

10-2014

# Can All Religions Live In Peace?

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# Can All Religions Live In Peace?

by

Antony Das S. Devadhasan

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2014

This manuscript has been read and accepted  
for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction  
of the dissertation requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Prof. Steven M. Cahn

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## **Abstract**

### **Can All Religions Live In Peace?**

by

Antony Das S. Devadhasan

Adviser: Prof. Steven M. Cahn

Religion is identified as one of the main factors that divide humanity. Pluralists like, John Hick identify the conflicting truth claims or the doctrines of different religions as the basis for religious exclusivism. Hick accuses the exclusivists of being epistemically arrogant and morally oppressive. His remedy for eradicating exclusivism is that every religion with conflicting truth claims should reinterpret these claims so as to share an outlook with other religions.

Alvin Plantinga, a critic of Hick, contradicts Hick on behalf of a believer or an exclusivist. He argues that for a believer his beliefs are true and all that are not in line with his beliefs are wrong. According to Plantinga an exclusivist's epistemic arrogance is justified as he/she is epistemically favored by God. Furthermore Plantinga says that if the exclusivists are morally oppressive pluralists are also for the same reason. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, another critic of Hick, focuses her discussion on the gap between rationality and truth. The problem occurs when we combine exclusivism of truth and inclusivism of rationality. She warns that doing so could lead to agnosticism. However, she finds that Hick solves the problem in a sense when he acknowledges that all religions are capable of communicating the divine to their respective believers, and all offer ways to salvation. She also points out three possible dangers involved in Hick's position, namely, i) phenomenal polytheism and noumenal monotheism, ii) the threat to religious commitment and

iii) the incompatibility of his position with many religions that consider seriously both historical and transhistorical truths. Moreover, Zagzebski proposes that trust in one's own belief is the decisive factor in one's religious convictions.

This essay aims to find a philosophical ground for the peaceful co-existence of religions. To be different from others is our existential situation. A religion is different from other religions based on its fundamental doctrines about the divine reality, which is incomprehensible or unfathomable unlike any material object of scientific experiment. Hick's Kantian analysis helps us realize that all the knowledge we can have is only phenomenal. On that ground, no religion can claim to be superior to all other religions. However, Hick's conclusion that all religions must modify their contradicting truth claims to be in line with other religions could be naive. Each religion is superior to other religions from the perspective of its followers. However, peace among religions is possible philosophically, especially as we are aware of our limitations in knowing the truth, and we respect others as they also search for the same.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost I acknowledge the accompanying presence of the Divine all through my life. I immensely express my immense gratitude to Prof. Steven Cahn, my guide. Since day one at the Graduate Center, he has been a great inspiration and support to me. I thank him for his assistance and availability in the writing of my thesis, from selecting my topic to its completion. I thank Dr. Matthew Gold, the Executive Officer of the M.A. Program in Liberal Studies, for his kind availability and encouragement throughout my graduate studies. I also gratefully acknowledge the service of Katherine Koutsis, Assistant Program Officer of MALS Program. I gratefully acknowledge all my professors who have contributed to my growth with their wisdom. I am immensely grateful to all the librarians for their valuable help. I also thank all my fellow students of MALS as well as of the Philosophy Department.

I owe my gratitude to Msgr. Thomas Bergin, pastor of St. Charles Church, Staten Island, Fr. Albin Roby, Mr. Michael Coppotelli, Mr. Bruno Evangelista and all my friends of St. Charles parish, for their encouragement and support throughout my studies. I gratefully acknowledge the following individuals who assisted with correction and proof reading, namely Ms. Jennifer Evangelista and Ms. Winsome Alston. I thank Rt. Rev. Peter Remigius (Bishop of Kottar), Most Rev. Peter Fernando (Archbishop of Madurai) and the other Madurai regional bishops for having given me the opportunity to do my studies abroad.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my parents Mr. Devadhasan and Mrs. Victorial and all the people of St.Charles Parish, Staten Island for their prayers and encouragement.

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## Introduction

Is religion a dividing or unifying factor in the world? The following example demonstrates how human beings, irrespective of all religious differences, long for peace. In May, during Pope Francis' visit to Palestine and Israel, the Pope invited both Shimon Peres, the president of Israel and Mahmoud Abbas, the president of Palestine to go to the Vatican to pray for peace. They went and joined the Pope in prayer on June 08<sup>th</sup>, 2014. The Pope encouraged them saying, 'Prayer has the ability to transform hearts and thus to transform history.'<sup>1</sup> This story emphasizes that religion remains a large part of our lives. Despite human achievements in the field of science, people still turn to religions for answers to the ultimate questions in life.

Our society is divided in many ways, and religion is seen to be one of the main causes for division. We are living in a multi socio-religious cultural world. Every person is unique and one's way of understanding the divine could be unique too, because spirituality does not deal with material reality but transcendental reality. Though the divine reality is fundamentally one, our beliefs could be different, since persons are not alike and each one understands the divine reality from his/her background. Unlike belief, religion is based upon an agreement among a particular group of people concerning their understanding of the divine and their response to the divine.

In this essay, we are concerned about the relevance and the challenges of religious pluralism in the world today. Every religion has its own unique culture, belief systems, and world views. All religions address the relationship among God, Man and World, but in their assessment, they differ drastically, and each religion claims to be the best. Often times, their truth claims are

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<sup>1</sup> Cf., Pope hosts Mideast peace summit. *New York Post*. New York, Monday, June 9, 2014, 8.

totally in contradiction to the truth claims of other religions. Given this situation, ‘Can all the religions live in peace?’ is the question before us. We shall approach this issue beginning with an analysis of the essay: “Religious Pluralism and Salvation” by John Hick a twentieth century ardent advocate of religious pluralism, which is followed by the presentation of two opposing views of Hick’s critiques, namely, Alvin Plantinga and Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski. Finally, we shall examine the possible philosophical basis for religious pluralism today.

### **A Life Sketch of John Hick**

John Hick was a well known philosopher of religion and theologian who until his last breath advocated the relevance of religious pluralism. He was one of the most important and influential philosophers of religion in the second half of the twentieth century. He was born on January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1922 in Scarborough, England and he did his MA at the University of Edinburgh and Ph.D. at Oriel College, Oxford University. Hick taught at Claremont Graduate University, California from 1979 to 1992 as Danforth Professor of Philosophy of Religion. He also worked as the H.G. Wood Professor of Theology as well as a Fellow of Research in the Arts and Social Sciences at the University of Birmingham. Hick became the founder and the first chair of the group All Faiths for One Race (AFFOR) and also worked as the chair on its Religious and Cultural Panel. He died at the age of 90, on February 9<sup>th</sup>, 2012.

John Hick did not follow any religion in particular. His family background was such that his grandmother and mother did not strictly follow any religion or go to a particular church regularly; rather they seemed to have belonged to different churches. While Hick began as a law student, he seemed to have undergone a religious experience which led him to accept evangelical

Christianity and to focus on the study of both theology and philosophy. In the early stages of his interest in religion he defended Christian faith against the evidentialist criticism of logical positivists, saying that Christian faith was not based on propositional evidence, but on religious experience. During this stage he based himself on Irenaeus' 'soul-making' theodicy in which God allowed evil and suffering in order to help the human beings to become mature so that they may follow God's will. But later in the 1960s, Hick seemed to have had another religious experience while he worked on civil rights issues in Birmingham, alongside people of other faiths. There he was convinced that sincere adherents of other faiths experience the Transcendent just as Christians do, despite their cultural, historical and doctrinal differences. Such experiences and reflections led him to develop the pluralistic hypothesis that 'adherents of the major religious faiths experience the ineffable Real through their varying culturally shaped lenses.' Furthermore, he interpreted Christian doctrines such as the incarnation, atonement, and trinity not as metaphysical claims but as metaphorical or mythological ones.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf., Cramer, David C. (2014). John Hick (1922-2012). *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*. Online resource: <http://www.iep.utm.edu/hick/>. Accessed on 07/07/2014.

## **Chapter 1**

### **A Critical Analysis of Hick's article: Religious Pluralism and Salvation**

Hick presents his article in six sections, and we shall also maintain the same structure in our analysis. Each section begins with a short summary introduction which is followed by an analysis further substantiated by references from other writings of Hick and others.

#### **1.1. Religions are the ways to salvation**

In the world of religious pluralism, each religion with its distinctive beliefs, spiritual practices, ethical outlook, art, forms and cultural ethos, demands a total allegiance from the believers. Hick wants to analyze the phenomenon of religious pluralism from the point of view of salvation. Generally all religions see salvation as moving from self-centeredness to God-centeredness. Analyzing the definition of salvation offered by each religion shows that all their various definitions come from a single understanding of the givenness of human existence as 'the state of fallenness'. The first part of the article presents before us some of the challenge presented by different religions claiming to be the ways to the divine, or the Real, as Hick prefers to call it.

Hick begins his article by acknowledging the many religious traditions, each with its own distinctive beliefs, spiritual practices, ethical outlook, art forms, and cultural ethos. For example, Catholic Christians believe in Trinitarian, namely, God the Father who created, God the Son came to save humanity by sacrificing his human life on the cross and God the Holy Spirit, who constantly cares for us all. Therefore the Catholics view the cross as a symbol of redemption and they also draw the sign of the cross on them reminding them of the presence of the Holy Trinity. It is obligatory for them to participate in the Sunday worship. They do all these things and more as a response to the Divine. Jews keep the Sabbath and the commandments as a sign of their religious

commitment. Muslims pray five times a day and pray facing the direction of Mecca. Both Jews and Muslims avoid eating certain food like pork considering it unclean. Brahmins of Hindu religion are strict vegetarians. Hindus believe that life is conditioned by karma, the result of one's actions in the previous birth, from which one could be liberated through the performance of dharma, which is righteous action or the duty pertaining to that particular birth. Therefore, dharma is performed as a response to the divine. Thus each religious tradition has its own characteristics. Hick also points out that despite the radical differences and distinctive characters of different religions there are also overlaps. In other words, most of the major religions agree that this world is transitory and earthly life is ephemeral, but there is a possibility of eternity after this life; God is everywhere; prayer, fasting, and other such spiritual practices bring blessings of God or gods, and so forth.

Hick's article takes for granted that there is only one divine reality and all different religions are trying to make sense of the same ultimate reality. Though there are many names given to the divine reality by various religions, in order to be neutral, he chooses to use the word 'Real' for the ultimate divine reality. The distinctive characters of religions are manifested in their understanding of the Real and their responses to the Real. He says that as long as the distinctive characters and practices of each religious tradition are seen as human phenomena, there is no problem. By that he means that there is no problem or conflict if such various beliefs, spiritual practices, and so on, are merely spontaneous activities of individuals in relation to the Real. On the contrary, if such beliefs or spiritual practices are considered as proper responses to the Real, defined by a group of people belonging to a particular religion, the differences are a problem for Hick. In reality every religious tradition presents itself both implicitly and explicitly as absolute

and unsurpassable in its understanding of the Real and demands total allegiance from the believer. The problem of the relationship among the various religious traditions is posed by their divergent belief-systems. Every religion has designed its beliefs, practices, its ethical outlooks, art forms and cultural ethos as responses to the Real it perceives in the reality based on its beliefs and doctrines. In such approaches by various religions, there are both overlaps and radical differences. While acknowledging these, Hick also points out some of the radical differences among the divergent belief-systems. He raises questions such as: “Is the divine personal or non-personal; if personal, is it unitary or triune; is the universe created, or emanated, or itself eternal; do we live only once on this earth or are we repeatedly reborn?”<sup>3</sup> Evidently there are many practices among religions that overlap too. For an example Jerusalem is the Holy City for Jews, Christians and Muslims. Though numerous wars have been fought by all the three religions to keep control over it, all of them not only consider Jerusalem as the Holy City but also maintain it by visiting there as pilgrims. Jews, Christians and Muslims try to respect the religious establishments of all three religions. On Ash Wednesday the Catholics apply ashes on their forehead as a sign of the beginning of the Lenten season as well as a reminder of the impermanence of life on earth. Likewise, Hindus in general apply ashes on their forehead everyday to remind themselves of the emptiness or the evanescent nature of this earthly life. Generally, most of the major religions practice fasting and prayer in order to gain blessings from the Real.

To understand the differences, Hick points to the various names of the Divine or the Real. ‘God’ is a very commonly used term for the divine but it has different meanings to different people: for Jews - ‘Yahweh’, for Christians – the Trinity, for Muslims – ‘Allah’, for Mahayana Buddhists

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<sup>3</sup> Hick, John. (2014). Religion Pluralism and Salvation. Cahn, Steven M. (ed.). *Reason and Religion: Philosophy looks at the World's Religious Beliefs*. USA: Wadsworth, 361.

– Buddha, for Hindus of *Vaishnavism* – Vishnu, for Hindus of *Saivism* – Siva, for Hindus of *Advaitins* – Brahman, for Hindus of *Sakthism* – *Sakthi*, for folk religions– the heroes who did great things or died for his/her community, and so on. Deities of folk religions are ordinary people who contributed extraordinarily for the welfare of the community or sacrificed their lives for their communities. There are temples built for such heroes like Mahatma Gandhi<sup>4</sup>, *Avvaiyar*<sup>5</sup> (a great ancient Tamil poetess), *Madurai Veeran*, and so forth.

For Hick, there are many variations in understanding the Real: whether the Real is personal or impersonal; if personal, is it unitary (Islam) or triune (Christianity)? Is the universe created (Creationist), or emanated or evolved (those who hold that the world emanated from God hold God not merely as an ordering principle but also as a productive principle<sup>6</sup>), or exists eternally? Do we live only once on this earth or are we repeatedly reborn as Hindus believe? Christians believe in only one birth and the redemption brought for the whole humanity by Jesus once and for all. On the contrary, Hindus in general believe in several rebirths which are determined by one's karma from the previous life. All the orthodox religions believe in a transcendent being that cares for the world and humanity. Spirituality is a field in which one may not have the complete knowledge of the divine unlike a material object. Karen Armstrong in her acclaimed book: *The History of God*,<sup>7</sup> says that the almighty does not change but our understandings of God and expressions change. She says that the human idea of God has a history where in each generation

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<sup>4</sup> There is one temple in Orissa, India for Mahatma Gandhi. On line resource: [http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2009-04-03/news/27633299\\_1\\_gandhi-temple-communal-amity-mahatma-gandhi](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2009-04-03/news/27633299_1_gandhi-temple-communal-amity-mahatma-gandhi). Accessed on 08/05/2014.

<sup>5</sup> Cf., Avvaiyar temple. Online resource: <http://incrediblekumari.blogspot.com/2008/07/avvaiyaramman-temple-muppanthal.html>. Accessed on 08/05/2014.

<sup>6</sup> Cf., Tanner, Kathryn. (2013). Creation ex nihilo as mixed metaphor. *Modern Theology*. 29 (2), 145.

<sup>7</sup> Cf., Armstrong, Karen. (1994). *A History of God: The 4000 Years Quest for Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. New York: Ballentine Books. 9.

the idea of God is slightly different from the previous generation. Since every culture is unique and different from others, the understanding and expression of the divine also would be different. Homo sapiens has come a long way in the history of evolution. Parallel to evolution human understanding of the divine also has been evolving. Hick's focus on religious diversity is so vast an area of research that it cannot be done in its entirety, for it is still an ongoing reality. Hick chooses to approach the issue of religious pluralism starting from the understanding of salvation. Salvation is the common concept in all the religions. Though salvation is basically a Christian term, with equivalent meaning there are also words like redemption, liberation, *mukti*, *mokcha*, *nirvana*, and so on used in most other religions. Hick calls 'salvation' a post-axial concept. He says that the aim of the pre-axial religions<sup>8</sup> was primarily polytheistic, and they were centrally concerned to keep life going on an even keel. But in the axial age of the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium B.C.E., principally, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam – were centrally concerned with a radical transformation of the human situation. Human beings began to see the world in a broader sense. They transcended their tribal mentality to see the world as one under one God.

If we examine the understanding of salvation, each religion differs. According to Christianity, as Hick would say, salvation is being forgiven by God because of Jesus' atoning death and so becoming part of God's redeemed community, the church. According to Mahayana

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<sup>8</sup> Pre-axial religion      Axial age is a term first introduced by German philosopher Karl Jaspers to describe the period from 800 to 200 BCE during which, similar revolutionary thinking appeared in Persia, India, China, the Occident, the Middle East and Greece. It is the pivotal point around which the whole human development revolves. Pre-axial age can be marked by the transition of human civilization from gathering and hunting to agriculture, domesticating animals and animal husbandry, from the exclusive understanding of tribal gods to inclusive understanding of God and the universe as one. In the Pre-axial age people had limited language skills for communication and very limited knowledge of the nature and therefore there was limited religious development. Post-axial age began with the axial age in which the religions, principally Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, etc. Ref: Tomek, Vladimir. (2007). The Axial Age, previous eras, & Consequences of the Axial Age. *Religious Tolerance.Org*. Online resource: <http://www.religioustolerance.org/tomek26.htm>. Accessed on 06/09/2014.

Buddhism, salvation is liberation, which is the attainment of *satori* or awakening, and so becoming an ego-free manifestation of the eternal *Dharmakaya*. Liberation in *Advaita* is the realization of *Tat-tvam-asi*. It is the realization of the individual soul that he/she is the Brahman. *Saivism* teaches that liberation is freeing *pasu* (soul) from *pasa* (the bondage of the world) and to turn to *pathy* (God).<sup>9</sup> Salvation in Islam is entering into a place of excessive indulgence of every pleasure known to man. Judaism speaks of salvation as the bodily resurrection by Pharisees or the liberation of the soul only from the body advocated by philosophers like Maimonides.<sup>10</sup>

While we trace understandings of salvation by various religions, evidently all religions take for granted the given the fallenness of human beings. Hick points out how each tradition conceptualizes in its own way, the wrongness of ordinary human existence – as a state of fallenness from paradisaal virtue and happiness, or as a condition of moral weakness and alienation from God, or as the fragmentation of the infinite One into false individualities, or as a self-centeredness which pervasively poisons our involvement in the world process, making it to us an experience of anxious unhappy fulfillment. Each religion portrays salvation as a limitlessly better possibility from than given fallenness. Salvation is claimed to be the joy of conforming one's life to God's Law for Jews; of giving oneself to God in Christ for Christians; of surrendering oneself completely to Allah for Muslims; of transcending ego and realizing oneness with the limitless for *Advaitins* of Hinduism; of overcoming the ego point of view and entering into the serene selflessness of nirvana for Buddhists; and so on. In short, all the religions project salvation to be the total transformation

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<sup>9</sup> Cf., V, Jayaram. (N.A.). Pasa, The Three Bonds That Hold You Back. *Saivism.net*. Online Resource: <http://saivism.net/>. Accessed on 08/10/2014.

<sup>10</sup> Cf., Krell, Marc A. (N.A.). After Life and Salvation. *Religion Library: Judaism*. Online resource: <http://www.patheos.com/Library/Judaism/Beliefs/Afterlife-and-Salvation?offset=1&max=1>. Accessed on 06/21/2014.

of human existence from self-centeredness to a new orientation, centered in the divine reality. That immeasurable superior possibility is available and entered upon here and now.

Hick brings to our attention another important factor, that is, each religion has defined and designed a particular way as the only means to enter into salvation. Salvation is achieved through being faithful to Torah for Jews; becoming a disciple to Jesus for Christians; being adherent to the Quranic way of life for Muslims; following the eightfold path for Buddhists; practicing the three great *margas*, namely, mystical insight, activity in the world and self-giving devotion to God, for Hindus.

There are many religions but their terrain is only one world and their subject is the divine that transcends the worldly reality. Human beings are those led toward salvation by religions. The transcending quality of the divine is the reason for the existence of so many religions. As the divine is not a material reality, each religion claims to have the right understanding of the divine and the only way to salvation. The problem Hick points out here is that while each religion claims to have the right knowledge of the divine, simultaneously, denies every other understandings and the ways of all other religions.

## **1.2. If all are ways of salvation, then which is superior among them?**

The first part concluded that salvation is a move from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. The second part presents before us the difficulty in comprehending the unobservable development of spiritual quality of a human relationship to the Real except through its fruits. Science is interested in dealing with matters that can be subjected

to laboratory experiments, and scientific method is always vindicated by its fruits. Can we apply the same approach to religions that deal with the transcendent reality?

We humans as contingent beings primarily depend on our senses to appraise anything of the world around us. Science tries to define any reality within its domain of experiments. But, religion deals with the transcendent reality, which is expressed on one level, in human words and action, particularly, in rites and rituals. On another level it is lived out by humans in the moral life. Therefore, Hick concludes that the only way to evaluate the superiority of any religion is by evaluating its fruits which must be evident in the human moral life. Each religion claims to constitute an effective context within which the transformation is possible. We cannot directly observe the inner quality of a human relationship to the Real, but we can observe the fruits of that relationship in the moral and spiritual quality of a human personality and in a man or woman's relationship to others.

For Hick, the word 'spiritual' means a quality or orientation in the life of saints or *arahat*, *bodhisattva*, *jivanmukti*, *mahatma*, etc. In the above cases, human life is described as becoming part of the life of the Real or being permeated from within by the eternal reality of Brahman or becoming one with the eternal Buddha nature. A saintly state is the transformed state from self-centeredness to the Real-centeredness as manifested in every tradition. There is a change in their deepest orientation from centeredness in the ego to a new centering in the Real, where one is empowered to live as an instrument of God/ Truth/Reality. Hick also acknowledges from his own experience that one is conscious in the presence of such a saintly person who is open to the transcendence. He shares one such experience in his autobiography as follows,

One day we were all taken by bus to visit Mahabalipuram and Kanchipuram, where we had an audience with the Shankaracharya of Kanchi. He is an old man with very beautiful face and intelligent, twinkling eyes. He came into the barn-like room and sat cross-legged on a table precariously held together with string, and we were each introduced to him, after which there was some discussion, someone translating throughout. I can well believe that he is a saint; but he did not have anything particularly interesting or illuminating to say to the assembled philosophers. The meeting was, in Hindu terms, more in the nature of *darshan*, simply being in the presence of a holy person.<sup>11</sup>

Hick divides the saints into two major categories, namely, saints who withdraw from the world into prayer or meditation, and saints who seek to change or transform the world. He also gives some examples that fit those categories, like, Julian of Norwich who spent her life in prayer or political Joan of Arc in the medieval century, Sri Aurobindo and Mahatma Gandhi<sup>12</sup> in our own century. Hick himself in one of his talks mentions Julian of Norwich, a fifteenth century Christian mystic, who saw visions of Jesus and wrote down those which were mostly positive about the world and human life in the future.<sup>13</sup>

In our present age of social consciousness, we are aware that every human understanding of social, political and economical systems could be analyzed and changed if needed. In such a given situation, a saintly person cannot but be involved in social and political reform, because saints are part and parcel of this mundane reality. Saints are, in fact, not different from us but they are more advanced in the salvific transformation. As already mentioned, one is able to become aware of a saintly person's openness to the transcendent, while we are also capable of identifying the ethical aspect of this salvific transformation in individuals through observing their behaviors.

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<sup>11</sup> Hick, John. (2005). *John Hick: An Autobiography*. England: One Word Publications. 196.

<sup>12</sup> Cf., Hick, John. (1993). Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion, 86. In his book, Hick admires Mahatma Gandhi's greatness saying how Gandhi was recognized by hundreds of millions in India as Mahatma, a great soul. He who had realized the human moral and spiritual potential to a rare degree, inspired many others to rise to a new level of effective self-giving love for others.

<sup>13</sup> Cf., Hick, John. (2002). Reincarnation and the Meaning of life (A talk given to the Open End, Birmingham, December 2002), 14. Online resource: <http://www.johnhick.org.uk/nietzsche.pdf>. Accessed on 06/23/2014.

But it is challenging to identify the kind of behavior in an individual that corresponds to the Real, and it is all the more difficult to determine which religion has the best ethical criteria. Therefore, Hick suggests a common criterion from the moral insights of great traditions, namely, love/compassion, because it plays a central and normative role in giving unselfish regard to others. Further he substantiates that criterion by citing sayings from various great religious writings: ‘One should never do to another that which one would regard as injurious to oneself. This, in brief, is the rule of Righteousness,’ (*Anushana parva*, 113:7 of *Mahabharatha*, an ancient Hindu epic) and ‘He who....benefits persons of all orders, who is always devoted to the good of all beings, who does not feel aversion to anybody.....succeeds in ascending into Heaven’ (*Anushana parva*, 145:24 of *Mahabharatha*, an ancient Hindu epic); ‘As a mother cares for her son, all her days, so towards all living things a man’s mind should be all-embracing’ (*Sutta Nipata*, 149 of Buddhism): ‘(one should go about) treating all creatures in the world as he himself would be treated’ says Jain scriptures (*Kintanga Sutra*, I.ii.33 of Jain Scriptures); ‘Do not do to others what you would not like yourself’ (*Analects*, xxi, 2 of Confucius); (the good man will) regard (others) gains as if they were his own, and their losses in the same way’ (*Thai Shang*, 3 of Taoist scripture); ‘The nature only is good when it shall not do unto another whatever is not good for its own self’ (*Dadistan-i-dinik*, 94:5 of the Zoroastrian scriptures); ‘As ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise’ (Luke 6:31 of Jesus); ‘What is hateful to yourself do not do to your fellow man. That is the whole of the Torah’ (*Babylonian Talmud*, Shabbath 31a of Judaism); ‘No man is a true believer unless he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself’ (*Ibn Madja*, Intro. 9 of Islam); etc.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Cf., Hick, John. (2014). Religion Pluralism and Salvation. Cahn, Steven M. (ed), *Reason and Religions: Philosophy looks at the World’s Religious Beliefs*. USA: Wadsworth, 363.

Hick feels comfortable in using love/compassion as the common criterion which is the basis for giving unselfish regard to others. All the major religions / faiths emphasize the virtue of love/compassion and teach humanity to avoid injustice, unnecessary suffering, and to live in peace. Despite the religious teachings, the personal virtues as well as vices are basically much the same within different religion-cultural settings. We witness both love and hatred or selflessness and selfishness spread more or less equally in every society. Therefore, Hick worries that there is no way of making a responsible judgment in this area. There is no good reason to believe that any one of the great religious tradition has proved itself to be more productive of love than another. Meanwhile, it is pretty easy for someone to see clearly enough the defects of the others from within each culture. But an objective ethical comparison of such vast and complex totalities is at present an unattainable ideal. Therefore no single institution can claim an over-all moral superiority.

From within each culture one can clearly see the defects of the others. My seeing or evaluating is always in reference to the understanding of where I belong or my frame of reference. My understanding of the group to which I belong is much influenced by its beliefs, ideologies, and so forth. My belonging to a group could come from my existential situation, namely, my birth or my coming into contact with the group. We shall try to understand this a little more clearly. At birth, probably, one enters into this world as a stranger. He needs a basis to know oneself and the world around. A newborn starts crying immediately after its birth, probably, it is due to its fear of anonymity. A person begins to base oneself on the outlook of his immediate family. Though a person seems impartial and unattached at birth, the person begins to attach oneself to some group that accommodates him/her. Then one gets indoctrinated automatically or naturally by the group

or society where one belongs. In other words, to be in this world is to belong somewhere, and thus one forms a basic structure of ideas and convictions. And thereafter, in every interaction, one filters every other idea that comes from outside in reference to one's basic outlook. The challenge here is to know whether one's ideology paradigm is right or wrong universally. As long as one's convictions are culture-bound, they are right in reference to one's culture. It is not necessary that the same should be universally right. There are some tribes in Rajasthan where marriage within the tribe is a taboo. Every female in that particular tribe is a sister to the men within the tribe. Unlike these few tribes in Rajasthan most other people in India practice strict endogamy. Therefore Hick is correct in saying that a universal objective ethical comparison of the totalities is unattainable. Along the same line, no single religion or any other institution can claim an over-all moral superiority. We can take for granted that there is no way to find out whether an ideology is universally valid. At the same time, we might agree with Hick that those ideologies that revolve around love or compassion are universally beneficial to humanity.<sup>15</sup>

Further, Hick acknowledges that every religion explicitly or implicitly means and teaches love. Though an individual's absorption of love occurs within the context, of a life situation or the teaching of love by an institution is conditioned, there are generally recognized attitudes with which some actions are done out of love. Those actions which are performed for the benefit of other human beings, sometimes to the point of sacrificing one's own life, could be recognized as an act done 'out of love'. Even though understanding and teaching of love by every individual and institution is limited, still an act of love is easily recognized, as it is done without any selfish motive, purely for the benefit of others.

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<sup>15</sup> Cf., Hick, John. Religion Pluralism and Salvation, 363.

Hick says that generally we do come to know that love/compassion has been witnessed among the people within their respective communities, their religion, profession, and so on, supplemented by travelers' tales and anecdotes. In that connection he mentions a report of a remarkable degree of self-giving love practiced among the Hindu families in the mud huts along Madras shore, India. He adds that there are many such similar accounts from biographies, social histories and novels of Muslim villages in Africa, Buddhist life in Thailand, Hindu life in India, Jewish life in New York, Christian life around the world, both in the past and today.

Hick is convinced that personal virtues (as well as vices) are basically much the same within all different religious-cultural settings. We see that love/compassion is spread in every society as much as cruelty, greed, hatred, selfishness and malice. Irrespective of the presence of love/compassion in every society, Hick feels that we cannot get a precise data of its presence for a comparative study of any social or religious communities in order to make any responsible judgment. The subject we want to analyze is so intermingled with varying natural conditions of human life in different periods of history and in different economic and political circumstances that it cannot be evaluated in isolation. For example, if we examine the impact of economy in society, we are surprised by the varying results in the ethical behavior of people. It may sound logical to think that the poor are more likely to steal and cheat, and the rich are fairer. But Berkeley psychologists Paul Piff and Dacher Keltner's studies suggest that people's compassionate feelings decline as people climb the social ladder. In one study they found that the less affluent were more likely to express their feeling of compassion towards others on a regular basis such as saying, 'I often notice people who need help,' and 'It is important to take care of people who are

vulnerable.<sup>16</sup> Such studies help us realize that the economic situation has more impact on the social behavior of people than the religious factor.

Hick is also aware of another major hurdle in evaluating religions, namely, that the religious cultures have been active in the society for a very long time and have so mingled with daily life. It is very difficult to make any judgment on particular religions because we can never have total information about any one religion. Additionally, even the fragments of collected information cannot be judged in isolation but always in the light of many other varying periods of history, as well as different economic and political circumstances. If we consider all the previously mentioned reasons, then, we can hardly agree with any one religion that claims to be more productive of love/compassion than another religion. Similarly we cannot also compare the large-scale social outlooks of the different salvation projects of various religions, because there too we have the same difficulty. And Hick believes that each religion had its own time of flourishing and deterioration. Every religion has contributed both good and evil to its society. But, even here we cannot evaluate the good and evil of each religion cross-culturally. Hick shows the vulnerability ‘in the weighing of the lack of economic progress and consequent widespread of poverty in traditional Hinduism and Buddhism against the endemic racism of Christian civilization, culminating in the twentieth century Holocaust’. There is a world of difference between the western and the eastern cultures, for example, the arranged marriage of the east against the western concept of marriage as one’s own choice. It is understandable that both have their merits and demerits.

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<sup>16</sup> Grewal, Daisy. (2012). Rich people have less compassion, Psychology Research suggests. *Scientific American*. Online resource: [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/10/rich-people-compassion-mean-money\\_n\\_1416091.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/04/10/rich-people-compassion-mean-money_n_1416091.html). Accessed on 06/30/2014.

From within each culture one can easily see the defects of another culture because our own is our frame of reference. One tends to identify oneself with the group he/she belongs to. Belonging to a particular group may come to one as a result of one's birth in a group. At the moment of birth one may not have an identity of his/her own and neither any influence from outside. An individual develops his/her identity gradually through his/her interaction with the surroundings. In person's every interaction one filters every other idea that comes from outside according to one's already accumulated knowledge from his/her surroundings. Since every person's ideology is formed depending on the group one belongs to, there cannot be any ideal ideology common for all. In such a condition, it is impossible to make an objective ethical comparison of any vast and complex totalities such as religions. Consequently we can conclude that there can be no religion to claim an over-all moral superiority. Even though we cannot comprehend of the totality of religious phenomena, Hick proposes love/compassion as the ideal virtue to measure the impact of religions on the individuals. Love/compassion is the ideal virtue that is universally beneficial to the whole of humanity. Every religion both implicitly and explicitly teaches love. Still that love is conditioned by one's worldview which is already conditioned by both the group one belongs to and one's own capacity for absorbing and personalizing truth. The remedy is to be aware of the limitation of every individual as well as the group which one belongs to. As long as an individual is a contingent being one's observation, understanding, expression, and everything else will be contingent. Better be aware of our contingency, so that we may be always open to truth wherever it may come from.

Salvation is an actual change in human beings from self-centeredness to divine centeredness. Hick understands that though all the world religions are guiding humans towards salvation, there is no way of verifying which religion is salvifically superior to the rest. In order to compare the effects of various religions we may need to have observable data. Such data may be collected from the individuals in whose lives their moral aspects are easily observable. In history we find that all the major religions approved war against another religion at one or another time. Still today religions are warring against each other in many ways. By considering salvation to be a new orientation that has both a more elusive “spiritual” character and a more readily observable moral aspect, Hick concludes in this section that there is no religion salvifically superior to the rest.

### **1.3. First level doctrinal conflict**

The last section concluded that there is no religion salvifically superior. In this section Hick explains that since the Real is transcendent there are various kinds and levels of doctrinal conflicts of different traditions who define the Real in their own way. And once again this shows that there is no religion that has proved to be soteriologically more effective than all others. Here, Hick utilizes a Kantian insight to challenge the foundation of the doctrinal claims of various religions.

Hick begins this section mentioning the names of the Real given by people of different faiths, times and places as *Jahweh*, or the Holy Trinity, or Allah, or Siva, or Vishnu, or as Brahman, or the *Dharmakaya*, the Tao, and so on. And already we have seen that Hick established that salvation with the meaning of transformation takes place in all religions. Having said that, Hick makes a hypothesis that if salvation is taking place to about the same extent within the religious systems presided over by these various deities and absolutes, then all these deities must be only

various manifestations of the more ultimate ground of all salvific transformation. Further Hick proposes a possibility for our consideration saying, “Let us then consider the possibility that an infinite transcendent divine reality is being differently conceived, and therefore differently experienced, and therefore differently responded to from within our different religio-cultural ways of being human.”<sup>17</sup> By that he simply means that salvific transformation is possible in all religious traditions. However, there are various kinds of doctrinal conflicts because of different conceptions of the ultimate reality which is transcendent.

With a Kantian understanding on the process of knowledge, Hick explains how human experience is partly formed by the conceptual and linguistic frameworks within which it occurs. According to Kant, perception is not merely an activity of our senses alone but also of the mind which is constantly active in perception and one’s environment as it appears to a consciousness operating with one’s particular conceptual resources and habits. Further Hick says that this understanding of the knowledge process is supported by cognitive psychology and sociology of knowledge. Michael Rohlf says,

Kant’s revolutionary position in the Critique is that we can have a priori knowledge about the general structure of the sensible world because it is not entirely independent of the human mind. The sensible world or the world of appearance, is constructed by the human mind. The sensible world, or the world of appearances, is constructed by the human mind from a combination of sensory matter that we receive passively and a priori forms that are supplied by our cognitive faculties. We can have a priori knowledge only about aspects of the sensible world that reflects the a priori forms supplied by our cognitive faculties. In Kant’s words, “we can cognize of things a priori only when we ourselves have put into them” (Bxviii). So according to the Critique, a priori knowledge is possible only if and to the extent that the sensible world itself depends on the way the human mind structures its experience.<sup>18</sup>

According to Kant, perception is never passive, but always accompanied by the process of an active mind. When we perceive something we are simultaneously aware of our environment which

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<sup>17</sup> Hick, John. *Religion Pluralism and Salvation*, 364.

<sup>18</sup> Rohlf, Michael. (2014). Immanuel Kant. *Stanford Encyclopedia Of Philosophy*. Summer Edition, 16-17.

is present to the consciousness that processes our particular conceptual resources and habits. Therefore there can be no pure perception of anything at all. According to Hick, this is the case with the analysis of religious experience if we analyze the phenomenon of religious experience inductively. In such analysis Hick suggests two possibilities. The first one is to postulate an ultimate transcendent Reality which in itself is beyond human experience and conception, except as it appears through our various human thought forms. And the second one is to identify the thought-and-experienced deities and absolutes with different historical forms of human consciousness. This concept is easily explained in Kantian terms as follows. The divine/Real is experienced through different human receptivities as a range of divine phenomena. Even prior to that process, religious concepts have played an essential role in the formation of human receptivities themselves. These different human receptivities produce many variations because they also consist of conceptual schemas which are influenced by personal, communal and historical factors. The Real is basically thought and experienced as a personal deity or non-personal absolute. But in general it is not actually experienced either as deity or as the absolute. In Kantian terminology each basic concept becomes schematized in more concrete form as influenced by individual and cultural factors. Likewise, one's religious tradition with its history, ethos, exemplars, scriptures, devotional meditative practices, and so on, shapes our basic concept of the Real. Religious influence of that sort becomes like a 'lens' through which we see the Real specifically as *Adonai*, or as the Heavenly Father, or as Allah, or Vishnu, or Siva, or non-personal Brahman, or *Dharmakaya*, or the Void, or the Ground. Therefore, one can say that an individual experiences the Real only as per the teaching of his/her own religion.

Hick consolidates all the above in three explanatory statements as follows.

1. The multiple deities and absolutes are only manifestations and appearances of the Real just like a mountain may appear in varying ways to differently placed observers. If that is the case with a physical reality it would be much more divergent for the infinite transcendental reality as the varying human conceptual schemas may produce varying modes of phenomenal experience. Though the appearances are not the Real *an sich*, they are not illusory.

2. That the Real is beyond the range of our human concepts does not mean that it is beyond the scope of purely formal, logically generated concepts. The Real is on noumenal ground but cannot be understood in that ground. Therefore we have no base to qualify the Real *an sich* as singular or plural, substance or process, personal or non-personal, good or bad, purposive or non-purposive.

In support Hick presents various quotes from different religious traditions as follows:

Gregory of Nyssa: “The simplicity of the True Faith assumes God to be that which He is, namely, incapable of being grasped by any term or any idea, or any other device of our apprehension, remaining beyond the reach not only of the human but of the angelic and *supramundane* in words, having but one name that can represent His proper nature, the single name being ‘Above Every Name’ (Against Eunomius I, 42).”<sup>19</sup>

Augustine: “God transcends even the mind” (True Religion, 36:67)

Aquinas: “by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches” (Contra Gentiles, I, 14, 3)

Qur’an: God is “beyond what they desire” (6:101)

The Upanishads: There the eye goes not, speech goes not, nor the mind” (Kena Up, 1,3)

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<sup>19</sup> Hick, John. Religion Pluralism and Salvation, 365.

Shankara: Brahman is that “before which words recoil, and to which no understanding has ever attained” (Otto, *Mysticism East and West*, E.T. 1932, p. 28)

It is fitting here to recall an act from the book *The Little Prince*, written by Antonine de Saint Exupery. The Little Prince asks the pilot to draw a picture of a goat for him. The pilot also draws a few pictures of a goat that did not impress the Little Prince for he wanted a goat with horns. After attempting to draw many pictures he still fails to satisfy the Little Prince. Finally, the exhausted pilot finally draws a box and tells the Little Prince that the sheep he requested was inside the box. The Little Prince looked so pleased at this picture and expressed in excitement, ‘That is exactly the way I wanted it!’.<sup>20</sup> If there could be such an unarticulated and incomprehensible world of difference between the perception of a child and an adult with regard to an image of a sheep, we need not say how different our perceptions should be of the Real.

3. There is a need to postulate an ineffable and unobservable divine-reality-in-itself so that we account for the various forms of religious experience, or else all those forms of religious experience would be categorized as mere human projections. ‘If on the other hand there is such a transcendent ground, then all these phenomena may be joint products of the universal presence of the Real and of the varying sets of concepts and images that have crystallized within the religious traditions of the earth.’ Therefore, postulating a transcendent reality affirms that religious experiences are human responses to the Real though they are culturally conditioned.

As Hick concludes the third section, he spells out clearly the main issue he addresses in this article, namely, the doctrinal conflicts. He hypothesizes that the doctrinal conflicts embody

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<sup>20</sup> Cf., de Saint-Exupery, Antoine. (1995). *The Little Prince*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Ltd., 12-14.

different conceptions of the ultimate that arise from the variations between different sets of human conceptual schema and spiritual practices advocated by different religions. Furthermore, each of these varying ways of thinking-and-experiencing the Real in respect to their religious teaching has influenced human life.

#### **1.4. The Second level of doctrinal difference deals with some metaphysical beliefs.**

In this section Hick mentions some of the issues connected with the metaphysical relationship between the Real and the material universe, human destiny, heaven, hell, purgatories, angels and devil and many other subsidiary states and entities. Additionally he shows that such metaphysical issues remain as open-ended questions, for there is no guaranteed certainty about them. However, he says that those issues are least important with regard to salvation.

There are three sets of metaphysical issues mentioned by Hick in this section. Firstly, he mentions some of the metaphysical ambiguities or uncertainties regarding the relationship between the material universe and the Real, namely, the creation ex nihilo, emanation, eternal universe, an unknown form of dependency, and so on. Secondly, Hick acknowledges the metaphysical ambiguities connected with human beings, namely, reincarnation or a single life, eternal identity or transcendence of the self. And thirdly, he mentions the questions about heavens and hells, purgatories, angels, devils, and many other subsidiary states and entities.

The concept, 'creation ex nihilo' means that God created this world out of nothing. The Bible states that God created this world (Gen 1:1). However, the issue is whether God created this world out of nothing or something. The early Fathers of the Church such as Theophilus, Justin Martyr, and Origen actually believed that the world was created out of the preexisting matter. Thus God

brought an order in the chaotic matter. But this view was mostly rejected by the fourth century theologians because it involved problems raised by Gnosticism. Irenaeus (130-200) rejected the idea of preexistent matter saying, ‘There was no preexistent matter; everything is required to be created out of nothing’ (McGrath, 38). In contrast to the Aristotelian view of an independently existing world, Tertullian (160-225) argued that the world depended on God for its existence. Colin Gunton, one of the greatest British theologians of the 20<sup>th</sup> century said, ‘God is not a potter who makes a pot from the clay which is to hand; he is rather, like one who makes both the clay and pot. This teaching which baffles understanding and is often rejected because there is no analogy to it in human experience must be understood as an interpretation and summary of scripture’s witness to God as a whole,’ (The Christian Faith, p. 17)<sup>21</sup> Regarding the theory of emanation we may find Spinoza’s understanding supporting it but still there is no conclusive evidence for that. Many such theories remain as only speculations or hypotheses.

The idea of reincarnation is connected mostly with Hinduism, which is based on karma and is the fruit of one’s action in the previous birth. Accordingly the soul experiences reincarnation repeatedly until it is made pure to become one with its source, the Divine. During this purifying process the soul passes through many forms, bodies, lives and deaths. There is also a kind of reincarnation in Buddhism but it does not believe in the existence of soul (Cf., *anatamavada*); therefore the reincarnation is of consciousness. Liberation (*nirvana*) in Buddhism is the extinction of desire, hatred, ignorance, suffering and rebirth, in short, the annihilation of the whole self.<sup>22</sup> According to Buddhism a human person is made up of five aggregates (*khandhas*), namely, “(1)

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<sup>21</sup> Craig, William Lane. Creation Out of Nothing. *Theopedia.com*. Online resource: [http://www.theopedia.com/Creation\\_out\\_of\\_nothing](http://www.theopedia.com/Creation_out_of_nothing). Accessed on 07/20/2014.

<sup>22</sup> Cf., Donald. S, Lopez, Jr. Nirvana. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Online resource: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/415925/nirvana>. Accessed on 07/20/2014.

corporeality or physical forms (*rupa*), (2) feelings or sensations (*vedana*), (3) ideations (*sanna*), (4) mental formations or dispositions (*sankhara*) and (5) consciousness (*vinnana*). Human existence is only a composite of the five aggregates, none of which is the self or soul. A person is in a process of continuous change, and there is no fixed underlying entity.”<sup>23</sup> Most other major religions do not have reincarnation or rebirth doctrines. Hick argues that all these metaphysical issues are important because they have such an impact on our belief system. Out of many metaphysical issues Hick picks creation ex nihilo and reincarnation as vital to our belief systems. He says that if creation ex nihilo were to be the case then it would give a sense of absolute dependence on the creator. And the idea of reincarnation makes sense, for it offers hope for future spiritual progress combined with karma. The principle of karma can justify and validate the present inequalities in the society. On the other hand, the same karma is rejected by Buddhism precisely because it justifies the social inequalities based on the caste system.

Apart from religious answers to metaphysical questions, there are also attempts to settle these metaphysical issues scientifically. Scientists have been trying to prove that the world came about more or less fifteen million years ago from the “big bang”. Accepting “the big bang” theory necessarily rules out the idea of an eternal world. Despite the claims by science on “the big bang” theory, we do not have sufficient reason to totally believe it, for it remains only a hypothesis. Likewise, there are claims regarding the reincarnation even in modern times; still there is no sufficient proof or agreed knowledge in these areas. Having discussed these metaphysical issues, Hick presents Buddha’s approach to such questions. Some two and a half millennia ago, Buddha

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<sup>23</sup> Tucci, Giuseppe. Nakamura, Hajime . Reynolds, Frank E. The Buddha’s Message. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Online resource: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/83184/Buddhism/68656/Nirvana>. Accessed on 07/20/2014.

too listed out a series of “undetermined questions”( *avyakata* ) and said that attaining salvation/liberation does not require the knowledge of all these issues but rather single-minded quest for liberation/awakening. However, Hick wants to apply the principle of Buddha for the entire range of metaphysical issues disputed by religions. Hick concludes that in the same way adherence to no particular opinion or dogma is a requirement for salvation, since it is evident that the transformation of human person from self-centeredness to the Real-centeredness takes place in each tradition irrespective of their different dogmas and a believer’s correct knowledge of them.

### **1.5. The third level of doctrinal disagreement**

The third level of doctrinal disagreement concerns historical questions. All religions have relation to some historical persons. All have their records of the past which rarely overlap. Even if they have their disputes about their historical judgments that does not necessarily affect the salvation process.

Hick approaches the religious disagreement in reference to history. History is a record of the past events, memories, discoveries, and so on. Every religion has its own link with history. The scripture of every religion contains many elements of its religious history. Even in prehistoric time, the religious experiences and teachings were kept alive through oral traditions. The Old Testament bears witness to the Israelite people’s traditional custom in which the head of every family recites the exodus story to his family annually during their Pascal celebration.

Every great tradition has its own historical roots because each religion is connected with individuals or groups who had faith experience in the past. Thus the religions have their historical beliefs. Hick gives examples of some of the major religions and the historical figures connected

with them. Judaism believes in the main features of history described in the Hebrew Bible, which may include their liberation from Egypt, their ancestors like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, King David, etc. Christian beliefs included that of the Old Testament as well as the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as described in the New Testament. Islam has its own main features of history described in the Quran mainly in the vision and life of Mohamed. The *Vaishnavite* Hinduism includes the belief in the historicity of Krishna. In the case of Buddhism the historicity of Gautama and his enlightenment at *Bodhi Gaya* are its historical reminders.

Having given some of the historical connections of religions Hick says that generally these historical roots or memories do not contradict their beliefs radically. Any contradiction would be very minor. However, Hick acknowledges that there are disputes among the ancient Near Eastern or Abrahamic religions: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. It is understandable as they all have the same roots. He provides an example of a contradiction between the Old Testament and Quran by indicating that according to Torah (Gen 22) it was Isaac whom Abraham was about to sacrifice at Mount Moriah whereas it was Ishmael according to Quran (*Sura 37*). Furthermore, according to Quran Jesus was a great prophet and “they did not slay him, neither crucified him, only a likeness of that was shown them” (*Sura 4:156*) which completely contradicts the historical report of the New Testament as well as the Christian theological belief. Though all such disputes connected with history could be possibly clarified with historical evidences, still one may not be able to arrive at certainty to settle it definitively, for the events in question are so remote. Therefore Hick says that we may have to be content with the different communal memories. Hick, in his book *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, says that the idealized Jesus is unaffected

by the defects of historical evidence.<sup>24</sup> Having analyzed the historical connections and their ambiguities in various religions, Hick says that irrespective of the importance of the communal memories of their history, the variance in their historical judgments do not prevent the different traditions from providing an effective context of salvation.

### **1.6. Hick draws the following Conclusions**

1. Our human religious experience is a cognitive response to the universal presence of the ultimate divine Reality that, in itself, exceeds human conceptuality.

Though we recognize the universal presence of the ultimate divine Reality, still we are not capable of comprehending that Reality, for that exceeds all our conceptualization. And our human religious experience is not immaculate but rather shaped by our religious tradition.

2. The Reality is, however, manifested to us in ways formed by a variety of human concepts including the range of divine personae and metaphysical impersonae witnessed to in the history of religions.
3. Each major tradition, built around its own distinctive way of thinking-and-experiencing the Real has developed its own answers to the perennial questions of our origin and destiny, constituting more or less comprehensive and coherent cosmologies and eschatologies.

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<sup>24</sup> Cf., Hick, John. (1993). *Disputed Question in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 35.

For Hick those answers developed and provided by different religious traditions to the perennial metaphysical questions about human origin and destiny cannot be completely true, for they are of human creation. In other words, the worldviews presented to us by our religions are partly true. By saying that, Hick rejects any part of revelation in religions, for it is all of human origin.

4. The correctness of the cosmologies and eschatologies taught by the religions is not a prerequisite for salvation, for salvation has been going on in all religious traditions through the centuries. Therefore, Hick suggests that we might learn to tolerate the differences in the cosmologies and eschatologies.

Can Hick really say that one's understanding of cosmology and eschatology has nothing to do with one's transformation? Does everyone who is serious about his/her transformation not have an understanding of the one's origin and destiny that plays a role in deciding one's transformation? Of course, we do agree with him that salvation does not depend on the correctness of a cosmology or eschatology one adapts to. We must also be aware that the answers by various religions to metaphysical questions are not the final ones. The history of the transition from Geo-centrism to Helio-centrism is a great example to show how the understanding of cosmologies and eschatologies has been shaped by philosophers and scientists as human development progresses. Nevertheless, any person who seriously seeks his/her transformation may have to have an understanding of his/her origin, destiny, and so on. Such understanding helps people in their ethical thinking and living.

5. The assertion of the sole salvific efficacy of any particular tradition raises the problem of belittling every other tradition. Christianity has such exclusive claims in New Testament texts like ‘There is salvation in no one else [than Jesus Christ], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved’ (Acts 4:12) and the Catholic dogma: ‘*Extra ecclesia nulla salus*’ (No salvation outside the Church). And the Protestant equivalent is: no salvation outside Christianity. Such claims not only speak of the relationship of Christians to God but also the relationship of non-Christians to God, and it denies salvation to non-Christians.

We do agree with Hick who points out such dogmas or assertions are explicitly against religious pluralism. The question here is whether this accusation is relevant because the official documents of the Catholic Church are more inclusive in its understanding of salvation as well as encourage a lot of interreligious dialogues.

6. Hick himself acknowledges that the exclusive approach has been abandoned and new inclusive theology has emerged in the Catholic Church. The devout people of other faiths are called “anonymous Christians” by Karl Rahner, which was endorsed by Vat. II. Many Catholic scholars like Bede Griffiths too promoted religious pluralism with still different approach. Griffiths writes,

We must pass into that world of non-duality, in which our present mode of consciousness is transcended... In this view of the ultimate mystery of Being, which is the beginning and the end of all our human aspiration, Hindu and Christian unite not only with one another but also with the Buddhist and the Muslim. There is a final transcendent state of Being and Consciousness, in which alone perfect bliss is to be found, to which every great religion bears witness. This state transcends all concepts of the mind and images of the sense, and is known only when the Divine Being chooses to reveal himself to man... May our study of different traditions of religion lead us all to a deeper understanding of this Divine Mystery and to share in a greater measure of this Divine Bliss.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Griffiths, Bede. (1991). *Vedanta and Christian Faith*. California: The Dawn Horse Press, 162-163.

7. Again, though it is inclusive, still it claims superiority for the Catholic religion. Alvin Plantinga's article: "A Defense of Religious Exclusivism" would answer this point.
8. Each religion has designed its own way of finding/establishing transforming peace with God. Hick demands that we must acknowledge that the immediate ground of transformation is the particular spiritual path of that religion. Nobody has a problem in accepting that. One who has green shades finds everything green. When a Christian looks at other religious traditions he/she understands them in his/her own terms in which one is trained. What is wrong with that?
9. Then Hick analyses a Christian inclusivist who by implication declares that the various spiritual paths are efficacious, and constitute authentic contexts of salvation, because Jesus died on the cross, and if Jesus had not died on the cross they would not be efficacious. And he points out the irrelevance of such claim based on the time differences. How are we to make sense of the idea that the salvific power of Dharma taught five hundred years earlier by the Buddha is a consequence of the death of Jesus in approximately 30 C.E.? This is not from Jesus or his disciples but a later development.

Why not think from the point of view of the Christian inclusivist? Having been trained in his faith, he/she can think anything only within the frame of his/her faith. Despite his/her conviction of universal efficacy of salvation in Christ there is no harm to anybody. One is

free to think in his/her own way. As we often tend to mistake uniformity with unity, we tend to see pluralism at loss of individual identities.

10. Further Hick invites us to reinterpret Christian doctrines like Trinitarian, Christology and soteriology in a way that is more compatible with our awareness of the independent salvific authenticity of the other great faiths.

We must promote the reinterpretation of the doctrine more amicably in a world of pluralism. But we have difficulty in deciding to reinterpret our own doctrines in order to suit every other religious claim. If every religion is going to define its fundamental doctrines in a way that do not contradict, in other words, not to differ from the doctrines of other religions, we will end up nowhere. Won't it be like throwing the baby out with the bathwater? Once again Hick seems to mistake uniformity for unity.

However Hick completes his article with an appeal to each religion to rethink its inherited assumption of its own unique superiority.

## Chapter 2.

### Responses of Other Scholars to Hick

#### 2.1. Alvin Plantinga responds to Hick on behalf of the exclusivists.

John Hick in his article, “Religious Pluralism and Salvation” seems to conclude that the very awareness of religious diversity demands that all religion must give up their claim of superiority over other religions and their truth claims. In response to that, Alvin Plantinga’s article: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism<sup>26</sup>, counteracts the challenges posed by John Hick from the point of view of a believer who takes the doctrines of his religion very seriously. Plantinga gives two of his own basic beliefs as a Christian:

- (1). God is the creator of this world and He is an almighty, good and personal being.
- (2). All human beings are in need of salvation and God’s plan is to redeem them through the incarnation, life, sacrificial death, and resurrection of his divine son.

And he says that there could be three kinds of responses from three kinds of people. Firstly, the non-Christian theistic religions may accept (1) and reject (2). Secondly, some people believe in the existence of some divine power beyond the natural world and care for human-well being and salvation. Thirdly, the naturalists do not believe in any of the above. Therefore, the challenge before a believer is choosing a way to respond religiously to the world.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Cf., Plantinga, Alvin. (2014). A Defense of Religious Exclusivism. Cahn, Steven M (ed.). *Reason and Religions*. USA: Wadsworth, 369-373.

<sup>27</sup> Cf., Plantinga, Alvin. A Defense of Religious Exclusivism, 369.

Plantinga also hypothesizes three possible reactions to religious diversity: 1. To continue to believe what one has received from one's tradition to be true, despite learning about the diversity. That means all those propositions that are incompatible with (1) and (2) are false for a believer who could be identified as an exclusivist by pluralists. 2. To withhold them believing neither them nor their denial. 3. To accept their denial as many pluralist, like Hick, do. There is a widespread apprehension that such exclusivism of the first sort is wrong and deplorable. This is the issue Plantinga wants to clarify in his response to Hick. Generally pluralists accuse exclusivism of epistemic and ethical failure. But Plantinga rejects both and all the more argues that exclusivism is unavoidable, given the human condition.<sup>28</sup>

Plantinga identifies the accusations of the pluralists as not aimed at exclusivism itself but rather the propriety or rightness of exclusivism. Plantinga begins his response by clarifying the concept of 'an exclusivist'. For Plantinga, an exclusivist is one who believes only his own beliefs, and considers others false because they are incompatible with his. And further, Plantinga defines an exclusivist as having three qualities:

- i) An exclusivist may be intellectually arrogant and egoistic just like any other person.
- ii) An exclusivist is aware of other faiths and has, to some degree, reflected on the problem of pluralism.
- iii) An exclusivist not only holds beliefs like God is the creator of everything and Jesus Christ is the Savior of the world but also considers false all other propositions incompatible with his own beliefs. And he/she also meets condition C, namely, a)being

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<sup>28</sup> Cf., Plantinga, Alvin. A Defense of Religious Exclusivism, 369-370.

rather fully aware of other religions, b) knowing that there is also some genuine piety and devoutness in them and c) believing that he/she knows of no argument that would necessarily convince all or most honest and intelligent dissenters.

First of all, Plantinga addresses the moral complaints against an exclusivist, namely, the charges of oppression and imperialism. And he says that there are always some who reject some beliefs an individual has. In that case one cannot say that those people who reject his opinion oppress him/her who believes in some beliefs which they do not believe. And at the same time he acknowledges that exclusivism could in some way contribute to oppression. It is always the case with everyone that others may not believe some beliefs of an individual. Moreover Plantinga calls it logical that while an exclusivist believes in something he/she will also believe that those who do not believe what he/she believes, fail to believe something that is deep and vital. And he/she must consider himself/herself as privileged with respect to others.

Plantinga takes up the next charge for analysis that an exclusivist is arrogant or egoistical, arbitrarily preferring his/her way of doing things to other ways. He says that in respect to a belief in the face of objections there could be three choices: i) one continues to hold one's belief; ii) one withholds it believing neither that nor its denial, and iii) one accepts its denial. According to Plantinga among the three choices whatever choice one makes will beget the same aforesaid charges. If one denies the exclusive beliefs as per the third choice his/her condition will be the same as his/her acceptance of the first as Plantinga explains below.

He/she will believe many propositions others do not believe and he will be in condition C with respect to those propositions explicitly accepted by those of other faiths. He/she will not know any arguments that can be counted on to persuade those who do believe those exclusive propositions accepted by the adherents of

other religions. And he/she is therefore in a condition of believing propositions that many others do not believe and furthermore he/she is in condition C.<sup>29</sup>

Thus he elucidates that if, believing some exclusive claims is sufficient for intellectual arrogance or egotism, the same is also true with denying those claims.

Plantinga further analyzes the second choice taken by pluralists like Hick. One can withhold the proposition in question because one could not convince others of what he/she believes. Thus one believes neither these propositions nor their denials. In other words, the pluralist says to the exclusivist that the right course under condition C is to abstain from believing the offending proposition and also abstain from believing its denial. Plantinga calls such a pluralist the abstemious pluralist. He argues that disagreement is fundamentally a matter of adopting conflicting propositional attitudes with respect to a given proposition. He explains it in the following examples.<sup>30</sup>

There is a proposition P

I believe P

You believe –P            This is a disagreement or contradiction.

I believe P

You withhold it, fail to believe it.    This is an act of dissenting.

As per Plantinga, if contradicting others under the condition C, is arrogant and egoistic, so is dissenting under C.

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<sup>29</sup> Plantinga, Alvin. A Defense of Religious Exclusivism, 369-370.

<sup>30</sup> Cf., Plantinga, Alvin. A Defense of Religious Exclusivism, 372.

Let us apply to P : It is wrong to discriminate against people simply on the grounds of race.

You believe P

Many people do not believe P

Recognizing that there are many people who do not agree with you, I do not believe P. And

I do not disbelieve it either because there are people like you who believe P.

Therefore, in such circumstances I abstain from the proposition or belief. According to Plantinga, by abstaining I implicitly condemn your attitude, your believing the proposition as somehow improper, naïve, perhaps unjustified or in some other way less than optimal. And I am implicitly saying that my attitude is superior, even though I am not able to prove to you that your attitude is wrong or improper or naïve. Thereby, I am guilty of intellectual arrogance.

For Plantinga, the real problem for an exclusivist is that he/she was obliged to think he/she possessed a truth missed by many others. The problem with the abstemious pluralist is that he/she is obliged to think that he possesses a virtue others don't or acts rightly where others don't. Thus Plantinga proves that if, in condition C, one is arrogant by way of believing a proposition others don't, one is equally, under those reflective condition, arrogant by way of withholding a proposition others don't. Moreover, one cannot be arrogant and egoistic just by virtue of believing what others don't believe, where one cannot show them that one is right. Plantinga delves still deeper into the concept supposing that one thinks the matter over, considers the objections as carefully as possible, and realizes that he/she is finite and furthermore a sinner, certainly no better than those with whom he/she disagrees; still it seems clear to him/her that the proposition in

question is true. In such a case too, one is behaving immorally in continuing to believe it. The following example makes it still clearer. I am sure that it is wrong to try to advance my career by telling lies about my colleagues; and I realize that there are people who disagree; I also realize that in all likelihood there is no way I can find to show that they are wrong. In such a case I am surely doing what is moral by continuing to believe as before. Likewise, if, after careful reflection and thought, one is so convinced that the right propositional attitude to take toward those exclusive propositions like (1) and (2) is abstention from belief, one cannot be blamed for egotism.<sup>31</sup>

There is always risk in believing as well as in withholding all religious or philosophical beliefs. One can go wrong that way as well as any other, treating all religious, or philosophical thought, or all moral views as on a par. In particular one cannot reach a safe haven by trying to take the same attitude toward all the historically available pattern of belief and withholding; for in so doing, one adopts a particular pattern of belief and withholds one incompatible with some adopted by others. Plantinga blames those pluralists like Hick for holding the propositions 1 and 2, and yet their colleagues from other faiths while telling literally false, believes still have valid responses to the Real. And according to him, Hick's solution is not the solution for the problem, because the solution sounds like throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

Though a religion is a collection of beliefs, rites and rituals, belief is considered to be the most important one in religions like Christianity. For Plantinga religious diversity is not merely the diversity of cultural expression of rites and rituals of various sorts, but also diversity in beliefs. And the awareness of religious diversity is consistent with continuing to believe what one has been

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<sup>31</sup> Cf., Plantinga, Alvin. *A Defense of Religious Exclusivism*, 372.

believing all along. And he says that it is also logical that if an exclusivist believes in something he/she will also believe that those who do not believe what he/she believes fail to believe something that is deep and important. Even though all have the same epistemic markers, the same phenomenology, a believer is convinced that all the various beliefs are not on a relevant epistemic par. As a believer believes that the Holy Spirit has given different gifts to different people, he/she must see himself/herself as epistemically more privileged than others. Regarding the pluralist Plantinga says that when there is an internal parity the pluralist withholds judgment and despite knowing that many do not agree with his/her position he/she continues to maintain it. Therefore the pluralist is in the same position as an exclusivist. Moreover, Plantinga concludes that both believing and withholding involve risk, while treating all religions or philosophical thoughts or moral views as on a par.<sup>32</sup>

## **2.2. Linda Zagzebski responds to Hick**

In the above section we saw Plantinga's critique on Hick's solution, on behalf of the believers. Here in this section, we shall see how Linda Zagzebski in her article: "The Problem of Religions Diversity"<sup>33</sup> understands both Hick's approach to the problem of religious pluralism and Plantinga's critical response to Hick.

Exclusivism for Christianity is one of the main targets of Hick's attack in his article. Zagzebski seems to acknowledge that there was exclusivism in Christianity until approximately

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<sup>32</sup> Cf., Plantinga, Alvin. A Defense of Religious Exclusivism, 373.

<sup>33</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. (2014). The Problem of Religious Diversity. *Reason and Religions: Philosophy looks at the World's Religious Beliefs*. Cahn, Steven M. (ed.). USA: Wadsworth, 374-381.

the middle of the twentieth century. She begins her response by presenting her understanding of exclusivism. She presents three kinds of Exclusivism, namely, 1.exclusivism about truth, 2.exclusivism about salvation and 3.exclusivism about rationality. 1. Exclusivist about truth holds that the doctrines of only one religion are true and those of other religions are true as long as they do not contradict. 2.Exclusivism about salvation holds that one's own religion is the only path to salvation. For example, Christians claim that only Christians go to heaven. Buddhists claim that nirvana can be achieved only through following certain precepts. We may ask why only our religion is the right path for salvation. Zagzebski reminds us that Plantinga's answer is that the Holy Spirit has given the gift of faith in God to some people and not others and therefore, some people are epistemically privileged. 3.Exclusivism about rationality holds that the teachings of only one religion are rational. The teachings of other religions are rational as long as they do not conflict with ours.

According to Zagzebski, fair-minded religious people deny exclusivism about rationality though they may accept exclusivism about truth. They combine exclusivism about truth with inclusivism about rationality. As Zagzebski hypothesizes that such people might say, "Our beliefs are true and the beliefs of other religions are false in so far as they are incompatible with ours, but the beliefs of many religions are still rational. The people who practice those religions are justified in believing what they believe, given their circumstances. If we had been born in their circumstances and had their experiences, we would probably believe what they believe."<sup>34</sup> In such a position one tries to understand others while not compromising one's commitment to one's own beliefs. For Zagzebski, the problem lies in the combining of both rationality and truth. We want to

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<sup>34</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *The Problem of Religious Diversity*, 375.

have rational faith because we think there is a close connection between rationality and truth. Rationality is understood generally as taking us to truth. But in combining exclusivism about truth and inclusivism about rationality there is a gap. She explains that there can be nine religions explaining the origin of the universe in nine ways. Though all of them may be rational, at the most, only one can be true. That leads us to conclude that rationality need not be always truth-conducive. Thus, Zagzebski shows that there is a problem of gap in combining exclusivism about truth with inclusivism about rationality.

All religions may agree on some of the fundamental ideas, such as, something is wrong with human beings as they are but by communing with the ultimate reality we can improve our morality and reach a higher level of consciousness. On the contrary, religions conflict about particular beliefs. And Zagzebski finds that religious diversity is a problem for both believers and nonbelievers with reference to rationality. If we maintain that our beliefs, the beliefs of others and the beliefs of atheists are rational then, we have no reason to think that one rational belief is preferable to a conflicting rational belief on the grounds of its rationality. Rationality may be more truth conducive than irrationality, but one rational belief may not be preferable to another with respect to truth-conduciveness. However, if we give up our own beliefs because their rationality is not closely connected with truth, then we all end up with agnosticism. As per Zagzebski, “What makes it a good thing for humans to be rational is that it puts us in as good a position to get truth as we can get.”<sup>35</sup> Therefore, she points out a danger that if we give up any chance of getting the truth about any important issue that goes against rationality. Despite her conviction that the

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<sup>35</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *The Problem of Religious Diversity*, 375.

problem of gap has not been resolved, she concludes two ways to resolve or avoid it, 1.The Pluralism of Hick and 2.Self-Trust and Religious Belief.

### **2.2.1. The Pluralism of Hick**

Zagzebski summarizes her understanding of Hick's understanding of the issue. According to Hick all the major religions offer a means for salvation that transforms humanity from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness. For him the fruit of transformation is a life of love and compassion. Since all the religions are productive of love and compassion, all the religions are genuine paths to salvation. As per Hick, that understanding leads to the metaphysical conclusion that the salvific ground in ultimate reality is the same in all religions.

Hick uses Kant's concepts of noumenal and phenomenal worlds to explain that all religions can have access to the ultimate reality. Noumenal world is the world 'in itself,' independent of our capability to experience it. Phenomenal world is the world of possible experience which "is necessarily connected with the ways in which it presents itself to our experience, through intuitions of space and time and through the concepts that permit us to make judgments about it, such as the concepts of cause and of substance."<sup>36</sup> Based on Kant's understanding of reality, Hick argues that we cannot experience God/ the ultimate reality as it is in itself directly any more than we experience the world of things-in-themselves. Therefore, the possibility of our experiencing the

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<sup>36</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *The Problem of Religious Diversity*, 376.

ultimate reality is through the experiential and conceptual forms available within our culture. And such phenomenal world is the only possible world of human experience which cannot be an illusion, for it is the only way we humans are capable of knowing anything. And further, our phenomenal world or the world of our experience is related to the world of reality-in-itself. Thus the world of Hindus, the world of Christians, and the world of Buddhists are distinct phenomenal worlds which are related to the world of reality-in-itself.

Zagzebski also points out the difference between Hick and Kant is the understanding of the phenomenal world. According to Kant the phenomenal world is the world which is there to be experienced by humans, which contains all the objects of experience that are interrelated by space and time and are also potentially affected by human actions. But Hick's understanding of religious phenomenal worlds is not parallel to Kant's, for they are many and those different worlds of different religions are like different lenses through which we experience the ultimate reality. In Kant's understanding we all humans are naturally equipped with categories to experience the world, whereas in Hick's understanding, such need is met by one's own religion.

Regarding the problem of gap between rationality and truth, Zagzebski claims that Hick solves it. According to Kant, we humans cannot experience the noumenal world but only the phenomenal world through the categories of knowledge which are naturally available within humans. Likewise, the ultimate reality also cannot be experienced as it is in itself, but the world religions put human beings in contact with religious phenomenal reality through different worlds of different religions, namely, world views. Since, all the great world religions are capable of putting us into touch with the religious phenomenal reality, all the world religions are rational and

true. However, Hick points out that there are two transhistorical truth claims of religious teaching that do not fit the Kantian model, namely, the doctrine of creation ex nihilo and the doctrine of reincarnation. One religion teaches that God created everything out of nothing, whereas another teaches that the material world is eternal. While one religion teaches that after death human beings get incarnated, another teaches that your body will be restored some day and your soul will rejoin the body in a resurrected life<sup>37</sup>, and yet another religion (Hinduism) teaches that you will be annihilated as a human person in order to be assimilated into something else. All these are mutually contradicting claims; accepting one will deny the other. And all their differences cannot be explained in reference to different religious phenomenal worlds. Along with those transhistorical claims, there are also historical beliefs which Hick judges unfit within the Kantian model. For example, Jesus either raised Lazarus from the dead or he did not; Jesus either rose from the dead or he did not. There is no different way of understanding such historical beliefs. Moreover, Hick does not have a problem treating such historical beliefs as well as incarnation as myths, because he believes that a true myth can also evoke the response of transforming a person from self-centeredness to reality-centeredness.

There are three problems in Hick's position pointed out by Zagzebski.

1. If Hick takes each phenomenal world to be a real one, then Hick is a polytheist. Strictly speaking in a Kantian sense, for Zagzebski Hick is a phenomenal polytheist and a noumenal mono-something, because he does not call the ultimate reality 'God'. On the noumenal level Hick's stand is parallel to negative theology in which God is indefinable, unqualifiable, uncategorized. Therefore Zagzebski finds Hick's position to be a combination of polytheism and negative theology.

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<sup>37</sup> Cf., Dogma of Catholic Faith in Nicene Creed: "I believe in the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body, and life everlasting....."

2. Hick's pluralism threatens religious commitment. It might lead a believer to think that the connection between one's religious doctrine and truth is very weak, as his/her religion does not stand out in the face of other religions' understandings of the nature of the universe and one's relationship to that universe. Pluralism also undermines the belief that the universe had a personal creator who providentially guides the temporal world, hears prayers and responds to them. The idea of the almighty as an impersonal force makes one's faith groundless.
3. Hick's separation of salvific beliefs that are phenomenal manifestations of ultimate reality from historical beliefs and transhistorical beliefs about the origin of the universe and the afterlife are not compatible. It was shown above that Christian beliefs in the ultimate reality always include the historical beliefs about the Incarnation, the Redemption, and the Resurrection.

### **2.2.2. Self-Trust and Religious Belief**

The problem of the gap between reality and truth arises from the perspective external to the self. All religions are rational, and therefore there is an intellectual egalitarianism from the external viewpoint. Belief is not completely external to the self but internal. If we look at others' beliefs the same way we look at our beliefs then there can be no one with an epistemically privileged position. In such a case, we are bound to end up in skepticism about all except a very few beliefs which are not enough to base a worthwhile life upon. Therefore, Zagzebski recommends that we need a substantial degree of self-trust and in the forces that have shaped one into a person to live a life with energy and purpose. And she says that any normal life will depend on self-trust in our intellectual faculties, procedures, and opinions. All these factors work in collaboration to ascertain

the truth of a matter. We test a memory by perception, we test perception by another perception, and we test most of what we believe by consulting other people or by comparison with the testimony or opinion of others. Thus, for Zagzebski, a belief is a refined product of a process and that belief also helps to test other new beliefs.

Zagzebski further develops her point, saying that our emotion is an important element of self-trust and this trust in our emotions is also accompanied by the faculties, procedures and opinions. The grounds for trusting our emotions are similar to the grounds for trusting our perceptions and beliefs. And trust in the beliefs that lead to action requires emotional self-trust. For example, my belief that I ought to escape a situation is often grounded in the emotion - fear. Zagzebski says, "If I trust the belief, I must trust the emotion. So, epistemic self-trust requires emotional self-trust. Both emotional and epistemic self-trusts are compatible with revising what we trust, but it takes self-trust to trust that the process of revision is trustworthy."<sup>38</sup> Among the emotions Zagzebski identifies admiration as unique, for it does not have other emotions as its parts. She further adds that the admirable is something that is attractive which means that one feels positive emotion towards the person one admires and such admiration might lead the person to imitate what is admirable given the right practical conditions. As per Zagzebski, attraction and desire to imitation are intrinsic to admiration.

She explains the relation between emotion and admiration, saying that a person's trusting his/her emotion of admiration may lead him/her to trusting the beliefs of the admired one more than trusting his/her emotion of his/her own beliefs, as when the other person may form his/her

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<sup>38</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *The Problem of Religious Diversity*, 379.

belief in a more admirable way; the other person is very much like one's present self but with more experience. This proves that an individual varies in trusting his emotion of admiration for different people. Therefore, it rejects intellectual egalitarianism. But then this adaptation process is not as easy as it may sound. Zagzebski says that one adopts the belief of the other person easily when one could do it without necessarily changing anything else about oneself. That leads us to another important factor with regard to the existentiality of a belief in a person. A person's belief is not a simple isolated factor but a complex factor that is intermingled with most of the aspects of a person's life. If a belief in the admirable is in conflict with the admiring person's belief which he/she trusts, imitation becomes very hard. In such a situation one is faced with a conflict with self-trust. The conflict is between the self-trust that I trust my belief and the self-trust that I trust the emotion of admiration that grounds my trust in the other person. Zagzebski says that given the complex nature of a belief, even if one trusts one's admiration more than his/her belief, it does not follow that one should adopt the belief of the admirable. Once again she explains that admiration is an emotion that leads one to imitate the admirable person in suitable circumstances only. For example, one may admire the Olympic gold medal winners without having any desire to imitate them. One can also admire the Hindu belief system without intending to adopt it. One does not adopt any such beliefs because they are not compatible with the self that one is. "Given the social construction of belief, trusting a belief commits me to trusting both the individual persons from whom I learned the belief, and the traditions and historical institution upon which I depend to interpret the belief. Religious beliefs are usually connected to a network of other beliefs, emotions, experiences, institutional loyalties, and connections with many other admirable people, all of which I trust."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *The Problem of Religious Diversity*, 380.

On conversion, Zagzebski says that an intellectually conscientious person who does not convert to another religion has greater trust in the social construction of his belief of his religion than his trust in the admirable person who believes in his/her religion. If one's trust in the admirable person is greater than the trust he has in his own, then it would be conducive for conversion. Thus, her analysis of self-trust concludes that conversion can be compatible with intellectual conscientiousness. And further she warns, "We should be suspicious of any account of conscientious belief that has the consequence that radical conversion is never a conscientious thing to do, and we also should be suspicious of any account of conscientious belief that requires us to give up the beliefs of others on the grounds that conscientiousness demands an external perspective on the self."<sup>40</sup> In other words, sometimes the conscientious belief may lead to radical conversion and sometimes it may not require one to give up one's beliefs that conflict with the beliefs of others rules out radical conversion nor adherence to one's own. Whenever we make a choice of conversion, some element of self-trust becomes the bottom line to judge between the conflicting beliefs. As per Zagzebski there is no standpoint outside of the self-trust which determines his/her decision of conversion. And she concludes that mere admiration need not require one to change one's beliefs, but it also adds something important to the dialogue between people with conflicting religious beliefs. It can give a person the feeling or awareness that one would imitate those beliefs of others if that person had grown up with a different social construction of the self. Empiricist philosopher Spinoza would say similarly in his ethical point of view that if someone does something violently or negatively, we cannot condemn that person because he acted on account of his background. Even though we think we are right regarding our beliefs, still we would be aware

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<sup>40</sup> Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *The Problem of Religious Diversity*, 380.

that that is not the end of truth. Thus Zagzebski rejects another point about tolerance, saying that tolerance comes not from thinking that everybody is right, but trusting that we are right in the admiration we have for many people who have very different beliefs.

## **Chapter. 3**

### **All Religions Can Live In Peace**

In this final section, we shall recapitulate some of the main points from the previous sections and add some more analysis to be followed by additional comments. In order to understand Hick's pluralistic position as a pluralist, we should be aware of some of his assumptions. He assumes that the society and world at large are divided because of religions. Those religious conflicts are based on exclusive truth claims of various religions. In particular he points out that the truth claims of each religion automatically dismiss the truth claims of other religions that are not in line with them. Since each religion claim to be the way of salvation, Hick chooses the concept of salvation to be a common ground for all religions to analyze the impact of each religion on the human race. He defines salvation as transformation of a believer from his/her self-centeredness to divine-centeredness. He is aware that this salvation project is practical only when we are able to observe their fruits in human life. Hick identifies love/compassion as the observable

fruit of salvation in human life. All religions do agree that love/compassion is the unselfish regard for others. Since every religion promotes love/compassion to become divine-centered, one might think that by measuring love/compassion among the believers of different religions, we can identify the best religion. However, Hick realizes that that does not help to identify the best of all religions, because all people engage in the acts of love or hate, irrespective of their religious identities. There is no way of verifying the superiority of any religion through any external means. Therefore, Hick begins to analyze the relation between the truth claims and their base that is the divine which he prefers to call the Real. In Kantian terms, he says that the divine noumenon, the Real *an sich*, cannot be known in itself; however, it is experienced through different human receptivities as divine phenomena. And religions play a vital role in the formation of human receptivities. In Hick's words, religion with its history, ethos, great exemplars, its devotional and meditative practices constitute an uniquely shaped colored lens through which we know the Real. It is a metaphysical impossibility to know anything in itself and it is so with the Real. Therefore, the intentional objects of worship with particular names as Adonai, the Heavenly Father, Allah, Vishnu, Siva, Brahman, *Dharmakaya* or the Void, and so on, are only appearances or manifestations of the Real, rather than the Real *an sich*. Since it is a metaphysical impossibility to know the Real in itself, Hick argues that there is no base for any religion to claim superiority over other religions.<sup>41</sup> Further Hick says that since the Real is ineffable and unobservable, we cannot deny the transcendental reality like materialists, because denying it would mean that all our religious experiences are merely constructions of human imagination. And as per him, the doctrinal conflicts embody different conceptions of the ultimate, and they arise from the variations between different sets of human conceptual schema and spiritual practices.<sup>42</sup> Further, Hick analyzes some

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<sup>41</sup> Cf., Hick, John H. *Religious Pluralism and Salvation*, 364.

<sup>42</sup> Cf., Hick, John H. *Religious Pluralism and Salvation*, 365.

of the disputed issues on the origin of the universe and the historical discrepancies connected with different religions and shows that the correct understanding of all those things is not a requirement for salvation. In the concluding section of his article, Hick focuses on the conflicting truth claims of religions more specifically, some of the central doctrines of the Catholic Church and he urges that those conflicting doctrines be reformulated in agreement with other religious doctrines.

Hick's use of the Kantian model helps him to disprove the claim of superiority of any religion. Pre-Kantian understanding is that we have direct access to truth of any reality as it really is. On the contrary, the Kantian understanding is that although there is a noumenal reality, we have access only to the phenomenon of the reality. In other words, we can understand the truth of the reality only in respect to the cultural/social/psychological grids through which our conceptualization of this noumenal reality is processed. According to Alston, in the pre-Kantian model, an exclusivist is not obligated to face his/her opponent in the absence of any objective common ground to determine which perspective is right. Agreeing with Alston, Quinn also adds to that the pre-Kantian model also implies that no contending perspective is correct in its present form and an exclusivist may adopt a Kantian approach to religious belief. Quinn holds that once we realize that it is reasonable to assume that the proponent of even a non-religious perspective has an accurate understanding of divine it is also reasonable for a believer to revise his/her own phenomenological perspective on the truth in a way to have a greater understanding of it by greater overlap with the phenomenological perspectives of others. Adding to that, Basinger says that Quinn's approach to conflict is becoming increasingly popular in exclusivist circles. And Basinger gives an example of a flexible understanding of the Biblical account of creation story. The Biblical account of God creating the world within six twenty-four hours period about ten thousand years

ago, is understood by Christians themselves in a broader sense: i) Since “a day is to the Lord a thousand years” the time frame of the creative activity could be understood to have taken millions of years. ii) Some even accommodate the “Big Bang” theory saying that God could have orchestrated the “Big Bang”. iii) Some look beyond the specification of Biblical narration of the creation story and understand that God is the author of creation.<sup>43</sup>

Alvin Plantinga responds as a Christian believer. He says that he is convinced that his beliefs are true and all that are not in line with his beliefs are wrong. He takes up the two kinds of accusation of the pluralist against exclusivist, namely, the exclusivist is morally and epistemically arrogant. Regarding the epistemic arrogance of the exclusivist Plantinga responds that the exclusivist is justified, for he is epistemically favored by God that he has something of great value which others lack. According to Plantinga, the moral indictment against the exclusivist has no base, for if the exclusivist is morally oppressive, just because he/she believes what he/she is convinced of, given the awareness of other religions, genuine piety and devoutness and no knowledge of arguments that would necessarily contradict them, it is the same case with the pluralist too. Further, Plantinga says that there are three choices of response with regard to a belief: i) to believe ii) to refute iii) to abstain. The pluralist seems to take the third choice. According to Plantinga, a pluralist is indirectly refuting the belief by his abstention. Thus abstaining is no nobler than accepting and refuting. Therefore, pluralist can be attacked like the exclusivist. Plantinga concludes that it is more responsible to believe than abstain from believing.

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<sup>43</sup> Cf., Basinger, David. (2012). Religious Diversity (Pluralism). *Standard Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. *Stanford Encyclopedia*, Zalta, Edward N. (ed.). Spring, 12-14.

There are different opinions regarding examining one's own beliefs in the face of contradictions. Some individuals, sometimes called fideists, argue that religious beliefs are not properly subject to rational assessment of any sort, because they think that such assessment demonstrates lack of faith. On the contrary, most others agree that the exclusivist has the right to assess his/her beliefs in the face of religious diversity. Furthermore, Robert McKim would say "disagreement about an issue or area of inquiry provides reason to think that each side has an obligation to examine beliefs about the issue."<sup>44</sup> It is human nature to seek the truth, and in order to maximize truth and to avoid error one needs to attempt to resolve the conflict. According to Plantinga, a believer has the responsibility to attempt to resolve a conflict if he/she thinks that an opponent is on equal epistemic footing. However, he denies that Christian exclusivists need to consider any opponent to be on the equal epistemic footing, because he/she has been epistemically favored by the Holy Spirit not to err at least in his/her fundamental Christian beliefs. Therefore, a Christian exclusivist is believed to be in an epistemically favored position than his/her opponents, as there is no way to demonstrate against it. However, Plantinga acknowledges a similar epistemically favored position to other exclusivists of other religious systems too. The critics would argue that the burden of proof is not on the shoulder of the opponents but on the shoulder of Christian proponent, for he/she needs to prove his/her epistemically favored position on epistemic grounds that are accepted by all rational people.<sup>45</sup> Plantinga's position does not suggest solving the conflict between opposite beliefs of different religion. On the other hand, it may lead us to realize the uniqueness of every religion and that its beliefs are relevant and practical within their frame. However, it faces the need to maximize truth and minimize error.

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<sup>44</sup> Basinger, David. *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, 5.

<sup>45</sup> Cf., Basinger, David. *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, 6-7.

Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski begins her reply to Hick by giving three kinds of exclusivism, namely exclusivism about truth, exclusivism about salvation and exclusivism about rationality. Zagzebski warns us of the problem of the gap between truth and rationality if exclusivism about truth and inclusivism rationality are combined. In that case, particular religious beliefs conflicting with the beliefs of others will remain a problem. It is a problem not only for religious believers but also for non-believers, because one rational belief may not be preferable to another with respect to truth-conduciveness. On the other hand, if both atheists and believers give up their faith on the ground that their rationality does not lead us to truth, then we all will end up in agnosticism. Further she says that according to Hick the salvific ground in ultimate reality is the same in all religions. Hick uses Kantian terms to explain how we get only the phenomenon of the world and the Real distinctively through the respective religious lenses. Zagzebski finds that Hick in a way, solves the problem of gap when he recognizes that all religions are capable of communicating the Real to their respective believers and all are ways to salvation. However, the problem of gap remains in the issues like the origin of the world and destiny of human beings. Zagzebski also points out a few problems with Hick's position: i) In his recognizing of each phenomenal world, Hick is a phenomenal polytheist and noumenal mono-something; ii) Hick's pluralism threatens religious commitment; iii) Hick's separating the salvific beliefs of phenomenal manifestations of the Ultimate from historical beliefs and transhistorical beliefs is not compatible with many religions. From her part she proposes Self-Trust to be the deciding factor regarding one's religious conversion.

### **3.1. Philosophical Possibilities**

David Basinger suggests an idea of Jennifer Lackey on the role of the self in deciding between one's own belief and another person's belief, saying that the final judgments made by an individual are based on personal beliefs to which each individual has access. Moreover, one is epistemically privileged as he/she has greater access to the reliability of his/her own belief-forming faculties than do his/her opponent. Likewise, Basinger mentions similar thoughts of Ernest Sosa who speaks of 'the gulf between the private and public domain' and Peter van Inwagen who speaks of 'incommunicable insight that the others, for all their merits lack.'<sup>46</sup> Therefore, in a situation of conversion, what matters is the individual's decision, which is very much based on an individual's convictions as to which personal beliefs are most plausible.

Religious diversity exists on basic issues. The Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam understand God as a personal deity; *Hinayana* Buddhism denies God's existence; Hinduism of *Advaita* considers personal deity as illusion; and so forth. Many forms of Christianity and Islam believe in immortality; on the contrary, *Hinayana* Buddhism aims at total annihilation of the self as a discrete, conscious entity. There are also disputes about our knowledge of God, whether God is the source of human moral behavior, the criteria to enter into heaven, and so on.<sup>47</sup> Apart from that, religions also differ in their expression of faith, namely, in their rites and rituals, and so forth, both these differences are not a matter of concern for us now, but rather conflicting theological assertions or doctrines. Generally the fundamental beliefs of a religion are the foundation upon which the worldview, the superstructure is constructed. Therefore, beliefs are taken more seriously than the expressions. However, the expressions do make an impact on the observers both positively and negatively. Though India is a secular country, minorities like

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<sup>46</sup> Cf., Basinger, David. *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, 15.

<sup>47</sup> Cf., Basinger, David. *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, 2.

Muslims, Christians, and so on, do fear the Hindu religious processions conducted once a while, because such procession were causes of religious riots in India. Often these processions are politically organized and carried out under the garb of religion. For Hick, it is the conflicting doctrinal or truth claims that is the cause of the division among religions.

Basinger mentions thinner theology and thicker phenomenology. There is one kind of approach to the problem of religious pluralism whereby the exclusivist gives more importance to phenomenology than to theology, compromising theological claims in order to solve the epistemic tension produced by religious diversity. Hick recommends such an approach to solve the conflicts among religions. On the contrary, Quinn says that it may minimize conflicts but is not the lasting solution, because even if one is strongly a Kandian exclusivist, he/she would still think his/her religious perspective is superior or closer to the truth than all other competing perspectives. Therefore, he says, at some point, a person must either cease to be an exclusivist or choose to hold belief more tentatively.<sup>48</sup>

### **3.1.1. To Be Is To Be Different**

To be is to be different. Only my being different from the rest is the base of my being as a separate entity. To be considered a religion, it needs to be both essentially and accidentally different from the rest. It is no exaggeration to say that the doctrines of a religion give its identity an independent entity. If we consider the history of religion, we can imagine that the number of religions then probably was not as many as we have. For example the Catholic Church was one

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<sup>48</sup> Cf., Basinger, David. *Religious Diversity (Pluralism)*, 14-15.

and the same from the time of Jesus, and the first major division came in the 16<sup>th</sup> century with the Protestant Reformation. People, who were not happy with the way the Catholic Church existed at that time, protested and separated themselves from it to form their own church, though the new has taken many fundamental beliefs from the Catholic Church. Likewise, in different times and for different reasons many detached themselves from their mother churches and formed religions. Presently there are numerous divisions among Christians. Any believing community is made up of human beings and constantly indulges in expanding their knowledge of truth and minimizing errors. However Hick's demand for reinterpreting the doctrines of religions is not the solution for the conflicts among the religious doctrines. Human beings are socially and culturally conditioned. Since human personalities are socially constructed a person can be better understood only within his/her background but not in isolation. A religion gives a believer a worldview which is most fitting to one's background. We already discussed in the beginning that it is easy for someone to see the defects of others from within one's culture. Therefore, one religion cannot dictate that another religion modify religious doctrines. Similarly, it is not reasonable to expect one religion to modify its doctrines in line with the conflicting doctrines of other religions.

Any human institution must be dynamic in order to last such as in the way that a living organism grows steadily. In order to grow, one must allow changes within. The constant activity of the religion in answering metaphysical questions keeps it relevant and alive. Such animation of a religion requires openness to the time. This openness is to take in what it does not have and to give what it has that the world needs. A religion is not required to change its fundamental beliefs. But if it is open to change in order to embrace truth, that religion can survive or else would be lost in time. The story of the Catholic Church in correcting its mistake of geo-centrism to helio-

centrism would be a good example of a challenging moment for a religion. A religion needs to have humility to acknowledge that it does not possess all truth. In the light of Kantian analysis we know that a reality can be known in phenomenological level only. Many religions claim to have received revelation from God. Most likely, revelations are taken as noumena by those respective religions. Yet what God reveals to the individuals of any religion at a particular time and in a particular historical context is received with the help of those receptivities formed by the person's background. Therefore, what he receives is also only the phenomenon of the revelation. That is why a religion requires constantly priests and theologians to interpret its doctrines. Logically there could be different revelations in different times too. All that we require is the awareness that one religion has truth but is not superior to others.

“Homo sapiens are also homo religious,” says Karen Armstrong.<sup>49</sup> Among all beings, humans are the only ones who could objectify themselves. Humans can ask fundamental questions and pursue finding answers to such questions. Indeed, they cannot stop asking questions and expanding their horizon of knowledge and truth. In such pursuit of truth, religion provides humans with a worldview which accommodates the whole of reality. Pursuit of truth is an ongoing process, which probably began in some homo-sapiens who ventured it as part of a community. Religion was born in a shared worldview that addressed the issues of a particular group of people. They expressed their shared worldview as a community as well as individuals in rites and rituals. Such worldviews are always conditional, for it is born within an already existing structure, in a particular geographical setup and time. A worldview primarily embodies the existential conditions of the community as well as its aspirations. Here, it may be relevant to remember the dictum of

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<sup>49</sup> Armstrong, Karen. (1994). *A History of God: The Four Thousand Year Quest for Judaism, Christianity and Islam*. New York: Ballentine Books, 8.

existentialism, i.e., existence is prior to essence. According to Karen Armstrong, God does not have a history but the human idea of God has a history, because it has greatly or slightly different meanings from one group to another at various points of time. Therefore, she says that an idea of God meant for one generation may not be meaningful to another. She gives the example that ‘I believe in God’ has no objective meaning but relatively in a context, when a believing community proclaims it. She is convinced that each generation has to create a particular conception of God that works for them.<sup>50</sup>

The thought of religion is born only within the existential condition of a community, namely, its culture. Steven Cahn says,

Each religion reflects the culture in which it develops, and cultures are not true or false, provable or disprovable, although one may be richer in some respects than another. Yet a culture is not tested by arguments, nor are religions. They are less like scientific theories and more like works of art, not adding to our factual knowledge but enabling many to enrich their response to the challenges of the human condition.<sup>51</sup>

In this context, it may be interesting to know something about the five divisions of land in South India is mentioned in *Tolkappiam* which is estimated to be 2500 years old. The divisions or the landscapes are *Kurunji*, *Mullai*, *Marutham*, *Neithal*, and *Paalai*. As the landscapes are recognized by their geographical differences, each has a primary deity who suits the characters of the respective landscapes. *Kurunji* stands for hilly terrain inhabited by *Kuravars*, a kind of nomadic tribe, hunters, and *Kanavar* (forest dwellers). *Murugan* is their principal deity who dwells on the hills and mountains. *Mullai* is a pastoral land inhabited by shepherd tribes and their principal deity is Mayan or Krishnan who himself was a shepherd. *Marutham* is an agricultural land which is the most fertile land among the five, which is inhabited by *Venthan* or *Indra*, the god of heavens who

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<sup>50</sup> Cf., Armstrong, Karen. (1994). *A History of God: The Four Thousand Year Quest for Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, 9.

<sup>51</sup> Cahn, Steven. (2006). *God, Reason, and Religion*. USA: Wadsworth, 55-56.

provides rain for agriculture. *Neithal* is the coastal region, inhabited by fishing tribes, whose principal deity is *Varunan*, the god of seas. And *Paalai* is the dry arid region inhabited by *Eyinar*, *Maravar* and *Kallar* who are warrior tribes and whose principal deity is *Kotravai* or *Durga*, the goddess of war.<sup>52</sup> All the deities in these five landscapes are befit their geographical and cultural set up. Now in the modern times, these divisions no longer exist, and some of their deities disappeared and some still thrive. Religions exist as long as they continue to provide a worldview that helps the believers live their lives meaningfully. This is more or less the vulnerability of natural religion or non institutionalized religion.

### **3.1.2. A Religion Is Indeed Superior To Others In Respect To Its Followers**

The Catholic Church could be a good example for an institutionalized religion, and in fact it is known to be the biggest organization in the world. Its supreme head, the Pope is connected to every member of the Catholic Church. Its doctrines are codified. It is roughly two thousand years old and it steadily thrives. The Catholic Church seems to function as a living organism, in the sense that it has been changing itself to befit the change of time. Since the beginning of the Church there have been several Councils conducted to respond to the needs of the times. Important doctrines were the fruits of such major councils. For example, until Vatican Council II (1963-1965), the liturgy was celebrated in the Catholic Church only in Latin as if God understood only Latin. And it was also the conviction of the Catholic Church that ‘*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*’ that is, there is no salvation outside the Church. The Vatican Council II redefined the Catholic Church’s understanding regarding the non Christians said,

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<sup>52</sup> Cf., Zvelebil, Kamil. (1974). *A History of Indian Literature: Tamil Literature*. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 38.

All men form but one community. This is so because all stem from the one stock which God created to people the entire earth (cf. Acts 17:26), and also because all share a common destiny, namely God. His providence, evident goodness, and saving designs extend to all men....The Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in these religions. She has a high regard for the manner of life and conduct, precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of truth which enlightens all men. Yet she proclaims and is duty bound to proclaim without fail, Christ who is the way, the truth and the life (Jn 1:6). In him, in whom God reconciled all things to himself (2Cor. 5:18-19), men find the fullness of their religious life. The Church, therefore, urges her sons to enter with prudence and charity into discussion and collaboration with members of other religions. Let Christians, while witnessing to their own faith and way of life, acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians, also their social life and culture.<sup>53</sup>

This above statement from Vatican Council II shows the openness and flexibility of the Catholic Church to know and accept truth and goodness wherever they might come from. The opening statement tells us that Church recognizes the single origin of all peoples, and God is the final goal for all. Such attitudes sustain a religion. Hick heavily criticizes its fundamental doctrines, and he urges the Church to reformulate them for they are exclusive. As we have already seen, there is no basis for Hick to come to the conclusion that the conflicting doctrines must be modified so that all will be in peace.

One of the accusations Hick has against the Catholic Church is that irrespective of its openness to recognize the role of other religions, the Church still seems to be mainly the exclusivist. Hick gives a quote from *The Degree on the Missionary Activity of the Church*:

All must be converted to [Christ] as He is made known by the Church's preaching. All must be incorporated into Him by baptism, and into the Church which is His body....Therefore, through God in ways known to Himself can lead those inculpably ignorant of the gospel to that faith without which it is impossible to please Him, yet a necessity lies on the Church and at the same time a sacred duty, to preach the gospel. Hence missionary activity today as always retains its power and necessity.<sup>54</sup>

In short he emphasizes giving up any exclusive claim of the Church. Hick's pluralism seems to be an extreme and impractical. Already Zagzebski warned that Hick's pluralism is a phenomenal

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<sup>53</sup> Flannery, Austin. (ed.). (1998). *Nostra Aetate. Vatican Council II: The Consiliar and Postconciliar Documents*, Vol. 1, 738-739.

<sup>54</sup> Hick, John. (1993). *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 83.

polytheism, a threat to religious commitment, and not compatible with the central teachings of many religions. Hick's position is too idealistic where there can be no entities called religions at all. His fears regarding the doctrinal conflicts of religions seem to be more of illusions. Ernst Troeltsch who wrote the book *The Absoluteness of Christianity* (1901) changed his position on the Catholic Church later. In his paper in 1923 on 'Relative Absoluteness', he says that Christianity is 'absolute' for Christians and the other faiths are likewise 'absolute' for their own adherents.<sup>55</sup> Ernst Troeltsch's position is a practical one, in which every believer and religion is respected and recognized.

## Conclusion

We began with the question, 'Can all religions live in peace?' Hick's answer to the problem is that all religions must reformulate their conflicting doctrines in order to respect others. Plantinga counters Hick on behalf of the exclusivist. Linda Zagzebski points out the flaws in Hick's proposal and emphasizes the importance of self-trust in deciding on conversion or change of belief.

Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, proposes a relationship between teacher and students. He says the teacher is a teacher-student and students are students-teachers. Basically he says that there is always two-way teaching and two-way learning. While the teacher teaches the students, in return he/she also learns from the students. Similarly, while students learn from their teacher, they also contribute to the knowledge of the teacher. Paulo Freire calls it a problem-posing education against the traditional banking type of education.<sup>56</sup> The understanding

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<sup>55</sup> Hick, John. (1993). *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, 77.

<sup>56</sup> Cf., Freire. Paulo. (2011). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York: Continuum, 80.

of Paulo Freire's teacher-student and students-teachers method might help us in understanding the relationship among religions. It is the fundamental right of every religion to claim superiority over other religions. Such claim can be seen as an existential necessity. However, each religion needs to be aware that it does not possess the wholeness of truth; therefore it must be also open to learn those truths that are found in other religions. Here one religion can maintain its superiority but always with humility learn from others too. Francis Clooney proposes a better analogy for a complementary pluralism in his book: *Hindu Wisdom for all God's Children*. His view is that religious traditions exist in complementary relationships to one another and as not being able to flourish if they are rigidly apart. He reminds us that we need one another to remain alive and he invites all to 'remember that learning religiously is a lifelong process of interchange, acquiring the other, losing oneself, putting oneself back together again. We consume reality, and the other seems to disappear inside us, but we become what we eat, and thus we remain alive, beyond ourselves. We might even imagine religious traditions to be male and female in relation to one another – provided we allow these male and female roles to shift and grow as we give and receive, as we nurture and explore each other's wisdom.'<sup>57</sup>

While we deal with the theme of peaceful religious coexistence, we are drawn between two extremes, namely, absolutism and shallow relativism. Absolutism means clinging to one's view only, admiring it like Narcissus, while rejecting others.<sup>58</sup> Hick fights against this absolutism. But, in the process of his fight, Hick ends up with shallow relativism. Hick's pluralism seems to aim at uniformity and his appeal to reformulate the conflicting doctrines of religions to attain agreement

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<sup>57</sup> Clooney, Francis. (1998). *Hindu Wisdom For All God's Children*. New York: Orbis Books, 7.

<sup>58</sup> Cf., Long, Jeffery D. (2013). Swami Vivekananda and Religious Pluralism. *Vedanta Conference, 2013*. New Dartmouth: University of Massachusetts, 6.

with others seems to ignore the distinctive differences between doctrinal differences of various religions. It does not recognize the rich diversity of the world in favor of uniformity which sounds like some kind of utopianism. Uniformity must be the opposite of pluralism. Pluralism makes sense only when we are different. We do not rule out the necessity of interaction between religions to learn from each other and correct one's own views in the face of some new truth from others. On the contrary, asking a religion to compromise its own doctrines with respect to that of others is unacceptable. Plantinga would argue that an exclusivist or a believer has every right to believe what he believes based on his belief that he/she is epistemically privileged to believe what he believes. Linda Zagzebski would say that one's belief is personal and depends on his/her self-trust on her belief which is most close to him/her.

Pluralism acknowledges differences, varieties, and uniqueness in every part of reality. Only by recognizing the plurality of the world one can see every other part of the reality to be complementary. If you and I are one and the same, then there is no space between us to know and learn from each other. Francis Clooney uses a fitting analogy between religions and spouses to explain the complementary character of religions. He says,

Religious traditions stand in complementary relationships to one another, they do not flourish if kept rigidly apart; perhaps we need one another to remain alive. If at first we are hesitant in the face of so many religions, it may help to remember that learning religiously is a lifelong process of interchange, acquiring the other, losing oneself, putting oneself back together again. We consume reality, and the other seems to disappear inside us; but we become what we eat, and thus we remain alive, beyond ourselves. We might even imagine religious traditions to be male and female in relation to one another-provided we allow these male and female roles to shift and grow as we give and receive, as we nurture and explore each other's wisdom.<sup>59</sup>

At this juncture, Swami Vivekananda's insight might be helpful to work towards a feasible and practical pluralism which Jeffery Long identifies as 'deep religious pluralism'. A deep

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<sup>59</sup> Clooney, Francis X. (1998). *Hindu Wisdom For All God's Children*. New York: Orbis Books, 7.

religious pluralism “seeks to advance a vision of pluralism that is not bought as the expense of genuine differences among religious traditions.”<sup>60</sup> For such pluralism we require unconditional openness without prejudices or ulterior motives, to learn from others what I do not have. Swami Vivekananda, a young *sanyasin* from India who participated in the Parliament of World’s Religions at Chicago in 1893, while addressing the issue of religious plurality he expressed his dissatisfaction about the use of the word “tolerance”. He said the word “tolerance” meant inequality, for the one who tolerates is obviously greater than the tolerated. Vivekananda says: “Why should I tolerate? Toleration means that you are wrong and I am just allowing you to live. Is it not blasphemy to think that you and I are allowing others to live? I accept all religions that were in the past, and worship with them all; I worship God with every one of them, in whatever form they worship Him.”<sup>61</sup> Thus he emphasized the necessity of acceptance in the place of tolerance. Vivekananda promoted a kind of ‘radical universalism’ according to which “We’re one, but we’re not the same.” According to him the world religions are distinct and different not only in their external forms such as languages, rituals, books, and so on, but also the internal soul of every religion.<sup>62</sup> Further he recognizes that each religion is distinct and has a soul. And he finds that the core insights of every religion complementing. He says, “I believe that they are not contradictory; they are supplementary. Each religion, as it were, takes up one part of the great universal truth, and spends its whole force in embodying and typifying that part of the great truth. It is, therefore, addition, not exclusion. That is the idea. System after system arises, each one embodying a great idea, and ideals must be added to ideals. And this is the march of humanity.”<sup>63</sup> When the very moment you demand any religion to reformulate its doctrines you are displaying a

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<sup>60</sup> Long, Jeffery D. Swami Vivekananda and Religious Pluralism, 5.

<sup>61</sup> Long, Jeffery D. Swami Vivekananda and Religious Pluralism, 2.

<sup>62</sup> Cf., Long, Jeffery D. Swami Vivekananda and Religious Pluralism. 4.

<sup>63</sup> Long, Jeffery D. Swami Vivekananda and Religious Pluralism. 6.

sense of superiority over that religion. Self-examining, recognizing, accepting, and integrating the truth from others into one's own are rights of every religion. Our awareness that every religion is working towards trying to respond to the human desire to know the divine and respond to it appropriately, and that every religion has partial truth of reality will surely lead one to accept the other as other and respect the existence of others as complementary to one's own.

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