DIFFERENT APPROACHES TO THE PROBLEMS OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

There are different approaches to the problems of religious diversity. In the contemporary world, where a clash of civilization is seen as an important menace to peace and religious diversity and religious confrontation is seen as an important cause of that clash. Religious diversity is and has long been a fact of social life. The fact that there is plurality of religious traditions, each with its own distinctive beliefs, spiritual practices, ethical outlook, art forms, and cultural ethos, creates an obvious problem for those of us who see them, not simply as human phenomena. Therefore it is evident that we live in a pluralistic world with regard to religious beliefs. While this has always been the case throughout world history, it is all the more evident today with the advent of instant communication, world travel and globalization. It is no longer possible to live in ignorance. The enlightenment was expected to bring about the decline of religion but the opposite has been the case with a renewed interest in all of the world religions.

The problem of the relationship between these different streams of religious life has often been posed in terms of their divergent belief systems. While there are various overlap between their teachings there are also radical differences: is the divine reality (I refer to it as the real) personal or non-personal; if personal, is it unitary or triune; is the universe created, or emanated, or itself eternal; do we live only once on this earth or are we repeatedly reborn? And soon and so on when the problem of understanding religious plurality is approached through these rival truth-claims it appears particularly intractable. I specified that major part of the problem is the very concept of religion. Anyhow, whichever way religion may be defined and
whatever may be the nature of practicing it, we need to find some way to make sense of the different versions of religion that exist all over the world.

Through the centuries people have adopted different approaches to solve this problem. These approaches can be broadly classified into five categories. I will take a brief look at each of these approaches. 22

2.1. Exclusivistic Approach

Perhaps the most natural position for a believer in a particular religion to take is that the truth lies with her own religion and that any religion holding opposing views is, therefore, false. Indeed the easiest way to dispose of all the questions concerning religious diversity is to deny it altogether. Only one religion is true and the other so-called religions are false or misguided and do not really deserve to be called “religions”. In other words this view propounds the idea that “my religion or conviction is the only true one; the rest are wrong”. Thus this dogmatic view considers as false whatever negates or denies its own assertions. An implied inference to this is the idea that if the world were to be united by one religion, that religion could only be “my religion”. Exclusivism generally regards other faiths as products of sin and evil forces to be overcome. Historically religious exclusivism is related to tendency of clans and tribal societies to view outsiders as inferiors, as enemies and even as less than truly human. Tribes who make war on other tribes need to justify killing their enemies. Competition over land and resources may be the root cause of such conflicts, but tribal priests and shamans would certainly be likely to support such battles by invoking the god of one tribe against the other.

Exclusivism is most prevalent in Abrahamic religions. These religions regard ordinarily all other religious claims as fake and invalid. For example in Christianity, religious exclusivism is seen in both Roman Catholic doctrine and in Protestantism. At the council of Florence (1438-1445) it was affirmed that:

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“No one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not just Pagan; but also Jews or heretics or schematics, can become partakers of eternal life; but they will go to the “everlasting fire which was prepared for the devil and his angles”, unless before the end of the life they are joined to the church”\textsuperscript{23}. Religious exclusivism naturally linked with a doctrine of salvation and teaches that only the member of one religion or sect will reach Heaven, while others will be doomed to eternal damnation. Thus exclusivists think that their religion is the only way for salvation. They position themselves in regard to the other as people who are responsible for introducing the correct religion to the other. In this view, the other is the one to be invited to salvation rather than merely a partner in interfaith dialogue. He should accept the invitation, convert to the religion that will save him and leave his past life behind. Basically, exclusivists are interested in mission more than interfaith dialogue. Thus, they would be displeased with the good characteristics of other religions. They believe that these characteristics would confuse people and inhibit them from finding the right religion and hence salvation. Similarly, Christian exclusivists call with the intention of salvations via Christ alone. It is by earnings of a individual knowledge of commitment to Christ with the intention of receives assurance of salvation. The non-believers cannot receive such assurance given with the intention of they are neither mindful of the uniqueness of Christ neither do they acknowledge his lordship. Christian exclusivist starts with the bible as the supply of all in rank in this area spirituality and salvation. The exclusivist view rightly sees the exclusiveness of the bible in its proclamation of Christ as the only road of salvation.

The archbishop of Canterbury refused to attend the world’s parliament of religions at Chicago in 1893 because, he said;

The Christian religion is the one religion. I do not understand how that religion can be regarded as a member of a parliament of religions without

\textsuperscript{23} Prabhavananda S, Isherwood, C (1954).
assuming the equality of the other intended members and the parity of their positions and claims.

This view may be the result of our feeling threatened by others and consequently fearing the loss of our religious identity, or it may be the result of misguidance of some religions leaders. But in many cases this dogmatic behavior can be seen as an outcome of either ignorance of holy tents or misinterpretation of them and or sake of our personal or national interests. For example, in the Gita, Lord Krishna says, “whoever comes to me, through whatsoever form, I reach him; all men are struggling through paths which in the end lead to me”. But in practice, in arguing for devotion to Lord Krishna we are forcing others to accept our way of worship, or at least we are claiming that our way is the best. Likewise in the Quran, God says: “there is no compulsion in religion”. And “there will be neither fear nor grief for those who believe in God and the last day, and do righteous deeds, whether Muslim, or Jew, or Christian, or Sabaeans”.

But in the life of many contemporary Muslims, these and many other similar principles of the Quran are overlooked. In this regard, the situation of the followers of other religious traditions today is not much better than Hindus and Muslims.

These attitude have been described by Sri Ramakrishna as resembling those of the blind men who examined an elephant, came to different conclusions and started to quarrel about their partial or limited stand points.

Swami Vivekananda compares seatrain views with the attitude of well-frog, in the story of the same name, which has no Idea of the ocean.” The exclusivists attitude, as rightly expressed by Helmut Von Glasenapp, undeniably offers to the follower of a religion some special advantages. It gives

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24 Bhagavad Gita. Trans – S. Radhakrishna, Bombay, Ch.11, P.21-22.
25 Quran 2, P.256
26 Ibid 5, P.69
him or her unshakable foundation for considering the world and life, and builds a solid embankment against the waves of doubt, as the standpoint offers immediately a sure code of conduct. The history of the world proves beyond doubt that all great men who have decidedly influenced human thought were able to do so only because they were convinced of the general applicability of their own views and felt that the views of others were erroneous and would therefore have to be corrected.\textsuperscript{28}

Because by exceeding a fine barrier this view naturally leads to fanaticism and strife which are dangerous and harmful for the welfare and unity of society. Additionally exclusivism has at least two difficulties. First, there is the practical difficulty that hundreds of thousands of people live and die in other religions and cultures without ever having heard of the path of salvation taught by a particular exclusivistic religion. The second difficulty for an exclusivistic religion arises as we become acquainted with other religions and the lives of their founders and “saints”. One finds individuals whose lives exhibit profound ethical commitment and religious devotion. That they are not loved by God seems dubious.

\subsection*{2.2. INCLUSIVISTIC APPROACH}

All religions provide a sense of community to their followers, in which brotherhood and universal values are preached to help in the quest for personal and collective salvation. However, paradoxically, a religious group may achieve collective identity at the expense of outsiders. Those belonging to a particular religion may define themselves against those who do not accept their own views. In this framework, the question of how such outsiders are connected to the possibility of salvation arises. Are outsiders included within a religions purview of salvation or excluded to be damned? Different religions provide divergent answers to this perplexing question, some saying that non-members are going to hell, while others say that non-members are “included”

\textsuperscript{28} H. Von Glasenapp (2007) “Ramakrishna and Harmony of Religions” in Sri Ramakrishna and His Admirers.
in a larger picture of God’s grace or salvation history. Though it seems arbitrary and cruel that billions of people would miss out on salvation just because they were born into the wrong religion. Inclusivism is one answer to this situation.

According to this approach one religion and of course, it is always “my religion” - is the fulfillment of what is best and true in others. In other words, only one religion is fully true but true religious seekers of all religious traditions will find salvation at least in the afterlife. Those who follow this approach tend to believe that other religions are based on knowledge derived from human reason, not on divine revelation and are therefore, inadequate and incomplete. Adherents of this approach will admit that there must be some divine purpose for the existence of many religions. The other religions cannot be totally false or misguided; they do have some element of truth - the fullness of which is, however, most clearly revealed in “my religion” alone/ thus in religious discourse, Inclusivism designates a particular theological position regarding the relationship between religions. If came up this position is characterized by the belief that while one set of beliefs is absolutely true, other sets of beliefs are at least partially true. Because of its sympathetic method to other religious conviction, inclusivism has a brilliant appeal to adherents of religions. This approach as middle ground between the extremes of exclusivism and pluralism, stands in contrast to exclusivism, which asserts that only one way is true and all others are in error and religious pluralism, which asserts that all beliefs are equally valid within a believer’s particular content.

In brief, there are two schools of inclusivism thought traditional inclusivism and relativistic inclusivism. Traditional inclusivism asserts that the believer’s own views are absolutely true and believers of other religions are correct insofar as they agree with that believer. Relativistic inclusivism asserts that an unknown set of assertions are absolutely true, that no human being currently living has yet ascertained absolute truth, but that all human beings
have partially ascertained absolute truth. Both types of inclusivist thought run through most religions.

The religions of Indian and Chinese origin have traditionally been quite accommodating when it comes to the issue of inter-religious relations. Traditionally the Chinese could follow more than one religions path without fear of official reprisal or excommunication. Correspondingly, in predominately Hindu India, ethical notions of universal dharma and metaphysical Brahman provided incluvistic frameworks for understanding other faith perspectives.

A few Hindu thinkers have begun to claim in recent years that their religion covers so vast a metaphysical spectrum that virtually every ideal found in other religions has already a counterpart in their own religion.

Jainism and Buddhism, too, emphasized non-violence towards all, including in the realm of religious beliefs.

Some Muslim theologians argue that historically Islam is God’s most recent revelation, so Judaism and Christianity are not false religions but are “preparations” for the final revelation of the prophet Muhammad.

But Christianity, especially Roman Catholic Church is excellent case study to illustrate this approach. At one time, the Vatican taught that “outside the church there is no salvation”, embracing a position of theological exclusivism; however, ever since the second Vatican council (1962-1965). Inclusvism has been the official position of the Roman Catholicism. During the second Vatican council, the council said:

Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek God and moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience nor does divine providence deny the help necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not
yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God, but who strive to live a good life, thanks to his grace. Whatever goodness or truth is found among them is looked upon by the church as a preparation for the Gospel.²⁹

Therefore Christian inclusivist affirms the centrality of salvation through Jesus while also maintaining the universality of God’s plan to save sinners.

Inclusivism is able to offer hope that grace will prove stronger than sin and that God’s grace is not restricted to those “lucky” enough to be born at the right time and place. Two characteristic axioms of Christian inclusivism are: 1) Jesus is the only mediator of salvation and 2) that God intends salvation to be available to all. This maintains the core Christian belief that Jesus is necessary for salvation but effectively deals with the problem of what happens to those who die without hearing the Gospel because somehow, God will grant an opportunity for all to respond to his salvific grace through Jesus Christ. Though God’s grace is present outside the church, the church is to be the bearer of God’s saving purposes for the world.

We can also refer to axioms of inclusivism as particularity and universality. Inclusivism differs from pluralism by stating clearly that salvation is found only through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Regarding universality, inclusivism differs from exclusivism by claiming that God intends his salvation to be available to all humans everywhere.

This approach was popularized by German Jesuit and theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) and Christian theologian Clark Pinnok.

Anonymous Christian is the controversial notion introduced by the Karl Rahner which declares the people who have never heard the Christian Gospel or even rejected, it might be saved through Christ. Non-Christian could have “in (their) basic orientation and fundamental decision,” Rahnet wrote, “Accepted the salvific grace of God, through Christ, although (they) may never have heard of the Christian revelation. Anonymous Christianity has been

regarded as the one theological idea that most shaped the second Vatican council.

Rahner has four theses which introduce and explain this concept of anonymous Christianity. The first is that Christianity has no equal among the other religion secondly other religions contain mixtures of natural knowledge of God as well as depravity because of original sin, mixed in with this good and bad is the supernatural grace of Christ, which is given as a free gift. Therefore, other religions can be thought of as lawful, but not free from sin and error. Thirdly, Christians must regard adherents to other faiths not merely as Non-Christians but as anonymous Christians because they have been touched partially by God’s grace and truth. Finally while the Church is not the exclusive holder of salvation, it is a tangible expression of what is a hidden reality outside of it. Rahner’s theology of religion seems to satisfy no one and although it is a middle ground between exclusivism and pluralism it is not an adequate response. His theory implies a lack of respect for the devout Buddhist or Hindu who seeks salvation is his or her own religion and chooses not to be a Christian.

In contrast to Rahner’s naivety with regard to other religions, Pinnock advocates for an inclusivism that in a bit more moderate and appealing to a larger group of people. Pinnock believes that the spirit is at work in other religions and works to prepare people to hear the Gospel of Christ, either before or after death.

In fact Pinnock is a leading proponent of evangelical inclusivism who believes that Christians should take seriously the doctrine of God’s omnipresence. God’s presence in the whole world indicates that God’s grace is also at work “in some way” among all peoples. Therefore Pinnock’s model of inclusivism lacks the naivety and offensiveness of Rahnet and has significant potential to serve as a moderating voice in the debate about religious pluralism.
But the inclusivism approach is found generally offensive- or at least irritating by most people, because it tends to undermine the special identity and uniqueness of every religion other than one’s own. It encourages us to say: “why my religion should be including as a part of some other religion? My own religion is broad enough to include or swallow all other religions. Such rhetoric is clearly not a pointer to peace, individual or collective. Additionally this approach is seen as arrogantly exclusivist, if observed starting the viewpoint of other religions. For example from Christian perspective Hindu are not saved by their dharma, and Muslims are not saved by their works, but all are saved unaware by Christ. This not only proves with the intention of salvation doctrine of all other religions are fake but also with the intention of people are not saved due to the fact of following the religious road of their religious conviction.

2.3. SYNCRETISTIC APPROACH

Syncretism is the reconciliation of the different religions by taking keystones from different faiths.\textsuperscript{30} Therefore this approach is the attempt to harmonize disparate, even opposing beliefs and to meld practices of various schools of thought. It is especially associated with the attempt to merge and analogize several originally discrete traditions, especially in the theology and mythology of religion and thus assert an underlying unity. Those who follow the syncretistic approach feel that every existing religion in its present form has certain limitations. Those recognize the diversities in religion but hold that these are not antagonistic to one another. They believe that a new religion will eventually emerge, or can be created, by combining the strong points of every religion and omitting their weak points. So religious Syncretism exhibits blending of two or more religious beliefs systems into a new system, or the incorporation into a religious tradition of beliefs from unrelated traditions. This can occur for many reasons, and the latter scenario happens quite commonly in areas where multiple religious traditions exist in proximity and function actively in the culture, or when a culture is conquered and the conquerors bring

their religious beliefs with them, but do not succeed in entirely eradicating the old beliefs or, especially, practices. If we look at the history of religions, we will easily notice that most of the syncretistic thinkers such as Akbar (1542-1605), Kabir (15th C), Bahuulla (1817-1892) and Ram Mohan Roy (1773-1883) were responding to the conditions in which they lived. They were trying to prevent the endless bloodshed and fighting between the different religious groups by uniting them, Islam and Hinduism in the case of Akbar and Kabir, Christianity and Hinduism in the case of Ram Mohan Roy. That is why all these attempts were praiseworthy and successful, at least in the beginning. However, we cannot claim that their successes were permanent. This is because, first of all, syncretism can mean the rather artificial joining of quite different religious beliefs and practices that together lack necessary coherence and consistency. Every religion has a recognizable character of its own, an organic unity. Therefore, it cannot melt into another easily. Secondly most syncretistic attempts result in the emergence of a new faith by the side of the other two faiths, like the Sikh religion and Bahai religion. Furthermore most of these movements became dogmatic or sectarian in their attitude as soon as their funder passed away. What we learn from history is that all endeavors to create unity in this way have only been of a transitory nature.31 So this does not mean, of course, that we should never combine in our own religious practice elements from other religious traditions. We can do so and it can actually serve to strengthen our core religious beliefs. But, when we do so, it must be done intelligently, so that our spiritual practices form an integrated whole supported by a metaphysically sound way of life. The key words here are integration and harmony.

We should also notice that religions may have synergetic elements to their beliefs, but adherents of so-labeled systems often frown on applying the label, especially adherents who belong to revealed religious systems, such as the brahmic religions, or any system that exhibits an exclusivist approach. Such

31 Ibid.
adherents sometimes see syncretism as a betrayal of their pure truth. By this reasoning, adding an incompatible belief corrupts the original religion; critics of a specific syncretistic trend may sometimes use the word “syncretism” as a disparaging epithet, as a charge implying that those who seek to incorporate a new view, belief, or practice into a religious system actually distort the original faith. Non-exclusivist system of belief, on the other hand, may feel quite free to incorporate other traditions into their own. In modern secular society, religious innovators sometimes create new religions syncretically as a mechanism to reduce inter-religious tension and enmity.

Of all the world religions, Christianity is probably the most syncretistic. Although rooted in Judaism, Christianity quickly came to absorb elements of Zoroastrianism (the ancient dualistic religion of Iran) some important features of pharaonic Egyptian religion, the religions of ancient Mesopotamia, and a number of Greco-Roman cults, which were they highly syncretistic. The Zoroastrian impact, which was already present in postexilic Judaism, was profound indeed. The prime example here is the intense Christian (and late Judaic) emphasis on a constant struggle between good and evil, which was the essence of the religion found by the Iranian prophet Zoroaster (or Zarathustra, C.630-550 B.C.E.) The fully evolved figure of Satan is a classic example of syncretism: a fusion of the Hebrew concept of Lucifer, the “fallen angel” and the Zoroastrian figure Angra Mainyu (Ahriman), who is the evil opponent of Ahura Mazda (ormazd) the “wise lord” and the embodiment of light, truth and goodness. Moreover, the late Zoroastrian tents tell of a final conflict between Ahura Mazda and Angra Mainyu, during which a messiah-like figure will appear and lead the forces of Good. This, of course, is dramatically reflected in a number of Judco-Christian apocalyptic tents, from the book of Daniel to the book of revelation. The important thing here is that neither Angra Mainyu nor Lucifer is identical to Satan. Rather, the Judco-Christian figure is a syncretism of two otherwise distinct evil entities.
Islam also drew extensively on older religions, including Christianity and Zoroastrianism, especially after the Muslim conquest of Iran in 641 C.E. The chief Muslim demon, Iblis, is markedly similar to Angra Mainyu and Islam also holds that there will be a final, Armageddon-like battle between the forces of good and evil. Classical and modern Hinduism can be characterized as a grand syncretism between the indigenous Dravidian belief systems of northern India, as reflected in the artifacts of the Indus Valley civilization and those carried into India in the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. by the Aryans, whose beliefs were a variant of those carried by Indo-European speakers across Eurasia from India to western Europe. One of the best examples is the major Hindu god Shiva, the third member of the trinity that includes Brahma and Vishnu. Shiva is often called “the Lord of Beasts” and an Indus Valley stamp seal found at Mohenjo-Daro dating from about 1800 B.C.E. shows a god seated in the lotus position and surrounded by animals. This figure’s connection with the later iconography of Shiva is clear and thus strongly suggests that in question reflects a syncretism of the ancient Dravidian and Aryan religions. Even the fully evolved Hindu caste system involves an amalgamation of the Aryan tripartite social class system, which they shared with other ancient Indo-European-speaking communities, and the indigenous emphasis on occupation groups, which is clearly evident in the physical layout of the chief Indus Valley cities: Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. Finally, there is an important point that many today are trying to apply this approach at the individual level. They create their own sort of “Cafeteria” religion—picking up something from Buddhism here, a little Hinduism there, a little from the native American tradition, and then topping it off with Christianity and Santa clause for many, creating a religion in the way that you would pick up spare parts at an automobile junkyard is appealing because you can discard what’s uncomfortable and keep what’s convenient and pleasant. This might provide a feel-good sensation for some time, but that’s about all it can do. When we are faced with crises that touch the deeper core of our personality, this kind of self-
created superficial “religion” cannot provide the strength and substance that we both need and want.\textsuperscript{32}

2.4. TRANSCENDENTAL UNITY OF RELIGION APPROACH

Many thinkers have posited the essential unity of the religions and have attempted to reconcile formal religious antagonisms under an array of different philosophical and theological canopies. The transcendental unity of religion that posed from traditionalist view is one of these endeavors.

The traditionalist or perennialist perspective began to be enunciated in the 1920; by the French philosopher Rene Guenon and, in the 1930s, by FrithjoF schuon himself. The Harvard orientalist Ananda Coomaraswamy and the Swiss art historian Titus Burckhardt also because prominent advocates of this point of view. Fundamentally, this doctrine is the Santana Dharma- the eternal religion of Hindu Neo- Bedantins. It was supposedly formulated in ancient Greece, in particular, by Plato and later Neo-Platonist and in Christendom by Meister Eckhart (in the west) and Gregory Palmas (in the East)

At the present moment all religions contain mixture of truth, which is divine and error which is human. The fundamental or essential of all religions are the same. There is difference only in the non-essential. The apparent differences in religions are due to a misconception or misconstruction of the followers. The conflicting points are all due to misconception and misconstruction of truth on account of prejudice, bigotry, lack of purity of heart and subtlety and purity of intellect and perverted condition of the intellect of people. All prophets are messengers of God. They are great souls who have had divine, intuitive perception of God. Their words are infallible and sacred. The Koran or the Zend- A Vesta or the Bible is as much as sacred book as the Bhagavad-Gita. Truth is neither Hindu nor Muslim, nor Buddhist nor Christian, Truth is one, homogenous, eternal substance. According to these background followers of the transcendent unity of religions theory believe that religion is

presented as having two related aspects and issue of unity and diversity in religions can be converted into two spiritual types: esoteric and exoteric.

Simply stated, the exoteric deals with the different forms and rituals that are used in religious expression while the esoteric knows and accepts that all religions are alike in heart and in essence. Therefore the exoteric aspect reveals the diverse, the different, whereas the esoteric contains the same, the essential. It is the unifying core, the summit which all paths lead and at which they all converge.

“in the spiritual world and still more, the universal order”, Guenon writes, “it is unity that presides at the summit of the hierarchy”. The mountain metaphor is frequently used to illustrate the shared conviction that all religions are but so many roads that lead to one and the same summit. Coomaraswamy takes an ethical stance to argue that all great religions of the world have valid claims to truth, which must be respected and understood in a comparative mode and not just tolerated. Doctrinal differences, conspicuous at the mountain’s wide base, should not prevent us from recognizing the inner meanings or seeing the peak where all differences vanish such recognition does not necessarily demand a change in the path one finds oneself on naturally, for “he who goes round about the mountain looking for another is not climbing.” Asserting the necessity of this approach for cross- religious understanding, Coomaraswamy writes: “The greatest of modern Indian Saints actually practiced Christian and Islamic disciplines, that is worshiped Christ and Allah, and found that all lead to the same goal; he could speak from experience of the equal validity of all these ‘ways’, and feel the same respect for each, while still preferring for himself the one to which is whole being was naturally attuned by nativity, temperament and training.”

The doctrine of the Transcendent unity of Religions can be summarized according to the following formula provided by Firth of schuon in his book of the same name:
“Pure and absolute Truth can only be found beyond all its possible expressions: these expressions, as such, cannot claim the attributes of this Truth; their relative remoteness from it is expressed by their differentiation and multiplicity, by which they are strictly limited”.

To illustrate the difference between metaphysical and theological knowledge, and indirectly to emphasize the unity of religions, Schuon uses the metaphor of light. He compares metaphysical knowledge to the awareness of the “colorless essence of light and its character of pure Luminosity” and theological knowledge to the assertion of light’s particular colors. Although both modes overlap in their distinction between light and darkness, they differ in the level of reality they disclose. Metaphysics discloses universal truths, whereas theology discloses divine revelations, which are but particular expressions of the universal truths. Philosophy is further removed from theology in that it deals with rational concepts, religions, thus viewed; translate universal truths, into dogmatic languages that are accessible by the wider public through faith. But the colorful variations of the dogmatic beliefs fade at the level of universal truths where all religious differences disappear. In brief, the reality of the transcendent unity of religions is shown to reside in the oneness of the Truth that governs all modes of manifestation and existence.

Seyyed Hossein Nasr as a famed traditionalist expounded traditional standpoint of studying religions in knowledge and the Sacred.

He wrote:

“The traditional method of studying religions, while asserting categorically the ‘transcendent unity of religion’ and the fact that all paths lead to the same summit’, is deeply respectful of every step on each path, of every signpost which makes the journey possible and without which the single summit could never be reached. It seeks to penetrate into the meaning of rites, symbols, images, and doctrine which constitute a particular religious universe but does not try to cast aside these elements or to reduce them to anything other
than what they are within that distinct universe of meaning created by God through a particular revelation of the Logos . . . . It also opposes firmly every form of reductionism or the sentimental unification or even rapprochement of religions, which would do injustice to the existing difference and the unique and particular spiritual perfume and genius of each tradition willed by God, to the necessity of discontent and acceptance of all that comprises a particular religion as coming from God and therefore not to be cast aside for any reason of human order”. But from the standpoint of this thesis what matters (most) is how similar or dissimilar the ‘Transcendent unity of religions’ and ‘Harmony of religions’ theories are, because Gandhiji’s Harmony of religions theories similar to transcendental unity of religions theory and at the same time is different.

As I mentioned before the claim of transcendental unity of religions theory are that religions enjoy two outward and inward aspects. The outward aspects of religion which involve ceremonies and etiquette are different, whereas the inward aspect of religion which is included the religion’s gem and its essence, in all religions aren’t more than one, all religions are the God's emanations and despite the differences on languages, religious laws and titles, they have fundamental unity with each others.33 Therefore traditionalists uses unity of religions interpretation and their purpose of unity is emphasizing on its’ united of religions inward aspect. Whereas Gandhiji used the term of “Harmony” without any reference to outward and inward and philosophical particularity in relation to different points of these two theories we can say:

The transcendental unity of religions theory is based on Gnostic approach towards religion and it has been gone up on view point of traditionalists which mainly have philosophic and Gnostic tendencies, whereas Gandhiji wasn’t either philosopher or Gnostic in idiomatic word and his reasoning on defense of religion is destitute definitions and technical reasoning of conversant with debate and argument. From other direction, the interlocutors

of transcendental unity of religions, like many of other theories of traditionalists are the elites or persons who are at least conversant in respect of theatricals with literature of rational and Gnostic subject. Whereas, Gandhiji was addressing to masses and it was verified on the scene of Indian actions and challenges, the society’s poor classes also connected with his word content simply; and since common people are involved more dependent on their fillings and prejudice and they seriously enter to sect’s disputes and struggles and more than others they harm or undergo failure. Therefore it’s more important to convince and enlighten them about harmony of religions. Both traditionalists and Gandhiji is pertinacious critic about modernity but their approach on modernity and its effect on their views are different. For traditionalists challenges of quantity-oriented wisdom and empirical science against revealed learning is taken into considerations. But Gandhiji suffered of war and violence as the ugliest of new world symbol and categories of kindness and non-violence are ongoing spirit on all his thoughts and functions.

2.5. PLURALISTIC APPROACH

The history of the encounters among adherents of different religions has taken the form of conflict, diatribe and even hatred. One of the most important causes is the tendency of religious sentiment to be strengthening among adherents of different religions. Consequently, the conflict between Israel and Palestine and the world of Arab continues. Revivalism of Biblical Christian groups in Latin America, rivalry among Moslems and Christians in Africa, Conflict between secularist and clergymen in Turkey, conflict of Hindu’s fundamentalist facing adherents of different religions in India, the war of religious group in Afghanistan and Iraq are all examples.

Basically, diversity stands as a hallmark of contemporary culture in the modern world, and it is no less significant in religion than elsewhere. Here in a society that consisted of many different groups such as religion, culture as well as group of interest, every people have their own orientation. Due to this fact, conflicts between religions have spread larger in every society.
Based on problems above, religious scholars carved out religious pluralism as a problem solving in their field of religious relationship. Religious pluralism is a term for religious diversity that imputes positive meaningful to religion and encourages appreciation of religion’s many forms. Many pluralists argue that all religions have their own religious teaching. The problem of religious pluralism actually arises from the fact that there are many such claims. In the view of this variety of truth claims, it would seem that they cannot be true; and in that case many they not very well all be false. An alternative that will explore here, use to the experiential apologetic rejects the assumption that only one of the different religious beliefs systems can be true.

Within academic studies of religion, religious pluralism has played an important role in expanding the horizons of many students and encouraging intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness. In this respect religious pluralism fosters the liberal education, scholarly inquiry, and open exchange valued in academic life compared to exclusionary approaches to religion that hold one faith tradition up as true or superior and consider others to be false or inferior, religious pluralism marks an important advance in endeavors to understand peoples and cultures on their own terms. At the same time, though religious pluralism operates to some extent like a religion itself, a conceptual framework of interpretation that rests in a universal and finally mystical understanding of religion and its essential importance for human existence.

The repressive violent and antisocial aspects of religion are hard to ignore, but the significance of these aspects declines insofar as the purpose of interpretation is to appreciate religions most enriching and beneficial aspects. As a model for thinking about religion and religious diversity, pluralism tends to lift up most inspiring and socially constructive aspects of religion, and downplay those aspects that fall short or fail to harmonize.

In respect of meaning, religious pluralism is a commonly used term with several distinct meanings. Depending on the content the term covers a wide
variety of theological and philosophical discussions, though each revolves around the central idea of different religious belief systems working together.

Religious pluralism is often used as synonym for religious tolerance, although the two concepts have distinct meanings. Religious tolerance implies that each person is entitled to their own set of beliefs without judgment conformity to some cultural or societal standard. While religious pluralism includes tolerance it is a more broad term that asserts that possible religious truth and values exist in many different doctrines, not solely that of the particular individual some theologians argue that an omniscient deity, such as God, created all of the religions in order to speak to people in ways that most appeal or relate to their circumstances in life. As such, even though their customs are different, they are all from the sole source. As a theological argument, religious pluralism suggests that if all religion is from the same original source, then all must be possessing of similar truth. This argument stresses the similarities between religions, often citing common stories, figures and doctrines. Thus the pluralistic approach not only acknowledge religious diversity but also accepts that each religion is completely valid according to its own terms and concern actually the pluralistic standpoint attempts to accept others as they are since there is no generally accepted criterion to distinguish between the true and falsehood of different religious systems, it is important that the followers of such systems should admit that other systems are true in their own way. Suggesting that all religions have truth and value causes considerable problems for religions that preach an exclusivist idea.

The theorist and proponent of pluralistic approach is major contemporary philosopher of religion, John Hick. Hick starts to say that the three fold exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism scheme could be applied to both truth and even salvation claims. For Hick conflicting truth claims among different religious traditions pose an obvious problem for pluralistic hypothesis.
Hick claims that all religion authentically experiences the real still each tradition holds beliefs that contradict the beliefs of other traditions.  

Hick explains that the various religious traditions find themselves in sharp disagreement on many issues. Here Hick notes three levels on which religious traditions disagree. These are: (1) Matters of historical fact (2) Matters of Trans historical fact and (3) Differing conception of the real

Respecting philosophical explanation of religious pluralism admittedly such an expanded understanding of religion has been forming in many minds during last seventy years or so has come to be known as religious pluralism. As shown by Hick this is the view that great world faiths, both theistic and non theistic, are different culturally formed responses to the ultimate and thus independently valid channels or contents of salvific human transformation.

Basically Hick’s plurastic hypothesis is that of an ultimate ineffable reality that is the source and ground of everything which is such that in so far as the religious traditions are in stereological alignment with it they are content of salvation. These traditions involve different human conception of the real with correspondingly different forms of experience of the real.

In short, this is like that all traditions are culturally conditioned response to the “same” ultimate reality still, how can all traditions be experiencing the real when their conceptions of the real are divers and contradictory? Hick resolves this dilemma by borrowing from the thought of Immanuel Kant who distinguishes between Nominal world, the world as it exist unperceived, and phenomenal world, the same world as humanly perceived, with all the difference that act of perception makes. Here Hick applies Kant’s distinction to religious phenomena and proposes a distinction between the real and situation,

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as it actually exists, and the real as perceived and experienced by individuals in a particular tradition.\textsuperscript{37}

Hick by means of famed example of blind men and elephant says that God is like an elephant surrounded by blind men. One man touches the elephant’s tail and says “The elephant is like a rope” Another touches the trunk and says, “No, it is like a snake” another touches one of the elephant’s massive legs and says, “You have both got it wrong; it is like agree” Another touches the elephant’s side and says “Nay, brothers, it is like a wall” Just as the blind men experienced the same elephant is different ways, religions experience the same ultimate reality in different ways. Some experience it as a personal God, others as Brahman others as a plurality of deities, and so on. How we experience the ultimate reality depends on our culture and education and modes of thought.

This approach is explained by Ramakrishna a nineteenth-century Indian Saint and his disciple Swami Vivekananda with different analogies, such as the analogy of reaching the roof through different ways, either by stone stairs or by wooden stairs or by bamboo steps or by a bamboo pole\textsuperscript{38} and the analogy of going to Dakshineshwara by carriage, by boat, by steamer or an foot. You will choose the way according to your convenience and taste, but the destination for all is the same. Some of you will arrive earlier than other, but all win arrive.\textsuperscript{39}

Ramakrishna not only advocated this idea and a theoretical level, but, following Christian and Islamic ways of worship and reaching the realization of Christ and Mohammed respectively, he showed us this is a fact rather than a fiction.\textsuperscript{40}

Similarity Swamy Vivekananda proclaims, “I have not one word to say against any religion or founder of any religion in the world. All religions are

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid. II. P.7070
\textsuperscript{40} Swami Saradananda (1978), Sri Ramakrishna the Great Master, Vol-I, P.299-300&332.
sacred to me”. In other well-known and often quoted words, Swamy Vivekananda following his master’s way says:

I accept all the religions that were in the past and worship them I worship good with every one of them; in whatever form they worship him. I shall go to the mosque of Mohammedan, I shall enter the Christians church and kneel before the crucifix; I shall enter the Buddhist temple, where I shall take refuge in Buddha and his low. I shall go into the forest and sit down in meditation with the Hindu, who is trying to find the light which enlightens the heart of every one.”

There are some criticisms about this attitude. One famed criticisms is that if religions pluralism holds that all religious are true, then problems arise. For, if all religions are true, then since traditional Christianity is a religion, traditional Christianity must be true. And if traditional Christianity is true, then Jesus is the only way to God. But if Jesus is the only way to God, religious pluralism is false. According to this criticism religious pluralism is another variant of exclusivism itself.

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42 Ibid. Vol-V, P.305