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The Meaning and Goals of Interreligious Dialogue

One of the terms one hears most often in the context of the study of World Religions¹ as well as in the context of their live² or simulated³ interaction in the contemporary world⁴ is the term—Dialogue. Some other terms “also ran”—such as Conflict,⁵ Confrontation,⁶ Encounter,⁷ Correlation,⁸ Convergence,⁹ Communication,¹⁰

1. See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 15 (Chicago: Helen Hemingway Benton, 1974), p. 634.
2. *Our Unity in Diversity*, International Association of Religious Freedom, XXII Congress, Montreal, 15–22 August 1975, pp. 25–31.
3. See Ninian Smart, *A Dialogue of Religions* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1960).
4. We may note here that “the great age of dialogue began in the years immediately after the Second World War. Incidentally, one of its first concerns was to find a way out of the impasse in which the dominance of Hendrik Kraemer’s theology seemed to have left the theology of encounter in 1938”. Cf. Eric J. Sharpe, “The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue” in John Hick, ed., *Truth and Dialogue in World Religions: Conflicting Truth Claims* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970), p. 81.
5. Philip H. Ashby, *The Conflict of Religions* (New York: Scribner’s, 1955).
6. Richard W. Taylor, “The Meaning of Dialogue” in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *Inter-religious Dialogue* (Bangalore: The Christian Institute for the Study of Religion and Society, 1967), p. 58.
7. See P. Tillich, *Christianity and the Encounter with World Religions* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); *Consultation on Buddhist-Christian Encounter* (Colombo: Christian Institute of Buddhist Studies, 1961).
8. Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 64.
9. R. C. Zaehner, “Religious Truth” in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 18; *Matter and Spirit: their convergence in eastern religions, Marx and Teilhard de Chardin* (New York: Harper & Row, 1963).
10. Kenneth E. Nolin, “A Theological Base for Dialogue with Muslims,” in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 209; Kenneth Cragg, “Hearing by the Word of God,” *The International Review of Missions*, Vol. 46 (July 1967).

Colloquy,¹¹ Conversation,¹² Participation,¹³ and Fellowship¹⁴--or are perhaps still in the running, but the term Dialogue holds the field.¹⁵

This article is an effort to examine this dialogical relation among world religions.¹⁶ It will carry out this examination first by raising, and then attempting to answer, a whole battery of questions :

1. *What* is Dialogue, among *whom* is it conducted, and *what* are its prerequisites and its context?
2. What are the *motives* and *goals* underlying the Dialogue?
3. What is the *mode* of Dialogue?
4. What are the *effects* of Dialogue?
5. *Whither* Dialogue?

In other words, we are concerned with the What, Who, Why, What for, How, to What effect, and Whither of inter-religious Dialogue.

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11. Consider the colloquial flavour of the title, R. C. Zaehner, *At Sundry Times* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958).
 12. S. J. Samartha, "Major Issues in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue in India Today," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 150.
 13. Paul Verghese, "Dialogue with Secularism," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 237.
 14. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Fellowship of the Spirit* (Cambridge: Centre for the Study of World Religions, 1961), pp. 39-40.
 15. Thus Eric J. Sharpe observes how "so popular at present" the "word dialogue" is and goes on to remark : "Indeed, a major difficulty that has to be faced at the very outset is that the word has become excessively popular. One suspects that in many cases it has degenerated into a cliché, and that some of those who use it do less out of a profound conviction than because it happens to be fashionable. It is now widely accepted that dialogue between believers is a 'Good Thing'. Exactly why this should be so is all too often left unexpressed. The literature of 'inter-religious dialogue' is already extensive, and growing rapidly; but it is not always clear in what sense (or senses) the word is being used, and what are the presuppositions that lie behind it" (*op. cit.*, pp. 77-78).
 16. The word is also used in the context of ecumenical movements; see Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

1. What is Dialogue?

Dialogue is "an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular issue, especially a political or religious issue, with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or settlement".¹⁷ Dialogue is thus something more than conversation. It shares with conversation the elements of exchange of ideas or opinions and an ambience of amiability but is something more than conversation in that it is not quite so free-wheeling. It is oriented to issues.¹⁸ At the same time, although it is more than conversation, it is less than participation. Participation involves a greater degree of commitment to joint action than is usually¹⁹ associated with the process of dialogue. Dialogue can, of course, lead to participation.

Apart from its verbal denotation, the connotations of the word Dialogue are also significant, for words do not exist in a cultural vacuum. The word involves a psychological presupposition and a historical background. From the psychological point of view, Dialogue is "a reaction-word, which presupposes a state of isolation and individualism from which we are to move".²⁰ One can trace "the origins of the notion 'dialogue' in our time in Martin Buber's questioning of Kierkegaardian existentialism".²¹ Thus one has lived in a situation in which one has not been talking—and now one wishes to talk.

But historically, too, Dialogue is a reaction-word, a reaction to monologue. It is not so much that there has been no talking going on—the *right* kind of talking has not been going on, while there has been a lot of the wrong kind of talking which may be called mono-

17. Jess Stein Editor-in-Chief, *The Random House Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Random House, 1967), p. 398.

18. For what some of these issues could be at a religious level, see R. C. Zaehner, "Religious Truth," in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 11-13.

19. Paul Verghese, *op. cit.*, p. 237. By participation here conscious participation is implied. It is also not used in the sense used by Paul Tillich when he says that "all participate in human existence", in *Theology of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964). p. 202.

20. Paul Verghese, *op. cit.*, p. 237.

21. *Ibid.*, n. 5.

logue.²² The purpose of this monologue was usually conversion.²³ So that historically the word Dialogue represents a moving away from conversion as the only goal of interreligious contact on the part of Christians.²⁴

The most salient feature of Dialogue, however, is that it usually occurs as a result of Christian²⁵ or Western enterprise.²⁶ This makes an understanding of the historical context significant. Since Christianity has to take other religions of the world more seriously now as they are "strangely alive"²⁷ and has to face the challenge of secularism and Marxism in the West itself,²⁸ it has embarked on a course of Dialogue with these forces.

Thus Dialogue in the context of World Religions means an exchange of ideas or opinions on a particular religious issue or issues with a view to reaching an amicable agreement or settlement or understanding, as a first step, to emerge from a state of isolation, usually undertaken at Christian or Western initiative.²⁹

Now one can distinguish between several kinds³⁰ of Dialogue: between Socratic, Buberian, Discursive, and Pedagogic Dialogue.³¹ The Socratic Dialogue is "a dialectic of open, mutual questioning *about* something. Such a dialogue is known to expose fresh understandings of the topic at hand".³² Buberian Dialogue "contains a

22. S. J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

23. Kaj Baago, "Dialogue in a Secular Age," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 133-134, 136, etc.

24. See Matthew P. John, "The Biblical Bases of Dialogue," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71; K. Kloistermaier, "Dialogue—the Work of God," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 125.

25. See Eric J. Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue", in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 76.

26. For instance, even the study of Comparative Religion, which may be viewed as a mode of intellectual Dialogue, "was proposed by Western scholars and . . . has been for the most part, a Western discussion" (Robert Lawson Slater, *World Religions and World Community* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), p. 46.

27. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

28. See Paul Verghese, *op. cit.*, p. 225ff.

29. "Perhaps the same idea could be equally well expressed by saying that the adherents of different religious traditions must meet, and ought to meet, seriously and sympathetically, both in order to find out what they agree and in what they differ" (Eric Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 91).

30. To be distinguished from *modes* of Dialogue: the various *kinds* of Dialogue could be carried out in various modalities—see section V.

31. Classification by Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, pp. 55-56.

32. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

kind of believing-in-love, a concerned openness, in which human authenticity is experienced".³³ Discursive Dialogue "involves abstraction and analysis through the use of common sets of categories or symbols" and may "lead to an enhanced understanding of each other's theoretical positions".³⁴ And, finally, Pedagogic Dialogue is "preconstructed dialogue which is fed to students and disciples in order to train and educate them".³⁵

Some facts need to be recognized about this tetrachotomy. Firstly, "these four meanings are not exclusive of each other".³⁶ And secondly, "when we speak of dialogue so positively as we do these days we mean the Buberian and Socratic kinds of dialogue but that it really is the Discursive kind of dialogue that we usually plan and achieve both among other churchmen and with men of other faiths and no faith".³⁷

33. *Ibid.*, p. 56.

34. *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 57. Richard W. Taylor seems to think of this as essentially going on within a tradition but with young Christians turning to Eastern religious entrepreneurs in the West in such numbers this form of Dialogue cuts across religions now.

36. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

37. *Ibid.*, p. 57. It thus becomes possible for people who favour one kind of Dialogue—say, the Buberian—to be critical of another kind of Dialogue, say, the Discursive. Thus K. Klostermaier is sharply critical of some aspects of Discursive Dialogue: "Increasingly, theologians turn out articles and books dealing with 'dialogue'. People who never left their Christian home countries and who never even had a talk with a non-Christian write magnificent studies about the encounter of religions and armed with a few scraps of often mistranslated quotations from the *Bhagavadgita* and *Dhammapada* come to far-reaching conclusions concerning the theory and practice of dialogue. None of these studies actually help to promote real dialogue—these rather confuse people and hinder true dialogue, by their uninhibited speculations of what non-Christian religion should be. They perpetuate the theological monologue by calling it dialogue" (*op. cit.*, p. 118). It will be noted that we have here included the "theology of dialogue" and would be inclined to include a "theology for dialogue" (*ibid.*, p. 126) as well, under the rubric Discursive Dialogue, something not done by Richard W. Taylor himself. It may also be pointed out that parallel monologues are no more of a dialogue than a monologue (see Swami Abhishiktananda, *op. cit.*, p. 89).

It is helpful to recognize at this point that the various kinds of Dialogue³⁸ described above really refer to various aspects of Dialogue. Thus when the focus is on the *topic* of Dialogue it is Socratic; when the emphasis is on the *method* of study or the topic (here being recognized as theoretical, whether it be the "comparative study of religion" or the phenomenological study of religion)³⁹ it is Discursive; when the focus is on the *parties* as *distinct* human beings⁴⁰ it is Buberian, and when the parties are bound in a teacher-pupil relationship it is Pedagogic. It will be noted that all these aspects are being viewed within the framework of a given relationship, namely, the *Dialogical*. Other frames are also possible—such as those of conflict or encounter or communication, etc. It is also helpful to realize that some parties engaged in Dialogue may rather *converse*⁴¹ or *convert*.⁴²

All these forms of Dialogue must be distinguished from an extremely extended sense of the term as in the dictum, "Indeed we live in a perpetual situation of dialogue,"⁴³ wherein the word Dialogue is used virtually as a synonym for interaction. Perhaps one should distinguish between "dialogue" with a small "d" which might refer to such a sense and "Dialogue" with a capital "D" which would refer to it not as a given existential fact of some kind but as a conscious undertaking. Thus one can visualize Dialogue taking place in the midst of dialogue.

This leads to the question of the context of a Dialogue and the prerequisites of a Dialogue. Some writers tend to emphasize that the

38. Another possible kind of dialogue may be referred to as the "divine dialectic" (see Kenneth E. Nolin, *op. cit.*, p. 208) or Divine-human dialogue (Matthew P. John, *op. cit.*, p. 67) and it may be maintained that "Interreligious dialogue must be placed within the context of human dialogue in general, and human dialogue seen in the light of divine-human dialogue" (*ibid.*, p. 68). It is easier to accept the first half-sentence as holding true of the dialogical relationship as visualized here than the second half.

39. Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 58 and n. 6.

40. When the parties are looked upon as *human* being rather than *distinct* human beings one is nudging close to "fellowship" and moving out of a Buberian Dialogue?

41. As in the Hindu-Christian, see S.J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

42. The Christian evangelist, for instance.

43. Herbert Jai Singh, "Preparation for Dialogue," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 41, 50, and *passim*.

context of the Dialogue in the modern world is secular, maintaining that "it is only in the context of 'an open secularism' which is impartial in its attitude towards all religions that a meaningful dialogue between religions can take place".⁴⁴ Thus a case is made out for dialogue *in* secularism as the proper context of interreligious dialogue as distinguished from dialogue *with* secularism. Now it is true that a certain openness is necessary for Dialogue to take place. "In the case of people for whom religion—be it Hinduism, Christianity, Islam or Buddhism—is simply a set of tenets or practices which have to be blindly adhered to, dialogue is really impossible."⁴⁵ It is also true that there has to be an element of impartiality in the dialogical situation. This is "an elementary condition for a worthwhile dialogue. Who would like to be simply summoned to the bar to hear himself condemned without discussion or be accepted as a minor partner in a meeting of grown-up people. Equality among partners in a dialogue is the first prerequisite of a dialogue".⁴⁶ It is not clear, however, as to why secularism should be a *prerequisite* for Dialogue,⁴⁷ though it seems to provide no doubt a certain *context*⁴⁸ for Dialogue. Openness and equality should suffice to get Dialogue off the ground,⁴⁹ and

44. S.J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

45. Swami Abhishiktananda, "The Way of Dialogue" in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 84.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 82.

47. Some scholars have gone to the other extreme and maintained that "The indispensable prerequisite for *religious* dialogue is a truly Christian life" K. Klostermaier, *op. cit.*, p. 122; emphasis added). This may, however, be not such an imperative for *inter-religious* dialogue.

48. S.J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 156.

49. There are two (or more) parties to a Dialogue. As it is the result usually of Christian initiative one of them is likely to be Christian. How does the Christian prepare for Dialogue? By cultivating openness and equality. The problem here is its past history of aggressiveness towards other religions (vide Swami Abhishiktananda, *op. cit.*, pp. 80-82). How does the interloping religion prepare for the situation? By cultivating openness and equality. The Problem here might consist of not taking the Christian seriously enough. According to Martin Buber, "the first step in dialogue is the recognition of the other in his otherness (*alterite*) and turning towards him with a view to communication". Eastern religions might tend to underplay the "otherness". Apart from this vital *internal* preparation, *external* preparation in the sense of enhanced knowledge of the scriptures, ritual, etc., of other religions will be useful too (see Swami Abhishiktananda, *op. cit.*, pp. 91-92).

*epoché*⁵⁰ and *agāpē*⁵¹ to keep it going. To improve the effectiveness of Dialogue, but perhaps not to ensure its "success"⁵² more preparation may be required on the part of both the parties.⁵³ But such preparation need not involve a conscious theology of dialogue⁵⁴ on the part of either party—though one might well result from it.

2. What are the motives underlying the Dialogue ?

The motives underlying Dialogue are closely related to the goals of Dialogue. A study of the motives for Dialogue seems helpful not only by itself but also because it might give us some idea of the goals of Dialogue. True, the *reason* for Dialogue is that "*Revelations are many*",⁵⁵ but what are the *motives* for engaging in it ?

50. Swami Abhishiktananda, *op. cit.*, pp. 86-90.

51. See Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 215-216.

52. K. Klostermaier, *op. cit.*, p. 122.

53. See C. Murray Rogers, "Hindu and Christian—a Moment Breaks", in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 111-117.

54. Notwithstanding the fact that Christian theological circles have long been concerned with evolving it. See Kenneth O. Nolin, *op. cit.*, pp. 204ff; R.R. Niebuhr, "Religion and the Frugality of Christ", *Harvard Divinity School Bulletin* 27(April 1963); Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology*, (New York: Holt, 1963); Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. V, (Baltimore: Helicon Press, 1966. Chapter VI), and "Anonymous Christianity and the Mission of the Church," *IDOC International* 1 (April 14, 1970), pp. 73ff, etc., are efforts to reconcile Christian theology with religious pluralism as distinguished from efforts to evolve a Christian theology of religious pluralism associated with R.C. Zaehner, *Concord and Concordant Discord: the interdependence of faiths*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, unpublished MSS of Cadbury Lectures: *A Theology of Comparative Religion*, etc. In spite of these efforts the feeling, articulated by P.D. Devanandan, that "the Christian community is at the moment theologically unequipped for living in the twentieth century with its pluralistic mankind" (see Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 37) seems to persist. The fact, however, that global religious plurality is being increasingly viewed within Christianity not so much as a *missionary* but rather as a *theological* problem seems to be of great significance in itself. The symposium on "Christian Faith in a Religiously plural World", held under the auspices of the universities of Washington and Lee (April 22-24, 1976), is a significant pointer in that direction.

55. Ninian Smart, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

Dialogue between religions could be as diversely motivated as dialogue among people. Thus one could engage in Dialogue to praise, to condemn; to convert someone to one's position, or not to; to unite, to divide; to inform, to misinform; to agree, to disagree; and so on. However, in the actual context of the emergence of Dialogue all of these possibilities have not been explored and, certainly, not exhausted. But the above reflections provide the key to discovering the motive underlying Dialogue. That motive must be sought in the motives of those who wish to engage in it; those who initiate it and those who accept the invitation to it.

The initiative for Dialogue has come from two main sources: the Christian Church and the Western academia in our own times. What then could be the theological, the intellectual and the contemporary motivation to engage in Dialogue?

Two main motives for Dialogue among World Religions can be detected at the theological level: the kerygmatic and the ecumenical. Two shades can further be detected at the kerygmatic level—the “proclamation” of the kerygma according to Hendrick Kraemer and its “communication”—according to Kenneth Cragg.⁵⁶

In contrast to this, however, in some measure, is another motive—the ecumenical. From this point of view, just as the various

56. This discussion can only be regarded as tentative as “there does not yet obtain among Christian theologians a consensus on the nature, structure and goal of inter-religious dialogue” (Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. iv). This point is highlighted by an examination of the connection which is understood to exist between Dialogue and Conversion to Christianity. According to K. Klostermaier, “Dialogue is not a tactical device of a Church which sees that other means to win followers have failed but the fulfilment of the calling of the Church, to be witness to the revelation of God in Christ” (*op. cit.*, p. 124). He says later, “Dialogue is an end in itself—it is not a preliminary to the traditional methods of proselytizing” (*ibid.*, p. 125). For Matthew P. John, however, “Dialogue, for a Christian, is not a substitute for evangelism; much less is it a mere *means* or *method* leading to evangelism. It is not an escape sought in an age, when effective evangelism appears to be difficult, to quieten the conscience” (*op. cit.*, pp. 75-76). Thus though both these scholars dissociate Dialogue from Conversion, for one Dialogue seems to be an end in itself while for the other commitment to Conversion seems to be of a deeper dye.

Christian churches have been harmonized through the dialogical process,⁵⁷ the same hope is held out for World Religions.⁵⁸

The theological motivation for Dialogue thus seems to reflect the paradox of Christianity itself – in that it claims to possess a revelation which is unique and at the same time, a Church which claims to be universal.⁵⁹

The intellectual motivation for Dialogue has been equally if not more pronounced than the theological. In a sense it represents the coming of age of the study of Religion in the West from being the handmaiden of Christian theology to a Muse in its own right. There can be several forms of intellectual motivation – the motive to debate – which leads to polemics; the motive to compare—which leads to Comparative Religion (in a narrow sense); the motive to explain one's own position—which leads to apologetics (devoid of its pejorative connotation); and the motive to understand the religion of the other—which leads to Dialogue. In any case, there can be little doubt that the primary intellectual motivation to be associated with Dialogue is a desire to genuinely understand, even appreciate the other religion's point of view (or that of other disciplines for that matter). And this understanding is seen to consist of something more than a mere intellectual understanding. It has to be personal understanding as well, not in the sense that it is a "subjective" personal understanding as opposed to an "objective" intellectual understanding but in the profounder sense, namely, that while "Truth and falsity are often felt in modern times to be properties or functions of statements or propositions" there is "much to be gained by seeing them rather, or anyway by seeing them also, and primarily, as properties or functions of persons".⁶⁰

57. See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 6, *op. cit.*, pp. 293–296.

58. See John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 18.

59. See Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 6. For an interesting implication this paradox see Ninian Smart, "Truth and Religions" in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 56.

60. Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "A Human View of Truth," in John Hick, ed. *op. cit.*, p. 20. Prof. Wilfred Cantwell Smith has been, *par excellence*, the most consistent and persistent advocate of this position; see his *The Meaning and End of Religion*, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

Apart from these theological and intellectual motives one needs to identify some contemporary motivations associated with "social engineering". It has been suggested that a Dialogue between Hindus and Christians in India, for instance, may realize the hope of a "secular promise".⁶¹ Or that all the religions might unite through Dialogue to realize a somewhat contrary hope—stem the tide of materialism⁶² (and secularism?).

It is clear, however, that whatever the theological motivational undertones or contemporary overtones, the basic urge for Dialogue comes from a sincere desire to understand the meaning of the various religions in its broadest connotation by sharing them in various ways with one another.

3. What should be the mode of Dialogue?

One might begin by indicating not so much the mode in which the Dialogue is carried on as the attitude with which it is carried on. One can broadly distinguish between three attitudes with which one might approach the whole issue of relating to another religion. At the one end of the spectrum one could place the polemical attitude, which sees the context "in terms of military operations to be described as advance and retreat, triumph, struggle, lines of defence, plans of attack, as if we were waging a war against other believers."⁶³ At the other end of the spectrum may be placed the syncretistic attitude which tends to underplay religious differences, even to reduce or remove them.⁶⁴ None of these attitudes is consistent with Dialogue—it is as if one constitutes the infra-red and the other the ultra-violet ends of the spectrum. It is the visible light in-between in which Dialogue can be carried on with an attitude which combines "a technical and objective understanding of the faiths as phenomena to be examined, described and understood intellectually" with a recognition "of the intrinsic inwardness of a religion as spirituality, as a movement of the soul towards the Holy."⁶⁵

61. S. J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 155 and *passim*.

62. Swami Abhishiktananda, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

63. C. Murray Rogers, "Hindu and Christian—A Moment Breaks," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 108.

64. *Ibid.*, p. 110.

65. *Ibid.*, p. 108. Somewhat similarly Matthew P. John distinguishes between three attitudes from the point of view of a Christian (see Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 69-71).

This should be the attitude, but what could be the possible modes of Dialogue? At least four different modalities of Dialogue can be distinguished: (1) the Theological, (2) the Scholarly, (3) the Personal, and (4) the Creative. These modalities are the result of a search for the basis of Dialogue.

The Theological approach basically views Dialogue from a Christian perspective, and sometimes seeks to discover from within the Christian tradition the basis for Dialogue. One can distinguish two broad approaches here: one which takes Christianity as a whole into account and the other which takes a given theological datum into account.⁶⁶

In pursuing this first approach one is led, for example, to the "unwritten book" in which Dr Hendrik Kraemer proposed to deal with "the terms under which the dialogue between Christianity and the great living religions should take place".⁶⁷ It should have four sections: "(a) an outline of the history and growth of each religion and culture; (b) 'a phenomenological survey of the creative mobiles in such a religious/cultural whole'; (c) a theological evaluation of each religion; and (d) a definition of the central points at issue between Christianity and the described religion".⁶⁸

More material is available on Dialogue proposed on the basis of a theological datum. Thus the modality of Dialogue has been proposed as stemming from the notion of Incarnation,⁶⁹ "the risen Christ's 'Incognito' on the road to Emmaus";⁷⁰ the Holy Spirit,⁷¹ Grace,⁷² and Faith.⁷³ Some scholars, looking at the situation from the vantage point not of the Christian but of the interlocutor, although in a Christian context, have suggested the use of the religious terms

66. This distinction was suggested by the discussion in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 89.

67. Quoted by Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 239.

68. *Ibid.*

69. See Kenneth E. Nolin, *op. cit.*, p. 213ff; R. C. Zaehner observes that Incarnation "is liable to turn up in all religions: but only in Christianity is it crucial" (*op. cit.*, p. 15).

70. Dr Cuttat, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

71. Dr Frederick J. Streng mentioned this possibility at a seminar at Harvard University in Fall 1973.

72. Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

73. *Ibid.*, p. 60.

of the other tradition⁷⁴ or even the adoption of its life style after the manner of Roberto de Nobili.⁷⁵ Thus the theological modes reflect various degrees of accommodation of the other religions to Christian theology.⁷⁶

As distinguished from the Theological, the Scholarly mode starts out from neutral ground. Here the accent is on being "scientific" and sensitive. It represents the growth of the movement in the study of religion which set out to be "free from prejudgement. It was *not* to be determined in the light of premises formed in advance and decided outside the field itself. It was *not* to be dominated by Christian theology. It was not to be subservient to contemporary Positivism. Neither philosophers nor theologians were to be allowed to impose their preconceptions".⁷⁷ It also developed the view that the believer's "faith is not blinding but illuminating".⁷⁸ The current study of Religion is pervaded by this attitude, wherein the various branches of the study of Religion provide their own forms of Dialogue.

Quite distinct from the Theological and the Scholarly is a Personal mode of Dialogue, Dialogue "in an ultimate personal depth—it need not even be a talking about religions or theological topics. Real dialogues have one feature in common: they are challenging in a very profound way".⁷⁹ In spite of its highly personal nature, or perhaps because of it, we possess a clearer description of what is explicitly involved in this dialogical modality than in some of the others we have talked about. It is to be viewed as an Inner Dialogue and an External Dialogue. In Inner Dialogue are involved (1) an un-

74. See Lynn A. De Silva, "Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 171.

75. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-195.

76. That such accommodation is a fact of Christian history is spotlighted by Robert Lawson Slater (*op. cit.*, p. 165) and highlighted by Kaj Baago, "Dialogue in a Secular Age," in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 127-141.

77. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

78. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

79. K. Klostermaier, *op. cit.*, p. 119. This view of Dialogue has been criticized as too narrow; see John B. Carman, "Continuing Tasks in Interreligious Dialogue" in S. J. Samartha, ed., *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movements* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971), pp. 83-94.

shakable faith in Christ, (2) followed by diving deep into non-Christian spirituality fearlessly, (3) which is followed by a deeper awareness of Christ and the Christian faith, and (4) finally, the deepening of, say, Hindu and Christian spiritualities together. This Inner Dialogue is a preparation for the External Dialogue in which (1) the non-Christian is met as *in Christ*, (2) a "frank and glad acknowledgement that he has not been outside the generosity of the Spirit's gifts," (3) the recognition of the *unknown* Christ, and finally, (4) *kairos*, "The moment of conversion, a work of the Spirit, when the Risen Christ in whom the spiritual world of my Hindu, pre-Christian neighbour, is gathered up, purified and transformed, is seen, known and worshipped".⁸⁰

The next modality takes us from the sacred to the secular. For by the Creative mode of Dialogue is meant the joining of hands on the part of two or more religions to complement each other in the task of modernizing the country. Thus it is sometimes hinted at,⁸¹ and sometimes explicitly stated⁸² that Hinduism will be helped by Christianity in India in facing the "acid tests of modernity," that "an affirmative view of history," for instance, represents "an area where one should expect greater possibilities of a creative dialogue between the Hindu and the Christian".⁸³

Each of these Modalities presents its own problems and difficulties. In the Theological modality the suspicion that Christianity has not given up its proselytizing goals and that Dialogue is only a front persists;⁸⁴ within the Scholarly mode the "proper method" for the study of Religion continues to be a matter of debate.⁸⁵ The Personal mode seems to involve a relativism which some do not approve of,⁸⁶ while the Creative mode remains to be actually tried.

80. C. Murray Rogers, *op. cit.*, pp. 111-117. A Dialogue, for instance, of the mystical paths of Christianity and Buddhism, experientially oriented, might fall in this category (see Lynn A. De Silva, *op. cit.*, pp. 201-202).

81. Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. iv.

82. S. J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, *passim*.

83. *Ibid.*, p. 168. One should distinguish here between such conscious Dialogue and the effect that the mere presence of religions side by side may have on one another.

84. Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 95.

85. See *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, Vol. 15, *op. cit.*, p. 634.

86. See John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 147-148.

4. What are the effects of Dialogue?

In assessing the effects and likely effects of Dialogue, it seems helpful to distinguish between the *general effects* of the fact that the religions of the world have been exposed to one another in the twentieth century as never before and the *particular effects* of Dialogue. Dialogue itself is, in fact, a particular effect of the general phenomenon. But what are the effects of Dialogue?

Dialogue, almost by definition, cannot leave the parties unaffected. Its effects can be viewed in terms of the effect it has on individual participants; within a tradition; among traditions and on the religious scene as a whole.

From available evidence, Dialogue has had a paradoxical effect on the participants. It has led to a deeper appreciation of another or other religions on the one hand; on the other, it often deepens a participant's commitment to his own religion.⁸⁷ Not only does it have this effect on the participant in terms of specific traditions, more generally it heightens and deepens a person's perception of *both* the differences and the similarities among religions in general.

Dialogue also produces effects within a tradition. The most obvious of these is in the case of Christianity, wherein the need for a theology of Dialogue, or an adequate theology to account for religious pluralism consistently with Christianity's unique claims, is now widely felt. It has not exerted similar pressure on Hinduism and Buddhism because of their pre-existing relativisms but Judaism and Islam, and Islam more than Judaism may feel the need soon. On the other hand, the very place of Dialogue as a half-way house between religious exclusivism and religious universalism might lead the Eastern religions to a greater circumspection in assuming away important differences—something to which Hinduism may have been more prone than Buddhism.⁸⁸

87. Personal communication, Muzammil Siddiqi, Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

88. Buddhism seems to have practised "critical tolerance" towards other religions (vide K.N. Jayatilleka, *The Buddhist Attitude to Other Religions*, Ceylon: Public Trustee Department, 1966, p. 1), whereas in Hinduism no limits to tolerance seem to have been laid down (see K.M. Panikkar, *Hindu Society at Cross Roads*, New Delhi: Asia Publishing House, 1955, *passim*).

Among traditions, Dialogue seems to lead to re-conception. One aspect of this process has been identified by Prof. Hocking who popularized the expression itself. It needs to be recognized, however, that through a Dialogue one tradition not only undergoes re-conception within itself—it also begins to re-conceive the *other* tradition. The recent interest in the philosophy of Rāmānuja in the West as compared to that in Śankara a century ago,⁸⁹ *prima facie*, seems to have something to do with the fact that during the last century the science of Religion was expected to prove soon “that what was essential in religion was to be found in all the great traditions”⁹⁰ but that the general tenor of opinion in our own time is that the thesis does not stand proved. Thus what aspects of Hinduism interest Christianity, for instance, may be affected by prevailing dialogical assumptions.

Dialogue as an aspect of the religious scene as a whole is an unknown quantity. It is a clearing house—but what it clears comes into it from outside! There is, however, a tendency discernible on the part of Dialogue to lead to a recognition of common ground among religions. The case of Prof. Huston Smith is interesting in this respect. In the last chapter of his popular book he presents three possible attitudes towards the new manifest fact of religious pluralism: (1) a belief in the superiority of any one religion; (2) an open-minded listening to all religions—in other words, Dialogue, and (3) a belief in the unity of world religions at some level.⁹¹ It seems that Prof. Huston Smith, who once advocated the second attitude has now moved closer to the third.⁹² On the other hand, there seems to be no *a priori* reason why the first attitude could not get strengthened. For instance, a consistent Dialogue over the major issues of religion—God, Afterlife, etc.—could easily lead to a kind of religious existentialism—that ultimately there are no answers to these questions except as one may happen to accept them through Revelation—and that too, one’s own. Or that life, and the universe, are what they were to begin with—a mystery—and since it is this mystery which is, say, freely acknowledged in Christianity, one is back to point zero but with a

89. See A.L. Basham, “Hinduism” in R.C. Zaehner, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 260.

90. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 26.

91. Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man*, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), Chapter IX.

92. Personal communication at a colloquium organized at the Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University.

positive number preceding it, namely, one's enhanced commitment. Thus the ultimate effect of Dialogue in some sense remains mysterious—which might confer on Dialogue itself a religious quality!

Dialogue also has its dangers. One of them could be a superficial incorporation of elements of another religion into one's own once a Dialogue has shown its comparative absence.⁹³ Besides, inasmuch as "value choices among religions are still needed"⁹⁴ the exposure to the bewildering supermarket of religious beliefs and practices may narrow the effective range of choice through confusion, instead of broadening it by providing more options.

Finally, Dialogue also has its effect on Dialogue itself. It has been observed that "in intercultural contact there is a tendency for traditions to precisify their nature". Modern Hinduism can be cited as an example.⁹⁵ What the case of Hinduism really demonstrates is that as one religion enters into a dialogical relation with another—with *an other*—it not so much precisifies as *vis-à-vises*⁹⁶—if a new verb may be coined—to denote the defining of one's position, not in absolute terms, but in relation to or relative to the other party or parties in the Dialogue.⁹⁷ Moreover, the fact that Dialogue of several kinds is possible may involve the problem of their interrelationship. It was pointed out earlier how the Scholarly mode of Dialogue is increasingly looked upon as taking place simultaneously on an intellectual and personal plane—a critical objective and self-conscious subjective level.⁹⁸ But this might not be enough from the point of

93. For instance, see S.J. Samartha, *op. cit.*, p. 148. In the past this result was sometimes achieved by polemics on the part of one religion and apologetics on the part of the other.

94. John Macquarrie, quoted by Richard W. Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

95. Ninian Smart, "Truth and Religions", in John Hick, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

96. Or one might say: it precisifies through *vis-à-visation*.

97. The circumstances in which the need to "define" Hinduism or rather to define its indefinability arose are a case in point; see Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 63-67; also see K.M. Panikkar, *op. cit.*, pp. 90-91.

98. A goal carried to the point that it has been suggested "that at this time of day any statements about religions other than one's own should be submitted to critics who themselves profess adherence to the religion in question", a position professionally associated with Prof Wilfred Cantwell Smith (see Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. ix).

view of some other modes of Dialogue, say the Personal.⁹⁹ Hence apart from dialogical definitions emerging as a consequence of Dialogue, another effect could be a controversy over the proper mode of Dialogue.

5. Whither Dialogue?

What kind of a religious world is the dialogical process going to usher in?

Opinions differ. There are several scenarios. Broadly, these reflect three visions of the future: actually, to begin with, only two: a religiously unitary world and a religiously plural world. Out of these two basic visions we get three: the emergence of this one religion in the world is visualized either as the replacement of all religions by one, say Christianity, or the replacement of all religions by a Universal Religion. Between these two hopes—each universalist in its own way—lies the vision of a world which continues to be religiously plural. Thus there are these three basic visions: (1) a single religion as world religion; (2) a world full of several religions; and (3) a universal religion as world religion.

The relationship of the dialogical process to these visions can be realized in a series of scenarios.

1. The Evangelical Scenario

It has now become bad form in certain circles to assert that one religion should displace or replace all or that all people should convert to one religion. But the idea certainly seems to have a presence of not just an articulation, and sometimes may have to be read between the lines. Thus the Uppsala Report of 1968 states that “The meeting with men of other faiths or of no faiths must lead to dialogue” on the part of Christians, but that “A Christian’s dialogue with another implies neither a denial of the uniqueness of Christ, nor any loss of his own commitment to Christ”. After describing the humanity of the dialogical relationship the Report adds, “Dialogue and proclamation are not the same. The one complements the other in a total witness”.¹⁰⁰

99. See Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, p. 78; but also see *ibid.*, p. 89.

100. Norman Goodall, ed., *The Uppsala Report 1968* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1968).

This assertion of the complementarity of the relationship between proclamation and Dialogue—and the constant assertion that Dialogue does not mean the abandonment of Evangelism¹⁰¹—keeps alive the suspicion that when the Christian Church talks about a preparation for Dialogue, that Dialogue is a preparation for proselytization.¹⁰² Some Christian writings do not serve to allay the fears either. It has been said even of the notion of reconception that “Professor Hocking is so much at pains to demonstrate this line of development in the case of Christianity that other believers have some ground for the suspicion that what he really has in mind as the coming world religion is the Christian religion so amended and enlarged that others will be disposed to accept it”.¹⁰³

Thus on this view Dialogue is a dress rehearsal for conversion and would lead to global consolidation of the one religion. Christianity was used as an example here but the same applies *mutatis mutandis* to other religions.

2. The Reconceptual Scenario

On this view the constant action, reaction and interaction of the various religions will lead to a reconception of each tradition not just in parts but as a whole, leading it to ask and answer the question : what does my religion stand for, or what can my Father do that your Father cannot do? “The reconception contemplated takes place *within* each religion ; it involves no abandonment of any religion, no stepping out, but its enlargement and development.”¹⁰⁴ This is the *process* : “as to what may come of such reconception, much depends on what may be seen to be essential in each particular faith”.¹⁰⁵

3. The Co-existential Scenario

Some scholars distinguish between (a) what men and women believe and (b) what attitude they hold towards these beliefs. If the

101. *Ibid.*

102. As, for instance, through an insistence on superiority. This also applies *mutatis mutandis*, to other religions; see John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 122-123.

103. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

104. *Ibid.*, p. 213.

105. *Ibid.* Also see Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, pp. 29-32.

latter aspect is focused on then one need not go on to the doctrine of reconception which pertains to (a). From the vantage point of dialogical presuppositions based on (b) one can visualize a world community with a continued co-existence of the great faiths, co-existence on a pattern of "reciprocal and welcomed change".¹⁰⁶

4. *The Affirmatory Scenario*

On this view all the traditions of the world should be looked upon as encompassing multiple perspectives within themselves and as dynamic in character, so that through the dialogical process "constructive change can occur in each participant's interpretation of his own position as he attempts to respond to the critical appraisal his partner offers. That result may at first seem quite contrary to what is generally taken to be the purpose of contact between traditions, since it emphasizes modification in one's position rather than in that of one's partner".¹⁰⁷ But in doing so the participant affirms his commitment to his tradition which has now become a more adequate religious system and hence Dialogue may lead to "the achievement of more adequate religious systems".¹⁰⁸

5. *The Veritas-Scenario*

On this view the dialogical process centres on the resolution of the conflicting truth-claims of the different religious traditions of the world and the obstacle these divergent claims present, as, for instance, "the obstacle that the traditional doctrine of the incarnation presents to a future global theology". The feeling is that "We live amidst unfinished business; but we trust that continuing dialogue will prove to be dialogue into truth, and that in a fuller grasp of truth our present conflicting doctrines will ultimately be transcended".¹⁰⁹

It is clear from this review of the various dialogical models—referred to above as scenarios to relieve the burden of a pedantic style—that they share two things in common: (1) they all—except for the

106. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 217.

107. George Rupp, *Christologies and Cultures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1974), p. 257.

108. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

109. John Hick, "The Outcome: Dialogue into Truth," in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 155.

explicitly Evangelical model—visualize a continued state of Dialogue among the religions of the world, they posit a continued religious plurality, and what is not immediately obvious, (2) all the models indicate an enlargement of the common meeting ground among religions.¹¹⁰ Thus Hocking expects a way common to all religions to emerge; indeed, he speaks of “several universal religions” as “already fused together, so to speak, at the top”.¹¹¹ Slater is more conscious of the differences among religions¹¹² but does not regard the prospect of “a religious contribution” towards “a world community” as “remote...despite continued differences”.¹¹³ Rupp assumes that “alterations in the direction of greater comprehensiveness will increase the measure of common ground which different traditions share,”¹¹⁴ and Hick looks forward to the diminution of differences as the grasp on Truth becomes firm.

Thus the common thread running through these different views seems to be that the religiously plural world will continue to thrive but that religions, at the same time, will incline towards a greater consensual commonality.¹¹⁵

Such is the prospect that the Dialogue of World Religions holds for itself and the religions of the world¹¹⁶—of a world in which the Dialogue transforms the religions of the world and the religions of the world transform the Dialogue. In this context it is important to recognize that in the act or fact of engaging in Dialogue one knowingly or unknowingly concedes certain presuppositions and it

110. Including the Evangelical; see Normal Goodall, ed., *op. cit.*, *passim*.

111. William Ernest Hocking, *The Coming World Civilization* (New York: Harper, 1956) p. 149.

112. Robert Lawson Slater, *op. cit.*, p. 225.

113. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

114. George Rupp, *op. cit.*, p. 258.

115. Does one detect two contradictory trends in operation here? One must bear in mind “the historical inevitability of the plurality of religions in the past, and its non-avoidability in the future” (John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 149).

116. For Christianity, which initiated Dialogue, it may mean a return from Christianity’s unquestioned answers (“I am the Truth”; see S. Radhakrishnan, *Fellowship of the Spirit*, *op. cit.*, p. 31) to Pilate’s unanswered question.

is through the operation of these presuppositions that the dialogical transformation referred to above comes about. From this point of view four such presuppositions may be identified and examined :

1. Dialogue, as it has been defined here, clearly implies that at some level—according to some, penultimate and, according to some others, ultimate—but at some level, religions are *different*. For if religion were an undifferentiated entity there could only be a kind of monologue—or a spiritual Yes-manship—or worse still, perhaps, monotony. Besides, if Dialogue is understood as relating not merely to an intellectual comprehension but also to a more personal understanding of a religion then we are “not merely concerned with possible incompatibilities as to truth-claims; but also with possible incompatibilities in *practice-claims*”.¹¹⁷ Thus Dialogue presupposes the existence of differences at either the level of theory or practice, or both.

2. By engaging on one's initiative in Dialogue or consenting to it, a certain *validity* to the position of the other party has been conceded even if only tactically. It is accepted that the position of the *vis-à-vis* is meaningful in some way for “if one party to a discussion refuses to agree that what the other fellow says has any meaning, there cannot be a discussion”.¹¹⁸ It goes deeper than that—by agreeing to participate in a dialogical situation in the light of its prerequisites one has granted a certain acceptability to the other's position for otherwise not only will there be no discussion, there will not be any discussant.

3. Real Dialogue, to which openness and equality are preparatory, involves the acceptance of the fact of the possibility that one may *change*¹¹⁹ or one's position may change as a result of the Dialogue. It may also not change—but the possibility of change has been introduced.

117. Ninian Smart, “Truth and Religions,” in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 47.

118. Ninian Smart, *A Dialogue of Religions*, p. 10.

119. Matthew P. John, *op. cit.*, p. 73; what is really being acknowledged here is the fact that one may be influenced or affected by the dialogical process. “Faith cannot speak to the world unless it is prepared to be affected by the world with which it speaks” (T.J.J. Altizer, quoted in Herbert Jai Singh, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 64).

4. Dialogue involves discussion and the "possibility of argument implies that there are *criteria* of truth, however vague. Indeed, the man who refuses to argue at all is guilty of slaying truth: both the true and the false perish, and he is reduced to mere expressions of feeling".¹²⁰ Even in the matter of emotions some emotions would be judged as more positive than others: friendship over hostility, love over hatred, etc. So that by engaging in a dialogical relationship one accepts the fact of a certain *normativeness*.¹²¹

Because of the operation of these presuppositions it appears that what started in the post-war era as the Dialogue of Religions seems to be imperceptibly leading to their Fellowship. For the attitude in which one can normatively hold together simultaneously the acceptance of the differences among religions along with their validity, in combination with the prospect of their transformation, seems to be best characterized as one of Fellowship. And how will this Fellowship be different from Dialogue? Dialogue is something in which the parties participate as discussants; Fellowship is when they discuss issues as participants. The shift is subtle; perhaps it is also quite significant.¹²²

120. Ninian Smart, *A Dialogue of Religions*, p. 14; emphasis added.

121. For a study of a Christian's difficulties in accepting these presuppositions see Matthew P. John, *op. cit.*, pp. 73-77; Eric J. Sharpe, *op. cit.*, pp. 79-81. One scholar who has shown greater sensitivity to this issue than others is Ninian Smart. What is more, he is fully aware of this—"It is perhaps worth remarking that one of the very few attempts to deal with questions of criteria for truth, in the interreligious context, is my own *Reasons and Faiths* (1958). The book is highly defective, and I only mention it because so few people in the field of religious studies have addressed themselves to the problem of criteria, as distinguished from the lower-order exercise of theologizing, dialoguing and the like" ("Truth and Religion," in John Hick, ed., *op. cit.*, p. 45).

122. This writer is indebted to Dr. Christopher Duraisingh, doctoral candidate, Harvard Divinity School, for generous help at various stages in the preparation of the paper. The responsibility for the views expressed, however, is the author's.