

# Commentary

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*It is with delight that we offer you these pieces which have been generated from features in earlier issues. Michael Hill continues the theme of satanic ritual abuse raised in Vol 6 No 2, and Lynne Hume offers a review essay on Louise Samways' treatment of New Religious Movements. Purushottama Bilimoria, in response to the discussions on inter-faith dialogue, considers several problems concerning religious pluralism.*

*We are encouraged by their enthusiastic response and would welcome input from other members on the material presented in the REVIEW.*

## **Satanic Ritual Abuse - Now You See It, Now You Don't**

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I remember clearly - and without the assistance of any therapist - an intuition of thirty years ago. I was in a cinema in the north of England watching the latest apocalyptic struggle between the forces of good and evil, as Peter Cushing once again consigned Christopher Lee's Dracula to the realms of the Undead. While the mostly teenage Hammer Horror devotees absorbed the mythology of garlic flowers and wooden stakes, it occurred to me that probably a much larger percentage of the audience could describe five methods of killing a vampire than could name five members of the current British government. The point I am making is that there is a large stock of popular 'knowledge' about the occult; and that

this widely diffused folklore contains a series of reiterated themes which, when combined in an occult scenario, convey the impression of an authentic network of ritual practitioners. Furthermore, if life is capable of imitating art, the upsurge of Christian fundamentalism since the 1970s has created a much more receptive environment for the validation of such claims than that faced by the gothic excesses of the 1960s. Nor should the 'invention of tradition' by the goddess-worshippers of Wicca's world be ignored as a source of alleged occult plausibility.

Philip Jenkins makes this point strongly when he suggests that much of what is popularly assumed to be satanic ritual derives from thirty pages of a Den-

nis Wheatley novel - *The Devil Rides Out* - and that it must be remembered that his account of a sabbat was wholly a literary artefact. Nor should the sheer amount of written and visual material on the subject be underestimated. Simply totalling the number of films made with occult themes, and ignoring the much more accessible material on television and video, the volume is substantial. The 1991 *Time Out Film Guide*, for example, provides the following indexed categories: 'The Devil and Antichrist' - 22 movies; 'Magic and Magicians' - 22; 'Possession, demonic etc' - 49; 'Undead' - 39; 'Vampirism' - 55; and 'Witchcraft' - 44. To these should perhaps be added the movies dealing with 'Afterlife', since it has been argued that in recent years Hollywood has paid more attention to this cultural preoccupation than have the clergy of some mainstream denominations. As one account put it, 'The afterlife, which used to be the territory of scripture, now seems to be the province of scripts.' In short, it is not credible to claim that many of the satanic scenarios reported to interviewers and therapists must be true because they could not have been invented. On the contrary, there is in fact a rich and dynamic popular cultural vein of 'information' about the occult.

The moral panic over alleged Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) has been undergoing some changes in 1994, and this article will examine several of these. On the one hand, some proponents of the concept continue to assert its validity and maintain that SRA is a substantial problem in societies such as the United States, Britain, and more recently New Zealand and Australia. Other proponents, including one whose edited volume is reviewed below, prefer the adjective 'satanist' since it does not involve belief in Satan as an ob-

jective reality. In the latest edition of their book *The Courage to Heal* - which has been dubbed the *Malleus Maleficarum* of the 'recovered memory' and abuse industries - Bass and Davis avoid the epithet 'satanic' and opt for the term 'sadistic ritual abuse'. Another group of proponents, including the New South Wales Sexual Assault Committee, prefer the label 'Ritual Abuse', which avoids satanic or satanist connotations; however, their claims constantly refer to a satanic ritual context. In New Zealand, the senior police sergeant who imported the claims of Californian 'cult cops' in 1991, has recently been back-peddalling in this way. While his 1991 media declarations clearly linked child pornography with satanism, in mid-1994 - partly in response to Jean La Fontaine's British finding, also reviewed below, that SRA does not exist - he was suggesting that sensational words like 'satanic' were clouding the issue of ritual abuse.

On the other hand, some substantial refutations of the SRA scenario have appeared this year. One of the most influential has been Jean La Fontaine's official report to the British Health Secretary based on more than two years' research into the alleged SRA phenomenon. It was commissioned after the Orkneys debacle involving SRA allegations: this involved a New Zealand Presbyterian minister and also marked the last of the major SRA cases in Britain. A further report was completed at about the same time as La Fontaine's by a New Scotland Yard team including Chief Superintendent Mike Hames, who in 1992 had been involved in investigation of a television documentary on alleged satanic abuse. This second report's findings apparently confirm those of the government report, though it is regarded as in-house and is unlikely to be

published. Further scepticism has been heightened by the debate over the so-called False Memory Syndrome (itself part of a more substantial professional debate over the nature of memory and indeed over the basic tenets of psychotherapy), which was most publicly featured in the Ramona trial in California. A brief review of some of the principal contributions to the SRA debate is therefore timely, and I will look first at accounts which support the SRA scenario before turning to research which seriously questions its existence.

The volume edited by Valerie Sinason, *Treating Survivors of Satanist Abuse* is a curious collection. First, its editor dismisses the issue of belief or disbelief of satanic stories with the dictum 'If a child is referred for bedwetting we do not send a forensic expert in to check the sheets'. This is a somewhat disingenuous statement, since a referral for bedwetting would normally result in a physical examination of the child; in addition, reported bedwetting is hardly an antecedent of serious criminal allegations. But Sinason's statement sets the tone of this book, in which the notion of corroboration is rarely visited. Only one chapter is devoted to false claims of sexual abuse, and its measured caveats about the professional duties of therapists and the possibility of false memories add a singular element of balance. In other contributions to the book, plausible explanations are avoided in the search for spurious evidence of satanism. For example, having described the murder of a young girl with Down's syndrome, one account continues: 'Much witchcraft is a celebration of the anti-Christ. Many Christian festivals are celebrated in covens in an inverse way. Evil replaces goodness and imperfection, perfection. Sadistic and selfish

impulses take the place of care and concern. Even the crucifix is placed upside down. Could it be in this context that the supposedly imperfect body and mind of the child with learning difficulties is therefore more attractive when evil reigns supreme?' Or could it be, one has to ask, that the affection and spontaneity shown by 'handicapped' children puts them more at risk of abusers? The latter is presented by the author as only a secondary possibility.

Elsewhere in the volume are attempts to establish the historical roots of both witchcraft and infanticide. The former owes more to Margaret Murray than to Norman Cohn who, along with Christina Lerner and other key figures in the interpretation of the early modern witchhunt, is simply ignored. As a result, the reader is presented with the chronology familiar to readers of such accounts as Tim Tate's *Children for the Devil* (a book which was withdrawn by its publisher after a threatened libel action but which is still described as 'splendid' by one contributor): from Gilles de Rais, through De Sade to Aleister Crowley. The latter's claim to large-scale infanticide is cited as factual rather than a satirical response to the Catholic Church's pronouncement that every act of masturbation amounted to the killing of a child. And a contribution on the 'historical foundations' of ritual abuse is largely a rehearsal of ancient myth and legend which purports to establish that child murder was normative rather than exceptional. Had the author been a better historian he might have been aware of a more recent source of alleged infanticide in the entire genre of nineteenth-century convent 'exposés' beginning with *The Awful Disclosures of Maria Monk*. But then the close affinity between the earlier moral panic over spurious convent tales

and the contemporary one over alleged ritual abuse might have become too apparent.

Indeed, it is remarkable just what is presented as credible evidence in this book. A literature review, for instance, describes the book *Michelle Remembers* by Smith and Padzer as being 'enormously credited by a number of writers as the first published account of satanic ritualistic abuse, and viewed by some as causal to all the cases that have since come to light' (presumably the latter is meant to indicate scepticism?). I doubt whether many people have actually read *Michelle Remembers*, because had they done so they would surely have concluded that at the very least its title should be *Michelle Confabulates*. How else can one interpret an account which features a personal appearance of the Devil, complete with tail and reciting excruciating doggerel throughout his rituals (the authors seem to be aware of the poetic imperfections because they point them out to a Catholic priest, who assures them that because the Devil practises deceit he would clearly want people to underrate his literary skills). Jesus and Mary emerge to give support to the victim, and there is an epic battle with sound effects between the forces of good and evil: 'The noise increased immensely - the NYUNG, NYUNGG, NNYUNGG below in conflict with the WHOOSHH WHOOSHH above. The forces of light had come to save Michelle from the forces of darkness... Satan was furious.' On reflection, an alternative title might be *Rosemary's Baby Meets The Exorcist*.

Sinason's volume cites with minimal critical appraisal the familiar stable of 'experts' on alleged satanic abuse. Finkelhor et al's *Nursery Crimes* is prominently featured, though the methodology on which

this study purportedly established that ritual abuse was occurring in day care centres is not examined. In Finkelhor's case it is important that the methodological critique be addressed, because his emphasis on 'multiple perpetrators' and the prevalence of abuse in day care centres has been influential in propelling child protection agencies to focus specifically on such environments. This type of emphasis featured prominently in the creche case which was initiated in Christchurch, New Zealand, during 1991-92, and the 1994 booklet of the NSW Sexual Assault Committee contains the following passage: 'There have also been reported cases of organised, ritualised, sadistic child abuse in day care and similar settings both in Australia and overseas. Sometimes the perpetrators appear to be operating within orthodox churches without the knowledge of these institutions. At other times they appear to infiltrate sectarian [sic] organisations such as scout groups, children's camps, pre-schools and day care centres.' Against such claims must be set the critiques of Finkelhor's research, such as that by Coleman, who notes: 'This is a truly remarkable book, primarily because of the monumental irresponsibility of the authors, who have taken public monies... and used it to compile statistics based on nothing more than opinions of a few beleaguered investigators. The wasted money will be the least of it, however, for this book promises to do much harm.' And Hicks quotes Nathan's judgement that 'From a scientific standpoint, then, most of the authors' conclusions are worthless... But what is disturbing about *Nursery Crimes* is that it seems to have achieved popularity precisely because, rather than in spite of, methodological flaws that contribute more to a climate of

hysteria than to constructive thinking about child sexual abuse.'

Other sources cited by the volume are Pamela Hudson - a Los Angeles therapist who devised a set of 'satanic indicators' to assist in the diagnosis of satanic abuse, and who has been influential in The United States, Britain, and New Zealand; and Catherine Gould, who is credited with devising a set of 'clinical indicators' which are so wide that, as Jenkins points out, it would be rare to encounter a child who had **not** been the victim of satanic abuse. Roland Summit, whose 'child abuse accommodation syndrome' implies that children never lie except when they are retracting stories of abuse, is another 'expert' who is cited. Summit, incidentally, has clung to a belief in the existence of tunnels used for ritual abuse under the McMartin preschool (the first in the States to be implicated in satanic allegations) despite the inability of police to find them. Among other sources of further information listed in the book is Cavalcade Videos, a Christian fundamentalist organization which distributes videos on alleged ritual abuse and Multiple Personality Disorder, including videos by Hudson and Gould. At the very least, some indication that these sources have been subject to severe critical scrutiny would have been appropriate; instead, they are offered as reliable and approved sources of information. It is noteworthy that each of these sources is also included in the booklet of the NSW Sexual Assault Committee.

Given the enormous momentum of the SRA lobby, it is important to evaluate carefully Jean La Fontaine's report to the British government: *The Extent and Nature of Organised and Ritual Abuse: Research Findings*. La Fontaine is a Professor of Anthropology who has pub-

lished in the area of ritual, and more recently has published a book on child sexual abuse. The combination might therefore seem to be thoroughly appropriate, though it did not preclude a True Believer in SRA from contrasting her book with that of Sinason on the grounds of 'one anthropologist versus forty clinicians'. La Fontaine's study was of children who had allegedly been ritually abused in the four-year period January 1988 to December 1991: at the outset it is pointed out that the accounts given by 'survivors' - adults who claim to have been ritually abused - are significant in creating a climate of belief **before** cases involving children are discovered. Here can be seen the significance of books such as *Michelle Remembers* in establishing the satanic abuse scenario.

A total of 84 cases in England and Wales involving allegations of ritual abuse were studied, giving an average incidence of 21 per year during the period studied but revealing a peak of 29 in 1989 followed by a decline to 10 in 1991. This represented only 8 percent of all the cases of alleged 'organised' abuse (abuse where there was more than one abuser and/or the abuse took place in an institutionalised setting). Geographically much of the alleged ritual abuse was located in clusters centering on the Midlands and London/south-east, with very deprived families on run-down estates forming a noticeable proportion of those involved. Cases involving alleged ritual abuse showed many characteristics of family-based abuse, namely the presence of women perpetrators, young victims, and a small percentage involving boys on their own. By contrast, in alleged paedophile networks nearly two-thirds contained no women at all. Thus there was a very different pattern of allegations to those in the

States, where day care centres were a major target, and it is significant that SRA claimsmakers in Australia and New Zealand have emphasised the latter, since most of their overseas 'expert' material has come direct from the States. Furthermore, the extreme deprivation of a large proportion of the accused in La Fontaine's research has some parallels with English witchcraft accusations in the early modern period, which seem to have been disproportionately aimed at poorer and more socially marginal individuals. As La Fontaine noted from her interviews, 'there are families equally poor who somehow manage better; their houses are clean and neat, their children, unlike these children, are not dirty and unwashed. Perhaps because of this it is not uncommon for those who fail in these respects to be viewed with hostility in the community. The neighbours may be hostile to both adults and children.'

The research noted the involvement of 'specialists' - those claiming expert knowledge of satanic abuse - in a majority of cases: often this included the dissemination of material listing satanic 'indicators' of the Gould and Hudson type. However, in contrast with the claim by a number of 'specialists' that identical allegations of an occult scenario can be found in such cases, there were in fact quite marked differences in the details reported: in 43 cases the allegations contained elements not present in any other case. This suggests that SRA constructions which purport to identify networks of perpetrators practising similar rituals are spurious. Another claim - that no evidence of SRA activity is ever found because the perpetrators are highly skilled at concealment and/or have connections with 'pillars of the community' (an important component of the Christchurch inves-

tigation) - is also thrown into doubt by La Fontaine's research, which discovered three cases in which there was material evidence of ritual in the course of sexual abuse of children. 'In each case, the activities were created and led by one man, who abused the children. He had also abused children without rituals. None of the three men concerned learned the rituals from belonging to an occult group... All the rituals differed from one another and there is no indication that there was any connection with other groups or between the individuals in these cases.' While books relating to ritual were found in the three cases, works on satanism or by Crowley were not among them. And although altars and candles were among paraphernalia found, in only one case were robes and costumes discovered: in short, the rituals were strategies to achieve sexual abuse rather than being a primary focus of activity, as alleged in the SRA scenario. These three cases are important in validating the overwhelming finding that SRA stories have no basis in material evidence - suggesting that if it does exist it will be found - and they are singularly lacking in such elements as the human sacrifices, bodies, blood, bones, and faeces which figure so prominently in the SRA claims traversed in the Sinason volume.

To summarise briefly the conclusions of La Fontaine's study, if satanic or satanist abuse is defined as the sexual and physical abuse of children as part of rites directed to a magical or religious objective, there was no evidence that it had occurred in any of the 84 cases analysed. In the three cases where 'ritual' evidence was found, ritual was secondary to the child abuse and did not resemble claims found in the other 81 cases. Children's disclosures were influenced by adults,

and interviews during the period 1989-91 were poorly conducted: 'What is defended as "what children say" may be nothing of the sort.'

So what was the origin of the satanic stories? There are two main sources: the first is the influence of the Evangelical Christian campaign against new religious movements, which in the 1980s turned its attention to allegations of satanism; the second is the proliferation of American and British 'specialists' in SRA (some of whom themselves belonged to the above campaign): 'Their claims or qualifications are rarely checked,' concludes La Fontaine, adding that their information about alleged SRA cases is often unreliable. Not only is the SRA crusade drawing attention away from children who actually have been abused, but it is also targeting the most deprived members of society:

'Demonising the marginal poor and linking them to unknown satanists turns intractable cases of abuse into manifestations of evil.'

## References

- Finkelhor, D, Williams, L M and Burns, N *Nursery Crimes: Sexual Abuse in Daycare*, Newbury Park, Sage, 1988
- La Fontaine, J S *The Extent and Nature of Organised and Ritual Abuse: Research Findings*, London, H.M.S.O., 1994
- N.S.W. Sexual Assault Committee *Ritual Abuse: Information for Health and Welfare Professionals* Information Booklet No 1, Sydney, NSW Sexual Assault Committee (Reprint), 1994
- Sinason, V. (ed) *Treating Survivors of Satanist Abuse*, London, Routledge, 1994.

## Louise Samways' *Dangerous Persuaders* A Review Essay

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This book, written in 1994 by a practising Melbourne psychologist, purports to be an expose of gurus, personal development courses and cults, and how they operate in Australia. In the wake of incidents such as the disaster at Waco, Texas, and the emphasis which anti-cult groups attach to "brainwashing" activities, I think it is important that some comment be made about Louise Samways' publication. As it relates specifically to the Australian scene a book such as this might be used to create fear, and to incite public hostility toward the groups mentioned within its pages.

In the Preface to *Dangerous Persuaders* Samways states:

*Dangerous Persuaders* has evolved not from an academic study of cults and personal development courses but from thousands of personal stories told to me over many years by my patients and people attending my seminars and lectures. I have mentioned the names of groups and courses only where I have heard similar and consistent stories from many separate sources.

As Samways states, the basis of her material is on the testimonies of her patients and not on any scholarly work she

has undertaken to ascertain the basic beliefs and activities of the groups she discusses. I would like to argue that it is not plausible to "lump" all the groups Samways has referred to in her book as dangerous because some people have had bad experiences from a particular small group or individual with whom they have come into contact. To do so is unwise and detrimental to the religious movement under attack. To illustrate this point I shall briefly discuss the "witches" in Australia, as Samways devotes a portion of her book to this phenomenon and I have undertaken research on this particular belief system in Australia over a two year period.

The fact that the word *cult* is used at all, is worthy of some preliminary comments. The term *cult* has become a negatively value-laden term to refer to a transient fad of a perverse nature. The original sense of the word, coming from the Latin *cultus* meaning "worship" has been given a more specific and derogatory interpretation today, and is applied to groups which are believed to be deviant in some way, according to popular opinion. A cult has also ironically been defined<sup>1</sup> as "someone else's religious group that does not agree with mine" which, given public attitudes, has a basis of truth to it.

If a religious group is perceived as being too different from mainstream ideology it is doomed to be labelled "cult", thus legitimising and reinforcing mainstream attitudes and values and serving important social control functions within the larger society. Given the negativity surrounding this word, Richardson<sup>2</sup> has suggested that the term should be severely limited in scholarly writings when referring to any religious group, for to do otherwise is to use the term as "a social

weapon" against new and exotic religious groups and experiences. My contention is that Samways' treatment of the witch, and perhaps some of the other groups she mentions, might be used in such a way.

Neopagan religious groups (and witches fall under this larger rubric as a branch of Neopaganism) do not proselytise and are, in fact, difficult to find. This does not mean that they are particularly secretive (although many groups feel that they fall under the category of "mystery" religions) or that they are engaged in nefarious practices. Because they are loosely organised, disparate groups of individuals, with neither religious edifice nor centralised administration, one has to be an active seeker in order to join any group. Many people, in fact, practice as solitaries for many months, and sometimes years, before they find a group to join. They are therefore not hapless victims, but active searchers, and are, for the most part, people who have tried a number of religions, none of which have addressed their needs<sup>3</sup>.

Rather than identifying this quest for a religious identity as something psychologically deviant, it has been argued by some<sup>4</sup>, that religious conversion can be placed within a complex cognitive developmental framework, one in which identity achievement is accomplished only through an individual's conscious moral and attitudinal struggle. Social scientists have long argued about the conversion/brainwashing controversy and have discussed the notions of the "passive convert" versus the "active seeker"<sup>5</sup>. The latter model, that of the active seeker, assumes that the 'convert' plays a conscious and active part in the process of conversion and that the change is often more gradual and developmental than it may appear to the outsider. Mischey<sup>6</sup> has

described the active seeker as one who engages in a "quest for and expression of a viable, psycho-social identity capable of rendering a life-perspective that provides a meaningful existence". More on this has been written by Kilbourne and Richardson<sup>7</sup> and a clear description of the active and passive convert is made by Richardson<sup>8</sup>. What is "conversion", or even conviction, to one person becomes "brainwashing" to another.

In the research on "witches" which I have conducted over a three year period, I would place the witches, and other Neopagans, into the category of "active seeker" and the "conversion" process for most of the witches I have come across is a very gradual one which develops over a quite lengthy period of time and through extensive reading and personal experimentation. This is not to deny that some individuals have become involved in certain groups that have imposed their ideas on them, but I maintain that it is the individual's choice about whether or not to continue in such a group.

In her discussion of Witches (:49-52) Samways has apparently based her evidence on the accounts of *one* "white" witch (a term which has been much misused) and that "White or black, witches use a great deal of ritual in their ceremonies" (:49). Yes, this is true, ritual is a basis of Wicca, and, just as in any religion, ritual is used to great effect. It is really not feasible to say that ritual in itself is detrimental to the individual. Samways' sweeping statement about rituals as being "extremely dangerous as they can be so hypnotic" (:50) gives the impression that she does not regard mainstream rituals under the same rubric.

There is no more potent ritual than the Roman Catholic mass, with its bread and wine representing the body and blood of

Christ, its incense, candles, majestic and colourful ritual costumes, which all have their effect on the participants. In just the same way, Wiccan (and Neopagan rituals in general) use costumes, candles, and incense to create atmosphere for a ritual. Yet no-one has suggested that in a Roman Catholic ritual, there is something amiss.

Samways writes that the "concentration necessary" to get rituals "right" focuses the participant's attention completely. Does this mean that during this whole time, the individual who has willingly engaged in rituals has been forced to engage in them? She talks about being "hypnotised by ritual" but in actual fact, it takes a lot of individual, purposeful concentration on the part of the individual to enter a trance state, one of the purposes of ritual. One would need to be a willing participant to be able to do so.

Samways' patients, "the few people I have spoken to who have been victims of ritual abuse" (:50), were "not clear whether the rituals they took part in were black or white, but some victims told me that they thought they were dealing with white witches". This informant is obviously as confused about the whole thing as Samways. Who was this person as what happened to him/her that was so dangerous? This is not articulated. "They were shocked and confused by how easily they became involved in more and more bizarre and damaging activities." What were some of these activities, what does the person regard as "bizarre"? What were the "damaging activities"?

The poor fairy shops - those delightful outlets which organise the ever-popular children's parties, and which cater to the imaginative fantasy world of children, have fared very badly in Samways' book. If we are to pay attention to her dire warnings of fairy shops being fronts for black

witches of the "old-hag kind" (what an indictment on mature women, and the perpetuation of the myth of the Middle Ages where helpless women were tortured and burnt at the stake for accusations of witchcraft!), children are going to be denied the wonderful fantasy world of the fairy story, not to mention putting the poor fairy shop owners out of business.

Not content with damning the fairy shops, one is also warned about the dangers of the "eco-feminists". It is true that many women have become disillusioned with the patriarchal system of Christian churches and some have actively searched for alternatives, finding in women's spiritual groups an opportunity to explore their own spirituality in surroundings more conducive to personal introspection, one which is without a hierarchical structure dominated by males. It is also true that these women, and many others, reject the concept of heaven and hell, as well as (and Samways neglects to mention this) the notion of a sinful Eve. Yes, many women's groups are empowering to women, but this factor does not make them dangerous.

One wonders why Samways mentioned the women's groups at all, as most of the comments she has about them are positive: they do not believe in, or participate in, drug taking or sacrificial ceremonies; they celebrate seasonal changes; they are a loose network of women with varying ways of exploring and expressing their beliefs, they are pursuing a harmless and even environmentally sound belief - all positive attributes by any standard.

Samways discusses the women's groups as if there were some terrible danger in all this, and warns the reader to be "extremely careful when choosing your coven". This is a sensible bit of advice at least, as one should be extremely careful

about everything that one does. Unfortunately, some children do not have a choice about their religion, but are socialised into a belief system of their parent's or guardians' choice at a very early age. This applies to all religions.

Samways also alludes (:vii) to financial gain and large-scale tax avoidance as being one of the major reasons for the promulgation of cult beliefs, an inflammatory statement which is likely to produce ire in the Australian public and a completely wrong impression of witches. I will also argue against this proposition as far as the witches are concerned. Many witches are solitary and so do not belong to a group; covens are organised on a shoestring and do not solicit money from their members. Quite the reverse, any costs incurred (and overheads are low as they do not own large blocks of land or even an edifice such as a church, nor do they require tithes) are met equally by members of the group on a voluntary basis. Costs of public festivals are kept to a minimum and the organisers usually find themselves out of pocket after such an event. Samways' account of the witches is defamatory and dishonestly represents a new religious movement with no recourse to facts.

I have not pursued any of the other groups<sup>9</sup> that Samways mentions in her book, but if they were all to be subjected to the same treatment as the unfortunate witches, I would not set too much store by her claims, and feel that the Australian public can rest assured that we are not (based upon Samways' evidence at least) in such dire straits as Samways would have us believe. I do not deny the possibility that there are strange people doing strange things, but I would like to see a bit more evidence before publishing such a damning indictment of particular

groups. Instead, we should look more closely into the reasons why individuals become involved in new religious movements in the first place. What are they seeking, and what is missing from mainstream monotheism that is not answering their needs?

I think we have to be careful in Australia not to embark on the same cult phobia which emerged in the United States in the past, inflaming a mania of anti-cult groups bent on "de-programming" sessions, and forcing people against their will out of religious groups of their choice.

To this end, a greater degree of research into the literature<sup>10</sup> on the brainwashing/conversion controversy, as well as investigation into religious group activities, would have been warranted before producing a text such as *Dangerous Persuaders*. I do not deny the experiences of Samways' patients, but do argue against the exposé of groups that she delineates on the slim evidence of some of her psychological patients without engaging in a full investigation, by fieldwork and participation, in each of the groups she has mentioned. This is tantamount to scare-mongering and is akin to the puerile accusations of satanism imposed on some groups when the evidence is hearsay or non-existent.

## Notes

1. Tucker, 1989. *Strange Gospels*. London: Marshall Pickering, Harper Collins Religious, Harper Collins Publishers. p15

2. Richardson, James T. 1993. 'Definitions of Cult: From Sociological-Technical to Popular-Negative' *Review of Religious Research*, 34, 4 (June, 1993).

3. Referred to as "conversion careers" by James T Richardson (ed.) 1978 *Conversion Careers: In and Out of the New Religions*. Beverly Hills: Sage Publications.

4. For example, Parker, Mitchell. 1985. 'Identity and the Development of Religious Thinking' in A Waterman (ed.) *Identity in Adolescence: Process and Contents*. Jossey-Bass: 43-60

5. For a useful summary of these two notions refer to Larry D Shinn 'Who gets to define Religion? The conversion/Brainwashing Controversy' *Religious Studies Review* (July 1993), 19, 3: 195-207

6. Mischev, Eugene J. 'Faith, Identity, and Morality in Late Adolescence' in *Character Potential*. 1980: 175-181

7. Kilbourne, Brock, and James T Richardson. 1985. 'Social Experimentation Self-Process or Social Role' *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*: 13-22

8. Richardson, James T. 1985. 'The Active vs. Passive Convert: Paradigm Conflict in Conversion/Recruitment Research' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 24: 119-236

9. I would suggest that she should at least consult authors such as James T. Richardson and Brock K. Kilbourne regarding role change and the active seeker in religious conversions. Richardson has also written extensively on *The Children of God*, another group included in Samways' book.

10. A useful bibliographical start is to be found in Larry D Shinn's article. See note 5.

# The Dismantling of 'Radical' Religious Pluralism

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*The article considers religious pluralism to be a discursive formation whose ameliorative overtures conceal more than they confront deeper metaphysical and epistemological quiddities. It asks, how is it that at this juncture the conditions for the possibility of a spremacist - logos - centricism that has been operative throughout Western religious history suddenly begins to appropriate the language of religious pluralism, ironically even in its most radical form that would end its own hegemony? The suggestion is that the discourse of religious pluralism, whether in the exclusive, inclusive, half-'n-half, perennis, or the radical form, re-configures the subject and object of privileged knowledge, the position of the other, set of concepts, modality and conception of truth and its possible negation, without really undercutting the original ideology. A closure, therefore, can only be avoided if some of its fundamental presuppositions are 'deconstructed' and more penetrating questions are thrown into the inter-regnums. What could such questions be? Read on!*

## I. Religious pluralism

The contemporary Swiss-German theologian Hans Kung has suggested that the "boundary between the true and false today, even as Christians see it, no longer runs simply *between* Christianity and other religions, but at least in part *within* each of the religions".<sup>1</sup>

The conventional discourse on religious pluralism has hitherto been framed in terms of the encounter of Christianity with "other" or "non-Christian" religions and the kind of response Christians might or might not make to people of non-Christian persuasion in all their diversity and complexity. The positions and attitudes adopted within the pluralist ('dialogue-ic') paradigm have ranged from forms of 'exclusivism' (that all religions have some worth, but Christianity offers the only valid path, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), 'inclusivism' (that other religions have great spiritual depth and revelations,

but are not sufficiently salvific), and 'pluralism' (that the truth-content of faith can have a variety of articulations each of which is legitimate), with shades in between. Ernest Troeltsch, William Hocking and Paul Tillich first suggested the idea of pluralism, although with differing interpretations and implications of the claim to finality or normativity for Christians. The consensus in more recent times seems to gravitate towards pluralism in one or the other of its interpretations. The more popular understanding of religious pluralism, as articulated by W C Smith, John Hick, Paul Knitter, D'Costa among others, maintains that "other religions are equally salvific paths to God, and Christianity's claim that it is the only path (exclusivism), or the fulfilment of other paths (inclusivism) should be rejected for good theological and phenomenological grounds".<sup>2</sup>

In other words, the traditional universalism and absolutism attached to the Christian position is bracketed and the in-

dependent validity of other religions - even in their "otherness" or *alterity* - is now recognised. Much thought has been given as to how the differences between religions, the great diversity of beliefs, practices, rites and symbolisms, might be reconciled or a *rapprochement* brought about among them. And there has been much optimism about learning from other religions and the mutual enrichment or upliftment that can be experienced anew in "dialogues and conversations" with people whose religious instincts appear not to have been scorched by centuries of internal theological disputes, doubts and argumentations, and by the rapid shifts that the modern (beginning with Western) societies have made towards secularism, scientism and technocratic utopianism.<sup>3</sup>

A corollary of this mitigated position is a more radical form of pluralism which argues that the established and dogmatic traditions should turn over to and enmesh (integrate) themselves as much as practicable with the currency of other, possibly less dogmatic, ("world" and "primal") traditions with radically different (maybe more ancient) historical roots and wealth of outlook on nature, on the human condition, on the cosmos, on liberation, and so on.

While during the colonial-imperial phase the distant and marginalised traditions were infiltrated, expropriated and recast to look more like the dominant tradition (e.g. Christianity in Hindu-Muslim India, typified in R. Panikkar's earlier *The Hidden Christ of India*), the trend now is to reverse the process and appropriate the "other" traditions into one's own tradition in the *inter-religious* context. Pluralism becomes a means of preserving the old in the guise of the new or the other.

This task, it is urged, is a matter of some urgency now that there is widespread recognition of the historical contingency of every cultural artefact - as surely religion is one - as well as our growing awareness of the unavoidable "prejudices" and the questionable assumption undergirding the privileged or paradigmatic access to the "Ultimate" claimed in each religion. Together the religions may be able to heal the scars left by the clashes of disparate cultures, and inject some sanity, hope and insightful wisdom towards preventing nature and humankind from the threat of human-engendered destruction, if not also work toward the betterment of human beings as indeed the goal of each religion appears, in principle at least, to be absolutely committed to.<sup>4</sup>

This would seem to be the challenge of what goes under the rubric of 'radical pluralism', which, while it acknowledges the historical relativity of each religion, nevertheless accedes to the intrinsic intentionality or drift towards the essential truth, the *telos*, as well as submitting to the fundamental integrity, insights, virtues and spirituality of each tradition. Even if the form of relativism it implicitly admits to is merely 'provisional', there appears to prefigure here an assumption that truth might just be plural; or, more likely, that truth is one but that it conceals itself behind a kaleidoscopic facade.

There are versions of radical pluralism that, pushed to further degrees of ambivalence, attempt to ride over the limitations imposed by the excluded middle, contrary to Parmenides' intuition; thus in calling for the non-exclusion of other truths from one's own, we have a simultaneity of 'One and Many'. But there is a more serious suggestion that supervenes on the distinction that some want to draw between truth in science, in religion, in ethics, in

human disciplines, in personal orientations, and so on. And this turns on a revision of the classical (Aristotelian) notion of truth (culminating in science as its key model). Thus, it follows that if religions are plural, truth must be plural.<sup>5</sup>

## II. Plurality of truth

The question of how one might legitimate the claim to a variety of truth **qua** truth aside, there is another problem which the pluralist paradigm seems least self-conscious of. As the post-modern critics are at pains to point out, radical pluralism continues to trade on the implicit assumption that there is such a thing as religious truth, or that there is an "ultimate something" that answers to the description of truth in each religion. In short, the assumption is that there is some one **ultimate** being or reality, the universal spirit as the absolute (*logos, onto-theos*), which transcendently sediments as the core intentionality of all religions. The ultra-radical pluralist might say that because the ultimate reality is ineffable and language presents a barrier to this hidden reality, the best we can do is to pursue the different names of the absolute (as we would if we were looking for the "ultimate ice cream" [6], or playing different "language-games"). The pluralist approach, then, in conceding to different paradigms of the ultimate reality, unequivocally affirms that there is an **absolute** of which each religious truth is an attempted articulation. The term "God" names the "ultimate reality" in Western religious traditions; the terms "Brahman" in Hinduism, and "*nirvanal/sunyata* (emptiness)" in conjunction with "*Dharmal/dharmakaya*" and "refuge in Buddha" in Buddhism, have analogous function to that of the term "God".<sup>7</sup>

In other words, religious truths are, if not simply a variety of reflecting articulations of the ultimate truth, modes of representations of the one true Ultimate (*ens realissimum*). It is only that we are not yet able to decide as to which of these is the final manifestation or decisive articulation, or as to which captures best the distinctive mark of the Ultimate: the truth of truths (the "highest truth" *a lá* neo-Vedanta discourse). Perhaps history in its nth fulfilment, or another (or the deferred) revelation, or a prophet, or *avatara*, or total submission, etc., will in due course disclose it to us.

## III. The questionable presupposition

It is this ontotheological presupposition, whether based on the identity of God and being (intuited through reason as in philosophical theology and argued in philosophy of religion) or based on revelation and faith as in the discourse of theology, or on the scriptural evocation of Brahman, and so on, that has now become suspect. Reason itself (more persistently since Kant) has come in the firing line as being an insufficient tool to explain and defend the claims supposedly derived from sources more transcendental to it. Theoretical reason knows only this world of "appearance", and not the whatever-in-itself. For Kant, the postulate of God, just as the ideas of the "world" and "self", is a matter of reasonable trust (and not quite a matter of faith), intended to guide and govern our wisdom and tenets. Thus if reason is not universal in all matters - or not universal at all - there can be no truth, still less religious truth, that can lay claim to being universal.

Thus it seems that while the earlier form of absolutism that underpinned the exclusive (and to an extent, inclusive) truth-claim of one religion over the others (i.e. in respect of being in possession of the truth, regardless of its content -- and this applies, *pari pasu*, to strong forms of Judaism, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism) is rejected, the absolutism in the truth-content (i.e. the grand claim in respect of the ontology of God, Brahman, Allah, Buddha-nature, etc.) is not really set aside or bracketed sufficiently. For, to reject the latter kind of absolutism would be to risk undermining the very doctrinal formations and foundations of religious discourse altogether. But it is precisely this foundationalism that has for so long stood its own ground within religion, and returned to in the thinking of great philosophers like Plato, Sankara, Hegel, Schleiermacher, Rahner, et al, which now has come under the hermeneutics of suspicion.

This critique is not simply a rehearsal of the attack of positivists and sundry philosophers, although it takes notice of it, but has come about in part as a result of the problems raised regarding the formation and function of God as an onto-theological concept in the history of Western thought, by Nietzsche, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, Barth with other German theologians, later Wittgenstein and French deconstructionists. The metaphysical presupposition or prejudgment implicitly determining much of religious thought anywhere in respect of the ever constant presence, the *sacra arche* and spiritual *telos* or its inspirations to a transcendentalised utopia, is increasingly thrown into the open as a possible source of all that has gone wrong in the current historical situation. Thus the facticity and particularity of Western thought in re-

spect of its presupposition and faith in the historical uniqueness of its development has been brought home by Heidegger, Gadamer and Derrida among others, who have in their own inimitable ways tried to address the "crisis" (and *décadence*) now upon the very foundations of (modern) European culture, thought, ethics, and religion. The illusion of the apparent universality and necessity of the metaphysical flight has apparently been dispelled by reaching back to the ground of metaphysics and the specific thinking, or the unthought, on which it has been based. Metaphysics is looked upon as a "*supplément*" (addition and substitution) for naive discourse "about things". The thought of Being or "truth" is tantamount to an "intrusion within language's closure upon itself".<sup>8</sup> Grammatology (the science of writing) shakes this complacency, and reveals the inconsistencies in the codes and signifiers which served to maintain the constancy of the logos, the absolute *arche* or *telos* that never was.

## V. Deconstruction in theology

Similar critical reflections have occurred and are perhaps continuing in Eastern traditions as well, which in the particular case of Buddhism may be traced back to Nagarjuna's (2nd century CE) dialectical critique of Brahmanic metaphysics and orthopraxy, continued in Vijnanavada's ambivalence over the Absolute of Vedanta, and more recently in Nishitani's work on *No-thingness* (combining Buddhist and Heideggerian insights for a critique of 'Eastern modernity').

In the Anglo-American world there have been echoes of this problematic in the so-called 'Death of God' theology

(with Robinson's *Honest to God* assault) and in the deconstructionist twist it (has) received in the hands of Thomas Altizer Jr, Carl Raschke, Robert Scharlemann, and Mark C Taylor<sup>9</sup>). Even though, it may be pointed out, that while in deconstructive a/theology the project of revealing the 'absence' and 'NOTNESS' of the theistic image of deity is meticulously completed, there is implicit in its discourse a "leap" (transgression) beyond the text (the 'Word', which writing both forgets and wrenches from its unconscious) to the projected (often interiorised into the equally abnegated self) return of the "noncentred whole", the "Wholly Other". It is in the otherness, the Alterity, of God which theism had forgotten and which lay buried beneath the metaphysical speculations, that the "traces" can be retrieved. This "absent" God is discernible only in the "space" marked by the *uncertainty of its différance* (read as Hegel's subversion of absolute idealism in the notion of absolute negativity).<sup>10</sup> The play on "difference" harkens back via Derrida to Heidegger's uncovering of the "ontological difference", that is, the difference between being and entities, as well as to his larger task of the "destruction" (*Destruktion*) of the history of ontology. A "spacing" is then made possible which does not tolerate an identity (total self-presence) that closes in upon itself. While the entitative notion of God as the transtemporal or metaphysical entity ("being as Being") is arrested (and dismembered), along with all the conventional signifiers attuned to this traditional conception, God is re-conceived (re-constituted) as the being that is not God or, better still, when God is not being God.<sup>11</sup> It is in its *totaliter aliter*, without remainder, as the "negated presence" rather than absolute nihilism, that truth arises as the "ghost"

that continues to dance on the tomb of the dead (Crucified) God: "a self-consciousness which itself becomes absolute by passing through the death of God".<sup>12</sup>

Bonhoeffer (already in conversation with followers of Mahatma Gandhi who had raised doubts about the historicity of Jesus) is particularly important in this regard for being perhaps the earliest of such 'deconstructionists' to have issued the challenge to Christianity to rethink its traditional self-understanding. As he wrote from his prison cell:

*Religious people speak of God when human perception is (often just from laziness) at an end, or human resources fail: it is really always the Deus ex machina they call to their aid, either for the so-called solving of insoluble problems or as support in human failure - always, that is to say, helping out human weakness or on the borders of human existence. Of necessity, that can only go on until men can, by their own strength, push those borders a little further, so that God becomes superfluous as a Deus ex machina.*<sup>13</sup>

Of course, while in one sense Bonhoeffer was, as the saying goes, pulling the rug from the under the feet of the Church, in another sense he was preparing Christianity for a radically different conception of the "ultimate" in his rejection of the metaphysical and theological notion of deity, and in his concern with the secular world. This challenge is still being worked out for its fuller implications in Christian theology (particularly with Barthian thesis of the historical reality of revelation that cuts across theism and atheism, believers and unbelievers alike); and it has had a tremendous impact on 'third world' theology as well (especially on liberation theology). But in other ways, the discourse has not moved much beyond the acceptance of Christ as the in-

carnation of truth [or the erased term] in history.

There is a further difficulty with deconstructive a/theology. While it does make considerable overtures towards, particularly Buddhist tradition (most evident in Altizer's recent writings with unmistakable Buddhistic signifiers), the concepts from varying traditions are treated as "remains, what is left over, to be used or discarded at the whim of the theologian"<sup>14</sup>, without giving full regard to their context, or to the damning indictment their further *reductio* might entail for what a/theology would not withstand, viz. its own self-destruction. Thus "Buddhist nothingness", "unya", the "utter self-emptying and emptiness of..." abound in the rhetorical fits of a/theology. Once emptied, however, the "space" is quickly filled up again - not on account of the spectre of relativism, but in the anxiety of stark nihilism, the abyss that might swallow everything/being and itself too. But why does a/theology evade this ultimate consequence of its own deconstituting endeavour? If a/theology is to be true to the dual *aporias* of pluralism and radical deconstruction, must it not countenance the possibility of its own structural subversion, capitulation? Indeed, there is already some disquiet among deconstructive theologians as they criticise each other's excesses, quasi-transcendentalisms, false inversions (e.g. of the *Geist* in the structure and language of the Unconscious), and misappropriation of the role of interpretation in the deconstructive enterprise.<sup>15</sup>

## V. The post-onto/theocentric challenge

In the light of the foregoing analysis, the challenge staring us in the face in the

late hour of the 20th century may be formulated thus: We might well be content and adapt ourselves to living in a pluralist milieu wherein each one accepts and tolerates the respective 'faith-path' chosen by adherents of other religions, but can we accept that there is therefore a plurality of 'absolutes'? That alongside God, there is in the deepest (or 'highest') reality, also Allah, Brahman, the Dreaming, Buddha-nature (or the converse)? That these are not simply different manifestations of the same 'One and Only One', or 'Not-Two, nor-Many', 'Not Another' (*non aliud*) being or truth, but are Ultimates in their own right? Or, we might be forced to ask, where does radical pluralism draw the line before the legitimacy it accords to each religion transgresses the boundary of the truth-claim with respect to the "Ultimate" in each religion? The question is not about the different ways in which the Ultimate is conceived (e.g. as the absolute in identity, in relativity, in identity-in-difference, in non-difference, in utter difference, or its "altar-ity", and so on), but it is about the presupposition that beyond the indefinite dissemination of the signs there is a referent (a signified), some constant, whether in its "*pleroma*" (infinite, "fullness") or its "*emptiness*" ("non-beingness", "nothingness"), that answers to the description? (Even if that absolutising is intransitive, i.e. without subject or predicate.)

And what response can a sanguine religious pluralism make to those (within religion and outside religion, say, in philosophy and science) who reject the idea or possibility of any 'absolute' altogether as a hopelessly futile metaphysical project in whose traps religions fell and have remained entangled? This critique, then, disqualifies any and all claims to universal truth in or across religions: all

religious truth is henceforth considered to be local, partial, and constructed. Here all truth stands de-absolutised.<sup>16</sup> So the differences in myth and doctrine across religions are not differences in truth-claims nor are they "alternative maps, in different projections, of the universe..." but are simply different ways of making sense of the existential facticity of life and different ways of dealing with this non-transcendental or relative subjectivity in the day to day activities and concerns of people. (While Hick appears to be saying something close to this, for him the *soteriological* significance, and its afterlife verification, nonetheless leads us away from the relative to some unarticulated notion of the absolute, once again.)<sup>17</sup>

Again, it is insisted, the differing orientations are not simply variations on the same invariant objective truth, but categorically distinct historical experiences which resist reduction to a unitary symbolic process, or revelation, or way of knowing. It resists reduction to even anything like a common denominator of the rather safe and pervasively non-cognitive 'numinous' that Otto sought on the cognitive model provided by Kant's epistemology, much less to the spiritual unity or its *telos* in transcendental subjectivity as pursued by theologians inspired by the Cartesian-Husserlian project in phenomenology.<sup>18</sup>

Hence to rescue religion and maintain genuine plurality of spiritual life-worlds, some argue, one ought seriously to consider rejecting belief in the Absolute (of any kind or form) altogether, and any claim to the universal and normative for all and sundry. For it is this belief, fundamental to most if not all religions, rather than the confrontations of differences in conceptions of the absolute and the practices and histories of the religious tradi-

tions amidst us, that gives rise to intolerance, competition, projective otherness, alienation (transcendental and mundane), self-righteousness, dogmatism, barbarism and such adverse conducts as the other history of religions has made amply evident.

Indeed, it would be argued in such a critique that overall what is more important to emphasise is the fact of the differences *qua* difference in the cluster of social-historical phenomena, and irreducibly so. And that there need be assumed nothing in particular, or of a general kind, of which these are differences; that is to say, at no point in the inquiry should one presume to have arrived at an understanding of some common 'Archimedean centre' ("the Center of the centre"), from which the lines of differentiation have, as it were, shot out. This predilection towards finding the core central myth, the universal arche(type), the projected confirmation in eschatology/soteriology/orthopraxy, and such other epithets ("Name of the names") that express this universalist proclivity across the differences in the religious orientations (described to us profusely by anthropologists and religious dialogists) ought to be indefinitely deferred, suspended, or even erased. Nor need this be a cause for celebration, but possibly a sombre Wittgensteinian-like resignation that such a goal is, alas in the final analysis, simply unattainable.

The Jainas in India pre-empted this move by suggesting that it is neither possible nor necessary to have an absolute view on anything, still less on matters of "ultimate concern", such as whether there is or is not an absolute. (Pyrrho perhaps imbibed "imperturbability" and "*epoche*" in matters ultimate from the Jainas when he accompanied Alexander to India.) Genuine tolerance and "conversation", the

Jainas preached, is only possible when "one-sidedness" (*ekanta*) in thinking is clearly set aside. (Jaina philosophy, it may be noted in passing, provided a seven-term dialectic which allowed the possibility of holding, that from varying points of view: "x is", "x is not", "x both is and is not", "x is inexpressible", "x is both not and inexpressible", "x is, is not, and is also inexpressible".)<sup>19</sup>

The challenge in the 'post-modern' human condition targets at the underfoot of radical pluralism in suggesting that there is neither one "absolute" or "decisive" truth-content (logos, presence) in religion (contrary to the exclusivist presupposition), nor a plurality of expressions or articulations inscribing the same deep truth-content (contrary to the inclusivists assumption). Indeed, it argues that all conceptions of truth are equally constructed artefacts, which have thus to be contextualised and understood in the horizons of the disparate and possibly unique experiences, tradition and aspirations of each cultural group. If the arguments on which this challenge is pivoted go through, then what kind of pluralism is possible, without risking ambiguity, equivocation, deep uncertainty and *angst* that characterise radical pluralism? Is 'critical pluralism' that can countenance and come to terms, albeit creatively rather than destructively, with the kinds of problems and questions raised, a real possibility? Might this be the direction or turn we could more fruitfully take in our reflections at this juncture of the history of reflections on religion and particularly on the confrontations of vastly different traditions, denominations and sub-cultures within and between the religions of the world? What particular steps can we take in Australasia, given its growing 'multi-cultural' matrix in the horizons of the ancient Abo-

iginal, Asian, Pacific cultures, and the predominant Anglo-Celtic (largely Christian) heritage of barely two hundred years vintage?

## Notes

1. Hans Kung, et al, *Christianity and World Religions: Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism*. Doubleday. 1986. p. xviii
2. Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism The Challenge of Other Religions*. Basil Blackwell. 1986. p 22.
3. For a succinct review of the current literature, see Francis X Clooney, 'Christianity and World Religions: Religion, Reason, and Pluralism'. *Religious Studies Review*. Vol 15, No 3, 1989. pp 197-204.
4. Despite methodological and theoretical problems, this commitment, which regurgitates the old humanist, soteriocentric, and orthopraxic views, becomes the urge for 'carrying on the conversation'. Cf. Paul Knitter, 'Making Sense of the Many', *Religious Studies Review* Vol 15, No 3, 1989, pp 204-207.
5. Cf Pauk Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes towards the World Religions*. Orbis. 1985, p 217f. See also Clooney, *op cit* p 200.
6. This a parody on an example from Hans Kung, "Response to Francis Cook *Is It Just This?* Different Paradigms of Ultimate Reality in Buddhism". In *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 9. 1989. pp 142-156. p 142.
7. Hans Kung *ibid* p 151.
8. Jacques Derrida, "The Supplement of the Copula", in Josué Harari (ed.) *Textual Strategies, in Post-Structuralist Criticism*. Cornell University Press. 1979. p 109.
9. See *Deconstruction and Theology*. Thomas J J Altizer, Jr, et al, Crossroads, 1982; Mark C Taylor, *Deconstructing Theology*. Scholars Press, 1982; *Erring: A Postmodern Altheology*. University of Chicago Press, 1984; *Altarity*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.

Charles E Winquist, *Epiphanies of Darkness: Deconstruction in Theology*. Fortress Press. 1986.

10. Mark Taylor, *op cit* (1982) p 100; cf (1984) pp 100-111.

11. Robert Scharlemann, *Inscriptions and Reflections Essays in Philosophical Theology*. University Press of Virginia. 1989. p 37, 43

12. Thomas J J Altizer Jr, "History as Apocalypse". In *Deconstruction and Theology*, p 176.

13. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God: Letters and Papers from Prison*. (Edited by Eberhard Bethge). The Macmillan Company. 1953.

14. Robert S Gall, "Of/From Theology and Deconstruction". *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*. Fall 1990 Vol LVIII No 3. pp 413-437. p 426.

15. For a more balanced approach to the problematic of interpretation in pluralism see David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope*. Harper & Row. 1987. pp 78f.

16. Leonard Swidler (ed.), *Towards a Universal Theology of Religion*. Orbis, 1987, 7-13. Curiously, most theologs, like W C Smith, John Hick et al, who are eager to develop a

'universal theology' do often begin by asserting the plurality of disparate, localised and historically distinct religious experiences. Cf. Stephen Neill, *Christian Faith and Other Faiths The Christian Dialogue with Other Religions*. 2nd edn. Oxford University Press. 1970.

17. I am indebted to Francis Clooney for this insight, *op cit*. p 200.

18. On Husserl's own confidence of the spiritual *telos* of European Man - vis-a-vis the Asiatic and "primitive" people who are partakers on different levels in the "Spiritual Image of Europe", see Edmund Husserl, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy* (trans. by Quentin Lauer). Harper and Row. 1965. pp 155-158.

19. Bimal K Matilal, *The Central Philosophy of Jainism (Anekanta-vada)*. L D Institute of Indology (Ahmedabad), 1981, p 55.

*This article is an abridged version of author's 'A Problem for Radical (onto-logos) Pluralism', published in SOPHIA Vol 30, No 1, 1991, pp 21-33; reprinted with permission.*

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