

# DIALOGUE BETWEEN WORLD RELIGIONS AND GLOBAL THEOLOGY

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Dialogue between great world religions (I mean Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Taoism) is nowadays inevitable. The growing possibility of direct communication with people of different world-views, beliefs, customs and practices, seems to be one of the main factors to impose the need of inter-religious and inter-cultural conversation on those who really want not only to understand adherents of different faiths and world-views but also to determine their own attitude towards them. One of the more remarkable and influential, but to some extent controversial, attempts in recent three decades at elaborating the idea of dialogue is that made by some modern British and American philosophers, theologians and comparative historians of religion. Among others they are: Wilfred Cantwell Smith, John Hick, Gordon D. Kaufman, Langdon Gilkey, Paul F. Knitter, Stanley J. Samartha, Alan Race, Julius Lipner, Raimundo Panikkar, Keith Ward, Leonard Swidler, John S. O'Leary, Franklin I. Gamwell and Robert Cummings Neville. This paper is to examine critically: 1) The concept and types of dialogue; 2) Ideological grounds of dialogue and 3) The idea of global theology.

## 1. The concept and types of dialogue

The notion of dialogue is an ambiguous one, and therefore potentially confusing. The word itself conceals a variety of presuppositions and attitudes, which can result in a lack of clarity about the aims and direction of dialogue proper. In the most general sense inter-religious dialogue" (gr. *dialegein* „converse, talk") is written or spoken exchange of thoughts concerning religious themes and problems involved in them with representatives of at least two different religions. Religions may be represented officially or informally by individuals or groups of persons taking part in mutual exchange of views.

Some of the philosophers and theologians of religion, mentioned above, classify religious dialogue in different manners. In principle we can distinguish two fundamental criteria of that division: on the one hand, in a

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manner that depends upon the subject of dialogue, and on the other, according to the purpose of dialogue. E. J. Sharpe has noted four distinct types of dialogue: a) human dialogue, b) interior dialogue, c) discursive dialogue and d) secular dialogue. The first type consists in the endeavour to appreciate the other person of faith who professes an allegiance different from one's own. The second lies in the desire to explore the intuitive recognition of a shared experience of the divine. The third is the search for ways in which the truth claims of different faiths may be viewed as complementary and not conflicting. The fourth arises from the need to collaborate in working towards solving practical problems in the building up of world community.<sup>1</sup>

J. Lipner distinguishes „reduction dialogue” from „committal dialogue”. A person involved in the reduction dialogue „tends to reduce conflicting religious claims by a process of what he calls ‘demythologizing’ i.e. emptying the otherwise irreducible facticity of such beliefs, of literal content, and supplanting them with unitive insights which have only ‘mythologically’ or ‘poetically’ been expressed by these overtly factual statements”.<sup>2</sup> That sort of dialogue implies that religious claims have no hard-core universal factual value, but only derive meaning for believers within the confines of a particular socio-cultural milieu in which they have their origin and development. In the committal dialogue each participant, after due analysis, may find it necessary to retain some measure of literality in the content of his religious beliefs.<sup>3</sup> In this case, according to Lipner, the sincere dialogist, encouraged by the experience of ‘believing religiously’ that he and his counterpart share, or in appropriate circumstances, by the experience of sharing unitive contents of religious beliefs, seeks to analyse and clarify the substance of different truth-claims. Lipner emphasizes that where truth-claims conflict, sharpening the focus of their factual content makes for much progress in unitive understanding.

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<sup>1</sup>E. J. Sharpe, ‘The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue’, in J. Hick (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue. The Relationship between World Religions*, London: Sheldon Press, 1974, p. 77ff.

<sup>2</sup>J. Lipner, ‘Truth-Claims and Inter-Religious Dialogue’, *Religious Studies* 12 (1976), p. 227.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*

He concludes that the purpose of dialogue today will be best fulfilled when participants redefine the limits and areas of facticity in their traditional truth-claims by clearing away as lucidly as possible the tangled undergrowth of hitherto sacrosanct and untouched 'factual truths', and seeking new insights of convergent understanding in the reinterpretation of these 'facts'.<sup>4</sup>

Another classification is that suggested by J. Hick. He distinguishes „the confessional” from „the truth-seeking stance” in interfaith dialogue.<sup>5</sup> In confessional dialogue, everyone is convinced that only her own faith has truth or absolute truth while all others have no or only relative truth. One enters interfaith dialogue only in order to induce a change of beliefs in others. In truth-seeking dialogue, however, „each is conscious that the Transcendent Being is infinitely greater than his own limited vision of it (...) and they accordingly seek to share their visions in the hope that each may be helped towards a fuller awareness of the Divine Reality before which they both stand”.<sup>6</sup> It follows from the above that in truth-seeking stance everything is subject to the unique logic of dialogue except people's common desire to have the fuller vision of the same Reality, which, according to Hick, is the underlying condition of interfaith dialogue. Through such interfaith dialogue, different religions can be mutually criticized, enriched, and transformed. The result of that, Hick claims, „may well be a growing world ecumenism, in which the common commitment of faith in a higher spiritual Reality which demands brotherhood on earth will seem more and more significant, while the differences between the religious traditions will seem proportionately less significant”.<sup>7</sup>

## 2. Ideological grounds of dialogue

In philosophical and theological literature concerning the problem of dialogue between world religions one can distinguish three classes of premises which the thinkers mentioned above take as the ground of

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<sup>4</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 229-230.

<sup>5</sup>J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, London and Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1980, p. 89.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 81.

<sup>7</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 57.

justification while involving in inter-religious dialogue. They are: 1) theological premises, 2) ethical premises and 3) universal ideas. Pragmatical reasons referring to specified activity in the world are considerably based on theological and universal premises. Our main task here is to present reasons for engaging in inter-religious dialogue put forward by modern British and American philosophers and theologians of religion. We do not take up how the matter of dialogue (its purpose and justification) is dealt with from world religions' point of view. Theological premises and universal ideas justify why one should undertake dialogue; ethical reasons determine the way it has to be carried out.

Theological premises are founded on certain ideas derived from religion and then rationally modified. The following ones seem to be of much importance:

1) Great world religions are equal in the concept of revelation, soteriology, the idea of sainthood, religious experience etc. Hence a practical rule is to treat them on equal terms (J. Hick, W. C. Smith).<sup>8</sup>

2) Different religions are partial expressions of the same Transcendent Reality. Hence the aim of interfaith dialogue is to enable all religions to better express this common Reality and to learn from each other in order to obtain the best possible response to the Reality (W. C. Smith, J. Hick, G. Kaufman, L. Gilkey, S. J. Samartha).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>J. Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths*, London: Macmillan, 1973, p. 120-132; J. Hick, *God Has Many Names*, op. cit., p. 48-53; W. C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion: A Revolutionary Approach to the Great Religious Traditions*, London: Sheldon Press, 1978, p. 170-192.

<sup>9</sup>W. C. Smith, 'Idolatry in Comparative Perspective', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987, p. 62-64; J. Hick, *Problems of Religious Pluralism*, London: Macmillan, 1985, p. 68-69; J. Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993, p. 21, 94; G. Kaufman, *In Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology*, Cambridge, MA & London, UK: Harvard University Press, 1993, p. 39ff; L. Gilkey, 'Plurality and Its Theological Implications', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, op. cit., p. 41; S. J. Samartha, 'The Cross and the Rainbow. Christ in

3) No religion possesses absolute or final truth. Hence an epistemological rule is to seek the truth in mutual dialogue - the truth that could be accepted by all religions (ecumenical model of religious truth) (P. Knitter, G. Kaufman, L. Gilkey, A. Race, W. C. Smith, J. S. O'Leary).<sup>10</sup>

4) There is no universal position available to us to evaluate the essence of different religions. Every religious (or secular) understanding (symbols, ideas, doctrines) and way of life is a particular one, that has grown up in a particular history, makes particular claims, is accompanied by particular practices and injunctions, and hence is to be distinguished from all other particular religious and secular orientations. So, if we want to enter into dialogue successfully with others of quite different commitments and convictions, we must find ways of relativizing and opening up our basic symbol system (G. Kaufman).<sup>11</sup>

5) Nowadays we have entered into a period in which we must speak of a common religious history of humankind. Hence a practical rule is that we now have to think on global scale of what men and women everywhere have to learn from all the religious traditions since each of them has its significant contribution to spiritual transformation of man (W. C. Smith, J. Hick).<sup>12</sup>

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Multireligious Culture', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, op. cit., p. 76-77.

<sup>10</sup>P. Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1985, p. 32, 219; G. Kaufman, 'Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, op. cit., p. 13; L. Gilkey, 'Plurality and Its Theological Implications', op. cit., p. 43, 49; A. Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*, Maryknoll: Orbis, 1983, p. 72, 77f.; W. C. Smith, 'Idolatry in Comparative Perspective', op. cit., p. 65-66; J. S. O'Leary, *Religious Pluralism and Christian Truth*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996, p.23-24.

<sup>11</sup>G. Kaufman, 'Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology', op. cit., p. 5ff.

<sup>12</sup>W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religions*, London: Macmillan, 1981, p. 131-132, 141-143; J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 300-303.

6) Different religions are regarded as different in their fundamentals. Hence interfaith dialogue is necessary for different religions to clearly realize these fundamental differences so that they can tolerate each other (S. M. Heim, K. Surin, G. D'Costa, J. A. DiNoia).<sup>13</sup>

7) The main purpose of dialogue today: much progress in unitive understanding, will be best fulfilled when participants redefine the limits and areas of facticity in their traditional truth-claims. It means, on the one hand, clearing away as lucidly as possible the untouched factual truths, and on the other, seeking new insights of convergent understanding in the reinterpretation of these facts (J. Lipner, K. Cragg).<sup>14</sup>

The second class of premises founded on certain ideas and values consists, among others, of:

1) The basic patterns and frameworks of great religious traditions that have been created by humankind in its long history which can provide genuine guidance with respect to the problems we today confront. They are considered to help bring peace in our time and build community with others (G. Kaufman).<sup>15</sup>

2) The fundamental values of persons and of their rights to freedom, justice being treated on equal terms (L. Gilkey).<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>S. M. Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way?*, Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985, p. 25-30; see also his 'The Pluralistic Hypothesis, Realism, and Post-eschatology', *Religious Studies*, 25 (1992), p. 211-216; K. Surin, 'A „Politics of Speech“: Religious Pluralism in the Age of the McDonald's Hamburger', in G. D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of Pluralistic Theology of Religion*, Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990, p. 192-212; J. A. DiNoia, 'Varieties of Religious Aims: Beyond Exclusivism, Inclusivism, and Pluralism', in Bruce D. Marshal (ed.), *Theology and Dialogue: Essays in Conversation with George Lindbeck*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990, p. 249-274.

<sup>14</sup>J. Lipner, 'Truth-Claims and Inter-Religious Dialogue', op. cit., p. 230; K. Cragg, *Muhammad and the Christian*, London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1984.

<sup>15</sup>G. Kaufman, 'Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology', op. cit., p. 13-14; see also his *Theology for a Nuclear Age*, Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985, ch. 1-3.

<sup>16</sup>L. Gilkey, 'Plurality and Its Theological Implications', op. cit., p. 45ff.

3) Religious tolerance without competition; reconciliation of great world religions without breaching their religious essence. The primary goal of interfaith dialogue is today to lay bare the fundamental differences between different religions so that people of different faiths can realize that they are seekers after different things rather than competitors for the same thing. Such a realization makes it possible for different religions to tolerate each other (S. M. Heim, G. Lindbeck).<sup>17</sup>

4) Preferential option for the poor and the oppressed as the soteriocentric criterion for religious dialogue (P. Knitter).<sup>18</sup>

Ethical premises constitute, among others, the following injunctions:

1) Members of the different religions of the world ought to show mutual respect and understanding, and to learn more and more from one another (G. Parrinder).<sup>19</sup>

2) We live now in a single interconnected and interdependent world, so it is no longer possible to ignore the other ways of being human or to move toward eliminating them. We must learn instead to encounter other religious traditions on equal terms, seeking, as sympathetically as we can, to understand and appreciate both their insights into the human condition and the forms of belief and practice they recommend and inculcate (G. Kaufman, J. Hick, P. Knitter).<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>S. M. Heim, *Is Christ the Only Way*, op. cit., p. 141, 150f.; G. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984, p. 18.

<sup>18</sup>P. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, op. cit., p. 193.

<sup>19</sup>G. Parrinder, *Encountering World Religions*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987, p. 221, 226n.

<sup>20</sup>G. Kaufman, 'Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology', op. cit., p. 4; J. Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, op. cit., p. 16-18; P. Knitter, 'Toward a Liberation Theology of Religions', op. cit., p. 194.



3) One ought to set one's free from moves toward authoritarianism in relation to other religions (G. Kaufman, S. J. Samartha).<sup>21</sup>

The problem of inter-religious dialogue includes some questions of much importance: 1) who is to carry on inter-religious dialogue?; 2) on what conditions and grounds?; 3) what manner? and 4) for what purpose? The question of conditions and grounds of inter-religious dialogue and of its purposes as well seems to be the most controversial. The British and American philosophers and theologians of religion share different opinions on how to solve the problem. We can distinguish three main stances to be determined conventionally as 1) revisionist universalism; 2) preservative particularism and 3) communicative (dialogical) pluralism.<sup>22</sup>

Revisionist universalism takes it for granted that great world religions are in principle equivalent. Hence it is necessary to build up overreligious and overconfessional grounds in the form of hypotheses or statements to explain not only plurality and variety of religions but also to determine the purpose and sense of dialogue between them. Accepting of the stance results in the reductionist interpretation of religious beliefs and doctrines (it refers in more or less degree to every religion). Clearing away the literal content of religious truths or replacing it by the mythological one makes it possible to come to a hard to determine common denominator on a high general level.

Preservative particularism maintains that there is no common measure for different religions since they are immutable in their fundamental beliefs, independent of each other and immune to any attempt of unification. Thus the main goal of dialogue except for increase in religious knowledge may be conversion from one religion into another or better understanding the others while remaining one's own religious beliefs, or rediscovering a lost element in one's own tradition.

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<sup>21</sup>G. Kaufman, 'Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology', *op. cit.*, p. 12-13; S. J. Samartha, 'The Cross and the Rainbow. Christ in Multireligious Culture', *op. cit.*, p. 79-82.

<sup>22</sup>See Y. Huang, 'Religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue: Beyond universalism and particularism', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 37 (1995), p. 137-140 and note 56.



The third approach assumes that unique and incommensurable religious truths, as well as those being capable of comparing, the acts of communicating them to another believers together with learning from them what they consider to be true, all that has to be subjected to the logic of interfaith dialogue. The logic emphasizes that through interfaith dialogue the elements of two different religions are fused with and transformed by each other but remain different.<sup>23</sup> Within this stance we can also choose another path suggested by J. Lipner namely, regarding dissimilarity and incommensurability of religious truths, to seek certain ideas on different levels of generality to be accepted by both parts of dialogue.

Another alternative, call it anthropological and universalistic, can be put forward, notwithstanding. If we assume as true that religion in its deepest essence serves first of all the man, his redemption, enlightenment, liberation or fulfilment, and it means that the matter is the moral and spiritual progress of human being, the question to be raised is which of the living religions (or what elements involved into great world's religions) warrants the best possible conditions to realize the idea on individual and social level as well. The problem, however, is that great world religions include in more or less degree divergent concepts of the man. None the less, it seems that the problem can be partly overcome by discerning universal contents in different religions concerning human nature.

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<sup>23</sup>This approach in inter-religious dialogue is put forward by Yong Huang who argues that „accepting something from an alien religion as meaningful and true, one judges about meaningfulness and truth not in the light of alien religion but in her own light. Thus, what is taken from one religion and is woven into the belief system of another often takes on a very different meaning and plays a very different role in its new incarnations” (‘Religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue...’, op. cit., p. 139). Huang seems to accept partly the view of David Tracy that in inter-religious dialogue every one is obliged to tell his partners what he believes is true, hoping that it may also be true for them. At the same time, one is also ready to accept from his partners whatever is true to him and weave it coherently into his own web of beliefs (see D. Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion Hope*, San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987, p. 99). Yet Huang gives priority to the communicative aspect of dialogue over the substantial and doctrinal one: „the increasing pluralization of religions is in proportion to the increase in their interconnection, dialogue, and fusion of horizons” (‘Religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue...’, op. cit., p. 140).

Furthermore, if we ascertain that religious ideas beliefs and practices are involved in historical, social and cultural development, hence, it can be traced within one religion or comparatively between two and more religions. The conclusion in the form of hypothesis is that perhaps there is such a religion that gives to the man relatively the most possibilities to realize his human essence. Thus, the main purpose of inter-religious dialogue is to determine the sphere in its various aspects and to test the strength of different arguments „for” and „against”.

### 3. The idea of global theology

During the last three decades marked with growing increase in comparative studies in religion the need of theological discipline to embrace not only one but all great religions of the world has been more often discussed. Three basic questions are taken into consideration: 1) Is it possible to create such a discipline?; 2) What is to be its subject of study? and 3) What methods can it use? I focus on proposed names of the discipline, arguments for its validity and general characteristics of its subject. Finally I present some critical remarks.

One of the main problems (perhaps the most important one) in creating the theological discipline which would take into account all great world religions is to clear it of the confessional charge. According to widely accepted definition theology is the discipline to investigate only one religion. It explains and defends religious beliefs and ideas making its propositions in objective language. Those who postulate the idea of global theology seem to be conscious of the fact that Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu theology as well as Buddhology and Taology are all confessional.

W. C. Smith remarks that a notion ‘the theology of religions’ may arouse a suspicion of Christian, Muslim, Hindu etc. theology of religions. He maintains that as far as there may be a Christian theology of work, of marriage, of art, of political liberation because faith, in its intellectual aspect, integrates and embraces almost all that one perceives and participates in, „...there cannot be a Christian theology of the other

religions, because religion embraces more than an outsider perceives".<sup>24</sup> What does the word 'more' mean Smith roughly explains that it is the faith that is 'central', 'total' and 'supreme'. Theology theologises about things, garnering them into a coherent whole, but faith cannot be theologised about by an outsider, since „it is itself an organising principle, by which the person is open to the infinite and is enabled to see all that is finite in relation to that infinite. Therefore one community's faith is on principle precluded from being the object of another community's theology. Faith can be theologised only from the inside".<sup>25</sup> On account of that Smith thinks that a Christian or Islamic, or Hindu theology of religions is an irrational concept, if it conceives them as 'other'.<sup>26</sup>

There are several names of proposed discipline in Smith's *Towards a World Theology*: 'a theology of comparative religion', 'world theology', 'a theology of the religious history of humankind', 'theology in global perspective' and 'transcendentology'. The author explains that the phrase 'comparative religion' is analogous with 'comparative anatomy', 'comparative literature, and the like, and the term 'transcendentology' stands for the study of Transcendence.<sup>27</sup> J. Hick uses the expression 'global theology'<sup>28</sup>, R. Panikkar as L. Swidler talks about 'a universal

<sup>24</sup>W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religions*, London: Macmillan 1981, p. 110, cf., p. 109.

<sup>25</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 110-111. Smith uses here his typical distinction between *faith* and *belief*. The first is a human experience of being grasped by transcendent reality which necessarily precedes any attempt to conceptually articulate it; the second denotes theological systems and creeds which are posterior to the experiences on which they rest and from which they derive their life. According to Smith theological systems are historically and culturally conditioned and for that reason they are relative (W. J. Wainwright, 'Wilfred Cantwell Smith on Faith and Belief', *Religious Studies* 20 (1984), p. 353-366).

<sup>26</sup>W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, op. cit., p. 111.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 123-125, 183. 'Theology' is defined by Smith as „talk about God; or more generically, about the transcendent dimension of human life and of the universe to which the history of religion (the history of man's spirit) bears witness and which it elucidates, and to which Christians have historically given the name 'God'" (*ibid.*, p. 151).

<sup>28</sup>J. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, London: Macmillan, 1985, p. 29n.; cf. his *God Has Many Names*, op. cit., p. 8.

theology of religion', and K. Ward uses the phrases 'open theology' or 'convergent theology' as opposed to 'closed theology'.<sup>29</sup>

To bring the theological discipline into being means to separate it from the system of sciences by determining its study subject and methods. Not all thinkers are convinced of the validity of global theology as the scientific discipline.<sup>30</sup> Those who think that it is possible to create such a discipline try to determine its tasks and the subject of study. Neither of them questions its non-confessional character. The attempt at clearing global theology of the confessional charge brought its adherents to formulate three different theoretical solutions, namely of 1) the universal (global) conception (W. C. Smith), 2) the complementary conception (J. Hick) and 3) convergent conception (K. Ward).

According to Smith the notion of 'theology of comparative religion' reflects the nature of the new discipline. Smith assumes that all theology is self-theology what means that neither is it a theology of one religion nor of religions and yet it must exclude no one. Smith lays emphasis on that global theology is „a theology for which 'the religions' are the subject, not the object; a theology that emerges out of 'all the religions of the world' (...), all the religious communities of the world, or (...) all the religious sub-communities of the human community”.<sup>31</sup> In other words global theology as a future discipline must be 'a theology of the religious history of

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<sup>29</sup>R. Panikkar, 'The Jordan, the Tiber, and the Ganges. Three Kairological Moments of Christic Self-Consciousness', in J. Hick, P. Knitter (eds), *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*, op. cit., p. 101; see his 'The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or a Cosmic Confidence in Reality?', in L. Swidler (ed.), *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988, p. 127nn. K. Ward, *Religion and Revelation: A Theology of Revelation in the World's Religions*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p. 335, 339-340.

<sup>30</sup>J. Lipner, for instance, holds that there can arise no theology of religions or universe of faiths for two main reasons: first, that many basic philosophical presuppositions of, say, Indian and Western religion are non-convergent; second, that the very idea of 'God' in a particular religious tradition depends on the revelation and underlying theology that produce it ('Does Copernicus Help? Reflection for a Christian Theology of Religions', *Religious Studies* 13 (1977), p. 253).

<sup>31</sup>W. C. Smith, *Towards a World Theology*, op. cit., p. 124.

humankind' or 'the faith history of us human beings'. It must include basic elements of Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist faith and theology, but it can be none of them, since, as Smith underlines, there cannot be a theology of faith from the outside. Accordingly, the theology of comparative religion „must be the product of thinkers who see, who feel and, indeed, who know men and women of all religious groups and all centuries, as members of one community, one in which they themselves also participate”.<sup>32</sup> The main task of proposed discipline „is to interpret intellectually all human faith, one's own and others'; comprehensively, and justly”, but assuming that different religions reflect partial concepts of Transcendence, revelation, salvation and religious truth, and that none of them has full and ultimate truth. Rather particular religions are on the way to the final truth.<sup>33</sup>

Smith thinks that theology of comparative religion will constitute in dialogue between great world religions. Not only its study subject will emerge in that way, but also its epistemological methods. Smith believes that „the task of attaining an epistemological sophistication that will be historically self-critical as well as universalist, is interlinked with, not prior to, our task of attaining corporate critical self-consciousness in the religious realm”.<sup>34</sup> On the other hand, systematic knowledge must be dynamic, personalist and historical, and must have to do with becoming more than with being.<sup>35</sup>

J. Hick is of the opinion that global theology can be built up if we distinguish in religion between the 'facts of faith' disclosed in the religious experience of a particular tradition the theories subsequently developed to integrate these into a systematic world-view.<sup>36</sup> The first are primary affirmations of faith which express the basic data apprehended by faith and the formulation of them is a descriptive and empirical process.

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<sup>32</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 152, 167-179, 187ff.

<sup>34</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 189.

<sup>35</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 192.

<sup>36</sup>J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London: Macmillan, 1989, p. 372.

Theological doctrines, respectively, are the propositions officially accepted as interpreting primary affirmations and relating them together in a coherent system of thought. The construction of doctrine is speculative in method, being philosophical thinking undertaken within the boundaries of a particular tradition.<sup>37</sup> According to Hick's pluralistic hypothesis primary affirmations are different manifestations, within different streams of human life, of the one ultimate Reality, and that the truth or validity or authenticity of such manifestations lies in their soteriological effectiveness.<sup>38</sup> Hick thinks that „it is because affirmations about the nature of reality are true or false or, more probably, partly true and partly false, that the theologies of the different religions can be compared with one another, that agreements and disagreements can be registered, and that the possibility of syntheses and even of a comprehensive global theology cannot be excluded in advance”.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the global theology will be developed out of a comparison of the theological affirmations of the different world faiths. The various confessional theologies may turn out to be in final opposition to one another or it may become possible to see them as partial accounts, from different angles, of a more complex ultimate Reality. Hick maintains that the project of global theology will be „the attempt to use these different affirmations, and the modes of religious experience on which they are based, as data for the construction of comprehensive religious theories. Such a theology would consist in a body of hypotheses about the nature of reality, expressing the basic common ground of the world religions, and receiving mythic expression and devotional content in different ways within different historical traditions”.<sup>40</sup>

K. Ward is convinced that it makes sense to speak of 'a common structure of faith' at the heart of many religious traditions, and of 'a common core of belief' in a number of traditions about the suprasensory

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<sup>37</sup>J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, London: Macmillan, 1987, p. 218.

<sup>38</sup>J. Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, op. cit., p. 373ff.

<sup>39</sup>J. Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*, London: Macmillan, 1985, p. 29.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 30; cf. *God Has Many Names*, op. cit., p. 8.



reality, the ultimate goal of religious practice and true human fulfilment.<sup>41</sup> Convergence of the central focal concepts of various religions makes it possible to speak of 'a convergent spirituality' in the modern world.<sup>42</sup> Ward explains that the convergence is not a movement of all traditions to a new, universally accepted tradition. „It is a recognition that many cultures and traditions are engaged in a common quest for unity with supreme perfection; a hope that they may seek and achieve a convergence in common core beliefs, as complementary images come to be more widely recognised; and an acceptance of the partiality and inadequacy of all human concepts to capture the object of that quest definitively”.<sup>43</sup>

The open theology, as postulated by Ward, can be characterized by six features. First, it will seek a convergence of common core beliefs, clarifying the deep agreements which may underlie diverse cultural traditions. Second, it will seek to learn from complementary beliefs in other traditions, expecting that there are forms of revelation one's own tradition does not express. Third, it will be prepared to reinterpret its beliefs in the light of new, well-established factual and moral beliefs. Fourth, it will accept the full right of diverse belief-systems to exist, as long as they do not cause avoidable injury or harm to innocent sentient beings. Fifth, it will encourage a dialogue with conflicting and dissenting views, being prepared to confront its own tradition with critical questions arising out of such views. Sixth, it will try to develop a sensitivity to the historical and cultural contexts of the formulation of its own beliefs, with a preparedness to continue developing new insights in new cultural situations.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>K. Ward, *Religion and Revelation*, op. cit., p. 337f.

<sup>42</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 95f., 302.

<sup>43</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 339.

<sup>44</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 339-340. A 'closed theology', as opposed to 'open theology', is - according to Ward - one which insists on the total distinctiveness of its own beliefs. It excludes others from any share in important truths, rejects all contact with other systems of belief and any developments of knowledge which would force a reinterpretation of its own tradition. It will restrict or prevent the expression of criticism or dissent. It will seek to suppress other religions, insisting that it possesses a complete or sufficient understanding truth, which change could only impair or destroy (*ibid.*, p. 340).



Some proposals for transforming traditional Christian theology are also put forward by some modern American theologians. Two main reasons for them are given in principle: the growing consciousness of world problems and challenges that face the modern man and the fact of plurality and variety of religions. It is difficult to find out precisely if those proposals are similar to the idea of global theology or theology of comparative religion of W. C. Smith's, J. Hick's and K. Ward's. Nevertheless, both G. Kaufman and L. Gilkey, as well as S. J. Samartha, P. Knitter and others think the change of Christian theology from orthodoxy to heterodoxy to be necessary.<sup>45</sup>

It is not our task in this paper to elaborate the question of legitimacy of theological and comparative studies in religion; neither is it the critical evaluation of methodological status of global theology. We maintain that that sort of investigation is unfeasible if the statements are formulated in object-language. Theology of a particular religion may be defined as study in which, along with other axioms, at least one sentence is assumed which belongs to a given creed and which is not sustained by persons other than the believers of a given religion. The sentences which constitute objective faith of a given religion are among others: 'There is a God', 'Christ is the Son of God', 'Mohammed is the Prophet of Allah', 'There is Reincarnation', 'There is Nirvana', 'Tao manifests through all things'. In every theology (buddhology or taology) there is a meta-linguistic rule indicating which sentences are to be considered as elements of objective faith. There is also the basic assumption according to which every element of objective faith - that is, every sentence designated by the meta-linguistic rule - has to be accepted as true. Thus a Catholic says that whatever God revealed and the Church proposes to be believed is true; in Islam it is believed that whatever has been revealed by Mohammed has to be considered as true; and in Buddhism the basic truth is that revealed by Buddha, and so on. Rabbi, Christian, Muslim or Hindu theologian as well as buddhologist, every of them makes a thorough study of axioms and the

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<sup>45</sup>See G. Kaufman, 'Religious Diversity, Historical Consciousness, and Christian Theology', *op. cit.*, p. 11-13; L. Gilkey, 'Plurality and Its Theological Implications', *op. cit.*, p. 41-43; S. J. Samartha, 'The Cross and the Rainbow', *op. cit.*, p. 81-83.

structure of his own faith and accepts as true, without a further object-linguistic proof, sentences which belong to the creed of his religion.

As far as a theologian can study only the faith of his own religion, a comparativist, on the other hand, is interested in the problems which are common to all religions. But a theologian can reflect on his own work and formulate sentences in meta-theological language. At the point of his study field a theologian comes to exercise the work of a philosopher of religion who, in his investigations, does not need to accept statements only on account of that they belong to a given creed. We maintain that meta-theological system including a few religions can be built up in principle, provided that no credal sentence of any religion can be changed, corrected or lost. Therefore, meta-theological system would be the work of philosophy of religion, not a theology which first of all explains and defends the faith of a particular religion.

The role of theology in comparative study of religions and its relation to philosophy of religion is understood differently, and not always clearly, by modern American philosophers of religion. Franklin Gamewell thinks that „because it is critical reflection on the claims of a particular religion, theology is similar to comparative philosophy of religion in that both require philosophical theology.<sup>46</sup> But the question what is philosophical theology is not answered by the author. Robert Cummings Neville shares the opinion that theology has been significantly changed by the new circumstances, i.e. comparative studies and interreligious dialogue. He says that „if theology is to deal with the truth of its issues, it cannot limit itself to what any one tradition or community believes (...). [It] must also make its arguments vulnerable to any and all who have an interest in the issue at hand, and thus its arguments need to be able to be cast in comparative language. (...). Therefore, (...) at present time theology requires three different but interdependent genres: traditional theology that interprets and reconstructs the symbols of a tradition (each tradition) in currently defensible and relevant ways, comparative theology that allows for the integration of perspectives needed to have public claim to truth in

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<sup>46</sup>F. Gamewell, 'A Foreword to Comparative Philosophy of Religion', in F. E. Reynolds, D. Tracy (eds), *Religion and Practical Reason*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994, p. 47.

even just one tradition, and philosophical theology that relates the symbols to their referents in critical fashion".<sup>47</sup> However, the problem of most importance is not to divide theology into parts but the question of legitimacy of comparative theology and its relation to philosophical theology considered in methodological and subject study bearing.

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<sup>47</sup>R. C. Neville, 'Religions, philosophies, and philosophy of religion', *International Journal for Philosophy of Religion* 38 (1995), p. 179.