I.
Theoretical Framework for Multiculturalism and Religion

Multiculturalism and Religious Pluralism: Interaction and Overlap

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I dedicate this paper to my friend and colleague, Vic Hayes. He has long tussled with the topic of religious pluralism and I have valued listening to him and dialoguing with him. I esteem his friendship and his scholarship.

We are living in a new phase of complex cultural interdependence. Groups that once could have expected to have lived insulated from all outside contact, untrammelled by any cultural interaction, are now faced with the reality of cross cultural contact. In Australia such social change has forced governments to confront so-called multiculturalism, understood in the sense of a variety of cultural groups living in proximity. Government policy on multiculturalism has been an experiment in social engineering, imposed on a population that has been largely unaware of the dimensions of the problem. Legal restrictions on 'ethnic' and racial prejudice and the enshrinement of the rights of 'ethnics' in the law have come as a surprise to the majority of Australians (Mark 1991). That reaction reveals an ignorance that is as dangerous as the ignorance of history.

But while multiculturalism has become a byword in scholarly debate, religious pluralism has been less obvious. This paper intends to describe multiculturalism and religious pluralism and to demonstrate the intimate connection between the two processes. It will also attempt to demonstrate that while limited and perhaps deceptive progress has been made towards meeting the challenge of multiculturalism, no such progress is evident in the case of religious pluralism.

Culture and Multiculturalism

In order to describe multiculturalism the concept of culture itself must be addressed. Culture means the total shared way of life of any given human group.

It is made up substantially by that group's modes of thinking, acting, feeling, valuing. Clifford Geertz once defined culture as:

> An historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men (*sic*) communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and their attitudes toward life (Geertz 1973:89).

Culture consists, according to Geertz, of a system of symbols. The meanings of those symbols are derived from and determined by those who use them, the human beings of the group. Symbols do not speak for themselves. The colour red means what the group decides the colour red will mean. Symbols are a special category of signs, namely signs whose connection with an object is a matter of convention, agreement or rule (Pierce 1931-58). Signs reflect the world; symbols create it (Kloskowska 1985:19-29, Knella 1965:Ch.2). Culture however is not something static. It is always developing (Asad 1983:237-259). In order to clarify this, I will introduce the concept of tradition. (Szacki 1969:17-31, Smolicz 1974:75-83) Tradition can have several meanings, but its essential meaning is the attitude of any given generation to its own past, which attitude may amount to either approval or disapproval of its cultural heritage. The current generation either identifies with its predecessors from whom the heritage is deemed to have derived or dissociates itself from them. The present generation of a given group can select a certain aspect of the cultural heritage and evaluate it, reform it or adjust it to its present needs. In the hands of each group, therefore, culture becomes malleable. A group inherits a way of life and then adapts that way of life to its present circumstances.

Culture is a human creation, dependent on human consciousness and memory. It is organic. Without human beings there could be no such thing as culture. Some anthropologists would even claim that without culture there would be no such thing as a human being (Geertz 1973:Ch.2). A human being has, in their estimation, been programmed by culture. While animals, to a large extent, have their behavioural patterns predetermined by their genetic code, human beings are less genetically regulated. They must put a construction on events and do so by means of symbols, a system of symbols, a culture. This striking dependence on culture seems to be species-specific (Lumsden and Wilson 1981, Benton 1984:111-134). Perhaps humans are directed by their genetic make-up to find order through culture. Perhaps dependence on culture

has so developed the human brain that humans are able now to shed dependence on instinct. Again, Geertz wrote:

> Undirected by culture patterns - organised systems of significant symbols - man's (*sic*) behaviour would be virtually ungovernable, a mere chaos of pointless acts and exploding emotions, his (*sic*) experience virtually shapeless. Culture, the accumulated totality of such patterns, is not just an ornament of human existence but - the principal basis of its specificity - an essential condition for it. (Geertz 1973:46)

Humans are essentially incomplete animals. They complete themselves through culture and, indeed, through particular forms of culture. Culture performs for humans what instinct achieves for other animals.

From being a vague, intangible entity, culture can take on a somewhat frightening objectivity. Anthropologists seem to be perennially divided over the degree of reality possessed by a particular culture. There would be those who would see culture as a super-reality, existing over and beyond the human group (White 1949). Ways of thinking, acting and feeling are considered to be independent of and external to the human individual. They exercise a power of control over the individual. Thus Emile Durkheim defined culture as:

> a collaborative consciousness, ... a psychic being that has its own particular way of thought, feeling, and action different from that peculiar to the individuals who compose it. (Durkheim 1961:65)

Human behaviour, according to this view, would be culturally determined. The individual's cultural imprisonment has been thus described:

> The individual does the thinking and feeling - by definition. But ... **what** he (*sic*) thinks and feels is determined not by himself (*sic*) but by the sociocultural system into which the accident of birth has placed him (*sic*). (White 1949:183)

Culture thereby becomes something like the script of a play and we are the actors who can do no other than perform according to the script. Such a determinist view does not ring true. It does not explain the evident influence of tradition in the sense explained above. It can be demonstrated that culture does change, which would be an impossibility according to this determinist argument.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is a conceptualist view (Kluckhohn 1949). For the conceptualist, culture is simply a handy, anthropological tool. It synthesises for the convenience of the trained observer, the many forms of

learned and shared behaviour with the material output that accompanies such behaviour. According to this view culture can be compared to a map. A map is not the real terrain. It is an abstract and formalised representation of the terrain. Culture would be an abstract description of certain uniform trends in language, activity, artefacts of a certain group. Culture would only exist in the mind of the investigator. Accordingly, what pass for cultural ideas and practices would be simply the cognitive blueprint formed by the observer's perception of a group living together and coping with each other. Those ideas and practices can be explained socio-psychologically.

Such a theory would seem to explain away the pervasiveness and dynamism of culture. A preferable view of culture would maintain that while culture is an abstraction, since it can never be experienced as a totality, it is still a reality. There is a distinctive mode of actual historical living in human society which corresponds to the abstraction. Such existential culture is the precondition for the logical construct in the mind of the observer. A cultural heritage is a reality, handed on by tradition from one generation to another. Those who receive the heritage are limited by its ordered dimensions and boundaries but they are still able to evaluate. In times when there is widespread dissatisfaction with the culture then creative individuals can introduce new culture patterns that may be accepted by others. A cultural revolution can take place.

If cultures, however, exist both in the mind and reality do they possess individual and distinctive reality? Is one culture comparable in its reality with another? Common universal characteristics have been confidently identified in all cultural systems (Kluckhohn, in Kroeber 1953:507-523). For instance, Spiro is able to identify "invariant dispositions and orientations" which stem from "pan-human biological and cultural constants" (1978:330-360). On the basis of these dispositions and orientations he is able to postulate "a universal human nature" underlying all humanity (*ibid.*:349-350).

There are others who hold that any such universality is illusory. Every culture is unique, formed by unique experience in the life of a particular group, shaped by non-recurrent historical events. Each element of a culture can only be judged by what it contributes to the totality of that culture. A particular form of government, therefore, cannot meaningfully be compared to another form in another culture. It only has meaning within the total culture of the one group. This is cultural relativism which has its own philosophical difficulties (Geertz 1984:263-278, Hollis and Lukes 1982).

A variant of relativism can be proposed however. The case could be put that while the behaviour patterns of animals are genetically determined and the genetic code orders their activity within a narrow range of variation, human beings are only endowed with very general response capacities. These are not the cultural universals proposed by Spiro and others. They are capacities to learn within a restricted range. Thus, we have an innate capacity to speak, but our capacity to speak English is culturally determined. The speech patterns of all languages work on a few basic principles. Beneath all languages there are deep structures, as Noam Chomsky calls them (1972, 1980). From the deep structures of all languages a 'universal grammar' could be compiled. Surface grammars are simply variants of the 'universal grammar'. Perhaps this principle can be applied to the whole of culture. Capacity is determined and controlled by the biological species. How this capacity will be activated and manifest itself will depend upon the culture into which the individual is socialised. Just as an individual is free to depart from the 'rules' of language and invent neologisms or even speak nonsense, so too the individual can depart from the 'rules' of culture generally and so behave, think and value in a variant or even a nonsensical way. A human being with capacities only is an incomplete animal. It is culture that completes the human being by activating the capacities in a certain direction.

There is an apprehension that any form of relativism, including the moderate form I have detailed above, will constrain the observer to accept blindly everything proposed in an alien culture. 'Everything' might entail cannibalism, infanticide or self-mutilation. We are not, however, required to be uncritical of our own culture; indeed tradition, as explained above, inclines a group towards constant evaluation. Likewise, alien cultures can be evaluated. However, a cultural proposition must be evaluated in its own cultural framework and context. This is done spontaneously in one's own culture. When considering an alien culture, the canons of evidence and epistemology proper to its cultural discourse need to be respected (Hanson 1979).

What does culture, understood in this way, offer to the human being? The human individual has a need for order. To make sense of the universe, self and others the individual within the group requires a direction, a purpose, a basic meaning. All cultural activity takes place in the context of 'world' construction. The mind and its categories structure reality. It is not as if the world is a passive entity waiting to be discovered. It is something that humans actively construct. In fact, different historical periods and different social classes within the same historical period may shape the world according to significantly different

configurations of values, power relationships and knowledge. Some of these constructed worlds achieve viability because they are supported by a plausibility structure. A group, by its general acceptance, gives such a constructed world its plausibility. The group commits itself to that world and defines its roles and identities *vis-a-vis* that world. The constructed world makes sense of human existence for the group member committed to that view of a meaning-universe. Culture, every culture, offers this. In order to find meaning and direction in this context, both individuals and the group must adapt to the present cultural heritage. When meaning and direction are attained, the group acts to retain its cultural heritage with the same tenacity as the individual displays in maintaining personal, physical life. Hence there is always an element of continuity about culture.

In general it is the universal need for order, the most basic of all capacities, accompanied by the universal capacities generated by human biology, psychology and geophysical context that give rise to so-called cultural universals. The capacities of the human group are activated and directed by a culture and this culture itself can be affected substantially by subsequent human experience and non-recurrent historical events. Tradition will shape and reshape the cultural totality in response to ongoing human need. Diversity will remain side by side with universalism.

What, then, is meant by the term 'multiculturalism'? It is evident that there are many humanly constructed cultures which presumably give adequate order and meaning to their constituencies, activating the basic human capacities of these constituencies in variant ways. Multiculturalism in some way maintains and encourages and preserves such a variety of cultures. It esteems and promotes their language differences, their different patterns of family structure and the rest of their variant configurations. It is here that we confront the question of religion. Two otherwise culturally homogeneous groups may well be diversified because of a significant religious difference. Two culturally heterogeneous groups may share the same religious tradition. Multiculturalism cannot overlook religion. In this cultural context we need to describe religion.

Religion and Religious Pluralism

Religion is a cultural pattern or, as many would see it, a separate cultural system. Like all culture it is, at base, a meaning-seeking activity. Like all culture it consists of a system of symbols. The symbols of religion are principally myths and rituals but they may include objects, natural phenomena,

clothing, smell and so forth. For those observers who study a religion from outside, the symbols must be learned. They are not signs. What for example is the meaning of a serpent? For the Canaanite religion it was the symbol of fertility, for ancient Greek religion it was the symbol of healing, for Hebrew religion it was the symbol of evil, for some Australian Aboriginal religions it is the symbol of creativity. The symbol must be learned and, indeed, the whole interrelated gamut of symbolism must be learned.

But religion, seen as religious culture, must also be appreciated in its vital function of attaining a particular form of order. We have seen that secular culture, in general, bestows order and human beings depend upon their symbol systems for viability. Should there be the remotest indication that these symbol systems might not prove able to cope with specific human experience, for example, the experience of death and dying, then anxiety is aroused. Human beings, accordingly, find themselves pitted against chaos, ultimate lack of interpretability. Culture, everyday or secular culture, allows human beings to bestow order on common human experience, to explain historical events, to solve problems of identity and destiny. However, there are certain points where chaos could reassert itself. Insuperable ignorance, the experience of suffering and the problem of evil with the concomitant problem of cosmic injustice can threaten an ordered world and threaten the interpretability of human experience. At this point there is need for religious culture. The religious person construes the world and self in terms of Ultimacy, of ultimate order. I would contend that all human persons who have reached a level of discretion would be 'religious persons', although not necessarily religious in a conventional sense. 'Religious culture' would include living world religions, syncretistic religions, Marxism, humanism, existentialism and so on.

Ultimacy is to be understood here as a focus, a symbolic representation of order and meaning that goes beyond everyday order. It is not postulated as an object *in se*, an autonomous reality (Hick 1973, 1977, 1980, 1987). While the symbol may be taken to infer a noumenal reality, such an inference does not prove its real and separate mode of existence (Loughlin 1987). This symbolisation of Ultimacy is produced, as would be expected, within the context of a particular cultural world-view into which the individual's life-direction has been integrated. If the world-view now postulates that the ultimate focus and the individual are widely separated then the focus will be symbolised in personal terms, such as a god or pantheon of gods, distinct from and even distant from the individual. If the world-view postulates an intimate closeness of individual and

focus, a gulf that is easy to bridge, then the symbolisation will be impersonal, such as *brahman*, encroaching on that individual's personal space. Religious cultural activity is about bridging the gulf between the individual and the ultimate focus in order to find ultimate order and meaning.

The attainment of ultimate order is, of course, an ideal. The individual seeks a form of liberating order and meaning not offered by secular culture, seeks the ability to focus on the cosmos from a 'reality'-centred vantage point rather than a self-centred one. Various terminology has been used to describe this search for liberation. Thus, Hick chooses "soteriological effectiveness" and Knitter "soteria".

This comparison between religious culture and what could now be called everyday or secular culture indicates the complexity of social life. The overlap of secular and religious culture in the individual's life and thought depends on the aforementioned culturally constructed world-view. A world-view is a structuring of space, time and persons into some meaningful pattern of interaction. If the same world view is verified in both a secular and a religious cultural system then the relationship between the two cultural systems is relatively simple. This would normally be the case in the original religious setting. Ancient Hebrew religion would have shared the world-view of a broader semitic culture. But religious cultures are portable. A religious culture can become attached to a secular culture previously alien to it (Penman 1987). It is when the secular and the religious cultural systems presume opposing world-views that the individual's life and thought are affected.

The Christian Anglo, for example, is in a potentially complex situation when, on the one hand, secular culture postulates a scientific world-view while Christian religious culture transmits the world view of the book of Genesis. One alternative is for the individual to nullify one or the other ("evolution is an unproven and unsustainable theory", "creation in Genesis needs to be interpreted symbolically"). Another alternative is to develop a Wittgenstein-like "language-games" approach to both world-views.

But the complexity goes further. In the first instance human beings may have access to a number of secular cultural systems. They may live their life within the one culture, being aware only of that single possibility for human order, or perhaps they have access to several and so they can choose. The result may be a choice of one with rejection of others, a dual system in which the individual oscillates from one to another or a hybrid system in which the individual selects elements from two or more to form a uniquely personal

cultural system. For our present purposes the complexity becomes more obvious when there is also access to several religious cultures.

Awareness of this variety of religious cultures raises the issue of religious cultural relativism. Obviously there are differences and disagreements between rival religious symbol systems. Disagreements can relate to belief symbols or to practical symbols. Some of the disagreements can be relegated to historical differences of opinion: Jesus died on the cross (Christianity) as against Jesus did not actually die on the cross (Islam). Historical evidence could, in theory at least, reconcile such disagreements but they are not of vital importance in comparing rival cultural systems. Historians stand by differing opinions of a similar type within secular cultures too. Other disagreements, on the surface more substantial, are really quasi-historical: reincarnation is possible (Hinduism); reincarnation is impossible (Christianity). It might be possible to conceive a historical test that would substantiate one or other side of the argument. Once again, however, the disagreement does not touch the essence of the cultural system.

Where religious cultures do differ substantially is in their ways of symbolising and relating to Ultimacy. The symbolisation and the determination of a mode of relationship are moderated within a specific world-view, by unique life experiences and unique historical events. Ultimacy has been variously symbolised as Yahweh, Allah, Nirvana, the Dreaming. Such symbolic forms are culturally conditioned responses activating the single universal capacity for an ultimate focus.

Once again the distinction needs to be drawn between Ultimacy in itself, the actual focus 'out there', and Ultimacy as humanly conceived within a particular religious group. Ultimacy in itself is the ultimate focussing of things. It is neither capable of validation nor disproof. It is a reality, a real focus, beyond the human order but it becomes part of human awareness in terms of sets of concepts which structure cognitive consciousness. Ultimacy as humanly conceived in symbolic form within a particular group will be unique. The differentiation of religious cultures, therefore, is primarily dependent upon variant, human conceptions of Ultimacy.

The observer of religions, however, could take up one or other of several stances towards religious cultures. The first would be exclusivism, the view that one particular religious culture is alone valid, possessing the only valid symbolisation of Ultimacy and the only legitimate mode of maintaining contact with that symbol of Ultimacy. The second would be inclusivism, the view that

one religious culture is certainly valid and true but that other religious cultures may share, partially and perhaps inadequately, the truth of the one valid culture. Thirdly, there is pluralism. Pluralism would maintain that all religious cultures that do enjoy or have enjoyed currency are true. They all embody variant but valid symbolisations of Ultimacy and variant systems of relating to Ultimacy. They are incommensurable and no value judgement can adjudicate between them. Choice between one and another would be dependent on an individual's life circumstances, prior enculturation and some degree of personal choice. Any critique of a religion must be performed within that religion's cultural context.

Multicultural Interaction

Amid the bewildering diversity of secular and religious cultural systems it is still clear that groups interact and that life proceeds. How can even a qualified unity within a broad social group be attained? At this point I wish to introduce the notion of an overarching framework of values as described by J.J. Smolicz (1981, 1984, 1988).

In a society composed of more than one ethnic group, there can exist a variety of relationships between the dominant (frequently the majority) group and the minorities. If such a society is governed by a degree of consensus, rather than coercion, a set of shared values must have evolved that overarch the various ethnic groups. Within such a cultural 'umbrella', ethnic groups may retain certain core values, such as a distinct language or family tradition.

We thus have a dynamic equilibrium established between the overarching or shared values of a broad-based community, on the one hand, and ethnic core values on the other. The dominant group in that community exhibits its own set of values, many of which have percolated into the overarching framework. Such shared values should not be regarded, however, as the majority's own 'private domain', but as the common possession of all the citizens.

To take an example, the overarching framework that has evolved in Australian society has been described in a policy statement of the Education Department of South Australia:

> Australia is a cohesive society, whose people, as individuals, subscribe to a set of common values which make them uniquely "Australian." English as the means of communication, a Western-style parliamentary democracy, a degree of economic and social opportunity for all individuals to better themselves according to personal abilities and resourcefulness, the freedom to pursue private

> interests within clearly defined legal and political constraints are some of the characteristics of this cohesiveness.
>
> Within this framework there exists a rich diversity of cultures, languages and customs which reflect the origins of present-day Australians.
>
> For groups from widely divergent backgrounds to co-exist happily and productively within a framework of common values, while still preserving languages and cultures, the diverse and changing nature of Australian society must be recognised, accepted and valued by all Australians. (1982:4)

An historical survey of the interaction between ethnic cultures and the dominant Anglo culture in Australia shows that at an early stage in Australian migrant policy the hope was that other ethnic groups would assimilate to the dominant Anglo group. Under the conditions of assimilation, the overarching framework has the lion's share of its values derived from the dominant group, while minority ethnic components contribute only remnants that are obliterated as far as possible. In such a situation even 'ethnic food' is suspect, while literacy in ethnic tongues is actively devalued and presented as intellectually confusing, socially disadvantaging and politically divisive.

The opposite of assimilation is separatism, when the overarching framework is only vestigial and each ethnic group is encapsulated within its own value system with little interaction between different groups whose members have constructed personal cultural systems almost entirely from their ancestral mono-ethnic constituents. Assimilation and separatism are the breeding grounds for ethnocentrism, the conviction that only one cultural system is valid.

Beyond the assimilationist and separatist positions lies the vast area that is covered by the label of 'multiculturalism' as described earlier. This involves some form of an on-going interpenetration between the overarching or shared values of the broad community on the one hand, and the ethnic values of the constituent groups on the other.

Religious Interaction

We can make certain correspondences between attitudes in the secular cultural sphere and analogous attitudes in the religious cultural sphere. Applying the model of an overarching framework of values to religious culture in Australia we find that several levels of religious community need to be taken into account. At the lowest level there are individual religious communities. Often these are

distinguished by ethnic core values. For example, under the umbrella of 'Roman Catholic Culture' we have Anglo-Hibernians, Italians, Poles. In these cases, the Roman Catholic culture has been linked with separate ethnic cultures. This is not to deny that there are also disparate Roman Catholic groups not having specifically ethnic core-values. Some are distinguished by values based on class or interest area (University-based groups, 'family' groups), others by values based on religious attainment (Charismatic Catholics), but similar principles apply.

Individually, each group is held together by its core values. The Anglo-Hibernian group has Anglo-Hibernian historical reminiscences recalling events in Irish history and folklore, preference for the English language with a particular accent, regularity of religious observance and a rather right-wing ethic which stresses sexual probity.

However, an overarching umbrella identifies these separate groups as Roman Catholic. The core-value within the overarching umbrella accepted by all adherents is a Myth and Ritual complex, protected by Roman authority. In this case 'myth' refers to the sacred story of Jesus, capable of being broken down into dogmatic statements as approved by the Vatican authorities. 'Ritual' would refer to the liturgical or sacramental practice approved by Rome. This Roman influence of the core-values has been well defined as the 'Roman mould' of the Australian Catholic Church (Moloney 1969; see Lewins 1978). The use of ecclesiastical Latin as a world-wide *lingua franca* was a remarkable instrument of control of this belief and practice by the Roman authorities. Its discontinuance may explain the stretching of the umbrella.

At a second level such a broad Roman Catholic grouping is linked, more tenuously still, with other groups such as Anglicans, Uniting Church, Greek Orthodox. They would all accord each other the title of 'Christian'. Their overarching umbrella is being articulated in ecumenical dialogue. At this second level the core value within the umbrella still consists of a common Myth complex but protected only by a written biblical text that is not subject to any Roman interpretation. Ritual is less of a common value.

At a third level 'Christianity' is linked with other conventional world religions and philosophies, such as Marxism, that act as surrogate religions, as mentioned above. The overarching umbrella has by this point become very stretched. An example of values enunciated at this level was given at the World Conference of the Religions for Peace at Kyoto in 1970:

As we were together in concern for the overriding subject of peace, we discovered that the things which unite us are more important than the things which divide us. We found that in common we possessed:

* A conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, of the equality and dignity of all human beings
* A feeling for the inviolability of the individual and his (*sic*) conscience
* A feeling for the value of the human community
* A recognition that might does not make right, that human power is not sufficient unto itself and is not absolute
* The belief that love, compassion, selflessness and the power of the spirit and of inner sincerity ultimately have greater strength than hate, enmity and self-interest
* A feeling of obligation to stand on the side of the poor and oppressed against the rich and the oppressor
* A deep hope that ultimately good will be victorious. (Quoted in Kung 1986)

At each of the levels certain groups would have opted out of the overarching umbrella making any semblance of pluralism illusory. Latin-Mass Roman Catholics, disavowing the present Roman authority, would not see themselves as part of a broader Roman Catholic grouping. Many Christians would not accept a broad definition of a Christian myth which would allow them to share in any meaningful way with other 'Christians' (Hunt 1990). Marxists would not subscribe to all the core-values of the Kyoto Conference which would make them party to conventional religionists. Religious exclusivism and inclusivism are widely subscribed in society as also is ethnocentrism with regard to secular culture.

Ethnocentrism and Religious Exclusivism

Public ethnocentrism in its more gross presentation is not socially accepted. Its appearance is usually attributed to ignorance or intolerance derived from an aberrant personality trait. The model of an overarching framework of values would, however, point to another interpretation. Ethnocentrism is the rejection of any overarching umbrella. A culture, once firmly established, correctly sees other cultures as threats to its unchanging continuance and its

superior status. There may be struggle and, let us say, the victorious conquest of one cultural group over others as has occurred often enough in history. Instinctively the victors safeguard their advantage by ethnocentric practices which protect their own culture and negate an overarching framework of values. These ethnocentric practices become part of the cultural heritage that is handed on. Ridicule of alien cultural behaviour, rejection of other 'ethnic' languages can be, and indeed are, transmitted as cultural values. Ethnocentrism becomes the instrument for maintaining dominance. An established ethnocentrism can be subsequently revitalised when a threatening situation once more requires a display of cultural dominance. So long as this strategy of domination remains unchallenged there is no sense in combating 'ignorance' or 'intolerance'; the root cause is to be sought elsewhere.

Religious exclusivism, although legally protected and socially acceptable, works in the same way. A religious culture can instinctively perceive the danger of syncretism. It can perceive its cultural configuration to be challenged. Once again we could postulate an historical struggle and victory. A claim to exclusivism assures a perpetuation of domination. Exclusivism, the negative reaction towards any overarching umbrella, is then enshrined as a core value. It becomes a 'belief' coded in formulas such as "There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his prophet" or "*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*". The belief is handed on as part of the cultural heritage and a strategy of domination is maintained. The formula of exclusivism can be revitalised on subsequent occasions when the dominant group is under challenge.

Islam's initial subjection of the Arabian peninsula and subsequent penetration of the Near East was rationalised by its claim to religious exclusivism. Its division of the world into *dar al-islam* and *dar al-harb* fiercely expressed this religious ideology. Once established, its religious exclusivism remained as a cornerstone of Islamic religious culture, able to be utilised in periods of political tension in order to galvanise Islamic support.

Another particular form of religious exclusivism is Christian antisemitism. This was spawned as a result of the Christian endeavour to dominate Western Europe. Antisemitism has sought support in biblical rhetoric which reflected very early Christian-Jewish polemic. Once consolidated, Christian antisemitism has been available as a ready instrument for those who would further their economic and political ambitions. The consequences in our own days have been too tragically obvious.

The religious exclusivisms of Northern Ireland or the Middle East will not, therefore, be solved by an objective study of other religious cultures and are not the prerogative of aberrant personalities. These exclusivisms are strategies for maintaining political and economic dominance. In short, religious exclusivism is not an accidental accretion to a religious tradition just as ethnocentrism is not a by-product of ignorance. Conflict and domination produce both of them and they are retained as the rationale of domination. Ethnocentrism and religious exclusivism live on within a culture far beyond their original point of construction. They are available in times of tension and confrontation to justify a new claim to domination.

Conclusion

I would conclude by a warning against any polyethnic or multi-faith community being complacent about attaining multiculturalism or religious pluralism. Here in Australia we are presently drafting legislation which will legally prohibit racial vilification as a ground of discrimination. It will become unlawful for anyone to incite hatred, by a public act, towards others on the ground of their race. This is a modicum of protection for the ideal of multiculturalism as a fact and a policy. But there is no such legal protection for religious pluralism. Given the correlation of secular and religious culture, this discrepancy would indicate a basic weakness in social strategy. What can be done? It is not sufficient to promote understanding of other religious cultures by study or personal contact. Students must be encouraged to document both ethnocentrism and religious exclusivism and their role in conflict and domination *in situ* - in Northern Ireland, in the Middle East, in Iran, in suburban Sydney. They should be enabled to discern the strategies of dominance that perpetuate ethnocentrism and religious exclusivism and envisage a social engineering which would dismantle them. Only in this way can a harmonious and just society begin to be created and only in this way can multiculturalism and religious pluralism in any valid sense be promoted.

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The End of "Religious" Pluralism?

Philip C. Almond

> *No longer are people of other persuasions peripheral or distant, the idle curiosity of travellers' tales. The more alert we are, and the more involved in life, the more we are finding that they are our neighbours, our colleagues, our competitors, our fellows. Confucians and Hindus, Buddhists and Muslims, are with us not only in the United Nations, but down the street. (Smith 1962:11)*

The single most pressing problem facing religion as we approach the new millennium is that of religious pluralism; or more precisely, how are those of one particular faith to think about those who adhere to other religious traditions? That this should be the problem is somewhat cause for surprise. For, for those of us who received our educational training, not in Studies in Religion, but rather in liberal Christian theological circles, secularisation appeared to create the critical task for religion. But paradoxically, secularisation has been a critical factor in the rise of religious pluralism in the West. On the one hand, Western humanity, in becoming very much the product of the scientific and technological revolutions of the past centuries has freed itself from the dominance which Christian belief and its institutions had over it. Yet, on the other hand, because secularisation has liberated Western humanity from viewing the world through a Christian monocle, this very fact has made possible an approach to understanding those spiritual universes within which others have for millennia found meaning, and in terms of which they have mapped out their life journeys.

In one way, religious pluralism is not new. Christianity itself arose in a context of religious pluralism. In its formative period as a new religious movement it was influenced, not only by the religious traditions of the Middle East, but also by those of the Roman Empire, by various forms of Gnosticism, the Mystery Religions and Greek philosophical traditions.

When in the fourth century, Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christianity and Judaism could no longer ignore each other. As Jacob Neusner remarks:

> In the fourth century, the age of Constantine, Judaic sages and Christian theologians met in a head-on argument on a shared agendum

> and confronted the fundamental issues of the historical existence of politics and society in the West: doctrine, specifically, the meaning of history; teleology, specifically, the eschatological teleology formed by the messianic doctrine identifying Jesus as Christ; and the symbolism of the godly society, specifically, the identity of God's social medium - Israel - in the making of the world. (Neusner 1990:278)

From the beginning of Islam, it and Christianity were in contact, often in conflict. Indeed, Western medieval Christianity constructed its own self-identity and bolstered its own claims in relation to and reaction against Islam. Christianity's image of itself was created from its understanding of Islam as the **essentially other**. (See Daniel 1960.)

From the middle of the thirteenth century, under the Mongolian hegemony, Christian travellers from the West had been periodically in touch with Buddhist, Hindu, Chinese, and Japanese religious traditions. Although they learned little of the doctrines of these traditions, they showed much interest in the similarities of cult and practice to that of their own Catholic faith. (See Almond 1986, Olschki 1960.) And from the time of the discovery of the Americas, Western Christians have been aware of the many spiritualities among the indigenous peoples of the Americas, Africa, Australia, and the Pacific regions. (See Marshall and Williams 1982.)

Still, granting that Christianity has, since its inception, created its own identity, at least in part, as a result of encounters with other faiths, our modern understanding of religious pluralism can only be said to date from the European Enlightenment. Prior to this time, the "other" was perceived through a conceptuality constructed primarily from Biblical and Classical images. In his recent work, *"Religion" and the Religions in the English Enlightenment*, Peter Harrison has demonstrated how the concepts of "religion" and "the religions" only emerged when the Enlightenment broke decisively with Patristic, Medieval and Renaissance notions of religion. In part, this was the result of the development of "natural religion" - the assumption that the other faiths were differing forms of natural religion; in part too, it was the consequence of pressing the religions into the service of religio-ideological conflicts inside the West, of interpreting them as formally equivalent to some or other form of undesirable heretical Christianity. Either way, the concept of religion was "naturalised":

> The concept "religion" involved the relocation of religious faith into a new sphere, a sphere in which the presumed substance of religion could serve as an object of rational investigation. The new context for

> "religion" was the realm of nature. In much the same way that the world became the object of scientific enquiry in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries through a process of desacralisation, so too, religious practices ... were demystified by the imposition of **natural** laws. As the physical world ceased to be a theatre in which the drama of creation was constantly re-directed by divine interventions, human expressions of religious faith came increasingly to be seen as outcomes of natural processes rather than the work of God or of Satan and his legions. (Harrison 1990:5)

In sum, the notion of "religion" as a something definable outside of the Christian economy, and consequently capable of rhetorical independence, is a very modern one, a result of the secularisation of our modes of thinking and the desacralisation of the world of the everyday incipient in the Enlightenment. And the same may be said of the concept of "religions". By the end of the nineteenth century, the historical relations between what came (oddly) to be called Western religions - Judaism, Christianity, and Islam - were to become more refined, the theological connections much more opaque.

This can be exemplified particularly with reference to Islam. There was, in the nineteenth century in particular, a proliferation of images of Muhammad and Islam. It was a time when traditional images of Muhammad were juxtaposed with new. Muhammad remained heretic, anti-Christ, ambitious imposter, profligate politician. But these were tempered by new images of him as sincere and heroic, as a noble Arab, and even as a true prophet of God.

The reasons for this change were many. The essence of Islam came to be seen as residing not in the present but in the past. Increased historical data about the prophet and the origins of Islam rendered earlier stereotypes effete. The demise of Christian apocalypticism and the rise of secular historical method created the Muhammad of history, relegating to the shadows Muhammad the anti-Christ of Christian polemic. The Victorian penchant for great men coupled with the Western fascination for an exotic romanticised East engendered a sympathetic environment for the rehabilitation of Muhammad and the religion he founded. And the rise of Western power over Islamic countries made for a context in which the Prophet and his religion could be treated benevolently, even while it sustained criticism of its modern manifestations. (See Almond 1989.)

Significantly too, the later part of the eighteenth and the early part of the nineteenth centuries saw the "discovery" of both Hinduism and Buddhism. Prior to this time, Hinduism and Buddhism had merely been inchoate and unclassified aspects of that which was not Judaic, or Christian, or Muslim, unidentified facets

of the polyglot worlds of "Heathenism" or "Paganism". But the arrival of Sanskrit texts in Europe, their subsequent decipherment, and the analysis of them independently of Biblical chronology and Classical points of reference allowed for the creation in the West of a previously unknown religion (religions) on the basis of its textual past, albeit a religion, the shape of which was determined by the social, political and intellectual needs of the West.

The impact of this Oriental Renaissance on the West is difficult for us to appreciate today, so familiar are we with the discourses brought into play as a result of it. But Raymond Schwab gives us some insight into the significance of it for the West:

> A whole world that had been entirely lost became, within a few years, completely known. For the first time the image of India regally entered the configuration of the universe. Except perhaps in those times drowned in legend, when more rumour than information would have reached him, a "cultivated man" would not necessarily have included India in his consideration of the cosmos. Judea would have been included because of biblical tradition; Persia because of its wars and its tradition of magic; Arabia because of its conquests and physicians, the Crusades and the schoolmen; and for the last two hundred years, China, seemingly because of the missions. The Indic world alone remained behind its wall. And then, in a single wave, it poured forth. (Schwab 1984:7)

It is even more surprising to realise how recent is the "discovery" of Buddhism. Between 1253, the year when the Franciscan William of Rubruck reached the camp of the Great Khan Mangu, and the departure of the Franciscan John of Marignolli from China in 1347, there had been sporadic contact between Western Christianity and Buddhism. But the information thus disseminated was inchoate at best, ill-informed at worst. With the overthrow of the Mongols in China in 1368 and the expulsion of Christians thence in the following year, the Buddhism of China and of the rest of Asia, was lost to view until the Jesuits arrived there at the end of the sixteenth century.

While information continued to accumulate, it was only during the nineteenth century that the congeries of data were subsumed under the term "Buddhism". The western creation of "Buddhism" progressively enabled various aspects of many Eastern cultures to be defined, delimited, classified, and to some extent therefore, ideologically controlled.

Thus, while believing that they were discovering Buddhism, nineteenth century scholars were inventing it, and doing so in their own likeness.

Buddhism was not waiting in the wings to be discovered, nor floating in some aethereal Oriental limbo expecting its objective embodiment. On the contrary, during the first thirty years of the nineteenth century, we were witnessing the creation of Buddhism. Buddhism takes form as an entity over and against the various cultures that can now be seen as instancing it, manifesting it, in an enormous variety of ways. Buddhism, as a taxonomic object, organised that which the West confronted in an alien space, and in so doing made it less alien, less other.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Buddhism had become a textual object located in Western institutions. Buddhism as it came to be **ideally** spoken of through the editing, translating and study of its ancient texts could be compared with its contemporary appearance in the Orient. And Buddhism thus seen compared unfavourably with its ideal exemplifications contained in the libraries, universities, colonial offices and missionary societies of the West. (See Almond 1988.)

Moreover, and without making too fine a point of it, the Western construction of the Eastern religions occurred not merely to make sense of the East, but to justify the Western presence in it. The construction of Buddhism and Hinduism, and the Victorian interpretation of Islam were part of the Western response to the other necessitated by imperialism, a response dictated by the inability of the West to appreciate the East as East, to value it or evaluate it *qua* Eastern. There was, one might say, an *a priori* incapacity to treat it on equal terms. The West was able to deal with it only from the assumption of its own essential and unquestionable superiority. The greater value of the West over the East, indeed over all those which it perceived as backward, uncivilised, degenerate, or decadent, was not a conclusion reached on the basis of an argument. How could it be? On the contrary, it was the rarely challenged premise in any argument on the truth or value of Eastern philosophy and culture. Edward Said writes:

> Under the general heading of knowledge of the Orient, and within the umbrella of Western hegemony over the Orient during the period from the end of the eighteenth century, there emerged a complex Orient suitable for study in the academy, for display in the museum, for reconstruction in the colonial office, for theoretical illustration in anthropological, biological, linguistic, racial, and historical theses about mankind and the universe, for instances of economic and sociological theories of development, revolution, cultural personality, national or religious character. Additionally, the imaginative

> examination of things Oriental was based more or less exclusively upon a sovereign Western consciousness out of whose unchallenged centrality an Oriental world emerged... (Said 1978:7-8)

In sum then, I want to suggest that the formulation of the problem of religious pluralism in the West in the late twentieth century is a legacy of the nineteenth century taxonomy of religions within a context of colonialism and imperialism. And if this is so, then perhaps some light might be thrown on the issue of religious pluralism, not by attempting to resolve it, but rather by attempting to dissolve it, or at least to avoid being led up rhetorical blind alleys of our own making.

It would of course be futile to suggest that we ought to remove fictive entities like "Buddhism" or "Christianity" from our discourse. For good or ill, for the past one hundred and fifty years, the world has been shaped by these imaginative constructions of it. But granted that they are imaginative constructions and, consequently, fictive entities, there is a conceptual obligation laid upon us to be much more self-critical in our linguistic deployment of them.

In the first place we need to be aware of the text-dominated way in which the study of religions has developed. The major world religions have primarily been constructed in the West as textual traditions and the major mode of understanding them has been through critical analysis of their texts. And the dominance of the text in Western culture generally has led us in the study of religion to see the written text as the key element in the understanding of religious life, and to construct Eastern religions on the model of the predominantly text-based Western religions. But religious life, both in the West and elsewhere, is lived outside of the text. And the contemporary study of religion entails going beyond it. As Lawrence Sullivan remarks:

> The problem of text becomes most acute in the study of religions because, in some religious traditions, text achieves its most hallowed state. At the same time, the comparative and historical study of religion makes clear that only in a few historical instances have texts been central to religious life. Even in literate culture, whose respect for writing, reading, and textual interpretation stem from the sacrality of the written word and its involvement with the divine will, it remains questionable how fully the notion of culture-as-text can account for religious experience and expression. (Sullivan 1990:50)

Secondly, we need to be much more aware of the differences within religions. "Christianity" ineffectively denotes both the religion of the Vatican

City and that of the sensuous snake handlers of the American South. That is to say, we need to be much more cognisant of pluralism within religions. Perhaps we should more self-consciously speak of "Christianities", "Buddhisms" and so on.

Thirdly, if the comparative study of religions has taught us anything, it is that aspects of one religion have often more affinity to parts of another religion than to other parts of itself. The bells of St Peter's resonate more with the gongs of Potala than with the tongues of Pentecostals; the doctrines of Luther echo more the teaching of Shinran than the Epistle of James; the writings of Matthew Fox dance more to the rhythms of native American spirituality than to the Gospel songs beloved of born-again businessmen.

Finally, we need to remember too that we are not merely Buddhist, nor Hindu, nor Christian, nor Muslim, but that we co-exist in other systems of discourse and that these may be, and often are, just as crucial in the creation of our self-identity: Christian maybe, but also socialist, student of religion, male, white, Australian, and so on. Jacob Neusner declares that:

> Religion matters not only because it integrates, it matters because it is one of the sole media of integration left to us. But for all of its power to define who we are and what we want to be and to what 'us' we belong, religion too forms only one circle, concentric, perhaps, with more of the circles of our lives than others, but coexistent with the lives of only a few specialists. For the rest, religious difference is just another difference. (Neusner 1990:285)

And this means that the study of religion is ill-served by uncritical belief in the systematic predominance of religions in shaping modern human consciousness.

The necessity to be much more critical in our deployment of these fictive entities - the religions - arises from the erroneous assumption that there is an essential non-linguistic "something" which corresponds to our linguistic construction of it, that there "really" is a something which exists independently of its socio-cultural manifestations, that there is an essence of Christianity over and against which its expressions in culture can be measured or evaluated as true or false expressions, legitimate or illegitimate interpretations. The fictive entity thus becomes the "reality" over and against which its manifestations can be supposedly measured. It is not surprising that the quest for the essence of Christianity should have originated at the time Christianity became a "world religion" alongside those others imaginatively constructed in the West, that is, in

the second half of the nineteenth century. For this is the time when, as I have suggested, the religious reality was shaped by these imaginative constructions of it.

If my analysis of religions as fictive entities is cogent, then the attempt to discern the essence of any religion "behind" its socio-cultural expressions across space and time is a meaningless one. For there are no such things as Christianity and Buddhism but only cumulative traditions (to borrow Wilfred Cantwell Smith's phrase) so classified. And this means we must be much more conscious of the recognition that our use of such terms is classificatory and not reificatory. And we must be much more conscious of the difficulties inherent in making normative claims about any religion, our own and others.

From this perspective, the problem of religious pluralism is a much more complex one than it first appeared. The challenge of religious pluralism is much increased by the realisation that such order as has been created by us from the phenomena of religion and religions is the consequence, not of our coming to know how the world is, but of our imposing a conceptual order upon it. It is not a question of how members of one religious tradition are to think about the other, but of how to think about the other both inside and outside one's own tradition. It may entail a recognition not of the unity of the religious experience of humankind but of its enormous diversity, the acceptance that a global theology is a Western fantasy and that radical difference and religious conflict are here to stay. It may suggest that, in a multi-cultural society, the way in which we continue to construe the problem of religious pluralism is irrelevant at best, socially divisive at worst. It does imply that, in the final analysis we have to do not with Christians, or Buddhists, or Hindus, or Jews, and so on, but, quite simply, with other persons.

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Faithful Syncretism

Victor C. Hayes

The opportunity to give this Charles Strong Trust Memorial Lecture is greatly appreciated, especially since the venue is the University of Sydney from which I graduated forty years ago. As you know, the Trust calls for lectures devoted to the "promotion in Australia of the sympathetic study of world religions - other than Christianity". I should remark, therefore, that in addressing the subject of Syncretism I will try not to be distracted by the fact that Christianity is thoroughly syncretistic but will press the point that all religions, old and new, are syncretic constructs.

In theological encounter, in inter-religious dialogue and in discussion of religious interaction virtually anywhere in the world, some words serve as scare-words. Relativism is one of them. Syncretism is another. These words seem to pose a special problem for Western religions. They crop up, writes Stanley Samartha, "whenever Christians are called upon to discuss the theological implications of God's concern for people of other faiths". And, he adds, when they do crop up "they invariably stall the debate". (1990:252)

"Syncretism", that is to say, may be identified immediately as a problem word, especially for religions like Christianity and Islam and Judaism which have strong allegiance structures and exclusionist frameworks. However, the phenomenon to which the word points (namely, the mixing, intermingling or interaction of different cultures and religions) is age-old, virtually universal and not about to cease. In fact, interreligious encounters can only proliferate, given modern mobility and communications. Better, then, that we not be struck dumb at the mention of an important though problematic word long associated with the range of phenomena which may result from interreligious encounter.

In this study, therefore, I want to explore the dimensions of Syncretism, clarify what could be meant by the phrase Faithful Syncretism, and ask, at the end, if there is life (and religion) beyond Syncretism.

Let me concede at once that for many people "faithful syncretism" will sound like a contradiction in terms. For five hundred years, in fact, Syncretism has been synonymous with Unfaithfulness! Despite the usage referred to by

Samartha, the word is not in wide general use (and is even avoided like the plague by some theologians and missiologists). Just recently, a visit to a class of mature-aged students in a Cambridge missiology seminar revealed that none of them used the word and some had not even heard of it. But they had heard of contextualisation, incarnation, acculturation, adoption, adaption, borrowing, assimilation and many other words which appear to relate to the same phenomena.

Syncretism as Universal and Inevitable

Among religious studies scholars the universality and even inevitability of religious syncretism has been readily acknowledged. Joachim Wach and Gerardus van der Leeuw recognized syncretism as an aspect of all religions (see Pye 1983). Helmer Ringgren thought that "few religions are totally 'pure' or homogeneous and free from elements of syncretism or traces of an encounter with other religions" (1969:8).

Missiologist Louis Luzbetak has spoken of world-wide "religious hybridization" which "affects almost any two religions or worldviews that meet" (1988:369, n.2 and 371). And Walter Strolz (1989:151) suggests that "every religion adopts and assimilates intercultural influences in some way". "The historical process by which a religion emerges and the later process of cultivating its own tradition are events which are entirely unthinkable without the operation of some foreign elements" (Strolz 1989:150). Syncretism, concludes Strolz, is "an essential feature of human communication" and it "enriches one's own tradition".

A Tricky Term

Despite its universality, however, or perhaps because of it, the definition of syncretism is problematic (analogous to the way the definition of religion itself is problematic). Theologians, missiologists, anthropologists and religious studies scholars have variously described "Syncretism" as a negative, tricky, ambiguous and controversial word. They worry because it carries both objective and subjective meaning, and because it seems to refer to phenomena which are not homogeneous enough for exact definition. Some prefer alternative terms and want to eliminate syncretism from their professional vocabulary (and they do), while other scholars see it as a potentially useful word for objective studies of religion.

These differing estimates of the term today relate to three facts about its past and present usage.

First, there were the long centuries when Syncretism functioned as a **pejorative** term, a term of reproach and abuse, a theological ***Scheltwort***. Secondly, and on the other hand, there is the recent rather defiant use of the word as a theologically **honorific** term, especially in those lands of the younger churches where contextualisation and acculturation are seen not as contaminating processes but as desirable, positive, even essential for the establishment and growth of a religion.

Thirdly, there is the recent proposal, now popular in certain religious studies quarters, that syncretism be regarded as a **neutral**, objective category in the scientific study of religions, that it be redeemed, if possible, from subjective meanings, that it be provided with a typology and, if possible, an agreed-upon definition, and that it be put to work in the history and phenomenology of religion.

In a moment we will need to look more closely at the origin, history and current definitions of this word, but first let us glimpse the dimensions of our problem by looking at what are said to be examples of Syncretism.

Three Examples of Small Scale Syncretism

Individuals can try to create their own syncretisms by bringing together particular components from two or more religious traditions. They can do this without concerning themselves with the more comprehensive encounters that may be going on between and among cultures and religions. Colpe (1987:219) cites numerous authors from the Hellenistic age who established their own syncretisms. Among the more interesting, I think, are Iamblichus and Aelius Aristides. But here are three examples from the present day.

(a) Michael Como was brought up a Methodist, but nowadays he prays daily before his Japanese-style altar on which are images of Jesus and Mary and an icon of Shakyamuni Buddha. (Arai & Ariarajah 1986:7)

(b) Mataji Yandana has established an ashram in the Himalayas where Christians and Hindus live together and where Christian life and practice are shaped by Hinduism's three-fold yoga (the ways of knowledge, devotion and action). Mataji has **integrated** them into one in the context of the life of this ashram where Christ is the Great Yogi. (Arai and Ariarajah 1986:23, 29)

(c) At a Christian monastic ashram in the Green Hills of eastern Oklahoma, leader Pascaline Coff OSB reports: "Our monastery has symbols of other religions in the main hall and chapel so that all who come feel at home. There are statues of Buddha, Nataraj, Avalokitesvara, Tibetan thankas and rudraksha malas from Rishikesh alongside Japanese Buddhist prayer beads, ... a peace pipe and an American Indian drum." Hymns and prayers show the influence of Eastern spirituality. They begin the noon praises, for example, by singing the Gayatri mantra in English before and after which there is a long *Ommmmmmm*. (Arai and Ariarajah 1986:47)

In the first example we have a single individual's private exercise in syncretism and are reminded of Kamstra's dictum: "to be human is to be a syncretist" (in Pye 1983). The second and third examples deal with local ashrams where a single leader has gathered a small community around herself. In their respective settings, Mataji Vendana illustrates the assimilation of Christian elements into her Hindu ashram, and Pascaline Coff illustrates the heavy assimilation of Eastern religious features into her Christian ashram.

Of course, questions immediately arise. What do we have here? Is it syncretism or eclecticism or a mere collection of exotic items for a kind of religious museum? Is this faithful assimilation, simple co-existence or a pious form of interreligious larceny?

Historic and Large Scale Syncretisms

Alongside these small-scale efforts, the literature supplies a great many examples of what scholars hold to be historic, large-scale and relatively stable syncretisms from ancient times till today.

(a) In ancient **Roman religion**, for example, Ringgren (1969:8) distinguishes at least two syncretistic stages: the adoption of Etruscan beliefs and practices and the influence of Greek religion. In addition, Hellenistic-Oriental elements intrude.

(b) Even such a homogenous religion as **Islam** contains a peculiar combination of elements from pre-Islamic Arabian paganism, Judaism and Christianity (although Muhammad would not have seen it this way). (See Ringgren in Hartman 1969:8,3f.)

(c) The New Catholic Encyclopedia believes that "religious syncretism in the strict sense" was produced by "that **invasion of Eastern divinities** with their mysteries which overwhelmed the Greco-Roman world" (1967:881). In fact, Frederick Grant (1953:xxiii) described the Hellenistic period as "the Age of Syncretism" because of its penchant for identifying deities and combining cults, (for example, Isis of a Thousand Names).

(d) Others agree that "what is presented as **the God of Israel** has come from at least three or four different streams of tradition". The Hebrew Bible's depiction of the God of Israel is, says Pannenberg, "a fusion of originally heterogeneous elements" (1971, in Hillman 1989:86).

(e) Christianity, too, has been seen as a dramatic example of religious syncretism. To quote Pannenberg again, Christianity "not only linked itself to Greek philosophy, but also inherited the entire religious tradition of the Mediterranean world", a process which was probably decisive for the persuasive power of Christianity in the ancient world (1971, King in Hillman 1989:87). At the same time, Colpe (1987:222) thinks that "the Christianity of the apostolic and post-apostolic ages was not a syncretistic religion, despite the multiform derivation of many of its basic concepts and views". He adds, obscurely, that the same must be said of Catholicism and various forms of Eastern Christianity. Such apparent disagreement suggests again that Syncretism is a tricky word.

(f) We also have a tricky situation when we turn to so-called Eastern religions. Japanese religion, for example, has been seen as a classic example of syncretism by most Western scholars of religion, and various Japanese scholars have agreed. But Jacques Kamstra (Gort 1989:134ff), who once shared this view (1967), now sees it as simply a Western prejudice. He drops the term syncretism and characterises Japanese religion as religious phenomenalism.

Nevertheless, Michael Pye has described **Shinto-Buddhist syncretism** and its long-term dynamics. He points back to the time when Buddhists saw Buddhas or Bodhisattvas as latently present in the form of local divinities (*kami*). Thus the *kami* Amiya was considered to be a manifestation of Shakyamuni, the *kami* Hachiman a manifestation of Amida, and so forth. They were drawn into a "syncretistic field", says Pye, and interpreted in terms of Buddhist meanings. Shinto seems to

have accomodated this in order to avoid extinction but in due course there came the Shinto reaction where Buddhist meanings were seen as but superficial manifestations of the profounder Shinto *kami*. (1971:89f)

(g) **Hinduism** seems to have endless examples of religious mixing and interaction. Larry Shinn notes that Bhagavan (the omnipotent Lord) is called by many names (for example, Para Purusa, Brahma, Isvara, Atman and Vishnu) due to historically recognizable "fusions" and "identifications" of vedic and non-vedic deities and deified heroes. Stories of Narayana, Vasudeva, the vedic Vishnu and the two Krishnas (warrior and cowherd) occur side-by-side in the Bhagavata Purana, even though referring to one deity, Bhagavan. Shinn concludes that there is an "eclectic synthesis" of the five theological traditions in the Bhagavata Purana. (1987:19).

(h) The case of Ramakrishna, however, illustrates a problem. Ramakrishna said, "Having plunged into the ocean of life, the one God rises up at one point and is known as Krishna, and when after another plunge, He rises up at another point, He is known as Christ. The incarnations are to Brahman, the Absolute, as the waves are to the ocean". (Ramakrishna 1987:42) But are **Sri Ramakrishna**'s identifications really cases of syncretism? For Vedantist Hinduism, where everything is ultimately a form of the One, can Syncretism be a meaningful notion?

(i) Of the new supraregional institutions of the present time, some are less syncretistic, others more. Colpe thinks the most syncretistic is the Unification Church in which contributions from old Korean shamanism, Mahayana Buddhism and Presbyterianism are still recognisable. (1987:226)

(j) In Brazil, as Colpe reports (*ibid.*), African and Indian cults, the Catholic ecclesial tradition, Pentecostalism and elements of classical European mythology, all had to come into contact in order that the great syncretic religions - Candomble, Macumba, and Umbanda - might arise.

(k) One final example. The Adelaide Heads of Churches announced this week that, as of next Sunday, faithful Christians must face in the direction of Mecca when they pray. Furthermore, to demonstrate a superior piety, they will be obliged to pray six times per day, using king-sized prayer mats. Shortly after issuing this decree the Heads of Churches were heads

without bodies, but they had raised interesting questions: what are the restraints upon syncretism and who decides what is plausable and legitimate?

Its Origin and History

Having set out these various examples of would-be Syncretism, let us now review briefly the origin and history of the term.

There is agreement in the Encyclopedias and in the literature that the term *sygkretismos* goes back to the time of Plutarch (c. 44 - c. 120 CE). James Moffatt (1921:155), in an admirable, compact essay, explains its origins thus:

> In his essay on brotherly love Plutarch observes that even brothers and friends who have quarrelled prefer to associate with one another in face of a common danger rather than fraternise with the foe; which is a Cretan precedent and principle, for although the Cretans were frequently at faction and feud with one another, they became reconciled and united whenever a foreign foe attacked them. This they called *sygkretismos*.

In its origin, then, the word points to "the instinct of self-defense which sinks private difference before a threatening peril" (*ibid.*).

After Plutarch - and here again the literature agrees - the term disappeared for fourteen centuries, only to reappear in the pages of Erasmus at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Erasmus is credited with transmitting it to the modern period by setting down the reference to Plutarch and using the term in its original sense. In 1519, for example, he wrote to Melanchthon expressing the hope that scholars of all parties would close their ranks against the barbarians. (Colpe 1987:218, Moffatt 1921:155)

For the century and a half after Erasmus the term passed from the humanists to the theologians. It was, in Moffatt's colourful phrase, "tossed about Europe" by members of the Reformed and of the Roman Church, quickly acquiring disparaging associations. It became a synonym for "fusion of an illegitimate kind", "hybridization" and "betrayal", and theologians who endeavoured to reconcile extremists were dubbed "syncretists". For example, efforts to reconcile Molinists and Thomists in the sixteenth century, and Lutherans and Calvinists in the seventeenth century, were denounced as syncretistic. (See Colpe 1987:218D, Moffatt 1921:155C & D.)

It will be noticed that usage here retains the idea of a third-party threat, even though it may seem perverse that these "reconciling" theologians and

Erasmus himself should have been so perceived. Nevertheless, in an age of deepening and hardening religious division, that is how they were regarded by the feuding parties. Syncretism, concludes Moffatt, was a label indifferently and acrimoniously applied to all irenical proposals.

Vivid instances of mid-seventeenth century usage, in which the word is set in very bad company indeed, are preserved in the Oxford English Dictionary (1971). For example, in 1651, Independency is described as "a Syncretismos or rather a Sink and Common Sewer of all Errours". And in 1653 a person is described as "plotting a carnal Syncretism and attempting the reconciliation of Christ and Belial" - a kind of ultimate blasphemy.

The theological disfavour in which the term was held runs on strongly into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In 1896, Hermann Usener, in his *Gotternamen*, renders syncretism as *Religionsmischerei* - mishmash of religions (1896/1928:337-340). Unlike *Mischung* (mixture, blending), *Mischerei* has negative overtones and this supports Usener's theological definition of Syncretism as "unprincipled abandonment of the faith of the Fathers". (See Colpe 1987:219A)

This negativity in the term's theological use spilled over into religious studies. As Michael Pye observed in 1971, most students of religion were "strongly influenced by Christianity" and tended therefore to see syncretism as "an illicit contamination, as a threat or danger, as taboo, or as a sign of religious decadence" (1971:350). The fact of Christian/non-Christian intermingling was admitted, but viewed with alarm and condemned.

The Twentieth-century Developments

The twentieth century, however, saw the emergence of both a neutral and a positive appraisal of Syncretism to stand beside the old negative one, so that we no longer needed to be intimidated by those wholly negative meanings. It became possible to associate Syncretism with faithfulness and to speak of Faithful Christian Syncretism, Faithful Muslim Syncretism and so forth. This meant, however, that scholars were sometimes caught in the act of both affirming and denying that a religion was Syncretistic.

This can be illustrated in the work of three Christian leaders who belonged to the early and middle years of the twentieth century. They are W.A. Visser 't Hooft, Hendrik Kraemer and W.E. Hocking. Their positions *vis-a-vis* world religious pluralism, interreligious encounter and Christian missionary activity have been much discussed. Here I am dealing **exclusively** and very

briefly with the way they handle the word "syncretism", which I have dealt with at greater length elsewhere.

(a) **W A. Visser 't Hooft**, a long time leader in the World Council of Churches, wrote a book specifically to counter "syncretistic" and "relativising" tendencies within Christianity. He titled it *No Other Name: the Choice between Syncretism and Christian Universalism* (1963). Early in the book he considers three proposed definitions of Syncretism.

The first definition proposes that we say we have Syncretism "whenever a particular religion makes any use of **concepts** which have their origin in the life of another religion", (Visser 't Hooft 1963:10) while the second proposal goes further and suggests we have Syncretism whenever a religion "takes into its own life **ideas** and **practices** which have their origin in another religious world" (*ibid.*:11).

Now Visser 't Hooft conceded, of course, that every religion, including Christianity, does this kind of borrowing the moment it steps out of its original environment. He knew that communication across cultural and religious boundaries made it necessary to use expressions, concepts and practices "embedded in the religious world" of the receiving culture. Nevertheless, he decided that he would not accept these proposals as definitions of Syncretism, but of **Translation** and **Absorption** respectively.

There were two reasons for Visser 't Hooft's decision. The first was that he recognized Translation and Absorption (as just defined) as benign and necessary for any faith which wants to extend its message into new contexts. Hence he wasn't about to refer to them by using a pejorative term like Syncretism. The second reason, however, was that he was preserving the word Syncretism for a very special use. He wanted it to refer exclusively to any religious mixing which would compromise what for him was the purity of Biblical/Christian faith. He spells this out in his third definition as follows:

> Syncretism is the view which holds that there is no unique revelation in history, that there are many ways to reach the divine reality, that all formulations of religious truth or experience are by their very nature inadequate expressions of that truth and that it is necessary to harmonise as much as possible all religious ideas and experiences so as to create one universal religion for mankind. (*Ibid.*)

Syncretism, thus described, was, for Visser 't Hooft, an "important, persistent and wide-spread religious phenomenon" which denies "fundamental Biblical/Christian truths" in at least four ways:

(i) it attempts to mix the worship of Yahweh with the worship of other gods
(ii) it denies that the Biblical god acts in history
(iii) it attempts to create one universal religion in which the uniqueness of Biblical/Christian religion is compromised
(iv) it confuses the creature with the Creator. (Visser 't Hooft 1963:9)

Now that is Syncretism. That is "the enemy", "the whirlpool", "the abyss" (*ibid.*:14). Such Christian Unfaithfulness, such unprincipled betrayal of the faith of the Fathers, deserves the most negatively loaded *Scheltwort* around and Syncretism was perfect for Visser 't Hooft's purposes.

However, it is open to us to identify Absorption and Translation as aspects of Syncretism or neutral constituents in a typology of Syncretism; and to identify Visser 't Hooft, because of his concern for the integrity of his faith, as in fact an advocate - and, like it or not, a fierce one - of one Christian version of Faithful Syncretism!

As he himself said, "the great question is whether the 'foreign' elements become a part of the original structure or whether that structure is essentially modified by them" (*ibid.*:11). In the former case, said Visser 't Hooft, we have Absorption and only in the latter case do we have Syncretism. That's because for him the very word Syncretism signified that the structure of the faith had been compromised; hence he felt compelled always to read it as **Unfaithful** Syncretism. I am suggesting that in **both** cases we have Syncretism: "Faithful" where the structure is not essentially modified, "Unfaithful" where it is.

(b) Our second figure, the influential Dutch missiologist **Hendrik Kraemer**, had the same problem as Visser 't Hooft. On the one hand he recognised that religions are inevitably syncretistic and could write: "in the history of mankind many patterns and varieties of syncretism appear as an inevitable result" of "genuine culture-contact" (1937:7 in Gort 1989:9). On the other hand he had inherited the word "syncretism" as "a term of abhorrence" (Kraemer 1954:254).

On the one hand then, Syncretism is inevitable and necessary, on the other hand it is abhorrent. So, like Visser 't Hooft, Kraemer can be read as both implying and excluding that Christianity is syncretistic. (See also R.D. Baird 1971:140-152 and Gort 1989:11.) For him, too, "absorption is not syncretism"

so long as it is undertaken "with a sense of clear discrimination". If foreign rites and conceptions "have been adapted to the dominant spirit and concern" of the host religion "in such a way that they have become a genuine and accepted part" of it, then, for Kraemer, all is well (Kraemer 1956:397). And this position, I am suggesting, is clearly a version of Faithful Syncretism.

(c) The third representative twentieth-century figure is **W.E. Hocking**. I refer in particular to his 1940 book, *Living Religions and a World Faith*. In this stimulating work Hocking explored three "ways to a world faith": Radical Displacement, Synthesis and Reconception. My interest here, however, is exclusively in his search for the best term to use for his Second Way. The candidate terms are "eclecticism", "syncretism" and "synthesis".

"Eclecticism", in Hocking's view, "should be reserved for the process of starting a new religion composed of a medley of ingredients from several religions" (1940:177). Hocking has no liking for this process. It is symbolised for him by "the mantelshelf of an Indian reconciler of faiths on which were brought together for adoration figures of Siva and Buddha, a crucifix, a portrait scroll of Confucius and a bust of W.E. Gladstone" (*ibid.*:181). Hocking is scornful of such "infertile aggregates" and of all movements that try to unite religions in "one vast harmony". "The sense of artefact hangs over them all", he declares. They have no vital breath "because there is no self". "A religion must be something before it can take on anything as part of itself" (*ibid.*).

The term "eclecticism" is thus "in deserved bad odour" for Hocking. Nevertheless, he confesses that it excites less horror than the word "syncretism" which "carries the flavour of theological promiscuity". "To be suspected of syncretism", he wrote in 1940, "is to be accused of a peculiarly poisonous variety of heresy" (*ibid.*). So it is not surprising - considering the theological complexion of those who might have wanted to read his book - that Hocking "regretfully" left this term of reproach to its "destiny".

What is surprising, and fascinating, is the fact that in the very paragraph in which Hocking **rejects** the word "syncretism" because of its negative theological connotations, he **affirms** it as "an entirely respectable name for a process repeatedly exemplified in the early history of Christianity" (*ibid.*:177). The profound tension between syncretism's pejorative-theological overload and its non-emotive, objective meaning is clearly illustrated.

Hocking's decision to refer to his Second Way as the Way of Synthesis, not the Way of Syncretism, was merely a prudent move, for as far as he was concerned the two words were virtually synonymous. Of Synthesis he wrote, as he could have written of Syncretism:

> When two religions are present in the same region, each tends to adopt from the other whatever seems peculiarly expressive in its language or significant in its ways, whether deliberately or by a less conscious kind of appropriation. There is mutual teaching and learning; and ... this process involves incorporating within one's own religion certain elements of other religions. (*Ibid.*:177)

Hocking is strongly in favour of Faithful Syncretism (though he does not use the phrase) for he believes interreligious borrowing (Syncretism) is essential for growth and enrichment and that it is a good thing as long as it is faithful, that is, as long as it does not threaten the integrity of one's tradition. Hocking is not concerned with getting individuals to transfer from one religion to another. One should abide in one's own religion while being willing to take over certain features of other religions into one's own. This, he believes, will lead to a new understanding of one's own religion complemented by valuable insights from others (his Way of Reconception).

The General Criterion of Faithful Syncretism

Now, from all that has been said, the nature of Faithful Syncretism and its **general** criterion have come clearly into focus.

As was the case with Visser 't Hooft, Kraemer and Hocking, the question is always how to preserve the perceived identity, continuity and integrity of one's own religious tradition. To this end, a distinction is always drawn between what are considered essential and inessential features, legitimate and illegitimate accretions, and so forth. In all the give and take of interreligious encounter, Faithful Syncretism **means** preserving what is "essential" to the receiving tradition and absorbing or appropriating only what is "legitimate".

Back in 1921, James Moffatt had hold of this general criterion when he described a "healthy" religion as one "which assimilates vital data from new soil and yet preserves its distinctive characteristics" (1921:156D).

In 1940 Hocking made the point, but in terms of three criteria: **individuality, organic unity** and **consistency**. He wrote:

> The religion which grows by accretion must have a recognisable being or character of its own to begin with, and must retain that individuality through the process of growth. The borrowed elements must not efface or neutralize that character (**Individuality**). What is added must not remain extraneous, like an ornament or piece of baggage but must become a part of the living religion (**Organic Unity**). What is thus entertained must be consistent with what is there (**Consistency**). (Hocking 1940:183f)

Still later, as we have seen, our two conservative theologians were part of this consensus. Visser 't Hooft (1963:11) considered it legitimate for a religion to be translated into other cultures so long as there was no loss to its essential meaning, and Kraemer (1956:397; see Gort 1989:11) judged it to be a good thing for a religion to adapt foreign elements to its own dominant spirit and concern if they became a genuine and accepted part of it.

Today, seventy years after Moffatt, this same general criterion is still being put forward. Religious Studies scholar, Hendrik Vroom, writes (1989:2), "Foreign beliefs and practices can be incorporated into a particular religious tradition as long as they do not threaten its continuity and logical integrity."

Specific Criteria of Faithful Syncretism in Particular Traditions

But now comes the crucial question. How does this **general** criterion translate into **specific** criteria for the world's particular religious traditions? Who spells out what it is to be a Faithful Muslim Syncretist, a Faithful Buddhist Syncretist and so forth? Who determines in each case what is to be welcomed, what is to be seen as extraneous, what is to be rejected? Who decides?

One answer is that it all has to do with power and who wields it. For example, Tom Driver insists that "Syncretism was strongly opposed only when it threatened the hegemony of the Christian Church, just as colonialist nations tolerated local customs as long as it remained clear who was in charge" (1987:207). To many a missionary it seemed clear who was in charge. In 1927 missiologist Thaurens could say with confidence: "so long as the *depositum fidei* and good morals remain intact, one may make as many concessions to the heathen life as one pleases" (1927, quoted in Verkuyl 1978:344).

But Aylward Shorter (1988:252f), writing recently out of an African context, suggests that the fear of loss of control is real among church leaders. Shorter writes, "the explosion of multiple inculturations (read: "syncretisms")

throughout the world is a frightening prospect for church leaders who feel more at home in a monocultural system". It is a "frightening prospect" because they cannot be sure who will be the winners. As Colpe (1987:220) has noted, when religious entities that were originally separate come together in such a way as to form a Syncretism, **three** results are possible: either what is superimposed predominates while the older survives, or the substratum continues to exercise dominance, or there is a balance. In the end it is only the first option that is satisfactory to the missionary seeking to export his religion.

But the second option may prevail; the substratum may continue to exercise dominance. An example of how the "powerless" can "win" is afforded by historian Niel Gunson. Between the 1820s and the 1840s, says Gunson, Western missionaries to Australian Aborigines often felt their work to be a failure at a theological or socio-religious level. Yet in this same period, he adds, "many Aborigines made their own syncretic assessments of their expanded world, relating their new knowledge of a white-dominated world to their ancient knowledge of the land without necessarily rejecting all their own beliefs and without necessarily accepting all the dogma and new mythology of the invading culture" (1988:106).

It is said (Cracknell and Lamb, 1986:86) that in 597 AD Gregory I sent Augustine of Canterbury on mission to the land of the Angles instructing him "to choose whatever things he found anywhere there that seemed pious, religious and correct, and to use them in the construction of a truly English Christianity".

Augustine failed to create this truly English Christian syncretism (although the vision remained) but we should be able to understand Augustine's failure. The communities of foreign faiths which have come to Australia over the last 200 years have also so far failed to create - **from interaction with the pre-existing religion** - a truly Australian syncretic Christianity or a truly Australian Buddhist or Islamic or Jewish syncretism. Only the pre-existing Australian Aboriginal religions have produced syncretistic forms (in interaction with Christianity).

So back to the question of who decides? A second answer is that the community decides. The right of communities of faith to define themselves is, I believe, inalienable. Ideally, it is exercised by **an ongoing trialogue** between lay-people-in-their-context, expert leadership, and those special voices from the past. But since religious traditions are children of history, the challenge of self-definition, the task of determining the limits of Faithful Syncretism is

continuous, complex, contested, open-ended and tricky. It is a matter of consensus, of decision, and there is **no final independent arbiter.**

This final complexity. Empirically and sociologically, each of the great traditions is irreducibly plural. We see this as soon as we ask, for example, who speaks for Christianity about what is essential, what inessential? Is it a member of Eastern Orthodoxy or a Quaker, an ecumenical or an evangelical, a main-line liberal Protestant or a Roman Catholic missiologist, a Liberation theologian or a Feminist Christian, an adventist or a pentecostalist? Or all the above and many more as well! Just so, Faithful Syncretism for the Jew, the Christian, the Muslim, the Buddhist, the Australian Aborigine, the American Indian, will not be one thing in each case but many.

There is a fundamental tension present in the clash of cultures and religions - a tension between admixture and purification. And, to come full circle, the tension is present not only in every community but in every individual. We saw how it led Kamstra to suggest that "to be human is to be a syncretist" (see Pye 1983). The right to define ourselves and our own communities of faith grounds every quest for the specific meanings of "Faithful Syncretism". Especially in the context of inter-religious encounter we have before us the choice between stultifying dogmatism and an enriching faithful syncretism.

Toward a Definition and Typology of Syncretism

I turn now to the problem of Syncretism for Religious Studies, namely, the problem of constructing a definition and a typology of Syncretism; for, as Michael Pye observed in 1983, "Syncretism has now become a technical term in the scientific study of religion, although its precise application is still a subject of discussion". My comments here must be kept brief.

The Question of Definition

Many scholars have expressed misgivings about the term and would vote to abandon it. But I think the Ayes have it. The word will not disappear. Inter-religious dialogue will provide a locus for its use. The faithful who need a good *Scheltwort* won't want to give it up. The Third World faithful who seek grass-roots contextualization of their religion will use it positively, proudly, defiantly. And Religious Studies scholars will find Syncretism too interesting

and promising a category to be tabled merely because of terminological confusion.

Let us recall that Plutarch, in whose writing the term *sugkretismos* first occurs, made three points about Syncretism. First, that the term was probably based on *sugkretos*, meaning "mixed together". Second, that the mixing or coming together was of elements (or communities) antagonistic to each other. And third, that the coming together was occasioned by the presence of a common enemy. Appropriately, the Oxford English Dictionary (1971), in its first definition, says Syncretism is "**the joining or agreement of two enemies against a third person**".

In its second definition, the Oxford reports that Syncretism is "**the attempted joining or reconciliation of diverse or opposite tenets or practices, particularly in philosophy or religion**". And the Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (Cross ed. 1974) follows suit: Syncretism is "**the attempt to combine different or opposite doctrines and practices, especially in reference to philosophical and religious systems**".

Notice, however, that in these two definitions Plutarch's third feature drops out. There is no mention of a common enemy, no third-party threat. What is left is simply the notion of mixing or intermingling which aims at a joining together, a combination, even a reconciliation of religions or their components which were formerly opposed - and this without prejudice as to whether it is a good or a bad thing.

Most, though not all, modern definitions also leave out mention of a third party threat. For example, Michael Pye (1971:93) sees Syncretism as "**the temporary, ambiguous coexistence of elements from diverse religious and other contexts within a coherent religious pattern**". And Helmer Ringgren (1969:7) has "**any mixture of two or more religions where elements from several religions are merged and influence each other mutually**".

By contrast, Meredith McGuire, a sociologist of religion, is quick to identify Modernization as a common third-party threat. She sees Syncretism (along with Traditionalism, Revitalization and Millenarianism) as a religious response to modernization, and defines it as "**the interweaving of new meanings into the traditional meaning system**" (1987:30). (Of course, for some there is a contamination involved in the very fact of mixing, and this they would see as the external threat.)

Some definitions are too narrow. For example, Andrew Lange (1887) defined Syncretism as "**the process by which various god-names and**

god-natures are mingled so as to unite the creeds of different nomes and provinces". Thomas Wiedemann (1990:68) defines "pagan syncretism" as "**the tendency to give divinities worshipped in several different cults the same name**". And Frederick Grant (1953:xxiii) thought of Syncretism as "**the tendency to identify the deities of various peoples and to combine their cults**". Note that between them these three definitions associate syncretism with the mingling, combination or identification of gods, creeds and cults. Perhaps Syncretism should include (or presuppose) an intermingling of any of the elements from any of the dimensions of religion.

Incidentally, I think the combining of gods may better be described as **theocrasy** in some cases, **identification** in others, and that these two terms - along with many others - should be considered not as definitions but as possible constituents in a typology of Syncretism.

The Nairobi Assembly of the World Council of Churches (1979.14) defines Syncretism as "**a conscious or unconscious human attempt to create a new religion**", and this definition is taken up by Kenneth Cracknell (1986:79 and 178 n. 30). But "a new and universal form of religion" doesn't look like emerging and, in any case, a new religion may be the result of **evolution** and not be syncretic at all.

Cultural anthropologists see Syncretism as "**any synthesis of two or more culturally diverse beliefs or practices, especially if of a religious character**" (Luzbetak 1988:360). But Luzbetak, as a theologian of Christian Missions, narrows the definition to "**any theological amalgam**".

Some scholars are negative and uneasy about using the term Syncretism. Aylward Shorter, for example, has Syncretism stand for "**far-reaching concessions to indigenous cultures at the expense of Christian orthodoxy**" (1988:253). And the World Council of Churches has used the word pejoratively, keeping for honorific use the term **Integration** (although I think Integration should also be a constitutent in a typology).

There are a number of other questions which need to be decided before a consensus definition can emerge. For example, should Syncretism refer to phenomena which are unconscious as well as conscious, uncontested as well as contested, transitional as well as terminal, processes as well as outcomes? I think that in all these cases the answer is both/and, not either/or, although there is not space here to argue and illustrate this response.

Toward a Typology of Syncretism

The search for a definition of Syncretism may best be undertaken in connection with the attempt to develop a typology. For a typology, we need firstly, to distinguish Syncretism from what may be simply **parallel phenomena**, for example, evolution, eclecticism, pastiche, harmonisation, replacement, and so on. Secondly, we need to identify those phenomena which may be simply **preconditions or accompaniments** of Syncretism, for example, contact, encounter, intermingling, interpenetration, co-existence, confrontation.

Thirdly, we need to devise **a continuum** of terms to indicate the **phases or degrees of syncretism** present. Here a selection of the terms which abound in the literature - and which I have jotted down during recent reading - could find a place. For example, echoing, imitation, addition, substitution, combination, complementarity; appropriation, borrowing, adoption, adaption, absorption, assimilation, symbiosis; merging, blending, coalescing, identification, integration, fusion, amalgamation, unification; metamorphosis, dissolution and disintegration.

Finally, we need to explore to what extent Syncretism is discussed under the auspices of other terms, such as acculturation, inculturation, contextualization and incarnation. (On the definition and typology of Syncretism see especially Kamstra 1967, Pye 1971 and 1983, Hartman 1969, Colpe 1987, Gort 1989 and Rudolph 1979.) It seems clear that much work remains to be done on this matter of a definition and a typology.

Styles of Inter-religious Adventuring: Syncretism and Beyond

So we have looked at Syncretism as a universal, perhaps inevitable religious phenomenon, and as a tricky term. We have cited examples of Syncretism (small scale and large). We have commented on the origin and history of the term, twentieth century developments, the general criterion of Faithful Syncretism, the problem of specific criteria, and the search for a definition and typology of Syncretism.

Now let our final question be about the point of it all. Why, **on a personal level**, would anyone want to get mixed up with his or her neighbour's religion? Most people don't. Let that be said at once. Nothing distances and isolates us from our neighbour more than religion - but that is another story. Let us consider only the question: Why visit other religious worlds? There will be a

variety of reasons because people are different. Let us identify some of these adventurers.

There is the **Tourist** for whom the adventure is no more than a sight-seeing trip. There is the **Shopper** at today's religious supermarket. There is the **Dilletante** who dabbles in one religion after another, perhaps jumping "from yoga to shamanism, from the Jesus prayer to Hare Krishna, from Tantric practices to Zen Buddhism" and so on (see Bettina Baumer, 1986:40). Sadly, there are also the **Collector** and the **Thief**. Note that many of Africa's once-living cultural and religious artefacts (now referred to as "ancient treasures") have been collected into museums, removed from ritual use, and left to go to ruin. Indeed, primal peoples everywhere have been plundered religiously. Also not without guilt has been the **Missionary**, another often heavy-handed adventurer.

There are, however, interreligious adventurers whose motives seem purer. One I will call the **Empathetic Phenomenologist** who tries single-mindedly to apprehend another religion as it appears to its devotees. Selecting from the immense variety of religious worlds inhabited by humankind, the Phenomenologists try to place themselves in the other person's shoes so as to stand and walk in them. Or, to use John S. Dunne's words, they "pass over" into the religious situation they want to investigate and "come back" with a clearer understanding of it.

C.J. Arthur, in a recent article (1987:59-79), has pointed to religious studies scholars who have seen the goal of phenomenology of religion at least partly in these terms. Winston King speaks of "observing religiousness from the veritable inside", Ninian Smart of "imaginative participation in the world of the actor", van der Leeuw of "imaginative re-experiencing", and both Rudolph Otto and Wilfred Cantwell Smith of "penetrative imaginative sympathy" (*ibid.*:64-67). **No syncretism** need be involved in such adventuring.

Also uninvolved in syncretism of any kind are the interreligious adventurers I would identify as **Persons of Second Innocence**. These travellers, in exploring another faith in order to understand it, have discovered its potential to influence their own religiousness. Eliade said, "to the extent that you **understand** a religious fact (myth, ritual, divine figure, and so on) you **change**, you are modified, and this change is equivalent to a step forward in the process of self-liberation" (see *No Souvenirs*, London, 1978:30, in Arthur 1987:79). For this last traveller, imaginative re-experiencing means exploring and defining your own religiousness through exploring the religiousness of others.

If now, in a final image, we use the word "cargo" to refer to all the objects of interreligious borrowing, adoption, assimilation, and so forth; and if we acknowledge that "cargo" therefore includes a vast range of religious objects, images, symbols, practices, liturgies, deities and so forth, then travellers, adventurers who visit other religions will, I think, be of just three kinds.

Of the first kind are those who come back **with cargo**, but cargo which is incongruous with or irrelevant to any faith they may have, cargo that can be incorporated into their faith - if they have one - only at the cost of compromising its integrity. This is **Unfaithful Syncretism** of which Tourist, Collector, Thief, Dilletante and many others may be guilty.

Of the second kind are those travellers who come back **with cargo**, but cargo which does **not** compromise the integrity of their faith, cargo which can be re-interpreted, incorporated, assimilated, amalgamated or fused into their own religiousness leaving it enlarged and enriched. This is **Faithful Syncretism.**

Of a third kind, however, are those who come back **without cargo.** This **may** be because a guilty conscience or a lack of funds prevents them from being effective Collectors or Thieves; or it may be because they really did travel just to stand and walk in someone else's shoes.

Or it may be that at least some of these travellers are no longer interested in acquiring cargo because they have entered into a kind of **second innocence.** Their travelling has brought them - or returned them - to the point where they see their own faith as sufficient unto salvation, their own *dharma* as sufficient unto enlightenment. This is religion **Beyond Syncretism.** Here dwell the people of second innocence who now rest from their labours. Here, beyond Syncretism, both hosts and guests are at their most pleasant and relaxed.

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Multiculturalism, Religious Pluralism and the *Pleroma*

Morny Joy

The topic of multiculturalism in Australia poses similar questions to those raised by the Canadian mosaic. Integration in these two situations need not necessarily imply assimilation, as it does in the melting-pot of the United States. But what is the reality behind these catch-phrases that give lip service to cultural diversity? Can an official decree promote tolerance? And what of the voices of the multifarious many whose lives - including their behaviours and literature - often put into question the cultural pretensions of the dominant group. This challenge becomes even more stark in the domain of religion. For the Anglo-Celtic affiliation has always been to some form of Christianity, whose policies of mission and conversion, though on the wane, testify to a type of salvific cornering of the market. Even when the general population undergoes a more secular turn, as in Australia, the prevailing heritage is one of Christian values. Other religions remain suspect. While they are perhaps no longer regarded as heathen or pagan, non-Christian religions in Australia are still a symbol in Australia of an otherness or difference which provokes fear, hatred, laughter or a shrug of indifference (which connotes irrelevance). It will take time, education and sensitivity to bridge such a chasm, but in the meantime it is not inappropriate to pose some philosophical questions. Not that philosophy can provide an instant panacea, but it may well highlight some of the problems that beset the traditional mind-set when faced with a difference that challenges its cherished assumptions. To illustrate philosophical developments in this direction (with particular reference to religion), I will survey some of the most pertinent ideas in the recent work of Paul Ricoeur and David Tracy.

In one sense, the issue of multiculturalism can be viewed as a reworking of the old conundrum of *the one and the many*. Multiculturalism involves, in this instance, the specific test cases of pluralism and intersubjectivity. It also evokes, within a religious context, the designated status of the outsider. The manner in which such a topic has been thematised at various junctures of Western history has depended on the prevailing philosophical and theological

schools of the time. In our present late twentieth-century setting, multiculturalism would seem to emphasize that the ways of the multicultural *many* must be granted equivalence with the accepted (and inferred as superior) standards of the *one*. But in this context of cultural equity, the problem becomes intensified for the multicultural many brings with it its own internal complexities of race, class, gender, and age - to name a few variables in addition to the ubiquitous question of religion.

So, when the investigation of difference is focused on religion, it is extremely difficult to filter it out as a separate strain. Depending on its location within the cultural and social variables listed above, the complexion of religion will change. All this is to say that to focus on one specific form of difference such as religion in a multicultural mixture introduces its own sets of problems. There also needs to be the awareness that multiculturalism itself is not an all-encompassing term but has a fluid and flexible definition, dealing with many different cultural practices and attitudes that are themselves evolving. This fact would also reinforce the point that there is no one privileged vantage point from which to survey the scene and make definitive descriptions. Unfortunately, or inevitably, it is the tendency of governmental pronouncements to make the phenomenon seem to be a homogeneous entity so that a slight shift of focus in public awareness could achieve certain desired effects for all concerned. Such a monolithic characterisation is no doubt responsible for the charges levelled at official policies on multiculturalism as being merely another bourgeois plot.[1] As such, these policies would indicate just another inroad of liberal inclusivism - a characteristic ploy of much recent interreligious dialogue.[2]

But such a blanket dismissal, motivated in this instance by the political filter of Marxism, would seem to pay just as little attention as the object of its rebuke to the heterogeneity involved in multiculturalism, for this evaluation reads all discrimination as merely a matter of class. I am not quarrelling with this particular observer's right to question whether difference can be regulated in accordance with a specific party platform, but I would also wish any interrogator to question his/her own assumptions in this regard. For when examining the ideas of exclusivism or inclusivism within a pluralistic setting, it is always helpful to keep in mind Levinas' critique of Western ontology. Levinas' argument is that the traditional philosophical (and theological) models have always sought to reduce the other to the same. Such a procedure probably found its ultimate expression in Hegel's dialectical method of subsumption of the other's contradictory or divergent position. A virtual caricature of this sublation

of otherness has been attributed to Sartre whereby any encounter with another became a virtual struggle for supremacy.[3] At worst, Western philosophical categorization can be reduced to a Darwinian survival of the intellectual fittest, which is why Levinas wishes to turn the tables, by always giving priority to the other (Other) as embodying an ethical imperative of respect that supersedes any abstract dictum (Levinas n.d.:194-247). And perhaps this is why the answer to questions of multiculturalism with regard to religion need to be treated within a practical, rather than a theoretical, dimension. And it would seem that more recent discussions on the question of religious pluralism are headed in this direction.

In a succinct coverage of religious pluralism, John Hick surveys instances of exclusivism and inclusivism as concrete realities within traditional Western religions before addressing the question of pluralism from a philosophical position (Hick 1987:331-33). His assessment is that the issue has not found a satisfactory formulation, citing the need for a theory that at one and the same time focuses on the utter diversification that is apparent in any phenomenological survey of religion, while also fostering an appreciation of such diversity. This is because in Hick's view such variety exemplifies different apprehensions of one ultimate reality. Perhaps the relevant response to Hick is that, given the dualistic parameters of Western models of knowledge, such a theoretical postulate that can simultaneously incorporate sameness and difference is well nigh impossible. This is perhaps the reason that Hick indicates he is in accord with a concrete approach to the experience of pluralism, rather than on a search for adequate philosophical preconceptions or justification.

Paul F. Knitter (1985), in his book *No Other Name?* frames his concluding chapter, "Doing Before Knowing" along such experiential, rather than theoretical, lines. He advocates a strategy of "passing over" which involves not just dialogue, but a conscious attempt to understand the world from the point of view of the other. His concluding pages confront the issue of Christian uniqueness. He does not make any definitive pronouncements in this regard, but he is genuinely optimistic that such an undertaking will both preserve and transform the present Christian identity. His evocations in this regard are placed against a backdrop of faith and trust, but his final appeal is one to the mystery of a type of divine providence, unfathomable by human beings, which nonetheless will sustain and support the appropriate developments.

Such general guidelines and long-term consolations are salutary, but they are not of particular assistance in the day-to-day encounter with otherness or

difference. What does it mean, and how realistic is it to strive to allow others to speak for themselves, without subjecting their words/beliefs to translation? For any translation inevitably entails distortion or reduction to one's own terms of reference. Perhaps there are no correct or explicit directions for such an encounter, so where are we to go for guidelines? One area in contemporary philosophy and theology that has shown significant and promising modifications in the revision of structures of knowing is hermeneutics. Perhaps it is in hermeneutics that new models of knowledge can be articulated that do not contain the traditional hegemonic ambitions that virtually deprived the other of its integrity.

For hermeneutics, while it does not totally liberate the other from the subjugating bonds of knowledge, subscribes to a model of knowledge that mitigates the subject/object dichotomy. It supports instead a contextually based way of knowing where dialogue and conversation are the primary modes of exchange. In addition, as it is understood by Paul Ricoeur, one of its primary explicators today, hermeneutics fosters a form of knowing that has implications not just for abstract modes of knowing, but for the manner in which new knowledge can be incorporated into new modes of awareness - new ways of acting.

> It is the task of hermeneutics ... to reconstruct the set of operations by which a work lifts itself above the opaque depths of living, acting, and suffering, to be given by an author to readers who receive it and thereby change their acting. (Ricoeur 1984:53)

In recent years, under the counsel of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, hermeneutics has changed from being regarded as simply a form of textual analysis. It has also moved beyond the confines of a purely methodological analysis of meaning. While the explanation and understanding of texts remain of primary importance, the movement of personal appropriation within the hermeneutic circle introduces an element of expansive self-awareness that traditional objective methods preclude. As Ricoeur (1981:158) describes it:

> By 'appropriation', I understand this: that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who henceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself.

So it is that hermeneutics allows for a measure of increased self-knowledge, which can occur because the reader does not try to impose

his/her own world-view on the interpretation of proceedings, but permits the other (whether text or person) to disclose their own meaning(s). At the same time, there is a growth in insight, both into the self and the other. But this self can no longer be construed along the lines of the traditional dominating Cartesian subject, nor those of an idealistic metaphysical self. Ricoeur has described this revised notion of self within a hermeneutic framework. While he does not subscribe to a totally dispersed postmodern version of subjectivity, he certainly endorses that the self/subject is no longer autonomous or in control.

> By **Self** I mean a non-egoistic, non-narcissistic, non-imperialistic mode of subjectivity which responds and corresponds to the power of a work to display a **world**. (Ricouer 1975-76:30)

Given this description, it is obvious that one can never again assume a totally objective viewpoint in any hermeneutic proceedings. To venture a contemporary formula, I would say that any attempt on our part to understand the other automatically involves us in an inextricable circle of self and other. Understanding of the other and self-understanding comprise a basic dialectic within hermeneutics. In such a complex procedure, where method and boundaries of identity interact, the doubled strategy involved is that of an increased awareness of different modalities which at once inform and enlarge one's own qualified sense of self. Thus it is that a hermeneutic approach can lead simultaneously to an appreciation of that difference portrayed by another, as well as to an increased understanding of one's own presuppositions. An even more nuanced description of this hermeneutic orientation would be one that points to the fact that it even encourages an exploration of the modes of being and doing depicted by the other.

As David Tracy, a Chicago theologian who has been influenced by Ricoeur, comments: "We find ourselves by allowing claims upon our attention, by exploring possibilities suggested by others, including those others we call texts". (Tracy 1987:19) Ricoeur himself has defined this notion of "being otherwise" as entertaining the possibility of being other than I am.

> Beyond my situation as reader, beyond the situation of the author, I offer myself to the possible mode of being-in-the-world which the text opens up and discloses to me. (Ricouer 1981:177)

Such an orientation, in Ricoeur's view, fosters an enhancement rather than a diminution of our capacities. This is because the meaning proposed by the other, when allowed a claim on our attention, enlarges our perspectives with

regard to both thinking and acting. Ricoeur terms this augmentation the introduction of a new "way of being" (after Heidegger) or (in deference to Wittgenstein) a new "form of life". In Ricoeur's view, the other will always present us with some form of alienation, of otherness - whether theoretical or experiential. Unless we are receptive to this challenge, our response to the other will always be in some measure diminished, as will our own potential for growth in awareness. The other deserves to be respected in all its strangeness, complexity and even menace. A genuine openness to another's claims allows for the radical possibility of being persuaded by his/her arguments and by his/her depiction of a world-view. This is not to say that Ricoeur is advocating instantaneous conversion to the ways of alterity, but he is endorsing a frame of mind that he considers essential to any dialogue with another.

Ricoeur's ultimate call to change our ways of being in the world, to alter our ways of thinking and doing, is a vindication of a hermeneutics that does not rest content with a merely intellectual appraisal of the ways of difference and with a perfunctory nod of approval in the direction of tolerance. Such an attitude simply condones a genial and liberal plurality in a hermetically sealed world of scholarship. In contrast, Ricoeur's work respects the fragile and precarious balance between myself and the other as living entities engaged in dialogue. It allows that such encounters do not always succeed - there are failures of understanding and of nerve - but they nurture trust, hope and optimism in the delicate negotiations that are always a part of human growth. Otherness is not the same, the similar, the cosily familiar. It is not an easy undertaking to be vulnerable to the other. It is a demanding task, involving risk, tedium, exhaustion, but it can also be an exhilarating experience where deepened perceptions compensate for the dangers and discomforts.

David Tracy is more specific than Ricoeur in his expansive hermeneutic reading of religious otherness. Tracy speaks of his own involvement in interreligious dialogue with Jews and Buddhists. Citing such facts as those that there are more Anglicans in Africa than in Great Britain and more Presbyterians in South Korea and Taiwan than in Scotland, he questions the continued domination of Eurocentric religious thought and practice (Tracy 1990:1). In addition to this aspect of otherness, Tracy cites the reality of multiculturalism itself and the interaction of people from many other lands, many other faiths, within formerly European identified colonies/countries. In this setting, Tracy discusses guidelines for responding to a real, as distinct from a projected, other.

Tracy, more explicitly than Ricoeur, sees us located in a postmodern climate where the traditional formulae of Enlightenment reason (as part of a Eurocentric heritage) are no longer applicable. In fact, he perceives them as perpetuating the problems of superiority and exclusiveness that have plagued the Western colonizing mind-set. He is realistic in his evaluation of the situation:

> There is no escape from the insight which modernity feared: there is no innocent tradition (including modernity), no innocent classic (including the Scriptures) and no innocent reading (including this one). (*Ibid*:5-6)

From a practical perspective, Tracy proposes guidelines that he feels will be of benefit not only in interreligious dialogue *per se*, but as a basic orientation towards the other. In all such exercises, Tracy recommends a suspicious demeanour, that is, a hermeneutics of suspicion, not just towards inherited attitudes and structures, but towards even the alternate views or constructs we may entertain in their stead. Tracy is thus more demanding in the need for a sustained critique of every moment in the process of knowing and constructing knowledge. Nevertheless, with certain provisions and further qualifications, Tracy is committed to the hermeneutic procedure and its breakdown of the subject/object dichotomy as the most promising means of approach to other religions. In fact, Tracy considers hermeneutics as a vital component in establishing new forms of knowing in a postmodern climate.

Perhaps the element that Tracy stresses most often is that of risk. What is implied in this wager is a refinement of Ricoeur's stance of respect for other possible ways of being. It involves an attitude of openness to the other, a receptiveness that contains the genuine readiness to be persuaded by the other's point of view. This is not a blanket endorsement of the other as a repository of higher wisdom, but an affirmation that, if the other's claims are taken seriously, they can lead to a major revision of the ideas and beliefs which were brought by the inquirer to the encounter. This is a position that puts a stronger emphasis on the fact that the other is always that which can put us into question. As Tracy puts it: "we must be prepared to risk our present understanding" (1987:103).

But this does not imply that we immediately become partial to abandoning our own positions, in a type of liberal guilt trip where the other is always right. In this connection, Tracy presents three criteria which he believes should be part of any interreligious dialogue. These are self-respect, self-exposure, and a willingness to place oneself at risk in the ensuing exchange.

(Tracy1990:73) Thus, unless there is a healthy dose of integrity, as distinct from a presumption of superiority, Tracy would hold that dialogue with the other is not feasible.

However, at the core of this process of risk, there is an even more compelling exhortation to self-examination. This search involves an introspective questioning in order to locate those tendencies in ourselves, for the most part neglected or even repressed impulses, that constitute the other within. Tracy posits that in coming to terms with our own unwanted dispositions, we become less likely to project them on others. Underlying this caution on Tracy's part is acceptance of the controversial belief that exclusionary and discriminatory practices in life derive from interior forms of rejection that become identified with external figures. The other becomes a kind of scapegoat for all we do not wish to admit to consciousness. Tracy posits that becoming aware of these propensities fosters a more conscious form of dialogue with the other, where neither idealization nor denial distorts the reciprocity involved.

Another aspect of otherness that Tracy feels should be taken into account in the ongoing refinement of a hermeneutic model is a recognition of the subjugated and marginalized segments within Western culture itself. The need to absolutise, or take as the norm, the lives of white, privileged men should undergo severe scrutiny. From this perspective, the voices of indigenous peoples, disenfranchised minorities and women have been relegated in Western history to the role of other and a major revision of the accepted values that condoned this development is urgently required.[4] For Tracy, this will entail a continuous process of internal critique of the presumed standards by which one has evaluated otherness according to patriarchal standards. Such a critique will be sustained concurrently with the challenge to these conventions by non-Western cultures. To add yet a further complication to the compound, women within non-Western traditions are also questioning the univocal voice of the purported other. Both within the multicultural community itself and within non-Western religions, contemporary women are rejecting not only the imposed designations of an imperialist categorizer but their assigned inferior status within their own traditions.[5]

This makes the whole multicultural interchange a particularly delicate and sensitive matter, where there are no simple answers or quick solutions. Tracy's two proposals of risk and of the investigation into personal and cultural mechanisms of rejection/displacement graphically convey the extraordinarily intricate nature of any such enterprise. Conceptual imperialism is a

hydra-headed monster, whether its effects permeate religion alone, or the more comprehensive cultural matrix. To detect and name it (apart from its more crude and all-too-blatant bigoted stupidities) is not a simple task. Nor is the discernment any easier in nominating strategies of resistance and change. The ground on which one stands, the constructs one proposes, the very structures of difference and opposition are all in a state of flux and are constantly in need of revision. So it is that instead of blanket recommendations for massive change, smaller more strategically precise tactics would seem more appropriate. Again, it is practical needs, rather than theoretical demands, that take precedence.

Nevertheless, where does such a process leave us - with the all-too-obvious inconsistencies, let alone contradictions, involved in such a multifaceted venture? Religion would appear traditionally to have operated more along the uniform lines of doctrines and commandments. It has left little space for uncertainty or variegation. Why pollute the pristine waters of religious discourse with the purported miasma of the multicultural debate? Possibly because the realization has gradually dawned, under the tutelage of Foucault, that procedures of exclusion are, and have always been, exercises of power. Religious manoeuvres of this variety have operated in a similar fashion to those of their secular counterparts in support of the prerogatives of the majority or of the ascendancy.

Yet, there remains a difference (up to a point). Whereas sociological, legal, and political negotiations can be employed to redress some of the excesses of discriminatory practices in society at large, religion, by and large, remains exempt from such appeals. In the past, religion was virtually a law unto itself as it dealt quite summarily with those deemed heretics or infidels. In addition, the intrareligious conflicts within Christianity itself over the centuries have been far from edifying. There unfortunately seems to be a specific variety of absolute conviction, perhaps motivated by a belief in divine election, that tends to taint religious controversies of whatever variety with a particularly obsessive mentality.

Tracy's approach will not be of comfort to those who seek the assurances of a bygone era when Christianity had all the answers and felt secure in its superiority. Tracy's recommendations are modest, tentative, exploratory, gentle, open-hearted and open-ended. There is a profound respect that suffuses his reflections on religious otherness. It is in his conclusions regarding the nature of the dialogical and hermeneutical process that these qualities are explicitly evident. Tracy defines himself as investigating uncharted territory, where

plurality and ambiguity are watchwords and where relative adequacy is the most trustworthy guarantor of meaning. The only way that Tracy's approach can be adequately described is as a virtual abandonment to the process, in the belief that there is an inherent beneficence (of divine derivation) at work.

For those for whom integration of the other (whether religious or otherwise) is a matter of reversing the structures of *real-politik*, Tracy's testimonial will have a distinctly other-worldly flavour. And, of course, they are right. This is because for Tracy it is only from a spiritual perspective that such a position can be ultimately assessed and justified. But this is not to say that Tracy can be regarded as abandoning ship for the higher moral ground and leaving the actual decisions of reform in the hands of the all-too-human power brokers. This is because Tracy's ultimate appeal for validation rests in a restitution of a prophetic-mystical theology as a support for interreligious dialogue. This theological hybrid allows Tracy the best of both worlds. On the one hand, he can address the mystical ideal of Ultimate Reality as evading the all-too-human attempts to encapsulate and legislate it. It is this ineffable dimension of the divine to which the mystics constantly give witness. At the same time, however, Tracy will also invoke the prophetic attribute of disclaiming words that are a radical disruption of the *status quo*. Tracy depicts this intrusion in the prophetic utterance as the voice of the other. The prophetic calling has always been one that is consonant with the outsider, that strives to bring about a change in consciousness and a mending of the ways. It is an awareness that is finely tuned to the injustices and transgressions in the social and historical domain.

By a merger of these two positions, (the mystical and the prophetic), Tracy hopes to promote a viable alternative to other models that have been tried and found wanting in discussions of religious pluralism. Tracy is not indulging in old-style conceptual theologizing, of a systematic or normative variety, but in a more speculative mode, exploring which elements of the tradition can be retrieved. It is squarely based in practical, rather than theoretical, concerns within a hermeneutic perspective. Perhaps second-order reflection on this construct's feasibility will follow at a later date. But, for now, Tracy seems content to place the ultimate grounding of all his musings concerning the need for a mystical-prophetic symbiosis in the abode of divine mystery, in the hope of an ongoing transformation of all things human. Whether such a hope should be interpreted as a foolish fantasy that invalidates Tracy's whole approach, or whether it marks a yearning for the *pleroma* where all differences will be as one, is a matter open to dispute. Perhaps all that can be safely wagered at the

moment, in distinct contrast to the millenarians, is that such a *pleroma* will probably be a long time coming. In the interim, the multifarious manifestations of otherness, both religious and cultural, will continue to expose the veneer of propriety that the majority view strives to endorse.

Notes

1 While his language may not be as blunt as this, Jakubowicz (1988:14-37) takes this approach.

2 An evaluation of inclusivism by two former proponents can be found in Hick and Knitter (1987).

3 See S. Zane Charmé (1991) for an excellent and discriminating reading of Sartre.

4 With reference to the status of Australian Aborigines see Hodge and Mishra (1991), especially pp.91-115, 178-219.

5 Examples of this trend in the Australian situation are the many articles of S. Gunew focusing on migrant women. See Gunew (1983:16-26). For a succinct survey of the need for a feminist approach to the multicultural question and its flagrant omission from most studies, see Jeannie Martin (1991:110-31).

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