Chapter 1

Introduction
The world has always had many religions and it is very unlikely that it will not be so in the future. The differences between the various religions are many. Some of them, which have aroused interest, are (a) forms of worship, (b) attitudes to other religions, (c) scriptures and beliefs contained therein.

Based on these differences there can be a variety of relationships between two religions. One of them is that of affirmation of superiority to oneself and inferiority to others. Distinctions like 'the faithful and the pagan', 'the Muslim and the Kaffir', 'the Arya and the Anarya', 'Nakhe and Bhavi', are not rare. These distinctions, generally covert but sometimes overt, were, and still continue to be a source of tension between religious communities. The most common form in which such tension manifests itself is riot between members of two communities. Communal riots between Muslims and Hindus, in places like Allahabad and Aligarh, are well known examples and require no details. The crusades and holy wars of the past, the War between Iraq and Iran, at present only strengthen the above statement.

Another kind of relationship that can exist between two religions is that of mutual tolerance. Here, one religion
allows the other to exist and operate, but does not put it on an equal footing. Lack of interest and positive unconcern about other religions characterise this attitude. Mutual dialogue is still another form of relationship that can exist among religions. Here one religion listens to the other and learns about it. Hence it obviates prejudices and paves the way to mutual recognition and respect. Based on dialogue, there can arise yet another form of relationship between two religions. Through dialogue, one religion becomes conscious of its own imperfectness and limitedness, and so realizes the need of being perfected and purified, by blending into it all the acceptable features found in others. This kind of relationship may be called as that of complementarity.

Our ultimate concern in the thesis is to discuss the question: Which of these relationships is the right one? And on what grounds? Before answering these fundamental questions, certain controversies which have actually arisen among the followers of different religions are dealt with here. They pertain chiefly to the problems: (a) of Idolatry, (b) of Conversion, and (c) of the Interpretation of scriptures.

But one may wonder, how can these problems be described as the problems of inter-religious dialogue? Or, what is the relationship between these three issues of controversy
and the title of the thesis? Such a question is not without justification. The term 'inter-religious dialogue' has already come to be used today in a rather restricted sense. Ever since Pope John XXIII proclaimed the "new openness" of the Church to the entire world at the inauguration of the Second Vatican Council, and the same was still more definitely articulated by his successor Pope Paul VI, in his opening address of the second session of the same Council, there has been a marked change in the mind and heart of the Catholic Church. The Church put an end to the age of anathemas, and came out openly with her willingness to enter into an active dialogue with non-Christian religions.

This is amply reflected in all the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council. Its Pastoral Constitution on the Church provides a general background for dialogue, as it opens up a new vision of the Church as the open Church, a Church that is ready to shed its past ghettoism and triumphalism and is coming forward to enter into dialogue with the whole human family. Moreover, its Declaration on Religious Freedom provides as it were a pre-requisite for this dialogue, by establishing the freedom of every man to practise his own religion. And the Council even brought out a special document on the Church's Relationship to Non-Christian Religions, wherein it had something to say about each of the major religions,
thereby showing a clear recognition of other religions as entities the Church can and should enter into dialogue with.

The willingness of the Catholic Church to enter into dialogue with other religions was further confirmed by the establishment of a special Papal Secretariat for this purpose. Explaining the purpose and activity of the Secretariat, Cardinal Marella said: "It is evident that the present time calls for a new contact between the Church and the non-Christians (distinct from that through her missionaries) mutual understanding, based no doubt on study but also on frankness, and the rejection of every prejudice. This will lead to mutual esteem to a sincere rapprochement, and to cordial collaboration in all possible fields." Still more emphatically Pope Paul VI, at the time of announcing the erection of the Secretariat, said: "In the present conciliar time and climate she (the Church) not only strengthens within herself the bonds of understanding, friendship and fraternal collaboration, but also seeks a level on which she can open the dialogue and meet with all men of good will."

This Secretariat has been actively initiating a lot of programmes for promoting a cordial dialogue with other religions. Also through its many publications such as the quarterly Bulletins, Guidelines etc., the Secretariat has been furthering the cause of dialogue with utmost earnestness and
sincerity. One of its Guidelines makes it very clear that this dialogue is aimed not 'to convert' the other party. Nor is it merely an exchange of ideas about the doctrines, beliefs, and practices of religions. Rather, it is an existential encounter motivated by love and sustained by a sense of respect, receptivity and reciprocity.

Thus it is patent from the above that the attitude of Catholic Christianity towards the other religions is clearly one of dialogue. The protestant Churches also have been involved in dialogue with other religions. Already about the beginning of this century they began inter-faith studies. And there is a special wing in the WCC (World Council of Churches), called DFI (Dialogue with Living Faiths and Ideologies), which is taking a variety of initiatives aimed at promoting genuine dialogue.

Given these marked changes in the attitude of Christianity towards other religions, it is bound to face certain problems. For, on the one hand its new attitude of dialogue, in its genuine form, must imply acceptance of the basic equality of the religious partners in dialogue. Otherwise dialogue would be a disguised means for converting the other party. On the other hand the long-cherished and deeply entrenched beliefs of Christianity (e.g. that Jesus Christ is the only Son of God, the final and full revelation
of God, or that the unique mediation of Christ and of the Church is necessary for the salvation of the whole of mankind etc.) imply an affirmation of certain superiority in itself. Obviously, then, there seem to rise a number of questions: "How should one resolve this contradiction or at least the incompatibility between the two sorts of implications, viz., those of the traditional position and those of the present day attitude of dialogue. It is problems of this nature that could actually be called 'Problems of Inter-religious Dialogue', taking 'dialogue', in the sense it has come to be used in the christian circles. But these are precisely the problems which we are not going to deal with in detail in our thesis. They are internal problems of Christianity, arising out of its commitment to one sort of formulation of its faith, which is in apparent contradiction to the basic equality of her religious partners, involved in the dialogue, into which Christianity seems to have entered with all earnestness.

However it must be noted that a more basic difficulty to a meaningful dialogue is the basic equality of religions themselves. Of course it is now possible for some of the religions to assume the basic equality of the various partners in dialogue. So much so that between the followers of different religions there is a more cordial relationship today than was possible even a few decades ago. But the difficulty, to relate this vague assumption of equality with
the many and real points of difference in religious beliefs and practices, is often the reason for the failure to extend this cordiality sufficiently beyond conference rooms, and dialogue meetings. We cannot carry on fruitfully with dialogue by an arbitrary decision to raise no controversial issues for discussion or by discussing only those matters where agreement is clearly in sight. We might even agree to disagree in an authentic dialogue. This does not mean a break-down of dialogue. It only shows that dialogue, to be meaningful, must not stop at a relationship of superficial nature.

So the need of discussing the more delicate problems is felt to be very important for the sustenance of whatever dialogic spirit the different religions may have by now developed, as well as for the promotion of that spirit. It is not unusual today, especially in the context of inter-religious contacts, to use the term dialogue in the rather restricted sense of meetings, discussions etc., where the fundamental assumption is one of the equality of different religions. This certainly indicates not only the earnestness and enthusiasm of the persons taking part in this kind of dialogue, but also the direction in which these religions are oriented. But, as has been pointed out already, dialogue in this sense, is still in its tender infancy and it draws heavily upon many historical and contemporary situations of
controversies and even conflicts which cannot be called dialogue in this restricted sense of the term.

Therefore, we use the term dialogue in its more general sense, which includes also various controversies between the adherents of different religions, and not merely the internal problems and conflicts that might be felt by one, who enthusiastically accepts the basic equality of religions, for the purpose of establishing a proper relationship with others as well as for making his own faith more meaningful. Thus we characterize a situation as dialogue, if it fulfills the basic requirement of dialogue, namely, the willingness to explain oneself and be explained to. That is why we consider such issues as idolatry, conversion etc. which are highly controversial even today as problems of inter-religious dialogue.

This wider sense in which we have used the term dialogue and the problems which we discuss are in fact more basic to the dialogue with its problems in the restricted sense, because the former provides not only the context but also the justification to the latter. Moreover, dialogue is not necessarily a relationship between equals, and the spirit of dialogue requires only the assumption of an absolutely basic equality, which is not the same as equality in matters of thought, belief, and practices. Thus our choice of these highly controversial issues as problems of inter-religious dialogue can well be
defended; in fact they can be thus shown to be the real problems of such dialogue.

Having thus introduced the topic and presented the problems with a view to bringing out their relevance and significance, we may now outline the scope and method of our inquiry. Evidently, the list of problems, we have given earlier, will show that it is not an exhaustive enquiry into all the issues of controversy prevalent among different religions. We have chosen only some of the controversies, which are of an illustrative nature. The problem of idolatry, which we deal with in the second chapter, is illustrative of the controversies among religions on the basis of differences regarding the form of worship. In some religions, idols are used in worship, while in others they are taboo. Of those, who do not use idols in their worship, many have decried the idol worshippers as idolaters, and that form of worship as simple idolatry and superstition. But, some of the idol worshippers have defended themselves that idol worship is not wrong. Thus the controversy has arisen about this form of worship. We are considering the contribution of some of the well-known Hindu leaders to this controversy. They are Raja Rammohun Roy, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi and Mahatma Gandhi. This controversy we present and discuss in the third chapter entitled "Law and Conversion."
The second problem, which we have chosen for our consideration in our thesis, is the live-issue of contemporary India, viz. that of conversion. The problem of conversion exemplifies one of the attitudes of any one religion towards another. Some religions have thought that their own religion was the true religion, capable of providing salvation to all men, and that outside the visible boundary of that religion there could be no salvation at all. Hence, moved by a sense of zeal for the salvation of souls, people from one religion have gone out to many parts of the world on an 'expedition' of souls, and made consistent efforts to convert others to their religion. Whereas others have objected to such programmes of conversion as well as their views of religions. Thus a controversy has taken place about conversion.

This being the most complex issue, and it continues to be a live-issue we have devoted a major part of the thesis (five chapters) for its consideration. To begin with, we have presented an account of the most apparent form of the controversy. Some members of the majority community of India want to prevent conversions by Law, whereas the pro-conversionists protest against such a move. The former, in support of their move, offer many socio-political grounds, whereas the latter reject them as groundless, and thereby claim the right of freedom to 'practise, profess and propagate' their own religion. This controversy we present and discuss in the third chapter entitled "Law and Conversion."
Of those who accept conversion in principle, some have tried to understand sympathetically the stand of the majority community in India. Viewing that their move for a legal ban on conversion arises out of their concern with the integrity of their community and the fear of erosion of the Hindu community, some Christians have tried to suggest 'Inculturation' of the converts as a solution to the problems of conversions. Whether, and how far such attempts are tenable, we discuss in the fourth chapter: "Inculturation and Conversion."

Finding that the fundamental reasons for or against conversion are not merely political, social or cultural but that they touch upon the parties' fundamental presuppositions about religions, we go into a discussion of those presuppositions in the three subsequent chapters. In the fifth chapter we consider such of those presuppositions which are clearly admitted and accepted by the parties concerned. But in the next, we go to dig out the ultimate presupposition of both the parties. Finally, in the seventh chapter we attempt an overall analysis of the whole question of conversion, weighing the fundamental presuppositions themselves.

Holy Scriptures are ultimately the bed-rock of almost all major religions, upon which they fall back for finding a support for their particular belief, practice or attitude to other religions. How, then, are the scriptures to be
interpreted? This becomes a controversial issue particularly in the context of other religious scriptures' claims conflicting with one's own beliefs, practices etc. An attempt at dealing with such controversies is made in the eighth chapter, but only in relation to the two problems we have considered in the thesis.

In the final chapter, we recapitulate the findings of our analyses of the three controversies we have considered in the thesis. Then we characterise the positions of the different parties involved, from which we further derive an understanding of the nature of not only the religious controversies but also of religion itself. We also derive the principles of approaching the other religions. The formulation of these, we hope, will have a practical bearing on the pursuit of a mature and fruitful dialogue, as well as a theoretical bearing on many issues relating to religion. All these, along with the limitations and the strength of our thesis, are spelt out in this chapter.

We have outlined above the treatment of the three issues we are considering in the thesis. But this does not adequately delineate the scope of our thesis. We must further state that our focus has been mainly on the discussions that have gone on in India. We have not bothered to treat the issues as arising in the context of the debates and discussions that
have been undertaken in the Western thought, though occasion­ally the views of some Western thinkers are mentioned in relation to the discussions of our issues. One may be inclined to think that the debates conducted elsewhere may be more learned, technically far advanced, and even more profound perhaps. But we do not agree with the idea that a technically more advanced way of handling the issues is in itself any advantage to us, unless it is about our problems, and the discussion has arisen against the background of our situation, and tradition. Also, our assumption is that a study of the controversies, as they have occurred in the Indian context, will have a bearing on the related issues discussed elsewhere.

Even of those issues which have arisen in the Indian context, one may intend to study the problems at a compre­hensive level, and also in depth. That is, one may try to take controversies covering the views of all the religions of / in India. However, there is necessarily a limitation to this in terms of sheer limitation of space. One has to select some religions, and consider only some aspects of the controversies. We have taken for consideration mostly those discussions and debates which have gone on between the representatives of Christianity and Hinduism. We have chosen, on the Christian side, mostly the missionaries including H.Kraemer. We have also taken some representatives of the
Indian Christian thinking, such as Fr. Staffner s.j. On the Hindu side, we have relied mostly on the original writings of some Hindu leaders like Raja Rammohun Roy, Swamy Dayananda Saraswathi and Mahatma Gandhi.

From the list of the parties to controversies, mentioned above, one can see that most of them do not have, to their credit, any 'systematic' treatise on the problems we intend to discuss. This situation is both an advantage and a disadvantage. It is advantageous to us in this that we get a virgin field. And we are left to understand the people and their views, devising our own ways of approach to their writings. Yet it is a disadvantage in that there is not initially something substantial to go upon. Therefore to pursue an inquiry in an area where there is no systematic literature of the kind which is normally expected in the philosophical field, so that one can discuss it critically on the problems and arrive at one's own estimate on them, we had to develop our own methods.

This problem became aggravated when we took up our inquiry on the live-issue of conversion. Most of the material regarding the controversy about 'Law and Conversion' (Chapter II), was collected from Reports like that of Niyogi Committee, and journalistic articles, that too, from those which appeared in magazines, journals of the popular level, news-paper
cuttings, 'Letter to the Editor' columns, so on and so forth. One major problem presenting itself to us was how to understand the different kinds of popular reactions to this ticklish issue, collected from such popular sources, and how to formulate the issues in such a way that they possess certain amount of philosophical content suitable for philosophical treatment.

Nor was the situation any better, as regards the other problems. Given the nature of the writings of people like Raja Rammohun Roy, Dayananda Saraswathi, that is, granted that their writings were not philosophical in the academic sense, and that most of their writings were written at different times, with different purpose in view, and that their arguments were sometimes contradictory, very often flimsy, we found a considerable amount of difficulty in dealing with the material. In the initial stages of our inquiry, it was not easy to develop a method of understanding the material at all, leave alone, formulating the issues involved therein. Gradually the approach was worked out, and the issues were identified, so that the possibility of a fruitful inquiry emerged.

A similar problem, but of greater intensity, arose in dealing with the writings of Gandhi. Given the mass of his writings on almost every topic he has touched, and also that they are all fragmentary, scattered, occasion-oriented and context-centred (that is, they have mostly been written either
in answer to certain queries raised with him, or to certain invitation to comment on a position the interviewee wanted to take on a particular issue, or himself commenting on a particular event or a problem etc.) a special method was needed to study the work of Gandhi. Following the inspiration of Prof. K.J. Shah, a fruitful method of dealing with the writings of Gandhi was devised and developed. Certain procedural points may be mentioned here:

(a) All the statements of Gandhi (that is, not only those which were impressive, oft-repeated by Gandhi himself, or oft-quoted by others, but also those that were rarely uttered by him; again not only those that are pleasing to one's own pet ideas and perspective, but also those that go evidently against them; further, not only those that cohere among themselves at the first sight, but also those that apparently contradict each other) were taken for consideration and given serious thought.

(b) Here we have mostly depended on the different anthologies of Gandhi's writings. Our assumption is that the main things Gandhi had to say, as well as the main objections to his views are represented there.

(c) Having considered all the writings on a particular topic, a concentrated effort was made to perceive the
connections and interconnections between them all, viewing
them as one whole.

(d) Finally, perceiving the fundamental unity of all
the writings of Gandhi, an effort was made to bring out the
unity of his thought and formulate the 'system' of his whole
thinking on the subject.

In spite of the labour involved in all this, I must
say, the result has been greatly rewarding. It was only at
the end of the whole hog, that one could find how great and
systematic a thinker Gandhi was. His thought proved not only
deeply religious, but also greatly systematic, as well as
theoretically sound. Of all the parties to the controversies
we found that Gandhi alone had touched really the essential
issues of religious plurality, sincerely trying to tackle
them both theoretically and practically. Again, while all
the others have been biased in one way or another, Gandhi
stands uniquely unbiased either by theory or practice of one
sort or another, but by fundamental considerations of what
does it mean to be religious, and religiously different.

This finding proved very useful in formulating the
issues of the different controversies, as well as in estimat­
ing the controvertists' presuppositions, and finally in
presenting a viable perspective to a fruitful inter-religious
dialogue, which was actually in our mind at the time of starting our inquiry. Thus taking inspiration from Gandhi's insight into problems of religious plurality, we were able to evolve also a correct method of understanding religions and their differences.

Our method consists in this that we take the best of a religion, — best, meaning the best interpretation of any belief or practice of a religion, given by a good follower of that religion — and see whether a belief or practice of a religion can legitimately be part of religion or not. Whether something is a legitimate part of religion or not is again judged only by seeing whether that belief or practice is able to provide its adherents with the possibilities of becoming great saints. This method of ours is in contrast with historical or sociological methods. It is not a historical method in the sense that we have not tried to examine whether what has been accepted by the parties to the controversies as true, was actually true or not. But we just accept whatever has been plausibly true as true and proceed to consider the reasons implied in the various arguments that have been presented. Nor is our method sociological as we have not tried to consider the circumstances which led to certain situations of controversies and so on.
How far our method as well as our inquiry have proved successful will be seen at the end of our study, i.e. in the final chapter of the thesis.