an historical phenomenon "which it is man's duty to defend";<sup>90</sup> it is an "institution...a set of ideas in men's minds, a heritage, a society...an historical reality."<sup>91</sup> The need here is to strive against non religion and "materialism" and to "ward off doubts."<sup>92</sup> Such an ideological orientation (his term is "modernist ideology")<sup>93</sup> does not promote a creative approach to problems of the present or the

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 131.

<sup>89</sup>Allama Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* ed. and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1986; second edition, Iqbal Academy Pakistan and Institute of Islamic Culture, 1989), 134. Note: the pagination refers to this publication which is different from the version used in earlier citations above. In full, Iqbal wrote: "The teaching of the Qur'an that life is a process of progressive creation necessitates that each generation, guided but unhampered by the work of its predecessors, should be permitted to solve its own problems."

<sup>90</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 139.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 138.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 140.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 128.

future.

The publication of *Islam in Modern History* (1957) represented a reworking of his political orientation coupled with his evolving "history of religion" approach against a Christian background. The interplay of ideas, ideals, ideology and the transcendent Idea or Ideal becomes Smith's basic agenda for the future. Such interaction has also been termed the dialectic (or tension) between the generic and the particular, or the absolute and the relative or the One and the Many, to name a few appellations.

Comparative religion studies have a function to fulfil in intercommunication; insiders and outsiders will have to learn to communicate with one another in order to establish interrelations between religious traditions. There is no "shorthand" for these functions. In a later chapter I shall suggest additional portions of this book which, I argue, contribute to the structures and conceptualizations of his theory as it further develops.

Smith next addresses all these concerns from an academic post--from McGill University in the West.

## Chapter IV

### COMPARATIVE RELIGION

#### Stage Two: McGill University 1949-1963

Wilfred Cantwell Smith initiated a long and illustrious academic career in North America when he accepted the W. M. Birks Chair of Comparative Religion at McGill University in 1949. While serving in this capacity, he also founded, in 1952, and was the Director of, the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill, whose mandate was consideration of common factors of Muslim identity worldwide. It was stipulated that half the student body and half the faculty were to be Muslim. While at McGill, Smith actively assisted in the formation of the Faculty of Divinity.<sup>1</sup>

My purpose in this chapter is twofold: to present Smith's conception of the field of comparative religion as enunciated and developed during his years at McGill; firstly, suggesting possible convergence or divergence with mentors such as Troeltsch, Macmurray or others; secondly, to continue to identify the Islamic component in Smith's evolving thought, from the point of view of a "comparativist" and that of a historian of religion, as evidenced in his many writings during this period about the Islamic tradition and about the Middle East. As the two strands--the discipline of comparative religion and the Islamic experience/component--are intertwined in his corpus, the investigation will be concurrent; the order will be

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<sup>1</sup>In *Religious Diversity*, Oxtoby writes: "(Smith's) was a new non-ecclesiastical position which figured in the formation of the Faculty of Divinity as part of the university after three and a half decades of interdenominational theological co-operation." xiii.

chronological. The exploration will start with Smith's inaugural address upon accepting the Chair in Comparative Religion at McGill.<sup>2</sup>

Smith's thesis expands on Troeltsch's "mediating principle" in his assertion that religion is to be found in the "interaction between men and their religious material"<sup>3</sup> rather than in the search for "essences" or "origins" in which history sees science and religion as two developing traditions. What is required is a mode whereby science and religion might move into dynamic cooperation.

Religion has a history; religions change in history. The science of religion (this, for him, is comparative religion) can discover how they change. Moreover, the comparative religionist, as scientist--and here is the basic affirmation--is able "to elucidate how religions can, from what they are, become what they ought to be."<sup>4</sup> What Smith means by this statement can be clarified by reference to Iqbal's understanding:

The world regarded as a process realizing a pre-ordained goal is not a world of free, responsible moral agents...From our conscious experience we have seen that to live is to shape and change ends and purposes and to be governed by them. Mental life is teleological in the sense that, while there is no far-off distant goal towards which we are moving, there is a progressive formation of fresh ends, purposes, and ideal scales of value as the process of life grows and expands. We

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<sup>2</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion," in *McGill University Divinity Faculty Inaugural Lectures*, 1949, 39-60, as reproduced and abridged in Walter H. Capps *Ways of Understanding Religion* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 190-203. Pagination that follows is that used by Capps.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 192.

become by ceasing to be what we are.<sup>5</sup>

This assessment of Islamic experience provided Smith with a vivid illustration of the need for process as opposed to static interpretations of a religion tradition; Troeltsch provided theoretical reasoning in support of openness to change. Smith views the future orientation of religions in the light of the Indian/Pakistan conflict; in the light of the rise, worldwide, of fundamentalism; in sum, especially in the light of 20th century history. However, what the religions ought to be, according to Smith, "is the part of the prophet."<sup>6</sup> For Troeltsch the great religions come to terms creatively with mediating elements in their environment, an ongoing process. Moreover, according to Troeltsch, creative compromise between subject and object requires new decision, new creation and new risk; in this process, history overcomes history.<sup>7</sup> Iqbal favoured openness to history, fresh ends and purposes, divine and human egos in interaction.<sup>8</sup> "Smith tried to do for Islam what Troeltsch had done for Christianity."<sup>9</sup>

#### Legitimation and validation

Smith asserts that knowledge and virtue are intertwined and that we

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<sup>5</sup>Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore, Pak.): Ashraf, 1930; reprinted 1960), 54.

<sup>6</sup>Smith, McGill Inaugural Address, 192.

<sup>7</sup>See James Luther Adams, "Ernst Troeltsch as Analyst of Religion," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* Vol 1 no 1 (Oct 1961):108.

<sup>8</sup>See Iqbal, *Reconstruction*, 54; 60-61.

<sup>9</sup>I am indebted to Dr. Sheila McDonough, Department of Religion, Concordia University, Montreal for this quotation and for permission to include it here.



have forgotten that "the pursuit of truth<sup>10</sup> is a moral and spiritual discipline."<sup>11</sup> Along with Macmurray, he deplores the "bifurcation" between subject and object, (Smith speaks of his "vigorous rejection of the subjective-objective polarity")<sup>12</sup> dating back to the Cartesian revolution. Modern science observes the "relation between intellectual truth and the severely practical as object" but the "relation between intellectual truth and the practical in the agent," part of the Greek heritage, "has been lost."<sup>13</sup>

Authority in religion, Smith observes, has shifted over the centuries. For instance, Luther effected a shift away from the authority of the Church; the Reformation substituted the authority of the Bible.<sup>14</sup> The forms of legitimation change and will continue to change; this claim is reminiscent of Troeltsch for whom "the standard that represents validity...must be discerned in the dramatic unfolding and interplay of perspectives...in confrontation with the process of creative

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<sup>10</sup>See Michael P. Morrissey, speaking of Plato's *Phaedrus*: "true wisdom is attained through the development of emotional rationality" in "Reason and Emotion: Modern and Classical Views on Religious Knowing" in *Horizons*, 16/2 (1989), 282.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, Inaugural Address, McGill, 198.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, "Retrospective Thoughts on *The Meaning and End of Religion*" in *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality/La religion dans l'histoire: Le mot, l'idée, la réalité*. ed. by Michel Despland and/et Gérard Vallée (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University, 1992) 19.

<sup>13</sup>Smith, Inaugural Address, McGill, 198.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, 199.

evolution.<sup>15</sup>

Smith believes that people searching for truth or for God can "talk and learn from each other" whereas the search for the "real" Islam or "real" any religion obstructs intercommunication. Here the focus is personalist rather than socialist; process rather than "socialist system." He has left behind the socialist orientation of his first book, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis*. The mutuality of "talking and learning from each other" appears to be consonant with the Macmurray/Vlastos affirmation of "mutuality as the law of life" but without Vlastos' explicit emphasis on the pursuit of social justice. Smith does not seek a synthesis as envisaged, for instance, in Macmurray's hoped-for synthesis of Christianity and Communism; in fact, Marxian analysis and critique of society disappear from Smith's writings after the Islamic experience of the Partition.

Smith's proposal for comparative religion is: as the scientist submits to a "transcendent standard, that of truth," so should the student of comparative religion, devoting himself to the higher standards of truth (scientific and rational), of beauty and of goodness/God. "Loyalty to universal ideals in terms of self-discipline"<sup>16</sup> should replace the search for authority in religion. God is immanent and transcendent. Farmer makes the same assertion, adding that God may be

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<sup>15</sup>James Luther Adams, "Ernst Troeltsch as Analyst of Religion" in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol 1, no 1 (Oct 1961): 109.

<sup>16</sup>Smith, Inaugural Address, McGill, 202.

apprehended "as a personal reality."<sup>17</sup> Vlastos and Macmurray speak of finding the "Other in the experience of mutuality."<sup>18</sup> In Platonic terms, conceptions of excellence and virtue are intertwined; in theological terms, Smith observes, "God is both immanent and transcendent; and no form can contain Him."<sup>19</sup>

The hypothesis that Smith places before the religions/peoples of the world at this time of perplexity is the acceptance of "the value, though not the authority, of the religious heritage; the authority, though not the adequacy of reason; and the example...of the scientific tradition"<sup>20</sup> Religion must attain that balance of freedom and order that science enjoys. It is a science of religion he proposes, not a synthesis. From this point forward, Smith's academic career deals with the implementation and refinement of this hypothesis.

Writings (Essays and Talks) between 1951 and 1959

The following selections indicate something of the continuity of Smith's thought as it developed over this period. Most of the output in this interval was either directed to a South East Asian audience or took as its subject the Islamic tradition and experience. Again, one might say that "Smith tried to do for Islam

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<sup>17</sup>H. H. Farmer, *Revelation and Religion: Studies in the Theological Interpretation of Religious Types* (Digswell Place: James Nisbet and Company, 1954; reprint 1961) 234-35; 238.

<sup>18</sup>Gregory Vlastos, "The Religion of Community: Review of John Macmurray's *The Structure of Religious Experience*," *Christendom*, II, 2 (Spring, 1937): 293.

<sup>19</sup>Smith, Inaugural Address, McGill, 202.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 201.

what Troeltsch did for Christianity."<sup>21</sup>

"Islam Confronted by Western Secularism: A Revolutionary Reaction" - 1951

History provides the backdrop for further formulations in Smith's evolving assessment of value in religious heritage. The Islamic component in his thought can be discerned in his modalities of comparison between the Christian and Islamic traditions as they face modernity. For instance, the challenge to Islam presented by modernity is not so much to a system of ideas as it is a threat to a 'community.'<sup>22</sup> Islam begins in history when Islam came to power as a community with its own laws and its own sovereignty; it begins with "power and success" whereas "Christianity was formed and expanded through centuries of oppression--as the religion of the proletariat, as it were, of the Roman Empire."<sup>23</sup> Smith sees the law, the Shari'ah, as the central expression of Islamic faith, chiefly "expressed in a social system"; by contrast, Christians have "tried chiefly to express their faith in theology."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, the Sunni-Shi'ah split originally arose from "a dispute as to how society should be organized, what sort of people should be its leaders."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>This observation was kindly provided by Dr. Sheila McDonough, Concordia University, Montreal, as mentioned above.

<sup>22</sup>Smith, "Islam Confronted by Western Secularism: A Revolutionary Reaction" in *Islam in the Modern World: A Series of Addresses Presented at the Fifth Annual Conference on Middle East Affairs* edited by Dorothea Seelye Franck (Washington: Middle East Institute, 1941) 19-30; 21.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 21.

From these observations, Smith makes this inference:

While Christianity in recent years has moved toward a social gospel, Islam has been a social gospel from the start.<sup>26</sup>

The contention that Islam started out as a social gospel, I suggest to be an "Islamic component" of Smith's thought, one building block among many in his theory.

In a similar manner, Smith differentiates Islam from Christianity, stating that the New Testament is a "revelation of God; the Quran is a revelation from God."<sup>27</sup>

a revelation concerning how men are to live in relation to God and to one another. To be Muslim involves accepting a revelation about how life should be lived in all its realms: social, political, ethical. The new Muslim communities, he concludes, will be both "Islamic and modern."<sup>28</sup>

Modern, in his view, constitutes the *sine qua non* of common ground for the religions of the world. "Modern" recurs as a subject below. 'Revelation' in the above references is used by Smith, it appears, as an historical descriptive term in two religious traditions, and not as a theological term. As such, it does not "reduce" Christianity to fit the Islamic case but does constitute a contribution to his "meta" theory. Kenneth Cragg, on the other hand, suggests that Smith "disapproves of the Christian conviction which looks back to a single pivotal event by which all else is

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 29.

understood."<sup>29</sup>

Radio Broadcast on "The Institute of Islamic Studies," 1952

On April. 20, 1952, Smith spoke on the subject of the imminent opening of The Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University over the Trans-Canada Network of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.<sup>30</sup> This remarkable broadcast outlines the rationale behind the founding of the Institute and describes the intended goal: "universities, as custodians and nourishers of our culture" have a double task, that of "the training of students" and secondly, the matter of "creative research," that is, in part, "handling questions for which answers do not yet exist."<sup>31</sup>

The broadcast underscores the cooperative nature of the enterprise: "Muslims and Christians will sit down to a joint consideration...of the modern problems of cultural interpenetration, conflict, and cooperation."<sup>32</sup> In like vein, "all seminars will be joint discussion groups."<sup>33</sup> Smith, I contend, in the the above quotations, employed, as early as 1952, the techniques and strategies (radio broadcasts, discussion groups, joint sessions) of the "university extension" movement

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<sup>29</sup>See Kenneth Cragg, *Troubled by Truth: Life Studies in Inter-Faith Concern* (Edinburgh, The Pentland Press, 1992) Chapter 13, "Wilfred Cantwell Smith: 'All Inner Faith is Inter-Faith'", 256.

<sup>30</sup>The broadcast was "reproduced virtually as delivered" in *Islamic Literature* (Lahore: 5, 1953), 173-176.

<sup>31</sup>*Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, 175.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 176.

of the time.<sup>34</sup>

One can find in this talk the names and academic background of the Muslim scholars from various corners of the world, along with non-Muslim scholars from the West, who were to be members of the faculty during the inaugural session of the Institute.

The overall goal is, of course, to foster "Christian-Muslim understanding"; in Smith's view, this involves a recognition in both communities that "to become a citizen of the world, one must become a new type of person."<sup>35</sup>

"The Intellectuals in the Modern Development of the Islamic World"<sup>36</sup>

In this article, written in 1955, Smith distinguishes between Western modernity's contention that the practical intellect alone exists and the view, deriving from Aristotle, that man's theoretical intellect, along with absolute reason, lies behind the phenomenal world with which it claims to be in touch. Smith contrasts the intellectual with the technician, whether in physics or philosophy, in production or in politics:

The intellectual is the man who makes a habit of using his mind to see

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<sup>34</sup>Willard G. Oxtoby observes: "In the 1960's Smith had made common cause with the social sciences, finding congenial their emphasis on the study of contemporary groups." In *Religious Diversity*, 160.

<sup>35</sup>Radio broadcast, "The Institute of Islamic Studies," 176.

<sup>36</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Intellectuals in the Modern Development of the Islamic World" in *Social Forces in the Middle East*, edited by Sydney Nettleton Fisher (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 190-204. Smith's article was written in 1955.

the world as it metaphysically is.<sup>37</sup>

He is not here opting for "a particular metaphysics, or...metaphysical theories." His contention is that what constitutes an intellectual depends not "on what views he holds, but on how he arrives at them."<sup>38</sup> What is important, for him, is the assumption that "the human reason is not only a process to be applied to truth, but a source of it--a critic of premisses as well as of the arguments built thereon"; only recently has this started to happen in the Islamic world: men are using their intellects by judging as well as reasoning about "the whole cultural heritage."<sup>39</sup>

I have selected this article, a contribution to a collection of essays, *Social Forces in the Middle East*, as well as the preceding item, in order to elucidate Smith's project for the study of comparative religion set forth in the McGill Inaugural Address, with regard to basic premisses about the people being addressed and the worldviews held, as well as the task at hand. These selections address a Muslim audience, juxtaposing, for instance, the Greek view (that the universal logos is immanent in the human logos..never quite integrated into classical Islam) with "*Huwa al Haqq*" (essential throughout to Islam) for which he gives, as one possible translation: "God is the truth."<sup>40</sup> In sum, Smith is addressing the intellectual, analyzing intellectual frameworks in the West and in the East, and offering a new

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<sup>37</sup>Smith, "The Intellectuals in the Modern Development of the Islamic World," 193.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., 193-94.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., 195.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 195.



intellectual orientation appropriate to the times.<sup>41</sup>

Chronologically, *Islam in Modern History* appeared next, in 1957. This important book was discussed in Chapter III as part of Smith's "Islamic experience," experience that is reflected in his ideological and methodological orientation to the study of religion.

"Some Similarities and Differences between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion" - 1952<sup>42</sup>

This essay was one in a number written by various scholars to honour the Arab scholar, Philip K. Hitti. Here Smith carries forward his refinement of comparison between the two religious traditions under consideration. Out of his scholarly discussion of the "will of God," I wish to select a small portion for purposes of illustration. Smith says that for the Christian "to strive to do God's will is man's highest calling--and his greatest failure."<sup>43</sup> In the case of Islam, "the will (*mashi'ah*, *iradah*) of God is not what man should do but what God does do."<sup>44</sup> Smith

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<sup>41</sup>According to "Tillich's Concept of the Protestant Era": "Only through 'timely' criticism and action can the significantly new come into being; only in this way can the import and demand of the unconditional impinge upon history. This is the practical implication of the Protestant principle." James Luther Adams writing in Paul Tillich *The Protestant Era*, Translated and with a Concluding Essay by James Luther Adams (Chicago: the University, 1948), 311.

<sup>42</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Some Similarities and Differences between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion" in *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti* edited by James Kritzeck and R. Bayly Winder (London: Macmillan, 1959), 47-59.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 50.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

discriminates between God's *amr* and His *mashi'ah*: *mashi'ah*, the will of God, is what happens (irresistibly); the command, *amr*, of God is what in human terms ought to happen. "Man can disobey God's command, but cannot contravene His will"<sup>45</sup> Smith suggests that the Christian's conception of God's will is something man aspires to discern and to follow--a moral striving, whereas the Muslim's is a cosmic conception, ordained or determined by God. I submit that Smith's understanding of the will of God for the Muslim as "determinist" or "cosmic" constitutes a basic framework of his growing theory of religion.

"Comparative Religion: Whither--and Why?" - 1959<sup>46</sup>

This closely-reasoned essay on methodology in comparative religion makes up part of an important collection of essays on the history of religions edited by Eliade and Kitagawa. The arguments Smith advanced in the McGill Inaugural Address are here expanded and explicated. The assertions about the "new world situation" and the "human quality" of the subject matter have by now recurred regularly in Smith's pronouncements. In this essay, he introduces a "locution in pronomial terms," that is, a manner of speaking about his discernment of the human condition, for him, of course, a religious matter.<sup>47</sup> This locution is frequently used

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 51.

<sup>46</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Comparative Religion: Whither--and Why?" in *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* edited by Mircea Eliade and J. M. Kitagawa (Chicago, the University, 1959), 31-58. Reprinted in *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* edited by Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 138-157. The pagination used is from the 1959 University of Chicago edition.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 34.

in subsequent works and one which is now routinely attributed to Smith. It concerns the stages which follow upon the personalization of the faiths, starting with a discussion of a "they."

Presently the observer becomes personally involved, so that the situation is one of a "we" talking about a "they." The next step is a dialogue, where "we" talk to "you." If there is listening and mutuality, this may become that "we" talk with "you." The culmination of this progress is when "we all" are talking with each other about "us."<sup>48</sup>

This is predicated on Smith's basic principles: "The study of a religion is the study of persons" and "Faith is a quality of men's lives."<sup>49</sup> One may speculate that the study of primitive religions tended to deal with persons in their response to their "religious material" such as shamans, totems, life crises, whereas the study of "civilized" religion became, over time, at least in the west, the study of abstract dogma and doctrine. Smith proposes to move the focus on to persons-- the living faith of living persons-- because, as he said in the McGill Address, religions "exist in men's hearts" not up in "the sky." This means, Smith acknowledges, that this study is about something "not directly observable."<sup>50</sup> At this point, he enunciates the methodological principle<sup>51</sup> that the proper study of mankind is by "inference."<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 34.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>51</sup>Langdon Gilkey comments on Smith's understanding and use of "principles" in a review article "A Theological Voyage with Wilfred Cantwell Smith" in *Religious Studies Review*, Vol 7, No. 4 (October 1981) 21n, 181, to which reference will be made in Chapter VIII.

<sup>52</sup>Smith, "Whither--and Why?," 35.

It is wrong to confound, as do social scientists and some humanists, the observable aspect of a "human concern with the concern itself."<sup>53</sup> Tillich also warned against elevating the relative to ultimacy.

#### General Comments

For Smith, religion houses the interplay between transcendent reality and anthropological, psychological and other "factors."<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the only alternative to objective study is not subjective study<sup>55</sup>--an allegation also made in the Inaugural Address. Scholars in the realm of religion are urged to write for a world audience: less will not do. Practitioners in community development, church organizations, outreach, in fact, in all voluntary associations, will know first-hand the appeal of the parochial against more comprehensive categories. Smith exemplifies his own edict: what he writes is acceptable, insofar as possible, to present-day religions of the world, in their mainstream. That his books have been translated into a dozen languages, including languages of the East, attests to their acceptability, although not always to the total acceptance of their contents.

It is worthy of note that although Smith, like any scientist, does not abrogate the frameworks of the science of religion that he is proposing, he nonetheless never fails meticulously to tailor his pronouncements to the audience addressed: intellectually, socially, occupationally, and according to religious tradition,

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>See *Islam in Modern History*, 15n4.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 16n5.

including segments thereof, or specific denominations. What is more, the literary style changes perceptibly, according to genre, subject and audience: from the clipped, "scientific" style of the first book, to the popularism of radio broadcasts, to scholarly prose, as in "Whither--and Why?." The latter contains, in addition to the customary full notes, excellent annotated bibliographic entries on the history of "the history of religions" throughout the world.

Although all earlier work has underscored Smith's "personalist" principle (the study of religion is the study of persons) and Vlastos, Macmurray and Farmer have been cited as mentors in this regard, the essay "Whither--and Why?" proffers a philosophical explanation. Smith asserts that if our understanding of "living religions" comes from "a knowledge of the institutions, formulations and over history," the latter may provide "clues to a personal quality of men's lives". Moreover, a "sympathetic appreciation of this quality may be derived from having adherents of that faith as...friends."<sup>56</sup> What is in fact required is more than spokesmen for religion: "The qualities of the believer's life can become known only in that personal two-way relationship known as friendship." <sup>57</sup> He goes on to say: "I cannot know my neighbour more than superficially unless I love him."<sup>58</sup> Two years before Smith's essay appeared in print, John Macmurray, in his 1957 Gifford Lecture, *The Self as Agent*, declared that "All meaningful knowledge is for the sake

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<sup>56</sup>Smith, "Whither--and Why?", 38-39.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 39n18.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 39.

of action, and all meaningful action is for the sake of friendship."<sup>59</sup> This represents a modification and extension of Macmurray's earlier position on "personalism" as expounded in such works as *Reason and Emotion*<sup>60</sup> and *The Structure of Religious Experience*.<sup>61</sup> There is consonance between what Smith says in "Whither--and Why?": that knowledge of another is possible, especially in religion, only through "that personal two-way relationship known as friendship"<sup>62</sup> and Macmurray's enunciation of the re-thinking of "the form of the person" in the light of the cultural crisis of the time, the crisis of the "personal,"<sup>63</sup> the key concept being friendship. Epistemologically, according to Macmurray, knowledge is for the sake of action and action is for the sake of friendship;<sup>64</sup> this is where meaning resides. Smith also

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<sup>59</sup>John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), 15.

<sup>60</sup>John Macmurray. *Reason and Emotion* (London: Faber & Faber, 1935; seventh impression 1950).

<sup>61</sup>John Macmurray, *The Structure of Religious Experience* (London: Faber & Faber, 1936). (These three lectures were delivered as the Terry Lectures at Yale University in April, 1936).

<sup>62</sup>"Whither--and Why?," 39.

<sup>63</sup>Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 29.

<sup>64</sup>See Wanda Cizewski, "Friendship with God? Variations on a Theme in Aristotle, Aquinas and Macmurray" in *Philosophy & Theology* (Summer 1992): 369-381. "Macmurray sees it as his task to uncover or construct a new intellectual form in which to seek understanding of the old or traditional problems." Cizewski accordingly looks to Aristotle and Aquinas for "some sense of the history of Macmurray's key concept, namely 'friendship', 370. "Macmurray stays within the tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas on friendship, since both state that friendship requires 'some sort of communication.' Once the interpretation of 'person' has been shifted from subject to agent...friendship cannot be legalized into existence, for friendship transcends the law and gives justice its justification (*Persons in Relation*, 186-205). Cizewski observes that it might be said that friendship is the product

refers to the "important epistemological point" in the study of religious traditions,<sup>65</sup> having in mind the need to communicate with "adherents" of another faith as "informants and perhaps even as friends."<sup>66</sup>

In "Whither--and Why?", the principle of validity that Smith proposes is that "no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers"<sup>67</sup> In his view, such a principle provides experimental control that can lead a student dynamically towards the truth.<sup>68</sup> This is an extension of the self-disciplined pursuit of the truth suggested in the McGill Inaugural Address. "A personalist epistemology," Smith observes, "is not infallible." There exists the possibility of inadequate information and mis-information; data must be "checked against or co-ordinated with texts and other overt data."<sup>69</sup> There is a proviso: "The personalist approach does not replace other methods, but in our present world surely cannot fail to supplement."<sup>70</sup>

Finally, Smith envisages a central task of comparative religion as being

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neither of "nature" nor of "works," but of "grace alone," 378. Religion, in its present stage, avers Macmurray, "sustains the intention to achieve the fellowship of all things in God." (*Persons*, 165). Cizewski asks what is this fellowship "if not the perfect realization of friendship with God?", 380.

<sup>65</sup>Smith, "Whither," 38.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 39.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 43.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid., 40n18.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 40n15.

"to construct statements about religion that are intelligible within at least two traditions simultaneously";<sup>71</sup> scholarly work must be cogent within three traditions simultaneously: the academic, a religious tradition, for instance, the Christian religious tradition, and a second religious tradition, let us say, the Muslim.<sup>72</sup> It is, as he tells us, what he attempted to do in his book *Islam in Modern History*.<sup>73</sup> Smith concludes with his vision for the role of the student, or rather, the "practitioner" of comparative religion: that he become a participant in the multiform religious history of the only community there is, humanity. Comparative religion may become the disciplined self-consciousness of man's variegated and developing religious life. Out of this could come a history of "man's religiousness."<sup>74</sup>

"The Comparative Study of Religion in General and the Study of Islam as a Religion in Particular" - 1961<sup>75</sup>

This essay was presented at the Colloque sur la Sociologie Musulmane in September 1961 and published by the Centre pour l'Etude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain in Brussels; it provides important building blocks in Smith's evolving conception of the study of religious traditions.

The thesis of the piece is that a religious tradition, Muslim, or for that

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<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 52.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 53.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 44n27.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 55.

<sup>75</sup>This essay appeared in *Colloque sur la Sociologie Musulmane*. Actes, 11-14, septembre 1961. Bruxelles, Publications du Centre pour l'Etude des Problèmes du Monde Musulman Contemporain, 217-231.



matter, Christianity, has to do with two realities: first, the transcendent; secondly, the historical, or existential. The first may be apprehended by, say, a devout Muslim; the second by the historian. Smith qualifies both: even the devout are limited in how they apprehend transcendent "ideals" (his term); the outsider has no access to this realm. The historian (or anthropologist) may study empirical, actual events; he presents a "human construct, a flux."<sup>76</sup> On the other hand, the task of the comparative religionist, according to Smith, is to present "ideals" and this poses an important problem: "the Muslim's ideas of what ideal Islam transcendentally is have also evolved."<sup>77</sup>

In effect, Smith denies the notion of Islam as an early-in-history "ideal system," an "entity" which Geertz believes preceded the Javanese manifestation of Islam, the subject of his study.<sup>78</sup> Smith makes his position clear:

I believe...that the fact that Muslims form in their minds an idea of an entity to be called "Islam" is both historically and logically subordinate to the Islamic religious life of which we are in pursuit.<sup>79</sup>

The "religious life" is what the article is about. He questions whether in the religious realm, "there is either in empirical fact or in theory anything to which the name Islam can meaningfully be given."<sup>80</sup> There is the "accumulating" Islamic religious

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<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java*, (Glencoe, Illinois: Free Press, 1960).

<sup>79</sup>Smith, "The Comparative Study of Religion in General..." 1961. 228.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 230.

tradition; and there is also the "actual faith of living Muslims" and "the actual living faith of Muslims."<sup>81</sup> (my emphasis). Smith uses these various locutions to demonstrate that the disciplined scholar, the comparative religionist, can report on "the actual faith of living persons" but no one can say what Islam as a "religion" is. No "intermediary fixed system" exists between transcendence and history.<sup>82</sup> Thus Smith strikes a blow against the reification of the concept "Islam" or any other religion.

This essay affirms the living faith of living persons in relation to accumulating historical traditions. It also affirms the "mutual relationship between the believing Muslim and the observing scholar." Smith believes this relationship, though "subtle and intricate," to be of "major theoretical importance" as well as historically important.<sup>83</sup> The overall emphasis is on a theory of persons.

#### Writings on Comparative Religion: 1962-1963

The series of CBC broadcasts called *The Faith of Other Men*<sup>84</sup> focuses on living persons of faith in six religious traditions of the world. His audience is now the vast listening public; he tells his audience that they must learn how to "transform our new world society into a world community."<sup>85</sup> Ten years earlier, Smith spoke

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., 231.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 225.

<sup>84</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Faith of Other Men* (Toronto: Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 1962)

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 3.

of learning to become a "citizen of the world";<sup>86</sup> the emphasis in *The Faith of Other Men* is on "persons" in interrelation with all the dimensions of the new world situation. For this, "a new type of person is required."<sup>87</sup>

The talks deal with "inner faith rather than outward system";<sup>88</sup> the method is to use a symbol from each tradition to illustrate that tradition; his purpose is to show how "other men perceive the universe."<sup>89</sup> The symbol—in one case an image, in another, a ceremony, different in each case—provides a link between the living person and transcendence, an approach that may be said to owe something to Troeltsch's "case by case" dictum. For instance, Smith chooses the Shin By Yu ceremony as the symbol by which to represent the Buddhist religious tradition as well as the people involved in such a ceremony. Moreover, Smith posits a dual role for the symbol:

Within the pattern there is a meaning, a deep and intangible significance that is symbolized; beyond the forms there is substance or the intimation of a transcending, limitless truth, an infinite that becomes available to men within the finite, through these channels that a society inherits and cherishes, and uses to express its faith and to nourish it.<sup>90</sup>

I have chosen to reproduce this passage because it so well encapsulates the central

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<sup>86</sup>Smith says "to become a citizen of the world, one must become a new type of person" in the Radio Broadcast, "The Institute of Islamic Studies," *Islamic Literature* (Lahore: 5, 1953), 176.

<sup>87</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>90</sup>*Ibid.*, 21.

thrust of these remarkable broadcasts. He discerns in the religious symbol the link between the transcendent and actual existence, an active link that participates in both realms; an interconnection that seems more dynamic even than Tillich's understanding of the symbol as mediating ultimate reality. In the case of Islam, Smith chose the repetition of the *Shahadah*. "To repeat this creed is formally to become a Muslim."<sup>91</sup> Revelation for the Muslim is the Qur'an, verbally revealed. Smith therefore finds it appropriate that the chief symbol of Islam, the *Shahadah*, "should also be verbal."<sup>92</sup> These talks well illustrate Smith's assertion that the "living person" of faith calls on his/her religious tradition in order to express his/her "living faith."

Smith considered these broadcast essays to be a popular version of what followed in 1963, namely, *The Meaning and End of Religion*<sup>93</sup> which has become a classic. It explores in scholarly fashion the orientation of the radio talks mentioned immediately above and the basic assumptions of the writings belonging to what we have called Stage Two—to do with a new conceptualization of the subject of comparative religion and how to teach it. *The Meaning and End of Religion* can be said to mark the culmination of this stage. Its chief message is that the religious universe of discourse must today abandon the reification of religion and instead adopt new dynamic categories of faith and cumulative traditions. By separating faith

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<sup>91</sup>Ibid., 27.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 29.

<sup>93</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1963; 1991).

from tradition, Smith opens up all the religious systems of the world in their diversity, within and without each tradition, to historical investigation. These are the "cultural frameworks," as John Hick puts it in the Introduction to Smith's book,<sup>94</sup> in which the life of faith finds expression. Faith, on the other hand, has its locus in persons in their response to transcendence. In *The Meaning and End of Religion*, Smith speaks of the interaction between the person (the locus of faith) and the cumulative tradition as a dialectical process.<sup>95</sup> This constitutes one aspect of turning "nascent world society" into a world community;<sup>96</sup> another aspect is the resolution of "the ideological and cultural question of human cohesion."<sup>97</sup>

### Conclusion

The years at McGill (1949-1963) were eventful: Smith taught comparative religion, the first person at McGill to do so; he founded and directed the Institute for Islamic Studies; he helped to set up the Faculty of Divinity. In his final year, 1963, he took a sabbatical leave, spending it in India on a study tour.

In the realm of religious discourse, Smith developed a hermeneutic of comparative religion which encompassed the legacy of Greek philosophical thought and introduced a personalist epistemology. The Institute of Islamic Studies ensured the pursuit of academic and dialogic study of Islam worldwide by scholars, half of

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., Introduction by John Hick, x.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 186-87.

<sup>96</sup>Ibid., 8.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 9.

whom, both faculty and student, were Muslim.

For Smith, religion flourishes "somewhere in the interaction between men and their religious material";<sup>98</sup> this material included that of other religious traditions, especially the Islamic. As a result, elements of his apprehension of Islam are crafted into his evolving hermeneutic of comparative religion. Central to all his endeavours, as evidenced in the publications selected from this period (Stage Two) is concern with the person of faith, along with the "faith" of persons. In studying the dynamic nature of interrelation between inner faith, as exemplified by the insider, and the understanding and interest exemplified by the outside observer, he develops a dialectic between transcendence and historical, changing expressions of religious traditions.

Smith declared that comparative religion should be concerned with the "ideals" of a religious tradition; with "what ought to be." A related task is the transformation of world society into a world community. This leads naturally to a consideration of the third stage of the academic career of Wilfred Cantwell Smith. "World Religions" suggests a new emphasis in the purview offered by Harvard University where he will spend the next decade engaged in the pursuit of the theory and the praxis of teaching world religions comparatively.

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<sup>98</sup>Smith, McGill Inaugural Address, 193.

## Chapter V

### THE COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RELIGION

#### Stage Three: Harvard University 1964-1973

In 1964 Wilfred Cantwell Smith became Professor of World Religions at Harvard University and Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions, succeeding Dr. Robert Slater. The Smith family endorsed the residential approach to the study of world religions introduced by Dr. Slater; consequently, they and their children occupied the residence along with a number of world religion students, thereby enhancing opportunities for discussion and dialogue and friendship in and out of the classroom.

During these years at Harvard, Smith produced a vast amount of written and spoken material, including major addresses at world conferences such as the International Association for the History of Religions, guest lectureships, including the Taylor Lectures at the Yale Divinity School, and the Strong Lectures in Australia. In addition, he contributed scholarly essays and articles to Festschrifts, academic journals and volumes dealing with the academic approach to world religions.

In this chapter, we shall concentrate on two aspects of Wilfred Smith's thought: the nature and goal of the comparative study of religion; and, secondly, the growing importance of the influence of the Islamic religious tradition on his evolving theory of comparative religion. Although "The Comparative Study of World

Religions" is the Harvard designation, I suggest that Smith's perspective may more properly be described at this juncture as centering on the comparative "study of religion" as such as a matter of emphasis and of preference for "religion" in the singular. Secondly, "the Islamic experience," contains more than one strand: on the one hand, it may be seen as a response, on Smith's part, to the events in India of the late forties, resulting in a radical change in his worldview; on the other hand, the Islamic religious tradition may be seen as providing building blocks in the development of new conceptual frameworks for the comparative study of religion. The two aspects of the Islamic influence are, of course, intertwined. Indeed, the global perspectives, that of comparative religion and the Islamic influence, are interrelated and intertwined throughout Smith's work. I propose to scrutinize the data in roughly chronological order, favouring the date of composition or presentation over the generally later date of publication, particularly of conference proceedings.

## I

### The Comparative Study of Religion

Smith delivered the Convocation address at Harvard Divinity School in October 1964—"Mankind's Religiously Divided History Approaches Self-Consciousness."<sup>1</sup> It is a pragmatic, less philosophical approach than the McGill address of 1949. Smith advocates, in general, greater historical knowledge (what he

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<sup>1</sup>"Mankind's Religiously Divided History Approaches Self-Consciousness" in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 29 (October 1964): 1-17. References are to the *Bulletin* pagination. Also appears in *Religious Diversity* as Chapter 6.



calls "consciousness"). He contends that once such knowledge is interiorized, it can be liberating and can lead to a recognition of the fact that "one's Church or other society" is an evolving process in which the individual may take part intelligently and meaningfully. Comparative religion can provide a "bridge" between "religiously divided" humankind and some form of interconnection. He sees the task as threefold: 1) gathering information (the study of traditions); 2) interpretation of faith; and, 3) at the level of generalization, drawing a conclusion. Once at this level, we should be able to "induce" some general truths about man's religiousness, one such truth being that faith, although highly diverse in its particular manifestation, is a "universal human quality."<sup>2</sup> Thus we can come to see that we are participants in a process in a world context.<sup>3</sup> This religiously historical awareness can help man to construct a viable future. This is Smith's project. He builds on it during the Harvard years.

The method suggested for "together" building a "better world" hinges on the comparative study of religion. Such study can provide the education, the vehicle being the historical approach. To be aware of diversity is to be aware of process: the challenge is to enter the process in order to "construct the future history of our religious life."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid. 9.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 13.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 17.

**"Non-Western Studies: The Religious Approach",<sup>5</sup> 1964**

It is not surprising to discover that the theme of the interiorization of historical awareness (historical consciousness), central to the education project presented to the Harvard Divinity School, is reiterated, also in 1964, in this address, presented to an Invitational Conference on the Study of Religion held at Indiana University.

What is needed, on the religious plane, is the ability to see the religious traditions from the inside--and that means, not alongside the other "factors" in a man's life, but over-arching them.<sup>6</sup>

Smith insists that the religious approach to the study of "human life in the Orient" is in terms of analysis and integration appropriate to those concerned, and "to which the analysis must be subordinated."<sup>7</sup>

**"Traditional Religions and Modern Culture"<sup>8</sup> - 1965**

In the following year, on September 9, 1965, Smith, one of six plenary speakers, addressed the eleventh congress of the International Association for the History of Religions at Claremont, California. According to Oxtoby, the speech

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<sup>5</sup>"Non-Western Studies: The Religious Approach." In *A Report on an Invitational Conference on the Study of Religion in the State University, Held October 23-25, 1964 at Indiana University Medical Center*, 50-62. New Haven: The Society for Religion in Higher Education.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 51. See Eric J. Sharpe *Comparative Religion: A History*, 2nd edition (London: Duckworth, 1986; 1975) for a discussion of the Conference, p. 283.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 57.

<sup>8</sup>Reprinted in slightly abridged form from *Proceedings of the XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1968), vol. I, 55-72 in *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* edited by Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 59-76.

provides an introduction to Smith's views on "the nature of 'traditions,' particularly in relation to faith."<sup>9</sup> Smith states unequivocally that it is the job of the historian "to inquire into what is going on", not to bring "a priori analyses" to the discussion at hand. He is referring here to a proposed discussion of traditional religion "under the impact of cultural modernization."<sup>10</sup> The term "impact" is inadequate because it neglects the "interiorization of modernity in the religious life of all communities."<sup>11</sup> One must acknowledge the inner reality of the other(s) in order to begin the process of understanding. This means not only to see the "religious traditions from the inside" but also the effects of contemporary life and culture as they have been internalized. "The emergence of Hinduism and Islam as 'traditional religions' is itself a symptom of modern culture."<sup>12</sup> Smith reminds us that whenever and wherever a religious decision is made, it involves our "relation to eternity"; it involves the "final destiny and meaning of the human race."<sup>13</sup>

"Religious Atheism? Early Buddhist and Recent American"<sup>14</sup>

This is the title of the Charles Strong Memorial Lecture Smith

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 61.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>14</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Religious Atheism? Early Buddhist and Recent American" in *Comparative Religion: The Charles Strong Trust Lectures, 1961-1970*, edited by John Bowman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972) 53-81.

delivered in Australia in 1966. Charles Strong, himself, deserves pride of place, for he is the author, one hundred years earlier, in 1896, of these words:

For, rightly to appreciate religion we need not merely sharp analysis, but broad sympathy to enter into the deepest thoughts and feelings of which a human being is capable.<sup>15</sup>

Smith furthers his exploration of the "interiority" of the religious realm by developing, in this lecture, the difference between "belief" and "faith," the latter being "something richer, deeper, more personal than belief; a quality of living."<sup>16</sup>

He gives here a succinct account of faith:

an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing the world and of handling it; a capacity to live at a more than mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.<sup>17</sup>

In the discussion that follows, Smith claims the Buddhist concept of Dharma to be "...akin to the notion of God in the West."<sup>18</sup> In other words, he contends for an "ultimate convergence or parallel between the reference of a particular Buddhist concept and that of the Western category of the divine."<sup>19</sup>

Religion scholars often place the Buddhist religious tradition beyond

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<sup>15</sup>Bowman, ed., *Comparative Religion*, 1972, xiii.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, 57n48.

categories of comparison with western "theistic" religions.<sup>20</sup> Smith's perception is different. For him, Buddha elevated Dharma to "absolute transcendence"<sup>21</sup>: what mattered was "to live a good life"; morality is "cosmically derived, and cosmically justified" not subject to the historical flux.<sup>22</sup> Thus, Smith is able to shift the question from "whether the Buddha believed in God to whether he had faith in God."<sup>23</sup> This is a striking illustration of Smith's position: it is not doctrine ("belief in") that provides common ground for the study of religious traditions but rather the "living faith" of "persons." He is clear in his mind that the followers of Buddha "live lives of faith."<sup>24</sup> Because Smith puts the emphasis on the person, on the personal relation with God which is faith, it follows that the human/divine relationship does depend on how you view or value the universe cosmically: a meta criterion.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Peter A. Pardue observes: "'Buddhism' is a Western term for the immensely diverse system of beliefs and practices centered on the teachings of the historical Buddha..." In *Buddhism: A Historical Introduction to Buddhist Values and the Social and Political Forms They Have Assumed in Asia* (New York: Macmillan: reprint 1971; 1968), vii. Wm. Theodore de Bary (editor) writes: "The Buddha is not God as distinct from man, nor does Buddhism...have any 'theology'...it starts from an experience of the human condition, an intuition concerning its essential character, and an aspiration to transcend it." In *The Buddhist Tradition in India, China and Japan* (New York: Random House (Vintage Books), 1972), xviii.

<sup>21</sup>Smith, "Religious Atheism?" in Bowman, *Comparative Religion*, 64.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup>See Mary Ann Stenger, "The Problem of Cross-Cultural Criteria of Religious Truth" in *Modern Theology* 3:4 (1987), 315-332, for a discussion of criteria used by Berger, Kaufman, Hick and Smith.

## Essays and Addresses to Christian Groups

In the following three selections, Smith is speaking to Christian groups, one of which is an ecumenical gathering. The first, "The Mission of the Church and the Future of Missions" is his contribution to a collection of essays written to honour James Sutherland Thomson,<sup>26</sup> a contribution that reflects his emphasis on the "inside" view of faith, as opposed to the external, doctrinal or institutionalized approach. The encounter is not geographic—it is spiritual.<sup>27</sup> His inclusivity sees the mission of the Church as surpassing even world-wide boundaries: God's "mission to mankind" is not limited by any one ecclesiastical, historical or "religious" movement.<sup>28</sup> He proposes new organizational structures to implement a new understanding of mission and to promote "inter-faith relations." Such an approach requires a basis of mutuality and the use of dialogue; colloquy is his preferred term.<sup>29</sup> Smith's premisses and the resolutions he suggests are in keeping with those set forth three years earlier in the Harvard Convocation address but are adapted to the missionary context. Once again he has shifted conventional categories: what

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<sup>26</sup>George Johnston and Wolfgang Roth, eds. *The Church in the Modern World: Essays in Honour of James Sutherland Thomson*, (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1967), 154-170.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>28</sup>*Ibid.*, 166.

<sup>29</sup>Smith's reasons for preferring colloquy over dialogue: "partly for its multilateral connotations but chiefly to suggest a side-by-side confronting of the world's problems (intellectual and other) rather than a face-to face confronting of each other. One might urge 'from dialogue to colloquy' as a slogan within the Church." In *Towards a World Theology*, 193.

needs to be seen is that "God's mission in the Church is one part of his whole mission to mankind, not his whole mission to one part of mankind, nor his sole mission to all mankind."<sup>30</sup>

The following year, Smith addressed the biennial convention of the Division of Overseas Ministries of the National Council of Churches on November 21, 1968 in New Haven. The convention "represented the mission leadership of the principal American Protestant denominations."<sup>31</sup> Oxtoby points out in his introduction to Smith's speech that the climate had changed: The Second Vatican Council had taken place and the ecumenical movement had been broadened to include Catholic as well as Protestant and Orthodox Christianity.<sup>32</sup> Although this is not Oxtoby's observation, it is noteworthy that the Adult Education movement flourished during this decade in North America, a movement that was closely linked, albeit informally, and especially in Canada, to organizations and associations that had originally been spawned by the church. Much of the movement was people-oriented and future-oriented, promoting group dynamics, group discussion and the search for consensus, participation and community, that is, the creation of more inclusive and authentic community. Smith, I suggest, would not have been unaware of the

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 166-167.

<sup>31</sup>"Participation: The Changing Christian Role in Other Cultures"; Chapter 7, 117-137 in *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* edited by Willard G. Oxtoby (New York: Harper & Row, 1976). Reprinted in slightly abridged form from *Occasional Bulletin* of the Missionary Research Library, New York, 20:4 (April 1969) 1-13.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., 118.

ideology or methods of this movement. Oxtoby suggests as much.<sup>33</sup> At any rate, the title of his address, "Participation: The Changing Christian Role in Other Cultures"<sup>34</sup> indicates the pragmatic nature of what he has to say about mutual understanding. Reference to the Islamic experience of the forties introduces his theme: Pakistani Muslims have discovered that they are "participants in a process."<sup>35</sup> He goes on to say that "to be a Muslim means to participate in the Islamic process"<sup>36</sup>--a statement that he extrapolates to all religious traditions. Once again Smith emphasizes the aspect of interiorization or "inner reality"--to participate in any of the processes or religious traditions at any time is to be part of the "human divine complex."<sup>37</sup> But he goes beyond this. The "category" that he proposes will cover the participation of "Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists...in the future evolution of the Western religious tradition."<sup>38</sup>

I conclude this section with a selection of remarks from a speech Smith gave to an international congress of Christian Secularists entitled "Secularity

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<sup>33</sup>As reported in an earlier footnote (Chapter IV, fn 34), Oxtoby writes: "In the 1960's Smith had made common cause with the social sciences, finding congenial their emphasis on the study of contemporary groups. In the early 1970's, however...he became sharply critical of the social sciences..." Introductory remarks to Smith's "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences," *Religious Diversity*, 160.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., 117.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 121.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., 127.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.



and the History of Religion."<sup>39</sup> First of all, he showed that secularization is not a modern or a strictly Western phenomenon at all.<sup>40</sup> Secular is a "relational term" that has meaning only in reference to its "user's orientation to something else"; it designates a departure from the perceived proper interpretation of the "religious and/or the Christian."<sup>41</sup> Smith emphasizes that common to the Ancient Egyptian, the Hindu, the Muslim, "the world, and their life in it, appeared to them as a coherent, significant whole"<sup>42</sup>; the pattern in each case has been different but it has included the whole of life and the universe. This is why the West has been so wrong in believing (here he is speaking of representatives of government and government agencies) that problems in the East could be resolved by secularizing the East. He cautions that theologians must be honest: the only thing that matters is to save man, not an institution or a system of thought.<sup>43</sup> In sum:

The function of the specifically religious, as I have called it, of the symbol, the form, has throughout history been to validate and consecrate the derivatively religious, life and the world at large.<sup>44</sup>

The corollary to this statement is that coherence embodies meaning. In another context, Smith states:

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<sup>39</sup>In *The Spirit and Power of Christian Secularity* edited by Albert Schlitzer (Notre Dame, University Press, 1969), 33-70.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., vi.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 35.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 42.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 57.

If you take away a man's faith, the elements in his life do not change; they simply cease to cohere into a meaningful whole. Islam...is the meaning...<sup>45</sup>

Islam, here is his example, *par excellence*, but it applies to all religious traditions.

Secularism, whatever its claims to totality, I understand him to say, falls short of these criteria.

## II

### Islamic Components in Smith's Thought

I propose here to develop my argument that the Islamic religious tradition continued to provide building blocks for Smith's emerging theology of religion, using as data Smith's writings and speeches during the Harvard years, 1964 to 1973. Selection has been based on an apparent emphasis on the Indian aspect of his approach: Hindu, Sikh and Muslim. Once again, a roughly chronological ordering is used, preference being given, in most cases, to the date of composition or delivery over that of publication.

"Is the Qur'an the Word of God?"- 1963<sup>46</sup>

It is Smith's practice to turn preconceptions into questions, thus forcing a confrontation with the basic premisses of the proposition. In "Is the Qur'an the

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<sup>45</sup>Smith, "The Islamic Near East: Intellectual Role of Librarianship." *Library Quarterly* 35 (1965):283-94; 287.

<sup>46</sup>The first in a series of three Taylor Lectures given at Yale Divinity School, New Haven, April 16-18, 1963 and subsequently published under the title *Questions of Religious Truth* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), 39-62. This first Lecture, "Is the Qur'an the Word of God?" was reprinted in slightly abridged form in *Religious Diversity* ed. Oxtoby, 1976, 22-40. This is the pagination I have used.

Word of God?" Smith carries on an inquiry somewhat analogous to his etymological inquiries: verbal nouns, for instance, *masdar*, as opposed to nouns (the former suggesting activity, process). Philosophically, Macmurray effects an epistemological shift from the subject to the "agent" or "doer" in his emphasis on action, as opposed to the Cartesian "I think" therefore, I am--*cogito, ergo sum*.<sup>47</sup> Similarly, for Smith, the proposition needs to be seen as a question about the possibility of living in the light of the Qur'an, that is, in accord with God's edicts--with Truth itself. This lecture, addressed to theologians, argues for new understanding on the part of non-Muslims of the Qur'an as a religious document--"living, life-giving," whatever the century--to the devout Muslim, "introducing him...to transcendence."<sup>48</sup>

Once again, Smith stresses interiority: outsiders need to pay more attention to the "inward life" of faithful Muslims. One of the Arabic words for revelation, he points out, is *wahy*, meaning "inner communication."<sup>49</sup> The lecture reiterates the theme of interaction of one religious tradition with another, conscious and unconscious, part of the historical process. Thus, in the future, in Smith's estimation, the answer to the question: "Is the Qur'an the Word of God?" will have to be discovered.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup>See John Macmurray, *The Self as Agent* (volume I of *The Form of the Personal*); (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press International, 1957), 50.

<sup>48</sup>Smith, *Questions of Religious Truth*, reprinted in abridged form in *Religious Diversity*, 22-40, 36.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 40.

"Koran" (Qur'an) - 1964

According to the "Koran",<sup>51</sup> the inherent nature of God from all eternity is that he speaks to men; what he says to men is a revelation from God rather than a revelation of God, as God discloses what he wants man to know. This is an interpretation which Smith reiterates in a number of places as a distinction not to be pressed too far, he says, because the Koran is a revelation of God's will, and the "theologians refused to dichotomize between God's attributes and his essence."<sup>52</sup>

In the following remarks, Smith elaborates what he considers to be "the Muslim view." It is similar to the interpretation found in *Islam in Modern History*<sup>53</sup> with slight differences of emphasis. Because this understanding is so central to his intellectual framework--I submit that it serves as a model for his meta-conceptualization of religious history--I reproduce it in full.

God created the universe, ordaining its processes and controlling them; he prescribed a pattern or order, which nature must obey. For man he ordained a PATTERN of behaviour, but unlike the rest of the natural world, man was made conscious and free, to decide whether or not he will conform to God's decrees.<sup>54</sup>

One Essay (1965) from a Collection of Smith's Essays on Islam

A valuable source of information for the study of the Islamic influence on Smith's work are his own introductory remarks to each of the essays in his volume

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<sup>51</sup>Article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1964, 454-455.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., 454.

<sup>53</sup>*Islam in Modern History*, 18-19.

<sup>54</sup>Article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1964, 454-455; 454.

*On Understanding Islam*.<sup>55</sup> He tells us, for instance, that "Islamic Law: Shari'ah and Shar" was originally presented as a paper to the International Congress of Orientalists quadrennial meeting in Moscow (1960) and subsequently developed into the present form as a contribution to a Festschrift (1965) in honour of his teacher, Sir Hamilton Gibb.<sup>56</sup> Discerning the transcendent element in the conceptualizing by Muslims of their world and the dynamic historical element in the process of that gradual conceptualizing, presented an important challenge.<sup>57</sup> As a student of language, Smith was able to determine that *shar* was originally a verbal noun, a *masdar*, and referred to an activity, a process, and not to a system or a law. Its subject was always God. "It refers to a process of assigning moral quality and moral responsibility to human life."<sup>58</sup> Smith's linguistic analyses, historical and etymological, indicate that the concept of responsibility preceded that of law; that what was thought of as obedience or disobedience of a law "was conceived and felt by the Muslim writers under survey as obedience or disobedience to God."<sup>59</sup> Law, the Shari'ah, came later. "The idea of moral responsibility" has always been present

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<sup>55</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1981)

<sup>56</sup>The essay appears in this "developed" form in Smith, *On Understanding Islam*, 1981, as chapter 5, 87-109.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 87.

<sup>58</sup>*Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>59</sup>*Ibid.*, 99.

in Islamic religious thought.<sup>60</sup>

In this piece of scholarly work, Smith demonstrates how to conduct comparative study from many points of view: historical, etymological, religious, and ethical, and at many levels, arriving at a more profound understanding of the concepts under study and their modification and refinement over the centuries.

The Claremont Address, "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture" - September 5, 1965

In order to illustrate elements in Smith's thought derived from his perception of Islamic sources, I return to the XIth IAHR Congress at Claremont in 1965. Smith has repeatedly characterized the nature of religion as "process" in his writings thus far. In "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture"<sup>61</sup> he develops the idea at length, using the Islamic experience as especially illustrative. At McGill, in 1949, he had stated that "religions, in history, do change." Change and process, however, are not inchoate. Tradition, for Smith, is the "cumulative and still changing result of changes carried over from the past."<sup>62</sup> What Smith adds to the scholarly debate on change and "diffusion" is his insistence upon "change upon change upon change" ad infinitum. To this he adds the ongoing interaction and "mutual involvement," willy-nilly, with "modernity": the interaction between "religious life and the rest of culture" in the Orient. That there exists a dichotomy between religion

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<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>61</sup>This appears as Chapter 4 in *Religious Diversity*, edited by Oxtoby, 1979, 59-76.

<sup>62</sup>Willard G. Oxtoby in his introductory notes to "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture" in *Religious Diversity*, 59.

and culture is a Western view.<sup>63</sup> Smith contends, rather, that "all the cultural traditions of Asia are religious traditions."<sup>64</sup> However, English-speaking Indian élites complicate the picture because they have "adopted" Western concepts of dichotomy between traditional culture and modern culture<sup>65</sup> leading to degrees of alienation from their "own societies." The history of Pakistan since 1947 is his case in point:

The great matter here is that, for political-socio-economic-international reasons, the reification of religion is an historical process, which though very recent in Asia, is yet powerful...the emergence of Hinduism and Islam as "traditional religions" is itself a symptom of modern culture.<sup>66</sup>

Smith categorically rejects the term "traditional religions," distinguishing the two qualities of faith (or "religion") thus: faith is "timeless" and faith is "present." If religion is anything at all, it is something that links the present moment to eternity.<sup>67</sup> Tillich spoke of the Eternal Now;<sup>68</sup> other writers in other times might have employed *sub specie aeternitatis*.

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 65.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>68</sup>According to Tillich, we stand, "in every moment, in the face of the eternal...in a particular mode of time...Past and future meet in the present, and both are included in the eternal 'now.'" In *Systematic Theology*, Vol 3 (Chicago: the University, 1963), 395.

Spinoza, for instance, employs the term, *sub specie aeternitatis* in his *Ethics*, 5, 29.

As a student of Islamic documents in their original tongue, Smith is keenly aware of the Muslim's apprehension of his faith as a "living reality," including the "system of commands" God has enjoined upon him.<sup>69</sup> According to Smith, the content of the commands might be learned historically (in other words, be contingent, shaped by the culture) but the force of the command would be contemporary, "fresh every morning."<sup>70</sup> Central to Smith's interpretation is his understanding that the faithful individual "did not obey the law" (the terminology is a modern aberration); rather, he "practised" the law--"it was God that he obeyed."<sup>71</sup> An important corollary for Smith refers to corporate behaviour: "(Society) was Islamic as a contemporary, living reality," not because it conformed to some abstract pattern deriving from the past (it did not), but it was Islamic because the members corporately lived out "their divinely ordained duty." Furthermore,

they did not strive to construct an Islamic society; they strove to obey God, and what we (and perhaps they) call an Islamic society resulted.<sup>72</sup>

This is a generalization from the individual to society; although Smith gives examples

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<sup>69</sup>Smith, "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture," 67.

<sup>70</sup>Iqbal spoke of the power of man to "imagine a better world, and to mould what is into what ought to be." In *Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam* (edited and annotated by M. Saeed Sheikh (Lahore: Institute of Islamic Culture, 1st edition 1986; 2nd edition 1989) 58. See also the first verse of the hymn written by John Keble (1792-1866) "New every morning is the love our wakening and uprising prove; through sleep and darkness safely brought, restored to life, and power, and thought." No. 360 in *The Hymn Book of the Anglican Church of Canada and the United Church of Canada*, 1971.

<sup>71</sup>"Traditional Religions and Modern Cultures," 68.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 68.



of "living" faith among Jews and Buddhists, he does not, in this piece, make a similar generalization to corporate society. Nonetheless, I submit that his understanding of the Islamic faith-experience constitutes an important component in his conceptualization of a corporate worldview of world society. incorporating a meta-criterion and a universal thrust.

The following cluster of ideas from this address constitute basic assumptions in his evolving hypotheses:

1. the religious and cultural history of mankind is embarking upon a new phase
2. to understand it, we must study it and not a subject called "traditional religion"<sup>73</sup>
3. there are new religious sensibilities at work in the world today, bearing or not bearing the designation "religious"
4. this involves becoming aware of "what is afoot among men" today in regard to the qualities of life that the traditions used to represent and foster, using symbols.<sup>74</sup>

However, a religious decision taken anywhere--in Pakistan, or Vietnam or wherever--affects the "final destiny and meaning of the human race."<sup>75</sup> Smith's conclusion is that (comparative) religion is the study of persons in their religious diversity; a study of how men and women become aware of their connection with transcendence and, in the modern age, possibly with "religionless faith."<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 73.

<sup>75</sup>Ibid., 69.

<sup>76</sup>Ibid., 76.

"The Crystallization of Religious Communities in Mughal," (a lecture given in India in 1963)

This lecture, first given in India, became incorporated in a Festschrift published in 1969 to honour Professor V. Minorsky.<sup>77</sup> The essay provides a vivid illustration of how Smith, after detailed historical study and analysis, generalizes to a theory, or, as he puts it, universalizes to a theory. The end product is his reification theory. A few salient features are noted to indicate some of the concluding observations of the essay.

He is concerned to interpret "a drift from universalism towards communalism", from Akbar to Awrangzeb; the decline of the universalist "Sufi interpretation of the Islamic order" and the growing adoption of the "closed-system reified interpretation."<sup>78</sup> As to the relation between the two movements of crystallization--the Sikh and the Islamic processes--they are intertwined through the martyrdoms of Arjun in 1606 and of Tegh Bahadur in 1673. These martyrdoms contributed to the growth of the Sikh "community's self-consciousness, separatism, and militancy."<sup>79</sup> Smith sees the process of crystallization and religious development, the process he calls 'reification,' as a "major pattern in the history of mankind."<sup>80</sup> The essay frequently underscores the role of leadership, identifying individuals who influenced decision-making among large segments of the population

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<sup>77</sup>In Wilfred Cantwell Smith *On Understanding Islam*, 1981, Chapter 9, 177-196.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid., 193.

as well as among their followers.<sup>81</sup> As elsewhere, Smith sees the basic struggle as between the universalist, open 'unity of mankind' approach and the formalized system: universalism as opposed to communalism.<sup>82</sup>

The essay is a study in how religious/social change is effected, and is still being effected, in the encounters between divergent groups over a long period of time, including the role of outstanding individuals, reinforcing his "reification theory" and contributing importantly to his understanding of world history.<sup>83</sup>

"A Human View of Truth" - 1970

At the Birmingham conference on the Philosophy of Religion, under the chairmanship of John Hick, Smith presented a paper entitled "A Human View of Truth,"<sup>84</sup> dealing with the historical-cultural situation in personal experience. "The locus of truth is persons; it is not statements that are true or false but the use of them by individuals."<sup>85</sup> He starts his exposition by indicating the subtleties and ramifications of Arabic words for "truth" regarded from a variety of aspects in a multitude of uses and at different levels. The empirical investigation yields the following generalizations.

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<sup>81</sup>Ibid., passim.

<sup>82</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>83</sup>Ibid., 193.

<sup>84</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "A Human View of Truth" in *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 1 (1971), 6-24 (page numbers are from this version). Also in John Hick, ed., *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship Between World Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 2nd impression, 1975), 20-44.

<sup>85</sup>Ibid., 6.

To begin with, faith is then the recognition of divine truth at the personal level. Faith is the ability to recognize truth as true for oneself--and to trust it.<sup>86</sup>

Smith extends this in the Islamic case to the recognition of the authenticity (truth) and moral authority of the divine commands.<sup>87</sup> He further generalizes, in an interpretation that may be said to be absolutely central to his formulation of the category of "transcendence," his all-embracing category:

(Faith) is the personal making of what is cosmically true come true on earth: the actualization of truth (the truth about man).

and

More mystically, it is the *discovery* of the truth (the personal truth) of the Islamic injunctions: the process of personal verification of them...for oneself and for the society and world in which one lives.<sup>88</sup>

The "inner appropriation and outward implementation of truth" (*tasdiq*) is a recurring theme in this work--his dialectic. The implementation, inner (spirit) and outer (behaviour) is doing "what God--or Reality--intends for man."<sup>89</sup> Smith is unusual among scholars in envisaging an eschaton so open and universal yet so rigorously proscribed as he extrapolates this soteriology to the world.<sup>90</sup> Salvation is for humankind.

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

<sup>89</sup>Ibid.

<sup>90</sup>The philosopher, John Macmurray, says "The inherent ideal of the personal...is a universal community of persons in which each cares for all the others and no one for himself." In *Persons in Relation* (New Jersey and London: Humanities Press International, 1961; reprint 1991), 159.

**"Conflicting Truth Claims: A Rejoinder" - 1974**

Once again, Smith's basic premisses may be adduced from his essay "Conflicting Truth Claims: A Rejoinder."<sup>91</sup> Here he explains why he rejects the conceptualization "conflicting truth claims" as an idea and why he rejected it as a topic for the Birmingham conference discussed immediately above. Smith declares that:

1. man's perception of the world and "each part of it" is culturally conditioned<sup>92</sup>
2. great religious "positions of mankind" are total worldviews, conceptually or symbolically embracing everything
3. the Western rational-critical tradition is one such world view.

The first statement indicates his acceptance of the importance of the role of culture, which for him, of course, includes religion. This premiss is further extended in the second statement. Because religious "positions" are total worldviews, they "conceptually or symbolically" embrace everything. In other words, the culture shapes the "great" religious "positions" which in turn dictate how the world is to be seen in all its parts. Smith provides a mini catalogue of what is to be found in the world: human life, human destiny, good and evil, actuality and potentiality, transcendence and the infinite, truth,<sup>93</sup> all recognizably philosophical/theological topics. Thus far he has effected an integration of psychology/social psychology (the usual domain of "perception"); anthropology (the role of culture); philosophy

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<sup>91</sup>Published in Hick, *Truth and Dialogue*, 156-162.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 156.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 157.

(axiology, ontology, epistemology) and theology. Finally, the Western rational-critical tradition is seen to be one of the total systems. Thus his basic premiss is that the Western rational system, used to thinking of itself as universal, subsuming all other views (religions) under their worldview, must learn "not" to use its own categories to interpret and to assess all that it encounters.

The "vision" Smith proposes<sup>94</sup> in order to deal with "unresolved pluralism" is one that embraces "each other's view of the universe." New categories and new conceptualizations are needed. Regarding conflicting truth-claims, Muslims "bear witness," Smith tells us. He prefers this model to "claiming a truth." He adds that early Christians, after all, proclaimed "good news."<sup>95</sup> The implication is that these approaches do not delimit; they open up.

Smith's Rejoinder to Eric Sharpe's article "Dialogue and Truth, 1973"<sup>96</sup>

I offer a final example of Islamic influence coming from this timeframe: Smith's response to Eric Sharpe's critique of his work, entitled "Dialogue and Truth." Smith's "Rejoinder" and the Sharpe article were both published in the same issue of *Religion* in 1973. In his reply, Smith gives a succinct account of an aspect of Islamic religious tradition which is of paramount importance to his understanding and appreciation of Islam and in constructing an alternative to "unresolved pluralism." I am not concerned to reproduce the argumentation

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<sup>94</sup>Ibid., 158.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 158-159.

<sup>96</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "On Dialogue and 'Faith': A Rejoinder," 106-114; Eric J. Sharpe, "Dialogue and Faith," 89-105 in *Religion* 3 (1973).

addressed to Sharpe but only Smith's remarks as they shed light on his perception of Islam and how this shapes his creative vision.

Religious convictions in Islam "are not meant to be 'articulate' in the Christian and Greek sense, but are rather programmatically so." This puts the emphasis on an "orthoprax rather than orthodox" approach.<sup>97</sup> Smith goes on to say:

reason can conceptualize the fact that religious convictions are symbolized in some such cases in primarily other terms than beliefs--and then one can talk rationally about that.<sup>98</sup>

Smith reiterates this basic insight: Islamic religious tradition is not rule-centered (deontological); not external; not static; not hypostatized; not "by rote." His approach may differ according to the particular purpose and setting of the essay/speech, but the bottom line remains the same: man must obey God although he has the freedom to disobey. Faith is an open category so that within this category the individual is in relation with the divine (responds to God; is grasped by God). According to Smith, this can take any or all of the forms offered by the religions of the world. He says of his own personal faith in this article that it is "an ellipse with two centres (foci), not a circle with one." Therefore, it is anthropocentric at one focus and equally theocentric at the other. "Faith is the locus of man's openness to transcendence."<sup>99</sup> He suggests that faith is a continuum from one focus (man) to the other (divine). Smith may well have been influenced by Iqbal's response to the

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<sup>97</sup>Ibid., 107.

<sup>98</sup>Ibid.

<sup>99</sup>Ibid., 110.

paradox in his own consciousness of affirming the values and identity of the past and of disclosing new standards in the light of which we see that our environment needs revision.<sup>100</sup> Sheila McDonough suggests that he held "both poles of this paradox in his mind": respect for the cumulative wisdom of the Islamic tradition and conviction of the necessity of "forward movement"<sup>101</sup> somewhat akin to the two foci of an ellipse proposed by Smith. The fact that the Islamic religious tradition has no "mediators" in the usual sense (a point Smith makes in *Islam in Modern History*), perhaps inspired Smith's model of an ellipse, encouraging God and man (divine and human) in a continuing relationship. Faith is the locus of transcendence and transcendence may be the locus of divine self-disclosure. However, Smith warns that what he "means by transcendence is a quite minor question...it is transcendence itself...that is of cosmic importance."<sup>102</sup>

## Conclusion

At Harvard, in 1964, Smith proposed an educational project: the subject was to be the comparative study of religion and the vehicle "history"; the goal was the interpretation or understanding of faith in order to arrive at generalizations about faith. For instance, faith, although diverse in its manifestation, is a "universal

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<sup>100</sup>Muhammad Iqbal, *The Reconstruction of Religious Thought in Islam*, (Lahore, Ashraf, reprinted 1960), 151. Quoted by Dr. Sheila McDonough in "Buber and Iqbal," paper presented to the First Colloquium of the Department of Religion, Concordia University, November 26, 1990, 2-27; 20.

<sup>101</sup>Dr. Sheila McDonough, "Buber and Iqbal," 19.

<sup>102</sup>Smith, "On Dialogue and 'Faith': A Rejoinder," 113.



human quality."<sup>103</sup> Thus we can come to see ourselves as participants in a process in a world context.<sup>104</sup> The study of comparative religion and the Islamic experience are so closely interconnected that at times, it has been difficult to decide under which rubric to discuss an item. I propose to indicate in summary form the principal thrust that emerges from these writings and speeches.

Smith develops the theme of interiority, or inner reality, in many of his pieces. He stresses the inner nature of faith. Similarly, he discerns the dynamic quality of interaction between the insider and the outsider, as well as among insiders and among outsiders, at all levels of historical time and at all levels of contact. The religious tradition is a process; the Muslim participates in the Islamic process. We are all participants in processes that impinge upon one another. Smith includes the Western rational-critical tradition as one of the world's total worldviews, along with the great "religious positions."

Man's perception of the world and "each part of it" is culturally conditioned. Thus the person (Smith's starting point) interacts with the historico-cultural setting in his daily life and in his experience, that is, in its contingency. As for the Muslim, he "bears witness" to transcendence. Study and appreciation of the Islamic experience leads Smith to assert that the Western rational system, used to thinking of itself as universal, subsuming all other views (religions) under its

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<sup>103</sup>"Mankind's Divided History Approaches Self-Consciousness" in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, 29 (October 1964): 9.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.* 13.

worldview, must learn "not" to use its own categories to interpret and to assess all that it encounters.

The new conceptualizations and categories that Smith systematizes in his study of the religious history of mankind will form the subject matter of the following chapter.

## Chapter VI

### RECONCEPTUALIZATIONS AND NEW CATEGORIES

#### Stages Four and Five

Dalhousie University inaugurated a Chair in Religion in 1973, inviting Wilfred Cantwell Smith to be the first McCullough Professor of Religion. Thus Smith spent the next five years in Canada in a setting somewhat more tranquil than the Harvard scene which had been marked, at times, by student unrest occasioned by conflict over the war in Vietnam. In 1978, Smith returned to Harvard as Professor of the Comparative History of Religion and as Chairman of the Committee on the Study of Religion. In spite of the onerous teaching and administrative duties which these posts entailed, Smith spoke and published widely. It is to these data we now turn.

#### I

##### Stage Four: Dalhousie University, 1973-1978

The Dalhousie years were filled with prodigious activity: during 1974 and 1975 alone Smith delivered major addresses to various academic and professional bodies at such universities as Lahore, Iowa, Louisville, Colgate, Washington and Lee, the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis and the University of Virginia. On June 4, 1974, he addressed the Royal Society of Canada in Ottawa; in May 1975, he was a guest speaker at the first Inter-religious Peace Colloquium held at Bellagio, Italy. In the realm of the written word, Smith wrote the article, "Religion as Symbolism" for the Propaedia, Encyclopaedia Britannica. Two of his articles became

contributions to Festschrifts, one honouring Niyazi Berkes, the other, R.H.L. Slater, both former colleagues at McGill, Professor Slater having also been his predecessor as Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard.

During this period, a collection of Smith's essays, *Religious Diversity*<sup>1</sup>, was published under the editorship of Willard G. Oxtoby. As well, the Richard Lectures, given in 1974-1975 at the University of Virginia, appeared in book form in 1977 as *Belief and History*<sup>2</sup>, the first of three books to deal with his hermeneutics of "discovery and recovery."<sup>3</sup>

The investigation that follows centers on Smith's developing reconceptualizations and new categories as seen from two perspectives: tracing an Islamic/Indian component in Smith's evolving theory of comparative religion; secondly, culling his thoughts on "living" in a religiously plural world. A chronological order will again be employed; the date of composition or delivery, where known, will preempt the date of publication, which, in the case of conference proceedings, follows by a year or more. The items to be scrutinized below represent a selection of all the available material deemed pertinent to the discussion.

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<sup>1</sup>Willard G. Oxtoby, ed. *Religious Diversity: Essays by Wilfred Cantwell Smith* (New York: Harper & Row, 1976)

<sup>2</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Belief and History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977).

<sup>3</sup>Peter Slater, "On Towards a World Theology" in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion*, 4/1-4/2 (1992): 117.

**"Faith in the Qur'an and its Relation to Belief"<sup>4</sup> - 1974**

This was the first of two Iqbal Memorial Lectures which Smith delivered at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, in 1974. It demonstrates the manner in which he explored in depth the Islamic concept of faith as represented in the term *iman*: first in the Qur'an, and then, "as explicated in subsequent centuries by intellectuals in the Muslim community."<sup>5</sup> His analysis of the language of the Qur'an leads to the following statements. God lays upon mankind "imperatives" and offers "rewards." People respond in an "act of faith."<sup>6</sup> Smith stresses the *masdar*, or verbal quality of the term. Here is a drama of decision: one either obeys or rebels; the religious category is not that of believing, but of a *Shahadah*, a "bearing witness."<sup>7</sup> The presuppositions of the framework are either acceptance or rejection. In the Qur'an the truth is given; it is clear; it is known.<sup>8</sup> Thus, the "Qur'anic worldview is theocentric--as a whole and in its parts." On the other hand, Smith states that this is "in sharp contrast to the anthropocentrism of the modern Western

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<sup>4</sup>Lecture One of the Iqbal Memorial Lectures given at the University of the Punjab, Lahore, 1974 as "Faith and Belief (Some Considerations from the Islamic Instance)". Reproduced under the title, "Faith in the Qur'an; and Its Relation to Belief," in Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), chapter 6, 110-134.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 111.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 132.

view."<sup>9</sup> Smith's ontological position is clearly implied in his assertion that faith "pertains to something that people are, or become."<sup>10</sup> Once again, Smith espouses "interiorization" as seen in previous discussions above.

The Iqbal lecture contains another insight which forms a building block in his growing theory. Monotheism, for the Muslim, "is the status quo, cosmically; it is not in process of being believed but is assumed, is presupposed, and is in process of being proclaimed."<sup>11</sup> This, I suggest, translates into a worldview for Smith--world-wide--waiting for witnessing on behalf of humankind, indeed, of humanity. With regard to faith and believing, Smith raises the question in this lecture as to whether these are genuine alternatives, the differences between them (faith/believing) being so great.<sup>12</sup>

#### "Religion as Symbolism" - 1974

"Religion as Symbolism" represents Smith's first extended statement on the subject of symbols; it appears as an article in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*<sup>13</sup>, and is illustrative of the central tenets of his theory; in fact, symbols are central to his theory, possessing:

an activating as well as representational quality...the ability to organize

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 133.

<sup>13</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Religion as Symbolism." Introduction to Propaedia, Part 8, "Religion" *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th ed.

emotions and the unconscious as well as the conscious mind so that into them we may pour the deepest range of our humanity and from them derive an enhancement of the personality.<sup>14</sup>

An "item" from the visible world can become the "symbol or locus of the invisible, the transcendent." In his "realm" other than this universe, what he calls a metaphysical order of idealist realities, he includes such symbols as the "perfect world"; "Once upon a time"; "Paradise," and others.<sup>15</sup> This is significant because it recognizes the realm of the metaphysical (Platonic or Neo-platonic) to be on an equal footing with the great religious traditions of the world in the use of symbols.

Smith stresses the orientation "induced by religious symbolism"; for instance, in the case of the religious history of the Hindu community, values such as, among others, "fortitude and quiet humaneness, a conviction that life is worth living and death worth dying."<sup>16</sup> "To share common symbols is about the most powerful of social cohesions" he affirms, whereas differing symbols among different peoples lead to division.<sup>17</sup>

The symbol has a moral dimension juxtaposing "what ought to be" alongside "what is"; the *status quo* (or today, as Smith observes, the *fluxus quo*) is seen to be "not final truth."<sup>18</sup> The student of religion should consider the "mundane

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 299.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 299.

data symbolizing the more than mundane" from the point of view of "their role in our lives."<sup>19</sup> Smith asserts that faith is the "meaning that religious symbols have for one."<sup>20</sup>

The significant allegation of this article is that religious symbols and religious systems are "ways of being human." Historically, religious symbols have raised man "not above the human level, only to it."<sup>21</sup> Smith's apprehension of Islam, as can be seen in the Iqbal lecture discussed immediately above, is that revelation is theocentric; the direction is from Creator to creature; the Qur'an reveals the imperatives and patterns for reaching the human level. I suggest that Smith draws on this model (God-to-human directive) in his project of reconceptualization: he enunciates a new category, his approach to religious anthropology, namely, that religious symbols and systems are ways of being human. This is part of his conceptualization of a worldview that has the potential to subsume the great religious traditions and Greek philosophy; it is open yet proscribed by the duty--in faith--to achieve right action; to choose, as in Islam, to respond to the divine "imperative" and to the diverse patterns for "reaching the human level." In other words, symbols and systems are dynamic, pointing to a reality outside themselves.

"Methodology and the Study of Religion: Some Misgivings"

The School of Religion of The University of Iowa invited Smith to

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 300.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 301.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.



participate in a symposium on "Methodology and World Religions," along with Professors Hans H. Penner and Jacob Neusner. The meeting was held on April 15-17, 1974 under the chairmanship of Robert D. Baird. Three important points emerge from Smith's presentation entitled "Methodology and the Study of Religion: Some Misgivings:"<sup>22</sup> 1) knowledge for understanding differs from knowledge for use; 2) the humanities have to do with persons rather than things and thus with knowledge for understanding; and, 3) the study of subject matter should not be fragmented into the study of disciplines, wherein the stress is placed on how one studies rather than the subject studied. He believed that the latter approach originated in Germany and had been adopted by American universities, as distinguished from the British academic approach which he had encountered in Canada, Britain and India. It was Smith's contention that the narrow, pre-conceived, de-personalized approach to study or learning misses truth and ignores reality itself.<sup>23</sup> Genuine knowledge leads to self-knowledge, to growth and to liberation. What he was after was a process of self-transcendence. Smith clarified his position in a panel discussion entitled "Is the Comparative Study of Religion Possible?" in which Penner and Neusner participated along with Smith.<sup>24</sup> According to Neusner, *The Meaning and End of Religion*

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<sup>22</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Methodology and the Study of Religion: Some Misgivings" in *Methodological Issues in Religious Studies* edited by Robert D. Baird (Chico, CA: New Horizons Press, 1975), 1-25. Discussion follows: 25-30. Further discussion: "Is the Comparative Study of Religion Possible? Panel Discussion." With Jacob Neusner and Hans H. Penner, 95-109. Smith's Rejoinder, 123-24.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., 101.

assumes a "referential theory of language" as does almost every historical religion; the reference might be to history, to function, to the sacred. Smith's answer, on the other hand, located the meaning of the word "sun," for instance, not in the sky, but in a person. He went on to say:

I feel very strongly that to locate meaning anywhere else than in persons is part of the movement to de-personalize modern society, which is making such havoc of our lives.<sup>25</sup>

Smith further contended that "it's in your heart, in your head, in the heart and head of your parents who taught you English."<sup>26</sup> In response to the charge of "narrow subjectivity," Smith declared that he was a personalist; that his goal was "a corporate self-consciousness which includes all human beings on earth"; a self-consciousness of "everything...ourselves in relation to everything."<sup>27</sup>

"Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal."

Two months later (June 4, 1974), Smith addressed the Royal Society of Canada at their meeting in Toronto on the topic of "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal."<sup>28</sup> This essay develops and extends many of the views on methodology set forth in the University of Iowa presentation, and goes beyond

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 101.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal." *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada*, Series 4, 12, (1974): 81-102. Reprinted in *Religious Diversity*, ed. Oxtoby, as Chapter 9, "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal," 158-180. (Page numbers refer to the version appearing in *Religious Diversity*).

them. In order to combat objectivity, which is inappropriate in the study of the humanities and disruptive of community, he has a new proposal: a goal for the study of man by man, that is, the "humane sciences." He calls it critical corporate self-consciousness; it subsumes the subject (individual and internalist awareness of something or someone, or self) and it subsumes the object (impersonal, externalist knowledge).<sup>29</sup> In other words, Smith's proposed principle of verification encompasses and goes beyond the insider/outsider dichotomy.<sup>30</sup> It is somewhat reminiscent of past teachings of the "group dynamics" movement wherein the group and the group member (the individual person) through group interaction, in particular, discussion groups, enhanced, it was believed, mutual critical growth of person(s) and the group as a whole. The dynamics of the whole resided in the interaction process.<sup>31</sup> However, Smith has something much more vast in mind: a new conceptualization of epistemology and religious anthropology.

Smith brings an innovation to the problem of validation or verification, not yet formulated at the earlier Iowa symposium--that is, the "experience" of the subject or subjects.

In objective knowledge, that a first observer's understanding has done

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 162.

<sup>30</sup>For a discussion of the subject, see N. Ross Reat, "Insiders and Outsiders in the Study of Religious Traditions" and "Responses by Edwin Gerow, Charles E. Vernoff, Langdon Gilkey, and Edmund F. Perry" in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* LI/3 (1983): 459-491. The five scholars cite and comment extensively on Smith's paradigm.

<sup>31</sup>As reported by Oxtoby, Smith, in the 1960's, found "congenial (the social sciences) emphasis on the study of contemporary groups." In *Religious Diversity*, 160.

justice to what is observed is testable by the experience of a second and third observer. In corporate critical self-consciousness, that justice has been done to the matter being studied is testable further by the subject or subjects.<sup>32</sup>

Human experience is different "from the inside and from without."<sup>33</sup> In principle, this embracing critical mutual awareness includes all humankind. There are no barriers, ideological or other, nor are there guarantees of virtuous human behaviour. Group practitioners, along with humankind, well know that the process can lead to oppression. However, for Smith's purposes, the comparative study of religion--his proposed new model--ensures that the outsider's view of a religious tradition will be validated by the insider before it is accepted either as knowledge or understanding. Again, in principle, this is applicable to humankind. "No statement involving persons is valid," Smith states, "unless its validity can be verified both by the persons involved and by critical observers not involved."<sup>34</sup>

The orientation that Smith argues for in this address to the Royal Society owes, once again, a great deal to his apprehension of the Qur'anic view of God as Creator and the human person as creature or creation. The Qur'anic imperatives are directed to the individual (Smith never suggests that these are rules). The individual responds. In Islam there is no mediator; it is righteousness that

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<sup>32</sup>Smith, "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences," 164.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

mediates between man and God.<sup>35</sup> But absent from the new, proposed critical, corporate self-consciousness is the early eschatological (*basileia*) cast of Vlastos' "mutuality" or the philosophical "turn" of Macmurray's use of mutuality. Be that as it may, "mutuality" as used by these two scholars may well have remained a foundational concept in Smith's argument.

The Richard Lectures, 1974-1975.

Smith presented the Richard Lectures at the University of Virginia in 1974-1975, lectures that were published two years later as *Belief and History*.<sup>36</sup> The lectures provide an historical analysis of the English terms "belief" and "believe." He demonstrates that believing is not a classical religious category; that rather, it is faith<sup>37</sup> that Scripture enjoins. From a linguistic point of view, Smith stresses understanding a statement rather than judging whether it is true or false.<sup>38</sup> In the Western world, all our systems, religious and secular, are "anti-alternative systems."<sup>39</sup> The contention that the Hindu religious complex, which is pluralist, is

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<sup>35</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957; reprint, New York: New American Library (Mentor Books), 1959), 25.

<sup>36</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Belief and History* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1977); The Richard Lectures for 1974-1975, University of Virginia.

<sup>37</sup>In "Book Survey," R.J.Z. Werblowski, in a reference to *Belief and History* and *Faith and Belief*, states that the two books have one thesis, which is very old. "What is new is the thoroughness and aplomb with which Smith presents it. Let no one say that Smith is merely importing Protestant Pietism into the Study of Religions...there is tremendous scholarship..." *Numen* 33 No. 2 (Dec 1986): 241-269; 244.

<sup>38</sup>Smith, *Belief and History*, 17.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 27.

to India what comparative religion is to the world<sup>40</sup> may be seen as yet another Indian component of Smith's evolving theory.

Because the thesis of the Richard Lectures is picked up and developed in subsequent work, particularly in the second book of the so-called Trilogy, *Faith and Belief*, more will be said on the topic as the matter comes up.

#### "Divisiveness and Unity" - 1975

Italy was the setting of the first Interreligious Peace Colloquium held at Bellagio in May 1975. Smith was among thirty-five participants called together to consider the subject: "The Food/Energy Crisis: A Challenge to Peace, A Call to Faith."<sup>41</sup> Smith spoke on "Divisiveness and Unity." Practical, present-day food and energy tasks require thrusts toward world community. Smith cites Durkheim who "saw religion as the expression, the symbolization, of community"<sup>42</sup> Moreover, a person of faith, as made clear in the *Bhagavad Gita*, "can strive...for world peace, for an end to world hunger..."<sup>43</sup> without any assurance of success. The only assurance is of having pursued a right objective. Smith tells his audience how he, as a Christian theologian, has learned much from Muslims and his study of Islam and, more recently, from Hindus and his study of things Hindu: about God, man, the world,

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 22.

<sup>41</sup>First Interreligious Peace Colloquium, Bellagio, Italy, *Food/Energy and the Major Faiths*(Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978) 71-85.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 76.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 80.

Christ, faith, and religious history.<sup>44</sup> Religious and social systems today must become compatible with alternative systems. "The incompatible will perish."<sup>45</sup> To confront ecological, demographic and other world problems adequately will require that we become "a new type of person,"<sup>46</sup> one who recognizes that "we" refers to all humankind.<sup>47</sup> The colloquium provided practical scope for the global application of Smith's theory thus far developed.

**"The Role of Asian Studies in the American University"**

Once again Smith was called upon to deliver the plenary address, on this occasion, to the New York State Conference for Asian Studies, meeting October 10-12, 1975 at Colgate University. His title was "The Role of Asian Studies in the American University."<sup>48</sup> Here Smith reiterates past messages: the need for a reconceptualization of the nature of man, of the "natural world and its control" and of their interrelation.<sup>49</sup> This, I suggest, constitutes the principal task Smith sets himself in his overall project of reconceptualization. He further contends that the false subject/object dichotomy, along with the depersonalization resulting from the

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 81.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., 85.

<sup>48</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "The Role of Asian Studies in the American University," *The Plenary Address of the New York State Conference for Asian Studies*, Colgate University (October 10-12, 1975) 1-13.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 8.

objectivization of persons, must be approached with new categories, not with Western preconceptions and Western categories. Only in this way can Asian studies contribute to the renascence of thought and thinking in the universities of the West. We have here Smith's rationale for the development of new categories regarding "persons." The object lesson applies to all persons everywhere.

**"Islamic History as a Concept" - 1975**

In November of 1975, Smith was invited to speak to the concluding plenary session of the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association of North America in Louisville, Kentucky on the topic, "Islamic History as a Concept."<sup>50</sup> The essay brings together previous assertions: Islam is a "particular way of being human"; this religious tradition is a "pattern" of Islamic factors; the meaning of life and of the universe resides for the Muslim, not in Islamic symbols, but in life and the cosmos seen "in the light" of Islamic symbols.<sup>51</sup> Revelation, the Qur'an, provides the symbols and the "pattern." Smith's framework for understanding Islam is historical; in this process, "elements such as the Qur'an, the law, and the other overtly 'religious' items," are also evolving.<sup>52</sup>

The framework has a second aspect, that of intention. Smith discerns a special relation between Muslims and history: the Muslim venture has been a vast

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<sup>50</sup>Chapter 1 in Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981) 3-25. The address appears in print for the first time in this collection of essays.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 16.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.



endeavour "to bend history to the will of God."<sup>53</sup> What is more,

God has been seen as operating through the Muslim community to render history Islamic--that is, to have it rise to His will for it.<sup>54</sup>

The parallel between Smith's discernment of the Islamic imperative for man and that set forth in his theory (for instance, religious symbols raise man to the level of the human--a kind of "evolutionary" telos) has already been noted. This represents one aspect of the manner in which Smith deals with the tension between religion and history. The matter will be further discussed in Chapter VII.

Symposium: "Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World"

The symposium entitled, "Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World,"<sup>55</sup> held at Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia, April 22-24, 1976, brought together representative scholars from the major religious traditions of the world in order to address a "specifically Christian problem: the search for fresh ways to express the universality of Christian faith in light of the increasing awareness of our religiously plural world."<sup>56</sup> One of the tasks of the symposium was to provide a forum for "intra-religious dialogue" as a complement to "inter-religious dialogues"

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<sup>53</sup>Ibid. 18.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., 19.

<sup>55</sup>Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman, ed. *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978). Sponsored by the Department of Religion, Washington and Lee University and the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 2.

already taking place.<sup>57</sup> Ten leaders were invited to participate in the symposium: "a Jew, a Muslim, a Hindu, and a Buddhist, as well as Baptist, Catholic, Episcopalian, Methodist, Presbyterian, and United Church of Canada Christians."<sup>58</sup> Smith was asked to make the final statement, "An Historian of Faith Reflects on What We Are Doing Here"<sup>59</sup> based, not on a prepared text, but on his observations at the conference. His opening remarks underscored the "public" character of the audience, a gathering which included not only invited participants, but also

‘a great company’ of mission secretaries, townspeople, clergy, academics, layfolk, students, religious followers, religious inquirers, religious observers.<sup>60</sup>

The Christian problem they were confronting was the "dilemma of universality and particularity."<sup>61</sup> Inherited Christian imperatives seem to push us in one direction, while our inherited moral imperatives, equally Christian, push us in the other, towards more brotherhood and concern. The Christian "cannot choose between loving God...or loving our neighbour."<sup>62</sup> Smith concluded by repeating an observation from *The Faith of Other Men*: "what Christians, Buddhists, Hindus,

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 7.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., 139-148.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., 141.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., 143.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid., 144.

Muslims, Jews have in common is perhaps not religion but humanity."<sup>63</sup>

"Religious Diversity: Muslim-Hindu Relations in India," 1976

Once again Smith was invited to give the opening address to a conference of religious scholars meeting at the University of Minnesota at Minneapolis in May 1976. The topic was "Historic Interaction between Hinduism and Islam in South Asia"--the first gathering at which Smith spoke to the Hindu-Muslim question; he titled his talk "Religious Diversity: Muslim-Hindu Relations in India."<sup>64</sup> In introductory notes to the printed version of the essay, Smith tells us that he had acquired a "much more serious familiarity with an appreciation for Hindu life" in the thirty-five years following his first arrival in North India.<sup>65</sup> In the interval, he had also studied Sanskrit.

The address restates a principle basic to Smith's understanding: that historically a religious tradition evolves; that traditions, in evolving, impinge upon one another and change, one tradition the other; and are changed; in this case, Hindu-Muslim relations are evolving. However, in this address he adds a new element: that of the contradictions between them. "The incompatibility of the two

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<sup>63</sup>Ibid., 146. Minor Lee Rogers, in the Introduction to *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World*, stated: "the kind of sensitivity Wilfred Cantwell Smith...so prophetically showed in his lecture in 1961 (subsequently incorporated as a chapter in *The Faith of Other Men*) had become an inescapable part of the awareness of the Christian community." The symposium grew out of the challenges--theological, intellectual, and moral--posed by an "increasing awareness of the religious diversity of humankind." p. 1.

<sup>64</sup>Smith, "Religious Diversity: Muslim-Hindu Relations in India," Chapter 12 in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981) 217-230.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 217.

is part of the truth about each."<sup>66</sup> To recognize this is to recognize the nature of the human condition; for Smith, the "clash of Hindu and Muslim is part of the truth about ourselves."<sup>67</sup> He sees this not only in terms of the insider/outsider (participant/outside observer) paradigm but in terms of "the opponents, its victims."<sup>68</sup> Smith adds a powerful dimension to reflection about "dialogue" or "comparativism" in propounding this "third dimension" in understanding a religious tradition and its faith.<sup>69</sup>

In speaking of the clash between Muslim and Hindu traditions, Smith couples symbolism and iconoclasm or rupture.<sup>70</sup> The wisdom he offers in his address to the University of Minnesota is quite different from the sociological stance taken three decades earlier in *Modern Islam in India* (1943). India, over the centuries and today, has had to deal with the "absolutes" of human pluralism and Islamic *tawhid* (or sense of unity) and in so doing, has attained "a simultaneous understanding of both."<sup>71</sup> He concludes the talk in these words:

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid., 227.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 226.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid. As already mentioned, N. Ross Reat and responders: Gerow, Vernoff, Gilkey, and Perry, discuss many variations of the insider/outsider approach to a religious tradition in "Insiders and Outsiders" in *Journal of American Academy of Religion*, LI/3 (1983): 459-491.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 227. See Smith's Encyclopaedia Britannica article, "Religion as Symbolism" for a discussion of symbolism in relation to iconoclasm.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid.

Pluralism and *tawhid*: Muslim, Hindu, outsider, must come to recognize that both are equally absolute--in India, in the world, and in ourselves.<sup>72</sup>

The printed version of Smith's address carries what he terms a Postscript. Here he further develops his notion of a third dimension. The first task is "to understand the Islamic and the Hindu each in its cosmic, transcendentalist, absolutist reference." Outsiders (many Western students) when attempting to explain conflict, bring their own concepts of religion and their own conception of reality to bear on the attempt--functions of "their own, usually unconscious, metaphysics."<sup>73</sup>

In order to illustrate "transcendence of differences," he points to the historical institution of *musha'irah* and the spiritual achievement of its poetry and, in particular, the evening of song, led by Ustadh Hafiz Ahmad Khan, which concluded the conference, as occasions "when 'Hindu' and 'Muslim' have become interchangeable terms, though both are still absolute."<sup>74</sup>

"Interpreting religious interrelations: An historian's view of Christian and Muslim" (Original address given in 1974)<sup>75</sup>

This is the title of Smith's contribution to a Festschrift honouring a former colleague at McGill, Professor R.H.L. Slater, who was also his predecessor

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid. 227. *Tawhid* (sense of unity) is not explicated in this essay. Some dictionary translations are: w-h-d, literally "making one" or "asserting oneness"; theologically, to the oneness of Allah in all its meanings.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 228.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid., 229.

<sup>75</sup>This contribution appeared in a special issue, honouring Professor R.H.L. Slater, *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 6/6 (summer 1976-77): 515-526.

as Director of the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. The Festschrift contribution is a revised version of an address given to the annual meeting of the American Academy of Religion in Chicago in November, 1974, under the title, "Muslim-Christian Interrelations Historically: An Interpretation." A further revised version, under the original title, "Muslim-Christian Interrelations Historically: An Interpretation" constitutes chapter 14 of Smith's collection of essays, *On Understanding Islam*.<sup>76</sup>

In this work, Smith places the religious complexes, Christian and Muslim, in juxtaposition, as they have been historically, for fourteen centuries. The study considers the two traditions as "neighbouring movements"<sup>77</sup> in world history. "God has mediated Himself to Muslims and Christians through...their idea of God...(this idea) is one particular religious form"<sup>78</sup> Through the use of historical analysis, Smith illustrates the convergence of religious traditions over the centuries. He concludes by insisting that history is a common history for all.<sup>79</sup>

### Summary

Smith leaves Dalhousie after five years to return to Harvard, having established and elucidated important segments of his evolving theory. The development of his reconceptualizations and new categories may be seen 1) from an

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<sup>76</sup>"Muslim-Christian Interrelations Historically: An Interpretation" in *On Understanding Islam*, Chapter 14, 247-264. Citations are from this version.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid. 247.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid., 257.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 264.

Islam/Indian perspective and 2) as his response to living in a religiously plural world in need of a new vocabulary for religious discourse.

### **Worldview**

In this period, Smith makes clear his apprehension of the Islamic worldview. His faith/belief distinction may be said to have antecedents in such statements as the following. Islam has to do with imperatives; people respond in an act of faith. One accepts or rejects the imperatives; it is not a question of believing. Faith is what people are or become; it is a question of interiorization. In Islam, monotheism is the status quo "cosmically". The Qur'anic worldview is theocentric--as a whole and in its parts. This, I suggest, undergirds Smith's visionary worldview, waiting for witnessing--world-wide--on behalf of humankind.

### **Symbolism**

In Islam, revelation is theocentric; the direction is from Creator to creature; the Qur'an reveals the imperatives and patterns for reaching the human level. This model may be said to lie behind Smith's enunciation of a new category--his new approach to religious anthropology--that religious symbols and systems are "ways of being human." This is part of his conceptualization of a worldview that has the potential to subsume the great religious traditions and Greek philosophy: open yet proscribed by the duty--in faith--to achieve right action; to respond to the imperatives for "reaching the human level." "To compete in goodness," as the Qur'an

tells us, according to Fazlur Rahman.<sup>80</sup>

### Living in a religiously plural world

Smith affirms that meaning resides in persons because a person's worldview confers meaning on that person.<sup>81</sup> To locate meaning elsewhere is to be part of the movement to de-personalize society. In his view, this is part of the human view of truth, part of the quest for truth,<sup>82</sup> rather than the reification of objects, institutions, ideas or methodologies.

As a personalist, Smith advocates a corporate self-consciousness that recognizes the interrelatedness between "each of us, and the rest of us, and the rest

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<sup>80</sup>Fazlur Rahman, "Muslim Response" in *Christian Faith in a Religiously Plural World* edited by Donald G. Dawe and John B. Carman (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1978), 74. The quotation from the Qur'an (Surah V, 48) as given by Rahman includes: "If God had so willed, He would have made all of you one community, but [He has not done so] that He may test you in what He has given you; so compete in goodness."

<sup>81</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 82.

<sup>82</sup>The quest for truth finds echoes in contemporary works, such as, for example, R. K. Elliott "Education, Love of One's Subject, and the Love of Truth" in *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain*, VII (Jan 1974) 135-153; Winifred Wing Han Lamb "Intellectual Eros; a model for inter-faith dialogue," *Australian Religion Studies Review*, Vol 7, No. 1 (Autumn 1994), 2-8; J. C. McLelland, "Ego now is more like Amo or Ero, modelling a desire to find and to meld, to share in the Platonic mode of participation, 'methexis' in "Pluralism without Relativism': In/Commensurable, In/Compatible, In/Comparable-Modalities of Religious Knowing and Being," Address given to the *Canadian Society for the Study of Religion*, Annual Meeting, June 2, 1995 at UQAM, Montreal, 11; Langdon Gilkey, "he or she possesses an eros towards not only truth in general, but the truth as seen through that discipline's efforts...she is an insider in the community of inquirers sharing that eros, and so having a commitment to the aims, the criteria, and the judgments of that community of inquiry." in "Responses" to "Insiders and Outsiders..." by N. Ross Reat, *Journal American Academy of Religion*, 1983, 487.



of the environment."<sup>83</sup> The task of reconceptualization is taken up again when he returns to Harvard. Smith's second career at Harvard spans the years 1978 to 1984; this timeframe will be broken down into two segments, called Stage Five and Stage Six, in order to look at the subject of "world theology" separately, commencing with the appearance of the book, in 1981. Accordingly, I turn now to Stage Five, the years at Harvard up to the publication of *Towards a World Theology* in 1981.

## II

### Stage Five: Harvard University, 1978-1981

In 1978 Smith returned to Harvard as Professor of Comparative Religion and Chairman of the Committee on the Study of Religion, posts which he held until 1984 when he became Emeritus Professor. The years, 1978-1981, were filled with activity: administrative and teaching duties; major addresses and lectures; the publication of books and articles. In what follows, I continue the search for Islamic components in Smith's reconceptualizations as well as an understanding of his deepening comprehension of what is involved in living in a religiously plural world. As will become apparent from the conference addresses, the audience has widened noticeably. The first conference is that of the Middle East Studies Association, and here it is that we shall start.

Presidential Address, 1978

Middle East Studies Association of North America

Title of address: "The True Meaning of Scripture: An Empirical Historian's

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<sup>83</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 222.

Smith is concerned with the richness, diversity and quantity of religious historical data now available; he contends that we must "forge new concepts" to do justice to this déluge. He is speaking here of the "poetry-plus"<sup>85</sup> nature of religion, as he did in invoking the *musha'irah* in his essay, "Muslim-Hindu Relations in India."<sup>86</sup> The theory he is putting forward concerns the meaning of Scripture, and it is the Qur'an which he cites as a specific instance. But he does not develop the "poetry-plus" motif. Instead, he repeats what he has said elsewhere, that the history of religion or of scripture, in particular the Qur'an, is the history of the continuum, over fourteen centuries in many lands, of the meaning and meanings evoked "in the hearts and minds" of Muslims.<sup>87</sup> History is process, not the search for pristine beginnings or "origin" as exemplified in some "history of religion" movements of the past. For Smith, "To understand history is to understand movement--forwards."<sup>88</sup> He adds that the *ummah* (the community of Muslims) is "as integral as is Muhammad in constituting the Qur'an as scripture";<sup>89</sup> that this perception is basic, whether seen as "simply a line, or as the base of a triangle with God always at the

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<sup>84</sup>*Proceedings*, Middle East Studies Association of North America in *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, II (1980): 487-505.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 487.

<sup>86</sup>Smith, Chapter 12 in *On Understanding Islam*, 217-230.

<sup>87</sup>*Proceedings*, Middle East Studies Association, 505.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 497.

<sup>89</sup>*Ibid.*, 504.

apex (a growing triangle)."<sup>90</sup> This is, I suggest, part of Smith's dialectic between God and man; the movement from God-to-man as discussed above.

Lecture, "Thinking about Persons," 1979

"'Person' is a transcendent concept, not simply empirical," Smith declares in a short lecture, "Thinking about Persons,"<sup>91</sup> where he brings to bear what he calls his "history-of-ideas framework."<sup>92</sup> In the struggle against de-personalization, Smith alludes, for the first time, to what he considers part of an alternative approach--complementarity--or the life of the "imagination...alongside the rational."<sup>93</sup>

His option is the pursuit of "integration" through a larger rationality by virtue of the study of human history. This vision of wholeness, "within which the scientific is a component...subordinate, and partial...yet important" and in which the personal is central, comprises the "real of value," higher than we, and recognized as "real."<sup>94</sup> I suggest that "real" in this context is what Smith understands as the "transcendent."

*Faith and Belief*, 1979

Here Smith conducts an exhaustive inquiry into the origins and

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<sup>90</sup>Ibid.

<sup>91</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Thinking about Persons," *Humanitas* (May 15, 1979): 147-152; 148.

<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 149.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid., 152.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

development of the concept "faith" in the religious traditions of the world as contrasted to "belief." The volume contains a revision of the Strong Lectures given in Australia<sup>95</sup> as well as a revised version of The Iqbal Memorial Lectures, delivered at the University of the Punjab in Lahore;<sup>96</sup> the former under the chapter heading, "The Buddhist Instance: Faith as Atheist?" and the latter, as "The Islamic Instance: Faith as Theocentric."<sup>97</sup> Smith speaks of *Belief and History* as a "supplement" to *Faith and Belief*.<sup>98</sup> Both books have as common purpose to disengage the terms "belief" and "faith" from faulty present-day interpretations—Smith's work of deconstruction. The scholarly documentation, captivating as well as erudite, covers more pages than the text itself.

Smith views faith as the quality of persons as distinguished from institutions or propositions of belief. Smith has many ways of suggesting the nature

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<sup>95</sup>Smith, "Religious Atheism? Early Buddhist and Recent American." *Milla wa-Milla* (Melbourne) 6 (1966): 5-30. Reprinted in *Comparative Religion: The Charles Strong Trust Lectures 1961-70*, edited by John Bowman (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1972), 53-81.

<sup>96</sup>Smith, The Iqbal Memorial Lectures, given at the University of the Punjab, were reprinted as "Faith, in the Qur'an; and its Relation to Belief," 111-134, and "Muslim and Christian: Faith Convergence, Belief Divergence," 265-281, in *On Understanding Islam*, 1981.

<sup>97</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton: University Press, 1979). Chapters mentioned: "The Buddhist Instance: Faith as Atheist?", 20-32; "The Islamic Instance: Faith as Theocentric," 33-52.

<sup>98</sup>See "Acknowledgments" following the Preface in *Faith and Belief*, n.p.

of faith.<sup>99</sup> One characterization is

an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, to the universe; a total response; a way of seeing whatever one sees and of handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at a more than mundane level; to see, to feel, to act in terms of, a transcendent dimension.<sup>100</sup>

In accord with his continuing theme of "interiority" and inside-outside distinctions discussed in earlier chapters, Smith envisages faith as the "inward" aspect of a religious tradition, whereas belief pertains to external expressions of a tradition. He suggests that faith is "generic," a human response to the transcendent.

In the concluding paragraph of *Faith and Belief*, Smith reveals his agenda for the future shape of his theory:

1. "reason is in principle universal, and...in the intellectual realm, converges";
2. Truth is ultimately one, although the human forms of truth and the forms of faith decorate or bespatter our world diversely;
3. our unity is real transcendently;
4. (will we move toward) the construction on earth of a world community;
5. a question of our ability to act in terms of transcending truth, and love.<sup>101</sup>  
(my emphases)

These affirmations and questions will be considered in the discussion of the third book of the trilogy, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of*

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<sup>99</sup>Edward J. Hughes lists thirty-seven "Descriptions of Faith" in Smith's writings. See his *Wilfred Cantwell Smith: A Theology for the World* (London: SCM Press, 1986), Appendix, 230-234.

<sup>100</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 12.

<sup>101</sup>*Faith and Belief*, concluding paragraph: 171.

*Religion* to be taken up in the following chapter, Chapter VII.

Opening Address  
14th Congress of the International Association  
of the History of Religions, 1980

The following year, 1980, "Traditions in Contact and Change: Towards a History of Religion in the Singular" was the title of Smith's opening address to the 14th Congress of the International Association of the History of Religions held in Winnipeg.<sup>102</sup> Here he sets forth his "world history of religion," to be seen "century by century"<sup>103</sup> involving the emergence of the "great religions as a form."<sup>104</sup> Historically, religious traditions have existed alongside one another, not as aberrations or deviations: China and Spain are two examples. Furthermore, he points to mediaeval scholasticism as an illustration in Western history of "an overarching Islamic-Jewish-Christian phenomenon," marked by interactive participation on the part of each of the communities. At various moments of "contact," these communities shared a common heritage of Greek *philosophia*.<sup>105</sup>

By contrast, the Muslim-Hindu "complexes" shared a common spirituality by way of the Bhakti and Sufi movements. The two movements

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<sup>102</sup>In *Traditions in Contact and Change: Selected Proceedings of the 14th Congress (1980) of the International Association of the History of Religions* edited by Peter Slater and Donald Wiebe (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1983) 1-23.

<sup>103</sup>*Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 20.

"developed in dynamic interaction."<sup>106</sup> Smith demonstrates that the religions of the world have participated in "a common, global history" in "divergent" ways; that in the future they will participate in "conceivably more convergent ways."<sup>107</sup>

Conference on the topic of "Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism" held at Union Theological Seminary, Richmond, Va.<sup>108</sup> Concluding remarks given by W. C. Smith as "An Attempt at Summation." (1981)

This conference broke new ground by bringing together, in the words of Donald G. Dawe, "a cross-section of Christian voices--theologians and church leaders, Roman Catholic, Orthodox, conservative evangelical and ecumenical Protestant, men and women, lay and ordained, with Third World representatives"<sup>109</sup> to discuss many aspects of religious pluralism in the world. The confrontation revealed, Smith says in his concluding summary,<sup>110</sup> "a pluralist multiplicity of forms of faith internally, among Christians: Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant."<sup>111</sup> It is a demonstration of his basic position that no "religion" exists as an entity, but rather as the dynamic, interacting faith of persons. "Religious pluralism is a Christian fact" is his declaration.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>106</sup>Ibid., 21.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 23.

<sup>108</sup>*Christ's Lordship and Religious Pluralism* edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1981).

<sup>109</sup>Ibid., vii.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "An Attempt at Summation," 196-203.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 197.

<sup>112</sup>Ibid., 198.

"History in Relation to both Science and Religion"<sup>113</sup> is the title of an article that also appeared in 1981. Here Smith asserts that ever since Kuhn, history and science may be seen to run parallel courses. The absolute truths of science now emerge as "historically specific, historically limited, historically transient."<sup>114</sup> Modern historical consciousness provides the framework within which science and religion are to be viewed. From this historical perspective, all the "so-called" religions are seen to be finite and contingent, a "divine-human complex in motion." Propositions are neither true nor false; like symbols, they point to the truth or to God; they enable humans to participate in truth, but they "themselves do not so participate."<sup>115</sup>

The basic framework in Smith's new conceptualization is "historical consciousness," the vehicle being the comparative history of religion. The Islamic conception of intellectual life (in particular the historical harmonization or accommodation of science and philosophies, of languages and cultures) subsumes and has subsumed, over the centuries, the many parts; in like manner, Smith's meta-history concept overarches or subsumes the segments.

Also published in 1981 was the seminal *Towards a World Theology*:

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<sup>113</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "History in Relation to Both Science and Religion" in *Scottish Journal of Religious Studies*, 2 (1981): 3-10.

<sup>114</sup>Ibid., 6.

<sup>115</sup>Ibid., 9.



*Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*.<sup>116</sup> This volume completes not only the arguments set forth in the earlier books of the Trilogy, but all that has preceded these in print and speech.

Accordingly, *Towards a World Theology* will be said heuristically to inaugurate Stage Six, covering a decade in which a theory of movement "towards a world theology" is launched, then clarified, enlarged, modified and refined, culminating, a decade later, in the appearance of *What is Scripture?* (1993). The following chapter (Chapter VII) will deal with this period of great productivity.

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<sup>116</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1981; reprinted 1987, 1989).

## Chapter VII

### WORLD THEOLOGY

Stage Six: Harvard University, 1981-1984  
Professor Emeritus, 1984-

Smith viewed pluralism and global technological advances as challenges: for the first time in history, humankind has the opportunity to give "a valid vision of the world a conceptual form."<sup>1</sup> *Towards a World Theology* and its companion earlier pieces, *Belief and History* and *Faith and Belief*, commonly referred to as the Trilogy, set forth the new conceptualizations. This literature, supplemented on occasion by works dating from 1981 onwards, will constitute the resource for an examination of his proposed new theory, along with critical comment.

The vision...(Smith writes) is of the unity or coherence of humankind's religious history. At one level, this unity is a matter of empirical observation. It is an historical fact. At another level, it is a matter of theological truth.<sup>2</sup>

His goal is to make such realities "evident" as well as the link between them.<sup>3</sup>

As the moon-view of earth provided an awareness of wholeness, so does Smith provide a new perspective of the history of man's religious life "seen as a whole."<sup>4</sup> Such a perspective, he tells us, can serve to bridge the gap between the "specific and the generic," that is between the particular and the universal; between

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (London: Macmillan, 1981; reprint 1989), 191.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 180.

one's own group and the "cosmic."<sup>5</sup> Smith proposes a meta view of humankind, transcending historical and existential boundaries of religion, but not superseding them. New conceptualizations are required for this "overview" and for the reactions and interactions it will generate. Such an overview promotes "knowledge of humanity by humanity"<sup>6</sup> as well as discernment of the "community" of mankind.

This is the vision--"ideal"; "shareable";<sup>7</sup> patterned;<sup>8</sup> eschatological<sup>9</sup>--towards which Smith moves; it is not syncretism, nor universalism nor systematic theology although it subsumes elements of these approaches. He contends that the relation of the "specific" concrete person to the "generic" God/Truth/Love makes it possible to arrive at a "theology of comparative religion."<sup>10</sup> His "religious history" framework encompasses the major religious traditions as well as those traditions where transcendence has been acknowledged but not conceptualized as God, for example Buddhism and the Western classical traditions where "transcendence has appeared primarily as Truth."<sup>11</sup> By definition, Smith's "pluralistic relativism"<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 186.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 188.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 191.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 82.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 126.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 181.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 185.

<sup>12</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 170.

excludes fundamentalists and literalists.

In sum, Smith proposes working towards a "theology of comparative religion that will be cogent, once constructed, for all mankind."<sup>13</sup> It should be pointed out that Smith views his model as a "beginning," one on which succeeding generations of men and women will labour, much as John Macmurray views his new theory of personalism as a "reconnaissance" on the road to a revolution in epistemological theory.<sup>14</sup>

Smith's conceptual framework "within which the universe is framed" confers meaning; it is the vision or "pattern" by which one "knows."<sup>15</sup> In this it resembles his perception of

(Islam)...a coherent, total system...the system confers meaning...the total system of Islamic thought that functions...symbolically...; an integrated world view...which serves them as a pattern for ordering the data of observation. It constitutes a conceptual framework within which the universe is framed, the universe and man...the vision by which he knows. He knows or is aware of not knowing...within "the system."<sup>16</sup>

His epistemological shift centers on this "overarching" pattern of meaning discerned

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<sup>13</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 126.

<sup>14</sup>John Macmurray, in *The Self as Agent*, writes "The present work is a pioneering venture. It seeks to establish a point of view...A new philosophical form cannot be established by demonstration. It can only be exhibited and illustrated in use...The function of a philosophical form is to exhibit the unity of human experience..." 13. Again, "Kant...compared his change of standpoint to the Copernican revolution in astronomy. The present proposal (to think from the *standpoint of action*) might use the same analogy." 85. In *Persons in Relation*: "What I have written can be no more than a preliminary and tentative reconnaissance (to this new enterprise)." 13.

<sup>15</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 82.

<sup>16</sup>*Belief and History*, 25.

by Muslims and Buddhists as opposed to the Western dichotomy of "religious" and "secular" realms.<sup>17</sup> Smith leans heavily on his perception of the Islamic tradition in arriving at the conceptualization of his worldview: coherence of pattern and order; of creation and goal; coinherence (revealed *ayat* or "signs");<sup>18</sup> universality (Quranic revelation is for all mankind); humans are free to discover and heed the signs of order and inner consonance. The person is free to choose to be part of this order (obedience) in the context of the cosmic universe, that is, of total humanity. This spells inner/outer integrity (personal/cosmic) and the integration of religious/secular divisions.

Smith's argument against hypostatization of linguistic labels is well known. In the three volumes of the Trilogy he presents an exhaustive and captivating documentation of the case against the reification of such terms as "belief," "religion" and many examples of Western objectivization such as "Hinduism." Tillich also inveighed against the practice of elevating the relative to the absolute, a principle basic to his systematic theology. Smith, like Tillich, emphasizes the "dynamics" of his approach, which is "process," "becoming rather than being"<sup>19</sup>; his twin categories--faith and tradition--are part of the process, the former providing for the human response to transcendence (God/Truth/Love), the latter encompassing all

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<sup>17</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 83.

<sup>18</sup>According to Fazlur Rahman, "The verses of the Qur'an are *ayat* or "signs" because they come from the same God who created the universe." In *Major Themes of the Qur'an* (Minneapolis: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980; second edition 1989), 72.

<sup>19</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 192.

"expressions of the apprehension or celebration of transcendence/the transcendent, such as: "temples, scriptures, theological systems, dance patterns, legal and other social institutions, conventions, moral codes, myths."<sup>20</sup> The "living person" serves as the *trait-d'union* between the categories of faith and tradition which cannot stand on their own. Smith suggests that the expressive-historical (cumulative) tradition mediates transcendence (the divine); that the personal experiential "living out" faith "grasps and is grasped" by the transcendent, in part through the intermediary of the symbols.<sup>21</sup> I shall pay attention below to the critique on this aspect of his theory.

### World Theology

The thesis of *Towards a World Theology* is that our new age, which perhaps coincides with postmodernism, is characterized by an emerging self-consciousness, wherein ideally all of us, corporately--that is, humanity--will become aware critically of our own and everyone else's human/intellectual/religious legacy, contemporary and historical. The vehicle for achieving this meta worldview or world theology will be the comparative study of the religious traditions of the world. Smith's term for this overarching perspective is "corporate critical self-consciousness." It, in fact, provides the epistemological basis for his theory, overcoming the subject/object split. The new category of "self-consciousness," according to Smith,

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<sup>20</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*, 141. In this reference, Smith calls the items in the above catalogue "objective data that constitute the historical deposit...of the past religious life of the community in question."

<sup>21</sup>I am using the term "symbols" to cover the items given in his catalogue: such as temples, scriptures, theological systems and on, cited above. Smith sometimes speaks of symbols and sometimes of metaphors in this connection.

"seeks to clarify what we mean by knowing."<sup>22</sup> What he is after, what he calls "true knowledge," is that knowledge in human affairs that "participants and observers can share and can jointly verify, by observation and participation."<sup>23</sup> (The emphasis is mine). He observes that the verification of the knowledge about man (what he calls humane knowledge) comes in understanding (observers alongside the "observed"); in wisdom (from participants on the "inside") and between the two in "mutual intelligibility." This leads eventually to "community."<sup>24</sup> Here Smith well illustrates his basic personalist assumption, or more precisely, his focus on humans as the locus of religion; he goes further than Vlastos or Macmurray in their "personalism." They envisage "mutuality" as a law of life and the Kingdom of God (community) as the goal of life. Smith, on the other hand, adds a third term to the subject/object (insider/outsider or self/Other) conflict; he adds, as noted above, the "mutual intelligibility" that results from interaction and exchange between the "observer" and the "participant." Community is still the potential outcome. Unlike the earlier social gospel models, verification follows upon the achievement of a new level of knowing--critical self-consciousness--ideally, an eventual achievement of community.<sup>25</sup> Smith's criteria are rigorous academic and professional standards and personal self-discipline. The vehicle for corporate, critical self-consciousness is the comparative

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<sup>22</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 55.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 102.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

study of religion; the movement towards this aim he calls "world theology."

The books of the Trilogy accomplish three important goals: first, he establishes the unity or coherence of humankind's religious history; secondly, he demonstrates the dual aspect of this unity (at one level, a matter of empirical observation—an historical fact; at another level, a matter of theological truth)<sup>26</sup> and, third, religious history, coupled with a "critical corporate self-consciousness" and the method of the comparative study of religion, is a movement towards a "world theology." Smith makes important modifications, innovations and refinements to the hypothesis in the following decade, much of which revolves around or is subsumed under his new "doctrine of man," what he terms his metaphysical anthropology. A brief overview of this period, 1981 to the present, follows, based on a thematic as well as an historical approach.

#### Collection of essays on Islam - 1981

Smith published a second major volume in 1981, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies*.<sup>27</sup> Of the sixteen essays, four appear here in print for the first time; dates range from the early fifties to 1981.<sup>28</sup> Smith prefaces each essay with valuable explanatory notes. For instance, the early study on Islamic Law, "Shar'iah and Shar," led him, twenty years later, he tells us,

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 3.

<sup>27</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981)

<sup>28</sup>These essays have been examined in their chronological place in earlier chapters.



towards forging a synthesis between the comparative history of religion and Christian (or Islamic, or global) theology<sup>29</sup> (emphasis added)

The tension between the history of religion and theology provides the backdrop for many of Smith's pronouncements during the coming decade, a reflection, in part, of a long and continuing debate concerning the nature and aims of the academic study of religion. From the time of Joachim Wach (1898-1955), a leading proponent of *Religionswissenschaft* (the history of religion; the science of religion) opinion was divided over what constituted the subject matter of comparative religion: as academic investigation was it also related to one's own faith; as a scholarly enterprise, did it also have a concern for understanding "other religions"?<sup>30</sup> During the period under consideration, the seventies and eighties, the "religious studies" debate had to do, mainly, with the controversy over what was seen, from time to time, to be (as in the case of Smith, himself) or indeed, intended to be, (as in the case of Charles Davis)<sup>31</sup> the "re-theologising" of religious studies.<sup>32</sup> This debate provides backdrop for the discussion of the following items.

#### "The Modern West in the History of Religion"

In 1983, for example, Smith delivered the Presidential address to the

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<sup>29</sup>"Islamic Law: *Shari'ah* and *Shar'*" in *On Understanding Islam*, 87-109.

<sup>30</sup>See Eric J. Sharpe *Comparative Religion: A History* (London: Duckworth, 1975; Second edition, 1986) 238; 312-313.

<sup>31</sup>See, for instance, Charles Davis "The Reconvergence of theology and religious studies." *Studies in Religion/Sciences de religion*, 4/3 1974/75: 205-221.

<sup>32</sup>See Sharpe *Comparative Religion* for a discussion of the debate: 238-40; 312-313, *passim*.

American Academy of Religion under the title "The Modern West in the History of Religion."<sup>33</sup> Smith points out that secular ideology is impersonal; that it has outlawed the transcendent; that it can lead to distorted expression and "misguided forms" of "privatized" religious sentiments.<sup>34</sup> Smith urges intellectuals to "clarify" the situation, to bridge the gap conceptually between the impersonal and the transcendent. Secularist ideology is society's orthodoxy.<sup>35</sup>

#### **"The World Church and the World History of Religion"**

The history of religion and its relation to theology is overtly the topic of Smith's address to the Catholic Theological Society of North America in 1984, entitled "The World Church and the World History of Religion: The Theological Issue."<sup>36</sup> Although he once spoke of a gap between "theologian" and "historian," he now states without equivocation that

it is impossible adequately to understand the course of human history, except theologically; and it is impossible adequately to theologize, except in awareness of world history.<sup>37</sup>

Revelations occur in history<sup>38</sup>; God is a religious pluralist.<sup>39</sup> Smith makes a

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<sup>33</sup>Published in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, LII/I (March 1984) 3-18.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>36</sup>*Proceedings, Catholic Theological Society of North America*, 39; (1984): 52-68.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>38</sup>*Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

distinction between such phrases as "pertaining to Christian" and "pertaining to Christ." The term "Christ" has transcendent reference; the noun "Christian" is essentially of contingent reference.<sup>40</sup> Smith suggests another mode of conceptualizing in order to distinguish between the particular and the generic, the mundane and the theological level: being Christian, Buddhist, Muslim occurs at the mundane level, whereas at the cosmic or theological level, one question dominates--the matter of grace, formulated historically in a variety of ways. Smith points out that Rahner's position is that grace is freely offered to every human being but that a "radical distinction" exists between the "offer" and the "acceptance."<sup>41</sup> Smith is "happy" with this but extends and broadens the categories: Sikhs, Muslims, Jews, Christians "are related to transcendence by being human";<sup>42</sup> being a Christian and being a Buddhist are historical events.<sup>43</sup> What matters cosmically is that grace is available to all. This is still another illustration of the meaning of Smith's twin concepts of "faith" and "tradition"--the relation to transcendence within these categories exhibits so many strands that it tends to be described somewhat differently in different contexts.

"Theology and the World's Religious History" - 1984

Leonard Swidler characterizes the Conference entitled "Toward a

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., 67.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 67.

Universal Theology of Religion," held October 17-19, 1984 at Temple University, in these words: "Interreligious, interideological dialogue is something quite new under the sun."<sup>44</sup> Four outstanding Christian thinkers, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Raimundo Panikkar, John Cobb and Hans Kung were invited to submit pre-conference papers on the topic for general distribution. Twelve respondents from the major world religions were invited, including Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Orthodox Christian, Shiite Muslim, "Taoist-Buddhist," Sunni Muslim, two Catholics and a Protestant. The lectures and the responses were printed in book form; Smith's paper, "Theology and the World's Religious History,"<sup>45</sup> was the first of four to be given. His thesis is plainly stated: "In the next phase of world thought, the basis for theology must now be the history of religion."<sup>46</sup> Those who discriminate between revelation and history as sources of theological knowledge are in error. According to Smith, revelation and its interrelations occur in history; it is revelation to "somebody" at a "particular" time and place.<sup>47</sup> "Living life religiously," Smith sees to be an interaction among four things: the accumulating religious tradition; the particular personality; the particular environment and the "transcendent reality to which the tradition points."<sup>48</sup> He does not provide a way of linking "revelation" and "transcendence" functionally: the

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<sup>44</sup>Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 1.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibid.*, 52-68.

<sup>46</sup>*Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibid.*, 62.

former "effects change" in person or group; the latter is a dimension in which one lives, by which one apprehends or is apprehended by the divine. Smith concludes his paper with the statement that "theology ideally is the truth about God."<sup>49</sup>

Kana Mitra, a Hindu respondent at the conference, has reservations about deriving all the data for theology simply from history, although she agrees that "revelation or realization (i.e. any encounter with the transcendent) is historical."<sup>50</sup> However, for her, the content of that encounter does not suggest the "contingent and nonabiding character of time." In her view, that is why theology refers to cases of direct encounter, whether of revelation or actual realization.<sup>51</sup>

#### **Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions - 1986**

Less than two years later, the theology of religions was again the focus of a conference, held March 7-8, 1986 at Claremont Graduate School. The subtitle states *Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*; the main title, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*,<sup>52</sup> according to co-editor, Paul F. Knitter, requires interpretation because the term "myth" needs to be "understood carefully": the book does not intend to deny the "myth" but it "wants to interpret it anew."<sup>53</sup> The new interpretation will deal

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 70.

<sup>50</sup>Kana Mitra, "Theologizing through History?" 79-85; "Afterword" 251-253 in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Swidler, 1987; 84.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., 84.

<sup>52</sup>John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, editors, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987; Fourth Printing, February 1992).

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., vii.

with the "ever-changing historical and personal" meaning of the "truth" of the myth and will come from various perspectives. The pluralistic model of a theology of religions set forth in the book represents a "paradigm shift"--"a turn that is both genuinely different from, yet dependent upon, what went before."<sup>54</sup>

Smith chose for his title "Idolatry in Comparative Perspective."<sup>55</sup> He cautions against the evil of attributing "idolatry" to other religious communities and against the danger of making an idol of one's own community. What is completely new in this paper, at least in its formal presentation, is Smith's addition of the new category of "community" to the twin concepts of "faith" and "tradition." He sees these as three component elements of the religions of the world, "counting community as in significant ways distinct from tradition, rather than subsumed under it, with participation in community as a major element."<sup>56</sup> Formerly, Smith spoke of the "historical process as the context of religious life, and participation as the mode of religious life."<sup>57</sup> He argued at that time that Christians participated in the Christian process; Jews in the Jewish process, and on.<sup>58</sup> Indeed, Whaling had listed "participation" as one of Smith's "universal theological categories" along with faith,

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<sup>54</sup>Ibid.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., 53-68.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>57</sup>In *Towards a World Theology*, 33.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., 34.

tradition and religious truth.<sup>59</sup> Now (1987) Smith sees community/participation, in addition to faith and tradition, as basic categories of the world-history of religion. What is more, he sees the religions of the world to be "parts of the world...temporal, contingent, mundane...intermediaries between humankind and God."<sup>60</sup> "Interrelatedness," stressed in earlier works, is enhanced by this new formulation of basic categories. What he wishes to emphasize in this paper on "Idolatry" is that it is wrong to "identify one's own 'religion' or tradition with God...rather than as an avenue to, or from the divine."<sup>61</sup> Tom F. Driver, in a Postscript to the conference, endorses Smith's position on idolatry.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, he has strong reservations about a facile understanding of pluralism. "Given the disjunctions and discontinuities existing between religious traditions, it is impossible and imperialistic to subsume the religions under universal categories."<sup>63</sup> I would suggest that Smith's categories are universal as "human" categories--for and about humanity; religious traditions are left autonomous. The categories are overarching or meta categories. To return to Driver, he sees pluralism as, itself, a "justice issue."<sup>64</sup> "Liberative

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<sup>59</sup>Frank Whaling, *The World's Religious Traditions* (New York: Crossroad, 1984) 14.

<sup>60</sup>Smith, "Idolatry..." In Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 59.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid.

<sup>62</sup>Tom F. Driver, "The Cases for Pluralism" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 203-218; 215.

<sup>63</sup>Tom Driver's sentiments as reported by Paul F. Knitter in the Preface to *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, vii-xi; xii.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid., 216.

praxis" provides the avenue to the universal--that is, particular deeds of liberative praxis.<sup>65</sup> Smith's insider/outsider paradigm may well lead to liberative praxis; he also speaks of "orthopraxy" rather than "orthodoxy"; Driver lays greater emphasis on the "here and now"; on what he calls "transcendence as radical immanence."<sup>66</sup>

"Transcendence" - 1988

Wilfred Smith delivered The Ingersoll Lecture, "Transcendence,"<sup>67</sup> to the Harvard Divinity School on March 10, 1988. This represents his most elaborate and comprehensive public statement on the topic, although references to transcendence abound in his work, starting with *Islam in Modern History*,<sup>68</sup> continuing to the present. My first observation is that Smith declares himself to be "an historian";<sup>69</sup> there is no allusion to being a theologian (or "also" a theologian) as in *Towards a World Theology* and subsequent pieces. The lecture casts a wide net: epistemology; Pablo Casals and Bach; Jacques Ellul; philosophizing about culture; Polanyi and Kuhn; Durkheim and social cohesion--"illustrative instances" of

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<sup>65</sup>Ibid., 217.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Smith, published in *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Fall 1988): 10-15.

<sup>68</sup>The following references occur in *Islam in Modern History* (New York: Mentor Books, 1957): 19; 186n24; 32; 186. There does not appear to be a reference to "transcendence" in Smith's first book, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* (Lahore (Pakistan): Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1963 reprint; 1943). However, Smith, himself, declares in the Lecture on "Transcendence": "From *Islam in Modern History* to *Faith and Belief*, just as my work has never been "about" transcendence, explicitly, so also it has always been so implicitly." 11.

<sup>69</sup>"Transcendence," 11.



transcendence as universal and as personal.<sup>70</sup> The burden of the lecture is precisely this: to show transcendence as universal and personal; to show that we live in a double context, as does religion: the mundane and the transcendent.<sup>71</sup> To lose sight of transcendence is to run the risk of switching from "purpose to procedure."<sup>72</sup> That objectivization or reification of anything tends to block out transcendence is part of this recurring theme. Just as transcendence (he tells us) as always been implicit in his work,<sup>73</sup> I suggest that this lecture reveals implicit basic presuppositions.

These presuppositions are beholden to three different, in common parlance, disparate realms: the scientific model; the legacy of Greek philosophy and, broadly speaking, the religious model, encompassing the religious "vision" of community as well as the approach of the mystic, and allusions to Islam. A simplistic analysis does injustice to great complexity; still it may be useful to use this analysis to attempt to clarify what he means by the very broad application of the term "transcendence."

A basic presupposition of the lecture is the importance of knowing "more" and recognizing that we can know more. He uses the scientist's idiom; Ian Barbour claims that religion and science follow parallel paths but that religion

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<sup>70</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., 14.

<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 12.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., 11.

outstrips science, venturing into territory that is properly its own.<sup>74</sup> "Knowing more" seems to be key to Smith's cognitive "mapping" and to the epistemological stance he develops. Persons are real in their faith and their tradition but they mediate transcendent reality (God/Truth//Love/Absolute). However, this "knowing," although dynamic and in process, needs qualification: it is only partial apprehension of, and an imperfect movement towards, transcendent reality. On the other hand, "knowing more", for Smith, is always a desideratum, in the mode of science. Some critics fault Smith for his "Western" orientation,<sup>75</sup> not for suggesting "triumphalism" (he does everything to debunk that) but more on the charge of "progressivism"; of not being consonant with the goals of Eastern religious traditions. But, for Smith, there is a caveat: this is what tends to get overlooked;<sup>76</sup> this is where the mode of science and the religious mode appear to coalesce; the caveat is that the "more" one knows the more one understands, on condition that we--all of us--the human race, together,

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<sup>74</sup>See Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms: The Nature of Scientific and Religious Language* (London: SCM Press, 1974). Barbour suggests that "science is not as objective, nor religion as subjective" as sometimes held. "But...I see a difference of degree between science and religions rather than an absolute contrast. These comparisons can be made without denying the distinctive non-cognitive functions of religious language which have no parallel in science," 171.

<sup>75</sup>Kana Mitra writes: "Smith's view of history itself is very much centered in 'Westernness,' if not Christianity in particular." In "Afterword" in Leonard Swidler, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, 251.

<sup>76</sup>See Antonio R. Gualtieri, "Transcendence and Reductionism in Religious Studies: Eric Sharpe on Wilfred Cantwell Smith," in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 1/1 (1989): 47-53.

Peter Slater, "On Towards a World Theology," in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 4/1-4/2 (1992): 115-131. Slater suggests that what is needed is the "harmony of the liberation of all in the interests of each..." 130.

seek to "know more" about our interrelatedness to one another and to transcendent reality and to a sustainable social and natural environment. This is Smith's vision of "ultimate concern"--anything but manipulative or liberal because it is squarely based on corporate human responsibility undergirded and interrelated with responsibility to the divine. When he speaks in an Islamic framework, "knowing more" is related to discovering more about the divine imperative for guidance in living one's life. As Smith says, and he is not alone, it is difficult to get outside ("to know more") the secularist, impersonalist, Cartesian cast of modern language with which we are saddled.

Once transcendence is lost sight of, purpose is likely to give way to procedure<sup>77</sup> points to a second basic assumption that owes much to the legacy of Greek philosophy. He is restating his long-standing argument that methodology is usurping the pursuit of truth, truth being more than a "correspondence theory" facsimile; truth being the pursuit of the "transcendent goal"<sup>78</sup> with particular relevance to academia. Humans, by their constructs and constructions, "mediate" transcendence, in "humanly-flawed ways."<sup>79</sup> The "humanly-flawed" qualification is one of the ways in which Smith attempts to "acknowledge" the nature of the finite: "less-than-perfect," "brokenness," "partial"; again, human qualities, such as destructive

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<sup>77</sup>"Transcendence," 12.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid., 13.

imagination, a capacity for wickedness.<sup>80</sup> Such qualifications, however, do not constitute a doctrine of the demonic,<sup>81</sup> nor of redemption nor of religious paradox. These rightly belong to the individual religious traditions; they are religious confrontations. Smith's meta theory, I suggest, is a dynamic process: evolutionary in that it is open; teleological in that it has a goal which is sustainable human life and discourse on this planet. The system envisages religious encounters among insiders and outsiders wherein they confront one another, transformatively, redemptively, out of the depths of their own religious tradition. Here is where the dialectic will be, or is already, beginning to be. It cannot be prescribed or proscribed. Such confrontation, in his eyes, has the potential, I suggest, to usher in the radically new.

The third implicit presupposition has to do with community. Smith made this erstwhile concern clear and prominent in his presentation at Claremont on "Idolatry" in 1987. Community (subsuming participation), faith and tradition become the three principal categories of his theory. In the Harvard lecture, he underscores the close relationship between community and "ritual celebration...and re-enactment," pointing out that the sense of community languishes, when "such

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<sup>80</sup>"Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal." Reprinted in abridged form from the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada* (Ottawa, Royal Society of Canada, 1975), as Chapter 9 in *Religious Diversity*, edited by Oxtoby, 1976: 158-180; 165.

<sup>81</sup>Peter Slater, for one, suggests that "a Tillichian concept of the demonic" would be useful for Smith in dealing with "those moves in religion" which in the name of universality impose constraints upon others. "On Towards a World Theology" in *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 4/1-4/2 (1992):126-127.

symbolic forms" as rituals are neglected. Smith demonstrates his re-arrangement of the multiple layerings of the concepts or categories of "faith" and "tradition" by emphasizing the new third category, community, involving participation in ritual events and celebrations:

through such repeated group actions a community is held together in each succeeding present. Such corporate participation in transcendence has been basic in advancing a group beyond *Gesellschaft* to *Gemeinschaft*, turning a society into a community, and an individual into a person.<sup>82</sup>

Whereas in the past, Smith stressed interrelatedness and interconnectedness, emphasizing "persons in relation,"<sup>83</sup> in this lecture at Harvard, he underscores dynamic community in

these re-presentings, the reiterated re-rendering of their joint inheritance and the re-distributing of it among them all.<sup>84</sup>

Here he speaks for *praxis*; the "doing of community."

In his conclusion, Smith formulates a double context for human life of the "mundane and transcendent: a mundane that is shot through with transcendence, a transcendence that we apprehend in "often distorted, even demonic, yet always improvable ways."<sup>85</sup> It could be argued that his interpretive category of transcendence points to a dynamic, corporate interpenetration of divine and human, wherein we--all of us--have the possibility of being mediated to, and of mediating to

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<sup>82</sup>"Transcendence" 1988, 14.

<sup>83</sup>The title of Macmurray's second Gifford Lecture.

<sup>84</sup>"Transcendence," 14.

<sup>85</sup>*Ibid.*, 15.

others, that which transcends us all supremely: God/Truth/Absolute/Love. It comes close to some of Smith's characterizations of "corporate critical self-consciousness." However, the latter term does not appear in the Ingersoll lecture. Smith appeals to reasonableness in his conclusion: "as an hypothesis (transcendence) makes more coherent and illuminating sense of a far wider range of the observable facts of human life today, than does its negation."<sup>86</sup> This hypothesis undergirds all his writings providing the dynamic and the "ground" of the interplay between and among mediating categories of faith and tradition, symbolization and community/participation, "observers" and "participants." It is his dialectic.

Nonetheless, Smith's comprehension of "transcendence" may be said to be epitomized in the thrust of the Arabic term, *al-akhirah*, found in the Qur'an, and ordinarily interpreted as "what comes after" this world, chronologically, eschatologically.<sup>87</sup> He tells us that the term may be understood as referring, in Arabic, in a double context, to "what is nearer by" (the immediate and superficial aspects of our environment and existence) and "what comes after" (the true fullness of these, their cosmic reality beyond the immediate and superficial, not quite beyond our reach).<sup>88</sup> The key words, "not quite beyond our reach" occur frequently in his

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<sup>86</sup>Ibid., 15,

<sup>87</sup>Ibid.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid.

corpus in varying phraseology.<sup>89</sup> They illuminate, for me, Smith's stance toward "transcendence" and the nature of his teleology.<sup>90</sup>

"Shall Next Century be Secular or Religious?"

In the same year as the Ingersoll Lecture, Smith travelled to Japan to speak to the Tenri Conference in Tenri, on the topic "Shall Next Century be Secular or Religious?"<sup>91</sup> Here, as at Harvard Divinity School, the thrust toward a world theology has been replaced by an analysis and explanation of "transcendence": at Harvard he concluded his lecture by saying that we live in a "dual context of mundane and transcendent";<sup>92</sup> at Tenri--as a "deeply religious," "secular humanist"--he sees the future being lived in a secular/religious context:

The goal is to discern and to live out the proper way to be fully

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<sup>89</sup>For instance, in *The Faith of Other Men*: "A man of faith is a man whose vision goes beyond his immediate environment, but whose life is lived within it." 57; in "Transcendence" (Harvard): "...what any of us may come to recognize...if we push on to attain enhanced inner integrity and moral discipline, and greater compassion and love for those around us, and more intellectual insight." 11; and "Characteristic of us is that we are self-transcending, especially as we move through time, and that our awareness of the universe, of reality, of truth, though always partial, can, if we take proper steps, be less partial today than it was yesterday, less partial tomorrow than it is today." 11. Finally, in *What is Scripture?* "(the meaning of scripture) lies in something beyond both itself and us to which it points." 365n54.

<sup>90</sup>For instance, in "The Finger that Points to the Moon': Reply to Per Kvaerne," *Temenos* 9 (1973): 169-72, he writes: "...what we are studying is greater than we," 172; in "Thinking about Persons," *Humanitas* 15 (May 1979): 147-152: the pursuit of integration through a larger rationality through study of human history...the vision of wholeness, in which scientific is a component and personal is central...comprises the real of value, higher than we and recognized as real. 152.

<sup>91</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Shall Next Century be Secular or Religious?" (Tenri, Japan, *Tenri University*, 1988), 127-151.

<sup>92</sup>"Transcendence," at Harvard, 15.

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*What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach*<sup>94</sup>

Smith's most recent publication (1993) is on the comparative approach to Scripture. Margaret Chatterjee of the University of Delhi terms it a "magisterial work which fittingly caps his lifelong concern with faith, cumulative tradition and the future of religion in an increasingly secular world."<sup>95</sup> According to Smith, what is common to scriptures, in spite of their great diversity, is that they mediate the relation between human beings and their cosmos;<sup>96</sup> they themselves mediate transcendence. In his view, scripture is a human activity.<sup>97</sup> This interpretation enables Smith to characterize the "Graeco-Roman Classics" as the "scriptures of the Western idealist rationalist-humanist movement."<sup>98</sup> This viewpoint, according to Chatterjee, "is an implicate of linking scripture to the transcendent."<sup>99</sup>

In consonance with his theory as a whole, Smith asserts that scripture "functions" symbolically; "its meaning lies in the hearts, minds, lives of those persons

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<sup>93</sup>"Shall Next Century be Secular or Religious?", Tenri, 150.

<sup>94</sup>Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *What is Scripture? A Comparative Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993)

<sup>95</sup>Margaret Chatterjee, "What is Scripture?" *Religious Studies Review* Vol. 30 (Sept. 1994): 366-368; 366.

<sup>96</sup>*What is Scripture?*, 217.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, 184.

<sup>99</sup>Chatterjee, 367.



and groups for whom it is symbolic";<sup>100</sup> "in something beyond both it and us to which it points."<sup>101</sup> It is not to be reified.

Ontology, on the other hand--in his vocabulary and system--is explicated more tersely and more satisfactorily <sup>102</sup> in *What is Scripture?* than in previous writing. First, there is "no ontology of scripture"; he rules out metaphysical, logical reference. Secondly, there is no ontology of "things we human beings do, and are" (no ontology of art nor of language).<sup>103</sup> In a sense, his "metaphysical anthropological" conclusion, I submit, encapsulates his entire theory:

Rather than existing independently of us (scripture; art; language) all are subsections of the ontology of our being persons.<sup>104</sup>

Smith suggests that scripture, art, language, and on, "might be more truly apprehended if conceived not as nouns but as some sort of adverb, a mode of our relating to the world."<sup>105</sup> This position illustrates his "personalist-relational" stance coupled with his "metaphysical anthropology."

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<sup>100</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture?* , 239.

<sup>101</sup>Ibid., 365n54. Smith also observes: "Fundamentalists, historicist scholars, and radical skeptics share in common a lack of appreciation of the transcendence involved." (in the case of scripture).

<sup>102</sup>Antonio R. Gualtieri, "Faith, Belief and Transcendence." *Journal of Dharma*, Vol. 6 (1981:239-52). He writes: "Smith means much more by 'transcendence.' For him the referent is also ontological, though it is difficult to pin it down with precision," 242. Smith here does give a fuller explanation of his understanding of "ontology."

<sup>103</sup>*What is Scripture?*, 237.

<sup>104</sup>Ibid.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid.

In a footnote, Smith refers to Gadamer's "perceptive philosophic treatment of games" wherein the latter relates "the players to them."<sup>106</sup> Smith continues: He (Gadamer) writes of "Play ("Game" is Smith's preferred term) as the clue to ontological explanation." The diversity of games was Wittgenstein's observation. Smith's response is "that we should look not at the games but at the people playing them: it is a human attitude to, involvement in, games that constitutes their being such..."<sup>107</sup> This suggests to me that Smith is aware of parallels between his work and Gadamer's, although key concepts may differ.

In his article, "Smith, Hermeneutics, and the Subject-Object Syndrome"<sup>108</sup> Robertson makes a number of observations regarding Gadamer's writing that appear quite congruent with Smith's own position, such as: for Gadamer, "play is a relational and reciprocal event; play is not simply a matter of inner attitude."<sup>109</sup> Again, "The ego, with its will, while not entirely set aside or suppressed, is nevertheless 'sublated' (*aufgehoben*) in play; it is transformed: by being

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<sup>106</sup>Smith's reference is to Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975) where this passage is found. ("The Concept of Play," 91-99). Quoted in *What is Scripture?*, 365-366,n55.

<sup>107</sup>*Ibid.*, 366n55.

<sup>108</sup>John C. Robertson, Jr., "W. C. Smith, Hermeneutics, and the Subject-Object Syndrome" in Michel Despland and Gérard Vallée, ed. *Religion in History: The Word, the Idea, the Reality/La religion dans l'histoire: Le mot, l'idée, la réalité*, published for the Canadian Corporation for Studies in Religion/Corporation Canadienne des Sciences Religieuses by Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1992, 209-223.

<sup>109</sup>*Ibid.*, 216.

taken out of itself and taken up into something that transcends itself."<sup>110</sup> Transformation is always possible in Smith's schema, I believe, particularly in the insider/outsider paradigm, if one takes into account the complexity and inner dynamics and interrelations of his dialectical faith/tradition/community plus participation categories. Self-transcendence is not precluded, although Smith's system does not legislate it; rather, it is an assumption. On the other hand, Robertson's advocacy of "further comparative work of Gadamer and Smith" is well taken.<sup>111</sup>

### Conclusion

The critique of Smith's work is already vast and continues to proliferate. Before turning to examples of the critical literature, however, it should be noted that the survey of his writings and addresses, just completed, covers a period of fifty years, beginning in 1943 with *Islam in Modern India* and culminating in 1993 with *What is Scripture?* The vision changes, yet the vision remains the same, as will be discussed in the final chapter. What of the author? He characterizes himself in similar but slightly varied terms: as a "rationalist" ; as "historian of the Orient"; a modified Christian; a "secular humanist, also deeply religious"; a "socialist."<sup>112</sup> In a speech to the Catholic Theological Society of North America in

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<sup>110</sup>Ibid.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid., 221.

<sup>112</sup>As a "rationalist", *Belief and History*, vi; "historian of the Orient", *Towards a World Theology* 3, 179; "modified Christian," 149; "a secular humanist, also deeply religious," 150, both in "Shall the Next Century be Secular or Religious?" at Tenri (Japan) International Symposium, 1988; a "socialist", "The Meaning of Modernization"

1984, Smith alludes to the "gap between theologian and historian" in reference to himself:

I knew and affirmed that I was an historian of religion, and for a while I tended to go on to add "and not a theologian"...I waited until my mid-sixties before publishing a book with the word "theology" in the title; and even then its other word "towards" was equally significant.<sup>113</sup>

Of course, he went on to say that his thesis had now become one of overcoming the dichotomy or gap between the "history of religion and theology."<sup>114</sup> Finally, valuable insight is provided by Smith in acknowledging that he went "beyond others in drawing major philosophic and theological inferences from the discernment that religious traditions are always changing."<sup>115</sup> This radically new discernment of religious traditions in constant change with its many ramifications has garnered a generous collection of critical comment ranging from approbation to rejection. Selections from the critique will be discussed thematically in the next and final chapter.

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in *Religious Diversity*, 79-80.

<sup>113</sup>Smith, "The World Church and the World History of Religion: The Theological Issue" *Proceedings 39; Catholic Theological Society of North America, 1984*, 52-68; 53.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>Smith, "Traditions in Contact and Change", XIVth Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions; *Proceedings*, 1983; 1-23; 3. (Congress held in 1980)

## **Chapter VIII**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **Global Human Discourse in its Religious Dimension**

**Smith long sought to bring religious discourse and intellectual discourse into harmony. To do this he evolved a complex, dynamic theory, subtly nuanced and many-layered: a project to facilitate global human discourse in its religious dimension. I propose the above description of his project to serve as a guide in 1) correlating Smith's basic presuppositions with his perception of the Islamic religious tradition and with the structures of his theory; 2) in examining the role of metaphysical anthropology in his emerging theory and its relation to the "personalist" philosophy inspired by Vlastos, Macmurray and Farmer and, 3) the interrelation of both to his insider/outsider paradigm.**

**The conclusion will center on the transformation of Smith's critical corporate self-consciousness into the new category of "community," along with the implications of this modification for his theory as a whole. Human history, for Smith, is the arena of the interplay between the mundane and the eternal. The task he sets himself is "bridging the gap between the generic and the particular"; the goal he seeks is a theory of coherence. The nature of the resolution and the implications for the future will constitute the final topic of this survey.**

**The areas of examination I have proposed correspond broadly to three major thrusts that dominate Smith's thought, in addition to his Christian background:**

1) the Islamic; 2) the "personalist"; and 3) the Greek philosophical heritage, particularly as expressed in his "metaphysical" anthropology.

## I

Smith early recognized that "conceptions are relevant to perceptions."<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it has been argued above that Smith's perception of the Islamic religious tradition entered into the conceptualization of his hermeneutic. The following brief summary will serve as introduction to a final assessment of the Islamic component in his theory.

Smith brought Christian nurture and academic training to his post as a missionary teacher in Lahore. His studies had included two years in Britain with Hamilton Gibb and H. H. Farmer. Many of the friends he made in India--Muslims, Sikhs, Hindus--had also studied in Britain; they were intellectual equals. He counted Christians among his friends, of course; nor did he limit friendship to intellectuals. What he and his friends had most in common was admiration for Nehru.

Smith stated the aim of his first book on Islam to be a contribution to a "sociology of religion."<sup>2</sup> Along with the Scottish philosopher, Macmurray, Smith was influenced by Marx who believed that philosophy was done from the standpoint of the "socially implanted agent rather than that of the asocial, ahistorical,

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<sup>1</sup>Smith, *Meaning and End of Religion*, 83.

<sup>2</sup>Smith, *Modern Islam in India: A Social Analysis* (Lahore: Sh. Muhammad Ashraf, 1943; reprinted from London (1946) edition, Lahore: 1963) x.

unembodied thinker."<sup>3</sup> After Partition, Smith rejected Marxian philosophy along with the worldview which he, himself, had articulated in *Modern Islam in India*, but he did not reject Macmurray's personalism. Smith moved from an emphasis on religious data (roughly the approach of the "history of religions" movement) to an emphasis on the role of religious data in the lives of persons. It was the powerful "living" quality of Islam, Annemarie Schimmel reports, that "fascinated" him from the beginning of his studies.<sup>4</sup>

Smith saw his task to be the conceptualization of historical process as the context of religious life<sup>5</sup> which required a conceptual framework and interpretive categories from a human perspective. He writes in 1957:

Surely the attempt to interpret religion academically must be an attempt to find a position that will do justice both to intellectual coherence and to all the observed facts.<sup>6</sup>

"Coherence" and its cognates recur frequently in Smith's terminology, referring both to intellectual ideas and to the person as affected by this concept. It is an "organizing" or "ordering" principle for Smith for which he readily acknowledges an Islamic model, as in the following examples.

Islam, of all major religious traditions of the world, has been

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<sup>3</sup>Thomas E. Wren, ed. *The Personal Universe: Essays in Honour of John Macmurray* (Atlantic Highlands, N.J.: Humanities Press, 1975), 2.

<sup>4</sup>Annemarie Schimmel, "The Muslim Tradition" in *The World's Religious Traditions: Essays in Honour of Wilfred Cantwell Smith* edited by Frank Whaling (New York: Crossroad, 1986), 130.

<sup>5</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 33.

<sup>6</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 16-17, n.5.

"inherently and by intention the most coherent, the most systematic."<sup>7</sup> He saw the "primary Islamic mood" as subsuming "all phenomena under a total coherence, itself transcendent";<sup>8</sup> a "coherent, total system...(that) confers meaning."<sup>9</sup> Faith, Smith observes (1965), is the pattern itself that all the factors in human life form. If you take away a Muslim's faith, the elements in his life do not change; "they simply cease to cohere into a meaningful whole."<sup>10</sup>

Furthermore, he stresses the Muslim "achievement of system, their emphasis on...unity, unification, integration...for several centuries (involving) hundreds of millions of persons."<sup>11</sup> Embedded in this discussion is Smith's acknowledgment of the Islamic "anaconic thrust...their turning away from particular representations."<sup>12</sup> This was a "coherent total system" that functions "symbolically" as an "integrated worldview."<sup>13</sup> For Smith, this exemplified *tawhid*, the Arabic word generally translated "monotheism."<sup>14</sup> That these perceptions were revelatory for Smith seems evident.

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<sup>7</sup>Smith, *Belief and History*, 22.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>10</sup>Smith, "The Islamic Near East: Intellectual Role of Librarianship." *Library Quarterly* 35 (1965), 287.

<sup>11</sup>Smith, *Belief and History*, 24-25.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 24.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., 25.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 24.



Smith extrapolates his understanding of "coherence" or "unity" to other groups. "Ancient Egyptians perceived the world artistically, creatively, with imaginative color and elaboration...their lives constituted a meaningful pattern."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, the Hindu, the Buddhist, the Muslim have seen "the world and their life in it" as "a coherent, significant whole."<sup>16</sup> Today, in the modern world, particularly in the West, coherence has been lost along with the mythologies now under eclipse. What is needed now, in Smith's estimation, is a coherent theory that will enable us (all of us) to contribute to "their and our becoming a community, multi-form, yet coherent."<sup>17</sup> Smith recognizes that religious diversity exists in each "organized society" and with it, "secularism as the organizing principle of social life."<sup>18</sup> In order to counteract this, we must find "a religious solution to that diversity"; "religious bodies" must produce "a coherent theory, even, of the fact that we human beings have always been and are today religious in a variety of different ways, and insist on being so."<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Smith, "Secularity and the History of Religion" in *The Spirit and Power of Christian Secularity* edited by Albert Schlitzer (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1969), 42.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Smith, *The Role of Asian Studies in the American University*. The plenary address of the New York State Conference for Asian Studies, Colgate University, 10-12 October 1975. (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University, 1976) (pamphlet), 10.

<sup>18</sup>Smith, "Christian-Muslim Relations: The Theological Dimension" in *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 1/1991/1, 11. (This article was originally read as a paper at a conference on Christian-Muslim relations held at the Free University of Amsterdam on April 27, 1990).

<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

The structure of the theory that Smith elaborates owes much to his understanding of the Islamic religious tradition; this he articulates in the essay "Islamic History as a Concept"<sup>20</sup> first written in 1975. Put briefly, Islam is a "particular way of being human";<sup>21</sup> this religious tradition is a "pattern" of Islamic factors; and, thirdly, the "meaning" of life and of the universe (cosmic meaning) resides for the Muslim, not in Islamic symbols but in life and the cosmos seen "in the light" of the Islamic symbols.<sup>22</sup> Here is Smith's shift: revelation (the Qur'an) provides the symbols and the "pattern"; the Muslim sees reality in the light of these. The basis is historical; thus the symbols and "pattern" evolve; history provides for the dynamic continuity of the past, the present and the future. Smith points out that in this process, interpretations of the Qur'an, the law and other religious items are also evolving; they are not reified nor static.<sup>23</sup> Smith, I have suggested in Chapter III, extrapolates these frameworks to his theory.

Studies honouring Philip K. Hitti include a contribution by Smith in which he explicates Islamic understanding of the will of God. Will (*mashi'ah, iradah*) of God is not what man should do but what God does do. God's will operates irresistibly. It is not a moral conception, but a determinist one. "The will of God

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<sup>20</sup>Smith, "Islamic History as a Concept" in *On Understanding Islam: Selected Studies* (The Hague: Mouton, 1981), 16. Similar treatments appear in *Islam in Modern History*, 1957; *Faith and Belief*, 1979 and *Towards a World Theology*, 1981.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup>*Ibid.*

is what happens; the command of God (*amr*) is what in human terms ought to happen; man can disobey God's command, but cannot contravene His will."<sup>24</sup> The human role of discernment is of vast importance.

Smith's proposed hermeneutic may be said to incorporate some of this dynamic divine/human relationship (quite different from Christianity and possibly unique). Discernment by a group of two, extending ideally to humanity, of the pattern "through which to view the universe," conveyed by symbols and in touch with transcendence, will come from "critical corporate self-consciousness"—mutual searching for understanding and, by implication, right conduct. This searching, teaching, self-learning and self-transcending, on the part of participants and observers, will achieve together, in groups, a new awareness of reality or ultimate truth or God. Such knowledge or apprehension, Smith cautions, is always approximate and partial, just as Tillich termed the temporal realization of the Kingdom of God "fragmentary" and "partial." In Smith's theory, "pattern" evolves into "critical corporate self-consciousness" which is, in his thought, an equivalence for the "comparative study of religion." Smith's model contains dynamic elements of correlation, polarity, dialectic, mediating symbols, interaction, and, of course, "participation," which should, perhaps, have led the list.<sup>25</sup> What Smith had to do

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<sup>24</sup>Smith, "Some Similarities and Differences Between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion" in *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti* (London: Macmillan, 1959), 51.

<sup>25</sup>Some examples that come to mind: correlation between the categories of faith and tradition; polarity between God's will and God's command; dialectic among mediating symbols, for example, the dialectic between the art form of a particular

was to provide for potential dialectical transformation on whatever occasion observers and participants might grapple for new insight in a multi-layered exchange--each subjected to his limit criterion in confrontation with everyone else's limit criteria. The model he suggests is instinct with transcendence: "within us and all around us, suffusing the world."<sup>26</sup>

As stated, Smith's method was the conceptualization of the historical process as the context of religious life. Out of his study of Islam, he acquired new empirical awareness. In *The Meaning and End of Religion*, for instance, he states that Muslims pledge fidelity to truth itself; that the Islamic tradition is self-engagement with truth. In Islamic thought, history mediates the eternal--righteousness is the vehicle.<sup>27</sup>

The historical framework has a second aspect, that of intention. Smith discerns a special relation between Muslims and history. "The Muslim venture has been a vast endeavour to bend history to the will of God"<sup>28</sup>...to render history Islamic...to have it rise to His will for it."<sup>29</sup> There is an element of intention in Smith: each person (ideally humankind) in consort with other humans (ideally

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mosque and the art forms of the milieu; the dialectic between new and old ways of "bearing witness" (people as mediators of symbols); interaction between insider and outsider, as well as among insiders; all subsumed by "participation" where there is "intention" toward community.

<sup>26</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture?* 1993, 231.

<sup>27</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 1957; 25.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 18.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 19.

humankind) achieves an awareness of ranges of choice possible in line with Truth/God/Reality. To understand the data of other persons' religious life...as symbols of transcendence...may cause you to "become a changed person."<sup>30</sup>

Closely linked to awareness in Smith's vocabulary is the concept of meaning. Faith, in the Islamic tradition itself, as noted above, is the pattern "that all the factors in human life form."<sup>31</sup> He follows this with the observation: "If you take away a man's faith, the elements in his life do not change, they simply cease to cohere into a meaningful whole."<sup>32</sup> It is an astute observation reinforced by evidence of loss of meaning in segments of the population in India, and, of course, in the West. What he saw to be true, especially among westernized or liberalized Indians (or Westerners), he incorporated into his theory of the two categories of faith and tradition: the agent of coherence is the "living person" whose "living" faith draws on and is nourished by the manifestations of the tradition, all in touch with the transcendent. Jarring values from another culture can and do impinge upon the totality--the intermeshing or mutual accommodation between faith and tradition--and may erode meaning.

The integrative nature of the Islamic experience of faith led him, I believe, to hypothesize the dual categories of faith and tradition. J. L. Mehta said of Smith that "human history as religious history provided an integrative conceptual

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<sup>30</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 89.

<sup>31</sup>Smith, "The Islamic Near East: Intellectual Role of Librarianship." *Library Quarterly* 35 (1965): 287.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

centre and unifying perspective."<sup>33</sup> These categories are bearers of, and vehicles for, transcendence, in a number of different ways at a variety of levels. As early as 1957 in *Islam in Modern History*, Smith characterized "transcendence" in the following ways:

the transcendent and deeply personal nature of religion;<sup>34</sup>  
transcendent norms go with a pattern of "oughtness";<sup>35</sup> the  
Islamic...insistence on the transcendent reference of each step in the  
historical process.<sup>36</sup>

Again, "In theological terms, we should say that reason is neither subjective nor objective but is the transcendent immanent in man."<sup>37</sup> Although Smith adopts a more complex language of interrelation and interrelatedness as the years advance (for instance, he no longer refers to the "nature" of "religion"), he does not repudiate the insights into transcendent reality as revealed in the Islamic experience. The study of Islam provided new empirical awareness apt for the conceptualization of the historical process as the context of religious life.

In the Festschrift for Hitti, Smith draws parallels between Christianity and Islam, as already mentioned. The determinist principle that governs the *mash'iah* (will of God) as opposed to the command of God (*amr*)—that is, "man can

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<sup>33</sup>*India and the West: The Problem of Understanding: Selected Essays of J. L. Mehta* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1985) xi.

<sup>34</sup>Smith, *Islam in Modern History*, 16

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, 19.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 186n24.

disobey God's command but cannot contravene His will"<sup>38</sup>--is reflected in Smith's formulations. There is a pattern of "nature" susceptible of scientific understanding; also, there is a "divine" pattern which humans must discover (in the case of Islam, revealed in and through the Qur'an). In Smith's dynamic historical framework, as humans continue to evolve over time, so does revelation (and all revelations), along with their interpretations.<sup>39</sup>

It was Smith's practice to translate and research Arabic texts, including Medievalists such as Taftazani, with particular regard to the faith concept. He tells us that from this work "grew twenty-five years later *Belief and History* and *Faith and Belief*."<sup>40</sup> In 1971, at a conference for a colleague, Harry A. Wolfson, Smith set forth the complex and subtle relationship between the Arabic words for faith: *al-iman* and *tasdiq*. *Tasdiq* does not have to do with "believing"; it "is to recognize a truth, to appropriate it, to affirm it, to confirm it, to actualize it. And the truth, in each case, is personalist and sincere."<sup>41</sup> Moreover, "*tasdiq* is the inner appropriation and outward implementation of truth. It is the process of making or finding true in

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<sup>38</sup>Smith, "Some Similarities and Differences Between Christianity and Islam: An Essay in Comparative Religion" in *The World of Islam: Studies in Honour of Philip K. Hitti*, 1959, 51.

<sup>39</sup>As mentioned above, Smith states that "elements such as the Qur'an, the law, and other 'religious' items, are also evolving." in "Islamic History as a Concept" in *On Understanding Islam*, 16.

<sup>40</sup>Smith, "Faith, in Later Islamic History; The Meaning of *Tasdiq*" in *On Understanding Islam*, 1981, 135-161; 136.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibid.*, 150. Smith concludes the essay thus: "The question is not what one believes, but what one does about what one believes or recognizes as true. At issue, in the matter of faith, is what kind of person one is." 161.

actual human life, in one's own personal spirit and overt behaviour, what God--or Reality--intends for man."<sup>42</sup> Here is the stuff for the making of a new category of faith. Smith lists other linguistic implications. Faith is the recognition of divine truth at the personal level and...the acceptance of obligatoriness as applying to oneself; the commitment to carrying them out."<sup>43</sup> Again, it is the personal making of what is cosmically true come true on earth--the actualization of truth (the truth about man)"<sup>44</sup> Some passages insist that faith is more than knowledge: it is a question of how one responds to the truth. Smith renders 'faith as *tasdiq*' as 'faith is the ability to trust, and to act in terms of, what one knows to be true.'<sup>45</sup> It is clear that Smith's category of faith embraces these interpretations. His exegesis also includes a distinction between the Christian and Islamic nuances of meaning. For instance, the Islamic sense of clarity (mystery is subordinated); God's revelation is *mubin*, clear, which is, perhaps, the most important insight in terms of an "outsider's" comprehension.<sup>46</sup> Smith says that "Islamic orientation is in general more moralist" than other orientations...It is more dynamic, with its revelation primarily of God's will (as distinct from the Christian case, with its revelation primarily of God's

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., 151-153.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., 151.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 152.



person)...For Muslims, "the eternal Word of God is an imperative."<sup>47</sup> Of course, Smith's faith category is more than the sum total of these apprehensions, but the influence cannot be disputed. For critics, this exegesis throws light on the role of "revelation" as linked to the notion of "order" or "pattern" as "God's will"; it should also illuminate facets of the "faith" component that appeared incongruous to some. Smith researched Islamic documents of antiquity in the original language; what emerges are perspectives on the "living person" seeking to discover and to live the "faithful" life. For Smith, revelation derived from the Qur'an is embedded in the evolving Islamic pattern of right conduct. As stated above, "The eternal Word of God is an imperative."<sup>48</sup> I suggest that "revelation" is embedded somewhat similarly in his overall theory. It operates at the heart of the insider/outsider paradigm, in interaction and interrelation with the category of symbols in correlation with the participants and observers. As he says, it is not a "Big Bang" theory. But, in his theory, revelation is in touch with transcendence.

I will round out my argument that Smith's engagement with the Islamic religious tradition and its languages, most particularly Arabic, helped to shape his theory/vision of a comparative religious history of humankind with one more illustration taken, again, from the Islamic apprehension of "multi-layered" faith. There are many other studies of Islamic exegesis and analysis that would serve to reinforce my argument (Smith has produced a vast documentation), but I think that

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<sup>47</sup>Tbid., 153.

<sup>48</sup>Tbid.

"faith" is the most important illustration, subsuming other examples, and allowing for generalization.

"Destiny" is the concept Smith lifts out of the Islamic worldview, "an ideational system giving order to man's perception of the universe and within which man's destiny may be discerned and discussed."<sup>49</sup> It is destiny, not the worldview, Smith insists, "that is, and always has been crucial."<sup>50</sup> It has to do with their faith: "that inexpressible transcendent human quality to which they gave expression, empirically in art, in ritual, in a patterned moral code, and also in ideas, all of which were formulated in terms of their comprehensive order."<sup>51</sup>

Smith's category of tradition can be glimpsed in the above description, namely, "expression, empirically in art, in ritual, in a patterned moral code, and also in ideas."<sup>52</sup> In addition, "a comprehensive order" has been a "regulating" principle for Smith, I suggest, all along, and has entered into his "critical corporate self-consciousness"--his insider/outsider criterion. Gilkey has suggested that a "criterion, or principle of interpretation, for universal or general revelation, is provided through that decisive centre--the new critical corporate self-consciousness."<sup>53</sup> I take it to be

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<sup>49</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1979), 48.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Langdon Gilkey, "A Theological Voyage with Wilfred Cantwell Smith," *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (October 1981): 304. Part of joint review with Huston Smith, entitled "Wilfred Cantwell Smith: Early Opus and Recent Trilogy,"

such a criterion but with qualifications that will emerge in the following discussion.

Faith is that personal movement whereby one transcends the duplicity of a divided (*munafiq*) self, the atomism of an isolated self, and the confusion of a whimsied self of impulses and unrealism (*ahwa' batil*), to participate in a community (*ummah*) that in turn participates in, is engaged in, the movement towards and in accord with, the final truth and goodness of reality.<sup>54</sup> (my emphasis)

One can see the counterpart, a decade later, to what is described above as the Islamic dynamic of interrelatedness and interaction--the reconciliation of the specific and the generic--in Smith's enunciation of the transformation of "critical corporate self-consciousness" into a new third category of community, alongside or subsuming "participation."<sup>55</sup>

This is Smith's hermeneutic: religious history provides the context for religion; his meta theory provides the conceptual framework constituted by the categories of faith, cumulative tradition and community/participation--in dynamic interrelation and interaction. "A conceptual framework," he tells us, in 1981, has to be understood as "a framework within which the universe is framed: the universe and man"... "the vision by which he or she knows...(the vision) that confers meaning."<sup>56</sup> The more recent meta theory or conceptual framework is functionally similar but differs, as it must, in its inclusivity--conceptual, possible, "visionary"

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298-310.

<sup>54</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 49.

<sup>55</sup>Smith, "Idolatry: In Comparative Perspective" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* edited by John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1987), 59.

<sup>56</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 82.

community of humankind, emerging out of transformative, transforming "critical, corporate self-consciousness," at the heart of which is the insider/outsider paradigm. Just as Islam is the "pattern" into which the minutiae of a devout Muslim's life "cohere" into "meaningfulness," including what the "outsider thinks of as secular," so, I suggest, does Smith's meta theory constitute an "ideational pattern."<sup>57</sup> Here is further support for this contention: Smith writes--and this I take to be central to his entire project:

Such an ideational pattern (the Islamic pattern) is significant primarily not in terms of the several ideas that make it up...They (ideational patterns) are significant, rather, in terms of their total coherence, and of their function of providing a framework within which the factual data and concrete events and spiritual propensities of the person's or society's life are interpreted."<sup>58</sup>

I believe it can be said that Smith's meta pattern seeks total coherence (all relationally compatible at a meta level) and provides a framework within which the "factual data and concrete data and spiritual propensities" of humankind's life can be interpreted.

In 1991 Smith set forth his "coherent theory" explaining that human beings are religious. In his view, we need such a theory; otherwise, secularism will hold the day, continuing to function as the "organizing principle of the social life."<sup>59</sup>

## II

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., 83.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid.

<sup>59</sup>Smith, "Christian-Muslim Relations: The Theological Dimension." *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, 1/1991/1, 11.

Smith's thought possesses such a high degree of coherence that discussion of one aspect of his theory invariably invites discussion of another aspect, true of religious anthropology and personalism. However, basic to any discussion is a recognition, I suggest, that his theory (call it the comparative study of religion, or world theology; the nomenclature is not fixed) is a meta theory, based on "empirical facts, as observed by historical study, to proceed by rational argument, and to contend that the goal is to discern and to live out the proper way to be fully human."<sup>60</sup>--words spoken at Tenri in 1988. They run parallel to his apprehension of the Islamic religious tradition within limitations that have been discussed in the preceding chapters. Smith's model may be seen as teleological, rather than eschatological, precisely because it is a meta model, which respects the autonomy of all the religious traditions. To see the unity or coherence of humankind's religious history, is to be grasped by vision, and in faith, "give heart" to a transcendent Someone or Something.<sup>61</sup> We look now at the interrelatedness of his anthropology and his personalism, along with strategies.

His early work contains recurring references to the subject-object dichotomy as well as the perspectival, emotional and intellectual gulf that separated

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<sup>60</sup>Smith, "Shall Next Century be Secular or Religious?" In Tenri International Symposium '86: *Cosmos, Life, Religion: Beyond Humanism*. (Tenri, Japan: Tenri University Press, 1988), 150.

<sup>61</sup>Smith cites the Hindu term, *Sraddha*, in explicating the nature of faith: "putting one's heart on something (someone) in the sense of esteeming it (him, her) (recognizing its value) not instrumentally but intrinsically, absolutely." In *Faith and Belief*, 64.

the adherent of a religious tradition from an observer on the outside. They could be seen as part of the same problem: part of the solution lay in "bridging the gap between the specific and the generic."<sup>62</sup> What was needed was a revolutionary worldview whose structures were universal (generic)--"empirical historical knowledge to puncture speculative generalizations and result in new empirical awareness."<sup>63</sup> His answer was to devise a conceptual framework of historical process as the context of religious life, with participation as its mode<sup>64</sup> to include, as well, interpretive categories from a comparativist point of view. "If the great religions are true," it follows that "the human community is the only real community there is...and what matters supremely are the relations among persons within that total community and the relations between men and God."<sup>65</sup> This will serve as an introduction to a discussion of the anthropological component (Smith says "metaphysical" anthropology),<sup>66</sup> as it relates to his overall aim. The starting point, however, will

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<sup>62</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 186.

<sup>63</sup>Smith, "Transcendence," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* 18, 3 (1988): 14.

<sup>64</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 33.

<sup>65</sup>Smith, "Whither--and Why?" in *The History of Religions*, ed. Eliade and Kitagawa, 58.

<sup>66</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 1979. Smith writes: "It will be noted that in classical humanist fashion my anthropology here has been metaphysical. To think or to feel that human behaviour may on occasion be inhuman, that people may be 'less than human,'...that we persons may become or may fail to become our true selves, is to recognize "man" as a transcendent and not merely an empirical concept. Faith bespeaks involvement in transcendence. Any anthropocentrism, then, betrays our human cause if it is not also theocentric--or to shift to the Buddhist or Greek mode, metaphysical." 139-140.

be a quick survey of some of the intellectual "shifts" in the academic realm that served as background for Smith's work as a scholar.

### Personalist Epistemology

Intellectuals in the Christian social action movement in Canada in the thirties and forties saw evidence for a "shift" from the ideal world to the real world; from eschatology to history;<sup>67</sup> from "other worldly to this worldly."<sup>68</sup> According to Gregory Vlastos, writing in *Towards a Christian Social Revolution*, mutuality--the love of God--provided the meaning and direction of the social action movement.<sup>69</sup>

John Macmurray, philosopher and mentor to Canadian Christian social action groups, formulated a "genuine new starting point based on a new analysis of experience and its ultimate data."<sup>70</sup> The resolution to the problem of the "form of the personal" involved, in Macmurray's formulation, starting from the "primacy of the practical," rather than from Cartesian "primacy of thought" or Cogito.<sup>71</sup> What this means is that we should think from the "standpoint of action" thus eliminating the

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<sup>67</sup>Roger Charles Hutchinson, "The Fellowship for a Christian Social Order: A Social Ethical Analysis of a Christian Socialist Movement," Doctoral Thesis, Toronto School of Theology, 1975, 54n,23; 100.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., 100.

<sup>69</sup>Vlastos, "The Ethical Foundations" in *Towards a Christian Social Revolution*, 1936, 56-57. Vlastos declares: "What is disturbing and revolutionary about the command to love is its challenge to a new way of living which begins immediately, destroys all class divisions, creates a new fellowship, and is ready for the Kingdom of God." 57.

<sup>70</sup>R. J. Blaikie, "Being, Process, and Action in Modern Philosophy and Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology*, XXV (1972): 145, 149.

<sup>71</sup>Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*, 84.

dualism between theory and practice. "I act, therefore, I am" permits us to know ourselves in a unified sense (as thinkers and actors) in relation with others and in unity with the world in which we act. Thinking or reflective activity is subsumed under action.<sup>72</sup> This formula avoids objectifying persons.

The sort of "being" known in the "I am" is essentially dynamic being and not static; it is genuine human being as understood by common sense, and not some abstracted concept frozen by the logical intellect.<sup>73</sup>

Dynamic being is, of course, inherently or integrally ontological, a point that Smith makes often. This understanding is absolutely basic to Smith's conception of person or persons; it undergirds his theory; it explains the way in which he uses "objectivity." Huston Smith, for example, refers to his "polemic against objectivity," suggesting that Smith defines "objectivity" idiosyncratically.<sup>74</sup>

### Metaphysical Anthropology

My argument is that Smith goes beyond the personalist orientation to something approaching a doctrine of man, what he calls his metaphysical anthropology. In Eliade and Kitagawa's book on the history of religions, Wach wrote: "Theological anthropology, including soteriology and eschatology, ponders

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., 85; 86.

<sup>73</sup>Blaikie, "Being, Process, and Action in Modern Philosophy and Theology," 149.

<sup>74</sup>Huston Smith, "Faith and its Study: What Wilfred Smith's Against, and For" in *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 7 No. 4 (October 1981): 310. Companion review to that submitted by Langdon Gilkey in the same issue.



over the origin, nature and destiny of man."<sup>75</sup> This juxtaposition of Wach's and Smith's formulations is instructive. "Destiny" figured importantly in the first half of this chapter; in the second half, "man" will so figure. For "man", read, at times, Smith's "human nature."

Paul Tillich, in the last lecture he delivered, emphasized the "positive consequences" of the use of the method of the "history of religions," one instance being:

We can use religious symbolism as a language of the doctrine of man, as the language of anthropology, not in the empirical sense of this word, but in the sense of doctrine of man--man in his true nature...(theology) tries to formulate the basic experiences which are universally valid in universally valid statements...(universality) lies in the depths of every concrete religion.<sup>76</sup>

The terminology used by Tillich in 1966--doctrine of man --man in his true nature-- would appear to be congruent with Smith's "metaphysical" anthropology.

A creative aspect of Smith's work is that he relates and correlates what before had been unrelated; (like Tillich, he correlates the existential realm with the divine realm); out of this interaction comes new meaning, new understanding. Smith's emphasis is on the interpenetration of the divine and human. "Everytime a person anywhere makes a religious decision, at stake is the final destiny and meaning

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<sup>75</sup>Joachim Wach, *The History of Religions: Essays in Methodology* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1959) 54.

<sup>76</sup>Paul Tillich, "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian" in *The Future of Religions* edited by Jerald C. Brauer (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 93-94. This was the concluding lecture in a conference on history of religions given at the University of Chicago (Divinity School). Paul Tillich died ten days later.

of the human race."<sup>77</sup> Again, "world history is the religious history of our race."<sup>78</sup> Human nature is "inherently aware of...and responsive to, what I am calling transcendence in its environment and within itself; and always has been so."<sup>79</sup> On the other hand, human nature is not fundamentally secular (as secularists claim) nor basically "religious."<sup>80</sup> It is the religious traditions that make transcendence available.<sup>81</sup> One sees the dialectic here between the generic category of faith (human quality in the living person) and the "particular" cumulative religious tradition.

Geertz observed that a basic ingredient of human nature is the capacity and necessity to live in terms of one or another (such) culture, or as Smith observes, in his case, in terms of one or another (such) "religion."<sup>82</sup> Smith suggests that this statement approaches his own evaluation of human nature, except that the context

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<sup>77</sup>Smith, "Traditional Religions and Modern Culture." Talk presented to the *XIth International Congress of the International Association for the History of Religions* at Claremont, California, September 6-11, 1965. In *Religious Diversity* edited by W. G. Oxtoby, 1976, Chapter 4; 69.

<sup>78</sup>Smith, "Interpreting religious interrelations: An historian's view of Christian and Muslim" in *Sciences Religieuses/Studies in Religion* 6/5 (été/summer 1976-77): 515.

<sup>79</sup>Smith, "Shall Next Century be Secular or Religious?" (Tenri, Japan: Tenri University, 1988), 145.

<sup>80</sup>*Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>81</sup>*Ibid.*, 145.

<sup>82</sup>Clifford Geertz, "The Impact of the Concept of Culture on the Concept of Man," in John R. Platt, ed. *New Views of the Nature of Man* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 93-118, as paraphrased by Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 330n3.

for Geertz is culture and for Smith religion.<sup>83</sup>

Many more examples could be cited to show Smith's "human" perspective--his "A Human View of Truth"<sup>84</sup> confounded many and will continue to confound, unless seen as part of his hermeneutic which presents (as did Macmurray) an alternative to radical individualism. Parallels between Smith and Macmurray suggest themselves in this extract from a review by Frank G. Kirkpatrick of the latter's work.

Macmurray claims that the views which hold the self to be essentially an aggregate of atoms, or simply a complex organism, are in fact abstractions and reductions from a more basic, more authentic, ontologically prior whole: the living person. By starting with the inclusive person, Macmurray therefore avoids dualism and goes beyond the limitations of more restricted concepts of the human person. (original emphasis).<sup>85</sup>

Macmurray announced a new start--a Copernican revolution in philosophy;<sup>86</sup> Smith effected a revolutionary approach to the study of religion: dynamic history as process; at once anthropocentric and theocentric; global "community-ness" of being human.

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<sup>83</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 330n3.

<sup>84</sup>Smith, "A Human View of Truth." *Studies in Religion* 1, 1 (1971): 6-24. Reprinted in *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship between World Religions*, edited by John Hick. (London: Sheldon Press, 1974; *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims*, 20-44. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974, with a new addendum, "Conflicting Truth-Claims: A Rejoinder," 156-62.

<sup>85</sup>Frank G. Kirkpatrick, "Toward a Metaphysic of Community" *Scottish Journal of Theology* Vol. 38 No. 4 (1985): 580.

<sup>86</sup>Macmurray, *The Self as Agent*. Macmurray, in effect, refers to Kant comparing his change of standpoint to the Copernican revolution in astronomy. "The present proposal (starting to think *from the standpoint of action*)," Macmurray says, "might use the same analogy." 85.

To turn from an impressionistic account to a biographical observation: Smith asserts that it was the ideal of humankind as a whole that inspired him from his youth on.<sup>87</sup>

Gap between the particular and the generic

Smith's conceptual frameworks and interpretive categories were designed to bridge the gap between the specific and the universal; to provide a link between the particular and the generic.<sup>88</sup> In his most recent book, he suggests that "...humankind's chief business...is to attain, or to accept, transformation, liberation, salvation, sanctification."<sup>89</sup> Forging links between the particular and the generic (divine/human), Smith seems to be saying, is preparatory to achieving/accepting "transformation." He puts it very well in conversation with Eric Sharpe;<sup>90</sup> I am selecting portions that deal specifically with the meaning of "faith"; the exchange goes back to 1973.

Smith acknowledges that Sharpe and A. R. Gualtieri feel quite strongly that "I mean by 'faith' something different from what...Christians generally, mean."<sup>91</sup> His answer, in part, follows:

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<sup>87</sup>Smith, "Retrospective Thoughts on *The Meaning and End of Religion*" in *Religion in History*, ed. Despland and Vallée, 18.

<sup>88</sup>"The central conceptual question of religious studies: the connection of generic categories and cultural specificity." Mentioned by Wm. E. Paden in a review of Robert Baird's book (reissue) *Category Formation in Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 6-4 (1994), 398.

<sup>89</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 227.

<sup>90</sup>Eric J. Sharpe, "Dialogue and Faith" in *Religion* 3(1973): 89-105.

<sup>91</sup>W. Cantwell Smith, "On Dialogue and 'Faith': A Rejoinder", *Religion* 3(1973): 106-114.

I have tried to suggest 'faith' as an explicitly open category, a *generic* (not specific) concept, open to differing specificities in differing instances.<sup>92</sup>

Smith agrees that his scheme would be "vitiating" if a "reified" faith were allowed to usurp his theory of liberated, "unreified" religion. He offers further clarification:

Where I failed to make myself clear, I guess, was in my intention that my category of 'faith' should be explicitly generic--just as is my concept 'cumulative tradition'. Hindus, Muslims, Christians...--all have a cumulative tradition, but this is a purely formal category, and in each case the content and shape is manifestly specified and different.<sup>93</sup>

In pursuing the matter, Smith states unequivocally: "I do not think that faith is everywhere the same"<sup>94</sup> a charge laid against him even today. In this article, Smith makes a clear and useful rejoinder to the suggestion that his approach is anthropocentric:

[M]y notion of faith may be dubbed 'anthropocentric' only if it be recognized that at issue here is an ellipse with two centres (foci), not a circle with one. It is equally theocentric: faith is the locus of man's openness to transcendence.<sup>95</sup>

This polarity is important in his work; it is a feature that appears to be overlooked by some critics. Man is not born *homo religiosus*; he is born with the generic (universal) capacity for faith. Another formulation is that "faith is not something extra in human life but is essential."<sup>96</sup> The category of faith, in Smith's doctrine of

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<sup>92</sup>Ibid., 109.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Ibid.

<sup>95</sup>Ibid., 110.

<sup>96</sup>Smith, *Faith and Belief*, 136.

humankind, is linked to the category of tradition which, through symbolization, mediates transcendence to the category of faith; this category, in turn, mediates transcendence directly. Both categories, moreover, can be mediators of transcendence between themselves. Smith includes in this spiritual movement "divine initiative and human involvement, plus the empirical object that mediates."<sup>97</sup> As has been stated in earlier chapters, transcendence in Smith's work is a "given"; he declares, as mentioned above, that his anthropology is metaphysical, hence transcendent.

### Spiritual Movement and Insiders/Outsiders

My objective thus far has been to show that Smith's (metaphysical) anthropology is related to his "personalism" and that they are both related to the dynamic spiritual movement encompassed in the interaction(s) between and among categories of faith, tradition, symbolization, participation, all mediators of transcendence, that is, the interpenetration of divine/human. This movement I see to be at the heart of his "critical corporate self-consciousness" which is later transformed into the category or "component" of community, subsuming participation.<sup>98</sup> What follows is a brief outline of the development of his

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<sup>97</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 240. Smith is speaking here of the possibility of calling the various scriptures of the world, "sacrament." Such wording might serve as "the trilateral term that is needed," 240. The trilateral term refers to the "divine initiative," "human involvement" and the "empirical object" (scripture), as noted above.

<sup>98</sup>Smith, "Idolatry" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, Hick and Knitter, 1987, 59.

outsider/insider paradigm in its correlation with other aspects of this hypothesis, including comparisons/contrasts with the thought of his mentors and with contemporary critics.

### Comparative Religion

Whaling observes that comparative religion, in Smith's view, is the comparative study of man in his religious dimension rather than the study of typologies, structures, archetypes, themes or religions in separation from man.<sup>99</sup> To get at the religious dimension, Smith adds to the basic conceptualization of the historical process, "as the context of religious life," the category of participation as the "mode of religious life."<sup>100</sup> So complex a matter as "participation" must be finely nuanced and safeguarded by criteria of validity. Before mentioning the criteria, let us consider the following words from Macmurray:

The primary demand of religion is for a personal integrity. Integrity here...means specifically a way of life which is integral. In particular, an integration of the inner life with the outer, a unity of reflection and action, a coincidence of motive and intention.<sup>101</sup>

It is a corporate as well as a personal application that Smith envisages. Macmurray's "integration of the inner life with the outer" in Smith's formula applies to the observer/observed complex as well as to all observers and participants individually. The motive and intention, ostensibly, for Smith, is the comparative study of religion,

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<sup>99</sup>Frank Whaling, *The World's Religious Traditions*, 12.

<sup>100</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 33.

<sup>101</sup>Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 172.

via a commitment to truth. (Religion is a pattern of commitment to truth).<sup>102</sup> Smith's criteria for a valid description of man are, namely, that the participant should be able to recognize himself in, and mutually affirm, the description offered by the observer.<sup>103</sup> Further, a third test is academic, arising out of the "objective evidence" and is rationally coherent both within itself and with all other knowledge, doing "justice to the faith in men's hearts by commanding their assent once it is formulated."<sup>104</sup>

This creative formula for the study of comparative religion, Smith's "personalist epistemology"<sup>105</sup> is at the hub of his theory--what is going on in an insider confirms truth; it gives a perspective "of a global verified self-consciousness of religious diversity."<sup>106</sup> In confirming truth, transcendence is affirmed or acknowledged. In addition, we must become participants at second hand, in other traditions as well as in our own (observer = critical; observed = self-consciousness).<sup>107</sup> Smith states unequivocally that if the academic study in the West "of the Asian people" transcends the subject/object dichotomy and becomes critically self-conscious and articulate...this will eventually contribute "to their and our

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<sup>102</sup>Oxtoby, Introductory remarks to Smith's "Objectivity and the Humane Sciences: A New Proposal" in *Religious Diversity*, 159.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid.

<sup>104</sup>Smith, "Whither--and Why?" in Eliade and Kitagawa, 44.

<sup>105</sup>Ibid., 39-40, n18.

<sup>106</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 124.

<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 89-94.



becoming a community, multi-form yet coherent."<sup>108</sup>

Michael Welker calls into question Smith's determination of "objective" and "objectivity."<sup>109</sup> He is opposed to the "objectivity of knowledge being described as: "external knowledge"; "externalist approach"; manipulating and conceiving from the outside."<sup>110</sup> He calls their use an

oversimplification, indeed a caricature of the meaning of 'objectivity'...leading to the neglect of characteristics of reproducibility and connectability as well as the communicable determinacy of objective knowing.<sup>111</sup>

These are precisely characteristics that Smith wishes to negate, or, better, surpass, in his "personalist" approach. Objects are to be found in the "category of tradition" and will be "known" as such by persons in the "category of faith." The fact that Smith omitted to give anywhere a detailed explanation of his "personalist epistemology" and to place it in its academic context has led to misunderstanding; it is not to say, however, that Welker is not appreciative of Smith's project.

Smith offers this "pragmatic verification of knowledge about man":

It lies in our applying it from alongside as observers, in the form of understanding; from the inside as participants, in the form of wisdom;

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<sup>108</sup>Smith, "The Role of Asian Studies in the American University," The Plenary Address of the *New York State Conference for Asian Studies*, (Hamilton, NY: Colgate University, 1976), 10.

<sup>109</sup>Michael Welker, "'Unity of Religious History' and 'Universal Self-Consciousness'; Leading Concepts or Mere Horizons on the Way Towards a World Theology?" in *Harvard Theological Review*, 81 (October 88): 437 and passim.

<sup>110</sup>Ibid., 438. Welker's references are to Smith's *Towards a World Theology*, 57-70, especially 68, 69-70, and passim.

<sup>111</sup>Ibid.

and between the two, as fellows, in the form of mutual intelligibility--which eventuates in community.<sup>112</sup>

Thus, corporate participation can turn a "society into a community, and an individual into a person."<sup>113</sup>

### Community

Community, for Smith and Macmurray, connotes what human life is about. In the following observations, Smith lays more stress on transcendence, whereas Macmurray underlines the moral aspect, but their ideas largely cohere. For instance, "community, as well as history, is a traditional locus of transcendence," in Smith's view.<sup>114</sup> For Macmurray:

A morally right action is an action which intends community...<sup>115</sup> This universal and necessary intention--the same for all agents--provides a norm for rightness or wrongness in all actions whatever...<sup>116</sup> A community is for the sake of friendship and presupposes love...<sup>117</sup> equality and freedom are constitutive of community.<sup>118</sup>

And Smith:

Community is one example of what gets lost (as a result of subject-object polarity); our participation as persons, in groups that transcend

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<sup>112</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 102.

<sup>113</sup>Smith, "Transcendence," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, 14.

<sup>114</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>115</sup>Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 119.

<sup>116</sup>*Ibid.*, 120.

<sup>117</sup>*Ibid.*, 151.

<sup>118</sup>*Ibid.*, 158.

us as individuals--groups ranging from two persons in love, all the way to the whole of humanity--and their participation in us.<sup>119</sup>

These are movements towards "critical corporate self-consciousness," towards community, towards seeing "world history as a whole,"<sup>120</sup> towards what Welker calls a "new world view," in which "historical facts become such through interconnectedness, interdependence, interferences and interpenetrations."<sup>121</sup> It is precisely a "new worldview" that Smith is after. Smith's "common history"<sup>122</sup> of "movements of the human spirit"<sup>123</sup>; the religious history of our race, is being played out today in cyberspace; humankind has entered a new dimension of information gathering, of understanding, of relatedness, instantaneously global. Such observers and participants may well have need of something analogous to Smith's "critical corporate self-consciousness."

#### Critical Corporate Self-Consciousness

I shall use the comments of three scholars in comparison and contrast with Smith's "corporate self-consciousness" to help sharpen our understanding of its role in his thought. The scholars are Huston Smith, George Rupp and Alasdair MacIntyre. Smith's critical corporate self-consciousness represents, for Huston

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<sup>119</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 221.

<sup>120</sup>Smith, *Towards a World History*, 37.

<sup>121</sup>Welker, "'Unity of Religious History' and 'Universal Self-Consciousness'," 436.

<sup>122</sup>Smith, "Interpreting religious interrelations: An historian's view of Christian and Muslim," in *Studies in Religion/Sciences Religieuses*, 6/5 (1976-77): 526.

<sup>123</sup>*Ibid.*, 521. The phrase is: "one of the world's greatest movements of the human spirit: the theist."

Smith, an "agreed-on data bank of global religious history."<sup>124</sup> "Data bank" appears to be far removed from the "relational" dynamic model envisaged by W. C. Smith in that it conjures up disparate albeit "agreed-on" multitudinous static data or facts, without meaning because they are unrelated to "living persons." George Rupp suggests that:

The force of 'corporate' is to claim for humane knowledge the appropriate equivalent to the requirement that scientific knowledge of objects in principle be available to all other observers.<sup>125</sup>

Wilfred Smith asserts that, in the case of human knowing of the human, this appropriate equivalent is, "knowledge that is in principle apt both for the subject himself or herself, and for all external observers; or, in the case of group activities, for both outside observers and participants."<sup>126</sup> According to George Rupp, "Corporate critical self-consciousness is...the disciplined awareness which the human community has of itself."<sup>127</sup>

W. C. Smith continues: to study the human "is to study oneself--even when one person studies another (or one society, another) separated by much space, or time, or both"<sup>128</sup> The "data bank" metaphor suggests the paradigm of "objective

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<sup>124</sup>Huston Smith, "Faith and its Study: What Wilfred Smith's Against, and For." *Religious Studies Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (October 1981): 306-310. (Co-reviewer - Langdon Gilkey).

<sup>125</sup>George Rupp, "The Appropriation of Traditions" in *The World's Religious Traditions* ed. by Frank Whaling, 169.

<sup>126</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 59.

<sup>127</sup>Rupp, "The Appropriation of Traditions," 169.

<sup>128</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 79.

knowledge" which, when applied to humans as the objects of knowledge, according to George Rupp, "sets observer and observed over against each other."<sup>129</sup> By contrast, corporate critical self-consciousness, Rupp observes, "presses toward a knowing common to both observer and observed because it is construed as knowledge of that whole of which both the subject and the object are a part."<sup>130</sup> It is Wilfred Smith's contention that:

In principle, then, for all humankind to know each other...is for all humankind to become one community. And *vice versa*: only as we move towards community can we come to know.<sup>131</sup>

Thus, in Smith's project, "critical corporate self-consciousness" comes to be designated "community"--on a par with the categories or components of faith and tradition. The kind of knowledge he has in mind is more akin to friendship, love, the "changed person," already alluded to. As Macmurray indicates, "a community is for the sake of friendship and presupposes love."<sup>132</sup> Smith acknowledges "friendship as an integral element in epistemology...love as constitutive of rationality...'corporate self-consciousness'...as an avenue out of subjective-objective polarity."<sup>133</sup> Smith is not after an "agreed-upon data bank of global religious history"--he would see it as always in the process of change.

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<sup>129</sup>Rupp, "The Appropriation of Traditions," 169.

<sup>130</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>131</sup>*Towards a World Theology*, 79.

<sup>132</sup>Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 151.

<sup>133</sup>Smith, "Retrospective Thoughts" in *Religion in History*, 18.

A proposal put forth by Alasdair MacIntyre having to do with a new "dramatic narrative which can claim historical truth" may come closer to what Smith envisages than "data bank." MacIntyre writes:

An epistemological crisis is always a crisis in human relationships. Crisis is resolved by construction of a new narrative which enables an agent to understand both his original beliefs and how he could have been misled by them. The narrative (original) becomes the subject of an enlarged narrative.<sup>134</sup>

Smith cites the fact that the Muslims call the Qur'an the *Kalam* of God...and that "God is the kind of God Who from all eternity has something to say to humankind."<sup>135</sup>

The divine imperative (in Islamic parlance) for Smith, is completed in the remainder of the quotation:

God (or the universe) has something to say to humans; in non-theist language, the universe is intelligible, and with cosmic ideal patterns for humans to emulate as in the Greek faith of western culture.<sup>136</sup>

Thus Smith believes that his epistemology (personal agency) enables the self to be in relation not only with persons but with God. Scholars who have shared this "personalist" orientation include John Oman, H. H. Farmer (Smith's professor at Cambridge), Alan Richardson, T. F. Torrance, Carl F. H. Henry and, of course, John Macmurray.<sup>137</sup> Concerning the latter, F. H. Heinemann makes this observation:

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<sup>134</sup>Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative and the Philosophy of Science," *The Monist* (1977): 453-72.

<sup>135</sup>Smith, *What is Scripture?*, 236.

<sup>136</sup>Ibid.

<sup>137</sup>Blaikie, "Being, Process and Action," 130.

(Macmurray) believes in the continuity of human action and in the correlative one world of action. We should act as though our actions were contributions to this one inclusive action which is the history of the world.<sup>138</sup>

Smith throughout his work endorses this personalist position; what he adds to the personalist approach is the enshrining of a paradigm of encounter within his world theology or meta theory.

### Subject-Object Polarity

Central to a discussion of existentialist personalism is the topic of subject-object polarity. John C. Robertson suggests that critical corporate self-consciousness is Smith's "third" alternative to the subjective-objective dichotomy.<sup>139</sup> For Smith, this third position subsumes the subject and the object and "goes beyond them."<sup>140</sup> This knowledge from the standpoint of both observers and participants<sup>141</sup> would take us "forward to a larger vision" than that now available.<sup>142</sup> Robertson is aware of a separation of "interior personal faith" and "relational" personal faith;<sup>143</sup> his remedy is to sublate the two, "thereby moving to a higher level."<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>138</sup>F. H. Heinemann, "Survey of Recent Philosophical and Theological Literature and Philosophy in *Hibbert Journal*, Vol 56 (LVI) (Oct 1957-July 1958): 181-182.

<sup>139</sup>John C. Robertson, Jr., "W. C. Smith, Hermeneutics, and the Subject-Object Syndrome," *Religion in History*, ed. Despland and Vallée, 219.

<sup>140</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 59.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>143</sup>Robertson, "W.C. Smith, Hermeneutics." 219.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibid.*

His contention is that Smith has the resources in his corpus to do this. Two reasons are advanced for this proposal: the first has to do with the use in Smith of "visual metaphors" of "seeing," "pointing to"; apprehending something or someone; the second, what appears to Robertson to be close to empty(ing) faith; to making faith non-cognitive, and the like.<sup>145</sup> An early assertion in Smith's work, in his essay "Islamic History as a Concept,"<sup>146</sup> may illuminate the matter, Fundamental to his view, though not confined to this tradition, is the belief that:

Islam is a "particular way of being human"; further, that this religious tradition is a "pattern" of Islamic factors and that the "meaning" of life and of the universe (sometimes cosmic meaning) resides for the Muslim, not in Islamic symbols, but in life and the cosmos seen "in the light" of Islamic symbols.<sup>147</sup>

Thus Smith effects an epistemological shift. Revelation (the Qur'an) provides the symbols and the "pattern"; the Muslim sees reality in the light of these symbols. There is also the matter of the "double dynamics" of symbols and his insistence that "symbolization is the basic religious category."<sup>148</sup> There is correlation of symbols and participation in his theory, especially in the outsider/insider criterion at the heart

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<sup>145</sup>Ibid., 220.

<sup>146</sup>Smith, "Islamic History as a Concept" (1975) in *On Understanding Islam*, 16.

<sup>147</sup>Ibid.

<sup>148</sup>Smith, "Symbols in Religion" in *Symbols in Life and Art: The Royal Society of Canada Symposium in Memory of George Whalley/Les symboles dans la vie et dans l'art: la Société Royale du Canada, colloque à la mémoire de George Whalley*, edited by James A. Leith (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press for the Royal Society of Canada) 89-104. The full statement is: "To see symbolizing rather than believing as a basic religious category has allowed a major, indeed a momentous, advance." 101.



of critical corporate self-consciousness. Referents, for Smith, are empirical events.

Secondly, Robertson has a suggestion for "transcending the subject-object schema altogether in what he calls "dialogue."<sup>149</sup> His proposal is to let "religious texts, events, or persons--one's subject matter...say something to one about "something."<sup>150</sup> Smith posits a dialectic: the "objects" in the category of tradition are in dialogue with the persons in the "faith" category, symbols and participation (participants) in correlation; persons in "faith" category have access (being mediated to) to transcendence/God/(cosmic)universe with the category of tradition mediating transcendence to persons via objects and symbolizations, participants and observers simultaneously "mediators," which would permit, it seems to me, a great deal of saying something to someone. But it is much more than that: here is the hub of the paradigm of "encounter," wherein the "transformative" surpasses the "cognitive", which Robertson appears to be championing. But this is not to exhaust the matter; there are also, for instance, participants at second hand. Robertson's remarks raise the possibility that critical self-consciousness may, in the mode of religious consciousness "offer a system of interpretation of existence itself subject to interpretation."<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>149</sup>Robertson, 220.

<sup>150</sup>Ibid.

<sup>151</sup>The power of religious consciousness, for Barbara A. Babcock, is "its reflexiveness--religion offers a system of interpretation of existence that is itself subject to interpretation, and that is infinitely compelling." In "Reflexivity" *Encyclopaedia of Religion*.

## Conclusion

"Idolatry" appeared in print in 1987.<sup>152</sup> In this essay, the dialectic between the particular and the generic takes on a different configuration from that of the past. As before, Smith wishes to guard against the human proclivity of elevating the forms by which one is grasped by the divine (or apprehends the divine) to ultimate truth or transcendence, rather than "relativizing (the forms) in relation to the Absolute."<sup>153</sup> However, in this presentation, he wishes to re-arrange the categories set forth much earlier in *The Meaning and End of Religion*.

From the perspective of world history, Smith sees the religions of the world as "temporal, contingent, mundane...intermediaries between humankind and God," possessing "two component elements": the categories of faith and cumulative tradition. Smith now proposes a third category, that of community, separating it from tradition, "rather than subsumed under it." "Participation" becomes a major element in community.<sup>154</sup>

It can be argued that "community" as a principal, "significant" category serves to strengthen his theory and make it more coherent. It is consonant with the personalist-relational approach in evidence throughout his work. For instance, in "Whither--and Why?" he states that "humanity is the only community there is";<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>152</sup>Smith, "Idolatry" in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 59.

<sup>153</sup>Ibid., 59.

<sup>154</sup>Ibid.

<sup>155</sup>Smith, "Whither--and Why?" in *Religious Diversity*, 155.

Vlastos observes that "a basic requirement of (his) very humanity (is) community."<sup>156</sup> Smith's references to the "community of communities: one spiritual community of all humankind" <sup>157</sup> and, again, a world religious community with all religious persons as members,<sup>158</sup> antedate but presage the new "category" of community.

"Critical, corporate self-consciousness," I submit, has been transformed into the new "significant" component of "community" along with participation. In my understanding, the insider/outsider paradigm is embedded in critical corporate self-consciousness;<sup>159</sup> indeed it is at the heart of community. This is what renders Smith's notion of community rigorous, moral, spiritually challenging, bestowing, eventually, the unity of coherence and meaning. It has to do with the creation of groups of two to, ideally humanity, of a special kind—a succession of communities to infinity. The two persons are the observer and the observed; the other end of the continuum: the human race.<sup>160</sup> Smith stresses awareness of any

given particular human condition or action as a condition or action of

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<sup>156</sup>Gregory Vlastos, "Sin and Anxiety in Niebuhr's Religion," *The Christian Century* (October 1, 1941): 1203.

<sup>157</sup>Smith, *Towards World Theology*, 131.

<sup>158</sup>*Ibid.*, 129.

<sup>159</sup>Smith speaks of "an ideal"...some of the (outsiders) and (insiders) will bring to the whole (speaking here of the Madurai temple) "a recognition of truth's transcendence"; also, "corporate critical self-consciousness...(is) the ideal at which to aim for human knowledge of that particular reality." *Towards a World Theology*, 66. "Ideal", I suggest, implies "transformation," beyond full attainment.

<sup>160</sup>*Ibid.*, 59.

itself as a community, yet of one part but not of the whole of itself; and is aware of it as experienced and understood simultaneously both subjectively (personally, existentially) and objectively (externally, critically, analytically; as one used to say, scientifically).<sup>161</sup>

Here is the principle of verification.<sup>162</sup> The congruence between Smith's formulation and that of Macmurray is apparent in the following:

A morally right action is an action which intends community...This universal and necessary intention--the same for all agents--provides a norm for rightness or wrongness in all actions whatever.<sup>163</sup>

Smith asserts that "in the transcendent vision, reason conduces to personal integrity and to community integration; to personal virtue and to the good society."<sup>164</sup> On this topic, there is basic agreement between the two scholars.

Once again, the anthropological strand is evident: "the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness...represents the emergence of man."<sup>165</sup> This is Smith's goal for all of us, ideally humankind ("ideally" is used in a platonic, non-attainable sense). The vehicle for the "study of man by man" is the study of comparative religion. I have tried to show that this is, although amazingly complex, layer upon layer, a coherent theory.

Early in his career, Smith turned his mind to helping people to opt for transcendence; rationally, communally, across the board. He wished to promote

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<sup>161</sup>Ibid., 60.

<sup>162</sup>Ibid.

<sup>163</sup>Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 119-120.

<sup>164</sup>Smith, "Transcendence," 12.

<sup>165</sup>Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 59.

"living," "experienced" religion as opposed to a religion that is simply handed down, or, as Geertz phrases it, a religion "remembered."<sup>166</sup> Smith wished to forestall such atrophy and to legislate living religion in his categories: faith--generic; unshaped by history, to be experienced, open to transcendence. His category of cumulative tradition covers "particulars" in history, "remembered" but as creeds, rituals, temples and the like, leading to experienced "revelatory acts," thereby mediating transcendence to the person of faith. Above all, Smith's insider/outsider criterion stresses the empirical and the experiential, extended to global categories--intellectually permeable (critical); non-group-specific (corporate) and exhibiting full awareness (self-consciousness). In the transition to the new, recent category of community/participation, that is ideally, world community, I believe there is a shift from the ostensible goal of a "world theology" to a potential, spiritual world community. Once again, Macmurray may be of assistance. The function of religion, he suggests, is

to create, maintain and deepen the community of persons and to extend it without limit, by the transformation of negative motives and by eliminating the dominance of fear in human relations. To achieve this would be to create a universal community of persons in which all personal relations were positively motivated, and all its members were free and equal in relation. Such a community would be the full self-realization of the personal.<sup>167</sup>

On many occasions Smith has endeavoured to alert society to the

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<sup>166</sup>See Clifford Geertz. *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1968; Phoenix edition 1971), 110.

<sup>167</sup>Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 1961; reprint 1991, 163.

necessity of examining the presuppositions by which we live and exploring alternatives to our worldview. He recognizes that we need a shared vocabulary. Moreover, when it comes to "human rights," Smith insists that "no one has reasonable grounds to talk about human rights who rejects metaphysics."<sup>168</sup> For him, the metaphysical implies the transcendent; humanism needs to be interpreted in the "cosmic" sense. (Macmurray speaks of all particular agents standing "in an identical relation" to a universal Person).<sup>169</sup> Smith here declares that intellect serves as an integrating principle for man...socially (rationality is the link among persons in society) and individually. Such symbolization translates into the universe and our personal life, each being "endowed with coherence and order." "Integration" (for Smith, this is faith in one of its forms) is what you have when the two are linked.<sup>170</sup> Ten years after these words were written, Judith Maxwell, a Canadian economist, stated that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms has fostered a shift to individualism, even as the opportunities for collective action have diminished; the debate is about the core values of our citizens.<sup>171</sup> On this subject, as well as many others, Smith has given due warning.

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<sup>168</sup>Smith, "Philosophia, as One of the Religious Traditions of Humankind: The Greek Legacy in Western Civilization, Viewed by a Comparativist." In *Différences, valeurs, hiérarchie: Textes offerts à Louis Dumont*, edited by Jean-Claude Galey, (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Maison des Sciences de l'Homme--Bibliothèque, 1984): 269.

<sup>169</sup>Macmurray, *Persons in Relation*, 168-169.

<sup>170</sup>Smith, "Philosophia as One of the Religious Traditions...", 271.

<sup>171</sup>*Montreal Gazette*, November 24, 1993; article caption, "Voice of the People."

The human condition, for Smith, is happily pluralist, for to be a human being is to be "diverse but not incongruous." Smith does not merely advocate better interfaith relations nor a deeper understanding and commitment to a single religious tradition, although these are part of his advocacy. What he does posit is a meta worldview, endlessly variegated, subsuming all others, the vehicle being the intellectual/spiritual enterprise of reflexive comparative religion, interpretation open to interpretation.

As teacher, preacher and prophet, Wilfred Cantwell Smith has alerted us to aspire to the building up--out of the human race--one spiritual community, diverse yet coherent.

# **WILFRED CANTWELL SMITH**

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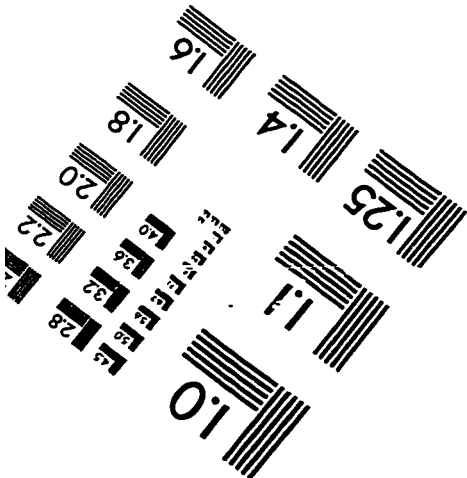
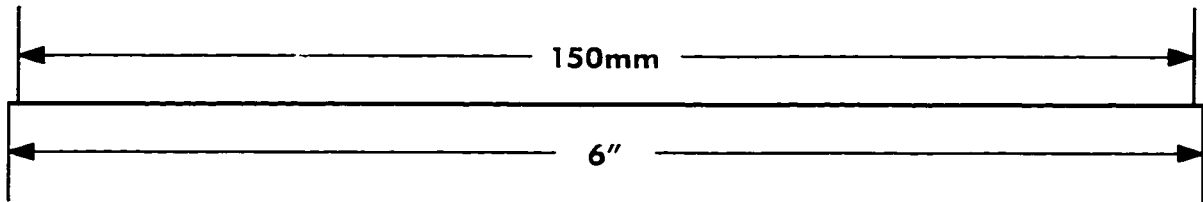
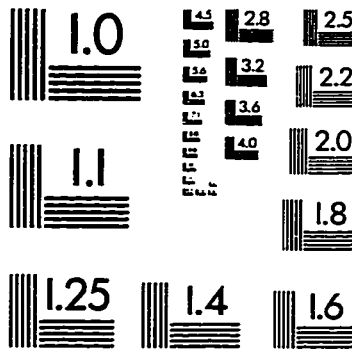
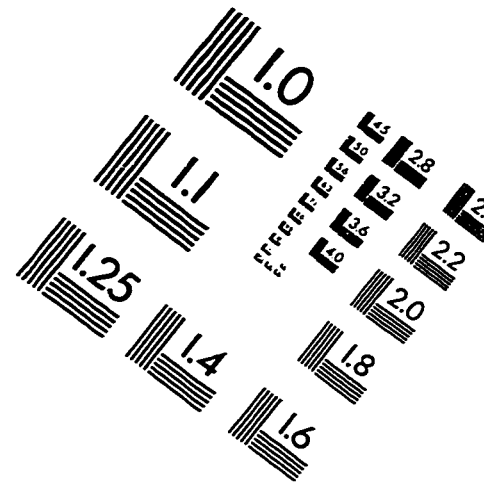
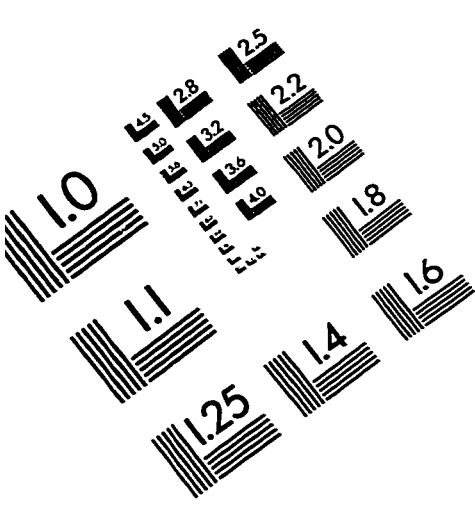
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