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Making Sense of Religion and Religions:
The Value and Limitation of Religious Unity in Diversity

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of
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ABSTRACT

Making Sense of Religion and Religions: The Value and Limitation of Religious Unity in Diversity

Grant S. Martin

Exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism have become common terms for sorting out different responses to religious diversity that have appeared within the Christian tradition. In this study, I argue that each of these responses is a different form of what could be called “unity in diversity.” Religious unity in diversity understands every different religious form as a variant of *one* religious form. The different responses to religious diversity make sense when it is understood that they derive from different ideas about what the unifying religious form is. The connection between the conception of unity and the resultant perception of diversity is so strong that we can go so far as to say that exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism are all rooted in a particular conception of what religion is. And to repeat, it is these ideas about what religion is that precipitate different ideas about what all religions are. At the heart of this study are five case studies of different attempts, within the Christian tradition, to make sense of religious diversity;

the conclusions above are derived from these case studies. Although every form of unity in diversity reduces all forms to one, no form of unity in diversity should be rejected if it works, and this can be determined by applying it. The only situation that no form of religious unity in diversity can handle is one in which there truly are different forms of religion. This situation, if it exists, shows the limitation of every *possible* form of religious unity in diversity.

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Different Forms of Unity in Diversity: Rethinking Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism

Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism

John Hick, a contemporary Christian theologian, introduced the terms *exclusivism*, *inclusivism*, and *pluralism* to account for the different responses to religious diversity that have 'evolved' within the Christian tradition. Exclusivism asserts that saving truth is available only within the Christian Faith, and those outside of Christianity are either of no account or are explicitly excluded from the realm of religious salvation. Hick sites the Catholic Dogma *Extra ecclesiam nulla salus* as one of the most powerful expressions of exclusivism. In contrast, inclusivism tries to universalize the saving power of Christ arguing, on the one hand, that Christ's atonement is for all human beings not only those consciously Christian, and on the other, that salvation to the degree it takes place in other traditions is really the work of the universal divine Logos who became fully incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth. In this schema, the advantage of being a Christian is that one is fully aware of the source one's salvation because it has been personally encountered in Jesus Christ; presumably, it is better to be saved by the known, rather than unknown, Christ. It is not difficult to see that inclusivism is closely tied to exclusivism in that what is now *included* in religion is so only because it is another form of the religion

which once served as the basis of exclusivism. Christian inclusivism affirms that all religions are really Christianity, and not surprisingly finds that Christianity itself is the best Christianity, which is to say the best religion. Again, this is quite a step from seeing all 'non-Christian' religions as anti-religion, but it does not offer a positive vision of other religions as *other* religions. Hick is aware of the tendency of inclusivism to 'backslide' into an only slight variation of exclusivism, but he also sees in inclusivism a potential movement toward the third Christian response to religious diversity; pluralism. Hick argues that once it is admitted that salvation is taking place in other religious traditions, without any connection to the Gospel or Christian Church, it is a meaningless gesture to affix the label 'Christian' to all religions, and that it is more appropriate to openly admit that salvation is possible within the many different religious traditions of the world. Hick asks, "why not frankly acknowledge that there is a plurality of saving human responses to the ultimate divine Reality?"(34) For Hick, inclusivism evolves into pluralism when it unmoors itself completely from exclusivism, and such pluralism is the most tenable response to our contemporary religious world because it can positively affirm religious diversity. (1985:31-34)

Hick defines religion as human response to the divine; more specifically as human transformation from self-centredness to God-centredness. This turn is called salvation. I am not going to use this definition but my own: Religion is how a human being understands and experiences their relationship to God. Human response to God is a form of relationship, but to so Divine presence incarnating in the world. Human relationship to God is broad enough to include both of these religious forms and consequently it will

stand as my working definition. Salvation, if I ever use it, will be understood as the perfect form of relationship between a human being and God. In this sense the goal of all religions, so defined, is salvation.

Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism Redefined as Universalism, Universal Pluralism, and Pluralism

Exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism are extremely awkward terms if we are to think about exclusivism and pluralism as polar opposites and inclusivism somewhere in between, as I think Hick does.¹ Our minds tend to polarize exclusivism with inclusivism and pluralism with something like “universalism”; consequently it is very uncomfortable to think about pluralism and exclusivism as polar opposites with inclusivism somewhere in the middle using this terminology. It seems to me that the this terminology badly mixes, on one hand, what these responses to religious diversity are trying to affirm and, on the other, the effects of these affirmations. Let me try to explain.

Using my definition of religion, pluralism affirms that there are many (or at least more than one) form(s) of true human relationship with the Divine. What is called exclusivism, on the other hand, affirms that there is only one form of true human relationship with the Divine. I will continue to call the first position *pluralism* but will

¹

This terminology does, however, work to Hick’s advantage when he tries to set them apart from pluralism as two sides of the same coin, or slightly different versions of the same evil.

now (generally) call the second position *universalism*.

What is called inclusivism remains the position in between universalism and pluralism. So-called inclusivism affirms that there is only one true form of human relationship with the Divine (i.e. one religion) but that all other forms of religion are a somewhat successful attempt to realize this (one ultimate form). There *is one* true form of religion but also *many* partially true forms of religion which are approximating it. This point of view is both universalistic and pluralistic; hence, I will call it *universal pluralism*. Let's now consider the *effects* of these three ways of understanding religious diversity.

Again, universalism asserts that there is one, and only one, true form of religion. Thus, all other forms of religion are necessarily not true, or false. This means that all other forms of religion are excluded from religious truth, or that religious truth is exclusive to only one form of religion. The universalist's religious truth is *absolute*. Pluralism asserts that there is more than one true form of religion. But more than this, it denies that there is one absolutely true form of religion and, consequently, affirms a plurality of *partially true* religious forms. All partially true forms of religion are *included* in religious truth. Pluralism affirms that religious truth is the *inclusive* possession of all. Universalism excludes all but one from religious truth whereas pluralism includes all but one (i.e. the exclusive one) from religious truth.

In contrast, universal pluralism is an "inclusive exclusivity" or an "exclusive inclusivity." In this case the one, or the universal, truth still excludes all that is false but *also* includes all that is partially true (and partially false). What is false is what in *no* way

conforms to the one and what is partially true is what in *some* way conforms to the one. What is partially true for the universal inclusivist is so in relation to what is absolutely true, therefore, this truth can be called *relative* truth.

Universalism, Universal Pluralism, and Pluralism as Different Forms of Unity in Diversity

In reality, it is hard to find pure forms of either universalism or pluralism, but only different admixtures of the two. All of these different admixtures of universalism and pluralism could be called different forms of *unity in diversity*. What I have called universal pluralism is a form of unity in diversity that tries to strike a balance between universality and plurality. In contrast, pluralism is a form of unity in diversity that tries to root itself in the diversity or plurality, and universalism is a form of unity in diversity that tries to root itself in unity or universality.

Universalism presumes pluralism; the one presumes the many. Our language reveals this interconnection when we ask, "one what?". Universalists always have a sense, or consciousness, of religious plurality in that they have a sense that everyone has the *potential* to *become* religious. Who does the universalist exclude entirely from true religion? No one because everyone has the potential to be *included* in true religion. Admittedly this in the most degenerate form of inclusion, but it must be so called. Even the proselytizer with no sympathy for his potential convert's point of view must presume in these the potential to be converted.

Consequently, the issue is not really about inclusion or exclusion but the *type* of inclusion. Universalists remain largely unconscious of other religions as *religions*. The religions of others are false and therefore not really religions at all. For this reason it is a taboo for universalists to really consider other religions on their own terms; this would be an admission that they were somewhat religious. If this ever does happen the distinguishing features of the other religions will simply become accusations against them - pantheism! polytheism! tritheism! In fact, whatever they are will be an accusation against them because by definition they are false. But as soon as the universalist turns in the direction of seeing the non-religions as false *religions* the seeds of universal pluralism and pluralism have already been sown.

Likewise pluralism presumes universalism; the many presume the one. Here language reveals this when it asks, "many what?". Pluralists have always had a sense of religious universality to the degree they have always had a sense of *religion*. To affirm a multiplicity of religions it is necessary to affirm religion in itself. How could we know that the multiplicity of things, which call themselves religion, are religion unless we know what religion is? To know what religion is to define it, and to define it is to distinguish it or cut it off from that which it is; it *excludes*. So again, there is not an issue of exclusion verses inclusion because pluralism also excludes, even if only minimally via a very broad definition of religion. What is of interest is the *way* pluralism excludes and includes.

As said, another religion for a universalist will, by definition, be a *non-religion*. The otherness of the "religion" is evidence its falsity. In contrast, another religion for a

pluralist will, by definition, be *partially* true. How does the pluralist effect this? To begin with the pluralist must have a universal base line to which all religions will *at least* conform. It might be a few common beliefs, some common ethical principles, a type of religious experience, etc. It doesn't matter what it is so long as it can be truthfully affirmed that it is common to *all* forms of religion. This commonality is the *basic* truth of religion and is what makes all religions *equal*. The goal of pluralism is to affirm the equality (equal truth) of all, or many, different religions. Common truth is taken as essential (or most important) truth and, therefore, what is distinct from common truth is defined (or dismissed) as inessential, superficial, or idiosyncratic. To use the highly charged term, all religions are made equal by *levelling* them.

If absolute religious truth was a circle a universalist would look at a square religion and denounce it in all of its hideous square falseness. In contrast, the pluralist would round the corners of the square until it looked like a circle and then declare that it was basically a circle too. Universalism is a form of unity in diversity where diversity is a monster. Pluralism is a form of unity in diversity where the unity is a die. Universalists see other religions only as deformity and pluralists see other religions only in conformity. This approaches caricature, but it is intended to compensate for the high esteem pluralists often attain by simply being anti-universalist.

Universal pluralism sees religious diversity both as deformity and conformity. All religions conform to the true form of religion, but in so far as they do not conform they

are deformed. For a universalist any deviation from true religion is evidence of complete falsity. For a universal pluralist, a deviation from true religion is only evidence that the deviated part is false; what does conform is *relatively* true.

The universal pluralist is able to see other religions as partially true and partially false by dislocating true religion from actual religion and consequently making it transcendental or *ideal*. All religions are defined in terms of participating in something which transcends all religions. This means that even if one religion participates in it perfectly there is still the *possibility* for other religions to participate in it too. This turn of thought may remain fairly close to universalism if a real religion is affirmed as the perfect form of the ideal, but it also may approach something very much like pluralism if equal participation in the ideal is affirmed. What keeps the former position from being universalism is that the *perfected* real religious form is like all other religions forms in that it is participating in something beyond itself. On the other hand, what keeps the later position from being pluralism is that the equal religions are all driving to an ultimate aim beyond themselves which is singular. In other words, it is *desirable* for the equality to end. What is more typical of universal pluralism (or inclusivism) is the middle ground which produces an obvious hierarchy. Every religion participates in the true ideal form of religion but some participate better than others. Consequently, it is possible to locate the best religion, the worst religion, and everything in between.

Hick's terminology has been popularly summarized as follows: exclusivists see their religion as the *only* religion, inclusivists see their religion as the *best* religion and

pluralists see their religion as *one of many* possible religions. There is of course truth in all of these statements but there are also aspects of universalism, universal pluralism and pluralism which these catch phrases miss.

The universalist's sense of only-ness, however, does not seek to exclude others from the only religion. In fact it has a strong impulse to include them; just not as *religious* others. The diversity in the universalist's unity in diversity is simply the many persons who are Christians (or whatever). To a pluralist this is an extremely degenerate form of unity in diversity but, like its form of inclusion, it is one. Universalists, therefore, are not totally devoid of a sense of religious diversity. All others have the potential for religion and when all others are religious their will be *many* religious persons. Given this qualification universalists do think of their religion as the *only* religion.

To say that universal pluralists think of their religion as the best religion connotes that they will have an attitude of condescending superiority to all other religions. This will not necessarily be so because all universal pluralists are at least humbled by the fact that they too suffer distance from the ideal. The best is always above the best. This humility makes their judgements of other religions, in contrast to universalists, sugar-sweet. This same judgement only becomes a bitter pill in contrast to the pluralist position that seeks to abolish the hierarchy altogether, no matter how benign and seemingly egalitarian.

Finally, to suggest that pluralists see their religion as simply one among many others suggests a pure and innocent non-judgmental openness to all other religions. This is not entirely unjustified as evidenced by the fact that interest today in religious diversity

is often expressed as an interest in religious pluralism. However, pluralists are not pure openness and we can see this in the pluralist's passion for putting universalists in their place. But apart from this inconclusive phenomenon, we can point to the simple fact that pluralists define religion and consequently exclude. Again, pluralists construct their unity in diversity by regarding what is common essential and what is distinctive inessential. This puts them in conflict especially with universalists who take their particularity as their essence.

Again, if I seem to be overly critical of pluralism and overly defensive of universalism and universal pluralism it is to compensate for those, like Hick, who typically do the opposite. I am not arguing that universalists cannot be feverishly blind with respect to other religions, that universal pluralists cannot treat other religions with arrogant condescension, or that pluralists cannot be so wide open with respect to other religions that they risk dissipation into the spiritual cosmos. These blemishes/virtues go with the territory - its just they are not the whole story and we need to try to be as broadly objective in our evaluation as possible.

The Principal Values and Liabilities of Universalism, Universal Pluralism, and Pluralism

Kate McCarthy, who has contributed to a recent book on religious diversity, has offered what I think is a more balanced evaluation of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism in her paper titled, *Reckoning with Religious Difference: Models of*

Interreligious Moral Dialogue. I am not going to present her arguments here but simply a terse account of what she considers to be the principal values and liabilities of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism for interreligious moral dialogue. (I will continue using my terminology although McCarthy does not.)

The principal value of universalism is the intense degree of *commitment* that universalists have for their religious truth. This is not altogether surprising given the fact that their particular truth is also universal truth. The principal liability of universalism is the passion universalists have for trying to *convert* all other (non) religions to their way. Universalists may engage in interreligious dialogue but typically with the aim of converting the other non-religions and not of learning from them. (1997:35-37)

The principal value of universal pluralism is the capacity to *integrate*, or to include many different religions in the same spiritual universe; to see the spiritual universe as a "coherent whole." Its great liability is *misrepresentation*. In the process of integrating the diversity on the bases of its participation in the unity, the diversity *can be* misrepresented. The universal - or in actuality its closest approximation - interprets (or misinterprets) everything in terms of itself and then, to little surprise, finds everything a worse version of itself. Nirvana turns up as an inferior form of salvation, etc. (1997:37-40)

The principal value of pluralism is the *openness* that pluralists have towards the truth of other religions. The pluralist is able to genuinely feel that something of value can be learned from the other. The principal liability is an incapacity to come to terms with *religious particularity*. I would argue that fruit of this incapacity is "levelling." McCarthy

writes, "the pluralist might be heard saying, 'We welcome everyone to the dialogue table. Except of course those who actually believe in the claims of their tradition.'"(1997:42)

This ironic exclusion of universalists and inclusivists, on their own terms, creates something of a universal void that tends to get filled with a "default religion." This I would call the common or basic form of religion in which all religions equally participate. The common religion might be rooted in particular religious form - in which case McCarthy makes the accusation of "subtle imperialism." Or it might be rooted in the common truths of all religions, which in the estimation of all particular religions amounts to "worthless platitudes." Of course, an effort to come up with a common base line for *all* religions, or a basic form of religion might be accused from both directions - both as a subtle form of religious imperialism (absolutism) and a collection of worthless platitudes. (1997:40-44)

The Principal Value and Liability of Every Form of Unity in Diversity

As said, I appreciate McCarthy's broad objectivity but I am now going to offer another interpretation by building upon her insights. McCarthy identifies the capacity to integrate many religions into a spiritual universe as the value of universal pluralism (or inclusivism). She also identifies the tendency of universal pluralists to misrepresent that which they seek to integrate as their greatest liability. I am now going to argue that these are also the principal value and limitation of universalism and pluralism. The reason that this is not obvious is that McCarthy has presented, in the case of pluralism and

universalism, the effects of their principals of integration and their means of misrepresentation, respectively, as their principal value and liability, instead of their value and liability itself. (i.e.. instead of integration and misrepresentation)

I will now try to show that the values of conviction and openness are effects of the universalist's and pluralist's integrating truth principle and, moreover, that these effects further manifest in the respective tendencies to proselytize and level other religions. Proselytizing may be thought of as their means of misrepresentation, or more directly as their particular *forms* of misrepresentation.

In identifying the formation of a coherent religious universe, which integrates all religious diversity, as the value of universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism alike; and by identifying misrepresentation as their principal liability I may seem to be making a very arbitrary value judgement. However, these "values" will basically be descriptions of what I think these different responses to religious diversity are trying to accomplish. Universalists, universal pluralists and pluralists all construct spiritual universes into which they hope all religious diversity will fit. The universalist by making it disappear, the pluralist by universalizing it; and the universal pluralist by reading all religious forms back to *the* religious Form.

If a particular religion does not fit, as it truly is, into a given spiritual universe the act of trying to make it fit, or of trying to integrate it, will be considered an act of *misrepresentation*. However, I am using misrepresentation very specifically and not as a general accusation against any and every attempt to integrate all religions into a religious

universe. Misrepresentation is representing a religion as perfectly/essentially/basicly something other than that religion perfectly/essentially/basicly is. This is not necessarily to say other than it perfectly/essentially/basicly takes itself to be.

The problem of misrepresentation is exceptionally difficult because it presumes a vantage point of truth from which misrepresentation can be distinguished from true representation. I will try to address this problem shortly, but for now I want to move away from judgements of value and liability. I said that constructing a coherent spiritual universe into which all religious diversity fits is the principal *value* of universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism. But this is only valuable without qualification if it works. If it doesn't work, or if it can't accurately integrate all diversity, it misrepresents and thus "becomes" a liability.

For now, I will limit this consideration to *how* universalists, universal pluralists, and pluralists try to construct their spiritual universes and *how* they try to integrate religious diversity into this universe; thus, leaving the question of value and liability aside. I will look for the principal truths of integration and the means of integrating plurality to that unifying truth. In other words, I will look for the founding principles of the different spiritual universes and the ways they have attempted to include all religions in their spiritual universe.

Generally, I am going to argue that the principles of integration for every integrating (or integrated) spiritual universe is a principle of *unity*, which can also be called a principal truth. Thus, I will begin by locating the principal truths of the

universalist's, universal pluralist's, and pluralists's respective spiritual universes.

Actually, I have already done this but I want to do it again in this context where I am identifying them specifically as principal integrating truths instead of as forms of religious truth.

I am also going to argue that the means of integration into any spiritual universe is *re-presentation* or *conversion* in light of, or into, the integrating truth principle. Thus, I will look at how the three forms of unity in diversity convert or re-present (represent) all other forms of religion so that they *can* fit into their spiritual universe. Again, the question of *misrepresentation*, and consequently of value and liability will be left aside. I am, however, going to take what McCarthy calls values as the effects the of principal integrating truths and her liabilities as the specific forms of conversion or re-presentation.

The "value" of universalism is conviction. This will now be understood as an effect of the principal truth of universalism which is *perfect* or *absolute truth*. (I will use these terms synonymously). Perfect truth demands absolute *conviction*, which is also *closure* to the possibility that there could be perfect truth elsewhere. If perfect truth is taken as the integrating principle of a spiritual universe then admission to this spiritual universe can only be achieved via conversion to this perfect truth. Those who stand outside of this absolute truth will be judged wholly false insofar as they make a claim to absolute or perfect truth. The universalist's passion for proselytizing is tied to the fact that the other cannot be related to as a truly religious other until converted to true religion. Another perfectly religious *other* would negate the universalist's claim to absolute truth;

consequently, the universalists tries to negate this possibility by negating anyone who makes such a claim. Whatever religious diversity gets put into the “grist mill” of universalism comes out on the other end as absolutely perfect religion or absolutely false religion. It seems to be the case that the proselytizer converts only when successful - but I would argue that the conversion is always made; there is just a different result depending on the obstinance of the damned or sensibility of the saved.

The “value” of pluralism is openness to the truth of other religions which is an effect of the principle of partial religious truth for all. Pluralism affirms the equal and universal participation of all religions in a basic form of religion. This might also be expressed negatively as, there is (in principle) no absolute or perfect religious truth for *any* religion. Absolute truth would negate the pluralist’s claim to partial truth; therefore, if pluralists want to maintain their claim to partial truth they must negate any claim to absolute truth. The pluralist needs to *convert* all other religious truth into partial truth (and only partial truth) before it can enter the pluralist’s spiritual universe. I have called this levelling but it is also simply conversion in the same way that the universalist’s proselytizing is conversion. Granted these are conversions to different forms of religious truth, but they are still conversions and conversions to forms of religion that can be integrated into the desired spiritual universe. In the pluralist grist mill everything comes out on the other side as basically the same, even if one twenty kilogram sack of wheat gets a different type of sack from another twenty kilogram, sack of wheat.

It is more difficult to get clear about universal pluralism because it shares qualities

of both universalism and pluralism. Again, McCarthy identifies integration to a coherent spiritual universe as the value of universal pluralism. I called this its *shared* goal with universalism and pluralism. It does try to integrate but so do the others. The question to ask is *how* it tries to integrate or what is its principle of integration, or its principal integrating truth. Once this is done it will be more possible to speak of a "value" or "limit" specific to universal pluralism. The integrating truth or principle of universalism is perfect or absolute truth (embodied unequally in one religion) and the integrating principle of pluralism is incomplete or partial truth (embodied equally in all religions). The principal integrating truth for universal pluralism is *participatory* or *relative* truth (embodied unequally in all religions, for now).

Universalism says you either have religious truth or you don't; universal pluralism says you have it either more or less; pluralism says you have it - but not all of it.

The effect of grounding a spiritual universe in participatory or relative truth is neither a sense of closed conviction about one's truth nor a sense of open incompleteness about it. There is a sense of closed conviction about what is absolute truth but also a sense of open incompleteness about having realized it. The value of this position might simply be its balance.

Regardless, we now need to consider the "means" by which the integrating principle of participatory truth seeks to realize its intended spiritual universe. Again, it is a question of *conversion*, but once more I will not presuppose that this necessitates misrepresentation. I will simply try to look at the particularity of this type of conversion.

Conversion always seeks to get the other to a point where they can be related to as

religious, and this is determined by what is considered to be religion. For the universalist, religion is perfect religion and therefore the universalist tries to convert all religions to the one perfect religion. Universalists proselytize or convert everyone whether they are successful or not. For the pluralist, religion is basic religion and the pluralist tries to convert all religions to the basic form of religion. Pluralism brings all religion to one basic level. For universal pluralists religion is religion as it really is in light of religion as it essentially or ideally is. All religions are converted to their actuality in light of the ideal; consequently, all are also *ranked* according to this ideal. Religion for the universal pluralist is real religion contra ideal religion. When religions are converted into the spiritual universe of the universal pluralist they are ranked. Neither universalists nor pluralists rank religion. For the pluralist all religions are equal or all the same basic level; for universalists there are no different *levels* of religion.

The coherent spiritual universe of the universalist is divided; the coherent spiritual universe of the universal pluralist is ranked; the coherent spiritual universe of the pluralist is flat.

Proselytizing, ranking and levelling all have negative connotations because they are associated with misrepresentation. The pluralist might be accused of misrepresenting the universalist's, and universal pluralist's religion by reducing them to something less than (and other than) they take them to be. They might admit that their religion is *at least* what the pluralist says it is but will insist that it is also *really* much more. The universalist and universal pluralist on the other hand might be accused of misrepresenting the

pluralist's religion as a non or inferior religion.

If true religion was a black circle the pluralist would say that a grey circle was basically a black circle; the universal inclusivist would say that a grey circle was a bad black circle; and the universalist would say that a grey circle was a non-black circle. These positions in dialogue would be in complete disagreement. The pluralist would say to the universalist that the grey circle is not a non-black circle but is basically a black circle and the two are basically the same. The universal pluralist would say to the universalist that a grey circle is not a non-black circle but is rather a bad black circle. To which the universalist would counter with exactly the opposite position as an "argument."

How, then, can we reconcile someone who sees a grey circle as a black circle, someone who sees a grey circle as an inferior black circle, and someone who sees a grey circle as a non-black circle. To be more religiously concrete how do we reconcile the pluralist whose sees Buddhism as basically Christianity, the "inclusivist" who sees Buddhism as an inferior version of Christianity, and an "exclusivist" who sees Buddhism as non-Christianity?

Differentiating Levels of Truth in Unity in Diversity : Absolute, Relative and Basic

We can begin by making some important distinctions. The universalist who rejects the grey circle as a non-black circle equates absolutely true circle with black circle. What is not a black circle, no matter what shade of grey, is not a black circle and, therefore, not a true black circle. The universal pluralist who ranks the grey circle as an

inferior black circle says that a circle is relatively true to whatever degree it resembles the black circle. Therefore, even a tinged white circle would be true to some extent; truth is conditioned upon participation in it. For the universalist truth is absolute and for the universal pluralist it is relative or conditional. The pluralist who accepts the grey circle as basically black equates black circle with basically true circle. Therefore what is not a black circle can also be regarded as a basically true circle. Of course because black is the basic truth grey can only be basically true by being basically black. Thus, grey must be seen as some kind of inconsequential variation of black.

The pluralist looks wise when the grey is almost black and foolish when the grey is almost white. In sharp contrast, the universalist looks wise when the grey is almost white and foolish when the grey is almost black. The universal pluralist doesn't fare much better. When black is almost grey universal pluralism looks like universalism proper and when grey is almost white it looks like pluralism proper.

Having made these distinctions we can attempt reconciliation by showing that these positions are not mutually exclusive. In other words, they can all be affirmed as true if limited to their particular domains of truth.

It *is* necessary to call the grey circle a false non-black circle, but only with respect to its claim of being a perfect black circle. We cannot logically affirm that a black circle is a perfect circle and then affirm that a grey (or non-black) circle is a perfect circle. The truth domain here is perfect or absolute truth. But just because in this domain all non-black circles *must* be regarded as false black circles does not mean that outside of it they must also be so regarded. Something false may not be regarded as truth, but as false it

may be regarded as relatively or partially true. A dogmatic universalist is engaged wholly in the battle to claim absolute truth; for the universalist only absolute religious truth is religious truth at all.

However, it is more accurate to say that only *absolute* religious truth is *absolute* religious truth: there is no reason to generalize this as religious truth altogether. Relative and partial religious truth is not negated because there is absolute religious truth. But the universalist can become “dogmatic” and affirm not only that partial and relative religious truths are not absolute religious truth (which is true) but that they are not truth in any sense (which is false). Pluralists, on the other hand, can become dogmatic about partial truth.

The pluralist claim that all religions are basically the same is valid in the truth domain of partial truth. If there is a basic form for *all* religion then all religions, which will necessarily participate in it, will be equal. If *all* religions didn't participate equally in the basic form of religion it wouldn't be the basic form of religion. Again pluralism, or the affirmation that all religions are basically the same and equally true because they participate in common in the basic form of religion, is valid within the domain of partial truth. But dogmatic pluralists can draw a false conclusion from this fact; that religions *only* participate in the basic form of religion, which is to say that basic religious truth is exclusive religious truth; only what is common is significant or *true*. Again, there is no good reason to generalize partial religious truth as religious truth altogether or real religious truth.

Universalists are dogmatic about denying the truth of partial and relative truth; pluralists are dogmatic about denying the truth of absolute and relative truth. For the universalist basic religion is unworthy - base, common, primitive. For the pluralist perfect religion is unattainable - perfectionism, fantasy, delusion. But the ideas of perfect religion and basic religion do not need to be thought of as mutually exclusive truths. Religious truth does not need to be exclusively identified with either truth so that the other necessarily appears as an abomination and, truly, it *should* not be.

As usual the universal pluralist works the middle ground between basic truth and perfect truth. The universal pluralist rejects the totalitarian religious society of the universalist and the egalitarian religious society of the pluralist in favour of a hierarchical religious society. The converts to the spiritual universe of the universal pluralist are all ranked according to their relative participation in the truth. The universalist hates the hierarchy because it *connects* the high to the low and the pluralist hates the hierarchy because it *separates* the high from the low. One seems to lower the high and the other to heighten the low.

However, it must be realized that again we are in *another* domain of truth. Participatory or relative truth is not absolute truth and it is not partial or basic (fundamental) truth. Consequently, there is no threat of what is basically true being falsely raised above all else that is basically true, or what is absolutely true being falsely dragged down into what is not absolutely true. Relative truth does not affirm basic truth or (realized) absolute truth; therefore it never suggests the possibility of truth above basic truth or truth below perfect truth. The hierarchy of above and below strictly applies to

what is relative truth.

The universalist is able to say something about the relative worth of different religions in terms of their participation in truth, while saying nothing about their equality in terms of basic truth, and their antithetical nature in terms of absolute truth. In fact, it is not *possible* to say anything about basic or absolute truth from the point of view of relative truth. And, likewise, it is impossible to say anything about relative truth from the point of view of absolute or basic truth.

The dogmatic universal pluralist affirms relative religious truth as the only real religious truth; everyone is ranked and no one has religious truth apart from their relative, *positioned* truth. Once more there is no reasonable foundation for asserting that relative religious truth is the only real religious truth.

The Possibility of Integrating the Different Levels of Truth in Unity in Diversity and the Consequences of Not Doing So

If partial/basic truth, participatory/relative truth, and absolute/perfect truth remain within their given domains of truth it is possible to affirm them all as true. But to make such an affirmation without internal contradiction it is necessary to formulate an understanding of how they are related. Without such an understanding, internal contradiction could not be avoided short of affirming one domain of religious truth over the others. I would argue that ‘pluralists,’ ‘inclusivists’ and ‘exclusivists’ do attempt such self affirmation over and against each other in order to maintain internal coherence.

Pluralist's root religious truth in basic truth, in what is common to all religions, and thereby affirm the equality of all religions. But they also negate relative and absolute truth and therefore the possibility of understanding religion as higher or highest. Consequently, they remain in conflict with both universalists and universal pluralists. Universal pluralists root religious truth in relative truth, in the degree to which all religions participate in essential truth, and thereby conceive of religion hierarchically. But they negate the possibility of truth as basic or absolute and therefore the possibility of seeing equal or perfect (as in perfectly realized) religion. They remain antagonistic to universalists and pluralists. Universalists root religious truth in absolute truth, in what is singularly perfect, and thereby construct a religious universe of one true religion and many false religions. But they negate the possibility of seeing truth as relative or partial and therefore prevent themselves from appreciating hierarchical or equal religious truth. They remain antagonistic to pluralists and universal pluralists.

This animosity among pluralists, universal pluralists and universalists could be overcome if it was accepted that religious truth is *really* absolute, relative, and partial and not simply one of these. But is this inherently contradictory? I will argue, on the contrary, that it is inherently contradictory to accept one of these aspects of religious truth without the others. It is inconsistent to talk about partial religious truth without admitting the reality of complete or perfect religious truth, and degrees of this perfection; it is inconsistent to talk about perfect religious truth without admitting the reality of a basic religious context in which such perfection, and stages on the way to it, are attained; it is inconsistent to talk about relative truth that is *never* realized in perfection on one end and

never grounded in equality on the other. Perfect truth and basic truth are poles of one reality, between these poles is every possible degree of relative truth. Let's return to the difficult problem of misrepresentation.

Dogmatic pluralists *do* suppress perfect truth and relative truth and thus are inconsistent on my terms. One of the ways pluralists suppress perfect truth is by making it impossible. Perfection is defined in such a way that it could never be attained and thus it is "proven" that perfection does not exist. And in the absence of complete truth (and also relative truth because it presupposes complete truth) partial truth comes to the foreground as the *only* truth. Whatever wants to be truth now must first be converted, from its delusion that it is higher or highest truth, into basic partial truth (and nothing more).

Is this conversion misrepresentation or true re-presentation? In light of what I have said it is *misrepresentation*. I have said that partial truth implies complete or perfect truth; therefore if there is partial there is perfect truth. It does not matter if this perfect truth does exist, only that it *can* exist. But if perfect truth does exist (as is possible) then to represent it as *only* partial truth is to misrepresent it because it *is* perfect truth. The pluralist might argue that this is meaningless because there is no perfect truth in actuality. But to counter my argument the pluralist would have to argue not only that there is no perfect truth but that there *cannot be* perfect truth. At this point I would accuse pluralism of being an absurd position on the grounds that it presumes partial truth but denies *in principle* complete truth. If pluralism admits that there is absolute and relative truth (as I

think it must to remain logical) then it must admit that it misrepresents these truths when it represents them as *only* partial truths. Its choices are to affirm relative and absolute truth *also*, or to misrepresent them as only partial truth and become absurd. If pluralism wants to maintain its integrity then it has to admit that the religious equality it professes is at the level of basic or common truth and that this has no bearing on the relative and absolute inequality at the level of relative and absolute truth. Let's consider universalism.

Again, the premise I begin with is that perfect truth implies a basic context in which this perfection can be realized. Without such a context the word perfect loses its meaning and what is 'perfect' becomes simply what is the case. A universalist would have no enthusiasm for perfection if it was simply what was instead of something which has perfectly come to be - I would add - out of that which was simply the case.

Universalists want to deny the basic ground of perfect truth and one way to do this is to vilify it. The basic act of vilification is to affirm not only that everything which is not absolute truth is not absolute truth (and in this respect false), but that it is also absolutely false in all respects. What is not absolutely true is not relatively true or partially true but only wholly false. Again, what is not absolute truth must be called false as absolute truth, but to extend this falseness to relative and partial truth is vilification or *misrepresentation*. Universalism becomes a self negating absurdity if it denies relative or partial truth to all that is not absolute truth (which is to say all other truth) because without partial and relative truth it is meaningless as complete or absolute truth. Such dogmatic universalism destroys itself by negating the condition upon which it establishes itself. If there is partial and relative truth the universalist's representation of this as

nothing but untruth is truthfully misrepresentation.

Here, conversion is from what is partially or relatively true to what is absolutely false, unless it is converted to absolute truth. This is not an argument against absolute truth trying to convert all relative and partial truth to itself (as absolute truth) but against absolute truth misrepresenting all relative truth and partial truth as utter falsity because it does not (and by definition will not) conform to it. If universalism wants to maintain its integrity as possessors of perfect truth then it is going to have to admit the existence of relative and partial truth, along with their respective hierarchical and egalitarian spiritual universes. By re-presenting these as false religions in every respect it misrepresents them. If this process of turning a kind (or honest) eye towards other religions sends the universalist into a frenzy of self doubt it is just as well; an absolute must earn its stripes.

A universal pluralist must admit that there is both basic and perfect religion, although the universal pluralist, as such, can only affirm the truth between these two poles. The universal pluralist affirms the relative truth between the poles of what is basic and what is perfect, but is thereby not permitted to deny the truth as basic and the truth as perfect. If the universal pluralist converts absolute truth into relative truth that is very perfect there is misrepresentation because only perfect truth can be truly represented as perfect truth. The most perfect relative truth cannot represent perfect truth, and must admit misrepresentation if it tries to do so. But if the universal pluralist denies the reality of perfect truth the basis for relative truth is destroyed. Likewise, universal pluralism can never posit a base line for equality because for it more basic always means lower and more unequal. Therefore, if the pluralist's conception of basic religious equality is

replaced by the universal pluralist's conception of the lowest form of religion there is misrepresentation. By admitting equality in terms of participation in perfect truth the universal pluralist also has to admit the reality of a basic *form* of equal religious truth. Universal pluralism never hits the base or the top and if we admit that there is a base and a top (as the universal pluralist must) then we must also admit that this base and top cannot be truly re-presented by something which is not the base or top i.e. by something in between them. The universal pluralist, to maintain integrity, must not try to represent that which it accepts as real but can only misrepresent unreally, i.e. perfect and basic truth.

My argument in all three cases has been the same. Pluralists affirm partial truth but partial truth presumes complete and relative truth, so to deny complete and relative truth is to deny partial truth also. Admitting the reality of relative and complete truth it must be admitted that any re-presentation of relative or complete truth as partial truth is misrepresentation. Universalists must affirm relative and partial truth to affirm perfect truth; therefore, they must admit that they misrepresent if they try to represent relative or partial truth as perfect truth. Finally, universal pluralists must affirm the reality of base and perfect truth if they are to affirm their own reality; consequently, they will have to admit misrepresentation if they try to represent basic or perfect truth as participatory truth.

Universalists, universal pluralists and pluralists can be reconciled if they recognize that they all presume an understanding of basic, relative and absolute truth and

that the claims made on behalf of each are non-contradictory if they are limited respectively to what is basic, relative, and absolute. It is possible to affirm the equality of all religions with respect to what is common to them all; it is possible to rank all religions as better or worse with respect to their relative participation in what is essentially true; and it is possible to affirm one religion as absolutely true and all other religions as false as absolutes. All of this can be affirmed without contradiction if it is accepted that absolute, relative and partial truth are mutually interdependent forms of religious truth.

I think it would be positive if pluralists, universal pluralists, and universalists lost their dogmatic attachment to equal partial truth, hierarchical relative truth, and totalitarian absolute truth respectively. It would be positive if a universalist filled with missionary zeal could look at other religions not only as wrong but also as relatively true and/or as basically true. If they did they would stop vilifying other religions. It would be positive if a universal pluralist filled with the self contentment of "integration" could also get grounded in the equality of all religions offered by pluralists or the either/or of universalists. If they would do this they would never confuse the best religion with perfect religion and the worst religion with basic religion, and would stop being overly impressed by what is better and worse. Finally, it would be positive if pluralists would open up to the possibility of better religions and the best religions. If they did this their dialogues with other religious persons - many of whom are universalists and universal pluralists - would become more meaningful.

In short, I am arguing that it is good to affirm the equality of religious diversity at its basic level but not to become a 'pluralist' and affirm equality at all levels of religious

truth by denying the other levels of religious truth. It is good to rank religions in a coherent fashion according to their relative degree of participation in essential truth, but not to become an inclusivist and presume that everything ranked as religious truth is everything that is religious truth. Finally it is good to be able to affirm absolute religious as absolute truth (this is just honesty) but not to become an exclusivist and exclude all other religions not just from absolute truth but from any truth.

It is possible to simultaneously affirm universalism, universal pluralism and pluralism insofar as these are recognized to be affirmations of the mutually interdependent aspects of religious truth. As such, none are affirmed dogmatically and to the exclusion of the others; affirmation of one presupposes the affirmation of the others. If these domains of truth are kept separate and their relationship of mutual interdependence is recognized then universalists, universal pluralists and pluralists can be reconciled. A spiritual universe understood as a *unity in diversity* which affirms the absolute truth of the unity, the partial truth of the diversity, and the relative truth of every combination of unity and diversity that is neither perfect nor basic can truthfully integrate into itself far more religious diversity than any form of universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism.

Thus, in terms of providing a framework for constructing of a coherent spiritual universe I would suggest that this vision of *dynamic* unity in diversity is more useful than pluralist 'inclusivist,' and 'exclusivist' visions because it can also include these narrower perspectives.

The Historical Cases of Unity in Diversity

The idea of universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism as different forms of unity in diversity that reveal the truth of this equation (or spiritual universe) from either of its two sides or from in between them has been born out of a study of several different responses to religious diversity within the Christian tradition. My conclusion is just that and not a presupposition. In the next section which I have called *Case Studies in Unity in Diversity: Nicholas of Cusa, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich & John Hick* I give the context where I worked out my thesis about exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism because, now, it is not just the context of my conclusion but the illustration of it. What has so far been presented very abstractly should come to life in the second section.

I will consider, in order, some Western views of Islam in the Middle Ages, followed by the thoughts of Nicholas of Cusa, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich and John Hick on religious diversity. These will be presented as case studies followed by analysis of the cases.

No one of the above authors is simultaneously a universalist, universal pluralist, and pluralist as I have suggested is possible and *desirable*. Consequently, in the third section which I have called *The Value and Limit of Religious Unity in Diversity* I will try to show how it is possible to be a universalist, universal pluralist and a pluralist while remaining internally coherent. This will necessitate relating basic relative and absolute truth to each other.

As expected, the basic form of religion will be understood as the common

religious context for the relative and the perfect forms of religious truth; the perfect form of religion will be understood as having its closest precedents in the relative forms of religious truth and its context in the basic form of religious truth. The relative forms of religious truth will understand themselves as in relation to the absolute or perfect form of religion and as grounded in the basic form of religion.

All forms of religion will be grounded in the basic form of religion, all forms of religion will be fulfilled in the perfect form of religion and, therefore, all relative forms of religion will be grounded in the basic form of religion and fulfilled in the perfect form of religion without being either grounded or fulfilled. This structure will represent a coherent religious universe with height depth and breadth. In this spiritual universe the equality engendered by equal participation in the basic form of religion will not be contradicted by the hierarchy and exclusivity of *its* relative and perfect forms because with respect to their basic form, which they will always be grounded in, they will *always* remain equal. With respect to relative truth there will only be hierarchy and such hierarchy will only be transcended or dissipated in the perfect and basic forms of religion. Again, this hierarchy will not contradict the radical equality at the level of its ground or the radical inequality at the level of its fulfilment. Finally, the singularity of the perfect truth will not be contradicted by the hierarchical plurality of its relative forms or the egalitarian plurality of its basic form(s) because this singularity is only true with respect to perfection. In such an interconnected spiritual universe there will be no efforts to represent all, and thus misrepresent some, truths in terms of one truth.

This form of unity in diversity might be called *dynamic* because it combines and

moves between elements that might be called universalist, universal pluralist and pluralist. This should become clear in the third section, but for now let's turn to the case studies where I have worked out my understanding of the universalist, universal pluralist, and pluralist forms of unity in diversity. These case studies may be thought of as applications of these forms of unity in diversity; just as the third section will be an application of my own dynamic form of unity in diversity.

II

Case Studies in Unity in Diversity: Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages, Nicolas of Cusa, Friedrich Schleiermacher, Paul Tillich and John Hick.

Case I: Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages

None of the four Christian author's that I will consider in the rest of this section are universalists. Nicholas of Cusa, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Paul Tillich are all universal pluralists of very different kinds: Cusanus is very close to being a universalist. Tillich is very close to being a pluralist and Schleiermacher is the quintessence of universal pluralism. John Hick is a pluralist.

Nicholas of Cusa's point of view could probably be described as the first historically significant turn away from universalism. Thus, if we examine thinking on religious diversity prior to Nicholas of Cusa we get a fairly homogeneous picture of universalism. Islam was Christianity's only conscious threat to religious dominance in the Middle Ages; consequently, if we consider Christianity's response to Islam during this period we get a fairly conclusive picture of its perspective on other religions or religious diversity. In this case study I am going to look at Christian responses to Islam in the Middle Ages, on one hand, as a preparation for understanding Nicholas of Cusa's consequent turn of thought and, on the other, to get a clear picture of what he was turning from i.e. universalism.

My short presentation of western views of Islam will be based entirely on R. W. Southern's excellent small book, *Western Views of Islam in the Middle Ages*.

Southern calls the first age of Christian-Muslim relations the "age of ignorance" which ended about 1120. During this time three very basic views of Islam developed. The first he links with Bede and also the Carolingian scholars who, being in the north, were far enough removed from Islam to give it a very serious place in the cosmic struggle between God and the Devil. They were happy to place it within its Old Testament context. The Saracens were the people of Ishmael, who was the son of Abraham and his servant girl Hagar. Ishmael was sent out into the desert, the Saracens came out of the desert - an obvious connection! (Southern) The second interpretation came out of Spain which had been conquered by Muslims, although Christians were allowed to remain as such so long as they paid their respects to Muhammad as political ruler. The tendency in Spain, however, was for the conquered peoples to adopt the culture and language of the conquerors. Thus, there arose in this context fervent Christians who feared they were being slowly wiped out by the permeation of Islam. Some of these were persecuted, and even martyred, for their anti-Islamic attitudes, and it is in this context that we find the first interpretations of Islam as an instrument of the anti-Christ. The third interpretation was born out of the first crusade. Southern says that before 1100 there were almost no references to Muhammad outside of Spain, but by 1120, everyone in the Christian West had formed an opinion about Muhammad and Islam. These opinions were invariably negative and fanciful, as they were for the most part cobbled together from the stories of returning crusaders. The literary genera of the time was also favourable to such

imaginative constructions; this was the age of the romances of Charlemagne and Arthur, the Miracles of the Virgin, the legends of Virgil, etc.

The first time that Islam was identified as a monotheistic religion instead of idolatry and pagan superstition, and that Muhammad was recognized, not as God, but as his Prophet was in the work of William of Malmesbury in 1120. These ideas were of course very much contrary to public opinion. The next movement out of the age of ignorance was much more significant and this was the commission of a Latin translation of the Koran in 1143 by Peter the Venerable. He justified this enterprise in terms of forging tools for fighting Islam which he saw as a Christian heresy; it was to him the "sink of all heresies," (1962: 38) Interestingly, this is the same justification that John of Segovia made in making his new Latin translation of the Koran in the 1450's. However, in Peter's crusading age there was not much appetite for studying the basic tenants of Islam even for the sake of disproving it. Islam required no study to know that it was diabolical. In fact, the apocalyptic visions of the 9th century Spanish martyrs were shortly to be brought up to date in 1191 by Joachim of Fiore. Once again, and on a more popular scale, the Saracens were chief instruments of the anti-Christ.

The next great influence on Christian views of Islam was actually precipitated from outside: from the "Mongol" invasions. This radically altered the West's perception of the size of the world. Peter the Venerable had thought that Muslims made up perhaps a third to a half of the world, the rest presumably he thought were Christians. But now no one was sure if Christians were one in ten or one in a hundred in relation to non-Christians. This new world created on the one hand a call for the end of crusading and, on

the other, one for more and better crusading. (Southern) The invasion of the Mongols also inspired hope that there were great hoards of Eastern Christians. However, this hope that the Mongols would unite with the Christian West to crush the common enemy, Islam, fluctuated with an equal terror that this great unknown quantity might be a threat to the Christian West itself. One of the great disappointments of the time was the fifth crusade which was controlled entirely by the Papacy. It was hoped that the masses of Christian armies from the East would come together like a vice with the West to crush Islam.

Islam was, of course not crushed and this situation of political goodwill which arose between Asia and the West actually brought about an unexpected agreement between Islam and Christianity. This took place in 1254, in a Mongol capital, when the Great Khan staged a debate with a Western Christian, a Nestorian Christian, a Muslim, and a Buddhist. The Western representative was William of Rubroek who had been sent to the capital to acquire much needed information about the Mongols for the West. William proved to be the most skilled of the debaters, arguing that he should speak for both of the Christians and that he should first confront the Buddhist. In his debate with the Buddhist he was so victorious, at least in the mind of the Muslim, that the Muslim said that he agreed with William and had nothing more say. Thus, Christians and Muslims were found to be better allies theologically than Christians and Buddhists.

Another significant event in the changing views on Islam happened when Roger Bacon was able to directly address the Pope with his own views of what was wrong with Christendom, which included his Islamic solution. Bacon was the first to argue against crusading as a means for converting the world to Christianity; instead he argued that it

must be brought to the truth of Christ through philosophical argument. This method would work because Muslims understood philosophy, even better than Christians. He would use the philosophy of Muslims to argue that they should become Christians. Bacon's principle exposure to Islam was through the impact of Muslim writers on Western theologians, like St. Thomas Aquinas. This anti-crusading approach was also picked up by John Wycliffe who argued that Christian self-improvement was the best way to deal with the Islamic heresy: as Christians turned to the truth of their religion they would turn against its heresies.²

The final person leading up to Cusanus that I will consider is John of Segovia. John of Segovia and Cusanus were contemporaries who experienced together the Council of Basel. John of Segovia sent a letter to Cusanus with his thoughts on Islam shortly after he had written *De pace fidei* so perhaps no direct link can be made, but I think it is doubtful that Cusanus would be entirely unfamiliar with John of Segovia's thoughts before the letter. It was John of Segovia's point of view that Islam was an error but the only way this could be shown was to have an accurate knowledge of it so that it could be refuted; this is why he wanted to produce an accurate translation of the Koran. His justification for studying Islam was like Peter the Venerable's and perhaps he was simply the first to carry out Peter's impulse. Regardless, he allowed himself to make a radically objective study of Islam; overcoming the fear of contamination by keeping his ultimate

²

If Wycliffe's idea does not strike one as radically new, perhaps, this is because it is reminiscent of the call of the Hebrew Prophets, and latter, the Rabbis, to return to obedience of the Torah as a way of hastening the Messiah's coming.

objective in mind. He also argued that Islam could not be converted by crusading because war was conducive to the spirit of Islam and not Christianity. He therefore suggested that the Christian message must be brought by a new means of communication and for this he suggested *the conference*; like Cusanus' heavenly one, but earthly.

Analysis I

The Christian authors who responded to Islam in various ways throughout the Middle Ages were unanimous in one respect: all viewed Islam as anti-religion. Islam was an insignificant development within Biblical history, an instrument of the anti-Christ, idolatry or pagan superstition, the sink of all heresies, or most kindly it was simply a Christian *heresy* (which is to say a false Christianity). There is some obvious development towards a greater recognition of Islam as an other religion in these views but none of them take the step of imparting positive religious value to it.

The apocalyptic Spaniards had a greater appreciation of Islam's participation in the spiritual drama of the world than did the more remote northern scholars. This "evolution" was obviously due to physical contact but is still significant. William of Malmesbury's recognition of Islam as a monotheistic religion rather than idolatry or pagan superstition was another advancement in the process of recognition. Nonetheless, even as a monotheistic religion Islam never become more than anti-religion until Nicholas of Cusa re-presented it in a more positive light.

All of these views of Islam illustrate the response to religious diversity that I have

called universalism and others have called exclusivism. Christianity is absolutely true and all other religions are absolutely false: the grey circle is non-black. The grey circle *had to be converted* into a black circle if it was to have any truth. The crusades sought to convert the Muslims by force. Bacon, Wycliffe, and John of Segovia all rejected war but still sought conversion; Bacon through philosophical argument, Wycliffe through self-improvement, and John of Segovia through the conference. The first and second Latin translations of the Koran were forged as tools against heresy and not for Christian edification. These translations had to be justified as terms of tools for fighting heresy because otherwise religious value would have been imparted to them, and this is the single act that universalists do not do. Christianity is religious truth and those who want religious truth must come to (convert to) Christianity: "No one comes to the Father except through me." (Jn 14:6) The Christian impulse in the direction of Islam as an other religion was to conquer, eradicate, convert; not to recognize, tolerate, appreciate. Translating another's Holy Book is a gesture in the direction of recognizing the other as *religious*. These gestures came to fruition in Nicholas of Cusa's form of religious tolerance.

I have argued that the universalist converts whether or not the convert is won. Islam is converted to a wholly false religion insofar as it continues to exist as a religion. We can see how the universalists converted the Muslims to either false Muslims if they persisted in their folly or to true Christians if they saw the light. This is *how* they did it, but we might also ask *why* they did it. Probably the most obvious answer is that Islam became a part of the Christian world, and more than this had become a threat to *its* dominance and even existence. The Christian response to this threat was war, and war has

always typically predominated in the realm of absolutes.

It took a turn of mind to envision a more peaceful solution; this occurred in Nicholas of Cusa who I will now consider.

Case II: The Argument of Nicholas of Cusa's De Pace Fidei

De pace fidei (On the Peace of Faith) is a heavenly dialogue, among the leaders of religion throughout the world, as well as St. Peter, St. Paul and The Word (Christ). It is received as a vision by a zealous man who has implored the Creator of all things to put an end to the persecution resulting from differences in religious rites. The zealous man concludes that from this dialogue, among these few wise men well versed in the world's religious diversity, "a single easy harmony could be found and through it a lasting peace established."(1990: 4) He writes out the dialogue to the best of his memory so that it may come to the attention of those who have the "decisive word in these great matters." (1990: 4)

This zealous man was Nicholas of Cusa and the decisive act of persecution that inspired him to write down his "heavenly dialogue" was the fall of Constantinople to the Muslim armies of Mehmed II in 1453. Cusanus was a Catholic Bishop who had already experienced a long and distinguished career as a theologian and church diplomat. As a part of the Council of Basel he was a chief negotiator in the tiresome talks that brought an end to the Hussite movement and a very brief union between the Greek and Latin Churches. The Council also paved the way for the re-establishment of Papal unity when it

supported Nicholas V and dissolved in 1449. Thus the power, and habit, of conciliation was well known to Cusanus when he turned his attention to the "Muslim problem" which was by now Christendom's greatest unsolved problem.

The heavenly dialogue of *De pace fidei* includes a Greek, an Italian, an Arab, an Indian, a Chaldaean, a Jew, a Scythian, a Frenchman, a Persian, a Syrian, a Spaniard, a Turk, a German, a Tartar, an Armenian, a Bohemian and an Englishman (xii) which gives us the impression that Cusanus is concerned with religious plurality as we think of it today: As including all forms of religion practiced by human beings. However, I will argue that Cusanus conceived of religious diversity in terms of the diversity of Christian heresy, of which Islam was one of the greatest and most problematic. R. W. Southern argues that Cusanus reduced the dispute between Christianity and Islam to that between Nestorian and Western Christianity, wherein the heretical Nestorian Christianity needed to be brought into the fold of the one true i.e. Western Christianity. (1962: 94) Thus, the Muslim problem is, for Cusanus, a Christian problem in the special sense that Islam is a Christian heresy that has erred in certain minor matters such as the divinity of Christ.

The argument I have just made can actually be deduced from the main thesis of *De Pace fidei* which argues that all religions can be brought to one orthodox faith, because all religions presuppose the same truth; and within this one orthodox faith, a certain diversity of rites can be tolerated. For Cusanus, the minimal foundation for the peace of faith is the acceptance of Christ, the Trinity, and the Church. But beyond these essentials there is room for diversity and compromise. Cusanus discusses certain non-essential rites like circumcision and baptism, and here is able to show his great powers of

conciliation. In the case of circumcision he argues that it would be better for the minority who are circumcised to conform to the majority who are not, and in the case of baptism he argues that it should not be objectionable to anyone because it is simply a symbol of the justification one receives through faith in Christ. But in both case he stresses the non-essential character of these rites leaving room for exceptions and the possibility of working out things differently. He even encourages a diversity of rites insofar as this might encourage the faithful to vie with one another in worship of the one true God.

The thesis of one faith and a diversity of rites has a remarkable parallel in an Islamic text that Cusanus read called *Lex sive doctrina Mahumeti*, a work in the "Toledan Collection." In this treatise, the Prophet was asked a question by a Medina Jew concerning previous prophets, to which he responded: "The religion or the faith of all of them was indeed one, but the rites of the different prophets were actually diverse." In the margin of his own copy Cusanus wrote: "fides una, ritus diversus." (1990: 222) This formula admittedly has great potential for enfolding enormous diversity within an all-embracing unity, but it faces the problem of all other visions of unity in diversity; it has to establish the truth of its unity. Cusanus conceived of the unity of faith in terms of Christ, Trinity and Church, and tried to argue this in the context of his dialogue. This was obviously an uphill battle, particularly in the Muslim case where, I think, the unity of religion is not Christ, the Trinity, and the Church but One God, his Prophet Muhammad, and Islam (human submission to God through obedience to His revealed laws). I will now discuss a couple of these arguments, which are sometimes quite clever but also unconvincingly contrived. (It's obvious where he is going.)

Cusanus takes an interesting path in trying to establish the primacy of Christ in all religions. He starts out with a discussion about Wisdom, which quite naturally takes place in the context of his dialogue between the Word and the Greek. The Greek readily admits that wisdom is the highest human pursuit, and then the Word helps him to reason that wisdom is one: "For if it were possible for there to be plural wisdoms, they would have to derive from one wisdom, before all plurality there is unity." (1990: 11) The Word then proceeds to explain that wisdom and the Word are one and the same thing. Therefore the Greeks in their pursuit of wisdom seek the Word, which is to say Christ. Therefore Greeks, or philosophers, are included in the community of faith.

Cusanus is even able to include polytheists in the community of faith by a similar line of argument. He argues that it is not possible to conceive of gods without presupposing one God: If there was not first one God there could not be many gods. The word says: "Never was there a people so dull as to believe in plural gods each of which would have been the first cause, source, or creator of the universe." (1990: 16). Thus by showing polytheists that they presuppose one God, who is a Trinity, they too can be included in the faith.

Cusanus, in line with St. Dionysius, argues that *as Creator* God is three and one, or a Trinity. For Cusanus the "fecundity" of God could not be described without the threefold nature of the one God. He argues that the Muslims would have to admit that a denial of the Trinity is a denial of the creative powers of God, and acceptance of the Trinity is a denial of the plurality of gods. He says that Muslims actually do conceive of God as a Trinity by positing that He has an essence or soul, but then add to this that He

also has a word and a spirit. Cusanus argues that his conception of God as three and one is a better description of the divine unity than the Muslim language of *having* a word and spirit. He maintains that God is only Being; therefore, we can only say that God is the word and the spirit, or conversely that the word and the spirit are God. It is inappropriate to say that God who only Is, has something. I think in this discussion Cusanus has hit precisely on one of the essential differences between Islam and Christianity, but he has no foundation for asserting the superiority of the Christian point of view, except that it is his own. A Muslim might just as well argue that God can only *have* because only God is God. God might have a word and a spirit, but even these are not the One Unknowable Essence who is God.

Earlier, I said that we can deduce that Cusanus conceives of all other religions as Christian heresies. We can do this because Cusanus argued that all religions presuppose the same one truth, which is Christ. All religions ultimately seek Christ, who is one with God in the Holy Trinity, and whose body is the Church. Therefore, those who seek truth apart from Christ, though they still presuppose Christ as the object of the search, have gone astray. It is in this sense of having gone astray from truth that other religions, including Islam, can be seen as Christian heresies. But in Cusanus' thought heresy is turned about so that it is seen in partial light instead of total darkness. This is the turn from universalism to universal pluralism, or from exclusivism to inclusivism. I will now discuss this turn more fully in my analysis.

Analysis II

Cusanus' genius was the ability to see grey as relatively black, or to see heretical *non-Christians* as heretical *Christians*; who despite being poor Christians were still Christians. They were still included in the *truth* they deviated from instead of entirely excluded from it on apart of their deviation.

Cusanus makes a move which by today's more pluralistic sensibilities is obnoxious, but for the time was incomparably benevolent; he turns all the non-religions into somewhat true (Christian) religions. Philosophers seek Wisdom, Wisdom is Christ, therefore philosophers seek Christ which is to say they are Christians. Polytheists presume the one God, the one God is a Trinity, therefore polytheists presume the Trinity (and probably Christ and Church as well) so are Christians. All religions can be brought to unity because all religions are really Christianity, albeit bad versions of it.

According to Cusanus, Muslims presume one God and the spiritual supremacy of Christ but are confused about the actual nature of the one God as Trinity and of Christ as the incarnate Logos. In the *Peace of Faith* Muslims come across as the best bad Christians. This, of course, is of small consequence if they prefer to see themselves as good Muslims rather than bad Christians.

How was Cusanus able to include all other religions in Christianity rather than exclude them? I am going to argue that he did this by simply drawing out a conclusion implicit in the Christian Logos Doctrine. The, Logos, the Word of God, or the creative intelligence of God - who is the second person of the Manifest Godhead (the Trinity) -

was made incarnate in Jesus of Nazareth, who thereby became the one and only Son of God. Presumably, the typical medieval conclusion drawn from this doctrine was that because the Logos was fully present in Jesus of Nazareth that it could not be present elsewhere. The Word of God as the second person of the Manifest Godhead was fully God and that which was fully God became fully man. This does leave very little room for God to be present elsewhere in 'man' which is to say in other religions - if the Logos is *all* in one place it can't (logically) be in another place too.

However, Cusanus drew out the implicit fact that because the Logos became *present* in Jesus the Logos also *transcended* Jesus. There was Christ above Christ. Therefore, the transcendent Christ or Logos was free to also be present elsewhere, and Cusanus argued that anywhere there was religion this was on account of the presence of the transcendent Christ or Logos. Of course the Logos was most perfectly incarnate in Christ as Christ which still necessitated religious conversion to belief in the incarnate Christ, but the conversion could be *gentler* now because it was not of aliens but of only wayward Christians.

Again, we might ask why Cusanus made this turn of thought. Here we might point to the destructive consequences that the war of religious absolutes was manifesting in the world; remember that the *Peace of Faith* was written within weeks after the fall of Christian Constantinople to the Muslim armies of Mehmed II.

Although Cusanus was the first significant historical expression of universal pluralism we can see that he remained about as close to his universalist roots as possible without really remaining one. His unity in diversity was ultimately a unity in a particular

form of Christianity (Christ, Trinity and Church) in which diversity over inessentials could be tolerated and welcomed. I suggested that he got this formula from Islam, but it is also possible that he was influenced by the Eastern Church with whom he had significant contact. Timothy Ware writes on the Orthodox position:

Orthodoxy desires unity-in-diversity, not uniformity; harmony in freedom, not absorption. There is room in the Orthodox Church for many different cultural patterns, for many different ways of worship, and even many different systems of outward organization

Yet there is one field in which diversity cannot be permitted. Orthodoxy insists upon unity in matters of faith. *Before there can be reunion among Christians, there must first be full agreement in faith:* this is a basic principle for Orthodox in all their ecumenical relations.(1993: 309-310)

I will now consider the thinking of Friedrich Schleiermacher who, as I have suggested, defines the “pure” universal pluralist type, even though Cusanus must be acknowledged as its founding member.

Case III: Friedrich Schleiermacher

One of Nicholas of Cusa’s most important theological concepts is the “coincidence of opposites.” Paul Tillich explains this concept as follows:

in everything finite the infinite is present, namely, that power which is the creative unity of the universe as a whole. And in the same way the finite is in the infinite as a potentiality. In the world the divine is developed; in God the world is enveloped.(1968:373)

Although Cusanus had studied Pseudo-Dionysius, who had articulated a similar idea, he claimed that his idea came to him as a divine gift. (1997:6-7)

Cusanus calls God the *absolute maximus* and the world the *contracted maximus*. Christ as both the absolute maximus and the contracted maximus is the coincidence of these two opposites; Christ as the God-man is the supreme coincident. The human being as finite is estranged from God and thus from its highest good which is eternal union with God. Christ as the God-man bridges the gap between the finite and infinite and makes it possible for human beings to be reconciled to God in union, through union with him. (1997: 25-26) There are subtleties in this conception which can't be discussed here; nonetheless, all I wish to emphasize are the main points that are helpful for understanding Schleiermacher; namely, 1) the finite and infinite are *related* and 2) Christ is their supreme point of contact.

Schleiermacher's thinking on religious diversity is important to this study because, on one hand, he represents a significant departure from Cusanus and, on the other, because he is helpful for understanding our next author, Paul Tillich. I will first consider Schleiermacher's thoughts on religious diversity found in *On Religion: Speeches to its Cultural Despisers* (1799), particularly the fifth speech, *On the Religions*. I will then briefly look at his hierarchy for understanding the historic religions (opposed to isolated household forms of worship) found in *The Christian Faith* (1830), specifically in the chapter called *The Diversities of Religious Communions in General....* .

On the Religions

The aim of Cusanus' Peace of Faith was to bring all religious diversity to peace through conformity to one Christian Faith. Diverse religions were *Christian* heresy that, while no longer entirely false, were better off if they would come together and "...accept one faith in the name of all and thereupon establish an everlasting peace.."(1990:63) In Schleiermacher's mind such union was tyrannical and antithetical to the true nature of Christianity.(1988: 222)

Schleiermacher understood religion, and therefore Christianity, in terms of "intuitions of the universe" of which there are as many varied forms as there are true individuals. Intuitions of the universe are rooted in feeling but are not therefore vague: every intuition has its own particular content and its own particular relationship with other intuitions. (1988: 207) An intuition of the universe is most basically an intuition of the infinite in the finite; in other words, religions are instances when finite forms reveal something true about the infinite. Schleiermacher writes:

...the basic intuition of a religion can be nothing other than some intuition of the infinite in the finite, some universal element of religion that may also occur in all other religions - and, should they be complete, must be present - but not placed in the centre of them.(1988:210)

Schleiermacher presumes the plurality of religions and finds them all rooted in this essential form of religion. (1988: 191) But not only is he positive about religious plurality, he is romantic about it. He says that if we want to understand what religion

really is we must see the work of the “world spirit progressing into infinity” and the “eternally rich womb of the universe” in its various forms in the course of human history. (1988: 192) Perhaps an appropriate metaphor here would be of a flower garden filled with flowers of various sizes, shapes, hues, and scents all revealing something about the essence of a flower. However, the progressive element in Schleiermacher’s thought can turn the garden metaphor more into one of a nursery competition to produce a perfect rose. I’ll return to this shortly but now I say more about where Schleiermacher says we find the essence of religion.

Schleiermacher answers that the essence of religion can only be found in the “determinate forms in which it has actually already appeared”; in short, we find religion in the religions. (1988: 193). He makes a distinction between positive religions which are well formed, specific, determinate and consequently reveal something about the nature of the infinite and natural religions that are ill formed, vague, indeterminate and consequently reveal very little about the infinite. For Schleiermacher, the more determinate a religion is the more it is worthy of our attention. (1988: 193) Natural religions are vague feelings that precede real religion; they are “dim imitations that precede that living intuition that opens up the religious life to a person.” (1988: 206)

Every intuition of the universe that bursts forth out of its eternal womb appears in individuals, to become the focal point of a personal religion around which all subsequent religious feelings and views revolve. (1988: 202, 204). However, such personal religion can become collective if other persons revolve all of their religious feelings around this same intuition. Specific forms of religion (or determinate forms of religion) however are

susceptible to corruption; over time the flame of the eternal that once shone forth in it can burn out:

If you investigate them [religions] at their source and their original components, you will find that all the dead slag was once the glowing outpouring of the inner fire that is contained in all religions, and is more or less the true essence of religion as I have presented it to you. Each religion was one of the particular forms eternal and infinite religion necessarily had to assume among finite and limited beings. (1988:194)

Schleiermacher uses the idea of corruption to dismiss Judaism, as he also uses the idea of progress to dismiss it, by relegating it to the childhood of religion.(1988:211)

Christianity, on the other hand, while suffering its fair share of corruption stands as the most advanced, or evolved, religion to have appeared within the history of religion.

In contrast to Judaism he writes:

The original intuition of Christianity is more glorious, more sublime, more worthy of adult humanity. more penetrating into the spirit of systematic religion, and extending farther over the whole universe. (1988:213)

Beyond this rhetoric Schleiermacher identifies the basic intuition of Judaism as “universal immediate retribution”; of the infinite reacting against the finite through another finite instrument, or of God punishing and rewarding persons for their free acts through other persons or things that in this respect are not acting freely. Whether or not his is the basic intuition of Judaism is another question. All that we can say is that this is what Schleiermacher took it to be and that he regarded it as an inferior basic intuition to that of

Christianity. Let's now look at how he conceived of Christianity's basic intuition.

I will begin by letting Schleiermacher describe the basic intuition of Christianity and then I will try to explain:

It is none other than the intuition of the universal straining of everything finite against the unity of the whole and of the way in which the deity handles this striving, how it handles the enmity directed against it and sets bounds to the ever greater distance by scattering over the whole individual points that are at once finite and infinite, at once human and divine. Corruption and redemption, enmity and mediation are the two sides of this intuition that are inseparably bound to each other, and the shape of all religious material in Christianity and its whole forms are determined through them. (1988:213)

More simply:

it [the infinite] sends its ambassadors in whom its own spirit dwells in order to pour divine powers among humanity.(1988: 214)

Let's pause and try to make sense of this, so far. The infinite manifests itself in finite form so as to be present to other finite forms. These mediators of the infinite are infinite *and* finite, or divine *and* human. They redeem the finite by linking it again to the infinite; which is to say they redeem corrupt finitude that is estranged or separated from the infinite. The enmity between the finite and the infinite is overcome through their mediation (through their coming together in the middle). We can now see that this position is practically identical to Cusanus' and in both cases the supreme mediator or coincidence is Christ. One important difference though is that Schleiermacher is overtly progressive and sees progress *beyond* Christianity. For Cusanus, Christianity is perfection

and from this vantage point other religions may be judged as “progressively” better or worse. But here it would be more accurate to say relatively instead of progressively. Even so, Cusanus is closed to further development and Schleiermacher is open to it. On the openly progressive quality of religion Schleiermacher writes:

Even while the finite wishes to intuit the universe, it strains against it, always seeking without finding and losing what it has found; ever one-sided, ever vacillating, ever halting at the particular and accidental, and ever wanting more than to intuit, the finite loses sight of its goal. Every revelation is in vain. Everything is swallowed up by earthly sense, everything is carried away by the indwelling irreligious principle, and the deity makes ever new arrangements; through its power alone ever more splendid revelations issue from the womb of the old; it places ever more sublime mediators between itself and the human being; in every later ambassador it unites the deity more intimately with humanity so that through them and by them we might learn to recognize the eternal being; and yet the old lament is never lifted that we do not perceive what is the spirit of God. (1988: 214)

I will return to the implications of this sense of open ended progress for Schleiermacher’s teleology, but for now I want to discuss his idea that Christianity is religion “raised to a higher power.” (1988: 214) Christianity characteristically likes to intuit the universe in religion and history. I think this means that Christians intuit the universe, not just in the universe, but also in the determinate forms of intuitions of the universe. In Schleiermacher’s words, it treats religions as material for religion. (1988:214) But because the recognition of corruption is a part of its basic intuition (see the lengthy quote above) it is thoroughly self-critical. It recognizes and criticizes the finite when it tries to stand as the infinite (as such), and thus corrupts the presence of the infinite in the finite. The theme of self criticism, which implies the fight of religion against religion, is one that

Paul Tillich further develops; however, I will not discuss that here.

Nonetheless, to look upon all aspects of the finite and see the infinite is the “highest goal and virtuosity” in Christianity.”(1988: 217) Schleiermacher describes the mood accompanying the capacity to see the holy mixed with the profane and transitory as a “holy sadness.”(1988:219) He further says that this mood accompanies every other feeling in Christians and was present in its founder through and through. (1988: 217)

To be able to see the infinite in the finite requires “higher mediation.” In Schleiermacher’s precise word, “..everything finite requires higher mediation in order to be connected with the divine.” (1988: 218) This, argues Schleiermacher, is the basic intuition of the universe that came to clarity in Christ’s soul. Moreover, if everything finite requires higher mediation so as not to stray even further from the universe, then that which mediates must not be only finite. It must be both finite and infinite: “it must be a part of the divine nature as much and in the same sense in which it is a part of the finite.”(1988:219) Christ not only recognized that the finite was in need of higher mediation, but that he was in the best position to mediate the infinite to the finite beings in his world. In other words, he was also conscious of himself as a mediator, and this found expression in his affirmation that he was the son of God (1988: 219)

However, although the idea of Divine mediation while being born in Christ and applied to his own being was not limited to application only in him. There could be other mediators of the Divine. (1988:219) Schleiermacher argues that all who take the intuition of mediation as the basis of their religion are Christians, but that Christians rooted in this basic intuition can be themselves mediators and thus produce new Christian scriptures. In

other words, “..not all that can be said within Christianity has been said.”(1988:220)

Nonetheless, Schleiermacher says that *all* religions do run their course; the “childish religions evaporate.” (1988: 221) Schleiermacher applied this principle to Judaism, but also to Christianity; it too was transitory, and even aware of this fact. When would Christianity evaporate? Schleiermacher answers using Paul’s teleology - When the Father becomes all in all:

there will come a time, it [Christianity] declares when there will be no more talk of a mediator, but the Father will be all in all. (221)

When he asks when this time will come he answers that he fears it lies beyond time because of the pervasiveness of the other half of the basic Christian intuition i.e. the corruption of the divine in finite things or human beings. Schleiermacher actually guarantees that this corruption will be endless by affirming as a truism that nothing finite can contain wholly the infinite. Thus, only a cosmic vision like Paul’s can overcome corruption entirely.

Nonetheless, Schleiermacher hopes that perception of the infinite in the finite would progress at such a steady pace that the occasional setback, wherein the finite corrupts the infinite, would hardly be noticed. He desires such a situation and says that at that point he would “gladly stand on the ruins of the religion I honour.” (1988:222) But corruption comes upon everything earthly and consequently Christianity is reborn in every generation with “new messengers of God” to draw finitude to the infinite and thus purify what has been corrupted. In this sense there will always be Christianity. Again, the

truism that nothing finite can contain the infinite in its entirety assures this.

Schleiermacher asks, if Christianity - or the "religion of religions" - will always exist does it not make sense that it should be "universally disseminated" and rule all of humanity. He answers no saying that "Christianity disdains this despotism"(1988:222) Christianity cherishes each of its elements to the degree that it would wish to affirm each of them as its very centre. But more than seeking an endless array of variations within itself, it also seeks to recognize (intuit) religion outside of itself. *Humbled* by its own long history of corruption, it is able to watch gladly as new forms of religion develop outside of this corruption. What Schleiermacher says at this point I want to strongly emphasize:

The religion of religions cannot gather enough material for the truest aspect of its innermost intuition, and just as nothing is more irreligious than to demand uniformity in humanity generally, so nothing is more unchristian than to seek uniformity in religion. (1988: 222)

He goes on to add that all forms of worshipping and intuiting the universe must be allowed, including ever new formations of religion. This is probably a justification for his own fairly radical point of view, but the point I want to emphasize in the above passage is that while Schleiermacher advocates no uniformity in religion, he also *allows* no diversity of religion by always reading as an expression of the *truest aspect* of Christianities *innermost intuition*. If there is nothing deeper than Christianity's innermost intuition than there is nothing deeper, or beyond, Christianity - except perhaps the fulfilment of its own ideal when "God is all in all."

In *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher further develops his idea of Christianity's innermost intuition and expresses it as the feeling of absolute dependence of everything finite upon one Supreme Infinite.(1960:34) He then works out a hierarchy of world's historical religions based on this. I will now very briefly consider this argument.

The Diversities of Religious Communities in General

Of the historical religions there are three types: monotheism, polytheism and fetishism (idolatry). Monotheism is the highest type. It can be described as a state wherein the world is taken into one's self consciousness which thereby expands to become a general consciousness of finitude that feels itself wholly dependent upon the one Supreme Infinite.(1960: 35) Of the monotheistic religions only three have appeared within the history of religion: Judaism, Islam and, most perfectly, Christianity. All other historical religions are either fetishism or polytheism.

People remain at the level of idol worship because their sense of totality has not yet developed. (1960: 34) It is a confused state of consciousness wherein the self has not learned to distinguish the high from the low and, consequently, tends to identify the 'highest' as a particular object arising to the senses.

The translation from idol worship to polytheism takes place when many local idols are united in one Being who possesses all of their powers and transcends all their local references. However, so long as such higher Beings are perceived as being present in *many* locations there is a tendency for them to backslide into idols. Therefore polytheism

never gets a foothold in reality until the higher Beings completely transcend locality. The self consciousness formed when a plurality of higher Beings are conceived contains at least a presentiment that behind this plurality there is one supreme being. (1960: 35) This is where polytheism opens up to monotheism and begins to disappear. The higher self consciousness is able to take the whole world into itself, and as a unity itself posits a greater unity as its source. The polytheist is never able to dissociate their self consciousness from a plurality of sense perceptions and thus posits a plurality as its source.

Of the three monotheistic religions Judaism by its tendency to limit the love of Jehovah to the people of Abraham betrays a lingering connection to fetishism; Islam, on the other hand, despite its strict monotheism betrays "a large measure of the sensible upon the character of the emotions which elsewhere keeps men on the level of Polytheism"(1960: 37); Christianity being free from these two weaknesses is, therefore, the most highly developed and perfect form of religion.

Analysis III

I will reserve most of my analysis for Schleiermacher's position in *The Speeches*. The only reason I included this brief presentation from *The Christian Faith* is to show a developed hierarchy, which is so characteristic of universal pluralism.

The turn of Cusanus from universalism to universal pluralism is barely perceptible; in Schleiermacher it is marked. I have called relative truth the integrating

principle of truth for the universal pluralist's spiritual universe, and ranking the means of conversion to it. When you are integrated into the universal pluralist's spiritual universe you *will be* ranked; the spiritual universe will be a hierarchy. This spiritual universe will have no determinate forms of either perfect religious truth or basic religious truth; all truth will be relative. Let's see if Schleiermacher fits the mould. This may seem like an exercise in futility given the fact that the "mould" has been largely based on Schleiermacher. But it is not, because it will demonstrate if the mould is well or badly constructed.

Schleiermacher ensures that all truth will be converted to relative truth, on one hand, by placing perfect truth out of time and, on the other, by denying essential truth a particular form.

The appearance of the infinite in the finite, through a mediator, is a moment of fleeting religious perfection; fleeting because it is prone to corruption. This corruption is perpetually purified by ever new appearances of religion in which the infinite again becomes present to the finite through a mediator; but again *this* is prone to corruption. Perfection that cannot be corrupted will only be the case when the infinite is perpetually and fully present in the totality of finitude - when God is all in all. Until this heavenly time, when there is not estrangement between the finite and the infinite, there will be a need for mediation of the divine to corrupted finitude. When will this be the case? Schleiermacher admits that it is out of time, in Reinhold Niebuhr's words this perfection is an "impossible possibility." With religious perfection placed out of reach as an ideal out of time, the practically highest truth becomes the relatively highest truth.

The essential, or basic, religious form is intuition. All religions, of which there is endless variety, are different intuitions of the universe. But, how do we know the essential form of religion?- only through its determinate forms. And, once we see the essential form of religion in one of its determinate forms is this the essential form of religion? - No, this is simply one of its determinate forms. And, are the determinate forms of religion equal? - No, some are high and some are low. In other words, nothing *positive* can be ascribed to the essential form of religion; positive value can only be given to the particular forms the essential takes on, and these are *all* and *always* of greater or lesser value.

Schleiermacher by occupying the middle ground between universalism and pluralism is open to criticism from both sides. The universalist may think he ranks Christianity too lowly and the pluralist may think he ranks Christianity too highly. This is a foregone conclusion given the fact that neither pluralists nor universalists rank religions. Any rank given to a universalist's religion is too low and any rank given to a pluralist's religion is too high.

I have argued that hierarchy is the hallmark of the universal pluralist's spiritual universe, whereas totality and equality are the hallmark of universalism and pluralism respectively. These are such marked characteristics that I am willing to say that anyone who ranks religions is a universal pluralist, anyone who equalizes religions is a pluralist and anyone who makes one religious form absolute is a universalist. There are, of course, subtleties within each of these positions; I will now discuss some of these present in universal pluralism: those within universalism and pluralism I will leave off until the

third section.

Universal pluralists rank religions. Cusanus ranks religions, Schleiermacher ranks religions; Tillich ranks religions; all, therefore, are universal pluralists. However, they all rank religions differently and consequently offer an excellent sample of the subtleties, or different shades, within universal pluralism. As I have already said, Cusanus leans towards universalism, Tillich towards pluralism and Schleiermacher is more or less in the middle. I will now look at Cusanus and Schleiermacher as variant forms of universal pluralism, but will not consider Tillich until after the presentation of his case.

I have argued that universal pluralists neither affirm religious truth as a basic form or as a perfect form, but always as a relatively perfect/imperfect form. This is most obviously the case in Schleiermacher. As I have just tried to argue, he undercuts the idea of a basic form of truth by making basic truth formless and the idea of a perfect form of truth by making it unattainable (out of time). With the top and bottom effectively removed all that remains is the middle ground of relatively true/untrue religions. With Cusanus and Tillich the middle ground is blurred, in opposing directions.

I have argued that Cusanus probably created his relative spiritual universe by drawing out an implicit fact of the Logos doctrine; that Christ transcends Christ. This allows the transcendent Christ (Logos) to be present in other religions and not just in Christianity where the Logos is perfectly present. But if the Logos is perfectly and completely present in Jesus (Christ), is it possible for the Logos to be present elsewhere? This is the side of the same equation that universalists work to prove that the Logos is nowhere present but in Jesus (Christ). How does Cusanus prevent himself from

backsliding into universalism, or even heading down the slippery slope towards pluralism proper? He affirms that Christ is both transcendent and immanent; both human and divine: both absolute maximum and contracted maximum. More accurately he is *between* God and man, which allows him to be *both* without committing a logical absurdity.

Cusanus' conception of Christ between God and man is a stronger affirmation of man than is the conception of Christ as incarnation. The incarnation concept implies God becoming man which effectively replaces man with God and this is why it is so difficult to frame a Divine incarnation in anything but absolutist terms. On the other hand, Christ as absolute maximum *and* contracted maximum, or as mediator of the infinite to the finite, does not replace man with God but lets *man* appear as God. The emphasis is on seeing the infinite *in* the finite.

Just as believing in an incarnate God is no easy task - it seems to me that the entire Gospel of John is written to persuade us to believe in this most unbelievable of phenomena - it is also not easy to see the infinite in the finite. Just flashes here and there, fragments that are endlessly corrupted, etc. Schleiermacher's description of this problem is so acute that it deserves repetition:

Even while the finite wishes to intuit the universe, it strains against it, always seeking without finding and losing what it has found; ever one-sided, ever vacillating, ever halting at the particular and accidental, and ever wanting more than to intuit, the finite loses sight of its goal. Every revelation is in vain. Everything is swallowed up by earthly sense, everything is carried away by the indwelling religious principle..... (1988:214)

Although, Schleiermacher and Cusanus shared the same form of religion or

Christianity, i.e. they both conceived in the infinite in the finite, Schleiermacher was more sensitive to the precarious nature of this form of religion and applied its implication to Christianity. Christianity was susceptible to corruption, improvement, and *ultimately* obsolescence. It is impossible to think of a fifteenth century Bishop drawing these same conclusions, even though in theory he should have been able to. Given Cusanus' religious environment the conclusions he did draw were radical enough.

As said, I will finish off this analysis of the different variations of universal pluralism after looking at Tillich's case, which I will now do

Case IV: The Shift in Paul Tillich's Thought on Religious Pluralism

In this case, I will try to demonstrate the shift in Paul Tillich's thought on religious pluralism by considering the change in his thoughts towards Christianity and Buddhism as a consequence of his trip to Japan where he encountered living Buddhism.

In Tillich' *Systematic Theology* Jesus as the Christ is the central event in the history of human religion. All other religions are either historical preparation for his appearance or the reception of it. It is central because all leads up to it and all follows from it. Judaism has a special place in this sequence because it provided the actual historical preparation for the manifestation of Jesus as the Christ in space and time. Islam is a religion of law like Judaism and its purpose is to prepare another historical culture for Christ. This is not to say that Christ will come again, but that this culture is being prepared for the reception of Christ who has already come. In this schema Tillich did not

have much to say about the eastern traditions (Hinduism, Buddhism, etc.) because he saw them as essentially mystical and a-historical. He says of the Buddha,

He is the decisive example of an embodiment of the Spirit of Illumination which has happened and can happen at any time, but he is not an historical movement which leads to him and is derived from him." (1963:368)

Mysticism for Tillich is an experience which takes place subjectively in individuals, without any relation to the objective world. A mystic can be in a state of subjective bliss while living in completely corrupt world. Tillich is critical of this perceived negligence towards the condition of the objective world in eastern religions. The Buddha might offer "salvation" in a subjective Nirvanic state but Christ offers a complete salvation by maintaining essential unity with God under all dimensions of life - both subjective and objective. Tillich explains that Jesus as the Christ is the self manifestation of God under the conditions of existence; he is the "New Being" who overcomes the ambiguities of life (autonomy and heteronomy, absolutism and relativism, formalism and emotionalism, subjectivity and objectivity etc.) by remaining united with God under all dimensions of life. By participating in the life of the New Being a human being is also able to overcome the ambiguities of life and remain in union with God under all dimensions of life; thereby conquering estrangement from God. This saved condition is represented symbolically as the "Kingdom of God," and Christ is the "central manifestation" of the Kingdom of God. In *Systematic Theology* Buddhism comes across as incomplete in its subjectivity, whereas Christianity by incorporating both objectivity and subjectivity in balance is presented as

complete or fulfilled.

Before we can understand Tillich's change of attitude after his trip to Japan, I think it is essential to understand the dynamic-typological approach to different faiths that he worked out in *Dynamics of Faith*.

In *Dynamics of Faith* Tillich argues that the universal base of all religions is the experience of the holy which has two elements: the holiness of being and the holiness of what ought to be. The holiness of being is the felt presence of the holy which "grasps the mind with terrifying and fascinating power. It breaks into ordinary reality, shakes it and drives it beyond itself in an ecstatic way." (1957:56) However, the holy also stands as a judgement over all that is. It is the law of being that demands our conformity. The holy stands for what we essentially are and therefore for what we ought to be. This element of the holy can be called the holiness of what ought to be. Tillich calls the form of faith experienced in the holiness of being the ontological type of faith and the form of faith experienced in the holiness of what ought to be the moral type of faith.

Tillich says that neither type of faith is pure, or even exists in reality, because both elements of the holy are present in every experience of the holy; therefore every type of faith has elements of both types. Even so, predominance of one element or the other can be seen in particular religions, and the dynamics of faith - manifest in the conflicts and interdependence of religions - can be seen in terms of these two types of faith. Ultimately, religion is driving towards a unity of these two types of faith, but before I consider this let's look briefly at the types of faith within the two types of faith.

The ontological type of faith can be understood in terms of a sacramental type and

mystical type. The sacramental type of faith is a state of being grasped by the holy through a particular medium and can only be understood in terms of the correlation between the experiencing subject and the sacramental object. For Tillich, the danger of the sacramental type of faith is the tendency to take that through which ultimacy is experienced as the ultimate itself. Tillich does not think that the sacramental experience of the holy can ever be criticized from outside of the "correlation of faith" but that it can be critically asked if the medium through which one experiences ultimate concern expresses true ultimacy. He contends that it is this question which is the driving force in the history of religion which drives religion past the sacramental type of faith in different directions. Nonetheless, all types of faith maintain an element of the sacramental.

A radical criticism of the sacramental type of faith which Tillich still classifies as an ontological type of faith is mystical faith. Mystical faith claims that no medium through which ultimacy is experienced can ever express ultimacy itself. Only in the depth of the human soul, where one tries to merge the mind with the contents of one's ultimate concern or the ground of being, can the real as real be experienced. But mystics realize the infinite distance between the finite and infinite and therefore conceive of their goal of union with the infinite as attainable only in part, or in glimpses, and perhaps never in this life time. Like the sacramental faith, elements of the mystical faith are present in all other types.

As mentioned already, the other type of faith is the moral type in which faith is experienced in terms of divine law which is both a gift and a demand. There are three types of moral faiths: the juristic, the conventional, and the ethical. Tillich sites Talmudic

Judaism and Islam as most representative of the juristic type. These faiths contain ritual laws which point to the sacramental *stage* of religion, but they also have social laws which transcend the ritual ones, creating a holiness of what ought to be. The conventional type of moral faith is characterized by a minimum of sacramental elements and a maximum of moral elements. Tillich sites Confucianism as an example of this type of Faith, and regards it as basically secular despite its few sacramental and therefore religious elements. He also sites it as the negative ground for the infiltration of the sacramental and mystical faiths of Taoism and Buddhism in China, and the positive ground for the infiltration of the communist faith. The third and Tillich argues the most influential of the moral types is the ethical type of "Old Testament Judaism." In this type of faith there is a strong sacramental basis but this never overwhelms the holiness of what ought to be, and obedience to the law of justice has always remained the way to God. The Jewish Prophets would criticize any reliance on the sacramental element of religion if it denied the moral element. Tillich sees the "world historical mission" of the Jewish faith as ensuring that the moral element, or justice, is a part of every faith.

For Tillich, the moral and ontological elements are both essentially united in any experience of the holy, although they diverge and conflict in the life of faith. But because they are essentially united, one type of faith can never destroy, or overcome, the other type, and in fact all faiths are ultimately striving to manifest the unity that is inherent in the experience of the holy which is the universal root of all religion. Therefore, the unity of the two types of religion is the highest type of religion. Tillich sees the most conspicuous example of this unity is found in Paul's description of the Spirit wherein the

Spirit is conceived as "the unity of the ecstatic and the personal, of the sacramental and the moral, of the mystical and the rational."(1957:.72-73) He says that if Christianity is not to regain this experience of unity, for real, it will not be able to claim that it fulfills the dynamics of faith, both in the past and the future.

It is important to notice that in the new typology Buddhism is again classified as a mystical religion, but it is now a type in which the mystical element predominates though not absolutely. Thus, Buddhism can be admitted to have elements, albeit weak, of the ethical. In this typology different Christianities are identifiable across the board, including the highest type wherein the types are united.³

When Tillich tried to understand Buddhism again after his trip to Japan, he did so also again within the framework of his dynamic typology worked out in *Dynamics of Faith*, and Buddhism still came up as a mystical type of faith. However, what radically changed for Tillich was that he was now calling Christianity, on whole, an ethical type of faith.⁴ Or rather he was willing to say that in Christianity the ethical element

³

I have never seen Tillich say together that Jesus as the Christ represents the perfect revelation of the Divine, and that Paul's doctrine of the Spirit represents a perfect reception of the Divine as revealed in Christ. Perhaps he didn't do this because this would have made the realization of the aim of all religions, in the unification of the types of faith, a uniquely Christian experience; and in his later years he was only willing to throw it out as a *possibility* that there was a central event in the history of religions which might make possible a concrete theology of "universalistic significance." (1966: 81)

⁴

In this consideration Tillich seems to reduce the ontological types to the mystical type and the moral types to the ethical type but he might just as well be working within the larger categories without identifying them. However, in his very last construction of the types he suggests three: the sacramental, the mystical and the ethical. Here he seems to present the sacramental as base or childish religion which is a fairly unconscious

predominates, though it does of course have a weaker mystical element. It is this weaker mystical element which makes it possible for Christians to understand the mystical concepts of Buddhism. Likewise the weaker ethical elements present in Buddhism makes intelligible to Buddhists the ethical Christian concepts. He identified the "Kingdom of God" and "Nirvana" as the symbols of the inner aim of Christianity and Buddhism respectively. Tillich also reemphasized the idea of a polar relationship in which elements are interdependent and never mutually exclusive, while always driving towards their unity:

A polar relation is a relation of interdependent elements, each which is necessary for the other one and for the whole, although it is in polar tension with the opposite element. The tension drives both to conflicts and beyond the conflicts to possible union of the polar elements. (1963:55)

Even so, Tillich was very cautious about any attempt to reduce the types to a common denominator thus denying each their concrete historical reality, or of trying to put the two together for something more complete. Tillich insisted that a religion can only be founded on the basis of a new revelatory experience. (1963: 67-68) But even here he put forth the suggestion that Paul's doctrine of the Spirit represented a fragmentary manifestation of this highest type of faith, in which the two elements inherent in any

reception or experience of the holy. The mystical and ethical types are still based on the sacramental experience but also come to a conscious realization of the implications in this experience. The mystic realizes that the medium of the holy is not the holy itself and the ethical prophet realizes the judgement of what ought to be implied in any experience of the holy. (1966: 86-88)

experience of the holy remain in tact. Unfortunately, he did not address the seeming difficulty that the highest type of faith is also a Christian type of Faith. To this I think he could have made the simple answer that this higher type of faith does not predominate in Christianity. Here he might also have said that although the mystical element predominates in Buddhism it does not lack altogether the ethical element, and therefore this highest type of faith is potential in Buddhism also. Granted, he says this implicitly by saying that the highest type is the *telos* of all types of faith.

However, I think Tillich could have immensely bolstered the validity of his typology as a useful tool for understanding all religions by finding in the history of Buddhism a fragmentary manifestation of the "Religion of the Concrete Spirit" as he reluctantly called the highest type of faith in the last lecture of his life. Of course it is theoretically *possible* that the Religion of the Concrete Spirit has only ever found expression within the Christian tradition, but if this is the case I would be very cautious in suggesting it as the inner aim of *all* religions.

Analysis IV

Tillich ranks religions and is, therefore, a universal pluralist in the likes of Cusanus and Schleiermacher. Apart from this affinity I am going to argue that they belong to the same type of religion, or Christianity. They belong to the type that conceives of Christ as a God-man instead of an incarnation, or God become man. They belong to the type that sees the infinite in the finite not just the infinite.

Tillich's affinity with this group becomes evident right away when we consider that the experience of the holy, which is the universal sacramental base of all religions, is precisely an experience of seeing the finite in the infinite. This basic universal form of religion is, however, dumb, and prone to corruption; thus it is "broken" and transcended in the direction of the mystical and the ethical. This is religion to a higher power in action. The ethical and mystical experience of the holy found the ethical and mystical types of faith, and practically all religions belong to one of these two types. The eastern religions tend to be more of the mystical type and the western religions more of the ethical type. Of course, neither side is mutually exclusive; there is no ethical religion *completely* without mystical content just as there is no mystical religion *completely* without ethical content. Moreover, the two types are ultimately unified in the perfect type of faith, the Religion of the Concrete Spirit.

The genius of the name "Religion of the Concrete Spirit" reveals perfectly Tillich's affinity with Schleiermacher and Cusanus. Ultimately, you are both finite *and* infinite, both Divine *and* human, both concrete *and* spirit. Of course the Religion of the Concrete Spirit is as elusive as St. Paul's spiritual body, and Schleiermacher's "God within you" (1988:223). The Religion of the Concrete Spirit only appears in fragments here and there within the history of religions. It is ultimately fulfilled in the kingdom of God but, then again, here we are out of time.

I said that universal pluralists never give a positive value to either perfect religion or basic religion. This is obviously true for Tillich with respect to perfect religion. Here he is in line with Schleiermacher - endless fragments of true religion, endless corruptions

of true religion, and an unattainable goal - perfection is *practically* out of reach. But on the other end Tillich seems to give a positive value to a basic form of religion. The experience of the Holy, where the Holy breaks into finitude to become present there, is a *universal* religious experience. But this basic religious form does not become the location of truth as it does for the pluralist, instead it is transcended because it is basically dumb, low, unconscious. Typical of universal pluralists, most basic means for Tillich *least true*. Given this qualification, Tillich can hardly be called egalitarian or pluralistic.

But, on the other hand, Tillich affirms equality among the two higher types of religion, to which most religions belong. And significantly, Christianity too belongs predominantly to one of these higher types of *half true* religions. This is quite a drop from Cusanus' and even Schleiermacher's appraisal of the relative worth of Christianity. I suggested that Cusanus' social context probably kept him from drawing out the implications of his theology for Christianity the way that Schleiermacher did. He *remained* something of a universalist in a universalistic environment. Perhaps, in the other direction, we can say that Tillich *became* something of a pluralist in a pluralistic environment.

For most of Tillich's theological career Christ was the central manifestation of the Kingdom of God; the New Being who conquered estrangement between God and man under the conditions of existence. However at the end of it he was suggesting that *maybe* there was a central event in the history of religions that could make possible a concrete theology of universal significance.(1966: 81) Just as it is hard to imagine Schleiermacher expressing his views on religious diversity in Cusanus' environment it is equally hard to

imagine him expressing these same views in Tillich's environment. Tillich became very pluralistic and egalitarian in his environment, but of course by holding out for the possibility of absolute truth he never fully crossed the line and became a pluralist. He continued to rank religions according to his ideal of perfection and thus remained a universal pluralist.

How Tillich went from conceiving Christianity as the singularly best religion in the history of religion to a form of half truth running parallel to the mystical religions of the east is not easy to discern. However, it is not impossible and I am going to provide a possible answer.

The first step to understanding this process is to figure out where Tillich's dynamic typology came from. I am going to suggest that it is rooted in own theology and his familiarity with other Christian theologies. By theologies I mean conceptions of how Divinity and humanity are related. Remember, that in my introduction this is how I defined religion and consequently I will use these terms synonymously here.

I have already discussed how Cusanus, Schleiermacher and Tillich all conceive of religion (again, the relationship between Divinity and humanity) in terms of the infinite being present in the finite. Because these three are Christians they all read this form of religion back to Christ, as his form of religion. Thus, Christ becomes *both* God *and* man. He is the finite and the infinite, the absolute maximum and the contracted maximum. Christ is not just God, he is a new *man*; a God-man.

This position is biblical and I will argue that St. Paul is its dominant biblical

representative. Tillich himself suggests this when he says that Paul's doctrine of the Spirit is the greatest expression of what he calls the Religion of the Concrete Spirit. Besides this we can point to Schleiermacher's adoption of Paul's teleology. Consider the following passage from I Corinthians:

If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being" the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.

I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." (I Co 15: 44-54)

Here Christ is the "second Adam," "the second man," "the man from heaven." All of the opposing tendencies in existence are overcome by becoming one: the body becomes spirit, the perishable is clothed in the imperishable, death becomes eternal life. The parallels between this and Tillich's ideas of concrete spirit, the Holy breaking into finitude, Christ as the New Being, the Kingdom of God beyond time, eternal life, etc. are too obvious to need commentary.

An examination of Paul's social context can be provocative for understanding his theology. He was both a Greek and a Jew and consequently struggled between mystical

Greek tendencies on one hand and ethical Jewish tendencies on the other. Paul struggled to be free of the law and then struggled with the effects of antinomianism. Here we have the first hints of why Tillich, as a Christian in the Pauline tradition, would conceive of the struggle within the history of religion in terms of an ethical side and a mystical side, and their solution in terms of their ultimate union. Paul lived this same struggle and proposed the same solution.

Let's now consider what I have suggested as the more typically Greek and mystical type of Christianity, and the more typically Jewish and ethical type of Christianity. I will argue that the former has its fullest biblical expression in the Gospel of John and the latter in the Synoptic Gospels.

As I have already said, the Gospel of John reads like an argument to convince one of the unbelievable phenomenon of God becoming man. Here the implication is that man is dissolved whereas with Paul the implication is that the man is made new as God and man. Time and again in the Gospel of John Jesus is trying to convince his enemies and disciples alike that the Father is in him:

Don't you know me Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say 'show us the Father'? Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? (JN 14: 9-10)

Here then are two visions of Christ, as the founder of two different types of Christianity. In one case Christ is God and in the other he is a God-man. The third vision, which is also biblical, is Jesus as the man of God; as Prophet of God, or Messenger of

God. Again, what each of these forms of Christianity is trying to articulate is an understanding (conviction) of how Divinity and humanity are related; even more, how they are *ultimately* related. Christ is the perfect vision of how man is related to God.

As said, the vision of Jesus as man of God is most predominant in the Synoptic Gospels. Christ's mission from God is to preach the glad tidings of his coming Kingdom. The Synoptics are filled with ethical guidance, with laws, on what one must do to inherit the Kingdom, in a way that neither John nor Paul's Epistle's are. In Matthew Jesus even affirms that the Mosaic law will be binding until heaven and earth disappear. The vision of Christ as a messenger of the Kingdom is the vision of Jesus/Christ that John Hick adopts. He rejects the affirmation of Christ's Divinity and envisions him as a man so totally submitted to the will of God that he becomes an instrument of the Divine Will. In the Synoptics, Jesus struggles with the will of God but ultimately submits. In John the will the Son is effortlessly the will of the Father because the Father is in the son.

In the Gospels Christ/Jesus Christ/Jesus is presented as being related to God in three very different ways: as God, and God-man and as man of God. Tillich's religious preference was for Jesus as the Christ or the God-man; this was his ideal. However, he was also sensitive to and aware of the mystical (Johannine) type of Christianity and the ethical (Synoptic) type. He had to be because his religious ideal was a polarization, or attempted union, of these two types. However, the two poles were ultimately failed visions of the ultimate vision of Christ, which is to say of the ultimate vision of the Divine/human relationship. The mystical type overemphasized God, the ethical type overemphasized man. the (impossible) union of them was perfection.

This was essentially Tillich's position in his first typology. The mystical and ethical types were unbalanced forms of Christianity, as were all other types of mystical and ethical types of faith. True Protestantism, which I think he thought of as the true form of Christianity, from time to time balanced the sides and fragmentarily achieved the inner aim of religious history. This was the first application of the typology. This same typology was then applied differently to Buddhism and Christianity. Regardless of the results, I think this was the process whereby he came to his final position.

As for the results, the fact that Tillich's typology is based on real types of religion within Christianity makes it promising for making sense of this situation. However, even if I might accept the types, I am uninclined to accept the direction of the typology or the relationship between the types. There is little evidence to suggest that the Religion of the Concrete Spirit is fulfilling either the mystical or ethical types of faith. And my doubts over this are not alleviated by the promise that some time, out of time, its telos will be realized. As a typology to be applied to all the religions of the world, I simply don't think it works. Let's now consider John Hick.

Case V: John Hick

John Hick is the only author in these five cases who is a pluralist. In the other cases I have occasionally suggested some links between the authors position on religious diversity and their social context. John Hick is a contemporary theologian and therefore has lived, and still does live, in the modern world in which religious diversity is a vivid

fact of every day life. Religions are today face to face in shared cultural spaces, in ways that are without historical precedent. Consequently, when I look at Hick I am going to look at a couple of ways that the social situation in the late 20th century may have influenced his thinking on religious diversity. I will begin with a short presentation of his position articulated in a paper called, *A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism*.

A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism

For Hick, Religion is basically human response to the ultimate divine Reality. When this response is positively open, it transforms us; this transformation is called liberation, salvation, enlightenment etc. This process of salvation is basically the same in all traditions. Hick defines religion as “the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality centredness.” (1985: 29)

Religion is a genuine *human* response to God or the Real but it never results in pure or direct knowledge of God because it is always “mediated” through human ways of knowing. In other words, our knowledge of God is always shaped and limited by our inherited religious concepts through which we conceive, and even perceive or experience, the Real.

At the heart of Hick’s “pluralistic hypothesis” is the distinction between God *an Sich* and God as experienced. God *an Sich* is the common core of all religions, but also the reason for religious plurality: God *an Sich* is one but can be experienced, humanly and *indirectly*, in a variety of ways. Thus, dialogue among different religions might be

fruitful, not for the sake of conversion, but because it might illumine for us different aspects of the Real, suggest to us different possible responses to the Real, and foster co-operation and mutual enrichment in our common planetary struggles.

Again, Hick argues that the universal "religious act" is one of turning from self-centeredness to God-centeredness, which is salvation, etc. As to whether salvation is more available in some the world's great religious traditions than in others, Hick answers negatively:

...the great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real or to the Ultimate from within the major variant cultural ways of being human; and within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centredness to Reality-centredness is manifestly taking place - and taking place, so far as human observation can tell, to the same extent. Thus, the great religious traditions are to be regarded as alternative soteriological 'spaces' within which, or 'ways' along which, men and women can find salvation/ liberation/ enlightenment/ fulfilment. (1985: 36-37)

Before coming to this conclusion he points to the development of several "degree Christologies" that have made it possible for Christians to think about Christ's "spiritual inspiration" in terms of *degrees* rather than in terms of *all-or-nothing*. One such degree Christology is Donald Baillie's 'paradox of grace' Christology (in *God was in Christ* 1948). It argues that insofar as an individual turns openly to God, that God is able to act in and through that individual. This act of giving oneself to God and thereby becoming an *instrument* of the Divine Will can be described as a "paradox of Grace." This paradox of Grace takes place in Christ to an extraordinary degree but is not therefore limited to taking place in him. This means that if Divine inspiration is supremely active in Christ

that this must be proved by historical evidence and not concluded *a priori*. I am not positive if Hick takes the experience the paradox of grace as the normative expression of Christian salvation, but I think that he does because of his understanding of Jesus as Prophet, rather than Christ as Incarnation or God-man. In fact, he affirms this as the true and original understanding.

I have already given Hick's conclusion that the world's great spiritual traditions offer salvation to a more or less equal degree. He arrives at this conclusion by presuming that there must be a strong connection between the authenticity of the various forms of religious experience and the moral fruit they bear (1985: 38). In other words, a religion is proven more authentic by the moral actions of its adherents. Hick calls those who bear moral fruits "saints" while recognizing the wide variety of "sainthood" in the various traditions. Nonetheless, Hick comes to the conclusion that no one religion is producing a disproportionate number of saints and therefore no religion is ethically better than any other, which is to say that no religion is better than any other in any sense.

As for explaining the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the different forms of religion, particularly those of eastern and western cultures, Hick has a solution. This is built upon the aforementioned fact that knowledge of God is mediated through human ways of knowing which are culturally conditioned. Hick argues that human beings have developed two predominant concepts through which all perceptions of the Real have been filtered: The concept of God or the Real as personal, and the concept of the Absolute or the Real as impersonal. Hick uses this reasoning to argue that claims like the advaitic

experience of union with the infinite or the Zen claim of direct experience of the Real are simply modes of consciousness informed by the non-personal conceptions of the Real. In other words, they are not really direct experience or really union with the infinite.

To my mind there are two dominant features to Hick's thinking about religious diversity; 1) the denial that absolute knowledge of God is possible; 2) the affirmation of the *equality* of religions. As mentioned, I am looking at our late 20th century situation for possible influences on Hick's thinking about religious diversity. Here I will point to two developments 1) The dominance of relative scientific truth over absolute religious truth as a valid form of truth; 2) The emergence of multi-cultural, religiously plural nation states in which all citizens are equal before the law irrespective of race, creed, colour, religion, etc. There are many other factors which no doubt have been very important in Hick's development, such as the emergence of inter-faith dialogue, the proliferation of religious scholarship, the development of means of mass communications, etc. but I will limit myself to two points.

Possible Social and Historical Influences on the Argument

The Decline of Absolute Truth

In 1977, John Hick in collaboration with six other British academic theologians produced a volume of essays called *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Hick edited the volume.

The purpose of the book was to show 1) that the “historical Jesus” did not conceive of himself as God-incarnate: 2) that the development of this idea could be traced back from its fruition at the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon to the decades after Christ’s death when he was conceived of as a Prophet appointed by God to usher in the Kingdom; 3) that the language of incarnation was metaphorical or mythic. Hick had a special interest in this last point because it would make it possible for Christians to accept religious pluralism.

This book stirred up some controversy: A counter-book, *The Truth of God Incarnate*, edited by “a leading member of evangelical wing of the Church of England.” (1985: 12) was quickly published and the Church of England Evangelical Council produced a pamphlet calling for the resignation of the Anglican contributors. But in the end none of the authors lost their livelihoods, let alone their lives, and perhaps even gained in popularity by the controversy. Five hundred years earlier, I guess, they would have been burned as heretics. Obviously, something very dramatic has changed over the course of the past five hundred years in order that a denial of the Incarnation of Christ, and consequently of the absolute divine truth of the Christian revelation, might enhance one’s popularity, even as a Christian theologian.

Generally, I would argue that over the last five hundred years the value of absolute revealed religious truth has decreased while the value of “relative” discovered scientific truth has increased, perhaps even in an equal and direct inverse proportion. But even if one has not increased to the degree the other has increased, I think it is pretty clear that in the late 20th century scientific research predominates over religious revelation as a

valid path to truth. Today science pays better than theology. For some, scientific research has even come to *invalidate* religious revelation as a means to truth. Consequently, when Hick, and company, declared in 1977 that the incarnation of Jesus Christ was myth or metaphor, and thereby undermined the absolute truth of the Christian revelation, they were not burned as heretics; they were making their claim in a scientific age that already knew there was no absolute truth. Perhaps it was the relativistic spirit of the 20th century that inspired these authors in their rejection of the absolutism of Divine incarnation, but if not it at least made it possible for them to present their views safely.

The Rise of Multi-Culture and Multi-Faith Situations

In the 1950's and 1960's there was large scale immigration to Britain from other parts of the British Commonwealth; particularly from the Indian sub-continent, and the West Indies. These minorities were being brought to Britain to fill some of the "rougher jobs" that were being created in a, then, expanding economy. This new diversity manifested itself both politically and religiously.

The political issues exploded out of the volatile mixture of the new ethnic diversity and long standing racist attitudes born out of Britain's colonial history. In this new situation, ethnic minorities faced gross discrimination in employment and educational opportunities, and thus the inherent inferiority of the "black man" became a self-fulfilling prophesy. Out of this situation there arose many official and voluntary organizations, composed of black and white "liberals" and "radicals" whose aim was to

promote a more just and equal society. Hick was a member of one of these official organizations but also founded an organization to deal, also, with some of the problems specific to the new religious diversity in Britain. This organization was called All Faiths for One Race (AFFOR) and it was involved in.

assisting people of the ethnic minorities to find their way through the intricacies of the welfare state: helping local Muslim groups to obtain planning permission to convert houses into mosques; educational work in schools and colleges; seeking appropriate local radio time for the minorities; trying to influence the churches towards greater involvement in the struggle for a successful multi-cultural and multi-faith Britain.....: and so on.(1985:6)

Hick was obviously deeply involved in trying to bring about justice and equality in the multi-cultural and multi-faith Britain that was emerging in the latter half of this century, and his sense of religious equality at this level has probably stayed with him and influenced his latter thinking about religious diversity. I don't know the history of civil rights in Britain but I do know that if all citizens were not equal before the law - irrespective of religion, race creed colour, etc - at this time they became so soon after. This is the present situation in our multi-culture, multi-faith nation-states and it creates an interesting frame of mind.

As we become accustomed to thinking of all religious persons as equal citizens, regardless of religion, we are not too far from thinking of them as religiously equal as well. There is no logical connection here but the affirmation of civic equality inculcates in us a feeling of equality so that it seems natural that this equality should exist on other levels too. Generally, I think it is now more culturally acceptable to be a pluralist than an

inclusivist or exclusivist. I am drawing these conclusions from my own feelings which have been thoroughly infused with the spirit of civic egalitarianism.

Analysis V

John Hick is a pluralist. He denies absolute religious truth and affirms partial religious truth: he affirms that all religions are engaged in the same universal religious act, or the same basic form, of turning from self-centredness to God-centredness, which is called salvation/liberation/enlightenment; he links truth to ethical efficacy and on this basis affirms equality among all the world's great religious traditions.

All this is not much more complicated than saying - All religions produce good people and therefore all religions are basically equal. The process of producing good people is not very important - at least not particularly - in fact, it's the exact same process in *all* religions - call it what you want to - salvation, liberation, enlightenment - it's all the same anyway. And if you think that you're doing anything more than becoming a moral saint I can tell you that you are not because this is what salvation, i.e. religion, is all about. You may *think* you are experiencing the Real directly but this is just a mode of consciousness you experience when you perceive the Real indirectly through your concept of the Real as impersonal. But let's not get caught up in all that because the moral fruit of this experience, where you *think* you are one with God, is the important thing. This is what makes you a good religious person - like *me*.

Hick does achieve an egalitarian spiritual universe but if anyone but a few

Presbyterians would be happy in it is another question.

I have called the act whereby all religions are converted into the pluralists spiritual universe *levelling*; all religions must be brought to the same level before they can enter this universe of equality and sameness. Perhaps *equalizing* would be a better word than *levelling* because the religions do not have to be made *less* than they are to become the basic form - they might even *have to* become more. What is important is that they become the same thing - basically.

In fact, the pluralist needs to make the religious floor model fairly elaborate because this is the house that everyone has to buy and live in. The problem then becomes that to construct a decent model you have base it on those you hope to fit into it, and once you do this it becomes questionable if others will fit into it with equal comfort. Pluralists of course try, but their sometimes heroic efforts to make a fit betray an ill fit. I am thinking of Hick's need to conflate and explain (away) certain religions into their "true" form in order to fit them into his pluralistic universe.

When I argued that basic truth has to be seen as part of a complex with relative and absolute truth I meant by this *really* basic truth. It must be a determinate form of truth but one that is so basic that it can be universally agreed upon. Even a few platitudes is probably too much to be called basic truth. But as I've said pluralists don't typically set the base line low or keep the model simple because everyone has to fit under the bar or live in the house. They do this because they don't want to cross the line into relative and absolute truth, but then they have to make their moves to make the fit.

If I made the basic form of religion in Hick's spiritual universe look foolish in my

caricature of his pluralism. this was not intended. What I was trying to make look foolish was the process of trying to turn every other form of religion into it.

Hick is critical of Christian exclusivists who see other religious persons as non-Christians and he is critical of Christian inclusivists who see other religious persons are inferior Christians. However, his version of Christian pluralism does little more than see other religious persons as equally good Christians even if they think of themselves as Muslims, Jews, Hindus, etc. His move from inclusivism is built upon the argument that if Christian inclusivists are going to admit that salvation is happening equally in other traditions then why should we continue to impart the name Christian to them; why not just admit that the same process of salvation is happening in Islamic, Jewish, Hindu forms etc. Here Hick misunderstands the inclusivist's act. Inclusivists, or universal pluralists, *never* affirm that other forms of religions are doing precisely the same thing, offering the same salvation, etc. They never affirm equality among the levels of religions (Tillich's mystical and ethical types of faith are on the same level; both are higher criticism of the sacramental type of faith)

Hick as a pluralist can't claim to be simply drawing out what is implicit inclusivism. Inclusivists never presume equality: this is the unique turn of pluralists and this distinguishes them from inclusivists and exclusivists. Hick is projecting the assumption of equality onto those who do not presume it. This is helpful for him because once equality is "generally accepted" (and not simply his own presumption) then it is possible to work out the better expressions of it; however, it is also dishonest and goes against the facts.

What I think Hick most basically does is 1) abstract a form of religion out of his own Christian experience; 2) call this abstraction the basic form of religion; 3) convert all other religions into this basic form; 4) make moral efficacy the sign of truth for the basic form of religion; 5) affirm religious equality, if moral efficacy is demonstrable.

Ostensibly, there is no *a priori* equality in this formula. but once its declared that all religions are basically doing the same thing (and in this sense equal) I think it is a foregone conclusion that they will then be found equal in all respects.

In the next section I will am going to apply the dynamic form of unity in diversity that I developed in the first section. My aim in doing so will be to show up its value and limitation as a structure for making sense of religious diversity.

III

The Value and Limitation of Religious Unity in Diversity

The Value of a Dynamic Form of Unity in Diversity

I have been critical of universalism because it is totalitarian and can only think of religious truth in terms of all or nothing. Likewise, I have been critical of universal pluralism because it is hierarchical and can only think of religious truth in terms of better or worse. Finally, I have been critical of pluralism because it is egalitarian and can only think of religious truth in terms of sameness. Universalism takes religious truth to be absolute, universal pluralism takes religious truth to be relative, and pluralism takes religious truth to be basic. I am now going to argue that it is possible to acknowledge absolute truth without being totalitarian, relative truth without becoming hierarchical, and basic truth without becoming egalitarian. I will do this by distinguishing and relating these different modes of truth. This is also to say that absolute truth becomes totalitarian when it is not distinguished from, and related to, relative and basic truth; that relative truth becomes hierarchical when it is not distinguished from, and related to, absolute and basic truth; and that basic truth becomes egalitarian when it is not distinguished from, and related to, absolute and relative truth. I will now draw the lines and make the connections between absolute, relative and basic truth. While doing this, I will also try to identify

some simple principles that might help to produce concord in interreligious relations.⁵

Basic Truth

The best way to think of basic truth is as the basic religious context or situation. Different religions will have different understandings and therefore will disagree with one another about the truth of the basic context; however, they will not disagree about what the basic context is.

In other words, different religions will have different points of view about the truth of the basic context, but they will not have different points of view about the basic context itself. A consensus about what is the basic context of truth is required for it to have unifying power. If there is no consensus, the proposed basic context will have to be rejected as the basic context, and the true basic context will still have to be found. The basic context can be anything so long as is agreed upon. There is value in locating a basic context even if everyone, in the end, disagrees about what ought to be done with this context. This disagreement, however, doesn't undermine the existence of the basic context or its unifying power: Ten doctors may disagree about what to do with a cancer

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In discussing these principles, and later as I discuss their application, my language will be largely prescriptive and consequent my tone will be "dogmatic." Please bear in mind that as I advocate what must be done and what will be the case I am not pronouncing categorical imperatives and their effects; I am only saying what must be done and will be the result *if* my principles are applied.

but this doesn't mean they disagree about the fact that there is a cancer. The value of locating basic truth, understood as basic context, is that it validates a plurality of responses to, or perspectives on, the basic context without turning the advocates thereof into God/Devil type adversaries. The differences can always be taken back to the basic context where there is agreement, and from this vantage point the different perspectives can again be seen as simply that. My first principle for promoting concord in interreligious relations, therefore, is to identify the basic or commonly agreed upon context in which all religious diversity is grounded and from which all religious diversity flows. This could be called the *principle of commitment*. Basic religious truth is the context for religious diversity but to appreciate this diversity we cannot limit religious truth to basic truth. Basic religious truth grounds all diversity in what is common to all religions but this does not mean that there is just commonality; there is also difference and for this we need leave the domain of basic truth for that of relative truth.

Relative Truth

In this domain all religious truth is - appropriately - *relative*. Here, all differences are recognized but also take on new significance; the differences become the form of religious truth. The *particular* understanding of the basic situation is taken as the truth of the situation. This happens because attention moves away from the basic situation and focuses instead on the various understandings of it. There is no agreement here although there is mutual understanding. It is appropriate for each understanding of the basic

situation, not only to be familiar with itself but, to be familiar with *all* possible understandings. However, it is entirely inappropriate to value one religious understanding as better than any other because this *requires* knowledge about what is absolutely true and this takes us into the domain of absolute truth. We should content ourselves with studying in an objective, non-evaluative, way every expression of religious diversity. Of course, this is impossible in practice but we must be open to it in principle. Thus, my second principle for promoting concord in interreligious relations can be called the *principle of mutual understanding*. At the level of basic truth we can imagine all religious diversity being grounded in what is common and affirmed, in this respect, as entirely equal. At the level of relative truth we can imagine many free floating constellations of truth where no different one is grounded in any other different one. Basic truth is the only ground and when this is transcended, i.e. not paid attention to, there is no ground and all is relative. However, just as different religions do not stay rooted in the ground of basic truth neither do they remain flying in the free space of relative truth. Religious persons commit themselves to particular forms of religion and this very act places value on one particular religious form over others. A person's commitment becomes that person's absolute: if we did not take one form of religion to be better than another we would not choose it.

Absolute Truth

The domain of absolute truth is one of valuation. As said, when we choose, or

commit, to one form of religion we judge it to be more valuable than others. We go beyond the affirmation that truth is in the distinct form rather than the common form to the affirmation that truth is in one distinct form, in particular, rather than all distinct forms in general. However, commitment to one point of view is not simply an act of judgement on other religions; it is also an act of self judgement because now one's own absolute truth is open to the judgement of what *is* absolute truth. To choose one's religion is an act of faith because by claiming to be the absolute there is no possibility for the absolute (which is what you are) to confirm that you are the absolute. You are turned back upon yourself and in this sense the absolute judges you by allowing you to, or making you, stand as you are. Nothing is added to what you are in this process, even if you really are the absolute. Of course *everyone* can and must make this turn: without it a religion represents nothing and is of no interest comparatively speaking. If religious diversity takes on form at the level of relative truth it takes on life at the level of absolute truth. At the level of relative truth differences take on a new significance in that they are recognized; at the level of absolute truth they take on another degree of significance in that they *matter*.

This, however, doesn't necessarily need to put different religious constellations on a crash course. If the affirmation of one's religious truth as absolute is primarily understood as self affirmation instead of primarily other negation then real religious differences do not have to become dramatic religious conflicts. The act of affirming one religion in light of absolute truth is a solitary act, even when it is collective. Although the act of committing to one form of religion is a choice for one and necessarily not for

others. the purpose of the act is self affirmation of one form of religion and as such is not animosity, but indifference, toward other forms of religion. One's religion is not made the least bit more true by the fact, or perceived fact, that someone else's is false. Such holy indifference could be positively expressed as holy tolerance. I use the word *holy* intentionally because here one is most intimately related to the Absolute, or the Holy. Other religions get little attention not coldly but because attention is primarily elsewhere. Thus, my final principle for promoting concord in inter-religious relations is the *principle of holy tolerance*.

The Relationships Between Basic, Relative, and Absolute Truth

I have called my form of unity in diversity dynamic because it allows movement between the three mutually interconnected levels of truth. In other words, it makes it possible to affirm truth at the level of basic, relative and absolute truth without internal contradiction. And because these three types of truth can be affirmed without internal contradiction so can the derived principles of common commitment, mutual recognition, and holy indifference/tolerance be applied without contradiction. I will now try to show this, and thereby show indirectly the internal relationships between basic, relative and absolute truth.

The most dramatic religious disagreement in my schema is at the level of absolute truth where holy tolerance should nonetheless prevail. Religions at this level may be polemical towards one another, in the sense that they might present the positions of other

religions as mistakes, but this should never escalate into violence because each religion will be rooted in its own sense of truth. Religions will realize that they do not need to affirm the other as false to affirm themselves as true, and therefore affirming the falseness of other religions will never be a primary objective of any one religion. All religions will stand positively in their own truth, where they *will* judge one another, but where they will also be fully conscious that they too stand judged by what *is* absolute truth. Holy tolerance will prevail among all religions.

However, holy tolerance is not enough in a situation where everyone has made a stand and some differently than others. In this situation the different religions are not connected to each other; at least not rightly connected. We can deduce this from the fact that unless there is unanimity at the level of absolute truth then someone (if not everyone) is wrong about the others. Only absolute truth is capable of rightly relating other forms of truth to each other, which means only one vision about the relative value of other religions *can* be right. If there are multiple visions then there are errors which will remain a source of contention no matter how much holy tolerance prevents this from escalating into violent contention. Religions who disagree are inherently discordant because they are unconnected. Therefore, to reestablish concordance it is necessary to reconnect them. This is not possible at the level of absolute truth because here they disagree (and their disagreements matter) but it is possible at the level of relative truth, where all religions are connected in a universe which enfolds all possible religions.

At the level of relative religious truth *every* religion becomes a *mere* possibility, but at least here every religion *is a possibility*. At the level of relative truth it is obligatory

not only to objectively understand other religions, but also one's own. The value of non-evaluative mutual understanding is that it reconnects religions that, in their individual faith stances, have been disconnected. This re-connection is appropriate because every apparently separate religion is really connected or related to every other religion. Where evaluative indifference to each other blurs this fact, non-evaluative interest in each other must make it clear again. If there was mutual adherence to absolute truth then there would be no need for this; even though consciousness of lesser possibilities would likely remain, albeit rightly judged in light of truth. However, so long as this is not the case and different valuations lead to discordant religious diversity, there is value in reconnecting them through mutual non-evaluative understanding.

However, the unity at the level of relative truth is uniquely unstable in that meaningless differences easily give way to value judgements which make them meaningful; thus destroying the unity grounded in meaninglessness. To polarize this tendency it becomes necessary to negate differences even further. This takes us to the level of basic truth. Here differences not only make no difference, they don't really exist. The universe of relative truth - where every religion is a possibility - can only exist because there is a basic situation which elicits different possible understandings. Without this basic situation there is no ground for claiming that different religions are simply different possible perspectives. We cannot avoid a conscious formulation of *what* the different religions are different perspectives of. This basic situation or basic truth is the *common commitment* of all the different religions. Establishing a common commitment is necessary to ground a relative spiritual universe which in turn can reconnect disconnected

absolutes.

A coherent vision of unity in diversity needs to accommodate the actual situation. Insofar as there is diversity at the level of absolute truth, the unity needs to shift to relative and basic truth. But insofar as there is unity at the level of absolute truth diversity will shift to relative and basic forms of truth (which will then be understood as variant forms of absolute truth). The vision of unity in diversity I have just presented is capable of relocating both unity and diversity, on different levels of truth, according to the needs of the situation. It is thus more capable of making sense of religious diversity than either universalism, universal pluralism, or pluralism which all confine both unity and diversity to a single level of truth.

Universalism locates unity (and "diversity") in absolute truth and is thus inept at handling a situation where there are multiple forms of religion claiming absolute truth. Its way of handling this situation is to deny all but one form of religious truth; it even makes a principle of denying multiplicity at this level. Pluralism locates "unity" (and diversity) exclusively in basic truth and thus is inept at handling situations where one religion claims absolute truth. Its way of handling this is to deny that this religion has the right to claim absolute truth for itself; it even makes a principle of this by denying the attainment of absolute truth to anyone. Universal pluralism locates unity and diversity exclusively in relative truth and thus is not good at handling "absolutes" in any form; either the singular ones claimed by universalists or the multiple ones claimed by pluralists. Of course in the later case the absolutes are no longer absolutes but different forms of the same basic truth. Universal pluralism makes a principled denial of both absolute and basic truth.

From my point of view, all religions take on the same basic form; all religions are different possible understandings of this same basic form; and one absolutely true understanding of the basic form of religion is the potential of all religions. All religions are united in all of these forms of religious truth, in different ways. At the level of absolute truth there is only unity when all religions become the one absolutely true form of religion. In this case diversity takes on the form of different variations of the same absolute truth. If such unity is recognizably not the case, it is not necessary to deny that it could be the case. My approach is to remind all contending absolutes that 1) the claim of absolute truth is primarily an act of self affirmation; 2) that every claim of absolute truth opens the claimant to the judgement of what is absolute truth; 3) that every contending absolute is a *possible* truth; 4) that every contending absolute is a different version of the same basic truth. If unity cannot practically be located at the level of absolute truth then practically locate it at the level of relative or basic truth. Shift the location of unity but remain open to the possibility that in a different circumstance it might have to be shifted back.

In some respects my criticisms of universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism are bogus because what they respectively call absolute, relative, and basic truth are not exactly the same as what I call absolute, relative and basic truth. Basic truth understood as the context for absolute truth is not the same as basic truth which denies absolute truth; absolute truth understood as the highest potential of basic truth is not the same as absolute truth which denies basic truth; relative truth understood as a possible

absolute form of the basic form is not the same as relative truth understood as a necessarily failed form of the same.

These differences far from being superficial are rooted in deep theological differences and to understand them we have to understand these theological differences. I will now try to do this despite the obvious difficulty.

The Theological Roots of Universalism, Universal Pluralism, and Pluralism

No religion is truer than my own. This seems to be a truism about religious conviction. If I could recognize a religion as truer than my own, surely I would adopt it as my own. None of the author's considered in the case studies deviate from this truism. Consequently, their various theories of religious diversity might be subtitled: *How I see other religions related to my own.* Implicit in the idea of how I see other religions related to my own is the idea of how I would like others religions to see themselves related to me.

Peter the Venerable, Wycliffe, Bacon, and John of Segovia all saw other religions in relation to their own as false non-religions. Consequently, they hoped that their religion would be seen by others as absolutely true religion. All had plans of action to get Muslims to see Christianity in this way.

Nicholas of Cusa, Schleiermacher and Paul Tillich all saw other religions in relation to their own as relatively true, but inferior. Paul Tillich is an arguable exception unless you understand his religion, as I do, as The Religion of the Concrete Spirit.

Consequently, they all hoped that other religions would see their religion as the superior religion, and made arguments to help these other religions see their own (evolutionary) path towards the superior religion. For Cusanus all religions would be brought to one Christian Faith; for Schleiermacher, the innermost truth of Christianity could not be exhausted short of cosmic perfection; for Tillich the inner aim of all religions was the Religion of the Concrete Spirit.

John Hick saw other religions in relation to his own as equally true, and appropriately created a framework for recognizing this equality. This, of course, facilitated equal recognition in his direction from the other religions.

In all cases, the authors saw their religion as truth and wished others to also see their religion as true - be it equal truth, relatively the best truth, or the absolute truth. It doesn't matter because in all cases this form of truth is recognized as truth itself (by denying the other forms of truth).

This analysis does not seem remarkably different from the common understanding of exclusivism as seeing one's religion as the only religion, inclusivism as seeing one's religion as the best religion, and pluralism as seeing one's religion as an equal among many religions. To some extent this is true; however, I also hope that I have been able to show these positions as conclusions drawn from within the structures of coherent spiritual universes. Thus, if we want to challenge the conclusion we also have to challenge the constructed spiritual universe from which it is drawn, and this necessitates comprehending it.

In the introduction, I argued that the integrating principles of truth for the

universalist, universal pluralist, and pluralist, were respectively absolute truth, relative truth and partial truth. But I did not consider in depth what it was that was absolutely, relatively, or partially true. The answer is obvious if we accept my definition of religion as the true form of human relationship with the Divine. However, the significant question to ask is why some religions consider their form of religion (the Divine/human relationship) to be absolutely true, and other relatively true, and still others partially true. And, moreover, is there a link between how a religion conceives of itself and how it conceives of other religions?

This connection is at once too obvious to miss and exceptionally difficult to see. How I conceive of religion in the singular will inform how I conceive of religions in the plural. But more than this, how I conceive religion in the singular will be based on how I experience religion in the particular; therefore my conception of religions will be based on my experience of religion. This means that my experience of myself will determine my experience of others. The question then becomes how do I perceive the other in light of my perception of myself, and here the determining factor is my perception of myself.

Returning to the subject matter, the first question becomes how do religions perceive themselves, and the second question becomes how do they perceive others in light of this perception. I have already considered this but now I want to do so in light of a positive affirmation that there is a connection between how one experiences religion and how one will relate to religious others. In other words, what I am now going to try to demonstrate is a link between particular forms of religion and particular responses to other religions or religious diversity. Specifically, I am going to try to link universalism,

universal pluralism, and pluralism to particular types of religion.

To clarify the direction I am headed in, John Hick felt that he had to rid Christianity of its incarnation "myth." In his view, the incarnation stands as a positive obstacle to a pluralistic understanding of religion because it implies that Divinity is wholly and therefore *only* present in, or related to, humanity in Jesus Christ. In other words, there is no other place to get connected to the Divine. Consequently, Hick dismissed the incarnation as myth and rooted his pluralism in the experience of God as transcendent. All human beings could respond to God and thereby be positively transformed (morally) even to the extent of become instruments of the Divine will. But no one, no matter how complete the openness of the response, could wholly become Divine; the finite cannot contain the Infinite.

Hick rooted pluralism in the idea of "complete" Divine transcendence and universalism (exclusivism) in the idea of "complete" Divine immanence.⁶ In other words, it could be argued that forms of religion which affirm Divine transcendence are by nature pluralistic, and religions which affirm Divine transcendence are by nature universalistic. These connections are interesting but can we make a general rule of them? I am going to

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Hick made the link between a complete Divine immanence and exclusivism and complete Divine transcendence and pluralism but not the link between inclusivism and the idea of complete Divine transcendence *and* immanence. I think he didn't do this mostly because he wasn't very conscious of this third possibility. He uses the name 'Divine Mediator' synonymously with the name 'Divine Prophet' which indicates he wasn't cognizant of the interpretation of Christ as Mediator in Schleiermacher's sense. It is precisely this type of religion that I link to universal pluralism.

argue that we can although there are variations within each type of religion that can make the process of seeing connections between a type of religion and a type of response to other religions very difficult.

I have already made connections along the lines that I am now suggesting are possible when I placed Cusanus, Schleiermacher and Tillich in the same category of universal pluralism and pointed out their theological affinity. Now, I might say more directly that the type of religion they belong to is directly linked to their response of universal pluralism. In other words, their experience of religion (as the infinite becoming finite) determines, and therefore is connected to, their experience of religions (as universal pluralism).

I won't say much further about the connection between the "concrete spirit type" of religion and universal pluralism, except to affirm it, because the case studies have largely done this already (even if not consciously). But, if I want to make a connection between religions that are strong on Divine immanence and universalism and religions that are strong on Divine transcendence and pluralism I am going to have to consider some of the variations within these types that don't seem to fit the mould. Such variations deserves case studies too, but because this is not possible here I will have to limit myself to very general discussions. My overall aim is to link particular forms of religion to particular responses to religions. The case studies I have done provide adequate evidence for making a link between the concrete spirit type of religion and universal pluralism, but they do not offer much evidence for making links with either pluralism or universalism. Therefore, as I try to make links between particular forms of religion and universalism

and pluralism I will provide a very small amount of supplementary material which at times will remain entirely abstract. This is the best I can do at this point.

Linking Universalism with the Idea of Divine Immanence

Divine incarnation and mysticism both express the idea of Divine Immanence: therefore we can link universalism to the idea of Divine immanence by linking it to the idea of Divine incarnation and mysticism. I will begin with the link between the idea of Divine incarnation and universalism because this is easier to see.

Staying within the framework of Christianity, if the Father is wholly and only in the Son then it stands to reason that the only way to the Father is through the Son; not as Divine mediator or prophet of God but as God in the flesh, or God incarnate. Incarnation is a form of Divine-human relationship, or a form of religion. It is a form of relationship that actually conflates Divinity and humanity; the two become literally one. Such union is the ideal of this type of religion. As said, if Divinity is wholly present in one individual then the only way for other individuals to become one with God is to become one with this incarnate God, who is most supremely one with God.

I will now try to make the link between the idea of Divine immanence and universalism by discussing Orthodox Christianity which is the most mystical of the forms of Christianity and also the most universalistic.

In Orthodoxy, Christ is most emphatically affirmed as God in the flesh, or incarnate. This means that Orthodox Christians must seek union with Christ in order to

have union with God. In Orthodoxy, to be one with God is to become a created god or a deified creature, and cosmic redemption is envisioned as the deification of the entire created order. (1993: 234-35) It becomes difficult to distinguish this from Paul's vision of God being all in all, however, the Orthodox vision is more one of God being poured into creation, and thereby transfiguring it in the Divine Light. Orthodoxy, cherishes storey's of its Saints who have experienced Divine transfiguration when the Holy Spirit pours into them. A good account of this is in *St. Seraphim of Sarov* by Valentine Zander. These Saints are viewed as the "first fruits" (to use St. Paul's words) of the coming cosmic redemption.

As said, the Orthodox Church while being the most mystical form of Christianity is also the most universalistic. Its goal is the same as Cusanus'; a universal faith with diversity of religious expression. It seems strange that a mystical religion should be universalistic because it is possible to think of the mystical experience as a solid platform for affirming religious pluralism. I will now discuss this possibility and then return to the reason why Orthodoxy remains universalistic by nature.

Again, it is difficult to mentally link mysticism and pluralism because the mystical experience seems like a plausible platform for linking, and therefore justifying, religious plurality. Many Christian theologians, such as Charles Davis, have tried to make sense of religious diversity in this direction.(in Oppenheim, 1995) Richard M. Buck wrote a highly idiosyncratic book called *Cosmic Consciousness* in which he identified the mystical experience (cosmic consciousness) as the foundation of every religion. He then discussed all the perfect instances of cosmic consciousness which included, the Buddha.

Jesus, Paul, Plotinus Mohammad, William Blake, etc, followed by the less perfect instances which included Moses, Socrates, Pascal, etc.(1969: XVII-XVIII) Madame Helena Blavatsky (Russian Orthodox by birth) is another example of trying to equalize religious traditions by rooting them in the mystical experience. (Fisher, 1991: 401-403) The new age, with its countless Shirley McLean type gods, could even be cited as an example of mystical pluralism. With the mystical experience at the heart of all great religions it is possible to affirm their equal validity. This can be criticized as just another form of unity and diversity that submits all religious diversity to the same religious experience, but there is another problem specifically related to mystical pluralism that I will now discuss.

When we get into a world with countless Divine incarnations we probably have to admit either polytheism or pantheism to be consistent, and Christianity has never been willing to do this. The other option is to significantly water down the idea of incarnation, but then it threatens to no longer be incarnation. To affirm Divine incarnation without becoming either polytheistic or pantheistic it is necessary to affirm a *single* Divine incarnation, and then try to explain how this incarnate God is related to the Transcendent God and the significance of this incarnate God for ordinary human beings. Orthodox Christianity has remained universalistic to protect the idea of Divine transcendence while affirming strongly the idea of Divine immanence. The doctrine of the Trinity is an attempt to make sense of both Divine transcendence and Divine immanence and this is why it is so important in Orthodoxy.

If God as transcendent is presumed to be single then this God as immanent must

also be single. The stronger the claim of immanence the stronger the need for singularity. A Divine incarnation is the strongest possible expression of Divine immanence and therefore, if true, requires singularity. Orthodoxy affirms one transcendent God, but also the perfect immanence of God in man through the incarnation of the Word of God in Jesus of Nazareth. If the incarnation is perfect it must be singular. Orthodox Christians affirm the perfect incarnation of God in Jesus Christ and therefore cannot waiver on their position that the Son is the only way to the Father.

If Christianity wants to remain monotheistic and affirm Divine incarnation it must affirm, as true, only one Divine incarnation, which means also that it must affirm as true only one religion. In other words, there is a connection between the concept of Divine incarnation and the universalist form of unity in diversity.

Mystical pluralism is a very questionable concept within the Christian tradition because it threatens both the idea of monotheism and Divine transcendence. Thus, I will suggest that mysticism in Christianity will always tend to be yoked to a strong form of universalism to avoid these threats. Therefore, within Christianity the more natural link with mysticism is universalism and not pluralism.

I have just tried to argue that, at least within Christianity, there is a link between universalism and the idea of Divine immanence. I will now try to make a similar link between the idea of Divine transcendence and pluralism.

Linking Pluralism with the Idea of Divine Transcendence

Both universalists and pluralists presume Divine transcendence and Divine immanence. Universalists, however are willing to call God as immanent fully God, while pluralists are only willing to call God as transcendent fully God. Consequently, universalists are completely closed to the idea of multiplicity in the domain Divine immanence, while pluralists in comparison are relatively open. The pluralist's openness can be accounted for by the fact that God as transcendent is God. This means that no form where God is immanent is a limitation on God; God *always* remains free to be immanent because God is never bound to an immanent form of God. In Hick's words God *an Sich* is never limited by God as experienced.

God as transcendent *equalizes* every form of God that is immanent. Given this fact, we have to account for the seeming anomaly of religions, and religious persons, who *are* only willing to locate God fully in God as transcendent, but are also exclusively committed to a particular form of divine immanence, or divine revelation. (If divine incarnation is the form of immanence when it is presumed that God can become fully immanent, then divine revelation is the form of immanence when it is presumed that God cannot become fully immanent.) This phenomenon is actually quite understandable. To affirm that God never becomes fully immanent does not mean that where God *is* partially immanent is not the *only* place where God is immanent. It is plausible to think that God is only imminent in one place or that there is only one truly Divine revelation. The only limitation placed on this thought is that the revelation cannot ultimately limit the source

of the revelation. In other words, there must always be in principle *openness* to further revelation.

If God is fully immanent there must be a principled closure to other forms of Divine immanence, but if God cannot be fully immanent there must be a principled openness to other forms of Divine immanence.

The real anomaly is when one who denies that God can become fully immanent closes to the possibility that God can become *further* immanent. This is inconsistent because closure to further revelation in effect makes whatever is taken to be partially immanent fully immanent. The natural disposition for one who affirms only God as transcendent fully God is openness to the *possibilities* of Divine immanence; to God's freedom. Moreover, it is a disposition of humility in light of the fact that no revelation of God is ever God *an Sich* and, therefore, all religions in their shared *incompleteness* are equal. The affirmation of closure, singleness, universality at the level of Divine immanence is antithetical to the affirmation that only God as transcendent is God. At the level of Divine immanence openness and plurality, at least in principle, are the rule.

But why not avoid the problem of conflicting forms of Divine immanence altogether by simply denying Divine immanence altogether? Because this proposition leads on the one hand to deism and on the other to atheism. (Perhaps atheism is just the next logical step after deism). This is the case because it is difficult to conceive of a God that does not participate in the world as being relevant to the world; a non-relevant God may just as well be a non-existent God. Just as Christianity has never been open to the possibility of multiple forms of complete Divine immanence, neither has it been open to

the possibility of no forms of Divine immanence. The former possibility threatens Divine transcendence, and the latter obviously threatens Divine immanence. Christianity has tried to affirm both Divine transcendence and imminence and has thus tried to stay clear of pantheism/polytheism and deism/atheism.

Linking Universal Pluralism with the Idea of Divine Transcendence/Immanence

I have so far concluded that pluralism is rooted in the idea of Divine transcendence and universalism is rooted in the idea of Divine immanence. Pluralists deny that the Divine can become fully immanent and universalists affirm it. In the case studies I argued that Cusanus, Schleiermacher, and Tillich all articulated the ultimate religious condition in terms of being *both* divine and human. This could be expressed as being *both* immanent and transcendent. Therefore, I will now also conclude that universal pluralism is rooted in the idea of both complete Divine transcendence *and* complete Divine immanence.

Three Types of Religion and Their Responses to Religious Diversity

I have just tried to link the idea of Divine transcendence to pluralism, the idea of Divine immanence to universalism, and the idea of Divine transcendence and immanence to universal pluralism. I am now going to take one step further and argue that particular types of religion are linked to the idea of Divine transcendence, Divine

immanence, and Divine transcendence *and* immanence; which means that particular types of religions are linked to the universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism. I will now try to identify the different types of religion and the types of response to religious diversity that *belong* to them. By saying that particular responses belong to particular forms of religion I am, in effect, saying that say that universalism, universal pluralism, and pluralism are theological superstructures of particular types of religions.

Using the terminology of Hick and Tillich I will say that exclusivism is a theological superstructure of the mystical type of faith, that inclusivism is a theological superstructure of the "concrete spirit" type of faith, and pluralism is a theological superstructure of the ethical type of faith.

In the same way that I modified exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, into universalism, universal pluralism and pluralism I am going to modify Tillich's understanding of the mystical, concrete spirit, and ethical types of religion before I use them. I will do this because I think Tillich's presentation of the mystical and ethical types of faith are simply the two sides of his Religion of the Concrete Spirit. I will now make a sketch of how I understand the three types of religions and how they are linked to the three different responses to religious diversity ⁷

7

When constructing the ethical and mystical types of faith I will draw on Weber's types of the world fleeing mystic and inner worldly ascetic as much as on Tillich's types.

The Mystical Type of Religion and Universalism

The *mystical* type of religion is rooted in the principle of identity between Divinity and humanity. (Tillich, 1974: 28) The goal of the mystic is union with the Absolute. In Christianity, Christ conceived as the incarnate Son of God is the perfect exemplar of this goal. Christ is one with the Father. The mystic is like a cup to be filled by God. (Weber) In mystical union with God the sense of separation or estrangement from God is overcome. The first Christian expression of this type of religion is in the Gospel of John. In terms of my definition of religion as human relationship with the Divine this type of religion emphasizes the Divine becoming human, which is a form of the Divine becoming immanent. This type of religion affirms that the Divine can become fully immanent and therefore in its relationships with other religions is universalistic. Remember that to affirm complete divine immanence, and safeguard divine transcendence, it is necessary for that which is immanent to be singular or universal. This has created within Christianity the problem of how to deal with its other incarnations, or other mystical sons and daughters of God. It has done this by insisting that unity with God is attained through unity with Christ.

Complete Divine immanence is linked to universalism; complete Divine immanence is the goal of the mystical type of religion; therefore, the mystical type of religion is inherently universalistic.

The Ethical Type of Religion and Pluralism

The *ethical* type of religion is rooted in the principle of the difference between Divinity and humanity. When God is understood as the Holy One the human being (an inherent sinner on account of being imperfect) will experience this gulf between Divinity and humanity as Divine wrath and human guilt. Guilt-consciousness is the religious expression of this absolute difference. (Tillich, 1974: 31). Submission to the will of God (who is perfect) is the means to salvation or perfection in the ethical type of faith. Submission to God and moral perfection make a human being usable to God, as a Divine instrument. Jesus was a morally perfect human being utterly surrendered to the will of God, who thereby became the supreme instrument of God's will; he became the chosen Prophet of God's coming Kingdom. Consequently, Jesus serves as the perfect exemplar for this type of religion. The first expression of this type of religion in Christianity is the Synoptic Gospels. This type of relationship emphasizes the transcendence of God, and the humanity of human beings. It is possible for a human being to become morally perfect and thus usable by God but not to become God. Human glory is to be an instrument of God's Glory. This type of religion denies that the Divine can become fully immanent and therefore in its relationships with other religions is pluralistic. If God is affirmed to be in some respects immanent (as God must be if God is to remain relevant to the world) then one way of safeguarding God's immanence in this situation is to affirm that no occasion of Divine immanence is complete. But what this means is that any commitment to a

partial Divine revelation must be open in principle to further revelation. This reasoning is not only at home in pluralistic situations but actually helps to generate them. If the Spirit of God is free to blow where it wills, there will be no end to self-proclaimed Prophets of the Spirit.

The affirmation of only partial Divine immanence is linked to pluralism: the ethicist affirms only partial Divine immanence by affirming an unbridgeable distance between humanity and Divinity; therefore, the ethical type of faith is inherently pluralistic.

The Theological Type of Religion and Universal Pluralism

The third type of religion I will call the *theological type*.⁸ *The theological type* of religion is rooted in cognition of the *relationship* between Divinity and humanity. The goal here is to overcome the tension between the finite and the infinite by seeing one in the other. Whereas the Divine instrument is willing to give up Divinity to become humanly perfect and the mystic is willing to give up humanity to become divinely perfect, the bearer of this type is willing to give up neither and seeks to become both

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My reason for calling this type theological is because this seems to be the principal activity of those who embody it. Mystics engage in mystical contemplation of God so as to become one with God, ethicists perform moral actions in conformity to God's will so as to be perfect in the likeness of God. Theologians (in this restricted sense) are not engaged principally in either mystical contemplation or ethical behaviour; their act is mental cognition of the relationship between God and man.

perfectly human and perfectly divine. Jesus Christ as the mediator of the infinite to the finite is the perfect exemplar for this type of religion. Its first expression in Christianity is found in the Epistles of St. Paul. The relationship in this type of religion emphasizes both human and Divine being. This type of religion affirms that the Divine can be fully transcendent and immanent, at once, and thus relates to other religions within the framework of universal pluralism.

The affirmation of both Divine immanence and Divine transcendence is linked to universal pluralism; the theological type of religion affirms the reality of both complete Divine immanence and complete Divine transcendence: therefore, the theological type of religion is by nature universally pluralistic.

Now that I have linked the ethical type of religion to pluralism, the theological type of religion to universal pluralism, and the mystical type of religion to universalism I must try to say what type of religion the dynamic form of unity in diversity I have presented is linked to. In other words, what is the theology that it is a superstructure of?

This will be useful for a couple of reasons. One, it will make clearer my somewhat confusing statements that the basic form of religious truth is the context for absolute form of religious truth; that the absolute form of religious truth is the highest potential of the basic form of religious truth; and that all forms of relative religious truth are possible absolute forms of the basic form of religious truth. I will generally limit the presentation of this theology, which is my own, to the question of how the finite and the infinite, or humanity and Divinity are related, which has otherwise been discussed in

terms of Divine transcendence and Divine immanence. I will do this because this is where I have linked the other types of religions (or other theologies) to responses to religious diversity. Thus, the presentation of my theology expressed as the relationship between Divinity and humanity will clarify my response to religious diversity in terms of a dynamic form of unity in diversity. The second value of making this presentation will be that I will then be able to show, very openly, how I try to relate my form of religion to other forms of religion, which as I have said seems to be at the heart of every response to religious diversity.

After applying my form of unity in diversity I will close with a discussion of the inherent limitation of every form of unity in diversity; namely, that it allows no diversity of religious truth.

The Theological Roots of My Dynamic Form Unity in Diversity

I am going to develop my theological position largely in relation to the theological positions of the mystical, theological, and ethical types of religion. I will begin by identifying what I think is the basic problem that each of these theologies is trying to address.

On the surface the basic problem is this: How does a transcendent God become immanent in the world; or, how does Divinity become present to humanity? But behind these questions are the more ultimate questions of how human beings are most perfectly related to God, and what human beings most perfectly are? Let me begin with a review

of how the mystical, theological and ethical types of religion answer these questions.

For the mystic, God fills or permeates the world with Divine presence. Human beings ultimately are deified or transfigured into created gods. Estrangement between human beings and the Divine being is overcome in union. For the mystic, a human being is most perfect when most Divine. The mystical imagery is of the Divine taking over the human condition in order to make it Divine. Of course, human beings have inherent limitations so must be understood as created gods rather than as God proper. Christ as incarnation is a powerful symbol of the human being becoming God, by God becoming human. Nonetheless, the answer to the ultimate question of who a human being is, is straightforward; a human being is most perfectly a Divine being, and a human being becomes a Divine being through union with, and permeation by, the Divine Being.

Franz Rosenzweig wrote: "His image, which He created into us, makes us not God but human." (The Science of God). This effectively sums up the difference between the mystical and ethical types of religion. The mystic is a created god whereas the ethicist is a creature of God. The ethicist accepts estrangement as the natural condition between Divinity and humanity but seeks to close the gap, not by becoming God, but by becoming more *like* God by acting according to God's will. Here we don't have God filling the vessel but using the instrument (Weber) God establishes the laws that must be obeyed in order to become like God. Christ as a Prophet is an adequate symbol of the ideal in this type of religion, but Moses as Prophet or as "our Rabbi" in Jacob Neusner's sense is better. In this type of religion God is usually present as Will rather than as Being, and consequently ethicists while refusing to claim Divine being for themselves will claim

divine action. Again, the question as to who a human being is straightforward; a human being is most perfectly a human being made in the image of God, and perfection is attained through submission to the Divine will as it is revealed to human beings. Such revelation is Divine immanence, and obedience to it is even Divine immanence.

Thus, in these two religions we have two very different visions of what a human being most perfectly is. The mystic says Divine and the ethicist says human. The mystic qualifies this by saying a created God and the ethicist qualifies it by saying a human being created in the image of God. It seems apparent that both are interpreting the same situation but they don't agree on whether the creature or image is Divine or not. The mystic says yes, and the ethicist says no. But in terms of what the creature or image does the ethicist says yes and the mystic says no. The mystic's great problem is estrangement whereas the ethicist's great problem is sin. The ethicist accepts estrangement as the natural condition and the mystic takes it on as a problem to be overcome through union. On the other hand, the mystic accepts sin as a natural condition and the ethicist takes it on as a problem to overcome through moral perfection. The mystic doesn't engage the problem of sin but instead turns to God who will dissolve the sinful human situation altogether in union. The mystic's moral act is contemplation. The ethicist doesn't engage the problem of estrangement but instead turns to moral action which makes the human being more perfect and thus more able to stand in the Holy Presence. Without moral action there is no possibility of Divine contemplation.

Where the mystic says “God” and the ethicist says “human” the theologian say “God-human.” The theologian presumes the problem of estrangement but doesn’t seek the solution to this in the mystics dissolution of the human being in the Divine Light. The theologian also presumes the problem of sin but doesn’t seek the solution in the ethicists quest for moral perfection. The theologian’s solution to both problems in the same: the God-man. The God-man overcomes both sin and estrangement for very obvious reasons. Christ as mediator is a very powerful symbol for this type of religion. Here the picture is not of the Divine Being permeating and taking over the human being, or of the Divine Will moving the human being toward greater human perfection, but of the Divine becoming present *as* the human being.

In the mystic, Divinity outshines humanity; in the ethicist, humanity reflects the Divinity; in the theologian, Divinity stands as humanity. To review the three positions in terms of what a human being most perfectly is, for the mystic, a human being is most perfectly Divine, a created god; for the ethicist, the human being is most perfectly a human being made in the image of God; for a theologian, a human being is most perfectly a Divine-human, or a human being in whom the Divine is visible (as human). Where do I stand?

Let’s begin with my positions on estrangement and sin. I start from the premise that God is the ultimate Ground and Creator of all created being. From the premise that God is the ultimate Ground of all being I conclude that there is on one hand no possibility for ultimate estrangement and on the other no possibility for ultimate union between Divinity and humanity. If we take seriously the premise that God is the ultimate Ground

of all being then we must conclude that there is no place a human being could get to that is entirely cut off from God. Existence stands out from the Ground of its being but never is it radically cut off from it. In this sense there is no need for reunion with God because it is entirely impossible to be separated from God. And insofar as one does exist apart from the Divine Ground it is impossible, as this separate existence, to be one with the Divine Ground; union would require the complete renunciation of the separate existence. Therefore, so long as we wish to remain identified with existent being we cannot attain perfect union with God, but neither can we be perfectly separated from God. There is no need to escape the world for God because on one hand God can't be found and on the other because God isn't lost. Thus, I am critical of the mystical impulse to flee the world for God.

From the premise that God is the Creator of all being I conclude on one hand that there is no possibility for a human being to be perfect (because only God can be perfect) and on the other that there is no state of utter depravity or sin because creatures only have being through the Creator. On the first point, no matter how much like God a creature becomes the creature will never become the Creator and therefore never perfect. At best a human being will become the perfect image of God, which is still not God. Unless it is realized that this is the best a human being can be and therefore the best a human being *should* be, a chronic sense of sin will pervade the human being; and the attempt to counter this chronic sense of sin will manifest in an equally chronic, albeit futile, effort to become perfect. Just as a creature by virtue of being a creature can never be more than a perfect creature (which is to say not Divinely perfect) a

creature can also never be less than a creature of the Creator. The creature can only *be* through the will of the Creator. Thus, the creature who does not submit to the will of the Creator may become grossly depraved but will never become anti-being. It is not possible for a creature to become so radically imperfect because in this case the creature would simply cease to be. A human can never become perfect the way God is perfect and can never become so imperfect as to have being apart from God. Thus, I am also critical of the ethicists chronic impulse to perfect the world on one hand and consign it to hell on the other.

The theologian lives between these two tendencies towards mystical escape into God and moral perfection of the human being. The theologian presumes the problem of both sin and estrangement and claims that it is possible to overcome both in the union and perfection of the God-man. From my point of view neither sin nor estrangement are real problems and neither perfection nor union are real solutions, and putting them together doesn't make them any more real.

For the mystic, estrangement is the problem and union is the solution; therefore, the perfect human condition is one of absorption into the Divine condition. For the ethicist the problem is sin and the solution is moral perfection; therefore, the perfect human condition is one of perfect submission to the Divine will so as to become humanly perfect (in the image of God). For the theologian, estrangement *and* sin is the problem and union *and* perfection is the solution; therefore, the perfect human condition is one in which the Divine becomes human but the human remains human.

From my point of view there is no possibility of either complete estrangement/union or complete sin/perfection. Therefore, God doesn't need to permeate the world to make it Divine and no longer estranged. And God doesn't need to move the world according to the Divine will so that it will no longer be in a state of sin. God inherently permeates the world and God inherently moves the world, but God can never cross over to become the world or effect changes in the world - *as God*.

I am suggesting that God as the Ground of all being and the Creator of all being is radically "transcendent"; that there is no possibility for God as Ground to become the world, or God as Creator to act in the world. The world doesn't become Divine by being God or acting for God because God can't be or act in the world. Again, this distinction hinges on the qualification that God does not be or act in the world *as* the Ground of being or *as* the Creator of being.

However, because the transcendent does not become immanent this does not mean that the world is inherently Godless. The world is the resultant form of a Divinely creative act in the Divine Ground. It might be called the Divine image. Thus, a human being is not to be understood as made in God's image but literally as God's image. We can't think of God as an appearance or image because then we would have to suppose a Creator of God's image. Here I am suggesting that the world is Divine on its own terms, as God's form or image, which necessarily is other than the Formless Ground in which it arises and the Creative Power which forms it.

My claim is not that the human being is most perfectly Divine or most perfectly not Divine (i.e. Divinely human) as the mystic and ethicist respectively say. And it is not

that a human being is most perfectly both Divine and human (i.e. not Divine) as the theologian says. My claim is that the human being is Divine as God's image, but as such is entirely different from God as Ground and God as Creator. If humanity is going to claim Divinity it cannot do so by virtue of what it cannot really become. Let me try to explain my position with an abstract example.

If we draw a circle on a blank page with a pen we can recognize that the distinguishing mark of the pen and the empty space of the blank page are the two "founding principles" of the circle. Without the space where the mark could be made there would be no circle and without the mark being made in the space there would be no circle. However, the circle is also more than either the blank page or the mark of the pen: it is also a *picture*. If we take our attention outside of the circle we can see it as a sphere floating in open space or a ball sitting on the ground, or a hole in the ground, or a ring on the ground. Whatever picture we see the picture will always appear to us as an unbroken whole. When we see the picture we will no longer see the prior open space that it now stands in place of; this will be completely covered over. But neither will we really see the mark of distinction any longer; this will blur as the mere outline of the picture itself. The picture is clearly the result of the pen mark made on the blank page but it must be acknowledged as something different from either of these. I will now apply this abstraction to our situation

If we think of the Divine Ground as the blank page and the Divine Creator as distinguishing pen mark, then the resultant picture is the Divine image, or the world. The world as Divine image is clearly the result of a Divinely creative act in the Divine

Ground, but it is also clearly neither the Creative Ground nor the Creative act in itself; it is something uniquely its own. But the complete dependence of the Divine image on the Divine Ground and Divine Creativity, as well as its origin in these, is enough to justify calling it Divine also.

The human being therefore, is related to God as Ground and God as Creator as God's image or Form, which is neither. This is my understanding of how a human being is ultimately related to God and what a human being most perfectly is.

I should now be able to clarify some of my statements about the basic religious truth being the context for absolute religious truth, absolute truth being the highest potential form of basic truth, and relative truth being a possible absolute form of the basic form. In my model the divine situation is always potential in the world because the world is itself the divine situation. Seeing the Divine in the world is more a matter of realizing what is always already the case rather than looking for phenomenal events where God penetrates the world. The Divine penetration model, in its various forms, is built upon the premise of that which is becoming other than it is through an outside influence. The sinful or estranged human being is made into a divine being or a divinely perfect human being through the outside influence of God's Being or Will. One question that arises out of this model is how much can the Divine penetrate and influence that which is not Divine? In other words, how does the Divine find its way into what is not Divine and to what extent can it dwell there? I undercut all of the dilemmas about how the Divine becomes what is not Divine by saying that the Divine cannot penetrate that which is not Divine, but that there is nothing which is not some aspect of the Divinity.

The religious situation may be expressed in terms of a Divine situation: if the Divine is present in a situation it is religious. The penetration model presumes that the basic human situation is not religious and must *become* religious through the penetrating influence of the Divine. This means that the world may be partly religious and partly non-religious at any given time. My model presumes that the basic human situation is Divine and that the only possibilities within this situation are to be dimly or acutely aware of this fact. In other words there is no state of non-religion and everyone is involved in the basic context. The penetration model presumes that what is non-religious will eventually be overcome when that which is Divine fully penetrates that which is non-divine. (Full Divine penetration may be conceived of in different ways). But such visions of perfection lead again to the difficult questions of how, and how much, the Divine can really penetrate that which is non-divine. The mixture in all cases seems, to me, chronically unstable. My understanding of perfection, on the other hand, is much more realistic because what is perfect already exists and therefore *can* be realized. Perfect or absolute religious truth is recognizing fully the truth of the basic religious situation. Relative religious truths are the endless possible attempts to try to understand the truth of the basic religious situation.

These are deep theological disputes and they will not be resolved here. However, I can now to show how I try to relate my religious point of view to other religious points of view that I disagree with.

Applying My Dynamic Form of Unity in Diversity

Again, my purpose here will be to show how I relate my religious point of view to others. The other religious points of view I will try to relate mine to will be those found in the mystical, theological, and ethical types of religion. I will try to understand all of these religions in light of my three principles derived from my dynamic form of unity in diversity. This, of course, may seem like a highly dubious undertaking given the fact that my dynamic form of unity in diversity is a superstructure of my own theology; I will proceed nonetheless.

My first move will be to locate the basic truth for all of the types of religion under consideration. I will suggest that the basic truth of my form of religion, as well as of the mystical, ethical, and theological forms of religion is that they all presume *existential being to be Divine in some respect*. For the mystic the created being is ultimately a created god, for the ethicist the created being is ultimately a Divine actor, for the theologian the created being is also ultimately the Divine being, and for me the created being is God's image. So our basic context is created being that is somehow divine but our disagreement is over how exactly as created beings we are, or can be, Divine. This basic context can always be evoked to bring us back to what we are all trying to articulate no matter how much our points of view may diverge. This is the principle of common commitment, and on this level I feel myself related to the other positions as a complete equal.

However, my sense of equality completely disappears at the level where I affirm my truth as absolute, or as my absolute. Here I cannot without contradiction affirm the other religions as equals. But as I've said, the act of affirming one's truth as an absolute truth is primarily a solitary act of standing before the actual truth and being judged by it. Again, the reward of this act is the right to stand exactly as you are. You are judged in light of the absolute and are not primarily interested in judging others as the absolute. If I affirm as my absolute truth that the human being is Divine because the human being is God's image I am not more confirmed by rejecting other points of view. The other points of view could not exist and I would still make the same affirmation. In my truth I remain largely indifferent to the other points of view, and I tolerate them out of this indifference. I am too absorbed in my own truth to really care that the mystic thinks that God transfigures human beings into created gods. This is not as obnoxious as it sounds; the indifference is not a conscious snub but the natural result of attention being absorbed in one's own truth. This is what I have called holy indifference or holy tolerance. Conflict with others should not arise at this level because others aren't a primary concern. When it comes to turning attention towards others it is best to leave evaluations behind and look objectively.

It is possible for me to consider the mystical, theological, and ethical points of view and describe them to their bearers such that they would agree I have understood them. The only place I will disagree with them is where they claim their point of view to be absolutely true. But again, the truth claim is an act which affirms a point of view and not something which adds to it. This is why it is possible to look at another point of view

objectively and understand it altogether without yourself affirming it as absolute truth. Understanding each other in a non-evaluative way is an application of the principle of mutual understanding. When I have presented the points of view of the ethical, mystical, and theological types of religions my aim has been to present them exactly as they are. If I have failed this is due to a lack of skill, but my intent remains the same. If I have disagreements with other religions my aim is to disagree with their very truth: to understand their truth exactly as they do, and then reject *this*. But, once again, rejection is more a matter of *different affirmation* and in this case the sense of rejecting another is largely lost.

Why would I bother with a non-evaluative consideration of other religious points of view that I do not affirm as absolutely true. One reason is to put the degree of difference into perspective. Valuations create a huge gulf; the gulf between truth and error. But if we remove the valuations and look at the same "truth and errors" objectively we might see only slightly different nuances of meaning. At times I find it hard to tell if the feeling of being one with God, an instrument of God, a God-man, or God's image are different at all. When differences become exaggerated on account of value judgements it is worth removing the value judgements and taking a look at the straight facts.

I have a strong feeling about what religion is, even if this is not well defined here. Out of this strong feeling for religion I have tried to show how I relate myself to equally strong feelings for religion that are different from my own. I can't claim that I have transcended my own point of view in trying to relate myself to others and consequently

my relationships may remain internal fantasies. But, on the other hand, I can put them to the test to see if this is or is not the case. I can really try to draw others into an agreement about what the basic situation or problem is; I can engage in a real process of mutual understanding with those who have different solutions to this basic problem; and I can encourage tolerance when each person retires to the solitude of their own absolute. If these types of relationship can become real then my solution, regardless of its origin, works. All that I have said so far speaks to the value of unity in diversity as a means for making sense of religious diversity; now I will speak briefly of its limitation.

The Limitation of Every Form of Unity in Diversity

There is a situation to which my form of unity in diversity, and no form of unity, can be appropriately applied; that of multiple religious truths. A situation of multiple religious truths will exist if unity cannot be established on any level of truth. I established the unity of my religious form with the mystical, theological and ethical forms of religion by identifying a common commitment to the position that human beings were in some sense Divine. But what about a religion that says that human beings are in no sense Divine or a religion that says human beings are in every sense Divine. We must admit that this form of unity in diversity is not going to be able to make sense of this situation.

For a form of unity and diversity to work it must be able to establish a common context, or basic form, from which everything else follows. This, of course, limits every departure to being a variation of the basic form; even the perfect form must be a variety

of the basic form. Unity in diversity doesn't allow formal diversity and insofar as truth is linked to a form it doesn't allow any real diversity of truth. There can be better and worse versions of the same truth but no different truths.

One way to handle this limitation is to deny the possibility of different truths, and insist on conformity to a single form of truth. However, it is inappropriate to demand conformity where there is no natural conformity, and in this situation it would be better for a form of unity in diversity to admit inadequacy and limit itself to a situation that it can handle.

As an illustration of content that would not fit into my form of unity in diversity I cited religions that on one hand conceive of the human being as *completely* Divine and on the other conceive of the human being as *completely* not Divine. These were not random examples but the only actual cases I know of that will not fit into my form of unity in diversity at all.

One of the best examples of a religion that conceives of creation as entirely non-Divine is the Baha'i Faith. Here the truth about God is that "there is none other God besides Me." (1992: 233) And one of the best examples of a religion that conceives of creation as entirely Divine is Adidam. Here the great truth about God is that there is Only God. I can't now go into the subtleties of these positions, but I can say that neither conceives of creation as being in *some respects* Divine. Creation as qualified Divinity has no expression in these traditions.

Regardless, what this evidence means (if I take it seriously) is that the vision of unity in diversity that I have so far been happy to use, must be abandoned in this new

situation. And if in this situation I cannot establish a common commitment of any kind then I must abandon, in principle, unity in diversity as a means for making sense of it.

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