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Sharing our Differences:
Koinonia and the Theology of Religious Plurality

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1.   Introduction

It is a privilege to take part in this discussion today, a day when the Faith and Order Commission recognizes the urgency of the theology of religious plurality and affirms its importance on the agenda of this commission. Few topics are as crucial to Christian self-understanding and at the same time as central to the struggle for reconciliation in the wider human community. May our reflections make some contribution both to the unity of a church often divided by these questions and to the peace of a world often broken over them.

This paper has three parts. In the first I will review the context for discussion of religious diversity, in terms of recent developments within the ecumenical movement and theological conversation. In the second part I will outline elements in a trinitarian framework for Christian theologies of religious plurality. In the third part I will offer some constructive personal reflections. In all three areas, my contribution can be at best a partial one, requiring addition and correction through dialogue with others engaged in various aspects of this vast topic.

Part One: Context

2.   History in the Ecumenical Movement

Christianity's relation with the religions has long been a topic of concern within the ecumenical movement. Faith and Order has been in large measure isolated from that history. Mission and evangelization were imperatives of Christian faith that animated the modern ecumenical movement, from Edinburgh in 1910 through the following world mission conferences of the International Missionary Council and the Commission on World Mission and Evangelism. The religions figured prominently in these discussions, but mainly as the objects and setting of mission.[1] The current WCC Mission and Ecumenical Formation team has continued reflection on the nature of mission and the significance of religious diversity for that mission.

In 1971 the World Council established a sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, fostering first hand encounters with leaders in other religious traditions and also bringing forward the contributions of those Christian communities with long experience of life in pluralistic contexts. The sub-unit looked toward those of other faiths as neighbors whom Christians were called to love and with whom they could collaborate in advancing God's purposes for peace and justice in history. Dialogue, as distinct from evangelism, was commended as a Christian vocation with its own integrity. It corresponds to the commandments to love our neighbors and not to bear false witness.[2] If we truly love our neighbors, we respect and seek to understand their religious lives in the most charitable light. The practice of dialogue inevitably leads to theological reflection about what God is doing in the religious lives of the world's people and what role the religions themselves play in God's

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[1]   Though, as Kenneth Cracknell has pointed out, missionaries themselves had already initiated a reflection on the religions that went beyond seeing them simply as objects of the Christian message. See Cracknell, K. (1995). Justice, courtesy and love: theologians and missionaries encountering world religions, 1846-1914. London, Epworth Press.

[2]   See World Council of Churches, S.-u. o. D. (1979). Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies. Geneva, World Council of Churches.

providential economy. And in fact, important groundwork has been done, particularly in regard to scripture.[3] The current WCC team on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue continues this work.

These are the two WCC programs that have raised the issues of religious pluralism. But neither group addressed the theological question directly and each has maintained an unresolved tension between God's universal saving will and the decisive finality of Christ. In the San Antonio and Salvador mission conferences, the tension was expressed this way: "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time, we cannot set limits to the saving power of God."[4] The dialogue unit expressed the same tension, urging dialogue as a necessary way of living out faith in Christ, but avoiding any theological statement about the religious status of those in other faiths. As one commentator observed, if the WCC was "loud in its call for dialogue of religions, it barely whispered a theology of religions."[5] A significant effort to develop a theological structure for dialogue was made with the Baar Statement in 1990, but little further conversation followed on that text.[6] A major new initiative was taken in 2003, when a working group was convened with members from the interreligious dialogue, mission and evangelism and faith and order programs, to study these issues and to prepare materials for the 2006 world assembly of the WCC. Our conversation today is a part of that process.

3.   Current Relevance for Faith and Order
With the exception of a specific project on the Church and the Jewish People that followed from a recommendation from the Fourth World Conference on Faith and Order at Montreal in 1963, Faith and Order has not addressed religious pluralism in any sustained study. In the study on the unity of the church and the unity of humankind, the broad issue of interreligious relations was touched (for instance in one section of the Louvain Commission meeting in 1971.) The topic was raised in Accra in 1974 and in Bangalore in 1978.[7] The lack of attention to this area is not surprising. Faith and Order participants do not necessarily have experience either in mission or interreligious dialogue. And for the most part our churches do not have detailed established theologies of religion to bring into dialogue in ecumenical discussion.

The subject of religious pluralism belongs on the agenda of Faith and Order now for two primary reasons. The first is that theological differences among Christians over the appropriate evaluation of religions and the corresponding views of mission and evangelism have become truly church-dividing. The commitment to world evangelism that once inspired a passionate quest for Christian unity has now become itself an issue that divides Christians within existing communions. In its work toward the unity of the church, Faith and Order cannot ignore this challenge. Second, the foundational theological issues of pluralism have become evident. Initially, proponents of both mission and dialogue treated the question of the religions as only secondarily theological. Mission was seen as the issue of theological substance. Study of the religions was needed only for instrumental application of the theological mandate for witness. Or relations with our neighbor were taken as the theological topic, and dialogue was simply an aspect of neighbor-love toward those of different religious beliefs. But on both fronts it is increasingly clear that religious pluralism itself demands a substantive theological assessment that directly involves our doctrine of God and Christology. What is at issue is God's activity in the religions and the relation of Christ to the religions..

The most basic question is whether there are reasons integral to Christian faith itself that we should attend to the religions. Do Christians have anything to learn from the religions, and if so why? Christians have traditionally affirmed validity in elements in other religions that mirror Christian convictions or can be seen to "anticipate" Christian fulfillment. Where traditions overlap with or lead toward Christian conclusions they are seen to contain truth. A more acute question has to do with those dimensions in which other religions are most distinct from and even contrary to Christian faith and practice. Is it even conceivable that these could be viewed

[3]   See especially Ariarajah, S. W. (1989). The Bible and people of other faiths. Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books.
[4]   San Antonio report, p. 32
[5]   Knitter, P. (2002). Introducing Theologies of Religion. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis.
[6]   See the Baar Statement at http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/baar.html.
[7]   Gassman, G. (1993). Documentary History of Faith and Order: 1963-1993. Geneva, World Council of Churches Publications. p. 208.

as valid and truthful in some way? Christian theology has often pondered whether adherents of other faiths may be saved in spite of their religion (for instance by the light of a natural moral law). It has sometimes considered whether the religions themselves might be extraordinary (or even ordinary) means toward Christian redemption. These reflections continue to be important for our work. But little theological consideration has been given to the significance of the traditions in their own right, not as secondary ways of being Christian but as primary ways of being themselves.

4.   Theology of Religions

The last twenty-five years have seen an explosion of literature in the area of theology of religions and interfaith dialogue.[8] Many factors prompt this interest. One very important factor is an attitude of repentance for phases of history in which Christian attitudes toward other religions have encouraged violence and cultural domination, behavior completely out of keeping with true discipleship. Another telling factor has been expanded opportunity for study and dialogue with religious neighbors, in settings from the academic world to globalized economic networks. And a third is awareness of the interreligious dimension of conflicts in many regions of the world.

A great deal of this discussion can be mapped on two different axes. The first concerns the type and extent of recognition that Christian theology extends to religions. A familiar typology sees the options on this axis as being exclusivism (other religions have no faith value and in principle Christianity replaces them), inclusivism (other religions have elements of true spiritual value consistent with Christian revelation and in principle these religions are branches leading to and fulfilled in Christianity) and pluralism (other religions separately contain at least as much divine light as Christianity and in principle each one independently carries the same saving power Christianity may offer).[9] In their typical forms, these views correspond to different Christological perspectives. Pluralists commonly view Christ as representative of divine presence and action that are exemplified elsewhere under other representations. The parallel or pluralism model contends that the religions each lead to salvation, with no need for any to depend on a fulfillment or source in another. Inclusivists view Christ as constitutive of reconciliation, and integral to relation with God. The fulfillment model holds that adherents faithful to the instruction of their own traditions may by that means receive the grace of Christ and attain salvation without outward Christian profession. Exclusivists understand Christ as constitutive of salvation and explicit profession of Christ as necessary to real relation with him. Thus, the replacement model maintains there can be no salvation apart from explicit attachment to Christ. In strict terms, no one of these positions implies a conclusion about the universal salvation of all persons. But the three options do offer a progressive specification of the means by which such universal salvation might be administered.

We may crosscut this threefold division with another based on the form of dialogue in which persons of faith encounter each other, rather than varied conclusions about the status of religions. There is a dialogue of beliefs, in which doctrines, teachings and theologies are compared and shared. There is a dialogue of experience, in which it is spiritual practices and interior religious life that are the focus of engagement. And there is a dialogue of life that focuses on the common human realities of material suffering and injustice, particularly on the condition of the poorest. It compares and shares the traditions' resources in an active effort to transform the world. According to which of these encounters is emphasized, the theology of religions that results may have a more philosophical, more mystical or more liberation character.

For individual theologians and communities, these categories mix. Among those who agree on an inclusivist vision of difference, one might stress cognitive issues and someone else stress experiential ones. The same person who is exclusivist about eternal salvation may be a pluralist about earthly justice. And one who unequivocally affirms that all religions lead to

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[8]   "Theology of religions" largely refers to discussion among Christian theologians, though even among such authors there is no agreement as to the appropriate title for this field. At the same time there has been a proliferation of interfaith organizations and initiatives that have produced their own literature about religious pluralism.
[9]   The typology may be applied to any religious tradition, though it has been developed and utilized primarily by Christian thinkers.

salvation may be an exclusivist about ethical issues, arguing that no one can be reconciled with God apart from explicit political profession of a certain sort.

5.1   Recent Developments

There are a number of movements bearing on the theology of religious plurality which can inform the reflections of Faith and Order.

5.2   The contribution of the Roman Catholic Church

A new period was marked by the Second Vatican Council document *Nostra Aetate.* Since the council, the Roman Catholic communion has engaged in sustained and extensive reflection on religious plurality, with significant contributions from the Pontifical Council on Interreligious Dialogue, notably the document "Dialogue and Proclamation."[10] This should be compared also with the document from the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith "On the Unicity and Salvific Universality of Jesus Christ and the Church" ("*Dominus Iesus*").[11]

5.3   Voices from Churches in Pluralistic Contexts

Reflection on the theology of religious plurality has been greatly enriched by increased participation from Christian theologians in churches with long experience of life in multireligious contexts, often as minorities within cultures shaped by other traditions. This has been true for instance of the contributions from Orthodox churches in the Middle East, represented in figures like Metropolitan Georges Kodhr and Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia. In the Roman Catholic Church, the churches of South Asia are particularly notable in this respect, including the work of theologians such as Michael Amaladoss, Aloysius Pieris, Felix Wilfred and Jacques Dupuis.[12] The same is true for Protestants, reflected in the work of figures such as Stanley Samartha, M.M. Thomas, Wesley Ariarajah and Thomas Thangaraj. The work of these and other writers contributes a new concreteness to the theological discussion.

5.4   Dialogue, common work for justice, multiple religious practice

Increasingly, Christians bring to theological study their experiences in interfaith dialogue or interfaith movements. In venues such as the World Parliament of Religions, there is a search for a common ethical basis and shared action for human welfare. In varied settings, there are also profound questions around issues of multiple religious practice, whether this involves Christians who have adopted specific practices or participation in another tradition or those of other faiths who in some measure reverence Jesus and share the church's worship. Such experiences are real, but often there are few theological categories for their interpretation.

5.5   Judaism

Jewish-Christian dialogue and Christian theological reconsideration of Judaism are the longest standing forms of Christian reflection on religious plurality. Christian identity is inseparable from an understanding of God's covenant with Israel and of Jesus as a Jew. This unique relation involves shared scripture and a tortuous history of Christian anti-Judaism. Much recent theological work in Christian communions seeks not only to rectify errors in Christian treatments of Judaism but also to develop a new basis for understanding the relation of the church and living Judaism in the providence of God.

5.6   Islam and Global Encounters

Recent global conflicts have brought special focus on the relation between the world's two largest religions, Islam and Christianity. We are aware in new ways of the dangers created by the lack of dialogue and common understanding between these traditions. Many Christians are turning to study of specific Muslim-Christian topics, in the conviction that it is in this area

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[10] See this document at
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html
[11] See this document at
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html
[12] See also the text of the Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Asia at
http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html

that the theology of religions can make the greatest direct contribution to unity and peace for the whole human family

5.7   Urgency of the Christological question

Much initiative in the discussion of religious plurality rests with "pluralist" thinkers who argue unequivocally that adequate response to religious diversity requires an alteration in foundational Christian theology. They contend that tension between the universal saving will of God and the decisive finality of Jesus Christ can only be resolved by a frank subordination of the second to the first.[13] On this view, the church should interpret the work of Christ as exclusively representative and illustrative, the unity of Christ with God as exemplary, and the church's confessional language about Christ's unique significance as metaphorical. This is in fact a call to the churches to adopt a new, normative Christology not only alongside but in necessary replacement of existing ones. in our churches. It is at this point that the sharpest church-dividing aspects of the question come into play.

5.8   Beyond Exclusivism--Inclusivism--Pluralism

Many commentators have recently contested the value of the exclusivist/inclusivist/pluralist typology. They contend it is not a good tool either to identify points of view or to define the important issues. The common point among these writers is a vivid sense of particularity, an emphasis on the integrity of individual faiths and a suspicion of the reductive effect of pluralistic theories as well as of the traditional a priori accounts of the other. Some simply observe that our knowledge of each other's religions is as yet too distorted and limited for any global conclusions to be reached. They commend a moratorium on declarative theology and a period of humble, mutual study.

Others pursue a project that is coming to be called comparative theology.[14] Comparative theology is characterized first by the recognition that we study the religions from a religiously committed perspective: there are no neutral standpoints. It is characterized second by an interest in careful, detailed comparison---not of one global tradition with another, for instance, but rather one specific text with another specific text, or a specific practice with another specific practice. And it is characterized third by an attempt to approximate an insider's understanding. At the simplest level this requires all the time and effort required to learn other languages and to receive instruction and guidance from interpreters within that tradition. There is no prior plan or program for such work. It can only go where the process leads. And countless specific projects will be needed before firm overall theories can be tested. But the Christian theologians engaged in this work view it as an explicit work of Christian theology. Having learned to inhabit some part of the other tradition, one returns to the sources and tasks of Christian theology with a changed perspective. The other religion has become a source for Christian reflection. Comparative theologians contend that more and more the ordinary practice of Christian theology will include this cross-reference to the substance of other religious traditions.

5.9   Trinitarian theologies of religion

Influenced partly by some of the considerations just reviewed, and partly by the work of Orthodox theologians who have helped the ecumenical movement recover an emphasis on pneumatology, a number of theologians across the confessional spectrum have turned to trinitarian theology as the primary resource for understanding religious plurality.[15] This development marks a new stage of genuine integration of reflection on the religions with the heart of the church's doctrinal tradition.

Part Two: The Trinitarian Shape of the Theology of Religious Plurality

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[13]   See for instance Knitter, P. F. and J. Hick (1987). The Myth of Christian uniqueness: toward a pluralistic theology of religions. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books.
[14]   See for example Clooney, F. X. (1993). Theology after Vedanta: an experiment in comparative theology. Albany, State University of New York Press.
[15]   See for instance Panikkar, R. (1973). The Trinity and the religious experience of man; icon-person-mystery. New York, Orbis Books, Smart, N. and S. Konstantine (1991). Christian systematic theology in a world context. Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, D'Costa, G. (2000). The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, Heim, S. M. (2001). The depth of the riches : a Trinitarian theology of religious ends. Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

6.1 Three Key Factors

Two necessary factors in the response to religious diversity are well attested in the ecumenical documents we noted above. One is the universal saving will of God (reflected in biblical passages like 1 Timothy 2:3-4). God is the God of all creation, and no people or culture lies outside the scope of divine providence and grace. The second is the particularity and finality of Jesus Christ as savior (reflected in biblical passages like Acts 4:12). Christ is both necessary for salvation and constitutive of salvation. To these two we can add a third: recognition of the unique and universal character of each religion in its own integrity. As in the first two cases our interpretations of God's saving will and Christ's decisive finality need to be grounded in scripture and tradition, so in the third case, our interpretations of a religion need to be grounded in the first hand sources and testimony that come from that tradition itself. Theology of religious plurality must credit, as far as possible, the self-descriptions of our neighbors. We interpret the religions from a Christian viewpoint, but what we interpret when we do so must be recognizable and affirmed by those whose religion it is. This is an inevitable, but possibly fruitful form of "competition" among the faiths: seeing which can most adequately take account of the distinctive testimony of others.[16] The faith that proves able to do this for the widest possible range of compelling elements from other traditions will not only be enriched itself, but will offer strong warrants for its own truth.

6.2 Theological Responses to the Religions

The Christian tradition is rich in resources for the theology of religions.[17] When we turn to scripture and to our theological traditions, we discover that these issues were already engaged in New Testament times and have been raised in many different settings since. In contemplating God's work apart from the history of Israel and the church, or in considering salvation for those untouched by that history of revelation, several themes recur in virtually all our traditions. One of these is the permanent, integral revelation given in creation itself, what some have called general revelation. Another is the continuing, active work of God's Spirit in the world, a free activity that is not constrained by human institutions or understanding. And a third is the presence of the same Word that was incarnate in Jesus, the *logos* without which nothing was made that was made. When expressing a wider hope, the conviction that salvation is available to those beyond the bounds of the church or explicit confession of Christ, Christians have inevitably turned to variations on these three themes. In developing theologies of religion, we do the same, often emphasizing one to the detriment of the other two. Many of the divisions among Christians over how to understand religious pluralism stem from the divergent theologies of religion that grow out of those differences in emphasis.[18] In other words, implicitly or explicitly, Trinity has been the framework within which Christians have reflected on the religions.

One approach to religious pluralism delves into the implications of trust in God as the source of a unitary creation. Religious diversity is addressed in terms of the imprint of the divine nature in all that is and the capacity for all persons to perceive that imprint. A range of ideas comes into play here: the image of God in human beings, general revelation, the light of reason or conscience, covenants with Adam and Eve, with Noah. There is a universal revelation of God in the things that God has made and this can be activated through the religions. So a typical advocate of this approach might argue that persons can relate to God apart from explicit relation to Christ, through this natural moral religion: "what the law requires is written on their hearts, to which their own conscience also bears witness." (Romans 2:15)

A second theological approach runs through the depths of Christological confession. Questions about the pluralism of faiths are explored through what we might call preincarnate, incarnate and postresurrection modalities of the divine Word. An example of the first would be reflections concerning the ways in which the *logos*, the Word of God, is already active in the

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[16]   John Cobb provides an interesting commendation of such "competition": Cobb, J. (1990). Beyond "Pluralism". Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 81-95.
[17]   See for instance the reviews in Sanders, J. (1992). No other name: an investigation into the destiny of the unevangelized. Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans, Dupuis S.J., J. (1997). Toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism. Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books.
[18]   See for instance a collection which lays out the patterns of theological thought characteristic of a number of Christian traditions in Heim, S. M., Ed. (1998). Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company.

world by virtue of participation in creation and therefore can be known in some measure apart from the gospel. The second involves consideration of the ways in which various faiths might providentially prefigure or reflect the concrete historical reality of Jesus Christ, ways in which the messiah is truly expected, to use Reinhold Niebuhr's phrase. The third modality concerns the active presence of the risen and living Christ to those in various religions, on the model of Jesus' resurrection appearances, where he is unrecognized either briefly (Mary in the garden) or for long periods (the road to Emmaus). Christ is actively present, and people respond directly to him, though he is not identified or named.

The third vein of theological reflection turns to the work of the Spirit and focuses on the continued freedom and providence of God's action. "The work of the Holy Spirit embraces the whole creation and the entire history of humanity and leads us to discern God's other activities in history beyond the historical Jesus and beyond the limits of the church." [19] The Spirit blows where it will, and the religions can be viewed as sites for this direct, spontaneous action of God. Whenever the religions are instruments for creation to fulfill some portion of its ordained beauty, justice and love, that presence of God is realized.

Christian theologies of religion affirm what is valid in other religions by identifying it either with God's revelation in creation, with the implicit presence of the Word, or with the direct action of the Spirit. Insofar as they are trinitarian, Christians recognize the validity of all three of these approaches, and affirm that the three are integrally related. Still, as it has been difficult to maintain a full and unified trinitarian perspective within the internal work of Christian theology, so it has been doubly hard to do so in the consideration of religious pluralism.

6.3 Trinity as the Framework for Theologies of Religious Plurality

By affirming the closest possible unity of Christ with God, in the specific context of Jewish monotheism, Christian faith created a dynamic absent in non-theistic traditions or more monistic or polytheistic ones. For God to be distinctively connected with historical particularity in this way, while also remaining the sole, transcendent creator, obviously required diversity in the means, the economy, by which God related to the world. And if this economic activity of God was to be at the same time true revelation of God's very self, then that variety of manifestation had to be rooted in a complexity of relation intrinsic to God's self. In other words, the ways in which God relates to creation are not accidental or artificial but expressions of God's intrinsic character.

The Trinity is Christianity's framework for understanding religious diversity. This framework was already present in the disciples' conviction that their encounter with Jesus could be correlated with the encounter with Israel's one God and with the new life they experienced within and among themselves as a result of Jesus. These were not identical experiences, but they were encounters with the same God. Of course there are innumerable ways that God may be manifest in relation with humanity. These three encounters---with the God of Israel who is not to be named or imaged, with the concrete humanity of Jesus, with the indwelling of the Spirit---were not simply three acts or manifestations among numberless others. They were revelations of the constitutive pattern of God's relation to humanity and of God's own relational nature.

With explicit knowledge of the Trinity, rooted in the incarnation, it is possible for us to unify other dimensions of religious experience. Trinity provides a particular ground for affirming the truth and reality of what is different. Trinitarian conviction suggests that among all the possible claimed manifestations of God more than one narrow band can be authentic. There are experiences of numinous powers in nature, whether a storm at sea or the birth of a child. There are experiences of deliverance and new life that come to a person who calls out for God's mercy in the midst of a desperate addiction or who is released from oppression. There are experiences of mystical unity and self-transcendence that overflow our normal individuality. The Trinity is an account of God that says these are experiences of the same reality, not different ones, and yet each has its own irreducible integrity. They ought not to be separated and pitted against each other (as for instance in a religion of nature over against a religion of history or one of spirit). Nor should they be reduced to some generic reality

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[19] Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, "Report of the Moderator," Central Committee Meeting, World Council of Churches, August, 2003.

underlying them all or hierarchically ranked so that only one is the definitive truth behind the other two. God is known in the midst of these different patterns. "Only such a 'pluralist' doctrine of God can allow for the equal validity of finding God as the fundamental and indescribable ground of all, as a partner in personal dialogue, and as the energy of one's own deepest selfhood—and only such a doctrine can present these elements as united with each other, requiring each other to make full human sense."[20] Just as Christians apply this insight to discern the presence of God in their daily lives, so it may also be helpful in our consideration of the religions. .

The Trinity teaches us that Jesus Christ cannot be the sole, exhaustive source for knowledge of God nor an isolated act of God to save us. Yet the Trinity itself is Christocentric. It is Christocentric in the empirical sense that the doctrine, the representation of God's triune nature, arose historically from faith in Jesus Christ. And it is so in the systemic sense that the personal character of God requires particularity as its deepest mode of revelation. The fullness of God's mystery is hidden in the divine source, overflows in Christ beyond the measure of our means to receive it, and is continually active in all of creation through the Spirit. "All history, both past and to come, is potentially a particularity by which God's self-revelation is mediated."[21] Christ is the concrete particularity by which Christians know this about the potential in all history and in whom, in the unity with the divine Word, this self-revelation decisively takes place. The scope of divine activity in all of religious history widens in proportion to the decisiveness of God's self-revelation in Christ, not the reverse. Christ is the basis upon which we can be open to other faiths.[22]

Without the constitutive role attributed to Jesus, there would have been no reason for Christians to evolve this understanding of the mystery of God. Yet, though the divinity and saving decisiveness of Jesus are the preconditions for such an understanding, the doctrine of the Trinity in turn rules out the absolute exclusivist reading of those qualities in Jesus. Thus, as Gavin D'Costa says, "The Trinity safeguards against an exclusivist particularism (Christomonism) and a pluralist universalism (theocentrism) in that it stipulates against an *exclusive identification* of God and Jesus, as well as against a *non-identification* of God and Jesus."[23] To make sense of the fact that God was as decisively in Christ as Christians believed, it was necessary to hold that God was elsewhere than Christ also. This is perhaps the key pivot point of the Christian theology of religions. It balances the tensions such a theology must maintain: without such a decisive Christology, no Trinity; with Trinity, no understanding of Christ's uniqueness so extreme that it cannot fit within a wider economy of God's action. The reality of God's active relation to creation in ways distinct from the event of the historical Jesus is coded into the trinitarian basis of Christian faith. So too is the intrinsic connection of all of God's action with that historical event.

The Trinity represents the Christian context for interpreting religious pluralism. If Jesus Christ is the decisive act and revelation of God for us, then by that image we know that gracious care and crucified, self-giving love are the modes in which we are called to relate with our religious neighbors. We are called to dialogue and common work for the good of God's reign. If the God made known to us in Christ is Trinity, then we must avoid either exclusivism or pluralism by dialectically relating the universal and the particular. Recognition of the work of the Holy Sprit "allows the particularity of Christ to be related to the universal activity of God in the history of humankind."[24] And if the Holy Spirit is active in the history of the world religions and the church stands under the judgement of the Spirit, then attention to the religions is vital for Christian faithfulness.

Part Three: In Many and Various Ways

[20] Williams, R. (1990). Trinity and Pluralism. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. P.4.
[21] D'Costa, G. (1990). Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theory of Religions. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. p. 19.
[22] M.M. Thomas provides a thoughtful exposition of this theme Thomas, M. M. (1987). Risking Christ for Christ's sake: towards an ecumenical theology of pluralism. Geneva, WCC Publications.
[23] D'Costa, G. (1990). Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theory of Religions. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. P. 18.
[24] The points of this paragraph are drawn from the theses in Gavin D'Costa's article Ibid.

7.1 Dimensions of Koinonia

I hope that the foregoing discussion is of some value in summarizing the current situation and outlining positive theological resources for our response to religious plurality. At best we can only say that our churches are working towards a theology of religious pluralism. We share this struggle with our religious neighbors who in their own ways also face challenges in religious diversity. We cannot know in advance all that we will discover or encounter in the dialogue of religions, so no sound theology can claim to be complete in that respect. And yet we do need serviceable theological maps, maps that can orient us toward respectful mutual relations with other religions and that already contain space where we can incorporate learning from other religions. With the Baar Statement we can "affirm that in Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, the entire human family has been united to God in an irrevocable bond and covenant."[25] This is the orienting compass point of our map, the witness we offer to all. Can this faith specify a place for the witness of other religions?

I believe that it can. Indeed, I believe that in honoring the testimony of our religious neighbors we gain a more profound understanding of salvation itself and of the distinctive witness Christians bear in the world. We are only at the beginning stages of this process. I offer the following as a theological experiment, as one way in which such a map might be drawn. I take as my point of departure the theme of *koinonia*, which has been so important in recent Faith and Order discussion of the nature of the church.

If there is true religious value in any tradition, it must stem from an authentic relation to God. There may of course be ostensible religious movements that have no such value, and in all religious traditions, including our own, simple human error may be mixed amid truth. Persons may stand nominally within any religious tradition and yet be estranged from living contact with God. But the crucial theological question is what kind of relation with God accounts for the best in the religions, for the truth we have recognized and the further truth we may recognize in other faiths? We saw in section two how Christian understanding of God as Trinity provides the context for our theology of religious plurality. Christians believe in a complex God, in whom the three persons and their unique relations subsist in a single *koinonia.* God is this communion in difference. Since Trinity is constituted by an enduring set of relations, the divine life has varied dimensions. It is those dimensions and their complexity that make possible various kinds of encounter with God. Human interaction with the triune God may take different forms. The dimensions exist because God is Trinity, but the dimensions belong to all of the trinitarian persons together, not to any one. I suggest that what is religiously valid in other faith traditions stems from authentic encounter with the divine through these dimensions.

Theological discussion of religious pluralism has primarily focused on the question of whether those of other faiths can attain salvation, and if so, how. The typology of exclusivism/inclusivism/pluralism is organized around this very question. Less attention has been given to what we mean by salvation, and how this relates to the aims of other religions. Salvation is a relation of communion or *koinonia* with God and with other creatures in Christ. In one sense such a statement is extremely general, for there is space within it for all the traditional differences among Christians over issues of *theosis,* justification, sanctification and the resurrection life. But the statement is of importance precisely because it highlights what is shared among Christian traditions. The *koinonia* dimension of salvation is of special importance in terms of the unique character of the Christian gospel. In other words, *koinonia* is a key both to Christian openness to other faiths and to its witness amongst them.

7.2 Dimensions of Relation

I would like to summarize three dimensions of the *koinonia* of the trinitarian life and three human images that reflect these.[26] The first dimension is characterized by the interplay of emptiness and immanence. The three divine persons each "empty themselves" to allow the indwelling of the others, and they each have an immanent presence within the others. If we were to seek an image of this reality in human life, we might best liken it to connections we sometimes characterize as nonpersonal, because they are of such an elemental sort. One of

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[25]   Baar Statement, Section III "Christology and Religious Plurality"

[26]   For a fuller development of these ideas, see Heim, S. M. (2001). <u>The depth of the riches : a Trinitarian theology of religious ends</u>. Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

us receives a blood transfusion from another, perhaps from someone we have never met. This is a significant, even life-saving relation, but it takes place on an organic level. Or we are awakened in the night by preconscious awareness of unusual noises. Just as the qualities of human personhood are not discernible at the level of the molecular interactions in our bodies or our preconscious awareness, so we may say that God's personal nature also encompasses a "pre-personal" dimension.

Secondly, within the Trinity, each of the three persons encounters the others in freedom, with its own unique character. The relations are asymmetrical, because each has its own identity and is no copy of another. In human beings we see a faint likeness to this in the dimension of direct personal encounter, in which we share ideas, intentions and emotion. We meet as distinctive others, honoring and enacting our identities in exchange. We do this face to face or through a medium like writing or art.

Thirdly, the divine persons do not only share one divine life process. They do not only encounter each other's uniqueness. They also enter into communion with each other, indwelling each other <u>as</u> different persons. The incarnation is a window into this trinitarian communion, and the path that opens our way to participate in it. We know some shadow of this in our human relations when empathy and intimacy with someone gives rise to a vicarious capacity to share his or her inner life. His or her characteristic responses and feelings begin to arise in us also, as a kind of second nature in us. These arise in us not instead of our own reactions, but alongside them, complementing and in some cases transforming them. Relations of deep love or friendship are marked by this dynamic. But it is manifest above all for us in our incorporation into Christ by faith through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. In this way we can share in Christ's love for others.

In God's relation with creation, God manifests in a proportionate way the same three dimensions of relation present in the divine life itself. These dimensions of relation are present in the inner-trinitarian life. They are present, far more faintly, in our human lives as part of the image of God given in creation and broken by sin. They are present in the providence of God's presence to the world. And we may find them also in the religions.

7.3   The dimension of emptiness and immanence

The act of creation reflects the first dimension we discussed. On the one hand, God "withdraws" or makes space for creatures to have their own being and freedom distinct from God. God ordains a divine absence, a distance between creator and creature that makes freedom and identity possible. And on the other hand, God practices a universal immanence, sustaining every being by divine power and order. These relations are both universal and hidden. God practices an active absence and an anonymous identity in creation.

Humans may respond to God's manifestation in this dimension in two different ways, each with its own integrity. First, God's contraction to make way for creation makes possible a valid human insight into the insubstantiality of all being. If creation is examined rigorously on this frequency---through meditation or science---- we can rightly find impermanence or emptiness at its base. All enduring, distinct identities are found without substance. This conclusion, and rigorous practice based on it, are characteristic of the Theravadan Buddhist understanding of *nirvana*.[27] Insight into this dimension is far more developed in Buddhism than in any facet of Christian tradition. The Buddhist vision of emptiness is an accurate description of one aspect of God's relation to creation, a fundamental dimension of contingency and distance given in the creative act itself. We find here an isolation and purification of that dimension. To realize such emptiness is to cling to nothing, not even one's own identity, and so surely to be delivered from all suffering, estrangement, and relationship.

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[27]   We can note here that Buddhist conceptions of *nirvana* and of "no-self" doctrine have often been characterized by Christians or Western philosophers as a kind of nihilism. But despite the largely negative terms often used by Buddhists in this connection, this is misleading. Buddhism is precisely not negative in this sense, since what it regards as unreal merits no attack and ensnares us as much by repulsion as by attraction. There is a certain limited parallel with the apophatic strands of Christian theology, whose "negative" approach to descriptions of God is in service of a positive encounter. Emptiness is a benign feature, a realization of the insubstantiality of all that occasions suffering and fear in us.

There is a second way to apprehend this dimension of divine relation. Here what is most profoundly grasped is not God's withdrawal, but God's sustaining, constant presence in all that is made. The constant dynamism of the divine life which upholds the world is taken as the substratum of one great self whose body is the world. From this perspective, it is a mistake to take emptiness or flux as the real story. Every individual part may change and pass away, like cells in a body, but the one self goes on. We can look deeply into ourselves or nature - by meditation or science - and find an underlying reality, present alike in all that is. The *advaita Vedanta* tradition of Hinduism expresses this perception powerfully. *Brahman*, the one unshakable reality, sustains all things by pervading all things. If pursued intensely and separately, this insight suggests an end in which the small "I" of the particular creature resolves into a perfect identity with the one absolute being. The creature can realize the impersonal immanence of the divine as their sole being, and yield back all unique identity and relations.

Either of the insights I have described can lead reasonably to the conclusion "I am that." All things are empty, or all things are literally divine, including me. The conviction that *samsara* is *nirvana*, or that *atman* is *Brahman* are two distinctive religious conclusions born of such wisdom. And the purity of the wisdom behind these conclusions is developed more profoundly within Buddhism and Hinduism than in Christianity. Sages who have taught and practiced this wisdom have benefited from God's illumination, for it is right to honor God's universal presence, and to realize our complete dependence on God.

7.4   The personal dimension

God's relation with the world in the dimension just described is the presupposition for another dimension of relation. The background of God's universal "withdrawal" and immanence sets the stage for a free and historical encounter of humans with God as a single "Thou" on the stage of creation. We may call this the personal dimension of God's relation with the world. It also has two sides. Under the influence of the biblical tradition, we tend to think of this dimension in terms of encounter with God as <u>a</u> person, even if the focus sometimes falls on law or Scripture as a crystallization of God's will and purpose. Obviously, this is a vision Christianity shares with Judaism and Islam. This is the God of the biblical and Qur'anic traditions, an agent, who speaks and acts with humanity. But it is possible to conceive a specific transcendent order without any personal being who expresses it, a divine will without a God whose will it is, so to speak. The *Tao* of Taoism or the *logos* in Stoicism, or the Kantian moral law would be examples. Thus at one end of the range there is revelation of a transcendent, impersonal order and at the other end there is the personal God who is both subject of loving encounter and source of law and guidance.

The key point that distinguishes this dimension as a whole from the first dimension we discussed is that it allows for, indeed requires, contrast and tension. Specific, historical revelation marks the divine and relationship with it off from other possibilities. Divine word or image points to the fact that the transcendent reality is not empty nor is all being already in perfect identity with it. There is a distance between us and God that must be traveled by moral and spiritual transformation. Revelation bridges the gap between God and us, pointing the way for change. The motto is not "thou art that," but "become what you are called/structured to be."

A trinitarian perspective suggests that what is apprehended in these cases is the external unity of the Trinity, God's personal will for the good of creation. Human reception may focus specially on the content of what is willed by God or on the personal character of the one who wills it. In either case, faithful response to the revelation of God is an authentic personal relation to God. Prophets stirred by the Holy Spirit have risen as messengers to their people, for God is not left without personal witness to any nation.

7.5   The communion dimension

Christian faith presupposes the dimensions we have described, and specifically presupposes the personal dimension. "In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world" (Hebrews 1:1-2). Christian faith extends the personal dimension of relation with two decisive steps. The first is the conviction that the

decisive revelation of the personal God is itself a living person: Jesus Christ. The second is the confession of God as Trinity, which finds this single divine "I" grounded in a communion of persons.

Christians thus are bold to proclaim that God relates with creation in the dimension of *koinonia* or communion, and salvation is the fulfillment of relation in this dimension. We can confess this only because we see it to be true in the incarnation of the Word, and in our relation with Christ. In familiar human interactions, we know of communion so real that a person can rightly say of certain aspects of her own willing, longing or loving that they seem to arise more from the effects of shared life with a friend than from any purely isolated individuality of her own. In even more vivid terms, we may become new creatures in Christ, members one of another, and partakers in the divine life.

The unique aspect of this dimension of relation with God is defined by the fact that we can only have it by sharing it with others. We can have *koinonia* with God only through *koinonia* with others. This does not only refer to the fact that we cannot be saved apart from Christ. For the typical feature of our communion with Christ is that we discover a new openness and love toward neighbors and enemies, a response that we can hardly credit as coming solely from us, except by virtue of Christ's dwelling in us. The effect of communion is openness to communion. We are not only changed through our *koinonia* with others, but such communion also characterizes final eschatological fulfillment. God has moved to save us through the incarnation, an act of communion with our human nature in which the dimensions of relation with God find their fullness together.

7.6   Salvation

Salvation is a complex state, for in it a person is open to each of the dimensions of the divine life that we have described. No individual can or could realize the complete fullness of possible relation with God in all of these dimensions in a self-contained way. But she or he does approach that fullness through *koinonia* with other persons, each of whom in their relations with God and with others fill out aspects that would be lacking for any one alone. The communion of saints is not an assembly of individuals who each repeat an identical unity and reconciliation with God. It is a living exchange in which one person's participation in God is enriched by the distinctive quality of another's. This is why the concrete body of the church has been regarded as fundamental to the Christian life, even to salvation itself. The way that we can most deeply participate in a divine fullness that literally overflows our finite capacities is through mutual indwelling with other persons. Speaking of the communion of the Trinity, we may say seriously that the divine nature is so great that even God cannot encompass it except through sharing.

Koinonia with each other is the condition of our participation in the divine life. Our finite receptions of the triune self-giving multiply each other, in a kind of spiritual calculus that deepens each one's participation in the communion of the triune life itself.

As the Letter to the Colossians says of Christ, "He is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:17). Through the incarnation of the Word, the inner *koinonia* of the Trinity has been shared with a human being. Through our human *koinonia* with that crucified and risen one we partake in that sharing to the limits of our individual created natures. And through our communion with each other in the body of Christ we are able to share ever more of the fullness of God. What does this imply about the dimensions of relation with God found in the religions? Communion is not an identity of contradiction. Because they are rooted in the divine nature itself, each of these dimensions of relation has its place in salvation. They have a place there not as isolated and exclusive relations, excluding others, but as participants in a wider mutuality. The only truly unique component of the Christian identity is communion in Christ. But we should not frame this uniqueness as the addition of a relation with God that replaces all others. The apophatic mystery of the divine emptiness, the unitive mystery of the divine immanence, the majesty of the divine law, the love and mercy of the divine personal encounter---each of these is embraced, not denied. Communion is the means by which all may share more deeply in each one, and so share more deeply in the divine nature.

Our estrangement from God—manifest in sin, evil and death-- distorts and blocks every dimension of relation. The reconciling and healing grace of God in Christ has broken down the dividing wall of sin between us and God, the wall of enmity that sets us against each other, and the wall of mortality that alienates us from nature. Active relation with God in the religions depends upon the reconciling work of Christ. Apart from this saving work, it would not be possible for alienation to turn to true realization of divine emptiness, for human egotism to turn to realization of divine immanence, for human conventions to give way to divine purpose, for God to be known in personal encounter. In inviting us into the "glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21) God in Christ cleared the barriers that blocked all these paths.

7.7   The religions
I have tried to sketch a theological perspective in which Christians can consider the substance of other religious faiths in terms authentically drawn from Christian sources. We began with the observation that this attempt would seek to combine the universal saving will of God, the decisive finality of Christ's saving work and the irreducible integrity of difference among religions. I suggested two points. The first is that because of the Trinity's nature as *koinonia*, God's inner complexity is matched by relation with creation in a variety of dimensions. Second, salvation is a complex state in which varied relations with God are unified in Christ.

The truth in the distinctive claims of other religions is rooted in real dimensions of relation with God. The existence of these dimensions is a manifestation of the whole economy of salvation, in which Father, Word and Spirit all participate. To recognize this integral truth present in other religious traditions helps us understand how they could become extraordinary means, or even ordinary means, by which their adherents may journey toward communion in Christ. In particular, no religious tradition is a monolith. Each one has movements and subtraditions that move toward personal and communion dimensions of relation with God. This provides the rationale for a Christian hope in an inclusive pluralism. Since these dimensions of relation are grounded in the Trinity, and have been freed from the utter dominion of sin by Christ, we can set no limits to the intrinsic attraction that draws them together toward salvation. The power of God is at work within the religions. Therefore there is reason for Christians to attend to the witness of their faith, as we can learn there in new depth of the dimensions of our own hope.

At the same time we need to acknowledge the claims of other religions to their own separate identities, and to their own distinct ends. According to their conviction, they do not need to be fulfilled in Christianity but quite the reverse. The religions provide a vantage point from which the Christian hope can be regarded as unwise, impossible and even blasphemous. From these perspectives, the variety of relation with God is more apparent than real. Christians, in holding to this diversity as eternal, estrange themselves from profound spiritual realization or obedience. Such criticism is worthy of our attention. It reminds us that salvation is not a universal aspiration, but a specific hope that is carried in the gospel. And it may challenge us to greater faithfulness in realizing the specific dimension of relation with God that is so profound in our neighbor's tradition. Of course, from the perspective of other religions, so long as Christians insist on clinging to distinct identities, relations and communion in the divine life, we will be prevented for that reason from realizing the concrete religious ends for which those traditions hope. In fact, in interreligious dialogue it is often precisely these elements that our partners specifically criticize: notions of Trinity, incarnation, participation by believers in the inner divine life.

In all major religious traditions there is clear awareness that people respond to the various dimensions we have described. Each tradition tends to take one dimension of relation with God as the basis for interpretation of the others, or even as the sole real dimension. If the dimension of impersonal emptiness is taken as fundamental, for instance, then the others become useful, transitory formulations on the way to realization of that dimension, simply imperfect anticipations of it. Christians are no different in a formal sense. We also grasp the entire set of dimensions through one, the dimension of personal communion. The peculiarity of this dimension is that it does not require that the other dimensions dissolve into it, or drop away as prior stages on the path. Communion in fact depends upon their permanence and distinctive quality, in the divine life and in salvation. Communion's way of including the other

dimensions is to include them <u>as</u> other, with an enduring co-equality.

The uniqueness of Christ is a reconciling uniqueness. The proclamation of the gospel to the nations is a proclamation of *koinonia* that finds God is nowhere without a witness. If Christianity preaches a new relation with God, it is a relation of communion that embraces those dimensions of relation with God found concretely in other religions. The trinitarian example tells us that the simple fact of religious difference does not automatically require flat judgements of rejection or acceptance. Everything depends on whether or how this difference functions in communion. If God is Trinity, the various relations with God we have outlined are themselves irreducible. Any one who clings to the truth of one of the relations in its purity and isolation can never be forced from it by pure negation.

It is impossible then to believe in the Trinity <u>instead</u> of the distinctive religious claims of all other religions. If Trinity is real, then many of these specific religious claims must be real also. If they were all false, then Christianity could not be true. The Trinity is a map that finds room for, indeed requires, concrete truth in other religions. Those truths can be various because God's presence to creation is manifest in various dimensions. On this map, in other words, there is room for affirmation of the other and for witness as well. *Koinonia* is at the heart of the good news of Jesus Christ of which the church is to be herald and sign. As such, it calls us always to affirm and share in our neighbor's relation with God and always to bear testimony to Christ as the one who establishes God's communion with humanity.

The ultimate ends described by various religions correspond to relations with God constituted by limitation or intensification within a particular dimension of the trinitarian life. The practice of compassion, mindfulness and insight on the Buddhist way, for instance, do offer a path to unconditioned reality and release from suffering. And this way is based in a real dimension of apophatic mystery in God's relation with the world. In this concrete respect the end in view is similar to salvation. We may say it is an actual aspect of the salvation for which Christians hope. But realization of this condition alone would relinquish a whole range of other possible relations with God and with others (not least of all with Christ). And the presence of these relations is integral to the communion of salvation. In that respect the Buddhist ideal is similar to what Christians mean by loss. Therefore Christians cannot fail to offer their own witness over against the Buddhist one, even though that witness need not take the form of a flat denial of the Buddhist aim.

Here we reach a mystery that a theology of religious plurality may not be able to resolve. How finally shall the threads of relation be gathered up? Shall they all grow together at last, with the purity of each religious particularity shared in explicit communion through Christ? Or, even though the distinct dimensions of relation with God are all rooted in the one Trinity, may persons actually realize the final ends that the religions propose as alternatives to that communion? From the Christian perspective we may hope for all to be saved. But we are not certain. And this uncertainty in return leaves room for the truth claims advanced by these religions themselves, including their contrasting visions of religious fulfillment. So this mystery may be a fruitful one, which supports both mutual respect between the faiths and their mutual witness.

In this perspective, the religions play a truly providential role. God's activity in the world is not confined to a narrow salvation history. God's grace enfolds the world and touches it in many dimensions. The religions reflect the fact that every human response to any dimension of God's manifestation and revelation meets only God's "yes" of grace in return. Every response to the divine initiative has its reward. Every relation with God that proceeds on the basis of some dimension of God's self-giving to us meets the fulfillment for which it aims and hopes, and is drawn toward the full *koinonia* of the divine life.

8. Conclusion

To see the religions in trinitarian perspective is to see them as representative of different dimensions of relation with God. These dimensions belong together, but they belong together as a communion-in-difference, the nature of the divine life itself. Therefore Christians can understand the differences among religions in light of their place in a shared communion, even when the religions themselves remain quite separate from that communion and even

opposed to each other. For within the *koinonia* of salvation, the distinct qualities of relation reflected by the religions remain distinct as well. Therefore, whether we focus on the inclusivist hope that the religions will lead to the knowledge of Christ or on the affirmation that the religions already have authentic contact with God, we can honor their role within the whole divine economy. The trinitarian perspective highlights what we have to learn from these traditions. And it highlights a challenge for our own practice. If we refuse communion with those of other faiths in their relation with God, then we are the ones who violate *koinonia*. Finally, generosity of spirit toward the religions does not diminish witness to the decisive work of Christ. For that decisive work includes Christ's gift of communion in the Spirit, and in that gift rests our hope that the many may truly be one, one in a *koinonia* that does no violence to difference.

Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, (2003), "Report of the Moderator," Central Committee Meeting, World Council of Churches, August 26

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FOOTNOTES

[1] Though, as Kenneth Cracknell has pointed out, missionaries themselves had already initiated a reflection on the religions that went beyond seeing them simply as objects of the Christian message. See Cracknell, K. (1995). Justice, courtesy and love: theologians and missionaries encountering world religions, 1846-1914. London, Epworth Press.

2 See World Council of Churches, S.-u. o. D. (1979). Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies. Geneva, World Council of Churches.

[3] See especially Ariarajah, S. W. (1989). The Bible and people of other faiths. Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books.

[4] San Antonio report, p. 32

[5] Knitter, P. (2002). Introducing Theologies of Religion. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis.

[6] See the Baar Statement at http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/baar.html.

[7] Gassman, G. (1993). Documentary History of Faith and Order: 1963-1993. Geneva, World Council of Churches Publications. p. 208.

[8] "Theology of religions" largely refers to discussion among Christian theologians, though even among such authors there is no agreement as to the appropriate title for this field. At the same time there has been a proliferation of interfaith organizations and initiatives that have produced their own literature about religious pluralism.

[9] The typology may be applied to any religious tradition, though it has been developed and utilized primarily by Christian thinkers.

[10] See this document at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html

[11] See this document at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20000806_dominus-iesus_en.html

[12] See also the text of the Synod of Bishops Special Assembly for Asia at http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html

[13] See for instance Knitter, P. F. and J. Hick (1987). The Myth of Christian uniqueness: toward a pluralistic theology of religions. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books.

[14] See for example Clooney, F. X. (1993). Theology after Vedanta: an experiment in comparative theology. Albany, State University of New York Press.

[15] See for instance Panikkar, R. (1973). The Trinity and the religious experience of man; icon-person-mystery. New York, Orbis Books, Smart, N. and S. Konstantine (1991). Christian systematic theology in a world context. Minneapolis, MN, Fortress Press, D'Costa, G. (2000). The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, Heim, S. M. (2001). The depth of the riches : a Trinitarian theology of religious ends. Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

[16] John Cobb provides an interesting commendation of such "competition": Cobb, J. (1990). Beyond "Pluralism". Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, Orbis Books: 81-95.

[17] See for instance the reviews in Sanders, J. (1992). No other name: an investigation into the destiny of the unevangelized. Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans, Dupuis S.J., J. (1997). Toward a Christian theology of religious pluralism. Maryknoll, N.Y., Orbis Books.

[18] See for instance a collection which lays out the patterns of theological thought characteristic of a number of Christian traditions in Heim, S. M., Ed. (1998). Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism. Grand Rapids, Eerdmans Publishing Company.

[19] Aram I, Catholicos of Cilicia, "Report of the Moderator," Central Committee Meeting, World Council of Churches, August, 2003.

[20] Williams, R. (1990). Trinity and Pluralism. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. P.4.

[21] D'Costa, G. (1990). Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theory of Religions. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. p. 19.

[22] M.M. Thomas provides a thoughtful exposition of this theme Thomas, M. M. (1987). Risking Christ for Christ's sake: towards an ecumenical theology of pluralism. Geneva, WCC Publications.

[23] D'Costa, G. (1990). Christ, the Trinity and Religious Plurality. Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theory of Religions. G. D'Costa. Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books. P. 18.

[24] The points of this paragraph are drawn from the theses in Gavin D'Costa's article Ibid.

[25] Baar Statement, Section III "Christology and Religious Plurality"

[26] For a fuller development of these ideas, see Heim, S. M. (2001). The depth of the riches : a Trinitarian theology of religious ends. Grand Rapids, Mich., W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co.

[27] We can note here that Buddhist conceptions of *nirvana* and of "no-self" doctrine have often been characterized by Christians or Western philosophers as a kind of nihilism. But despite the largely negative terms often used by Buddhists in this connection, this is misleading. Buddhism is precisely not negative in this sense, since what it regards as unreal merits no attack and ensnares us as much by repulsion as by attraction. There is a certain limited parallel with the apophatic strands of Christian theology, whose "negative" approach to descriptions of God is in service of a positive encounter. E

3 Hick's Theology of Religious Pluralism.

Having considered hick's philosophy of pluralism in the last chapter, I am now ready to examine Hick's theology of pluralism, concentrating especially on his Christology for a pluralistic age. as one of the leading philosophers of religion of our time, hick has not only been active in the contemporary theological scene, his contributions, particularly in the area of Christology, have been. They would call their theological experiment Koinonia Farm. Koinonia means fellowship or communion in Greek, marking the farm as a space where a community could live and work out their beliefs about the Fatherhood of God, brotherhood of man, dignity of work, and fellowship of the Spirit together. As one Koinonia observer put it, "the ideas of the new Testament either had to be rejected or incarnated." Koinonia was to be this Incarnation. Koinonia members built and inhabited small wooden cabins on the property, sometimes sharing these humble lodgings among several families. They took turns cooking and ate most of their meals together in a common area. Religious pluralism is an attitude or policy regarding the diversity of religious belief systems co-existing in society. It can indicate one or more of the following: As the name of the worldview according to which one's own religion is not held to be the sole and exclusive source of truth, and thus the acknowledgement that at least some truths and true values exist in other religions.