

**RELIGIOUS PLURALISM: POSSIBILITY AND LIMITATIONS OF
A DIALOGUE RESPECTFUL OF BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY**

by

Mamadou N'DIAYE

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SUPERVISOR: DR BILL DOMERIS

The opinions expressed in this thesis do not necessarily reflect the views of the South African Theological Seminary.

DECLARATION

I hereby acknowledge that the work contained in this thesis is my own original work and has not previously in its entirety or in part been submitted to any academic institution for degree purposes.

Mamadou N'Diaye

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By the time I engaged in this work a friend of mine expressed his fear that exposition to the challenge may well carry me astray from my convictions and threatened my personal faith. I must recognize that when confronted with many of the arguments raised within the issue, I have been sometimes disconcerted. But the more I have been digging into and reflecting on the various questions this thesis have dealt with, the more I learned to meet them. Rising up to this point has been possible however because I have been challenged to search, to think and to work hard.

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I started with that fear expressed by my friend and I ended with a stronger and more rooted conviction with regards to the issue. It is also my conviction that this is an area of Christian thought where African and other theologians of the South hemisphere have something to contribute for the good of the Church in carrying on the work of the Master.

Soli Deo Gloria.

SUMMARY

In the dawn of the twenty century, voices raised to call Christianity to reconsider its relation to non-Christian traditions in a world that was turning unavoidably global and pluralistic. Globalization has affected all spheres of human society, and has been affecting the debates over the relation of Christianity to non-Christian religions overall after World War II. The pressures it has created in our contemporary socio-realities urged a rethinking of Christian relation to non-Christian traditions. Under such pressures, dialogue emerged as a new paradigm which since the missionary gathering in Tambaram has become a leitmotiv. In the debate over religious pluralism, two new approaches have made their ways distancing themselves from traditional Christianity labeled Exclusivism. They are self-qualified as inclusivism and pluralism. Karl Rahner's anonymous Christianity was the first inclusivist model that took the lead to become after Vatican II the basic model other inclusivists have used. With his so-called Copernican model, John Hick has become the leading figure of a pluralist approaches to religious pluralism. This study set to consider the dialogical approach of pluralists and inclusivists with regards to biblical Christian identity. It aims at giving an understanding of the roots of the challenge and its implications for biblical Christian identity, at questioning the appropriateness of these new dialogical approaches for biblical Christian identity and at examining the possibility and limitations of dialogue from a fair and biblical New Testament perspective. While a dialogical approach to non-Christian traditions is appealing, this thesis contends that to be appropriate a Christian model must preserve the integrity of biblical Christian identity as given by the New Testament. To be fair, it must secure also parity in true respect of the integrity of all parts and avoid reducing religious identities through a cultural relativism. This thesis calls therefore for a Christian model grounded in a Trinitarian theology that leaves safe the theocentrism and the christocentrism of the New Testament.

ABBREVIATIONS

DJG	<i>Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels</i>
EDWM	<i>Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions</i>
GELNT	<i>Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament</i>
KJV	<i>King James Version</i>
LB	<i>Living Bible</i>
ML	<i>Modern Language</i>
NIDNTT III	<i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology, Volume III</i>
NIV	<i>New International Version</i>
RSV	<i>Revised Standard Version</i>
WNWD	<i>Webster's New World Dictionary of the American language</i>

Unless otherwise indicated, all Bible references are from the New International Version.

THESIS OUTLINE

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1	NEED	1
1.1.1	<i>The changes after World War II</i>	1
1.1.2	<i>The issue of religious pluralism</i>	2
1.1.3	<i>The challenge</i>	2
1.2	SCOPE	3
1.3	METHODOLOGY	4
1.4	KEY CONSIDERATIONS	4
1.4.1	<i>Pluralism</i>	4
1.4.2	<i>Religious pluralism</i>	5
1.4.3	<i>Dialogue</i>	7
1.4.4	<i>Other definitions</i>	7
1.5	RATIONALE	8

CHAPTER TWO: HISTORICAL BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION

2.1	INTRODUCTION	9
2.2	MEDIEVAL UNIFORMITY	9
2.2.1	<i>From imperial pluralism to medieval uniformity</i>	9
2.2.2	<i>From uniformity to Denominationalism</i>	10
2.3	ENLIGHTENMENT AND SECULARIZATION	10
2.3.1	<i>Seventeenth century and Eighteenth century deists</i>	10
2.3.2	<i>Modernism and post-modernism</i>	11
2.4	GLOBALIZATION	11
2.4.1	<i>Nature of globalization</i>	11
2.4.2	<i>Dynamics of globalization</i>	12

CHAPTER THREE: SHIFTING PARADIGM

3.1	CHRISTIANITY AND NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS	13
3.1.1	<i>Christian debates about non-Christian religions</i>	13
3.1.2	<i>Towards a paradigm shift</i>	13
3.2	ROMAN CATHOLICISM	14
3.2.1	<i>From reluctance to openness</i>	14
3.2.2	<i>Vatican II</i>	15
3.3	NEW PARADIGM, NEW ISSUE	15
3.3.1	<i>A controversial issue</i>	15
3.3.2	<i>Problems of theory and praxis</i>	16

CHAPTER FOUR: PLURALIST AND INCLUSIVIST MODELS

4.1	INTRODUCTION	18
4.1.1	<i>Religious diversity and the West</i>	18
4.1.2	<i>Key principles</i>	18
4.2	OVERVIEW OF PLURALIST MODELS	19

4.2.1	<i>John Hick</i>	20
4.2.2	<i>Paul Knitter</i>	20
4.2.3	<i>Summing up</i>	21
4.3	OVERVIEW OF INCLUSIVIST MODELS	22
4.3.1	<i>Pre-Vatican II: Karl Rahner</i>	22
4.3.2	<i>Post-Vatican II: Hans Kung</i>	24
4.3.3	<i>Post-Vatican II: Jacques Dupuis</i>	25
4.3.4	<i>Evangelical inclusivism: Clark Pinnock</i>	26
4.3.5	<i>Summing up</i>	26

CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

5.1	INTRODUCTION	28
5.2	PLURALISTS AND BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY	28
5.2.1	<i>Foundational implications</i>	29
5.2.2	<i>Ontological implications</i>	40
5.2.3	<i>Existential implications</i>	43
5.2.4	<i>Evaluation</i>	46
5.2.5	<i>Summing up</i>	49
5.3	INCLUSIVISTS AND BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY	51
5.3.1	<i>Foundational implications</i>	51
5.3.2	<i>Ontological implications</i>	53
5.3.3	<i>Existential implications</i>	54
5.3.4	<i>Evaluation</i>	54
5.3.5	<i>Summing up</i>	56

CHAPTER SIX: POSSIBILITY AND LIMIT(S) OF DIALOGUE

6.1	INTRODUCTION	58
6.2	TOWARDS A MODEL OF GENUINE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM	59
6.2.1	<i>Epistemological considerations</i>	59
6.2.2	<i>An existential model</i>	61
6.3	ELEMENTS OF A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK	64
6.3.1	<i>A Trinitarian theology</i>	64
6.3.2	<i>Revelation and diversity</i>	65
6.3.3	<i>The universal ministry of the Holy Spirit</i>	66
6.4	CONTEXT AND LIMIT(S) OF A DIALOGICAL APPROACH	67
6.4.1	<i>Mission and Dialogue</i>	67
6.4.2	<i>Continuity and discontinuity</i>	68
6.4.3	<i>Limit(s) of dialogue</i>	69
6.5	SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS	70
6.5.1	<i>Final summary</i>	70
6.5.2	<i>Recommendations</i>	78
	Endnotes	80
	Work cited	84

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 NEED

1.1.1 *The changes after World War II*

The modern means of transportation have facilitated, after World War II, a rapid and massive movement of people all around the world as never before. A host of migrants from various backgrounds have been settling in all large cities, mostly for economic, and oftentimes for political reasons. The phenomenon, added to other parameters, contributed to the relativization of distances that set the direction towards our contemporary global village. Western European history witnesses a typical case in the shaping of social diversity in modern era. While empirical pluralism of some scale is a worldwide characteristic of modern societies, it is in the so-called Western world (Europe, North America, Australia!) that immigration has generated such wide diversity. The industrial and economic achievements of Western European countries and North America, ill-balanced by the poor conditions and the dictatorial political powers that sprang up in many African and Asian countries in the decades following World war II, have allured many people aspiring to freedom and better conditions of life. Geographical boundaries opened wide and cultural ones broke off when people found their niches in the main cities of Western Europe.

Westerners found themselves living in neighbourhood with Africans, Arabs, Turkish, Chinese and other Asians, sharing the workplace, their children meeting at school. But those new “colonies”, called to integrate a new environment, have shown a willingness to keep their humanly fundamental right to difference. Communities have rather organized to a large extent to affirm their identities amidst the countrymen. The case of the European countries may differ by some parameters from other countries around the world but such social diversity as partly an outcome of the intermingling of people is a worldwide reality no nation on earth will escape.

Furthermore, where democracy exists, the religions which once dominated a nation's social, political and moral life have been pressed to make

room for neighbours holding to other religious values. The development of new technologies of communication in the last decades of the past century has intensified the phenomenon. Even countries which may be counted as politically or religiously impenetrable are becoming open areas because of the flourishing of satellite communications. Wherever living, people are in touch. They can interact, trade, exchange ideas. The intermingling of civilizations has resulted in a variety of pluralisms: social, political, cultural, religious, each of which is an issue.

1.1.2 The issue of religious pluralism

People of different social, cultural, political and religious backgrounds living in close neighbourhood have to avoid the fratricide confrontations of the past centuries despite the affective nature of religious convictions. There is a need to work out a mutual understanding that helps people live peacefully in a pluralistic society (Stammer 2004). Faced then with the reality of religious diversity and the challenge of non-Christian faiths at home and in the mission field, some Western Christian thinkers have come up with new approaches to world religions. Since the ecumenical gathering of Tambaram, in 1938, dialogue has become a dynamic and controversial paradigm shift. After the second Vatican Council, it has taken a consistent shape in the West and has flourished ever since. In the last decades of the past century a variety of theologies of religious pluralism has been written. Among the many constructions towards a Christian theology dealing with religious diversity some stand remarkably as the pluralist theology of religious pluralism of John Hick and the inclusivist theology of religious pluralism of Karl Rahner.

1.1.3 The challenge

In today's global neighbourhood, dialogue appears desirable and many writers advocate its creedal necessity. Some promoters hypothesize the need to deconstruct many biblical truth-claims as foundational to dialogue. However,

these so-called theologies of religious pluralism, given their implications for the universal Church, raise paramount issues challenging the Christian Church nowadays. Schrottenboer (1989:118) pointed out that “We would observe that if the idea of religious pluralism takes hold, it will spell the demise of the Christian mission.”

The Church in Africa is already affected in these days of globalization, and is going to be more affected if it does not react. The late Byang Kato pointed out the challenge in his masterpiece “*Theological Pitfalls in Africa*”. He warned that “Christo-paganism appears to be the area of attack within the next generation....The relativity philosophy is seeking to make the Scriptures only one of many revelations rather than a special revelation” (Kato 1974:173). It has effectively received a new boost within the last decade of the twenty century. The nineties have been marked by a cast of opinions and writings of advocates and supporters of pluralist as well as inclusivist religious pluralism. Advocates of these trends consider Christian traditional truth-claims, labelled “Exclusivism”, “a virus”, “a disease of imagining its religious truth superior to all others and its path to salvation the only one” (Madany 2004).

One may however question the appropriateness of the methodologies and the hermeneutics used by these dialogical approaches. If they are questionable, there is a need for Evangelicals to address the issue and come up with a biblical alternate view of dialogue. Therefore, the crucial question this thesis raises is “What concept of dialogue respectful of biblical Christian identity should the Church hold to in a pluralistic society?”

1.2 SCOPE

Religious pluralism, as an issue, is dealt with in various theological approaches. While there are various views on the subject, the expression as it appears in the title of this thesis relates to the theology of religious pluralism, as pointed out above, of such theoreticians like John Hick and Karl Rahner. This thesis aims to give an understanding of the challenge and its implications for

biblical Christianity, to question the appropriateness of the pluralists' dialogical approach for biblical Christianity and to examine the possibility and limitations of dialogue from a fair and biblical New Testament perspective.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

The thesis sets to bring out the issue through a review of the historical roots and the development of inter-religious dialogue throughout the twenty century. There will be a special focus on religious pluralism underlying its rationale for the dialogical approach it advocates for. To make an adequate evaluation of this approach, the thesis will identify and evaluate the implications of pluralist and inclusivist for three irreducible characteristics of biblical Christian identity. They are the foundational, ontological and existential characteristics of biblical Christian identity. The thesis will use New Testament theological and narrative data related to the issue to explore the possibility and the limitations of dialogue from a biblical perspective.

1.4 KEY CONSIDERATIONS

Many of the terms used in discussing the issue of pluralism are given meaning or meanings more elaborated than what one will find in a dictionary. This makes necessary to define some of them, even to assign them a meaning in context where necessary.

1.4.1 *Pluralism*

The word *pluralism* has been overused and means a little when standing alone. In its broader sense, it describes the fact that society in our modern and global world is characterized by the neighbourhood of people of various origins, cultures, religions, and value-systems. Restricted to the religious aspect of such reality, the word is used in a less broad sense to indicate the diversity of religious faiths in a given society and in the world. But within the issue of

religious diversity itself some have used it to qualify a given theoretical stance. Thus Nash (1994:9) defines it as “the belief that Jesus is not the only Savior”, a definition which to some extent catches Hick’s, cited by Nash (1994:22), and according to which “there is not merely one way but a plurality of ways of salvation or liberation”. One agrees with Carson (1996:13) that there is a need to distinguish between the diverse uses of the word. Nowadays, it calls to qualifiers to assert its meaning in a given context.

Carson, at the outset of his book, *“The Gagging of God”* (1996:13) is right then in making the useful distinction between “empirical pluralism” to mean the factual diversity “of race, value-systems, heritage, language, culture, and religion in many Western and some other nations”, “cherished pluralism” meaning the acceptance and the desirability of empirical pluralism. “Philosophical and hermeneutical pluralism” which, out of the influence of post-modernism, is a stance according to which “any notion that a particular ideological or religious claim is intrinsically superior to another is *necessarily* (italics his) wrong” (Carson 1996:19). In this thesis, when standing alone, the word will be used in its broad sense that is the *fact of diversity*. In this sense, pluralism is a general term encompassing the diversities that characterize today’s societies: social, cultural, political, religious diversities, ethnic and so on.

1.4.2 Religious pluralism

Before going farther to define “religious pluralism”, it is worth noticing the various stances with regard to the issue of religious diversity. One will point out that concerning the debate pluralism has generated in the areas of philosophy and theology of religions, Western thinkers who have dealt with the issue, are usually categorized into three main labels. The position that endeavours to make salvation available to other religious faiths from their own traditions calls itself pluralist (John Hick, Paul Knitter). A middle position identifies as inclusivism because while granting to non-Christian faiths validity and effectiveness, it maintains that in Christ only is salvation perfected (Rahner, Kung and Dupuis). The third category is labelled Exclusivism or particularism

which holds to Jesus as the one unique mediator of salvation (Netland, Carson). Evangelicals usually are labelled exclusivists. There exist, of course, a variety of formulations within each category going from soft to radical stances. However, and whatever the variety of formulations, any of them falls by and large under one of these three categories.

Moving then to the terminology “religious pluralism”, as it appears in the title of this thesis, it relates to a theory, a given philosophy and/or theology. It is what Carson (1996:19) has named “philosophical or hermeneutical pluralism”. It indeed is given a variety of meanings. Sometimes, it is used in place of “pluralism” to indicate the fact that a society includes a plurality of religious faiths, in which case, it is synonymous to religious diversity. Dupuis takes it further to mean “not merely... a matter of course and a fact of history (pluralism de facto) but as having a *raison d’être* in its own right (pluralism de jure or ‘in principle’)” (Dupuis 2004:11).

The terminology is typically used to name the theology of pluralists that defends a plurality of ways to salvation, as DiNoia explains,

According to pluralist theologies (and philosophy) of religions, every religious community can be understood to mean by “salvation”, at least minimally, a state of being that transcends the limitations of present human existence and that is attainable through the form of life prescribed in the community’s teachings.

(DiNoia 1992:38)

One finds in Dupuis’s clarification a very helpful insight:

The theology of religions or of religious pluralism thus represents a new method of doing theology. Its point of departure is a practice of inter-religious dialogue, on the basis of which it goes in search of a Christian interpretation of the surrounding manifold religious reality.

(Dupuis 2003:11)

It is in this later sense that the terminology is used in the thesis in addressing the religious pluralism of pluralists and inclusivists alike. One will keep in mind the fact that both inclusivists and particularists use the terminology in elaborating alternative responses to pluralist models. So, there may be a pluralist theology of religious pluralism as well as an inclusivist or a particularist one.

1.4.3 Dialogue

The concept of dialogue has gone through numerous reconstructions within the issue of religious pluralism. A standard definition of dialogue is, “a talking together; a conversation” or “an open and frank discussion, as in seeking mutual understanding” (WNWD 1968:208). The word however becomes overloaded with philosophical or theological assumptions when one moves into the debate about pluralism. Knitter, for instance, after having given a general definition of dialogue as “the exchange of experience and understanding between two or more partners with the intention that all partners grow in experience and understanding” (Knitter 2002:207), subjects his definition to a number of debatable presuppositions.

What this thesis has labelled “dialogical approach” is however, in pluralist understanding, a theological method which promotes inter-religious dialogue in dealing with other faiths. Dialogue is a paradigm shift that is given such a priority by pluralists and inclusivists as to make necessary to suspend traditional claims (i.e. evangelism). Hick’s radical pluralism, for instance, tends to overvalue dialogue without any other alternative left in a Christian encounter with other religions. Given the fact that not everyone agrees about the meaning of the word in the sense held by pluralists, this thesis assumes the above Webster’s general definition as a neutral starting point in defining dialogue.

1.4.4 Other definitions

Two locutions are of great importance in the debate. They are *religious tolerance* and *religious intolerance*. Sometimes debaters charge their counterparts of being intolerant or ask for tolerance. But the meanings given to these locutions may differ from one debater to another. The thesis agrees with the following definition given of religious tolerance, that is “to acknowledge and support that individuals have the right and freedom to [hold to] their own beliefs and related *legitimate* practices, without necessarily validating those beliefs or practices” (Religious freedom, 2004).

Likewise religious intolerance defined as follows,

...refusing to acknowledge and support the right of individuals to have their own beliefs and related *legitimate* practices, and also the unwillingness to have one's own beliefs and related practices critically evaluated. The following does not constitute religious intolerance: exercising the right to challenge a religion's claims (e.g. regarding alleged compatibility with, or superiority over, other religious beliefs); condemning and disallowing illegal practices; rejecting a movement's claim to be a 'religion' when there is sufficient evidence showing religion is used as a cover.

(Religious freedom 2004)

1.5 RATIONALE

This thesis assumes that dialogue is not absent in Jesus and in apostolic encounters with other faiths though it is not however the whole story. In a world which needs to leave behind the historical, painful and unbiblical wanderings of Western Christianity, dialogue, if genuine and honest, may be of great help. It should therefore be more constructive for Evangelicals to explore, to investigate, to study and to elaborate an approach to dialogue respectful of biblical Christian identity and useful in a pluralistic society. While recognizing that much has been done by Evangelicals to answer the challenge of religious pluralism, there is still room for further elaboration based upon New Testament theological data to provide materials appropriate to the building of an environment conducive to genuine, honest and true dialogue. This thesis aims to contribute to an approach to dialogue respectful of biblical Christian identity.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION

2.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an overview of the historical background of modern philosophical and religious attitudes into play in the debates over religious pluralism nowadays. It will underline the factors that have shaped the religious history of the West, including globalization. All these factors have weighed on the emergence of the twenty century new missionary paradigm shift.

2.2 MEDIEVAL UNIFORMITY

2.2.1 *From imperial pluralism to medieval uniformity*

Despite the fact that Christianity faced sometimes violent opposition from Judaism, there was however a certain degree of tolerance from the part of imperial Rome (Zagorin 2003:4). People were allowed to worship private gods (*superstitio*) given they complied with the state religion (*religio*) (Green 1981:38). Jews were tolerated despite their strict monotheism (Whiston 1995:379). The emperor was the *Pontifex maximus*, the high Priest of the State cult (Nicole 1996:44). The prevailing relative religious tolerance was a corollary of the very essence of polytheism. By the end of the first century, Roman emperors turned their back to Christians, perceived as a threat (LaTourette 1975a:81, 82). Christianity became “*religiones illicitae*”, illicit religion (Bainton 1964:83) and faced two centuries of persecution.

After 313, when Christianity became the state religion, slowly the state itself turned its back on pagan religions (Nicole 1996:44). It was rather the beginning of religious uniformity in the West. Facing heretics, Christian thinkers (Augustine, Chrysostom) justified the use of coercion and violence against dissenters (Zagorin 2003:30, 319)¹. Hence they paved the way for the religious uniformity that developed throughout the Middle Ages. After Rome and the East broke their relationship in 1054, the Roman Catholic Church

brought its dominion over rulers and societies to a head (Moyer 1951:248)ⁱⁱ, shaping medieval Western European society.

2.2.2 From uniformity to Denominationalism

The Protestant reformation put an end to this religious uniformity. The movement was the result of the collapse of the papal system due partly to the moral decaying of the priesthood, the scandalous behaviour of some Popes, schism and the “feudalization of the Roman Church” (Cairns 1973:269). But Protestantism led to denominationalism rather than religious pluralism. “There was neither tolerance nor religious pluralism nor freedom” (Olivier and Patin 1996:134). Even the peace of Augsburg, in 1555, at the expense of Calvinists was a denial of religious freedom (Newman 1902:392; Geyer 2008). The bloodiest religious war lasted thirty years to end with the peace of Westphalia, in 1648, leaving Europe exhausted and contributing partly to the scepticism that characterized the Seventeenth century.ⁱⁱⁱ

2.3 ENLIGHTENMENT AND SECULARIZATION

2.3.1 Seventeenth century and Eighteenth century deists

The way out from the religious coercion and the religious confrontations of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries has been twofold. First, there was a pragmatic call to and an advocacy for religious toleration from people like Locke and Bayle (Zagorin 2003:265). Seventeenth century rationalists had been calling to reason in view of building a sustained rational metaphysical system that would bring about certainty (Wells 1989:120). There were also some Enlightenment thinkers of the late eighteenth century (Voltaire, Hume, French freemasons) with an anti-Christian agenda (LaTourette 1969a: 39; 1975b:1004). They celebrated more the freedom of criticism than the freedom of thought. Diderot irreverently expressed the new mentality: “All things must be examined, debated, investigated without exception and without regard for anyone’s feelings” (Netland 2001:73). Such was the state of mind that led to the

emergence of higher criticism. Higher criticism proceeded to a destructive critic of Christian orthodoxy.

2.3.2 *Modernism and post-modernism*

Descartes' methodological doubt is, for many scholars, a good starting point for modernity (Carson 1996:58). The optimism of the eighteenth century expected an autonomous human progress, and this hope lasted in the nineteenth century with thinkers like Hegel, Marx or August Comte (Baude 1993:65). Like Kant, they both reject the idea of a providential and active involvement of God in this World. But that century saw already a shift towards what has been labelled post-modernism (Baude 1993:66). The shift was exemplified in Schopenhauer's pessimism, Kierkegaard's existentialism, Nietzsche and Freud both "destructive agents of modernity", as Baude (1993:66) qualifies them. With Freud Western society moved to the secularization of values after that of knowledge and social institutions. Escobar agrees with Baude, adding Karl Marx to Nietzsche and Freud and labelling them "masters of suspicion" (Padilla et al 1977:65). There is continuity between modernism and post-modernism but there is also discontinuity in that post-modernists have revealed being suspicious and sceptical against modernism (Wells 1989:187). Scepticism and relativism characterized the Western mind at the dawn of the twenty century.

2.4 GLOBALIZATION

2.4.1 *Nature of globalization*

According to David Jobling, quoted by Carson (1996:538), the term globalization was first used in "the field of economics". But it later turned to refer to the modern proximity of nations and people that brought about changes that have prompted a shift from a local to a more global perception of reality in many areas. In this sense, globalization is an outcome of the process of modernization "at its critical stage", according to Guinness (1991:84). After World War II, the world entered the post-colonial era and was led into new

paths of proximity. Mass migration for political and economic reasons attracted many to the West. Demography in other parts of the world coupled with migration has replicated the concentration of people and has given birth to mega-cities like Tokyo, Mexico, Alexandria and Lagos. Jet transportation and consequently the tourism industry have also facilitated cultural encounters.

2.4.2 Dynamics of globalization

The technological developments of telecommunication introduced the world into the third phase of globalization. Television, computers, satellite dishes and the World Wide Web open up frontiers generating *a high potential of interconnectedness* between the various areas of the globe. Interconnected, people and nations are also *interdependent*. Another dynamic in the process is the aggressive influence of Western commonalities. Globalization therefore carries with it the threat of *homogenizing values, languages, even the behaviour of people* of non-Western cultures (Netland 2001:88-88). This has become obvious through the invading influence of the English language and the success of the American MBA degree. Even if local cultures basically resist homogenization they are still more or less affected. Leslie Newbigin well remarked that “a unique movement of secularisation is leading the nations of all continents in its course” (quoted in Padilla et al 1977:82).

Another dynamic of globalization is *reflexivity* (Netland 2001:88). It relates to the way globalization affects knowledge and precisely the certainty of knowledge. For instance, the high flow of information widens the gap between information and comprehension (Guinness 1991:86). The outcome is *a loss of confidence* that does affect popular understanding of truth with regard to cultural and religious domains, even with regard to the domain of scientific truth (Netland 2001:88). These various dynamics make of globalization a factor in the ongoing secularization of the West rebounding in the debates on religious pluralism.

3. SHIFTING PARADIGM

3.1 CHRISTIANITY AND NON-CHRISTIAN RELIGIONS

3.1.1 Christian debates about non-Christian religions

The problem of the awareness of the relations of Christianity to other religions is not as recent as many of us tend to think. It can be traced down through many centuries. Apart from the confrontational encounter with the Muslim conquerors of the eighth century, there had been the crusades and long after, the encounter of Christianity with other religious faiths through missionary enterprises. By the end of the eighteenth century, William Carey forced attention to the unfinished task of the Church. The passion for the mission grew rapidly and great numbers of missionaries scattered around the world (Reapsome, 2000:162). Christianity spread worldwide.

While Christianity was registering considerable gains overseas, the social structures of Western societies were undergoing processes of de-Christianization and secularization (LaTourette 1975b:1466). Missionary biases against other cultures and people of other faiths were pointed out by critics. By the end of the nineteenth century voices began to surface, promoting a more positive view of other religions. Rising nationalisms and aspirations to independency followed World War II. It was unavoidable for people confronted to Western imperialism to see in Christianity, no matter what, the religion of the colonialists. The legacy of Christian missions' biases and their ambiguous relationship with colonialism had been weighing since in the encounter of Christianity with other religions (Netland 2001:30). This explains partially the paradigm shift the relation of Christianity to other religions was to witness in the following decades.

3.1.2 Towards a paradigm shift

One can take as a starting point in the study of the modern paradigm of religious pluralism the missionary conference at Edinburgh in 1910 (Alasdair

1980:188). After Edinburgh, J.N. Farquhar's book, "*The crown of Hinduism*" called for "fundamental shifts in Christian understanding and theology" (Ariarajah 2004). From there on, the relationship of Christianity and other religions became a source of ongoing controversies. During the next conference at Jerusalem, in 1928, the issue was also debated (Bosch 1993:480). It was so controversial that only hardly were participants able to come up with a declaration (Ariarajah 2004).

After Jerusalem, the *Report of the Commission of Appraisal of the laymen's Foreign Mission Enquiry* labelled the attitude of Christians as exclusive (Bosch 1993:480). Hendrik Kraemer's book "*The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*" played a central role at the following conference in India. Kraemer was aware of "the problematic of interfaith dialogue" ahead of his time (Hoke 2000:547). He criticized the fulfilment theme, asserting the discontinuity between Christianity and other religions and the centrality of Christ as revelation of God (Plantinga 1999:245). In 1939, World War II broke out and the issue was relegated to the background to be rekindled within the ecumenical movement at Amsterdam, in 1948 (Ariarajah 2004). In New Delhi, in 1961, for the first time the concept of Dialogue was stated in the final report (Ariarajah 2004).

3.2 ROMAN CATHOLICISM

3.2.1 *From reluctance to openness*

Until then Roman Catholicism has continued to hold to the Cyprian axiom "No salvation outside the Church!" But there was some mitigation in Rome's position after World War II. Sesboüé (2004:201) reports the condemnation of Father Leonard Feeney in 1949 for having supported too rigidly the axiom while at the same time the Vatican reaffirmed the infallibility of the axiom. Despite the official position of the Church many Catholics have been sensitive to the Protestant ecumenical undertakings, and in their desire to work towards unity, they join in ecumenical gatherings (LaTourette 1969b:228). Official endorsement of the presence of Catholics in non-Catholic gatherings would be

seen as recognition of those non Catholics bodies (LaTourette 1969b:233). In 1948, Rome renewed her opposition to individual members' request to attend the Constitutive Assembly of Amsterdam (Jung 1971:80). Rome however moved slowly but steadily towards a rapprochement of Catholics and other branches of the Christian faith. There were Roman Catholic observers at New Delhi (Anderson 2000:681), and from then Roman Catholic publications treated more favourably the issue.

3.2.2 Vatican II

Vatican II (1962-1965) was indeed the turning point in the Church's attitude towards other Christian and non-Christian faiths. Vatican II welcomed Eastern Orthodox and Protestant observers (Nicole 1996:262). While reaffirming its fundamental position that the Roman Catholic Church is "the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church of Christ", Rome "solemnly acknowledged other Christian bodies to which the Catholic Church is bound in many ways" (Christusrex 2005). The Council allowed cautiously its members "to join in Oecumenical [*sic*] activity and to meet non-Catholic Christians in truth and love" (Christusrex 2005). On October 28, 1965, *Nostra Aetate*, pointed to non-Christians traditions as reflecting "ray of truth" (Paul VI, 1965), paving the way for greater Catholic involvement.

3.3 NEW PARADIGM, NEW ISSUE

3.3.1 A controversial issue

The World Council of Churches (WCC) went a step further at Kandy in 1967 crossing the boundary of the Kraemer discontinuity to show real interest in interfaith dialogue. From that meeting on dialogue became the new controversial issue. The Kandy meeting, according to Ariarajah (2004) "affirmed dialogue as the most appropriate approach in interfaith relation". Buddhists, Hindus and Muslims interacted with the participants at the interfaith dialogue held at Ajaltoun, Lebanon, in 1970 where dialogue was envisaged on mutuality (Bosch 1993:484). A document on interfaith dialogue was produced,

after an evaluation of the Ajaltoun interaction, in Zurich two months later (Ariarajah 2004). The organization embarked also on bilateral meetings with non-Christians (Ariarajah 2004).

Intra-faith dialogue, involving Christians of different confessions has taken more impetus these last decades. After Vatican II, the Roman Catholic Church engaged in dialogue with Anglicans, Orthodox and other Protestant confessions; the Anglican Communion has developed intra-faith dialogue with Lutherans, Baptists, Orthodox, Old Catholics and Roman Catholics (Aco 2005). Inter-religious dialogue between Christian and non-Christian faiths started as an initiative of the WCC before Vatican II (Ariarajah 2004). Inter-religious dialogue has been extended to dialogue with non-religious ideologies and later to the so-called New Religious Movements (NeRMs). In the eighties, the Roman Catholic Church was on a hostile position regarding the possibility of dialogue with cults but in the nineties, Rome softened its attitude towards more openness to a possibility of dialogue “with prudence and discernment” (Barker 2005).

3.3.2 Problems of theory and praxis

The optimism of Ariarajah (2004) notwithstanding, dialogue is not shared by all practitioners and one should recognize that the practice of dialogue raises many concerns and questions making of dialogue itself a controversial issue. There are questions pertaining to the definition of dialogue (Pierson, 2000: 274), its meaning, its significance and the purpose of interfaith dialogue. In Vancouver 1983, twenty three years after Kandy, “the theological significance of other religious traditions still remained a controversial issue” (Eck 2008). Problems arise for different reasons when people of different backgrounds communicate (Yannoulatos 2004). John Taylor, quoted by Barker underlines, “Communication between one [religion] and another is fraught with difficulty which must not be underestimated” (Barker 2005).

The attempts to provide a theological basis to inter-religious dialogue have also raised key issues for involved religions and especially Christianity. Liberal pluralists, Catholic inclusivists and some Evangelicals have moved to re-

interpretations of Christian claims, having espoused Cantwell Smith's "common essence", Troeltsch's "relativism" and Toynbee's "essential oneness" (Knitter 2002:21-54). Liberal Protestantism from Christocentrism and Catholicism from ecclesiocentrism both moved to theocentrism. The issue of salvation has been given a central concern but beyond it the models promoted are attempts to reformulate traditional Christian theology so as to fit what their authors feel is required for a genuine dialogue of religions. But the conditions set forth by some of these philosophies raise many issues touching core elements of the religions they pretend to reconcile or, at least, to draw towards dialogue.

4. PLURALIST AND INCLUSIVIST MODELS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The historical background has brought to light the fact that the attitude of most Westerners towards religion in general and Christianity in particular is not merely commanded by the thrust of the globalization of the twenty century.

4.1.1 Religious diversity and the West

As Leslie Newbiggin (2004:136) remarks, “European people had already become pluralist in their attitude to religion in the nineteenth century.” Whatever the weight the awareness of other faiths has had on the nowadays paradigm shift, the issue of religious pluralism was, first of all, internal to Western society and prior to the twenty century globalization. Given the process of de-Christianization the West has been going through since the Enlightenment it is no wonder that the issue is mostly debated the way it is, in the West.

The issue cannot be confined to a strict Western debate. The Christian landscape has been noticeably changing, as Mbiti once wrote “This statistical tilting of Christendom from the north to the south, after 2,000 years, holds tremendous prospects and challenges” (Mbiti 1981:59). Christianity has declined in Europe while tremendously and steadily growing in the southern hemisphere. Johnston and Mandrik reveal (2001: 5) that in the year two thousand the south represented 59.4% of World Christians versus 16.7% at the outset of the twenty century. If we take into account the global situation the world has already entered in the twentieth century, the situation asks for models that takes into account the universality of the Christian faith (Flemming 1996). In my view, in today’s global context, a Christian approach of universal intent cannot be confined to or conditioned by a cultural distribution of religions which identifies Christianity with the West.

4.1.2 Key principles

In the definition of any particular identity, I agree with Schwöbel (2004:43) who points, as first condition of dialogue, "...the *independence* (italics his) of the partners in dialogue, which requires the acknowledgement of the genuine and distinctive particularity and individuality of their respective positions". Lest dialogue be discriminatory, authentic identity must be a prerequisite to any genuine and honest dialogue. Dialogue between fully convinced Buddhists and fully convinced Muslims necessitates that those involved enter its arena as fully convinced Buddhists and fully convinced Muslims, from their own defined identities (Griffiths 2004:169; Ramadan 2004:203). This being true, any model of *Christian* theology of religious pluralism of universal intent must be bound to respect the biblical Christian identity. This can be grounded further in the principle of *reciprocity*, which in my view, should be the second fundamental condition of any genuine dialogue. I agree therefore with Dupuis who writes, "After all, at the basis of any *authentic* (Italics mine) religious life is a faith that endows that life with *its specific character and proper identity* (italics mine)" (Dupuis 2004:378).

This thesis assumes also that any theological model intended to be *Christian* and to be of *universal intent* must be designed with regards to the inherited biblical texts. How do pluralists and inclusivists deal with the characteristics of Christian identity as asserted by the New Testament texts, and to which this thesis will from now on refer to as biblical Christian identity? To answer this question, the thesis will next provide an overview of pluralist and inclusivist representative models and approaches before identifying and evaluating their implications for biblical Christian identity.

4.2 OVERVIEW OF PLURALIST MODELS

In the last decades of the past century, some theologians within both camps have advocated a more radical shift from traditional Christianity. The pluralist models depart from Christian truth-claims. I have chosen two outstanding pluralists, John Hick and Paul Knitter. Together, their models represent fairly the substance of pluralist views on religious pluralism.

4.2.1 John Hick

Hick's earlier paradigm shift was a rejection of the traditional Catholic and Protestant models alike. Hick pretended to write his view as a demand of "the demythologized modern mind" (Hick 1973:104). For Hick (1973:131, 1993:78), the ecclesiocentrism of the Catholic Church that conditioned salvation to one's integration to the Roman Church, and the Protestant christocentric dogma on salvation are outdated. A theocentric model should be substituted for the christocentric traditional approach to religions, according to Hick (1999a:329, 330). Radicalizing the Kantian distinction between *noumenon* and phenomenon^{iv}, he provided his model the rationale for hypothesizing that God is unknowable. It is from this epistemic hypothesis that Hick interprets religious traditions as various culturally-conditioned perceptions of the Real, all being irreducibly different from the "Real as it is" (Hick 1973:131; 1996:49). Religious traditions are therefore kept at equidistance from God (Hick 1996:50). So Hick can safeguard a parity system levelling out all religious traditions.

Hick designed a God-centred model with Christianity and all religious traditions moving as planets around a God-centred Universe, so placing Christianity *on equal footing*, "among" (Hick 1993:48) other religious traditions. But this God-centred model displayed still Christian characteristics, not neuter enough for some theistic and non theistic faiths (Nash 1994:35). Under such charge, Hick realized the limitations of his Copernican model for non-theistic faiths since he needed an all-encompassing parity model embracing all religious traditions (Netland 2001: 225). He therefore made a more radical move by replacing God by Ultimate Reality. In *Disputed Questions* (1993), Hick defines the Ultimate as "That beyond which there is nothing further", and he adds, "But then this could be simply the physical universe (including ourselves)" (Hick, 1993:164).

4.2.2 Paul Knitter

Paul Knitter, in my view, echoes Hick's pluralism to a great extent. Their views evolved following the same pattern: Knitter, like Hick, moved from

christocentrism to a theocentric model (Knitter 1987:184). Knitter's rationale is that the Christian claims of "uniqueness" and "superiority" of traditional Christianity is outdated (Knitter 1987:6). Knitter, in fact, endorses Hick's application of the Kantian distinction between *noumenon* and phenomenon by interpreting religious traditions as "maps", not "the territory itself" (Knitter 2002:220). But even Hick's Ultimate Reality still raises the acute problem of the 'ontological ultimate' (Plantinga 1999:341). Knitter therefore bypassed the problem by proposing a more practical model called 'soteriocentric' or 'regnocentric' model (Knitter 1987:184). In fact, Knitter's theology was already influenced by proponents of the theology of liberation (Knitter 1983:145). This regnocentric model emphasizes the 'Reign of God', as its central theme^v, and a radical option^{vi} for the *poor* and the *oppressed* as its rallying concern (Knitter 1987:181). Knitter calls all religions to focus and be committed to the central aim of the 'Reign of God' which, according to him is "the eco-human well-being" (Knitter 2004).

4.2.3 Summing up

John Hick is the leading proponent of radical pluralism. He defends a Christian model of religious pluralism that aims at reformulating the Christian faith to fit into a strict parity-system for all religious traditions. The epistemological rationale of his model he found by radicalizing Kant's distinction between *noumenon* and phenomenon (Hick 1973:131 1996:49, 50). Hick, first, tried to secure his model by postulating a radical ineffability of the Divine that keeps all religious traditions at equidistance from Transcendence (Hick 1996:50). He then moved to what he equates to a Copernican revolution, by shifting from the so-called christocentrism to theocentrism (Hick 1993:48). Later on, he considered this theocentric model unfit for non-theistic religions as well as for some monotheistic faiths (Nash 1994:41; Netland 2001:225). Hick reshaped his model therefore proposing since then his own defined perception of Transcendence he calls 'Ultimate Reality', as a rallying *universal* to replace God at the centre of his model (Hick 1993:164).

Knitter, though prominent among the pluralist theologians, is one who in many ways espouses Hick's thought. His progression takes almost the same process. Like Hick, he distanced himself from the so-called christocentrism of traditional Christianity to adopt a theocentric model (Knitter 1987:184). His theocentric model then articulated not only God as the 'common ground' of the religions, but also 'salvation/liberation' as their 'common goal' (Knitter 2002:209). Later, he welcomed Hick's idea of 'Ultimate Reality'. But given the ontological problem of the ultimate Knitter preferred finally a more practical approach by stressing a 'common goal' as the rallying motive of the religions in dialogue. Knitter identifies God's Reign as the 'common goal' of all religions in his more recent works (Knitter 1987:184). He gives priority to dialogue under the influence of liberation theology. His model is also a pneumatocentric model because Knitter emphasizes the universal activity of the Spirit as a way out of the sticky intra-Christian debate over pluralism, inclusivism and exclusivism (Dupuis 2004:196).

4.3 OVERVIEW OF INCLUSIVIST MODELS

4.3.1 *Pre-Vatican II: Karl Rahner*

Karl Rahner is the Catholic theologian who has definitely impacted Catholic approaches to religious pluralism. Rahner opened the path to the inclusivist paradigm by introducing the idea of a relative validity of Non-Christian religions. Though holding fast to the centrality of God's only salvation through Christ (Rahner 1973:31; 1979:218), he postulates its access through non-Christian traditions. For Rahner, God's grace is God's "self-sacrificing love embracing all men" (Rahner 1966:391). Rahner's thomistic anthropology views every human being as endowed with the seed of "justifying and saving grace" that will develop into "eternal life" unless one freely rejects it (Rahner 1963:34). From that starting point, Rahner operates the link to, at least, some religious traditions as proper channels of God's grace. He states his basic thesis for the universal provision of God's grace through non-Christian traditions as follows,

Until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of an individual, a non-Christian religion (even outside the

Mosaic religion) does not merely contain elements of natural knowledge of God, elements, moreover, mixed up with human depravity which is the result of original sin and later aberrations. It contains also supernatural elements arising out of the grace which is given to men as a gratuitous gift on account of Christ.

(Rahner 1999:293)

Rahner distinguishes lawful religions from unlawful ones. A religion is unlawful if not only it includes "...something false and humanly corrupted but also makes this an explicitly and consciously adopted element – an explicitly declared condition of its *nature* (italics his)" (Rahner 1999:298). Lawful non-Christian religions therefore are channels of God's grace; a provision that makes of their members "anonymous Christians" (Rahner 1976:283); a status that depends not on their attitude of acceptance or of refusal but on the efficiency of God's grace. At first stage, Rahner's anonymous Christianity was directed to the unevangelized, as Rahner put it:

the 'anonymous Christian' in our sense of the term is the pagan *after the beginning of the Christian mission* (italics mine), who lives in the state of Christ's grace through faith, hope and love, yet who has no explicit knowledge of the fact that his life is orientated in grace-given salvation to Jesus Christ.

(Rahner 1976:283)

In an interview reported by Arraj, Rahner elucidates:

Anonymous Christianity means that a person lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly constituted Christianity... Let us say, a Buddhist monk... *who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God* (italics mine)...

(Arraj 2007)

Rahner grounds his thesis in God's dealings with pious Old Testament and New Testament pagans (Rahner 1999:294). In Rahner's view, a non-Christian religion is not only "preparatory" but also "sufficient" for the salvation of its members (Heron 1980:192). For Rahner (1999:291), God has not only made *possible* all human beings' salvation but also he has *actually* saved them. Therefore the difference is between the "explicit faith" of Christians and the "implicit faith" of anonymous Christians (Rahner 1979:52, 394). 'Explicit Christians' have, in degree, a "*greater chance* (italics mine) of salvation" (Rahner 1999:301). What Rahner means by "a greater chance" is perhaps to be understood in the way Dupuis expresses Rahner's thought: "Thus

anonymous Christianity remains a fragmentary, incomplete, radically deficient reality” (Dupuis 2003:55). Rahner’s “anonymous Christianity” has heavily weighed upon the Second Vatican Council.

4.3.2 Post-Vatican II: Hans Kung

Hans Kung has been an outstanding Catholic inclusivist following Vatican II. While, in my view, Kung attempts to distance himself from the ‘anonymous Christianity’ of Rahner and to offer another view, a closer look shows that his finally comes down almost to the same result. Kung disavows the inclusion of non-Christians as members of the Church by “unconscious ‘*desiderum*’ towards the Church” (Kung 1967:317) but at the same time, evoking 1Tim 2:4-6, affirms “in Christ the whole world receives God’s grace” (Kung 1967:318). Kung opposes Rahner’s concept of “anonymous Christian” as far as it is meant to maintain the ecclesiocentric formula (Kung 1978:98) otherwise Kung like all Catholic inclusivists rests on Rahner’s thesis regarding the soteriocentric centrality of the Cross. So, he too coerces salvation through Christ on non-Christians. Another difference between Rahner’s first position and Kung is that the temporary validity of non-Christian religions turns to a permanent one in Kung’s theory^{vii}. This is a post-Vatican II move leaning upon the Council decree *Lumen Gentium*, 2: 16 (Abbot 1996:15). For Kung then, non-Christian religions instead of being preparatory are as permanent as Christianity. A non-Christian tradition differs just in degree from Christianity; the former being qualified as ‘ordinary’ way of salvation for its members compared to the ‘extraordinary’ way of salvation for Christians (Kung 1986:46).

This being said, Kung qualifies members of other traditions as “pre-Christians” (Kung 1972:98). Kung (1976:91) justifies his position in suggesting “that non-Christians too as *observers of the law* (italics mine) can be justified.” He goes even further, adopting in my view, an unconditional universalism because though he does not consider all religions equal, he affirms: “They [human beings] will be saved, not because but in spite of polytheism, magic, human sacrifice, forces of nature....[N]ot because of, but in spite of all untruth and superstition” (Kung 1976:104). As I mentioned before, Kung’s model is

more inclusive than Rahner's first model because his claim of a permanent validity of non-Christian traditions, and also, implicitly, the inclusion of unlawful traditions.

4.3.3 *Post-Vatican II: Jacques Dupuis*

More recently, Jacques Dupuis has come up with a refined inclusivist view designed to transcend the "commitment-openness" dilemma (Dupuis 2003:228) in trying to reconcile the particularity of the Christ-event with the particularities of other traditions. Dupuis's inclusivism has a fourfold hypothetical foundation: the common origin and the common destiny for all human beings, the universal presence of the Spirit in members of other religious traditions and those traditions, and the universal reign of God all traditions are building together (Dupuis 1998:547, 549). He proposes a Trinitarian view emphasizing the universal activity of the Holy Spirit. Dupuis starts by affirming the continuous validity of biblical covenants, leaning on Irenaeus who once stated that "...the covenants [Abrahamic, Noahic, Mosaic and Christic] stand each other as so many ways of divine engagement with humankind through the logos" (Dupuis 2003:104). Easily then Dupuis extends validity from the universal Noahic covenant to non biblical traditions and he summarizes his view as follow: "There is One God - One Christ - convergent paths" (Dupuis 2004:203).

Non-Christian religions, Judaism included, bear germs of the new covenant, in Dupuis' s view (2003:105, 106). Therefore, for Dupuis, the permanent validity of all covenants makes of their members part of the people of God (Dupuis, 2004:225). Dupuis follows Avery Dulles's suggestion that "...it may be held that the divine person who appears in Jesus is not exhausted by that historical appearance" (Dupuis 2003:124). Dupuis, therefore, disjoins Jesus and Christ as to find room for other symbols outside Christ (Dupuis 2001:542). Dupuis tends to move from the traditional view by adopting a Kingdom-centred perspective. For Dupuis, the Reign of God is universal and its universality means that "Christians and 'the others' share the mystery of

salvation in Christ” (Dupuis 2003:344). The two poles of his kingdom-centred inclusivist model are the cosmic Christ greater than its partial incarnation in the Christ-event, and the universal ministry of the Spirit that makes of non-Christian revelations valid paths to the Father.

4.3.4 Evangelical inclusivism: Clark Pinnock

Clark Pinnock and John Sanders^{viii} are among Evangelicals who attempt to distance themselves from the so-called exclusivism of traditional Christianity without espousing the inclusivism of Catholic theologians like Rahner and Kung. Pinnock (1992:79) argues, “Why would God, who is present everywhere, absent himself so totally from the sphere of religion, the very realm in which people search for ultimate answers?” For Pinnock (2002), “The idea holds that God’s grace is at work in some ways among all people, possibly even in the sphere of the religious life.” Pinnock’s relativization of the objective content of faith widens the access to God’s gift through Christ for other traditions. The main thesis of Pinnock is that saving faith does not entail a specific content directed towards Christ but just sincere faith coupled with an authentic fear of God as found in non-Christian religions, even those with a non personal God (1992:74,75). One question with Pinnock’s view is the subjectivity of such “fear of God” and such “sincerity”. Pinnock, like other inclusivists supports his case by calling to God’s dealings with God-fearing pagans in the two Testaments (1992:92, 93). Despite his claim of promoting a cautious inclusivism (Pinnock 1996a:99), he advocates, in my view, a soteriocentric Christology that de-emphasizes the centrality of the person of Christ, not his work.

4.3.5 Summing up

It is well accepted that Karl Rahner has been the first most influential proponent of the prevalent paradigm shift in Catholic theologies of religions nowadays. Rahner’s inclusivistic postulate was the lawfulness of the major non-Christian religions and the access of their members to salvation through Christ as God’s gift (Rahner 1973:31; 1979:218). It was not until the second

Vatican council that Rome consecrated an official openness to non-Christian religions (Nicole 1996:62; Vatican Archives 2005) after having been reluctant to any rapprochement to non-Catholic traditions (LaTourette 1969b: 228-233).

From then on, some Catholic theologians (Kung, Dupuis) have been promoting the inclusivist view leaning on the declarations of the Council. Kung, endeavouring to avoid the somehow offensive “anonymous” terminology of Rahner, promotes not only the permanent validity of non-Christian religious traditions but also their sufficiency as ‘ordinary ways of salvation’ (Kung 1986:46). He advocates a universalism that leaves behind the distinction between lawful and unlawful religions (Kung 1976:104). The different inclusivist theories are not without raising a dilemma between openness to others and commitment to Christ (Dupuis 2003:228). More recently, the Jesuit theologian Jacques Dupuis has come up with a Trinitarian/pneumatocentric theory destined to solve the “commitment/openness dilemma” (Dupuis 2004:196) by re-centring the religious encounters on the Reign of God and the universal ministry of the Spirit. Inclusivism is not yet endorsed as the dogmatic position of Rome, and some of these theologians (Kung, Dupuis) have gone through the scrutiny of the hierarchy (see Dupuis 2004:434-437).

Among Evangelicals, Pinnock advocates a cautious inclusivism. The main thesis of his “evangelical inclusivism” is that saving faith does not entail a specific content directed towards Christ but just sincerity coupled with an authentic fear of God as found in non-Christian religions (Pinnock 1992:74, 75)). Pinnock appreciates non-Christian traditions cautiously compared to Kung and Dupuis (Pinnock, 1996:99). His soteriocentric Christology de-emphasizes the centrality of the person of Christ, not his work.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Pluralists like Hick and Knitter maintain that a levelling out of the different faiths is the unique acceptable condition of genuine dialogue. This assumption has led Hick to point to high Christology as the main stumbling block to dialogue (Hick 1980:6). Hick expresses the challenge:

This (the incarnational doctrine) makes Christianity unique in that it, alone among the religions of the world, was founded by God in person. Such a uniqueness [*sic*] would seem to demand exclusivism – for must God not want all human beings to enter the way of salvation which he has provided for them?

(Hick 1999b:339)

Knitter expresses the same opinion (Knitter 1996:135). This is why Hick and Knitter set about to deconstruct and reformulate traditional Christology. Hick proceeds by drawing from what is known about “other religiously impressive persons” (Hick 1993:36). This section aims at analyzing and evaluating the implications of the pluralist Christological reformulations for biblical Christian identity. This will be done on the basis of three distinguishing characteristics of biblical Christian identity the present work has assumed from the outset.^{ix}

5.2 PLURALISTS AND BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

It is obvious that in Hick and Knitter’s views the singularity of Jesus Christ as held by traditional Christology must be challenged if one wants to maintain a parity system by levelling down Jesus to other founders. This, in my view, explains Hick’s choice of the liberal “Jesus of History”. It provides a rationale for affirming that Jesus was a mere human being and to proceed to deconstruct all biblical affirmations and concepts that explicitly or implicitly imply Jesus’ deity and Christianity’s singularity.

5.2.1 Foundational implications

For Hick and Knitter the incarnation was not metaphysical but metaphorical or symbolic. Both see it as the manifestation of “God’s *agape*” (Hick 1993:144; Knitter 2002:152) that means a punctual and non exhaustive “embodiment of God’s *agape*” (Hick 1993:144)^x. Consequently, Hick denies the divine nature to Jesus Christ. According to Hick, the Christology of the early Church ignored the “two natures Christology of Chalcedon” (Hick 1993:50).

The denial of a metaphysical incarnation does not suffice however for a pluralist levelling out of Jesus and other religious founders. Pluralists are obliged to deal with the titles that have been traditionally understood with an ontological import. This is why Hick and Knitter contend that Jesus self-applied none of the titles but the Son of man title. Both deny any ontological motif to the titles Son of God and Lord (Hick 1993:45, 46; Knitter 2002:180). Hick insists on Jesus’ personal preference for the use of ‘Son of man’ rather than ‘Son of God’, ‘Messiah’ or ‘Lord’, and infers from this that it is the Church that bestowed divine titles upon him (Hick 1993:40, 46). Knitter also restricts the import of the title Son of God to its functional and eschatological motifs for, according to him, incarnational and ontological motifs are the results of a distortion introduced by “second generation Christians” (Knitter 2002:179). Knitter even characterizes the move of the Church as a critical shift from Jesus’ Judeo theocentrism to a Hellenistic christocentrism (Knitter 2002:175). Hick and Knitter’s Christological contentions if well-founded throw traditional Christology back into question. One needs therefore to reconsider the ground of Pluralist Christological contentions regarding the person and the work of Jesus Christ: the incarnation, the titles as well as Jesus’ death and his resurrection.

Hick is ready to concede to Jesus the title of Messiah without any inference of deity. According to Hick (1993:40), others sought to thrust the title on Jesus. It is true that the title in itself does not imply deity. Messiah referred, first of all, to people set apart for a God-given task, Isa 45:1. The term had been used for priests, prophets and kings of Israel who were anointed for that

purpose, 1 Sam 10:1; 2 Sam 19:10; 1 Kg 19:16; Lam 4: 20). The title is found in post-exilic Jewish writings, *Psalms of Solomon* 18:5; *1 Enoch* 48:10; 52:4; *4 Ezra* (Ladd 1987:138). According to Pate (2000:107), second temple Judaism evidences that the messianic hope solidified in the expectation of the coming of an individual deliverer for Israel. The identification of this individual figure to a Davidic king and Messiah exists in *the Similitudes of Enoch* (Ladd 1987:138). Besides the Davidic king paradigm, the Messiah is depicted as priest, prophet, Danielic Son of Man, three other paradigms Collins identifies in “post-Hasmonaeen Judaism”, according to Pate (2000:108). The figure of the Danielic Son of Man is also mentioned in *The Similitudes of Enoch* as well as in the DSS (4Q246), and in *4Ezra* which identifies the Danielic Son of Man as the Messiah (Pate 2000:127).

In my view, this messianic hope seems to have been shared in some way by some of the disciples at least, Jn 1:45. I think the identification of Jesus as son of David might have been in correlation with his identification as Messiah. New Testament writers anyway rely mostly on the Old Testament to assert Jesus’ messiahship, Mt 1:22; 2:5; 12:17-21; Mk 1:2; Lk 4:17; 19:38. I therefore contend that while Second Temple Judaism in carrying messianic expectations through diverse currents constituted a historical link, it was not the foundational background for the New Testament identification and assertion of Jesus as Messiah. The background of the messianic hope is to be found in Old Testament promises, 2 Sam 7:12-16; Ps 89:3, 4; Isa 9:7; Jer 33:17. It must be underlined also that Jesus did not rebuke people who identified him as Messiah or son of David, Mt 9:27; 15:22; 16:16; Mk 8:29; 10:47, 48; Lk 18:38, 39, and the writer of the third Gospel affirms a correlation between messiahship and kingship by virtue of Jesus’ Davidic ascendancy, Lk 1:32, 33.

I concede that none of the titles, standing alone or even applied to people in general, carries *a priori* divine connotation. But I contend that each of the titles, as related to the New Testament figure of Jesus of Nazareth, takes a particular dimension in light of Jesus’ words, sayings and behaviour. The work and words of Christ justify to a certain extent the connotations the Christian *kerygma* has put into them. In my view, it is unlikely that many of Jesus’ acts

and sayings did not raise questions in the minds of the disciples. If we accept that the disciples shared the basic prevailing functional and eschatological motifs of messianic hope from their Jewish background, and if we consider some of the data recorded on Jesus' baptism, Jesus private self-disclosure to his disciples, added to his public discourses and acts, we may assume that they were pointers that likely led the disciples to perceive in him the promised Messiah.

The title *Son of God* may be related to messiahship without an *a priori* divine connotation because in itself, as in Ps 2:7, it was, first of all, a Davidic title (Osborne 1981:283). However, it seems to me that the opposition of the religious leaders could have arisen only from a perceived ontological connotation in the use of the title when related to Jesus' acts and his teachings, Jn 10:33; Mt 26:63; 27:40, 43; Mk 14:61-63; Lk 22:70. In my view, arguments against divine sonship based on Jesus' self-restriction from the public proclamation mainly of the title "Son of God" for himself, needs to be tempered. One may also venture to call *allusive self-disclosure* the implication of pre-existence in Jesus' question about the relation of the Messiah to David, Mk 12:35-37 (see Witherington 1992:487)^{xi}.

The sharp contrast between Jesus' attitude before his resurrection and the profusion of the title in apostolic writings, "twenty nine times in the epistles" according to Ladd (1987:163)^{xii} may well be reasonably accepted from the kenotic^{xiii} attitude, Phil 2:7 and the impact of the resurrection. Jesus did not publicly claim to be either a prophet or the son of David. We must not be diverted by the fact that Jesus did not proclaim publicly "I am the Son of God, the Messiah, the Lord..." In fact, already within the synoptic accounts, the contrast between the private openness to his disciples and Jesus' public secrecy as regards the titles is insightful. Jesus behaved as if he voluntarily left people the freedom to think about his teachings and deeds and make personal decisions as regards his identity.

As for its background, the title appears effectively in inter-testament writings, in *Wis. Sol. 2:18*, in *4 Ezra 7:28, 29*; *Enoch 105:2* (Burke 1985: 1033).

There is mention, in DSS 4Q246, of a Son of God, Son of the Most High who is, not without discussion, identified with the Son of man of Daniel 7: 13, 14 (Pate 2000:128). The phrase is used in Scriptures with diverse meanings. Beyond the creational sonship of all human beings, Gen 5: 1, 2; Lk 3: 38; Acts 17: 28; Eph 3: 15, the covenantal sonship of Israel, Hos 1: 10, and the messianic sonship of the promised Davidic king, 2 Sam 7: 14; Ps 2: 7, Vos, according to Ladd (1987: 161) points to a fourth meaning in the New Testament theological usage of the phrase applied to Christ. This fourth meaning well articulated in Pauline theology and in John's Logos Christology depicts Christ as partaking to the divine nature (Ladd 1987: 161). If therefore the titles had a Jewish background prior to second or fifth generation Hellenistic Christians, there is not a coercive need to posit a Hellenistic influence for their background. Bultmann's contention for a Hellenistic background had been challenged by scholars like Schweitzer (Otto and Marshall 1982:618), Cullman and Manson (Léon-Dufour 1963:410), who maintain a Palestinian origin for the titles. The "Son of God" phrase also, in light of Jesus' acts and words cannot be restricted to a functional motif though by itself the title does not necessarily entail deity.

Again I would stress that more than the titles, his sayings and his behaviour express Jesus self-consciousness. If Jesus never claimed *publicly* the phrase "the Son of God" directly for himself, he nevertheless used the term "the Son" for himself in relation to God as "the Father", Mt 11:27; Lk 10:22, also "my Father", mainly in John, Jn 3:35; 5:19,20, 23. Jesus' divine sonship is affirmed by the writers of the Synoptics at his baptism, Mt 3:17; Lk 3:22; at the transfiguration, Mt 17:5; Mk 9:7; Lk 9:35. It surfaces in synoptic accounts of the temptations in the desert, Mt 4:3; Lk 4:3, and of Jesus trial, Mt 26:53, 63; Mk 14:61, 62; Lk 22:70. Jesus' awareness of the uniqueness of his relationship with God seems obvious in the distinction he systematically made by calling God "*my* Father" in relation to himself, Mt 7:21; 26:39; Lk 2:49; 24:49; Jn 2:16, and "*your* Father" in relation to his disciples, Mt 5:16; 6:8, 14, 15; Mk 11:25, 26; Lk 6:36; 12: 30, 32. I think if none of the titles was expressed by the New Testament writers, it is highly plausible that in light of Jesus deeds and words as reported by New Testament writers, somewhere a generation would have

asked the same question the religious leaders once asked: Was he the Christ? Was he equating himself with God?

The relevant questions, in my view, are rather: did the disciples grasp an ontological motif before Pentecost? If so, to what extent and when did the disciples grasp an ontological import of the title before Pentecost? We may consider that the disciples were not renowned theologians, and so they knew not as much as the religious leaders. But we must also recognize that many a time Jesus privately provided them with glimpses. It is true that Jesus reproached the disciples their dullness, Mt 8:26; 16:8; Mk 8:17; 9:19. It is not necessary to think that the disciples grasped the fullness of the import of the titles during the earthly ministry before the Easter event, and before Pentecost. Tradition developed undoubtedly after Pentecost. John recalls Jesus' promise of a deeper understanding from Pentecost on, Jn 16:13. But even if it is difficult to assert the extent to which the disciples grasped the ontological import of the title before the resurrection and despite their limitations, there is an impressive connection between the titles and Jesus powerful acts and words that explain Peter's behaviour in Lk 5:8 and Mt 16:16.

It is true that a certain reading of Roman 1:4 may suggest that the resurrection is the seminal point of Jesus' divine sonship. Effectively, the participle *oristhentos* may well be translated by *designated* or *declared* or *instated* (Vincent 1946:4); *appointed* (Bauer 1979:580); *instituted*, *installed*, according Sanday and Headlam (1971:7), who highlight however the neutrality of the immediate context that does not allow for one's determination. The neutral context makes also hard to determine whether *en dunamis* in Rom 1:4 is construed with *oristhentos* or *huiou theou*. In either case, however, *oristhentos* is to be understood in light of the global context of Pauline Christology that does not provide a ground for adoptionism. The resurrection as vindication of his Odivine sonship threw certainly more light into his earthly ministry, his deeds, words and his self-disclosure (Pannenberg 1994:365). Without doubt, Jesus' divine sonship took another dimension in the disciples' minds that explains the post-resurrection ontological *developments* but the resurrection did not turn Jesus into divine in the disciples' minds. As Osborne (1984:283) writes,

“Although Christological development moved from the functional to the ontological, this does not mean the earliest statements had no ontological meaning.”

I do not agree therefore with Knitter, according to whom Jesus “became” gradually Son of God, “especially in his resurrection” (Knitter 2002:179). Lk 2:49 implies, in my view, that in early childhood Jesus was already aware of the uniqueness of his relationship with the Father. What we find in the New Testament is a functional ontology (Hellwig 2004:109). As McGrath (1992) puts it, “we are dealing with an identity of being, rather than just an identification of function. Jesus acts as and for God precisely because he *is* God.” Because Jesus is the Son of God, he is the revelation of the Father, Col 1:15; Heb 1:3; he can deliver and redeem, Rom 5:10; Gal 4:5; 1Jn 4:10; he is superior to the angels and to Moses, Heb 1:5; 3:6. It is probably this functional ontology that makes appropriate the title Lord which, according to Blocher (2002:135) is the “most functional” of the titles. It seems to me that we need to make a distinction between a functional ontology and a conceptual ontology. The later, in my view, characterized the fifth century debates concerned with the articulation of the two natures while New Testament writers concerned themselves with a functional ontology.

As for the title Lord, its meaning is of high importance in the debate. The phrase, of course, has a wide range of meanings and has been applied to mere human beings as well as deities (Hurtado 1993:561). But within the Gospel narratives, the meaning of the vocative *Kurie*^{xiv}: sir, master, and the fact also that it has been used by the mystery religions and for divinized Roman emperors (Wells 1985:76) do not override the specificity of its Christian usage where it is used for Christ. That there was a distinctive Christian usage surfaces in Paul’s address to the Corinthians, 1Cor 8:5 where Lord is opposed to the many deities. It is well accepted also that *Kurios* is effectively used in the LXX in place of YHWH, as a linguistic device for the ineffable Name (Wells 1985:75). As Moule underlines the use of the title for God was not the exclusive practice of Greek-speaking Christians; “non Christian Greek-speaking Jews also used *kurios* for God” (Moule 1979:40). According to Hurtado (1993:562), it has been used also

by first century “Greek-speaking Jews” for God to parallel *Adonay* and *Mareh* by “Semitic-speaking Jews.” So, it is not unlikely that its Christian usage was related to the Aramaic *Maranatha* from *Mareh*, to refer to God.^{xv} Witherington (1992:486) rejects Bousset’s argument for a Hellenistic pagan influence on the basis of a “strong evidence” for Aramaic-speaking Jewish Christians’ use of the title.

As to its meaning, Jesus’ lordship is to be understood beyond the ordinary meanings of the phrase *Lord* if we consider a number of elements. Prerogatives which characterize Yahweh’s lordship in the Old Testament are recognized to Christ, by New Testament writers: the power to forgive sins, Mk 2:7, 10; the authority of judge of the living and the dead, Ac 10:42; exclusive relationship with the people of God, as bridegroom, Mt 9:15; 25:1; attribution of the name above all other names, Phil 2:10, 11. Jesus in Jn 13:13, for instance, stresses his authority upon their lives rather than the authority of his teachings only, Jn 13:16, 17. Moule (1979:42) remarks also that Old Testament passages that relate to God are transferred to Christ, i. e. Ps 102; Isa 45:23. The opening formula of 1Pet 1:1 is another case in point, where *kurios*, according to Michaels (1988:17), is used for *Theos* in the corresponding formula in the LXX therefore indicating a transfer of divine title to Jesus.^{xvi} The association of *lord* and *god* as opposed to the many gods and lords in 1Cor 8:6 suggests also a link between deity and lordship. Paul’s application of Isa 45:23 to Christ shows that deference shown exclusively to YHWH, Rom 14:11, was also attributed to Christ in Phil 2:10, 11. I find however Phil 2:9-11 to be more explicit because the enthronement with the *Name above all other names* leads to due recognition of his lordship. Blocher (2002:133) underlines “the extensive use of the title (for Christ) and the connotation of divinity.” I agree with Knitter (2002:182) that the disciples meant really “what they were saying” in applying to Jesus the titles. As Marshall points out:

The Gospels were written by men who believed that Jesus was Messiah and Lord. They applied to him terms which indicated that they regarded him as the supreme representative of God and hence as the one who possessed the key to human destiny....*This can be taken as historical fact (italics mine)*, denied by nobody.

(Marshall 1979:55, 56)

Hick concedes cautiously that Jesus self-applied the title Son of man to express mere manhood, calling to the demonstrative use of *man* in Acts 2:22 (Hick 1993:44). Notwithstanding the fact that his interpretation of Ac 2:22 is not exegetically convincing within the context of Peter's discourse,^{xvii} one needs to consider the meaning or meanings of the phrase "the Son of man". Bornkamm (1960:230) attributes to the Palestinian Church the transfer of the title to Jesus who, according to him, never used the title Son of man for himself. Bultmann accepts some of the sayings as originating from Jesus while others (Colpe, Borsch) posit Babylonian or other non-Jewish provenances (Otto and Marshall 1982:617).^{xviii}

Since there is evidence of a Jewish background, I do think it is not a *priori* of necessity to posit non-Jewish backgrounds unless evidences coerce us. *4Ezra* and the DSS *4Q246* reflect the influence of the Danielic Son of man, according to Pate (2000:127). The phrase is used in the *Similitudes of Enoch*, which is likely not the background, if it is later than the evangelists' accounts, as many think (Ladd 1987:149).^{xix} After a serious consideration of the different biblical backgrounds proposed by scholars (Num 23:19; Ps 8:4; Ezekiel 2; 1Enoch 46:1; Dan 7:13, 14), Moule (1979:11-22) concludes, after considering the definite article among other data, that Dan 7 is the background of the phrase. According to Stein, "the title is found in all the Gospel strata (Mark, Q, M, L, and John) and satisfies the criterion of 'dissimilarity'" (Stein 1985:584). It is reasonable therefore, in my view, to maintain Dan 7:13 as the most plausible background for the phrase. According to Marshall, consensus has not been reached yet as regards the meaning of the phrase (Otto and Marshall 1982:617), but for Ladd (1987:149),^{xx} by the time of Jesus, the Danielic son of man seems to have turned, in some Jewish circles, into a messianic pre-existent individual. It is Otto's contention also (*NIDNTT III* 1982:620) who questions the historical method used in current discussion of the title; he agrees with a partial influence of Dan 7 but he insists also on "Jesus own historical contribution" (*NIDNTT III* 1982:621) in using the phrase.^{xxi} In my view, a historical method that presupposes one's alienation to his/her cultural patterns will reveal inadequate and historically unsound. History witnesses that the rise

of a particular religion has always involved a new countercultural paradigm sometimes dramatically hard to welcome into the limits of the cultural settings of his founder. This was the case for Moses facing the Egyptians and for the founder of Islam facing Mecca's aristocracy. It is more likely that Jesus did not get along with the religious establishment of his time because of the paradigmatic teaching he carried on against prevailing rabbinic teachings.

It seems to me that the meaning of the title, as Jesus applied it to himself, goes beyond the restriction advocated by Hick (1993:40). It is correct, on the basis of the New Testament texts to hold that the title was used sometimes referring to manhood, as in Mt 8:20. However New Testament authors have also used the title to stress his humiliation as God's servant, Mt 20:28; Mk 10:45; Lk 24:7. This suffering servant represents one of Jesus' self-understanding as Son of Man. This agrees with the context of Daniel 7: 13-28 which associates a heavenly figure, Dan 7:13, to the saints, Dan 7:18-27. The link to Daniel 7:13 is evident in eschatological references to the second coming as in Mt 16:27; 24:30; Lk 21:27. Jesus certainly identifies with the people of God as the suffering Son of man called to share in his reign. There is however another aspect of the Son of man which is not the least. The Son of man of the Synoptic Gospels is endowed with divine prerogatives. In my view, one would hardly understand the consistent association of the title with divine prerogatives, Mt 9:6; 13:41; Mk 2:10; 8:38; Lk 5:24; 6:5; 12:40; Jn 3:13; 6:27, within a strict restriction of the title to mere manhood. I therefore do not agree with Hick's contention that Son of man expresses only Jesus' manhood.

To level down Jesus to other religious figures, Hick and Knitter have to propose a non normative Christology for Jesus death and his resurrection. They admit the factuality of his death but Hick goes as far as to deny any atoning value to the Cross. According to Hick, Jesus did not teach the need of a 'mediator' nor of 'atoning sacrifice' (Hick 1993:98). Hick goes as far as to argue against the biblical teaching of justification by faith that "A forgiveness that has to be bought by full payment of the moral debt is not in fact forgiveness at all" (Hick 1993:98). No atonement of sins, in Hick's view, is needed. In my view this objection is not relevant because, contrary to what Hick asserts,

forgiveness *a/ways* implies voluntary sacrifice from the part of the offended. First, there is not a single forgiveness worth of being called forgiveness if it has not cost something to the forgiver. Secondly, if God used one mere human being to die on the Cross for others, in my view, salvation would have cost nothing to God but someone else would have been the real hero of the story. Hick views salvation in a rather horizontal line in making of mutual forgiveness the only condition for God's forgiveness (Hick 1993:98). In his striving to level down Jesus to other founders Hick has not paid (consciously or not) due attention to the determinative importance of Jesus' death for biblical Christian identity. He therefore moves one of the vertical axes of biblical Christian identity that is the import of the death of Christ for Christian salvation, namely the atoning death of Jesus Christ.

As regards the resurrection, both Hick and Knitter deny its corporeality (Hick 2006; Knitter 2002:199) and put into the event metaphorical, symbolic motifs. Hick rejects any inference of deity from Jesus' resurrection since the *facts* of other biblical resurrections did not turn their beneficiaries into divine figures (Hick 1993:44). For him, the disciples had experiences of appearances he likens to Yogananda's visions of his died guru (Hick 1993:42). But, in my view, Yogananda's case is not to be likened with the resurrection of Jesus as reported in the New Testament for, at least, the following reasons. Yogananda's experiences were really different from the disciples'. He was alone and one may well in the case of a single witness postulate psychological conditions that may account of them as mere daydreams or mere visions while the fact that they were many witnesses does not leave room for any such conclusion regarding the biblical reports^{xxii}. Secondly, Yogananda did not see a resuscitated person but appearances whose substance Hick does not tell much about. Thirdly, it is still possible to pretend to have visions or to experience appearances of someone whose body is still lying in the grave. Yogananda did not, in my understanding, affirm the absence of his Guru's corpse from its tomb. The disciples, on the other hand, not only affirmed the absence of Jesus' body from the tomb but as late as on the day of Pentecost they challenged their

adversaries in such way that their hearers had just to go and check for evidence.

It is widely accepted that something really happened, something impressive enough as to bring them from despair to the passionate conviction that Jesus was resuscitated. The attempts to prove that the resurrection was not corporeal, from Reimarus's political theory to the objective theory of scholars like Lampe and Bornkamm have met reasonable objections up to this point of history (Osborne 1984:275-278). It must be stressed that the disciples believed that it was a physical resuscitation, and they were so convinced of it as to ground partly in this conviction the reasonableness of their faith, I Cor 15:14, their self-sacrificing dedication and their credibility in critical ways^{xxiii}. Therefore there is no coercive reason to hold to a metaphorical resurrection.

Given the foundational character of the work of Christ, the import of his death and his resurrection for Christian faith, 1Cor 15:14, even appearances are not adequate for the axial role of the resurrection for biblical Christian identity. The resurrection was the transcending divine act of God's redemptive work through Christ the disciples called upon for recognition of his Messiahship and his lordship, Acts 2:24-31. It is therefore central to biblical Christian faith, Acts 1:22; 1Cor 15:13, 14, and this is why it is at the heart of the apostolic *kerygma*. In my view, a non corporeal resuscitation would mean a mythical vindication. That God sent appearances to the disciples so strongly, so impressively that they ended really believing and witnessing that Jesus resuscitated corporeally is highly unethical. It would mean that God himself mystified the disciples and put them on the wrong track. The argument is tantamount to that held by Muslims who deny Jesus' death arguing that God replaced Jesus by someone else with the appearance of Jesus to die on the Cross (Feldman 1988:63). The New Testament writers also faced objections against a corporeal resuscitation and they had to put much energy in stating again and again the factuality and/or the corporeality of the resurrection, Lk 24:39; Jn 20:27; 21:12, 13; 1Cor 15:3-7.

The pluralist deconstructions challenge more than everything else the integrity of the person of Christ and his work. The Church holding its identity on

the basis of who Jesus is and his salvific work, the pluralists' contentions if well-founded affect inevitably the two most foundational bases of biblical Christian identity.

5.2.2 *Ontological implications*

In his Christological reformulations, Hick (1993:53) makes recourse to the synergistic pneumatology of Baillie and Lampe to interpret the activity of the Holy Spirit as essentially the same in its nature for the whole human race, Jesus included. I consider that such generous, universal and unilateral outpouring of the Holy Spirit does not reflect an exegetically sound reading of the New Testament, if it is equated with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. In my view, something new in the active presence of the Holy Spirit happened at and from Pentecost, something the trinomial view of Léon-Dufour helps capture.

Léon-Dufour (1963:205) proposes a restructuring of the binomial promise/fulfilment view of salvation history by dividing the second term into "the time of Jesus" and "the time of the Church". One must keep in mind that the Holy Spirit is present and active throughout the whole salvation history. As Léon-Dufour (1963:205) writes, "In fact, the Holy Spirit has not succeeded Jesus to determine a new period, but he has been active during the time of Jesus....Jesus had been filled with the Spirit since the beginning." In my view, Pentecost was rather the introduction of a new dimension in the activity of the Spirit, Acts 2:4; 6:3; Rom 8:13; Eph 1:13. The active presence of the Spirit in History became bidirectional since Pentecost. While continuing his ceaseless activity towards all human beings, John 16:11, the Holy Spirit entered a new stage in God's purpose: the ministry *in* the believer. Therefore, in the divine economy of salvation history, the universal ministry of the Spirit to the world is not identical to the ministry of the Holy Spirit *in* the believer.

I agree therefore with Ladd who also stresses the difference between the presence of the Spirit in Old Testament times "upon men" mostly, "with" the disciples during the earthly ministry of Jesus, and his indwelling "in them" after his departure (Ladd 1999:336-338). Ladd identifies the endowment "in them"

with the event at Pentecost and remarks that the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost “...cannot be in the divine economy until after Jesus’ death and glorification (*italics mine*) (Ladd 1999:330). Tenney also rightly underlines from John 16:8-15 the two distinct directions; to the world, the Holy Spirit works towards convicting human beings “of sin, righteousness and judgement” while the Spirit guides the believer into the glory of Christ (Tenney 1981:157). In my view, the historical location of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit is the first reason Pentecost cannot be identified with the Spirit’s universal ministry towards human beings of all times and places. Pentecost is a starting point for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit, Jn 7:39, though the Spirit’s has been active from the beginning. In the process of salvation, beyond the preparatory work of the Holy Spirit, there is his abiding *in the believer* that is the abiding of Christ *in the believer*. As Siefrid, referring to Rom 8:9 puts it, “Those who belong to Christ have the indwelling Spirit of Christ, and are not ‘in the flesh’ but ‘in the Spirit’” (Siefrid 1993:434). Bruner also points to Gal 3: 14 that locates the gift of the Holy Spirit “in Christ” (Bruner 1972:227)

The Holy Spirit continues the work of Christ in this second direction, as *allon parakleton*: another (of the same kind) *parakletos*. As Roth (1964:295) writes, “In both the so-called Q source and in John we read of Jesus consoling his disciples with the promise of the Spirit as a friend who comes alongside to help (*parakaleō*) in time of persecution and when guidance is needed Luke 12:12.” My point is that one cannot lean upon the sovereignty of the Spirit vis-à-vis the Church to argue for his opening *diverging* paths of salvation through other religious traditions. For the Spirit of Pentecost is the *Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of his Son*, Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6, the activity of the Holy Spirit cannot be conceived in disjunction from the unique and universal purpose of God *in Jesus Christ*, Jn 16:14; Eph 1:10.

Another reason the ministry of the Spirit to the world needs to be distinguished from Pentecost is the condition expressly required for the bestowal of the Holy Spirit “in” human beings. Longenecker (1981:283) points to “the relation of the gift of the Holy Spirit to repentance and baptism” as a feature of Peter’s message, Acts 2:14-36. Peter in fact directed the audience to

the necessity to repent and receive through faith in Christ the forgiveness of sins, Acts 2:36, and the promised Holy Spirit, Acts 2:33. The conditionality of the gift of the Holy Spirit is significantly present in all three Synoptic records of the message of John the Baptist, Matt 3:11; Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16. The fourth Gospel insists also on its irreducible necessity, Jn 3:5; 4:24; 7:39, and its nature. Repentance constitutes a noticeable point of similarity between the baptism of John and that lorded by Jesus. But the noticeable dissimilarity between John's baptism and Jesus' is the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as a particular feature of the latter, Mt 3:11, Mk 1:8; Lk 3:16. The repentance that leads to the baptism of the Holy Spirit is to be understood as *metanoia*. Bonnard's elucidation of the meaning of the substantive *metanoia*^{xxiv} in the Matthean text relates the Greek word to Old Testament covenantal usage that points to a *return* to Yahweh's alliance (Bonnard 2002:32). One does not access the Kingdom of God without returning to God's alliance, without due acceptance to abide under God's sovereign rule. Repentance is then a condition for entrance in the Kingdom from Pentecost (Caragounis 1992:424).

Paul and John point clearly to the divine provision of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as onto-genetic of biblical Christian identity, Jn 3:5; Rom 8:11; 1Cor 3:16; 5:17; Tit 3:5-7; 1Pet 1:3-5. For Paul, the reception of the Holy Spirit is not only *habitation* but also 'reception' of a *new nature*, the *new man*, Eph 4:24, making of the Christian believer a *new creation*, 2Cor 5:17, in contradistinction with the corrupted human nature, the 'old man' that determined his/her way of life before conversion, Eph 4:22. Members of the new covenant community are not adherents to a corpus of rituals and duties aiming to moral reformation and religious performances. Therefore the theology of the New Testament cannot construe the relation of the Holy Spirit to the believer as barely an influence or an inspiration (contra Hick 1993:52). In my opinion, the action of the Spirit extends to a deeper ontological dimension than the inspirational Christology of Baillie and Lampe (Hick 1993:52) implies. Christians become "*partakers of the divine nature*", II Pet 1:4 (KJV, RSV) through the life of the Holy Spirit "in" them. I agree with Knudsen (1964:316) that this does not result in the divine becoming human or the human becoming divine. Nonetheless, the indwelling of the Spirit

is a hallmark of the ontological dimension of biblical Christian identity as Paul wrote unequivocally to his Roman addressees, Rom 8:9.^{xxv}

If one adopts the inspirational pneumatology of Baillie and Lampe the indwelling of the Holy Spirit ceases to be a hallmark of biblical Christian identity if the ministry of the Spirit is the same for all human beings. By the same token, Christians do not partake in divine nature in any particular way if the influence and the inspiration of the Spirit are universal privileges accessible to all human beings. This is overall true if one considers that Hick, in his concern for a strict parity, avoids making essential, qualitative or quantitative distinctions between Christians and others as to the presence of the Spirit.

5.2.3 Existential implications

The indwelling of the Spirit introduces Christians into a new position, a new status Pauline theology identifies as one of *adoption (huiiothesia)*, Gal 4:5, 6, clarifying the nature of their sonship. This new status leads into a new consciousness, one of a higher degree of immanent relationship with God^{xxvi} as ‘members of God’s family’, Eph 2:19, not as slaves but as ‘sons’, and ‘heirs’, Titus 3:7. Hence Christians relate to God *personally* not *impersonally*, not as an unknown and radically transcendent Ultimate, even not just as the Creator and providential God, but as their Father, Gal 3:26; 4:6. Therefore the denial of the hypostasis of the Spirit by Hick (1993:53) and his radicalization of Kant’s epistemology (Hick 1973:131; 1999b:341) bar the way to a personal relationship with Transcendence, in my view. If indeed the biblical perception of God as a *personal* being is not valid (Hick 1993:177) and the Spirit is but a mere impersonal influence or inspiration then a personal relationship between man and Transcendence is not possible.

Paul’s metaphorical use of the body in Rom 12 and 1Cor 12, expresses nevertheless the organic interrelationship (O’Brien 1993:128) and the hierarchical dependence of Christians to Christ as members of Christ, Rom 12:5; 1Cor 12:12-2. As Fung (1993:81) puts it, “Christ as the head is not only united with the Church as the source of its life, but also stands over it as its

absolute ruler (italics mine).” The nature of the new life does not allow for an autonomous religious life. Given this aspect of biblical Christian identity, it is existentially difficult, not to say impossible, for Christians to drive out and enter a dipolar identity as Knitter (2002:210) suggests.

The Old Testament terminology in Petrine epistles is most illustrative^{xxvii} for understanding the relation of biblical Christian identity to the world. Christians are identified as ‘strangers’ here and now, being ‘pilgrims’ on the earth, 1Pet 2:9 (KJV). The heavenly citizenship of Christians as a dimension of biblical Christian identity is also stressed by the author of the epistle to the Hebrews. He exhorts his Christian addressees to hold fast to their faith as *Xenoi kai paradidēmoi epi tēs gēs*, ‘strangers and pilgrims on the earth’, □Heb 11:13, aspiring to a heavenly city, Heb 11:16, the city of God of verse 10. For this reason, Christian believers cannot set this world as their horizon and secularize God’s Kingdom in the perspective favoured by Knitter. It is true that the ‘upwards calling’, Phil 3:14 to a ‘heavenly citizenship’, *politeuma en ouranois*□, Phil 3:20, does not imply a radical withdrawal from this world into what Stott (2007) qualifies as a “monasterial Christianity”^{xxviii}. Their orientation towards the heavenly and eschatological city is counterbalanced by a call to serve as Christ’s *witnesses* on the earth, Lk 24:48; Acts 1:8.^{xxix} But Knitter (2002:222) is faulty of making of the central issues of worldly kingdoms the central focus of God’s Kingdom.^{xxx}

According to Hick (1999b:339), it is better not to dissipate one’s energies for the conversion of people since salvation is experienced within all traditions. Knitter does not follow Hick in his dismissal of proclamation but he advocates for a moratorium as to give precedence to dialogue over proclamation (Knitter 2002:222). Mission, in my view, is the *raison d’être* of the Church in the world. But we need to understand the scope of the mission of the Church to address Hick’s contention. The kingdom of God has broken through into the world as the “*missio Dei*” (Bosch 1995:525-527)^{xxxi} entrusted to the Son as a Davidic King, Ps 110:1; Mt 28:18-20^{xxxii}; Eph 1:9. It is “incarnational” because the Father carries his mission through the ministry of the incarnate Son (as *kephalē*, head).^{xxxiii} The kingdom of God is not just proclaimed as an eschatological

reality, it is also present, Lk 17:21, in the world.^{xxxiv} First, its presence in the world has been, during Jesus' earthly ministry, God's *incarnate* holiness, love and powerful acts, through the Son. Secondly, the Kingdom is present meaning that God has empathetically involved himself with human beings in their distresses as *Sōter*, Lk 2:11 (see also Mt 4:23; 1Tim 4:10). Jesus' citation of the missionary text of the "*Ebed YHWH*" (Isa 61:1, 2) in Luke 4:18-19 points out two dynamics of the "*missio Dei*": his implication in favour of the needy and the distressed, Lk 4:18b, and the proclamation of a divine future to all human beings, Lk 4:18c (see also Mt 4:23). These two dynamics and God's incarnate holiness constitute, in my view, the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei* entrusted to the Son.

The threefold dimension of the ministry of the Son who is the *head* delineates the threefold dimension of the mission of his body, the Church. Believers are called to witness the empathic implication of God in favour of the needy. Js 1:27 defines religion as empathy and holiness. Christians must be fully aware that the '*missio Dei*' addresses also the global situation and the global needs of God's fallen creatures. Then Knitter (2004) is right in recalling Christians not to lose sight of this dimension of Christian presence in the world by a renewed concern for the "eco-human crisis", since the presence of the kingdom was, from the inception of Jesus' earthly ministry, an *implication of God* in the distress of human beings in the world. He errs, however, in secularizing Christian mission as to give priority and focused concern to the here and now 'eco-human crisis' by asking for a moratorium on the proclamation of God's salvation in Christ (Knitter 2004; Heim 2003:74), the message of hope.

Pluralists' views run against the specificity of biblical Christian identity in the world. They forget that Christians do not equate the Kingdom with any of the earthly structures of the present (Kung 1978:252). The dynamics of God's Kingdom in the 'present' of fallen human beings cannot be given priority over the future of God: the eschatological kingdom. Its proclamation can by no means be a *back issue* in the mission of the Church. By reducing its mission to

an empathic involvement with the needy, Christians will soon engage in a secularization that will turn them into mere philanthropists.

5.2.4 Evaluation

At the centre of the discussion of the import of the titles is the very issue of Jesus lordship. Hick and Knitter's low Christology reduces Jesus to a mere man, a charismatic religious leader. If Jesus is a mere human being (Hick 1993:40) his authority upon Christians should not be the same as if he is the incarnate Son of God. However, the exploration of the backgrounds and of the New Testament usages of the two titles *Son of God* and *Lord* points to divine lordship. Anderson (1984:179) pointing to the resurrection as vindication reaffirms the divine import of the formula "Jesus is Lord" in the early Church. Therefore Hick and Knitter cannot deny the divine nature of Christ and the incarnation, without reducing Jesus lordship.

As pointed already, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit is onto-genetic of biblical Christian identity. As Bruner (1972:225) affirms: "The indispensable *pre-condition* (italics mine) for the giving of the Spirit is the work of Christ." Therefore by denying the atoning value of the death of Christ and the corporeality of the resurrection, Hick and Knitter jeopardize the very basis of biblical Christian identity. Hick and Knitter, in their deconstruction of Christian truth-claims reduce the resurrection to a non corporeal metaphor and to appearances or visions. Given the foundational character of the work of Christ, the import of his death and his resurrection for Christian faith, 1Cor 15:14, even appearances are not adequate for the determinative role of the resurrection for biblical Christian identity (Thiessen 1986:243). The New Testament basis for biblical Christian identity is nothing less than the corporeal resurrection. Discussions about the nature of the resurrection may still be on the agenda but if it is widely accepted that faith in the risen Christ launched the New Testament Church (see Hick 1993:43), it must be also accepted that the early Church believed the resurrection to be corporeal rather than metaphorical or mythological. Hartlich (1995:122) is right to pinpoint that "Without an objective,

ontic grounding for Christology in the resurrection event Christian faith has no basis.”

The foundation of the ontic dimension of biblical Christian identity being the indwelling of the Holy Spirit under the condition of repentance and faith, the synergistic pneumatology of Baillie and Lampe, which Hick adopts, is not without implications for biblical Christian identity. Pluralists deny the conditionality of the bestowal of the Holy Spirit by upholding to a unilateral presence of the Spirit shared by all human beings, including Jesus, in the same way. They confuse the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit with the bestowal of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The thesis has shown that they are two distinct dimensions of the active presence of the Spirit. The implications of confusing the universal ministry of the Spirit with the event of Pentecost are twofold. It implies, first, that the bestowal of the Spirit is no longer the hallmark of biblical Christian identity. Secondly, it means also that repentance and faith are no longer necessary since the activity of the Spirit is without condition the same for all human beings. The same must be said as regards Hick’s denial of the atonement. Contra Hick, it must be stressed that the indwelling of the Spirit presumes the efficacy of the work of Christ, his death and his resurrection (Anderson 1984:178). If as pluralists contend, God’s grace is already universally and unconditionally bestowed, the substitution of a horizontal atonement over against the vertical divine mediation of the Son reduces sanctification to one’s management of his relation to his neighbour. This leads to an anthropocentric salvation, and sanctification is reduced to one’s ability to manage interpersonal relationships without any need of a vertical treatment of sin.

If, as Hick contends, the resurrection is not corporeal and Transcendence cannot be said to be personal or impersonal, the denial of the hypostasis of the Spirit implies that the relation of Christians to Transcendence cannot be conceived as a real interpersonal relationship. This should result in the necessity to revise almost all of the existential, practical Christian life, for instance, addressing God as a *personal* and *living* Father. If God is not a personal God, even if Christian spirituality is functional, it is erring in the way it relates to true Transcendence. The same is true with Knitter’s charge of a

distortion of Jesus' purpose by a "second Christian generation" (Knitter 2002:173), that consequently contributed to create a gap that divorces the Church from its founder. If effectively the teachings of the New Testament reflects deviations from what Jesus really was and really taught, the distortions cannot but affect the very nature of genuine Christian identity. In losing the authentic tradition of early Christianity, the authentic Christianity of the authentic Jesus and his first disciples, "second generation Christians" from the point of distortion, have introduced concepts that resulted in a diverted biblical Christian identity.

Knitter is right when contending against Hick that early Christians meant what they said (Knitter 2002:182). But, in my view, Knitter's love language creates an existential problem to biblical Christian identity. It reduces not only biblical claims but suggests also that Christians can believe one thing and confess something else. As Pinnock (1996:333) asks, "How can Christ's resurrection be true for us and not for the World?" By the time one places the singularity of Jesus and his uniqueness as true for himself and not true for others even out of passionate love he has already admitted the relativity of his confession for himself.

The disjunction of the Church from Jesus is also evident in the way pluralists redefine the mission of the Church. Pluralists reduce the Church's mission to principally one of the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei*, the empathic implication with the poor and the needy. As for proclamation, Hick affirms that salvation is universally taking place through all traditions so that proclamation is a waste of energy (Hick 1999b:339). Knitter not only gives precedence to Christian service over proclamation but he also confines mission to socio-ethical struggles in favour of the exploited (Bosch 1995:646) without real concern for Christian behaviour amidst fellow human beings. In my opinion, any view of the *missio Dei* that does not integrate its threefold dimension will be detrimental to the *raison d'être* of biblical Christian identity in the World because mission is the very reason of the Church's presence in the world.

Levelling down Jesus to other founders, as proposed by Hick and Knitter, carries with it dramatic implications for Christian biblical identity. As already

underlined, any Christology that affects the person and the work of Christ affects also biblical Christian identity. If the pluralist theology is valid, Christians must reappraise not only their understanding of Jesus Christ but also the nature of their relation to Christ. His lordship will no longer be that of an ontological Son of God but rather that of a metaphorical and mythological Son. If we welcome the pluralist contention that even the Messiah title was bestowed on him over against his will (Hick 1993:40) then Christians must see Jesus as a man some of his deeds and words qualify as not more than one to whom we relate only because of his teaching and his example, a functional mentor though an imperfect human being. If true, this new “recovered” picture of Jesus of Nazareth requires Christians to not indulge in worshipping attitudes in their relation to Christ.

5.2.5 *Summing up*

The assumption of Hick and Knitter is that a parity system built upon the levelling out of all traditions is the only valid basis for genuine dialogue. This assumption implies that Jesus Christ and Christianity be levelled down to other founders and traditions (Hick 1993:36). Therefore Hick and Knitter engage in Christological reformulations that consist essentially in a revision of all Christian truth-claims affirming or implying singularity, normativity, uniqueness. They address the two essential Christological categories: the person and the work of Jesus Christ. As to the person of Christ, Hick and Knitter deny the incarnation and the divine nature of Jesus Christ; they reduce the biblical titles, even the Son of man title. Concerning the work of Christ, Hick and Knitter reject the redeeming value of the Cross and the corporeality of the resurrection. Knitter argues for an adoptionist view that implies, in my view, the negation of the divine nature in Jesus sonship. The section, after a brief exposition of the Christological reformulations of Hick and Knitter, deals with 1) the arguments against maintaining a high Christology; 2) the implications of the reductions and denials of the titles, the death and the resurrection for biblical Christian identity.

The thesis has revisited some of the works of scholars like Moule (1979), Otto and Marshall (1982) to restate the Jewish background of the Messiah and

Son of God titles (see also Ladd 1987:138, 161; Pate 2000:107, 127; Burke 1985:1033), the Palestinian relation of *kurios* to the Aramean *Maranatha* (Moule, 1979:42; Michaels 1988:17; Marshall 1979:55, 56); the understanding of Jesus' retention from a public use of the titles (Witherington 1992:486). The thesis has also looked back to Knitter's adoptionist view and Hick's interpretation of the resurrection as well as his denial of the atoning death of Jesus. My remark is that the revisionism of Hick and Knitter concerning the person of Christ and his work is not justified, particularly the arguments based upon Hellenistic backgrounds of the so-called overstatements of a deviationist Christian generation. This section concludes that the Christological basis given by Hick and Knitter to their pluralist models is not justified in light of the objections the thesis has drawn from the scholarly work pointed earlier and in light of the New Testament teachings.

The thesis also evidences that the implications of the revision of traditional Christology for biblical Christian identity are detrimental. The denial of the divine nature to Jesus impacts necessarily his lordship; it is not simply an issue of levelling down Jesus to others: for instance, if Jesus divine nature is denied, Christians must radically change their historical attitude towards Jesus Christ especially in the area of worship. If Jesus is a mere man, vulnerable as natural human beings are, many of his words and deeds must be discarded and the authority upon the Christian life they imply must be revised. If the atoning value of his death is denied, then Christians must revise their vertical relation to God, and Bruner's affirmation that "The indispensable *pre-condition* for the giving of the Spirit is the work of Christ" (Bruner 1972:225) is no longer valid. The foundations of biblical Christian identity are shaken where incarnation is denied; if the one who died on the cross is a mere human being, redemption has not taken place because no mere man can redeem his neighbour. The ontological nature of biblical Christian identity is also affected; akin the nature of Christian life as the life of the risen Christ, Gal 2:20. The habitation of the Spirit is no longer a hallmark of biblical Christian identity; furthermore, the existential implications reduces the mission of the Church to humanitarian concerns for

one's neighbour; Christians should sought redemption at a horizontal level if the atonement is denied.

In my view, the basic weakness of Hick's Christology is that Christology is made a sub-servant of his theoretical model. The model is created first and Christology is worked out to fit in. The methodology is not acceptable. As Cotterell (2000:761) remarks, "The evidence in Hick's enterprise is the inevitability in any such exercise of the abandoning of core Christian theology particularly incarnational theology." In my view, to be consistent, a biblical Christology must preside to any *Christian model* of religious pluralism, not the opposite (see Guggenheim 2002:417)^{xxxv}. Pinnock (1996:333) once wrote: "The faith of Christians would be fatally damaged if it came to be accepted that the risen Lord were our myth of meaning and nothing more." Pinnock's point can be extended to all Christological reformulations of Hick and Knitter. It means that the Christology of pluralists affects necessarily the biblical Christian identity. If the Church has departed so radically from Jesus as pretend Hick and Knitter, then it is the very heart and the very substance of biblical Christian identity that ask for urgent paradigmatic revision.

5.3 INCLUSIVISTS AND BIBLICAL CHRISTIAN IDENTITY

Inclusivists postulate salvation as the common denominator at the centre of their models. By salvation, inclusivists mean the "particularity axiom" (Nash 1994:109) posited by Rahner (1973:31; 1999:295) according to which God's only salvation is that won by Christ. Inclusivists differ in their application of the axiom to non-Christian religions and the implications for biblical Christian identity vary according to the theological treatment of related soteriological and Christological issues.

5.3.1 Foundational implications

For Rahner, faithful members of non-Christian traditions without any knowledge of the Christian message are "anonymous Christians" who partake

to God's salvation through their temporarily valid religious traditions (Rahner 1999:293). Kung widens the path opened by Rahner and includes the members of lawful and unlawful non-Christian traditions alike. For Kung (1976:104), salvation through Christ is unilaterally bestowed by God regardless that the individual's religious tradition is lawful or not. Dupuis relates non-Christian traditions to the Noahic and the Mosaic covenants postulated as permanently valid besides and despite the Christic covenant (Dupuis 2003:204). Catholic inclusivists view Christ as only an instrument of God's salvific action. This approach leaves room for the agency of other founders and revelations making non-Christian religions valid paths to salvation. For Pinnock, members of non-Christian religions are saved through Christ on the basis of their faith and their fear of God. Pinnock's inclusivism is more cautious as regards the validity of non-Christian traditions though somehow ambiguous.

Inclusivists therefore reduce the basis of biblical Christian identity to one of its two pillars, namely the work of Christ. Jesus' atoning death is instrumental to the salvation of non-Christians, not his agency as mediator and sphere. If these inclusivist views are correct, a first inference is that those converted to Christ from other traditions did not need to do so essentially because they were already saved through Christ within their former traditions. Inclusivists do not take into account the fact that God's salvation involves the punctual event through Christ as well as an ongoing process *in* Christ (Morris 1993:861). In endeavouring to make room for other religious figures in salvation history they have minimized this central truth of Christian salvation: salvation by grace is not only *through* Christ but also *in* Christ, as the "decisive sphere" (Siefried 1993:435).

The Trinitarian Christology of Jacques Dupuis, as a case in point, has gone farther as to introduce a disjunction between the man Jesus and the logos and a disjunction between Jesus and the Spirit (Dupuis 2003:110). In Dupuis' Christology, the 'cosmic' and 'timeless' "Word to become incarnate" (Dupuis 2003:124) became effectively incarnated but temporarily and partially in the punctual Jesus of Nazareth. As the cosmic Christ, he continued to operate universally in and beyond the Church through other religious traditions. In my

view, Dupuis jeopardizes the integrity of the person of Jesus Christ by delocalizing one of the two natures, namely the divine.

5.3.2 *Ontological implications*

Identifying the 'Spirit of Christ' with the Pentecostal event, Dupuis writes, referring to Rom 8:9:

In that sense it has been noted that the Spirit is God's 'point of insertion' through Christ in people's lives and that its work consists of making them children of the Father in the Son through the risen humanity

(Dupuis 2003:179).

This means consequently that the gift of the Holy Spirit does not necessitate repentance or objective faith. Likewise, Pinnock (1992:74, 75) upholds that access to salvation does not necessitate but subjective faith, sincerity and good disposition. For Kung (1976:91), members of other religions are saved as "observers of the law". These affirmations contradict the New Testament, Rom 3:20, 21; 4:16, that opposes salvation by works to God's grace. These inclusivist views affect therefore the ontological basis of biblical Christian identity by creating a double standard in holding that salvation is unconditionally bestowed on non-Christians, while Christians have accessed God's grace through repentance and faith.

The objection made earlier against pluralists can be turned on to inclusivists also. If the universal ministry of the Spirit means that members of other religions are saved in the Spirit, the indwelling of the Spirit is no longer a hallmark of biblical Christian identity. Though Hick errs in promoting a view that makes of dialogue an absolute as to deny any distinguishing particularity to Christianity, he is right when pointing out that Rahner's inclusivism coerces upon non-Christians a *passive* Christian identity they have not asked for (Hick 1981:66). Rahner's view affects the integrity of biblical Christian identity by coercing Christian salvation on others^{xxxvi} and therefore affirming the possibility for one to become Christian without voluntary determination and to access Christ salvific work over against Christ through other paths and other figures.

In Pinnock's view also, 'Believers' and 'Christians' participate to the same determinative and ontic gift of the Holy Spirit that Dupuis (2004:300) calls "the abiding presence of the Spirit..." Pentecost therefore becomes a unilateral and universal divine operation effective for the salvation of people of non-Christian faiths by virtue of the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit. Ontologically then, believers do not differ at all from others: they all are born anew to the life of the Spirit unilaterally bestowed upon all.

5.3.3 *Existential implications*

From Rahner to Pinnock, the "particular axiom" (Nash 1994:109) is at the centre of all inclusivist models this thesis has investigated. The foundational assumption of the inclusivists is that salvation is the only one won by Christ and it is accessible to faithful members of non-Christian traditions. In Rahner's pioneering view (1996:326), it is accessible to faithful members of lawful non-Christian traditions. If this is the case, a member of a lawful non-Christian faith does not need to live his faith not even to be a follower of Jesus. Kung (1976:104) widens the path by including all traditions which implies that even an animistic does not need to cut ties with animistic practices since despite such practices he/she will be saved. Pinnock (1996:99) distances himself from those who do not discriminate between true and false religions. He focuses on providing salvation to members of other traditions through faith coupled with their fear of God as found in non-Christian traditions (Pinnock 1992: 74, 75), there is no need for non-Christians to become Christian and therefore this will bear necessarily in the mission of the Church. Dupuis (2004: 297) by disjoining Christ from Jesus reduces his person whatever his now exalted humanness. This must bear necessarily in Christian attitudes towards Jesus, if correct.

5.3.4 *Evaluation*

The analysis of the inclusivist models reveals a striking characteristic. These models have seemingly ignored a New Testament truth that is salvation by grace takes place not only through Christ but also it is located *in Christ*. This

failure constitutes, in my view, the Achille's tendon of these inclusivist models. Catholic inclusivists seem to have deliberately chosen to do so because they want to manage room for non-Christian traditions and their founders (Dupuis, 2003:124). Pinnock avoids the question by focusing on the attitude of members of non-Christian traditions but the problem is not solved.

A second problem with these models is that they overlook the conditionality of the indwelling of the Spirit: repentance and faith in God's grace. For Rahner (1979:56, 57), the gift of the Spirit is part of God's gift; Dupuis identifies the gift of the Spirit with Pentecost (Dupuis 2003:179). The indwelling of the Spirit according to these models appears then a corollary to the unconditional gift of grace, coercively applied to their beneficiaries. Pinnock conditions salvation to faith and fear of God, but the two concepts need elucidation and do not necessarily correspond to repentance and faith in God's grace. As Ramesh underlines,

There is no biblical evidence of an abstract faith-principle toward God without specific truth bringing salvation. Consequently, Pinnock and Sanders must make an enormous leap, a leap that is exegetically unsound and logically questionable.

(Ramesh 2006)

Catholic inclusivists reduce the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei* since salvation is already accessed by non-Christians. Though Dupuis (2004:360) defines proclamation as "an invitation to the commitment of faith in Jesus Christ and to entry through baptism in the community of believers which is the Church", proclamation anyway can no longer be a call to salvation.

These models however cautious they want to be are not without implications for biblical Christian identity. The new soteriological possibility opened to members of non-Christian traditions, the unconditional indwelling of the Spirit and the reduction of the threefold dimension of the *Missio Dei* are not without affecting the consistency of biblical Christian identity. How consistent is it to require repentance and faith for the salvation of those who are willing to accept Christ and his lordship and to bestow it unconditionally upon others who may even reject openly Christ and his salvation? In my view, these inclusivisms lead to two different kinds of salvation through Christ.

In fact if salvation through Christ is accessible through other mediators and revelations and without repentance and faith, then there is no real need to call people to repentance and faith. These inclusivisms cannot escape Hick's charge of coercing a Christian category, salvation through Christ, upon non-Christians who have not asked for.

5.3.5 Summing up

From Rahner to Pinnock, the "particular axiom" (Rahner 1973:31; 1979:218; Nash 1994:109) is at the centre of all the inclusivist models this thesis has investigated. The foundational assumption of the inclusivists is that salvation is the only one won by Christ and it is accessible to faithful members of non-Christian traditions. For Rahner (1999:293), it is accessible to faithful members of lawful non-Christian traditions; Kung (1967:318; 1976:104) widens the path by including all traditions, without ethical discrimination. Dupuis joins Kung and engage in anchoring non-Christian traditions to God's salvation history by validating them through the pre-Christic covenants, the Noahic and the Mosaic covenants (Dupuis 2003:104). He identifies the members of non-Christian traditions as members of the Kingdom who have received the gift of the Spirit through the Spirit's universal ministry. Pinnock distances himself from those who do not discriminate between true and false religions. The cautious inclusivism of Pinnock avoids affirming overtly the validity of non-Christian (1996:99). He rather provides access to salvation to other traditions through their faith coupled to their fear of God (Pinnock 1992:74, 75).

The analysis of the inclusivist models reveals that these models have seemingly ignored a New Testament truth that is the christocentric location of salvation: *in Christ*. None of them does include this unavoidable dimension of the biblical salvation by grace. This is a very high price for the inclusion of other mediators (Dupuis 2003:124). In putting greater concern on ways to include non-Christian traditions they have weakened the integrity of the Christian salvation. A second problem with these models is that they overlook the conditionality of the indwelling of the Spirit: repentance and faith in God's grace.

For Rahner (1979:56, 57), the gift of the Spirit is part of God's gift; Dupuis (2003:125) identifies the gift of the Spirit with Pentecost. The indwelling of the Spirit according to these models appears then as corollary to the gift of grace, coercively applied to their beneficiaries. Catholic inclusivists reduce the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei* since salvation is already accessed by non-Christians (Bosch 1993:392).

These models however cautious they want to be are not without implications for biblical Christian identity. The new soteriological inclusion of members of non-Christian traditions without the person of Christ, the unconditional indwelling of the Spirit and the reduction of the threefold dimension of the *Missio Dei* are not without affecting the consistency of biblical Christian identity. How consistent is it to require repentance and faith for the salvation of those who are willing to accept Christ and his lordship, and to bestow salvation unconditionally upon those who reject Christ?^{xxxvii}

Christianity will not really stand, nor will biblical Christian identity, if the basis of Christian faith does not. There is no basis to Christian faith without the Cross. Kung's point is pertinent: "The cross is not only example and model, but ground, power and norm of the Christian faith" (Kung 1976:410). But a *symbolic or metaphorical* Cross cannot be the *literal* atoning place of the *real* sins of the world. If this is true, inclusivists too must face my contention to pluralists: if God used one mere human being to die on the Cross for others, salvation would have cost nothing to God but to the real hero of the story, the mere human being the sinful man who died on the Cross. Inclusivists jeopardize the basis of Christian faith and the basis of biblical Christian identity because the meaning of the Cross cannot stand if the one who died at Golgotha is the symbolic not the ontological Son of God.

6. POSSIBILITY AND LIMIT(S) OF DIALOGUE

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis has brought to evidence the inadequacy of pluralist and inclusivist paradigm shifts for maintaining the integrity of biblical Christian identity in their endeavours to meet the challenge of religious pluralism. The deconstructions/reconstructions of pluralist approaches affect biblical Christian identity at all levels. It is true that one may rightly question the 'conflicting approach' that depicted other religious traditions as totally negative, if not demonic, without a second thought. However, the shifts have been done more in the logic of the deconstructions that have taken place in the West since the eighteenth century than in that of a truly genuine and honest thrust for dialogue. It seems inevitable, from such perspective, for Western pluralists and inclusivists alike not to fall pray of an expiatory process that consciously or unconsciously resembles to efforts aimed at indemnifying non-Christian religions (Sanneh 2004). Inclusivism seems to be a shift from one extreme to another, from a strict and undue ecclesiocentrism to an undue laxism as, like Warren, quoted by Carson (1996:95), puts it, "if Jesus was in no particular and distinctive sense 'the way, the truth and the life'".

More than everything else, it must be underlined that the issue of religious pluralism cannot be dealt properly with as long as it is treated according to the relativistic presuppositions of the West. Given the nature of religion and religious faith, the relativistic Western worldview cannot be given primacy and would not get us out of the imperialism pluralists pretend to distance themselves from (Millbank 2004:188). As Heim puts it:

Pluralist theologies have struggled conscientiously to avoid imposing explicit Christian categories on other religions. But it seems obvious that they have enthusiastically made *normative* (italics mine), in the negative as it were, modern Western views on true religion.

(Heim 2003:121)

The debate, as it appears to me, resembles more to an intra-Christian controversy than a true dialogical debate between Christianity and other

religious traditions. To honestly contribute through a model respectful of true religious pluralism and biblical Christian identity, this thesis will propose another approach.

6.2 TOWARDS A MODEL OF GENUINE RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

6.2.1 *Epistemological considerations*

Hick's model affirms that A (YHWH), B (Allah), C (Trinity) are non-valid perceptions of D (Ultimate Reality). Religious traditions are defective languages (discourses) on human perceptions of D (Ultimate Reality) (Hick 1993:177). Therefore Hick proposes that only D (Ultimate Reality) is valid which then must be substituted to them (Hick 1999b:343)^{xxxviii}. But this substitution^{xxxix} of a new referent is a more exclusive approach because Hick's Ultimate Reality is conceived as different, universally valid and then *necessarily* superior to all other religious referents. Therefore, it constitutes the very negation of real pluralism.

Hick's model seems to require a generalization of the different traditions as to allow him to relativize some religious particulars (sainthood, salvation) (Hick 1993:87). But to postulate salvation as a universal religious aspiration does not mean, as Hick (1996:43) pretends, that the same salvation is practically taking place within all traditions. As Netland argues: "We must be sensitive to the distinctives of each worldview, for they differ not only in their beliefs but also in the relative weight they give to various kinds of belief within the system" (Netland 2001:292). This is also the opinion of the Muslim scholar, Legenhausen (2004).

Inclusivist models propose a subordinate status to non-Christian traditions by affirming the validity of B (a non-Christian tradition) by virtue of the universality of God's gift through Christ (A). Therefore Inclusivist approaches also are inadequate for a real religious pluralism because of its soteriological annexation of other religious traditions. Mark Heim, though holding an

inclusivist position, works from another postulate that bears more promise in my view. Heim's book *Salvations* (2003) is one of the sharpest critiques of pluralist generalizations, specifically those of Hick (Heim 2003:13-43; 99-126). Heim himself proposes a truly unusual approach he calls "orientational pluralism" (Heim 2003:133). His model adopts the philosophical approach of Nicolas Rescher^{xi} which he applies to the issue of religious pluralism. Heim disagrees with the pluralist approach which tends to negate the diversity of soteriological aims^{xii} (Heim 2003:129); I agree with him because such diversity needs not be denied lest one finds himself with something else than true pluralism, a critic Heim rises against Hick's pluralism (Heim 2003:23-35).

The alternative Heim proposes focuses upon the perspectives from which 'perceiving subjects' operate. Diversity is the result of the differing perspectives. For they perceive the same reality from different perspectives 'perceiving subjects' may all claim validity from their perspectives. The "orientational perspective" as hypothesized by Heim postulates therefore the validity of A (Christianity) and B, C (other religious traditions), each being true from its perspective. Heim explains:

While it violates the principle of non-contradiction to say that at the same moment I both see and do not see a train, there is no contradiction involved in saying that another person sees it and I do not. And there is no logical problem in saying that a train is seen by two persons at once—one from inside and the one from outside—though it is not possible for the same person to be doing the seeing in both cases.
(Heim 2003:134)

In my view, this approach contributes significantly to the debate by underlying the necessity to take into account (contrary to pluralists) the perspectives of the 'perceiving subjects' as crucially determinant in the epistemological process. However, in my view, it is still defective in its requiring a given perspective, on the basis of its self-assertion, to affirm the validity of other views. As long as mutual validation is the criterion, little hope there is that a model of universal scope be found. This is however what Heim also endeavours to attain through his Trinitarian theology (Heim 2001:24). In fact, since Heim recognizes that each perspective has but one valid position, it

becomes contradictory, in my view, to affirm the validity of all perspectives from his/her own. Furthermore, Heim's approach would be appropriate only if the differing views have not in many crucial instances mutually excluding claims in their perceptions of Reality. For instance, if one perspective affirms that Transcendence is personal and another perspective that Transcendence is impersonal, the principle of non contradiction makes it impossible to see the perceptions as two valid faces of the same reality^{xlii}.

6.2.2 An existential model

This thesis therefore proposes a refinement of Heim's hypothesis in view of postulating an existential model. I agree with Heim that diversity occurs in the epistemological process as the result of the different and sometimes differing perspectives of the 'perceiving subjects'. But the question still remains since we cannot validate all perspectives at once from our own.^{xliii} Therefore, a tradition may *claim* its validity but is not necessarily in a position to validate other perspectives at once (Varillon 1995:23).

Given the nature of Transcendence and of the particularities the meta-realities of a religious tradition (i.e. the meaning of the death of Christ for the Christian faith), two elements of religion cannot be underestimated that are conviction and commitment^{xliv}. Then, no tradition is capable to invalidate another religious tradition *on a strict rational and objective basis*. Transcendence is highly central to religion and cannot be reduced rationally. This means that a *Christian* theology of religious pluralism may claim its own validity not the validity of other religious traditions nor does it have the rational competency to coerce argumentatively the meaning of the Cross on another religious tradition unless there is an internal validating base within that tradition. Unless one who holds to another tradition moves to the perspective of God's absolute holiness and human beings humanly incurable nature, she/he may not be in a position to recognize or accept the necessity of the Cross. This is the work of the Holy Spirit.

I underline here the principle of reciprocity and the way it applies to dialogue from an equal footing. The principle of reciprocity implies that Christians cannot ask others to validate Christian truth-claims as a prerequisite to dialogue. Then the principle of reciprocity requires non Christian partners to engage in dialogue from the same footing. As Sesboué writes:

Reciprocity does not entail that I adhere to the view of the partner every time that he contests mine.... True reciprocity requires that I accept to hear the pretension to universality from my partner without being scandalized.

(Sesboué 2004:299, 300)

Reciprocity therefore is no less than the application of the golden rule rightly understood^{xlv}. This means that Christians do not need to deny any dimension of their identity to be on equal footing with others in entering a dialogical process contrary to the contentions of pluralists and inclusivists.

None of the pluralist and inclusivist models studied is really a parity-model, not even Hick's. Hick's Ultimate Reality is deficient for many reasons. It is not functional since nothing can be said of^{xlvi}; being none of the existing referents, it is a different referent and therefore a competing one. The inclusivist models, on their part, have been already reproached the fact that they centre on the unique salvation through Christ that is a Christian particular. *Inter-religious* dialogue asks for models *religiously* acceptable by all partners. This runs against Hick and Knitter's pretension that to be on equal footing Christianity needs to deny its particulars. As Cox (1998) remarks, "The most nettlesome dilemma hindering interreligious dialogue is the very ancient one of how to balance the universal and the particular."

A genuine model of religious pluralism will preserve the integrity of all identities. Furthermore, dialogue takes place around a tension, a problem, not a solution. It is only when true pluralism is secured that dialogue takes all its importance, not in erasing the differences. As Bosch rightly remarks:

The various models seem to leave no room for embracing the abiding paradox of asserting both ultimate commitment to one's own religion and genuine openness to another's, of constantly vacillating between certainty and doubts. Each time—in all these approaches—the

tension snaps.

(Bosch 1993:483)

It may be useful here to value *partially* Rahner's anthropology as a working tool. I do not agree with Rahner's speculation about all human beings' openness to God that allows him to erase the distinction between Nature and Grace as if God's grace is part of God's self-communication in Nature. I do not totally agree with Rahner simply because of the very fact that awareness of God's grace is not a *universal* in human beings' experiences. Notwithstanding this limitation, Rahner's "transcendental experience" (Baukham 1988:556) helps understand what human beings share universally that is the human predicament and the awareness of *Mystery beyond Nature*. But the human predicament, as a universal, is less debatable for a model of universal import since our awareness of the *Mystery beyond Nature, given our diverse perceptions, may give rise to greater debates.*^{xlvii}

Therefore where Hick posits the ontological Ultimate Reality (an agnostic solution) at the centre of the universe of faiths, and inclusivists posit salvation through Christ (a Christian particular), this thesis posits an existential *religious* universal that is the *human predicament* (in Christian terminology, the fallen human being), and the common awareness of the need to transcend this state of our existence. This is the most common denominator because it is a time/space universal experience of all human beings. For this reason, it guarantees not only parity but also the integrity of religious identities at the outset of a dialogical encounter. Schematically, dialoguing religions revolve around this common denominator like physicians who gather around a patient. Dialogue starts with this tension (Bosch 1993:483) and gives each partner the privilege to listen to others' exposition of their solutions and to seize the privilege to expose his/her therapy.

This common denominator is the *universal expression* of the model. But like an aircraft with a swinging wing its geometry varies because dialogue is also contextual. Therefore the centre must be open to variation *in substance* that is the possibility of integrating different elements depending on the context. For instance, a Muslim-Christian dialogue would add other common elements

like a personal God. An intra-Christian dialogue would incorporate more common elements: salvation through Christ alone, the Trinity, for instance. The more multilateral the dialogue will be the more reduced will be the substance of the common centre. As Bosch (1993:485) writes, "This means, among other things, that the Christian Gospel relates differently to Islam than it does to Hinduism." This model needs no identity alteration but asks each partner to consistently apply the principle of reciprocity: do to your partner what you want him/her to do to you. No party will require the other something it is not ready to concede mutually.

6.3 ELEMENTS OF A THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Any model of religious pluralism needs a theological justification as well a theological foundation that guides Christians in the process of implementing dialogue. A Christian theology of religious pluralism faithful to the biblical texts will therefore provide the framework for Christian involvement in inter-religious dialogue. Following are some of the elements this thesis suggests as foundational.

6.3.1 A Trinitarian theology

A Trinitarian theology will contribute to a framework for a dialogical approach to other religions without taking the path either of inclusivists or pluralists. It will have recourse to the Bible's explicit and implicit recognition of God's *transcendence and immanence* through natural and special revelation to account for the possibility of knowing God. New Testament writers underline God's transcendence. God is not a naked reality exposed to human beings' immediate perception and comprehension. His transcendence does not allow for his reduction through a theoretical formulation (Smith 1992:95). In the wake of the Old Testament, the New Testament affirms also that the divine nature exists in transcendental discontinuity with non-divinity, Exodus 20:4; Acts 17:29. The invisibility of the Father mentioned in Jn 1:8; Col 1:15; 1Tim 1:17, and his inaccessibility, 1Tim 6:16, do not mean however a radical transcendence making impossible for him to enter into contact with created beings, and for

created beings to have *some knowledge* of the Creator. Rather than claiming the impossibility to know God, the New Testament that affirms the inaccessibility of God affirms also his immanence, Acts 17:27, 28.

A Trinitarian Christology will also show that the theocentrism of Jesus does not suffer doubts. The title “Son of God” given to the eternal logos in incarnation does not reduce the sovereign transcendence of the Father since it is a title of subordination to the Father, (See Pannenberg 1994:363). It is the task of biblical theology to make evident the intra-textual coherence of the New Testament theocentrism and christocentrism. The centrality of the Word/Son in God’s purpose, Eph 1:9, 10; Col 1:19, 20 does not obliterate the centrality of the Father in the revelation of the Godhead, Mt 24:36, and in the economy of his sovereign will, Mt 7:21; Mk 14:36. The Son is not confused with the Father nor is the Father confined by the Son. The incarnation of the Word/Son made tangible the immanence of God within History, Jn 1:14, but is not the exhaustive expression of the invisible and humanly inaccessible divine nature.

6.3.2 Revelation and diversity

Biblical theology^{xlviii} does not lead to an impasse when it comes to account for the diversity of religious perceptions from a Christian theology. Knowledge of God is given possible indirectly through natural revelation, Rom. 1:19, 20, and most impressively through the incarnation of the Word/Son, Heb 1:1-3. The New Testament affirms such knowledge to be not only possible but also a condition to human fulfilment, Jn 14:6; the New Testament writers reaffirm these two levels of God’s self-disclosure as leading to different levels in the knowledge of God. According to the New Testament texts, natural revelation and incarnation delimit the spectrum of genuine knowledge of God along the continuum of God’s transcendence and immanence. One moves from absolute transcendence towards immanence first through natural religion, Rom 1:19, 20, before getting closer through special revelation that reaches its climax in the incarnate Son. The incarnate Word/Son is the most impressive point of immanence between the Creator and Creation in God’s action, Gen 1:3,

6; Jn 1:1-3; Heb 1:3; 11:3. Natural revelation is the area of the spectrum where we may most comprehend the possibility of a valid “shared cognitive content” for the different traditions (Heim 2003:132).

One would hardly be biblical in denying any truth outside the Bible since the New Testament recognizes access to some knowledge through natural revelation, Rom 1:19. This is the positive side of religions conflicting approaches have neglected. Paul has made recourse to general revelation in the religious convictions of Athenians in dialoguing with Athenians, Ac 17:17, and in debating with some of their philosophers, Acts 17:21-30. A biblical dialogical approach may well explore and make use of it. The progressive aspect of God’s disclosure from natural revelation, and throughout special revelation, is also a highly relevant theme to be considered overall where inclusivists tend to foster their arguments about God’s dealing with the so-called pious pagans in the Old as well as in the New Testament. Cases like that of Jethro and other Old Testament “pagans” cannot be called to as do inclusivists and pluralists to support a doctrine that coerces God’s self-disclosure and his salvific gift through other existing religious channels.

6.3.3 *The universal ministry of the Holy Spirit*

The way pluralists and inclusivists interpret the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit renders necessary the treatment of the issue. Rightly interpreted, it has also its interest in such a biblical theology of religious pluralism. To seize the meaning of the Cross and of the resurrection the ministry of the Holy Spirit is necessary, because the meta-realities of God’s self-disclosure are not naturally accessible (I Cor 2:10,11). Pluralists and inclusivists tend to see the universal ministry of the Holy Ghost and Pentecost in bare continuity as to grant the indwelling of the Spirit to every human being. One needs to show that natural revelation, as already affirmed, may well be foundational to genuine dialogue without any need to distort the ministry of the Holy Ghost.

In my view, the Spirit does not generate a second kind of special revelation but use the “seeds” of natural revelation to fulfil the universal ministry

of the Spirit Jn 16:8 points to. This aspect of the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world is to be reset in context by taking seriously John's discourse, and by making a sharp distinction with the salvific outpouring of the Spirit as another dimension of the Spirit's activity, Matt. 16:8, 14; Acts 2:3. The former relates to all human beings while the latter, as evidenced in Acts 2:3, 4, does not.

If the New Testament allows for a universal dimension in the ministry of the Holy Spirit not confined by the Church, and therefore acting beyond its institutional boundaries, there is however no supportive argument one legitimately may put forwards to make of the religious traditions the coercive channels for God's self-disclosure to those who belong to these traditions (contra Dupuis 2003:223). Likewise, it is not of necessity to conclude from one or some instances of the Spirit's use of elements of a tradition the soteriological *validity* of that tradition as a whole. Again, none of the pagan cases pointed out by pluralists and inclusivists is convincing. A biblical theology of religions will rather help clarify the various cases in point as to dismiss misleading interpretations.^{xlix}

6.4 CONTEXT AND LIMIT(S) OF A DIALOGICAL APPROACH

6.4.1 *Mission and Dialogue*

This thesis has underlined the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei* any balanced view of the mission of the Church should incorporate. The great commission, Mat 28:18-19, must not overshadow the overall threefold dimension of the *Missio Dei*, nor must the other facets of the *Missio Dei* reduce the urgency of the great commission as to take primacy over it or legitimate the moratorium Knitter advocates for (Knitter 2002:222). I agree with Bosch (1993:484) that it is erroneous to hold that "commitment to dialogue is incompatible with commitment to Evangelism." In my view, the mission of the Church constitutes the very context of Christianity's encounter with people of non-Christian traditions.

A missiological basis for dialogue will rethink and integrate Christian love for one's neighbour in ways making a sharp distinction between people and

ideas, as to help in the necessary categorical distinction. The former are to be loved and served and the later must remain debatable. It will rethink Christian citizenship in the world with regards to the active presence of the head through his body in the light of the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei*. A monasterial Christianity is antithetic to the incarnation of the Word/Son, Jn 12:45, and the ministry he has called the Church to, Jn 17:15-18. While dialogue in the perspectives of pluralists and inclusivists was not on the agenda in New Testament days, contrary to Knitter's pretension (Knitter 2002:177), there are nonetheless New Testament hints to dialogical attitudes in the encounters of Jesus and Nicodemus, Jn 3:1, 2; Jesus and the Samaritan woman, Jn 4:8, 9; Paul and the Athenian Jews and God-fearing Greeks, Acts 17:17, to point to some examples.

6.4.2 Continuity and discontinuity

What about the content of dialogue within a framework that recognizes the legitimacy of dialogue with people of other religions on the basis of the "shared cognitive content" from natural revelation? Biblical theology needs to pay renewed attention to the discontinuities as well as the continuities between the Bible and non-Christian religions (Wright 1988:136). As missiologist Gerald Anderson, quoted by Netland, calls to our attention:

In faithfulness to biblical revelation, both of these traditions (continuity and discontinuity) must be affirmed and maintained, but this is difficult to do when persons affirm continuity with doubtful uniqueness and others affirm uniqueness without continuity. What is needed in our theology of religions is uniqueness with continuity.

(Netland 2001:327)

It must be stressed again that the legitimacy of religious diversity and therefore religious pluralism does not come from the validity or truthfulness of religious traditions. As related to the Trinitarian theology of the Bible and the various modes of God's disclosure in human history, diversity is conceivable since there are diverse sources and differing degrees to God's knowledge and given the progressive disclosure in God's revelation. The New Testament biblical theology cannot deny a relative and valid knowledge of God in other

religions, Rom 1:19. But we must insist that knowledge does not mean salvation be it a valid knowledge. Paul considered valid the knowledge that Paul spoke of in Rom 1:19, that is located within natural revelation, Rom 1:21, even if it is not sufficient for salvation.

It should be recognized that the relevancy of natural revelation cannot be affirmed if it does not provide *valid* data however limited and insufficient they are. Once recognized the reality of natural revelation, the potential of commonalities will soon emerge between biblical Christianity and other religious traditions, at least some of them. Cross-traditional values may serve as basic substance for a dialogue between Christianity and members of non-Christian religions. To be realistic, partners in dialogue must start with these commonalities and move towards particularities. Conditioning dialogue to philosophical relativism or doctrinal rearrangements will lead to an impasse (Hellwig 2004:114, Pannenberg 2004:103). It is common sense to start with what is known and agreed upon and to endeavour towards the unknown and the particulars^l. Dialogue between people of differing religious traditions is a *religious* dialogue, not philosophical outbids.^{ll}

6.4.3 Limit(s) of dialogue

A dialogical setting does not need to serve as means for proclamation. Likewise dialogue must not be substituted to the proclamation of the Kingdom, the core of Jesus' mission, nor ought it to be an argument against proclamation. Dialogue cannot serve as "the antithesis of conversion and mission" as Pope Benedict XVII once qualified the pluralist understanding of dialogue (Allen 2005). Dialogue is not negotiation, nor ought its usefulness, at any rate, to be a justification for denying freedom of expression. What makes possible the neighbourhood of differing and opposed political ideologies is a mentality that accepts the possibility for one's ideas to be questioned and debated (Hooper 2008; Hall 2008). The world does not need a new inquisitorial environment (be it rationalistic or religious) but asks for human beings' ability to face peacefully challenging worldviews. It is people who do dialogue not ideas, so I find less

misleading the Ajaltoun formula: “Dialogue *Between* [sic] Men of Living Faiths” (Bosch 1993:484) than the present dominant phrasing “Dialogue of Religions”.

How far can go a dialogical process will depend on the partners in dialogue. For Christians, it will depend not only on the openness allowed by their biblical faith in a *right* handling of the biblical texts (Bosch 1993:187), but also on the partners’ freedom and openness to dialogue^{lii}. Therefore the others’ freedom and openness to dialogue will also be paid attention to in Christians’ endeavours. Dialogue is first of all an attitude not of toleration but of acceptance of one’s neighbour as fellow human being. Toleration may well be a condescending limitation to the freedom of otherness (Keshavjee 2005). The acceptance dialogue requires is rather awareness and lovely willingness to recognize to one’s neighbour the rights and freedom expected from him (Guinness 2008). This is what the principle of reciprocity requires. The attitudinal disposition for dialogue asks one to distance oneself from all forms of verbal or physical violence. Where there is not or barely openness to dialogue, such attitude will surely limit the possibility of dialogue. Genuine openness to dialogue is also openness to risking one’s faith as an act of faith. It necessitates maturity in experience and knowledge; to be genuine and honest, dialogue must respect the principle of independence as well as the principle of reciprocity.

6.5 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.5.1 *Final summary*

This study set to consider the dialogical approach of pluralists and inclusivists with regards to biblical Christian identity. The questions it addresses are: Do the implications of these views leave safe biblical Christian identity? If not, what concept of dialogue is really respectful of biblical Christian identity? The challenge of Christianity’s relation to non-Christian religions has always been there from Christianity’s inception. But since the dawn of the past century it has taken a truly new dimension. Our planet has become a global village characterized by a high degree of proximity, interconnectedness, interdependence, reflexivity (Netland 2001:81, 88). Homogenization is one of

the threats the interaction of these dynamics carry with it. Globalization affects all spheres of human society, and has been affecting the debates on the relation of Christianity to non-Christian religions overall after World War II. The pressures it has created in nowadays socio-realities urge a rethinking of Christian relation to non-Christian traditions (Padilla et al 1977:82).

In fact, religious pluralism is not a new phenomenon in Western societies, but the dynamics of globalization have given it a bolder shape in our contemporaneous situation. Factual religious pluralism broke in when Protestant denominationalism ended centuries of religious uniformity in West Europe. Following the seventeenth century religious wars, the quest for freedom of conscience took a new impetus with the promotion of natural religion by the deists (Zagorin 2003: 292). The dynamics of the Enlightenment opened the paths to modernism characterized by the secularization of the whole Western culture. Thereafter, the technological and scientific developments generated a materialistic spirit that deepened the secularization of Western society marked by an anti-Christian mindset (LaTourette 1969a: 39). If its triumphal mentality has faded with the post-modern scepticism following two dreadful world wars, its impact continues to bear on Western societies. The secularism of modernism and the scepticism of post-modernism have resulted to a relativistic worldview. This is then the broader context of the issue in the West.

In the course of rising demands and pressed by the dynamics of the twenty century globalization Western Christian liberalism, first, engaged in a more positive appraisal of non-Christian religions. The issue became central from Edinburgh 1910 (Ariarajah 2004). In 1961, the concept of dialogue emerged at the New Delhi WCC's conference to become a controversial issue from the Ecumenical council at Kandy in 1967 (Ariarajah 2004). The last decades of the twenty century saw flourishing new theologies addressing the relation of Christianity to other religious traditions. They aimed at providing a theological basis and justification to the already consecrated paradigm shift. The issue has moved from the fulfilment paradigm of Farquhar (Ariarajah 2004) to the inclusivistic theory of Karl Rahner who asserted the lawfulness and salvific value of the great religions (Rahner 1999:293). A step further was to be

expected and it has been quickly made by theologians who thought that the inclusivist move was not enough and dialogue required that Christianity abandon any claim of uniqueness and normativity (Hick 1973:104; 1999b:343). In the seventies, this trend has developed, led by John Hick who, without contest, is the most radical proponent of this approach of the paradigm shift.

Hick's epistemological pluralism strives for a model based on parity among religious traditions. He pretends to speak as a neutral voice approaching the issue philosophically rather than theologically. Grounding his view into a radicalized Kantian distinction between perceived and ontic reality (Hick, 1999a: 329, 330), he interprets religious diversity as resulting from the diversity of cultural perceptions of one Reality (Hick 1973:131; 1996:49). Salvation, for Hick (1996:43), is taking place within each tradition (Hick 1996:43). If so, parity among traditions requires a move from the traditional christocentrism to a theocentric model. This is the basis of Hick's pluralism from which he proposed a God-centred model. But later, he modified his model to do justice to traditions that hold to non-personal transcendence (Hick 1993:164,166). He replaced God, the personal Transcendence of monotheistic faiths by what he presents as a neutral universal: Ultimate Reality (1993: 85). Hick pleads for a conversion from self-centredness to his Reality centred model (Hick 1984:229).

Paul Knitter alike moved from the so-called christocentric model to theocentrism and then to the Reality-centred model of Hick. But the ontological problem this model poses has led Knitter to favour a kingdom-centred or soteriocentric model (Knitter 2002: 209). Knitter is influenced by liberation theology and his approach is socio-political and practical. He places a radical option for the poor and the oppressed as the rallying concern for his model (Knitter 1987:181). Less motivated to do radically away with Jesus' uniqueness, he interprets it as relational love language valid for Christians but not absolute.

Inclusivism is considered a middle point between traditional Christology and the radicalism of pluralist views. Its initiator is Karl Rahner who thought that since God wants all to be saved, 1 Tim 2:4, he must have provided within

what he terms *Dasein*, the concrete human being, an impulse towards God's love (Rahner 1963:10). For such condition to be met, Rahner postulated a transcendental anthropology that displaces the human horizon from nature to grace by making the two coincide within human history. For Rahner, grace and nature are but one single reality where salvation history and human history coincide (Congar 1984:277). God's grace means, in his view, God's self-communication (Rahner 1970:194). He postulated then the relative validity of lawful non-Christian religions. For Rahner (1973:31), salvation has been won through Christ but members of non-Christian religions, access it from their own traditions (Rahner 1999:293). They are "anonymous Christians"^{liii} and "people of God".

For a long time reluctant to dialogue with other Christian bodies as well as non-Christian religions, Rome operated a dramatic turn through the second Vatican Council. The declarations of the Council *Nostra Aetate*, *Gaudium Spes*, *Ad Gentes* and the post-Vatican declarations *Redemptoris hominis*, Dialogue and Mission, and John Paul II's encyclical, *Dominum et Vivificantem* (Abbot 1996) have encouraged Catholic theologians to abound in developing the inclusivist model. Since then, inclusivism has become the prevalent approach to religious pluralism for many Catholic theologians. Kung (1976:98) though willing to preserve the centrality of salvation through Christ tries to distance himself from the "anonymous Christianity" of Rahner because he sees Rahner's theory as a further attempt to salvage the ecclesiocentric formula (Kung 1967:318; 1986:46). Furthermore, Kung has widened the path opened by Rahner by validating all traditions^{liv}. He qualifies them of ordinary paths to salvation while Christianity remains the extraordinary path. Jacques Dupuis who builds upon Panikkar's mystical Christology conceives a "cosmic Christ" to which all revelations participate. Dupuis's Trinitarian Christology anchors non-Christian traditions to Scriptures (Dupuis 2003:104) by maintaining the validity of the Noahic and the Mosaic biblical covenant (Dupuis 2004:225). He interprets the Christ-event as a mere punctual expression of the timeless "cosmic Christ" it does not exhaust, and he validates other revelations through the universal ministry of the Holy Spirit.

Clark Pinnock's cautious inclusivism is an Evangelical approach to the issue which attempts to widen the paths for other religious traditions without sacrificing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Pinnock's soteriocentric Christology maintains the centrality of the Person of Christ but makes Christian salvation available through non-Christian religions. The main thesis of his position is that salvation does not require but sincere faith coupled with an authentic fear of God as found in non-Christian religions.

Christology is at stake in the debate (Hick 1999b:339; Knitter 2002:172; Dupuis 2003:227). And because this is the case, the question raised by the thesis with regards to biblical Christian identity is highly relevant for whoever considers himself a disciple of Jesus Christ. What is the place granted to Jesus Christ, his person and his work by these shifting paradigms?

According to Hick and Knitter, the Christology of the New Testament has been diverted by a Hellenistic Christian generation from the original functional and symbolic Christology into an ontological Christology (Hick 1993:40, 46; Knitter 2002:199). Ontological motifs have perverted the import of the titles as well as the meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus (Hick 1993: 42; Knitter 2002:199). But against the pluralist argument, it must be affirmed that the Jewish background being well established, there is no need really to postulate a Hellenistic background. It is solidly reaffirmed by careful attention paid to the study of the titles: the Messiah and Son of God titles (Ladd 1987:138, 161; Pate 2000:107, 127; Burke 1985:1033), the Palestinian relation of *kurios* to the Aramean *Maranatha* (Moule 1979:42; Michaels 1988:17; Marshall 1979:55, 56); the understanding of Jesus' retention from a public use of the titles (Witherington 1992:486).

As regard the implications of the revision of traditional Christology upon biblical Christian identity they are detrimental. The denial of the divine nature to Jesus impacts necessarily his lordship, and where accepted requires Christians to revise their attitudes towards Jesus. This will affect especially the area of Christian worship. If Jesus is a mere human being, the authority upon the Christian life they imply must be revised. If the atoning value of his death is denied, then Christians must revise their vertical relation to God, Christians

should sought redemption at a horizontal level if the atonement is denied. The ontological nature of biblical Christian identity as the life of the risen Christ, Gal 2:20, is also affected. The habitation of the Spirit is no longer a hallmark of biblical Christian identity; furthermore, the existential implications reduce the mission of the Church to humanitarian concerns for one's neighbour.

In my view, the basic weakness is methodological: Christology is made a sub-servant of his theoretical model. The model is created first and Christology is worked out to fit the model. Pinnock was right when he once wrote, "The faith of Christians would be fatally damaged if it came to be accepted that the risen Lord were our myth of meaning and nothing more" (Pinnock 1996b:333). If the Church has departed so radically from Jesus as pretend Hick and Knitter, then it is the very heart and the very substance of biblical Christian identity that ask for urgent paradigmatic revision.

Inclusivists seem to think that the solution to religious pluralism for dialogue necessitates that Christianity provides unconditional Christian salvation to non-Christians (Schlette 1971:87; Kung 1972:98; Dupuis 2004:203). The rationale behind this approach is in many ways debatable. Congar (1984:271), for instance, suggests that the contemporaneous success of the great religions requires the recognition of their validity. Inclusivists call to God's dealings with pious pagans in both Testaments to foster their position but none of the cases pointed out does really support their view (Rommen and Netland 1995:12). Inclusivists are drawn into reducing as low as possible the scandal of Jesus' particularity to make room to others for a fair openness to non-Christian traditions. The method used has been to cut as much as possible into the particularity of the person of Christ while preserving his work (Rahner 1999:293; Kung 1986:46; Dupuis 2003:110, 124). Almost all inclusivists use disjunctive methods to create gaps that allow them to do away with the uniqueness and normativity of Jesus. They proceed directly by separating the two natures (Kung, Dupuis) or indirectly by creating a gap between the Church and Jesus. Another inclusivist device consists of having the gap between the New Testament and dogmatic formulations (O'Leary 2005). Pinnock (1998:13) has

recently proposed to move from the “rational/propositional method” in favour of a “narrative” that will help evangelical revise the doctrine of God.

Inclusivists have, by so doing, their back to the wall. They have provided pluralists a sharp argument against them. At least, Hick is very relevant in indexing one inclusivist inconsistency. If they have had the theological genius, the skilful means for reducing the person of Christ, why not make use of it to perform the next step^{lv} that is to also reduce his work. Catholic inclusivists, anyway, miss the point already in altering the two natures Christology, making of Christ one mediator among many.

Inclusivists then pretend to avoid throwing the whole Christian tradition by holding fast to salvation through Christ. However I have five contentions against this position. 1) They seem to ignore that salvation by grace takes place not only *through* Christ but also *in Christ* (Rom 6:1-11). 2) They overlook the conditionality of the indwelling of the Spirit: repentance and faith in God’s grace (Dupuis 2003:125; 2004:244,344). 3) Catholic inclusivists reduce also implicitly if not explicitly (Kung, Dupuis) the threefold dimension of the *missio Dei* if salvation is already accessed by non-Christians (Bosch 1993:392). 4) Inclusivists jeopardize the basis of inclusivism: the salvation won by Christ if a mere human being, sinner among sinners, died on the Cross. 5) If a Cosmic Christ has incarnated in other founders, then we have not a *monogenēs* Son of God, Jn 1 but many! The fact is what mediates Christ’s salvation is not a word uttered by a founder but the cross endured by the Son of God, Heb 10:19, 20. It must be stressed that the cross is not transferable because Jesus is the only human being who ever understood the purpose of his death as a time/space universal salvific offer to all human beings in freedom (Mt 18:11; Mk 10:45; Lk 19:10; Jn 3:14, 15; 10:15, 17).

Therefore, against inclusivistic reductions, it must be stressed that Jesus’ death finds salvific import only within the integrity of his person. Moreover, how consistent is it to require repentance and faith for the salvation of those who are willing to accept Christ and his lordship, and to bestow salvation unconditionally upon those who reject Christ? How necessary is it for one’s identity to abide

under Jesus lordship if one may be saved and become Christian, even anonymous Christian, over against Jesus of Nazareth?

Given the negative implications of pluralist and inclusivist theologies with regards to biblical Christian identity, this thesis proposes another approach. It is built upon a modified view of Heim's "orientational perspective". The "orientational perspective" as hypothesized by Heim (2003:124-157) postulates the validity of A (Christianity) and B, C (other religious traditions), each being true from its perspective. Two persons located one in and the other out a train may state contradictory utterances (I see/I do not see) without either being illogical (Heim 2003:134). But then, Heim suggests the possibility for one of them to affirm the validity of each affirmation from where he/she stands and consequently the possibility for traditions to validate each other's religious end (Heim 2003:146).

My contention however is while this example holds true, it does not reflect the situation of two believers of two different traditions. To the unique train in Heim's example one must substitute two trains and two people each located in but one train. This, in my view, illustrates the situation of two persons belonging to differing religious traditions. So modified, the "orientational perspective" does not allow but one statement. This means that a believer, from where he stands, cannot affirm more than the validity of his tradition (Varillon 1995:23). The fact that pluralists and inclusivists alike have to revise the Christology of the New Testament to fit their purposes implies that they cannot validate other traditions in faithfulness to the New Testament teachings.

This thesis postulates the *legitimacy* of religious traditions in place of the paradoxical *validity* of differing salvations, as more relevant and less controversial a basis for dialogue. True pluralism requires openness to dialogue within the reality of the uniqueness of each tradition (Cobb 2004:91, 92). Instead of the pluralistic epistemic speculation on the ultimate or the soteriological particular of inclusivists, this thesis proposes the existential universal of *the human predicament and the universal need to transcend it* as the common denominator, the centre around which faiths revolve. It is *factual*

and *universal*, and may well serve as a common denominator from which talk may start without any tradition imposing or denying its particularity. It secures therefore parity in true respect of the integrity of all parts contrary to Hick's Ptolemaic universe that reduces all traditions through a cultural relativism. Furthermore, this model grants legitimacy not on the basis of validity but given the real nature of the particular meta-narratives which does not allow for a *coercive* argumentation on the level of a strict rational conceptualization. Dialogue takes place around a tension, a problem, not a solution (Bosch 1993:483). Another advantage is that this model can also be contextualized by substantiating the common centre depending on the partners in dialogue. Muslim/Christian dialogue differs from a Hindu/Christian dialogue, for instance (Bosch 1993:485).

As a Christian approach to other faiths, this model is grounded in a Trinitarian theology that stresses God's transcendence, Exodus 20: 4 and God's immanence through natural and special revelation, Rom 1:19; Heb 1:1-3; the place and coherence of theocentrism and christocentrism; the universal ministry of the Spirit. The thesis concludes on the possibility of dialogue without any need to jeopardize biblical Christian identity and on the basis of a fair parity that does not affect other identities. A guiding principle in dialogue will be the principle of reciprocity based on the positive formulation of the golden rule, Mt 7:12, that helps partners focus on the freedom of otherness (Millbank 2004:188). Christians cannot ask others to validate Christianity nor must a partner require Christians to validate his/her tradition as a prerequisite to dialogue. Dialogue is not negotiation. Furthermore, we will do well talking of a dialogue of people of different religions rather than a dialogue of religions. People do dialogue not ideas. While dialogue may be rewarding and fruitful it must not be dogmatized because it is not a panacea; it has its usefulness and its limits and cannot be substituted to proclamation.

6.5.2 Recommendations

Evangelicals have mostly engaged into defending themselves against pluralists and inclusivists. Some have certainly drawn alternative paradigms from an Evangelistic worldview^{vi}. This thesis does not intend to reject or downplay the efforts already invested but rather to contribute to the need of a valid, workable model faithful to the biblical texts. Dialogue is not only desirable, but may be most fitted and fruitful in carrying on the *missio Dei* towards the eschatological fulfilment of God's eternal purpose *in Christ*^{vii}.

While others tend to marginalize biblical Christians, Evangelicals should engage in developing working models from a biblical Christian theology of religions that will lean on the New Testament Trinitarian Christology to reassess as convincingly as possible the singularity of Christ and the universality of God. Biblical Christians must privilege the *legitimacy* of diversity in lieu and place of the *mutual validation* approach. It is a sound approach given the limitations of natural revelation and the nature of meta-truths in religious traditions.

Nowadays challenges call Christian theologians to reflect on the three dimensions of the *missio Dei* in more integrative ways (Bosch 1993:381). The challenge of religious pluralism is a theological and a missiological challenge. Ultimately, it calls Christians to take seriously into account the vertical and horizontal presence of the transcending and immanent God who refuses to be confined to either dimension. This means that our Christian identity is not well assumed if the disequilibrium between the holy empathy of God, the social Gospel (favoured by Catholics and liberals) and the proclamation of God's future, the message of hope that constitutes the Great commission (Evangelicals) is not well corrected. As Cobb (1997) puts it, "Christians have not resolved the tensions between an emphasis on social change and a stress on personal, inward transformation." A dialogical approach to non Christian religions is not to be feared by biblical Christians and may well help correct misrepresentations from the shadowing evils of the past.

ENDNOTES

ⁱ Augustine's rationale for the use of coercion (*Letters* 2:57, 59, St Augustine, letter 93, dated 408) was to persuade a recalcitrant dissenter: "to repudiate a false doctrine and embrace the truth he had previously denied..." (Zagorin 2003:30).

ⁱⁱ Moyer (1951:248) writes: "It became a dreaded moral, economic, and political weapon in his hands. A whole nation could thus be prohibited from the observance of the sacred rites of the Church if the king would not yield to the wish of the pope."

ⁱⁱⁱ Seventeenth century scepticism was the result of the conjugated effects of secular Renaissance, the Protestant revolt against Rome, denominationalism, religious wars, persecutions and intolerance in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (*see* Netland (2001:96).

^{iv} In my view, Kant's distinction between "reality as it is" and "reality as it is perceived" (Hick 1993:159) cannot be absolutized. Science would not be possible if there was a radical discontinuity between "reality as it is" and "reality as we perceive it".

^v The encyclical *Lumen Gentium* denounces this substitution of the traditional christocentric perspective for a theocentric perspective (*Lumen Gentium* 17).

^{vi} Knitter (1987:181): the "*preferential option for the poor and the nonperson* constitutes both the *necessity* and the *primary purpose* of interreligious dialogue."

^{vii} After Vatican II, Rahner also widened the path in writing: "So the possibility cannot be denied to any other group of men whatever their externally verifiable attitudes and beliefs" (Rahner 1976:202).

^{viii} For a fairly good grasp of Pinnock and Sanders' inclusivism, see Ronald H. Nash, *Is Jesus the Only Savior*, Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994, pp. 106-162.

^{ix} See p. 4:§1:3

^x Robinson does not agree with Hick reductionist view though he rejects the incarnation as "of one substance" (*Homoousios*). For him Jesus is "of one love" (*Homoagape*) with the Father (1979: 102, 116-117, 119-121).

^{xi} See Witherington's quotation of Taylor about the "allusive character" of the question (Witherington 1992:487).

^{xii} Ladd (1987:163) reports that the title occurs in the epistles, "Seven times in Romans, six times in Hebrews, sixteen times in 1 John."

^{xiii} Hick attacks *kenoticism* as inappropriate to account for the two natures of Christ (Hick 1993:66). I agree with Morris that one may reject the idea of Christ divesting himself temporarily in his incarnation because of the immutability of the divine nature (Hick 1993:67) but I use *kenotic attitude* as an appropriate phrase for accounting of Christ divine self-containment during his earthly ministry if one understands the *kenocitism* of Phil 2:7 as attitudinal rather than substantial. Divine self-containment does not contradict, in my understanding, the two natures of Christ.

^{xiv} Jn 13:13 allows one to hold that the title was not synonymous to *Rabbi* and so, we must find another meaning than the commonly used *Rabbi*.

^{xv} Moule (1979:38, 43) calls to our attention that *Marana* as a vocative may have the same meaning than *Kurie*. *Mareh* also can refer to a human being. However, for Moule (1979:43) to use *Maranatha* to mean "come, Rabbi" would be a non-sense because "one does not call upon a mere Rabbi to come after his death."

^{xvi} According to Michaels (1988:17): "Because the title *κύριος* is so frequently transferred in the NT to Jesus Christ, *εὐλογητός ο Θεός* becomes the characteristic NT form for blessing God."

^{xvii} The culmination of Peter's message being the affirmation of Jesus lordship and his messiahship, Acts 2: 36 (see Longenecker, 1981:36) it is hard to think that Peter is preoccupied by stressing Jesus' humanness as Hick insists.

^{xviii} Opinions about the background range from those who accept the evangelists' use of the phrase as originating from Jesus himself (Moule, Vos, Cranfield, Cullman, Marshall) to a mixed position that grants to Jesus the eschatological sayings of the Son of man (Schweitzer, Jeremias), to those who rather grant the apocalyptic sayings while holding that Jesus did not refer to himself (Bultmann) ending with the radical position that attributes the phrase to the Christian community (Teeple, Perrin, Vielhauer, Käsemann), (Ladd, 1987:151; see also NIDNTT III, 1982:618-619).

^{xix} The "*Similitudes of Enoch*" is not considered the background of the NT uses of the phrase due to the fact that copies of the "*Similitudes*" were not found at Qumran.

^{xx} Ladd (1987:149) alludes to the use of son of man in *The Similitudes of Enoch*; he considers that even if it is later than the evangelists it is more of Jewish production.

^{xxi} After a thorough overview of scholarly discussions on the title Son of Man, Otto (NIDNTT III, 1982:621) notices: “It is not a sound historical method to deny Jesus the use of the expression ‘the Son of man’ and to relegate this problem to later stages of the Christian community.” Marshall underlines that agreement has not been reached and the debate remains unabated (Otto and Marshall, NIDNTT III, 1982:617). In my view, as far as a method is laid to search for the historical Jesus by confining him within the limits of the Judaism of his time, then little hope there is to find the true historical Jesus. Cullman quoted by Moule (1979:8) has also reacted against such methodology.

^{xxii} Some (Strauss, Renan, Marxsen) have tried to explain the resurrection in this way but Scholars like Niebuhr have raised at least difficulties against it: Jesus appeared to people who did not expect his resurrection, and the fact that the appearances stopped neat after a short period (Osborne, 1984:278). Even the idea that the disciples expected his resurrection goes against the way the disciples behaved after the event of the Cross, Jn 20:9, 10.

^{xxiii} If Jesus’ corpse was still in the grave, Peter’s stand on the day of Pentecost, less than two months after the Cross, would have been pure foolishness, Acts 2:32; the only reasonable explanation would be the political theory which is ethically unacceptable, and goes against all the evidences. Likewise, Paul would have been less than wise in pointing to as numerous as five hundred eyewitnesses whom detractors might have referred to for investigation, 1Cor 15:6, 12.

^{xxiv} *Metanoia* means basically a change of mind but it may have the negative sense of turning away when used with the preposition *απο* (GELNT, 1979:512). According to Bonnard’s explanation, in covenantal contexts, mainly from Jeremiah’s time, the positive meaning points to a return to Yahweh’s alliance. (Bonnard 2002:32).

^{xxv} About Rom 8:9 Bengel writes: “For the distinctive marks [Gnorismata of the Christian] proceeds in this order: he who has the Spirit has Christ; he who has Christ has God” (Bengel, Bengel and Stendel 1860:101).

^{xxvi} The new awareness sonship leads to, is expressed by Paul in Rom 8:15 where he opposes, *pneuma douleias* spirit of servitude to *pneuma huiotesias*, spirit of sonship. The former brings into fear while the latter gives the freedom to call to God as Father, *huiotesia* is a “legal technical term” used for Israel, Rom 9:4 and Christians, Gal 4: 5; Eph 1:5 “in a transferred sense” (Bauer, GELNT, 1979:833), which, according to Martin (1988:652) indicates “the process of becoming sons of God (in non sexist language...)”

^{xxvii} About the titles in 1Pet 2:9 applied to his Christian addressees, Michaels remarks: “All four of these titles of honor (or five, depending on how they are counted) appear to be adaptations of titles from either Exodus 19:6 or Isa 43:20-21, and were originally designations of Israel as the people of God (cf. the specific phrase, ‘people of God,’ in v. 10)” (Michaels, 1988:107). .

^{xxviii} Ministerial Christianity functions as a country club while in incarnational Christianity, the Church has a double identity because she is “out of the world” (by distinction) and “in the world” (by implication) (Stott, 2007).

^{xxix} The substantive *μαρτυς* occurs in Luke and Acts, mostly used for those who have been witnesses of the resurrection of Jesus, 1:22; 2:32; also for Paul because of his experience on his way to Damascus, Acts 22:10; for Jesus himself in Rev 1:5, even God

^{xxx} See David Bosch (1993:400): “The Christian’s eschatological vision of salvation will not be realized in history. For this reason, Christians should never identify any specific project with the fullness of the reign of God...”

^{xxxi} We use the terminology in the classical Trinitarian meaning as expressed by Bosch: “the sending of the Son by the Father and the sending of the Spirit by the Father and the Son” extending in the sending of the Church by the Trinitarian God (Bosch 1995:526). Furthermore, I do not agree with Hoekendijk’s secularizing socio-political understanding of *missio Dei* that emphasizes the secular world (Moreau 2000:47).

^{xxxii} Bonnard notes: “if, as J. Jeremias thinks... following O. Michel, verses 18-20 are an enthronement text, v. 19, according to the traditional order, ‘commands the proclamation of his reign to all nations’” (Bonnard 2002:418). .

^{xxxiii} See the *potential* eschatology of Caragounis in DJG (1992:425): the kingdom of God is present through the presence of Jesus as “agent of the kingdom of God”.

^{xxxiv} Lk 17:21: *Hē basileia tou Theou entos humōn estin*. *Entos* is translated “within” in some versions (KJV; LB; NIV), and “among” by others (RSV; ML). In whichever sense one interprets *entos*, the kingdom is present, and its presence is what we are interested in here. See however Caragounis’ contention for *entos humōn* meaning “within you” (Caragounis 1992:423).

^{xxxv} Guggenheim (2002:431) points to the absence of a theologically valid key that made people move from one extreme to another that is from the rigorous “outside the Church...” to a too soft opening of Christian salvation. Scriptures must remain rather the “historical and spiritual memorial of God’s purpose of universal salvation” (Guggenheim 2002:417).

^{xxxvi} The integration of the legitimacy of otherness according to the inclusivist model is annexationist. As Blanpain (2000:599) remarks, it creates “the feeling of being reduced to the system of thought, the mode of representing else.”

^{xxxvii} A more cautious inclusivism, different from Rahner’s as well as Pinnock’s is that people who have not heard the Gospel but have become *aware of their sinful nature* and the holiness of God to the point to recognize their unavoidable failure *and the need for God’s grace as to call to the Creator* will be saved according to God’s grace, through and in Christ. *This view does not help however for a dialogical approach since it addresses the situation of those who died without hearing the message while in dialogue we are faced with the living not the dead*. My personal experience, as a former Muslim, convinces me that one may well realize his sinfulness and his need of God’s grace before hearing and understanding the message of grace through Christ. Like Cornelius’, my story did not stop there; it extended to my being led to Christ.

^{xxxviii} Hick rejects the concepts used by traditions for Transcendence because: “It is infinite, eternal, limitlessly [sic] rich beyond the scope of our finite conceiving or experiencing. Let us then both avoid the particular names used within the particular traditions and yet use a term which is consonant with the faith of each of them –Ultimate Reality, or the Real” (Hick 1999b:343). Is not Ultimate Reality a human concept? If it is, how can it be more appropriate than Yahweh or Allah? How is it more encompassing than any of the referents it is substituted to? Where did Hick find these attributes of Ultimate Reality?

^{xxxix} Despite Hick’s precaution not to characterize Ultimate Reality, the radical differentiation he postulates is in itself a characterization which allows Hick to distinguish Ultimate Reality from other referents.

^{xl} See Heim’s development of Rescher’s ‘orientational pluralism’ (Heim 2003:133-137).

^{xli} Heim prefers the terminology “religious end” or “religious aim” to avoid applying a Christian category to non-Christian traditions. But if “salvation” is a strict Christian category, why after all one should deny that “there is salvation only in Christ”?

^{xlii} Heim (2008) has attempted to validate other ends through a Trinitarian view that interprets the Trinity as a complex of relationships including impersonal as well as personal possibilities. But his demonstration does not solve the basic impossibility of God being both personal and impersonal.

^{xliii} To validate all perspectives is to place self in all perspectives. This is not possible given the evaluative nature of religious perspectives that includes conviction and commitment.

^{xliv} Gorday (2008) remarks “Individual commitments, Panikkar realizes, can make people seem intransigent. In Panikkar’s view this happens not so much because they are obtuse or recalcitrant, but because what each has come to believe is grounded in personal experience”.

^{xlv} Bos’ quotation of Gomez-Ibanez (Bos 2008) contains the negative formulation of the golden rule, “What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others”, which, as for me, is more concerned with one’s freedom rather than the freedom of otherness, which is what the golden rule is really about.

^{xlvi} Of two perceptions of Reality one may be personal and the other impersonal but the perceived Reality as it is cannot be both. For me only “*Nothing*” is neither personal nor impersonal; any existing entity is necessarily personal or impersonal.

^{xlvii} Ultimate Reality as well as Allah, YHWH, Trinity are all exclusive perceptions of the *Mystery beyond Nature*.

^{xlviii} I use the word according to the definition proposed by Carson (1996:502): “...the theology of the biblical corpora as God progressively discloses himself, climaxing in the coming of his Son Jesus Christ, and consummating in the new heaven and new earth.”

^{xlix} In all cases evoked by inclusivists, if God used elements of their former traditions to reach out to them, the story did not stop there since all of them moved to God’s covenant. Cornelius would not have left his former tradition to become Christian if that tradition was endorsed by God.

^l Sidy Dieng (2007) distinguishes between two forms of dialogue. The more realistic and practical is what Father Louis Pasteur Faye calls the “dialogue of deeds and collaboration”. Among the examples he

cites the cleaning of catholic cemeteries at Ziguinchor and Dakar by Muslims and Christians together. Dieng recognizes that the most difficult form has to do with matters of doctrine.

^{li} Is not subjacent to the pluralist Christological reductions the expectation that Muslims, for instance, will reduce Muslim absolutes (i.e. Muhammad supersedes all previous prophets) so that all traditions find themselves under the umbrella of relativism?

^{lii} Amaladoss (2006) signals the suspicion of Hindus for anyone interested in studying Hinduism “who is not a Hindu”.

^{liii} The qualification has been contested: Kung opposes its adequacy (1976:98, 410); Coffy (1972:67) finds it contradictory since Christianity is not an anonymous religion. Schlette (1971:85) prefers the term “legitimate”.

^{liv} In *Le Christianisme et les Religions du Monde*, Kung having asserted the validity of Islam affirms that Muhammad is an “authentic and truthful” prophet (1986:47) and the Quran is “Word of God” (1986:52-55)

^{lv} In Swidler’s “Towards a universal theology of religion”, Knitter (2007) too accuses Kung of “subtle, camouflaged narrowness” for refusing to cross the Rubicon.

^{lvi} One instance is the “Evangelistic paradigm” of VanEngen in *Christianity and the Religions, a Biblical Theology of World Religions* (Rommen and Netland 1995:187-191). But his model places the risen Christ at the centre and might meet with the charge of putting a Christian particular at the centre.

^{lvii} The Malian experience deserves attention. Evangelicals are involved in religious leaders’ dialogue with Catholics and the high council of Islam in solving some of the Nation’s most challenging problems (See Doumbia “Leaders religieux musulmans et chrétiens en toute fraternité pour la paix et contre le Sida” in *Essor*, 15677, April 5, 2006). This is being done without outbids characteristic of most Western theologies of dialogue and without any pressure from one partner upon the other.

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