LEABHARLANN CHOLÁISTE NA TRÍONÓIDE, BAILE ÁTHA CLIATH | TRINITY COLLEGE LIBRARY DUBLIN
Ollscoil Átha Cliath | The University of Dublin

Terms and Conditions of Use of Digitised Theses from Trinity College Library Dublin

Copyright statement

All material supplied by Trinity College Library is protected by copyright (under the Copyright and Related Rights Act, 2000 as amended) and other relevant Intellectual Property Rights. By accessing and using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you acknowledge that all Intellectual Property Rights in any Works supplied are the sole and exclusive property of the copyright and/or other IPR holder. Specific copyright holders may not be explicitly identified. Use of materials from other sources within a thesis should not be construed as a claim over them.

A non-exclusive, non-transferable licence is hereby granted to those using or reproducing, in whole or in part, the material for valid purposes, providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. Where specific permission to use material is required, this is identified and such permission must be sought from the copyright holder or agency cited.

Liability statement

By using a Digitised Thesis, I accept that Trinity College Dublin bears no legal responsibility for the accuracy, legality or comprehensiveness of materials contained within the thesis, and that Trinity College Dublin accepts no liability for indirect, consequential, or incidental, damages or losses arising from use of the thesis for whatever reason. Information located in a thesis may be subject to specific use constraints, details of which may not be explicitly described. It is the responsibility of potential and actual users to be aware of such constraints and to abide by them. By making use of material from a digitised thesis, you accept these copyright and disclaimer provisions. Where it is brought to the attention of Trinity College Library that there may be a breach of copyright or other restraint, it is the policy to withdraw or take down access to a thesis while the issue is being resolved.

Access Agreement

By using a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library you are bound by the following Terms & Conditions. Please read them carefully.

I have read and I understand the following statement: All material supplied via a Digitised Thesis from Trinity College Library is protected by copyright and other intellectual property rights, and duplication or sale of all or part of any of a thesis is not permitted, except that material may be duplicated by you for your research use or for educational purposes in electronic or print form providing the copyright owners are acknowledged using the normal conventions. You must obtain permission for any other use. Electronic or print copies may not be offered, whether for sale or otherwise to anyone. This copy has been supplied on the understanding that it is copyright material and that no quotation from the thesis may be published without proper acknowledgement.

UNIVERSITY OF DUBLIN

(TRINITY COLLEGE)

HARMONY, MODESTY, DIALOGUE: A MORAVIAN CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGIES OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

TRINITY COLLEGE
LIBRARY DUBLIN

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE HEBREW, BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL SCHOOL

IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY LIVINGSTONE ANTHONY THOMPSON

MAY 30, 2003

TRINITY COLLEGE
2 8 JAN 2004
LIBRARY DUBLIN
THES
7873

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own work and that it has not been submitted either in part or whole for another degree to this or any other university. I give permission for the university to lend and copy the dissertation upon formal request.

Signed: _____

Date: October 6, 2003

SUMMARY

Despite the multiplicity of religions, religious aspirations and religious goals, Christians have generally maintained that in Jesus Christ God has been revealed in an unsurpassable way. In modern times, however, Christians themselves have been questioning whether this exclusive position is still plausible given the loss of Christian claims to superior truth. Changes in Christian self-understanding in a plural context have led to the development of theologies of pluralism. The aim of this study is to develop such a discourse from the point of view of the Moravian Church.

Different Approaches to Religious Pluralism

In **section one** of this study we look at the search by Christian theologians to develop a discourse that takes seriously the claims of other religions. This search has been motivated by three factors. The first is the Enlightenment questioning of fundamental Christian assertions. The second is the evidence of stability and sustainability in the non-Christian religions. The third is the increased emigration of peoples of other faiths into Europe as a result of the break-up of colonialism. Today, the paradigm of the discourse on religious pluralism is no longer formulated in terms of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, as in the early stages of the development. It is recognised among theologians that the exclusive denial of value in other faiths is no longer plausible. Current Christian approaches to religious pluralism differ from each other in terms of the extent to which they can hold in tension the commitment to the Christian tradition and the recognition of value in and the significance of other religions.

The commitment to the other in the approach of John Hick, the commitment to one's own tradition in Gavin D'Costa and George Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach represent the field within which the discourse on pluralism is formulated today. The weaknesses in these approaches, however, make the search for an approach more suitable for the Moravian Church a necessity. The approach of Hick attempts to occupy a tradition-free standpoint and, like the approach of Lindbeck, ends with a negation of dialogue. These weaknesses make them unsuitable for the Moravian Church, which desires to engage the other religions in dialogue while showing a commitment to the Moravian tradition.

Though favouring a commitment to one's own tradition, this research discounts D'Costa's version of that approach because it does not treat the issues of revelation and Christology in a way that is satisfactory to the Moravian Church. This research is therefore centred on retrieving theological material from within the Moravian tradition for the development of a Moravian theology of pluralism.

Moravian Resources for Pluralism

In **section two** we dig for theological resources in the Moravian tradition that have a bearing of religious pluralism. Relevant material can be found in the works of John Amos Comenius and Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, the two most influential theologians in the last four hundred years of the Church's life. Writing in the context of the inter-church and international disunity in the immediate post-Thirty-Year War period, Comenius argued for the reform of human affairs in the areas of politics, religion and philosophy. The seriousness with which Comenius approached the search

for truth, his implicit trust in the human intellectual capacity and his conviction that God speaks to all nations and cultures, led him to centre his approach on a rigorous dialogue as a means of coming to terms with differences between the religions. His absolute commitment to dialogue and his allowance for divine revelation in the other religions are the unique contributions that he brings to the development of a Moravian approach to pluralism.

Zinzendorf's approach, which can be called a hermeneutic of modesty, is a *de facto* retrieval of the apophatic tradition. He argued that human inability to properly formulate ideas about the divine, from whom we are separated by an unbridgeable gulf, and the limits of human rationality, should cautions us in our claims to know God and God's will for others. The contribution Zinzendorf makes to the development of a Moravian approach to pluralism is one that emphasises the provisionality of human discourse, a human-centred Christology in which the divine in concealed amidst his revelation, and an eschatology of surprise. The Moravian approach, this writer claims, offers a more suitable way to deal with revelation and Christology as critical issues in interfaith relations.

A Moravian Theology of Pluralism and the Challenges to Caribbean Theology

A Moravian approach to pluralism, then, which **section three** develops and seeks to apply to Caribbean theology, is one that has four distinct features or imperatives: (1) the imperative to dialogue as a means to unity and the discovery of truth, (2) the imperative of modesty as a consequence of the incarnation and the enduring gulf between human and divine beings, (3) a human-centred Christology that precludes the need to speculate on Jesus' divinity and (4) eschatology of surprise that emphasises an openness to the future of the world and to the ultimate significance of other religions.

The contextual relevance of the Moravian approach to pluralism is demonstrated in the challenges that it presents to theological discourse in the Caribbean. When Caribbean theology takes on board the imperatives of the Moravian approach to pluralism there are several consequences. First, by developing an approach to pluralism from the point of view of one's own tradition, the Moravian approach challenges us to re-think the starting point of the regional discourse. Secondly, by taking cognizance of the conversation between the religions issuing from the loss of Christian claim to superiority, the Moravian approach challenges Caribbean theology to re-think the relevance to pluralism of the action-reflection-action method to theology. Thirdly, the human-centred Christology of the Moravian approach challenges Caribbean theology to consider what the modesty in the circumstances of Jesus' birth and the work of the man Jesus has for relationship with other religions. It seems that the notion of preferential option for the poor who belong to other religions is an ethic with christological implications. Fourthly, the Moravian approach to eschatology presents two challenges to Caribbean theology. The first is to be more concrete in its perception of utopia and the second is to reformulate the notion of Christian utopia because current formulations have the anti-plural implication of the eventual dissolution of all other religions apart from Christianity. A plural context seems to require a plural conception of utopia, which relieves us from the burden of a single utopian dream. The Moravian approach to pluralism, then, is more amenable to dialogue, offers a more suitable way to deal critical interfaith issues and is able to reshape the discourse on Caribbean theology to show greater sensitivity to religious plurality.

To Jean-Marie, Lesley-Ann, JoAnna and Jordana

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS xii

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS xiii

CHAPTER

1. INTRODUCTION 1

1.1: Religious Pluralism as a Theological Problem 1

1.2: Theology and the Enlightenment 2

1.3: Hermeneutical Considerations 4

1.4: Towards a Moravian Theology of Pluralism 10

1.5: Religious Pluralism and Caribbean Theology 12

1.6: Hurdles to be Crossed by a Moravian Theology of Pluralism . 14

1.7: Moravian Resources for a Theology of Pluralism 17

1.8: Aims of the Study 19

SECTION I

PLURALISM AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

2. THE IMPACT OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT 24

Introduction 24

2.1: The Agenda for the Discourse on Pluralism 25

2.2: Rationalism and Deism: Enlightenment Presuppositions 28

2.3: Kant's Critique of Reason 32

2.4: Liberal Theology: Harvesting Rationalism for Theology 35

2.4.1: Historical Relativism: A Precursor to Theological Relativism 39

2.5: Pietism: Excluding Reason from Matters of Faith 44

Conclusion 46

3. RECENT THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PLURALISM: HOW AMENABLE ARE THEY TO DIALOGUE? 49

Introduction 49

3.1: Hick's Approach to Pluralism: A Commitment to the Other.. 52

3.1.1: Critique of Hick: 58

3.2: D'Costa's Approach to Pluralism: The Theoretical Basis 62

3.2.1: A Commitment to One's Own Tradition: A Trinitarian Approach to Pluralism 63

3.2.2: Critique of D'Costa 67

3.3: Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Approach 74

3.3.1: Critique of Lindbeck 82

Conclusion 88

SECTION II

THE MORAVIAN TRADITION AS A SOURCE FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

4. A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MORAVIAN CHURCH 92

Introduction 92

4.1: Towards a Brief History of the Moravian Church 93

4.1.1: The Hussite Pre-History 94

4.1.2: The Birth of the Unitas Fratrum 98

4.2: Theology of the Old Unitas Fratrum 102

4.2.1: The Emergence of Comenius 106

4.3: Zinzendorf and the Renewed Church 108

Conclusion 113

5. COMENIUS AS A SOURCE FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM 115

Introduction 115

5.1: Sources of the Intra-Moravian Hermeneutical Tension 116

5.2: Comenius' Universal Principles and Plurality 120

5.3: Creation as a Theological Basis for Harmony 123

5.3.1: Comenian Anthropology and Religious Conflicts... 124

5.3.2: Engendering Harmony as a Continuation of Creation 127

5.3.3: Creation as a Basis for a Theology of Pluralism ... 129

5.4: Revelation and Religious Pluralism 131

5.4.1: Criteria for Determining Divinely Inspired Books ... 135

5.4.2: Harmony Between the Three Arenas of God's Revelation 139

5.4.3: Comenius' Epistemology of Harmony 143

5.5: Eschatological Imperatives for Harmony 146

Conclusion 149

6. THE INTERFAITH APPLICATION OF COMENIUS' HERMENEUTICS OF HARMONY..... 152

Introduction 152

6.1: Sources of Comenius' Anthropology 153

6.1.1: Attitudes to Difference: Comenius and the Pluralists 157

6.1.2: Attitudes to Dialogue: Comenius and the Pluralists.. 161

6.1.3: The Role of Tradition in Dialogue 165

6.2: Attitudes to Eschatology: Comenius and Hick 167

6.3: Revelation: A Problem Between the Religions 170

6.3.1: The Qur'an as Divine Revelation?: Comenius' Approach 171

6.3.2: The Contemporary Relevance of the Comenian Criteria 174

Conclusion 176

7. ZINZENDORF'S THEOLOGY AS A SOURCE FOR A THEOLOGY OF PLURALISM..... 179

Introduction 179

7.1: Challenges to Reading Zinzendorf in Light of Pluralism 181

7.2: Zinzendorf – An Apophatic Theologian? 185

7.3. The Presuppositions of Zinzendorf's Theological Modesty..... 196

7.4: The Meaning of Theological Modesty 199

7.4.1: Application of Zinzendorf's Theological Modesty.... 202

7.4.2: Zinzendorf's Anthropology..... 203

7.4.3: Modesty and Soteriology 208

7.4.4: Zinzendorf's Modest Christology 214

7.4.5: The Divinity of Jesus 218

7.4.6: Modesty in Christian Mission 224

Conclusion 229

8. THE INTERFAITH APPLICATION OF ZINZENDORF'S THEOLOGY..... 233

Introduction 233

8.1: Provisionality in Zinzendorf's Theology 234

8.1.1: Provisionality and Interfaith Dialogue 237

8.2: Zinzendorf's Christology and Pluralism 240

8.3: Pluralism and the Eschatology of Surprise 248

Conclusion 253

SECTION III

A MORAVIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY

9. HARMONY, MODESTY, DIALOGUE: FEATURES OF THE MORAVIAN THEOLOGY OF PLURALISM..... 256

Introduction 256

9.1: Features of the Moravian Theology of Pluralism 258

9.2: Dialogue: The First Imperative 262

9.2.1: Revelation Through Dialogue 264

9.2.2: Harmony in Revelation 269

9.3: Epistemological Modesty: The Second Imperative 271

9.3.1: The Concealment of God in the Incarnation 273

9.3.2: Divine Concealment and Interfaith Relations 275

9.3.3: Divine Concealment and Truth 279

9.3.4: Divine Modesty and Dialogue 280

9.4: A Human-Centred Christology: The Third Imperative 284

9.5: An Eschatology of Surprise: The Fourth Imperative..... 288

9.6: Summary 292

9.7: Challenges to the Moravian Approach 293

10. CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF A MORAVIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM..... 298

Introduction 298

10.1: The Emergence of Caribbean Theology 301

10.2: Caribbean Theology and Religious Pluralism 307

10.3: Caribbean Theology and the Crisis of Relevance 311

10.4: A Moravian Theology of Pluralism: Drawing on Comenius and Zinzendorf 313

10.5: Rethinking Caribbean Theological Hermeneutics 315

10.6: Overcoming Methodological Hurdles..... 320

10.6.1: Towards a New Theological Method 321

10.7: Towards a Plural Christology: A Moravian Contribution ... 327

10.7.1: Objections to the Plural Christology 332

10.8: Towards a New Eschatology 334

10.8.1: Interreligious Harmony as Utopia 337

10.8.2: Beyond Interreligious Harmony – Surprise 343

Conclusion 346

11. CRITICAL ASSESSMENT..... 349

APPENDICES..... 365

BIBLIOGRAPHY..... 367

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the staff of Reece Library at Moravian College in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, the Chief Librarian at Library of the World Council of Churches in Geneva and the Archivist at the Moravian Archives at Muswell Hill in London. Thanks also to Bishop Joseph Cooper of the Moravian Church for his reading helpful suggestions to portions of the text. Most importantly, I wish to acknowledge with gratitude the help and support of my wife Jean-Marie.

ABBREVIATIONS

CCC	Caribbean Conference of Churches
CH	Celestial Hierarchy
DN	Divine Names
Ep	Epistole
Lk	The Gospel of Luke
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
MT	Mystical Theology
SCM	Student Christian Mission
TMDK	Trans-Atlantic Moravian Dialogue
WCC	World Council of Churches

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1: Religious Pluralism as a Theological Problem

One of the features of the modern era, to which Western theological discourse in general is learning to adjust itself, is the increasing incidence of tolerance between different religious traditions. This is not a wholly new phenomenon because for several centuries after its birth Christianity had the status of being a minority religion, a position it relinquished only during the Constantinian era. It is also true that during the time of the Ottoman Empire, Muslim Caliphs were graciously disposed to Jews and Christians, to whom the Qur'an refers as people of the Book (Sūrah 3:115-117). Notwithstanding the awareness of the existence of other religious traditions, Christian theology has generally not taken the other religions seriously to the point where the questions that they pose were taken up in Christian theological narrative. However, there is now a growing awareness that Christianity can no longer afford simply to disregard the theological perspectives of other religions because they are not just archaeological or historical facts but growing traditions whose assertions are appealing to a growing number of persons.[1] It is not just that several religions exist side by side, but they are challenged to engage each other in a context where there is a loss of traditional Christian claims to pre-eminent authority. The starting point of this study is the assumption that readiness to engage other traditions in dialogue, that is, to

---

[1]According to the figures compiled by David Barrett and others in the most recent edition of *World Christian Encyclopedia,* between the mid 1990's and mid 2000, the worldwide Christian community grew at a rate of 12.6 percent and the worldwide Muslim community at a rate of 19 percent. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 4.

ask questions and to re-think one's position in relation to questions asked, is an imperative for existence in a plural context.[2]

The loss of Christian pre-eminent authority has resulted from two related theological developments. **First**, there was the separation between philosophy and theology as a by-product of the efforts to domesticate Aristotelian philosophy in the late medieval period. As a result of this separation, theologians increasingly came to view the provinces of faith and reason as separate. In Ockham, for example, the entire attempt to synthesize faith and reason was undermined. His refusal to stretch knowledge beyond the bounds of ascertainable experience may have inaugurated the trend towards empiricism.[3] **Secondly**, and as a result of the first development, there was the obliterating of Christian claims to superior knowledge as a consequence of the enthronement of reason as the pre-eminent basis for determining truth. These two developments, which are precursors to the approaches to theology in the Enlightenment, form the basis for the modern approaches to pluralism.

1.2: Theology and the Enlightenment

From the point of view of theology, the Enlightenment represented the attempt to overcome the bias against a role for reason in matters of faith and revelation. It

---

[2] Theologians who seek to develop theologies of religious pluralism share this assumption readily. See, for example, Hans Kung, *et al*, *Christianity and World Religions: Paths to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), xviii-xix; Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999), 6; S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000), 7; Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997), 18.

[3] Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age, trans.* R. M. Wallace (London & Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1983), 147-150.

therefore gave birth to the modern problem of the relationship between scripture and history and to the rejection of unjustified claims to traditional Christian authority. By arguing that the central message of the Christian faith was amenable to reason, Locke and Toland set the stage for the commencement of a search for the development of the historical critical method of biblical interpretation and of the search for the historical Jesus. Hermann Samuel Reimarus (1694-1768) and David Friedrich Strauss (1808-74) are probably the most outstanding among modern scholars who used the historical critical method in the search for the historical Jesus. In a certain sense their work set the parameters for the question of the relationship between faith and history in modern theology.[4] The effect of Reimarus' approach was to exclude anything apparently supernatural from the biblical records. According to McGrath, the distinction he made between the historical Jesus and the fictitious Christ of dogma proved to be significant, the result of which was the quest for the historical Jesus out of rationalist suspicion that the New Testament portrayal of Christ was a dogmatic invention. This faith-history dichotomy and the corresponding questioning of the metaphysical understanding of reality have contributed to some Christians being cautious about making claims to finality for Christianity.[5] Thus theology came to occupy a defensive position, which was a complete turn about from the situation at the onset of the Enlightenment when those questioning the traditional claims to authority had to give the justification for their challenge. In this defensive posture, there were two kinds of theological responses. One was liberal theology and the other

---

[4] See as example of their argument *Reimarius: Fragments*, ed. Charles H. Talbert, trans. Ralph S. Fraser (London: SCM Press, 1971), 69-71; David Friedrich Strauss, *The Life Of Jesus Critically Examined* (London: SCM, 1973), 39-40

[5] Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Oxford & Vancouver: Blackwell, 1997), 367.

was pietism; the former committed to the use of rationalism and the latter questioning its role in matters of faith.

The problem of religious pluralism today derives its character from the retreat of religion into the private sphere and the levelling of the differences between the religions as a result of Enlightenment critique. In response, Christians have sought to develop theologies of pluralism as discourses about the extent to which traditional Christian assertions can be maintained in a plural context.[6] Different hermeneutical paths have been followed in response to the reality of pluralism

1.3: Hermeneutical Considerations

The task of developing a theology of religious pluralism today has to take account of three hermeneutical models already at work. First, there is the approach that may be termed a **commitment to the other**. This approach is predicated on the view that in order to do justice to the others in the different religious traditions, the Christian needs to surrender the claim to the superiority and finality of Christ and move towards a recognition of the independent validity of the other religions. A sample of the views of persons committed to this approach can be found in the publication *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness.*[7] The call to surrender the claim of Christian superiority is made on three grounds. First is the **historical** ground, which calls attention to the

---

[6] The connection between the Enlightenment critique and how the problem of pluralism is understood today can also be illustrated in the fact that Hick picks up Strauss's notion of myth in developing his view of the myth of the incarnation; compare John Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977), 167-185 with Strauss, *The Life of Jesus,* 39-40.

[7] John Hick & Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987).

limitation of all historico-cultural accounts of knowledge and religious beliefs and the difficulty of judging the truth claims of another culture and religion on grounds that do not meet their approval. The historical ground challenges us to find a way to relativize Christian faith-history. This is possible because many Christians already accept modern historical methods for understanding the Christian faith as well as other religious traditions as different ways of being human.[8] If we can accept the historical character of beliefs and conviction, it may not be necessary to maintain the notion of one tradition being normative for the rest. Historical consciousness suggests that the great religious traditions of the world are more or less on par, with each of them having a mixture of good and evil practices as part of their history. As Hick points out, each religious tradition "is a long-lived social reality that has gone through times of flourishing and times of decline; and each is internally highly diverse, some of its aspects promoting human good and others damaging the human family."[9]

The second ground, which is the **epistemological,** claims that the infinity and the ineffability of God forbid any one religion from claiming to have the final word about God. The religions all participate in Ultimate Mystery but that Mystery is not owned by any single religious tradition. The theological systems of the religions are responses to what has been perceived from the revelation of that Mystery. Theologies may be seen as "channels introducing those who ponder them, and especially those who subscribe to them, those who see their significance, to a truth that in turn is more

---

[8] Gordon Kaufman, "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* 5.

[9] John Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* 30.

than human; more than finite."[10] People who argue on this ground claim that to regard Christianity as final and absolute is a form of idolatry because that mistakenly elevates it to divine status and honour, the position that is reserved for God alone. The Divine Mystery remains always beyond our apprehensions or even the sum total of all human apprehensions. Therefore, any claim on the part of one religious community to have exclusive or unique knowledge becomes inadmissible.[11]

The third ground for the commitment to the other, as a theological approach, is an **ethical** one. It is the view that religions should be judged in relation to their commitment to the promotion of justice. In this view, a preferential option for those most in need might serve well as the context for a new meeting of the religions.[12] According to this approach, the answers to questions of revelation and truth and the place of Christianity among the world religions, "are not simply 'given' in the Christian scriptures and tradition; they must be worked out through the praxis of dialogue between the Christian tradition and that of other religions."[13] Knitter argues that as liberation theology has shown that we cannot begin to know Jesus unless we are following him, so also it can clarify the conditions for the possibility of claiming any kind of uniqueness or exclusiveness for Jesus. Such uniqueness and

---

[10] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Idolatry: In Comparative Perspective," *Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, 56.

[11] Stanley Samartha, "The Cross and the Rainbow: Christ in a Multireligious Culture," *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* 75.

[12] Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness,* xii.

[13] Paul F. Knitter, *"No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1985), 206.

exclusiveness "can be known and then affirmed only 'in its concrete embodiment,' only in the praxis of historical involvement."[14]

Critics of the above pluralist approach see its weakness in its attempt to occupy a high hermeneutic ground immune from the biases of a particular tradition. They claim that in reality this pluralistic approach is a product of the Western liberal theology and the Age of Reason. The pluralist hermeneutical perspective, then, is to be set within the context of the science versus religion debates of the Enlightenment period, which led to a belated acceptance of the new scientific knowledge and the enthronement of reason. The philosophical turn to the subject, as evident in Cartesian philosophy, is the predication of scientific knowledge and is the basis for the epistemology on which the pluralistic approach to theology is predicated.[15] The emergence of the new epistemology in the Enlightenment meant that Christianity came to be seen as a surviving tradition, which was in the process of retreating from the public sphere to occupy a more private habitation. The suspicion of the predominantly Western character of the discourse becomes clear when at the precise moment of the recognition of other cultures and religions, it is "none other than the moment of total obliteration of other cultures by Western norms and categories, with their freight of Christian influence."[16]

---

[14] Knitter, *No Other Name*, 196.

[15] John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1996), 174.

[16] Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," 175.

Another perspective claims to stand on a firmer hermeneutical ground in developing a theological approach to pluralism. This second approach, the **commitment to one's own tradition,** seeks to come to terms with the significance of other religious traditions but is at the same time keen to affirm the importance and significance of Christian uniqueness. This perspective, therefore, reflects dissatisfaction with the approach in which the uniqueness of the revelation of God in Jesus is bracketed. It maintains that the affirmation of the uniqueness of Christian revelation is fundamental to what it means to be Christian. Only when that is affirmed can there be a real dialogue with other religions, which in their own way will make claims, some of which may be contrary to Christian beliefs. Moreover, an approach to pluralism with a clear commitment to one's own tradition does not run the risk of appearing to stand in a neutral position but recognizes that each hermeneutical approach stands within a given tradition. The approach that favours a commitment to one's own tradition benefits from the insight that calls attention to the illusion of the liberal project, which is the belief that it is possible to establish a tradition-free rationality. Liberalism, which began as an appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality, against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition, has itself been transformed into a tradition.[17] For those committed to this second approach, a major task of a theology of pluralism is to discover the resources available to a particular tradition for responding to the reality of religious plurality.

Coming to terms with plurality from the point of view of one's own tradition will not necessitate taking a posture of exclusivism, which finds theological justification in the

---

[17] Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* (London: Duckworth, 1988), 335.

understanding of revelation associated with Barth. In fact, the rejection of Barthian exclusivism is something shared by the two hermeneutical perspectives in question. What the approach of commitment to one's own tradition insists on is that appropriate theological resources are available within the Christian tradition for responding to the challenges of plurality. For example, D'Costa seeks to establish a Roman Catholic trinitarian orientation to the other religions as recognition of the tradition specific nature of all thought and practice. He draws upon the documents of that tradition because, in his view, it is through that tradition and the authority of the church that the trinitarian resources become available.[18]

The third hermeneutical model, the **cultural-linguistic approach** is one that aims to treat the religions as being ultimately significant on their own terms. The proponents of this approach are committed to showing the value of other religions while remaining committed to their own. The weakness of this approach, as we shall see, is that it does not address the ways in which the religions must engage each other.

This research is situated in the second of these three approaches. The aim is to develop a theology of religious pluralism from the point of view of the Moravian Church. In this approach our chief resources will be the theological positions of Comenius and Zinzendorf, which were formulated in the period between 1600 and 1760. More than any other, these two personalities have contributed to the stockpile of theological material within the Moravian tradition.

---

[18] Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of the Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 2000), 99-100.

1.4: Towards a Moravian Theology of Religious Pluralism

By situating itself within the Moravian tradition, this study recognizes that in doing theology one cannot stand outside a given tradition or context. However, the choice of the Moravian tradition as the point of departure for a theology of pluralism is not arbitrary but is based two important grounds. **Firstly**, it is based on the view that the Church's competence for interfaith relations has not been fully explored. The Moravian Church is one of the oldest surviving churches in Protestantism and carries within its self-understanding a history of genuine commitment to other traditions. Having overcome many challenges to its identity during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, not unlike the challenges that plurality poses to Christianity, it may be that other traditions can learn from the Moravian approach to other religions. The Comenian emphases on harmony and dialogue when dealing with other religions and Zinzendorf's theological modesty have not yet been explored as suitable bases on which to develop an approach. It is this possibility of finding within that tradition fresh resources for dealing with pluralism that gives the study its broader academic relevance.

Moreover, from a systematic theological point of view, no serious attempt has been made in the Moravian Church to undertake a full reflection of this nature. Notwithstanding these theological resources, one misses any cogent presentation of issues relating to other religions in the proceedings of the Moravian Synods. It would appear that the Moravian Church has not yet taken a theological position on the question of the ultimate significance of other religions. This study aims to draw on the resources of the Moravian tradition in developing a theology of religious

pluralism, recognising the reality of encounter with the other religious traditions and the need to take them seriously.

Secondly, recent approaches do not offer a suitable framework for pluralism because critical questions relating to revelation, Christology and eschatology, which the plural context put to Christianity, are either left unanswered or answered at the expense of taking seriously the claims of other traditions. As Sections II and III below will show, there are resources within two Moravian sub-traditions, the Comenian and the Zinzendorfian, that give new insights into these doctrinal questions. For example, Comenius overcomes the problem of revelation because he construes revelation as occurring in three arenas, the mind, the world and scriptures. He is therefore able to be more categorical on the question of whether other religions can be a source of divine revelation without undermining Christian beliefs. Zinzendorf's modest approach to doctrines overcomes the problem of divinity of Jesus by centring his focus on the humanity of Jesus. He argues that Jesus' divinity is not a matter for consideration by non-believers. Rather, it is a subject that the Holy Spirit makes clear to those whom he leads to faith in Jesus. Jesus' divinity is therefore of secondary significance.

It seems vital, then, that in our search for a theology of pluralism we remain in touch with our tradition, which means engaging in an intra-communion dialogue. This is critical given the contextual nature and the hermeneutical procedure of this reflection. The point of departure is the Moravian tradition, which, as part of the Christian community, needs to come to terms with the questions that the presence of other religions put to it. The next step is to question the Moravian tradition and re-read its

theological resources in light of the plural context. In doing so, resources relevant to the plural context are retrieved, which then provide the basis for the third hermeneutical step; that is, to commit the Moravian tradition to engage the other religions in a process that is consistent with its own theological history. However, the aim is not to construct a theology of religious pluralism as a meta-narrative applicable to all religions and to all contexts. Rather, the study limits itself to the Caribbean context and refers in particular to Islam.[19] This modest and regional-specific approach is consistent with the modesty that is part of the Moravian tradition and underlines the fact that a given theology of pluralism has limited contextual application.

1.5: Religious Pluralism and Caribbean Theology

By situating itself in the Caribbean context, the study enters into the debate on Caribbean theology, the framework for which was set in the period between 1971 and 1981. The positions in the books *Out of the Depths* and *The Troubling of the Waters,* attempted to free Caribbean theological discourse from the traditional assumptions and emphases in European theological tradition as it was experienced in the Caribbean. These studies recognized the need to annul the marriage between theology and colonialism, which produced the unwanted offspring of a tendency to overlook the history and the realities of the Caribbean context. Another significant publication was *From Shore to Shore: Soundings in Caribbean Theology,* written *by*

[19] Islam has been the fastest growing religion for the last three decades and is one of the world religions present alongside Christianity in the Caribbean region. For details on the growth and spread of religions see David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, eds., *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World* Vol.1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

William Watty.[20] It could be said that these publications represented the theological side of the regional struggle for independence, indigenization and liberation. They reflected a paradigm shift in theological discourse and forced a re-thinking of the way theology was articulated in the region. Benefiting from the trend already set in Liberation Theology in Latin America, the discourse that emerged served to underline the authenticity of the Caribbean as a context for theological reflection. It was a discourse that had de-colonization and the struggle for a unique Caribbean identity as assumptions at the centre of its narrative.

In a certain sense, this study is seeking to underline the issue of religious pluralism as a much more significant factor in the regional theological discourse than Caribbean theology has so far shown. The intention is to give another dimension to Caribbean theology by showing the manner in which the regional discourse can take on board the issue of religious plurality. In the initial stages of the Caribbean theological project there was the awareness of the cultural significance of the Afro-Caribbean religions (e.g. Rastafarianism, Kumina, Santeria), and subsequent papers dealt with the issue of religious plurality. Watty in particular called attention to the need to consider the insights of other religions as part of the process of developing a Caribbean theology.[21] However, as was the case with liberation theology, the early attempts at Caribbean theology did not seriously engage the question of the challenge

---

[20] Since Watty's publication the only major attempts to articulate a theology of the Caribbean were, Noel Erskine, *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective* (New York: Orbis, 1981) and Lewin Lewin Williams, *Caribbean Theology* (New York & Washington DC: Peter Lang, 1994). Neither publication undertakes any serious treatment of inter-faith issues.

[21] For example, Dale Bisnauth, "Religious Pluralism and Development in the Caribbean: Questions," *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 4, No. 2 (1982): 17-33. See for example, Watty, "The De-Colonization of Theology," in *Troubling of the Waters, ed. Idris Hamid* (San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printry, 1973), 69-70. More recently Williams has suggested that the notion of "Radical

that the other religions pose for that theological discourse. In its reaction to the imperial European missionary theology, Caribbean theology overlooked an important aspect of the Caribbean context, by failing to insert issues relating to other faiths in the centre of its discourse. This means that the theological discourse was impaired because it was less than profound in the manner in which it dealt an important aspect of its context. Further reflection has shown, though, that a more serious engagement with the context is needed if the discourse were to maintain a cutting edge of relevance. As this study will show, when Caribbean theology takes seriously the issues of religious plurality, its starting point, its hermeneutical method, its Christology and its understanding of utopia have to be articulated in a different way.

The assertion, then, is that the credibility of the regional Christian discourse today must be judged in relation to the seriousness with which it engages the questions that other religious traditions raise. It seems clear that consideration of what other religions mean for Caribbean theology is a challenge that cannot be sidestepped if the regional theological reflection is to develop and so move beyond any intra-regional myopic tendencies.

1.6: Hurdles to be Crossed by a Moravian Theology of Pluralism

A theology of religious pluralism developed from the point of view of the Moravian tradition, however, faces two critical hurdles. The **first** relates to the scope of application of a particular theology of pluralism. An approach developed in relation to Islam, for example, may have to be different from an approach developed in

---

Monotheism" may offer some clue for an approach. The inadequacy of this for the Caribbean will be looked at in the final chapter of the research.

relation to Buddhism because each tradition puts a different set of questions to the Christian community. It is therefore difficult to construct a theology of pluralism that has every other known religious tradition in view. Apart from being preposterous, such an approach would falter on at least two grounds. In the first place, it would fail to take notice of the differences between the other traditions, which amounts to casting every religious tradition into a single mould. Secondly, the failure to take cognizance of the differences would prevent the Moravian tradition from harvesting credible resources in the other religions that could serve the development of its self-understanding in a plural context. In effect, such an approach would amount to a closure of serious dialogue. Different theological approaches, then, have to be developed in response to each religious tradition that is encountered. A theology of religious pluralism should therefore not only be clear about its contextual biases but also its limitations. This study refers in particular to Islam but where appropriate references will be made to Hinduism and Buddhism because of the experiences of encounter between Moravians and these traditions.[22]

The **second hurdle** that developing a theology of pluralism from the point of view of the Moravian tradition faces is a question of ecclesiology. The issue of ecclesiology is important not only for inter-Church but also for inter-faith relationship. Within Christianity this problem can be illustrated with reference to two somewhat recent developments. One is the 1950 meeting of the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches that accepted an understanding that membership in the WCC

---

[22]Coming to terms with the Afro-Caribbean Religions is a particular challenge and of relevance to Caribbean theological discourse but it is outside the specific scope of this study. For further reading on the question of Christian theology and Afro-Caribbean religions see Sankeralli Burton, ed. *At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity* (St. James: Trinidad & Tobago: CCC, 1995)

"does not imply that each church must regard the other members churches as churches in the full sense of the word."[23] The other event was a caution issued in 2000 by the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith of the Roman Catholic Church concerning the use of the terminology "sister churches".[24] Implicit in these two events is a questioning of the ecclesiological authenticity that some Churches may claim. The question to be faced is whether a given ecclesial community is Church in the full sense of the word, and therefore constitutes an authentic tradition from which a particular approach to theology may develop. From an interfaith point of view, the differences in ecclesiology in Christianity mean that to engage Christians in dialogue is to discourse on several fronts at the same time. It seems, however, that the onus is on the particular tradition to indicate the unique resources that it has to contribute to theological debate. The differences in ecclesiology and theological approaches that we find within the Christian tradition should not alarm us, however, because they too belong to the nature of pluralism itself.

Since theological thought and Christian practice are tradition-specific, the response to other faiths has to be formulated in terms of a reflection on the resources of a given tradition. In this way the tradition takes seriously its own life and history, which have combined to make the tradition what it is. This intra-tradition reflection and dialogue seems to be a prerequisite for engaging the other religions because recognition of the other presumes an awareness of self. The question, then, is what resources are there within the Moravian tradition, which may provide that tradition in particular and the

---

[23] Vitaly Borovoy, "The Ecclesial Significance of the WCC: The Legacy and Promise of Toronto," *The Ecumenical Review* 40, Nos. 3-4 (July-October 1988): 505.

[24] *The Tablet* 2 (September 200): 1167.

wider Christian tradition in general, with the basis for developing an appropriate response to plurality.

1.7: Moravian Resources for a Theology of Pluralism

Today the Moravian Church, or Unitas Fratrum, comprises twenty Provinces and Affiliated Provinces located primarily in Africa, the Caribbean, Europe and North America. The Moravian Church traces its origins to the attempts at the first Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church in Bohemia during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. The most outstanding leader of that reform was Jan Hus, who was put to death by burning at the Council of Constance in 1415. Within a few years after his death the movement that he inspired divided into two main groups, both of which understood themselves as standing in the Hussite tradition. The Unitas Fratrum or Moravian Church emerged to become a worldwide community as part of the further break-up of that tradition.

Throughout the course of its history the Moravian Church has developed significant resources in a number of areas that have facilitated its survival and accommodation. This is especially true of the Counter-Reformation and Enlightenment periods. The **main resource**, then, that the Moravian Church can draw on, is the theological ideas developed during these two periods, which have also significantly affected theological thought. In this regard the first port of call for developing an appropriate theological response is the works of Bishop Jan Amos Comenius and Bishop Nicholas Ludwig Count Zinzendorf, who were the main persons to formulate the Moravian responses to those crises and who aimed to fashion a clear Moravian identity.

Another important Moravian resource for a theology of pluralism is the formula, "In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity," which is the most popular expression of Moravian self-understanding. In many respects an aspect of a unique Moravian identity subsists in this formula, which as a 1914 publication on Moravian theology notes, can be traced back to Comenius: "Our guiding principle is the motto of the Moravian Bishop and Educator, Comenius: 'In essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity'."[25] However, the formula does not appear in the Church Order of the *Unitas Fratrum,* the publication that outlines the main theological positions of the Moravian Unity.[26] Yet despite its non-appearance in official positions of the Unity Synods, the formula has enjoyed a privileged place in the piety and popular perceptions of the Moravian Church. As the Moravian Church seeks to come to terms with the challenges of pluralism the significance of this formula for developing a Moravian theology of religious pluralism must then be considered.

---

[25] Augustus Schultze, *Christian Doctrine and Systematic Theology* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church College, 1914), iv. In the 1979 reprinting, the editors noted that this publication had been for more that half-a-century the most definitive statement of the theology of the Moravian Church in English. The formula is used also in several publications meant for popular reading. For example, it is used in *The Moravian*, a monthly publication of the Provinces of the Moravian Church in North America, as well as on several Internet websites of Moravian Churches.

[26] It appeared in the American editions of the Church Orders of 1907, 1911, and 1924 but it is not clear why the formula has been excluded from the official publications subsequent to 1924. According to Vernon Nelson (the Moravian Archivist in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, in an undated and unpublished article entitled "The Slogan, 'in essentials unity, in non-essentials liberty, in all things charity' " in Moravian Archives in Bethlehem), the official attitude towards the formula changed after the 1930 publication of an article in the *Moravian Messenger* (an official organ of the Moravian Church in the United Kingdom), which cast doubt on the Moravian origins of the formula. In that article Blanford noted that the formula belongs to the period of the Reformation and "has been traced to the writing of one... Rupertus Melderius" (J. H. Blanford, "In Essentials, Unity; in Non-Essentials, Liberty; in All Things, Charity," *The Moravian Messenger* XL, II (November 1930): 125. According to Blanford, the Moravians were mistaken in thinking that the formula was their own invention and property.

These two sources for a Moravian theology of pluralism do not exhaust the possible sources within the Moravian tradition. However, apart from the fact that they are among the most significant theological resources, they have not hitherto received as detailed a consideration in relation to pluralism as will be given in this study.[27]

1.8: Aims of the Study

Clarifying how to relate theologically to the other religions is a challenge for each tradition within Christianity. In order to do so, each must determine whether it has the resources and the bases on which to rely for this theological task. With that in mind, there are three major tasks that this study aims to accomplish. **The first,** to which the second chapter is dedicated, is to locate the emergence of the issue of pluralism as a

---

[27]There are two additional sources to which allusions will be made in this study, but which cannot be considered in full. One is the extensive experience in diaconal work that the Moravian Church has acquired in dealing with people of other faiths, particularly in Africa, Palestine and Tibet. One project that symbolized the commitment of the whole Unitas Fratrum is the Leper Home that was established in Jerusalem in 1865. This work is particularly important, not only because the project has made an outstanding contribution towards the elimination of leprosy, but also because it symbolised the century-long commitment of the Moravian to working with Muslims. (Other ventures were initiated in Africa and Surinam.) The Director of the Home reported that of the eighty lepers that were believed to be in Palestine in 1926, thirty of them (26 of whom were Muslims) were under the care of the Moravians. This self-understanding of commitment to service is itself derived from two Moravian sub-traditions. One is the puritanical work ethic of the Ancient Unity, which was practiced in Bohemia, and the other is the pietistic missionary zeal that swept across Germany in the early parts of the eighteenth century. It is noteworthy, however, that the areas of *diaconia* and missionary activities provide the bases for some of the most contentious relationships between Muslims and Christians. Both religions see themselves as having a global mission, which makes for keen rivalry between the activists. Muslims have viewed the medical and educational work of Christians among them as amounting to a new form of crusade. It seems evident that some of the most virulent anti-Western nationalists in the Islamic world learned their secular nationalism in missionary schools. This naturally raises questions about the character of Moravian witness among Muslims and the implication of that witness for a theology of religious pluralism. The other resource for developing a Moravian theology of pluralism is the litanies of the Church. The Moravian Book of worship boldly asserts that Islam is "close to [Christianity] in heritage and faith." Although no justification is given for this assertion, analysis of Moravian perceptions of Islam over the years shows a gradual development towards this positive view. Zinzendorf noted that Muslims, like Jews, believe that there is one God, even though they excluded Jesus or denied his true form and nature. This position has its precursor in the ambivalent position that we see in Comenius. He reportedly referred to Islam as, a blind cave of errors mixed from Judaism and Christianity. However, in his *Consultation for Reform* he espouses a much more tolerant view, believing that the Jews and the Muslims should be approached with respect and in a way that does not offend. What is clear, though, is that in the liturgical life of the church there has emerged a theological attitude of tolerance to people of other faiths that can also provide further basis for elaborating a fully developed theology of religious pluralism.

modern theological problem. Although it could be argued that semblances of the modern problem began to emerge in William of Ockham (14th century), it became full blown during the Enlightenment (18th century). In responding to the challenge of pluralism different kinds of theologies of pluralism have been formulated. In chapter three we will look at those of Hick, D'Costa and Lindbeck as different examples of the kinds of theological approaches that are already available to the Christian community. However, we will show why from the point of view of the Moravian tradition a theology of religious pluralism will have to be formulated differently. This brings us to the **second** task, which is addressed in Section II. It is to show that the Moravian tradition has theological resources that provide a credible basis for developing a theology of religious pluralism. A theology of pluralism must respond to the challenge of showing that genuine Christian affirmations can be made in such a way that the theological right of other religions to exist is not at the same time brought in question or undermined. These resources, we will show, can be retrieved and applied to the development of Christian theologies of religious pluralism. After outlining a brief history of the Moravian Church in chapter four, we will look in chapters five through eight at the Comenian and Zinzendorfian resources that provide a number of insights having a bearing on relationship with people of other faiths. From an examination of the resources we conclude that the Moravian tradition offers two sets of ideas to the current discussion on religious pluralism. The first is Comenius' understanding of harmony in creation, anthropology and revelation, unity within and between the books of God and imperative dialogue with people of other faiths in order to determine truth. The other is Zinzendorf's apophatic notion of modesty, which is evident in his views on salvation, Christology, and Christian

mission. The tension between the Comenian and Zinzendorfian approaches, particularly in regard to eschatology, allows the Moravian theology of pluralism to operate with a plurality of utopian vision, which seems to be a demand of the plural context. The study, therefore, does not overlook the tension in the Moravian tradition arising from the different approaches of these two main personalities but shows how the theology of pluralism that is constructed must live with an intra-Moravian theological tension.

Given the finding of adequate resources, the **third** and final aim, which we take up in Section III, is to draw out the main features of the Moravian approach to pluralism and to look at the specific contribution that a Moravian theology of religious pluralism can make to Caribbean theology. The application of Moravian theology to the Caribbean is consistent with the need to read all theologies as contextual. When the Caribbean regional discourse takes pluralism seriously in a manner illustrated by the Moravian approach, which we outline in chapter nine, there are at least three consequences for Caribbean theology. These challenges we outline in chapter ten. The first is to re-visit the starting point of the discourse, which has not only concealed the tension between Christianity and the other religions in the region but has also overlooked the resources that could be harvested from within the traditions. A starting point situated in a specific tradition challenges the churches to dialogue with their own history as a prerequisite for entering the conversation between Christianity and the other religions. The second challenge is to re-visit the action-reflection-action approach, which in practice has overlooked the demand for dialogue in a plural context. That approach may have to yield ground to one that situates itself in the conversation that has emerged between the religions. A third challenge will be to re-

visit Caribbean Christology. Though the need for a plural Christology was recognized in the early ventures of the regional discourse, there was no serious attempt to come to terms with the fact there was a commitment to the liberation of the poor as an ideal in other religions. Caribbean Christology must be articulated in a language that maintains a commitment to Christ while at the same time being one that removes the sense of illegitimacy that has been conferred on those religions that have a similar commitment to justice for the poor. A fourth challenge to Caribbean theology is to re-conceptualise the notion of utopia as the goal of the theological task. The notion of Christian utopia as the goal of the contextual theology, which the Caribbean discourse has borrowed from liberation theology, seems to imply that all but the Christian faith will disappear at the end of history. The Moravian theology of pluralisms offers a Christian approach to utopia, which does not imply the disappearance of all but the Christian faith and yet at the same time does not compromise the conviction concerning the ultimate significance of the Christian faith.

There is a two-fold relevance to this study: it forces the Moravian Church to refashion its theological position in light of pluralism and lifts up fresh resources for constructing a theology of pluralism. However, the study does not pretend to offer a global narrative on pluralism. Rather, the discourse is biased towards a particular tradition and is developed in relation to a specific context.[28]

---

[28] Although Heim also aims to be tradition-specific, one of the weaknesses in his orientational pluralism is that he does not pay sufficient regard to the need to be context-specific. Heim, *Salvations,* 10. Dupuis's approach is also wanting because of the lack of specificity to the actual context he addresses. See Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 9.

SECTION I

PLURALISM AS A THEOLOGICAL PROBLEM

CHAPTER 2

THE IMPACT OF THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON THEOLOGICAL THOUGHT

Introduction

Religious pluralism refers to the situation in which there are different notions of God, different and sometimes conflicting claims to validity, superiority, truth and ultimate significance made by religions in a given cultural context. From the point of view of Christianity, the assertion of an equal claim to validity and truth among religions runs counter to the traditional Christian position that God has made himself known in Jesus in an unsurpassable way. The challenge that pluralism puts to Christian theology is to justify its claim to unsurpassable revelation, which means finding appropriate language for stating its position in a context of competing religious assertions. Several attempts have been made to establish such a framework, which has led to the development of theologies of pluralism. Attention has been called to the Western theoretical nature of the theological discourse on pluralism. It is seen as the intellectual framework in which the religious order that resulted from the immigration into Europe from the East and the South during the 1960's is depicted.[1] Adrian Hastings notes that at the precise moment people in the West were turning their aspirations to the pluralist idea, the rest of the world was moving with equal suddenness towards a unitary and anti-plural model.[2] The discourse on pluralism is

---

[1] Adrian Hastings, "The Relationship of Theology to Religious Studies," in *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative,* ed. Ian Hamnett (London & New York: Routledge, 1997), 229. Hastings argues that John Hick must be read against that background.

[2] Hastings, "The Relationship of Theology to Religious Studies," *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*, 229.

therefore under suspicion because it resembles the unseen hand of the globalization project.

Our aim in this chapter is to show how the Enlightenment set the contours of the theological landscape on which today's discourse on pluralism is constructed. Understanding the emergence of pluralism as a theological problem will help us to see not only the weaknesses in contemporary approaches to it but also help us to construct an approach more amenable to the demand for dialogue, which, as we shall see, is an imperative of the plural context.

2.1: The Agenda for the Discourse on Pluralism

Since the publication in 1977 of the epoch making *Myth of God Incarnate,* the editor, John Hick, has been seen not only as the leading advocate of the pluralist position but also as setting the parameters and the agenda for contemporary discussion on religious pluralism.[3] His position may be summarized with three theses: the first is that the unitary Real is the goal of each religion. Secondly, there are different ways of experiencing and perceiving the Real. Thirdly, claims to knowledge of the Real are *on par* because the Real is beyond the range of our human conceptual ability. Beyond

---

[3] In the early stages of the description of approaches to pluralism the categories, exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist were used. Generally speaking, the exclusivist position was understood as one that insisted on salvation through faith in Jesus alone. The inclusivist makes two main claims. (a) The first is based on the idea of implicit faith. It implies that people of other faiths who are rightly disposed in their attitude would not be excluded from salvation because they would make a positive response to faith in Jesus if it is presented to them. (b) The second type of inclusivism holds that it will be possible beyond death, for people who did not have the opportunity in this life, to make the response of faith in Jesus. Neither of the two forms of inclusivism addresses the other religions as systems but only individuals within them. The pluralist position makes the bold step of asserting that in the major world religions, at least, a salvific transformation is taking place in the same manner in which it is occurring in Christianity. [See John Hick, "The Theological Challenge of Pluralism," in *Christianity and Other Religions,* ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Oxford: One World, 2001), 156-171.] According to Heim, John Hick is the best-known interpreter of the pluralist position. *Salvations,* 15.

all that, the discrepancies between the official Christian self-understanding and the realities of human life, between theological theory and observable fact, suggest the need to revise the traditional notion of Christian uniqueness.[4]

Critique of Hick, which has come from several directions, has therefore amounted to a critique of the pluralist approach. From the point of view of **sociologists,** there are at least three major concerns with the approach. In the first place, the pluralist approach is seen to generate a relativism that fractures belief into a bewildering variety of options, and makes it difficult to choose between the diversity opened.[5] The consequence of this is that those churches that have opted for a pluralistic approach to theology have sown the seeds of their own demise because they are the ones that have experienced the greatest numerical decline. Secondly, some sociologists see the idea of pluralism as carrying with it the price tag of perpetuating the marginality of religions, especially those of the East, under the guise of affirming diversity for all. The argument is that the notion of pluralism in theology has flattened the cultural landscape and has brought closure to the space in which the relationship between the transcendent and the incarnational can be articulated. As a product of Western culture, religious pluralism caters to the taste of the middle-class and facilitates its capacity for shopping around, thus acting as a consumer to the holy. The overstress on pluralism inevitably encourages privatisation of religion and theological illiteracy.[6] Thirdly, the pluralist approach is seen as tending towards orientalism. In the discourse

---

[4] Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths,* 13.

[5] Flanagan, "Theological Pluralism," in *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*, 91.

[6] Flanagan, "Theological Pluralism," 96.

on orientalism the Orient serves as the anti-type of Europe, for which religious pluralism is its liberal corrective. As a discourse, orientalism divides the globe unambiguously into the Occident and the Orient, the latter being seen as strange, exotic, sensual, irrational and potentially dangerous.[7] The Orient is the silent other that becomes incorporated into the common humanity and common history project of the West. Furthermore, it is no mere coincidence that the ideology of religious pluralism, as a global discourse, has appeared at the precise historical moment that capitalism became dominant on the world stage. Thus, the effort to make religion plausible through the emphasis on pluralism has had the fatal effect of rendering it implausible.

From **theologians**, on whom we shall focus in greater detail in the next chapter, the critique has also focused on the notion of pluralism. Hamnett rejects altogether the idea of pluralism on the grounds of its parasitic nature. According to him, pluralism discredits itself as an acceptable approach because it essentially seeks to erode a given tradition on which it is constructed.[8] However, the theological approaches that have been formulated in response to Hick's approach, operate with similar presuppositions to his. This is one of the reasons why they fall short of meeting the needs of traditions in the present plural context that wish to affirm their own tradition and at the same time maintain a genuinely open attitude to other religions. A fundamental step in critiquing and understanding contemporary approaches to pluralism, then, is to expose

---

[7] Kenneth Surin, "Towards a 'Materialist' Critique of Religious Pluralism: An Examination of the Discourse of John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith", in *Religious Pluralism*, 119-120. Bryan S. Turner, *Religion and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 31.

[8] Hamnett, *Religious Pluralism,* 7.

the presuppositions upon which they are based. Exposing the nature and extent of these presuppositions is critical to the development of an alternative approach.

2.2: Rationalism and Deism: Enlightenment Presuppositions

In seeking to understand the emergence of pluralism as a theological problem we shall start with the Enlightenment. It is important to note, though, that the theological developments in that period have their precursor in Ockham's separation of faith from reason, which played a major role in the dissolution of scholasticism. Blumenberg has argued that the preoccupation with the omnipotence of God in Ockham's theology may have given birth to the ascendancy of human reason as arbiter of truth. According to Blumenberg, abandoned by providence and made responsible for himself, man did not express disappointment at the loss of inherited cosmology but rather celebrated his being awakened from cosmic illusion. "The destruction of trust in the world made him for the first time a creatively active being, [and] freed him from a disastrous lulling of activity."[9] Ironically, the emphasis on the omnipotence of God, which was supposed to lead to faith, resignation and submission, had the opposite effect, "namely the development of the consciousness that precisely in what was supposed to be sacrificed there lay that which could not, in the interest of humanity, be relinquished."[10] Herein lie the turn to self and the rise of rationalism that would characterize the modern age, in which there is a suspicion of claims to truth that cannot be verified. This characteristic is part of the logic of plurality with which the present age is wrestling.

---

[9] Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age,* 139.

[10] Blumenberg, 156.

There are two main issues relating to the Enlightenment vis-à-vis theological pluralism that ought to be mentioned because of their underlying presence in modern approaches to pluralism. The first is **rationalism** and the turn to the self, which was exemplified in Cartesian philosophy. This development may well have set the trend towards individualism in modern thought. Most critically, however, by placing the burden for the most secure knowledge of truth in the mind of the individual, it unwittingly undercut the Christian notion of revealed knowledge as having pre-eminent authority. In an unintended way, then, Cartesian philosophy was the bane of the notion of the superiority of Christian revelation. Descartes argued that he was compelled to admit that there was not one of his former beliefs about which doubt may not properly be raised.[11] The turn to the self and the ascendancy of reason are fundamental presuppositions in eighteenth century theology, which had its most important developments in Locke and Toland. The significance of **deism,** the second issue, is that it provided theology with the theoretical framework and the language to critique traditional claims in religion and to subject them to the test of reason. Naturally, its most scorching effect was on traditional Christianity, which was seen as stumbling-block to reason. A major task for deism was to show that Christianity could be construed as amenable to reason. By subjecting everything in Holy Scripture to reason and by removing the notion of mystery from the Gospels, deism served notice that reason was the basis on which religion was to be judged and that the claim to Christian absoluteness and superiority could no longer rely on tradition. In the

---

[11] *First Meditation,* The Philosophical Writings of Descartes, vol. II, trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoof and Dugald Murdoch (London & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 12.

context of plurality, the ascendancy of reason to the position of final adjudicator of truth served as the basis for casting all religions into the same mould and ascribing to them relative salvific parity.

The removal of the category of mystery from God and the filtering of revelation through the lenses of reason were the most significant challenges that Toland presented to the church of his day. In a certain sense he furthered what Locke initiated in subjecting the assertions of Holy Scripture to rational critique. In deism, then, the relationship between faith, revelation and reason was re-ordered. From an epistemological point of view, reason was given pre-eminence over revelation because it was shown to be applicable retroactively to persons before the revelation in Jesus. Reason was capable of delivering all that humanity needed to know, whether it relates to knowledge of God, or knowledge of the world.

The subjugation of revelation and faith to reason was a major achievement of the Enlightenment that had significant consequences for theology. Theological discourse thereafter had to come to terms with the minor role of faith and revelation, and the loss of Christian superiority. Moreover, critical dogmas like the incarnation and the Trinity were placed under the severe test of reason. In a certain sense, the approaches to pluralism today are predicated on that redefinition. The next stage in the theological landscape was the re-assessment of the role of reason itself in matters of faith, in which Immanuel Kant and the proponents of liberal theology and pietism were the main protagonists.

Rationalism and deism as products of Enlightenment thought led to four kinds of development that crystallised the framework within which the modern approaches to pluralism are articulated. The first was Kant's critique of reason, which sought to come to terms with the claim that reason was the most secure basis for knowledge. He argued that traditional metaphysics, which was predicated either on revelation or on empiricism had to give way to metaphysics based on *a priori* predicates. The second was the development in liberal theology, which had its genesis in Schleiermacher who had his earliest religious influences in German pietism. In reacting to Kant's project, Schleiermacher shifted the emphasis and considered religion mainly in terms of the feeling of an impulse towards God as the common core in all religious experiences. This notion of a core experience has provided a framework for relating Christianity to the other religions. However, as we shall see, Barth argued that liberal theology did not take theology seriously on its own terms. Considering Barth's reaction is important because his approach highlights the kinds of challenges that we must reckon with in a plural context.

The liberal theological project facilitated the trend towards historical relativism, which can be treated as the third development in Enlightenment thought. The turn to history was the result of attempts to establish the core message of Christianity as amenable to reason. The consequent levelling of the differences between Christian history and the history of other religions, which in the twentieth century was best articulated by Ernst Troeltsch, had its early beginning in Reimarus who built on the deistic work of Locke and Toland. Historical relativism provides the justification for the pluralist approach to religious pluralism and can therefore be called the precursor to theological relativism. The fourth development we shall consider is pietism, which

sought to limit the role of reason in matters of faith. Zinzendorf, one of the most articulate proponents of pietism, argued that matters of the heart are beyond reason and it is ridiculous to try to subject the matter of divinity to human speculation.

2.3: Kant's Critique of Reason

The early Enlightenment thinkers, for example Locke and Toland, successfully brought into question the tradition that relied on revelation as the basis of the claim to truth. In its place there was constructed an epistemology that gave pre-eminence to rationalism and empiricism. It is within the context of this epistemological tension between the traditional and the "new" epistemology that Kant's critique is to be situated.[12] In his critique Kant was arguing on two fronts: one against the dogmatists and the other against the empiricists.

On one front, Kant was keen not to yield ground to the dogmatists, who for him were eminently represented by the school of Christian Wolff (1679-1754).[13] Directing his argument against this school, he argued that traditional metaphysics consisted largely of illusions arising from the attempt to acquire knowledge of all things, (e.g. the soul, the world as a whole, God), as they are in themselves, by reason alone, regardless of the limits of sensibility. This was the basis of his critique of the ontological argument for the existence of God. For him, the notion of existence could not be included in the concept of God and cannot be inferred from that idea alone. The existence of an object is always the presupposition of the truth of any assertion about it, and cannot

[12] Immanual Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* trans. Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), Introduction, 20.

[13] Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* Introduction, 2.

itself be assumed for the proof of such an assertion. Since the ontological argument, as the predicate of the other arguments, is unsound, he believed that the entire enterprise of proving the existence of God as an object of theoretical cognition should be given up as hopeless.[14]

On the other front, Kant wanted to defend metaphysics as a rigorous scientific discourse. In order to do so, he had to propose a way to knowledge with universal validity, which originated independently of experience.[15] He wanted to show that knowledge derived from particular experiences could not justify the claim to universal validity. This approach seems to have its roots in the parting of ways of theology and philosophy in the Middle Ages, where the close links between the two disciplines that seemed natural in scholasticism broke under the pressure of criticism.[16] In late scholasticism it was argued that reason was not in a position to undermine faith and that certain truths could not be established by traditional philosophy. In search for a secure basis for knowledge, Descartes established a tradition, in which Kant followed, that tried to provide a secure foundation *via* the examination of the human cognitive capacities.

The centre of Kant's metaphysics is that when concepts of pure understanding are applied to forms of sensibility, they give rise to sound principles of judgement. He used the term *a priori* knowledge to describe knowledge that is both universal and valid. He also described as "synthetic" the judgements that go beyond what can be

---

[14] Kant, The *Critique*, Introduction, 13.

[15] *Critique*, A1

[16] F. C. Copleston, *A History of Medieval Philosophy* (London: Methuen & Co., 1972) p. 231

known solely in virtue of the contents of the concepts involved in them. He argued that the problem of reason is, therefore, the question of how synthetic *a priori* judgements are possible. One of the accomplishments of Kant's transcendental philosophy was to show that fundamental principles of science are themselves based on *a priori* predicates, which are also the predicates of morality. For example, the conception that guarantees the certitude of the principle of causation, which is a law that the mind imposes as it interprets experience, is the same that guarantees the freedom of the human will.[17]

Kant also showed that reason was out of its depths when it came to the question of God because of the inability for anyone to know ultimate reality as it is in itself. The distinction he made between the phenomenal world (or world of appearance) and the noumenal world of ultimate reality proved helpful to those who were keen to show that things pertaining to God were not amenable to empirical investigation. As he argued, we cannot have knowledge of things as they are in themselves, that is, the noumenal aspects of the phenomena. This meant that notions like the existence of God or the immortality of the soul could not be proven nor could they be called objects of knowledge because we can only know what can be an object of possible experience. If that were not the case, then the dispute over God's existence and the

---

[17] Kant, *The Critique*, Introduction, 21. In developing his view on causation Kant was responding to Hume, who argued that our idea of cause is derived ultimately from the sensory experience of regularly conjoined events. (John Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human understanding,* XII, iii.) In response to this Kant argued that the concept of causation must exist *a priori* in order for us to have an objective experience (*Critique of Pure Reason*, A746/B774).

immortality of the soul would have been already settled.[18] Thus, Kant's critique served to put God outside the range of reason.

Kant's critique of rationalism was useful for the development of liberal theology. Benefiting from Aquinas' notion of revelation as the first principle of Christian theological discourse, liberal theology argued that its methodology should be seen as similar to that employed in the other sciences. According to Schleiermacher, exploration of issues relative to the subject matter of theology required as a matter of first principle a particular mode of faith, "that is, a particular way of being conscious of God."[19]

2.4: Liberal Theology: Harvesting Rationalism for Theology

A second development in the Enlightenment was liberal theology, which sought to harvest the fruits of rationalism for theology. The convention in the history of theological thought is to regard Schleiermacher as setting the basis upon which the modern liberal theological project, at least in the Protestant tradition, has been constructed. One of the reasons for this is that he is probably the first who sought to apply the rationalism of the Enlightenment to theology in a systematic way. He argued that, "theology is a positive science, the parts of which join into a cohesive whole through their common relation to a particular mode of faith, that is, a particular way of being conscious of God."[20] For him, theology was to be understood as

---

[18] *Critique of Pure Reason,* A750/B778.

[19] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study*, trans by T. N. Tice (Lewiston, Queenstown, Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990),1.

[20] Schleiermacher, *A Brief Outline of Theology,* Introduction, §1

religious affections set forth in speech.[21] In outlining his theological position, however, he insisted upon the peculiarity of the religious impulse, which was characterized by the sense of absolute dependence on God: that is, absolute dependence on "that which is the co-determinant of this feeling and to which we trace our being in such a state."[22] By construing the point of departure for theological reflection as the self-conscious feeling of dependence, Schleiermacher set the theological enterprise on a different footing from that of the Enlightenment. As far as he was concerned, Christian doctrine and talk about God was not something to do with knowledge because "God is given to us in feeling in an original way."[23] Accordingly, Schleiermacher understood that the world exists only in absolute dependence upon God who created it and by whom it is sustained.

Schleiermacher's approach remained central to the thought of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and Wilhelm Hermann (1846-1922). For Ritschl, faith was grounded on the individual religious experience and not on philosophy or propositional statements. In addition to this, he added significance to historical study of the gospels as the way to access the truths of the New Testament. He concluded that historical study could show that the notion of the kingdom of God was an ethical reality that is central to the Christian message and that it is an ideal that could provide the basis for the development of modern society.[24] However, later historical studies, especially as

---

[21] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, ed. H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999) I, § 15.

[22] Schleiermacher, *The Christian Faith*, I, § 4.

[23] Ibid., I,§ 4, 5.

[24] McGrath, *Christian Theology*, 102. The issue of historical relativism will be taken up in the section following.

undertaken by Troeltsch, cast doubt on the ability to make such judgements from a scientific-historical point of view. For his part Hermann, who taught Barth and Bultmann, believed it was neither dogmatic propositions nor words of scripture that provided the basis for faith but personal trust in Jesus.[25]

Twentieth century discourse on theology had to reckon with Karl Barth who views the development of theology from the Renaissance to Schleiermacher, as consisting of two main trends. One was the increasing humanism and deification of humanity. He argued that given the deep-seated anthropocentrism of Neo-Protestantism, modern theology had to be purged of the ideological twist by which it had become marred. With reference to Schleiermacher and the whole modern theological project, Barth said theology had become in modern times a cultural theology because it treated religion as something rooted in the general structure of the human spirit.[26] In his view, by treating theology as a function of civilization, liberal theology failed to take theology seriously on its own terms as having a subject matter amenable to rational and logical investigation. The second trend Barth noted in modern theology was the greater interest shown in faith rather than in the object of faith. Unlike the case in classical theology, the attention in modern theology was focussed on human piety, which meant God became a little more than the co-determinant of religious feeling and awareness.[27] In response to these trends Barth emphasised a supernatural

---

[25] David Ferguson, *Bultmann,* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), 12.

[26] Quoted in Thomas Torrance, *Karl Barth: An Introduction to His Early Theology, 1910-1931* (London: SCM,1962),58. It is to be noted, however, that Schleiermacher follows Zinzendorf in his understanding of the human being having absolute dependence on God. See section on Zinzendorf below.

[27] Torrance, *Karl Barth,* 59.

Christology, which when applied says, "obedience to God means that we become and are continually obedient to Jesus."[28] In other words, Barth understood being obedient to Jesus to mean becoming obedient to God as he is in his own essence. The lack of emphasis on Jesus in Schleiermacher's theology was for Barth a disturbing element. He therefore credits Zinzendorf with the re-establishment of the Reformation and New Testament insight of the pre-eminence of Jesus, which was missing not only in the context of the Enlightenment but also of secularised orthodoxy.[29]

Barth's bequest to modern theology has had a double effect on attempts to develop theologies of pluralism. Firstly, his approach represents a critique of the Enlightenment assumptions, in which there has been a tendency to imagine that one can stand free from the influence of a particular tradition.[30] Secondly, his approach is seen as a hindrance to serious dialogue because for him there is no coincidence between the Christian faith and religions. This antithesis between Christian revelation and religion, which remains in modern theology, gleams through current attempts to develop theologies of pluralism.[31] For this reason, there have been recent attempts to retrieve the roots of liberal theology and to re-read Schleiermacher in a way that is

---

[28] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* vol. II, 2, 568.

[29] Ibid., According to Barth, Zinzendorf "was perhaps the only genuine Christocentric of the modern age." (*Church Dogmatics,* IV, *The Doctrine of Reconciliation,*1, 683.

[30] According to McIntyre, liberalism began as an appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition but has itself been transformed into a tradition. A. McIntrye, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality,* 335.

[31] Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Religion: A Contested Site in Theology and the Study of Religion," *Harvard Theological Review*, 93, 1 (2000): 9. Fiorenza attributes this antithesis particularly to Emil Brunner's reading of Schleiermacher, but it seems also to have a source in Barth's critique of Schleiermacher. See for example the critique of D'Costa below.

more amenable to the plural context.[32] As this study will show, there is a way to understand revelation that can overcomes that antithesis. According to Comenius, revelation is given in three arenas, the mind, the world and scripture, all of which must operate in harmony. For Comenius, religion is the product of the desire for good that is located in the mind, which means religion presumes revelation and does not stand over against it.

2.4.1: Historical Relativism: A Precursor to Theological Relativism

The attempt in the Enlightenment to overcome the bias against a role for reason in matters of faith and revelation gave birth to the modern problem of the relationship between scripture and history. In a certain sense this is an extension of the liberal project but because of the correlation between this approach to history and the development of theological relativism in current approaches to pluralism, it is treated separately here as a third development in the Enlightenment. In the venture of Locke and Toland to articulate the central message of the Christian gospel the stage was set for the commencement of a search for the true Jesus, the historical Jesus. This was at the same time an attempt to show that what in Holy Scripture is called Christian revelation were natural phenomena that could be accessed through critical historical research. The challenge was to peel back the accretions of religious affections that Jesus' disciples constructed around him over the centuries of the Christian era. Mackey places Reimarus at the head of the list of modern scholars who set out on the quest for the historical Jesus. Reimarus was keen to rid the New Testament of the "dragons" of miracles and mysteries with the weapons of rationalism and

[32]Fiorenza, "Religion: A Contested Site," 7-34.

naturalism.[33] Consistent with the liberal theological project, the effect of his approach was to exclude anything apparently supernatural from the biblical records. In separating the intention of Jesus from the founding of the Christian religion, it meant that Christian history was not only effectively eclipsed but it also meant that there was a certain falsehood and presumptuousness in Christianity as it was known and practiced.

If Reimarus is the patriarch of the quest for the historical Jesus, then David Friedrich Strauss is one of its most outstanding apostles. Although writing in the early nineteenth century, after distinct theological reactions to the Enlightenment were already formulated, Strauss' *Life of Jesus Critically Examined* (1835) represents one of the most influential texts in the faith-history tension in modern theology. In this text he introduced the notion of myth to describe the facility that religious communities use to construct accounts of meaning in their sacred history. A narrative is described as myth when it "proceeds from an age in which no written record existed, but in which facts were transmitted through the medium of the oral tradition alone."[34] It is in respect of his notion of myth in particular that the work of Strauss is of relevance to our concern because with the distinction above he maintained that certain aspects of the Scriptures could not be considered historical. He put forward two criteria by which to discern historical validity. The first was that the narrative must be treated as unhistorical when it is irreconcilable with the known and universal laws governing the course of events. (This refers to the law of causality in which the

---

[33] James P. Mackey, *Jesus the Man and the Myth: A Contemporary Christology,* (London: SCM, 1979), 19.

[34] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus,* 52.

absolute cause never interposes upon the secondary causes and the law of succession by which a logical chronological and development order is followed.) Secondly, an account is regarded as being historically valid when it shows internal consistency and is not contradicted by other accounts.[35] Thus Strauss' life of Jesus research helped to provide the impetus for the recognition of the need to work out the principles and methods of biblical research. The challenge that theology then faced was to overcome that faith-history dualism, which in many respects is a heritage of the Enlightenment.

Ernest Troeltsch (1865-1923) made a serious attempt to come to terms with this dualism. He argued that the study of all religious history must be informed by three principles. The first was the principle of criticism, which states that no evidence is ever immune from challenge. The second principle was analogy, which presupposes that every event under consideration is similar to events we have experienced ourselves because only in this way can there be understanding. Thirdly, there must be correlation, which assumes that events are interconnected in a vast network of relations. Troeltsch was responding to the recent position in liberal theology, made first by Ritschl (1822-1889), that the proper starting point for theology is the New Testament presentation of Christian truths. It was previously argued that these truths could be recognized and endorsed by the historical enquirer making value judgements. According to Troeltsch, no estimate of Christianity could be formed except by reference to the total context. This historical method implied not only the recognition of the relative uncertainty of all historical knowledge but also that Christianity should be seen in its involvement with general history. Troeltsch

---

[35] Strauss, *The Life of Jesus*, 88-89.

regarded the traditional Christian approach to history as being dogmatic because it had a starting point wholly beyond the relativity of historical scholarship, on which it predicated its absolute positions. While the dogmatic approach to history is predicated on the notion of miracle, the historical method issued from the metaphysical assumption that all things, including the activities of the human mind, are totally interconnected. Moreover, the production of a scale of values, for example by the great cultural and religious traditions, depends on subjective judgements and can never be conclusive.[36]

The cumulative effect of Troeltsch's position was to raise the profile of a phenomenological approach to religion and to make it difficult for the historian to identify any one expression of religion as absolute for others.[37] This is the position

---

[36] Troeltsch, *Religions in History,* 22: 25. Although questioning the helpfulness of Troeltsch in coming to terms with religious phenomena in the twentieth century, Lehmann concludes that Troeltsch "prepares us to master the task of coming to a better understanding of religions in Europe in the twentieth century." See Hartmut Lehmann, "The Suitability of the Tools Provided by Ernst Troeltsch for Understanding of Twentieth-Century Religion," *Religion and Society* 27, 3/4 (1999): 295-299.

[37] Ferguson, *Bultmann*, 14. With a rationalist approach to history, one was challenged to take account of the fact that others who claim to believe in God made such claims on the basis of a belief in revelation also witnessed to in their scriptures. This meant that the absolute claims of Christianity could no longer be as easily justified. The difficulty of maintaining a privileged position for Christianity resulted in an interest in Oriental studies arising from the Enlightenment's rejection of the traditional Christian authority and the viewing the claims of Eastern religions on an equal footing alongside Christian claims. One pluralist who has argued consistently along these lines is Wilfred Cantwell Smith, whose work we shall look at in more detail later. The point Smith makes, however, is that observation has shown that the historical process of one religious tradition can be a significant part of and a function of what happens in another. On the basis of this intersection and overlapping of histories, Smith proposed that the religions become the subject rather than the object of a new theological approach. A theology that emerges from all the religions, as subject, would be "a theology of the religious history of humankind." [Wilfred C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981), 125.] Another pluralist, Gordon Kaufman, has argued along similar lines, asserting that if we understand human historicity as the context for the development of the religious traditions, then the Christian faith, like every other faith, will be seen as one perspective, one worldview, which has developed in and through a long history of interaction alongside other traditions. Consistent with this Troeltsch notes that rather than displaying any historical uniformity Christianity has had a different character in every age. See his essay, "The Absoluteness of Christianity", *Christianity and the Other Religions,* ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Glasgow: Collins, 1980), 16. Consequently, he suggests that Christian meanings and values should be taken to be the products of historical developments, instead of taken to be grounded

that Wilfred Cantwell Smith takes in his argument for a world theology. In his view, it was not until we come to Schleiermacher that the notion of Christian faith as one kind of faith out of many alternatives developed. Smith believed that faith as well as theology ought to be singular because they refer to common phenomena in human history.[38] Liberalism and a relativistic conception of history are the bases on which theological relativism is constructed, which is a problem that theology faces in an increasingly plural context. As D'Costa argues, the Enlightenment not only accounts in part for the demise of traditional Christian theology but in granting a type of equality to all religions ended up denying public truth to any and all of them.[39] As our critique of Hick will later show, by attempting to locate his starting point in a neutral ground beyond all the religious traditions, his theology of pluralism is as guilty of the hermeneutical naivety as it is of relativism. He gives a different account of the religions than the people of the religions themselves wish to give. It seems difficult, however, to demonstrate the claim for a meta-theology that offers a view beyond the particularity of a given tradition.[40] This study hopes to show that one can be genuinely open towards other religious traditions while having a clear hermeneutical starting point within one's own tradition. In other words, theological relativism is not a necessary consequence of openness to other religions.

---

simply and directly in divine revelation. (See G. Kaufman, "Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology," in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 8.

[38] Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 117.

[39] D'Costa, *The Meetings of Religions,* 2-4.

[40] Heim, *Salvations,* 105.

2.5: Pietism: Excluding Reason from Matters of Faith

A fourth development in the Enlightenment can be seen in pietism, which sought to deny rationalism any role in matters of faith. Historically speaking, pietism has been interpreted as co-terminus with the emergence of modern Protestantism because the movement is viewed as a reaction within Lutheranism and Calvinism. The pietistic movement reaches back to Johann Arndt's *True Christianity* and Phillip Jakob Spener's *Pia Desideria,* the works of Gottfried Arnold and Gerhard Tersteegen, all of which were concerned to raise the quality of Christian living to a higher level. These texts are regarded as setting the foundation of the thought of the movement.[41] Arndt embraced a theology that emphasised asceticism and mystical union with God but which was opposed to theological speculation. For him theology was not a mere science or rhetoric but a living experience and practice. True Christianity consists, "not in word or external show, but in living faith, from which arise righteous fruits."[42] In the late seventeenth century the university of Halle in Germany, where Christian Wolf was lecturing on the virtue of Enlightenment rationalism for theology, was also the leading school of pietism in Europe. It was from this centre that its influence spread to North America, especially in those areas settled by people from Germany, Holland, Switzerland and Scandinavia.

A leading apostle of pietism was the Lutheran (and later, Moravian) Zinzendorf who came under the influence of the Bohemian Brethren who migrated to Germany. His attitude to reason and rationality may be read as a reaction to the Enlightenment's

---

[41] Erb, *Pietists* , 3-4. Erb constructs a trajectory from Hus, to Luther, through Arndt to Spener (See, Arndt, *True Christianity,* trans Peter Erb (Toronto, New York: Paulist Press, 1979), xiii.

[42] Johann Arndt, *True Christianity*, trans. Peter Erb (Toronto, New York: Paulist Press, 1979), 22.

attack on revealed religion.[43] Indeed, it could be argued also that his critique of rationalism was a counter balance to the excessive claims to knowledge in his Enlightenment context. So it is clear that the context of the Enlightenment is the background against which he must be read. However, in his response to the Enlightenment's claims for reason he was putting forward an epistemology with a different set of predicates, designed to undercut the claims to certitude in the sphere of metaphysics. Whereas Kant's critique of reason was philosophical, Zinzendorf critiqued reason from a theological point of view. He asserted that the love shed abroad in the heart by the Holy Spirit, which was concretized in the incarnation and the death of Jesus, was a truth that philosophy could not comprehend.[44] Zinzendorf was therefore minded to use reason in human matters so far as it sufficed, but in spiritual matters he was minded to remain simply with the heart-grasped truth, which became for him the ground of all other truths.[45] In this respect he provided the starting point for Schleiermacher's theology, which means that liberal theology and pietism have a common paternity. For Zinzendorf, it was hopeless to attempt to define the relations internally in God as, Father, Son and Holy Ghost. It is a depth so

---

[43]Renkewitz argues that in the period that Zinzendorf lived the traditional perception of the world was shaken by discoveries in sciences. The sharp sword of reason pierced and reordered the world. Thus the space that the infinite had in the world receded as the traditional support for revelation was undermined. [Heinz Renkewitz, "Zinzendorf als Theologe – seine Stellung in der Geschichte und seine Bedeutung für unsere Verkündigung," in *Zinzendorf-Gedenkbuch* Herausgegeben von E. Benz und H. Renkewitz (Stuttgart: Evangeliches Verlagswerk, 1951), 77.] Bettermann argues that in his anti-rationalism Zinzendorf was swimming against the tide of the times; that he despised theology altogether and would not admit to any knowledge in religious questions from logical reflection because there was a certain atheism in intellectualism. (*Theologie und Sprache bei Zinzendorf*, 11.). Freeman notes that Zinzendorf has to be understood in the context of an age in which humanity was coming of age, asserting its ability to understand and handle the world by use of the reason and science. (Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology,* 41.) He therefore places Zinzendorf's attitude to epistemology, theodicy, original sin and his understanding of history within the context of the discussion in the Enlightenment, issues that he would more than likely have met in his time at Halle and Wittenberg.

[44] Gambold, *Maxims,* 9.

[45] Freeman, 76.

profound and unfathomable, that in contemplating it, we should ruin our intellectual faculty, and yet not be able to frame one just expression concerning it.[46] Therefore, one who attempts philosophically to treat the issue of the divinity of Christ is only exposing oneself to ridicule.

In its suspicion of the claims of reason, pietism may also be seen as a precursor to those attempts today that question the epistemological presuppositions of the whole Enlightenment project. What this study will show is, that when dealing with matters pertaining to the divine, modesty is appropriate because despite revelation there remains a gulf between human and divine realities that ensures God's concealment amidst the revelation.

Conclusion

The Enlightenment, then, marked a critical phase in the development of the relationship between faith and reason, which came to be seen not only as belonging to different provinces but also as the latter having pre-eminence over the former. In the words of Locke, we can have no knowledge for which there were not already pre-existent notions in the mind. Ultimately, this meant that reference had to be made to reason even with a claim to revelation because revelation needs reason to be understood. Descartes' attempt to situate epistemological certitude in the individual finds full expression in deism, which asserted the priority of the mental capacity of the individual over revelation. As the approach of the pluralists demonstrates, the new

---

[46] Gambold, 20.

epistemology had the effect of levelling the differences between the religions because faith became subjugated to reason.

Kant's critique of the pretensions of reason and traditional metaphysics re-opened the debate over the relationship between reason and faith and in particular the status of the claim that reason has pre-eminence over faith as a secure epistemological basis. Kant's critique was one of four kinds of development in the Enlightenment. The other three were liberal theology, which though predicated on the Kantian critique of the presumptuous role the Enlightenment assigned to reason, sought to harvest what reason and history could offer to theology. The legitimacy of faith in liberal theology, as championed by Schleiermacher, is derived from the perception that there is an orientation of dependence of the human being to God. Schleiermacher saw liberal theology as a scientific discipline, in which the affections of the heart were systematically set forth in speech with the aid of reason as a servant and not an enemy of faith. Secondly, there was the development of historical relativism that gave birth to theological relativism. In this conception, the religions came to be seen as relatively equal because when they are looked at from the point of view of a rationalist approach to history they represent a common phenomenon. The third development was pietism, which denied any role for reason in matters of faith. Zinzendorf, for whom faith was a matter of the heart, is an example of those who championed this cause. These developments namely, Kant's critique, liberal theology, historical relativism and pietism constitute the theological topography on which recent approaches to the problem of religious pluralism are constructed.

Since the Enlightenment, then, any claim to superior knowledge had to pass the acid test of reason or, alternatively, deny that knowledge has any thing to do with reason. The problem of religious pluralism today must then be seen against the background of the loss of authority of Christianity, the rise of religious relativism and the concomitant weakening of faith as a credible basis for knowledge. Consequently, recent approaches to religious pluralism, with which the next chapter will deal, have been of two genres. One kind has emphasized the equality of all religions and that there is no reasonable basis for any one to claim superiority. The other kind has tended to claim priority for a particular religious tradition because of the belief that something pre-eminent, which is beyond the competence of reason to judge, has been given to that tradition. Our next task then is to determine the continuing viability of these two kinds of approaches to pluralism.

CHAPTER 3

RECENT THEOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO PLURALISM: HOW AMENABLE ARE THEY TO DIALOGUE?

Introduction

The second half of the twentieth century has witnessed a concerted attempt among Christian theologians in the West to come to terms with the growing incidence of religious pluralism. The recognition that the claims of other religions can no longer be overlooked in Christian theological discourse is one of the consequences of the effect of the Enlightenment on religion. The emergence of reason as the preferred basis for adjudicating between truth claims served to undercut traditional claims to Christian pre-eminent authority. Thus the need to develop a theology of religious pluralism is a response to the recognition that Christian assertions, albeit predicated on revelation, no longer possess unquestionable propositional force.

However, in addition to the levelling effect of the Enlightenment on religion, there were two other factors that hastened the drive to develop theologically sound dialogical approaches to other religions. **One** was the result of the missionary enterprises that took place over the previous two centuries. Much to the consternation of the missionaries, the religious worlds of Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam, in particular, were not caves of error and ignorance, as it was construed in the European missionary thrust. What the missionaries found mainly in Asia and Africa was that these religious traditions were successful in sustaining the lives of millions of people

and seemed impervious to Christian evangelism.[1] The realization of the internal strength and cohesion of the other religions led early nineteenth century theologians and missionaries to plead for justice, courtesy and love when dealing with the other religions.[2] The theologies of pluralism that developed have built on this earlier awareness.

The **other factor** that has contributed to the rise of theologies of pluralism is the rapid increase in the presence of other religious traditions in the metropolitan areas of Europe and North America, which has resulted from increased emigration towards the end of the colonial era. Every major city in Europe and North America is home to thousands of people of other faiths. Encountering people of other religious traditions is no longer the esoteric privilege of missionaries far a-field but a daily experience for the ordinary lay Christian. In a real sense, the theologies of pluralism were aimed at giving theological content to the *de facto* plural approach that people were already taking to their religious faith. The theologies of pluralism were aimed at dealing with two challenges. On the one hand, they were seeking to justify the openness and tolerance with which Christians approached people of other faiths. On the other hand, they were seeking to remind Christians that the uniqueness of the Christian faith should not be compromised in the interest of good relations among neighbours.

---

[1] In 1887, speaking at the Centennial Anniversary of the Moravian Society for Propagating the Gospel, Rev. Morris Leibert noted that Asia continued to be a stronghold of systems and beliefs whose worth and strength must be acknowledged. Sixty years later when writing about the difficulty in propagating the gospel in Suriname, one Moravian missionary wrote: "our mission work has not made any appreciable progress among these British Indians. ... Two trends can be observed. There are pious Mohammedans or Hindus who reject Christianity: either because they consider themselves superior to it or because they see no difference between Christianity and Mohammedanism." *The Centennial Anniversary of the Society of the United Brethren for Propagating the Gospel to the Heathen*, 1887, 48.

[2] Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy, Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions* (London: Epworth Press, 1965) 35. Cracknell notes that theologians, for example Frederick

In coming to terms with the new reality of religious pluralism, then, a number of approaches have been developed. In general these can be organized into three main types. The first is the approach that favours a **commitment to the other**. This approach calls attention to the difficulty of adjudicating between religious truth claims and consequently sees the religions as being virtually *on par*. John Hick, whose work we shall consider, is probably the best representative of this approach. The second approach is one that favours a **commitment to one's own tradition** and seeks to find appropriate resources within the Christian tradition to respond to the challenge of pluralism. Gavin D'Costa, whose work we shall also consider, is a good example of that approach. He argues for a trinitarian approach to pluralism drawing on ecclesial documents from Vatican II. A third approach that we shall consider is represented by George Lindbeck, which essentially is situated between the other two approaches. Lindbeck's **cultural-linguistic approach** is one that treats the religious tradition as one would a language or a culture, where the doctrines are seen as communally authoritative rules of discourse that regulate religious beliefs and conduct. In this chapter we shall consider these three approaches with the view of indicating the limits of their viability. One of the important challenges that a theology of pluralism faces is that of constructing a paradigm that can hold the tensions that arise from different approaches to faith and the conflicting notions of truth that are concomitant with plurality. As we shall see, the three approaches mentioned above are unviable and unsuitable not only for the Moravian Church, for which we are seeking to develop a theology of pluralism, but also for other traditions that seek a

---

Maurice (1805-1872), began to argue early in the twentieth century that the encounter with other religious traditions might offer correctives to Christian theological formulations.

genuine and convincingly open approach to other religions, while remaining committed to their own tradition.

3.1: Hick's Approach to Pluralism: A Commitment to the Other

Since the publication in 1977 of the epoch making *Myth of God Incarnate,* John Hick has been seen as a leading advocate of the pluralist position expressed as a commitment to the other. It is important that we consider Hick's position because he was one of the earliest theologians who sought to cross the theological Rubicon from inclusivism to pluralism. Beyond that, however, several of the other positions on religious pluralism have been constructed in relation to his position.[3] It is hardly necessary, though, to outline in full the details of his argument, given the considerable attention it has already received in scholarship, so a brief overview will suffice.

The principal philosophical basis for Hick's theology of pluralism is the argument in **Kant's philosophy** that consciousness is not a passive reception of the impacts of the environment but always a process of selecting, ordering, integrating and giving meaning to stimuli in accordance with our system of concepts.[4] Hick therefore makes use of the Kantian distinction between the noumenal and the phenomenal for his understanding of human perception of the divine. According to him, we are aware of the supernatural or Ultimate Reality in terms of the categories that the mind imposes on our formulation of religious experiences. Therefore, the different apprehensions of the single Ultimate in the religions are to be regarded as different but equally valid

[3] Example of these would be Mark Heim, Gavin D'Costa and Jacques Dupuis, all of whose works are referred to in this study.

[4] Hick, "The Theological Challenge of Religious Pluralism," *Christianity and Other Religions,* ed. John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (Oxford: One World, 2001),168.

human responses to the Real.[5] The Real as it is in itself lies beyond the entire network of our concepts. This means we are not permitted to have concrete experiences of the Real as it is but only in so far as we conceptualise it in human categories. The religious traditions stand between the Real and us and constitute different 'lenses' through which it is viewed.[6]

Hick believes that cognitive psychology and the sociology of knowledge corroborate Kant's epistemology. He draws on Jastrow's theory of perception to show how groups in different geographical settings are right in what they affirm and wrong only in their insistence that others are mistaken. The divine reality that we encounter in Christianity is capable of being experienced in quite different ways.[7] The fact that in some traditions the Real is perceived in personal terms and in others in impersonal terms does not affect Hick's basic pluralistic hypothesis. Since the mind plays the all-important role of construing reality, the way the Real is perceived is a function of our preferences or traditions. Therefore, "the status of the various God-figures is as *personae* of the Real, that is, the Real as variously perceived by the personifying human mind, while the various non-personal absolutes are *impersonae* of the Real, that is, the Real is variously manifested in non-personal terms to the non-personifying religious mentality."[8] Both perspectives are products of the presence of the Real in the world. A pluralist interpretation of religion, therefore, cannot identify the Real as

---

[5] John Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths* (London: SCM, 1995), 30.

[6] Hick, "The Theological Challenge of Pluralism," 168.

[7] Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, 25.

[8] Hick, "The Theological Challenge of Pluralism," 168.

the object of any single tradition to the exclusion of the others because it is the same Real that is variously experienced within the different traditions.

Hick believes we are in the early stages of a transition from a view of Christianity as the one and only true religion to a new understanding of Christianity as one world religion among others, all of which are equally true. In order for this transition to be completed, it will necessitate a re-structuring of Christian theology, particularly in the area of Christology and soteriology. In terms of **Christology**, Hick underlines the fragmentary and ambiguous nature of data available to us concerning Jesus. This has resulted in a situation where "a number of different beings, describable in partly similar ways, have been worshiped under the name of Jesus or under the title of Christ."[9] In each case, communal and individual imaginations have projected their own ideals on the data but behind the gallery of different ideal portraits, the unknown Jesus of Nazareth lies buried under several centuries of history.

Hick argues that the notion of God incarnate, which is treated in orthodox Christian doctrine as unchangeable dogma, is only one of the several possible ways of construing Jesus' lordship. The metaphor of God incarnate, though powerful and fundamental to Christian self-understanding, has never yet been shown to have a viable literal meaning. Instead, New Testament scholarship has shown that the historical Jesus did not claim to be God incarnate and that what we know as the doctrines of the Trinity, incarnation, atonement, and so on, "have escalated into theoretical constructions going far beyond the original experience to which they are

---

[9] Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," *The Myth of God Incarnate*, ed. John Hick (London: SCM, 1977), 167.

related."[10] What has happened in the case of Jesus is analogous to what happened in Mahayana Buddhism, where the Buddha came to be revered as much more than an outstanding individual who lived and died centuries ago. In each case the developing tradition was led to speak of the individual in terms that he himself did not use and to understand him by a complex systems of beliefs that was gradually formed by later generations.[11] The escalation of the myth concerning Jesus is understandable because it is evident that in his life, as well as the biblical witness concerning him, people have had a decisive encounter with God. However, since a faith response to Jesus may be expressed in different ways, it was not necessary to allow the notion of the incarnation "to function as an iron mask from within which alone Jesus is allowed to speak to mankind."[12]

Hick believes that given the problems with the traditional notion of incarnation, and given the difficulty of arriving at an agreed understanding of what exactly that means in the modern context, a Christology of inspiration may have greater plausibility. An inspiration Christology does not require or support the notion of three divine persons but affirms three distinguishable ways in which the one God is experienced as creator, redeemer and inspirer. On this interpretation the notion of three persons, like the

---

[10] Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths,* 126. Roger Haight has shown, however, that the two major christological developments, one at Nicaea and the other at Chalcedon, were meant to show that God was truly at work in Jesus. From the point of view of Nicaea it could be said, "the God encountered in Jesus for our salvation is truly God." R. Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God*, 284. From the point of view of Chalcedon, which was preoccupied with the questions of the divine and human natures in Jesus, it could be said that Jesus as human makes God present to us. Furthermore, Jesus is relevant to us as Saviour because he is consubstantial with us (p. 296). In other words, the constructions, though theoretical, do quite the opposite to what Hick claims. They aim to close the gap between the original experience of Jesus and us.

[11] Hick, "Jesus and the World Religions," 169.

[12] Ibid., 182.

Ninety-Nine Beautiful names for Allah in Islam, does not refer to centres of consciousness but to major aspects of the one divine nature.[13] Openness to the wider religious life of mankind with its plurality of ways can free us from an absolutized Christian particularism.

In considering the issue of **soteriology,** Hick concludes that the religions are basically equal in terms of what they offer.[14] This conclusion is necessary because he believes that comparing the observable effects of the religions is the only objective criterion by which to judge their salvific quality. He argues that salvation should then be looked at in a concrete and empirically observable way as an actual change in men and women from self-centredness to God-centeredness. Alternatively in more general and non-theistic terms, salvation should be seen as a new orientation centred in the Ultimate, the Real, as it is conceived and experienced within the various traditions. From that point of view, salvific transformation seems to be taking place in all the great religions, including Christianity.[15] At the same time, each religion has shown complicity with evil, which means that a worldwide study of the harmful effects of religious absolutism would draw material from almost every religious tradition. Hick

---

[13] Hick does not give support for the view that orthodox teaching regards the Trinity as three centres of consciousness. Construing the Trinity as three centres of divine consciousness is in fact a misunderstanding of the doctrine. On the contrary, orthodox teaching is closer to the notion of the Trinity as referring to aspects of the divine nature than to centres of consciousness. An orthodox explication of the doctrine does not separate the economic Trinity from the eternal Trinity. As the WCC notes, the One God is in all eternity the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. See for further discussion *Confessing the One Faith: An Ecumenical Explication of the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991), 20.

[14] Although Heim argues for a plurality of ultimate ends, he is hard pressed to demonstrate the corresponding plurality in Ultimate Reality, which is a logical outcome of his argument. Unless he can demonstrate this latter plurality, which the notion of the Trinity cannot really fulfil, his argument collapses into a form of Hickean pluralism. See Heim, *Salvations,* 163-171.

[15] Hick, "The Theological Challenge of Religious Pluralism", *Christianity and the Other Religions,* 65.

sees the religious traditions as long-lived social realities, each of which is internally highly diverse. To our partial and fallible human view, they simply constitute different ways of being human in relation to the eternal.[16] In their different ways, each religion calls us to transcend the ego point of view, which is the source of all sin, and so become centred in that ultimate mystery, which Christians call God but which goes by other names in other traditions.

Hick's conclusion, then, is that Christian doctrines, for example the Trinity, the incarnation, soteriology, are not divinely revealed truths but theoretical constructions designed to solve specific problems, and in so doing, always in terms of the presuppositions and the conceptual and linguistic resources of a particular age.[17] He therefore does not regard theological doctrines as infallible or unchangeable but as being subject to revision and reinterpretation in each cultural epoch. The reinterpretations do not entail the unique superiority of Christian revelation but leave open the possibility of a genuine religious pluralism.[18] In response to the claim that the account of the religions he gives is different from the one that various traditions give of themselves, Hick notes that there is a tendency in each religion to accommodate others by subordinating them to itself. However, an interpretation in which the great religious traditions are approached from the point of view of salvific parity will be different from the account that each will give.[19]

---

[16] Hick, "The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity," *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*: *Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 30.

[17] John Hick, "A Recent Development Within Christian Monotheism," *The Concept of Monotheism in Islam*, ed. Hans Köcker (Vienna: W. Braümuller, 1982), 70.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Hick, *The Rainbow of Faiths*, 48.

Hick's position may, then, be summarized with three theses: the first is that the unitary Real is the goal of each religion. Secondly, there are different ways of experiencing and perceiving the Real. Thirdly, claims concerning the Real are presumed to be equally valid, since the Real remains beyond the range of our human conceptuality. Beyond all that, the discrepancy between the official Christian self-understanding and the realities of human life, between theological theory and observable fact, suggests the need to revise the traditional notion of Christian uniqueness.[20]

3.1.1: Critique of Hick

The large number of criticisms levelled against the pluralist approach as represented by Hick means that it is at least questionable as a suitable paradigm for the plural context. One set of concerns relates to the fact that Hick's proposal undercuts the sense of uniqueness that people naturally attach to their faith. For example, D'Costa argues that when pluralistic theologies of religions have assimilated themselves to modernity they end up representing modernity's gods, which in the case of Hick is agnosticism. For D'Costa, the discourse represented by Hick, as well as the arguments in the *Myth of God Incarnate*, is an attempt to turn history into essences, a restless drive that will not cease until modernity has fixated this world into an object that can be forever possessed. The down side of Hick's 'essentialism' is that it brings closure to dialogue. Thus, according to D'Costa, the theology of religions articulated in the pluralism of Hick and Knitter ends up as a neo-pagan unitarianism. By seeking

---

[20] Ibid., 113.

to obliterate differences and otherness, this pluralism ends up as a strong form of exclusivism.[21] In place of Hick's approach D'Costa proposes instead a Roman Catholic trinitarian orientation to other religions, which we shall consider in more detail later. Mark Heim also dismisses Hick's soterio-centric pluralism arguing that in its full form that pluralism condemns all claims to know a universal religious truth, which for Heim is an untenable position.[22] Along with Panikkar and Birch, Heim argues for a plurality of absolutes in opposition to the unitary noumenal realm in Hick's argument.[23] Jacques Dupuis believes that a constitutively unique Christology is more amenable to pluralism than Hick's pluralist approach.[24]

The position represented by Hick has come in for questioning also among Muslim theologians. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, this sentimentalist approach as represented by Hick, although based on creating a better understanding between the religions, treats the total integrity of the tradition as being of less importance than mutual understanding. The requirement, for example, that Christians should stop believing in the incarnation in order to relate to Muslims leads one to ask why they should remain Christians and not embrace Islam instead.[25] Nasr believes that a more plausible way is an approach that looks at the other traditions through the perspective of one's own tradition.

---

[21] D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions*, 27-39.

[22] Heim, *Salvations*, 97.

[23] Ibid., 168.

[24] Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 305.

[25] Nasr, *Knowledge and the Sacred*, 289.

From the point of view of this study there is one critical issue that brings into question the viability of the approach to pluralism that Hick represents. The issue relates to the role a particular approach to pluralism is expected to perform. It seems that a theology of pluralism ought not to be aimed at demonstrating the necessity of eclipsing, disbanding or making null and void a particular tradition. On the contrary, a theology of pluralism assumes that a particular religious tradition must continue to live in the context of other religious traditions, which gives validity to the hermeneutical approach that regards one's own tradition as the starting point for theological discourse. A theology of pluralism must enable the particular tradition to engage others in the plural context, which means drawing on its own theological resources and history to develop ways of living with difference. A theology of religious pluralism is therefore by nature dialogical: first, because it seeks to develop an approach that keeps in tension assertions that are at best different or at worst conflicting; secondly, because it puts the onus on each tradition to justify and defend their claims.

If, however, we start like Hick by declaring that all the religious traditions have a similar goal in the Real, and that they are in fact different lenses through which the Real is perceived, it raises two fundamental questions. The **first** is the epistemological question of how Hick arrives at the conclusion that such is the goal of all the traditions. That conclusion seems to imply that a process of investigation or dialogue has been completed and that the realization that all the religions have the same goal is the outcome. In that case, there is no need for further dialogue. In other words, Hick's theology of pluralism takes an epistemologically high ground that

makes null and void any questioning of the claims that the religions make. It not only relieves the religions from having to justify their public assertions but also robs the particular tradition of the opportunity of retrieving its own resources to respond to the questions that the existence of the other religious traditions put to it. By Hick's approach to pluralism we are landed in an eschatological future in which we know all that we need to know about the goal of all the religions.

The **second question** raised by Hick's approach is this: what is the need for a theology of pluralism if we know before hand the goal of all the religions? If we are in a post-dialogue, post-ignorance and a post-difference zone, then theological discourse and interfaith conversation serves no fundamental purpose, save and except to circulate data that is already known. In this Hickean stratosphere the religions do not need to engage each other because essentially there is no other. All the religions will collapse into the Real thus confirming that there are several possible doors of entry into its immensity.

Contrary to Hick's closure of dialogue and notwithstanding the eschatological future in which his theology of pluralism lands us, the religious traditions are still asking questions about each other and about their goal. Furthermore, the view that all the religions are equally valid responses to the Real does not accord with the desire people still have for making choices between them. Those who reflect on the traditions in which they live and the truths to which they subscribe seem to want to hold that it is not just by the accident of their birth that they are situated within these traditions but that there is something different that makes a particular tradition more compelling and more plausible. It seems we are not only ignorant about the precise

nature of the goal towards which we move but also of the goal of others that we encounter in our journey. A theology of pluralism must therefore keep the question of the goal of our own tradition and of the character of the other traditions as questions still requiring discussion and dialogue. D'Costa feels that a Roman Catholic trinitarian approach is a better prospect for a viable theology of pluralism.

3.2: D'Costa's Approach to Pluralism: The Theoretical Basis

D'Costa's tradition-specific approach to pluralism is predicated on the critique of modernity that can be found particularly in Alasdair MacIntyre and John Milbank.[26] Central to D'Costa's version of the tradition-specific approach is the suspicion of the attempt in the project of modern liberalism to establish a social order in which individuals could emancipate themselves from the contingency of particular traditions by appealing to tradition-independent norms. He sees the pluralist approaches of Hick and Knitter as predicated on the hope of achieving a tradition-independent rationality, which MacIntyre describes as the illusion of the liberal project.[27] Despite their intentions to encourage openness, tolerance and equality, the pluralists fail to attain these goals on their own definition because of the tradition-specific nature of their positions. Pluralists need to acknowledge that the tradition from which they develop their approach is the Enlightenment, which is simply one among several traditions and also one that does not have priority over others. Moreover, the Enlightenment's negation of religious claims has bequeathed agnosticism to

---

[26] He relies on MacIntyre's arguments in three outstanding publications: *After Virtue* (London: Duckworth, 1981), *Whose Justice? Which Rationality* (London: Duckworth, 1988) and *Three Rival Versions of Moral Enquiry* (London: Duckworth, 1990); John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990).

[27] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* , 335.

liberalism because of the flight from particularity in seeking to stand on a neutral ground.[28]

The dynamic between MacIntyre and Milbank and their attempt to consciously construct an argument from a tradition specific point of view may be called the dialectic of traditions.[29] This position provides D'Costa with the grounding for his dialectical approach in his critique of pluralism. He aims to show that on their own terms and by their own criteria the approaches of the pluralists have failed to be open and tolerant. Their instrumental view of religion is a child of modernity because they reject the ontological claims of the religions and see their usefulness only in terms of their ethical force.[30] In the first part of his book D'Costa offers his critique of the pluralists and in the second part offers his own view, which he believes succeeds where the pluralist have failed. Our concern here will be with his argument for a Roman Catholic tradition-specific approach rather than with his critique of the pluralists.

3.2.1: A Commitment to One's Own Tradition: A Trinitarian Approach to Pluralism

In making the argument for the trinitarian openness of the Roman Catholic Church, D'Costa proceeds along two hermeneutical paths. In the **first** place he combs the

---

[28] D'Costa, 28.

[29] D'Costa finds Milbank's critique of MacIntyre helpful because according to D'Costa, it calls attention to an air of non-commitment on the part of MacIntyre at the philosophical level and to his failure to show the continuity between Aristotelian virtue and Christian virtue. For Milbank Christian virtue stands over against both MacIntyre's antique virtue and modernity and is much more critical of antique virtue than MacIntyre allows. Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory*, 5.

[30] D'Costa, 25

ecclesial documents for places where references are made to the presence of the Holy Spirit beyond the church in the world and in the non-Christian religions. By rooting his argument in the ecclesial documents of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II, he seeks to indicate the seriousness with which he takes the tradition-specific approach. He argues that the Roman Catholic tradition-specific approach must show the intrinsic interrelationship between the Bible, tradition and authority.[31] He finds clear references particularly in *Redemptoris Missio* 28 –29 and *Gaudium et Spes* 44. D'Costa, however, makes two important cautionary remarks arising from statements in the two documents. One is that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the world and in other religions cannot be separated from the Body of Christ nor is it to be construed as an alternative to the presence of Christ. Even though it may not be evident to the people of those other religions, the spirit in question is in fact the spirit of Christ. The second cautionary remark is the fact that the recognition of the presence of the Spirit in the other religions does not confer independent legitimacy upon those religions because the very positive judgement itself is a Christian theological recognition and, consequently, relates to the reality of the Trinity in the church.[32] With these two cautionary remarks D'Costa ensures that nothing appears to derogate from the pre-eminence of Christian revelation and from the right of Christians to decide on the salvific value of the other religions. For D'Costa, the most important aspirations of the pluralist, that is, openness, tolerance and equality, are better embodied, more coherently justified and fully articulated in the Roman Catholic trinitarian theology.

---

[31] Ibid., 100. The period since Vatican II, however, is a rather brief period of Roman Catholic history. This means that the greater part of the history of the church is excluded in this consideration. This limited focus will at the very least bring into question the thoroughness of the assessment.

[32] D'Costa, 113.

One critical issue that D'Costa seeks to address is whether on the basis of documents since Vatican II there is any justification for regarding the other religions as vehicles of divine revelation. His conclusion is that although the Fathers of Vatican II allowed for the possibility of salvation for people outside the Roman Catholic Church as well as outside Christianity under certain conditions, it is silent on the specific question of the other religions as vehicles of divine revelation.[33] There is neither an explicit yes nor no, which he believes could have been an intentional move on the part of the Council to prevent an unqualified positive affirmation of other religions as salvific structures or as containing divine revelation. This silence does not contradict the clear affirmation that grace is operative in the other religions, which also contain much that is good, holy and true, because that grace operative in the other religions is to be viewed as *preparatio evangelica.* D'Costa is keen to show that this does not entail a separation between the grace of creation and the grace of salvation. It is critical to his theology to maintain that only in the historical church, which subsists in the Roman Catholic Church, is grace finally and fully ordered towards its eschatological end.[34]

The **second** hermeneutical path along which D'Costa's trinitarian theology procedes is through texts in the Gospel of John that refer to the work of the Holy Spirit. He seems concerned to discount Hick's claim that the ethical imperative to love, on which the pluralists predicate parity between the religions, is something that is common to all the religions. For D'Costa the acts of love that the Spirit enables the believer to perform are not abstract ideas or general theories of theism, but a specific

---

[33] Ibid., 103-4.

[34] *Lumen Gentium*, I, 8. D'Costa, 108.

set of practices found in the person of Jesus. This love is not an ideological egalitarian principle, which can be translated without the accompanying narrative in the way the nineteenth-century liberal exegete articulated the notion of moral gospel. Instead, "this love has both its source and shape in the 'person' of Jesus, God's gift to the world."[35] Consequently, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the other religions should not be interpreted to mean that a new revelation could emerge from that religious tradition. This is not to circumscribe the Holy Spirit or to restrict its activities. It means rather that all truth, in whatever form it is discerned, will serve to make Christ known more fully to Christians.[36] In other words, wherever the Spirit is present it enables Christ-like practices, whether in Christianity where Christ is known or in the other religions where he is yet unknown. Therefore, the claim of the presence of the Spirit in the other religions is an intra-Christian claim and it does not mitigate the challenges and the questions that Christians might put to the other religions.

On the basis of the above argument, D'Costa believes that there is an imperative for the Christian to be open and tolerant and to presume equality when encountering people of other religions. On the question of openness he points out that since the Holy Spirit is operating in the other religions, to be closed to them would make the church guilty of being inattentive to the prompting of God. By the same token, it means that by taking the other religions seriously the church lays itself open to genuine change, challenge and questioning.[37] However, D'Costa does not see trinitarian theology *per se* as being able to admit of tolerance and equality of religions

---

[35] D'Costa, 119.

[36] Ibid., 129.

[37] Ibid., 133.

but that the position of the church on tolerance and equality is clearly stated in the Vatican II decree on religious liberty, *Dignitatis Humanae.* Here it is stated in such a way that safeguards the important principle that error has no rights.[38]

3.2.2: Critique of D'Costa

The **strength** of D'Costa's argument is the clarity with which he argues for a tradition-specific approach, which serves to extricate the discourse on religious pluralism from its earlier confinement in the categories of pluralism, exclusivism and inclusivism. Early discussion on the subject found these categories helpful but they are now inadequate for the increasing complex nuances the discourse has taken on. In addition, the recognition that the pluralist position is situated within Enlightenment liberalism underlines the fact that all discourse is situated within a given tradition, even though it may not be at first recognized. However, there are several concerns about his position that make his approach to pluralism generally unviable and unable to meet the needs of the Moravian Church.

The **first** concern is his attempt to cut the umbilical cord between his tradition-specific approach and modernity. It seems that his approach is an extension of pietism, a theological development in the Enlightenment that reacted to the universalistic pretensions of reason.[39] The tradition-specific approach, then, is a child of modernity in the sense that it was formulated in relation to the rise of rationalism.

---

[38] Ibid., 139.

[39] Geoffrey Treasure, *The Making of Modern Europe 1648*-1780 (London & New York: Methuen, 1985), 107-109.

D'Costa is concerned to show that Hick and other pluralists must be situated in the tradition of the Enlightenment. However, the tradition-specific approach that D'Costa proposes is hard pressed to situate itself outside the context of Enlightenment presuppositions. D'Costa's tradition-specific approach is based on a hermeneutical concern similar to pietism, which was in fact a new approach to epistemology. This means that D'Costa's tradition-specific approach, like pietism, is best understood within the framework of the claims on reason in the Enlightenment. D'Costa is on shaky ground when he argues that the tradition-specific approach is an alternative to the liberal project. He is therefore liable to the same critique levelled at the pluralists, which is, that they do not recognize the tradition in which they are situated. His Roman Catholic tradition-specific approach is best understood within the context of the Enlightenment's debate over faith versus reason and the role of reason in matters of faith. Furthermore, by limiting his focus to ecclesial documents since Vatican II, which themselves were formulated with modernity in mind, he fails in his bid to set his approach over against modernity.

A **second** concern with D'Costa's approach is the notion of revelation he espouses. By being unable to affirm that the other religions are vehicles of revelation he is saddled with the task of explaining how these other religions can be the locus of spiritual and moral truth, holiness and goodness, as *Nostra Aetate* 2 claims. How can Islam not be the locus of divine revelation if they "acknowledge him [the God of Abraham] as God … and await the day of Judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead"?[40] It seems that a viable theology of pluralism

[40] *Nostra Aetate,* 3.

must have a comprehensive view of divine revelation that can account for true piety and holiness in other religions. As we shall see later, Comenius' understanding of revelation as taking place in three books of God, the world, the mind and Holy Scriptures, allows him to account for the divine presence in non-Christian religions without having to make immediate recourse to the claims of Christian absoluteness, a position into which D'Costa's approach locks him. By having to re-assert the traditional notion of Christian superiority D'Costa's does not make a convincing case for a greater openness, tolerance and the presumption for equality that he sets out to show.

The **third** concern relates to the trinitarian theology that D'Costa develops, which is based primarily on four passages in John's Gospel: John 14:15-18; 14:25-27; 15:26-27 and John 16: 7-15. His conclusions arising from the exegesis of the passages are as follows:[41] first, the Spirit enables participation in God's inner trinitarian love, the response to which is a form of life that is attentive to the relationship in which the enabling role of the Spirit is recognized. Secondly, the sense of the Spirit's presence does not invoke any new revelation beyond what is known already in Jesus. Thirdly, the Spirit's testifying and teaching activity is to be understood as enabling the practice of the imitation of Christ's love in the church. Fourthly, the Spirit's activity involves a way of life in conformity with Jesus, not just a deeper intellectual understanding of what Jesus said. In short, wherever the Spirit is, Christ is, even if Christ is not recognized.

---

[41] D'Costa, 120-121.

There are two questions, arising from these exegetical conclusions, that one is prompted to ask. In the first place one must ask whether trinitarian theology is the same as the doctrine of the Spirit because D'Costa does not seem to make a distinction between them. In actual fact, his conclusions relate more to pneumatalogy than to trinitarian theology. D'Costa shows that there is correlation between Christian talk about the Spirit and talk about Jesus. However, a fundamental aspect of trinitarian theology relates to the relationship between talk about Jesus the Son and about the Father, which is not given any real attention in D'Costa's discourse. The issue of Christology and the claim to the divinity of Jesus is a major problem in the relationship between Christianity and the other religions. However, it seems that D'Costa is trying to bypass the christological problem by superimposing his pneumatalogy upon the doctrine of the Trinity, thereby allowing Christology to be brought in without having to deal with it. The doctrine of the Trinity is a function of Christology and entails a full discussion of Christology. A viable theology of religious pluralism must face squarely and deal adequately with the problematic issue of Christian claim to Jesus' divinity and the incarnation, which are unique Christian claims. In brief then, D'Costa calls trinitarian theology a discourse that seems to resemble a doctrine of the Holy Spirit more than any thing else.

The second question that D'Costa's exegesis of the Johannine passages raises is how to resolve the dilemma of whether people of other faiths, among whom the Spirit is present, would be expected to understand the ethics of love that they display in Christian terms. For if the other religions are not vehicles of divine revelation, then the ethics they display have no basis in their own religion – in which case the term

"anonymous Christians" would be justifiably applied to them. However, one does not have to strain to see the unreasonableness of such a position. If people of other faiths do not claim to draw inspiration from Jesus for their ethics of love, what then is the basis for claiming that their Spirit-led ethics is "Christ-like", if "Christ-like" does not mean analogous to that of Christ? It seems the ethics of each religious tradition must either be judged on its own terms or on agreed criteria. The alternative to this is that Christians should be prepared to have their ethics termed Buddha-like or Mohammed-like, as the case may be. D'Costa's approach, however, is unable to resolve this dilemma because the starting point of his position is an understanding of divine revelation as being absent from the other religions. The unwillingness to see the other religions as locus of divine revelation seems to be derived from the fear that to do so would confer on them independent salvific value, which would bring into question the Christian claim as being the only way of salvation.

Wanting to preserve the uniqueness of Christianity is understandable but it cannot be that the other religions are assessed on a different set of criteria. The logical consequences of assessing all the religions on the same criteria, to the extent that that is possible, must be accepted. As we shall see later, a more valid approach can be found in Comenius, who is prepared to accept the consequences of subjecting the scriptures of all the religions to the same set of external, internal, and intimate criteria for determining their revelatory content. He gives the people of other religions the benefit of the doubt in their claim to be in possession of divine revelation. He thereafter invites them to assess those claims on the basis of agreed criteria. Apart from determining the authenticity of claims to divine revelation by way of agreed

criteria, the only alternative is to assert the priority of one over the rest, which does not take us beyond the present situation in which the religions jostle for superiority.

The **fourth** concern with D'Costa's approach is that while one understands that he must be selective in the data on which he draws, he is far too silent on those aspects of the Roman Catholic tradition that undercut openness to other Christian traditions, let alone other religions. One such issue is the doctrine of infallibility. According to Vatican II:

> [The] infallibility, however, with which the divine redeemer wished to endow his church in defining doctrine pertaining to faith and morals, extends just as far as the deposit of revelation, which must be religiously guarded and faithfully expounded. The Roman Pontiff, head of the college of bishops, enjoys this infallibility in virtue of his office, when as supreme pastor and teacher of the faithful – who confirms his brothers and sisters in the faith (see Lk 22:32) – he proclaims in a definitive act a doctrine pertaining to faith or morals.[42]

This doctrine has functioned in an exclusive manner in the relationship with other Christians and, consequently, remains a barrier to openness to other religions.[43] It is

---

[42] *Lumen Gentium* III, 25 [Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican II* (Dublin: Dominican Publications, 1995), 35.]

[43]In the inter-church situation, the Anglican-Roman Catholic International Commission (ARCIC) has shown that even after years of dialogue on the matter, areas of differences still remain between Roman Catholics and other Christians over the teaching of infallibility. Anglicans, for example, do no accept that the Bishop of Rome can make an infallible pronouncement, but that the infallibility of his judgement can be recognized only in retrospect. When the notion of infallibility applies to the whole church of God, Lossky and others note, Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches affirm that the people of God, by virtue of their being God's people, are free from error in keeping the faith, which is termed infallibility *in credendo* *See* Nicholas Lossky and others, eds., *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Geneva: WCC, 1991), 512. Infallibility is seen here as a gift of the Holy Spirit that enables the church through its creeds and living witness to adhere to what they believe God has revealed. However, one must acknowledge the difficulty of discerning what the whole people of God believe. What can be

surprising that this issue is omitted from consideration, being so fundamental to Roman Catholic ecclesiology.

In summary, it seems that a theology of religious pluralism that is amenable to dialogue has to be articulated in a way that is not based on an *a priori* discounting of the claims of the other religions as vehicles of revelation. D'Costa's notion of a trinitarian theology as the basis for openness to the other religions has to be discounted on at least four grounds. The first is that it incorrectly situates itself over against the Enlightenment tradition, whereas it is in fact as much a child of that tradition as is the approach based on the "commitment to the other." Secondly, the understanding of revelation he espouses, where Christianity is seen as the only locus of divine revelation, seems to be in conflict with the claim that the Spirit is present in other religions, which he is keen to maintain. Thirdly, he fails to deal adequately with the issue of Christology, which is central to any interfaith conversation. Fourthly, by limiting his focus to documents since Vatican II he has omitted the longer part of Catholic history, which brings into question the comprehensiveness of his approach.

In regard to the question of revelation, we shall show that Comenius' approach that emphasizes revelation in three arenas is able to overcome concerns about the claims to revelation in other religions. On the subject of Jesus' divinity and the Trinity this research hopes to show that is it possible for Christians to worship Jesus as God, that is, to claim him as divine and yet not require those outside the Christian community to have to make that claim. As Zinzendorf would have us understand, seeing Jesus as

---

regarded as infallible seems to arise from the dynamic between what the accepted authority that the church affirms and that which the whole people of God can be judged to accept.

God is a second order task of faith and need not be set as an issue in interfaith discourse. In fact, Zinzendorf objects to setting the issue of the Trinity in a mixed setting. In his view, "no doctrinal systems calculated for a mixed religious body ought to turn upon the mystery of the Holy Trinity, much less make the very introduction of it."[44] On the related question of the infallibility we shall also argue with Zinzendorf that the notion of provisionality in theological discourse has a more useful application to an inter-faith situation. Greater openness to other religions is facilitated by treating doctrines as provisional discourse, which means doctrines are seen as changeable, tentative and in need of revision. As the apophatic writers emphasize, despite the revelation of God there still remains an immense gulf between God and us. This recognition of the limitation of human discourse subsists in the apophatic tradition and can serve the plural context in a meaningful way. Therefore, the idea of permanence or infallibility in doctrine has to be held in tension with the ideas of changeability, tentativeness and limitations, which are also part of the Christian tradition. At this juncture, though, we must consider George Lindbeck's approach to pluralism because he follows Zinzendorf in treating doctrines as second order discourse.

3.3: Lindbeck's Cultural-Linguistic Approach

The approach to pluralism that George Lindbeck offers is best understood against the background of his experience in ecumenical dialogue. There he became aware of the paucity of adequate categories for conceptualizing the problems associated with

---

[44] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 21.

doctrines and dogmas. For example, inter-church conversation needed to understand why particular communions maintained exclusiveness towards others, even when there were no remaining theological justifications for doing so. There was then a clear need to properly grasp the nature and function of doctrine and to find a way to overcome and remove the anomalies in inter-church relations. Lindbeck sees that the nature of the relationship between communions within Christianity is analogous to the relationship between Christianity and the other religions. Therefore, as was the case with Comenius before him, he believes the proposals he develops to resolve the problems of inter-church relationship have interfaith applicability.

The approach he advocates is fundamentally different from Hick's in the sense that unlike Hick he does not see the religions as being oriented towards the same ultimate goal. For that reason he rejects the notion of a common core experience at the heart of each religion. Lindbeck describes the approach that sees a common core experience in the religions as the experience-expressive approach. The ground for this approach was to some extent prepared by two developments. One was Kantian philosophy in which the metaphysical and epistemological bases of the earlier regnant approaches were demolished. The other was the development of individualism, which has made it hard for people to perceive or experience religion in a cognitivist fashion. In the experiential-expressive approach doctrines are treated as non-formative and non-discursive symbols of inner feelings. Here the nature and function of doctrine is downplayed and seems to have no critical role in religious agreement or disagreement because they "are constituted by harmony or conflict in underlying feelngs, attitudes, existential orientation or practices, rather than by what happens on

the level of symbolic (including doctrinal) objectifications."[45] Lindbeck sees the experiential-expressive approach to doctrine as suggesting that people of historically and doctrinally different religions can have the same faith but express it in different ways. However, the difficulty in specifying the exact features of the core experience believed to be common in a variety of religions makes the assertion of commonality empirically vacuous.[46]

Lindbeck's approach is different from D'Costa's, which according to Lindbeck's categorisation would be called cognitive-propositional. The cognitive-propositional approach emphasizes the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the ways doctrines function as informative propositions of truth claims about objective realities. In this approach, "if a doctrine is once true, it is always true, and if it is once false, it is always false."[47] Changes to doctrinal positions and the relegation of old attitudes cannot be accounted for in this approach and consequently, it cannot function adequately in a plural context where one must allow for doctrinal changes. In fact, Lindbeck treats the doctrine of the Trinity, which is central to the propositional approach of D'Costa, simply as an intra-systemic truth that can be understood only within the context of Christianity. The cognitive/propositional and the experience/expressive approaches, then, are not suited for ecumenism and therefore not amenable to interfaith application.[48]

---

[45] George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), 17.

[46] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 32.

[47] Ibid., 16.

[48] Ibid., 8.

Lindbeck sees the cultural-linguistic approach to pluralism, which is designed to give a non-theological account of the relationship between religion and experience as being more suited for plurality. This approach to pluralism, which has gained ascendancy because of its relevance to the non-theological study of religions, has two roots, one cultural and the other linguistic. On the cultural side the root goes back to Marx, Weber and Durkheim and on the linguistic side the root goes back to Wittgenstein.[49] The approach is influenced by an understanding of language, as constituting a hermeneutical event in the tradition, an event that is at once assimilation and interpretation. In this sense it is correct to say that the language speaks the speaker rather than that the speaker speaks the language.[50]

The distinctiveness of the cultural-linguistic approach from the experiential-expressive and the cognitive-propositional approach can be demonstrated in two ways: (1) in relation to the perception of religion and, consequently, (2) in relation to the perception of doctrine. In regard to the **first distinction**, religion is perceived as a heavily ritualised, comprehensive, interpretive scheme, embodied in myths and narratives, which structure experience and understanding of self and the world. In this sense, a religion operates as a cultural or linguistic framework, which allows for the description of reality, experiences and inner feelings: "it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a

---

[49] Ibd., 20.

[50] Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 421.

manifestation of those subjectivities."[51] The cultural-linguistic assertion, that the religion provides the prerequisite for adherents to have particular experiences, subverts the understanding of experience in the experiential-expressive model where the external features of the religion are derived from inner experience. The cultural-linguistic model stresses that the way in which human experience occurs is shaped and constituted by cultural and linguistic forms.[52]

If the experience is a derivative of the religion, and not the other way around, there are two issues that the cultural-linguistic understanding of religion has to face. The first relates to the meaning of becoming religious and the second relates to the starting point of the religion. These are critical questions because neither becoming religious nor the starting point of the religion can be given in experiential terms or else it would be no different from the experiential expressive model. In other words, it must be shown that experience is the outcome of the religion rather than that from which the religion springs. Commenting on this issue, Lindbeck sees becoming religious as meaning becoming skilled in the language and symbol system of the religion because when we know well enough and accept the core story of the religion we interpret and experience our world in terms of the religion. The religious person interiorises a set of skills that teaches one how to feel, think and act in conformity with the religious tradition.[53]

---

[51] Lindbeck, 33.

[52] Ibid., 34.

[53] Ibid., *35.*

In response to the issue of the starting point of the religion, Lindbeck describes it as a comprehensive scheme used to structure all dimension of existence; one that functions as the medium that contains the skills for organizing experience. In this model, then, the modes of action in the story and the concomitant language and doctrine precede and shape experience. This is the reason why the notion of a common experiential core is a misnomer. The experiences that religions evoke are varied. "Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematize the same experience; rather, they have different experiences."[54] Contrary then to the idea that the religion is something universal that arises from within the individual and diversely expressed and objectified in particular faiths, the cultural-linguistic understanding is that religions are like cultural systems that shape and produce our most profound sentiments and attitudes. This understanding of the religion, however, begs the question of how the experiences are regularized and shaped, which brings us to the second distinction of the cultural-linguistic approach, the role of doctrines.

The **second distinction** of the cultural-linguistic approach is the way doctrine is understood. Doctrines are construed as regulative, functioning as second order propositions, as "grammatical rules" so to speak, by which the religion is articulated.[55] Doctrines are not seen as expressive symbols or as truth claims but as communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitudes and action. In his understanding of the function of doctrine as the grammar of a language, Lindbeck draws on recent

---

[54] Ibid., 40.

[55] Ibid.,16 & 80.

developments in anthropology and linguistics.[56] According to Lindbeck, human beings are thoroughly genetically programmed to language use to the extent that failure to acquire a language will result in improper physiological development. The acquisition of language is that which shapes the pre-experiential physical basis of their conscious experience and activity.[57] Of critical significance for Lindbeck's theory is the question of how religion is acquired, which is analogous to how language is acquired. For him, the aesthetic and non-discursive dimensions of the religion – the poetry, art, rituals etc – are not propositional in character. Rather, it is through these that the basic patterns of the religion are interiorised. This is similar to the learning of a language where the child, when presented with certain data, constructs a theory of the language, of which the data presented is a sample.[58] In a manner similar to the internalising of the rules of grammar, "which identify much of what [the child] has heard as ill-informed, inaccurate and inappropriate,"[59] adhering to a particular religion involves the internalising of the doctrines as grammatical rules. For Lindbeck, then, becoming religious involves becoming skilled in the language, the symbol system of a given religion that shapes various kinds of what is called religious experience.[60] Different religions have different grammatical rules, which reinforce the assertion that the different regulative schemes evoke different experiences.

---

[56] See for example, Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures,* 1973, 55-86 and Noam Chomsky, *Language and the Mind*(New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1972), 163-167. Chomsky believes that certain concepts of linguistics can be used in philosophy in a rewarding way, particularly the differences between surface structure and deep structure of sentences.

[57] Lindbeck, 37.

[58] Noam Chomsky, *Language and Mind*, 171.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Lindbeck, 39.

On the basis of the cultural and linguistic differences between the religions, how then are the notions of unsurpassability and absolute truth to be understood? In Lindbeck's view the cultural-linguistic approach is open to the possibility that the religions may have notions of truth, of experience and of God, that are incommensurate. This means that there is no common framework within which to properly compare religions. In the cultural-linguistic approach truth claims are intra-systemic rather than ontological, thus giving doctrine a force of truth that arises from the grammar of the religion.[61] The utterances are systemically true when they cohere with the relevant context. Like the use of language, its correct use cannot be detached from a particular way of behaving and only in the performatory use do they acquire propositional force. Doctrines require referential specificity for them to have first order or ontological truth and falsehood.[62] Truth in this sense is relative to the actual context of the religion and is construed as having a symbolic efficacy. The proposition of the religion is true to the extent that its objectives are interiorised and exercised by groups and individuals in such a way that their existence conforms to the ultimate reality in the way the religion proposes it. To the extent that this does not happen the proposition of the religion is false.[63] One has to be inside the context and be skilled in the "language" of the context before the propositional meaning of an affirmation can become determinate to be rejected. Doctrines are, therefore, not necessarily permanent or unconditional but may be temporary, accidental or even reversible. The

---

[61] Ibid., 49.

[62] Ibid., 68.

[63] Ibid., 51.

reason for this is that for Lindbeck technical theology and official doctrine are second order discourse, the truth or falsity of which is determined within the context on the religion, "when one is seeking to align oneself and other performatively with what one takes to be the most important in the universe."[64] Doctrines, then, are to be understood in a categorical sense, which means that even if there were only one religion it would still be opened to falsehood in the same way a correct map may be used in an incorrect way. "The categorically and unsurpassably true religion is capable of being utilized ... in a manner that corresponds to ultimate reality, and thus being ontologically (and "propositionally") true, but is not always and perhaps not usually so employed."[65] For Lindbeck, the relevance of the cultural-linguistic approach is seen in the fact that an increasing number of people in the post-Christian period regard religions as possible sources to be used in articulating and organizing the experience of the inner self. [66]

3.3.1: Critique of Lindbeck

Despite the persuasiveness of the cultural-linguistic approach it is vulnerable to at least two important criticisms. The **first** is that it seems to require that the religions be perceived as existing in a compartmentalized way as isolated units. Its insistence on an intra-systemic approach suggests that one can only question or understand the assertions of the religion from the inside, which means no proper understanding of the

---

[64] Ibid., 69.

[65] Ibid., 52.

[66] Ibid., 22 & 41. This cultural-linguistic approach understanding religion is shared by persons in the fields of the philosophy of religion and comparative religion. For example, Leonard Swindler argues that religious truth must be related to the cultural milieu of the speaker and the hearer because truth is dialogical and bound up with language. Swidler's views are referred to in J. *Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 285.

religions can be ever formed from outside. One gets the impression that Lindbeck perceives religion as he would a "pure" language or "pure" culture, in which there is no sharing from a common stock of concepts. However, the idea that a set of concepts is unique to a particular religion is more imaginary that real. What the cultural-linguistic approach misses is the fact that the context in which the religions exist is a plural context and not a cultural ghetto. This means that religious assertions are made and have to be understood in that context of plurality. It is an illusion to imagine that a religion can so isolate itself that the rules governing its activities and concepts are seen as peculiar to that religion and can be assessed only from the point of view of the adherents. This narrow understanding of context and concepts does not seem to be viable because of the intersecting and overlapping character of religious boundaries.

Schreiter has called attention to three characteristics of context today that have a bearing on how we understand the relationship between the religions, which seem to undermine the viability of Lindbeck's understanding of concepts in a plural context. The first is what he calls the *deterritorialized* context, which is occasioned by the compression of space caused by globalization. In deterritorialized contexts systems intersect and crisscross in a way that makes it difficult, if not impossible to continue to refer to boundaries. The second characteristic is that context today is *hyperdifferentiated.* This means that as a result of "the compression of time, the world of cyberspace, and the movement of peoples mean that people are now participating in different realities at the same time."[67] Here the challenge is not only to

[67] Robert Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998), 26.

construe culture accurately but also that the multiplicity of belonging, or complex identities, has to be accounted for in the context of plurality. The third characteristic of context today is its *hybridised* nature, which makes the notion of a pure culture more an aspiration than a reality.[68]

So, rather than understanding the religions as the "enclosed compartments" as we find in Lindbeck, we should view the space in which religions operate as communities without walls. Already we are experiencing a situation where all the major religions are drawing upon notions of human rights, liberation, feminism and ecology from what seems to be a common stock in global discourse. Much of what is happening in modern societies can be called an "osmosis of discourse" where there is an interchange of use in religious concepts and symbols across the religious divide.[69] It seems that rather than focussing on intra-systemic hermeneutics, which tends to treat the religions as ghettos, the plural context calls for an intercultural approach to hermeneutics, in which the different religions are engaged in a genuine dialogue in search of understanding. Inter-cultural hermeneutics situates itself as an alternative to Lindbeck's cultural hermeneutics. It explores the conditions that make communication across cultural divides possible, not only in terms of the framework of meaning but also in terms of the rituals and the material aspects.[70] The aim of

---

[68] Schreiter, *The New Catholicity,* 27

[69] John May, *After Pluralism: Towards and Interreligious Ethic* (London: LIT Verlag, 2002), 58

[70] Schreiter, *The New Catholicity*, 29. Schreiter makes a distinction between inter-cultural and cross-cultural. The former refers to communication across boundaries while the latter refers to generalization that can be made about inter-cultural communication based on analysis of different intercultural encounters. Culture is understood as consisting of three aspects: the ideational, which relates to beliefs, values and attitudes; the performance, which relates to rituals; and the material, which relates to artefacts (language, food, clothing etc) that become a source for identity.

intercultural hermeneutics is to communicate appropriately, that is, in a way that does not do violence to the hearer's cultural mode.[71] As we shall later see, semblances of intercultural hermeneutics can be seen in Comenius' hermeneutics of harmony. In his view, creation, revelation and eschatology give the basis for a hermeneutic of harmony.

The point then is that religions can be understood and questioned by outsiders because in actual fact there are degrees of understanding, which is true for adherents as well as outsiders. If there were no degrees of understanding then cross community research, for example as carried out by the Christian Kenneth Cragg in Islam, which is respected in the Muslim Community, would have to be disregarded. An approach that takes cognizance of the intersecting and overlapping nature of culture is more viable in a plural context than one that seeks to foster the notion of cultural particularity.

The **second criticism** of the cultural linguistic position relates to its conception of truth as contextual or categorical. Lindbeck argues that from a categorical point of view there could be notions of truth that are incommensurate, despite their claim to be unsurpassable. He makes a distinction between the intra-systemic and ontological approaches to truth, which relate respectively to truth as coherence and truth as correspondence. For him, there is no correspondence between religious truth claims and reality in and of itself, but doctrines function as constituting a form of life, a way

---

[71] Schreiter, 33. In Gadamer's extensive study on hermeneutics [*Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975)], the details of which are beyond the scope of this study, the hermeneutical situation is analogous to what we mean when we speak of inter-cultural hermeneutics. According to Gadamer, when seeking to understand a text it is important to observe that the text speaks into a situation determined by previous opinions. Moreover, only because a text must be brought out of its alienness and become assimilated is there anything for the person who is seeking to understand it to say. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 429.

of being in the world, which itself corresponds to the Most Important, the Ultimately Real.[72] Lindbeck opts for the coherence theory of truth over the correspondence theory because he perceives each religion as a self-contained system, thus making it impracticable to speak of a common framework or of common criteria for assessing truth claims.

It seems, though, that one must first accept that the religions are self-contained systems in order to accept this application of the coherence theory of truth. The intra-systemic approach must come to terms with the fact that the religions are not proposed simply as cultural particular systems but as having universal propositional force. Instead of treating their truths as propositional only in a given context, both Christians and Muslims, for example, regard their truths as universally propositional and as corresponding to ultimate reality in and of itself. This means that the account that Lindbeck gives of the religions differs radically from the account that believers in the religions themselves give.[73] His assertion that the religions are different systems and make truth claims relevant primarily to the system they represent is different from the position in the different religions that their truths can be affirmed by all, irrespective of one's location in life – hence the ongoing missionary activities by the religions. What seems to be needed is an approach that does not dismiss the propositional intention of the religious claims at the outset but takes them at face

---

[72] Lindbeck, 65.

[73] It should also be noted that the theory of truth as coherence is dependent on the rationalists' and logical positivists' attempts to establish facts by the use of reason unaided by the senses. For a discussion on this see Brian Carr, "Truth," *An Encyclopaedia of Philosophy,* ed. G. H. R. Parkinson (London: Routledge, 1988), 86. Lindbeck's approach here should not surprise us for he limits the effectiveness of the experiential-expressive approach to religion. By centring his analogy of the religion on language he betrays a rationalist intent of demonstrating the truth of the religion by reason.

value and then to consider their viability. Only in this way can the imperative of dialogue be maintained in the plural context. If one dismisses the propositional intent of religious claims, it amounts to not taking them seriously enough to engage them. By making relative the propositional intent of the religions, the cultural-linguistic approach makes dialogue null and void.

The end result of the intra-systemic approach to truth, then, is that it rules out the necessity of dialogue even when the competing assertions in a plural context seem to warrant it. Lindbeck arrives at the same conclusion of the closure of dialogue as Hick, though by a different route. This brings into question the viability of their approaches for a plural context because an approach that takes dialogue seriously seems to be a fundamental prerequisite for the plural context. The existence of different theologies of pluralism already reflects the importance of dialogue. Therefore an approach that seeks to being closure to dialogue is at variance with the logic of pluralism.

As we shall see, the approach taken by Comenius where the truth claims of the religions are received for discussion rather than rejected *a priori* is a more viable approach. Unlike the cultural-linguistic and the cognitive propositional approaches, where the truths of others are either treated categorically or discounted altogether, Comenius believes that all truth claims should be treated as particular and private truths within the human community to be regarded as universal truth if they meet the agreed criteria. This approach opens the possibility for real dialogue because it

recognizes the intersecting and overlapping nature of the context and takes it seriously. However, while Comenius does not dismiss *a priori* the truth claims of the different religions, he does not relieve them of the burden of demonstrating their universal character. Unlike Hick's approach, where all the truth claims are immediately given equal status, Comenius makes a distinction between universal truth and private truth. For him, truth that is universal must meet agreed criteria in a public enquiry. However, some claims cannot be affirmed by all and must be treated as private and peculiar. The Comenian approach sees a major task in an interfaith context as clarifying the criteria by which universal truth is discerned. Once it is discerned, universal truth becomes public property and rises above its contextual particularity.

Conclusion

In summary, the modern context has three main types of approaches to pluralism. The first type, the commitment to the other, treats the religions as being virtually *on par* in terms of their salvific potential. The religions are different but equally valid paths to salvation or different lenses through which the Real is perceived. The second type, the commitment to one's own tradition, attempts to judge the other religions in terms of the categories of a particular tradition. Here, one's own tradition is perceived as having ultimate salvific potential, though traces may exist anonymously in others. The third type, the cultural-linguistic approach, situates itself between the previous two. In this approach truth claims have to be understood and judged within the context of each religion. There is no common framework for assessing religious truth, which means conflicting notions of truth have to be allowed to co-exist.

A major failure of these approaches is that the first and the third essentially aim to bring a closure to dialogue either by treating all major religions as ultimately the same, or by treating them as ultimate in their own terms. These two approaches are at variance with the intuitive necessity of dialogue in a plural context. The second approach, a commitment to one's own tradition, seems to be the most helpful but not in the way articulated by D'Costa. He fails to show how a Roman Catholic trinitarian theology of religious pluralism is most helpful for the plural context. His approach is unable to respond appropriately to the claims of other religions to be the locus of divine revelation and fails to deal adequately with the issue of Christology, both of which are of fundamental importance in the relationship between Christianity and the other religions.

In the approach to be developed in the second section of this study, we hope to show that the Moravian tradition, with its emphasis on harmony, modesty and dialogue offers a more viable approach to pluralism. It is an approach that overcomes the difficulty of claiming that Christianity is the only locus of divine revelation by locating revelation in three books of God, the world, the human mind and scriptures. While this does not mean that all the religions thereby bear witness to divine revelation, that possibility is not ruled out *a priori.* It means though that all the religions have a right to make the claim to be the locus of divine revelation because of a unity in creation, equality among human beings and the fact that the divine communicates with people. The Moravian theology of pluralism focuses attention on establishing criteria for determining revelation and truth, believing that the human mind has the capacity to discern truth regardless of its genesis. A Moravian theology of pluralism also proposes a way to overcome the problematic questions of

Christology in a plural context and the traditional Christian claims to salvation. One of the positions we shall consider is that of Zinzendorf, who regards the redemption of all souls as being already accomplished. Whether or not people of other faith see in Jesus the means of their salvation and whether or not Jesus is seen as God is a task for the Holy Spirit. Consequently, Zinzendorf does not exclude *a priori* the people of other faith from having a future in God because he believes that God can do as he pleases with those he has created. According to Zinzendorf, if God likes he can even restore the devil. The uncertain nature of the future cautions Christians to be modest in their assertions. Section II, then, aims to set the contours for the Moravian approach to pluralism.

SECTION II

THE MORAVIAN TRADITION AS A SOURCE FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

CHAPTER 4

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MORAVIAN CHURCH

Introduction

As we saw in the previous section, Christian churches, like the Moravian Church, which want to develop a genuinely open approach to other religions, find that current approaches to pluralism founder on a number of counts. They tend towards the closure of dialogue with other religions, fail to treat adequately the question of divine revelation vis-à-vis the other religions, fail to answer definitively the question of whether the adherents of other religions have a future in God and fail to develop an appropriate Christology. This study hopes to show that a Moravian theology of pluralism is an approach more amenable to today's plural context and is able to offer a more comprehensive answer to the questions that the existence of the other religions put to the Moravian Church. However, there has not yet been any significant reflection on what resources there are in the Moravian tradition to enable that tradition to develop a theology of religious pluralism. The aim of this section, then, is to retrieve suitable theological resources from within the Moravian Church that can enable it to make a credible contribution towards the development of Christian theologies of pluralism. The research therefore breaks new ground in the area of Moravian theology. This chapter in particular will give a brief overview of the history of the Moravian Church and situate within it the point at which the Comenian and Zinzendorfian sub-traditions emerged. Considering the rise of these two sub-traditions is an important prelude to the subsequent task of lifting up the theological resources they offer for developing a theology of pluralism.

4.1: Towards a Brief History of the Moravian Church

The history of the Moravian Church may be divided into four main periods. The **first** is the period between its formation in 1457 and 1530, by which time the first generations of leaders died. Towards the end of this period the church was significantly influenced by theological ideas emanating from the Lutheran and Reformed ventures at church reform. The **second** period is between 1530 and 1620, which was dominated by the persecution of the churches in the Counter-Reformation pogrom. The period ends with a virtual wipe out of the Moravian Church, which went into exile for the whole period between 1620 and 1727. This exilic period is, in effect, the **third** period of the Church's history. The **fourth** period of its history is the period since the 1727 revival, during which the Church spread beyond the European continent. The personality of Zinzendorf dominates the first generation of this revival and his theological weight continues to influence the life and thought of the Church today. There have been important developments in the period since 1727, for example the efforts to correct what seemed to have been extremes during the period of Zinzendorf leadership (1727-1760). Significant changes can also be discerned in the period after World War II. However, dealing with the details of those developments is beyond the scope of this study.[1]

---

[1] See the following for a fuller treatment of the History of the Moravian Church: (1) Edmund De Schweinitz, *The History of the Church know as the Unitas Fratrum, 2nd ed* (Bethlehem: Moravian Publication Concern, 1901); (2) J. Taylor Hamilton, and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-1957* (Bethlehem & Winston-Salem: Interprovincial Board of Christian Education, Moravian Church in America, 1967); (3) Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1998); (4) Rudolf Rican, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren: A Protestant Hussite Church in Bohemia and Moravia*, trans by C. Daniel Crews, (Bethlehem & Winston-Salem: The Moravian Church in America, 1992)

For the purposes of this study we shall contract the history into two major periods. The first is the emergence of the Unitas Fratrum from within the bowels of the Hussite Movement in the fifteenth century and the other in the engrafting of Zinzendorfian pietism into the Unitas Fratrum in the early eighteenth century. These two developments seem to correspond to a tension in Moravian theology between pre-Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment epistemologies. For reasons that will become clearer, this study has termed these approaches as the Comenian and the Zinzendorfian sub-traditions. The former embraced a rationalistic approach to theology and the latter reacted to and attempted to correct Enlightenment epistemology, by espousing an approach that limited the pretensions of reason.

4.1.1: The Hussite Pre-History

Having formerly been associated with other reform movements, recent scholarship has taken the view that the Hussite movement did not require the influence of Wyclif and Valdes to succeed and therefore was not fundamentally dependent on either the Lollards or the Waldensians.[2] However, the reformatory demands of Jan Hus should not be treated as either sporadic or without precedence. The Hussite movement bears the mark of a nationalistic movement whose integrity was derived from the fact that it gave voice to popular concerns reaching back to the middle of the fourteenth century. For his articulation, Hus "drew upon a common stock of beliefs to oppose universally felt abuses."[3] Any association with Wyclif, therefore, should be treated as being of secondary significance. Although Hus used some of Wyclif's formulations, especially

[2] For a brief outline see Thomas Fudge, *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia* (Brookfield: Ashgate, 1998), 37-38.

[3] Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent 1250-1450* vol. II (New York: Manchester University Press, 1967), 621.

after 1403 when the University of Prague banned his work, he spoke consistently in the voice of a traditional Czech reformer.

The Hussite movement should be situated theologically in relation to issues surrounding the papacy and the oppositions to that office especially in Prague. In 1309 Clement V (1305) chose Avignon as his See, the result of which was that his successors (who were generally French) came to be regarded as being subservient to the French court. The war between England and France during this period led to a deep-seated patriotically motivated English resentment to the papacy because it supported the French in the quarrel.[4] This was further exacerbated by oppressive papal fiscal policies that gained for the curia the reputation of being rapacious and unscrupulous. These policies met with harsh opposition from William of Ockham and John Wyclif, among others.[5] The election of Pope Gregory XI and the return of the papacy to Rome in 1377 inaugurated a protracted schism over the papacy that must be reckoned with, in order to understand the Czech reform movement that eventually gave birth to the Moravian Church. Within a year after the election of Urban VI, Gregory's successor, a group of French Cardinals met and elected Clement VII who returned to Avignon since he was unable to dislodge Urban from Rome. In an effort to heal the rift between Rome and Avignon, a pope was elected in 1409, but neither of the existing two accepted his authority. This led to the unhappy situation between 1409 and 1415 when three pontiffs held office concurrently. Jan Hus was

---

[4] Matthew Spinka, *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus, vol. XIV, The Library of Christian Classic* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1953), 91.

[5] Gordon Leff, *Medieval Thought: Augustine to Ockham* (London: The Merlin Press, 1959), 256.

born in 1369 during the papal schism and at the time of his ordination in 1400,[6] the schism would have been the most important issue facing the church. With the reformers before him he shared an approach that emphasised the need for the life of the clergy and the authority of the papacy to come into line with biblical simplicity.

The Hussite movement also represents two important ecclesiological/theological developments. One is that it is the point at which the urge for reform in the late medieval Roman Catholic Church took the shape of the formation of an independent Church. Secondly, it represented the concretising of a new development, which we can term ecclesiological pluralism, the space for which was created in part by the demise of scholasticism. In a real sense, the Hussite movement is Protestantism in its infancy. It made a significant contribution to the development of denominationalism and, consequently, to the further development of religious pluralism as a factor within Christianity itself.[7]

Jan Hus may be regarded as one standing at the transitional stage between the medieval period and the Lutheran Reformation and thus provides a link between the old and new reform movements.[8] From a theological point of view the Hussite movement represents the development of a practical approach to theology as an alternative to the highly philosophical approach in scholasticism. Hus was first and foremost a reformer in the practical and moral tradition of his predecessors Milic and

---

[6] Leff, *Heresy in the Middle Ages*, 620.

[7] For more on the Moravian contribution to the rise of ecclesiological pluralism see Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, U.K. and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1994), 329-388.

[8] Spinka, *Advocates of Reform*, 3.

Janov. In this respect he has significance for the theological development after him. Hus ensured that ethics was kept at the forefront of the agenda of Christian theology and the movement he inspired took the form of a national revolt that crystallized the main positions of subsequent Protestantism.[9] This is particularly evident in his work *De simonia* where he treats simony (the trafficking of holy things) as one of three kinds of heresy, the other two being apostasy and blasphemy.[10] As far as Hus was concerned, simony was to be regarded as an ethical misconduct more severe than theft, fornication or defamation. The whole work on *De simonia* is dedicated to identification of simony and to the clarification of how to overcome its incidence in the church.

The central demands of the Hussite movement that were promulgated in 1420, five years after the martyrdom of Hus at the Council of Constance, in some way sum up the practical orientation of the movement for reform. Serving a political function with their roots in the thirteenth century, these demands received their final shape and were presented to the Christian world about the time of the siege of Prague (1420). The demands are termed the Four Articles of Prague and should be given more credence as representative of the thrust of Hus' concern than the thirty articles on which the Council of Constance predicated his condemnation.[11]

---

[9] Leff, *Heresy in the Middle Ages*, 607.

[10] Jan Hus, *De simonia II*, in *Advocates of Reform*, 199-200.

[11] See Norman Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Council vol. 1* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1990), 429-431. In his "mistrial" before the Council Hus refused to own the articles presented to the Council because they thwarted the meaning of his teachings; See Matthew Spinka, *John Hus at the Council of Constance* (London & New York: Columbia University Press, 1965), 226-230. In a letter to a correspondent he called "father" written on June 20, 1415, Hus explains the dilemma in accepting the charges of the Council: "It implies that I revoke ... many truths that the Council calls scandalous; and secondly, that I should have to abjure and thus acknowledge as mine errors that the Council falsely

4.1.2: The Birth of Unitas Fratrum

The 1415 condemnation and death of Hus and that of Jerome in 1417 led to a revolt against both the church and the state in Bohemia and Moravia. In a June 26, 1415 letter to the faithful in Prague Hus said: "they [the Council of Constance] did not defeat me by any Scripture or any proof, but that they sought to seduce me by deceits and threats to recant and abjure."[12] It was therefore evident to the Czechs that Hus did not receive a fair trial and was therefore not worthy of death. An injustice had been committed not only to Hus but also to the people of his country who were always in full support of him. The subsequent uprising in that nation went beyond concerns about religious reforms and spilled over into concerns about the welfare of the whole nation. It gave voice to the concerns of the discontented within the church and the dispossessed in the society all of whom were urging for an improvement in their situation.[13]

The supporters of Hus did not agree at all times on the practical consequences of the demands for reform that they were making. Therefore within a few years after the death of Hus (1415) the movement that he inspired became divided into two main groups, the Taborites and the Calixtines. This division may have set in motion a tendency that has remained a part of the Protestant tradition; that is, the propensity to subdivide. Both groups understood themselves as standing in the reforming tradition

---

ascribes to me, and consequently be a perjurer." [*Hus at the Council of Constance*, 270-271] See also Spinka, *John Hus: A Biography* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 288.

[12] Spinka, *John Hus*, 288.

[13] Rudolf Rican, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren*, trans. C. D. Crews (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church, 1992), 7.

of the Hussites. The Taborites, who were based mainly in the rural areas, were more extreme in their demands than their counter-parts who were based mainly in Prague. They rejected veneration of saints, images and relics and they did not hold church decrees as binding. Their priests conducted worship without priestly vestments and made extensive use of the vernacular.[14] The Taborite movement itself was not homogenous and soon different strands emerged, especially over issues related to war and peace and the extent to which political means should be employed to transform society. In view of the fact that there was no central authority around which views could be tested, there was a continual reference to scripture as being the unshakable basis of authority. This meant that the repute of the individuals who emerged tended to be associated with their interpretation of the Bible.

One leader who emerged and enjoyed a great reputation was Petr Chelčický, renowned for his uncompromising biblicism.[15] Like persons in the mystical tradition, he gave priority to imitating Christ, whose law alone could guarantee the liberation of the individual from darkness and perversion. Chelčický rejected the pretensions of the popes, the bishops and the scholastics. In a manner similar to the Bogomils and the Cathars, he rejected the cult of saints, opposed the adoration of images and had a negative attitude towards wealth and ceremonies. He emphasised the ethic of love for neighbour, rejected state power and the use of force, arguing that the latter was an antithesis of the law of Christ. In time, followers gathered around Chelčický, referring to themselves as Brethren of Chelčický. About the year 1453, some

---

[14] Rudolf Rican, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren,* 8.

[15] Ibid., 21.

sympathizers of Chelčický who belonged to the Calixtine Church in Prague withdrew to the Kunvald area, near the city of Žamberk and made use of the ministry of some of the Calixtine ministers.[16] The subsequent tension with other Calixtine clergy led the Brethren to withdraw further into the forest and soon establish a congregation of their own. Cranz writes:

> Under the direction of Gregory, [they] met in 1457, in a conference; in which, according to the light they then had, they formed their church-fellowship among themselves, not upon the plan of the afore mentioned Compactata,[17] or upon that or other privileges and rules of men, but upon the rules of the Law of Christ. Hence, in the beginning, they denominated themselves *Fratres Legis Christi*, or, Brethren of the Law of Christ.[18]

Thus, the Unitas Fratrum, which was formed first under the name Brethren of the Law of Christ, is one of the outgrowths of the Hussite movement. In its establishment in 1457 the Church was characterized by ideals of Jan Hus: a rejection of the traditional religious practices, strict discipline, pacifism and a mild form of asceticism. The formation of the new Church was justified on the basis that, "the law of Christ is sufficient for the government of the Church militant, without the addition of human

---

[16] David Cranz, *The Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren or A Succinct Narrative of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren or Unitas Fratrum,* trans. B. La Trobe (London: W. and A Strahan, 1780), 22. This is probably the earliest full account of the history of the Moravian Church and provides a point of reference for all the subsequent accounts. It was completed in 1771.

[17] The Compactata in question here is the agreement between the Bohemians and the Council of Basel (1433), which was later repudiated by Pope Eugenius IV. The Compactata provided for the right of laity to receive the Holy Communion in both kinds.

[18] Cranz, *History of the Brethren*, 23.

laws."[19] Ten years later in 1467 in a Synod at Lhota, the church laid the basis for a separate priesthood and episcopacy, taking the name the *Unitas Fratrum* (Unity of the Brethren), by which it is known today. One problem the new group had to resolve was the question of ordination. They were not disposed to receiving ordination from the Calixtines and would not have received Roman Orders. They found what they regarded as a pure priestly order among the Waldensians in Austria from whom they accepted ordination. Stephen of the Waldensians consecrated the first Bishop of the Unitas Fratrum. This ordination caused the Brethren to be termed Waldensians, a fact that has been a source of confusion in the history of the church. [20]

The idea of forming a separate church was without precedence, as a result of which they were accused of forming a state within the state. From the very outset, then, the newly formed church met with opposition and persecution from the Calixtines as well those adhering to the Roman Orders. The Church grew rapidly as they attracted a large number of Taborites, who were scattered by the defeat at the hands of the Calixtines in a conflict in 1434 .[21] In order to avoid persecution the Brethren went further into the forests, so they were nicknamed *Jamnici* or *Grubenheimer*, which refer to persons who lived in caves.[22]

---

[19] B. Seifferth, *Church Constitution of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren* (London: W. Mallalieu, 1886), 95.

[20] Cranz, 29. The questioning of the legitimacy of Moravian Orders in America and England, and the inability to support the doctrine of apostolic succession, led the Brethren to resort to the theses of personal apostolic succession. However, this idea does not, according to Rican, accord with the idea of the Bishop's office as it is in historical actuality. For further discussion see Rican, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren*, 384.

[21] Edmund de Schweinitz, *The Moravian Manual Containing an Account of the Moravian Church or Unitas Fratrum,* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Publication, 1869), 148.

[22] Cranz, 30.

4.2: The Theology of the Old Unitas Fratrum

As far as the early leaders were concerned a new paradigm was needed for the theological emphases in the emerging Protestantism because they believed that the speculative approach of scholasticism associated with Roman Catholicism had already fully run its course. As the confession of the Unitas Fratrum emphasised, purity of doctrinal beliefs and good order not rationality was the centre of the Christian experience.[23] By the time of the Lutheran Reformation, the Unitas Fratrum had done considerable work in developing a confessional approach to theology, which had no semblance of the late scholastic approach. One of the fullest extant articulations of the theology of the old Unitas Fratrum is the 1522 Catechism of the Bohemian Brethren *(ein christiliche untterweysung der klaynen kinder jm gelauben, durch ein weyz einer frag [en]. m.d. xxi [i]),*[24] which is based on an earlier fifteenth century version, the exact date of which is uncertain.[25] The main aim of the Catechism was to impart the things essential for salvation.[26] It begins with the assertion that the human being is a rational mortal who needs to be saved. The

---

[23] *Constitution of the Bohemian Brethren,* I

[24] *Christian Instruction in the Faith for Little Children, in the Form of Questions, 1522;* de Schweinitz makes mention of an earlier document, The *Apology*, of 1503, which he believes is the oldest extant document of the Bohemian Brethren. [de Schweinitz, *The History of the Church Known as the Unitas Fratrum* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Publication Concern, 1901), 200.] The *Apology* is significant in that it details the distinction between things that are essential (*essentialia*) from the auxiliary (*miniterialia*) and the accidental *(accidentialia*), a distinction that would be significant in Moravian theology from 1632 onwards and survives in the contemporary formulation, "in essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity." However, de Schweinitz's apologetic presentation of details does not allow for a critical examination of the contents, the full text of which is not available.

[25] de Schweinitz, *The Catechism of the Bohemian Brethren*, p. 5

[26] The approach of limiting one's consideration to things necessary for salvation became important for the earliest ecumenical endeavours between the churches. For example, the Consensus of Sendomir, an agreement made between the Unitas Fratrum, Lutheran and Reformed in Poland in 1570, makes allusion to the essential and the non-essential things. For more on this see Ruth Rouse and others, eds., *History of the Ecumenical Movement: 1517-1968* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1993), 62.

salvation of the human being depended on three divine graces: faith, love and hope. As Comenius would also later emphasize, faith, love and hope summarize the whole gamut of Christian faith and practice. Faith, the first ground of salvation, is founded upon the Apostles' Creed, which he called the universal Christian faith. The evidence of the presence of that faith is the keeping of the Ten Commandments, which above all hang on the love of God and love of neighbour. Other issues relating to the saints, the Virgin Mary and the sacraments that are not included in the Apostles' Creed are dealt with. Christian practice was predicated primarily on the Ten Commandments and the Beatitudes and keeping them is a proof of love, which is the second ground of salvation. The third ground of salvation is true hope; hope in God essentially, in Christ meritoriously and in the Holy Ghost. The Catechism gives a long list of things on which some men build false hope. Reminiscent of the Hussite ideals, this list includes "obedience to the Pope and the Romish Church, without obeying the Word of God; ... [trusting] in papal letters and bulls, believing that what is falsely promised therein will come to pass."[27] The Pauline emphasis in the Catechism on faith, love and hope is similar to the emphasis that we find in the writings of Augustine.[28] The new Church was laying claim to the primitive church as its own pre-history, a trend that would become the hallmark of the subsequent Reformations.

---

[27] *The Catechism of the Bohemian Brethren,* 15.

[28] "For as the pious faith has no desire to exist without hope and without charity, it is needful that the faithful should believe what he does not yet see in such a way that he may hope for and love a vision of it." *Epistolae*, CXX, ii, 8; "For where are there those three, in order to build up which in the mind the whole apparatus of the divine Scriptures has been raised up, namely Faith, Hope and Charity, except in a mind believing what it does not see, and hoping and loving what it believes?" *De Trinitate libri* VIII, iv, 6; "As then you see what was made as one thing, so be you one, by loving one another, by holding one faith, one love [and one] undivided charity." *Sermones*, CCIX.

A much later document of theological significance is the Ecclesiastical Order of the Unity of the Bohemian Brethren, which was finalized in the General Synod, held at Zerawich in Moravia in 1616. This formal setting out of their doctrine became necessary because of plans to impose a uniform liturgy and polity on the evangelical churches that had diverse rituals. The document claims to be the work of the original founders of the Unity with the partial aim of restoring purity of doctrine and simplicity of Christian life. It asserts that in order to effect the "pure worship" of God, the original founders sought, "the model of the apostolic and primitive church."[29] The Bohemian Brethren perceived that theology had not singled out those things that were necessary for salvation, which made it necessary for them to set out clearly those things in Christian thought and practice. The categories they used were things Essential, things Auxiliary and things Accidental.[30]

The things **Essential** were divided into things on the part of God and things on the part of human beings. On the part of God the essential things were: the grace of the Father, the merit of Christ and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. On the part of human beings the essential things were: faith, love and hope, which is similar to the framework in which the Catechism of a century earlier was constructed.

---

[29] *Constitution of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren*, trans. B. Seifferth (London: W. Mallealieu, 1866), 99-100.

[30]This hierarchical structure for doctrine pre-empted Vatican II in its emphasis on hierarchy of truths in the context of ecumenism. The Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio* declares: "While preserving **unity in essentials**, let all in the church, according to the office entrusted to them, preserve a proper **freedom in various forms** of spiritual life and discipline ... and even in the theological elaboration of revealed truth. **In all things** let **charity** prevail". See *Unitatis Redintegratio* No.4 (my emphasis) In No. 11 the Decree declares: "When comparing doctrines with one another, they [catholic theologians] should remember that in catholic doctrine there exists an order of 'hierarchy' of truth, since they vary in their relation to the foundation of the Christian faith".

The things that were **Auxiliaries** included, the Word of God, the keys[31] and the sacraments. These things were given as the means whereby the essentials became known: the word of God reveals, the keys assign and the sacraments seal. The auxiliaries serve the essentials to ensure that the purity of the faith was kept intact.[32]

The **Accidentals** of Christianity were those things relating to the time, place and mode of worship, which included the ceremonies and the external rites of religion. These things, which Comenius later called the accessories, should be practiced with liberty and prudence, and "in a manner that they might not only prove no obstacle to faith, love and hope, ...but rather than they might serve to illustrate and impress them."[33] The Essentials and the Auxiliaries were commonly held among Christians but the Accidents were drawn from practices in the primitive church and various indications in Holy Scripture. Although they were to be treated with a measure of flexibility, at the same time the recognition of Accidentals was not a license for individuals to change and introduce ceremonies and opinions without subjecting them to proper general examination.

By establishing a hierarchy in beliefs and practices, the Bohemian Brethren were indicating those truths they were prepared to negotiate and those that were not open for discussion. In relation to some doctrines there had to be unity among Christians,

---

[31] Although this seems to be a reference to papal authority, the translation by Seifferth places a footnote to John 20:22, which refers to the Holy Spirit. However, the Order treats the Holy Spirit as an essential, not an auxiliary. The reference to the instrumental nature of the ministry alerts us to the possibility that "keys" here is a reference to the office of the ordained ministry.

[32] *Constitution of the Bohemian Brethren*, 102.

[33] Ibid., 103.

while in others liberty should be allowed. This approach to belief and practice became important for attempts at church unity in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.[34] Whether an approach that organizes truth in a hierarchical fashion has relevance to the present plural context remains to be seen. What seems certain is that this approach to doctrine is part of the contribution that the Moravian Church can make to discussions on pluralism. By the second decade of the sixteenth century confessionalism had emerged as the paradigm for theological discourse. The significance of the Hussite controversy was that in this movement a genuine reformation was initiated and in the process it crystallized the main positions of subsequent Protestantism.[35] At the beginning of the Lutheran Reformation, the Unitas Fratrum was estimated as having four hundred churches in Bohemia and Moravia and about two hundred thousand adherents.[36]

4.2.1: The Emergence of Comenius

Having emancipated itself from the margins of society, the Unitas Fratrum was the most vital religious force in Bohemia and Moravia to respond to the Lutheran challenge.[37] However, the development of confessional pluralism created a problem for the society, which was expressed, for example, in the war between the Protestants and the Catholics that lasted from 1618 to 1648. From the inaugural session of the Council of Trent (1545 – 1563), the Roman Church went on a counter-offensive

---

[34] Rouse, *History of the Ecumenical Movement,* 42-69.

[35] Leff, *Heresy in the Middle Ages,* 607.

[36] De Schweinitz, *Moravian Manual*, 153. Lambert puts the estimate at 150,000. For more on this see Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell, 1994), 385.

[37] Lambert, *Medieval Heresy,* 359-360.

against the new religious developments, rejecting the Reformation on every important doctrinal issue and the Hussite demand for communion in both kinds.[38] It was during the Thirty-Years War that John Amos Comenius emerged as leader of the Unitas Fratrum. In his attempt to address the divisions in the church and society, he composed his *Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart* (1623), in which he offered a sober critique of society. Additionally, in his *Consultation on Reform,* which will be the focus of later consideration in this section, he outlined the way to reform society in terms of religion, politics and philosophy. Together with other publications by Comenius these were to have significant impact on the Moravian Church as well as sections of European society. The Brethren Church remained an exiled church under the Bishopric of John Amos Comenius, from 1632 to his death about 1670, enjoying greater peace in Poland than in the land of its birth. By the end of the second decade of the seventeenth century the Counter-Reformation had reduced the numbers so extensively that the church all but disappeared. The revival of the Church began in 1722, when refugees of the Bohemian Brethren Church found a safe place on the estate of Count Zinzendorf, a German Lutheran priest and noble man. A link between the Renewed Moravian Church and Lutheranism was established through the hospitality the family of Zinzendorf offered the refugees fleeing persecution in Bohemia and Moravia, a good number of whom had links with the Old Unitas Fratrum.

---

[38] Ozment, *The Age of Reform,* 407.

The Unitas Fratrum, then, is an outgrowth of the Hussite Movement, an identity that the Church has been zealous to maintain. That identity has subsisted in the Church's hierarchical organization of theological issues in terms of their proximity to salvation. In the essentials, which are necessary for salvation, there should be unity among Christians. However, for those things that are accidental or non-essential, there should be liberty. The engrafting of the Zinzendorf's pietistic emphasis onto this Bohemian stock is what gives Moravian theology and polity its unique character today.

4.3: Zinzendorf and the Renewed Church

The second major development in the Moravian Church occurred in the second decade of the eighteenth century with the emergence of Zinzendorf. The early history of the renewed Moravian Church is co-terminus with the history of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf, who was born in Dresden on May 26, 1700. The Count's ancestry in the aristocratic house of Zinzendorf can be traced to eleventh century Austria where his house was numbered among those supporting the Austrian dynasty.[39] His thirty-eight year old father died when Nicholas was only a few weeks old, as a result of which his mother and grandmother, who were influenced by Jacob Spener's pietism, had responsibility for his education and religious formation. In fact, his family on both sides was particularly close to Spener. Spener's *Pia Desideria* of 1675, which was seen as a corrective to a kind of Lutheran scholasticism, significantly influenced the movement that was later called pietism.[40] It is not

[39]John Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf: The Story of his Life and Leadership in the Renewed Moravian Church* (Bethlehem, PA & Winston-Salem, NC: The Moravian Church in America, 1984), 13.

[40] A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer: A study in the Moravian Contribution to Christian Mission and Unity* (London: SCM, 1962), 22.

surprising therefore that Zinzendorf was schooled at Halle, the seat of eighteenth century German pietism, under the tutelage of Spener's successor, August Hermann Francke. The Elector Frederick William III of Brandenburg was closely associated with Spener and built Halle in 1694. Although Zinzendorf seemed to have had problems in adjusting to the strict discipline of the school, he left after six years believing that he learned there what could make him "happy for time and eternity."[41] Despite his three years study at the University of Wittenberg where he majored in jurisprudence, Zinzendorf nurtured the pietistic influences from Halle. Moreover, he took interest, though with no serious outcome, in the dispute that arose between two strands of Lutheranism, one at Halle and the other at Wittenberg. His view was that there was a common ground between the two strands, despite their different perceptions of doctrine. In this context Zinzendorf developed an interest in church unity, which was reinforced through his contacts with the Roman Catholic Cardinal, de Noailles of Paris. The issue of Christian unity would later become a fundamental principle in his theology and ecclesiology.[42]

In 1722, during his tenure at the court in Dresden, Zinzendorf met Christian David of Moravia, who was part of a second wave of migration out of Moravian and Bohemia. Part of the attraction of Germany to the Moravians/Bohemians was the evidence of greater religious freedom and the evangelical renewal that had taken place in the Lutheran congregations in Dresden and Zittau through pietism. Though the migrants were of mixed religious background, many of the Moravians/Bohemians had nurtured

---

[41] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 30.

[42] Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer*, 26.

the piety of the Old Unitas Fratrum and saw in Lutheran pietism an opportunity to resurrect that tradition. Christian David later led the first group of Moravian refugees to the manor of Berthelsdorf. Zinzendorf had previously acquired Berthelsdorf and came to live there after his marriage in 1723. The rapid influx of refugees and concomitant political and social factors, together with the Count's interest in religious affairs, led him to take leave of the Saxon court and from 1727 onwards he attended fully to life in Berthelsdorf. The new religious community swelled its ranks as it drew pietists and enthusiasts from Lutheran and Reformed circles, to add to the original settlers, many of which were Moravians. Conflicts over doctrine and authority soon ensued but were settled through the instrumentality of Zinzendorf. In retrospect, the disputes themselves can be seen as having at least two positive effects. In the first place, it led to a clarifying and a solidifying of the self-identity of the community. That self-identity was a mixture of Moravian tolerance overlaid with Lutheran pietistic modesty. The second outcome of the disputes was that from it Zinzendorf emerged as *de facto* leader, which was related to the fact that he was host for the refugees and his deep interest in the spiritual welfare of the community.

Zinzendorf found in the Library in Zittau a copy of Comenius' *Ratio Disciplinae,* the constitution of the Bohemian Brethren, which he translated into German for the community at Herrnhut. He then drew up a compact based on the old Brotherly Agreement of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren.[43] These events, a new sense of unity and a renewed self-understanding in the community form the background to the

[43] In the Brotherly Agreement the Brethren agreed, among other things, to observe Christian obedience, accept instruction and warning from one another in the spirit of love and mutual accountability. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, people coming into membership were expected to sign the agreement. See Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer,* 36 & 53.

famous Pentecostal experience of August 13, 1727, which is used to mark the rebirth of the Unitas Fratrum. However, despite the recovery of the older Moravian tradition, the community remained faithful to the Augsburg Confession, which was due particularly to the influence of Zinzendorf. In fact, the theology of the renewed Unitas Fratrum is predicated primarily on Zinzendorf's explication of the Augsburg Confession, which was given in special lectures, sermons and talks. At a later stage in this section we shall give a detailed consideration of that theological emphasis because it is fundamental to understanding contemporary Moravian theology.

Through Zinzendorf's personal initiative a new settlement was organized at Herrhaag, near Ronneburg, which was to occupy a dominant place in Moravian affairs. A conference of Moravian Brethren in nearby Marienborn December 6-9, 1736, is looked upon as the first Synod of the Renewed Moravian Church. The centre at Marienborn, as well as Herrnhaag, played a significant role in the development of Moravian doctrine between 1743 and 1750, a period known as the Sifting Period.[44] Although having difficulties not unrelated to the fact that he was a Count, Zinzendorf was formally recognized as a Minister of the Gospel by the theological faculty of the University of Tübingen on December 19, 1734.[45] The unique character of Moravian Orders took on another feature when on May 20, 1737 Zinzendorf was consecrated as Bishop of the Unitas Fratrum by the grandson of John Amos Comenius, Daniel Jablonsky, the last Bishop of the old Unitas Fratrum. Jablonsky was at that time

[44] The Sifting Period was a time of evangelical fervour and zeal that expressed itself in an unusual fascination with the body, blood, wounds and death of Jesus. Herrnhaag was at the centre of these excesses but Gustav Frederick rescinded the act of toleration of the Moravian in Wetteravia in 1749, after which most of the Moravians migrated to Pennsylvania in North America.

[45] Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf*, 120.

serving as a minister in the Reformed Church. Two years earlier Jablonsky had consecrated David Nitschmann, one of the exiles from Moravia, which helped to seal the relationship between the old Bohemian/Moravian tradition and the new congregation at Herrnhut. In a certain sense, Zinzendorf was effectively an ecumenical Bishop, not only because of his acceptance of the orders of three separate denominations (Moravian, Lutheran and Reformed) but also because he did not confine his episcopal duties to any single communion.[46] This commitment to ecumenism was not only symbolized in his ordination and consecration, but also in his desire to organize the Brethren Church into what he called Tropuses;[47] that is, units of Moravians, Lutherans, Reformed and Anglicans.

One of the most significant features of the Renewed Moravian Church is the extensive overseas missionary activity in which it became involved. Moravian missionaries commenced their overseas engagement in 1732 in the Caribbean after which every continent was visited and work started although not all those efforts have survived. With the work in Australia handed over to other evangelicals, this is the only continent on which there is no active congregation of the Moravian Church today.

---

[46] When we consider Zinzendorf's pastoral care of Diaspora Societies the notion of "episcopal duties" may be understood in less technical terms than in reference to ordination. As Lewis (132) points out, only in special cases were members from the Diaspora Societies allowed to become members of the Moravian Church. In other words, they were under pastoral care but not within the Moravian Church. In this sense his pastoral care was not limited to the Moravian Church *per se*. Moreover, his view that the Moravian Church should be at the service to the rest of the Protestant community also points to his understanding of the ecumenical nature of his ministry.

[47] Lewis, 139-141. According to the *Church Book of the Brethren's Unity of the British Province*, (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1892), 21, the word "tropus" (from the Greek *τρόπος*) must not be taken in the sense it was used in rhetoric, that is, as signifying a metaphor. It is to be understood in the way it is used in logic, that is, to signify the mode of a proposition. The word "method" or "system" comes nearer to the way in which it is used in the Brethren's Unity. The 1848 Synod, which was held at Herrnhut in Germany, understood tropus to mean a mode of teaching, an idea that seemed to have been adopted first at the Synod of 1744. For a fuller treatment see *The Results of the Synod,* 1849, IX, 104.

Nevertheless, that intense activity in overseas mission has continued *via* mission boards and agencies because as the Church Order declares, the vocation of the Church is "to proclaim His [the Lord's] word to its congregation and to the world."[48]

Conclusion

The Unitas Fratrum, we may then conclude, grew out of the Hussite Movement with a theological position centring on ethical/theological concerns. In this emphasis the Church gave serious attention to the different theological positions it engaged because of the need to hammer out unity among Christians. In the Bohemian context the concern for unity among Lutherans, Calvinists and themselves led the Moravians to clarify those things that were essential for salvation and those things that were merely accidental. In the German context, its theological position was an attempt to harmonize an old Bohemian theology with the new emphasis in Lutheran pietism.

Sensitivity to a plurality of theological positions, then, is a hallmark of Moravian history and theology. This characteristic means that the Church has developed resources through the centuries that may be useful in the present era of religious pluralism. Our next task, then, is to excavate the Moravian theological sub-traditions

---

[48] *Church Order* 1985, II, 100. For a comprehensive history of the Moravian Unity see Rudolf Rican, *The History of the Unity of the Brethren* trans. Daniel Crews (Bethlehem, PA: Department of Publication, Moravian Church, 1992); J. Taylor Hamilton, and Kenneth G. Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum, 1722-19757* (Bethlehem, PA: Inter-provincial Board of Christian Education, 1967) See also the *Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum, (Moravian Church)*, 1995 # 208 for the list of current Provinces. For a comprehensive coverage of Moravian missions see J. E. Hutton, *A History of Moravian Missions* (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1954). A good example of a narrative of the life of a missionary is John Henry Danke, *A Narration of the Life of John Henry Danke: Missionary of the Church of the United Brethren Amongst the Copts in Egypt* (London: W. McDowall, 1830).

of Comenius and Zinzendorf to retrieve those resources for developing a theology of pluralism, a task that until now has not been undertaken in the Moravian Church.

CHAPTER 5

COMENIUS' THEOLOGY AS A SOURCE FOR A THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Introduction

In seeking to retrieve theological resources from within the Moravian tradition for application to today's plural context, which is the aim of this chapter, one has to bear in mind the existence of a hermeneutical tension in the Church that has influenced theological discourse in recent times. On the one hand, the Church has a clearly stated hermeneutical principle that governs biblical interpretation: "the Unitas Fratrum recognises the Word of the Cross as the centre of Holy Scripture and of all preaching of the Gospel."[1] On the other hand, however, there is a refusal to commit to any particular theological system. The Church maintains that:

> Just as the Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own because it knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind or expressed completely in any human statement.[2]

In addition to this statement of hermeneutical modesty, the *Church Order* notes that hermeneutics within the Moravian Church benefits from "two millennia of ecumenical Christian tradition and the wisdom of our Moravian forbears."[3] So, on

---

[1] *Church Order 1995*, I, 4

[2] Ibid

[3] Ibid.

one hand the Church owns the ecumenical tradition together with its forbears as part of its hermeneutic tradition, in which it lifts up the "Word of the Cross" as its pre-eminent interpretive key. On the other hand, it is suspicious of all theological systems because of the limitation of the human mind and of language, and because of the inability of reason to penetrate certain mysteries of the gospel. This tension, which gives a unique character to theological discourse in the Moravian Church, has to be understood in relation to its sources.

5.1: Sources of the Intra-Moravian Hermeneutical Tension

There seem to be two sources of the Moravian hermeneutical tension. The **first** is the plurality of traditions that were formally incorporated into the Renewed Moravian Church in 1744. According to that Synod, "The renewed Brethren's Church recognizes within its pale three modes of teaching Christian doctrine, which it distinguishes as the Moravian, the Lutheran and the Reformed tropus."[4] The Synod of 1774 reaffirmed this position arguing that the entire Protestant Church, which sprang from the sixteenth century Reformation, agreed on the sole authority of Holy Scripture in matters of faith and on justification by faith. The centrality of the Scriptures was found to be consistent with the Bohemian/Moravian Brethren Church, which preceded the Reformation by some fifty years. The differences in their conception of Christian doctrine, their constitution and ecclesiastical practices, could be regarded as different ways of apprehending the one Divine truth. However, none of the three tropuses was required to give up their peculiar confession of faith in becoming a part of the renewed Moravian Church. The result was that the three

[4] Quoted in *Results of the Synod of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren Held at Herrnhut in the Year 1848*, IX, 104.

interpretive traditions were allowed to exist side-by-side in the new union. The plurality of ways of apprehending divine truth was seen as a precious treasure to be faithfully preserved. The Moravian Church believed it should "be of service to the [whole Protestant Church] by means of this gift ...to help it [the Protestant community] more and more fully to carry out the will of the Lord, 'that they all may be one'."[5] This belief has influenced the role of the Church in inter-church ecumenism. However, the different hermeneutical approaches that the three tropuses brought persisted for sometime, thus ensuring that there were differences and tensions in the ways in which Scripture and the wider Christian tradition were read. In the early years of the Renewed Church, Zinzendorf played a key role in developing a bias towards the Lutheran tradition, which is the reason the Augsburg Confession was declared to be the main confession guiding theological discourse.[6] In the immediate post-Zinzendorf period there was an attempt to lessen the role that one confession was perceived as playing. Consequently, the current *Church Order* lists ten different confessions to which it subscribes, though only the Bohemian Confession of 1535 can be called Moravian.

In the **second** place, the hermeneutical tension may have arisen because of conflicts over liberal theology and the extent to which the historical-critical method was to be

---

[5] *Church Book of the Brethren's Unity of the British Province,* II, 9, 44.

[6] In the Introduction to Zinzendorf's *Twenty-One Discourses,* the Synod of 1748 was keen to indicate the consistency of its positions with the Augsburg Confession. See for example ix-x. However, under the leadership of Spangenberg in the immediate post-Zinzendorfian period there was a trend away from some Zinzendorfian views. Instead of emphasis on the consistency with the Augsburg confession, the Synod of 1775 determined a list of essential doctrines to which adherence was expected. These were (1) Doctrine of the total depravity of humanity – that we cannot save ourselves, (2) Doctrine of the Divinity of Christ, (3) Doctrine of the Atonement – that Jesus died for our sins and was raised for our justification, (4) Doctrine of the Holy Spirit as the one who leads us to conviction of sin and to faith in Jesus, and (5) Doctrine of faith – that faith must be evidenced in obedience to God's commands. For a full discussion see Hamilton, *A History of the Church,* 216-221.

allowed to influence Moravian hermeneutics. The reaction within the Moravian Church to liberal theology came first and foremost from the German Province because of the attempts to introduce the thoughts of Albrecht Ritschl (1822-1889) and Wilhelm Hermann (1846-1922) into the Moravian Seminary at Gnadenfeld. So extensive was the controversy that the Synod considered a proposal for the closure of the seminary. Although that proposal was not approved, groups that supported Moravian overseas mission threatened to withdraw their financial support.[7] The *Church Order* of 1911 reflects the thinking of the German Synod of 1908, where the issue proved to be contentious.[8] In responding to the theological controversies the *Church Order* repeated the position first promulgated at the Synod of 1879: "We hold fast to our genuine Moravian view, that it is not our business to determine what the Holy Scriptures have left undetermined, or to contend about the mysteries impenetrable to human reason."[9] Clearly, this suspicion of reason in theological circles reflects a general mood in the second half of the nineteenth century.[10] By contrast, the Compendium of Doctrine included in the Results of the Synod of 1857 does not include any statement that refers to the limitation of reason, despite the limits

---

[7] Daniel Crews, *Confessing Our Unity in Christ: Historical and Theological Background of to the Unity* (Winston Salem: Moravian Church, Southern Province, 1994), 16.

[8] Crews, *Confessing Our Unity in Christ*, 17.

[9] *Church Order 1911*, II, I,2. See also *Results of the General Synod of the Brethren's Unity 1879*, II, 6 (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1881), 10. The only difference between the 1879 and the 1911 statements on the issue is the first phrase: in 1879 it runs, "We strictly adhere to the principle which has always obtained among the Brethren, that is not our business ...etc." The 1911 statement runs, "We hold fast to our genuine Moravian view, that it is not our business ...etc".

[10] Toland refers to this suspicion and was critical of the church in general for its negative attitude to reason. The project of deism was to show that reason in fact had a role in religion, hence Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity.*

that Zinzendorf placed on reason in his commentary on the Augsburg Confession.[11] This latter source of tension, concerning the extent of use of liberal theological methodology, has been the more influential factor in Moravian hermeneutics and continues to play a role today.

It seems that it was inevitable that the tension over reason would develop because it also reflects differences between the approaches of John Amos Comenius and Count Zinzendorf, the two most influential theologians in the Moravian tradition for the last four hundred years. On the one hand, Comenius writes out of a pre-Enlightenment context, in which he showed a willingness to embrace reason and sees it in harmony with faith. On the other hand, Zinzendorf writes within an Enlightenment context and takes a position over against rationalism, limiting the role that reason can play in matters of faith. Therefore, what became the tension in the hermeneutics of the Renewed Moravian Church was already pre-existent in the differences in the hermeneutics of Comenius and Zinzendorf. Our intention then is not to attempt to resolve that tension as we retrieve these theological resources because this plurality of views, especially on non-essentials, is itself engraved in the Moravian self-understanding. Instead, the two approaches must be allowed to engage each other as part of the logic of pluralism itself. Our aim is to see what contribution each of these two theological sub-traditions can make towards the development of a viable Moravian theology of pluralism. We shall first address ourselves to the Comenian sub-tradition.

---

[11] In fact, at the Synod of 1769 Spangenberg questioned whether the use of the lot, which had earlier been instituted in recognition of human inefficiency in arriving at a reasoned consensus, would not be best dropped, since it remained an apple of contention. For the details see Hamilton, *A History of the Church*, 217.

5.2: Comenius' Universal Principles and Plurality

John Amos Comenius (Jan Amos Komenský) was born in Nivnice, Moravia, on March 28, 1592 and began his pastoral work in the Moravian Church at the commencement of the Thirty-Years War.[12] He soon realized that a new initiative was needed for the reformation of the age in which he was living. The broader context of his work is the Counter-Reformation pogrom that was initiated in Prague in 1621. In June of that year, twenty-seven leaders of the Brethren, Lutheran and Evangelical churches were executed, after which all the Brethren Churches in Prague were confiscated. During the crisis Comenius went into exile in Poland with two hundred other priests and hundreds of members.[13] It is from Lešno in Poland that he undertook most of his writing. In 1632 he was appointed a Bishop of the Unity, with special responsibility for the exiles.

Faced with the problems of pluralism and disunity, he attempted to reformulate his philosophical ideas, giving pre-eminence to the notion of harmony in human affairs.[14]

---

[12]In the introduction to his translation of *Panaugia*, Dobbie has suggested an alternative birth place at Comma, hence his surname. Nivnice is chosen here because it is believed to be corroborated by the records of the University of Heidelberg. In either case it is near the modern city of Brno, where the Czechs have honoured his memory by setting up a museum in his honour. For a fuller treatment of Comenius see Matthew Spinka, *Comenius: That Incomparable Moravian* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1934).

[13] It is estimated (Rican, 348) that there were between five thousand and six thousand members of the Brethren Church that went into exile at that time.

[14] His ideas are contained in his *magnum opus*, *De Rerum Humanarum Emendatione Consultatio Catholica* (*The Consultation on the Reforms of Human Affairs)*, which was discovered in 1934. See John Amos Comenius, *Panaugia or Universal Light: Being Part Two of His Consultation on the Reform of Human Affairs,* trans. A. M. O Dobbie (Warwickshire, England: P. I. Drinkwater, 1987), viii. The issue of unity in religion, philosophy and politics gleams through much of Comenius' published works. Spinka mentions ninety-two titles in a partial bibliography of Comenius' work. See, Spinka, *John Amos Comenius: That Incomparable Moravian*, 156ff. Jan V. Novák, *Jan Amos Komenský: jeho život a dĺlo* (Praha, 1932) 699-709 lists one hundred and fifty-four titles of larger works and forty-nine

He argued that previous attempts at reform were partial because they were focussed on a single aspect of human affairs: education, politics or religion.[15] The result of these piece-meal efforts was either slow progress or the opening up of fresh rifts more dangerous than before. In contrast he called for an approach to the reform that drew out the connection between these three most important features of human society, to which everything else was secondary.[16]

Comenius' attempt to reform the world by overcoming religious dissensions, which can be termed an early theological attempt to respond to religious differences, was based on three normative principles of unity, simplicity and freedom. The first, the principle of **unity,** is derived from the idea of a unit and applies to anything that has its parts so interconnected and coherent that when the whole is moved all its parts also move.[17] This unity, and hence the union and the communion that it implies, is derived from creation where God laid the foundation for universal union and communion by making all human beings of one and the same substance. The opposite of unity is multiplicity, which occurs when things are unconnected and do not affect or attract automatically.

---

titles of smaller works. See also A. Heyberger, *Jean Amos Comenius,* (Paris, 1928), 243-65 for a partial listing.

[15] Comenius gives as examples John Wyclif (c.1320-1384), John Hus (1373-1415), Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531), Calvin (1509-1564), Menno Simmons (1505-1561) and the Pope himself. See Comenius, *Panorthosia,* XXXIII, 3.

[16] Comenius, *Panegersia*, IV, 13.

[17] Ibid., IX, 3.

The second universal principle, **simplicity,** is applied to anything that is not composed of several parts, which means the thing in question is self-contained, unchanging and identifiable.[18] The term is also applied to God since God is not composite but a being of pure power, pure goodness and pure wisdom. Comenius draws from this the conclusion that the human being was made to be self-sufficient and dependent on God alone. For as God in his simplicity exhibits pure omnipotent power in managing his works without further assistance, "so it is probable that man has been furnished with internal powers to perform the works which are appropriate to his nature, that is, to achieve results which he wishes and understands."[19]

Comenius' third universal principle of reform is **spontaneity or freedom,** which refers to the capacity for a unit to operate on its own accord and by its own inclination. Implied in this third principle are the two afore-mentioned ones of unity and simplicity. A system that is composite and complex cannot be truly free in its operation because it needs to rely on external force, which amounts to compulsion.[20] According to Comenius, freedom is also a mark of divinity because God as the Supreme Being does not need to depend on a higher will and as almighty being there is no fear that his might will be fettered or restrained. God is therefore free to do as he pleases and he has impressed this mark of divinity on the human being. God himself does not desire to reduce the human being to nothing but respects human

---

[18] Ibid., IX, 2.

[19] Ibid., IX, 14.

[20] Ibid., IX, 5.

freedom and is offended if it is violated. Human freedom is curtailed when the individual is not able to operate as an autonomous centre of power and thought.[21]

In highlighting the principles of unity, simplicity and spontaneity Comenius was seeking to harness and harmonize theological, political and philosophical resources for the services of unity. He believed that there were three bases on which to argue for unity and harmony. We will look at these three bases in the following sub-sections: 5.3: creation, 5.4: revelation and 5.5: eschatology.

5.3: Creation as a Theological Basis for Harmony

The first basis for seeking harmony was the unity he perceived in God's **creation**. According to Comenius, the union and communion in creation is indicated in the witness of Scripture that all humanity is descended from one and the same stock, in the same manner in which branches and leaves share in the total nature of the tree.[22] God could have fashioned all human beings in the way he adopted in making the angels, that is, making them all at once. In choosing the way of a single stock for humanity, God was ensuring the strictest union and communion in the human race. The identity of blood and nature thus ensures perfect union and communion in the human community. In his understanding, then, human nature is one and the same in every corner of the world because all people have the same endowment of senses,

---

[21] Comenius seemed to have had in mind the suppression of religious views in the Counter-Reformation and the Decrees that emanated from the Council of Trent (1545-63), which began to take serious effect in Bohemia in 1622. According to Comenius, since Disputations and the Decrees that follow them concerning beliefs and duties have the appearance of compulsion, one comes to the conclusion that truth is more likely to win a trial if it stands in shining armour than if it is noisily and crudely defended. In this regard, see Comenius, *Panaugia,* III, 20.

[22] Comenius, *Panegersia*, IX, 10.

reasoning powers, will and active faculties. Comenius felt therefore that the ideas that emanated from other lands (other nations and other religions) should be owned as part of the resources of the one human community. In his view, it was incumbent on us to receive and assess the ideas of other traditions in the search for harmony because the same God, who is one, is in all things and has created all human beings in his image.[23]

5.3.1: Comenian Anthropology and Religious Conflicts

Comenius defends his common human nature theory by calling attention to the three innate human principles that match the necessities of all kinds of action: knowing, willing and achieving. In every person there are (a) innate norms of knowledge that are called notions, (b) stimuli of desire that are called instincts and (c) organs or capacities for action that are termed common faculties. The latter two he considered as new contributions to the understanding of human activity: "hitherto philosophers have spoken only of Common Notions; not one of them has ever brought these into order and arrangement: they have remained scattered, as they occur to any one upon any occasion."[24] According to Comenius, these three innate principles were sufficient to exhaust the variety, however extensive, of all things and as such are norms for what the world contains. Knowing, willing and doing are present in human nature in all nations, in all ages and in all conditions.

Comenius links the three elements in human society (education or philosophy, religion and politics) to the human intellect, will and the faculty for action, which he

---

[23] Ibid., IX, 11.

[24] Comenius, *Via Lucis*, Dedication, 6.

calls the "roots of human sublimity."[25] In drawing out this connection Comenius argues that: (1) the hunger in the human being for truth produces philosophy, which exercises the intellect; (2) human desire for good creates religion and the cultivation and enjoyment of the highest good, which exercise the will; (3) human eagerness to manage his/her affairs leads to the creation of a political system and thus draws upon the capacity of human faculty for action. In the political systems we see evidence of the insatiable desire of human nature to control its present environment and to fashion and refashion it anew.[26] These three factors, the intellect, the will and the faculty for action are primordial in nature because they were demanded of the human being from the very beginning.[27]

Ironically, the thing that creates problems in society, as well as the human desire to find solutions, is our creation in the image of God. According to Comenius, "from the beginning of time there have been hostilities over questions of leadership, science and godliness, [which is also] true of the modern world."[28] Human beings desire wisdom in the mind, piety in the heart and tranquillity in life, which relates respectively to philosophy, religion and politics. These desires, however, give rise to rivalry in the human community. This does not mean that creation itself is a problem but that that

---

[25] Comenius, *Panegersia,* IV, 11.

[26] Ibid.,10.

[27] According to Comenius, Adam was ordered to inspect God's creatures and to give them individual names and so to master them; this was the origin of philosophy. Eve was commanded to multiply and replenish the earth, which was the origin of human society that requires politics for its administration. Adam was also commanded to abstain from a certain fruit that he might acknowledge his dependence on God and this was the origin of religion. See the fuller discussion on this idea in Comenius *Panegersia*, IV, 16. More than one hundred years later Schleiermacher, who grew up in the Moravian Church, would predicate his understanding of religion on the human sense of absolute dependence on God (das Gefühl der schlechthinnigen Abhängigkeit').

[28] Comenius, *Panegersia,* IV, 22.

restless search for truth and the highest good, which leads to conflicts in the human community, is a function of the very capacities created by God. This may require a certain ability on our part to live with unresolved differences because they lie deep within human self-understanding and nature.

In order to achieve the solutions to the problems of society, a number of factors needed to be in place. These include a proper understanding of the human being, and an awareness of how visible affairs are related to what the human being is in the depths of his soul.[29] An inventory of common instincts and common faculties would enable us to embrace all the treasures of truths, desires and abilities, which would in turn make it easier to disperse the darkness of ignorance and error that afflict human affairs. He concludes:

> If we rescued common ideas from their underlying confusion, we should all fully understand them and find it easier to comprehend other ideas, which are derived from them, however obscurely. Similarly, if we all rightly understood the common instincts of human nature, our wishes would coincide and wars would cease, since we have enough instincts prompting us to happy ends for ourselves and the community, if only we knew how to get rid of the spurious instincts which tend to interfere. Then at last we should all be able to attain our ends if we all clearly recognized the common faculties and freed them from confusion. For the ultimate ends of the divine light in mankind are the ability to wish for all that is good, to know all that is true and to do all that is possible.[30]

---

[29] Comenis, *Panaugia*, VI, 23.

[30] Ibid., 25.

The solution to human conflicts in philosophy, religion and politics will evade us unless we are able to come to terms with the human mind, which is the image of God in each person. The reform of human affairs, therefore, is related to our appreciation not only of the fact that all human beings are created in the image of God but that the dissensions we experience are related to the impetuses of the human mind. The desires that lead to the search for truth, piety and tranquillity are related to the operation of the intellect, the will and the individual's capacity for action.

5.3.2: Engendering Harmony as a Continuation of Creation

Comenius treats the universe as the macrocosm and the soul as the microcosm of God's creation. This correlation between the macrocosm and the microcosm of creation led him to perceive the reform of human affairs in philosophy, religion and politics as a continuation of the act of creation. He claims that the urge for reform is evidence that the one and only Creator and Lord is striving day by day to make the world more open to himself and more accessible to all people. He asked, "Why should we not cling to the hope that in the course of time we shall become one assembly of nations, well ordered and sharing the same bonds of science, laws and true religion?"[31] Since for him God's purposes in creation were for himself and not for the devil, we can expect that God will perform his work of wisdom in us and destroy the cunning of the devil that expresses itself in confusion and dissension in society. God will control everything so that a drama badly begun by his creatures, or one wisely begun by him and spoiled by human unreasonable action, is brought to a perfect conclusion. We can then hope for a happy ending to the unhappy drama of the

---

[31] Comenius, *Panegersia,* VIII, 14.

world.[32] The enthusiasm shown for reform, then, should be seen as evidence that God, the secret architect of things, is continuing his work of creation through the use of human resources. For notwithstanding the omnipotence of God, "it is well-known that from the beginning of creation God took no immediate action by himself in dealing with creatures, but always used them as his agents."[33] We should share whatever is God's concern, since we are the image of God. According to Comenius, one could not be far from wrong if one concludes that God's own hand will initiate pious attempts to save his church and increase his glory.

The observation that God has created the world as a unit in the natural sense provides Comenius with the impetus for seeking harmony in the moral sense. He locates the desire for knowledge and truth, the sense of divine power and the love of peace and tranquillity in the human mind. These virtues then do not have to be re-created because their roots are firmly implanted in human self-understanding. The challenge was to bring them into harmony so that they do not relapse. Human beings were not only to seek ways of harmony with a clear conscience but also to co-operate positively with them. We would only be tempting providence if we wait for miracles, when the means to find solutions are already available in one form or the other.[34] Since God is seeking harmony, nothing remains but for people to join in the search piously, seriously and persistently until a way to reform is discovered.[35] This search

---

[32] Ibid., 16.

[33] Ibid., 26.

[34] Ibid., 25

[35] Ibid., 27.

was necessary because "the bitter hatred which exists between all the sects in religion, philosophy and politics increases the hope of eventually restoring harmony to the world [because] ... its real source lies in the love of unity, truth and goodness."[36]

The first basis of harmony, then, is the unity already given in creation, which is exemplified most dramatically in the fact that the image of God is impressed in all human beings. The desire we have for reform is derived from the divine impulse for perfection in the human community and in that sense is a continuation of the act of creation.

5.3.3: Creation as a Basis for a Theology of Pluralism

We shall have to consider in detail later the interfaith relevance of Comenius' understanding of creation. At this juncture, however, two critical remarks are necessary to indicate the direction in which the discussion is headed. The first relates to the interfaith significance of the proposition that the image of the Creator, however the Creator is perceived, is impressed on the minds of every individual. It seems that a more profound justification, than that the people of other faiths are blind to God's revelation, must follow upon the Christian claim that the image of God is impressed on each person. At the very least this means that there is no inability on the part of people of other faith to recognize and receive God's revelation, which for Comenius is given in three arenas; not only in Holy Scripture or in the world of nature, but also in the mind of the human being. A formidable problem in interfaith dialogue is the inability of Christians to affirm with conviction that the other religions are also the

[36] Ibid., 13.

locus of divine revelation. As we shall see, such a difficulty is overcome with Comenius' view of revelation in three arenas, which neither undermines the unique claims of Christian revelation nor precludes the possibility of divine revelation in non-Christian contexts.

The second remark relates to how we understand the make-up of human being. Even if we do not agree with how Comenius understands the structure of the human mind, we cannot miss the force of the assertion that the unity in creation bequeathed equality in the human community and that, whatever is his or her location, the human being desires truth, piety and tranquillity. By implication, there is relative parity in terms of human desires, irrespective of our social, cultural or geographical location. By proposing anthropology as the basis of his call to harmony, Comenius gets involved in the ongoing debate about the place of anthropology in theology. His insistence on the commonality of human desires may, however, lead to a tension in his thought. On one hand, by painting all humanity with the one anthropological brush Comenius offers a meta-narrative that overrides the particularities of each culture, which some argue must be maintained against globalizing trends.[37] Here Comenius' universalism functions as a homogenizing schema that tames and domesticates the particularities of the different cultures. As Surin argues, it is difficult to argue for a common humanity as long as the existing political and economic order constitutes a world system whose structures, group members and rules of legitimization require the systematic

[37] See Anthony Giddens, *The Consequence of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 51ff. He defines globalization as the intensification of worldwide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away and vice versa. [p. 64]

consignment of masses of human beings into political and economic subjugation.[38] On the other hand, however, the view that all human beings desire truth, piety and tranquillity challenges us to assess with greater compassion the piety of people of other faiths. Though Comenius does not advocate that all ideas held by people of other faiths should be accepted without question, he leaves himself open to be influenced by other traditions. This openness is predicated on his belief in the equality of human beings and, as we shall see, his conviction that God speaks to human beings in all cultures through his three books. For Comenius, then, a theological anthropology and a theology of creation can provide the basis for a theology of pluralism.[39] Having looked at creation and anthropology as a basis for a theology of pluralism, our next step is to consider Comenius' views on revelation and harmony between the scriptures of different religious traditions and how this will impact a theology of pluralism.

5.4: Revelation and Religious Pluralism

The second basis of Comenius' hermeneutics of harmony and of his call for reform is the **unity of revelation** within and among the three books of God. Considering how Comenius deals with the issue of revelation is important because of the centrality of

---

[38] Kenneth Surin, "Towards a Materialist Critique of Religious Pluralism," 120.

[39] This anthropological predication for his theology finds common cause with Pannenberg who, over against a dogmatic anthropology, argues for a fundamental theological anthropology that considers human existence as it is investigated in human biology and psychology. The understanding of anthropology on which Pannenberg predicates his research is what biological research tells us about the special character of the human beings as opposed to the animals most closely related to them. [Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985), 22]. In a similar manner, Comenius' philosophical conclusions are derived from comparing the human being with the animals: "an indication of the inner light that is peculiar to the mind of man and enables him to discover the appearances of things is obtained by contrasting the learning-power of the animals with that of human beings." (*Panaugia,* VI, 4) So, then, Pannenberg's anthropological methodology, which has contemporary theological relevance, was already prefigured in Comenius.

this issue in Christianity and Islam. A fundamental question for Christians is whether the Qur'an can be regarded as revelation from God in the same sense in which the Bible is revelatory. Coming to terms with the issue of revelation (*wahy*) is particularly significant because despite decades of Christian-Muslim dialogue, the central issue of the acceptance by Christianity and Islam of each other as veritable revelations has not been settled.[40]

Comenius considers the question of the revelatory nature of the Qur'an in the context of his view of the three-fold way in which God addresses humanity.[41] In what seems to be an allusion to the Qur'an he writes that such books are found in other nations as well as in Europe, and their holders claim that they were written by God's bidding and dictation. He cautions anyone to dare to reject any one of them as a hoax.[42] For him, revelation is God's handiwork and it would be perilous for anyone to wish to stand in God's way. To immediately reject the claim that others have a book from God, though different from our own, is to run the risk of refusing to listen to the voice of God. Refusing to listen to what God is believed by others to have said:

> Imposes blindness upon God. In other words, he imagines God as a blind, deaf, and dumb idol or a cruel tyrant who perhaps watches our downfall and destruction with a smile of indifference and certainly does not intervene as He might. Since no one could wish for such an absurd God, the idea would be unthinkable, and when one hears that books are being circulated in God's

---

[40] "Islamic-Christian Dialogue: Problems and Obstacles," *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations,* 11, No. 2, (July 2000): 214.

[41] Comenius, *Panaugia,* VII, 2.

[42] Ibid., 8.

> name, one would wish them to be truly divine so that we may listen to God. This is the first point on which we must agree, that some books must exist in which the voice of God himself is recorded, no matter how far we have to go to find them.[43]

As a matter of primary importance, then, he gives all books claiming the status of a divine message from God the benefit of the doubt. However, since sacred scripture is the voice of God to human beings, infallible criteria must be established to insure against deception since there were several books claiming divine status. In order to ensure that there is not an error of judgement in regard to divine books, "we must first and foremost agree upon criteria or signs which may enable the divine books to be certainly and infallibly distinguished from others."[44]

The idea of establishing infallible criteria for determining the authenticity of the claims to revelation of other books represents one of the critical moments when Comenius steps beyond the intra-Christian polemic and addresses himself to the wider interfaith context. As far as he was concerned, any book claiming to be representing the voice of God must be given a hearing. However, there is a tension, then, in Comenius' attitude to books of possible divine origin. On the one hand, he wanted to guard against bestowing on some questionable book the honour that is due to God's word, hence the need for criteria. On the other hand, however, he believed that we were to live in fear and trembling and be cautious about making pronouncements about any book that is believed by anyone to represent the voice of God. This tension

---

[43] *Ibid.*

[44] Comenius, Panaugia, VII, 9.

seems unavoidable because his willingness to subject all claims to sacred scriptures to the same criteria derives from his theology and his anthropology. He is open to the possibility that other books may be the source of revelation because he wishes to have agreement on the theological assertion that God speaks to all people. To immediately deny the claims of others would be a *de facto* denial of the Christian claim, which makes the issue of agreed criteria so critical in his approach. He also believes that a common set of criteria is possible because his anthropological assertion is that all human beings have a desire for truth and a capacity for finding it.

The argument for the unity of revelation may then be summarised according to the following affirmations: (1) In addition to revelation in the human mind and the world of nature, God has given us important information and warnings for our salvation in sacred scripture. (2) If more words of warnings (i.e. divine books) are forthcoming, they must be tested against the agreed infallible criteria, to insure against deception and to show what is authentically God's word. (3) Everyone must accept as authoritative any statement proven to be from God.

From these three theses Comenius develops an approach to revelation that was aimed at giving a definitive answer to the question of divine revelation in a non-Christian context. The first step in that approach was to outline the criteria for recognizing divinely inspired scriptures. The second step was to indicate the harmony between the three arenas of revelation and the harmony between sense, reason and faith. The third step was to show harmony within each arena through an analytic, a synthetic and a syncritic reading of God's books. These three hermeneutical steps that we must now consider are at the centre of the Comenian approach to the plurality of claims to

revelation. The question that we must also keep in mind is the relevance of this approach to the development of a theology of pluralism today.

5.4.1: Criteria for Determining Divinely Inspired Books

The first movement in Comenius' hermeneutic of harmony is the setting of criteria to recognize divinely inspired books. According to Comenius, the criteria can be divided into three sets of characteristics. First are the **external characteristics,** which can be divided into three sub-types: the first is the character of those who bear the revelation and committed it to writing. Their piety and spiritual discernment would not allow them to deceive the world with fictitious claims. Their simplicity means they do not even know how to invent revelations. According to Comenius, it is clear proof of the divine origin of the revelation when they come from organs that are normally incapable of producing them, as when God used infants to confound the wise.[45] The second external characteristic relates to the verifiability of the revelation. Comenius believed that miracles verify the credibility of revelation and make them indubitable. The third external characteristic relates to the transmission of the revelation from one generation to the next. For Comenius, the transmission of the testimony is sealed by martyrs who fearlessly submit to violence or even death at the hands of sinners who reject the word of God.

The second set of criteria is the **internal characteristics,** which can be further sub-divided in three aspects. The first aspect of internal characteristics relates to the

[45] Ibid., 12. Muslims believe that the authenticity of the claims of Muhammad's Prophethood is indicated by the fact that he was *ummi*, which means illiterate (Surah 7:157). This condition of *ummi* meant that the Prophet was a clean vessel for receiving the revelation of the Qur'ān

nature of the events to which the revelations refer.[46] According to Comenius, true revelations refer either to events that precede the existence of the world, events that will come to pass after the end of the world, or events that will happen in this world but in circumstances that we could not possibly predict. Comenius believed that the less elaborate the revelation the greater the likelihood of its authenticity. The second aspect of the internal characteristics is the progressive nature of the revelation to which the divinely inspired book refers. For Comenius genuine revelation involves a gradual process of ever-increasing enlightenment. The gradual movement in revelation is similar to what obtains in the development of the human mind "whose light increases with each succeeding age."[47] The third aspect of the internal criteria is the agreement between the revelation in the book in question with previous revelations in the written Word, the nature of things and sound reason. The word of the divine book must then be consistent with what is enacted in the other two theatres of God, the external world and the human mind. In language that anticipates Locke and Toland, Comenius argued that, "although God can make many revelations above the level of reason, he must not do so contrary to reason and risk conflict of truth or the destruction of either side."[48] To make the revelation contrary to reason God would risk contradicting himself. God must also show internal consistency whether

---

[46] *Panaugia,* VII, 15.

[47] Ibid., VII, 16; Comenius is alluding here to the view that the revelations of the New Testament are developments and expansions of the revelations given in the Old. His conception of the developing capacity of the human mind was similar to the view held that the Renaissance and the Enlightenment represented an emergence from the darker ages. Here Comenius is using evolutionary language before the notion of evolution came into philosophical discourse.

[48] Comenius, *Panaugia* VII, 17. The possibility of deception to which Descartes referred in his meditation does appear in Comenius.

he is expressing himself through his works in nature, or through reason in the human mind or through dictating his revelation in words.

The third characteristic of divine books Comenius describes as the **intimate characteristics.** A truly divine book must make a three-fold impression on the human mind.[49] The first is that the enlightenment and joy it gives must be more than can be derived from any other human writings. Secondly, the divine books are able to bring about a conversion, or a supernatural transformation towards full obedience and surrender of the will to God. Thirdly, the divine books are able to communicate the strength of the Holy Spirit, which is most clearly seen in the example of martyrs who are prepared to give their lives as a witness to the revelation. These intimate characteristics are positioned at the centre of contemporary debate about Scriptural authority. For Comenius, the authority of a divinely inspired book is intimate in the sense that it makes a personal challenge for commitment rather than a demand for intellectual assent to something that is clear-cut and absolute.[50]

In **summary** then, there are sets of criteria for determining the revelatory character of sacred writings, the external, the internal and the intimate. The external criteria relate to the piety of the messenger, the verifiability of the revelation and the authenticity of

---

[49] Ibid, VII, 18

[50] Schneiders refers to this kind of authority as disclosive authority: "In this case, the address of the authority never fully transcends its character as appeal. It never attains even relatively evidential status such that, if one wishes to reject the appeal, one must 'disprove' its claims. In this category are such appeals as the claim of the beautiful to aesthetic response, the claim of a suffering human being to compassion, the claim of a parent to filial piety, the claim of the loving rebuke of a true friend to a hearing and even a response of repentance and conversion, the claim of friendship to fidelity, the claim of one who has demonstrated his or her love to be believed. Such claims have in common that they call for a response that is not exclusively or even primarily intellectual but affective and moral." Sandra Schneiders, *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture* (Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999), 56.

the process of transmission. The internal criteria relate to the nature of the events to which the revelations refer, the further enlightenment they bring and their consistency with previous revelations. The intimate criteria relate to the effect of the message on the hearers and the kind of authority the message possesses.

The significance of these criteria is that Comenius recognizes the different perspectives from which one had to consider the question of the divine status of a set of writings. However, not all the criteria seem to have continuing relevance. For example, it is not clear how the notions of piety, miracles and the nature of the transmission in the external criteria could challenge any negative judgement in relation to the Qur'an. Similarly, in reference to the intimate criteria, the effect that a particular book has relates to the context and manner in which it is used and may not be particularly helpful in resolving the question the status of an unauthorized book. Any book that is used in worship, for example, can be expected to have the effect to which these intimate criteria refer. At the same time, two aspects of the internal criteria may give further breadth to the discussions relating to the scripture of other traditions. In the first place there is the aspect of the internal criteria that there must be agreement with previous revelations. This is relevant to discussion between Christians and Muslims over the disagreement between the contents of the Bible and the Qur'an. If it is accepted that there must be agreement between revelations, then Muslims would be challenged to reconsider the view that the Qur'an abrogated the Bible on certain points. By the same token, on the basis of the agreement criterion Christians would be challenged to give up the notion that Jewish revelation has been superseded. The notion of agreement, however, is in tension with the further

revelation criterion, which is the third aspect of internal criteria. That criterion seems to suggest the possibility of eclipsing earlier revelations. The use of the internal criteria today would therefore necessitate coming to terms with this tension, which Comenius seeks to do in the second step in his hermeneutics.

5.4.2: Harmony Between the Three Arenas of God's Revelation

Comenius' **second hermeneutical movement** was to show that there is agreement between the three arenas of revelation. His argument is that there is harmony between, the external world of nature, Holy Scriptures and the internal world of human mind. He writes:

> God, therefore, has three lamps from which His brightness flashes and radiates towards us, namely, the world, which is the constant workshop of His wisdom, our mind, which constantly dictates and explains reasons, and His Holy Word, which constantly forewarns and corrects our mistakes. These three lamps are variously described as three books of God, three theatres of God, three mirrors or the threefold law of God, our threefold pandects and the threefold fountain of wisdom. … We also refer to them as our pandects or collection of all the things that need to be known. The world really contains pandects of all sensory things, the mind those of intelligible things, and Holy Scripture those of spiritual and eternal things. Alternatively the world is there to explain all objects of perception, the mind to explain all matters of understanding, and Holy Scripture … to explain the right and proper beliefs on the way to salvation.[51]

[51] Comenius, *Panaugia* IV, 6, 7, 12.

According to Comenius, however, the three lights or the three divine books would be useless unless God trained us to behold their images clearly with our eyes.[52] The contents of the world are special and individual, so we have been given the appropriate organs of reception in the form of senses, both internal and external. Likewise, the contents of the mind are universal, the ideas are also universal and the appropriate organ for comprehending in the field of intelligible things is reason. What Holy Scriptures contain is spiritual and generally remote from sense and reason, so that if they were not revealed they could not possibly be known, the appropriate organ for perceiving them is faith.[53] The way in which we perceive the lights of God in the three arenas of revelation is analogous to the way the eye perceives light, which can be represented by the following table. According to Comenius, when the object is presented to the eye to be looked at immediately this is called direct vision. When a mirror lies between the object and us we receive an image of the object, which we call reflex vision. When a barrier, as when a coin is at the bottom of a glass, comes between the object and us, the object can come into view through an appropriate medium, for example pouring water in the glass with the coin. This way of seeing we call refracted vision. In other words, we perceive the objects of the world through the senses, which we call direct vision. Secondly, we are able to look at intelligible objects and distinguish one from the other by the use of reason, which is the image of God's eye within us. We call this reflex vision since the mind is really like a mirror reflecting everything it meets, not contemplating them immediately but forms abstract ideas of them. In this way the mind imitates God, who sees the whole world in

---

[52] Ibid., VIII, 1.

[53] Ibid., VIII, 7

himself, since he contains the reasons for everything. In the third place, we become aware of many things beyond the senses and the power of reasoning. This faculty for accepting report that we get from credible witnesses is what we call credulity or faith, which denotes an act of believing. The testimony of the voice of God, concerning things that neither sense nor reason conveyed we call refracted vision. [54]

Table 1

THE THREE-FOLD WAYS OF READING THE THREE BOOKS OF GOD

BOOKS OF GOD	**EYES GIVEN FOR READING**	**TYPE OF VISION**
The External World	The Senses	Direct Vision
The Human Mind	Reason	Reflex Vision
Holy Scriptures	Faith	Refracted Vision

Comenius was keen to maintain harmony between the three books of God and harmony between faith, reason and empirical observation, at a time when there was the trend towards the separation of the disciplines. He urged that we read the world, the mind and Holy Scriptures together as the three books of God. Each must be inspected with the threefold-eye of sense, reason and faith. If sense, reason and faith were used to help each other, when one is wrong it would be fully corrected by the other two. For example, faith is fallible unless it is duly confirmed by sense and reason. If the condition of mutual correction is not observed, errors will occur

[54] Ibid., VIII, 3. Idem *Panaugia*, VIII, 5-6.

frequently or at least there will be serious obstacles to our understanding. For him, true knowledge of the world of nature was a key to the mysteries of scripture. Nature and scripture serve each other as commentator and interpreter, scripture speaking in more general terms and nature in particular terms.[55] He concludes that there is: "Major harmony ... between our inward and external eyes when sense, reason and faith are on friendly terms and so much agreement that conflicts are unthinkable."[56]

By arguing for harmony between sense, reason and faith Comenius seeks to overcome two challenges. In the first place, he aims to overcome the tension that may arise from the application of his criteria for determining divine books. One criterion required was that what is revealed in a divinely inspired book must be in agreement with reason and empirical observation. For Comenius, where contradictions cannot be resolved it was due either to the improper application of the three-fold eye of faith, sense and reason or to the questionable nature of the revelation. Secondly, Comenius was responding to the emerging trend of treating sense, faith and reason as distinct provinces.[57] For this reason Comenius' perception of harmony between the three books of God is a unique theological contribution that is important for inter-church and interfaith dialogue, as well as for the relationship between faith, philosophy and

---

[55] Comenius, *Via Lucis,* XIV, 8.

[56] Comenius, *Panaugia,* X, 23.

[57] This eventually became full blown in deism, where Locke claimed: "no man inspired by God, can by revelation communicate to others any new simple ideas which they had not before from sensation or reflexion." John Locke, An *Essay Concerning Human Understanding,* IV, xviii, 3.

the human and natural sciences.[58] His third hermeneutical step addresses the issue of agreement within each arena of revelation.

5.4.3: Comenius' Epistemology of Harmony

The **third movement** in Comenius' hermeneutic of harmony was to discern the harmony within each arena of God's revelation. For this task Comenius proposes a manner in which the three-fold eye should be employed within each book. As a result of the vastness of God's threefold books, many things can only be seen remotely or at best obscurely. The question is how to read each book so that we might benefit from the depth of their riches, especially when there are wide disagreements among scholars who look into the same books.

The first of the three-fold method for reading that Comenius recommends is **analysis**, by which he means reading the books of God in such a way that the parts hidden in the whole are exposed by closer inspection. The analytic method breaks down the object into smaller parts and provides a starting-point for synthesis. The second way he recommends is **synthesis**, which is the means whereby the whole is recognised through its previously known parts. Comenius likens synthesis to the microscope, which examines the smallest of objects, for example atoms, in order to draw conclusions about the larger ones. Synthesis may be understood by contrasting it with analysis: whereas analysis is useful for finding the contents of things, synthesis is

[58] Polanyi's aim in *Personal Knowledge* was to restore the power for deliberately holding unproven beliefs in the context of empirical observation and reason, as an alternative to the failure of trusting that we could be relieved of all personal responsibility for our beliefs by objective criteria. According to Polanyi, "the doubting of any explicit statement merely implies an attempt to deny the belief expressed by the statement in favour of other beliefs which are not doubted for the time being." Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1962), 272.

useful for detecting the force that creates, composes or unifies things. Whereas analysis deals with the parts of objects, synthesis deals with the order of the parts.[59]

The third method he recommends is **syncrisis**, which is a comparative method that deals with the universal and ultimate form of the idea from which the objects derive their vital force.[60] Comenius considered the verification of the existence of God as a way to illustrate the syncritic method. For him if we did not deduce the existence of God from human mental competence then we would have to allow that human capacities that are known were the most excellent in the entire universe. However, we are not convinced that that is the case.

By asserting that there is a harmonious way to read the three arenas of revelation Comenius aims to come to terms with the consequences of the plurality of readings. It is a hermeneutical task to see the connections between faith, reason and empirical observation as it is a hermeneutical task to see the connections between the Bible and any other divinely inspired scriptures. In any investigation sense, reason, and faith were needed at one hermeneutical level and analysis, synthesis and syncrisis at the other. All three books of God should be read analytically to see the parts, synthetically to see the coherence of the parts and syncritically so that the fundamental form of the matter under consideration may become clear.[61] When, sense, reason and faith are applied synthetically, they will show the unity between the

---

[59] Comenius, *Panaugia*, IX, 13.

[60] Ibid., IX, 5.

[61] Ibid., IX, 18.

world, the mind and scriptures, the third of which was for Comenius the only thing that separated people of different religions. The separation between the divine books of the religions is further exacerbated when a reading of them alongside the nature and the mind would yield conflicting truths. However, a synthetic reading of the Three Books of God would show that there is no contradiction in God's revelation.

Comenius' approach presents two challenges to a theology of pluralism today. In the first place, there is a challenge to read the three arenas of revelation for harmony, which will involve maintaining a mutually critical relationship between sense, reason and faith. The hope is that excesses in the use of one of these three "eyes" will be corrected by the use of the other two.[62] Secondly, this hermeneutical approach means the modern Christian theologian cannot sidestep the issue of the revelatory significance of the Qur'an. It seems that either the Qur'an must be declared spurious or that it must be declared as being divinely inspired. It must be excluded from consideration altogether or it must be read alongside the Bible as being of revelatory value. The force of this conclusion is derived from the argument that no arena of God's revelation and no book claiming divine status can be excluded except on the grounds of clearly established criteria.

In **summary**, Comenius proposes three hermeneutical movements to come to terms with conflicting assertions about revelation. The first movement is that of recognizing

---

[62]Here Comenius overcomes the problems faced by scholastics who argued that a truth from the point of view of faith might not be possible to be established by reason or the senses. Averroes stressed that truth in the area of philosophy should be separated from truth in the area of theology. This separation between philosophy and theology featured in the theology of Siger of Brabant, a position that led to the eventual separation of the two disciplines. See Etienne Gilson, *A History of Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1955), 387.

books of divine origin, for which he sets out three criteria, the external, the internal and the intimate. When we have a sense of what constitutes the third book of God's oracle, the next step is to use the three-fold eye of sense, reason and faith for looking into these books or three arenas of God's revelation. In order to ensure that our reading does not result in a skewed or fragmented picture, we should then make the third hermeneutical move, which is to use the three-fold eye to read each arena of God's revelation. This required reading analytically to see the components, synthetically to see their coherence and syncritically to determine the use and end of what we have analysed and synthesized. For Comenius, then, the age of conflict and rivalry, of dissension and strife, of religious, philosophical and political disagreements, is faced with a hermeneutical problem. Unless we can agree on what books we are reading and on the way to read them, we are not likely to overcome our conflicts. The force of Comenius' challenge pushes Christians to come to a definite position on the question of revelatory nature of the Qur'an, and how it is to be read, as a prelude to overcoming the differences between Islam and Christianity. Recognizing that some conflicts may extend beyond the present epoch, Comenius shows where there is yet an eschatological imperative to seek their solutions.

5.5: Eschatological Imperatives for Harmony

We have already dealt with creation and revelation as two bases on which Comenius predicates his call for religious harmony. The third basis of this call is **eschatology,** the consideration of which is important for two reasons. In the first place, the related issue of utopia is relevant to any approach to pluralism and is a concern especially for Christianity and Islam. Secondly, eschatology is an important aspect of the intra-

Moravian hermeneutical tension, which must be reckoned with in the development of a Moravian theology of pluralism. For the Moravian approach to have application in the Caribbean context, where Caribbean theology follows liberation theology in operating with a single utopian vision, it must come to terms with the different conceptions of utopia that there are between Zinzendorf and Comenius.

Comenius put an extreme weight of responsibility on the human being for creating the utopian dream of pan-harmony. He believed that "the whole history of the world, corresponding to the life period of man, must necessarily culminate in some highest level of intellectual development."[63] Pan-harmony is the framework for the fullest possible knowledge that can be gained under heaven, so it will be the last stage of world history. There were already several stages in the progressive use of the intellect. The final stage of world history was pan-harmony, which Comenius characterized as one in which there would be "the gathering and confluence out of all the lights, which have hitherto revealed the one great light for the common use of mankind."[64] The final stage will join together all the previous stages and "will set in the light, more clearly than ever before, those things which we ought to contemplate,

---

[63] Comenius, *Via Lucis,* VI, 3.

[64] Ibid., XIII,4-10. The first stage Comenius called autopsy, that is, the direct and accurate inspection of the world by means of the eyes. The second stage was the stage of mutual questioning. By questioning and by responding to questions, the individual was able to effect a fuller advance of wisdom. The third stage was the custom of holding public assemblies, where many persons could be taught at the same time. Comenius locates the institution of this third way before the Flood (Gen 4:26) but said it continued up to his time. The fourth stage for advancing wisdom was the invention of writing, which he said was the only method available for handing on to posterity the things worth remembering. The fifth stage of advancing knowledge was the discovery of the printing press, the result of which has been intense competition of the publication of fresh discoveries. The sixth stage in intellectual development and the spreading the light of knowledge throughout the human race was through the art of navigation. Through navigation communication was opened up between peoples of various continents hitherto cut off from each other. Yet, despite these six stages, the world has an ineradicable longing for a fuller light of knowledge, which, in the highest sense, was full of all those things that are offered for our learning here on earth, and set forth in that threefold book of God given to us.

and will make the speech of all men to all men more precise in dealing with them."[65] Therefore, the Comenian imperative for harmony is based on the perception of the ultimate re-ordering of the world as a present human task in partnership with God rather than as a future task for God alone.

Comenius gives three reasons to justify the assertion that human initiatives were necessary to establish pan-harmony as the climax of history. The first was psychological: he felt it was necessary to overcome the piecemeal efforts and partial results of previous attempts to bring about harmony, all of which failed because they were not sufficiently universal.[66] The second reason was ethical: he considered it prudent that Christians seek to attain the things we ask of God. Our efforts, then, to secure unity in the world, which is clearly something we desire and pray for, should be given to God as offering in the hope that God may use it.[67] The third reason was theological: he believed that though unity and harmony are spiritual notions, we understand them only in earthly terms. Therefore, effort was needed on earth to achieve the things of heaven.[68]

---

[65] Ibid., XIII, 12.

[66] Ibid., III and IV. Comenius includes in the list of such persons Diogenes, who lit a lamp at midday proclaiming that he was looking for a man; Heracleitus who was constantly bemoaning follies with ceaseless tears and sighs; Democritus, who declared that all men were foolish and ridiculous; and Christ, who bore "witness in his own words: 'we have sung to you and you have not danced; we have mourned to you and you have not beaten your breasts'." *Via Lucis*, III, 9. Comenius' interpretation of Matt 11: 17 suggests that the quotation was Jesus' critique of the society. However, it seems the writer was saying that this was the society's critique of people like Jesus.

[67] Ibid., VII, 1.

[68] Ibid., XIV, 4-5.

Comenius' eschatological vision of pan-harmony, then, was seen as the result of human beings acting in concert with God, which had psychological, ethical and theological justifications. Since God gave unity to the human community, we were under an imperative to work assiduously for its establishment. The fact that Comenius does not relieve the human being of the responsibility for the end of things has critical implications for a theology of pluralism. His utopian dream for the religions is not a wait-and-see attitude but it is a future to be created through human initiatives. According to him the dissensions and confusion that arise from the plurality of the present day was a consequence neither of God's inactivity nor of God's failure but was due to human action or inaction. God always uses the efforts of human beings so it was critical to the future that our best efforts were put forward. Given the desire for a future of harmony, and having regard to several failed attempts, it was now incumbent on us to pursue those things that will bring about the future we seek.

Conclusion

In his *Consultation on Human Affairs* Comenius took the position that there was a need to reform the affairs of the human community in terms of politics, religions and philosophy. Efforts to this end were already attempted but because these were fragmentary and partial they failed. The time had come for a holistic approach that was based on three universal principles. The principles were unity, simplicity and freedom, which constituted the axis around which the wheel of harmony would be set in motion. The universality of these principles was justified with reference to three bases that justified the call to harmony. (1) The first basis is **creation**: the assertion is that all the created works of God display his image, but more so the human being, in

whom the image of God is most clearly impressed. As an important part of creation all human beings were made one in terms of intellect, will and capacity for action. The elements in human society, philosophy, religion and politics are related to these aspects of the human person and the problems and solution in society can be understood in relation to the human mind. The desire in the human community for reform can be regarded as the ongoing process of creation.

The second basis is **revelation**, in which the claim is made that the three books of God, the world, the human mind and Holy Scriptures make the will of God known. All three must be read together in order for us to know the will of God in the fullest possible way. All nations should bring their account of the word of God, which would be assessed on agreed criteria. When the criteria are met, sense, reason and faith must be applied in reading all three books of God, which exist in mutual relationship, so that something obscure in one can be made clear in another. So as to see the connection between the revelations within and between the books, the three fold hermeneutical principle of analysis, synthesis and syncrisis is required.

The third basis for the call to harmony was Comenius' **eschatology.** There were psychological, ethical and theological reasons for human efforts to create the harmony we desire. Our utopian dream was to be seen as a reality we create in obedience to God's prompting. This call to action in light on the desired end, one could say, is the foreground for Comenius' call for harmony.

The challenge that a Moravian approach to pluralism faces, then, is to show the relevance of Comenius for interfaith engagement. According to his approach, the

problems of the relationship between Christianity and the other religions had to be resolved through human efforts because they are related to the God-given desires for truth, piety and power. His insistence that religious claims be subjected to public scrutiny places him in the modern period with its awareness of plurality and difference. The central argument of his approach, however, is that the bases for harmony are already given in creation and revelation and the imperative to achieve harmony is derived from his perception of the climax of human history. The contribution that Comenius makes to a theology of pluralism, then, must be seen in relation to his views on creation, revelation and eschatology.

CHAPTER 6

THE INTERFAITH APPLICATION OF COMENIUS' HERMENEUTICS OF HARMONY

Introduction

Comenius' efforts to bring about harmony at the national and international levels may be described as a pre-Enlightenment attempt to develop a theology of pluralism. Although at the outset he was concerned with issues of inter-church relations and their impact on politics, he was quick to see that he could not focus his concern for unity and peace in one nation or one region of the world. His vision of a full reform of human affairs led inevitably to finding efforts to overcome the undesirable consequences of international religious plurality and conflict.

There are three areas in which Comenius put questions to the modern approaches to pluralism. The first is in the area of creation theology, particularly his understanding of the human being as one made in the image of God. This divine characteristic is fundamental to appreciating the drive to know the truth. The second area relates to revelation, which he understands as being given in three arenas: the external world of nature, the internal world of the mind and the written word of scripture. The third area is his understanding of eschatology. Comenius put the individual at the centre of responsibility for creating the utopian harmony that we desire. Our aim in this chapter, then, is to undertake three specific tasks. Having regard to his theology of creation, the **first task** is to look at the sources of Comenius' anthropology, which plays a significant role in his understanding of dialogue and of the role of the human being in creating the utopian vision. The **second task** is to illustrate the contemporary

interfaith relevance of his anthropology by comparing his approach to difference, dialogue and eschatology with that of contemporary pluralists. As we will see, his approach differs from theirs, which ends with the elimination of dialogue or a concealment of difference, both of which Comenius' anthropology forces him to emphasize. The **third task** will be to show that his understanding of revelation is able to resolve the problem of whether the Qur'an can be regarded as divine revelation.

6.1: Sources of Comenius' Anthropology

Our first task then is to consider the source of Comenius' anthropology, given that it constitutes such an important aspect of his approach to other religions. As we saw in the previous chapter, Comenius drew on the biblical witness in developing his notion of the human being as creature made in the image of God. From this he concluded that there is unity and hence equality in the human community. The evidence of the image of God in all human beings is that they all alike thirst for truth, piety, freedom and the capacity to manage their own affairs. In stressing unity and freedom as important human characteristics Comenius was also using the language of the **Moravian theological tradition**. The Motto of the Moravian Church states: "In essentials, unity; in non-essentials, liberty; in all things, charity". The formula has functioned as a sort of guide for Moravian interfaith and inter-church involvement. Although the terminology of the Motto itself was probably developed outside the Moravian Church, there is a certain affinity with an older Moravian tradition, in which a distinction was made between the things that were necessary for salvation

and those that were not.[1] For the Moravians, unity and liberty were ideals that held an important place in the practice of the faith. In employing these categorizations, the Moravians were attempting to situate the identity of the Moravian Church among the other churches.[2] That identity was one that stressed unity in the essential things of the faith and liberty in those things that were not considered to be necessary for salvation.

Given the currency of the notions of unity and liberty in Moravian discourse, one suspects that Comenius as Moravian Bishop may have drawn on these theological ideas in developing his thoughts on unity and liberty as anthropological categories. A reasonable conclusion to draw is that Comenius' understanding of unity and liberty in the human community would have been influenced by the explication of these

---

[1]In *The Apology* of 1503, believed to be one of the oldest extant documents of the Moravian Church, the distinction between essential and non-essential things was deemed necessary because of "the confusion prevailing throughout the church generally." According to Schweinitz, this document was found in a Lissa Folio. See De Schweinitz, *The History of the Church* , 200, note 1. Schweinitz, *The History of the Church*, 201. In that document, distinctions are made between three orders or levels of beliefs and practice in the life of the church. The document speaks of things "essential" (*essentialia*), things "auxiliary" or "ministrative" (*ministerialia*) things and things "accidental" *(accidentialia*). (Schweinitz has "*accidentilia*" which seems to be an error.) The things essential relate to the grace of God the Father, the merits of Christ the Son and the gift of the Holy Ghost on God's part and human faith, hope and love on the part of humans. The auxiliary things were those that serve the essential, for example the word of God and the sacraments. Accidental things refer to the time, place and mode of the exercise of the auxiliary, and as such include the ceremonies and rites of religion. What the early Moravians meant by "auxiliary" is not equivalent to the "non-essentials" in the later formulation. Nevertheless, the main point is that there was a consistent discourse on the basis for unity and liberty. The delineation of the basis for unity and liberty in ecclesial practice may be called the formal principle of the [early] Brethren's theology. See R. Rican, *The History of the Unity,* 1992, 403. (Kalich first published this book in Prague in 1957.) The Book of Order of 1911 sees the formula as the thread that joins the old Unitas Fratrum to the new. It states: As the oldest in the sisterhood of Protestant Churches, the Moravian Church stands today as in the beginning, for unity in essentials, for liberty in non-essentials, for love in all things. 'In necessariis unitas, in non necessariis libertas, in omnibus caritas.' *Book of Order1911,* 4.

[2]It is not without significance the Vatican II Declaration on the Relation of the Church to non-Christian religions, ***Nostra Aetate,*** has employed the emphasis "unity in essentials." The Moravian formula and a Comenian kind of philosophical grounding seem to gleam through the Declaration when it notes: "ever aware of its [the Church's] duty to foster unity and charity among individuals and even among nations, it reflects at the outset on what people have in common and what tends to bring them together." This is not to suggest that Comenian philosophy has influenced the Council at this point but rather that Comenius in developing his philosophy may also have drawn on the Roman Catholic philosophical heritage, which, in any case, is the ground out of which the Moravian Church springs.

in all ages and under all conditions.[6] The desire and search for truth, piety and tranquillity, which constitute the foundation of human affairs, are based on the make-up of the human soul. These three characteristics of the mind are inseparable and are not dependent on education or learning because they are operative in educated as well as uneducated persons. From the commonality of notions, instincts and faculties, Comenius asserted that everything that common ideas dictate must be true; that the good is that which common instincts prompt all men to pursue and that every purpose that common faculties are meant to serve must be possible.[7] His conclusion, which has implication for religion, philosophy and politics, is that all human beings because of their divine likeness, "know, desire and are able to achieve the same things, in the same way by virtue of their very humanity."[8] This anthropological claim was critical to Comenius' argument in two ways. In the first place, the claim was a prerequisite for his conclusion that the human mind is an arena of God's revelation. Secondly, unless there was agreement that every person had the same mental capacity, it would be unreasonable to expect that everyone could see the truth to which the Christian gospel bore witness.

Therefore, the Moravian theological tradition and philosophy are sources of Comenius' anthropology. Accordingly, there are two consequences for a theology of

---

[6] Ibid., Dedication 8. Comenius shows reliance on Lord Francis Bacon, whose philosophical position he admired. He refers to Bacon as "illustrious," who he said wrote: 'That all things are possible which can be done by some persons, though not indeed by anybody and everybody; and by a number of persons united, though not by a single person; and in a series of ages though not in the same epoch and finally by public effort and at public expense, though not by the resources and toil of individuals.' (Dedication 13.) See also Idem, *Panaugia,* VI.11.

[7] Comenius, *Panaugia,* VI.17.

[8] Comenius, *Via Lucis*, Dedication 12.

pluralism: the first is that there is unity and hence, equality in the human community, arising from our having been created in God's image. The second is that each individual because of the structure and operation of the mind desires truth, piety and tranquillity. The intellect seeks after truth, the will seeks after piety and the capacity for action seeks after tranquillity. There are also two consequences emanating from Comenius' approach to anthropology, which we must then consider as part of our second task. The first is the seriousness with which he approaches the claims of others, which lands him irretrievably into a rigorous dialogue. However, this dialogue has the capacity to overcome the patronizing tendencies that we find in the approach of today's pluralists because it insists that everyone who is affected by a truth claim must give assent to its status as truth. The second consequence is that he holds the human being fully responsible for moving history towards its utopian climax. Therefore, global reform is for Comenius a necessary corollary of taking the claims of others seriously.

6.1.1: Attitudes to Difference: Comenius and the Pluralists

In his major work, *Towards a World Theology,* Wilfred Cantwell Smith notes that the bifurcation that secular intellectuals assumed in their thinking about religion tended to converge with the thinking that isolated Christianity as an entity apart from the other religious human communities.[9] For Smith, however, such segregation cannot be maintained in light of recent emphases in epistemology, which challenge us to move beyond the subject-object approach to knowledge, towards the corporate self-consciousness approach where knowledge is for the subject as well as for the external

[9] W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology,* 54.

observer.[10] In Smith's view, the only accurate knowledge in religion is knowledge in which all affected participants are involved as conscious individuals. Recognizing this critical epistemological turn, we must conclude, according to Smith, that no statement about Islamic faith, for example, is true if Muslims do not accept it as true.[11] Consequently, once the step to recognize the faith of men has been taken, the next step is the recognition that there are not other men but a single human community with one religious history.[12] Smith therefore urges that we should construct a single appropriate theology instead of various theologies because the different religions do not represent different religious histories, *per se,* but different ways of being human. For Smith there is only one religious history for all humanity, to which a single world theology corresponds.

One is suspicious, though, of the possibility and necessity of writing a single narrative over all religious history as Smith has done. According to Heim such an approach is more exclusive than previous approaches to other religions because it subsumes various religions within one large system. Although the other exists in subsidiary status or in opposition, they did not truly exist as other. Smith's vision annihilates every other within a super-system that recognizes no alternatives and can hardly be questioned because it is 'ours' – and 'ours' is all-inclusive.[13]

---

[10] Smith, *Towards a World Theology,* 59.

[11] Ibid., 87.

[12] Ibid., 103.

[13] Heim, *Salvations,* 56.

Comenius also describes the human community as having a single history moving towards it eschatological climax, which means he is under the same sharp critique from Heim. On closer observation, however, there seems to be an important difference between Smith and Comenius that may save the latter's position from Heim's critique. This difference lies in Comenius' respect for the individual's intellectual capacity and freedom and, consequently, his assumption that there must be differences between human beings and within the human community. Comenius' argument for the equality between human beings and for harmony in the human community is justified on the grounds of creation, revelation, and eschatology. However, that equality does not destroy the differences that arise from the freedom of human thought and action. Human beings can examine natural objects in the world and have agreement because they do so on the basis of the senses that are common to them.[14] Agreement can be reached when people begin with similar ideas of reason, for example the notion of "whole" or "part", which means the same to all, whether Christians, Jews or Turks. For Comenius, however, agreement is not natural to free thinking individuals. On the contrary, human zeal for the highest good, the highest truth and piety, account for the radical differences between people. So, although for Comenius human history was a single continuum moving towards a future utopia, the individual had a key role to play in determining its course. Failure to play our proper part in history has led to ignorance and dissension, which we must endeavour now to remove through action in the areas of politics, philosophy and religion. Therefore, the way Comenius understands the structure and operation of the human mind allows him to concede the existence of real philosophical, religious and political differences in

[14] Comenius, *Panaugia,* XV, 9.

the human community. His plea was for dialogue as a way to live with and, where possible, overcome the differences. In his view, the challenge of plurality is to bring the different conceptions of human history into conversation, which means dialogue is a fundamental prerequisite for harmony.

According to Comenius, even within a single religious community there are differences to such an extent that a common pedagogical approach ought not to be taken to dealing with them. Instead, he insisted that the different religious levels at which people lived be recognized.[15] One must resist the temptation to subsume every one under one religious system. What is common to humanity, then, was not a religious history but rather the intellect that searches for truth, the will that yearns for piety and the capacity for action that is directed towards tranquillity. In their operation, the intellect, the will and the capacity for action go in different directions, which makes for real differences in philosophy, religion and politics. What Comenius hopes for is that, in as much as the movements in different directions cause dissensions and confusion, a way to ensure harmony, not uniformity, can be found. Harmony would not mean that all the religions operate in the same way but that they are directed towards the same end, that is, the glory of God and harmony in the human community. However, those things on which there is no consensus, since they are doubted by one side or the other, would be set aside, not as if they are totally false or not totally true, "but leaving them to lie on the table without prejudice until a future date."[16] The freedom to choose a way that was different from others was built into

---

[15] Comenius, *Panorthosia,* XXIII, 6.

[16] Comenius, *Panaugia,* XV, 16.

the structure of the mind and to seek to limit that freedom with a totalising system would be seeking to erase the image of God in the individual.

The agreement on theological issues did not mean establishing a world theology from the parts of the several, as Smith suggests. Rather, Comenius believed that in a plural context the integrity of the religions would be kept intact, in so far as others could share the truth that they declare. The safest way to harmony, he said, was not uniformity but agreement on those things that are true and beyond doubt in the area of politics, philosophy and religion.

6.1.2. Attitudes to Dialogue: Comenius and the Pluralists

In order to illustrate the interfaith relevance of Comenius' approach, we can also compare his understanding of the role of dialogue with that of Lindbeck. The strength of Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach lies in his recognition of the importance of one's hermeneutical position. If one takes Lindbeck's position to its logical conclusion, we are under obligation to defer judgment on any aspect of another religion until we have understood fully how the position is arrived at within the context of the religion's semiotic system. Lindbeck was interested in accounting for the internal logic and coherence of the religious systems but Comenius was interested in the truth of the claims, which for the latter is public property with universal validity. So while Lindbeck's position is not concerned with dialogue between the religions, per se, Comenius' position sees dialogue as a necessary way towards the determination of truth. For Comenius, though, the claims of the religion must be verified on agreed criteria. His hermeneutical criterion of harmony between sense, reason and faith meant that what is held as universal and true cannot be inconsistent

with either, reason, or sense or faith. Consequently, the religion cannot shield itself from criticism by calling attention to its semiotic system.

By insisting that finding truth is the goal for dialogue, Comenius' position is in tension with Knitter who speaks of absolute truth in a relative sense. According to Knitter, the pluralistic world is discovering that no truth can stand on its own; that no truth can be totally unchangeable. Truth does not prove itself by triumphing over all other truths "but by testing its ability to interact with other truths – that is, to teach and be taught by them, to include and be included by them."[17] For Knitter, then, the absoluteness of the truth is founded in its relational and inclusive capacities. Knitter allows that the truth of each religion is absolute, "insofar as it calls for total personal commitment and claims universal relevance."[18] This notion of absolute truth is analogous to Smith's notion of a single history to which there would be a Christian contribution.[19] The pluralist position is that each notion of truth as well as each contribution to world history is equally valid. However, it is precisely in this respect that Comenius differs. For him, only dialogue can establish the truth content of the claim, although assertions may at first be given the benefit of the doubt. Nevertheless, there was nothing sacred about a position if others cannot affirm it as truth on the basis of agreed criteria. In other words, truth is not derived from people's conviction but emerges through the rigour of dialogue. It was not just that there is a Christian, or an Islamic or a Buddhist contribution to truth. Rather, whatever

---

[17] Knitter, *No Other Name,* 219.

[18] Ibid., 220.

[19] Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, 129.

contribution is made had to be acceptable to the other or else it could not stand as truth. Finding the truth was therefore not at variance with dialogue.

For Comenius one of the implications of dialogue is that one had to be prepared to give up one's position if a better way is shown.[20] He lamented the fact that people simply adhered to their religion as a consequence of the accident of their birth, which results in our remaining "as far apart in our religion as in our rivers, seas, mountains, languages and cultures."[21] At the same time, Comenius was committed to people holding their position if they could find no other that was superior. Instead of seeking to integrate all narratives into a meta-narrative, he was seeking to satisfy himself that he could also hold as true the claims to truth that others hold, which had to be established in a dialogical process. By placing all claims to truth on the discussion table, he expected that there would be profit when others are attracted to share in our agreements about truths. Decisions about human affairs should not be made without referring the decisions to all who are affected by them. All affected by a decision must have the same information and opportunity to pass judgement on it.[22] The outcome of dialogue, however, did not mean that there had to be unanimity and consensus about everything because people were expected to be able to differ amicably on some point or the other without giving offence. The search for harmony through dialogue

---

[20] Heim relies on Nicholas Rescher's orientational pluralism in arguing along these lines. According to Rescher, orientational pluralism does not entail indifferentism. In any inquiry, the fact that one must inevitably defend one's position on the basis of one's values does not impede our taking the stance that our position is right. See Nicholas Rescher, *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 112; Heim, *Salvations*, 133-143. Comenius, *Panaugia,* XV, 18.

[21] Comenius, *Panegersia*, VI, 15.

[22] *Panegersia,* XI, 2.

required also that parties in consultation were able to cope with differences because the absence of harmony is the cause for war.[23]

Comenius finds precedence for his dialogical approach in the tolerance displayed by the Apostle Paul and Saint Augustine.[24] Comenius took the view that a similar tolerant, dialogical approach ought be taken in dealing with people of other religious persuasions. He asked, "Why should we not treat Jews, Mohammedans, pagans and all kinds of heretics with the same clemency and wisdom?" [25] Given that many of the disputes in the world had to do with religion, Comenius was keen not to appear to be reproaching or censuring other people directly or indirectly. He said that experience had taught him that it is futile for people to contradict each other and to quarrel over differences of opinion. His approach then was to proceed slowly and gradually, "without giving offence to Jews or Turks."[26] For him, therefore, the dialogical approach was firmly grounded in the Christian tradition.

---

[23] Comenius, *Panegersia,* XI, 27.

[24] Comenius, *Panegersia*, Intro, 29. Comenius, however, misreads 1Cor 9:21, which in fact speaks of Paul becoming as one "outside the law" to those "outside the law." Paul said that he was "under the law of Christ" but that need not be read to mean that those outside the law, meaning the Mosaic law, were thereby understood to be under the law of Christ. Comenius does not refer to the exact place in Augustine from which this account is taken. One can only assume it refers to his work *Contra Faustum Manicheaum.* Manicheanism is believed to have had extensive influence on Augustine's thought because he was himself a Manichee from 378-82. Later, however, Augustine moved beyond Manicheism because even in the discussion with Faustus, the ambiguities and fables were more than the truth. For details see W. H. C. Frend, *The Rise of Christianity*, p. 663, note 86; and Augustine's, *De utilitate credendi*, VI.13 and *Against the Epistle of the Manicheus Called Fundamental*, XI.12.

[25] Comenius, *Panegersia*, Intro, 29.

[26] Ibid., Intro. 35.

To the modern ear Comenius' approach to truth may sound like an impossible Habermas-like universalism.[27] However, it was consistent with Comenius' understanding of truth and his understanding of the human being. The universal character of truth prevents him from patronizing the position of people of other faiths or from taking their truth claims for granted. His respect for truth and the seriousness with which he approaches claims to truth means he must took the claims of others seriously to the point of accepting them if they were more convincing, or of rejecting them or putting them in abeyance if they were not. The individual had the internal intellectual competence to seek truth and can identify it wherever it is seen. Comenius therefore poses a significant challenge to the modern theologian who believes that certain claims are beyond question and to the plural context where claims to truth are asserted without the concurrence of partners in dialogue.

6.1.3: The Role of Tradition in Dialogue

One aspect of Comenius' approach to pluralism that remains problematic, however, is his perception of the **role of the tradition** in dialogue. In speaking of plurality and dialogue Comenius thinks not only of traditions but also of individuals, as if they stood free from the traditions. In his view, giving space for the position of the individual was an ethical imperative. Tradition has the capacity to function in a

---

[27] Jurgen Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1990), 197. Habermas is concerned with establishing a moral viewpoint that is amenable to reason. He believes that the Kantian monological reflection is inadequate for this because the philosophy of the subject has given way to the philosophy of language and monologue has given way to dialogue. According to Comenius, when one is dealing with a rational creature one has to respect his freedom of choice, which does not permit another party to make his decisions for him. Comenius' principle of universality pre-empts that put forward by Habermas in his discourse ethics. According to Habermas, claims to valid norms cannot take the form of private moral deliberation, like Kant's categorical imperative. A valid norm must satisfy the interest of all affected by it. A norm is universal, satisfying the interest of everyone, when all affected by it can accept the consequences and side-effects that its general observation is expected to have. See Habermas, *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action,* 65.

tyrannical way over the individual and unless it is possible to break free of a given hermeneutical tradition it may not be possible to access the truth.[28] Comenius did not believe that a person should simply adopt the position of a religious faith because they were born into it but that they should break free of that tradition if a more plausible position is put forward in discussion. This position has to be understood against the background of the oppressive role played in Bohemia by the Roman Catholic tradition.

However, the role of the individual must be seen in the context of the tradition in which the individual stands. By questioning the weight that tradition carries in interpretation and by raising the profile of the input of the individual over against the tradition Comenius seems to be suggesting that the individual can stand in a "tradition-free" zone. However, any attempt to try and establish truth by supposing one can stand in a neutral position is an illusion.[29] While it is clear that Comenius was not trying to assert a neutral position free of tradition, his emphasis on the freedom of the individual from tradition runs the risk of seeking to occupy a tradition-free ground.

It is not necessary to situate oneself outside the tradition in order to exercise a hermeneutic of suspicion. This is what liberation theology has shown by using the experience of the poor as the hermeneutical starting point. Comenius' emphasis on

---

[28] Comenius, *Panaugia* xv, 21.

[29] MacIntyre, *Whose Justice,* 345.

the role of the individual seems to miss the tradition-specific nature of his own approach. In a Moravian theology of pluralism the individual is challenged to commit to a process of intra-tradition as well as an inter-tradition dialogue. Therefore, in retrieving the Comenian approach to pluralism for today's plural context, one should keep in mind the tradition-bias in his approach and the need to be sensitive to the tradition specific nature of all theological discourse. In this way the role of the individual would not be allowed to eclipse the role of the tradition, as the context in which the individual stands.

In summary, the high esteem in which Comenius holds the human capacity to find truth *via* a process of dialogue rescues him from the dangers of relativism, which is an ever-present threat to the pluralist position. In his view, the individual is able to adjudicate between notions of truth by a rigorous process of dialogue because the thirst for truth inhabits the mind. Dialogue was necessary to establish truth because all affected by the truth claim must give assent to its universal quality.

6.2: Attitudes to Eschatology: Comenius and Hick

The second consequence of Comenius' anthropology is that he put the individual at the centre of responsibility for the direction of history. This is contrary to Hick's position, which according to Cheetham implies that there will be opportunities after death to come to terms with our lack of understanding in this present life.[30] Comenius had the perception that harmony could be achieved through global reform. His vision was for a universal council with representatives drawn from all nations that would

[30] David Cheetham, "Evil and Religious Pluralism: The Eschatological Resolution," *The New Blackfriars* 78, No. 915 (1997): 215.

have responsibility for implementing global actions.[31] Comenius' sense of urgency and apocalyptic vision was due to the fact that he believed the world had arrived at the seventh millennium, or the world's Sabbath. He saw his era as an opportunity to summon a jubilee for the proper restoration of the world's affairs. In Comenius' vision, the success of such a council would depend on at least three rules. The first was the need to avoid prejudice, which was exemplified in people claiming universality for their religion alone.[32] Secondly, there would be need for impartiality, so that one considers not only oneself but also the well-being and the interest of others. In other words, a social contract enshrined in law should take precedence over individual interest. Thirdly, everyone should be prepared to hold views on the basis of reason rather than custom. This means, for example, that the differences in customs that currently exist between particular churches would not be treated as an absolute obstacle to unity. The church would become truly universal and united when custom played a diminished role. The duty of the universal council would be to remove obstacles through consensus, so that no conclusion would be reached unless it was acceptable to all. This would include not only dealing with the theological issue of revelation but also the economic issue of the distribution of goods and international trade as well as the political issue of territorial boundaries. Comenius did not make a sharp line of demarcation between the theological, economic and political issues because he believed that they all impacted the common good, which was to be

---

[31] *Panorthosia*, XXV, 3. The idea of the United Nations was therefore conceptualised by Comenius in the seventeenth century, nearly three centuries before it became a reality.

[32] *Panorthosia*, XXV, 10

determined by common approval.[33] Ultimate global reform meant that all obstacles to unity based on religion, politics or philosophy would be removed.

From the point of view of **interfaith dialogue**, one may be inclined to dismiss this utopian vision because it implies that all religions would collapse into one, in which case his position would not be ultimately different from Hick's. On closer observation, however, Comenius' view differs from Hick's in at least one important respect. Unlike Hick, he did not believe that all the religions were *on par* in terms of their offer of salvation. Instead, he believed that the truth of one religion would eventually triumph over the rest, not by force but by persuasion, since "human nature clings tenaciously to its freedom and objects to tyranny."[34] In his view, truth is singular and universal, therefore the force of the truth of one religion would eventually impose itself on everyone who is exposed to it. This position is predicated on his trust in the ability of the individual to recognize and freely choose the truth. Although he believed that the Christian faith was the religion whose truth would eventually triumph, he did not rule out that other people would see their religion similarly in an ultimate way. He does not object to people holding to their position but allows that they would do so until the force of truth leads them to accept something else. Therefore, as a prelude to the eventual acceptance of one religion, the religions of the world would live in an alliance of freedom, dialogue and interreligious harmony when the reforms on which he spoke were carried out.

---

[33] Ibid.

[34] Ibid. Comenius would support the idea of a world Parliament of Religions, as it exists today, as an instrument of religious harmony. However, he would see it as a penultimate state and a prelude to the eventual acceptance of one religion, the truth of which would impose itself on all.

In **summary**, then, for Comenius the most credible approach for a plural context is one that emphasizes dialogue, which means taking the positions of others seriously enough to engage them, but not to seek to integrate them into a single narrative. In this regard Comenius represents a critique of Lindbeck, Knitter and Smith, whose positions end with an elimination of dialogue. He also offers a more constructive approach than Hick, who conceals difference, in an effort to emphasize the equality and equal validity of the religions.

6.3: Revelation: A Problem Between the Religions

Our third task in this chapter is to look at the issue of revelation, which Comenius sees as being the most fundamental when compared with doctrinal issues like the Trinity, Christology, and the incarnation. For him, the different claims to revelation constitute the root cause of religious conflicts. The insidious impact of disagreements among Christians, and the failure of previous attempts at unity, left him with no option but to seek "to abandon the usual ways … and attempt to rebuild concord on new foundations."[35] In his proposed Consultation on Human Affairs, his ultimate goal was to open the three lamps, or arenas of God's utterance, to all nations.[36] He addressed his proposal for reform first to Christians and then to the other nations and religions who believed that they too had a word from God.

Central to Comenian theology is the harmony between the three arenas of God's disclosure. Scripture is not to be treated in isolation from the external world or from

---

[35]Comenius, *Panegersia*, Intro, 21.

[36] Comenius, *Panaugia* XV, 22.

the internal dictates of reason, because it is only when the world, reason and Holy Scriptures are seen to be in harmony that a case can be made for the universality of the Holy Scriptures. According to Comenius, "any fresh revelations that they [i.e. Holy Scriptures] contain will not offend against good sense and reason."[37] If revelations are untrue they cannot be consistently in perfect harmony. Although outwardly the Bible does not claim to show the same systematic harmony as the mind and the world, when it is read analytically, synthetically and syncritically, its internal harmony is shown to be extremely remarkable, since it is composed with divine skill.[38]

Comenius argued that since revelation is from the one God, there must be harmony between the three books (the world, the mind and scriptures) and within each book, for God cannot contradict himself. The problem, however, related to the third book, or scriptures, which several nations of the world claim to have. Although these scriptures were not identical, if they were from God they had to be in harmony and could not contradict each other. It follows that the status of the Qur'an, for example, cannot be left indefinitely as an open question for the Christian. On what basis, then, can the revelatory nature of the Qur'an be established or denied?

6.3.1: The Qur'an as Revelation?: Comenius' Approach

In seeking to resolve the issue of different claims to revelation Comenius takes a practical approach by asking the question: Can Christians regard the Qur'ān as

---

[37]Comenius, *Panaugia* VII, 31.

[38]Ibid., VII, 35.

revelation from God? By formulating the issue in this way Comenius situates himself at the centre of today's debate about the revelatory significance of scripture outside the Judeo-Christian tradition.[39] Unlike the attitude that we find in the contemporary debate, though, Comenius realized that the onus was also on the Christian to prove that their scriptures were also of a revelatory nature. Being attuned to pluralism and committed to a process of public enquiry into truth, he does not assume that the revelatory character of the Bible was clear to all. In order to establish this, he proceeds by first seeking agreement on the fact that God speaks to us.

The foundational principle on which the revelatory nature of any scripture rests, then, is whether God speaks to us, which means that the existence of God was not in question. The revelatory nature of scripture, according to Comenius, cannot be discussed with persons who doubt that God exists, or that God speaks to us. If then we are discussing the revelatory nature of a particular writing, it is assumed that our partners in dialogue are those who like us believe that God speaks to people. In today's discussion between Christians and Islam, for example, it is critical whether Christians believe God speaks to people in Islam and *vice versa.* As the WCC guidelines on dialogue put it, Christians engaged in dialogue with people of other faiths must ask, "what God may be doing in the lives of hundreds of millions of men and women who live in and seek community together with Christians, but along

[39] See for example Dupuis, 235-253. Dupuis' conclusion is that the fullness of revelation in Jesus does not gainsay the possibility of other scriptures being termed "word of God." (Dupuis 253.) The weakness with Dupuis' position, though, is that he fails to make the assertion concrete. Comenius, on the other hand, considers a specific tradition on the basis of criteria he proposes and to which he invites the particular tradition to subscribe. In this way Comenius' approach is more intentionally dialogical, as a result of which his conclusion is more categorical.

different ways."[40] It is within the context of dialogue with fellow believers in a God who communicates that the questions of the criteria for determining divine books arise. Given the differences in the perception of the third book (scriptures), there needs to be determination whether there is one such book or whether there were several credible books. The three criteria, the eternal, the internal and the intimate that Comenius proposes for the determination of divine books must then be seen in the context of that fundamental assumption that God speaks. In order to test the relevance of his proposed criteria for today we will look at their implications for Islam.

For Comenius, the questions Christians put to Muslims about the nature of the Qur'an were similar to questions that Christians themselves had to answer regarding the nature of the Bible. He therefore deals first with the fact that Muslims question the accuracy of the Bible and the pre-eminence that Christians give to it as the revealed word of God. He suspected that the reason Muslims made the charge of corruption was due to their inappropriate interpretation of Holy Scriptures. He therefore challenged Muslims to read the Bible with the three-fold eye of sense, reason and faith and apply the three-fold hermeneutical method of analysis, synthesis and syncrisis. He was also aware that the challenge to the Muslims to read the Bible from the perspective he proposed could also lead to the assertion that the Christian should read the Qur'an from the perspectives proposed by a Muslim. In fact, he invited them

[40] *Guidelines on Dialogue,* 11.

to propose their way of demonstrating the divine nature of their scriptures to augment the criteria he proposed.

6.3.2: The Contemporary Relevance of the Comenian Criteria

Maybe the most significant contribution of Comenius to inter-faith dialogue is to be found in the criteria for divine books that he put forward and in his openness to receive the position of the other religions that would make a case for the divine origin of their scripture. He believed that other religions that have claims about revelation from God were justified in regarding it as a universal gift from a universal God to be made universally available. He said that, "it was unlikely that God, who created sensory light in the world and the intellectual light in the mind and made them universal, would fail to make the light of his own revelation universal also."[41] As we saw in the previous chapter, his three criteria were first the external, which relates to the character of the messenger. The second, the internal criteria, involved issues relating to the content of the message and the third was the intimate criteria, which was concerned with the effect of the message on hearers. On the basis of these criteria, there are three challenges that Comenius brings to modern theology.

---

[41] Comenius, *Panaugia*, VII, 20. The intimate criteria led Comenius also to question the dissemination of the Qur'an by asking whether it has been sent to more nations and tongues than the Gospel. This concern is an allusion to the view among Muslims that the word of God was received in Arabic and that other languages cannot be the bearer of the fullness of the divine revelation. This position in Islam has often been overlooked in modern discourse on pluralism because of the tendency to overlook the issue of revelation. For Comenius, God's wisdom and goodness demanded that his blessings should become more widespread, which is the reason that effective communication is such a fundamental part of his methodology. In fact, one aspect of the reform of human affairs was the development of a common international language that would operate alongside the local national languages to facilitate communication between the nations and to provide a common means whereby the revelation of God in the third book could be read. The force and relevance of his position today is that unless the revelation of God was in a language that people could own and understand it would not be able to meet the intimate criterion of providing enlightenment or to pass judgement on the Christians and enlighten their darkness. Islam must therefore rethink the notion of revelation, especially as it relates to the question of language.

The **first** is that he rules out making appeals to revelation as the basis for asserting the pre-eminence of the message of the Qur'an or of the teaching of Jesus in Christianity. For him revelation as written word must be verified on the basis of agreed criteria. Assertions of divinely inspired writing must withstand the critique of dialogue and must be tested in conversations between the two communities.

The **second** challenge relates to applying critical analysis to the Qur'an. It seems that only by assessing the Qur'an on the same critical basis as the Bible will scholars in Christianity and Islam come to a common understanding of how to overcome their discrepancies, for example the different accounts of the death of Jesus. Therefore, the revelatory nature of the Qur'an is not an *a priori* negative or affirmative judgement, but one that emerges after reading it alongside the Bible in an analytic, synthetic and syncritic manner, keeping in mind the need for harmony between sense, reason and faith. This harmony is important because although God can reveal things above reason, he must not do so contrary to reason. If problems of this nature could not be resolved using the method Comenius proposed, his vision was that they should be left as an open question until further revelation makes resolution possible. What is unclear now could become clearer as human history moves towards its eschatological climax.

The **third** challenge relates to the issue of scriptural authority. The critical contribution of Comenius' hermeneutics is that he set the notion of scriptural authority in a dialogical context. He believed that all religions having a claim for a book with a divine status must bring them into the public arena for common reading. The disclosive authority emerges in dialogical rather than in unilateral reading. The

effect of Comenian hermeneutics is to challenge the plural context to practice multiple reading of scriptures. It is therefore no longer acceptable for Christians to pass judgement on the Qur'an without having read it with the intention of finding where it is in harmony with the Christian Bible and in harmony with sense and reason. More critically, since there is the claim that the Qur'an is of divine origin, it is incumbent on the Christian to read those scriptures in a similar way as the Bible is read as a prelude to passing judgement on its content.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Comenius' approach to religious plurality is predicated on his understanding of creation, revelation and the role of the human being in bringing history to its climax. His anthropology, which has its source Moravian theology and philosophy, sensitized him to the need to respect differences in the human community and to the need to engage and live with them. Engaging and living with difference commits him to a dialogical approach, which is the only method available to us in a context of competing truth claims. At the same time, his respect for truth as a universal quality, and of the relentless drive of the intellect to find it, prevents him from accepting without question the claims of others, which remain peculiar and private if in public discourse others cannot accept them.

The Comenian approach to religious plurality, then, stands over against the anti-plural theology of John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith. In response to their aim to construct a meta-discourse over all the religions, Comenius maintains that it is both possible and necessary to live with differences. There is then no need to press

religious plurality into a meta-discourse beyond dialogue. Dialogue and difference are corollaries of a plurality context.

Unlike Lindbeck, Comenius does not treat the claims to truth that others make as being beyond question. If these claims are to move beyond their peculiarity to acquire a universal force, others must be able to accept them and their consequences. We can arrive at what is universal truth through a process of dialogue. Finding truth, then, is the purpose of dialogue, which is not be construed as a time bound process but as an ongoing enterprise. In this regard, Comenius also stands over against Knitter, who perceives truth in a relative sense. The difference between the two positions is that Knitter seems to give a universal force to what Comenius calls peculiar and private truth. Knitter would regard Comenius' hope to find universal truth as an impossibility.

Comenius' approach to revelation is able to overcome the difficulties faced by Christians who want to maintain an open approach to other religions but are prevented from doing so because of the way in which revelation is construed. He construes revelation as occurring in three arenas, the world, the mind and scriptures. This approach enables him to overcome the problems associated with revelation in scriptures. He challenges the Muslim community to enter into dialogue about the content of their scriptures, as this is the only way the universal force of its truths can be demonstrated. He also challenges Christians to be open to the revelatory nature of the Qur'an, the truth of which must be consistent with what is revealed in the Bible, since God neither contradicts himself nor reason.

Comenius' approach is situated within the Moravian tradition, which is the source for his theology. However, the Comenian approach represents only one side of the hermeneutical tension in the Moravian Theological tradition. Our next task is to see how the other side, the theological resources in Zinzendorf, may assist us in developing a theology of religious pluralism. As we shall see, the Zinzendorfian approach is in some respects in tension with the Comenian approach. However, it is this tension and plurality of approaches within the one Moravian tradition that gives it credibility in the plural context.

CHAPTER 7

ZINZENDORF'S THEOLOGY AS A SOURCE FOR A THEOLOGY OF PLURALISM

Introduction

Earlier in this section we looked at the emergence of Zinzendorf as leader in the Unitas Fratrum. The point was made then that the theology of the Renewed Church owes more to Zinzendorf than any other personality. It is for this reason that a Moravian theology of pluralism must reckon with Zinzendorf's theology. A great wealth of theological material can be found in his sermons, a large quantity of which is still extant.[1] However, there are four pieces from the Zinzendorfian corpus that will be of primary interest to us in this section. These four pieces were chosen because they are among the more systematic presentation of his thoughts.[2] The first is *Maxims, Theological Ideas and Sentences*, edited by John Gambold, which is based on sermons and addresses given between 1738 and 1747. The second is *Nine Public Lectures on Import Subjects in Religion*, a series of sermons preached in London in 1746. The third piece is his commentary on the second article of the Apostles' Creed, *Sixteen Discourses on Jesus our Lord* (1751). This commentary is particularly important for Moravian theology because it is probably the most systematic presentation of the much-talked-about Zinzendorfian christocentrism. It represents a refining of earlier positions that he enunciated in sermons and informal talks. The

---

[1] For a detailed outline of primary and secondary works related to Zinzendorf see Arthur Freeman, *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf* (Bethlehem, PA & Winston-Salem, NC: The Moravian Church in America, 1998), 319-340.

[2]Bettermann's view that Zinzendorf never systematically expounded his theology is shared widely among Moravian Scholars. See W. Bettermann, *Theologie und Sprache bei Zinzendorf* (Gotha: Leopold Plotz Verlag, 1935), 8.

fourth piece and the most important is his commentary on the Augsburg Confession, *Twenty-One Discourses or Dissertations upon the Augsburg Confession* (1753). This commentary was published only six years before Zinzendorf died and so can be regarded as the most mature presentation of his theological ideas. In the preface to the commentary on the Augsburg Confession it is noted that those who wanted to know more fully the main theological ideas of the Brethren Church would particularly welcome the publication. It is noteworthy that this commentary on the Augsburg Confession was given at the seminary at Marienborn near Frankfurt during a time of doctrinal crisis, when it was necessary to clarify the foundations upon which the Moravian communion was constructed.[3] These four publications, then, are among his most systematic theological works and consequently constitute the basis for this chapter. In looking at this material, our main aim will be twofold: first, (in 7.2) to

---

[3] The period of doctrinal crisis between 1745-1750 is usually termed the time of Sifting. During this time the community at Herrnhaag was the centre of a piety expressed in language of sentimental diminutives centring on the wounds of Jesus. Remnants of this language can be found in Zinzendorf's *Twenty-One Discourses:* "We have the privilege thro' the merits of Christ ... to participate of the leaven-like nature of the little spark proceeding from the pleura [the holy-side of Christ] so that not only our soul is so thro'-spirited, but our mortal body too partakes of the same thro' the crucified body of Jesus; yea, that the corpse of man gets a grain or seed of immortality into itself, which at the Holy Sacrament, as often as we drink of that blood-stream, is ever opening itself anew, but yet also comes more and more into a concentration; so that by virtue of this little grain, which the new Spirit brought with it from the pleura, with which our mortal body is thus endowed, and which has been so frequently moistened **by our sucking-in that blood**[my emphasis], our mortal body shall one day be restored again to an eternal and unfading life." Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourse,* Discourse III, 44-45. Hereafter, in reference to Zinzendorf's *Twenty-One Discourses, Sixteen Discourse* and *Nine Public Lectures* the Roman Numeral will refer to the number of the discourse or lecture followed by the Arabic which will refer to the page(s) in the edition used for this study.

The Renewed Moravian Church adopted the Augsburg Confession as their primary Confession for a number of reasons. First and foremost, the Augsburg Confession was seen as the most ancient and most widely accepted Confession among Protestants, being the bond of unity of the Evangelical Christians at the 1536 Diet of Ratisbon. As a Lutheran and leader within the Renewed Church, Zinzendorf was particularly influential in securing its place with the Moravian tradition. Secondly, it was felt that the Augsburg Confession was an expansion of and an improvement on the older Bohemian Confession, which the Moravian refugees would have been inclined to follow. Thirdly, giving assent to the Augsburg Confession would guarantee toleration of the Moravians in Germany at that time.

form a critical understanding of Zinzendorf's theology, which has traditionally been read primarily in a radical christocentric way. As we shall see, Zinzendorf's awareness of the gulf between human and divine beings imposed on him a modest approach that puts him in the company of the apophatic theologians. Although we do not claim him as a full-blown apophatic writer, on the evidence of his theological preferences he must be situated at the outskirts of the apophatic tradition. Secondly, (in 7.3), we aim also to explore the meaning of the notion of theological modesty with reference a few key theological issues, which are important for intra-Christian as well as interfaith dialogue. The way Zinzendorf treats these doctrinal issues creates space, not hitherto recognised, where other religions can be engaged in dialogue. The fruitfulness of Zinzendorf's theology as a source for a theology of pluralism lies in this notion of theological modesty.

7.1: Challenges to Reading Zinzendorf in Light of Pluralism

In looking at the relevance of Zinzendorf as a source for a theology of pluralism, we are immediately faced with three challenges. The **first** is to come to terms with the christocentrism found in his writings, which, at first glance, would seem to be at variance with pluralism and interfaith dialogue. This task is particularly formidable because theologians within the Moravian tradition, as well as others outside, read Zinzendorf's christocentrism in an anti-interfaith way.[4] For example, Kinkel is keen

[4] Both German and American Scholars of Zinzendorf emphasize his christocentrism: See Bernhard Becker, *Zinzendorf in Verhältnis zu Philosophie und Kirchentum seiner seit: Geschichtliche Studien* (Leipzig: T. C. Hinrichs' sche Buchhandlung, 1886), 61ff. J. T. Hamilton, *A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church or the Unitas Fratrum or the Unity of the Brethren During the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (Bethlehem, PA: Times, 1900) , 216ff; H. Renkewitz, "Zinzendorf als Theologe" *Zinzendorf-Gedenkbuch,* Herausgegeben von E. Benz und H. Renkewitz (Stuttgart: Evagelisches Verlagswerk, 1951), 75-97; G. Kinkel, "The Key to an Authentic Zinzendorfian Witness," 26-39; H. Beck, "To Honour Christocentrism, To Resist Chrisitomonism: Two Annotations of the Theology of Zinzendorf" *TMDK* 20 (May 2000) : 41-52 ,

to emphasize what seems to be Zinzendorf's negative assessment of other religions. He points to Zinzendorf's assertion that if religious thoughts and intentions were not a function of faith in Jesus Christ, the person holding them would be considered to be an atheist.[5] Kinkel regards this as a predominant position in Zinzendorf's theology. Barth also throws his theological weight behind reading christocentrism as central to Zinzendorf's theology. He refers to Zinzendorfian as "perhaps the only genuine Christocentric of the modern age."[6] For Barth, Zinzendorf is the true genius of the Evangelical awakening of the nineteenth century. In his own brand of christocentrism Barth was dismissive of the value of religions and co-opted Zinzendorf in support of his assertion that obedience to God in his essence means becoming obedient to Jesus.[7] It is also from Barth that we get the demarcation between faith and religion. In his view, the religions reflect the attempt of human beings to reach God whereas it is by faith that we see that in Jesus God has reached down to the world.[8]

However, as it will be shown, the christocentric focus in Zinzendorf has to be understood within a broader context of his modest approach to theology. A closer reading of his more mature theological work can yield material that may prove relevant to a context of a plurality of faiths. For example, the distinction he made between belief in God and saving faith is often overlooked. According to Zinzendorf,

---

[5] G. S. Kinkel, "The Key to an Authentic Zinzendorfian Witness for the Twenty-First Century" *TMDK* 19 (November 1999) : 30-31.

[6] *Church Dogmatics,* IV.1 (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1956), 683. Hereafter the Roman Numerals refer to the original number of Barth's work, while the Arabic numbers will refer to the page number in the edition by T & T Clark.

[7] *Church Dogmatics,* II.2 (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957), 568.

[8] Barth, *Church Dogmatics: The Doctrine of God,* Vol. II, 1a, 3

belief in God, though unable to overcome sin, is deeply rooted in the nature and minds of all human beings and cannot be erased either by the enemy or any flight of reason. People cannot hinder or suppress knowledge of the supreme God.[9] This distinction seems to have positive implications for those who have the capacity for faith but who as yet do not believe in God as revealed in Jesus. At the level of "anthropological faith"[10] all human beings share a common faith in God. This idea that all humanity possesses a common "faith" in God, for example, shows that a closer reading of Zinzendorf need not render him irrelevant or unhelpful in terms of providing theological resources for a plural context. Therefore, Zinzendorf's christocentrism need not deter us from considering his relevance for pluralism.

The **second challenge** we face, in reading Zinzendorf as a source for a theology of pluralism, is to offer a different view of his theology from the traditional anti-interfaith characterization that results from reading him simply in a christocentric way. Given the emphases in Zinzendorf's writings, we hope to show that he can be described as a theologian on the periphery of the apophatic tradition. When we speak of apophatic theology we refer to the discourse that is undertaken with an acute awareness of human ignorance of the nature of God – not "a naïve pre-critical

---

[9] *Sixteen Discourses,* I, 2

[10] This expression is found in Juan Luis Segundo, who in his effort to contextualize theology, has sought to resituate the place of revelation, subjecting it to other imperatives in theology. According to Segundo, while it is theologically appropriate and logical to begin with revelation, the experiences of human beings in their existence and history suggest the possibility of another order that places an "anthropological" faith first, because that order would be more consistent with the experiences of believers and non-believers alike. (Juan Luis Segundo, "Revelation, Faith, Signs of the Times," *Mysterium Liberationis*, p. 329) This "anthropological" faith is the term used to describe the human quest for meaning and liberation. It is anthropological because both religious and non-religious persons possess it, and though different in each person it is always faith. According to Segundo it precedes revelation because "in order for us to receive this truth [of God's revelation], it must find us somehow engaged in a common quest for human liberation." (Segundo, "Revelation, Faith, Signs of the Times," 332.)

ignorance of God, but as a kind of acquired ignorance ... to unknow."[11] This proposition runs counter to the position from which Kinkel agues, in which he sees Zinzendorf as one who expressly rejects the apophatic way. According to Kinkel:

> Thus, in relation to naked deity even the apophatic way is rejected in the sharpest terms. For Zinzendorf, all the attempts to construct criteria for recognizing the holy and all attempts to bring such experiences into language by means of self, or culturally, generated concepts are tragic because ironically the criteria and the linguistic constructions are themselves deeply enslaved to culture and to all the limits that go with creaturely being.[12]

Kinkel's conclusion is as critical as it is problematic when considered from two points of view. In the first place, to imply that the apophatic way is concerned with "constructing criteria for recognizing the holy" or an attempt "to bring experiences [of the holy] into language", is to misunderstand the apophatic way. Secondly, to disassociate Zinzendorf from the apophatic way without a careful examination of his writings in light of apophatic texts is to arrive at a premature conclusion. A considered description of apophatic theology and a proper assessment of Zinzendorf's theology may in fact yield a different view. Since Zinzendorf is traditionally read as a radical christocentric theologian, reading him from the point of view of apophatic theology is to break new ground in the assessment of this Protestant figure.[13]

---

[11] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 19.

[12] Kinkel, "The Key to an Authentic Zinzendorfian Witness," 35.

[13] Freeman makes psychological assessment of Zinzendorf in comparing his desire to know God with Carl Jung in his *Memories, Dreams and Reflections*. See Freeman *An Ecumenical Theology*, 73ff. He also describes Zinzendorf as using "the terminology of mysticism" [p. 83] and dedicates a whole section to Zinzendorf and mysticism [p. 55-60] in which he relies extensively on Uttendörfer,

Although keen to distance Zinzendorf from apophatic tradition, Kinkel nevertheless recognizes notions in Zinzendorf's thinking that can be described as apophatic. He correctly points out that Zinzendorf worked from a theological position that emphasised the gulf *(eine tiefe Kluft)* separating human from divine being.[14] Although this is not in and of it self sufficient to designate Zinzendorf apophatic, it provides a point of entry to re-read his theology because the awareness of the discontinuity and differences between human and divine realities and the inability to experience the immensity of God are positions also central to the apophatic tradition.

In order to come to terms with these two challenges we hope to lift up two inter-related movements that are central to Zinzendorf's theological discourse. The first movement is the apophatic-like character of his theological views. The second, which is derived from the first, is the modesty and presumption of ignorance that is for him the preferred posture of the human being before God.

7.2: Zinzendorf – An Apophatic Theologian?

In order to demonstrate Zinzendorf's association with apophaticism we must also come to terms with some long held attitudes towards that tradition. There is a tendency for a survey of negative theology, despite all its variations, to end with John of the Cross (1542-91).[15] This means that there is really no modern apophatic

---

Zinzendorf und die Mystik. However, Freeman does not make any particular reference to the Apophatic tradition.

[14] Kinkel, "The Key to an Authentic Zinzendorfian Witness," 35.

[15] Denys Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity and Christian* Mysticism (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4. Turner argues that contemporary understanding of mysticism is opposite to

theologian in the classical sense of the word. This makes an attempt to show a figure of the Enlightenment as having a theological emphasis like Dionysius particularly onerous.[16] The discontinuities between modern and medieval cultures suggest we are therefore not permitted to assume, for example, that Western Christianity possesses a single mystical tradition. There is a tendency to read back the terms of modern Christian conceptions upon a stock of medieval authorities. According to Turner, even if there are points of convergence between medieval and contemporary apophaticism, there is at least one significant way in which the two cultures differ: that in the Middle Ages apophaticism was no mere intellectual critique of discourse but was in addition a practice that was expected to be embodied in a life.[17] Notwithstanding this observation, the position to be presented here is that the similarities between the apophatic way and Zinzendorf's theological emphasis, particularly in *Nine Public Lectures* and *Twenty-One Discourses on the Augsburg Confession*, challenge us to re-read Zinzendorf in light of the apophatic tradition.

---

what mysticism connotes in the medieval period. John of the Cross was a contemporary of Teresa of Avila. His main works include, *The Ascent of Mount Carmel, Dark Night of the Soul, Spiritual Canticle,* and *Living Flame of Love.* However in her survey of mysticism in Europe Underhill ends with William Blake (1757-1827). She includes in her survey Madame Guyon (1648-1771), who had an impact on Zinzendorf and whose work he had translated. However Underhill does not make reference to Zinzendorf. Evelyn Underhill, *Mysticism: The Development of Humankind's Spiritual Consciousness* (London: Bracken Books, 1995), 453-473.

[16] The difficulty of locating Zinzendorf in the apophatic tradition is further exacerbated by the fact that there is no particular reference to any known apophatic writer in his surveyed works, even though it is clear that Zinzendorf read classical and medieval authors.(In *Twenty-one Discourses,* Discourse II, 27 Zinzendorf refers to Basil the Great)

[17] Turner, *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 4 & 8. Regarding the use of the word mysticism in contemporary discourse, Turner argues that given the tendency for the use to be linked to experiences of "inwardness", "ascent", and "union", then to that extent the medieval mystic offers an anti-mysticism.

There are two indications in Zinzendorf's theology that lead us to raise the question of his proximity to the apophatic tradition. The **first** is the strong emphasis he places on the need for modesty in light of the hiddenness of divinity, which meant there was little that could be said about God. It is for this reason he often refers to God as the Abyss, the one who dwells in darkness and of whom no one knows anything:

> For this is His phrase which He [Jesus] uses more than once in the Sermon on the Mountain: 'My Father who is in secret (Matt 6:6, 18), who dwells in darkness, or indeed in a light which no one can approach, of whom no one knows anything: He shall now begin to receive divine worship.[18]

The impossibility of perceiving God is a theme running through Zinzendorf's theology. This is similar to the emphasis in Dionysius, who remarked that even in revelation God remained concealed because we know God only to the extent of the revelation. That which the divine ultimately is in its ground and source remains beyond all intellect, all being and all knowledge.[19] God is one who dwells in divine darkness, which is an unapproachable light.[20] The transcendent darkness remains hidden from all light and concealed from all knowledge. For Dionysius, then, one cannot discuss or understand the one Superunknowable, transcendent God. Such things "can neither be talked about nor grasped except by the angels who in some mysterious fashion have been deemed worthy."[21] The incomprehensible immensity of God is a mirror in which is reflected the reality of the human condition. For this

---

[18] *Nine Public Lectures*, II, 13. (Emphasis mine.)

[19] *DN* 2, 645A – 645B; See Gambold, *Maxims,* 130.

[20] *Ep* 5, 1073A 1ff.

[21] *DN*1, 593B 10-12.

reason Dionysius makes the incarnation of Jesus a fundamental aspect of his theology, although that revelation is not itself free from mystery: "we have no way of understanding how, in a fashion at variance with nature, he was formed from the virgin's blood."[22] The Transcendent One still remains hidden because "this mystery of Jesus . . . can be drawn out by no word or mind."[23] What is to be said remains unsayable and what is to be understood remains unknowable. All that we see is something of his which has being and which is knowable. God himself "is completely unknown and non-existent."[24]

In a similar manner, Zinzendorf maintained that the Creator remains invisible amidst this revelation. His revelation is a "secret, sudden unknown reality, hidden from the eyes of all mankind, that it can never be described."[25] We cannot of ourselves "so much as enter upon a solid and coherent meditation about the Source of his Being,"[26] even though an instinct to this end lies within us. However, this inability to perceive God is not only due to what humanity is but also because of the immensity of God:

---

[22] *DN* 2, 648A

[23] *Ep.* 3, 1069B

[24] *Ep.* 1 1065A 12ff, *Ep.* 5 1073A; This awareness of the distance of God from the human knowing underlies the practice of contemplation in the Author of the *Cloud of Unknowing.* According to that Author, the contemplative life, in so far as it is possible to be possessed, consists entirely in this darkness, and in this cloud of unknowing, with a loving impulse and a dark gazing into the simple being of God himself alone. For the Author of the *Cloud of Unknowing*, it is not desirable to be preoccupied with trying to understand God's activities. Thoughts of God's activities will bring to our mind a variety of excellent and wonderful instances of kindness but these will detract from God himself. (*Cloud* VII). For Dionysius the reason we posit intangible and invisible darkness to God is that he dwells in light that is unapproachable (Tim 6:16).

[25] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* III, 28-2. Idem, VIII, 90. Compare Zinzendorf here with Dionysius in *Ep* 3, 1069B2.

[26] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, XII, 173.

> He is a God so tremendous, so stupendously great, that a Creature durst not presume of itself and upon its own account to approach him or to have any thing to do with him. A grand Charter is requisite to this End, this belongs only to certain Persons.[27]

Zinzendorf therefore urged that we banish from our minds the thought that human beings are of divine extraction or an emanation from God in the sense in which the Greek poets speak of emanation.[28] He insists that, "we are beings made at a certain time, [hence] there is an immense gulf between us and God, so that we could never come to him."[29] This gulf was that which necessitated the incarnation, which as we shall see later, explains Zinzendorf's preoccupation with the person of Jesus. According to him, we are not able to receive immediately from the Father or the Holy Ghost, but "our bridegroom for whose arms we were created was obliged to be born in our nature."[30]

At the same time, however, Zinzendorf was verbose in his reference to Jesus as the human face of God.[31] On the one hand there is the caution in attempting to formulate any idea of the hidden God and yet, on the other hand, he was filled with superlative expressions about Jesus. This tension in his thought is similar to the tension in

---

[27] Ibid., V, 68-69. Emphasis mine.

[28] Gambold, *Maxims,* 164.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid.

[31] See the section on Christology below.

apophatic theology. As Turner describes it, the theological language of apophatic theology is one in which we encounter the limit of language in the profusion of our affirmations, and then break through into the dark silence of the transcendent.[32]

The **second** indication in Zinzendorf that alerts us to the question of his relationship to apophaticism is his strong plea for theologians to be aware of the limits of reason in religion. For him, the essence of God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, is so profound that we would ruin our intellectual faculty in trying to contemplate it. We cannot penetrate the deeper things of God by reason nor is our relationship with God dependent on our being able to use reason.[33] The language that Zinzendorf used in coming to terms with the limitation of reason in penetrating the things pertaining to the divine is similar to that used by the Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing*. In *Cloud,* the author resolved that only love is able to reach God in this life, not knowing.[34] He chose the way of love because although all rational creatures, angels and human beings, have two powers at work in them, one knowing and one loving, "God is incomprehensible to the first, the knowing power [but] to the second, which is the loving power, he is entirely comprehensible."[35] As long as the soul dwells in this mortal body, then, the clarity of our understanding in regard to spiritual things, especially to God, is always mixed up with some sort of imagination. However, love

---

[32] Turner, *The Darkness of God*, 32.

[33] Gambold, *Maxims,* 20. This language bears resemblance to Dionysius *Divine Names* I, 585B3 – 588A7111.

[34] *Cloud* VII.

[35] *Cloud* IV.

was able to beat through the cloud of unknowing.[36] This blind impulse of love is an attitude motivated not by the benefits from God but by what God is. Not even the most wretched of sinners should think himself presumptuous to offer a humble impulse of love towards God because it is only this impulse of love that can pierce the cloud of unknowing between himself and his God. No matter how much spiritual understanding a man may have in the knowledge of created things, he can never by the work of the understanding arrive at the knowledge of the uncreated spiritual thing, which God is. The truly divine knowledge of God is that which is known by unknowing.[37]

In his dealing with the problem of the limitation of human reason, Zinzendorf notes that people are often inclined to enter into speculation about unknowable things. However, he argued that there were things not made clear to us, things that have exceptions made against them; things that have something of the mysterious and the obscure; such things belong to God (as in Deut 29:29). We ought not "thro' human preaching to furnish the least opportunity of leading people into [such] points of knowledge".[38] For example, we ought not to pretend that we know the name of God,

---

[36] *Cloud* IX.

[37] *Cloud* 70; In dealing with the issue of human beings approaching God and forming any affiliation with God, Dionysius betrays a Platonic influence. He speaks of the human yearning for the transcendent Good, by which he means human desire for God. (*DN* 4 700A 12ff). This yearning, which for Dionysius is the same as loving, involves "an absolute abandonment of yourself and everything, shedding all and freed from all, you will [then] be uplifted to the ray of the divine shadow which is above everything that is."(*MT* 1 1000A). The yearning brings ecstasy so that the lover belongs not to self but to the beloved and it is not absurd to say, "love for you [God] came on me like love for women." (*DN* 4 709; Zinzendorf often speaks about the relationship of the believer with Jesus as that of a bride to a husband. One of his favourite expressions is that Jesus is his Husband. Only the real lovers can truly handle the most sacred things because, "only they know how to pack away sacred symbols ... they alone have the simplicity of mind and the receptive, contemplative power to cross over the simple, marvellous, transcendent truth of the symbols used to represent God."(*Epistolae* 3, 1105C 13-17)

[38] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* X, 145.

as if God can be named. Since no one knows God's name, Zinzendorf was not bothered either by the polytheism of some people, the monotheism of the Jews and Muslims or what people called God. For him, as God cannot be approached so also he has no adequate external name among creatures except as he acts and manifests himself towards them. In manner similar to the Author of *The Cloud of Unknowing,* Zinzendorf sees love, not knowing, as the way to approach God. According to him, we should not even imagine that we know the Saviour. We begin to know him only when we have loved him first above all things:

> When for us nothing more in the world is in competition with him, when we have forgotten ourselves on account of Him, our health, our life, our possessions and goods, our enjoyment. ... When we have forgotten ourselves with body and life out of love toward him and can at certain times out of love toward him be angry with ourselves, then, I say, a small beginning of the knowledge of Him is responsible. ...In Him and His person lies hidden treasure of wisdom and knowledge which cannot be fathomed or exhausted.[39]

The inexhaustible nature of the knowledge, wisdom and way of God is just reason for the soul that longs after God not to attempt to know but only to love. A soul most tenderly in love with the Saviour may be ignorant of a hundred truths but because of that love is bound more closely to the Saviour. At the coming of the Son of Man that which will make the difference is whether the soul most ardently meditated on this part of the body: "the hole in His side, His Heart, out of which flowed blood and water."[40] In language reminiscent of the Author of the *Cloud,* Zinzendorf asserts that

---

[39] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* V, 48.

[40] Ibid., III, 31.

if virtuous living is not accompanied by "the pure impulse of the heart"[41] the person has a false heart towards God. The reason the Creator is invisible, he continues, is that the Creator refuses to be loved for any other reason than because one does love. The Creator does not wish that souls be led into loving God with an insidious and designing heart because of miracles, the glory of God and God's benefits.[42] Zinzendorf believed that God allowed some people to be poor, some to be sick, some to have a life of trouble, some to remain in a sort of Babel-uncertainty; that God allows dubious ideas to gain upper hand in the world, so that all human means that could be induced to make one love God for subsidiary aims are cut off.

For Zinzendorf true love was the love demonstrated by the thief on the cross. It was a faith in distress in as much as it had to do completely with an unknown. It was a faith that said, "I love you as an unknown Lord, of whom I know nothing, whom I have never known."[43] This Zinzendorf calls the *fiducia implicata*, which is a manifestation of eternal life; the faith which God works in the heart in the middle of our stillness; where He and we have to do with each other alone; where nothing comes between Him and us, "no man, no book, no knowledge, no learning, not even the most necessary truths."[44]

---

[41] Ibid., VIII, 90. Treasure also argues that in Zinzendorf the spirit of *The Cloud of Unknowing* was reanimated. Treasure, *The Making of Modern Europe,* 109.

[42] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures* , VIII, 90.

[43] Ibid., III, 36.

[44] Ibid., IV, 38.

By putting the emphasis on God's awareness of the person, rather than the person's awareness of God, Zinzendorf and the apophatic writers would see our preoccupation in theology with how to describe the internal relationship in the Trinity as a distraction. The only requirement that he demands of the person is to love God for love's sake. The implication of this for an interfaith situation is immense. If love for God is the criterion for salvation, then the salvation of other people is not an issue on which pronouncement can be made. From an interfaith point of view, it would seem that the critical question that Zinzendorf's negative theology raises is whether the person loves God, which is a prerequisite for knowledge as it is for salvation. As we shall see later, Zinzendorf does not discount the salvation of people on the basis of lack of knowledge of God but on the basis of lack of love for God.

In **summary**, when Zinzendorf considered God's distance and immensity and being at the same time aware of the limitation of human mental competence, it forced him to be modest in his approach to God. In this posture, there are in fact extensive similarities between Zinzendorf and the apophatic writers. The question, then, is not whether Zinzendorf used apophatic categories but rather whether in doing so he was aiming to uphold that tradition. Even though he could well be referring to apophatic writers in his reference to the Mystics in his *Twenty-One Discourses,* this is not a sufficient basis on which to claim for him any conscious interest in the apophatic tradition. At the same time, it would certainly not be true to say, as Kinkel does, that he expressly rejects that tradition. One would be closer to the truth to say that his use of 'apophatic categories' suggests that he would be more inclined to embrace rather than reject that tradition. It is clear that his writings betray a character that puts him on the periphery of apophatic discourse. Our conclusion, then, is that a theological

modesty that has apophatic overtones is central to Zinzendorf's theology. Even though we cannot treat him as a classical apophatic writer, in order to appreciate the modesty in his theology we have to situate him at the periphery of the apophatic tradition. The extent of negation in the theological language Zinzendorf employs provides justification for us to suggest an association with apophatic theology.[45] Therefore to deal with Zinzendorf's theology is to engage in a measure of retrieval of apophatic theology.

Our next task is to explore the meaning of this theological modesty and to indicate its relevance to pluralism. Already two important themes have begun to emerge that have implications for plurality. The first is that Zinzendorf cautions us in the positive assertions that we make about God that would suggest that we have a full grasp of who God is. God remains hidden even amidst his revelation, which means modesty must attend the affirmations of Christians in a plural context. Secondly, by putting the emphasis on love for God rather than knowledge of God as a means to salvation, Zinzendorf forces us to think of the salvation of people of other faiths in different terms. As we shall see, Zinzendorf is prepared to regard the whole world as already redeemed and insists that no one is condemned on the basis of original sin. He seems

---

[45] Zinzendorf does not refer specifically to the apophatic writers but probably had in mind someone like the Author of the *Cloud of Unknowing* when in his *Twenty-One Discourses* he refers to the Mystics. These Mystics, he said, have written extensively about the matter of free will, "how and to what end we should give up the our Will." The question of the control of the will was a central feature of the spirituality about which the *Cloud of Unknowing* speaks. According to the Author, "if a man were so reformed by grace as to have a constant control of the impulses of his will, he would never be without some taste of eternal life, or without the full food in the happiness of heaven."[45] Zinzendorf said Jesus carried the matter of the subjugation of the will to the highest degree when he said that neither the mind nor any member of the body must seem too dear when it provides fuel for the self-will - "[t] his is the summit Mysticism ." Discourse XVII, 222. See also *Cloud* IV.

to have less difficulty than modern Christians with the notion of salvation for those who lack knowledge of Jesus. For him the critical issue was not knowledge of Jesus but whether like the thief on the cross one can love Jesus without claiming to know him. If as Zinzendorf suggests, not even necessary truths are critical for our salvation, then ignorance of God is not a liability as we are inclined to think in modern theological discourse.

7.3: The Presupposition of Zinzendorf's Theological Modesty

In order to appreciate Zinzendorf's theological modesty, we must understand the theological justification for his attitude to reason and rationality. Although we touched on this earlier, further elucidation is necessary because Zinzendorf's approach is traditionally read only as a reaction to the Enlightenment's attack on revealed religion.[46] However, Zinzendorf recognized reason as a God-given capacity but limited its role in matters of faith. In so doing, he was putting forward an epistemology that was designed to undercut the claims to certitude in the sphere of metaphysics. This was a task that Kant would later take up, though not from the same point of view. Zinzendorf's limitation on reason, which preceded Kant's philosophical critique, was from a theological point of view. According to Zinzendorf, the understanding of the human being in divine matters is analogous to that of a poor animal in the comprehension of geometric or algebraic propositions. He was minded, therefore, to use reason in human matters so far as it sufficed, but in spiritual matters he remained simply with the heart-grasped truth, which little children could understand. These little scholars of the Holy Ghost, as he called them, "get

[46] Renkewitz, "Zinzendorf als Theologe," 77; Betterman, 11; Freeman, 41.

acquainted with their Abba and their divine Mother too [i.e. the Holy Spirit] at the same time, as soon as they are capable of thinking."[47] As far as it relates to God Zinzendorf believed we were to say, "I am Behema, a dumb animal before [God]; I cannot penetrate into the depths of things."[48] This modesty in what the human being can say about God implies that we should be less assertive about our claims to knowledge of God.

For Zinzendorf, an over-confidence in the role of reason has several spiritual consequences for the individual. **First**, the immodesty that springs from an uplifted trust in the ability of reason is one of the causes of unbelief. The arrogance and immodesty that nurtures overconfidence in the capacity of reason, according to Zinzendorf, is the same that leads a meddling intellect to be suspicious of biblical truths. When reason goes beyond its limits, faith is no longer a shield against corruption and the person is left in a state of confusion.[49] In what seems to be a reference to deism and historical criticism, he asserts that whoever reads the Bible, and situates himself within the world of Holy Scripture and speaks from that perspective and yet doubts the incarnation, the divinity of Christ and the redemption of souls, is "possessed of a confused understanding, or a knavish heart."[50] Either that person sees more than he is willing to allow or with conceit and immodesty claims to

---

[47] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 25-26.

[48] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VII, 78.

[49] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* XI, 162; Gambold, *Maxims,*130; Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* VI, 89.

[50] Ibid., 91.

see farther than his insight really reaches. In Zinzendorf's understanding, believing in the sacrifice for sin and the incarnation was the *à priori* basis for reasoning.[51]

Secondly, assuming a posture of modesty and ignorance is more attuned to godliness. Ignorance is God's way to keep mortals from being dried up by the same satanic spirit of rebellion that was evidenced in the Garden of Eden. In keeping the human being close to the beast in regard to knowledge, God was thwarting Satan's scheme, which designed to make human beings like God through the faculty of reason.[52] Although this faculty is God-given, it was the main instrument of Satan's scheme against God. Those people, therefore, who are keen to exercise themselves in knowledge and to show the greatness of their reasoning abilities are in fact co-operating with Satan. According to Zinzendorf, the fall does not consist in the lust of the flesh but in the lust of the mind, a seeking to know. God's conversation with Adam was in effect a critique of those who were more concerned with insight and reflection than with love.[53] There was then no need to represent Christianity as being agreeable with common sense. As soon as an attempt was made "to demonstrate to atheists and common deists and people like that that our religion is a wisdom rooted in their heads, a discernment which they can take in their own way, then they are obviously threshing empty straw."[54] On the contrary, the means of understanding available to

---

[51]This is analogous to Aquinas' idea of revelation as first principle: "if our opponent believes nothing of divine revelation, there is no longer any means of proving the articles of faith by reasoning, but only of answering objections – if he has any against faith." *ST,* Ia, I. 8.

[52] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, IX, 121.

[53] Ibid.,122-123.

[54] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures* , VII, 78.

the human being is not sufficient for the Christian message. We should then not be surprised, indeed it is to be expected that Christianity will be treated as foolishness.

By limiting the role of reason, Zinzendorf was not being anti-rationalistic as much as he was being modest, recognizing the spiritual value of a presumption of ignorance. This attitude situates him at the outskirts of the apophatic tradition where there is preparedness to negate positive assertions in order to underline the limits of human language and mental formulations. The interfaith significance of this approach is that it provides space for dialogue with people of other faiths. When Christians take this approach in the encounter with people of other religions, the outcome cannot be predicted because there is openness to the future in which we cannot predict what will happen because God will surprise us.[55]

7.4. The Meaning of Theological Modesty

When Zinzendorf is read closely there seem to emerge at least three emphases in his theological modesty that have implications for pluralism. The first is the **apophatic-like character** of his theology, a tension between what he knows about God and what he does not know; between what he sees and what cannot be seen; between what he

---

[55] As the 1996 World Mission Conference of the WCC put it: "on our journey of dialogue Christians - as well as their partners from other religions – may be surprised, for Christ may encounter them where they would never have expected him." [Christopher Duraisingh, ed., *Called to One Hope: The Gospel in Diverse Cultures* (Geneva: WCC, 1998), 61.] In an unexpected way the hermeneutics of modesty is akin to a hermeneutics of suspicion and is strongly eschatological. A hermeneutic of suspicion says, "it is not necessarily so." A hermeneutic of modesty says, "I have not seen any thing as yet." An approach of modesty seems to suggest that we have not seen every thing as yet, or what we have seen may be other than it seems. Cracknell describes an approach like this as the "You Ain't Seen Nothing Yet" approach to the future of religion. [Kenneth Cracknell, "The Theology of Religious Plurality," *Current Dialogue* 26 (June 1994) :16-18.] In discussing the possibilities for the religious future he opts for this approach over against three other possibilities, namely: the ultimate triumph of one religious tradition over all the others; the deliberate creation of a new religion; and the conscious decision by religious communities to continue living in various forms of splendid isolation.

experiences and what is beyond experience; between what he speaks of and that for which he has no appropriate language. The consequence of this tension in his thought is a refusal to treat theological assertions with any kind of dogmatic finality but to regard them as provisional. The *Church Order* captures this idea with its statement that: "The Unitas Fratrum maintains that all creeds formulated by the Christian Church stand in need of constant testing in the light of the Holy Scriptures."[56] As in negative theology, Zinzendorf doubts the capacity of the human mind to be able to formulate permanent assertions about God, of whom we only form glimpses through the Incarnate One. To focus on theological modesty, then, is to perform a hermeneutical act of retrieval not only of Zinzendorf but also of the apophatic tradition, which is a credible approach to doing theology.[57] At the centre of the retrieved discourse is the idea that our language, which deals with things within human experience, cannot properly apply to God since God cannot be contained within the categories of human experience.

The second aspect of Zinzendorf's theological modesty that emerges on close reading is a **human-centred Christology.** Zinzendorf put emphasis on Jesus as a historical figure and refuses to be drawn into speculation about his divinity. However, he maintained a traditional understanding of the mystery of the hypostatic union - that all the time the man Jesus was God. In order to bring the modesty of the Creator into sharp focus, Zinzendorf takes pain to underline the human-like-us character of Jesus.

---

[56] *Church Order*, 1,5. "In the light of Holy Scriptures" should be taken here to mean in the light of new interpretations.

[57] David Tracy underlines that the theological classics were retrieved from within the Christian tradition; Barth of Calvin; Lonergan and Rahner of Aquinas, Reinhold Niebuhr of Augustine; Richard Niebuhr of Jonathan Edwards; Paul Tillich and Bultmann of Luther. David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism,* (London: SCM, 1981), 104.

He stressed that in his incarnation Jesus himself was not always aware of his divinity because of the reality of his human consciousness. This means Jesus had limitations of memory, of vision and of knowledge.[58] Zinzendorf sees the recovery of the history of the man Jesus as a most urgent theological task.

The third issue that Zinzendorf's theological modesty seems to involve is a perspective of openness to the future, which we might call **surprise eschatology.** This is the sense in which he discusses theological issues relating to soteriology, and the mission of the church. The human mind, he argues, cannot fathom the fullness of God's activity in the world and so we do not know what God may be doing among people who do not yet believe in Jesus. The mystery of God's salvation is not about the unsaved but about those who are saved, for we do not know why the Holy Spirit has called those who are called. A further surprise awaits us as we journey towards the immense God because even after a hundred aeons in eternity we will not yet arrive to the one to whom we are flying. So the future is open, which means its nature will come as a surprise to believers as well as for the non-believers.

In what follows we will consider Zinzendorf's approach to doctrinal issues, through which gleams his theological modesty. His modesty, we will show, creates room for engaging people of other faiths in a fruitful way.

---

[58] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 75: "... [his participation in the Godhead was] concealed from, and became a mystery to him."

7.4.1: Application of Zinzendorf's Theological Modesty

As a result of the limits he placed on reason, Zinzendorf was keen to avoid the danger of approaching Christian truths as if they can be known before they are believed. He therefore does not put the need to understand doctrines as a primary Christian task. He considers it an ancient rule of the Christian church that articles of faith are to be overlooked at the first introduction in the faith.[59] Zinzendorf therefore objected to the practice where verbal assent to doctrines in the confession of creeds was used as a means to determine one's religious status.[60] For him, the proof of knowledge of the truth was not verbal assent but the preparedness to suffer for the truth. The person, then, to whom the truths of the faith were not preached should not be expected either to believe them or to suffer as a consequence of not understanding them.

For Zinzendorf, it is the Holy Spirit in its second-level operation that enables someone to understand the doctrines of the faith that must be first believed. The second-level school of the Holy Ghost has several classes depending on our levels of knowledge, but whether one "afterwards go to heaven out of the fifth, fourth, third, or the first class or a select class, still he has the very same happiness."[61] Zinzendorf warned that the wise scholar of the Holy Ghost would not attempt to treat things of a higher class than where he or she is located. If he is presumptuous enough to enter upon the things of a higher class, then he will be judged either to have a weak mind or, alternatively, he will be considered to be an over inquisitive person who will fall eventually in heresy. In order then that the truths of the Christian faith be understood,

---

[59] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* Preface, 3.

[60] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourse*, I, 2.

[61] Ibid., 7.

it would be necessary first to have everlasting life, which consists in the simple knowledge that we are saved through the death of Jesus.[62] To insist that people understand doctrine in order to believe was for Zinzendorf an attempt to subvert the normal mode of operation of the Holy Spirit. Upon believing, the Holy Spirit will teach us the things we need to know but an inquisitive attitude is at variance with the modesty and presumption of ignorance that is suited for holiness.

To show the relevance of this modest approach to doctrine for today's plural context, we shall now consider Zinzendorf's anthropology and how he understands salvation, Christology, and Christian mission. These issues occupy a significant place in his theological writings and are related to the tension between himself and Comenius. We must then explore these as part on the intra-Moravian dialogue and as a prelude to showing that Zinzendorf's theology can make an important contribution to interfaith conversation.

7.4.2: Zinzendorf's Anthropology

Zinzendorf's anthropology is set forth in a dualistic fashion, in which the activities of the mind are set over against the activities of the body. According to him, the dilemma that humanity faces is that we are caught between the tendencies of the beastly nature and the tendencies of the mind. Two contrasting consequences follow from these tendencies. On one hand, without deliverance from the tendencies of the beastly nature people go about brutish, scraping in the earth for a meaningful existence, having no time for the cultivation of the spirit; not taking advantage of

---

[62] Ibid.,12.

God's means of deliverance from the beastly condition. On the other hand, there is the activity of the mind, which is worse because knowledge leads to pride, "and yet does not make a person one jot more a partaker of the Saviour's wounds, nor a jot more Jesus-like; the mind does not for that reason resemble the Lamb's mind, nor the body his corpse, one grain more."[63] Under the latter tendency, people seek the cultivation of the mind and think little of God's provision for meaningful existence. In the former, the body gains ascendancy and people live simply to fulfil the needs of the flesh, knowing that it is under the necessity of death. In the latter, the mind gains ascendancy and people are consumed by their over-driven speculation or else perish in insensibility. [64]

The war between the twin tendencies inclines the human being to self-hatred and self-rejection, which accounts for opposition to the notion of God in human flesh. People who have a reverence for God but no heart connection with the mediator will find it hard to think that God could be in their form. They would rather choose to have to do with something unfathomable and transcendent than a human form. They prefer to pay reverence and homage to something incomprehensible, than to hear of an incarnate Creator, of a God who is of their own flesh and bone. Their inclinations are either to deny it or to dilute the idea so that it is more acceptable to them.[65] An inability or unwillingness to acknowledge the incarnation is related to our pride and

---

[63] Ibid., X, 141.

[64] Ibid., IX, 120-124.

[65] Ibid., VII, 95-97.

immodesty. Zinzendorf cautions that this human tendency towards self-hate is an anthropological disorder with eternal consequences.

This anthropological disorder is what Zinzendorf refers to as sin, which he saw as reflecting the war between God and the devil. God is the Father of every good and perfect gift and of truth but Satan is the Father of lies, that is, of all that is evil, wrong and untrue.[66] These two principles of good and evil are at war with each other. However, the origin of the disputes is something of which we have no distinct knowledge. Although he sees actual sin as springing from original sin, Zinzendorf makes a distinction between the two forms. The difference lies in what is understood to be the current status and consequence of original sin. By explicating this difference Zinzendorf took a position that was in tension with the official position of the Church of his day. According to the official position of the Church, everyone coming into the world is afflicted by original sin and is therefore under condemnation at birth without knowledge of Jesus and baptism.[67] For Zinzendorf, however, the capacity of original sin to lead to death has been removed because of the atonement of Christ:

> Our Saviour suffered so bitterly for original sin, he so really died for it, and nailed it in such a manner to the cross's tree, that no human soul dies of that any more, nor perishes upon account of there being such a thing as original sin. Original sin could not be merely forgiven, but it was also necessary it

---

[66] Ibid., XV, 205.

[67] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, Preface, xii-xiii. The position of the Synod continued: We teach that since the fall of Adam, all mankind, naturally [e] ngendered from him, are conceived and born in sin, that is, they from the very womb are full of evil lusts and inclinations, and can have by nature no true fear of God, nor true faith in God; also that this innate disease, or original sin, is truly sin, and condemns under God's eternal wrath all such who are not born again through baptism and the Holy Ghost; and we believe that whosoever does not look upon original sin as sin, and in general would make nature pious and good by natural strength, offereth reproach to the sufferings and merit of Christ.

> should be atoned for; but actual sin is now no more atoned for, but forgiven; from this, grace and release may be had in the sacrifice of Jesus.[68]

Therefore, a blanket condemnation is not spread over humanity as a consequence of original sin. As we shall see, this understanding of the status of the human being had implications for salvation as well as significant consequences for **interfaith understanding.** Zinzendorf's assertion that the whole world is under the meritorious effect of God's modesty, as evidenced in the incarnation, is consistent with his position that the effect of original sin is annulled. If humanity is no longer under condemnation on account of original sin because of the death of Jesus, then the whole world is already under the benefit of this act of redemption whether or not it is seen. This implies that the issue of the salvation of people of other religious persuasion must then be left as open question. Unlike the position of the Synod, Zinzendorf believed there was no need to be anxious about original sin. For those who died before the birth of Christ his death was effective retroactively and for those born after Christ his death was a covering.[69] According to him, people of other cultural and religious background struggle more against the idea of the incarnation than about the idea of the Godhead itself. The dispute about Jesus' Godhead is a purely metaphysical subtlety, "but the dispute about his manhood is a heart's matter; against this the will contends."[70] People's sensibility are offended by the idea that God their Creator was a boy and that one who had a male discriminating member (i.e. a penis) was, according to the hypostatic union, the Creator and the Christ in one person.

---

[68] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 76.

[69] Zinzendorf based this position on 1Peter 3: 19, which is captured in the Augsburg confession in the expression, "descended into hell."

They miss the point that boyhood was hallowed because Jesus was a boy and that motherhood was hallowed because Mary carried him in her sisterly womb. They miss the point that on account of the incarnation the brothers in the congregation are full of reverence for the sisters and the sisters revere the brothers on account of their bearing an outward resemblance of the Saviour.[71]

The anthropological significance of the incarnation is that humanity itself becomes a sacrament of divinity; that the human form is the modest location of the divine life and activity. For him, because the Son of God was a boy, the proper touchstone, the proper *shibboleth,* it behoves us to attend on the male infants, purely as being little creatures fashioned after the Lamb of God. Wherever, then, we encounter a male form, the Christian can affirm that that creature is fashioned after the Lamb of God. Every human soul, irrespective of its location and irrespective of its religion, is blessed because it is a human soul.[72] This begs the question, however, whether the salvation of people in other religions is thereby assured, which brings us to the question of soteriology.

---

[70] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourse,* VII, 97.

[71] Ibid.,100.

[72] Ibid., 101. The emphasis on the male form rather than on the human form is a weakness in the Count's argument because of the exclusion of reference to the female. He corrects this masculine reference with a more inclusive language in *Nine Public Lectures,* VI. Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VI, 67. Zinzendorf usually uses the term religion to refer to the different Christian denominations. At this point, however, he seems to have more than just Christian denominations in mind because of the global reference.

7.4.3: Modesty and Soteriology

Zinzendorf took the view that people who perish were those who suffered *recidiva* or relapse, who allowed themselves to be re-possessed by Satan. He would therefore not speculate about the salvation of people - whether people of other religions, like the Anakunkas in Canada, or of some Lutherans in Germany. To him, it would be the greatest absurdity in the world to engage in a speculation about peoples' salvation.[73] The death of Jesus was for the whole world so, irrespective of how people accepted it, everyone in the world who in this life has not deliberately given themselves as servants of corruption are saved eternally, whether or not they have been part of the church.[74] According to Zinzendorf, it was hardly necessary to be concerned with the issue of sin before the fall, which "is not properly a good subject to attempt talking of and fathoming to the bottom."[75] The concern was with day-to-day activities, where human nature heaps sin upon sin, is resigned in afflictions, and is lacking in obedience and love for the neighbour.[76]

The necessity of redemption is understood within the context of the mind-body dualism in his anthropology. In view of the twin tendencies in the human being, Zinzendorf saw Jesus as the only hope for the human condition. This is the perspective from which his christocentrism must be read. The incarnation-redemption

---

[73] Ibid., V, 77. The Anakunkas is the name of a tribe of Indians that the missionaries met in Canada, who practiced their own religion.

[74] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 77.

[75] Ibid., XV, 209.

[76] Ibid., XIV, 202.

is for Zinzendorf the miracle of miracles.[77] The wretchedness of the human condition into which God was revealed should not be taken for granted.

We must therefore read Zinzendorf's approach to salvation against the background of his anthropology. There are several features in his soteriology that conjure up the notion of modesty. The **first** is his emphasis on the suffering Christ. In the imagery he employs, he said the grain of immortality, which the Spirit brings from the "little side hole" of Jesus, endows our mortal body and by it our body is frequently moistened by our "sucking-in that blood."[78] Once the human person has been captivated by the image of the suffering Lamb, that person is no longer perceived in a normal way but rather, "as a consort, as a playmate for the marriage-bed of the blessed Creator and eternal Husband of the human soul."[79] Through the veil of this somewhat offensive language we hear Zinzendorf's assertion of humanity's only hope. The only remedy for all that is immoral, unethical, and disorderly and all fleshly mindedness is the painful glance of the Saviour.[80]

The **second** feature of his modest soteriology is his emphasis on the need for ignorance. He took the view that the concession of ignorance is more suited for the grace of salvation. According to him, "the ignorance of almost all spiritual things,

---

[77] Gambold, *Maxims,* 26 & 28.

[78]Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, III, 45.

[79] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VII, 86. Zinzendorf uses the image of the mystical marriage to describe the relationship between the Christian and the Saviour. As was the practice in European countries that a woman takes the name of her husband, so also the Christian takes the name of Christ to mean that he or she belongs to Christ. See *Nine Public Lectures,* VII, 77; Freeman, 192-193 and E. Beyreuther, *Studien zur Theologie Zinzendorfs: Gesammelte Aufsätze* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Kreis Moers, 1962), 72-73 for a further discussion of the idea of the mystical marriage.

[80] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VII, 84.

yea the wrong apprehension immediately consequent upon the shortness of the mind's insight, may, ... very well be consistent with those graces."[81] Since no knowledge was required for salvation, Zinzendorf said he presupposed that it was possible for the person to be entirely ignorant of the Father and the Holy Ghost, and not to understand anything else and not learn a line more, except that his creator is his Saviour, and yet in heaven become a spiritual saint, and patriarch amongst the blessed.[82]

This presupposition of ignorance and the inability even to express oneself is consistent with what humanity fundamentally is, that is, weak and poor. Acknowledgement of this condition with greater modesty would save us from some of the consequences of the sinful life. Before the gospel can reach a soul, "it must be made poor in spirit and must see that in itself it is worthless and helpless."[83] According to the Count, the unhappiness of humankind comes from our unwillingness to give honour to God and to "allow that prodigiously-important point, that man ever was, even before the fall, a weak and brittle vessel, ... and that now since the fall, over and above the weakness, over and above the possibility of falling, over and above the vessel's inability to maintain itself in happiness, a guilt also lies upon us."[84] The desire to have knowledge was a consequence of the fall, where a rebellious spirit grafted the first idea of disobedience upon the human nature. As Zinzendorf put it, after the fall our natural wisdom is truly nothing else but a vehement desire to know

---

[81] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, 1, 4.

[82] Ibid. Idem, *Nine Public Lectures,* III, 31.

[83] Hamilton, *A History of the Church,* 194. See especially the Chapter XX, "The Theology of the Zinzendorfian Era." Hamilton's view that the details of the terminology of Zinzendorf became obsolete must now be reconsidered.

all such things that could make us happy, without, on the contrary, knowledge of those things on which true happiness really depends. What we know are things that we have no need of or things that are uncertain and probable. Our inclination after the fall is to know everything other than what concerns our salvation.[85]

Since the fall there have been only two paths to holiness available to humanity. One is a "patched-up holiness" that is based on reason and the other is the way of ignorance. The former Zinzendorf called natural holiness, which any person can attain by mere principles of morality. Natural holiness is the holiness of reason and "is good for nothing, because it doth not proceed from him, who must work all in all."[86] The latter he called true holiness because it required no input from the person – hence the notion of ignorance. This is when a person "drops and loses all his rights he has by nature and reason, and by faith received from our Saviour assurance that his future expectation depend entirely upon grace and mercy."[87]

With such a strong emphasis on ignorance, Zinzendorf refused to pass judgement upon, or condemn, people who did not know Jesus. He argued that the person that will condemn a natural man, that is, someone who neither has nor could have known Jesus as Saviour, nor by their distractions in other things could have had any true vision of the Saviour, meddles in a foreign affair. To have the expectation that one who has never known about Jesus is to have faith in him is analogous to sending "a

---

[84] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* III, 37.

[85] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* XIV, 148.

[86] Ibid.,150.

[87] Ibid., 151.

lame man upon an errand, or [to] engage a blind man to give his judgement about things which require sharp sight."[88] However, the capacity for faith in Jesus is a gift that God gives, which to our natural method of reasoning is manifest folly.

Next to the incarnation and the saving death of Jesus, then, the greatest mystery and the deepest wonder is how God leads us to believe in Jesus, that his death and martyrdom has brought redemption for all.[89] Those who do not believe that Jesus is come in the flesh for the salvation of the world must be left alone because flesh and blood cannot make this mystery known. Education, human arguments and convictions can at best imprint knowledge of the Saviour in the head but not on the heart.[90]

From an **interfaith point of view,** Zinzendorf's argument here has far reaching implications. On the basis of his position here it could be argued that the faithful of other religions, who have not heard about Jesus, could neither be expected to believe in him nor would come into condemnation for lack of faith in him. From Zinzendorf's point of view, the biblical warning in 1Cor 16:22, "let anyone be cursed who has no love for the Lord Jesus," ought not to be applied to those who do not know the Lord. According to him a passage such as this is really applicable to Christians who insist upon being in God's family while persisting in the way of the

---

[88] Ibid., VI, 57.

[89] Ibid., VII, 81.

[90] Ibid., XI, 122.

old corruption.[91] Moreover, the knowledge of Jesus' Lordship is not to be inculcated by arguments or persuasions. Even if a person is led by argument, to the point where there is no objection against it, that will not ensure knowledge of Jesus. The person who comes into knowledge of Jesus comes into knowledge of a mystery, which can support him in all the changes and chances of his existence.[92] The salvation of sinners, then, is not something so self-evident that one can make positive and conclusive assertions about it.

Zinzendorf maintains that individuals, who do not have faith in Jesus because they have not heard that message, or because the Holy Spirit has not drawn them, are not condemned. Although not committing himself to general salvation on account of the efficacious death of Jesus, Zinzendorf however leaves us in no doubt about his conviction that not a single soul perishes any longer on account of Adam's fall, which is contrary to the traditional evangelical position.[93] From closer observation, Zinzendorf is seen to be holding a view of salvation that emphasised belief rather than knowledge. Lack of knowledge did not lead to condemnation and belief was a gift granted by the Holy Spirit. Knowledge was not necessary for salvation and it is the Holy Spirit that makes belief possible. People are not condemned for lack of knowledge because salvation is by faith, which is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Since God is proclaimed as the one who leads a person to faith in Jesus, then only God may

---

[91] Ibid., VI, 58.

[92] Ibid., 60.

[93] See also *Twenty-One Discourses,* X, 145 where Zinzendorf deals with the question of the redemption of devils. The interesting thing about his position here is not simply that he believes it is not within the bounds of our knowledge but that he does not expressly deny the possibility of their redemption. As he put it, to come to a position on this matter might be "interpreted as over forward inquisitiveness in us."

pronounce and bring closure to the question of the salvation of people of other faiths. There is a certain mystery about the salvation of people who do not know Jesus. This means that interfaith conversation must reckon with the issues of Christology and Christian mission, which we shall consider in turn.

7.4.4: Zinzendorf's Modest Christology

The principal emphasis that can be discerned in Zinzendorf's Christology is the weight he places on the humanity of Jesus as God incarnate. It seems that Zinzendorf was led to this emphasis because of his awareness of the difficulty there is for human beings to speak about God in the depth of his divine mystery, which, as we have argued, puts him in the company of the apophatic writers. For him, human limitation in trying to formulate ideas about the nature of God meant there was little sense trying to look beyond Jesus. The Count's christocentrism, therefore, is a function of the apophaticism in his theology. Perceiving this emphasis is therefore central to understanding his theology. He argues for the incarnation of Jesus as the most important occurrence in human history. It was not only a miracle but also a necessity that served at least two important functions in the relationship between God and humanity.

In the **first** place, the incarnation came about in order that the mystery of God and his ultimate concern for the human community, which are otherwise inaccessible to human knowledge, would become known. Indeed, "that consideration what must the Father of such a Son be cannot be persecuted with thought, but with mere

prostration."[94] Jesus our brother and husband is important for all humanity because of what humanity is in its ignorance and because of who God is in his immensity. For him the concession of ignorance leads sooner to the true knowledge of God, which those who trust in reason cannot have.[95] Such true knowledge even the little children who are baptized in the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost possess.[96]

According to Zinzendorf, in the incarnation Jesus is revealed as the archetype of the human being; the original of what it is to be human and human destiny is defined in him. Human life is to be modelled after him because "the incarnation of Jesus Christ [is] the only groundwork, where upon it is worthwhile to build."[97] The lowliness of Jesus and the reality of his humanity are therefore critical for human salvation, even though it is a problem for some. Believing in the incarnation of Jesus brings with it the risk of being classed as a fool or a person lacking in common sense.[98] However, it demonstrated the connection between God and his creatures.

---

[94] Gambold, *Maxims,* 67.

[95] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* I, 10.

[96] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 25-26. The emphasis on Jesus as human, led Zinzendorf to emphasize the distinction between Jesus and Christ. The name Jesus is his own proper personal name, which he bears in the flesh for the benefit of all. The name Christ is the name of his office, and belongs only to those that have the experience of redemption, who see him as the anointed one. The name Jesus refers to his general intercession on the cross, but the name Christ relates to his last will and testament, which he made with his father, where he prays for those whom the father would give him. [*Sixteen Discourses,* III, 25.] Therefore, Jesus must be manifest everywhere as Jesus before he can be known as Christ, because on account of the office and merits, the name Christ is mysterious beyond description. Jesus is the one who reveals that which we cannot really know of God and the Christ is the one who makes our relationship with God possible. In other words, there is need for a medium between humanity and God to communicate knowledge of God, which is the role that Jesus as Christ plays.

[97] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* V, 54. See also *Freeman,*168.

[98] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, IV, 66.

A **second reason** for the incarnation was to demonstrate the modesty of the Creator. For Zinzendorf, Christology was an expression of God's own modesty in accommodating himself to the ignorance of humanity. Jesus was not ashamed of the fact that he too was ignorant; that there were things that were concealed from him. When he was asked about the last judgement he freely signified his humanity by saying he did not know.[99] Jesus believed in all earnest that his Godhead had forsaken him on the cross. Had he not believed it he would not have said it and lamented it.[100] As human-like-us he represents humanity in all its weakness yet at the same time he is God. The Saviour's ignorance was a sign of the modesty of God who was not ashamed to subject himself to the vicissitudes of human life. Being able to see and find this God of all gods in the person of a man is itself beyond reason's power and cannot be called acquired knowledge.[101] Arguments and proofs cannot help the person who cannot believe that this man Jesus is his Saviour and that his Saviour is creator.[102]

Having made his modest appearance in the flesh, Jesus knows the human disposition and has experienced whatever human beings might encounter in this life.[103] People took offence at what seemed to be a disparaging of Jesus and an attempt to bring him

---

[99] *Gambold, Maxims,* 48. Here Zinzendorf uses the same argument that Irenaeus used against the Gnostics. According to Irenaeus, "if, then, the Son was not ashamed to ascribe the knowledge of that day to the Father only, but declared what was true regarding the matter, neither let us be ashamed to reserve for God those questions which may occur to us." *Against Heresies* xxxviii, 6

[100] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, VI, 92.

[101] Ibid., II, 32.

[102] Ibid., VII, 102.

[103] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* V, 47.

to the level of the ordinary human being.[104] In his reaction Zinzendorf said that rather than focusing on the Saviour's humble form, some Christians, under the pressure of liberalism and freethinking, have preoccupied themselves with the Saviour's gracious qualities and his great understanding. They imagine that his lowliness, his humility and his ignorance would not satisfy men of learning. However, he pointed out that Jesus could not be made any meaner than the Holy Scriptures make him. He was born an infant boy; he was a mere carpenter.[105] This, said Zinzendorf, is the touchstone of human hope.

In this emphasis on Jesus' humanity, Zinzendorf's Christology is situated at the centre of today's Christological debate and the development of theologies of pluralism.[106] At a later stage we must investigate the fruitfulness of this emphasis for the plural context. At this juncture, though, we must first consider the issue of Jesus' divinity, which is an assertion Zinzendorf wants to keep in tension with the emphasis on his humanity.[107]

---

[104] Zinzendorf reports how that in a public disputation at a university there was a prayer inserted against the Brethren: "that God almighty would not suffer his son to be so disparaged, and made so mean." Gambold, *Maxims,* 89.

[105] Carpentry was probably the most popular of the trades in the Herrnhut Moravian Settlement.

[106] See Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God,* 292-293. Haight has argued that this emphasis on Jesus' humanity is a fundamental presupposition in interpreting the classical doctrines of Chalcedon. The focus on Jesus' humanity was seen in the mid-eighteenth century as a one-sided emphasis in Moravian theology. The General Synod of 1748, which received Zinzendorf's commentary on the Augsburg Confession notes in the preface to the publication that the charge was laid against the church: "we ran into a like tedious excess to that, which the Arians and Socinians usually lay the charge of St. Athanasius's Creed." (Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* Preface, ix-x.); See also Dupuis, 190.

[107] As the Synod of 1748 and Zinzendorf insisted: "we find in the *mixtura inconfusa* of the very highest divinity and the very poorest and most reproach'd humanity, the true *panulum* or food for our heart, at once prostrate in the dust before God the Creator, and unspeakably enamoured with our Fellow-Man and Husband." (Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourse,* Preface, xi.)

7.4.5: The Divinity of Jesus

Zinzendorf's strong emphasis on Jesus' humanity leads one to wonder about his perception of Jesus' divinity, which according to traditional orthodoxy must be kept in tension with his humanity. His basic position is that for a number of reasons one should be modest about trying to marshal arguments to prove that the man Jesus is God the creator. The **first reason** for this modesty is that as a matter of first principle Jesus is already called Son of God in Holy Scriptures.[108] We cannot know more than what Holy Scripture affirms. It is not a matter for dispute but a truth that is grasped intuitively. This means an unlearned boy can understand the truth of Jesus' divinity even as he pronounces it. Since it is beyond words and prior to any argument, the truth about Jesus' divinity was something to be experienced, not something to be taught. If the person is unable to confess the divinity of Christ, no argument can prove the case. Trying to establish his divinity by argument will only tempt us to use all manner of uncouth and impertinent expressions that are not found in the word of God, "and which our short-sighted understanding must first find out, to explain and express with words, what our thoughts should never dare to venture upon."[109] Only by faith can the divinity of Christ be apprehended. Zinzendorf was therefore not prepared to use any other verification for this mystery than, "it is written, so we read."[110] The primary task was to receive the man Jesus, who would afterwards declare the family to which he belongs. He would make known what we need to know about the Father and the Holy Spirit, although we would not be able to find words

---

[108] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* IV, 35.

[109] Ibid., IV, 35.

[110] Ibid., 36.

sufficient to explain it.[111] This brings us to the second reason for not trying to prove Jesus' divinity.

The **second reason** for modesty and for not trying to marshal evidence to prove Jesus' divinity is that the matter of his divinity concerns the depth of the Godhead that we neither know nor are able to comprehend beyond the level he reveals to us. According to the Count, the mysteries of the deep things of God are things in which we can never meddle, "because of the human imbecility of our understanding."[112] Zinzendorf would therefore not be prepared to make Jesus the subject of discussion beyond what pertains to his humanity because the question of his divinity is not a subject matter within the parameters of human reason. The references in Scripture, which deal with his humiliation and assumption of human nature, do not provide us with a basis for constructing an argument about his divinity. Jesus concealed his inward secret majesty and glory, "and because he was always present to himself, never did reveal it openly."[113] He would even forbid his disciples from speaking about his divinity when they observed something sublime in him. According to Zinzendorf, the people of Jesus' time could not even understand the notion of a person being born again of the spirit; "how much more would they have been surprised and confounded, had he discoursed to them about the abysses of divinity?"[114] Zinzendorf believed that we should therefore abstain from seeking to

---

[111] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 25.

[112] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* IV, 40.

[113] Ibid., 37.

[114] Ibid., 48.

abstract notions of divinity from those texts, which in reality speak only of Jesus' humanity.

A **third reason** for modesty and silence with respect to Jesus' divinity is that to be pre-occupied with Jesus' divinity may come at the expense of treating his life in corporeal terms, which for Zinzendorf was one of the greatest threats to the Christian faith. For him it was a necessary task of theology to re-establish the history of Jesus because his theological contemporaries with their polemics and disputes and wanting to appear reasonable, would not do so. In this regard Zinzendorf's theology finds itself at the centre of modern christological discourse in which the point of departure is the historical Jesus. For Zinzendorf, the central plan of the Christian faith was to "believe historically, that the creator of the whole world, the everlasting father [or the father of eternity] was born of a pure virgin, whom never man knew, and who, being overshadowed by the Holy Ghost, actually brought forth the saving health of the world out of her womb."[115] The challenge of faith was to believe that this man's death on the cross was the moment of redemption, which by nature is not possible. Thus our Saviour is to be considered an ordinary man, and that all the comfort for us is drawn from his modesty, in which he is equal to us.

For Zinzendorf the divinity of Jesus was to be seen in the context of the Trinity. He explained that all the persons of the Trinity possessed all things in common, so that whatever is attributable to one is attributable to all, except when the matter is absolutely annexed to the humanity. Therefore, creation is in Scripture ascribed to the

[115] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 67.

Son, and Redemption was accomplished by Jesus but "we may say without sin, the Father is the Creator of the world, the Holy Ghost is the Creator of the world, (*Veni Creator Spiritus*) altho' indeed we cannot say of the Father and the Holy Ghost that they died for our sins, yet we may with all right name them nevertheless Redeemer, Saviour, Sanctifier."[116] For Zinzendorf, however, the world in general cannot appreciate the mystery of the Trinity:[117] This mystery concerning the three divine persons is the basis for the preoccupation with Jesus, in terms of liturgy and worship. Zinzendorf's christocentric focus was derived from the fact that "the apostles call [Jesus] the *enchiridion,* the ΚεΦάλιον, the chief article of all doctrine, in whom the Πλήρωμα of the Godhead dwells σωματικως."[118] So it was impossible to be charged with idolatry for worshipping Jesus. Apart from the fact that the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him, we cannot worship the man in the hypostatic union without at the same time worshipping God. When we speak of Jesus, we are at the same time speaking of the Creator, the Redeemer, the Sanctifier, and at the same time the mediator between the Godhead and human nature, who is also husband, Mother, Father, Brother and Bridegroom, who is all and in all. Although it may seem ironic, by focussing on Jesus Zinzendorf was insisting on the equality of persons in the Trinity. He was keen to make the point that only through Jesus that has knowledge of the Trinity.

In summary, Zinzendorf's modest approach to Christology is one that emphasizes the humanity of Jesus because he considered that apart from what we see and experience

---

[116] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 22-23.

[117] *Maxims, Theological Ideas and Sentences,* p. 121-124.

[118] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 23.

in Jesus, God is beyond human knowledge and experience. Zinzendorf shared the classical understanding of the Trinity and two natures of Christ.[119] He believed that unless there is a hypostatic union then we have to allow for two Christs. Nevertheless, he wanted to ensure that the talk of the divine nature did not come at the expense of the human nature. He said that at the bottom of the God-like honour, which people lend to his humanity, lay an intention to degrade and derogate from his Godhead in real human form.[120] He said that it was only by taking seriously the humanity of Jesus in all its weakness that we are able to appreciate the modesty in the incomprehensible divine majesty taking pleasure in that very mean and abject form, the human form.[121]

This issue of the incarnation is particularly pertinent to the **interfaith** conversation with Muslims. The Qur'an recognizes Jesus as "a word bestowed on Mary, for he was created by Allah's word,"[122] but he is not recognized as God and his death is denied. It would seem that on the basis of these contradictory perceptions of Jesus Christians and Muslims have no basis for conversation. For Zinzendorf, however, since it is not given to human reason to understand the incarnation, it is not surprising that it is

---

[119] Reflecting the nuances of Chalcedon, Zinzendorf argued that in the hypostatic union, all of Jesus' human thoughts and actions were separated from his Godhead and he did not admit any special or intimate operations of his Godhead into his manhood. In other words, even in the hour of temptation, or when he was on the cross, there was no confusion between divinity and humanity, because his Godhead was no aid to him since he had divested himself of it. However, the rest of the creation had the benefit of the governance of the Godhead in the usual way. (*Twenty-One Discourses,* IV, 49.)

[120] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses*, IV, 49-50.

[121] Ibid., 50;

[122] Surah 4: 171; see also *The Meaning of the Holy Qur'an* (Beltsville, Maryland: Amana Publications, 1996) 239 (note 676).

misunderstood or not believed. It would not seem problematic to him that the divinity of Jesus is denied or that in Islamic Christology Jesus is equated with the other prophets. What was extremely problematic to Zinzendorf is Islam's denial of the death of Jesus. Zinzendorf's emphasis was that nothing should derogate from Jesus' humanity. Though he is seen in Islam as an ordinary man, their denial of his death undercuts the reality of his human life and deviates from the word of God.[123] For Zinzendorf, not only was Jesus one with the prophets but he was also one with all human beings. The further vision of the person of the crucified Saviour, who is also Creator, comes from accepting the authority of the Bible and the Holy Spirit, who bear this testimony.

A Moravian theology of pluralism would however need to come to terms with the question of Jesus' divinity. The dialogue with Jews and Muslims has not resolved the differences of views on the question of Jesus' divinity but it is recognized that interfaith relations must reckon with this issue. For reasons we outlined above Zinzendorf's approach is to eliminate the question of Jesus' divinity from conversation and speculation because it is not a subject suited for a mixed audience of believers and non-believers. He takes a similar approach in dealing with the doctrine of the Trinity.[124] However, it seems that by refusing to make Jesus' divinity a matter

---

[123] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 63. Zinzendorf refers to the Gospel of Barnabas as an example of the attempt to interpret the birth and death of Jesus in a spiritual and mystical instead of a natural way. The Gospel of Barnabas has an account similar to the position in Islam that Jesus did not die but slipped away into heaven.

[124] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* II, 21. According to Zinzendorf, the mystery of the operation of the Godhead consigns us to silence, which means we ought not to enter into the speculations about the internal relationship of the Holy Spirit to the Father and the Son. In this regard he held the Apostles' Creed in high regard because of its sensitivity to this mystery. He noted that although the Apostles' Creed deals with Trinity in three articles relating to Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier, the authors seemed not to have known much of the Holy Spirit. All that is said in the creed about the third person of the Trinity is, "I believe in the Holy Ghost." (*Twenty-One Discourses,* IV, 47.) The silence

for conversation, Zinzendorf's approach coincides with Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach in which truth is treated as intra-systemic. Therefore, while an intra-systemic approach can serve the plural context, there seems to be the need for an approach that allows Christians to engage people of other faiths in a more creative way. This brings us to the issue of Zinzendorf's approach to Christian mission.

7.4.6: Modesty in Christian Mission

Evidence of the Zinzendorfian hermeneutic of modesty can also be discerned in his conception of Christian mission. He tackles this issue in discussing the ministry and the preparation for faith. Three aspects of his modest approach to mission have implications for a theology of pluralism. The **first** issue is the plurality of instruments for bringing the Christian message. He believed that there were several means whereby the message could be presented: by an apostle, an angel of God, a printed book, a letter, or by the bellman singing it under the window.[125] As Zinzendorf saw it, the Saviour could make use of any instrument and of any opportunity because of his tenderness towards the human soul:

> In whose heart soever the Holy Ghost awakens a longing, (were it only the creaturely human longing) after his creator, after his first Origin, after his friend, after his, to him yet unknown, flesh and bone; and the heart is not stiff-

with regard to the Holy Spirit is proper, however, because we can form no certain image of him and therefore ought not in thoughts or words to enter the abyss of this matter. (*Twenty-One Discourses,* IV, 58.). The Trinity he said, "is a depth so profound and unfathomable, that in contemplating it, we should ruin our intellectual faculty, and yet not be able to frame one just expression concerning it." (Gambold, *Maxims,* 20.) Therefore, the person who attempts philosophically to treat any matter dealing with the Godhead is only exposing himself or herself to ridicule. Instead, he admonishes a posture of ignorance in such matters because for wise reasons the Holy Spirit suffers humankind, when they soar above their sphere into the divine essence and hyper-metaphysical definitions, never to define the relationship satisfactorily.

[125] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* Discourse XII, 170.

> necked, nor forgets the thing again immediately, but waits and bethinks itself, not squandering away the emotions wrought by the Holy Ghost, ... then this poor man effectively becomes a scholar, a hearer of the gospel, a parishioner of the Holy Ghost, let the mode and the circumstances be as they will.[126]

This means an individual could have a true encounter with God at any time, at any place and in any way, irrespective of who the person is and how miserable that life may be. The prerequisite was simply that the person gets "an eager desire after the Object, and comes into a longing after the unknown highest Good, that is, after his Creator."[127]

The **second** issue Zinzendorf emphasizes is that no particular training is required for Christian mission. A person involved in evangelistic mission required no particular qualification or any particular preparation; all that was needed was for the message to be conveyed and be apprehended by faith.[128] It was for this reason many of the volunteers who led the missionary enterprise of the Moravian Church particularly in the eighteenth century were manual labourers. The English Mission Secretary, took the view that students generally did not make as good missionaries as mechanics. Consequently most of the missionaries were drawn from the artisan and labouring classes.[129] Not only were such men more able to endure rough conditions, but also they were less likely to become involved in discussions about dogmatic theology. For

---

[126] Ibid., 172-3.

[127] Ibid., 174.

[128] Ibid., 170.

[129] J. E Hutton, *A History of Moravian Missions*, (London: Moravian Publication Office, 1954), 190.

the Count the chief duty of the preacher was not theological discussion but to tell the story of the cross.

The **third** issue relates to the status of persons who are the object of Christian mission. For Zinzendorf, a common factor in all human beings is a longing after God as their Source and Creator. The one Creator "acknowledges that he is the rightful husband of the most miserable and pitiful creature, of even the most [detestable] prostitute."[130] Consequently, it was not necessary for the Brethren to be proselyte-makers because "the Holy Ghost himself, and not man, must make the beginning of

---

[130] *Nine Public Lectures,* I, 4; H. Meyer. Ed., *Quotations in Extensio from Manuscripts Diaries and Rare Volumes at Herrnhut and Bethlehem,* 1924, 125. The idea of the total depravity of the human being is a well-used expression in Moravian theology. The first attempt to formalize the theological priorities of the Moravian Church after the death of Zinzendorf was in the Synod of Barby held in 1775. First among the five main doctrinal positions was the idea of the total depravity of the human being. (E. De Schweinitz, ed, *The Moravian Manual: Containing an Account of the Moravian Church or Unitas Fratrum* (Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Publication Concern, 1869), 96. The Easter Liturgy, which has remained the most extensive form of confession, says of the human being: "I believe that, by my own reason and strength, I cannot believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or come to him."(See *Moravian Manual*, 103.) The Synod held in Herrnhut in 1879 made slight changes to the wording in reference to depravity, which once again is listed first among the truths that hang on the affirmation of Jesus as the propitiation for sin: "The doctrine of the total depravity of human nature, that, since the fall, there is no health in man, and that he has no strength to save himself."[*Results of the General Synod of the Brethren's Unity held at Herrnhut in the Year 1879* (London: Moravian Publication, 1881), 11.] It is noteworthy that the 1879 Synod expanded the reference to Jesus' humanity to include a reference to his divinity. This emphasis on Jesus as the model human being was in fact a retrieval of an emphasis from the Zinzendorfian period. This emphasis on the real humanity of Jesus was also picked up by the Synod of the British Province in 1892, which included in their position the results of the General Synod of 1888. [See the Church Book of the Brethren's Unity in the British Province (London: Moravian Publication, 1892), 19.] The results of the Synods of 1899, 1902 and 1909, which were published in 1911, reiterated the 1879 reference to man's depravity. The total depravity of man is symbolized in the suffering of Jesus, which shows how human nature is deserving of curse and condemnation. For this reason, the person of Jesus Christ remained the centre point of Moravian preaching. Highlighting of the total depravity of man remained an emphasis in the theological position of the church until 1957 when the Synod adopted a whole new approach to the issue of doctrine. This change had been fuelled by the theological ferment that took place in Germany towards the end of the nineteenth century but the impact of this ferment on the church was delayed on account of the two World Wars. In the new approach of 1957, there was no summary of specific doctrines, which led to a deeper burial of the Zinzendorfian general assessment of the human condition under the new formulation that was entitled the *Ground of the Unity*.

man's happiness and salvation."[131] People, he believed, should be allowed the freedom granted them by God, even to have nothing to do with God. Experience has shown that God allows people to go their own way and God has overlooked their choice with inexpressible patience. Where people are slow to accept the Christian message force should not be used to make them do so. For Zinzendorf, whoever is fond of forcing people to accept his own notions and modes of worship, whoever is eager only to bring other people over to his way thereby shows that he is not a wise child of God and does not possess the right spiritual understanding.[132] People who do not know God are in a state of spiritual innocence. Therefore, one who forces, compels, or thoughtlessly persuades other people to one's own religious ideas puts people out of the state of innocence in which God tolerates them, and brings them into the danger of divine judgement. In other words, it would be better for a Muslim to remain in his religion than for force to be used to make him or her pay homage to Jesus.

It is on account of the patience and forbearance of God that his judgment is not extended over all the earth. God knows, he argued, that people who go against the grain of the religious culture in which they were socialized do not want to have to give up their culture in order to keep faith. As he put it, religion is made a point of honour because people tend to give credence to what their neighbours have to say in

---

[131] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* Discourse XII, 169. It was this attitude of non-proselytism that directed his response when people from other denominations sought to join the Brethren Church. His attitude was first to tell them to go back to their church. He reveals in Discourse XVIII (p. 227-228) an incident where people who believed in transubstantiation wanted to join his congregation saying he was glad to prevent people from leaving their own congregation when he could and would only accept others out of pressing necessity.

[132] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* I, 1.

matters of faith. People who want to see the conversion of others must not become a tyrant to the human race.[133] In his view, the true child of God is obliging; he is a comfort to all and burdensome to none. If someone begins to dispute with the child of God in a temporal or religious matter, then he always supposes the other to be right. The Christian should remove himself from vainglory, from exalting himself above others and from insisting on being right.[134]

From an **interfaith perspective**, one could conclude that for Zinzendorf the existence of the other religious traditions should not be treated as an evil to be overcome but a mystery to be unlocked. He was therefore not prepared to preach to anyone before it was evident to him that the Holy Ghost had cemented the person's heart to show a desire for instruction in the Christian faith. This approach he recommends as "a sovereign remedy against all unseasonable itch of making converts, and against all those vain enterprises, which do not turn out to the benefit of souls, but oftentimes more to their hindrance."[135]

However, Zinzendorf's modesty in missionary activity did not mean that he was minded to favour any discussion of basic truths of the faith and seemed not to have seen any need to prove them. He held that believing in Jesus was something that was brought about by the Holy Spirit.[136] To be discussing and seeking proof for

---

[133] Ibid., 3.

[134] Ibid., II, 21.

[135] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* XII, 184.

[136] Ibid., 182.

foundation truths, according to Zinzendorf, was a departure from the approach of Jesus and the apostles, who did not argue about the truths but set them forth with authority. Zinzendorf was eager then to preach the gospel but only where he was sure that the Holy Spirit had led people to a readiness for the faith.

His anti- proselytism stance was based on his belief in the freedom of human beings to choose their own mode of faith. The existence of many who did not believe in Jesus as their Saviour and Lord was for him not a calamity but a cause for humility. His main concern in mission was not the fact that others did not believe because that was allowable under God's tolerance. Rather, it was the fact that those who believed were given the opportunity to do so. On this score, we can conclude that the plurality in which we live today would strike him as a great mystery of God's indulgence, which should lead Christians to humility about receiving the grace of God and to wonder about what God may be doing among people of other faiths.

Conclusion

Zinzendorf's theology, then, must be seen within the context of his understanding of God's immensity and the gulf between God and human beings. Like the apophatic writers, he saw God as one who dwells in darkness and remains hidden even amidst his revelation. This distance necessitated the incarnation of the Godhead in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. This act of divine modesty stands as the interpretive key to Holy Scripture and the only truth we really need to know. In a similar manner, human beings must show modesty in their approach to God. We should not presume to know anything, except that the Creator is our husband, for ignorance is more suited for the grace of salvation.

Zinzendorf takes the view that, on account of the incarnation, wherever we encounter a male form the Christian can affirm that that form is fashioned in the image of the Lamb of God. Every soul is blessed because it is human. As a result of the death of Jesus, there is no blanket condemnation to humanity, irrespective of whether or not there is acceptance of this truth. Therefore, freedom from condemnation is not contingent on faith in Jesus but on the existential fact of Jesus' death. No one coming into the world is condemned because of original sin, for which atonement has already been made through the death of Jesus.

Consistent with this, Zinzendorf leaves the issue of salvation to the work of the Holy Spirit. Simply put, the Holy Spirit will call those that he wills to salvation in his time. This position is reinforced in his theology of mission in which he claims that the itch to make converts is ameliorated only by an approach in which the Christian refuses to preach unless it is evident that the Holy Spirit has made the recipient gospel-ready. The mystery to be solved in the area of mission is not the fact that there are those who do not believe in Jesus. From the point of view of God's indulgence, even opposition to God is permitted. The mystery, rather, is why those who believe were called. The existence of other religions is, therefore, a cause for the greatest humility among Christians and should leave them to wonder about what God may be doing among those who do not have faith in Jesus as Saviour.

From our consideration so far, there are three emerging themes that have implications for a multi-faith context and a Moravian theology of pluralism. The **first** relates to the means by which theological discourse demonstrates people's awareness of

linguistic limitations. It was the awareness of this that led Zinzendorf to the use of apophatic-like categories, which gives his discourse the character of modesty. In developing a Moravian theology of pluralism, we shall argue that this awareness needs to be incorporated in the way theology is articulated in the plural context.

The **second** theme relates to the nature of the christological discourse that springs from a refusal to speculate about the divinity of Jesus. Since for Zinzendorf the divinity of Jesus is neither evidential nor reasonable, he questions any attempt to make it a subject for public dialogue. Such an approach that centres on Jesus but does not require that he be immediately affirmed as divine suits the plural context where the notion of a human who is also divine is a major stumbling block. The Moravian theology of pluralism can benefit from a human-centred Christology because it limits the discussion to categories within human experience.

The **third** emerging theme relates to how we perceive the future of the world and the future of faith. By centring the initiative for salvation on the free action of the Holy Spirit, Zinzendorf's approach cautions the Christian in making any absolute assertions about the salvation of people of other faiths. Our inability to predict or programme when or whether the Holy Spirit will lead people to faith in Jesus means that we can expect that God will surprise us. A Moravian theology of pluralism will be characterized by openness to the future; that is, an eschatological approach that does not bring immediate closure to the question of the ultimate fate of people from other religious traditions.

With this outline of Zinzendorf's theological modesty and the three emerging themes, our next task is to test their interfaith applicability as a necessary step in developing a Moravian theology of pluralism.

CHAPTER 8

THE INTERFAITH APPLICATION OF ZINZENDORF'S THEOLOGICAL MODESTY

Introduction

To demonstrate the applicability of Zinzendorf's theology in a plural context is, in effect, to develop an approach to pluralism. However, a Christian theology of religious pluralism must overcome a critical challenge: that is, it must show itself to be solidly grounded in the Christian tradition. The discourse must be owned by the Christian tradition even as it reaches out beyond the Christian context. Therefore, a theology of pluralism is not an instrument designed to disband or undermine the religious tradition. It is not a means to show that the particular tradition is irrelevant or null and void. Rather, it is an instrument by which the tradition is enabled to engage the plural context. A viable theology of pluralism must be able to demonstrate how it is possible to remain within one's religious tradition and at the same time take seriously the plural context in which assertions and claims, some of which are conflicting, are being made. It must be able to appropriately answer the questions that the plural context raises for religious beliefs.

From a methodological point of view, then, an approach to pluralism must be tested in an intra-Christian context before it can be applied to an interfaith context. We saw already that Comenius' approach was first developed for an inter-church situation before it was applied to an interfaith context. Our consideration of Zinzendorf's modest approach to theology has raised three themes related to pluralism. These are his use of apophatic categories, his human-centred Christology and his openness to

the future. Our aim in this chapter is to further explore the meaning of Zinzendorf's theological modesty from the point of view of Christian theology and to draw out its implications for the encounter between Christians and people of other faiths.

8.1: Provisionality in Zinzendorf's Theology

In reading Zinzendorf's theology, one discerns an apophatic-like provisionality in his theological discourse. This provisionality arises **first** from the awareness that our formulations depend primarily on our knowledge of human existence, not on our knowledge of the divine life *per se*. We are beings made at a certain time and an immense gulf is fixed between God and us because we cannot so much as enter upon a solid and coherent meditation about God, who is the source of being, nor receive immediately from God. In a certain sense, notwithstanding the revelation that God makes in Jesus, our theological discourse is about God who remains hidden amidst his revelation.[1]

Secondly, treating theological discourse as provisional arises from the awareness that what is apprehended in revelation cannot be captured in fixed dogmatic statements but is always in the process of being formulated and being understood. Any attempt to reach God is to capture darkness and still find no God. As Pailin argues, theologians who do not admit to the tentativeness of their understanding, in effect, freeze God and treat God as dead. The ultimate nature of the object of theology is grounded in

[1] A similar observation was made by Dionysius, who insists that we must be cautious about our use of words or our conception concerning that hidden divinity which transcends being because the divine is beyond speech, mind, or being itself. The truths we speak of God should therefore not be set down in plausible words of human wisdom. When we name the transcendent hiddenness as God, what in fact our minds lay hold of is "nothing other than certain activities apparent to us, activities which deify, cause being, bear life and give wisdom." *DN* II, 645A7-15.

mystery and we are working from a non-ultimate situation.[2] Zinzendorf's sensitivity to this mystery has led to a certain caution by the Moravian Church in claiming a theological position of its own.[3] For Zinzendorf, whatever we say of Jesus and his kingdom consists in nothing but figures, good thoughts and representations. In reality however, what these are in themselves surpasses our imaginations. The things to which our theological expressions refer are more glorious than any idea we could possibly frame.[4]

Thirdly, theological discourse must be seen as provisional, tentative and changing because of the changing nature of our socio-political and cultural contexts. According to Zinzendorf, the philosophical ideas with which people are inclined to express themselves change every twenty to twenty-five years even though theological ideas may remain for a much longer time. Nevertheless, theological knowledge has the same fate as the philosophical. "There are seasons, when this or the other doctrine and opinion is more in vogue and another more overlooked: and according to what then has ascendancy, such or such matters are either strongly impugned, or suffered to pass with more indifference."[5]

---

[2] Pailin, *The Anthropological Character of Theology,* 29.

[3] According to the Moravian *Church Order,* "just as Holy Scripture does not contain any doctrinal system, so the Unitas Fratrum also has not developed any of its own because it knows that the mystery of Jesus Christ which is attested to in the Bible, cannot be comprehended by any human mind or expressed completely in any human statement." *Church Order,* 1985, 1,4. From the point of view of apophatic theology also, theological discourse by nature must be impermanent and changing because affirmations are always unfitting to the hiddenness of the inexpressible One. (*CH* I, 141A4-141A9.)

[4] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* XIII, 137.

[5] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* X, 141; see also Gambold, *Maxims,* 43.

The recognition of the tentativeness in theological assertions has implications for Christian theology as well as for interfaith relations. Given the plurality of positions on certain theological issues, Zinzendorf considered it necessary to indicate the areas where differences of opinion could be allowed and those areas where there had to be unity. He recognized three levels of theological discourse in the Christian faith: concerning the secret things (or mysteries), doctrinal discoveries and fundamental truths.[6] Mysteries are those things that the Christian faith affirms but of which a full understanding is not necessary for salvation. These include the doctrine of the Trinity, the notion of grace or the Eucharist. Though an insight into these can be helpful there is no detriment in failing to understand them. Doctrinal discoveries refer to those truths that are not secret but relate to the formulation that teachers make for their own understanding of things in the faith. In relation to these truths as well as to the mysteries, differences of understanding can be allowed. Fundamental truths are those truths necessary for eternal happiness and salvation. These include the truth that Jesus Christ and him crucified is the means of our salvation. In fundamental truths, Zinzendorf argued, we all must behave with the same earnest. He allowed for the provisionality of theological discourse in the areas of mysteries and doctrinal discoveries but in reference to fundamental truths he would not allow for any difference of opinion among Christians. Fundamental truths cannot be demonstrated by reason but the ability to understand these things is granted to all who desire them by the Holy Spirit.

---

[6] Gambold, *Maxims,* 44.

8.1.1: Provisionality and Interfaith Dialogue

From an **interfaith** point of view, it seems that Zinzendorf would allow for Muslims not to be able to understand the Trinity, the incarnation or the significance of the Eucharist because differences of opinion and lack of understanding are allowable in the mysteries and the doctrinal discoveries. However, in respect of the fundamental truths there were only two options open to the Muslim: either to accept them in faith without understanding or to refuse to accept them. This means that on the basis of Zinzendorf's understanding of fundamental truths, those things that make for eternal happiness and salvation do not allow for flexibility, provisionality or difference. He holds this position because in a manner like Comenius, he wanted to be clear on the core truth of the faith, which is analogous to the notion of hierarchy of truths in Vatican II.[7]

This notion of fundamental truths touches most critically on the relationship with people of other faiths. However, by excluding the notion of fundamental truths from provisionality Zinzendorf suggests that the manner in which we arrive at the awareness of such truths is not subjected to the same exigencies as our seeking to know the mysteries or to make the doctrinal discoveries. This is critical to him because even a little child can grasp a fundamental truth that a person of learning, who relies on his mental power, may fail to see. From Zinzendorf's point of view, then, the interaction with people of other faiths must involve an imperative to bear

---

[7] *Unitatis Redintegratio,* 11.

witness to the Christian truth.[8] Unlike Comenius, who sees dialogue as a means of determining the truth as yet unknown, Zinzendorf would see dialogue as a means of bearing witness to the truth that is already known. The differences between the two approaches illustrate the tension within the Moravian tradition.

It seems, however, that we must also allow for dynamism and change even in the way we express fundamental truths because the development of dogma is also subjected to historical conditions. The reformulation of fundamental truths makes them amenable to new interpretations and to the discovery of new meaning. A good example of this is the changing nature of the meaning of salvation in Jesus.[9] Zinzendorf himself illustrates this in his understanding of the reign of God, objecting to the way it is stated in Holy Scripture (1Cor 15:25). He argued that it is not the Son but God the Father who will reign until He has laid all our Saviour's enemies at our Saviour's feet. Thus the Saviour would resume his government over all creation, which he gave up at the time of his incarnation. Zinzendorf disagrees with the text of scripture at this point, arguing that Paul was giving his opinion as he did in 1Cor 7:12. One must question how he is able to exercise such freedom with respect to the wording of canonized texts but at the same time appears inflexible in the use of language to

---

[8] The WCC Guidelines for Dialogue recognizes this necessity in the assertion that dialogue is not at cross-purposes with bearing witness: "as Christians enter dialogue with their commitment to Jesus Christ, time and again the relationship of dialogue gives opportunity for authentic witness." *Guidelines on Dialogue,* 11.

[9] Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God,* 335-336. Haight traces the different conceptions from New Testament times through the classical period to current understandings. According to Haight, many of the traditional expressions of how Jesus saves resemble myths that no longer communicate to educated Christians; some are even offensive. However one cannot assume that the traditional language sounds credible today; it may function as an obstacle to faith, and too little attention is given to critical reinterpretation of it.

express fundamental truths.[10] It seems inconsistent with his position to grant less authority to scripture than he does grant to what may be later extra-canonical formulations. The only way to resolve this inconsistency in Zinzendorf is to assume that the fundamental truths to which he refers are formulated in scriptural terms and because of his hermeneutical key are given greater weight than texts he feels are amenable to change and correction. Nevertheless, others may see the freedom he exercises with respect to the canon as similar to the freedom that they exercise with respect to formulation of fundamental truths. Zinzendorf sees in a different way what for some people is fixed and unchangeable. Against this background, it seems difficult for Zinzendorf to maintain that provisionality may not also be applied to the way we express fundamental truths.

In summary, the application of Zinzendorf's apophatic theology in the plural context leads to the following assertions; first we must show modesty in the claims we make concerning the divine because the divine remains hidden amidst his revelation. Secondly, the limitations of human language mean that we must allow for a certain extent of provisionality in our discourse. Thus, notwithstanding the notion of fundamental truths, there should be a preparedness to revise our theological assertions. Thirdly, the changing nature of our contexts means our theological positions are dynamic and formulations are amenable to new interpretations and to the discovery of new meaning.

---

[10] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V,51-52.

Even with reference to Zinzendorf, then, it is possible to make space for conversation with Muslims. For Zinzendorf, however, such conversations would have to have a missionary imperative because Christians cannot give up the responsibility to bear witness to the truth in Jesus. This brings us to the question of Zinzendorf's Christology and its application in a plural context.

8.2: Zinzendorf's Christology and Pluralism

Traditional christological emphases range from approaches that emphasize the pre-existent logos who is manifested in the human being, to narrative and existential approaches in which Jesus' own history and what we can know about him constitute the starting point. Although situated in the existentialist camp, Zinzendorf's approach goes a further step in placing the emphasis on Jesus' weakness, ignorance and vulnerability, in order to indicate the modesty of God in taking such a mean and beggarly form in the incarnation. He seeks to avoid the speculation in the above approaches as well as those approaches that would deify Jesus' humanity. As we saw in the previous chapter, we can describe his approach as a human-centred Christology.[11] He presents the human being at the lowest possible level of existence and emphasised that it is at that level that the incarnation took place. He makes no distinction between Jesus and the meanest feature of human existence because only in that way does Jesus truly appear to be our brother and only in that way the incarnation becomes an act of divine modesty.

---

[11] In the Introduction to Zinzendorf's *Twenty-One Discourses* (ix-x), the Synod of 1748 admitted that "by our so much insisting on the plain humanity of the Creator, and so unweariedly digging up and displaying all instances of that real humanity which could any where be found, they [divines of our own religion] have thought that we ran into a like tedious excess so that, which Arians and Socinians usually lay to the charge of St. Athanasius's Creed."

The difficulty with this approach is that it must show how we can look at Jesus as man and worship him as God. The way classical Christology gets around this issue is to hold the humanity and the divinity of Jesus in tension in the doctrine of the hypostatic union. It was however not problematic for Zinzendorf to justify worshipping Jesus because it was only in the incarnation that human beings could experience God who dwells in darkness. His insistence, though, is that the divinity of Jesus is not evidential. The subject of Jesus' divinity is therefore an "in-house" issue that only members of the household of faith can appreciate.

Of what relevance, then, is Zinzendorf's christological approach in a plural context? Zinzendorfian Christology presents three challenges to the present plural context. **First**, it confronts traditional notions of speaking about Jesus in the Christian context. In his approach Zinzendorf draws on the classical understanding of the hypostatic union but he does not see it as necessary to state what the incarnation involves in concrete terms. He neither rejects the classical christological formulations of Nicaea and Chalcedon nor repeats them. He is open to new ways of expressing the truth of the hypostatic union even though he is suspicious of attempts to express in words what thoughts should never venture upon.[12] Zinzendorf prefers an approach that shows caution in the claim to know Jesus because no one knows the Son but the Father and those to whom the Father chooses to make him known.[13] He therefore challenges Christians to include a presumption of ignorance in the way we speak about Jesus because knowledge of him is not self-evident. We should neither presume

---

[12] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* IV, 35.

[13] Ibid., 36.

that we know Jesus fully nor that we know in what way knowledge of Jesus is available to those outside the Church. In fact, Zinzendorf insists that love for Jesus as one unknown is more important than knowledge of him. With this emphasis, Christians ought to be more cautious about bringing closure to the question of the salvation of people who are not Christians.

The **second** way in which Zinzendorf's Christology challenges the plural context is that it undercuts the position of those, for example in Islam, who object to the idea that Jesus is divine. Zinzendorf would have no objection to the Muslims placing all their emphasis on the fact that Jesus was a mere man. The rigidity of the christological language of Chalcedon, which makes relating to people of other faith difficult, would seem to be unnecessary in his view. His concern is not to present Jesus as divine, which is what the Muslim objects to. He wishes to present the man Jesus as the locus of encounter with the living God. Seeing Jesus as God is for a second level of faith, which must be preceded by seeing the man Jesus and his death on the cross as our only hope of salvation. The question for people of other faith, as it is for the so-called Christian, is what Jesus means to them. As far as attitude to Jesus is concerned, Zinzendorf makes no demarcation between people of other faiths and those within the influence of the Christian community. For him there is one stumbling block to salvation in the way of all the world, all evil doers, infidels in all nations, of all barbarians, all half beasts and cannibals, of all civilized and reputable people, of all learned as well as laymen, of all philosophers and people of low capacities, "nothing but unbelief".[14]

---

[14] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* VIII, 85.

The difficulty Zinzendorf had with those who did not worship the man Jesus, as God, was to understand the one who is, then, concretely the object of their worship. Since we can neither know nor conceive of God in his immensity, it is clear that we cannot really worship God apart from the way in which he has made himself known in visible form. In his view, to seek to worship where there is no incarnation and no hypostatic union is at best false or at worse idolatrous. According to him, true religion is not so much being able to know things in their interconnection and order but rather it is allowing ourselves to be initiated daily in the truth that the Son of God out of grace became human-like-us. It must then be said, "as he is so are we in this world".[15] In Zinzendorf's view, true religion must of necessity have an incarnational component because otherwise we worship what we can neither know nor see.

The **third** challenge of Zinzendorf's Christology, which from an interfaith point of view may be the most significant, is his assertion that on account of the incarnation everyone is in a certain sense already redeemed. The person who understands the mystery of the incarnation, he argues, knows that those who do not yet know Jesus are not only lost and condemned but also redeemed.[16] All souls have already been redeemed through the meritorious death of Jesus, which we are led to see through the gift of faith that God grants to us. According to the Count, every person is already redeemed, the awareness of which God will grant the faith to see. That is why next to the mystery of the incarnation the other great mystery is the mystery of faith: "when

---

[15] Ibid., V, 54.

[16] Ibid.,VII, 73. In the Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, 14, Pope John Paul II holds a similar position.

[God] makes us believe in his Son Jesus Christ, how that he by his death and martyrdom has redeemed all the souls of men."[17] For this reason the child of God is not easily provoked to be angry with wicked people. For notwithstanding their most miserable and unreasonable doings, by which they hurt themselves the most, they are looked upon as redeemed ones. In other words, the redemption of people in the world is a merit of the grace of God. To our natural method of reasoning this is manifest folly and can be easily exploded.

There are two issues that arise from this incarnational focus in Zinzendorf's Christology, which have implications for a theology of pluralism. In the first place Zinzendorf's claim that all persons are redeemed through the meritorious death of Jesus, whether or not they are aware of it, lands him in a position, not unlike Barth, where he must then justify the necessity for insisting upon personal faith as the way to salvation.[18] As is the case with Barth, the difficulty with Zinzendorf's position is that he seems to want to hold a belief in general salvation for all because of the death of Jesus, and at the same time he insists on personal saving faith as a prerequisite for salvation. In other words, there is a tension between his subjective and objective

---

[17] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* VII, 81. According to Zinzendorf, "even the remembrance of sin is blotted out in the tribunal of God; for no longer will a single human soul be damned because Adam has fallen; not a single human creature needs look pained because Adam has fallen. For at once all sin is atoned for on the cross, the entire Fall is erased, and the whole obligation to Satan and the entire sentence passed upon the fall of Adam is torn up, cancelled, and annulled by the nails of Jesus." See also *Nine Public Lectures,* VI, 68.

[18] Barth, *Church Dogmatics,* IV, 1, 522. According to Barth, it is in Jesus that the judgment of God is fulfilled and the pardon of God is pronounced to <u>all</u> [emphasis mine]. This doctrine of justification, Barth notes, has functioned as the basic and central dogma of the Christian faith. It is "the Word of the Gospel, that both offensively and defensively it has been adopted as *the* theological truth." Barth also shows his indebtedness to Zinzendorf for calling attention to the subjective emphasis in the doctrine, that the individual is not a particle or a sample or specimen but is in fact the whole object of God's saving grace, which leads the individual to confess in faith "that Jesus Christ Himself is *pro me,* just for me." (Barth, *Church Dogmatics, IV,* 755.); Idem, *Church Dogmatics,* IV, 1, 522.

views on redemption. On the **subjective** side, he does not allow for salvation apart from believing in Jesus. That which decides the eternal destiny of the individual is not the religious denomination but rather his nature.[19] The Christian is the person who has been incorporated into the family of Christ, the one who has taken the name of Christ in the way in which a woman traditionally takes the name of her husband at marriage. In a manner reminiscent of Comenius, Zinzendorf does not believe that it is sufficient that a person is called Christian as a result of the accident of his birth.[20] For Zinzendorf, the true Christian is one who would still choose to be a Christian, even though that person was born in another religion.[21] So, on the subjective side, it is up to the individual to accept salvation in Jesus. Failure to believe in Jesus will bring the punishment of hell.[22]

However, on the **objective** side, Zinzendorf argues that even though everyone is born with a measure of awareness of God imprinted on his/her mind, (an anthropological faith, so to speak), that which effects redemption is the death of Jesus, which works retroactively. The fathers of old before Jesus' time were like embryos, so to speak, which could not be born again until Jesus had died. The Saviour's first task at death

---

[19] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures*, VII, 75.

[20] This makes his understanding of the Christian different from Hick's who sees adherence to Christianity as being due largely to the context in which a person is born.

[21] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VII, 78.

[22] *Sixteen Discourses,* Discourse X, 109. Zinzendorf's understanding of hell , which for him operates at two levels of death, also illustrates the necessity of the subject exercising personal faith in Jesus. Failure to believe in Jesus will eventually result in eternal death. At one level, the first death is the present world where, though dead, the unbeliever moderates the bitterness of death by means of amusements invented by Satan to divert the thoughts of his servants, in order to keep them from thinking upon the one thing needful for their salvation. The second level of death is eternal death, where all the amusements are gone and where the arguments, which people reserve to answer the accusation of the heart are forgotten. They sink into eternal death for they are condemned because they did not believe in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

was to ripen the embryos by his suffering and death. He, "as it were, brooded them out in the warm cave of his side's wound".[23] Therefore our Saviour has a method of justification with respect to all mankind in general, "the method of purchasing righteousness for the whole race of men."[24] The decisive intervention of God was the incarnation, the outcome of which we see in Jesus. Zinzendorf seems to suggest that the demonstration of faith, hope and love is not a necessity to indicate the person's salvation or redemption. In fact, despite the display of behaviour to the contrary, Zinzendorf looks on the person as redeemed. For him, we know nothing of the merits of Jesus by nature. Rather, it must be given to us from above. That is why the persons whom the Saviour draws do not have a distinct idea of who has drawn them. "They know that they are delivered from misery and love their merciful deliverer; but they study often and muse upon it, before they know him aright."[25] So, salvation seems to depend entirely on God's initiative.

It seems, though, that only by allowing for the sufficiency of "anthropological faith" for salvation can Zinzendorf hold a view of general salvation. For if as the Count says, it is God who brings the person to faith in Jesus after the preaching of the Gospel, then salvation depends not on the individual, *per se*, but on God. In that case his position would extend unquestionably to allow for the salvation of persons in other religions, unless God chooses not to call them. Zinzendorf both rules out and includes the people of other religions in salvation. On one hand he argues that the reason some people are not saved is because of unbelief, which is a stumbling block

---

[23] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 82.

[24] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* XIV, 154; idem *Nine Public Lectures,* VI, 62.

[25] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* XVI, 173.

to salvation.[26] On the other hand, he insists that as a result of the atonement of Jesus Christ, not a single soul perishes anymore on account of Adam's original sin. This tension in his thought between subjective and objective redemption is left unresolved, which suggest that a Moravian theology of pluralism will not be free from internal tensions.

The second issue is that the anthropological focus of Zinzendorf's incarnational Christology is in direct contrast to Comenius' view, which stresses human likeness to God. According to Comenius, we display or have the capacity to display evidence of divinity because we are created in the image of God. In this regard, Comenius makes very little reference to the work of Jesus and seems to have a low level of christological interest. For him it is through the original act of creation that we are endowed with the image of God, which already puts us on the road to salvation. Redemption is already prefigured in creation. Zinzendorf however argues that the human being is unlike God because of sin. Creation was corrupted through the sin of Adam, which means the image of God in us became defaced through original sin. It is the death of Jesus that has restored that image in us.

This intra-Moravian theological tension naturally has implications for the theology of religious pluralism that we develop. We may note at this point that for Comenius, the people of other faiths are like Christians in the sense that they too are created in the image of God and have access to God's revelation in his three books, the world, the

---

[26] Ibid., VIII, 85.

mind and Holy Scriptures. As we saw above for Zinzendorf, though, there is a tension in his thought concerning those who are redeemed. All human beings are sanctified through the incarnation and redeemed through the meritorious death of Jesus but failure to come to faith in Jesus will bring condemnation. As we shall see later, in order to benefit from this theological tension, a Moravian theology of pluralism must include a dimension of internal dialogue between these two positions.

Notwithstanding the intra-Moravian anthropological tension, it seems that a Moravian theology of pluralism cannot exclude, *a priori*, the people of other religions from salvation. The idea that people of other faiths have a place with God in eternity, without being routed through adherence to Christianity has theological justification in the Moravian Church, which Zinzendorf's eschatology seems to reinforce.

8.3: Pluralism and the Eschatology of Surprise

Already we looked at the provisionality of theological discourse and Zinzendorf's human-centred Christology as issues arising from his theological modesty. A third issue that arises is the eschatology of surprise. Zinzendorf's eschatology is probably best illustrated in his approach to the subjects of the future of the church and the kingdom of Christ and the outcome of the preaching of the gospel. In developing his position, Zinzendorf was reacting to a view that was current in his time, that one could know with surety the persons who would reign with Christ in the one thousand years before the last and final judgement of the living and the dead (Rev 20:4). His response to that position was that the kingdom of Christ "will be a kingdom full of

unknown, as it is now."[27] In other words, it will be impossible to determine the extent as well as the content of the kingdom. He was therefore sceptical about the assertions being made about the future of the church. His general admonition was that his brethren should not meddle in the things pertaining to the future because these things "stand promiscuously in the Bible, so that no one can rightly ascertain them."[28] It was Zinzendorf's view that it was the Saviour's will not to have the things relating to the future assorted and that Jesus determined an unknown time when the mysteries would be unravelled. The content of the kingdom will then remain a secret and the divine will was behind that secret.

There are two consequences for interfaith dialogue that arise from this uncertainty in regard to the future. The **first** is that if we cannot be sure who the partners in the thousand-year reign will be, then, we must concede some ignorance with respect to the salvation of people of other faiths. Zinzendorf argued that we do not know when and by whom an individual will come to the conviction of Jesus as Lord. It was therefore not the business of the believer to pass judgement upon others in regard to salvation. Rather, the believer should be humbled by the fact that thousands of people did not believe in Jesus. The indifference of people to the gospel proves that it is not the believer but the Holy Ghost that brings about conversion.[29] This fact is key to some mysteries that are riddles to reason. For example, one cannot explain why the

---

[27] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses X*, 146.

[28] Ibid., 152.

[29]Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* V, 51. According to Zinzendorf: "It is nevertheless not the responsibility of the preacher that one is awakened, but rather the Holy Spirit. … The Holy Spirit has done everything before hand, everything invisible, everything inexpressible, everything that happens in the spirit of the mind, everything that happens in the soul, out of which faith may rise." (51).

sense of the gospel is clearly communicated to some but yet remains unconvincing to others. As he argued:

> Another mystery, which we cannot well account for, is not so much why the gospel is not preached to the African? (Many scrupulous heads torment themselves about this without knowing what they would be at) no; but the mystery lies rather here, Why the gospel is preached to the Europeans? For, that the gospel is not preached to the heathens, may be admirably reconciled with the divine mercy and faithfulness, which can deal so indulgently with ignorance: but that in the situation wherein the present Europeans are, since the year 800, the gospel is everyday preached unto them …that one cannot however say, *Christus non est*; this I cannot understand, here I must suspend my judgment, and think, O *abyssus*, O the depth!"[30]

Zinzendorf's point is that the Europeans were no more deserving of the grace of salvation than were the Africans, or the other nations to whom the gospel was not yet preached. The implication is that it would be rather arbitrary on God's part to select the Europeans for salvation and exclude others. Since it is primarily God's action to determine the saved, he must have a plan for those who do not yet know the Christian message and it would be premature for anyone to bring closure to the question. With modesty we must make the concession that we do not know why the gospel was preached to Europeans. Today we could also say we do not know why Islam and Christianity are growing side-by-side in so many countries and, consequently, what the implications of this is for the future of religion. We do not even know how it was that Christians obtained the Grace. The fact, then, that Christians know the grace of God is no reason for pride. On the contrary, the absence of widespread belief in the

---

[30] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* XX, 269.

Christian message is reason for humility. The mystery begs the question, 'What are we missing about what God is doing among people of other faiths'?

If then Christians are not able to speak confidently about the future, then the judgement that is passed concerning the future of the church and the future of religion may be premature. The **second** implication arising from our ignorance of the content of the kingdom of God, then, is that we do not have a basis on which to categorically exclude people of other faiths from a future in God. To do so would bring closure to the future in a way that removes the initiative from God. However, as Zinzendorf notes, the future belongs to God and he can do as he pleases with any of his creatures. If one were to ask if God has the capacity to have mercy upon the devils, the answer would have to be yes, absolutely! It is in God's power to have mercy even on the devils and the damned.[31] This means we even have to allow in theory not only for the salvation of people from other faiths but even for the restoration of devils by the grace and mercy of God. The further question as to whether or not God will restore the devils, however, is to tempt one to enter into undue speculation. To such a question the answer would be similar to Jesus' when asked whether many or few will be saved: "see (says he) that ye obtain grace, that ye may find the straight gate; thank God, if it be so ye are saved, and therefore have no need to enquire, how long ye shall be damned."[32]

---

[31] Ibid., X, 146.

[32] Ibid.

So, for Zinzendorf the future is an open space in which God acts unilaterally and in a way that we cannot predict.[33] The space is broad enough to accommodate what appear now to be inconsistencies and contradictions. In a word, it is a future of surprises. It was not the business of the believer to speculate about the salvation of those outside but, as Zinzendorf said, it would be a wicked person who would be envious of their salvation.[34] It is also a future in which God will not need our help to gather God's children. In fact, Zinzendorf felt that the idea that Christians will be treated in a special way during the time of the thousand years reign of Christ should be banished from Christian teaching because it was entirely incompatible with modesty, the heart-principles and the daily inculcating of the merits of the Saviour.

What then is the significance of the notion of the future as a future of surprises for the way we view Muslims or other people of faith today? Do we have grounds for including people of other faiths from salvation? According to Zinzendorf, we have no grounds for their absolute exclusion because the future is one of surprises. To exclude them is to attempt to take the initiative from God who does as he pleases in mercy and grace to all his creatures.

---

[33] This is reminiscent of Ockham's emphasis on God's infinite power. According to Ockham, "even if God cannot perform a work to the limit of his power, it is nonetheless not superfluous for him to have such great power, since God does not exist for the sake of any of his works." [*Quodlibetal Questions,* VII, 18, reply to objection 3; See William of Ockham, *Quodlibetal Questions*, Vol. 1&2, Quodlibets 1-7, trans A. J. Freddoso and F. E. Kelly (London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 655.]

[34] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* X, 146.

Conclusion

The apophatic-like manner in which Zinzendorf speaks about God, the human-centred Christology that he employs and the eschatology of surprise that characterizes his understanding of the future are derivatives of his theological modesty. When we read his theological modesty from the point of view of today's plural context, it is seen to provide space in which people of other faiths are drawn into conversation. Zinzendorf's epistemological caution prevents him from claiming too much concerning the infinite, omnipotent God, who he believes has the power even to restore devils if he wills. If then God has the power and is sufficiently gracious to restore devils, it would be presumptuous to exclude people of other faiths from his ultimate plan for salvation. The future then is one of surprise for we do not know what God will do.

At the same time, however, the unknowable God has allowed himself to be encountered in the man Jesus. True religion therefore has an incarnational component for we can neither know nor conceive of the eternal God in his immensity. The question for people of other faiths, then, is what exactly is the object of their worship, and where is the concrete location of their encounter with their God. Apart from the event in which God gives himself and his will to be known there really is no means of knowing God. Interfaith conversation, therefore, cannot bypass incarnational Christology. From the point of view of Christian revelation it seems the onus is on people of other faiths to indicate the object of their worship, if it is not the God-man Jesus. In other words, Christians encounter the God they worship in a living human being, the only location in which we can formulate our notions of God.

Having looked at the Comenian and Zinzendorfian emphases within the Moravian tradition, our next task is to draw out the implications of the intra-Moravian tension in their positions and apply it to the plural context, which is the task of the following section. First we must determine the shape of the Moravian theology of pluralism that arises from the Comenian and the Zinzendorfian approaches and show its relevance for the Caribbean context.

One major hurdle that developing a Moravian theology of pluralism must cross is the possible objection that an application of European thought to the Caribbean contradicts the very notion of Caribbean theology, which is predicated on extricating the regional theological discourse from European assumptions. How then can the use of Comenius and Zinzendorf be justified? It seems the relevance of the research for the Caribbean stands or falls on being able to successfully show the credibility of retrieving these aspects of the Moravian tradition.

SECTION III
A MORAVIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: IMPLICATIONS FOR CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY

CHAPTER 9

HARMONY, MODESTY, DIALOGUE: FEATURES OF THE MORAVIAN THEOLOGY OF PLURALISM

Introduction

In the preceding sections we looked at the emergence of religious pluralism as a problematic factor in Western theological discourse and at the theological approaches taken to come to terms with it. We saw that the three types of approaches represented by Hick, D'Costa and Lindbeck are not sufficiently suited for those religious traditions that seek a more convincingly open approach to other religions. These approaches disqualify themselves on two grounds. One is that the approaches are essentially anti-dialogue and the other is that they have not been able to settle the question of whether the other religions can be the locus of divine revelation. In relation to the former ground, Hick sees all the religions as cultural and geographical variations of the same reality, all of which will eventually climax in the Real. Hick's approach therefore sees no ultimate need for dialogue. The logical conclusion of Lindbeck's approach is no different from this because he regards the religions as enclosed entities whose truths are systemic. In relation to the latter ground, D'Costa seems to decide *a priori* that other religions are suspect in their claim to be the locus of divine revelation, even though in his approach he makes a case for the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions.

However, it seems that taking the claims of others seriously, and hence dialogue, is a prerequisite for co-existence in a plural context. A suitable theology of religious pluralism must be an instrument that enables the religious tradition to engage the

plural context. It must be able to show how one can remain committed to one's own tradition and at the same time take seriously the claims of others. Therefore, a Christian theology of pluralism can neither undermine the tradition in which it is situated nor reject *a priori* the claims of other religions. Rather, it must see these claims as questions that warrant appropriate responses. Looking at other religions from the point of view of one's own tradition, then, is an imperative for reviewing one's own theological resources in light of the challenges of the plural context. This justifies the search within the Moravian tradition for suitable resources, which may serve not only the Moravian Church but also the wider Christian community. This approach is critical, not only because a search to this end has not yet been undertaken in the Moravian tradition, but also because not all the traditions within the Christian community have the kind of resources that the plural context seems to demand. A Moravian theology of pluralism is, then, a contribution to the Christian community of a way in which the relationship between Christianity and the other religions may be approached.

The viability of a Moravian approach to pluralism, however, must be weathered in a concrete situation of plurality. This, then, is the purpose of the final section of our exploration: it is to outline the features of the Moravian approach to pluralism and to indicate how the Caribbean theological discourse will be re-shaped when considered in light of the Moravian approach. Stating the task another way: since it is recognized that the issue of religious pluralism must be made concrete in a specific context, the aim is to see whether the hermeneutic of harmony that we find in Comenius and the hermeneutic of modesty that we find in Zinzendorf can help to define an adequate approach to pluralism in the Caribbean.

In order to fulfil this aim, three important tasks have to be performed. First, we must give a proper outline of the features of the Moravian theology of religious pluralism (9.1-9.6). Secondly, we must give an account of the factors that gave rise to Caribbean theology and the salient features of that discourse (10.1). The third task will be to indicate the contribution that a Moravian theology of religious pluralism can make to the regional discourse, which must be articulated in the context of other religious traditions (10.2-10.8).

9.1: Features of the Moravian Theology of Pluralism

The retrieval of Comenian and Zinzendorfian theological resources has revealed a number of areas of tension within the Moravian tradition. However, in outlining the Moravian approach to pluralism our aim will not be to try to resolve the tension because that tension belongs to the logic of pluralism itself, and is part of the contribution that the Moravian Church makes to living with plurality. Instead, our aim is to allow the two approaches to engage and influence each other.

The approach to pluralism that draws on the interchange between the Comenian and the Zinzendorfian sub-traditions is centred on a discourse that has four main features or is characterized by four imperatives. The **first** is an imperative of dialogue, which is derived principally from Comenius. The unique approach of Comenius is his understanding of revelation as occurring in three books of God, the world, the mind and sacred scriptures. By looking at revelation from the point of view of a hermeneutic of harmony, he is able to be open to other religious traditions and, at the same time, he is able to critique those traditions in the search for truth, which for him

is a universal category. The Comenian approach is by nature dialogical. He argues that truth in one area must be in harmony with truth in the other arenas, such that God's revelation does not appear to be contradictory. In the context of the Caribbean this approach calls for a review of the understanding of revelation, which has largely been responsible for the posture of superiority that Christians have taken towards the other religions.

Secondly, the Moravian approach to pluralism is characterized by an imperative of modesty, which is derived principally from Zinzendorf. His modest approach, which is situated on the periphery of the apophatic tradition, carries with it at least two consequences. In the first place, it allows him to insist upon the peculiarity of Christian revelation in the incarnation but in a way that does not necessitate speculation on the hypostatic union nor require people of other faiths to immediately see Jesus as divine. The divinity of Jesus is beyond reasonable explanation and, in any case, must be treated as a second order discourse. The second consequence of his modest approach is that it prevents him from taking for granted the gulf between human and divine beings, and therefore shows respect for God's omnipotence and freedom. His awareness of the hiddenness of God prevents him from claiming to know what God will do because God is a God of surprise. The inner tension in Zinzendorf between what he knows and what he is unable to know, between what he sees and what he is unable to see, between what can be said and what must be negated, is what aligns him with the apophatic. This tension expresses itself in his understanding of redemption where he wants to claim both a subjective and an objective approach at the same time. This means that Zinzendorf is unable to rule out the salvation of people in other religions even though he insists on salvation by faith

in Jesus alone. The effect of Zinzendorf's theological modesty in the Caribbean context is that it challenges a review of traditional notions of Christology, eschatology and the future of the kingdom of God, which bring us to the third and fourth imperatives.

Whereas the first and second features are due to the tension between Comenius and Zinzendorf, the third and fourth features are derived from the overlapping of their views. The **third** feature of a Moravian theology of pluralism is the emphasis on a human-centred Christology. By this we mean a centring of focus on Jesus' human life, while accepting that in a mysterious way Jesus was also an expression of the divine life. The significance of this approach in a plural context is that it overcomes the need to speak of the hypostatic union, which has been the cause for controversy within the Christian community. It also overcomes the need to immediately perceive the divine life that Jesus represents. The divinity of Jesus is of second order significance and is of value only to those who are ready to accept God in human form.

The **fourth** feature is that the Moravian approach to pluralism is characterized by an eschatology of surprise. This means that the future is seen as unpredictable and contingent. Its contingency is derived from the Comenian emphasis on the ineffectiveness of human action, on one hand, and from Zinzendorf's emphasis on the uncertainty of divine action on the other. The unpredictability and contingency of the future means that we should follow our current paths with modesty because we do not know the shape of the future, either as a consequence of our actions or as a consequence of divine action. It means also that we must be opened to the challenges

that the plural context put to us, seeing we do not know what role the other religions are expected to play in God's plan to bring all people to himself.

In presenting these four features, we shall take cognizance of the dialogue that occurs at two levels, which is critical to the Moravian approach to pluralism. At the first level, the dialogue is an intra-Moravian dialogue between the Comenian and the Zinzendorfian approaches because the issues of anthropology, truth, and the future are seen in different ways. At the second level, this dialogue is with other religions, which the Comenian understanding of revelation in three arenas and the Zinzendorfian understanding of incarnation as an act of divine modesty necessitate. For Comenius, revelation is given in the external world of nature, the internal world of the human mind and sacred scriptures. For Zinzendorf, there is a need to demonstrate modesty similar to the divine modesty in the incarnation, which itself is an ongoing dialogue between God and humanity: "in these days he [God] has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he created the worlds."[1]

What we hope to show, then, is that the Moravian approach to pluralism is aimed at achieving harmony in the human community. It is an approach that is modest in its epistemology and dialogical in its methodology. The Moravian Church understands itself as a community in dialogue, as pilgrims modestly embracing every step that brings us closer to the goal of divine unity.[2] Taking the context seriously means we

---

[1] Hebrews 1: 2. Emphasis mine.

[2] *Church Order,* I, 6.

must engage the other religions in dialogue because we cannot "withdraw from [the world] through indifference, pride or fear."[3] As an intra-tradition as well as an interfaith discourse, this dialogical approach to pluralism is more suitable for the plural context.

9.2: Dialogue: The First Imperative

A Moravian theology of pluralism that draws on Comenian resources must affirm firstly, a commitment to dialogue as a way to discover truth. From the point of view of the Comenian tradition, the commitment to dialogue is predicated on the unity already given in creation:

> Since the whole human race is the product of the one Eternal Creator and is intended to be the image of the same original God, since it has been introduced into the same earthly home and is equipped with the same instruments of Reason, Speech and Free Action and is destined to reach the same heavenly ends, it is most desirable that every inhabitant of the world should be ready, willing and able to know and understand his fellow-men and to live a reasonable life with them.[4]

The recognition of the capacity of language to determine our perception of reality and thus to reveal reality's nature has gained ascendancy in modern times.[5] However, the articulation of the connection between revelation and language and the relationship

---

[3] *Church Order,* I, 10.

[4] *Panglottia,* I.1.

[5] The development is due in large measure to the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). His early philosophy embodied in *Tractatus logicophilosophicus*, rests on the view that reality determines the structure of our language. Later he reversed this relationship and suggested that our language is what gives us our conception of reality.

between language and unity in the human community is a unique contribution of Comenius, which hitherto has not been recognized. Comenius regarded conversation as the bond of humanity, the absence of which means the breakdown of society. Without conversation, society exists in a state of Babel-like confusion, which is the cause of misunderstandings and war. The plurality of languages, therefore, can exacerbate the problem of disunity if with language differences people do not seek to communicate with each other.[6] For Comenius, a challenge for society is to develop a universal means of conversation, in which all could participate and which would overcome the difficulties concomitant with the plurality of languages.[7] There was the need, then, for linguistic harmony to match the material and the mental harmony that he advocated. By all participating in a common language or by all participating in several languages, we would be enabled to discover the wisdom of God revealed in and through other languages, which we are barred from seeing because of our inability to communicate in them.[8] According to Comenius, "Let Wisdom speak to

---

[6] *Panglottia,* III. 3. Comenius focuses on the role of language in conversation, which, naturally, must involve more than one person. In his view, language is a framework of words that signify things and present them to the mind in a reasonable way. There is therefore an interrelationship between three elements of language. First there are things, which must be denoted by words. Secondly, words must be expressed in sound to convey distinct meaning and thirdly, there must be minds to find the words meaningful. As a consequence of this relationship, Comenius described the conversation as a picture representing things, which are sometimes intangible. Conversation is derived from thinking about things and is the means whereby thoughts about things are transferred. In other words, it is a vehicle for passing mental images from one mind to another.

[7] In *Panglottia* Comenius goes into detail about a proposal for engendering better conversation between peoples of the world. He perceived that there were three options to improved conversation, which he termed the "three ways of (linguistic) salvation." [*Panglottia*, II.6] The first, *Pantoglottia*, by which he meant the refinement of all languages in current use by providing versions of select books in these languages, would engender mutual rivalry thereby leading to the improvement of all languages. This would open the possibility for revealing fresh secrets of God's wisdom. The second possibility, *Polyglottia*, means the learning of a select number of languages as it happens in schools. The third possibility, *Monoglottia*, refers to the creation of a single language that would seek to overcome the anomalies of the known languages. The option of using this language in international conversations would reduce misunderstandings.

[8] *Panglottia,* IX, 5.

the sons and daughters of all nationalities individually in their own tongue for the purpose of polishing their minds and their morals and so benefiting the nations universally."[9]

Comenius envisaged the development of language to serve the cause of the proclamation of the gospel. However, a Moravian approach to pluralism today must go beyond the narrow perception of language as an instrument of evangelism. It must maintain that it is possible through dialogue to discover further truths about God beyond what we already know. This is an issue to which we must then turn because there is the need to spell out precisely what is meant by the notion of "revelation through dialogue."

9.2.1: Revelation Through Dialogue

Comenius' understanding of revelation and dialogue is such that through dialogue with people of other faiths other truths about God could be made known. Understanding revelation is for him an interpretative task in which people who believe that God speaks to human beings must be involved together. This view is analogous to the idea that revelation is handed on through the intra-church activity of interpreting and re-interpreting the original of the witness of the first community of believers.[10] Understanding revelation through re-interpretation overcomes the

---

[9] *Panglottia,* IV. 1.

[10] For example, Francis Schussler Fiorenza, "A Roman Catholic Perspective on the Offence of Revelation" *Harvard Theological Review,* 95:3 (2002) pp. 265-271. According to Fiorenza, "the meaning of revelation is a hermeneutical or interpretive problem." (p. 271) See also Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God* (London: SCM, 1990),165. For Schillebeeckx, who deals specifically with issues relating to other religions, the issue for Christian theology is not what is common to many religions, but precisely that difference between them that forms their uniqueness and distinctiveness. The distinctiveness and uniqueness of Christianity is its unavoidable historical

dilemma faced by a supernaturalist approach, which assumes that the revelation has to be received and understood in the same way. By emphasizing the contextual nature of the interpretation of the testimony of revelation that is handed on, this approach allows for differences in the way the message is understood. Seeing revelation as re-interpretation overcomes the temptation of having to claim a priority for any single epoch of the revelation, as well as the need of having to claim a climax of history before history is at a climax.[11]

---

peculiarity, which is expressed in the dominant paradigm of the incarnation. However, Schillebeeckx does not draw the consequence of the absoluteness of Christian revelation from his notion of Christian distinctiveness. According to him, the revelation of God in Jesus in no way means that God absolutizes any historical particularity, not even Jesus of Nazareth. On the contrary, the risen Jesus points to God beyond himself, which means, "anyone can encounter God even outside of Jesus ... [because] the manifestation of God in Jesus does not fence off 'religious history', as emerges for example from the origin of Islam as a post-Christian world religion." [*Church*, 66.] Schillebeeckx sees revelation as an interpretation moving from one semiotic system to another. By revelation he means experiences in which the possibility of the new is disclosed; where a space is opened up in which we see reality differently; where it is possible to see the world in a different way from that which is customary in ordinary experiences. Revelatory experiences "bring us, through the disintegration of our everyday identity, to a new reinterpretation of our own identity which makes us happy, brings us salvation or makes us whole." [Church, 22.] In other words, revelation happens in the stream of ordinary day to day experiences and involves a subjective response. However, the subjective form of the response does not mean that the revelation is the private property of the person who perceives the event as revelatory. Experiences are appropriately called revelation only when in an event of nature or history, in contact with other people, or in the world, something shows itself which provokes this particular response, though what shows itself is not capable of compelling the person to only this response. Although it seems contradictory, Schillebeeckx simply wants to emphasize the dialectic between the personal and the public nature of the experience. It is this dialectic that gives revelation its progressive character. The testimonies of the first generation of Jesus' followers have to be interpreted again and again in different cultural contexts. There are two consequences for this interpretation of the testimony of Jesus' followers. The first is that in no single period of the tradition of interpretation, not even that of the Bible, can the cultural forms be absolutized, even though the historical and socio-cultural mediations are the only possible vehicles for the meaning of the offer of revelation. [*Church*, 37.] The dialectic between the culture and the tradition of the interpretation of the witness is what allows the offer of revelation to be handed on. Revelation is handed down to others because the first followers of Jesus and the later generations used socially shared systems (semiotic) of communication. One generation had to translate the meaning of the testimony from a previous generation, but they understood what was being said only through the semiotic system that they know and in which they participate. The second consequence of this interpretation is that faith in God's revelation has a starting point in this world. This means that any possible understanding of faith is contextual: it "takes place on the basis of and through the medium of the human understanding of reality – distinctive to a particular culture in which the gospel is proclaimed and heard."[*Church*, 39.] The mediation of revelation is, therefore, a function of the time and context but comes within the interpretation that is presented on each occasion.

[11] Pannenberg, *Revelation as History,* 143. One of the difficulties with the way Pannenberg understands the end of history is that he asserts its climax in Jesus even when history is not at a climax. According

The Comenian idea of revelation through conversation, however, adds another element to the notion of revelation through re-interpretation. It emphasizes the dialogical imperative in Christian theological discourse not only as an intra-Christian activity but also an as activity between the religious traditions of the context. The religious traditions must be lifted up as important aspects of the context with which one must also dialogue. It makes the claim that truth is revealed as a consequence of the dialogue that occurs in two directions at the same time. In one direction it involves the re-interpretation of the Christian witness and thus conversation within and between different eras, cultures and semiotic systems. In the other direction it involves conversation with the non-Christian religions that bear witness to the divine presence in a given cultural and geographical context. For Comenius, the latter conversation is critical and is derived from his perception that revelation is given to all in the three arenas of the world, the mind and divine oracles. It is insufficient, then, simply to have a positive theoretical attitude to the other religions in a given context without showing how engaging them in conversation can change the landscape of Christian theology.

The idea of revelation through conversation that Comenius advocated has, in a sense, already been embraced in current interfaith conversation, though not with the same force. According to the 1990 Baar Consultation on "Dialogue with People of Living Faiths":

---

to him, if the fate of Jesus is the anticipation of the end, and if this is the revelation of God, then no further revelation from God can appear.

> Our theological understanding of plurality begins with our faith in the one God who created all things, the living God, present and active in creation from the beginning. The Bible testifies to God as God of all nations and people. ... We see the plurality of religious traditions as both the result of the manifold ways in which God has related to peoples and nations as well as a manifestation of the richness and diversity of humankind. We affirm that God has been present in their seeking and finding, that where there is truth and wisdom in their teachings, and love and holiness in their living, this like any wisdom, insight, knowledge, understanding, love and holiness that is found among us is the gift of the Holy Spirit. ... This conviction that God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples.[12]

While the statement does not make a claim for equality in the statuses of the scriptures of all religious traditions, like Comenius it recognizes that God is present and active in the plurality. Comenius goes further in insisting that we are under obligation to receive the books for which divine claims have been made and to verify that such claims can be upheld without question.[13] In this respect he was anticipating twentieth century dialogue between Christians and Muslims which has questioned whether the time had come to "consider a whole set of phenomena of revelation in their intensity and their originality in order to design a theology of revelation that would be equally acceptable to a Jew, a Christian and a Muslim, or that would at least give their scripture an undistorted image that everyone could recognize."[14]

---

[12] Kinnamon and Cope, *The Ecumenical Movement,* 417-418.

[13] *Panaugia*, VII, 21.

[14] The Muslim-Christian Research Group, *The Challenge of the Scriptures: The Bible and the Qur'an* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989), 88.

A commitment to dialogue as a means of disclosure of truths, therefore, means responding to the questions that the awareness of other accounts of truth raise for what we hold to be the truth. It also involves revisiting the accounts of truth that we bear, which would show a preparedness to expose our understanding of truth to questioning and to remove status of immunity, in order that our perception may be reshaped or simply be reaffirmed in a process of dialogue. From a Caribbean regional point of view, taking account of other witnesses to truth means more than just noting that there are differences between religious communities. It means taking the differences seriously to the point where we attempt to answer the question of what these differences mean for Christian theology. It is clear that not all the questions that the conflicting accounts of truth raise will be answered satisfactorily or immediately, if any at all. Nevertheless, we are not thereby absolved from the challenge of dialogue. Unless we take another religion seriously and unless we remove immunity to questioning from our accounts of truth, then interfaith dialogue cannot have a revelatory function. This position that we derive from Comenius is not to be confused with the relativism in Hick's approach. Rather, since dialogue is for Comenius the way to apprehend the truth, he envisages that a person can abandon a given position and take hold of another.

Revelation through dialogue does not mean that what is revealed is inconsistent with what is already known in the world, the mind and Holy Scriptures. Instead, Comenius insists that there must be harmony in revelation, an issue we must further explore.

9.2.2: Harmony in Revelation

Comenius based his understanding of revelation on four assumptions, which can be regarded as first principles for his theology. The first three assumptions declare: (1) that God exists; (2) that God cares for the world he created and (3) that God desires humankind to attain full salvation. The fourth assumption is (4) that God communicates with human beings in the peculiarity of their context. That communication occurs in three arenas: in the external world of nature, in the internal world of the mind and in divine oracles. The unity that is taken to exist in God, therefore, is the *a priori* basis for assuming harmony in revelation. This fourth assumption is particularly important for understanding Comenius' attitude to the other religious traditions and is the unique contribution that he makes to a Moravian theology of pluralism.

However, Comenius' understanding of harmony in revelation is in tension with the Zinzendorfian understanding. According to the latter, every person coming into the world is imprinted with an inerasable awareness of God, which enables the individual to discern God's further revelation. This means there is no atheist in the real sense of the word. Atheism is really the refusal to accept the further knowledge of himself that God gives in the person of Jesus. Most importantly, however, all that we need to know for salvation has been revealed in the person of the Lord Jesus, of which the Holy Scriptures are the most reliable witness. This revelation is necessitated by the mystery of God, who remains hidden despite his revelation. For Zinzendorf, then, the highest miracle was the incarnation, which is also the clearest evidence of divine

modesty and divine concealment.[15] So, Comenius emphasizes the world of nature as a credible arena of God's revelation whereas Zinzendorf does not. Comenius allows for the possibility that God speaks also in other scriptures apart from the Christian Bible, which for Zinzendorf is absurd. Comenius allows for the possibility of discovering unlimited universal truths about God through a process of dialogue with people of other faiths, who like Christians are given the three books of God for exploration. However, Zinzendorf aligns himself with the apophatic tradition in maintaining that God remains hidden amidst his revelation and that the human cannot therefore discover things about God. The Moravian approach to pluralism must proceed by way of dialogue in the tension that arises from the two approaches to revelation. In a plural context, the Comenian approach that emphasizes dialogue and the human capacity to discover God's truth must reckon with the modest approach in Zinzendorf, which insist on ignorance. The self-confidence of the Comenian seems to be balanced by the caution of the Zinzendorfian.

The first path for a Moravian theology of pluralism, then, is a commitment to dialogue within the particular tradition and between the religious traditions on the question of revelation. This dialogue has to be ongoing as the attitudes of Christians to other religious traditions change through reading in their scriptures and as different cultural contexts and different epochs read the original Christian witness in a new way.

This imperative to dialogue as a way to discover truth is, however, in tension with the second path for a Moravian theology of pluralism, which must be characterized by

[15] This idea of divine concealment will be picked up later.

modesty in terms of epistemology. It is an approach that makes a concession of ignorance of God despite divine disclosure. Zinzendorf maintains that we will never know God in the fullest depth of God's divine mystery because God remains hidden amidst revelation. The discontinuity between human and divine being cannot be bridged because even in heaven we will be still moving towards God. In this respect, a Moravian theology of pluralism is also aligned to the apophatic tradition.

9.3: Epistemological Modesty: The Second Imperative

In a previous chapter we mentioned three issues that illustrate the modesty in the theology of Zinzendorf: (1) the apophatic-like character of his theology, (2) the human-centred nature of his Christology and (3) the eschatology of surprise. Our aim here is to deal in further detail with the apophaticism evident in his theology, which must be included in a Moravian theology of pluralism. We will deal with the other two issues when discussing the third and fourth features of the Moravian approach.

A recurring feature of Zinzendorf's theology is his refusal to speculate on matters pertaining to the divine nature. It would seem, though, that this refusal is a mark of scepticism, which denies the possibility of knowledge. A distinction must then be made between scepticism and the modesty that must characterize a Moravian theology of pluralism.[16] To speak of modesty does not mean a denial of the possibility of knowledge. Rather, this approach recognizes the depth and complexity of the questions human beings ask about divinity. It also recognizes the difficulty and

[16] Scepticism is the view that "no one ever knows anything about anything ... [and that no one is] reasonable in believing anything." [Peter Unger, *Ignorance: A Case for Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 1.] In other words the sceptic denies the possibility of certitude and asserts that, "everybody is always ignorant of every thing." [Unger, *Ignorance*, 94.] The sceptic, therefore allows for knowledge only if one is certain, but regards certainty as a position that is unreasonable.

the presumptuousness of proposing answers to such questions. When an approach recognizes the limitation of the answers that are given to fundamental questions of meaning and purpose, it is inclined to treat answers in a provisional way, which is characteristic of the modest approach.

An approach characterized by modesty must also be distinguished from the notion of philosophical doubt that characterizes the philosophy of Descartes and which sought to overcome the ravages of sixteenth century relativism and scepticism.[17] An approach characterized by modesty, however, does not begin with doubt of existence of the external world, nor does it predicate knowledge simply on the thinking subject as we find in Descartes. On the contrary, it accepts the existence of the world and the human being as part of it, but concedes that God as the source of being is beyond what we can formulate with words. An approach characterized by modesty cautions us about making absolute claims about God irrespective of the predication of such assertions. The apophatic writers believed that words could not capture the reality of God. Consequently, even justifiable affirmations had to be negated, to ensure that words did not appear to be able to capture the reality of divine being. The modesty in Moravian theology is best accounted for by situating the approach within the apophatic tradition. For the apophatic writers, words fail to correspond to a deficit in human experience because God is beyond the reach of the human conception and experience.

---

[17] Rene Descartes, *The Principles of Philosophy,* I, IV, *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes,* vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 219. For him, the first task of philosophy was to rid oneself of all prejudices by calling into doubt all that could be doubted. Descartes argued that doubts could be raised about the entire external world because of sense deception; the senses couldn't be relied on for proof of certainty and truth. See also Charles Guingon, *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge* (Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing, 1983), 23.

A question that this notion of modesty faces, though, is how it can assert ignorance of God when it is affirmed that God has drawn near to us in the person of Jesus. This means that a fundamental task for an approach that emphasizes epistemological modesty is to come to terms with the incarnation. As we will discover, for Zinzendorf God conceals himself while making himself known in the incarnation.

9.3.1: The Concealment of God in the Incarnation

One of the most radical assertions made in Moravian theology is that notwithstanding the hypostatic union, Jesus was believed to stand in a certain insufficiency, and in a limited knowledge of himself so that he was not even aware that he was the eternal God. According to Zinzendorf, it was as if he forgot who he was because:

> When a thought that he was God, darted into his mind, (pretty much in the same manner, as a person of thirty years of age can recollect, as in a dream, what he has once done or spoken eight or nine-and-twenty years ago upon his mother's lap) when a thought of his everlasting, self-existent Godhead darted into his mind pretty much in this manner; it was as it were transiently, and by the by [because] … when he was to go into this lower world, and chose to do it, bid adieu thus far to the operation and activity of his own Godhead.[18]

The idea that the Son of God was limited in knowledge and that he was unable to recall his past except by momentary flashes would portray him in a rather imperfect light. However, Zinzendorf was on orthodox grounds in suggesting that Jesus was limited in knowledge and lacking in memory. According to the formula of Chalcedon,

---

[18] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* V, 72.

Jesus was different from us in only one respect: he was without sin. It was not only that the Saviour was man in the literal sense, but as Zinzendorf understood it, he ascended into heaven as man, he sits at the right hand of God the Father as man, and he will still be man at the end of things when he comes as judge.[19] In other words, the only form in which human beings can get a glimpse of God is in human form. The hypostatic union, then, was a necessity occasioned by human capacity (or incapacity) on one hand, and by God's own modesty on the other. One should not miss here the theological implications of the link that Zinzendorf makes between anthropology and Christology. If Jesus were ignorant and lacking in memory, if Jesus were lacking in the full knowledge of his own Godhead and exercised faith as any human being can, it should caution other human beings in the claim they make, not only about Jesus but also about the whole Godhead.

What we see in this Moravian approach to pluralism, then, is that the incarnation is indicative of God's concealment amidst his revelation. This perception of the incarnation calls for a certain modesty in claims about the extent to which we know God, even from the point of view of Christian theology. At least two consequences follow from this position when dealing with people of other faiths. In the first place it cautions us in the claims we make about God that go beyond what Jesus seemed to have claimed. Secondly, this approach cautions us about making claims to knowledge of God apart from what has been revealed in human form, the only form in which we can see God. This leads to the issue of how the incarnation as concealment affects interfaith relations.

---

[19] Ibid., VIII, 106.

9.3.2: Divine Concealment and Interfaith Relations

One of the major stumbling blocks in the dialogue between Christians and people of other faiths is the affirmation by Christians that there is no other name under heaven given among men whereby we might be saved. (Acts 4:12). Zinzendorf was himself puzzled by the notion of God that people of other faiths held, if they did not regard Jesus as God in human form. It would seem that the christocentric emphasis that Count Zinzendorf displays in referring to Jesus as the only way to salvation makes his theology unfriendly to interfaith discourse. However, unfriendliness to interfaith relations is not a necessary conclusion when one notices the distinction Zinzendorf makes between the experience of Jesus as Saviour and the propositional statement that no one is adopted to the Father except through him.

Zinzendorf knows from his own experience and from the witness of Holy Scripture that we are born again through Jesus. As he argued, "I therefore know it, because the revelation of the Holy Ghost, as it operates in the soul, is expressed by our Saviour clearer than almost any thing, and because it harmonizes with so many other circumstances of the Holy Scripture."[20] However, the assertion that we can only come to the Father through the Saviour was something prior to experience, on which he could therefore not speculate. He said:

> Here the Brethren may easily imagine, that tho' I should make ever so long a detail, (so as these kind of things admit of being discussed and speculated) yet

---

[20] Ibid., IV, 57.

> I could not speak determinately of, nor discover the manner, how the Saviour is the intermediate person thro' whom we are begotten; this is far too spiritual and super-celestial. ... When once it is clear to me, how we are likewise begotten through this channel, I will describe it too.[21]

It is pertinent to raise the question of what kind of contribution Zinzendorf's distinction between experience and propositional statement can make to interfaith dialogue. For Zinzendorf the statement that we are begotten through Jesus alone was an assertion beyond experience, which cannot be verified. The experience of Jesus as Saviour is something that can be affirmed because of the Holy Ghost operating in the soul.[22] However, the affirmation that he is the only Saviour among men, or that no one has access to the Father except through Jesus is not a point of doctrine that can be explained because the basis of this truth is concealed. In the words of the Count, the claim that Jesus is the only access to the Father is something "super-celestial," which means it is beyond the parameters in which human words can operate. We either accept the assertions in faith or we do not. Neither those who believe it nor those who question it can offer, on the basis of reason or experience, an absolute justification for the assertion. The effect of this in interfaith discourse is to indicate the limits of dialogue. We should not see dialogue as a panacea for religious conflicts because there are some things in our religion that dialogue may not be able to resolve, even though what those issues may be cannot be decided prior to dialogue.

---

[21] Ibid.,

[22] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* IV, 57.

The distinction between experience and propositional statement and the refusal to subject the assertions of faith to discussion would suggest that there is really no role for interfaith dialogue. However, in his awareness of the hiddenness of the basis for certain truths, the Count was not seeking to adopt a Gnostic approach of private knowledge. Instead, we should see his position as a kind of "privileged ignorance." In a way akin to the apophatic writers, he does not know and cannot explain what he knows. As Zinzendorf put it, there is a seeing and a not seeing and there is a hearing and a not hearing.[23] Even in the future life there will be a deficit of knowledge because we will be in an incessant aspiration towards the Lord. We will be ever moving towards him and never knowing him fully. The knowledge of who the Saviour is was for him not an experience that could be fully achieved either in this life or the next:

> Does anyone meet us in the second million of the αιωνες of our duration, and ask us again whither we are flying to? We still say, 'to our Window.' And what is that? How is it called? The through-pierced side: for that is, even in the future life too, ever new to us. He shall be thy Lord, and thou shalt aspire incessantly towards him with all thy desire.[24]

In his reference to the soul as having an eternal movement towards God, towards "his window," Zinzendorf was not prepared to give the desire for God a future terminal point. In this regard his eschatology is consistent with those who today hold that we live always with something before us, something still promised to us, which as yet we

---

[23] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VII, 82.

[24] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* IV, 59-60; "Dear friends, do not fancy that we know the Saviour fully. We do not begin to know him." *Maxims, Theological Ideas and Sentences,* 198.

do not possess. Zinzendorf rejects the idea of rising through the hierarchies to become one with God but holds the Christian notion of salvation in an unfinished mode. In a sense: "we are always *in via,* always on the way, always travelling towards the future of God which will almost wholly surprise us."[25] Salvation or knowledge of God is not something that can be fully accomplished – even in the world to come. One will not be able to say after millions of aeons that one has arrived at the full knowledge of the Lord and at a full experience of salvation. This position makes less cutting the exclusive edge of salvation through Jesus alone. It opens the future in a way that challenges us to see salvation as an eternal process rather than an eventual actual achievement.

Zinzendorf therefore speaks with surety about things given to the heart or to which Scripture attests but of those things beyond his experience and the witness of Scripture he would not venture into speculation. He does not know why it is affirmed that Jesus is the only way to the Father. He cannot defend it on the basis of reason or experience. What he knows is that God accommodated himself to our ignorance, which makes Jesus God with us. His position is to accept it and to allow others the freedom to reject it. His concession that he does not know the basis of the assertion that we can come to the Father only through Jesus is for him further evidence of God's concealment amidst the revelation, which calls for modesty in dealing with things pertaining to God.

---

[25] Kenneth Cracknell. "The Theology of Religious Plurality", *Current Dialogue*, 26 (June 1994): 18.

9.3.3: Divine Concealment and Truth

In refusing to speculate on things outside experience or things about which Holy Scripture does not speak categorically, Zinzendorf was effectively indicating the full extent of the limits of epistemology. It was not only that there was a limit on reason but also on the individual's experience. There were truths that he was prepared to affirm for which there was no experiential or reasonable justification. To the rationalist or the empiricist this was manifest folly but neither could they demonstrate that the truths were unreliable. This position is in tension with that of Comenius who believed that truths attainable in this life could be discovered through dialogue with others. In his approach to truth Comenius emphasised that we get access to revealed truth through conversation between the different eras of Christian witness as well as through conversation with other religious traditions. True dialogue involves putting oneself in the place of the other to understand what is claimed about revealed truth. Thus dialogue within and between the religious traditions is a way to revelation. For Zinzendorf, though, we can speak of truths within the parameters of experience, while there are others of which we have no notion. This recognition of the partial sense in which experience functions in making us aware of truths about God is similar to the apophatic writers who were cautious about associating religious experience with God.[26] In limiting speculation to the boundary of experience Zinzendorf served notice on those who are presumptuous enough to make statements about the immense God, who despite his incarnation remained outside the boundary of human experience. This observation of a limit on the extent to which experience could guarantee religious truth, means there has to be a rethinking of the way Zinzendorf's

[26] *DN* I, 593B4-12.

theology is assessed.[27] The emphasis he placed on the man Jesus was due to the inability to experience God. So there is a sense in which we cannot experience God, even though we affirm the incarnation. It is for this reason that we situate Zinzendorf's theology on the periphery of the apophatic tradition.

At the same time, however, Zinzendorf saw the incarnation as God reaching out to human beings. In this sense it may be interpreted as an invitation for humanity to participate in a conversation with the divine. This perception of dialogue in the incarnation can ameliorate the otherwise "anti-dialogue" posture evident in Zinzendorf's theology.

9.3.4: Divine Modesty and Dialogue

Zinzendorf understands the incarnation as an act of divine modesty, which was designed to overcome the two countervailing tendencies in the human being, the beastly tendency of the body and the immodest tendency of the mind. In one respect the individual is worthless, despicable and good for nothing and in the other the individual is desirous of knowledge and holiness but unable to reach them. The image of God in the human being has been defaced as a result of sin, for which we have a primal propensity. The use of the intellect and reason rather that being evidence of divinity, as Comenius affirms, becomes in Zinzendorf an evidence of the satanic pride, which is inquisitive and desires only to know. The way to holiness is to put to

[27] In *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart,* 59. Freeman notes that for Zinzendorf knowledge of God was 'dark' because we are ontologically separated from God. However, he asserts that "God has always revealed God's self experientially in the Son. ... Thus the knowledge of God in Christ is not dark but clear and plain." [59] One must however reckon with Zinzendorf's own word concerning even Jesus' awareness of the Godhead. According to Zinzendorf, the relationship of Jesus to the Godhead was not something always before him but was "transient". [See *Twenty-One Discourses*, V, 72.] In other words, even to Jesus the Godhead remained concealed amidst the revelation.

death the tendency of the flesh, which is beastly and the tendency of the mind, which is satanic. The solution to the problem of the human condition is to be found in the ideal man, Jesus, whom God put forward as our only hope and propitiation. By the appearing of God in the flesh we are challenged to consider the human being in a new way. In the incarnation the tendency to self-hate that resulted from the fall of Adam has been erased along with the entire sentence that fell on the human race.

Consistent with the witness of Hebrews 1:2, the incarnation is God's invitation to humanity to participate in a divine conversation or the broadening of the divine discourse to overlap and intersect with human discourse. In the incarnation the human being is challenged to make a re-assessment of the human and divine realities because of the assertion of an interfacing between the two realities. The incarnation is an invitation to dialogue with God because with it a fundamental assertion affecting divinity and humanity is made in a language that human beings can understand, seeing God speaks concretely in the (body) language that we know most intimately – the human-form. In order for the dialogue to be ongoing, a human response must be made to the divine assertion. According to Zinzendorf, however, the inclination to self-hate means that the human being would prefer when dealing with the divine to hear an assertion that has "to do with something incomprehensible, unfathomable, transcendent … than to hear of an incarnate Creator, of a God who is of his own flesh and bone."[28] Consequently, in the conversation with God, the human being is inclined to take objection to the incarnation as human discourse being presented as divine discourse. The human being does not want to imagine that the Creator could

---

[28] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* VII, 96-97.

be so common. The human will, therefore, contends against the assertion upon which the passion of Jesus is predicated, "that the blessed Creator of all things was so mean, as to lie on dry grass, upon coarse hay and swaddling clothes."[29] However, the human being cannot deny that in Jesus a "word" is spoken in human language without at the same time denying his or her own human existence. This word, the biblical witness affirms, is also a divine word, which we will deny if we determine that God would not be so immodest. As Zinzendorf puts it, a person must either deny his/her own human-form or else "be obliged to let Jesus' male-form pass for certain as naturally, as entirely, as simply as his own."[30] Religion without incarnation as a dialogical component has the challenge of indicating how God is perceived and in what way it is possible to communicate with the hidden God, if not in human discourse.

If God is seeking to dialogue with humanity in the incarnation, then dialogue has divine sanction. By stressing God's involvement in human discourse the Moravian understanding of dialogue is given a theological grounding that goes beyond the pragmatism in current interfaith conversation.[31] God's appearance in the flesh draws every human being into a divine conversation, which according to Zinzendorf means that "every human soul, be it where it will (in whatever part of the world and in

---

[29] Ibid., 97.

[30] Ibid., 98.

[31] At the commencement of the Christian-Muslim dialogue under the auspices of the World Council of Churches the grounds listed as the necessity for dialogue all related to the practical rather than theological issues. According to the March 1969 Meeting in Cartigny, the necessity for dialogue arose out of several factors: (a) the specific historical roots that the two religions have in common; (b) the attitude of self-criticism which is inherent in each religion; (c) the increased mobility and mixing of populations; (d) the political situations, especially in the Near East. See Stuart Brown, ed., *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversations Sponsored by the World Council of Churches* (Geneva: WCC, 1989), 3.

whichever religion it is born) is blessed because it is a human soul."[32] The Zinzendorfian tradition may then be seen as a corrective to the seeming over-emphasis on dialogue as merely an activity between human beings. In this respect the pragmatism of the Comenian sub-tradition needs the theological assertiveness of the Zinzendorfian.

Theological modesty then, can be seen as an attitude of openness to the other while being committed to one's own tradition. For this reason it is an approach that can foster mutual affection and dialogue between adherents of the different religious traditions, all of who are forever unfulfilled in their desire for a full knowledge of God.

However, for the Moravian approach to pluralism to find credibility in the Christian community, it must deal satisfactorily with the issue of Christology, which is fundamental to Christian theology but a theological problem in the context of interfaith conversation. This brings us to the third characteristic of the Moravian theology of pluralism, which asserts the uniqueness of Christ in a way that does not make null and void the existence of the other religious traditions.

---

[32] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* VI, 67.

9.4: A Human-Centred Christology:[33] The Third Imperative

The christological focus in the Moravian approach is centred on the human being acting in the world in obedience to God. In Moravian terms, salvation seems to be dependent on human action - either the human being made in the image of God or the human being who is God incarnate, that is, God in human image. However, once again this is source of tension in Moravian theology.

On one hand, in his Consultation on Human Affairs, Comenius does not place as much weight on the role of Jesus as he does on the role of human being as co-creator and as one with whom God necessarily works. Consistent with the pre-eminent role of the human being, it could be said that the means for the salvation of the world has already been put within the grasp of the human being, who must now live in accordance with the image of God in him. The well-being of society and the character of the future depend not on divine intervention *per se,* but on human beings pursuing those ideals, for which the image of God has given the sense and capacity to achieve. In a certain sense, our creation in God's image is that which guarantees our being able to see what God is doing in the world and to align ourselves with it. For Comenius, as a result of being created in the image of God, the human being has a

[33] This must not be confused with Haight's notion of Spirit Christology, which for him proceeds from below because it begins with a historical consciousness of Jesus. He opts for a Spirit Christology as most suitable to the plural post-modern context because it more adequately thematizes the Christian experience of Jesus and explains the meaning of Jesus as being the bringer of God's salvation. For "when one asserts the divinity of Jesus with a dynamic Spirit Christology, this means that God, and not less than God, is really present to and working in Jesus, and that this is so in such a manner that Jesus is a manifestation and embodiment of the reality of God." [*Jesus Symbol of* God, 462.] The difficulty with Haight's approach is that one is still left wondering what people of other faiths would understand by the assertion that the Spirit of God is present in Jesus in a symbolic way. [297ff.] The difference with the Human-Centred approach is that it does not require people of other faiths to see Jesus as someone divine because that perception is of value only to those willing to accept the notion of God in human form. For the Human-Centred approach to Christology, the divinity of Jesus is of second order significance.

salvific role and a christological function. The framework for redemption was already set in creation, which included the creation of the intellect, the will and the capacity for action. It is now our duty and privilege to work out our salvation with God in fear and trembling. In short, for Comenius there is really no distinction between creation and redemption thus human activity in the world is an outworking of both. The work of Jesus of Nazareth, which is an activity for the well-being of the world in obedience to God, is the work that each human being is expected to do.[34]

On the other hand, Zinzendorf emphasizes the work of the man Jesus as the incarnate God but plays down the use of human intellect and the will. Jesus has already accomplished redemption and all that is required of the individual is to place their faith in the man Jesus. Central to Zinzendorf's position, which cannot be overstressed, is that we should not try to understand the notion of hypostatic union because the question of Jesus' divinity is beyond the terms that human mind can frame. Nothing should derogate from the humanity of Jesus, because only in our perception of God's proximity to us as human to human will the act of divine modesty accomplished in the incarnation be made clear. In other words, our preoccupation must be on the work of Jesus as a human being.[35] It is God's Spirit who will enable the work of Jesus to be called the work of God, because "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit." (See I Corinthians 12: 3.)

---

[34] Comenius, *Via Lucis,* VII,3-7.

[35] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* VII, 102.

Although predicated on different notions of being human, redemptive action in the Moravian tradition is centred in the human being who acts in accordance with the divine will. In light of the different anthropologies that underlie the christological views of Comenius and Zinzendorf, it seems that a Moravian approach to pluralism is forced to embrace an approach to Christology that can accommodate a plurality of anthropologies. It is for this reason we refer to a human-centred Christology, which means it is centred on human action as having divine sanction and divine implication.

The interfaith value of a human-centred Christology is that it allows the Christian to affirm Jesus as Saviour of the world while at the same time allowing that people of other faiths immediately see him as an ordinary human being. In fact, to Zinzendorf it is preferable that we simply emphasize that Jesus lived in humility and poverty as the meanest of servants; that all his speeches were delivered according to this mean condition of his, but his secret majesty and glory, which were always present to himself he did not reveal openly. All we can speak of then is really those things that prove the majesty of his manhood.[36]

When a human-centred Christology is affirmed in the context of the Caribbean, with sensitivity to plurality, the regional discourse is challenged to review its perception of the christological problem. Rather than being preoccupied with the divine versus the human nature of Jesus, the problem of Christology becomes a question of how to interpret and exhibit the work of the human being, Jesus of Nazareth. The challenge involves helping the people of other faiths to encounter the reality of the person's

[36] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* IV, 37.

earthly life without having to insist that they perceive Jesus as divine. This encounter will take place at different levels of community life through formal and informal contacts but will be characterized by praxis. On the basis of that encounter, the people of other faiths must be allowed to develop their own christological attitudes, the outcome of which should not be prejudged. Whether or not Jesus is perceived as divine is of secondary importance. The primary question is whether people are drawn to him in love when Christians exhibit his work. A human-centred Christology is, therefore, not so much what we believe about Jesus, but about what we do in Jesus' name.[37] It is an approach that has an unapologetically missionary intention, though not directed towards conversion, which is seen as the work of God.

The uncertainty concerning the outcome of christological attitudes, which people of other faiths will form on the basis of what Christians do, leads us to the question of eschatology, the fourth feature of a Moravian approach to pluralism. This relationship between Christology and eschatology is derived from the fact that Christians see Jesus as the one who inaugurates the Kingdom of God. The human-centred Christology, with the attendant consequences outlined above, have a bearing on what we claim for the future of the church and the religions. Therefore the question we seek to answer next is what approach to eschatology is most suited for the plural context, given the conflicting claims about the ultimate significance of the religions?[38]

---

[37] Admittedly, though only coincidentally, this human-centred Christology resembles what Knitter describes as doing before knowing in the praxis of dialogue. [Knitter, *No Other Name,* 205-231.] Where this approach differs from Knitter's however, is that a human-centred Christology is not seeking to clarify Jesus' uniqueness. [Knitter, 206.] Rather, its aim is to demonstrate who Jesus is. The question of his uniqueness is of secondary importance. At a later stage we must look at the relationship between a Moravian human-centred Christology and Christopraxis in liberation theology.

[38] David Cheetham has proposed that a way to approach the problem of plurality is to suppose that following death it will become apparent that one particular faith was the most faithful representation of

9.5: An Eschatology of Surprise: The Fourth Imperative

The fourth feature of the Moravian approach to pluralism is an eschatology of surprise, which presents some uncertainty about the end of the church and the end of world. This eschatological emphasis is derived from two bases in Moravian theology. In the **first** place it is based on Zinzendorf's human-centred Christology, which expresses itself in a world-embracing ecclesiology. In the understanding of the Moravian Church, the purpose of the church or body of Christ is directed towards human beings in this world:

> The Lord Jesus Christ calls His Church into being so that it may **serve him** on earth until He comes. The Unitas Fratrum is, therefore, aware of its being called in faith to **serve humanity** by proclaiming the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It recognises this call to be the source of its being and the inspiration of its service.[39]

In the Moravian tradition, there is no developed discourse relating to the fellowship that the church on earth shares with the church triumphant.[40] This is consistent with Zinzendorf's wish not to speculate about things beyond this world. The main ecclesiological emphasis relates to the church as an earthly reality, whose form and

---

ultimate reality. However, as will become apparent, there is no justification for regarding the ultimate pre-eminence of one religion as the only form of an eschatological solution. See, David Cheetham "Evil and Religious Pluralism: The Eschatological Resolution," *New Blackfriars,* 78, No. 915 (1997) : 215.

[39] *Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum*, 1995, 1. Emphasis mine.

[40] *Church Order,* II, 101(a). The Liturgy for Burial of the British Province also has this prayer relating to the Church triumphant: "Keep us in everlasting fellowship with the Church Triumphant, that we may rejoice together in your presence both now and evermore." [*The Moravian Liturgy: Authorized for use in the British Province of the Moravian Church,* (London: The Moravian Book Room, 1960), 94.]

activities are confined to this world.[41] As the human body of Christ, the church as we know it came into being to serve Christ by serving the neighbour and the world. Its *raison d'être* is to serve the Lord on earth through service to humanity. The church has a "this worldly" structure, whose purpose relates to service in this world. The church, is, therefore, not understood as an end in itself but is seen as instrumental to the witness of Jesus in the world.

There are two important consequences that flow from this perception of a "worldly" church. One is that if the church has an instrumental function relative to the witness in this world, then we must maintain that the end of the church, at least in terms of this function, is co-terminus with the end of the world. The Moravian Church recognizes the importance of ecclesiological structures and sees the Church as the place where human fellowship with God becomes a living reality. These structures, however, are not a prerequisite or a *sine qua non* for salvation. In fact, from the point of view of Moravian ecclesiology, the religious systems of the world will eventually disappear because "the Unitas Fratrum looks beyond this earthly witness of the church to the great consummation when the Lord will 'draw all people unto Himself' and His Kingdom be fully established."[42]

This perception of the "worldliness" of the church is also consistent with the emphasis on Jesus as a person of the world. The benefit of this perception is that it frees us from having to speculate about the nature and content of church beyond this world. The

---

[41] The Church Order notes that the liturgical form of the services in the church, "gives expression to its union with the whole Church of Christ **on earth**." [*Church Order,* II, 101(b)] my emphasis.

[42] *Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum,* #150.g (22); my emphasis.

absence of speculation about the church beyond the world leads us to see the future as surprise because there is no sense of what that will be like.

The other consequence is that if we assert the "worldliness" of the church, then we must also maintain that the other religious traditions are also worldly. The "worldliness" of the church, and the "worldliness" of religious traditions, lends credence to the notion of contingency in religious structures in general. The only question is who determines the ultimate significance of the other religious traditions. It seems Christian theology in general and Moravian theology in particular must maintain that as it is the Lord who determines the function of the church, which is to bear witness to the Gospel until he comes, so also it is the Lord who must determine the ultimate significance of the other religions. That ultimate significance we do not know, which also contributes to the notion of an eschatology of surprise.

The first basis for an eschatology of surprise, then, is a human-centred Christology expressing itself in a "worldly" ecclesiology. The **second** basis for the eschatology of surprise is the conflicting perceptions of the future that we see in Comenius and Zinzendorf. On the one hand, Comenius views the future as a function of human action. The future is not something that happens to us but something that we create as part of our duty to co-operate with God who has placed his image within us. The future we desire is the future for which we pray and work. God's omnipotence in Comenius is not a unilateral action that excludes the activity of the human being because it is through the human being that God works to bring about the future. Comenius' future is not an unknown entity, in the sense that it is the direct outcome of human action in concert with divine activity. On the other hand, Zinzendorf views the

future as entirely the work of God, even though that does not remove its sense of uncertainty and unpredictability. God's omnipotence means that he can do as he pleases because God refuses to be programmed by human interests. Zinzendorf is mindful of the hiddenness of God amidst his revelation, which means we cannot predict God on the basis of what he has revealed. We are able to know of God because God has accommodated himself to our humanity but we cannot claim to know God in the depth of his immensity.

A Moravian theology of pluralism must operate with this conflicting perception of the future. One of the consequences of this conflicting perception of the future is that there is no theological basis to bring closure to the question of the ultimate significance of the other religious traditions. Since there is no justification for interpreting their existence as instruments of evil, we must allow for the possibility that God can use them in his plan for the future of the world, even if now we cannot perceive how that will be done.

Another consequence of this conflicting perception is that a Moravian approach to pluralism is forced to treat the future with openness because we can neither predict nor programme God.[43] This in itself is an imperative for Christians in the Caribbean to engage people of other religious traditions in dialogue because failure to do so means we could miss the opportunity to develop our own resources in response to the questions that the other religions pose.

---

[43] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* X, 146. To illustrate the freedom and power of God, Zinzendorf maintains that God has the power to restore devils.

Leaving the ultimate significance of the other religions as an open question and treating the future with openness suggests we will encounter God in unknown ways and unexpected places. More importantly, openness to the future and to the ultimate significance of other religions implies confidence in God as one able to build God's kingdom as he chooses. There is a certain maturity in our faith and true modesty in our attitude when we are able to see that Christian witness is not indispensable for the Kingdom of God. God is the one who must bring closure to the question of the ultimate significance of the other religions. God may even bring people of other religions into one community with Christians because "God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham."[44]

9.6: Summary

In summary, then, there are four imperatives that characterize a Moravian approach to pluralism. The first is an imperative to dialogue that arises from the plural context in which God has revealed his truth in three arenas, the world of nature, the mind and Holy Scriptures. The claims of others must be taken seriously, which means other religions that claim to have divine oracles must be given the benefit of the doubt until those claims have been proven otherwise. The second feature is an imperative of modesty, which calls attention to limitation of our language and thought to formulate ideas about God. The revelation of God in the incarnation does not abolish the hiddenness of God. However, the incarnation may be seen as invitation for human

---

[44] Luke 3:8. Derrett has noted that the passing of souls to inanimate objects was known in India and Kabala. See Duncan M. Derrett, "Stones Cry Out [Luke 19:40]" *Expository Times* 113, No. 16 (2002): 9. Derrett lists a few instances in the Bible where reference is made to stones having a voice. The reference here to God raising up children of Abraham from the stones is metaphorical but it calls attention to God's freedom and omnipotence.

beings to participate in a divine conversation with God. In this sense, the incarnation itself provides theological justification for the dialogical approach that is central to the Moravian theology. The third feature is a human-centred Christology, which is derived from the conflicting notions of the human being that Comenius and Zinzendorf espouse. This human-centred Christology has implications for ecclesiological praxis as well as traditional notions of Christology. However, this approach allows the Christian to affirm the redemptive role of Jesus while not requiring people of other faiths to see him as divine. The fourth feature, an eschatology of surprise, is derived from two sources. One is the Zinzendorfian human-centred Christology and the concomitant understanding of the purpose of the body of Christ, which is to serve Christ by serving humanity. Moravian ecclesiology holds that the end of the church is tied up with the end of the world. The "worldliness" of the church is ground for treating all religious structures as temporary and to link their purpose also with the world. The ultimate purpose of the religions, however, remains an open question. The other is the conflicting perception of the future in the Comenian and Zinzendorfian sub-traditions. By having to exist in the tension between the Comenian and Zinzendorfian understandings of the future, the Moravian approach to pluralism emphasizes the unpredictability of both human and divine actions.

9.7: Challenges to the Moravian Approach

From the point of view of Christian theology, the Moravian approach needs to address three critical issues. The **first** concerns the relative status of each religious tradition. Although the Moravian approach treats all religious traditions as contingent and temporary, this does not imply an equality of status between them, as we find with

Hick's approach. In fact, the approach distinguishes itself from Hick's, in a number of ways. Firstly, it does not treat the religions as being on par. Rather, it treats human beings as being generally on par in terms of their intellect, will and capacity for action. They are equal in the sense that all desire truth, piety and tranquillity. However, this equality in the human community does not translate into the equality of the religions. Secondly, this approach is different from Hick's in that it does not claim that God is known in the same way in all the traditions, although it does affirm that the One God is at work in the world (because this approach is situated in the Christian tradition). Rather, it affirms that because God is not co-terminus with any particular tradition but is beyond the created world, the traditions must leave themselves open to the possibility of further understandings of God not now available to them. This may mean that current notions of God may have to be revised. Since God remains hidden amidst his revelation, there is a state of "not yet" in the fulfilment of the desire that the human being has for full knowledge of God and of divine truths. From this sense of "not yet" we derive the imperative for dialogue in search of truth and the relentless longing to know God in God's fullness. What has been made known in Jesus confirms our suspicion that hiddenness belongs to the very nature of God.[45] The fact that Jesus was man as we are means that there is concealment in what he reveals of God, because it is not immediately available to the ordinary eye. What we know of Jesus is sufficient unto our salvation but there is more for us to see. If there were nothing further that can be made known of God, then the idea of heaven and the beatific vision, which is part of the Christian tradition, become null and void. Amidst the revelation in Jesus we are still seeing God through the glass darkly.

---

[45] According to Barth hiddenness is one of God's properties. Karl Barth, *The Doctrine of the Word of God,* Vol. I.1, 184.

Thirdly, where Hick describes the different religions as lenses through which the divine is perceived, the Moravian approach views the traditions as the contexts in which the divine perceives us. We believe that God sees us in the traditions to which we belong. The primary question then, is not whether the other religious traditions can lead to God but, rather, what is the plan of God vis-à-vis the other religious traditions. This we clearly do not know. However, the salvific potential of the other religious traditions must remain an open question. Christians do affirm that God will bring us to salvation in and through the revelation in Jesus. However, that neither gives Christians the right to declare with D'Costa and the Roman Catholic Church that none of the other religious traditions apart from Christianity is the locus of divine revelation, nor does it place Christians on a higher epistemological ground to declare with Hick that all the religions are on par in terms of their salvific potential. Since God knows the current traditions in which we are positioned, we can conclude that God is able to allow each tradition to play a major or a minor role in God's plan for humanity, even though we are not able to see how that would work.

The **second** critical issue that the Moravian approach must face relates to the claim of the uniqueness of Christian revelation, which the approach of Lindbeck, for example, seeks to maintain. By construing its context as irretrievably plural, the Moravian approach to pluralism is a critique of Lindbeck's approach because unlike Lindbeck it recognizes the intersecting and overlapping nature of the context, the multiple identities and the sharing of discourse between the traditions. Within this plurality, each person stands within a given tradition but that does not preclude an osmosis of

discourse occurring between the thin membranes that remain of what used to be the distinct boundaries of particular traditions. Just as several notions of what it is to be human must co-exist and intersect, in the same way multiple traditions co-exist and overlap, thus creating a plural context of overlapping identities. The plural nature of the context is a reality shared by all the religions and, as Comenius has argued, God is operating in this plurality. Therefore, perceiving the revelation of God is a hermeneutical task that relates to dialogue as an intra-Christian as well as an interfaith enterprise. It seems clear that if all in the plural context does not affirm the truth of Christian revelation, it remains a "peculiar" truth. This means that the uniqueness of Christian revelation, though based on conviction, is a proposition made in a plural context, to which the other religious traditions must respond.

A **third** challenge to the Moravian approach is that it must show it is not purely a theoretical construction that does not relate concretely to how people of faith live their lives. Responding to this challenge is the task of the next chapter. As we shall see, the Moravian approach represents a concrete challenge to the traditional way in which Caribbean theology has been articulated. First, the idea of harmony in revelation and dialogue as a way to truth challenges the regional discourse to re-appraise the approach that is inclined to dismiss the revelatory value of the other religions. Secondly, the idea of modesty puts caution on the regional discourse in regard to its theological assertions. It may be that we have to be less positive about aspects of Christian assertion, especially as it relates to the ultimate significance of other religious traditions. Thirdly, the human-centred Christology that arises from Moravian theological modesty challenges Caribbean Theology to re-state the Christological problem as having more to do with interpreting and exhibiting the

message of Jesus than with traditional issues relating to the human-divine nature of Christ. Fourthly, the notion of a surprise eschatology re-opens the debate about the future of the religions and their ultimate significance. Christians may need to suspend the traditional judgement that ascribes no ultimately divine value to the other religions. Openness to the future and to the other religions suggests a confidence in God as one able to build his kingdom as he wills. In other words, Christian witness is instrumental but not indispensable to the Kingdom of God. By incorporating the insights of Moravian theology mentioned above, the regional discourse must then look concretely at four issues: (a) its starting point, (b) its method and (c) its Christological focus and (d) how the climax of theological action is understood.

CHAPTER 10

CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY IN LIGHT OF A MORAVIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Introduction

Having looked at the outline of the Moravian theology of pluralism, our final task is to see what this approach to pluralism can contribute to the theological discourse in the Caribbean region.[1] Undertaking this task is necessary because Caribbean theology has not yet inserted the issue of pluralism into the centre of its discourse, even though the need for it has been recognized. Considering Caribbean theology in light of the discourse on Moravian theology will not only give the Moravian theology of

[1] In geographical terms, the Caribbean is that series of islands situated in the Caribbean Sea, which includes the Bahamas at its northern end and the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago at its southern boundary. The Countries of Guyana, Suriname and French Guiana on the mainland of South America are also included because of the commonality of their colonial history. On the Western fringe the region includes the Central American mainland territory of Belize in Central America and extends eastward to Barbados. The other countries include Cuba, Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Dominica, Grenada, Antigua and Barbuda, St. Lucia, St. Kitts and St. Vincent all of which are independent nations. However, the region also includes territories under the administration of colonial powers. These include, The United States Virgin Islands, the French Overseas Department of Martinique and Guadeloupe, the Netherlands Antilles – Curacao, Aruba, Bonaire, St. Eustatius, Saba and St. Maarten, and the British Crown colonies of Montserrat, Turks and Caicos, the Cayman Islands and Anguilla. The region has a population of about forty million of which 78% are Christians, 7% are Spiritists (a designation used by the authors of the *World Christian Encyclopedia* 2001 to mean primal religions or religions emerging from the overlapping of primal and other traditions) 2% Hindus, 1% Muslims and others (including Buddhist, Jews, and Baha'is) 1%. 11% of the regions' population claims no religious affiliation. (*See* Appendices for further details). The word Caribbean is also reference to a historical experience [Watty, *From Shore to Shore*, 47.] In many respects it is the outcome of the interface between pre-existing Amerindian cultures, African and Asian importation and European colonization, which was inaugurated some five centuries ago. This means that the Caribbean is probably the youngest civilization in the world. The clash of these different civilizations meant the virtual death of the first, the exploitation of the two imports and domination by the third. Given the number of the islands and the differing language and cultural patterns arising from the colonial history, one can see that pluralism is part of the definition of what the Caribbean connotes. Cuthbert describes it is a complex socio-cultural mosaic. [Cuthbert, *Ecumenism and Development,* 2] Watty describes the Caribbean as a pelau culture. Pelau is the name of a Caribbean dish that is a mixture of different kinds of meat and herbs in a carbohydrate base. [Watty, *From Shore to Shore*, 65.] The larger part of the Caribbean is the English speaking territories with several French, Dutch, and Spanish nations. Consequent upon the formal end to colonial government in the 1960's, the region came to a new awareness of the need to forge a regional perspective to overcome the years of living with division, which was kept intact by the strong colonial and metropolitan ties. It is in this context of initiatives to overcome regional division that the discourse on Caribbean theology emerged.

pluralism its contextual significance but will also move the discourse on Caribbean theology to another level of relevance. In this final chapter we hope to accomplish two tasks. The **first** is to indicate the factors that gave rise to Caribbean theology and to clarify the main features of the regional discourse. As we will see, Caribbean theology is the Christian religious discourse that emerged at the intersection of three socio-political movements: Black Power, the struggle for independence and Latin American liberation theology. As a consequence, the discourse is centred on the related themes of indigenization, de-colonization and liberation.

The **next** task is to look at four issues relating to Caribbean theology, in light of the issues raised by the Moravian approach to pluralism: namely, the questions of the starting point, methodology, Christology and the concept of utopia in Caribbean theology. In relation to the starting point we question whether the understanding of the notion of context in the regional discourse remains adequate in light of the awareness of the region's plurality and the need to deal with the concomitant issues. We will argue that a much more helpful approach is to situate the starting point of the discourse within a specific tradition for only in this way will the relevant resources deep within the traditions be uncovered.

In relation to the question of method, we will show the inadequacy of the notion of action-reflection-action as a theological method in a context where dialogue with other religions is an imperative. It seems the plural context requires a theological method that more intentionally addresses the challenges of a multi-faith context. In place of the action-reflection-action method we argue for a method that moves from

conversation to co-action. In this new approach the conversation between the religions is seen as the first moment of theological discourse in a plural context and co-action refers to the action to advance the ideals on which conversation partners agree. Such actions or assertions are modest and tentative because they are made on the basis of present knowledge and may therefore change, as the community becomes wiser.

In relation to the issue of Christology, there is an attempt to insert the notion of a human-centred Christology into the regional discourse. A human-centred Christology is not concerned to explicate the classical arguments for the two natures of Christ. Rather, it focuses attention on the modesty of the life of Christ and the work of the man Jesus. The critical issue it raises is whether people in other religious traditions can do the work of Christ without knowing him and asks what that implies for their salvation on one hand and for Christian self-understanding on the other.

In relation to the concept of the future we will argue that the regional discourse needs a concept of the future that relieves it from having to claim that only in the Christian faith do people have a future with God. The question is whether there is an approach to utopia that can do justice to the hope of Christians for their faith but at the same time leaves the question of the ultimate significance of the other religions as an open question. In this regard we argue that the designation "Christian approach to utopia" is more adequate than the notion "Christian utopia" in Caribbean theology, when considering the future of the religions.

Considering Caribbean theology in light of these four issues will illustrate how the regional discourse is altered when the reality of the plural context is taken seriously.

10.1: The Emergence of Caribbean Theology

Caribbean theology is part of the larger phenomenon of contextual theologies, the emergence of which coincided with the break up of European colonialism. Contextual theologies recognize that the way in which theological ideas are formulated depends on the socio-political and cultural context from which they arise. This fact was not always as evident in the Caribbean as it is today because European theological formulations were believed to be the only way in which theology could be understood. There has been nearly five hundred years of European theological domination in the Caribbean but that has changed since efforts in the 1970's to break with European theological methods and assumptions.

Caribbean theology emerged at the confluence of **three interrelated impulses**, the understanding of which is a prerequisite for appreciating the regional discourse. The first factor is the **Black Power** movement that swept across the Americas, reaching the height of its influence during the 1960's. One of the earliest inspirations of the movement was the Jamaican Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). He developed and disseminated a unique brand of African nationalism and black pride through the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) that he organised in 1914.[2] The

[2] The Rastafarians regard Garvey as a prophet because of his racial consciousness and he figures highly in the songs of the Reggae legend, Bob Marley. Garvey's thoughts were shaped in part by his encounter in London with the African Duse Mohamid Ali, editor of the magazines *African Times* and *Orient Review*. It was in London that he seemed to have formulated his ideas of an International African association, having come to appreciate the atrocities of imperialism and its effect on Africa. Blacks in the United States, particularly Claude McKay (also Jamaican born), Brooker T. Washington and the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP) also influenced him.

concept of Black Power became the paradigm in the 1960's through which socio-economic, spiritual and psychological issues were narrated. From a socio-economic point of view, it represented a cry of defiant protest, of a demand for economic power and of an end to imperialism. It was a call for the empowerment, cultural reconstruction and re-awakening of the black masses. In this sense it was a modern manifestation of the anti-European protest of black people, which is as old as the European trade with India and Africa.[3] In the movement one can discern the maturing of the consciousness of the black person demanding treatment as an equal participant in the world process and not a role limited to servitude.[4]

In overcoming the innocence of thinking that European Christianity arrived in the Caribbean with some kind of apostolic purity, the Caribbean theological discourse

---

[Philip Sherlock & Hazel Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican People,* (Kingston, Jamaica: Randal Publishers, 1988) 301.]

[3] Ashley Smith, "The Religious Significance of Black Power in Caribbean Churches," *Troubling of the Waters*, 90.

[4] From a spiritual point of view the movement was a combination of forces working for a higher synthesis of the native capacities of the black person. According to Earl Augustus, Black Power has provided the inspiration for a genuine catholicity, of pursuing an ideal of unity. Like the original impulses that gave rise to the ancestral cultures, it is a comprehensive initiation of the black person into the main stream of self-development. It is his contention that: "The pursuit of the Self-Atman of the Hindus, the Christ-Consciousness of Christian Mystics, the Perfect Man or Insam-I-Kamil of Islam, the Muntu or Cosmic Person of the Buntu, the El Dorado or [R]adiant [O]ne of the golden age of our Amerindian peoples is the phenomenon which Black Power has signalled on a scale which marks the birth of new synthesis, a culture distinctive of the religious creativity of our people." [Earl Augustus, "The Spiritual Significance of Black Power for the Christian Churches," *Troubling of the Waters*, 109.] Ashley Smith also sees an important psychological significance in the movement because of the tendency for the black person to internalise the negative conceptions that were used to describe the masses. Throughout the colonial era the black person was described as ugly, lazy, lacking in initiative, carnal and limited in cognitive capacity. The consequence of this negative anthropology was that the black person came to think that black people were "miscreated," which meant that there was the need to be reborn in the image of the European. There was then a propensity to mimic the European in dress, values, taste, etiquette, theology, philosophy, and so on. The Black Power protest was, therefore: "An effective manifestation of the black man's rejection of the impersonal or semi-personal 'itness' imposed upon him by his brother who has not only enslaved and colonized him but also managed to get him to take on the role which the latter has assigned to him through the very process of enslavement or colonization." [Ashley Smith, "The Religious Significance of Black Power," 94.]

draws on the ideals of the Black Power movement in stressing the need for the indigenisation of faith and racial consciousness.[5]

The second impulse that gave rise to the discourse we call Caribbean theology is the **struggle for political independence**, which came to fruition in the region in the 1960's. The struggle itself reaches back to the very beginning of the slave trade, which saw violent reactions from the Africans to the policy of forced recruitment and the horrors of the Middle Passage.[6] The Africans nurtured the ideal of political freedom, which materialised when the British government was forced to promulgate the Act of Emancipation on August 1, 1834. Emancipation marked the end of the first phase of political independence. The second phase was the struggle for self-government that lasted for another 130 years, which included the explosive phase of the 1930's when the main political parties in the region emerged. What occurred in

---

[5] Watty argues, however, that from the point of view of the Afro-America, nothing indigenous has survived because of the uprooted nature of people of African descent in the Americas. This lack of anything indigenous in the region is the cause for people to search for their roots outside the hemisphere. What has occurred is that the religions of Blacks in America and the Caribbean represent an accommodation to the historical situation. [*From to Shore to Shore,* 73.] Watty's preference for accommodation rather than indigenization suggests that a clear line of demarcation can be drawn between the two notions. It seems to be the case, though, that the search for an indigenous expression of a culture is never a hope to find a "pure" expression untainted by historical situation. Rather, it is an expression of a preference for how a particular religion or cultural expression is articulated. In other words, accommodation is a given and does not preclude the search for something indigenous. The legend, Bob Marley describes the task faced by the Caribbean mind in the lyric of his song, Redemption Song: "emancipate yourself from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds."

[6]The Middle Passage refers to the passage from Africa to the Caribbean across the Atlantic Ocean. The account that Sherlock and Bennett relate of the story of Olaudah Equiano of Nigeria, is probably typical of the experiences of others. Equiano won his freedom, after he crossed the Atlantic and was sold into slavery in Barbados: "I was soon put down under the decks and there I received such a salutation in my nostrils as I had never experienced in my life... I became so sick and low that I was not able to eat... on my refusing to eat one of them [the white men] held me by the hand ... and tied my feet while the other flogged me severely. ... One day, when we had a smooth sea and moderate wind, two of my wearied countrymen who were chained together ... preferring death to such a life of misery ...jumped into the sea." [*The Story of the Jamaican People,* 123-124.]

the struggle for self-government was "a transfer of political power from a predominantly white-brown minority to a predominantly black majority."[7]

Caribbean theology represents the attempt to formulate a theological discourse that would complement the political imaginations of the region. Consequently, there is in Caribbean theology a major emphasis on the idea of the de-colonisation of theology. The central thought is that the church must disassociate itself from colonial theology if it is to contribute to the social reconstruction in the region. The missionary thrust in the Caribbean (as well as in Africa) was in many respects a movement of cultural imposition.[8] It could be termed "imperialism at prayer" because in the mind of the missionary as well as in missionary policy there was no clear distinction between evangelization and westernization. European Christianization in the Caribbean was dedicated to the purging, sterilization and fumigation of every trace of Africa. The salvation of the Black person was salvation from the hell of being African. Thus the Christian that was created by this process would "be encouraged to accept a self-understanding according to the definition of his mentors, to love those qualities in him which they admired and to hate those of which they disapproved."[9] As Watty argued, only by a radical de-colonization of received theology will it be possible to bequeath a living faith that could guarantee both the survival of religion and the healing of the people.[10] Received theology has been in a marriage with colonialism, the fruits of which are the perversion of the gospel, theological justification for self-hate and a

---

[7] Sherlock & Bennett, *The Story of the Jamaican people,* 372.

[8] Watty, *From Shore to Shore,* 75.

[9] Watty, *From Shore to Shore,* 76.

[10] Watty, "The De-Colonization of Theology," 50.

tendency to put down the black person. The marriage meant that received theology was a theology of oppression because it could not extricate itself from the colonial system of wickedness and brutality.

The third impetus for a Caribbean theology is the influence of the discourse on **liberation theology** that developed in neighbouring Latin America. Liberation theology provided the discourse on Caribbean theology with a hermeneutical method, which was easily adapted because of the similarities of the experience of colonization.[11] The liberation theological method rests on a nexus of faith and praxis, where the theologian lives the faith in the context of the experiences that provide the basis for reflection. More importantly, though, the liberation theologian must in some way share in the liberative process and be committed to the oppressed. In its method, therefore, liberation theology moves through three moments or mediations. The first is the socio-analytic mediation in which there is an examination of the actual conditions in which the oppressed live. The second moment is the hermeneutic mediation, in which there is the re-reading and questioning of the word of God in light of the situation of oppression. The third moment is the practical mediation where action is undertaken to ameliorate or transform the situation of the oppressed. The circle in which the theological method moves is from an analysis of the reality of the

---

[11] The main difference between the two regions is that on one hand Latin America was colonized predominantly by Spain and the Caribbean, on the other hand, was colonized by a mixture of powers including Britain, Spain, France and the Netherlands. This means that whereas Latin America is predominantly Roman Catholic, the Caribbean is predominantly Protestant.

oppressed through annunciation of the word of God as an imperative for liberation and finally to arrive at action aimed at transformation.[12]

Caribbean theology, therefore, has the theme of liberation as a major emphasis in its discourse. It raises questions about the quality of human experience in the region and the hermeneutic of suspicion is applied to the interpretation of the word of God that has bolstered colonial theology.[13] The discourse raises questions about colonial exploitation, racial discrimination and division, which have left the region with the legacy of economic deprivation and divisiveness.[14] Colonial divisions superimposed upon the pre-existent geographical divisions were further compounded by an amazing variety of religious traditions that grew up in the region. These include Afro-Caribbean Religions, Caribbean Indigenous Religions, and the whole spectrum of Christian, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist religions. Although Caribbean theology has not yet taken up seriously the question of other faiths, the need to address them has been recognized.[15] The point, though, is that the search for unity and harmony and a

---

[12] Clodovis Boff, "Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation," *Mysterium Liberationis*, 73 –83.

[13] Theresa Lowe-Ching, "Method in Caribbean Theology" *Caribbean Theology: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead,* ed. Howard Gregory (Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press, 1995), 26.

[14] For an example of some features and consequences of classism in the Caribbean see the essay by Geoffrey B. Williams, "Classism and the Caribbean Church", *Out of the Depths*, 49-50. He argues that the internalisation of the norms of classism has engendered self-hate and shame on a racial basis. By implicitly, or explicitly agreeing with a classist position the church contributes to this self-hate. The colonial principle of division exacerbated the pre-existent reality of separation due to the Caribbean Sea, which has been a formidable barrier limiting contact between the peoples of the region. The effect of these two divisive factors, one artificial and the other natural, is a recognizable regional insularity where, "to be a Barbadian or a Grenadian is far more important that being a Caribbean person or a West Indian." [Robert W. M. Cuthbert, *Ecumenism and Development: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Conference of Churches* (Bridgetown, Barbados: CCC, 1986), 15.]

[15] William Watty, "The De-Colonization of Theology", *Troubling of the Waters* (San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahaman Printry, 1973), 69-70.

new community in the Caribbean remain challenges central to the Caribbean theological task.

In **summary**, then, there are three major trends in Caribbean theology. First is the impetus of Black Power, which has sensitised the region to its African and Asian heritage and has given rise to an emphasis on indigenization. Secondly, the impetus of political independence and self-government has a theological complement in the call for a new approach to the mission of the church, which is articulated as a call for the de-colonization of theology. Thirdly, the need to find an appropriate theological method to deal with the reality of domination and the need to fashion a new reality has led to the employment of the hermeneutical method used in liberation theology. This gives the theme of liberation to the region's theological discourse.

However, one theme that is underdeveloped in Caribbean theology is the issue of religious pluralism and it is towards this that the study is directed. The demand for recognizing the integrity of the other religious traditions means that Caribbean theology must extend the notion of context to include reference to the other religions. There is need for a hermeneutic approach that may help Caribbean theology to deal with religious pluralism as a non-negotiable aspect of the context. We must first clarify, though, how the issue of pluralism has been dealt with so far.

10.2: Caribbean Theology and Religious Pluralism

In referring to the absence of an appropriate approach to dealing with religious plurality as a Caribbean issue, Watty notes:

> It is beyond the competence of this writer, though it is very much within the range of his interest, to consider how de-colonization applies to the East Indian religions of the southern Caribbean and what they can contribute to the emergence of a Caribbean theology. It is perhaps altogether unfair to regard them, in the context of the Caribbean as a whole, as very much the same kind of ghetto-phenomenon that the Rastafarians of Jamaica represent and therefore before Caribbean theology can fully evolve a Caribbeanization as well of the East Indians as of the Rastafarians must take place, and Christianity itself de-westernised and Caribbeanized must open, by means of dialogue, to insights which will come from these two areas of religious life and thought in the Caribbean.[16]

This quotation, which is one of the most important texts relative to the issue of Caribbean theology and religious pluralism, raises a number of concerns relevant to a theology of pluralism. The **first** is that Watty recognized that it was not possible to contextualize Christian theology in the Caribbean without calling attention to the other religions, an issue about which other writers were also cognizant.[17] However, there is as yet no framework for developing a theology of religious pluralism.

The **second** issue arising from Watty's text is the reference to de-colonization, which has critical relevance for a theology of pluralism as well as for Caribbean theology. Here Watty raises the question of how the notion of de-colonization would apply to the Eastern religions and the Afro-Caribbean religions. However, the appropriateness of the notion of de-colonization as a paradigm within which to situate the discourse on

---

[16] Watty, "De-Colonization of Theology," 70.

[17] Patrick B. Anthony, "A Case Study in Indigenization," *Out of the Depths,* 192. In a similar vein Hamid said that one of the features of the new Caribbean missiology is that it will affirm that God has been and still is at work in other religions and that God was at work in the religion of the forefathers of

religious pluralism has to be questioned because the notion of de-colonisation is a reference to the marriage between the received Christian theology and the imperial powers. The problem for Caribbean theology is that it wishes to hold on to the notion of the superiority of Christian revelation while debunking the notion of European superiority with which it was communicated in the Caribbean. It seems that the notion of de-colonization is particularly an issue for Christianity, which means a more suitable framework is needed to facilitate the conversation with other religious traditions. In seeking to sever the link between colonialism and theology, and in seeking to engage the other religions in the regional theological task, Caribbean theology may have to surrender the notion of Christian superiority. An alternative to the notion of superior revelation is Comenius' idea of revelation in the three arenas, the world of nature, the mind and Holy Scriptures.

A **third** issue arising from Watty's observation is that there may also be the need for a Caribbeanization of Hindu and Islam at the same time there is a de-westernization and a Caribbeanization of Christianity. Watty assumes that there could be a recognizable "Caribbeanized" characteristic as a common denominator for all religions in the region.[18] First, it would be an understanding of the faith in which God is transcendent but not an absentee because the notion of an absentee God seems to be a corollary of the absentee landlords on the Caribbean sugar plantations. Secondly, it would be one that emphasizes vocation-history in the place of salvation history, because the latter notion became a means whereby the history of God's presence among the original

---

the peoples of the region. [Hamid, *Out of the Depths,* p. ix. Clifford Payne, "What will a Caribbean Christ look Like?: A Preface to Caribbean Theology," *Out of the Depths, 6*-7.]

[18] Watty, "De-Colonization of Theology," 70-79.

inhabitants was denied. Thirdly, because colonial theology thrived on the notion of the permanence of the colonial power and arrogance of everlasting grandeur, a Caribbeanized Christianity would need to emphasize an eschatology that took seriously the decline of worldly powers.

It seems that for the want of a suitable framework Watty does not develop the notions of transcendence, vocation-history and eschatology in relation to the other religions. This is not altogether surprising because Watty's primary concern is the articulation of a Caribbean theology to replace a European theology. However, the immediate task facing the region is the articulation of theology in a way that is sensitive to the theological affirmations of the other religions. For this task, the notion of a "Caribbeanized" religion is not sufficiently suitable because it smoothes out the edges of differences between the religious traditions. That is why this research insists that only an approach to other religions from the standpoint of one's own tradition can meet the challenges of Christian theology in a plural context because it engages the differences between the religions and avoids constructing a meta-narrative over them.

The **fourth** issue that Watty raises is the necessity for dialogue between the religious traditions in the region. The challenge to initiate this dialogue was taken up several years later by the Caribbean Conference of Churches. The publication *At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity* (1995) is one of the outcomes of that preliminary initiative. What the conversation between the religious traditions has already shown is that Christianity's partnership with colonialism, and its insistence on the pre-eminence of the revelation in the Christian Bible, makes it less

able to be an equal partner in dialogue.[19] There is then the need to formulate the dialogical task in a manner that makes it possible for Christians to participate without having to surrender those things that have sustained faith in their own tradition and yet at the same time not dismiss the ultimate significance of the other religions.

The Moravian theology of religious pluralism is one in which the resources of that tradition, which have relevance for a plural context, are retrieved and re-worked into a discourse that is both consistent with the tradition and relevant to the context. A Caribbean theology that aims to come to terms with other religions, therefore, can benefit from the theological resources in each church. This means that the principal source for a Caribbean Theology of religious pluralism is the religious traditions themselves. Unless these resources are recognised and retrieved, the regional discourse, as we shall now show, will not emerge from the threat of being irrelevant.

10.3: Caribbean Theology and the Crisis of Relevance

A careful study of recent pronouncement on Caribbean theology suggests that the discourse is experiencing a crisis of relevance. This can be illustrated with reference to three observations. The first is that of Burchell Taylor who in a paper in 1998 argued that attention should be paid to the development of an identifiable social ethic.[20] Secondly, Ashley Smith also expressed a concern about relevance in response to a paper by Adolfo Ham dealing with challenges for Caribbean theology in the 21st

[19] Ravi-ji, "Hinduism and Popular Religion," *At the Crossroads,* 160.

[20] Taylor, "Engendering Theological Relevance," 9-12.

Century.[21] In response to Ham's rehearsing of foci of the seventies, Smith argues that theology today, "needs to express the space of confrontation between our limitedness, our various understandings and interpretations, our conditionality, and the object or direction of these limited expressions."[22] Smith wishes to emphasise that there is a gulf between God and us and that the notions of God we articulate are limited and conditional. The task of theology is to recognize that it is working in this gulf. However, as is the case with Taylor, Smith does not develop the theological task to which he refers.

A third instance that illustrates the crisis of relevance in the regional discourse is Williams' allusion to Christian exclusivism in a 1998 unpublished paper. According to Williams, one of the things that Caribbean theology has taken for granted is the absolutization of Christianity where other religions exist, and are practiced with comparable fervour. He therefore questions the validity of viewing liberation in solely Christian terms. Williams borrows Niebuhr's term of "Radical Monotheism" as a possible clue to developing an approach. He argues that God should be construed as "a single centre in human existence to which all systems and cultures relate."[23] Although he does not develop the idea, it is clear that his proposal heads in the direction of Hick's theocentric approach, which has already been shown to be inadequate for the imperative of engaging the other religious traditions in today's plural situation.

---

[21] See articles by Ham and Smith in Howard Gregory, Ed., *Caribbean Theology: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead* (Bridgetown, Barbados & Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Canoe Press, 1995)

[22]Gregory, *Caribbean Theology*, 10.

[23] Williams, "Invigorating the Caribbean Theological Enterprise," 12.

What is clear, then, is that there is a crisis of relevance in the regional discourse because of the failure to engage the context in the fullest possible way. This research is addressed to the absence of any clearly developed theological framework to enable Christians in the Caribbean to relate meaningfully to the other religions. Our next task then is to show how the Moravian theology of pluralism can be of use to the discourse on Caribbean theology.

10.4: A Moravian Theology of Pluralism: Drawing on Comenius and Zinzendorf

As we saw in the previous chapter, a Moravian theology of pluralism draws on theological resources to be found in Comenius and Zinzendorf. It would seem, though, that one ought to object to the retrieval of European theological resources for application to the Caribbean as an affront to the very notion of Caribbean theology. That objection, it seems, could be predicated on the grounds that the Caribbean person must remain committed to the de-colonization of theology and therefore must be suspicious of European theological assertions. As Watty puts it, there is the need to find a way to assist "the emergence of a coherent Caribbean philosophy which might equip the area with authentic understanding at what is probably the most critical period of its history."[24]

The objection to the use of European resources may also seem reasonable in light of the observation that European missionary theology, for example as articulated by Zinzendorf, has within it notions of scorn, repudiation and contempt for the Africans

---

[24] Watty, "The De-Colonization of Theology," 50.

who constitute the demographic majority in the Caribbean.[25] It would seem that all European theology is colonial in character and should be regarded as "a mythologization of colonialism and the historical outworking of a theology."[26] To return to European sources, then, could be seen at best as an attempt to sanitize European ideas to make them more palatable to the Caribbean, or at worse an attempt to re-enslave the Caribbean mind.

There are, however, two bases on which the retrieval of these particular European resources for application in the Caribbean can be justified, both of which relate to the hermeneutical option of situating the discourse in one's own tradition. **The first** is the fact that several of the churches in the Caribbean, and certainly the majority of those that are member churches of the Caribbean Conference of Churches, share with the Moravian Provinces in the Caribbean a European pre-history with which they must reckon. Even though the majority of Caribbean people are of African or Asian descent, their theological traditions are in part European. As Payne argues, "we must own up unashamedly to the presence of European elements in our theological heritage, and cease to regard the fact as an unmitigated disaster."[27] Looking at European resources from the perspective of the Caribbean Church is part of what must be included in the task of dialoguing with one's own tradition. The retrieval of relevant European resources is part of the dialogical task of finding resources within

---

[25] Ibid., 63.

[26] Ibid., 55.

[27] Clifford Payne, "What will a Caribbean Christ Look Like?," 4.

one's own tradition, which is a necessary first step for the Moravian Church to come to terms with its own history.[28]

The **second** reason it is legitimate to consider European resources is that such an approach is consistent with the nature of pluralism. Each religious community has the task to look selectively within itself for those resources that are of relevance for the task at hand. Being significantly influential on the Moravian community, Comenius and Zinzendorf offer to a theology of religious pluralism resources that have hitherto not been explored. By applying the Moravian approach to pluralism to the Caribbean, the research seeks to emphasize that a contextual approach to pluralism is the most plausible and that the religious tradition itself is part of what has to be included in the notion of context. Our task, then, is to examine the ways in which a Moravian theology of pluralism challenges the traditional discourse on Caribbean theology. The first is a challenge to reconsider the notion of the starting point of the regional discourse.

10.5: Rethinking Caribbean Theological Hermeneutics

One of the reasons for the hermeneutic consistency and clarity of Latin American Theology of liberation is that it is situated within a specific Christian tradition. The notion of faith that influenced the reflection on liberation theology was communicated through the prism of Roman Catholicism. In order for a religious tradition in the Caribbean to respond to the specific questions that the claims of the other religions

[28]This approach is analogous to the use made in the Caribbean and Latin America of Marxist analysis. Williams argues that given the successful use of Marxist analysis in liberation theological thought, Caribbean theology does itself no harm in at least examining some of its prospects as a philosophical view point. See Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, p. 78

put to the Christian faith it must look afresh at its own history for appropriate resources. When this is done with an awareness of the Caribbean historical, cultural and socio-economic realities, the regional theological discourse takes on new vitality because the intra-tradition dialogue spills over into an inter-church and an inter-faith conversation.

The **first** challenge that the Moravian theology of pluralism puts to the traditional way in which Caribbean theology is articulated is to re-visit the perception of the starting point of the discourse. The early exponents of Caribbean theology, especially those already mentioned in this chapter, regard the individual's experience in the Caribbean reality as the most suitable starting point for the regional discourse. That experience, Williams notes, is to be construed as a cultural experience of faith, which may be explicated with the help of different analytical tools, particularly history, sociology, and philosophy.[29] Caribbean theology has therefore been variously described as a theology of de-colonization (Watty), a theology of liberation (Theresa Lowe-Ching), a theology of protest (Smith) and a theology of indigenisation (Williams).[30] When the experience in the context is analysed with such heuristic analytic tools, however, it conceals the front on which Christians have to engage people of other religious traditions. In fact, one could be led to think that there is really no need to consider the issue of religious differences because all Caribbean people, irrespective of their religious background, share a common history, and are subjected to the same socio-

---

[29] Lewin Williams, *Caribbean Theology,* 113.

[30] Watty, *From Shore to Shore;* Lowe-Ching, "Method in Caribbean Theology," *Caribbean Theology,* 23-33; Smith, "The Religious Significance of Black Power in Caribbean Churches," *Troubling of the Waters,* 83-104; Williams, *Caribbean Theology.*

economical and political factors. When the realities of other religions are taken on board, however, we have to ask whether the notions of de-colonization, liberation, and indigenization are suitable paradigms for interfaith conversation. What is needed, then, is an approach to theology that does not overlook the particularities of the context, but at the same time exposes and deals with the differences between the religious traditions. This is what the Moravian approach to pluralism provides.

In the Moravian approach to pluralism the starting point of the discourse is construed as the experience of the individual within a specific ecclesiological tradition. The choice of the Moravian Church as a starting point does not preclude other ecclesiological traditions from being used as starting points. In fact, the Moravian approach sees it as the duty of each tradition that hopes to continue existing in the plural context to clarify its usefulness as a starting point to engage religious pluralism. At the same time, however, the choice of the Moravian tradition is not arbitrary but is based on several important reasons. The **first reason** is that by limiting its point of departure to a specific religious tradition the Moravian theology of pluralism seeks to sharpen its hermeneutical perspective. It recognizes the complexity of the notion of context because each player is already a mixture of several identities. A general starting point, for example history, sociology or faith in a cultural setting, is unsuitable for the plural context because of its domestication of difference within a given context. The notions of common history or common faith overlook the particularities of the religious traditions that form faith and the perspective from which history is read. Only as the tradition excavates its own history for useful resources for the present plural context will the imperative for conversation with others be taken seriously. Theresa Lowe-Ching recognizes the need for this intra-

tradition search and dialogue when she calls attention to the need to reinterpret the traditions so as to expose the contribution of women and disclaim the patriarchal distortions.[31] By looking at sources within the Moravian tradition the aim is to re-read the theological history of the church in light of pluralism.

The **second reason** for the choice of the Moravian Church as a point of departure for a theology of pluralism is to lift up the continuing significance and importance of the existing religious traditions as players in the Caribbean context. This is critical to observe because there have been attempts in the Caribbean to minimize the significance of the traditions within Christianity, either because they emanated from Europe or because they are perceived to have lost their historical importance.[32] According to Watty, for example, denominations are creations of European Christianity and only when these divisions are overcome will the Churches in the region truly overcome their colonial legacy. This means that Moravians ought not to speak of Jan Hus as if he were martyred last night nor should Methodist speak of John Wesley as if they were at Aldersgate with him.[33]

Watty is correct in calling attention to the divisiveness of denominationalism. However, unless he means by this criticism that denominations should be eclipsed and made null and void, then it is clear that we will have to deal with these traditions in

---

[31] Gregory, *Caribbean Theology,* 29.

[32] The most recent survey of world denominations [Barrett, and Others, *World Christian Encyclopedia,* 7] shows that independent post-denominational bodies are growing at a much faster rate that the historic Protestant, Roman Catholic and Anglican Churches. However, the new bodies tend to operate with relatively the same self-understanding as the older structures. We can call the phenomenon denominationalism in a different form.

[33] Watty, *From Shore to Shore,* 19-22.

one form or the other.[34] It can hardly be the case, though, that Watty imagines that all the existing denominations should be combined into a super-denomination. Such a move would be at variance with the plural context in which we are living. At the same time, this does not mean that the phenomenon of Uniting Churches is to be discouraged. However, the trend towards combining churches must not be taken to mean an absolute end to all small ecclesiological communities. It is the authenticity and integrity of the individual churches and the need for them to be in conversation that gave birth to the modern ecumenical movement. To pretend that these traditions do not exist is as dangerous as treating them as eternal structures. What seems clear is that the religious traditions as modes of faith and formation must be engaged in one form or the other in a plural context.

The **third reason** for calling attention to Moravian resources in relation to the starting point of Caribbean theology is that no other suitable approach has as yet been put forward in the context of Caribbean religious plurality. Watty has hinted at the need for an appropriate theology of pluralism but the only serious and yet undeveloped proposal has come from Williams. However, even in its undeveloped state William's proposal is a version of Hick's theocentric model, the weakness of which has already been shown. The Moravian theology of pluralism, then, offers the regional discourse

---

[34]For example, the Presbyterians, Congregationalists and Disciples of Christ have been united into a new entity called the United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands. However, despite the erasure of older structures, the ecclesiological structures of the new United Church are similar to the antecedent denominations. In time the new entity would have forgotten the previous denominations and would have taken on a new form but in practical terms it remains a bigger version of the antecedent forms. This was the case with the Moravian Church, which in its 1727 renewal consisted of Bohemian, Lutheran and Reformed sub-traditions, which subsist in the way theology is articulated and the openness of the Moravian Church to other Churches.

a new and contextually relevant model as to how the issue of religious pluralism in the Caribbean can be addressed.

By way of summary, then, the first contribution that a Moravian approach to pluralism makes to Caribbean theology is to reposition the hermeneutical starting point. Rather than thinking of the broad terms of Caribbean culture and history as starting points, the Moravian approach calls for a focus on one's own tradition in order to discover those resources that are relevant to the situation of plurality in the Caribbean. The second challenge addresses itself to the theological method in Caribbean theology.

10.6: Overcoming Methodological Hurdles

The **second challenge** from the Moravian approach to pluralism relates to the action-reflection-action theological method, which the regional discourse has imported from Latin America.[35] That theological method, or as Boff terms it, the seeing-judging-acting approach, which is characteristic of liberation theology is unsuitable for the plural context in at least one respect. It has not taken cognizance of the conversation between Christians and people of other religions who are trying to come to terms with the word of revelation in their scriptures and the presence and action of God in their religious history. The critical significance of dialogue within and between different religious traditions has therefore been overlooked. According to Charles Amjad-Ali,

---

[35]See For example, Clodovis Boff, "Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation" *Mysterium Liberationis*, 57-85. Williams reads Watty's method as similar to the approach of Gutierrez's action-reflection [Williams, *Caribbean Theology,* 112]. A similar argument is made by Lowe-Ching. According to Lowe-Ching, Caribbean theologians have consciously employed the Latin American Liberation theological method. See Lowe-Ching, "Method in Caribbean Theology," *Caribbean Theology*, ed. Gregory, 26.

when Latin American liberation theologians gave political character to their theology they lacked the dialogical approach and the recognition of the plural context because they were operating largely within the symbolic pattern of Christendom.[36] This means that the theological problem was stated in a way that overlooked the fact that other religious traditions were in fact operating in the context. Liberation theology's silence in respect of the other religious traditions is analogous to the silence of the voices of women, at moments in Christian history, not because they did not exist but because there seemed not to have the awareness that they had a valid and unique contribution to make.

In copying that theological method, the Caribbean regional discourse also imported the methodological assumptions that underlie the Latin American project. These assumptions carried with them an insensitivity to the plural context and the virtual exclusion of the critical significance of dialogue. The plural context seems to require an approach that recognizes the critical significance of dialogue with other religious traditions. It is in this respect that the Moravian approach to pluralism represents a challenge to Caribbean theology. This approach lifts up dialogue as a central imperative of theological discourse today.

10.6.1: Towards a New Theological Method

When Caribbean theology takes up the challenge of a Moravian approach to pluralism, the methodology must take into consideration the mutual questioning, if

---

[36] Charles Amjad-Ali, "Religion and Politics in Islam: Challenges to Christian-Muslim Relations," *Christian-Muslims Dialogue: Theological and Practical* Issues, Roland E. Miller & Hance A. O. Mwakabana, eds. (Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1998), 120.

not the ongoing dialogue, between people of different religious traditions. Failure to do so would result in a skewed perception of the context. Therefore, a Caribbean theological method that is sensitive to plurality will have two distinct moments. The **first moment** is the awareness of the (*de facto*) conversation that developed at the precise moment it became clear that the Christian tradition could no longer claim to have absolute authority in the matters of faith, piety, or religious truth. We have already discussed in earlier chapters the factors that gave rise to this development and the ways Christians have sought to respond to it. It is only when Caribbean theology takes cognisance of this new initial moment in theology, namely, the conversation between the religions that the discourse will emerge from the insular religious world in which it has been operating.

Treating conversation or dialogue as the first moment in theological discourse in a plural context neither makes null and void nor undermines the discourse already developed in each tradition. In fact, such prior developments are necessary prerequisites for participation in a public discourse. However, the positions developed within the tradition do not have the same status in a public conversation as they do within the confines of each tradition. This is because such positions are treated as particular and peculiar points of view to be rejected if they do not meet the criteria for universality. In other words, when a theological position is put forward in the public arena as part of a conversation, it loses any authoritative status it otherwise has, until public conversation can confirm its authority beyond the confines of the particular tradition from which it sprung. From the point of view of the plural context and the arena of public conversation, the already developed tradition-specific theological positions are treated as pre-conversational. Therefore, there is a

difference between theological discourse in a plural context and theological discourse within a tradition not particularly sensitive to plurality. Up to this point, Caribbean theology has confined itself to the latter, largely because it is saddled with a hermeneutical method and an understanding of Christian revelation not suited for plurality. The aim of this study has been to extricate the discourse from its narrow confinement by means of a fresh articulation of its starting point and its method, thus enabling the regional discourse to take more seriously the realities of its context.

From the point of view of the Moravian theology of pluralism, the **second moment** in the new mode of theological discourse is co-action, understood as an assertion or action in the public arena. The terminology co-action is preferred because it is consistent with the notion of conversation. The critical significance of the term, however, is that it is meant to convey the idea that the action or assertion is made with sensitivity to the conversation on which it is predicated and the plurality of perceptions in which it is set. Given the reality of difference in the public arena, co-actions are those acts or assertions made in a plural context with modesty and tentativeness, which characterize the Moravian approach. We speak of modesty because actions are undertaken on the basis of limited knowledge - "now we see through a glass dimly." (I Cor 13: 12) The reality of God, who is the object of theological discourse, remains hidden despite the three arenas of revelation, the world, the mind and the Holy Scriptures. Even though Christians affirm that God is revealed in an unsurpassable way in the incarnation, the perception of the full essence and extent of the divine life remains beyond human grasp. As Zinzendorf puts it, we have not even begun to know the Saviour, so we should not imagine that we know him

fully. Our years are a continual growth and in eternity we shall know him a whole eternity better.[37]

Theological assertions predicated on the conversation-co-action model are also described as tentative because their meanings are subjected to change, given the ever-changing conditions of a plural context. The tentativeness of actions is analogous to the manner in which findings put forward in the scientific community are treated. These positions are made on the basis of convictions arising from empirical observation. However, they are usually received with caution and suspicion, especially when they run counter to long-standing positions and practice. In fact, it might be several years before certain assertions find their way into the centre of the discipline.[38] Therefore referring to theological actions or assertions as tentative in no way suggests that they are put forward, received or rejected without careful thought.[39] On the contrary, because they belong to the self-understanding of the religious community, the onus is on the actors to justify the need to make their new claim.[40]

---

[37] Gambold, *Maxims*, 198.

[38] An example of this was the reticence in the medical community to accept the findings of Freud, which today are seen as the one of the most important developments in the area of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

[39] Scientists and theologians are often keen to show the different methods associated with their respective fields of interest. According to Frohock, the characterization of scientific inquiry may be multiple – puzzle solving, open and contentious debate, or falsification. However, the purpose of such inquiry is explanation that can be presented in transparent and replicable terms to an objective reader. In religious reasoning, however, some explanations are incomplete as a matter of necessity and must be open to external insights beyond the limits of human experience. [Fred M. Frohock, "Words and Things: Religious and Political Domains", *The Journal of Religion* 82:3 (2002): 365-392.] (See especially 387-388) However, these differences do not make null and void the position that theological assertions in a plural context need not be perceived as dogmatic positions. The debate between Roman Catholics and other Christians over the issue of transubstantiation is one in which the assertion in one community is contested in another. This is the sense in which assertions must be understood in a plural context.

[40] A good example of this is the changes in what seem at first to be a dogmatic position in relation to the Jews. From the great uprising in 63-70 A.D. the relationship between Christians and Jews

The **consequence** of regarding theological actions and assertions as modest and tentative is that they give a perspective of openness to the future. For example, where the practical mediation in the action-reflection-action model of liberation theology claims conclusiveness for theology because it starts with action and ends with action,[41] the conversation-co-action model claims inconclusiveness because its actions and assertions are not ends in themselves. They are oriented and open towards the future and always are open to critique. An action or assertion is a response made at a particular moment in time, which at a later moment may be deemed inappropriate. As instruments serving a more ultimate purpose, such actions or assertions are offered to the plural context in faith and hope, which means their quality and effectiveness can be improved as the community becomes wiser and more secure in its knowledge. In effect, theological co-actions are "serious proposals" based on convictions, which are put on the table to elicit the responses of the others in the community.

There are at least two **immediate benefits** to the new conversation-co-action approach. One is that by recognizing conversation as the first moment of theological discourse in a plural context, the approach treats other points of view with greater respect and seriousness. For example, whereas the first moment of the action-

---

increasingly became one of mutual estrangement. The Jews were considered to been formerly elected by God, a position that they relinquish by their rejection of Jesus. They were even considered to have been responsible for the death of Jesus. Nowadays the attitude to the Jews among Christians ranges from those who still regard Jews as the elected people of God who will be saved to those who see them as destined for eternal punishment in their continuing rejection of Jesus. The dogmatic assertion that they are absolutely excluded from a future with God no longer holds sway. See Gunther Gassmann, ed., *Documentary History of Faith and Order, 1963-1993* (Geneva: WCC, 1993) 312-322.

[41]Boff, "Epistemology and Method," 83. According to Boff, Liberation theology is anything but an inconclusive theology.

reflection model in its socio-analytic mediation asks, "why this oppression,"[42] the conversation-assertion model asks, who are the fellow partners in the social context and what is their perspective on the reality to which we are challenged to respond? In this way, the conversation-co-action approach not only ensures that voices often excluded, for example of women, youth, or the elderly, are heard but also that the voices of racial, ethnic and religious minorities are not excluded. The approach is more intentionally inclusive because in it each person or tradition gives their own account of reality rather than having someone else speak on their behalf.

Another benefit of the conversation-co-action model is that the community is not saddled with an ethical or moral dilemma if it happens to change its position because the possibility of change is already implicit in the idea of the modesty and tentativeness of the co-action. In response to the reality of changes in a community's doctrinal position Lindbeck proposed that doctrines be understood as being of different sorts; conditional, unconditional, accidental, conditional-temporary, conditional-permanent, unconditional-permanent, and the like.[43] The problem with Lindbeck's approach is that apart from the increasing array of descriptive phrases, it does not resolve the difficulties associated with the contradictory attitudes to doctrine even within the same religious community. In the Moravian approach, theological assertions and actions are put forward on the basis of present understanding and knowledge and it is understood that these may change in the event of new perspectives. With this approach, the tenacity with which people tend to hold to their

---

[42] Boff, "Epistemology and Method," 75. Emphasis mine.

[43] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine,* 82-83.

theological positions and ethical conduct can be surrendered without the fear of losing faith or identity, neither of which is static. Both faith and identity change and grow as people draw on new resources from their history and context.

The second challenge, then, that the Moravian approach to pluralism present to Caribbean theology relates to its theological method. The plural context requires an approach that is intentionally dialogical both in theory and in practice. The **third challenge** of the Moravian approach is that it challenges Caribbean theology to develop a new perspective on Christology.

10.7: Towards a Plural Christology: A Moravian Contribution

The early ventures in Caribbean Christology recognized the need for some framework for developing a plural Christology. The argument then was that a Caribbean Christology would have to pay regard to cultural and theological influences from Africa, Europe and Asia as well as other global factors.[44] Roger Haight has also argued for a plural Christology on the basis that a uniform mode of understanding Jesus Christ is historically impossible and at variance with the historicity of all human understanding.[45]

However, more recent Caribbean publications, reflecting the influences of liberation theology, have overlooked the issue of plurality in focussing on Christ in relation to culture and socio-economic conditions. Here Christ is seen as liberator of the poor and

[44] Payne, "What will a Caribbean Christ Look Like," 2-8.

[45] Haight, *Jesus Symbol of God,* 426-427.

to know Christ is to be committed to the salvific activity of liberation. It is affirmed that Christ is present in the situation of the poor.[46] However, the Christological assertions do not pay sufficient regard to the fact that the context of our operation is not Christendom but one of growing religious plurality. The discourse in the Caribbean has not drawn out the implications that the notion of preferential option for the poor has for people in other religious traditions. The poor of whom Caribbean and liberation theology speak are not only the Christian poor but also include the Muslim and Hindu poor. The discourse on Christology, while central to Caribbean theology, must not be articulated in a way that overlooks the christo-praxis in other religions; actions of love and justice for the poor that are consistent with the actions of Jesus. The task then is to show whether the human-centred Christology of the Moravian approach is more able to take regard of this praxis, which seems to be a demand of the plural context.

The Moravian human-centred Christology has two foci. The **first** is the modesty associated with Jesus as locus of the divine life. That modesty is with reference to the circumstances of his birth and life and the presupposition of ignorance he displayed. For Zinzendorf, who was the first proponent of this Moravian Christology, the lowliness of Jesus' human existence, his willingness to admit ignorance and his obedience to God are important ideals for which Jesus is the archetype of the human being. To use language akin to liberation theology, this Moravian Christology is authenticated by its commitment to the poor and ignorant and draws its inspiration

[46] Watty, *From Shore to Shore*, 51-61; Williams, *Caribbean Theology*, 36-39.

from those who are obedient to their God.[47] The critical assertion this study makes is that wherever these qualities are displayed, be they in Islam or Hinduism, they call to mind the life of Christ, even though the Christ-likeness of that witness may not have been intended.

The **second** focus of the human-centred Christology is the work of the man Jesus. Zinzendorf describes this work as one of kingdom building, which Jesus undertook in three phases: the first phase was the kingdom he had before the foundation of the world. The second phase, which he calls the kingdom of the cross was inaugurated at the incarnation and continued to his exaltation. The third phase started at his ascension and shall continue to all eternity. The first and third phases surpass our imaginations and are beyond any idea we could possibly frame of the best possible world. We are therefore not in a position to describe these phases excepting by uncouth expressions.[48]

Thus the only phase of which we can speak is the kingdom of the cross. Even so, God is the only one who can determine the time at which people come to this kingdom. According to Zinzendorf, this second phase of kingdom building involved the work of identification with human weakness and frailty and of reconciliation with God.[49] The context in which Jesus carried out his work was the Roman occupation of Israel. The consequence of this occupation was that it sharpened Jesus' sensibility to political issues. He was educated in republican principles and so perceived Herod as an

[47] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* III, 30; IV, 37.

[48] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* XIII, 135-137.

[49] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* V, 45-54.

intruder, even though he recognized the wisdom of giving to Caesar the things that are Caesar's.[50] Zinzendorf's point is that in his work of identification and reconciliation Jesus was not politically naïve but was sensitive to the realities of his context. Jesus' humility and identification with the poor should then not be divorced from the political realities within which it was set.

When this christological emphasis is inserted into the discourse on Caribbean theology, it makes the assertion that a human-centred Christology is a politically sensitive ethic that shows solidarity with human weakness and frailty and is dedicated to reconciliation in the human community. It asserts that the true test of Christology, then, is whether people are doing the work of Christ. Being sensitive to religious plurality, the question that a human-centred Christology puts to people of other faith is whether they are committed to reconciliation to God and to solidarity with human weakness and frailty. When through Christian witness people in other religions come to reflect on the work of Christ, they develop their own unique Christology so that we can speak of a Muslim Christology, a Hindu Christology and so on. People of other faiths will discover that commitment to reconciliation and solidarity with the poor belong to the work of Christ, which they do in fact further as they pursue those ideals. They can be committed to the reconciliation, justice to the poor, and so on, and not draw their inspiration from knowledge of Jesus. However, their commitment to these ideals is in concert with Christian witness.

---

[50] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* XX, 261-262.

A human-centred Christology does not consider it a disaster or a threat to the Christian faith that other traditions display an ethic that resembles Christian ideals. Such coincidence is derived from the fact that Christology draws upon a stock of religious material, "which are universal in their ubiquity and in their addressing of universal, systemic problems."[51] However, the material is shaped by each tradition, which underlines the force of the incarnation. As Zinzendorf argues, true religion is not knowledge of all things in their entire interconnection but the awareness of an incarnational imperative: that as Jesus is, so are we in this world.[52]

A human-centred Christology articulated in the Caribbean will not insist upon the need to understand the notion of the divinity of Christ, as in classical Christology, or of divine transcendence, as in liberation theology.[53] According to Zinzendorf, the dispute over Jesus' divinity is purely a matter of metaphysical subtlety, upon which thoughts should not venture.[54] The human-centred Christology, therefore, is not a dogma but it is a practical assertion that neither makes a claim to finality nor to absolute orthodoxy. It is a Christology in transition because it is predicated on the imperatives of modesty and dialogue and is therefore always being shaped by the realities of the context, one of which is religious plurality.

---

[51] Schreiter, *The New Catholicity,* 20.

[52] Zinzendorf, *Sixteen Discourses,* V, 54.

[53] Jon Sobrino, "Systematic Christology: Jesus Christ, the Absolute Mediator of the Reign of God," *Mysterium Liberationis,* 458; Williams, *Caribbean Theology,* 108-110.

[54] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* VII, 97; Idem, *Sixteen Discourses,* IV, 35.

The significance of this human-centred Christology is that is does not immediately connote the illegitimacy of other religious traditions. On the contrary, it recognizes the familiar practical actions of the other traditions as incarnation of the ideals of Christ. At the same time, this approach to Christology that is centred on Jesus' humanity is consistent with the Christian tradition.

10.7.1: Objections to the Plural Christology

The description of the plural Christology above must face three possible objections. First, it must respond to the objection that the idea that there can be an Islamic Christology or a Hindu Christology resembles Rahner's notion of the anonymous Christian, which amounts to a failure to understand the piety and ethical conduct of people in other religions on their own terms.[55] What the human-centred Christology emphasizes, though, is the hermeneutical standpoint from which we develop a discourse about Christ. It should not surprise us that what to us is Christian piety may also appear to the Muslim as resembling Muslim piety or to the Hindu as resembling Hindu piety. An Islamic Christology is nothing other than the discourse about Christ from the point of view of Islam. Such a Christology is one among several perceptions in a plural context. It is possible, then, that Jesus Christ can be the subject of interfaith discourse as is the notion of justice and peace. The question is whether all perceptions of Christ have an equal status, which brings us to the second objection.

[55] Rahner, "Anonymous Christians," *Theological Investigations* VI (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1969), 390-398; Idem, "Observations on the Problem of the 'Anonymous Christian'," *Theological Investigations* XIV (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1984), 281-294.

The second objection is that such an approach to Christology, like Hick's, treats the life of Christ in a relativistic manner, when Christians affirm him to be the one in whom God is revealed in a unique and unsurpassable way. In response to that objection it is noted that the qualities of the life of Christ may be visible in other religious traditions, which does not derogate from the unique way in which Christians perceive him. If people of other religions claim a different source of inspiration for an ethic that appears Christlike to us, the onus is not on them to demonstrate the authenticity of their inspiration. Rather, it is for us who see their ethic to determine whether it is contrary to the way of Christ. In other words, can people of other faiths have an unorthodox theory of Christ but display ortho-praxis? For reasons already set out above, a human-centred Christology, like Caribbean theology and liberation theology, gives priority to ortho-praxis over orthodoxy. However, the display of Christlike ethic in other religions does not mean they have an equally valid perception of Christ. What it means is that we cannot overlook the implication that that Christlike ethic may have for the salvation of people of other faiths, which is related to the third objection.

The third possible objection is that the human-centred Christology outlined above seems to suggest that people of other faiths who display what resembles a Christ-like ethic need not believe in Jesus Christ as Saviour for their eternal salvation. This would mean that salvation is by works rather than through faith in Jesus, thus making the death of Jesus null and void. The human-centred Christology affirms that in the life of Jesus Christ God was fully revealed and that faith in Jesus brings salvation. However, the human-centred Christology does not seek to adjudicate on the question of the salvation of people of other faiths. It believes that passing such judgement is at

variance with Christian modesty. Nevertheless, it does affirm that, if God wills, he is able to bring people who do not now know Jesus as the way of salvation into an eternal relationship him. The fact is that we do not know what God will do with his creatures in the future, except that we know that he will surprise us.

This idea of the future as surprise brings us to the fourth challenge that the Moravian approach puts to Caribbean theology. With this approach to pluralism, Caribbean theology is challenged to consider the future in a way that does justice to the present plural context in which we live. It seems that a plural context demands that we construe the future with a plurality of utopian vision, which can keep the hope of the Christian message in tension with the vision of the future of other religions. Therefore, revisiting the regional conception of eschatology is the **fourth challenge** that the Moravian approach to pluralism put to Caribbean theology.

10.8: Towards a New Eschatology

Given the impetuses that gave rise to Caribbean theology, the action that climaxes the action-reflection-action approach to theology is aimed at liberation, decolonization or indigenization. In addition to these tasks, Lowe-Ching adds that there is also the need to incorporate a feminist agenda, which in her view is able to promote a more integral, holistic vision.[56] Liberation theologians for their part make the Reign of God the goal of their endeavours. According to Sobrino, the Reign of God furnishes liberation theology with a totality and a particular historicization, both of which dimensions are

[56] Lowe-Ching, "Method in Caribbean Theology," 31.

critical for liberation theology to be simply theology.[57] The question, then, that faces us at this juncture is whether the conversation-co-action approach envisages a different climax from the action-reflection-action approach. In other words, what are the ultimate implications and consequences of the conversation-co-action approach?

In responding to this question, one should note first that there is a tension within the Moravian tradition when it comes to the question of the future of theological action. On one hand we have the Zinzendorfian approach, which is itself characterized by a further tension. Zinzendorf sees two kinds of approaches to theological action. In the first place he argues that our theological task should be determined by the nature of the context. He illustrates this by making reference to Jesus' anti-status-quo republicanism versus the Pauline support for the state.[58] Naturally, then, Jesus would have a different view of the outcome of his theological actions from Paul. Secondly, however, Zinzendorf argues that one should be opened to the future because one can never predict what God will do. There is a sense in which our actions may bear no relationship to what God brings about, which means we should be modest in offering our actions to God in the hope that God will use them as part of his final actions. For Zinzendorf, God's freedom and omnipotence safeguards any necessary dependence on human initiatives. This inability to predict the way things will turn means that the future is uncertain and will meet us a surprise.

---

[57] Jon Sobrino, "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology," *Mysterium Liberationis,* 356. See also in the same publication Ignacio Ellacuria, "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin America," 289-328.

[58] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-One Discourses,* Discourse XX, 261-262.

On the other hand, however, Comenius had a concrete vision of harmony as an ideal state in the human community, which was something within the competence of human beings to achieve. Comenius' confidence in the actions of human beings to accomplish a perfect state of affairs was derived from the fact that he saw the work of the human beings, who are made in God's image, as the furthering of God's work of creation. Although God can do otherwise, yet his way has been to work *via* human actions. The miracle of divine action for Comenius was how God aligned himself with human initiatives to bring about a better world, as the crowning moment of God's creative will. Therefore for Comenius, human actions could be seen as creative and redemptive, the end of which is the fullness of God's creation.

This concrete Comenian vision stands over against the uncertainty of Zinzendorf's future and seems to be a more suitable climax of the conversation-co-action approach. So where Zinzendorf is uncertain of the relationship between human actions and the climax of history, Comenius sees the climax of history and the eventual fullness of creation as the outcome of divine-human activity. However, This intra-Moravian tension makes it difficult to define a single vision of the goal of theology in the Moravian approach. An approach that draws on the intra-Moravian tension would have to extend that tension into the future, in which case the future of theological actions would have to be considered as two conceptions of utopia in tension with each other. The Comenian perception, which we will consider first, is one within the competence of human actions. The other, the Zinzendorfian is one beyond human knowledge and competence. Our next task, then, is to consider Comenius' vision of interreligious harmony as one conception of utopia. Our aim here is to set out the practical actions needed to bring about the utopian harmony that he outlines in his

Panorthosia. What Comenius demonstrates is that it is possible for the human community to exist in a utopian state of interreligious harmony consequent on actions to reform religious and political activities at the local as well as at the global level.

10.8.1 Interreligious Harmony as Utopia

In the earlier designation of utopia in liberation theology, three characteristics were emphasised.[59] In the first place utopia meant the denunciation of the existing order and the repudiation of dehumanising situations. Secondly, utopia was understood as annunciation of what is not yet but will be, the forecasting of a new society. Thirdly, utopia was considered as a rational imagination of the reality beyond the limits of the social reality that science could define. In an effort to move the conception in the direction of concrete Christian action, Ellacuría has argued that utopia, which is the climax of liberation theological action, must have certain characteristics in order for it to be Christian. He includes in the list of features prophecy of the Hebrew Scriptures, the Sermon on the Mount, the Last Supper Discourse and certain conciliar and papal documents. More importantly, he argues that Christian utopia must be concretely related to the promised Kingdom of God, for which prophetic action is necessary to ensure that utopia does not appear to be simply an abstract concept.[60]

There are, however, two ways in which the conception of utopia in Caribbean theology and liberation theology limits the extent to which it can function as a suitable

---

[59] Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation,* 233-234.

[60] Ignacio Ellacuría, "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin America," *Mysterium Liberationis,* 292. By prophecy Ellacuría means the critical contrasting of the fullness of the Kingdom of God with a definite historical situation, which makes manifest the limitations and evils of a definite historical situation. (See p. 292)

notion for a plural context. The first is that despite its emphasis on human action the conception remains theoretical and lacks concreteness in what precisely are the steps required to bring about the new order that is imagined. Secondly, by describing the new order as "Christian utopia," liberation theology excludes any role that other religions could play in bringing about the necessary changes in the human community. The implication is that utopia in the human community is a function of Christian action alone. However, since we do not know the future, the plural context challenges us to develop a notion of utopia that does not imply the non-participation or non-existence of the other religions and yet one that is not at the expense of authentic Christian self-understanding.

As a contrast to this theoretical and exclusive notion of "Christian utopia" Comenius goes into great detail in outlining a concrete "Christian approach to utopia" in a plural context, which he designated as harmony in the human community. He does not refer to the state of harmony as "Christian harmony" because he envisaged that all nations of the world would be able to participate in it. It is for this reason the approach is termed a "Christian approach to utopia." The harmony would result from concrete actions to reform the education system, the Church, state politics and global relationships, which means the utopian vision is consistent with the human-centred Christology.[61] The scope of this study does not allow us to consider in full the whole

---

[61] Dereck Simon reads Schillebeeckx as opting for an understanding of liberation that originates from Christian sources but which have been thoroughly secularised within a culture and can socialize personal and collective initiatives without reflecting any association to explicit forms of Christian witness. [Simon, "Salvation and Liberation in the Practical-Critical Soteriology of Schillebeeckx", *Theological Studies,* Vol. 63, No. 3 (2002): 509.] If this is a correct reading, there are two areas of difference between Schillebeeckx and Comenius. The first is that Comenius sees the state of affairs that emerge from reform not as secular but as constituting the will of God in the world. Secondly, whereas Comenius intentionally allows for the role of other religions in the creation of harmony,

range of reform that Comenius believed would lead to harmony. In order to illustrate its concreteness we will therefore look briefly at an area touching most closely on religious reform.[62]

Schillebeeckx seems to see Christian witness as the originating source, even though the final form of liberation is not identified with any specific form of Christian witness.

[62] For an outline of the significance of his educational philosophy see Spinka, *John Amos Comenius That Incomparable Moravian*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 163 and chapters VI & VII. Apart from the religious and the global, reform was also anticipated in political and economic life. In terms of the political the vision Comenius had was for that area of human activity to be reformed in four main areas: peace and security, the judiciary, economics and political representation. [*Panorthosia,* XXIV] While some of the political solutions he espouses are dated, the concerns and the questions he raises are still relevant to political life today. The area of peace and security presented itself as a necessary area of reform because for Comenius peace and security are the aims of human society. It was therefore critical that all efforts were to be made to put an end to those things that caused disruption, distress and insecurity. He was particularly concerned about threat to peace in two main areas. First was the propensity for war, which led to bloodshed and the overthrow of states. According to Comenius, "there was no safety in war, and therefore disarmament is necessary to prevent the outbreak of further hostilities." [*Panorthosia,* XXIV, 1] Laws and not weapons of wars (whether steel or emotional weapons) should be used to administer truth and justice. Drawing on the prophetic action proposed in Isaiah 2:4, Comenius proposed that the guns could be melted-down to make church-bells or musical instruments. The second area in which there was a great threat to threatened peace and security was religious quarrels, which in his view was caused primarily by false accusations. A courageous action was needed to exorcise and cast out the demon of the art of false accusation, which is a trouble to the world. In other words, our religious rhetoric and theological discourse should be directed at engendering peace not exacerbating conflict. In this regard the Christian community had a leading responsibility in the world. The second area of political action as an instrument of harmony was for reform in the area of the judiciary. (He refers to a 1579 publication by Nicolaus Vigelius designed for judges, which detailed the extent to which jurisprudence as practiced in Germany at the time was undermining the glory of God and the well-being of the people.) The judiciary should be directed towards protecting the rights of each person in the state and must be predicated on the divine law of loving one's neighbour as oneself and on natural equity. By their public nature, the frequency of their meeting, the speed at which cases are resolved and the manner in which they were conducted, courts should be accessible to the poor, the afflicted and the oppressed. Comenius was not arguing in the sense of preferential option for the poor but on the basis of equality of all persons. Laws to avoid starvation and shortage must protect the distribution of the goods of the state, which brings us to the reform of economic life, the third area of reform. In illustrating the need for economic reform Comenius was sharply critical of the publication industry, the music industry, small business, the banking industry and other means of profit in the state. [*Panorthosia*, XXIV, 7] His sharpest criticism, however, was for businesses that operate monopolies and oligopolies, which undermined the principle of natural equity and equal access to the common good. According to Comenius, "just as we must not tolerate the confusing system under which a number of people force their way into everything by an order which determines who should undertake each enterprise, so it is equally intolerable that any work which more people could do better through the interplay of honest effort and mutual competition should fall into the clutches of a single individual." [*Panorthosia*, XXIV, 7] Action was needed to remove the threat that these anomalies pose to the economy. In addition, action was also needed to ensure that unemployment and idleness did not become a threat to the well-being of the state. In his view, laws should be enacted that required the rich to devote time to serving the public interest and to ensure that the poor had the competence of a trade and the opportunity to practice it. The cure of idleness and unemployment, he believed, would destroy the core of the abominable disorders of the world. "We must see that everyone has an honest occupation to profit him in body and soul as well as in material goods." [*Panorthosi*a, XXIV, 6] In addressing himself to the issue of political representation Comenius argued that procedures should be put in place for representatives to be

The area was that of **church reform, by** which Comenius meant furthering the initiatives of people like John Wyclif, Jan Hus, Martin Luther, Ulrich Zwingli, John Calvin and Menno Simmons, all of which were limited in their scope. What Comenius envisaged was religious reform involving three levels of action: one theological, one ethical and the other symbolic. Reformation at the theological level was designed to strengthen the human community through faith, hope and love, which were for him the essentials in theology. In order for this to come about, the action needed was the discernment and acceptance of the revelations of God in three arenas, the world, the mind and Holy Writ. The discernment would involve the critical reading of the scriptures of all the religions to determine their divine nature and dialogue with people of other faiths who also claim to know God's will.

The second level of action needed in the church was ethical and would involve ecclesiastical practices, which Comenius called the ministerials. The reform would be aimed at overcoming the itch of disputation, ending violence against conscience and ending inquisitions. Comenius believed that this action should precede any change in theological positions. As Comenius put it, "life should be reformed before doctrine ... [because] Christ inquires not so much into our doctrine as into our deeds."[63] This pre-

---

assessed as part of their accountability. He believed the community should not only have the right to point out errors and oversight but also to have leaders who were faulted in their conduct to be removed from office. He urged that public officials be not exempt from the law, but should be rewarded or punished in relation to their conduct. This fair distribution of rewards and penalties was necessary to provide constant incentives to virtue in the world around us. Comenius' view was that unless the state apparatus functioned justly and efficiently it would serve as a stumbling-block to harmony.

[63] *Panorthosia,* XXIII.

empts the notion of ortho-praxis before orthodoxy that we find in liberation theology. Naturally, the practical steps to bring about the moratorium in disputations, violence and inquisitions would have implications for people of other faiths. When applied to the plural context it means building relationships with people of other faiths ought to take precedence over finding doctrinal correctness.

The third level of action needed in church reform was the symbolic, which involved ceremonies and rituals, or what Comenius called the accessories. Rituals and ceremonies should not be allowed to spoil the beauty of the church or to detract from its main purpose, which is to see to it that the will of God is done on earth as it is in heaven. He therefore argued in favour of the use of more inclusive symbols like, the body, the home, the city, the kingdom or the school to represent the church and to reinforce its instrumental function in the society.[64] Comenius drew inspiration from the symbolic actions taken during the reforms of Hezekiah (2 Chronicles 29:3ff) and from the early Church (Acts 2: 44ff), where the emphasis was on building up the community rather than the individual. This approach to the church does not mean that the Christian community would then eclipse the other traditions but that priority would be given to living in harmony with them.[65]

---

[64] See Section on "An Eschatology of Surprise: The Fourth Imperative" in previous chapter of this study.

[65] This vision of the Church as a community living in harmony with other communities is central to the guidelines that the World Council of Churches has given for the way Christians should see themselves in relation to people of other faiths. According to the *Guidelines on Dialogue*, "more urgently today than ever in the past, the traditions of our individual communities are being drawn towards one another, sometimes into a new harmony ... The inter-relatedness of human communities brings with it many new challenges to mutual concern and pastoral care, the response to which, both individually and collectively as communities, will determine the character of the reality of 'the community of humankind'." [*Guidelines on Dialogue,* 5.]

What Comenius envisaged, therefore, was a shift in the ecclesial thought, attitude and practices, in a way that would indicate that the issue of harmony was being engraved in the self-understanding of the church. The harmony so created was not to be considered irreversible but would require rigorous attention and strict supervision so that it does not lose its utopian character.

In summary, the Comenian way to the harmony, or the utopian dream was through human actions for reform of religion and politics at the local level. For Comenius, harmony would be the will of God being done on earth as it in heaven.[66] Therefore, the one stage of utopia that arises from the conversation-co-action is a human creation. The second stage of the utopian dream is something in tension with Comenius and is perceived as being beyond human competence. Recognizing the limitation of human actions, the conversation-assertion approach also draws on the Zinzendorfian tradition to extend and make a more comprehensive utopian vision.[67] This means that the Comenian perception of the future must be held in tension with the Zinzendorfian. A plurality of perception of utopia is consistent with the plurality in which we live and corresponds to the tension between the two Moravian sub-traditions.

---

[66] In this sense Comenius' understanding of utopia is similar to the way it is articulated in liberation theology. According to Libânio, "utopias are human creations, that spring from human longing for a better life in the face of the hard sufferings of the present." ("Hope, Utopia, Resurrection", *Mysterium Liberationis,* 726.)

[67] According to Simon, Schillebeeckx proposes an eschatological restraint on human actions for liberation because of the recognition that irrespective of how comprehensive those actions are, liberation will always be partial and limited. He calls this an "eschatological provisio", which "entails that there can never be any claim that sacralizes, by identifying it as commensurate with God's definitive eschatological initiative, any single or sum total of emancipative liberations in history." "Salvation and Liberation", p. 515. Where as Zinzendorf would share this view, Comenius was of the view that human actions were also evidence of God's action and therefore could achieve God's perfect will. This difference in the trust in human actions maintains a tension in the Moravian conception of the future.

10.8.2 Beyond Interreligious Harmony – Surprise

The second stage of the utopian vision of the conversation-co-action approach is derived from the Zinzendorfian side of the tension in the Moravian tradition, which has a different configuration from the interreligious harmony of which Comenius speaks and is itself characterized by internal tensions. A bias towards the Zinzendorfian tradition means that one must treat the climax of history as an uncertain reality beyond description and human competence. We must regard this future as a surprise, **first** because there may be no direct relationship between human initiatives and the climax of history. God does not need to depend on human action for his purposes. Even if there were a direct link, we cannot occupy a position at the end of history and say what that end will be. In other words, human initiatives in history are actions in faith and hope and are not predicated on absolute certainty about their outcome. It was in an effort to sever any possible link between human actions and God's gracious actions that salvation for Zinzendorf was unrelated to human efforts. He insisted that salvation is through the merits of the wounds of Jesus alone. If one is conceited to imagine that human initiatives, however noble, will somehow earn even a little "lily in paradise", that person is not only a heterodox but also a fool. In the thinking of Zinzendorf, it was not even accurate to believe that our faithfulness to God is what ensures our salvation because without being eternally saved we cannot be faithful. At the end of the day the Saviour and Judge of all the earth is "obliged even still to say, this is a man, a wretched creature, which is not meet or worthy to enter into the Kingdom of God."[68] However, since there is no reliance on our actions, the outcome of all things depends on our Saviour alone.

---

[68] Zinzendorf, *Twenty-Ones Discourses,* XI, 158-160.

The **second** reason for treating the climax of history as a surprise, from a Zinzendorfian perspective, is that one neither knows nor can predict what will become of the religions. In a sense this runs contrary to the traditional Christian attitude, which supposes, like Comenius, that ultimately only one religion (the Christian faith) will be left intact at the climax of history. However, from the point of view of Zinzendorf, the Christian cannot be so positive about the fate of the other religions because that is at variance with Christian modesty. For Zinzendorf, in differences of opinion over religious matters the Christian should remove himself from vainglory and from insisting on being right.[69] Unlike Comenius, Zinzendorf did not believe that persuasion could lead a person to faith in Jesus. For him it was the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to bring a person to faith but one could not predict when that would come to pass. He would therefore be less confident than Comenius would be about everyone eventually coming to accept the Christian faith. One cannot be certain about what the Holy Spirit would do since God was gracious and powerful enough to lead whoever he wills to salvation. This uncertainty about what the Holy Spirit would do is part of the reason for the inner tension in Zinzendorf between an objective and a subjective view of redemption.

The effect of these Zinzendorfian uncertainties on Caribbean theology is to suggest that one must also see the future as uncertain. He was critical of those who believed that they could put the manner of Jesus' coming into some predictable system. The only thing that Zinzendorf was prepared to affirm was that the coming of the Lord

---

[69] Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures,* II, 21.

would involve Jesus becoming important to people.[70] This perception of the end of history as uncertain is in tension with the Comenian, which treats the end of history as a human creation that we are obliged to undertake. This intra-Moravian tension belongs to the logic of the plural context, in which different notions of utopia are needed to balance each other.

For Caribbean theology, this conflicting perception of utopia in the Moravian approach to pluralism shows that the discourse need not assume that it must operate with a single conception of the utopia towards which our theological actions are directed. The weakness of the concept of utopia that is linked to the action-reflection-action approach to theology is its insistence that a single notion called Christian utopia is the end of history. By showing preference for the notion "Christian approach to utopia" instead of "Christian utopia", the Moravian approach shows that having mixture of perceptions of utopia is both possible and plausible, without compromising Christian convictions.[71] Caribbean theology, therefore, does not have to fear differences between or within the religions, nor is it saddled with the burden of

---

[70] Ibid., VI, 65-66.

[71] Drawing on support from Gavin D'Costa, Raimundo Panikkar, and George Bosworth Burch, Mark Heim has also argued for a plurality of religious ends on the basis of the differences between and within the religions. According to Heim, the internal divergences are distinctly meaningful ones, differences that in their farthest reach connect with the wider pluralism. (*Salvations,* 174.) The central claim that Heim makes is that "our religious choices and formation do differentially determine our religious fulfilments in this life and, if there are such, in the next." (p. 177.) However, if we allow for the differences between Heim's conception of religious ends, meaning ultimate salvation, and our conception of utopia, meaning an ideal state of affairs [João Batista Libânio, "Hope Utopia Resurrection," *Mysterium Liberationis,* 716-727], there is a fundamental way in which our conclusion here is different from Heim's. It does not assume, as does Heim, that the utopian perspective is a derivative of one's religious preference. Rather, it suggests that one's religious practice is determined by one's utopian perspective. In other words, the Moravian approach does not question whether there is a utopia but presses forward towards the perceived utopia. Hence, in view of the utopia of interreligious harmony, Comenius argues for a dialogical approach in dealing with people of other faiths. Also, in view of the hiddenness of the omnipotent and gracious God who surprises, Zinzendorf gave priority to modesty.

having to press all religious perception of the future into one grand narrative. Taking the plural context seriously, and having regard to the Moravian approach to pluralism, means that the regional discourse is liberated from the tyranny of a single utopian vision.

Conclusion

Caribbean theologians have recognized that the region's theological discourse must come to terms with the demands of the plural context if it is to remain relevant. However, no suitable framework has been offered to indicate the way that the issue of plurality can enter into the discourse and the consequences for theology when those issues are taken seriously. It is in this respect, then, that the Moravian approach to pluralism is relevant to Caribbean theology.

The Moravian theology of pluralism has its starting point in the Moravian tradition and through a hermeneutic of retrieval it brings forward those resources from the Comenian and Zinzendorfian sub-traditions, which are relevant to the plural context. These sub-traditions give the Moravian approach a character that is propelled by four imperatives: the imperative of dialogue, the imperative of modesty, a human-centred Christology and a surprise eschatology. When Caribbean theology is read from the point of view of the Moravian approach, there are four challenges that ensue. The **first** is the challenge to re-visit the starting point of the discourse. By lifting up the significance of one's own tradition as a starting point for pluralism, the Moravian approach challenges the churches in the region to excavate their own traditions for relevant theological resources for the region's current theological task. The dialogue

with one's own tradition will not only further Caribbean theology's classical task of indigenization, de-colonization and liberation but will also provide the basis for responding to the questions that the other religions in the context raise. The **second** challenge is to re-think the hermeneutical method. The loss of Christian superiority means that a conversation between Christianity and the other religions has been initiated, which has become the first moment of theological discourse in a plural context. Consequently, the action-reflection-action method has to yield ground to an approach that is more sensitive to dialogue. The new method in the Moravian approach is described as conversation-co-action because it recognizes that doing theology in a plural context is neither individualistic nor dogmatic but must be in dialogue with other contextual partners. The **third** challenge that the Moravian approach puts to Caribbean theology is to re-formulate its christological emphasis. The Moravian Christology centres its emphasis on the humanity of Jesus because it does not believe that the divine life can be captured in the uncouth formulation we are inclined to develop through over inquisitive speculations. As human-centred, this Christology is plural in its scope because it draws on theological material to which the other religions also have access. The evidence of an ethic in other religions that is familiar to Christians gives credence to the incarnation, even though other religions may not draw their inspiration from Christ. When formulated in these terms, the Moravian human-centred Christology does not immediately connote the illegitimacy of the other religious traditions. The **fourth** challenge is with respect to the future. The notion of Christian utopia as the goal of the action-reflection-action method must give way to a conception of the future that can accommodate a mixture of utopian vision. The tension between the Comenian conception of the future as a human creation and the Zinzendorfian conception of the future as something beyond human

competence allows the Moravian approach to operate with a necessary tension. The Moravian approach illustrates that Caribbean theology does not have to labour under the burden of single conception of utopia that excludes reference to the other religions. The Moravian approach shows how the other religions can be included in a concept of utopia without compromising the conviction concerning the ultimate salvific quality of the Christian faith. This approach to pluralism can therefore be seen as one that is centred on harmony, modesty and dialogue.

CHAPTER 11

CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Hermeneutical Position

This writer takes the view that engaging religious pluralism is an unavoidable theological task today. However, as we undertake this task, it seems hermeneutically inappropriate to argue from a position above or beyond a particular tradition. The illusion of appearing to adopt a neutral posture and of being able to write a meta-theological narrative from that position of neutrality are recognized weaknesses of some of the current approaches to pluralism. Consequently, this study was undertaken from the specific hermeneutical position of commitment to the Moravian tradition, which is the perspective from which religious pluralism and Caribbean theology are read.

Aims of the Study

The study aimed to accomplish three distinct tasks. The first was to locate the point of emergence of religious pluralism as a theological problem and to assess the approaches that have been designed in response to it. The second task was to determine whether the Moravian tradition has credible resources that maybe employed in the construction of a theology of religious pluralism. The critical nature of this second task became clearer as the approaches assessed in the first task proved to be unsuitable for the Moravian Church. Beyond that, however, clarifying what resources there are within the Moravian Church was necessary because such a task has not yet been undertaken in this tradition. If the Moravian Church hopes to maintain a relevant witness, in a context that is irretrievably plural, then it must

develop a theology of pluralism. The third task was to draw out the main features of a Moravian theology of pluralism that could be distilled from the available resources, and to see what contribution this approach could make to the discourse on Caribbean theology. This last task was important to show that the Moravian approach could live up to its claim to be contextually relevant.

The Emergence of Pluralism as a Theological Problem

With respect to the first task, we saw that religious pluralism emerged as a theological problem at the precise moment that the hitherto unchallenged claims to the superiority of the Christian faith and of the unsurpassability of Christian revelation became untenable. Although the seeds for this development were sown in the separation between faith and history in late scholasticism, the full challenge to Christian authority came during the period of the Enlightenment. The rise of rationalism in Cartesian philosophy meant the burden of determining truth was placed on the operation of the intellect and reason became the sole arbiter. Christian authority, which was based on revealed truth, was unprepared for this development. It became the task of those who made the claim to revealed knowledge to prove its veracity. The immediate consequence of this for theology was that several important biblical affirmations came into doubt. In response, the deists tried to show that there were aspects of the Christian faith that were amenable to reason but that on the basis of this acid test there were several traditional beliefs that had to be expunged. Efforts to demonstrate that the core message of Christianity was amenable to reason gave rise to the historical critical method of biblical interpretation and the search for the historical Jesus. More importantly, it gave rise to historical relativism, which became a central issue in later attempts to come to terms with religious pluralism.

A major development in Enlightenment thinking came in Immanuel Kant, who directed his critique at the dogmatists and the empiricists. His *Critique of Pure Reason* was an attempt to construct a new basis for metaphysics. His transcendental philosophy showed that synthetic *a priori* judgements were possible and that both science and morality were in fact predicated on such judgements. His insistence that the noumenal world of ultimate reality is beyond the competence of reason to assess proved helpful for the emerging liberal theologians, who were keen to argue that God as ultimate reality was beyond empirical investigation. In his keenness to employ the rationalistic method, though not the rationalistic suspicion of what could not be verified empirically, Schleiermacher argued that theology was a positive science that had as its point of departure the notion of absolute dependence on God, which showed his indebtedness to his pietistic heritage. This scientific approach to doctrine, however, was at variance with the preference in pietism to exclude reason from matters of faith. Several of the current approaches to pluralism must be situated in this liberal theological tradition.

Approaches to Pluralism

The tension over faith and history and the dispute about the role of reason in theology, which emerged in the Enlightenment, issued forth into two kinds of approaches to dealing with the issue of pluralism today. On one hand, there are those approaches that emerge from the trajectory of historical relativism, which runs from Ernst Troeltsch though David Friedrich Strauss back to Reimarus. These approaches treat religions in a phenomenological way and therefore see the claims of Christianity as virtually on par with the other world religions. The term pluralist best describes these

approaches, which have John Hick as their most able representative. On the other hand, there are the approaches that stress the peculiarity or the uniqueness of the Christian faith. These approaches vary from Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach, which sees religious doctrines in a regulative sense, to D'Costa's trinitarian approach that treats doctrines in a propositional sense.

The Weaknesses in Current Approaches

These approaches to pluralism have proven unsuitable in at least two ways. The first is that they undermine the imperative of dialogue, which the Moravian Church regards as a prerequisite for living in a plural context, either by concealing the real differences between the religions (Hick), or by denying the real discourse already taking place between them (Lindbeck). In the case of Hick, his approach is one that attempts to occupy a high ground beyond all the traditions and claims that the religions will in the end collapse into one because they are simply different lenses through which the divine is perceived. In that case, dialogue is really academic because truth is not in question. In Lindbeck's approach, real dialogue is impossible because the religions are like different languages or cultural systems, which have no common vocabulary for conversation between them. The differences of doctrine are analogous to rules of grammar and must therefore be seen in a regulative sense. One can only appreciate these rules of discourse in the religions from the inside, which means it is not credible to assess them on any criteria external to the religion.

The second way in which these approaches prove to be unsuitable is that they (for example D'Costa's) fail to respond categorically to the question whether the other religions can be the locus of divine revelation. In their view, the affirmation that God

has revealed himself in Jesus in an unsurpassable way does not allow for comparable divine revelation in other religions. The fact that other religions that display an ethic that resembles the Christian ethic in no way dislodges those religions from their position beyond divine revelation. The inadequate treatment of Christology and revelation in the current approaches means a Moravian theology of pluralism must be able to surmount those weaknesses.

The Moravian Tradition as a Resource for a Theology of Pluralism

The **second task** of the research was to determine the kind of resources the Moravian tradition has for developing a theology of pluralism. With respect to this task, it is important to note that the Moravian tradition is characterized by a tension between Comenius and Zinzendorf, the two most important Moravian theologians of the last four hundred years. Comenius based his approach to theology on the unity that he believed existed in creation and revelation and on the eschatological imperative for unity that derives from the God-implanted desire for harmony that there is in the human being. In his view, the unity in creation is supremely expressed in the structure of the human mind, which has common norms in the intellect, common instincts in the will and common capacities for action. Since Comenius saw the human being as a microcosm of the world, he believed that efforts to overcome dissensions were to be treated as ongoing acts of creation. This drive to achieve harmony, coupled with the God-given freedom of the individual and the natural hunger for truth, goodness and power,[1] meant that the most fruitful way to resolve differences was through dialogue. Dialogue as an imperative in the Moravian

[1] For Comenius this meant the capacity to manage one's own affairs

theology of pluralism is therefore not simply a practical necessity but a fundamental consequence of Comenian anthropology.

The understanding of revelation with which Comenius operated therefore demanded a dialogical approach. In his view, God's revelation was given in the external world of nature, the internal world of the mind and in the scriptures of the religious traditions. With this approach he assumes that each religion is the locus of divine revelation even though dialogue had to ratify the claim that one is in possession of divine revelation. He does not hesitate to state his preparedness to give all who claim to receive divine revelation the benefit of the doubt. With this approach, then, Comenius takes the discussion on revelation to another plane. He is not asking whether others are the recipients of divine revelation, as we find in the current approaches. Instead, he proposes three criteria to test the veracity of what is claimed to be a divinely inspired word. Only by means of agreed criteria for recognizing divine revelation and an agreed method of reading divinely inspired books will we be able to show that God's revelation is neither contradictory nor at variance with reason. For Comenius, the problem relating to revelation is that of finding a way to draw out the harmony that must be present in God's activity.

On the other side of the intra-Moravian tension is Zinzendorf who emphasizes modesty in all things. Unlike Comenius, he is less sanguine about reason and about the possibility of discovering truth beyond what is supremely given in the incarnation of Jesus. In fact, as far as he was concerned, the only thing we really needed to know was that our Creator is our Saviour. For this reason, all doctrinal issues are secondary

to the axial affirmation that the lowly birth and circumstances of Jesus' life and death gave witness to the love of God, who in modesty habituated himself to human life.

Zinzendorf's theological modesty constrains him to centre his attention on Jesus' humanity, which is the only instantiation of a bridge between humanity and God. Nevertheless, he maintained that we couldn't hope to know Jesus fully, since even after a thousand aeons in eternity we will still be seeking to know him. So while the incarnation reveals God, it is at the same time an act of divine concealment. His awareness of the otherness of God alerted him to the provisional nature of the terms that we use to describe God. The tension between Zinzendorf's theological affirmations and negations give an apophatic character to his theology.

In addition to his sensitivity to the provisional nature of theological discourse, Zinzendorf offers two critical emphases towards the development of a Moravian theology of pluralism: a human-centred Christology and an eschatology of surprise. These emphases in his theology allow us to read the christocentrism for which he is known in a different way. His human-centred Christology removes the need to speculate on Jesus' divinity, which means people of other faiths are drawn into a conversation about Jesus as human-like-us. His emphasis on God's omnipotence and love allowed him to keep the issue of redemption as an open question. This derives first from the assertion that the death of Jesus has atoned for the world, thus precluding any condemnation on account of original sin. Secondly, the possibility of the salvation of people of other faiths is derived from God's ability to do as he pleases with his creatures. We simply do not know what God will do in the future, except that we know he will surprise us.

This tension between Comenius and Zinzendorf also relates to the role of reason in theology and therefore has two implications for the Moravian approach to pluralism. On one hand, this approach cannot situate itself outside of the Enlightenment, as D'Costa seeks to do in his trinitarian approach, but must without apology own the Enlightenment as an authentic aspect of its theological heritage. On the other hand, the Moravian approach cannot adopt a relativistic posture, as we find in Hick's approach, because that would be contrary to the spirit of the Moravian tradition. An approach arising out of the resources of the Moravian tradition must pay regard to the hermeneutic of harmony and the presumption of dialogue in the Comenian sub-tradition, as well as the theological modesty that we find in Zinzendorf. A dialogue between these two sub-traditions must also characterize this approach as the wider Moravian tradition engages the plural context.

In retrieving these Moravian resources, though, no attempt was made to resolve this tension. This does not mean that a Hick-like relativism is the outcome this approach. The difference of the Moravian approach from Hick's is that it sees the need for internal dialogue as a prerequisite for participating in the dialogue with other traditions that is demanded by pluralism. By allowing the different positions to engage each other, the extremes of one approach are corrected by the extremes of the other. The approach that emerges is more sensitive to the plural context because it does not try to domesticate the real differences in outlook. A Moravian theology of pluralism that draws on the Comenian and Zinzendorfian resources is therefore responsive to the dialogical demand of the plural context.

Features of the Moravian Theology of Pluralism

Our **third task** consisted of two aspects: determining the features of the Moravian theology of pluralism and applying it to the regional discourse on Caribbean theology. With respect to this task, it became evident that the emerging Moravian theology of pluralism, which draws upon the Comenian and Zinzendorfian sub-traditions, must operate with four clear imperatives or features. The first is an imperative of dialogue, which is demanded at three levels. At one level there is an imperative imposed by the structure and operation of the human mind, which hungers for truth and goodness and has a relentless drive for tranquillity. This mental operation leads to a tension in the human community, the fruits of which had to be harvested through dialogue. At another level, dialogue is called for by the intra-Moravian tension, which has implications for anthropology and eschatology. The Moravian Church today lives in the tension between Comenius and Zinzendorf. This tension expresses itself in "the continual search for sound doctrine,"[2] on one hand, and the awareness that the mystery of Jesus Christ "cannot be comprehended completely by any human mind,"[3] on the other. At the third level dialogue is demanded by the incarnation, in which God invites us to participate in a divine conversation. The Moravian approach, therefore, sees dialogue as an anthropological, an ecclesiological and a theological necessity. The dialogical imperative is not simply a reaction to the plurality of religious claims nor a political motivation to find agreement. It is the fleshing out of a self-understanding that meets the demand of the context.

---

[2] *Church Order*, I,4.

[3] Ibid

The second feature of the Moravian approach is an imperative of modesty, which is based on two principles. The first is the principle of revelation, in which it is affirmed that God laid aside his immensity to make himself known in human life. This mystery is the most fundamental principle of Christian theology and is the basis for Christian ethics.[4] The second basis is the principle of difference that there is between human and divine beings. There remains a gulf between humanity and God, who is concealed amidst his incarnation. Drawing upon apophatic categories Zinzendorf asserts that what we do not know about God and the divine life makes what we know and what we say about God provisional and contingent. On the basis of this ignorance, Christian theological discourse is challenged to be modest; that is it must maintain flexibility in its formulations and show openness with respect to other religious traditions. This modesty is evidence of the awareness of the omnipotence and freedom of God, who does not have to conform to our expectations. God's power to restore devils if he chooses alerts us to the wisdom of keeping an open attitude towards the salvation of those who do not now believe in Jesus. This openness to others who may not know or believe in Jesus has implications for Christology, which is the third feature of the Moravian approach.

The third imperative of the Moravian theology of pluralism is a Christology that centres attention on the work of Jesus as an ordinary human being. This seeming one-sided christological focus derives from the Zinzendorfian view that it is inappropriate to speculate about the nature of the divine life, of which we have no knowledge except to the extent that it is made known to us in human form. A human-centred Christology removes the problem of the divinity of Christ from interfaith conversation

by centring attention on Jesus' work of reconciliation, kingdom building and identification with the poor and ignorant. It reflects a praxis that gives hermeneutical priority to the poor and ignorant, in whose life the incarnation is best reflected. People of other faiths who show equal commitment to the poor and ignorant, according to this approach, are in fact furthering the witness of Jesus. This does not mean, however, that they knowingly draw inspiration from his life nor put their hope in him. Through Christian witness, however, people of other faiths can learn that the ideals of reconciliation, commitment to the poor and obedience to God to which they are given, are also Jesus' ideals. In this way they can love him without knowing him, which Zinzendorf calls the *fiducia implicata.* It refers to the faith that God works in the heart in the middle of our stillness and ignorance; where and God we have to do with each other alone; where nothing comes between God and us; no human being, no book, no knowledge, no learning, not even the most necessary truths. The Moravian approach to pluralism cannot bring closure to the question of the salvation of people of other faiths because the future remains unknown, which brings us to the fourth imperative.

The fourth feature of the Moravian approach is an eschatology of surprise, which derives its force from the conflict between the two sub-traditions that are at the centre of this study. On one hand, Comenius emphasizes that God is at work in us in the search for harmony. We should therefore see the future as a utopian dream that is constructed on the foundation of human initiatives. On the other hand, Zinzendorf emphasizes that the future is unknown and may bear little resemblance to human efforts. This conflicting perception imposes a sense of uncertainty about the exact

---

[4] Ibid.

nature of the future but also allows the Moravian approach to operate with plurality of perceptions, which is consistent with the plural context. Here again, the Moravian approach does not adopt a plurality of eschatological visions out of political necessity. The plurality of perceptions is the outworking of tension in its own history. It is this coincidence between the demands of the plural context and the Moravian self-understanding that gives relevance to the Moravian approach.

Implications of the Moravian Approach to Pluralism for Caribbean Theology

The discourse on Caribbean theology, which developed at the point of intersection between the Black Power Movement, the struggles for political independence and liberation theology, finds itself today in a crisis of relevance. This crisis is in part related to the absence of a developed theological framework for relating to other religions. By drawing on the methodology of the Latin American theological project, Caribbean theology has imported into its discourse the lack of sensitivity to pluralism that is evident in liberation theology. When the Moravian theology of pluralism is allowed to engage Caribbean theology, there are four specific challenges that it presents to the regional discourse.

The first challenge is for Caribbean theology to review its starting point. By using such heuristic notions as history, sociology and cultural experiences as starting points, the early ventures of the regional discourse smoothed the edges of the differences between the religions and facilitated a concealment of useful resources that were deeply embedded in the different Christian traditions. The Moravian approach is situated within a specific Christian tradition and engages the reality of religious pluralism using its own theological resources. It seems that the intra-tradition

dialogue that is initiated with the search for appropriate resources is a prerequisite for participating in a broader discourse involving other religions. The Moravian approach challenges other Christian churches in the region to re-visit and excavate their own history for relevant resources. When those resources are retrieved and re-articulated in light of the plural Caribbean context, then and only then is the discourse on Caribbean theology ready to respond appropriately to religious pluralism.

The second challenge of the Moravian approach is to re-visit the action-reflection-action methodology, which has so far been unable to accommodate the reality of the interfaith context. This approach is predicated on the notion of a unilateral reflection among Christians and does not pay regard to the fact that the plural context is one in which reflection on the issue of justice for the poor is also taking place among people of other faiths. In place of this anti-pluralism methodology, the Moravian approach proposes a method that moves through two moments. In its first moment, this approach takes account of the public conversation that was inaugurated between the religions at the precise moment that there was the loss of pre-eminent Christian authority. At that point, Christians began to listen more carefully to what others were saying. From that point onwards, Christian theology was not simply making claims but also responded to the claims of others that had implications for the Christian faith. Theological discourse as a public enterprise needs to pay attention to the views of others. That conversation must now be seen as the principal moment of theological discourse. The second moment, which we describe as co-action, is the set of modest and tentative actions and assertions that are made with an awareness of the interfaith nature of the public arena. Comenius' attitude to others who made assertions about God's word was that they should be given the benefit that what they claim is indeed

the word of God. However, these assertions should be tested by agreed criteria, so that we do not give ascent to something that is spurious. Zinzendorf's attitude to others in a discussion on religious matters is to suppose them to be right. The modest and tentative character of the Moravian approach stands over against the positivism of the dogmatic posture. The modest approach is one that anticipates the reaction of others to ratify its universal validity and also one that is flexible. This idea of a position in transition is consistent with the approach to Christology, which is the area of the third challenge.

The third way in which the Moravian approach challenges Caribbean theology is to re-visit its approach to Christology. Caribbean Christology like liberation Christology has emphasised the incarnation as the most valid focus for the task of liberating the poor. However, the action-reflection approach failed to take cognizance of two critical issues related to pluralism. First, there was no significant attempt to develop a christological position that took seriously the religiously plural nature of the commitment to justice for the poor. Secondly, it failed to take into account the fact that some christological attitudes have conferred a sense of illegitimacy on other religions. By aiming to build on earlier recognition of the need to develop a plural Christology, the Moravian approach developed here is concerned with articulating a christological position that is amenable to a religiously plural context. This approach is categorical in asserting that, though people of other religions may not affirm Jesus as divine, it does not mean that their Christology is illegitimate or invalid. The test of a valid Christology is not orthodox dogma because our formulations about the divine are always provisional and changing. Rather the test is the praxis based on the life of Jesus of Nazareth, which is more accessible to us. People of other faiths can

participate in the work to which Christ was committed without knowingly drawing inspiration from Jesus. A plural Christology is one that recognizes that participation in the work of Christ contributes to the building of Christ's kingdom. The Moravian human-centred Christology overcomes the speculative debate over Jesus' divinity by relegating that discussion to a secondary position. On the basis of the Moravian approach one can take the position that it is not necessary for salvation that we understand either the Trinity or the divinity of Jesus. The one thing necessary is commitment to the work of Jesus.

Finally, the fourth challenge that the Moravian approach brings to Caribbean theology is in the area of eschatology. The traditional Christian attitude is to imagine that only the Christian faith has a future in God. By naming this future Christian utopia, which is understood in both Caribbean theology and liberation theology as the kingdom of God, the regional discourse is saddled with the task of accounting for the future of the aspirations of the other religions. The Moravian approach sees the need for an eschatology that is consistent with current plurality, in which the narration of Christian hope does not amount to the "anti-hope" of the other religions. In a plural context, Christian theology seems to be faced with two eschatological choices. It must either argue for or justify the demise of all but the Christian faith or it must narrate a future for the religions in a way that does not undermine Christian hope. This writer takes the view that the former choice is preposterous because it aims to play the role of final adjudicator, which we must allow God to play. We are therefore left with the second choice, which the Moravian approach seeks to accomplish. By operating with two conceptions of utopia, one as harmony resulting from human actions and the other as the surprise that results from God's action, the Moravian

approach is able to free Caribbean theology from having to press all notions of the future through a single utopian vision. We are able to imagine the inclusion of people of other faiths in a state of harmony, or we claim their inclusion in a reality that we do not know – a surprise, the form and content of which we cannot now see. This plurality of utopian vision is consistent with the plurality in which we live but it does not undermine the Christian hope of our future with God.

When we speak of a Moravian approach to pluralism, then, we refer to the approach in which Christians seek to live in harmony with people of other faiths, a harmony that is maintained through an attitude of modesty on account of the gulf between human and divine beings, with a commitment to engaging others in dialogue for the sake of bearing witness to the truth, which has been revealed in the external world of nature, the internal word of the mind and in divine oracles.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

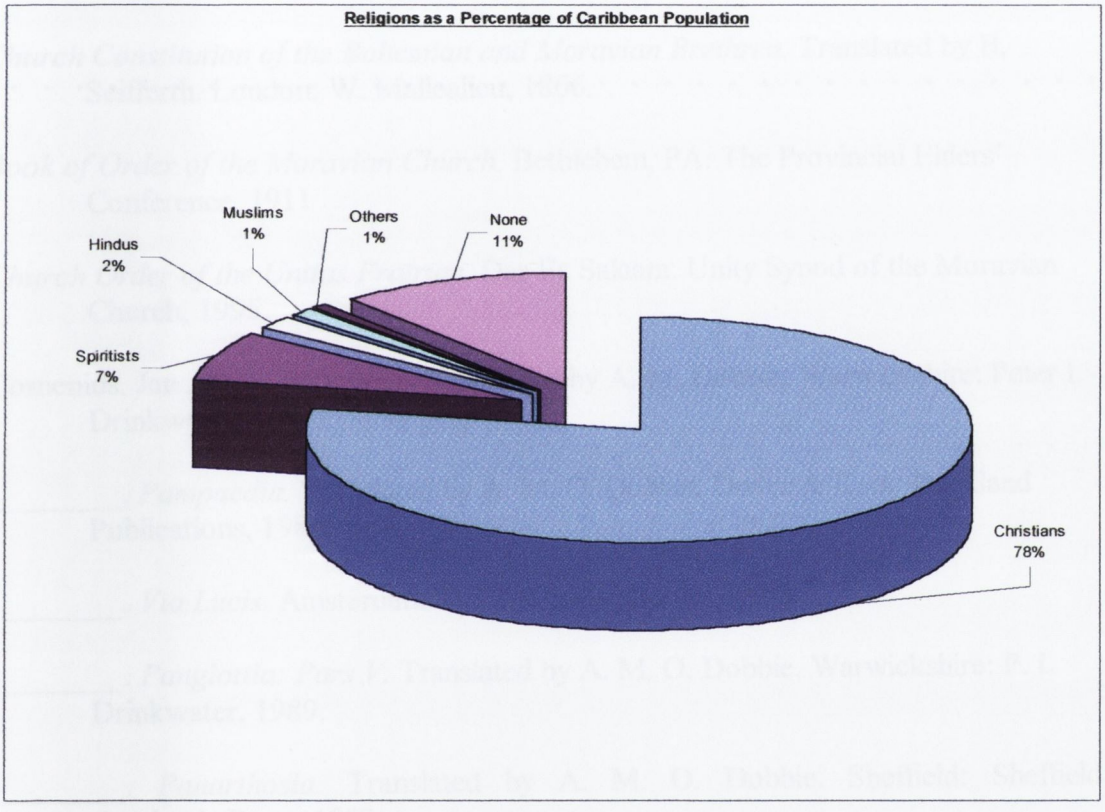
TABLE 2
RELIGIOUS ADHERENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN

			RELIGIOUS ADHERENTS IN THE CARIBBEAN						
Country	**Population**	**Christians**	**Spiritists**	**Hindus**	**Muslims**	**Bahai**	**Buddhist**	**Jews**	**Others**
Anguilla	8,000	7,604	455	17	46	86	0	0	0
Antigua-Barbuda	68,000	63,441	2223	0	274	629	0	0	0
Aruba	103,000	99,094	1,005	0	284	148	0	144	241
Bahamas	307,000	283,205	4,736	0	0	1,241	0	917	184
Barbados	270,000	261,875	54	892	2,021	3,522	108	32	519
Belize	241,000	218,923	2,094	5,536	1,389	6,941	842	2,600	440
Bermuda	65,000	60,230	1,340	0	0	325	21	21	46
British V. Islands	21,000	18,461	6,229	52	59	192	0	0	0
Cayman Islands	38,000	29,766	5,826	98	74	336	0	656	0
Cuba	11,201,000	4,900,000	2,007,947	23,185	9,073	1,139	6,085	823	22,388
Dominica	71,000	67,052	1,888	141	163	1,225	92	0	60
Dominican Rep.	8,495,000	8,083,942	185,582	0	1,869	5,901	1,529	612	9,400
French Guiana	181,000	153,362	6,411	2,901	1,574	725	0	98	107,787
Grenada	94,000	90,935	1,151	637	304	145	0	0	48
Guadeloupe	456,000	434,273	1,413	2,278	1,695	1,595	0	0	210
Guyana	861,000	439,180	17,380	279,934	70,113	14,584	2,067	65	21,650
Haiti	8,222,000	7,874,670	207,084	0	1,940	17,055	0	196	3,172
Jamaica	2,583,000	2,170,527	259,656	30,733	3,156	7,456	316	511	9,658
Martinique	395,000	383,296	419	939	858	2,031	158	0	2,620
Montserrat	11,000	10,209	16	11	0	156	0	0	0
Netherlands Antill.	217,000	204,730	1,886	451	425	579	1,076	807	500
Puerto Rico	3,869,000	3,753,600	27,274	3,404	928	2,788	503	2,683	1,579
St. Kitts/Nevis	38,000	36.471	525	577	115	197	0	0	104
St. Lucia	154,000	148,380	2,555	1,386	705	364	0	0	569
St. Vincent & Gren	114,000	101,569	1,996	3,833	1,698	1,662	0	0	581
Suriname	417,000	210,203	14,760	74,113	57,880	6,424	2,470	765	29,641
Trinidad and Tob.	1,295,000	836,991	19,264	294,947	88,513	15,627	4,032	605	6,757
Turks & Caicos	16,760	15,349	432	0	0	129	0	0	0
US Virgin Islands	93,000	89,520	0	390	98	577	0	302	0
Total	39,904,760	31,010,423	2781601	726455	245254	93779	19299	11837	218154

APPENDIX II

FIGURE I

RELIGIONS AS A PERCENTAGE OF CARIBBEAN POPULATION



BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY MATERIAL

Book of Order of the Moravian Church. London: Moravian Church, 1910.

*Catechism of the Moravian Brethren: 1522. T*ranslated by E. de Schweinitz.

Centennial Anniversary of the Society of the United Brethren for Propagating the Gospel to the Heathen. Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church, 1887.

Church Constitution of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren. Translated by B. Seifferth. London: W. Mallealieu, 1866.

Book of Order of the Moravian Church. Bethlehem, PA: The Provincial Elders' Conference, 1911

Church Order of the Unitas Fratrum. Das Es Salaam: Unity Synod of the Moravian Church, 1995.

Comenius, Jan Amos. *Panaugia.* Translated by A. M. Dobbie. Warwickshire: Peter I. Drinkwater, 1987.

_____. *Pampaedia.* Translated by A. M. O. Dobbie. Dover & Kent: Buckland Publications, 1986.

_____. *Via Lucis.* Amsterdam: Apud Christophorum, 1668.

_____. *Panglottia: Pars V.* Translated by A. M. O. Dobbie. Warwickshire: P. I. Drinkwater, 1989.

_____. *Panorthosia.* Translated by A. M. O. Dobbie. Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1983.

_____. *Panegersia.* Translated by A. M. O. Dobbie. Warwickshire: P. I. Drinkwater, 1990.

_____. *The Analytic Didactic of Comenius.* Translated by Vladimir Jelinek. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Hus, Jan, "De ecclesia." In *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought.* Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966.

_____. "De simonia." In *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus.* London: SCM, 1953.

_____. "Letters of Hus and Relevant Documents." In *John Hus at the Council of Constance.* New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1965.

Moravian Book of Worship. Bethlehem, PA & Winston Salem, NC: Board of Publications, 1995.

Pseudo-Dionysius: The Complete Works. Translated by Colm Luibheid. New York: Paulist Press, 1987.

Results of the Synod of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren Held at Herrnhut in the Year 1848, 1849.

Results of the General Synod of the Brethren's Unity. London: Moravian Publication Office, 1881.

The Church Book of the Brethren's Unity in the British Province, 1892.

The Moravian Liturgy: Authorized for use in the British Province of the Moravian Church. London: The Moravian Book Room, 1960.

The Moravian Manual: Containing an Account of the Moravian Church or Unitas Fratrum, 1869.

von Zinzendorf, Nicholas Ludwig. *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects in Religion Preached in Fetter Lane Chapel in the Year 1746.* Translated by George W. Forrell. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1973.

_____. *Sixteen Discourse on Jesus Christ Our Lord: Being an Exposition on the Second Part of the Creed, Preached at Berlin by the Right Reverend Lewis, Bishop of the Antient Brethren's Churches.* London: W. Boyer, 1751.

_____. *Twenty-One Discourse or Dissertations upon the Augsburg Confession, Which is also the Brethren's Confession of Faith: Deliver'd by the Ordinary of the Brethren's Church before the Seminary. To Which is prefixed, A Synodal Writing Relating to the same Subject.* Translated by F. Okelly. London: W. Boyer, 753.

SECONDARY WORKS IN THE AREAS OF MORAVIAN THEOLOGY AND HISTORY

Atwood, Craig, D. "The Significance of Zinzendorf at the Beginning of a New Millennium." *TMDK* 19 (1999) : 15-26.

_____. "Blood, Sex, and Death: Life and Liturgy in Zinzendorf's Bethlehem." PhD. Diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 995.

Beck, Hartmut, "To Honour Christocentrism, To Resist Christomonism: Two

Annotations on the Theology of Zinzendorf." *TMDK* 20 (2000) : 41-57.

Becker, Bernhard. *Zinzendorf in Verhaltnis zu Philosophi und Kirchentum seiner Zeit: Geschichtliche Studien.* Leipzig: 1886.

Benz, Ernst und HeinzRenkewitz, Hg. *Zinzendorf-Gedenkbuch.* Stuttgart: Evangelisches Verlagswerk, 1951.

Betterman, Wilhelm. *Theologie und Sprache bei Zinzendorf.* Gotha: Leopold Klotz, 1935.

Blanford, J. H. "In Essentials, Unity; in Non-Essentials, Liberty; in All Things, Charity." *The Moravian Messenger* XL, II (1930) : 125-126.

Bost, Geneva. A. *History of the Bohemian and Moravian Brethren.* London: Religious Tract Society, 1834.

Cranz, David. *The Ancient and Modern History of the Brethren Church or, A Succinct Narrative of the Protestant Church of the United Brethren or, Unitas Fratrum.* Translated by Benjamin La Trobe. London: W. and A. Strahan, 1780.

Crews, C. Daniel. *Confessing Our Unity in Christ: Historical and Theological Background to "The Ground of Unity."* Winston Salem, NC: Moravian Archives, 1994.

de Schweinitz, Edward. *The History of the Church Known as the Unitas Fratrum.* Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Publication Concern, 1901.

_____. *Letters of Condolences Addressed to Count Nicholas Lewis von Zinzendorf on the Occasion of the Death of his Son Christian Renatus,* [1901]

Fudge, Thomas. *The Magnificent Ride: The First Reformation in Hussite Bohemia.* Brookfield, USA: Ashgate, 1998.

Freeman, Arthur, J. *An Ecumenical Theology of the Heart: The Theology of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf.* Bethlehem & Winston Salem: The Moravian Church in America, 1998.

_____. "The Hermeneutics of Count Nicholas Ludwig von Zinzendorf." PhD. diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1962.

Gambold, James. *Maxims, Theological Ideas and Sentences.* London: J. Beecroft, 1751.

Hamilton, J. Taylor. *A History of the Church Known as the Moravian Church or the Unitas Fratrum or the Unity of the Brethren: During the Eighteen and Nineteen Centuries.* Bethlehem, PA: Time Publishing Company 1900.

Heymann, Frederick. *John Zizka and the Hussite Revolution.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University press, 19955.

Kinkel, Gary, S. "The Key to an Authentic Zinzendorfian Witness for the Twenty-First Century." *TMDK* 19 (1999) : 26-39.

_____. *Count Zinzendorf's Doctrine of the Holy Spirit as Mother.* Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, 1988.

Leff, Gordon. *Heresy in the Middle Ages: The Relation of Heterodoxy to Dissent 1250-1450.* Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975.

_____. *Wyclif and Hus: A Doctrinal Comparison.* Manchester: John Rylands Library, 1968.

Lewis, A. J. *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer: A Study in the Moravian Contribution to Christian Mission and Unity.* London: SCM, 1962.

Maynard, G. Oliver. *The Moravian Church Among the Churches: Pioneer of the Oecumenical Task.* Barbados: Cedar Press, 1982.

Meyer, Henry H., ed. *Quotations in Extenso From Manuscripts, Diaries and Rare Volumes at Herrnhut and Bethlehem.* 1924.

Molnár, Amédeo. "The Brethren's Theology." *History of the Unity of the Brethren.* Translated by C. D. Crews. Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church, 1992.

_____. *J. A. Comenius: A Perfect Reformation.* Prague: Ecumenical Institute of the Comenius Faculty, 1957.

Oberman, Heiko, ed. *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought.* Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1966.

Podmore, Colin. "The Church of the Bohemian Brethren." In *Anglican - Moravian Conversations: The Fetter Lane Common Statement.* London: Council for Christian Unity, 1996.

Rimius, Henry. *A Candid Narrative of the Rise and Progress of the Hernhutters, Commonly Call'd Moravian or Unitas Fratrum: With a Short Account of their Doctrines Drawn from their own Writings.* London: A. Linde, 1753.

Renkewitz, Heinz. "Zinzendorf als Theologue – seine Stellung in der Geschichte und seine Bedeutung für unsere Verkündigung." *Zinzendorf-Gedenkbuck* Heruasgegeben von E. Benz und H. Renkewitz. Stuttgart: Evangeliches Verlagswerk, 1951.

Rican, Rudolf. *The History of the Unity of Brethren*. Translated by C. D. Crews. Bethlehem: PA: Moravian Church, 1992.

Schultz, Augustus. *Christian Doctrine and Systematic Theology*. Bethlehem, PA: Moravian Church, 1979.

Spinka, Matthew. *Advocates of Reform: From Wyclif to Erasmus*. London: SCM, 1953.

_____. *John Amos Comenius: That Incomparable Moravian*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943.

_____. *John Hus at the Council of Constance*. London & New York: Columbia University Press, 1965.

_____. *John Hus: A Biography*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968.

Treasure, Geoffrey. *The Making of Modern Europe 1648-1780*. London & New York: Methuen, 1985.

Ward, W. R. *Christianity Under the Ancien Régime, 1648-1789*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Weinlick, John R. *Count Zinzendorf: The Story of His Life Leadership in the Renewed Moravian Church*. Bethlehem & Winston Salem: The Moravian Church in America, 1984.

SECONDARY WORKS IN THE AREA OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

Aslan, Adson. *Religious Pluralism in Christian and Islamic Philosophy: The Thought of John Hick and Seyyed Hossein Nasr*. Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1998.

Cragg, Kenneth. *The Call of the Minaret*. London: Collins, 1986.

_____. *The Event of the Qur'an: Islam in its Scriptures*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972.

Bowker, John. ed. *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Brinkman, Martien. "Shifts in the Interpretation of Christian History: Cases from the Middle-East, Africa and Asia Compared." *Exchange* 29 (2000) : 97-116.

Brown, Stuart. *The Nearest in Affection: Towards a Christian Understanding of Islam*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1994.

_____. *Meeting in Faith: Twenty Years of Christian-Muslim Conversation Sponsored by the World Council of Churches:* Geneva: World Council of Churches Press, 1989.

Carr, Brian. "Truth." *An Encyclopaedia of Philosophy.* Edited By G. H. R. Parkinson. London: Routledge, 1988.

Cheetham, David. "Evil and Religious Pluralism: The Eschatological Resolution." *New Blackfriars* 78, no. 915 (1997): 208-217.

Coward, Harold. "Religious Pluralism and the Future of Religions." *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Thomas Dean. New York: New York State University, 1995.

Cracknell, Kenneth. *Justice Courtesy & Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions*. London: Epworth Press, 1965.

_____. "The Theology of Religious Plurality," *Current Dialogue,* No 26, (June 1994) : 10-22.

Daniel, Norman. *Islam and the West: The Making of An Image*. Oxford: One World, 1993.

Dean, Thomas, ed. *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion.* New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

D'Costa, Gavin. *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religion*.Oxford and New York: Blackwell Inc., 1986.

_____. "Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative.* Edited by Ian Hamnett. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

_____. *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000.

_____ ed. *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*: *The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions.* Maryknoll, New York, 1996.

Drummond, Richard. *Towards New Age in Christian Theology*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985.

Dupuis, Jacques. *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

Esack, Farid. *Qur'an Liberation & Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of the Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression. Oxford*: Oneworld, 1997.

Flanagan, Kieran. "Theological Pluralism: A Sociological Critique." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*. Edited by Ian Hamnett London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Gangadean, Askok. "The Hermeneutics of Comparative Ontology & Comparative Theology." In *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion*. Edited by Thomas Dean. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Goddard, Hugh. *Christian and Muslims: From Double Standard to Mutual Understanding*. Richmond, UK: Curzon Press, 1975.

Gombrich, Richard. "Reflections of an Indologist." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*. Edited by Ian Hamnett. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Haight, Roger. *Jesus Symbol of God*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.

Hasting, Adrian. "Pluralism: The Relationship of Theology to Religious Studies." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative*. Edited by Ian Hamnett. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Hebblethwaite, Brian. *Ethics and Religion in a Pluralistic Age: Collected Essays*. Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1997.

Heim, S. Mark, ed. *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1998.

_____. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1995.

_____. "The Depth of Religious: Trinity and Religious Ends," *Modern Theology* 17:1 (Jan 2001) : 21-55.

Hick, John. *The Rainbow of Faiths*. London: SCM, 1995.

_____. "Jesus and the World Religions." In *The Myth of God Incarnate*. Edited by John Hick. London: SCM, 1977.

_____. "A Recent Development Within Christian Monotheism." In *The Concept of Monotheism in Islam*. Edited by Hans Köcker. Vienna: W. Braümuller, 1982.

_____. ed. *Truth and Dialogue: The Relationship Between the World Religions*. London: Sheldon Press, 1974.

Hick, John and Brian Hebblethwaite, Eds. *Christianity and the Other Religions*. Glasgow: Collins, 1980.

Hick, John & Paul F. Knitter, Eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

Kateregga, Dadrie & David Shenk. *Islam and Christianity: A Muslim and A Christian in Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1981.

Kimball, Charles. *Striving Together: A Way Forward in Christian Muslim Relations*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

Knitter, Paul. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions*. London: SCM, 1995.

_____. *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*. Oxford: One World Publications, 1996.

Küng, Hans and Others. *Christianity and the World Religions: Paths of Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism*. London: Collins, 1987.

_____. *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic*. Translated by J. Bowden. London: SCM, 1991.

Lindbeck, George. *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Post-Liberal Age*. London: SPCK, 1984.

Marshall, Bruce, ed., *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 199.

May, John, D. "Essence – Identity – Liberation: Three Ways of Looking at Christianity." *Religious Tradition* 6 (1984) : 30-41.

_____. *After Pluralism: Towards and Interreligious Ethic*. London: LIT Verlag, 2002.

McCarthy, Michael. "Pluralism, Invariance and Conflict," *The Review of Metaphysics* vol. LI, no. 1 (Sept 1997) : 3-24.

Miller, Roland E. & Hance A. O.Mwakabana, Eds. *Christian-Muslim Dialogue: Theological and Practical Issues*. Geneva: Lutheran World Federation, 1998.

Mohammed, Ovey. Muslim-*Christian Relations: Past, Present, Future*. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1999.

Nasr, Sayyed Hossein. "Islamic-Christian Dialogue: Problems and Obstacles to be Pondered and Overcome," *Islamic and Christian-Muslim Relations* Vol. ii (2000): 213-227.

Nazir-Ali, Michael. *Islam: A Christian Perspective*. Exeter, UK: Paternoster House, 1983.

O'Leary, Joseph, S. *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996.

Panikkar, Raimundo. "Philosophical Pluralism and the Plurality of Religions." In *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Thomas Dean. New York: State University of New York Press, 1995.

Parrinder, Geoffrey. *Jesus in the Qur'an*. Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 1995.

Pulcini, Theodore. *Exegesis as Polemic Discourse: Ibn Hazm on Jewish & Christian Scriptures*. Atlanta, Geogia: Scholars Press, 1998.

Race, Allan. *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*. London: SCM, 1983.

Rescher, Nicholas. *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993.

Rippin, Andrew. *Muslims: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices: The Formative Period* vol. 1. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Rippin, Andrew & Jan Knappert, eds. *Textual Sources for the Study of Islam*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1986.

Robinson, Francis, ed. *Cambridge Illustrated History of the Islamic World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Robinson, John, A. T. *Truth is Two-Eyed*. London: SCM, 1979.

Schimmel, Annmarie, *Deciphering the Signs of God: A Phenomenological Approach to Islam*. New York: New York State University Press, 1994.

Shenk, David, *Global Gods: Exploring the Role of Religions in Modern Societies*. Scottdale, PA: Herald Press, 1995.

Slater, Peter. *The Dynamics of Religion: Continuity and Change in the Patterns of Faith* London: SCM, 1978.

Smart, Ninian. "Philosophy of Worldviews of the Philosophy of Religion Transformed." In *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Thomas Dean. New York: New York State University Press, 1995.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion.* Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981.

Stenger, Mary Ann. "Gadamer's Hermeneutic as a Model for Cross-Cultural Understanding and Truth in Religion." In *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Thomas Dean. New York: New York State University Press, 1995.

_____. "Religious Pluralism and Cross-Cultural Criterion of Religious Truth", *Religious Pluralism and Truth: Essays on Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion.* Edited by Thomas Dean. New York: New York State University Press, 1995.

Stubenrauch, Bertram. "Controversy About the Incarnation: What is Specific to Christianity," *Irish Theological Quarterly* 64/4 (1999) : 349-360.

Surin, Kenneth. "Towards a 'Materialist' Critique of Religious Pluralism: An Examination of the Discourse of John Hick and Wilfred Cantwell Smith." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative.* Edited by Ian Hamnett. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Swartz, Merlin, L., ed. *Studies in Islam.* New York & Oxfod: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Vroom, Hendrik, M. *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives.* Translated by J. W. Rebel. Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B, Eerdmans, 1989.

Ward, Keith. "Imperialism and Co-existence in Religious Ideology." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative.* Edited by Ian Hamnett. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Watt, William. *Islamic Creeds: A Selection.* Edinburg: Edinburg University Press, 1994.

_____. *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey.* Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1985.

_____. *Muslim-Christian Relations: Perceptions and Misperceptions.* London & New York: Routledge, 1991.

Weidemann, Thomas. "Polytheism, Monotheism, and Religious Co-existence: Paganism and Christianity in the Roman Empire." In *Religious Pluralism and Unbelief: Studies Critical and Comparative.* Edited by Ian Hamnett. London & New York: Routledge, 1990.

Whaling, Frank. *Christian Theology and World Religion: A Global Approach.* Basingtonke: Marshal Pickering, 1986.

World Council of Churches. *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies.* Geneva: WCC, Publications, 1979.

SECONDARY WORKS RELATED TO CARIBBEAN THEOLOGY

Anthony, Patrick. "A Case Study for Indigenization." *Out of the Depths.* Edited by Idris Hamid, 185-215. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limted, 1977.

Bisnauth, Dale. "Religious Pluralism and Development in the Caribbean: Questions." *Caribbean Journal of Religious Studies* 4, no. 2 (Sept 1982) : 17-33.

Boff, Clodovis, "Epistemology and Method of the Theology of Liberation." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology.* Edited by Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 73-83. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Burton Sankeralli, Ed. *At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity.* St. James: Trinidad & Tobago: CCC, 1995.

Cuthbert, Robert, W. M. *Ecumenism and Development: A Socio-Historical Analysis of the Caribbean Conference of Churches.* Bridgetown, Barbados: CCC, 1986.

da Silva Gorgulho, Gilberto. "Biblical Hermeneutics." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 123-150. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Earl, Augustus. "The Spiritual Significance of Black Power for the Christian Church." In *The Troubling of the Waters.* Edited by Idris Hamid, 109-124. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1973.

Ellacuria, Ignacio. "The Historicity of Christian Salvation." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology.* Edited by Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 251-289. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

_____. "Utopia and Prophecy in Latin America." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*, ed. Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 289-328. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Erskine, Noel. *Decolonizing Theology: A Caribbean Perspective.* New York: Orbis, 1981)

Gutierrez, Gustavo. *A Theology of Liberation.* Maryknoll, New York: 1973.

_____. "Option for the Poor." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology.* Edited by Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 235-250 Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Julien, Terry. "Christian Mission, Cultural Traditions and Environment." *Out of the Depths.* Edited by Idris Hamid, 9-27. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1977.

Libânio, João, Batista. "Hope, Utopia, Resurrection." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology.* Edited by Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, *716-727.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Lowe-Ching, Theresa. "Method in Caribbean Theology." In *Caribbean Theology: Preparing for the Challenges Ahead.* Edited by Howard Gregory, 23-33. Kingston, Jamaica: Canoe Press, 1995.

Magana, Alvaro, Q. "Ecclesiology in the Theology of Liberation." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology.* Edited Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 194-209. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Mulrain, George. "African Cosmology and Caribbean Christianity." In *At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity.* Edited by Burton Sankeralli, 46-65. St. James, Trinidad: CCC, 1995.

Payne, Clifford. "What will a Caribbean Christ Look Like? A Preface to Caribbean Christology." In *Out of the Depths.* Edited by Idris Hamid, 1-8. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1977.

Ravi-Ji. "Hinduism and Popular Religion." In *At the Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity.* Edited by Burton Sankeralli, 151-162. St. James, Trinidad: CCC, 1995.

Rivera, Luis. "The Mission of the Church and the Development of a Caribbean Theology of Liberation." In *Out of the Depths.* Edited by Idris Hamid, 249-261. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1977.

Russell, Horace. "The Challenge of Theological Reflection in the Caribbean." In *The Troubling of the Waters.* Edited by Idris Hamid, 25-34. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1973.

Segundo, Juan Luis. "Revelation, Faith, Signs of the Times." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology.* Edited by Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 328-349. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Sherlock, Philip & Hazel Bennett. *The Story of the Jamaican People.* Kingston, Jamaica: Randal Publishers, 1988.

Smith, Ashley. "The Spiritual Significance of Black Power in Caribbean Churches." In *The Troubling of the Waters*. Edited by Idris Hamid, 84-101. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1973.

Sobrino, Jon. "Central Position of the Reign of God in Liberation Theology." In *Mysterium Liberationis: Fundamental Concepts of Liberation Theology*. Edited by Ignacio Ellacuria & Jon Sobrino, 350-388. Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1993.

Taylor, Burchell. Engendering Theological Relevance. Paper presented at the "Consultation on Caribbean Theology" in Kingston, Jamaica, 6-8 January 1998.

Watty, William. *From Shore to Shore: Soundings in Caribbean Theology*. Kingston, Jamaica: Cedar Press, 1981.

_____. "The De-Colonization of Theology", *The Troubling of the Waters*. Edited by Idris Hamid, 49-79. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1973.

_____. "The New Missiology – A Biblical Perspective." In *Out of the Depths*. Edited by Idris Hamid, 91-113. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1977.

Williams, Geoffrey, B. "Classism and the Caribbean Church." In *Out of the Depths*. Edited by Idris Hamid, 49-90. San Fernando, Trinidad: Rahman Printery Limited, 1977.

Williams, Lewin, L. *Caribbean Theology*. New York & Washington DC: Peter Lang, 1994.

_____. Invigorating the Caribbean Theological Enterprise: Learning from the Past, Forging a Path to the Future. Paper presented at the "Consultation Caribbean Theology" in Kingston, Jamaica, 6-8 January 1998.

Zamuel Hesdie. "Popular Religions and Ecumenism." In *At The Crossroads: African Caribbean Religion and Christianity*. Edited by Burton Sankeralli, 6-12. St. James, Trinidad: CCC, 1995.

GENERAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbott, Walter, M. *The Documents of Vatican II*. USA: American Press, 1966.

Abraham, William, J. *Divine Revelation and the Limits of Historical Criticism.* Oxford, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Anderson, A, ed. *The Treatise of the Three Importers and the Problem of the Enlightenment: A New Translation of the Traité des trios Imposteurs, 1777Edition.* New York: Rowan & Littlefield, 1977.

Arndt, Johann. *True Christianity*. Translated by Peter Erb. Toronto, New York: Paulist Press, 1979.

Aquinas, St. Thomas, *Summa Theologiae 1a.*1. *The Nature and Extent of Sacred Doctrine*. London: Black Friars, Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1963.

Arndt, Johann, *True Christianity*, trans by Peter Erb (Toronto & New York: Paulist Press, 1979)

Augustine, *De Trinitate Libre. A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church.* Vol. 3. Edited by P. Schaff. Edinburg: T & T Clarke, 1993.

Ayers, Michael & Daniel Garber, eds. *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, Vol. I. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Barrett, David, George T. Kurian and Todd M. Johnson, eds. *World Christian Encyclopedia: A Comparative Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. II. The Doctrine of God.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957.

_____. *Church Dogmatics. Vol. II, Second Half. The Doctrine of God.* Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1957.

_____. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part I. The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1956.

_____. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part II. The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* Edinburgh; T & T Clarke, 1962.

_____. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part IIIa. The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* Edinburgh; T & T Clarke, 1961.

_____. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part IIIb. The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* Edinburgh; T & T Clarke, 1962.

_____. *Church Dogmatics, Vol. IV, Part III Fragments, The Doctrine of Reconciliation.* Edinburgh; T & T Clarke, 1962.

_____. *Theology and Church*: *Shorter Writings 1920-1928.* Translated by L. P.

Smith. London: SCM, 1962.

_____. *The Christian Life: Church Dogmatic IV, 4. Lecture Fragments.* Translated by G. W. Bromiley. Edinburg: T & T Clarke, 1981.

Bauman, Zygmunt. *Globalization.* London: Polity Press, 1994.

Berger, Peter. *The Social Reality of Religion.* USA: Penguin Books, 1967.

Bettenson, H., ed. *Documents of the Christian Church.* London: Oxford University press, 1977.

Blackwell, Constance & Sachiko Kusukawa, eds. *Philosophy in the Sixteenth & Seventeenth Centuries: Conversation with Aristotle.* Brookfield, USA & Singapore: Ashgate, 1999.

Blumenberg, Hans. *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age.* Translated by Robert Wallace. London & Cambridge: MIT Press, 1983.

Borovoy, Vitaly. "The Ecclesial Significance of the WCC: The Legacy and Promise of Toronto." *The Ecumenical Review* 40, Nos. 3-4 (July-October 1988) : 504-518.

Bosch, David. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission.* Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1995.

Carr, Brian. "Truth." In *An Encyclopaedia of* Philosophy. Edited by G. H. R. Parkinson, 76-98. London: Routledge, 1988.

Chomsky, Noam. *Language and the Mind.* New York: Harcourt Brace Jonanovich, 1972.

Collinson, Diané. *Fifty Major Philosophers: A Reference Guide.* London & New York:
Routledge, 1988.

Copleston, F. C. *A History of Medieval Philosophy.* London: Methuen & Co., 1972.

Cottingham, John, Robert Stoothoff and Dugald Murdoch, eds. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.* Vol. II. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984.

Cross, Richard. *Duns Scotus.* New York & Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

Derrett, Duncan, M. "Stones Cry Out (Luke 19:40)." *Expository Times* 113, No. 16 (2002) : 187-188.

Descartes, Rene. *Rules for the Direction of the Mind. The Philosophical Writings of Descartes.* Vol. 1. Edited by G. R. T. Ross. Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985.

Downing, F. Gerald. *Has Christianity a Revelation?* London: SCM, 1964.

Erb, Peter, ed. *Pietists: Selected Writings*. Toronto, New York: Paulist Press, 1983.

Ferguson, David. *Bultmann*. London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992.

Fiorenza, Francis. "Religion: A Contested Site in Theology and the Study of Religion." *Harvard Theological Review*, 93, 1 (January 2000) : 7-34.

Flannery, Austin, ed. *Vatican Council II*. Dublin, Ireland: Dominican Publications, 1995.

Fremantle, Anne. *The Protestant Mystics*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1964.

Frend, W. H. C. *The Rise of Christianity*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984.

Funkenstein, Amos. *Theology and the Scientific Imagination: From the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Truth and Method*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1975.

Gay, Peter. *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation: The Rise of Modern Paganism*. London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1966.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Giddens, Anthony. *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Gilson, Etienne. *History of Christian Philosophy in the Middle Ages*. London: Sheed & Ward, 1980.

Guignon, Charles, B. *Heidegger and the Problem of Knowledge*. Indianapolis, Indiana: Hackett Publishing Co., 1993.

Gunton, Colin, E. *A Brief Theology of Revelation: the 1995 Warfield Lectures*. Edinburg: T & T Clark, 1995.

Habermas, Jürgen. *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1983.

Häring, Herman. "The History of Jesus as the Foundation and Origin of Religious Identity." *Concillium,* no. 2 (2000) : 100-112.

Hart, Trevor. *Faith Thinking: The Dynamics of Christian Theology*. London: SPCK, 1995.

Hegel, G, W. F. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Translated by A. V. Müller. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.

Hume, David. *The Natural History of Religion and Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Joint Working Group of the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church. "The Notion of Hierarchy of Truths: An Ecumenical Interpretation." *One in Christ* Vol. xxvii (1991) : 284-293.

Israel, Jonathan., *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity 1650-1750*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Jacob, Margaret. *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents.* New York & Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001.

Jeanrond, Werner, G. *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance*. London: SCM, 1994.

Judovitz, Dalia. *Subjectivity and Representation in Descartes: The Origins of Modernity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Kant, Immanuel. *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone*. Translated by T. M. Greene & H. H. Hudson. New York: Harper & Row, 1960).

_____. *The Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated by P. Guyer & A Wood. Cambridge, UK, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Kenny, Anthony. *A Brief History of Philosophy*. London: Blackwell, 1998.

Kinnamon, Michael, and Brian Cope. *The Ecumenical Movement: An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*. Geneva: WCC Publication, 1997.

Lambert, Malcolm. *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation*. Oxford, UK & Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994.

Lehmann, Hartmut. "The Suitability of the Tools Provided by Ernst Troeltsch for Understanding of Twentieth-Century Religion." *Religion and Society* Vol. 27, no. 3/4 (1999) : 295-299.

Leff, Gordon. *Medieval Thought: St. Augustine to Ockham*. London: The Merlin Press, 1959.

_____. *William of Ockham: The Metamorphosis of Scholastic Discourse*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1975.

Locke, John. *An Essay Concerning the Reasonableness of Christianity*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894.

_____. *The Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in Scripture*. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Press, 1997. [This Edition is a reprint from the 1794 Edition of *The Works of John Locke.*]

Lossky Nicholas and others, ed. *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*. Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991.

Löwith, Karl. *Meaning in History: The Theological Implication of the Philosophy of History*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1959.

Mackey, James, P. *Jesus the Man and the Myth: A Contemporary* Christology. London: SCM, 1979.

Maurer, Armand. *Medieval Philosophy*. Ontario, Canada: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1982.

McCarthy, Michael. "Pluralism, Invariance and Conflict." *The Review of Metaphysics* Vol. LI, No. 1 (1997) : 3-24.

McDonald, H. D. *Ideas of Revelation: A Historical Study, A.D. 1700 to 1860.* London: Macmillan & Co., 1959.

McGinn, Bernard. *The Flowering of Mysticism: Men and Women in the New Mysticism (1200-1350) Vol. III*. New York: Crossroad Publishing Co., 1998.

McGrath, Alister E. *Christian Theology: An Introduction*. Oxford & Vancouver: Blackwell, 1997.

McGuinness, Philip, Alan Harrison and Richard Kearney, eds. *John Toland's Christianity Not Mysterious*. Dublin: Lilliput Press, 1997.

McIntyre, Alisdair. *After Virtue*. London: Duckworth, 1981.

_____. *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* London: Duckworth, 1988.

McIntyre, John. *The Shape of Christology: Studies in the Doctrine of Christ*. Edinburg: T & T Clarke, 1998.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*. Oxford, Cambridge, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1990.

Mittle, Alan. "Toleration, Liberty and Truth: A Parable." *Harvard Theological Review* 94: 4 (2002) : 353-372.

Moltmann, Jürgen. *God in Creation*. London: SCM, 1985.

Moran, Gabriel. *Theology of Revelation*. London: Burns & Oates, 1967.

Munz, Peter. *Our Knowledge of the Growth of Knowledge: Popper or Wittgenstein?* London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985.

Oberman, Heiko Augustinus, ed. *Forerunners of the Reformation: The Shape of Late Medieval Thought*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1981.

Ockham. *Quodlibetal Questions*. Translated by A. J. Freddoso and F. Kelley. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1999.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Knowledge and the* Sacred. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press 1981.

Ozment, Steven. *The Age of Reform 1250-1550: An Intellectual and Religious History of Late Medieval & Reformation Europe.* New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1980.

_____. *Homospiritualis: A Comparative Study of The Anthropology of Johannes Tauler, Jean Gerson and Martin Luther (1509-16)in the context of their Theological Thought*. Leiden: Brill, 1969.

_____. *Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 1973.

Pailin, David, A. *The Anthropological Character of Theology: Conditioning Theological Understanding*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*. Translated by Matthew J. O'Connell. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1985.

_____. *Metaphysics and the Idea of God*. Translated by P. Clayton. Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1988.

_____. *Revelation as History*. London & New York: Macmillan, 1968.

Parker, Thomas, H. L. *Calvin's Doctrine of the Knowledge of God*. Edinburg: Oliver & Boyd, 1969.

Persson, Per Erick. *Sacra Doctrina: Reason and Revelation in Aquinas*. Translated by Ross Mackenzie. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1970.

Polanyi, Michael. *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1954.

Przywara, Erich ed. *Augustine Synthesis*. London: Sheed and Ward, 1936.

Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of the Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity*. Translated by W. V. Dych. New York: The Seabury Press, 1974.

_____. "The Essence of Christianity." *Sacramentum Mundi*. Edited by , ed., K. Rahner, 299-313. London: Burns & Oates, 1968.

_____. *Theological Investigations Vol. III: Theology, Anthropology, Christology*. Translated by D. Bourke. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975.

_____. *Theological Investigations Vol. XIII: Theology, Anthropology, Christology*. Translated by David Bourke. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1975.

_____. *Theological Investigations Vol. XIV: Ecclesiology, Questions in the Church, the Church in the World*. London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, 1976.

_____. *Theological Investigations Vol. XVI: Experience of the Spirit: Source of Theology*. Translated by David Morland. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1979.

_____. *Theological Investigations Vol. XVIII: God and Revelation*. Translated by Edward Quinn. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984.

_____. *The Trinity*. Kent: Burns & Oates, 1970.

Raiser, Konrad. *Ecumenism in Transition: A Paradigm Shift in the Ecumenical Movement?* Geneva: WCC Publications, 1991.

Redeker, Marin. *Schleiermacher: Life and Thought*. Translated by J. Wellhauser Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1973.

Remond, Rene. *Religion and Society in Modern Europe*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1999.

Richardson, Kurt. "The Contemporary Renewal of Trinitarian Theology: Possibilities of Convergence in the Doctrine of God." In *The Nature of Confession: Evangelicals and Postliberals in Conversation*. Edited by Timothy Phillips & Dennis Okholm, 183-192. Downers, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1996.

Ricoeur, Paul. *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

_____. "The Crisis of the Cogito." In *Descartes*. Edited by Tom Sorell. Aldershot & Brookfield: Ashgate, 1999.

Rudolph, Kurt. *Gnosis: The Nature & History of Gnosticism*. Translated by R. McL. Wilson. San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1987.

Schillebeeckx, Edward. *Church: The Human Story of God.* London SCM, 1989.

_____. *Jesus: An Experiment of Christology.* London: Collins, 1979.

_____. *Revelation and Theology.* London: Sheed and Ward, 1967.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *The Christian Faith.* Translated by H. R. Mackintosh and J. S. Stewart. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1999.

_____. *A Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study.* Translated by T. N. Tice. Lewiston/Queenstown/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990.

Schneiders, Sandra, M. *The Revelatory Text: Interpreting the New Testament as Sacred Scripture.* Collegeville, Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 1999.

Schreiter, Robert. *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1998.

Shedd, W. G. T. "Introduction." In *De Trinitate, Libri XV.* Edited by Phillip Schaff. Edinburg: T& T Clarke, 1993.

Simon, Dereck. "Salvation and Liberation in the Practical-Critical Soteriology of Schillebeeckx." *Theological Studies* 63, No. 3 (2002) : 494-520.

Strauss, David, F. *The Life of Jesus Critically Examined.* London: SCM, 1973.

Sykes, Stephen. *The Identity of Christianity: Theologians and the Essence of Christianity from Schleiermacher to Barth.* London: SPCK, 1984.

Talbert, C. H., ed. *Reimarus: Fragments.* London: SCM, 1971.

Tanner, Norman P, ed. *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils, Volume One: Nicaea to Lateran V.* London: Sheed and Ward, 1990.

Tauler, Johannes. *Sermons.* Translated by Maria Shrady. New York: Paulist Press, 1985.

Taylor, Charles. "The Opening Argument of the Phenomenology." In *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays.* Edited by A. MacIntyre. London, Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1976.

Thiemann, Ronald. *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise.* Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985.

Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology, Vol. 1.* London: Nesbet & Co. Ltd., 1953.

Torrance, Thomas F. *Karl Barth: An Introduction to his Early Theology, 1910-1931.* London: SCM, 1962.

Tracy, David. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism.* London: SCM, 1981.

Troeltsch, Ernst. *Religion in History*, trans J. L. Adams & W. F. Bense. Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991.

Turner, Bryan, S. *Religion and Social Theory*. London: Sage Publications, 1991.

Turner, Denys. *The Darkness of God: Negativity in Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

Underhill, Evelyn. *Mysticism: The Development of Human's Spiritual Consciousness.* London: Bracken Books, 1995.

Unger, Peter. *Ignorance: A Case fro Scepticism*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

van Ess, Josef. "The Image of God and Islamic Mysticism, the Image of Man and Society - Islamic Perspectives." In *Christianity & the World Religions: Paths to* Dialogue. Edited by Hans Kung and others, 70-82. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999.

Walsh, James, ed. *The Cloud of Unknowing*. New York: Paulist Press, 1981.

William of Ockham. *Quodlibetal Questions*, Vol. 1&2, Quodlibets 1-7. Translated by A. J. Freddoso and F. E. Kelly. London & New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.