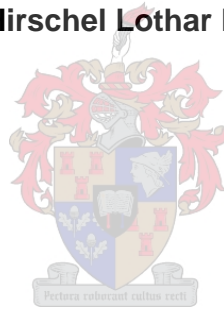


CHRISTIANS AND RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY?

A THEOLOGICAL EVALUATION OF THE MEANING OF AN ETHIC OF EMBRACE IN A CONTEXT OF RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

by

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**Dissertation presented for the degree of
Doctor of Theology (DTh) in Systematic Theology
at Stellenbosch University**

Promoter: Dr. G.V.W. Brand

March 2012

DECLARATION OF RESEARCHER

In submitting this dissertation, I declare that the entirety of the work contained in *Christians and religious diversity? A theological evaluation of the meaning of an ethic of embrace in a context of religious diversity* is my own, original work, that I am the owner of the copyright thereof (unless to the extent explicitly otherwise stated), and that I have not previously, in its entirety or in part, submitted it for obtaining any qualification.

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Hereby I declare that I have language edited and proofread the thesis *Christians and religious diversity? A theological evaluation of the meaning of an ethic of embrace in a context of religious diversity* by Hirschel Lothar Heilbron for the degree DTh in Systematic Theology.

I am a freelance language practitioner after a career as editor-in-chief at a leading publishing house.

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March 2012

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the Glory of God and my dear loving wife, Sheena, and to my beautiful daughters, Siaan and Reese, for their sincere love and support during this academic journey.

SUMMARY

Due to the consciousness of religious pluralism and the need for peace amongst the religious communities of the world, the researcher considered, and herewith presents, the arguments for and against each of three traditional theological models for evaluating the relation between Christianity and other religions. Although this theological debate about the truth and salvific value of non-Christian views of life is important, and although the three approaches discussed each brings out important aspects that have to be considered in this debate, they were found to be limited in an important respect, namely, that they do not suggest practical strategic solutions for how Christians should relate to people who hold beliefs that differ from their own.

With reference to the notion of an “ethic of embrace,” drawing on a number of New Testament texts as interpreted by theologians like Hans Küng, Miroslav Volf, Harold Nethland, Sam Storms, and Robert H. Stein, to name but a few, a strong case could be made for the necessity of such an ethic as a guideline for how the churches should interact with those who do not share their faith. It could be concluded that each of the three theoretical models, Particularism, Inclusivism and Pluralism, needs to be reconsidered from the perspective of an ethic of embrace. The researcher therefore inquired into the extent to which each of the theoretical models can be reconciled, and can indeed support and undergird, an ethic of embrace. Since, at least at face value, Particularism seems to raise most questions in this regard, it received particular attention. It was concluded that, also when applied in the context of the Particularist model, the ethics of embrace is the missing link that can help influence religiously motivated conflicts in a positive way. This allows for a more peaceable praxis as it not only addresses religious conflict in the world, but can also enable the Particularistic model to foster peace among religions and therefore, indirectly, peace among the nations of the world.

The themes of reconciliation, tolerance, forgiveness and hospitality, which are interconnected with an ethic of embrace form an important part of chapter 5,

with its focus on the truth and salvific significance of Jesus Christ reflected in his life as portrayed by Biblical witnesses. It is argued that He is not only the truth, or the one who spoke about the truth and his salvific significance, which is of central importance to the Particularistic model, but was able to demonstrate its practical application through the life He lived among humans. He demonstrated practically how the neighbour can be embraced in accordance with a particular understanding of the will of God.

OPSOMMING

Hierdie tesis ondersoek die potensiaal van 'n etiek van omhelsing ("embrace") aangesien drie tradisionele modelle in die teologie van die godsdienste, naamlik Partikularisme, Inklusivisme en Pluralisme, nie voldoende is om vrede tussen die verskillende gelowe van die wêreld te bevorder nie. Argumente ten gunste van en teen elke model, sowel as hulle sterk en swak punte, word behandel om duidelik aan te toon dat nie een van die drie modelle genoegsame praktiese strategiese metodes oplewer nie. Nadenke oor die waarheidsgehalte en moontlike verlossingskrag van nie-Christelike godsdienste, en oor Christene se wyse van interaksie met mense van ander gelowe, verskaf opsigself nie die nodige vrugbare praktiese riglyne nie.

Met betrekking tot die idee van 'n etiek van omhelsing, het verskeie teoloë, waaronder Hans Küng, Miroslav Volf, Harold Nethland, Sam Storms, en Robert H. Stein, om net 'n paar te noem, sterk konstruktiewe argumente ontwikkel wat die idee van 'n etiek van omhelsing ondersteun en bevorder in verband met Christene se verhouding met mense van ander gelowe. Hierdie studie argumenteer ten slotte dat die drie teologiese modelle wat ondersoek is 'n etiek moet heroorweeg van 'n verhouding van omhelsing teenoor mense van ander gelowe, indien hulle tot vrede tussen mense van verskillende gelowe wil bydra. Die navorser ondersoek ook tot watter mate die drie modelle met 'n etiek van omhelsing versoen kan word. Aangesien Partikularisme skynbaar meer vrae in hierdie verband oproep, word dit veral deurdink. Die navorser kom dan tot die gevolgtrekking dat die etiek van omhelsing, in die konteks van Partikularisme, dalk die verlore skakel is wat, ook vir die Partikulariste, geweld onder die verskillende gelowe kan teenwerk. Dit kan moontlik nie slegs vreedsame verhoudings tussen die verskillende gelowe teweegbring nie, maar ook daartoe bydra dat Partikularisme in die teologiese debat tot geloofsvrede kan bydrae.

Versoening, vergifnis, gasvryheid en toleransie is temas wat in verband met 'n etiek van omhelsing ter sprake kom, en vorm belangrike aspekte van hoofstuk 5, aangesien dit nie net in abstrakte sin die waarheidsgehalte en

verlossingskrag van Christus sterk beklemtoon nie, maar ook die wyse waarop dit in sy lewe, soos die Bybelse getuies dit narratief skets, in 'n praktyk van omhelsing van die medemens gestalte gevind het.

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I thank God for how He used my two promoters, dr. Gerrit Brand and prof. Nico Koopman, in this process. They helped and guided me immensely throughout this academic process. The success of this dissertation is as much theirs as mine. I honour and value their insights, knowledge, wisdom and faith in me. They motivated me to persevere until completion of this dissertation. It is an honour to know them as promoters, friends, and colleagues and as God’s servants who reflect his love and grace in, and to, a world that is in dire straits. “May the roads arise to meet you on your journeys ...” (part of an Irish blessing). My sincere thanks for all that you have done!

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CONTENTS

DECLARATION OF RESEARCHER	ii
DECLARATION OF LANGUAGE EDITOR	ii
DEDICATION	iii
SUMMARY	iv
OPSOMMING	vi
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	viii
Chapter One: An introduction	1
1.1 BACKGROUND.....	1
1.2 RE-AWAKENING OF RELIGION.....	2
1.2.1 <i>Introduction</i>	2
1.2.2 <i>From secularisation to de-secularisation to revival of religion..</i>	2
1.2.3 <i>My position as researcher</i>	3
1.2.4 <i>My theological method</i>	5
1.2.5 <i>Some religious demographics</i>	7
1.2.6 <i>Religious diversity</i>	8
1.2.7 <i>Religious conflicts/clashes</i>	10
1.2.8 <i>Traditional models</i>	16
1.2.9 <i>Ethic of embrace</i>	18
1.2.10 <i>Conclusion</i>	19
1.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION.....	20
1.4 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH.....	20
1.5 THE HYPOTHESIS.....	20
1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY.....	21
1.7 PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND STRUCTURE.....	21
Chapter Two	24
2.1 INTRODUCTION.....	24
2.2 DEFINING CHRISTIAN PARTICULARISM.....	25
2.3 REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTICULARISM AND THEIR VIEWS..	25
2.3.1 <i>Fundamentalists</i>	26

2.3.2 Evangelicals.....	27
2.3.3 Pentecostals/Charismatics.....	29
2.3.4 Karl Barth (Protestant).....	29
2.3.5 Hendrik Kraemer.....	30
2.3.5.1 Jesus.....	31
2.3.5.2 Christianity.....	31
2.3.5.3 Revelation.....	32
2.3.5.4 Salvation.....	32
2.3.5.5 Scripture.....	33
2.3.6 Lausanne Movement’s covenant.....	33
2.3.7 Core theological values of particularists.....	35
2.4 CENTRAL FEATURES.....	36
2.4.1 No value in other religions.....	36
2.4.2 The origin of non-Christian religions.....	37
2.4.3 Uniqueness of Jesus as the Only Way.....	39
2.4.4 Christianity as the true religion.....	41
2.4.5 God’s presence in other religions.....	44
2.4.5.1 Revelation.....	44
2.4.5.2 Salvation.....	46
2.4.5.3 Scripture as main authority.....	51
2.5 CONCLUSION.....	51
Chapter Three	55
3.1 INTRODUCTION	55
3.2 INCLUSIVISM DEFINED.....	56
3.3 OBJECTION AGAINST CHRISTIAN PARTICULARISM.....	58
3.3.1 No one religion.....	59
3.3.2 No one salvation for all – Jesus Christ.....	62
3.3.3 No Christian superiority but equal paths.....	64
3.3.4 Conclusion.....	66
3.4 THE MAIN FEATURES OF INCLUSIVISM	67
3.4.1 Karl Rahner.....	67
3.4.2 Nature is graced/God of love.....	68
3.4.3 Truth and grace.....	69
3.4.4 Religion is “a way of salvation”.....	70
3.4.5 The “anonymous Christian”.....	72
3.4.6 Limits for the church and for religions	73
3.5 THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH: FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS	75

3.5.1 Introduction.....	75
3.5.2 <i>Nostra Aetate</i>	76
3.5.3 <i>Ad Gentes</i>	79
3.5.4 <i>Gaudium et Spes</i>	80
3.5.5 “Revelation and not ways of salvation”.....	81
3.5.6 <i>Interreligious dialogue</i>	82
3.5.7 <i>Dialogue essential to Christian life</i>	86
3.5.8 <i>Dialogue and its limitations</i>	87
3.5.9 <i>The Reign of God</i>	88
3.5.10 <i>Position of the Holy Spirit</i>	89
3.6 BEYOND DUPUIS’S “FULFILMENT THEORY”.....	92
3.7 LIBERATION THEOLOGY.....	95
3.8 OTHER CATHOLIC VIEWS.....	99
3.9 CONCLUSION.....	100
Chapter Four	101
4.1 INTRODUCTION.....	101
4.2 DEFINING PLURALISM.....	103
4.3 OBJECTION AGAINST INCLUSIVISM.....	107
4.3.1 <i>The fulfilment theory</i>	108
4.3.2 <i>How does Jesus save?</i>	110
4.3.3 <i>The role of the Holy Spirit?</i>	111
4.4 MAIN REPRESENTATIVES.....	112
4.4.1.1 <i>John Hick</i>	112
4.4.1.2 <i>Background</i>	113
4.4.1.3 <i>Copernican Revolution</i>	115
4.4.1.4 <i>Hick’s epistemological inquest</i>	116
4.4.1.5 <i>Hick’s Christology</i>	1117
4.4.1.6 <i>Hick’s Christianity</i>	120
4.4.1.7 <i>Hick’s soteriology and revelation</i>	122
4.4.1.8 <i>Summary</i>	124
4.4.2 RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR.....	127
4.4.2.1 <i>Background</i>	128
4.4.2.2 <i>The cosmotheandric idea</i>	129
4.4.2.3 <i>The Divine</i>	131
4.4.2.4 <i>Humanity</i>	131
4.4.2.5 <i>The universe</i>	132
4.4.2.6 “ <i>Mutual fecundation</i> ”.....	133

4.4.2.7 Panikkar's pluralistic Christology.....	136
4.4.2.8 Summary.....	137
4.5 ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY MODEL.....	137
4.5.1 Love for one's neighbour.....	138
4.5.2 The suffering universe – common ground.....	139
4.5.3 "Walking in their shoes".....	141
4.5.4 A unique liberation Christology.....	142
4.5.5 Summary.....	144
4.6 ADDITIONAL SUPPORT FEATURES OF PLURALISM.....	145
4.6.1 Jesus not the only Saviour of the universe.....	146
4.6.2 Jesus as a symbolic representative.....	146
4.6.3 A Spirit Christology.....	147
4.7 OBJECTIONS AGAINST RELIGIOUS PLURALISM.....	148
4.7.1 Violation of uniqueness.....	149
4.7.2 Deceptive relativism.....	151
4.7.3 Jesus the "only" Saviour?.....	152
4.8 CONCLUSION.....	153
Chapter Five.....	156
5.1 INTRODUCTION.....	156
5.2 ETHIC OF EMBRACE DEFINED.....	159
5.3 REPRESENTATIVES OF AN ETHIC OF EMBRACE.....	160
5.4 MAIN FEATURES OF AN ETHIC OF EMBRACE.....	161
5.4.1 Universal unconditional love.....	163
5.4.2 Universal unconditional grace.....	166
5.4.3 Religious uniqueness: Working toward a greater common good.....	168
5.4.4 Postmodernism: Being open to "religious truth claims".....	171
5.4.5 Surpassing post-ecumenism.....	173
5.4.6 Building friendships with the "Other".....	177
5.4.7 Practice Biblical tolerance.....	179
5.4.8 Christians should engage in a ministry of reconciliation.....	183
5.4.9 Christians should produce the fruit of Biblical hospitality.....	187
5.5 CONCLUSION.....	193
5.6...In support of Christian Particularism [Postscript].....	193
Chapter Six.....	196
6.1 INTRODUCTION.....	196

6.2 ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR TRANSFORMING SOCIETY.....	198
6.3 OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP NEW RELATIONSHIPS AND RESTORE OLD ONES	200
6.4 THE REIGN OF GOD'S KINGDOM ESTABLISHED.....	202
6.5 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH DIALOGUE OF LIFE....	204
6.6 BUILDING THE CHURCH GOD'S WAY.....	206
6.7 GOD'S BLUEPRINT FOR BUILDING PEACE.....	208
6.8 CONCLUSION.....	209
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	211

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

“Christians and religious diversity? A theological evaluation of the role of an ethic of embrace in the context of religious diversity.”

1.1 BACKGROUND

The consciousness of religious pluralism has again become a reality in South Africa, and increasingly so in all parts of the world. John Coffey (2001:1) says that this is happening despite the opinion of secularists who maintain that secularism is the inevitable by-product of modernisation, and that the rise of modern science, pluralism, and consumerism will usher in the decline of religion.

According to Peter Berger, a sociologist of religion (1999:9-10), these thoughts have occupied the mindset of many educated Western Europeans, as they tend to judge humanity as a single linear pathway destined to secularity. Berger (1999:2) argues that the secularisation theory provides the idea that modernisation necessarily leads to the decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals and skeptics, such as religious sociologists. Coffey (2001:2) says that these secularists based their arguments chiefly on one of the many case studies that were conducted in England.

Even though it appears that secularisation is taking the world by storm by boosting the self-confidence of the unbelieving generation or the non-believing world, and leaving the believers experiencing an enormous amount of worry and concern, it was not long-lived, as in recent years, sociologists of religion have become more and more skeptical about the secularisation theory. This means that statistics like the above (the decline of church membership) must be interpreted differently. Coffey (2001:1) says that, although some Christians responded with a prophetic lament over the wasteland of contemporary society and that the church faced catastrophic and terminal decline due to secularisation,

in contrast, other Christians regarded the contemporary world with almost millenarian excitement and predicted a massive Christian awakening.

1.2 RE-AWAKENING OF RELIGION

1.2.1 Introduction

This section will explain that the so-called secularisation theory has been replaced by a de-secularisation thesis. It will also examine some demographical statistics of religion that give a clear indication of this development and will look at religious pluralism and its impact on religious conflict or clashes amongst the religions of the world. (There are many concepts around religion and how to distinguish them from other dimensions of life, which cannot be dealt with here in detail. Here, the aim is merely to point out some general trends).

1.2.2 From secularisation to de-secularisation to revival of religion

In the sixties, sociologists of religion argued that it seemed as though secularism would reign supreme in all democracies. Berger, himself a Christian (see Berger 2003), predicted that, by the 21st century, religious believers were likely to be found in only small sects, huddled together to resist a worldwide secular culture (Coffey, 2001:1). Jonathan Sacks (1991:2) says that Max Weber calls this the “disenchantment of the gradual displacement of the supernatural”. (Religious diversity often tends to lead to religious conflict [see also Reuters 2009:1-2]). There is a real need to find ways for religions to co-exist. Chapter five of this dissertation will take a closer look at this).

However, this did not last long as there was a revival of religion all over the world and Berger (1999:2) replaced his so-called secularisation thesis of the 1960’s with a so-called de-secularisation thesis arguing that “the assumption that we live in a secularised world is false: The world today, with some exceptions, is as furiously religious as it ever was, and in some places more so than ever.” To

support his claims of a religious explosion, Berger (2005:3) says the following about religious revival:

The Russian Orthodox Church, presiding over a strong religious revival in the post-Soviet era and enjoying the favour of the Putin compromise government, is flexing its muscles in the Balkans and the Middle East ... Chassidic movements with headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, are sending missionaries to Israel and to Jewish communities in eastern Europe ... The so-called "Jesus movie," ... produced by an American Evangelical organization and synchronized in well over hundred languages ... screened aggressively by missionaries in villages throughout India despite outrage of pious Brahmins and the opposition of the Indian government ... devotees [to Hinduism] dance and chant to Krishna in major American and European cities. Hindu missionary organizations ... are busily evangelizing wherever they can ... Buddhist groups with headquarters in Japan and Taiwan and south Asia are attracting sizeable numbers of converts in Western countries.

Coffey (2001:2) adds that communism set out to displace Christianity, however in the end the churches had the final say. Coffey (2001:2) says further that it was by the turn of the millennium that sociologists of religion began to talk, suggesting that the secularisation theory should be buried and put to rest.

1.2.3 My position as researcher

Growing up in a coloured community in the Cape Flats, despite the many challenges people had to face, has helped neighbours in many cases to develop mutual love and appreciation and to value one another. With limited resources available people did the best they could to try and better their current living situations. With the proper support from parents, there were those who were able to receive a good education and who went on to fulfil their dreams of a "better life" for themselves and their family.

However, socio-economic conditions such as poverty forced many to become school "dropouts", leaving school with no or little education. The only

work that fit their level of education was to become factory workers, domestic assistants or fishermen who earned a low income. Some men developed a craftsmanship and others worked as labourers. With the little they had for themselves and their family, they often still somehow had enough to share with those who were in need. Sharing and caring have become the norm amongst many of the inhabitants of the community. This has strengthened the lines of respect that have become a strong pillar helping the members of the community to live side by side with each other.

Religious groups in the community were and still are today mainly Christians and Muslims. For these groups working and living together was not optional, nor was it a choice. They were forcefully sardined together. Despite this political background the members of these groups have to a large extent learned that tolerance is pivotal for the survival of the community. The days on which these groups expressed their worship were not only known by all but were also respected. Their places of worship were visited occasionally when there was a funeral, a wedding or a celebration of any kind. Lasting relational bonds were cemented, as many of these religious institutions became beacons of hope for the inhabitants of the community.

Being an inhabitant of such a community and an adherent to the Christian faith, I have been struck by how global change has negatively impacted on close knit communities like the one I come from (see Pillay 2003: chapter 16 on the impact of global discourses about Islam on local Christian-Muslim relations). Where love and respect and tolerance for individuals and their religious belief system were once the order of the day, it is now increasingly being replaced by intolerance, strife and discontent with each other.

Where Christian-Muslim relationships were once largely marked by harmonious living, today these groups have lost much of the momentum of respecting each other's space. Christians who are generally believed to be commanded by God to preach his gospel of love, peace and hope are often more engaged in pointing out the weaknesses of religious others. Their close knit relationships have been negatively fuelled by the global religious issues. This is

braking down the very foundation on which the religious tolerance between these communities has been build.

This has not only put my theological stance in question but equally, it has challenged my approach to or relationship with adherents of especially the Muslim faith. This motivated me to enquire theologically into the question of an adequate approach to interreligious relations from a Christian point of view.

1.2.4 My theological method

Engaging with Anselm's well known concept of *fides quaerens intellectum*, faith seeking understanding (see Brand 2011:20-30 for a recent defence of this account of theology against modernist objections), I have developed an understanding of what theology is and the criteria, such as the Bible and revelation, theologians should use to evaluate theological views. In turn I define theology as "the understanding and implementation of the Bible in the context in which I find myself". Theology is not just theoretical but is an influential practice that affects life (see Brand 2003:183). How people think is how they respond. The Bible as a guide that is sometimes understood as telling Christians to live in peace may inform a theology in the context in which we live that emphasises peace. To the extent that this is relevant and adequate in our context contributes to the extent to which our interpretation of the Bible is authoritative and can be taken as a criterion of doing theology. In Christian theology as I understand it we read the Bible through the life of Christ. This I discuss and expand on in Chapter five.

From the context I discussed above I find it important that theology must make a contribution to peace between religions of the world. In this case my context is the community in which I grew up, where people were once my friends despite our different religious belief systems. With a strong dual Pentecostal and Dutch Reformed background, the real challenge came when I started to work for the Quaker Peace Centre, whose goal is to promote peace and harmonious living in communities on the Cape Flats. In essence, tolerating and accepting

each other despite the differences. Indeed, differences are taken as the strands that hold communities together.

For the first time I realised that my Christian faith has been practised in a vacuum of isolation. My understanding, as a Pentecostal, of God's word with regard to evangelising the lost with the good news of hope and salvation that is in Jesus Christ alone was that we must "Go and make disciples", but we (in my context) have been saying, "Come and be saved and then we will make you disciples." This is what I *practised* and it has made me become religiously retarded.

When I left the safe comforting confines and the boundaries of where I served as a minister, and found myself in the midst of a plurality of diverse religions, I did not know how to share my Christian faith with other religious believers when I was given the opportunity. The daunting question that became a burden to me was: "How do I share my faith with those who hold a different belief system than the one I have, without condemning, criticising or creating religious conflict, but at the same time not losing my own identity as a Christian?" I did not know how to do this!

The extent to which a theological position on the relations between religious communities and their convictions helps make sense of this contextual experience, it will have a foot to stand on. Such contextual relevance therefore functions as a criterion in my understanding of the task of theology.

This concern has led me to speak to a friend, dr. Clint le Bruyns, who was a senior lecturer at Stellenbosch University in the discipline of Systematic Theology and Ecclesiology at the time, who then introduced me to professor N.N. Koopman, currently Dean of the Faculty, who not only became my promoter, but also helped me with the process of formulating my research proposal. Shortly afterwards, dr. G.V.W. Brand became my promoter and continued to be my promoter until the end of my thesis, and has guided me in producing the final result of this thesis.

1.2.5 Some religious demographical statistics

This section examines some religious demographical statistics, the purpose being to determine the extent of the ongoing rising visibility of religion in the world, Africa and South Africa, and the general shape of the religious scene.

The Office of National Statistics 2001 Census revealed:

During the 2001 Census about ethnicity and religious identity in England and Wales information was collected which showed that these two countries are more culturally [sic] than ever before and the Christian faith population remains the largest religious group. Amongst the other faiths were the Pakistani Muslims (658 000), Indian Hindus (467 000), Indian Sikhs (301 000), Bangladeshi Muslims (260 000) and White Jews (252 000).

This statistic clearly indicates the increase of religious awareness in closely knit communities and the urgent need for finding key elements that would bind the adherents of different religions together, despite their differences. Finding these key ingredients would not ensure harmonious co-existence amongst the different religions of the world, but more importantly it establishes help with the development of communities.

The Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labour's International Religious Freedom Report of 2005 reveals figures on religious demography from the 2001 census:

In a country (South Africa) that has an area of 470 693 square miles, with a population of approximately 44.8 million, about 80 percent of the population belongs to the Christian faith, and 4 percent to other religious faiths, this includes Hinduism. About 15 percent claims to have no religious affiliation.

As we commented above regarding the increase of religious awareness, in order for South Africa to ensure peaceful co-existence amongst the adherents of the different religious groups, especially with the influx of foreigners, the leaders of

South Africa should become aware of the seriousness of religious diversity and how this diversity could change the morale of the South African society.

Reuters reporters Artur Asiimwe and William Maclean (2004:1) wrote in their paper: South of the Sahara, saying less than two percent of South Africans, or about 650 000 people, are Muslims who are mostly from Indian and Coloured communities.

They estimate that 74 700 are African Muslims (from fewer than 12 000 in 1991) when apartheid banned racial interaction.

They say further that like many other believers of the Muslim faith, the Cape Town based Islamic Council of South Africa strongly believes that the Muslim faith is growing stronger and becoming notably visible in the increase in the numbers of their Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), which grew from 138 in 1980 to a total of 891 in 2000).

More recent statistics by Johnson & Ross (2009:126-128) on religious demographical statistics in Southern Africa indicate that Christianity is ranked first with 82%. Considering statistics in 1991 about the Muslim religion, based on current figures, today the Muslim faith has the lowest percentage (2%), in Southern Africa.

The Hindu faith in Southern Africa also stands on 2%. However, it might appear, statistically speaking, that both these religious entities are on the increase as their adherents show loyalty and commitment to their call.

Looking at these statistics it is clear that religion has not been on the decline. Instead it has been on the path of numerical incline as more and more people express their beliefs. Nonetheless, along with the expansion of religious growth throughout the world, one stands witness to the negative impact of religion as believers of various religious groups engage in warfare – killing in the name of religion.

1.2.6 Religious diversity

This section on religious pluralism will explain that there is growth in the consciousness of religious diversity all over the world. It will also explain the two possible understandings of religious pluralism and how religious diversity has engendered an ideology of acceptance. Here the word “ideology” is used purely descriptively, indicating a framework of thought.

Samuel Huntington (1997:19-20) says the early 1990's gave rise to a new era in world politics. This was the beginning of an epoch when people started to express their culture and cultural identities more vigorously in America; people began to search for their own personal context. In 1994, after the collapse of the apartheid evil, South Africa underwent the same transformation as people of different races and cultures embarked on rediscovering their racial and cultural identities. S. James Anaya (1995:326) says that this has led people to becoming cultural citizens who acknowledge individual rights and identities, and the protection of these rights and identities.

Many South Africans responded to the occasion by enjoying their rights and responsibilities as they immersed themselves in this ideology of religious pluralism, and engaged in daily civic life. However, Coffey (2001:4) says it is the impression of many sociologists that religious pluralism corrodes traditional religious faith; as the existence of so many religious faiths, which make competing claims of truth, undermines the plausibility of religious belief. Stein Villumstad (2004:5) says that people in a pluralistic society hold strong values and beliefs as they express individualism and consumerism to their firm beliefs. This causes them to impact their context in which they operate but, at the same time, disregard the traditional religious beliefs (Sacks, 1991:64). Whether this is really the case or not it remains true that even isolated cases of conflict are often interpreted in terms of this assumption. To that extent the assumption might perhaps serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy.

In contrast to Coffey and Villumstad, in his paper: “An Islam experience of religious pluralism in post-apartheid South Africa”, Imam A. Rashied Omar (2000), of the Maitland Mosque in Cape Town, states that there is a difference between religious pluralism and religious diversity, as well as the many different

ways religious practices are being expressed. He calls this “minimal religious pluralism”. According to him the very nature of religious pluralism is built on relationship and not regalia (see also Shockley, 1988:140) – a theme I shall also take up in Chapter 5 when I discuss the ethic of embrace.

Omar (2000) says further that religious plurality deals with statistical facts, whereas religious pluralism speaks of the relationships between different religions, extrinsically engaging in dialogue with other religious traditions, and intrinsically examining its own religious traditions within its own borders.

Coffey (2001:4) says that a study in America has concluded that American evangelism positively thrived on pluralism because living in a pluralistic context causes evangelicals to sharpen their distinctive religious identities (see also Smith, 1998:76-77).

In the previously quoted essay on “Global pluralism and religion” Berger (2005:3) writes:

Modernity does not necessarily lead to the decline of religion. What it does lead to, more or less necessarily, is religious pluralism. Modern developments – mass migration and travel, urbanization, literacy and most importantly the new technology of communication – have brought about a situation in which different religious traditions are present to each other in a historically unprecedented manner.

Omar (2000) comments:

South Africans have had a negative understanding about religious pluralism under apartheid, and as a result Mandela committed himself to pursue a public policy of genuine religious pluralism. Being aware and realizing the important role religion plays in the make up of any country the policy that was adopted was not aligning to any religious tradition. However it welcomed active and constructive interaction with all religious traditions.

The researcher will consider this in more detail in Chapter four.

1.2.7 Religious conflicts/clashes

This section will explain how religious diversity often leads to religious conflict or clashes in the world. The researcher is aware that conflict not only occurs in religion, but for the discussion in this dissertation the focus will be on religion. Villumstad (2004:5) says that:

Religion is important in the lives of large majorities of people in the world. People live their lives based on their religious convictions as they engage with each other in the community. This significance of religion is played out in and through religious communities and institutions of which historic roots determine the nature and functioning. In a number of contemporary conflicts throughout the world, whether international or domestic, religion is mentioned as one of the influencing factors.

Reuters (2009:1-2) has reported that, in Africa, tension between the Muslim and Christian faiths has been an ongoing dilemma for decades. Since 2000, religion-related violence has caused the death of 5 000 people. A Kenyan historian, Ali Mazrui (2002:15-23) also noted that, since September 11, 2001, the tension that resulted in religiously motivated riots has brought the death toll to 200 people, as Washington made demands to African nations to help stop all Muslim militant activities.

In this world of modern civilisation, religious conflict has reached a dangerous level, resulting in ethnic and religious groups becoming a threat to peace and harmony for not only the state internally, but also for the world at large. The post-modern epoch has brought a rise of new challenges as the world struggles to deal constructively with religious pluralism and religious societies become more complex and more and more pluralistic. Coffey (2001:3) says that all over the world, religiously based complexity is growing as the states were removed from ecclesiastical control due to modernity.

David Machacek (2003) says that in the early twenty first century America was one of the fore-runners in opening its doors, welcoming and promoting religious pluralism as well as embodying racial, ethnicity and cultural and

religious diversities. He says that this was done for the advantage and advancement of technological development. This has given rise to racial and cultural conflicts and clashes amongst locals. Alister McGrath (2003:546) calls this the by-product, which led some people to believe that all religions are equally true and provide a valid pathway to God. (See Chapter four of this dissertation.)

As news regarding religious conflicts makes headlines, it appears that these conflicts provide no solutions. In an interview with Nathan Gardels (1991) in *New Perspectives Quarterly* about his book, *Global responsibility in search for a new world ethic*, Hans Küng states:

Whether Bahrain, Buddhist, Confucians, Christian, Hindu, Jew, Muslim, Shintoist, Sikh, or Zoroastrian, all share in their basic beliefs of conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family and the equality and the dignity of all human beings; a sense of sacredness of the individual person; a sense of the value of human community; a recognition that might is not right and that human power is not sufficient and absolute; a belief that force of inner truthfulness and of the spirit ultimately has greater power than hate; enmity and self-interest; a sense of obligation to stand by the poor and the oppressed; a profound hope that good will prevail in the end. All religions place a distance between [hu]man[ity] and his bestial drives.

The manner in which this message has been interpreted and propagated plays a pivotal role in influencing and affecting the stability of society. Whether these are communities of the same or different religious beliefs, it is important to note that religion has always been a source of conflict (Villumstad, 2004:back of cover).

Many authors, such as Jonathan Fox (2001:2) and Bruce M. Russett (2000:2) have placed Samuel Huntington's controversial 1997 thesis, "The clash of civilization: Remaking of world order" under the spotlight. However, the focus is mainly on Huntington's application of the term civilisation and the simplistic dualism it evokes. Huntington's starting point, that religion plays a significant role in contemporary international conflicts, is relatively uncontroversial. (See also section 4.2 Defining religious pluralism in this thesis). Huntington's (1997:13)

influential book *The clash of civilization: Remaking of world order* argues that the central and most dangerous dimension of emerging global politics will be conflict between groups from differing civilisations and that the greatest threat to world peace lies in the clash of civilisations, the religions of whom form a crucial dimension of their identities. At the same time, he states that an international order based on civilisation is the surest safeguard against world war. For Huntington (1997:28), the greatest conflicts will not be between rich and poor from different socio-economic classes, but will be conflict between peoples who belong to different cultural identities. It will be tribal wars and ethnic conflicts in civilisation.

The current Middle East crisis or conflict between Palestine and Israel manifested in South Africa when adherents to Islam submitted a petition to the United States Embassy in South Africa in protest against the unwanted presence of Americans in the Middle East. Huntington (1997:28) speaks about “kin countries” or “cultural kinship”, where groups from these civilisations rally to support their countries that are being oppressed.

Now, the religious dimension of the conflict about land in Israel/Palestine manifests more than ever before. There is also a surprisingly strong religious dimension to the post 9/11 conflict between the USA and terrorist groups and even countries. Sometimes, these conflicts are unfairly reduced to conflicts between Christianity and Islam.

Also in America the unification of different faith groups was witnessed as they expressed their contempt of America’s disreputable response soon after the catastrophic destruction of the Twin Towers in New York. People of different religious groups protested and did not support the retaliation of America’s counter response. This has strengthened the interfaith bonds amongst Muslim communities around the world as they gave strong rise to the adherents of their faith.

As seen in Delft, a local residential location in Cape Town, not all conflicts are religiously motivated. South Africa witnessed an unpleasant ordeal of xenophobia in 2007 when the killing of 42 innocent refugees (businessmen)

became the order of the day. These are the latest statistics according to the Statistics Association of South Africa.

The death of those who died, of whom many were Muslims, was the result of disputes that arose due to, not only economic, but also racial and cultural differences that led to violence. Many of these refugees are asylum seekers in South Africa due to the ongoing wars in their home countries, such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, from which many fled because of ethnic violence, only to find themselves in South Africa where similar ethnic violence raged in some local communities that threatened and eventually claimed some of their lives.

In this respect, at a symposium on the topic of Muslim persecution of Christians, the questions of discussion were: *“How widespread is the persecution of Christians in the Islamic world? Aside from its obvious tragic and horrifying ingredients, what is the significance and meaning of this persecution? Why is it almost never mentioned in the Western media? How is it connected to the conflict between the West and militant Islam? Why should America be concerned?”* Jamie Glazov (2003) says that, on another occasion, these extremists’ attacks on Christians in countries, such as Egypt, Algeria, Iran, Yemen, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Philippines, Nigeria, and Indonesia, are due to the lack of governmental interventions. Furthermore, he says that Christian interference to prevent the spread of radical Islam has led to civil war and communal violence. As a result, two million people (mostly Christians and Animists) were killed in the Sudan in the late 1980s since the National Islamic Front (formerly the Muslim Brotherhood) had taken control of the country.

Glazov (2003) says, since the introduction of the Islamic sharia law, in Nigeria alone approximately 11 000 people were massacred during the past three years. Amongst paramilitary militant organisations, such as the Laskar Jihad, allied to international terrorists, this has sparked motivation in Eastern Indonesia to butcher the local populations. Glazov (2003) adds this final comment:

There is widespread discrimination against Christians in Muslim countries. They are frequently at a disadvantage in marriage, custody and inheritance cases, are forced to subsidize Islam through taxes, are severely restricted in building and repairing churches, and are often excluded from government positions. This happens in most Muslim countries. In some cases, as in Pakistan or Iran or Nigeria, the testimony of a Christian counts less in a court case. Blasphemy and apostasy laws disproportionately target minorities. In Saudi Arabia, Christianity is entirely forbidden.

Zeeshan Haider (2007:2) reported on Wednesday, 11 July in *The Cape Times*, a local South African newspaper, that interreligious conflicts continue to make headlines around the globe. It said that in Islamabad, Pakistani forces killed the leader of the Red Mosque and more than 50 of his students. Whilst fighting in the holy war or Jihad, the leader of this rebel group preferred to die as a martyr for his religious faith. See “Events surrounding the Red Mosque stand-off between Islamic militants and the Pakistani Army in July 2007 in Islamabad.”

SAPA-AFP (2007:2) also reported in *The Cape Times* on Wednesday 11 July saying that in Kandahar near a NATO convoy, 17 Afghanistan civilians died in atrocious suicide bomb attacks to which extremists of the Taliban movement, in support of Al-Qaeda, were linked. SAPA-AFP (2007:2) says further in *The Cape Times* on Wednesday 11 July that other religious interrelated incidents, Maoist rebels in Raipur, India ambushed and killed dozens of Indian troops.

SAPA-AP (2007:2) further reported in *The Cape Times* on Wednesday, 11 July by saying that in Ramallah in the West Bank, Hamas has rejected Abbas's claims on al-Qaeda propaganda.

We can conclude that religious differences constitute only one aspect of all the cases mentioned, with ethnicity, culture, politics and economic interests also playing a role, so that it would be naïve to suggest that violence will disappear if religion does. Moreover, we have seen that the clash of civilisation thesis is not necessarily accepted by all scholars and that alternative perspectives, such as the Golden Rule Thesis (See Section 4.2 Defining religious pluralism), contribute alternative perspectives on the context under discussion here. Nevertheless, this

is no excuse for religions that are represented as agents of peace, so that the various conflicts do constitute a moral challenge to religion.

1.2.8 Traditional models

Against the backdrop of the reality regarding the effect that religion has on the globe, our concern as Christians should be whether the traditional models, namely Particularism, Inclusivism and the Pluralism of dealing with religious diversity need re-evaluation and reconsideration as they seem to be inadequate to bring full religious peace in the world. These models will be dealt with in chapters 2, 3 and 4. In order to declare my interest, the reader should know that I am personally sympathetic towards the Particularistic model. However, in those chapters I will not be arguing for this model over the other since my aim is not to defend a particular model, but rather to investigate whether an ethic of embrace has something to offer to the debate regardless of which model one supports, and the extent to which each of the models can or cannot be reconciled with such an ethic. The purpose of my analysis of the models is to present them accurately and highlight some questions arising from the debate between them.

Within Christian thinking (this dissertation will concentrate on the Christian discussion, about which the researcher is more familiar, and where the debate was mostly centred) McGrath (2001:546) says that the *Particularist view* is that only those who hear and respond to the Christian Gospel will be saved. Due to the impact of religious diversity, Christianity has taken on a dimension of projecting Christianity as a religion solely for Christians. This public proclamation through visible practices of Christianity in society seems to project even stronger than ever before that salvation is available only for a select group. He defines this, as only those who hear and respond to the Christian Gospel will be saved. In other words, the Particularist view strongly emphasises the significant aspect of truth and its salvific value.

In his book, *Christian theology: An introduction*, McGrath (2001:545) says that the *Inclusivist view* argues that: "Although Christianity represents the

normative revelation of God, salvation is nonetheless possible for those who belong to other religious traditions.” McGrath (2001:547) says, Inclusivism contends the following: “The saving grace must be available outside the bounds of the church – and hence in other religious traditions. This saving grace of God is thus available through non-Christian religious traditions, despite their shortcomings.” This projects the idea that the view of Inclusivism emphasises the significant aspect of truth; however, emphasis on a universal salvific value is promoted.

McGrath (2001:546) says that the third dimension of the traditional model is *Pluralism*, which states that all religions are equal. All religions are acceptably equal, not only in belief, but also in practice; all religions lead to God. McGrath’s (2001:546) formal definition is: “Pluralism retains the view that all the religious traditions of humanity are equally valid to the same core of religious reality.” This pluralistic view claims that all religions have equal truth and salvific value.

McGrath (2001:549) continues by saying that each religion is understood to represent a distinctive yet equally valid grasp of some ultimate spiritual reality, which some religions term “God,” and others define in rather more non-theistic or atheistic terms. For these reasons, pluralistic writers tend to refer to the spiritual reality that they believe to lie behind all religious terms, such as “ultimate reality” or “the Real,” thus avoiding the explicit use of the term “God”.

Theologians like David Lochhead and Klippies Kritzinger have criticised these models for being only concerned with a narrow concept of salvation that has to do with what happens with people after death. They argue that salvation is not “something that kicks in” securing a place in heaven when one dies, but that it must have meaning now as one lives one’s life now in every present moment. Kritzinger (1991:216-217) believes that one’s life must reflect meaning, which reflects an unbiased attitude toward those who hold different religious beliefs than yours. He supports Lochhead (1988:2) who says that a relationship that isolates or marginalises or even shows a spec of hostility toward the adherents of these other beliefs does not reflect Christ-likeness. They believe that we should

engage in an interreligious dialogue, which will strengthen our relationship with these faiths.

Kritzinger (1991:217-231) says that Christians should be aware that Christian theology is not the only theology alive but rightfully each religion has its own theological reflections. This might, according to him, help Christians to grasp and “internalize” the reality of religious plurality in our midst. Nurturing these ideas of being aware of will help us to do better theology when in dialogue with these different religious traditions. Our approach or dialogue would then be one of common purpose as we engage in looking at ways of how we can bring about a more just and reconciled society (in his context South Africa) now in this present life, that would project peaceful and harmonious living (see also Kritzinger, 1997:47-62; 1998:231-254; 2008:764-790).

I regard their criticism as valid of the traditional models. This raises the question why I choose to discuss these models. The narrow question is still influential, and the broader perspective offered by Kritzinger and Lochhead while enriching does not remove the narrower question of truth and post-mortem salvation. For Christians their answers to the traditional models impact the way they approach people of other faiths. The call to salvation after death is important in the Pentecostal context and other contexts and questions regarding it will remain relevant. What I want to determine still is whether an ethic of embrace can be meaningful for such Christians for whom the narrower soteriological question is primary.

1.2.9 Ethic of embrace

Chapter 5 will examine Miroslav Volf’s proposed model of embrace and God’s command to the church regarding its relation to people of other faiths.

In his book, *Exclusion and embrace*, in respect of “embrace,” Miroslav Volf (1996:100) presents the central thesis of the relevant chapter that God’s perception of hostile humanity in divine communion is the model for how human beings should relate to one another. He broadens his support for embrace by

saying, "... we who have been embraced by the outstretched arms of the crucified God open our arms even for the enemies – to make space in ourselves for them and invite them in – so that together we may rejoice in the eternal embrace of the Triune God" (1996:131).

God's command that commissions the church to do likewise to what He did, sums up this central theme – embrace and reach out to all people, also people of other faiths (Matt. 28:18, 20).

The development of an ethic of embrace in the context of religious diversity and conflict might have redemptive and *peace-building* significance. An ethic of embrace might enrich each of the three major positions among Christians to deal with religious diversity. An ethic of embrace might exercise a peaceable influence upon religiously motivated conflicts, and an ethic of embrace might help to address religious conflict in the world and foster peace among religions (when I refer to the religions of the world in this thesis, I mean religious people) – therefore, peace among the nations of the world (towards which Hans Küng has striven over many years). Do all three models have a reconciliation factor? This also raises the question: Can each of the three models combine with an ethic of embrace?

1.2.10 Conclusion

In summary of what has been said thus far: There has been a revival of organised religion all over the world. Some sociologists of religion even had to change their so-called secularisation thesis and replace it with a de-secularisation thesis. The researcher has examined some religious demographic statistics that show an increasing universal religious growth all over the world and also mention the close interaction among a diversity of religions and the growing conflicts and clashes between religions of the world. The argument was that the three traditional models of dealing with religious diversity need re-evaluation and reconsideration as they seem inadequate to bring full religious peace in the world. Lastly, the notion was examined of an ethic of embrace that might have

the potential to enrich discourses on religious diversity and that might even contribute to peace among religions.

1.3 THE RESEARCH QUESTION

Against this background, this study enquires into the potential of an ethic of embrace for dealing constructively with religious diversity. In theological and philosophical literature, the idea of tolerance and embracement receives more attention.

What is the potential of an ethic of embrace for dealing constructively with religious diversity? By constructively I mean especially contributing toward peace between religious communities as implied in my understanding of theology above.

It may seem that this question is a purely pragmatic one whereas the thesis has a theological aim. I believe, however, that theological and pragmatic perspectives cannot be separated since theological proposals are partly to be judged by their pragmatic implications, as I have suggested in the section “My position”.

Therefore my argument for an ethic of embrace will combine pragmatic considerations with other theological perspectives, implying that together they constitute theological argument.

1.4 THE AIM OF THE RESEARCH

This study aims to propose the notion of an ethic of embrace for dealing with religious diversity and religious conflict.

1.5 THE HYPOTHESIS

The hypothesis of the researcher is twofold. Firstly, an ethic of embrace has something of value to add to the three models, Particularism, Inclusivism and

Pluralism. And secondly, each of these models can be combined with an ethic of embrace. Models and ethic operate on different theoretical levels. A model cannot do the work of an ethic and vice versa. By a model I mean a structured framework for understanding something. In this case the relation between different religions. In contrast an ethic refers to guidelines for action; not how things are but how they should be and what kind of practices are required in order to achieve that. In other words (adding value) and (combining) cannot mean treating a model as an ethic or vice versa. Rather, it means identifying an ethic, which can do what models are not meant to do without thereby undermining the particular model one opts for. The ethic of embrace in this thesis is not in conflict with these models; on the contrary it comes in as a support to these models. At least, that is what I shall argue.

1.6 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was undertaken by way of a literature review of three main Christian responses to religious diversity, namely Particularism, Inclusivism and Pluralism. A survey was also done of the growing literature on an ethic of embrace. For a clear picture of an ethic of embrace-related themes, such as the ethics of reconciliation, tolerance, forgiveness and hospitality, these will also be investigated. In developing a theological perspective on these issues aspects of the work of Miroslav Volf in particular will receive attention, among other reasons because he provides a distinctive understanding of embrace, which links it to “exclusion” in a way that is relevant to my research questions concerning the compatibility of the three models with an ethic of embrace. An attempt will be made to construct an ethic of embrace from a theological perspective. The meaning of this ethic for the three dominant models for dealing with diversity will be explored, and the potential of this ethic for building peace among the religions will also be investigated.

1.7 PRELIMINARY DESIGN AND STRUCTURE

Chapters 2, 3 and 4 will present and consider the arguments for, and against, each of the three traditional Christian models, and point out the arguments against each model. In the light of this discussion, the researcher will argue that, although the theological debate about the truth and salvific value of non-Christian views of life is important, and that the discussed three approaches each bring out important aspects that need to be considered in this debate, they are also inadequate in one respect, namely that they do not suggest practical strategic questions about how Christians should relate to people who hold beliefs different from their own.

Chapter 5 will make this clear with reference to the notion of an “ethic of embrace,” and will argue that a strong case can be made (on the basis of a number of New Testament texts, as interpreted by theologians such as Hans Küng, Miroslav Volf, Harold Nethland, Sam Storms and Robert H. Stein to name but a few) for the necessity of such an ethic as a guideline for how the church should interact with those who do not share its faith. From this conclusion, it follows that each of the theoretical models (Particularism, Inclusivism and Pluralism) need to be reconsidered from the perspective of an ethic of embrace.

Therefore, Chapter 5 will inquire into the extent to which each of the theoretical models can be reconciled, and can indeed support and undergird, an ethic of embrace. Since Particularism seems, at least at face value, to raise most questions in this regard, it will receive particular attention. However, the assumption that Inclusivism and Pluralism are necessarily more naturally attuned to an ethic of embrace will also be studied critically. The study will be structured as follows:

Chapter 1 will be the Introduction to the study.

Chapter 2 will discuss Particularism as a Christian response to religious diversity.

Chapter 3 will discuss Inclusivism as a Christian response to religious diversity.

Chapter 4 will discuss Pluralism as a Christian response to religious diversity.

Chapter 5 will discuss the notion of an ethic of embrace.

Chapter 6, the conclusion, will discuss the potential of an ethic of embrace for the three dominant responses to religious diversity, and for dealing with religious conflict.

CHAPTER TWO: PARTICULARISM AS A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

“... God has revealed the Way and the Truth and the Life in Jesus Christ, and wills this to be known throughout the world” (Kraemer, 1938:107).

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter discussed the so-called secularisation thesis of a sociologist of religion, Peter Berger. This was replaced with a de-secularisation thesis in the light of religious revival that was taking place all over the world. Some religious demographic statistics were shown to indicate the universal increasing religious growth. The closer interaction among a diversity of religions and also the growing conflicts and clashes between the religions of the world were also mentioned. It was argued that the three traditional models, Christian Particularism, Christian Inclusivism and Christian Pluralism, of dealing with religious diversity need re-evaluation and reconsideration, as they seem inadequate to bring full religious peace in the world.

In this chapter, the aim of the investigation of Christian Particularism is to define Particularism; to examine who the representatives of Christian Particularism are; to identify their distinctive features; and to study the objections made against Christian Particularism, as well as their responses to these objections; before drawing a challenging conclusion.

2.2 DEFINING CHRISTIAN PARTICULARISM

With a Particularistic view, Hendrik Kraemer (1938:107) says that God has revealed *the Way* and *the Truth* and *the Life* in Jesus Christ, and wills this to be known throughout the world (see also McGrath, 2001:545). Paul Knitter (2002:19)¹ contends that, "... Christian missionaries throughout the centuries have cast forth into the world with the conviction that it is God's will to make all peoples to be Christians ... God wants only one religion, God's religion: Christianity." Knitter (2002:13) says further that, throughout history all Christian theologians and church authorities seek to preserve the values of the universal scope of the Christian claims and their knowledge of particular historical sources of those claims without falling into either relativism or absolutism. Knitter (2002:19) continues that according to the Particularist view, Christianity is to take the lead and all other religions are not only to follow, but will find their fulfilment in the Christian faith.

2.3 REPRESENTATIVES OF PARTICULARISM AND THEIR VIEWS

Knitter (2002:20-50) provides a concise but comprehensive outline of who these Particularists are and also gives a brief description of their hold-on beliefs, which they have passed on to their successors throughout the centuries. This section will refer to Fundamentalists, Evangelicals, New Evangelicals (Pentacostals and Charismatics) and their core beliefs. We will also discuss Karl Barth who is also considered as the most influential Protestant thinker in the 20th century and Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965), who has been noted as the main proponent for

¹ Paul Knitter's book, *Introducing Theology of Religion*, 2002, will be used as a central source of the discussion of the different models in this study. He sketches the position of three Christian models as it stands today. He also adds a fourth model, Acceptance Model (Knitter 2002:173, 243), which I will not be discussing in the study since the three model analysis has been the dominant one in the wider discussions. Knitter provides a well-structured and comprehensive up-to-date study of the different Christian theologies on the religions of the world and religious pluralism. See also other sources, such as the work of John Hick, *A Christian theology of religions: The rainbow of faiths*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995; and of Heim, *Salvations: Truth and differences in religions*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995, on the topic of Christian theologies and religious pluralism.

promoting the Particularistic Christian view. We will also have a brief look at the Lausanne Movement.

2.3.1. Fundamentalists

J.I. Packer (1958:xx)² says that, within Christianity, there has been progressive growth of “a group of American Evangelicals, of all Protestant denominations, which banded themselves together to defend their faith against liberal encroachment after the First World War.”

Knitter (2002:20) says that the birth of the Fundamentalist movement started from 1910 to 1915 as a counter attack upon modernity, which was viewed as a threat to destroy the foundations of the Christian faith and identity. According to Packer (1958:xx) these perceived threats were marked by components that questioned the authenticity of the Bible and the ranks and position that Christianity held in society. Knitter (2002:19) says the Fundamentalists responded with an antagonistic unwavering “No”. (See also James Barr, *Fundamentalism*, London: SCM Press, 1991). Packer (1958:xx) says, “Liberalism was an attempt to square Christianity with these anti-supernatural axioms.”

Packer (1958:xx) summarises, the outcome was that what liberalism has done by trying to reconcile Christianity with modern science, it has done nothing other than abandon the Christian character, leaving only an indefinite type of religious ambition that was present in the world before Christianity arrived on the scene. He further says, what apologists defended once, has now been forsaken (see also Machen 1923:7).

However, Packer (1958:xx) says that what Fundamentalism started out to contest did not last that long as:

² J.I. Packer's book *Fundamentalism and the Word of God*, 1958 has been adapted for publication in *HTML*. A few of the text notes also need further work. It has been re-printed with James I. Packer's (1984) permission. Original page numbers are indicated by [xx].

Fundamentalism withdrew more and more into the shell provided by its own inter-denominational organizations. Partly in self-defence, the movement developed a pronounced anti-intellectual bias; it grew distrustful of scholarship, skeptical as to the value of reasoning in matters of religion and truculent in its attitude towards the argument of its opponents. Something less than intellectual integrity appeared in its readiness to support a good cause with a bad argument.

Furthermore, Packer (1958:xx) says that we must not judge the Fundamentalists too insensitively because their only aim was to defend the faith against what he calls “a militant and aggressive Liberalism.” He says even though this was their fight, it was better than not fighting at all for what they believed, despite the fact that they have been criticised for bringing forth a “narrowed and impoverished” Evangelism due to controversies they had with those who opposed them. Packer (1958:xx) says that their “Fundamentalism was Evangelicalism of a kind, but of a somewhat starved and stunted kind – shrivelled, coarsened and in part deformed under the strain of battle.” Francis Collins makes a similar point in his book, *The language of God: A scientist presents evidence for belief*, Chapters 8-11).

2.3.2. Evangelicals

Knitter (2002:20) says that despite the Fundamentalists’ sincere concerns and goal to persevere the purity of Christianity, Evangelists and theologians went ahead and also expressed their reproach toward the Fundamentalist movement for their lack of concern and care for the social gospel towards humanity. This has caused a huge uproar during the forties and fifties as Evangelicals aspired and formed a National Evangelicals Association that aimed to commit to Christianity, as well as resist the fading of Christianity into society without having a voice or a leg to stand on. The Evangelicals projected the image of a reformed Fundamentalist approach, which not only differed in style but also in substance. The word “Evangelical” tends to be used differently in various parts of the world. In this context it refers to Christian groupings that are closely aligned to fundamentalism.

This was clearly visible in their Evangelical projection of a lively interest in world affairs and the plight of the poor, both in Canada and overseas. Irving Hexham (1993) says that they are also very involved in a wide range of social initiatives and as Packer (1958:xx) says, “Evangelicalism at its best has shown itself to be a much richer thing than this Fundamentalism which we have been describing: they started out intellectually virile, church-centered in its outlook, vigorous in social and political enterprise and a cultural force of great power.” With reference to apartheid, the Evangelicals witness with a declaration that, in 1986, there was a similar development in South Africa. (See J.W. Hofmeyr *et al.* (eds), 1991. *History of the church in South Africa: A document and source book*, pp. 372ff).

Knitter (2002:21) says that as the movement grew, the developments took shape in line with this change, and evolved in these circles due to the need, or lack of, Christianity to impact and influence society. Hexham (1993) says these Evangelical Churches run a variety of specifically religious programs that have social implications, such as producing the regular Evangelical publications, *Christian Week* and *Faith Today*. This has shown their involvement in a wide variety of social programs that have benefited the entire community, individuals, Evangelicals, congregations and denominations. Hexham (1993) further says that this is evident in the free Christmas day dinner that the First Baptist Church in Calgary offers to anyone who wants it. It has been recorded that this Church fed over 700 people alone. This is not the only example. Throughout Canada one also finds that many other Evangelical Churches offer free Christmas dinners to the needy, ruling out the idea that feeding the needy at Christmas is an isolated event.

Fundamentalism moved from Reformed Fundamentalism or Evangelicals to yet another change or extension in these circles: the “New Evangelicals” or the “Ecumenical Evangelicals”. These reformers aimed to form links with the world outside of these circles. Whereas the Fundamentalist stance was focused on the inerrancy of the Bible, that was softly challenged by the Ecumenical view, which not only spoke about the limited inerrancy of the Bible, but also challenged them

(evangelically) to face up to their political responsibility by helping to bring justice to the oppressed (Knitter, 2002:21).

2.3.3 Pentecostalism / Charismatic movement

This is where Knitter (2002:22) expounds and identifies a fourth movement in this Christian camp – the Pentecostals or Charismatics that began at the dawn of the 1900s. The claims they brought to the table for discussion were based upon the personhood and office of the Holy Spirit in the Christian faith. He says that today, these expressions of Pentecostalism and the Charismatics proliferate throughout the globe, as the Spirit-empowered intensity is based more on spirituality than on their theology.

Given the classification of this movement, it is clear that amid their differences lie their underlying unity and the strength of the Fundamentalists, Evangelicals and Pentecostals / Charismatics – the proponents of Particularism – that mark the exclusivity of Christianity that Knitter (2002:21/2) calls the “foundational pillars of Christianity.”

2.3.4 Karl Barth (Protestant)

Karl Barth (1886-1968) was a notable Swiss Protestant theologian, who has been regarded as the most influential Christian thinker of the 20th century. His views on religion and Christianity, have become foundational for many defenders of the Particularist model (see also Knitter 2002:24), despite the fact that many other Particularists are uncomfortable with his theology on several other grounds.

In his work, *Church Dogmatics*, Barth (1956:280-361; 2001:5-18 – an abridged version) cements his stance in what is considered as the four “alones” which is vital to the Particularist model.

Barth’s view on the first alone stresses the point that we are saved by *grace alone*. Due to the condition of the world that surrounds humanity as well as the reality of his own sinful nature, humanity is unable to save himself. He can

only be saved by a “Higher Power” which Barth calls *grace*. Barth’s second “alone” emphasises that we are saved by *faith alone* and not by our works. Our salvation is anchored in God by faith and not by our works. Barth stresses a necessary and important element which is foundational to the Christian, and that is *trust*. Our faith in God is only secure in God if our trust in God is established. His third alone emphasises *Christ alone*. It is by Jesus Christ alone that we are saved and have received the unmerited favour of God.

The final alone stresses the point that through Scripture and the pure preaching of the message of Jesus Christ alone are we saved. Barth regarded the Bible as the only revelation of God. God’s sole revelation of Himself is in Jesus Christ. He was against all forms of religion that take their departure from nature and human abilities. Barth sees revelation and salvation as given by God and valid quite apart from the subjective responses of human beings, and this is questioned as regards to how far it takes account of the importance of human responses to God. On the matter of salvation, he stands as an Inclusivist and, on the matter of truth, as an Exclusivist.

In the next section we will have a look at Hendrik Kraemer, who was a leading Barthian forerunner for the Particularistic Christian view, and his contribution to this Christian view. We will look at his stance on Jesus as the only Saviour of the world; his position on Christianity in relation to other religious groups; his soteriological and revelation belief; his belief of Scripture as God’s infallible and inerrant Word and his contribution to the Lausanne Movement before we draw to a close.

2.3.5 Hendrik Kraemer

According to Enoch Wan (2007), Kraemer was a noted scholar, one of a high calibre whose opinion represents the model of the exclusivistic approach. As a reputable Reformed missiologist, highly esteemed by leaders of the International Missionary Council, the council consulted him to author a book on the theology of religions. Wan (2007) says that his book, *The Christian message in a non-*

Christian world, became his *magnum opus* in missiology. Wan (2007) says further that the result of his book made him to become the *leading voice* in the field of the theology of missions. This was the first of many books he has authored, such as *Religion and Christian faith* (1956), *The communication of the Christian faith* (1957), *World culture and world religions* (1960) and *Why Christianity of all religions?* (1962).

2.3.5.1 Jesus

Kraemer's (1962:71-80) Christology was centred on God unlike the belief of opposing view (Pluralism) which we will be looking at later in this study. He held Jesus in high regard, emphasising his Divinity as the unshakeable firm foundation, and as the most distinguished and unique component of Christianity. He has done this without being ignorant to the human nature of Christ Jesus. He argues that Christ is the ultimate revelation of God and he considers this as the core factor of all truth and value. He rejected the idea that Jesus is only the fulfilment of the other faith. Instead he promoted the truth about Jesus being the only Saviour of the world.

2.3.5.2 Christianity

Kraemer (1962:114) says Christianity cannot be considered on the same level as the religions of the world. He says Christianity is unique and must be distinguished from all other religions of the world. This is because of the Personhood of Jesus Christ being God's Revelation. Kraemer (1963:295) says evangelisation and conversion for all of humanity is the core business of the Christian Church. He present "*Theology of Religion*" in such a way that it would serve as a motivator to evangelise instead, despite all opposing approaches which are done by the Pluralists or Inclusivists. For Kraemer (1956:17, 18) the primary interest of the Christian Church is its mission toward the non-Christian religions. Thus the Church is "the apostolic body" and is commissioned to

proclaim the message of God, bringing about spiritual transformation (see also Wan, 2007).

2.3.5.3. Revelation

Kraemer (1962:71-76) says Jesus as the way, the truth and the light is God's only revelation, putting it in a class of its own. According to him this does not run parallel with any other religious claim or ideas, regarding Jesus' position, that says that God's revelation is also evident in other religions of the world. He proposes that, "God's self-revelation occurs in more than one way and at more than one place and these revelations, as he persistently believes, can only be interpreted and understood correctly in the light of the revelation of God, in Jesus Christ." He says the revelation of God, "the divine initiative", cannot be identified with any ideas, concepts and experiences that are engendered in the course of history (See also McGrath, 2001:545).

Kraemer (1956:237, 353, 363) says any value judgment or truth-claim for religion can be carried out only by its adherence to the revelation of God. He expresses his understanding of revelation, which he likes to express as "Biblical realism". He understands this to be God's Self-disclosure in the Person of Jesus Christ. It is the focal point of his revelational activity. Other modes of his revelatory works in nature, history or conscience, which scientific researchers argue are God's revelation in other religions, are of a different order. These modes, therefore, according to Kraemer, may not be called "revelation" or even "general revelation" (see also Wan 2007).

2.3.5.4 Salvation

In accordance with other Particularists, the verdict stands; Kraemer's doctrine of salvation stresses that only through faith in Jesus Christ alone can salvation be obtained. Kraemer (1938:211) says due to humanity's corruptible character, he is in need of a Saviour, Jesus Christ, in order to be restored. He says humanity is

being restored through the redemptive atonement of Christ on the cross. This then makes all other religions invalid paths for salvation because it is only through Jesus that humanity can be saved. He says this is the clear message of the Gospels that brings forth the message of truth.

2.3.5.5 Scripture

Kraemer (1962:74) contends that God is omniscient – He knows all things, past, present and what is to come. Since He alone knows the truth, truth is “never in the first place an intellectually demonstrable proposition”. Kraemer’s (1938:107) idea of truth is based on his believe that God has revealed the Way and the Truth and the Life in Jesus Christ and wants the entire world not only to know this but to believe this.

Kraemer (1962:20) says by recognising the unique authenticity of Scripture can help give one a better understanding regarding the witness of Jesus Christ. His epistemological stance of religions is in regard to his understanding of revelation, which is not based on the empirical statement of men or the phenomenology of religions, which remains a strong point.

In the next section we will have a brief look at the core function and belief of the Lausanne Movement, which supports Particularism.

2.3.6 Lausanne Movement’s covenant

Wan (2007) says in the official paper, “The Manila Manifesto”, published after the Lausanne Congress (LCWE 1989), the main core of the gathering declared the affirmation that the Jesus of history and the Christ of glory is the same person; who is also the “absolute unique God incarnate, sin bearer, the conqueror of death, and the coming judge ...” The Manifesto also states: “We affirm that other religions and ideologies are not alternative paths to God, and that human spirituality, if unredeemed by Christ, leads not to God but to judgment, for Christ is the only Way.”

Wan (2007) says, Kraemer's legacy has been succeeded well in evangelical Christian movements. The "Frankfurt Declaration" (1970) and "Lausanne Covenant" (1974) are examples of the exclusivistic approach tied to Kraemer. This movement, which is considered as the most ecumenical confession of evangelising the world with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, has become the heartbeat in Evangelical circles.

S. Douglas Birdsall (2009:4) current executive chairman, of the Lausanne Movement in Boston, Massachusetts says that the Lausanne Covenant is a call to Evangelical churches, which holds dear to Scripture as the final authority in their daily lives and in what they believe. He says that this was a public declaration to the world that Evangelicals' relationship between their faith and their lives is a covenant made to each other as brothers and sisters in Christ and also a covenant made with God.

In the Didasko Files: Lausanne Movement (2009:6-8) Chris Wright, current international Director, Langham Partnership International chairman, Lausanne Theology work group, says that this covenant reminds Evangelicals of their holistic mission in this world. According to him this mission is summed up in their commitment to uphold the truth of the Bible in its revelation of God and it is telling the story of the universe – past and future. He says that the message of the gospel is the centrality of Jesus, his death and resurrection and his Lordship over the entire world. He says that the movement emphasises that the Bible as a "whole gives us the whole counsel of God – that is, God's mind, purpose, plan, will, and mission." In this God's love and compassion is seen in his relation to those who are socially, economically and culturally marginalised as well as those who are in need of spiritual deliverance from the bondage of slavery to sin.

Wright (2009:6-8) says further that part of our discipling of nations is to engage in doing justice, love, mercy and walk in all humility before God and humanity. According to him the Lausanne Movement declares that evangelism and church nurturing, as seen in the Apostle Paul's mission and ministry, are twin functions of the church. By failing to recognise and apply this, the Lausanne

Movement says that conversion without depth is futile and will never develop to change the false philosophies of the world and the so-called Christians.

According to Wright (2009:6-8), the movement, based on their confidence in God, is to bring the “whole world to the knowledge and worship” of our Lord Jesus Christ recognising our own human frailty. With this Wright says that Evangelicals confirm their participation in God’s mission, as sinners, being mindful that they are as much in need of God’s forgiving grace as those who they are evangelising. He says that what characterises The Lausanne Movement’s covenant is the, “confidence, humility, of human energy and trust in God, of vision and realism, of joy in the Lord’s doing and grief over human failures, of strategic thinking and the Spirit’s leading, of global vision and local action, of words and works.”

2.3.7 Core theological values of Particularists

The different representatives of Particularism (Fundamentalists – Evangelicals – New Evangelicals – Pentecostals / Charismatics) have been examined. The next section will investigate the underlying core values and theology built on a common foundation among Particularists that supports their differences in style or theological detail. Knitter (2002:22) highlights the four distinctions which we will look at next.

He says the first distinction that will be recognised is the *authenticity of the Bible* for all believers or followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, despite the different notions regarding the inerrancy, or partial inerrancy, of the Bible that erupted amongst them.

The second distinction labours the point of true Christianity that comes forth stronger in deed than in word. One needs to practice one’s belief in equal measure to speaking about it openly.

The third distinction concerns the office and person of Jesus. To this Christian camp, Jesus is not just the Saviour of the human race, but is

emphatically and undeniably the *only* Saviour of the world. Therefore, the element of salvation is added to the element of exclusive truth.

Lastly, due to their personal experiences and encounters with their Saviour, Jesus Christ, these Christians have devoted themselves to *share with the whole world the saving grace* and love of their Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Christ.

Knitter (2002:22) says that what makes them common, transcends their differences. He identifies them under a blanket term as the “Evangelicals”, which is the term that we will be using in this chapter.

2.4 DISTINCTIVE FEATURES OF CHRISTIAN PARTICULARISTS

Knitter (2002:23) says that the attitude of many contemporary Fundamentalists and some Pentecostal Churches “looked upon other faith communities as so lacking, or so aberrant that in the end Christianity must move in and take their place.” The next section will discuss the *distinctive features of Christian Particularists*.

2.4.1 No value in other religions

Wan (2007), the editor of *Global Missiology* and director of the D.Miss. Program, Western Seminary, says that Hendrik Kraemer (1963:112) says in his book, *The Christian message in a non-Christian world*, 3rd ed. that “there is no natural religion,” therefore he denies the scientific research of religions.

Knitter (2002:23) states that, due to the considerable abnormal appearances and inadequacy of other religions, the theology of Particularism is that Christianity has the responsibility to move in and take over the leading role to guide all other faiths into a clear and proper relationship with God and, in so doing, add meaning and value to them. According to him, this has been (and still is) the Christian view during most of church history.

Christianity has not only become the religion only for Christians, it has also propagated, stronger than ever before, its mission to convert the world. This was confirmed, in a conversation in 2008 with Nigel Keur, a missionary with Operation Mobilization World Wide, on Missions: Communicating Cross-culturally. The researcher learned that a certain group of people, the Dalits, “the Untouchables” in India who had fallen victim to the caste system, have now in great numbers turned to Christianity. The membership of this specific group ranges in the vicinity of 400 million people for whom Christianity has become a home of hope and has added value and dignity to their personhood. Today, the Evangelical belief is a strong force with its members spreading the Gospel (along the lines that Christianity is God’s religion) as God’s “absolute” message across the globe. (See also General Secretary article, 1999).

2.4.2 The origin of non-Christian religions

Another belief of the no-value-of-religions stigma plays out in the origin of non-Christian religions. Brad Johnson (1999:1), a teaching research assistant in the Theology of Philosophy Departments of Cincinnati Bible College and Seminary whose research was on inter-religious dialogue, philosophical apologetics and the interplay of Christology, says the following:

There is, of course, what we might call “naturalistic” explanations of the origin of all religions. Those committed to a naturalistic worldview that denies the existence of God or of a supernatural realm see all religions as the product of [hu]man[ity]’s imagination in some way. They might say that religion is the expression of [hu]man[ity]’s fear of the overwhelming forces of nature, or of his desire to overcome death. While such naturalistic factors may indeed play a role in the development of some religious sentiments, they are hardly sufficient to account for the origin of all religious belief. (A recent example is Daniel Dennett, 2006).

Furthermore, Johnson (1999:1) adds: “From the perspective of one committed to a super naturalistic world view, and particularly from the Christian viewpoint,

there are several elements that may have contributed to the origin of non-Christian religion,” and gives three reasons to support this view. Firstly, Johnson (1999) says that whatever truth we perceive coming from the non-Christian faith, must be attributed to God, as he is the source of all truth. He adds that these truths have been passed down from generation to generation and that it is possible that the remnants were the carriers of these truths.

Johnson (1999:1) further mentions the possibility of an implant of some elements of truth in some cultures through contact with God's people, the Israelites, with early Christians, or perhaps some parts of the Scriptures. He uses Islam as an example, saying that it has a great deal of both Judaic and Christian influences due to Mohammed's early contact with representatives of both religions. At this point, it would seem that Johnson tends slightly towards Inclusivism as far as truth is concerned, while sticking to Particularism as far as salvation is concerned.

Johnson's (1999:2) second main view is that we “must recognize that where there is falsehood or even a twisted perspective on the truth, this is the result of [hu]man[ity]'s sinful nature in repressing the truth about God.” Here he reflects on Romans 1, that identifies the corruptness of [hu]man[ity]'s heart, which constantly suppresses God's truth by substituting “futile speculations” (Rom. 1:21).

In his third view of defence, Johnson (1999:2) highlights humanity's adversary, Satan, and his demons who “counterfeit” religious experiences. He says, according to Psalm 106:36-37, anyone who serves idols offers sacrifices to demons, and that the apostle Paul clearly warns the church in Corinth (1 Cor. 10:20) as well as Timothy (1 Tim. 4:1) about false religious teachings to deceitful spirits. Johnson's final remark labours the point by saying that, in the second letter to the Corinthians, Paul says that Satan “disguises himself as an angel of light” (2 Cor. 11:14) and disguises many of his agents as “servants of righteousness” (2 Cor. 11:15).

Johnson (1999:2) says that Satan often promotes evil and everything that goes with it. He also says that Satan, as an “Angel of light”, has the ability to deceive by easily endorsing a high level of morality or religion only to discourage or divert people’s attention from realising their need for God’s unmerited favour, which was expressed through the death of Jesus Christ.

Johnson (1999:2) says that non-Christian religions can represent the human response to the truth about God that one knows; they could also be a human attempt to suppress the truth and substitute their own speculations; and lastly they could represent the deception of Satan, who replaces the truth with a lie.

Clark Pinnock (1992:87) says, this phenomenon was visibly detected in the Old Testament times of paganism. He further stipulates emphatically that the endorsement of religion (non-Christian) can never be more eligible, because of its temptation to domesticate God and use him to justify all kinds of evil purposes. Therefore, an unholy trinity, namely the world, the flesh and the devil, has created religion. Pinnock (1992:91-92) says that humanity’s capacity, which is in direct rejection of the divine identity when it is offered, has initiated it.

Now that we are aware of how, according to the Particularists, the non-Christian religions began, let us consider Christianity’s relationship with other non-Christian religions.

2.4.3 Uniqueness of Jesus as the only way (salvific exclusivity)

Now that the aspects of Christianity’s relationship with other religions have been examined, the next section will consider the Evangelical claims regarding the uniqueness of Christ as the only way – the uniqueness of Christ as God’s revelation. As Pinnock (1992:54) believes that this uniqueness of Christ rises from the Biblical soil and context; its uniqueness has special characteristics like no other God. “Christ is not a *son* of God, but the *Son* of God nor is he a *saviour* but the *Saviour* of the world.

Despite the many angles one finds in the Bible or tries to make sense of their claims, the essential truth that they project or proclaim, according to the Evangelicals, is that Christ is the unique revelation of God – the only Way. Knitter (2002:27; 6) says based on biblical evidence in the New Testament, Jesus is the Saviour; the only one who alone can save humanity from the mess he has placed himself in; this is constant to the Evangelicals. Bishop Stephen Neill (1984:31), asserts that, for the Evangelicals, Christ has reconciled the universe to God; one Man – through his obedience – has built the bridge and has established a permanent relationship between God and the human race (see also Knitter 2002:28).

Harvey Cox (1988:7-8) writes that, for those who engaged in dialogue with other religious faiths, Jesus is not a background figure but is, and resides at, the centre of the Christian faith. He says that the Evangelicals' assertion that Jesus Christ is the centre of their Christian faith is based on New Testament Scripture that declares that all the fullness of the Godhead was present in Jesus Christ.

Netland, (1991:262) thinks that no other religious institution has made claims such as the ones made of Jesus, such as his being God or the only begotten Son of God. He adds that, nor did any account emerge of any form of resurrection, which Jesus experienced. Based on this, among many other Biblical evidence, the Lausanne Covenant in 1974 also strongly proclaimed the uniqueness of Christ, claiming that there is only one Gospel and one Saviour, although there are different Evangelical approaches. Pinnock (1992:49) says that in his divine wisdom, God reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus.

According to Knitter (2002:31) the Evangelicals' claims of Jesus as the only way to salvation and hope are embedded in their confidence that once people allow Christ to become their Saviour and save them from this perishing world with all its turmoil, this will be confirmed. However, if people of this world desire to partake in this saving grace in Christ alone, their response to him should be one of honest and sincere commitment.

Knitter (2002:27) says further that the Evangelicals view the New Testament account of the uniqueness of Christ as very dear to their belief. To call

oneself “an Evangelical”, one must resonate the seriousness of the Bible, especially the New Testament, because the witness of Christ is based upon it.

Calvin E. Shenk (1997:35) says, “Christ did not come just to make a contribution to the religious storehouse of knowledge. The revelation, which he brought, is the ultimate standard. Since in Christ alone is salvation and truth, many religious paths do not adequately reflect the way of God and do not lead to truth and life. Jesus is not, therefore, just the greatest lord among other lords. There is no other lord besides him.”

In the light of what Shenk (1997:35) says in this last statement regarding the contributions Christ came to make, one can conclude that his message stems from God and the Kingdom, which gave Him the authority to make these claims. “All authority has been given unto Me ...” (NIV, Matt. 28:18). To say that Jesus is the one and only way, or Saviour, for many postmodernists is ludicrous and absurd, however, Knitter (2002:53) says that denying this, according to the Particularist view is diluting Christianity, because in this is the core of the Christian message and what it has claimed all along.

2.4.4 Christianity as the true religion (truth exclusivity)

Due to the isolation of Christians from communities in the West, much ignorance existed regarding Christianity, and vice versa, that raged among the religions of the world. Pinnock (1992:81-82) says that the world has become smaller and, as a result, has forced Christianity to become aware of all other surrounding religions. Today, religion has become one of the most talked about topics in the world. Sacks (1991:73) puts it thus, “From Hume to Voltaire onward, religious beliefs became a subject of ridicule and disdain.” Members of most other religious traditions have critically challenged Christianity’s validation and truth. What M.M. Thomas (1966:21) says about this is based on what happened in Asia that brought about the Asian Revolution:

The idea of “the white man’s burden” and the imperial “civilizing mission” whether of Britain in India or of the Dutch in Indonesia became a bit too unbearable in its self-righteousness when the sanction of Christian theology was added to it. The Dutch “Christian” political parties continued to justify their rule in Indonesia till the very end on the basis of divine creation and calling. The same phenomenon exists with the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa in its theology of apartheid. More recently Max Warren’s “Theology of Imperialism” intensely irritated the Chinese Christians, and they produced the most devastating critique of it, and showed how perverted Christian theology has become if it could justify such a devilish movement as imperialism.

In John 14:6, Jesus makes a profound statement – one of Christianity’s core verses – proclaiming that He is the complete and ultimate description of what Christianity is supposed to portray. Carl E. Braaten (1992:29) says that this verse, which reflects Christocentricity, has been the standard Protestant concept of the absoluteness of Christianity. Knitter (1985:171-172) emphasises that our Christian faith is built on Jesus’ public and private ministry, the sacraments, his atonement on Calvary, his resurrection, and his present reign in our lives and in Heaven.

According to Knitter (2002:26) none of the other religious traditions have these truths as part of their belief system and this makes it impossible for them to understand his message of salvation and to accept it. To them, it might seem as bondage when one makes the choice of accepting, and living out, his salvific message, but for those who do so, it is liberating and fulfilling (1 Cor. 2:14). To those who are perishing, this is foolishness (NIV, 1 Cor. 1:18).

Braaten (1992:29) contends that the “Absoluteness of Christianity” is a formula that goes back to German philosopher George W.F. Hegel, who developed a comprehensive philosophical framework, or “system”, to account, in an integrated and developmental way, for the relation of mind and nature, the subject and object of knowledge, and psychology, the state, history, art, religion, and philosophy refer to Christianity as the “Absolute religion”. Braaten (1992:35) says the religions of the world are a permanent presupposition of the universal missionary mandate inherent in Christianity from the beginning. He says that

Christianity's promise of future of fulfilment, through the Gospel of Christ, would be meaningless apart from the universal context of humanity's religious history. The uniqueness of Christianity lies particularly in its individuality and making its claims to absolute truth and validity over every other religion.

Braaten (1992:37) contends that this allows one, under the conditions of historical relativism, to continue to appreciate Christianity and still regard it as the highest religion as long as one adopts it as a criterion to evaluate other religions.

Christianity's claims of truth as the only true religion does not rest on its comparison to all the other religions, but it is established and builds on the work, life and death of Jesus Christ (Knitter, 2002:26), unlike the other religions that, until recently, were viewed as zones of spiritual and theological zones of darkness. Pinnock (1992:81-82) says that Luther and others underwent unpleasant manifestations of the corrupt aspects of religion; therefore, Luther comments that all worship and religions outside of Christ are to be viewed as the worship of idols. Keith Johnson (1997:7) says that, 2000 years ago, God entered human history through Jesus Christ, who was nailed and died on a cross, hanging between two thieves. Three days later He arose from the dead. This is the central claim of Christianity.

Johnson (1997:7) further says, "The truthfulness of Christianity depends upon a critical historical event – the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead." He quotes from Scripture where Paul wrote about the significance of Christ's resurrection, which reads: "If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith" (1 Cor. 15:14). This first-century letter, which the apostle Paul wrote to a group of Christians, was vital because their Christian faith and allegiance to follow Jesus Christ would have been in vain and false if He had not arisen from the dead.

Johnson (1997:7) says that one of Christianity's strongest arguments of defence is locked up in Jesus' resurrection account. Based on Scripture, he reinforces his belief by arguing that, "Christianity offers criteria by which its truth-claims can be evaluated ... the best way to begin examining Christianity is to

carefully study the four biographical accounts of Christ's life found in the Gospels in the New Testament.”

It is important to recognise that the reality of evil is real and in our midst. Despite what influential religious leaders try to project, Knitter (2002:51) says that philosophers always try to sophisticate language; there is an imbalance in this world – “something is wrong with us and the world.” Johnson (1999:5) says that it should be communicated with people of other religions that there is a human dilemma worth mentioning and that no other religion presents a solution or answers in the same way that Christianity does. Knitter (2002:52) says what Evangelicals call “good news” is that there is a “Higher Power”, a “Divine Reality”, who can help us or perhaps save us and make it possible for us to exceed our own limitations.

2.4.5 God's presence in other religions

Knitter (2002:33) stresses in theological terms, the notion of the so-called Evangelicals, namely the many Fundamentals and some Pentecostal Churches (total replacement perspective) regarding revelation and salvation, that is the absence of God's presence in other religions; therefore, dialogue cannot be established with them. To them there is no revelation and no salvation is found in these foreign religions. However, this stance has been redeemed by the New Evangelicals who, without compromising their faith and being true to Christianity, seek ways to dialogue with other faiths while recognising God's presence in other religions in the world. The next section will concentrate on the study of the Particularistic view of God's revelation, but the absence of God's salvation in other faiths.

2.4.5.1 Revelation

Pannenberg (1968:5) says that:

Self-revelation is thus so strictly understood that it is no longer permissible to think of a medium of revelation that is distinct from God himself. The creaturely medium of revelation. Jesus Christ is caught up to God in this distinctiveness and received in the unity with God himself. A means of revelations that in itself remains creaturely and holds to its distinctiveness from God would of course imply a sort of pollution of the divine light, presuppose an inadequate manifestation, and prevent the development of a full revelation.

Pannenberg (1968:5) says that, this was echoed by the Hegelian, Philipp Marheineke (1827:15), who not only said that God is revealed through God himself and then to the human spirit, and not through the human spirit. He further states that this revelation is reserved and designated only for Christianity because of its distinction from other religions, due to the fact that it “rests on the full disclosure of the nature of the absolute as spirit and not because of the truth alone which it contains and is transmitted by the supernatural means.”

Pannenberg (1968:5) says that these beliefs have latched onto influential Particularists, such as Barth whose doctrines propagate that God’s revelation could not be understood or received by humanity’s ability – only by God through his Holy Spirit. (Barth’s Particularism is distinctive in the sense that, although salvation is only through Christ, it is not exclusively for Christians. This makes him an Exclusivist-Universalist).

Knitter (2002:34) argues that, what Barth and others like him overlooked was the Biblical evidence regarding God’s revelation to people through nature and their conscience. It was the Fathers of the Church, who said that God’s ability and desire to communicate with people of other faiths could not be limited to Christians only.

Knitter (1974:64) says that Paul Althaus believes that revelation is an ever-occurring reality and takes place through the visible reality of creation and humanity’s power to perceive and reason. He says that for Althaus, this general revelation is necessary because through this, humanity would experience God’s judgment and his own need for redemption. Knitter (1974:69-70) says that Althaus continues to support Luther, who says, “God has given all men a

knowledge about Himself – a knowledge which is ‘ineradicable.’ But this general knowledge of God is limited; it does not enable humanity to grasp God’s will for humanity, i.e. what God has in mind for humanity’s ultimate future ... but the special knowledge comes only through Christ’s revelation.”

Knitter (1974:64) contends that for Althaus humanity is sinful and needs to realise his sinful state. He says that according to Althaus humanity must know God in order to sin against Him and also to wholly reject Him. Knitter (1974:135-136, 2002:35-36) says this is clearly contrary to Barth who believes that there is no real revelation of God outside of Christ, or who heard a silence in other religions, or that other religious groups are of mere human manufacture. Knitter (2002:34) says that:

Evangelicals who follow this more moderate viewpoint recognize and affirm and even rejoice in a genuine revelation of God in and through other religions ... the authentic presence of God’s Spirit within the persons and the structure of the other faith communities ... who represent more than groups of human beings asking questions, wrestling with the big issues of human existence ... ways in which God gives answers and reaches out to human search.

Particularists conclude that other religions do not qualify as bearers of salvation, although they allow for the revelation of God.

2.4.5.2 *Salvation*

The previous section covered, and concluded with, the essential aspects stating why the New-Evangelicals accepted the notion that revelation is evidently present in other religions. However, this does not resonate smoothly with the idea of salvation being present in other religions. The next section will explain why the New-Evangelicals, like the “Evangelical Brotherhood,” discard the notion of salvation being present in other religions and why they claim its legitimacy only in Christianity.

Knitter (2002:36) says New-Evangelicals believe that God is revealed in other religions, but that is as far as it goes; in other religions He does not save. Knitter (1974:137) says that according to Althaus, "... revelation does not necessarily include redemption as an act of atonement and forgiveness ... salvation is limited to only one form of revelation – to only one historical expression of God's self-witness: Christ's."

Knitter (1974:138) says that Althaus not only refutes the notion of salvation in the confines of religions other than Christianity, but also the idea that revelation is to become a means of salvation. This is observed as he reluctantly disallows "God's salvific will and final redemption to be mediated through any history outside that of Christ." Here Barth stands strong, unwaveringly agreeing with Althaus by saying that salvation is only available and possible in and through Jesus Christ, but in the scope of God's universal salvation.

McGrath (2001:546) maintains that one cannot find knowledge of God other than through Jesus Christ. The knowledge of God and salvation are possible only through Jesus Christ and, at the end of history, it will be grace that will stand above unbelief, and everyone will come to faith in Jesus Christ who is the individuality of God's revelation. He declares that, while a Particularist may believe that all non-Christians will be condemned, they do not have to believe this because, according to Barth's theology, Particularism is still compatible with universal salvation.

Harold Lindell (1949:117) says that, "God does not reveal Himself redemptively through other means than ... through his children's missionary activity to a lost world." McGrath (1996:163) (who represents a post-Enlightenment Particularist view) states that, "The New Testament thus affirms the particularity of the redemptive act of God in Jesus Christ. This foundational difference should not be ignored or merged into the various concepts of divinity found in other religions."

McGrath (1996:165) says further that, God's revelation about Himself to other faiths is neither new nor controversial. He believes that people of other religious faiths know some true things about God through creation and the

Gospel, however he says knowledge of God from natural revelation does not necessarily save people nor does it mean that there are agreement regarding key Christian issues, such as salvation only through Jesus Christ. McGrath (1996:178-179) also says that God's ability to save is not limited by humanity's failure to evangelise. He says further that God has the ability to save all people, without making use of his agents, even though "hope and trust of a fully orbbed character of an informed Christian faith" has not taken place.

McGrath (1996:165) defines the importance of the unified relationship between revelation and salvation, whereas Althaus' (Knitter, 1974:137) distinction of the doctrine of revelation and salvation labours the point saying that the presence of revelation does not always demand the presence of salvation. He believes furthermore that revelation is not coextensive with salvation. This means that it can exist and be active to bring forth fruit in a context where salvation not yet exists. He adds that, even though this might be the case, it does not mean that revelation substitutes for salvation.

Vlach (2004) agrees with McGrath's thesis of Christianity's distinctiveness and the prerequisite of belief in Christ for salvation. Based on what McGrath (1996:178) said, Vlach (2004) concludes that God is by no means restricted to step into reality and "use extraordinary means outside of human proclamation to bring people to saving faith." He proceeds by saying, "like McGrath's claims, God may use visions of the risen Christ to bring people to faith. How much of this activity takes place is not known."

Geivett and Phillips (1996:214), who represent an evidential Particularist view, endorse the notion that:

Individual salvation depends on explicit personal faith in Jesus Christ, which is a version of Christian particularism that is sometimes called exclusivism or restrictivism.

Vlach (2004) says this view has been the traditional view of Christianity up until the Enlightenment and still has many adherents today. For them salvation is

found in Christ. Even though John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 do not supply a strong support for Particularism, they do, however, emphasise Christianity's exclusive nature. He agrees with the standpoint of Geivett and Phillips regarding the Biblical account that places sound judgment on the New Testament that faith in Christ alone is a prerequisite for salvation and the importance of spreading the Gospel globally carries much weight for Christian Particularism.

Braaten (1992:74), a contemporary Lutheran theologian, agrees with Knitter, and asserts the necessity of Christ ontologically and epistemologically in constructing a theology of religion, and says, "Christ is not merely an expressive of a divine salvation equally available in the plurality of religions; salvation is constituted by the coming of the concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth." He says further that salvation is found in none other, but in Christ alone.

According to Knitter (2002:36), Pannenberg's (1973:111-115) stance on this is rooted in the conviction of Biblical evidence in Christ's teachings about himself, whilst Carl Heinz Ratschow, according to Braaten (1992:74), finds that the "total and central distinction" between the Christian Gospel and other religions is at the heart of the doctrine of justification by Christ alone.

Thus, Lutheran theology, regarding the understanding of salvation, based on Christocentrism of Scripture, as well as the Reformation insights with regard to salvation "by faith" in "Christ alone" serves as a foundation on which it is lodged.

Knitter (2002:39) says we can conclude that these claims that say, one can only come to know God's love truly comes by faith alone in Christ, not only resonates from Biblical evidence, but is confirmed "according to Evangelicals, by what is evident when one takes a closer look at the teachings and workings of other religions". Johnson (1999:5) confirms this by saying:

One would also find this in Orthodox Judaism and Muslim certainly shares our belief in a personal Creator-God, though Christianity is unique in the monotheistic tradition with regard to the doctrine of the Trinity. There are even truths about Jesus that we share in common with Muslims – that He was a prophet of God,

and the Messiah, and that He worked many miracles, though they deny that He was the Son of God, or that He died for the sins of the world.

Christian Particularism has been in the “line of fire” receiving huge amounts of criticism from other opposing Christian approaches. One of the crucial questions (which will be discussed more under *Objection against Christian Particularism* in this chapter) often asked, labours the point of salvation and the destiny of those who have not heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ (McGrath, 2001:545).

Knitter (1974:138-139) says, Althaus, with a weak response to a question such as this, attempts by proposing three possible yet contradictory answers about humanity’s encounter, those who never knew Christ during their lifespan here on earth and who had to work only with revelation. He says, a) “That God will simply justify the non-Christian who have [sic] never known Christ by an act of his omnipotent will – *without any personal decision* on their part. b) Or, God himself will *bring [hu]man[ity] to a decision* and ‘take over,’ as it were, his free will. c) ... those who have not known him on earth will have to *make their own decision.*”

Knitter (1974:139) says, such responses carry little or no weight because it “would be easier and more consistent to allow the ‘Spirit’ within revelation to bring the non-Christian to a ‘form of salvific faith’ here on earth.” Johnson (1999:5) says that the big challenge is to understand and balance the universal aim of salvation with the particular nature of salvation in Jesus Christ and that this challenge seems to cast forth a dividing line among the different options of inherent Exclusivism.

Furthermore Olkholm and Phillips (1996:20) say, “One can also be in a pessimistic agnostic position toward the unevangelised acknowledging that special revelation is necessary for salvation but choosing to go no further than scripture.”

This makes it difficult for those who have not heard the Good news of the Lord Jesus Christ as well as “leaving the difficult question of salvation in the hands of God, who is righteous and merciful.”

2.4.5.3 Scripture is the main authority

Knitter (2002:51) says Evangelicals have a firm belief in the New Testament as the only witness for the followers of Christ and when challenged to ensure their defence; they must “ground their new theologies of other religions and their efforts to dialogue with other believers on the witness of the New Testament. They hold to believe that the Bible poses a qualitatively superior position”. The Bible is the foundation on which all their claims are built. Apart from the Bible, any claims made to create any misguided facts or notions about Christ’s personhood and work, contrary to what the Bible declares, bares not only false witness, but is an abomination and should be refuted profusely.

The Particularists consider the Bible as their main authority in all spiritual engagements. Particularists do recognise and respect the understanding that, although other neighbouring religions carry truths and values, their conclusion, found in the Gospels, is that only in Christ is the true salvation which would ensure a person an eternal destination with Christ. Scripture declares that Jesus Himself is the way, the truth, and the life. He not only provides, but He is the only means to the Father (John 14:6). Wright (2010:17) strongly emphasises that the mission of God from Genesis to Revelation unifies the Bible. He says that the central focus of the Bible is God and his mission is to bring salvation to the whole world.

2.5. CONCLUSION

In summary, the aim of this study of Christian Particularism was to disclose to the greater audience what Evangelicals embrace as the essence of Christianity. In other words, why they believe what they believe.

The researcher identified the representatives of Christian Particularism as the “Evangelicals” (Knitter, 2002:22). The central features discussed in this chapter on Christian Particularism, according to the Evangelicals, are as follows:

There is no salvific value in other religions: Christianity is not only the fully true religion, but also the only valuable religion. There is no value in any other religion.

The origin of the non-religion: All other religions are human-made and are an attempt to control God.

The uniqueness of Jesus as the only way: Evangelicals emphasise the seriousness of New Testament resonance, regarding the uniqueness of Christ as God's revelation.

God's presence in other religions: Some Evangelicals agree that it is possible for God to reveal Himself through other religions; however, they do not agree that salvation is obtainable in any other religion other than Christianity.

The underlying strengths of Christian Particularism is their unifying recognition of the *authenticity of the Bible; their strong emphasis on doing more than saying; their strong belief in the work and person of Christ as Scripture projects it; and the saving grace of Christ for the world.*

The underlying weakness of Christian Particularism is not only located in the *isolation and marginalising of other religions, but also their arrogance as a religion that claims to be the only true religion and that dialogue could only proceed based on the terms and conditions of Christian Particularism. Another weakness is their inability to account for the destiny of "lost souls" – those who have never heard the Gospel.*

These weaknesses have left Christian Particularism-Evangelicals with some new challenges to face. In order for Christianity to impact, influence and make a difference, Christian Particularism should consider "adjustments" to their current position or status, which alienated them from all other religions, and enter into a *friendship* with other religions. It is only engaging in dialogue with adherents of other religions, and an understanding of the "other" that would promote tolerance of the "other". As Volf (1996:154) challenges us to make "space for the other in the self, and re-arranging the self in the light of the presence of the other." Johnson (1999:5) says that should it be as Christian Particularism–Evangelicals

claim that God's answer is fabricated in his saving grace, which is revealed through his provision of his Son, Jesus Christ, who has become the only sacrifice for our sin, then "[s]alvation is not something we achieve; it is something we receive."

The researcher can conclude that, for the New Evangelicals whose stance is riveted and imbedded in Scripture as it is for the "Evangelical brotherhood," who declare that salvation originates from no one else other than the person and work of Jesus Christ, which is one of the core aspects of Christianity of which Jesus Christ is not only central, but he is also the Cornerstone on which the Christian faith is built. Lesslie Newbigin (1995:160-189) reminds us that God loves people. He admonishes but also encourages Christians by saying that this is the point of departure when it comes to sharing our Christian faith with people of other faiths, without compromising or watering down our own faith but also not to judge, condemn or criticising the adherents of other religious beliefs. He says further that everyone, being part of creation, whether Christian or non-Christian is related to Jesus Christ and therefore Christians must recognise and rejoice in God's saving grace at work in the lives of those who hold a different faith.

Wright (2010:29-30) says that, "the Bible in stark contrast, is passionately concerned about what kind of people they are who claim to be the people of God", if we are to share the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that we should be people of good standing when we proclaim the gospel of transformation. The proclamation of the Gospel comes from a personal transformation we underwent by the word of God. He says that, "the apostle Paul saw only integration when he described his own life's mission as calling all the nations to 'faith's obedience'."

Wright (2010:31-32) says that, "God's people are called to nonnegotiable, uncompromising loyalty to the uniqueness of God – revealed as YHWH in the Old Testament, and walking among us in the incarnate life of Jesus of Nazareth in the New." He says further that, God's uniqueness, which is seen in his unique sacrifice, Jesus Christ, marks the supreme mission of the church, which "is to bear witness to the truth that the Lord is God and there is no other".

This concludes our examination of the features of Evangelicals, however, this leave us with some though provoking questions, such as: Could the challenge for the Evangelicals be that they not only endorse other religions, but also develop a changed attitude toward them? Could an open relationship – dialogue with other religions – become real and a foundational pillar in faith communities and lead to peace amongst religions? A dialogical community of communities amongst the religions of the world will remain a dream unless religions strive together to make it a reality. Knitter (2002:8) says this is not only possible, but is necessary if the world desires to achieve peace in the world amongst the adherents of religions. It will be evident in the next chapter how proponents of Christian Inclusivism have taken a further step, than proponents of Christian Particularism, for dealing effectively with religious Pluralism. Chapter 5 will also consider whether Particularism can accommodate an ethic of embrace.

CHAPTER THREE: INCLUSIVISM AS A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

Christian Inclusivism "... affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions and at the same time maintains that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God" (D'Costa, 1986).

3.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter on Christian Particularism, the aim was to disclose what the Evangelicals typically embrace as the essence of Christianity. The researcher identified the representatives of Christian Particularism as the "Evangelicals" and discussed the features that, according to the Evangelicals, were understood as the no-value view of other religions – Christianity is the only true and valuable religion and the origin of non-Christian religions. All other religions are man-made and are an attempt to control God. As far as Christianity's relationship with non-Christian religions is concerned, to live in peace with people of other faiths is regarded as Scriptural. The uniqueness of Jesus is regarded as the only way to salvation. Evangelicals emphasise the seriousness of the New Testament motif, regarding the uniqueness of Christ as God's revelation. Some Evangelicals do agree that it is possible for God to reveal Himself in other religions; however, they do not agree that salvation is obtainable in any religion other than Christianity.

This study also examined the arguments of Christian Particularism, which is their unifying recognition of the authenticity of the Bible; their strong emphasis on doing more than saying; their strong belief in the work and person of Christ as Scripture projects it; and Christ's saving grace for the world.

The previous chapter concluded with a challenge for Christian Particularism, that in order for them to have a lasting impact in the world of religion and contribute to achieving peace among the religions of the world, they

should develop a changed attitude toward them through mutual dialogue. This can become a foundational pillar in faith communities and could lead to peace amongst religions of the world. This will be elaborated upon in Chapter 5 that discusses an ethic of embrace.

This particular chapter will have a closer look at Christian Inclusivism as an alternative Christian response to religious diversity. The aim of this chapter firstly is to define Christian Inclusivism. We will revisit the main features of Christian Particularism, which have been refuted by proponents of the Inclusivism model such as Karl Rahner (1966:115-134), a German Jesuit, commonly known as one of the leading and most influential Catholic theologians of the 20th century. We will then study the main features of this model before we draw our conclusion.

3.2 INCLUSIVISM DEFINED

D'Costa (1986:80) states that Christian Inclusivism "... affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions and at the same time maintains that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God." John Sanders (1992:215) says that, "Christian Inclusivism is the doctrine that salvation is appropriated only on the basis of Christ's work, but not necessarily through explicit faith in him."

William Lane Craig (1993) in his paper, "Middle knowledge and the soteriological problem of evil," says Christian Inclusivism believes that, while Christ is the only way to salvation, people of other faiths may be saved without becoming Christians. God has made salvation obtainable to everyone who sincerely responds to the truth that they have, whether it is through creation, conscience, another religion, or some other means. Such individuals are sometimes termed "anonymous Christians". Johnson (1999:1) says that "Inclusivism has also been called a blanket term to characterize a sort of 'middle way' between exclusivism and pluralism."

Vlach (2004) says Inclusivism argues that:

One religion is best but salvation is possible in other religions. Inclusivism is the position that one religion is uniquely true but salvation is accessible to those outside of that faith. He continues by saying that people of other faiths can be saved by Jesus even if they do not explicitly believe in Him.

Netland (1991:10) says that what makes Christian Inclusivism so unique is that it is an attempt to strike a balance between God's revelation and salvation in Jesus Christ and openness to God's saving grace in other religions. One final definition of Inclusivism, which the researcher wishes to highlight, comes from Storms (2006:3), who advocates:

Whereas Jesus is ontologically necessary for salvation, he is not epistemologically necessary. In other words, salvation is only a possibility because of what Jesus has done in his life, death, and resurrection. Apart from what He did, all would be consigned to eternal death. However, [one] need not consciously confess faith in the name of Jesus to be saved. Salvation is available to those who have never heard the name of "Jesus" if they respond positively in faith to the revelation God has made of Himself in nature and conscience.

Pinnock's (1992:49-52) argument extends further as he declares one can only reach the Father by passing through Christ Jesus. This does not mean that there is only one route to the Father. All routes lead to God and end up at Christ. However, this does not mean that all these routes have their origin in Christ. Pinnock (1992:78-80) believes that salvation is possibly obtainable if one has a sincere "faith" in Christ. Craig (1993) says that,

Inclusivists hold that, though Christ is the unique Savior, nonetheless there are many people included in his salvation who are ignorant of this fact – even followers of other religions. Inclusivists generally hold that Christ's salvation is available to those who positively respond to the truth they have – whether it be through creation, conscience, another religion, or some other means. Such individuals are sometimes termed anonymous Christians.

Craig (1993) continues by saying that Inclusivism is making full use of the full measure of God's grace whilst at the same time are committed to the uniqueness of the Lord Jesus Christ. He says that the Inclusivist contends that God, because He is sovereignty, has allowed things to be the way they are. He does not question whether Inclusivism appears to be an "attractive position, or a logically possible one", but if the evidence presented is convincing and Biblically truthful.

Craig (1993) says that the Inclusivists draw their support from Scripture through the case of Cornelius, the centurion, recorded in Acts 10. Cornelius is referred to as "a devout man ... who feared God," even before he had heard the Gospel. This is pointed out as evidence that he was an anonymous Christian before believing in Christ, therefore,

It must be remembered, however, that in the next chapter (specifically in Acts 11:14), it is clearly stated that though Cornelius was favourably disposed to God he did not receive salvation until he heard and believed in the gospel.

Craig (1993) says the conclusion Inclusivists draw is that, salvation can come to those who do not know Christ, however Hebrew 9:27 strongly suggests that this faith in Christ must be expressed before we die.

3.3 OBJECTION AGAINST CHRISTIAN PARTICULARISM

In order to have a better appreciation for the distinctive feature of Inclusivism we first have to consider the objections made against Particularism, which will be investigated comprehensively in this part of our study. The objections which will be focused upon are: *no one religion of the world; no one salvation for all – Jesus Christ; and no Christian superiority but an equal valid path to God, followed by a conclusion.*

These objections are significant features in the discussion below, notwithstanding opposing responses of Christian Particularism to these questions.

3.3.1 No one religion for the world

Sir Norman Anderson (1984:8) states that there will always be an ongoing debate between the great religions of the world and their relationships with Christianity. He says that this highlights the importance of a subject that will have diverse opinions among experts, and a widening interest among the public at large will continue.

In his book, *On being a Christian*, Hans Küng (1976:89) the Catholic theologian writes: "There will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions; there will be no peace among the religions without dialogue between religions." He is also the leading thinker behind the Global Ethic Foundation, an organisation that promotes interfaith education and encounter, declares that no one religion can exist in grand isolation or ignore the others. As for him, today more than ever before, this is not possible. Christianity is brought into contact, discussion and confrontation with the other religions of the world. He maintains that there has been an extensive religious geographical horizon_{at} the beginning of modern times that has been added in our own time.

Knitter (2002:1) puts it in another way by saying that the problem is not new. He continues thus: "From the clouded origins of the human species, as the spark of consciousness broadened and gave rise to the driving concern for the meaning of life, there have always been many religions, each with its own 'ultimate' answers." It is clear that, in our global world today, all other religions with their diverse philosophies and outlooks on life have taken centre stage challenging Christianity's claims of being the only true religion or the only way to God.

Storms (2006:1) contends that we are living in an uncomfortable increasingly growing world with religious traditional Christian Exclusivist claims that Jesus Christ is "The Way, the Truth, and the Life" and salvation is obtainable only for those who consciously put their faith in him. This has branded Christians as being offensive and arrogant and has become the "scandal of particularity" – the most "volatile and urgent issue facing the church in the 21st century."

One of the many reasons to which Storms (2006:1) ascribes this is the pragmatic view people have of religion, being that, “people are less concerned with universal truth claims and more with what works; what brings fulfilment; what feels good and facilitates self-growth and sense of well-being.” Another reason that Storms (2006:1) gives is the significant contribution of globalisation that negates the world’s isolation or remoteness. He says that technology has made this possible, and has created new and established platforms connecting citizens of the world; people can be in contact with each other instantaneously.

According to Storms’ (2006:1) understanding the cultural differences of people from different tribes and tongues have become a thing of the past. So, the exclusive claims of Christianity have become less attractive to those who are now faced with having to “get on” with those around them – our “next-door neighbours”. Communications and technological advances have transformed lives in a number of seconds – faster than what 100 educators could do in 100 years of travelling. Netland (2001:142) says that:

In popular consciousness tolerance and pluralism are linked in the perception that Particularism (the view that one religion is distinctively true and thus normative for all peoples) is inherently intolerant of other faiths whereas pluralism, which holds that all religions are equally legitimate responses to the religious ultimate, is appropriately tolerant.

McGrath (2001:544) confirms this in an opening statement, saying that Christianity is but one valid religious tradition among a host of others ... a plurality of cultures within its midst.

Newbigin (1991:146) advances his definition by differentiating between Pluralism as a fact of life, and Pluralism as an ideology. With this, he states that an important aspect of the postmodern worldview is that Pluralism is to be encouraged and desired, and that “all truth claims are to be condemned as imperialistic.”

Sacks (1991:81) says, G.K. Chesterton who emphasising the importance of communal living in this one world God has given us, says that, “The virtue of

people, who believe anything,” but as Sacks (1991:81) says, “It is the virtue of those who believe unconditionally that rights attached to the individual as God’s creation, regardless of the route he or she chooses to salvation.” This change from religious modernism to religious freedom has confronted the Particularists with regard to understanding the measure of their relationship with people of other religious traditions.

Sacks (1991:64) says further that, “... if we are to have a public culture, and one with a religious dimension, it is a discipline we have to undergo. We have to learn how to speak to those whom we do not hope to convert, but with whom we wish to live.” Sacks (1991:67) says that, Horace Kallen (1924:124), argued that for everyone to live in peace and harmony, together as equals, they should not be ridiculed or discriminated against for who they are or what their belief is based upon, and their values need to be agreed upon. Sacks (1991:20) believes that religious value remains a potent enough force in our cultures that needs to be renewed.

According to the Pluralists, Christian Particularism lacks tolerance. It is intolerant towards people of other religious beliefs. John Horton’s (1998:429-430) traditional definition of tolerance has included that it is when one makes a, “deliberate decision to refrain from prohibiting, hindering, or otherwise coercively interfering with conduct [or beliefs] of which one disapproves, although one has the power to do so” (see also Storms 2006:1). He further states that the underlying factor here is the one that we must be aware of, which includes an important message that speaks about the danger of offending someone else because of his/her different religious beliefs or religious practice.

To propagate Christianity as the superior religion and God’s only religion carries offensive elements that not only reflect intolerance but also announce indirectly that other faiths are inadequate and false. As said earlier, Storms (2006:1) says, “In popular consciousness tolerance and Pluralism are linked in the perception that Particularism (the view that one religion is distinctively true and thus normative for all peoples) is inherently intolerant of other faiths,

whereas Pluralism, which holds that all religions are equally legitimate responses to the religious ultimate, is appropriately tolerant.”

3.3.2 No one salvation for all – Jesus Christ

McGrath (2001:545) says that Particularism has been criticised for its conflicting stance with God’s universal saving will to save all humanity. This question is asked in the light of those who have not heard the Gospel, or choose to reject it. Craig (2005) in his paper, “Politically incorrect salvation”, says what the contemporary Pluralist would like to know is this: Is Particularistic propaganda-based exclusivity of the doctrine of salvation through Christ alone for Christians only? He says that Pluralists are concerned about those who have not heard the Gospel, whether revealed to them through nature or their own consciences.

McGrath (2001:546) says that, Pluralists argue against the inconsistent claims that not only esteem Christianity higher than other religions, but also the idea that salvation is found only in Christ. He says the Pluralists oppose such notions and, according to him, this stands in contradiction to God’s universal saving will. Craig (1991) says:

For the person who objects to the exclusivity of salvation through Christ, is in effect, posing what one might call *the soteriological* problem of evil, that is to say, he maintains that the proposition: 1.) God is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnibenevolent is inconsistent with, 2.) Some persons do not receive Christ and are damned.

Storms (2006:2) says this has helped William Craig to resolve the problem of the exclusivity of salvation through Christ, and his own subsequent study of the notion of middle knowledge, which addresses the “moral problem of how God can justly withhold salvation from those who never had the opportunity to hear and believe in the name of Jesus.” Geivett and Phillips (1996:270) contend that Craig’s middle knowledge theory asks, God knowing all things past, present and future:

Why should not God, who is omniscient, know what a person in some non-Christian land would freely decide if that person were, contrary to fact, to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ? Some who accept the doctrine of middle knowledge hold that there are individuals who never hear the gospel but would believe if they were to hear it and that God saves them on the basis of his foreknowledge of that fact. But it is equally plausible philosophically that God knows that all individuals who never hear the gospel are individuals who would not believe if they were to hear the gospel.

Wilfrid Cantwell Smith (1981:90) differs somewhat and asserts that all religion shares a common core experience of which Christianity is a part. He says Christ can save people whether or not they know his name. He quotes from Scripture:

... thou art formless. Thy only form is our knowledge of "Thee." Any claim for uniqueness made for one concept of the Transcendent, for instance the Christian claim that the Transcendent is present in fullness of Jesus Christ (Colossians 1:19) is to be regarded as wholly unacceptable (see also McGrath 2001:546).

In response to the above quotation, Craig (2005) says:

Closer analysis reveals the problem to be counterfactual in nature: God could not condemn persons who, though freely rejecting God's sufficient grace for salvation revealed through nature and conscience, would have received his salvific grace mediated through the gospel. In response, it may be pointed out that God's being all-powerful does not guarantee that He can create a world in which all persons freely embrace his salvation and that his being all-loving does not entail that, even if such a world were feasible for Him, God would prefer such a world over a world in which some persons freely reject his salvation. Furthermore, it is possible that God has created a world having an optimal balance between saved and lost and that God has so providentially ordered the world that those who fail to hear the gospel and be saved would not have freely responded affirmatively to it even if they had heard it.

Knitter (2002:58-60) says that a Particularist claims that Jesus is the one-and-only Saviour. He says that:

Christians ... Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, and Native Americans who not only say that they have found peace and happiness and a sense of oneness with the Divine in their own religion but also show in the way they live their lives that this is very much the case. They are people who are happy, at peace, and committed to loving each other and improving the world.

He says that the danger of this claim of the Particularists is that other religious faiths may also make such claims speaking of their “saviour” or “son of God” in a form of a teacher who has been guiding them to enlightenment and Nirvana, or as the “Glorious One” who loves and affirms them just as they are.

As for Storms (2006:2) the major concern of this objection is about the eternal destiny of those who died before Christ made his appearance on the scene.

... Along with our knowledge of the vast majority of human beings in history who have died without ever hearing the name of Jesus. Are they forever condemned to hell? If so, how can it be fair or an expression of divine justice that they entered eternity without having had the advantage or opportunity afforded those who live in a place or time where the gospel of Christ is preached?

3.3.3 No Christianity superiority but equal paths

Pluralists argue further by asking the question: What will happen to those who have been born in a religious faith, other than Christianity, that claims superiority over all other religious faiths? What Pluralists do not grasp is this: How can God, who is known as an all-loving, all-powerful and all-kind God (and is so proclaimed by his followers), send people to hell especially those due to historical and geographical implications?

Today, amidst our changing Pluralistic society, Particularists refuse to acknowledge and agree that all religions are equally (or nearly equally) valid as ways to approach God, despite the differences that exist amongst them. Storms (2006:2) says the “scandal of Particularity” is not only regarded as the most explosive and vital subject matter that faces Christianity today, but is also regarded as arrogant and offensive.

Keith E. Johnson (1997:1) a graduate of the University of Michigan (B.S. in Chemical Engineering) and Trinity International University (M.A. in Christian Thought) who frequently speaks on Religious Pluralism and comparative religions at university campuses, currently serving as the regional coordinator on Ongoing Theological Education with the Campus Ministry of CCC and lives in Indianapolis, says that “some claims” fundamentally speaking that all religions are equally alike.

He further says that the analogy most often used of people taking different paths up the same mountain, but all arrive at the same summit, is the viewpoint which Pluralists not only embrace but also encourage others to believe that this is the way of life.

The Christian Inclusivist viewpoint labours the desire to conserve the uniqueness of the Christian faith but, at the same time, embraces (a failure of Particularism) an attitude of acceptance of people of other faiths. Storms (2006:3) says that:

In their opinion, though people of another religious conviction may be ignorant of Christ – or possibly even have rejected Him – yet because of their positive response to what they know about God, or even due to their efforts to follow the dictates of their conscience, they are unknowingly included in the number of those who are recipients of Christ’s salvation. The analogy is sometimes used of a person who receives a gift, but is unaware of who the ultimate giver of the gift may be.

Storms (2006:3) says this is in contrast to the so-called “fulfilment” view, which holds that all other non-Christian faiths are incomplete and have insufficient anticipation of what has been revealed in Christ despite the religious ethical and moral components. He says that this scandal recognises that all revelations revealed in other religions are imperfect and partial, but it is perfectly and completely revealed in Christianity through Christ. Therefore, Christianity is elevated as the religion that not only replaces, but the religion that fulfils all moral and ethical good truth in all other religions.

Knitter (2002:56) says that the objection to Christianity’s claims of superiority and declaring that all paths are equal has also brought the authenticity of the Bible under a spotlight. He says that the question that has been asked is based on the sources for its theology: What are the primary materials that Christians utilise to build their understanding of other religions? Storms (2006:2) says the negative influence of Biblical criticism has shaken Christians’ confidence to contend that the Bible should be approached with the idea that, whatever portion one reads (especially the Gospels) it should be regarded as the objective truth.

Storms (2006:2) says that this could be recognised as:

Perhaps the greatest influence is the widespread “loss of confidence” in Christianity as traditionally defined. This has left many Christians in limbo, lacking the confidence not only to believe and know that the Bible is the absolute and only truth of God but it has also hampered Christians to adhere to the call to evangelize the world with the Gospel of Christ. Christians do not feel at liberty because without the confidence of knowing what we believe are absolute and objectively true we cannot say to those with different religious belief, that we are right in what we believe and they are in error for what they believe when it comes to religious concerns.

3.3.4 Conclusion

These, among others, are the objections against the Christian Particularists that need a response. The existing challenge(s) Particularists face today is to search for “better strategies” to make their claims valid and “accommodative” so that other religious groups would embrace Christianity without ridiculing, condemning, criticising or labelling it as an isolated, cold and insensitive religion. In the Gospel of Luke, the Bible says that the people (“sinners”) had a tendency or a habit of listening to Christ ... (Luke 4:42-44).

Storms (2006:2) concludes by saying that there is a real emerging belief and that the real enemies of Christianity are not other religious groups, but atheism and secularism.

3.4 THE MAIN PROPONENTS OF INCLUSIVISM

3.4.1 Karl Rahner

Karl Rahner was born on 4 March 1904 in Freiburg, Breisgau, Germany, and entered the Society of Jesus at the age of 18 years. After ten years of in-depth study, he was ordained as a Jesuit priest in 1932, D’Costa (1986:81-83) says.

His doctoral studies concentrated on the work of an Italian Catholic priest in the Dominican Order, a philosopher and a theologian in the scholastic tradition: Doctor Angelicus, Doctor Universalis and Doctor Communis. In his doctorate, published as *Spirit in the world* in 1939, he argued for post Kantian metaphysics and also attended seminars about German philosopher Immanuel Kant, who is being regarded as one of the most influential thinkers of modern Europe and of the late Enlightenment. Martin Heidegger conducted these seminars in Freiburg. After the completion of his doctoral studies, he became a professor of theology at the Jesuit Faculty at Innsbruck in 1938. Here he began his collection of what is known today as *Theological Investigations* which is regarded as his main contribution, for the Inclusivism model.

D’Costa (1986:81-83) says between 1939 and 1944, the Nazis prohibited the Innsbruck Faculty to continue and Rahner was compelled to neither practise

nor engage in any pastoral care or to lecture in Vienna. During this time, he developed a holistic understanding of the pastoral challenges and demands that were fostered by technology and secularisation.

D'Costa (1986:81-83) says that in 1945, Rahner returned to Germany, and accepted a professorship in Theology at Pullach and later at the University of Innsbruck, Munich and Münster. Knitter (2002:68) says that Rahner's theological concerns focused mainly on the predicament faced in their relationship with those who hold a believe system other than theirs. Even though he lacked religious education, regarding the belief systems of the faiths his "change of heart" for the adherents of other religions, has become key to Christianity during the 1960s which was then in turn embraced by Vatican II. Rahner, in theological circles, is considered to be the "chief engineer". His contributions in the theological world have made a massive impact on this Christian approach.

The next section will consider his contributions he made to Christian Inclusivism.

3.4.2 Nature is graced / God of love

Sanders (1992:217) says that Inclusivists believe God is love and desires to share his love not only with an exclusive group, but with the whole human race. They say that God desires to bring all people to Himself, whether they are considered as outcasts, publicans or sinners, like it was in the Jewish society.

Inclusivists believe that God is sovereign and He acts in accordance with his will, and not man's restrictions and limitations. His mission is to save man and He will do what He thinks is necessary. He wants man to know Him and have a relationship with Him, which is revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. They believe that we are equally responsible toward God to work on our relationship with the Lord.

Unlike the no-value-system claims of the Christian Particularist, the Inclusivist attributes a positive value act to individuals who are in a disposition. Rahner (1980:61-62) believes that, non-Christian religions should be considered

as channels through which his grace flows due to the supernatural elements that it mediates. He maintains that, if the Christian revelation is to mean anything, then it must be on the basis that God somehow offers grace to those who have never heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Dupuis (2000:143) says whatever truth and grace are already found among the nations as a sort of secret presence of God, this frees them from evil influences and restores them to Christ.

Schillebeeckx (1990:87-88) says:

Through grace God has become a person for us. Creation does, however, offer us the possibility of affirming the personal character of God as a mystery, and this recognition forms the basis of the possibility of associating with God in grace ... if at a certain point which is not grace, our human freedom were not able to come into contact in some way with the personal God, then grace or revelation would be impossible.

Rahner (1980:56-61), in his first thesis, focuses not only on Christ alone, but also brings Christianity into the spotlight and challenges Particularists to consider the danger of stating other religions as invalid. He avoids Particularism's idea of marginalising other religions and admonishes that, if Christianity considers itself superior over other religions, it must be aware of the possibility of not reaching all people.

Rahner (1980:61-66) says that this is not in line with God's saving grace. He contends that, although these other religious traditions may not possess the complete truth, however, they do possess "supernatural, graced-filled elements" which mediate the grace of God as they show forth the *fruitful of the Spirit* in the life of the non-Christian religions. He says if we believe in the salvific purpose of God toward humanity through Jesus Christ, then we must be aware of the "gratuitous influences of natural grace in the lives of all men."

3.4.3 Truth and grace

Knitter (2002:75) says one of the major strengths of Inclusivism was when they did away with the 16th century restrictions that disallowed and denied people of other religious faiths the privilege of salvation. It was impossible for them to receive or obtain this salvation, because they had “outside-the-church” status. Today the Catholic Church embraces all that which is “true and holy” in non-Christian religions, respecting the moral and doctrinal teaching as well as joining in dialogue.

According to Knitter (2002:75), during the second half of the century, the Catholic Church explored the challenges and “risk” of dialogue with people of other religions. This was viewed as a giant leap forward for Inclusivism, as they embraced Rahner’s writings.

Although he never explored or developed a proper understanding of these non-Christian religions, Rahner (1980:75) firmly believed in God’s universal salvific will for all people and this convinced him that there was a need for dialogue with them.

Netland (1991:20-24) said from 1962 to 1964, Vatican Council II latched onto it and made inroads into the hearts and lives of people of other faiths. Knitter (2002:75) says, “Never before had a church, in its official pronouncements, dealt so extensively with other religions; never before had it said such positive things about them; never before had it called upon all Christians to take these religions seriously and dialogue with them.”

According to Netland (1991:14-19) the desire for mutual understanding and enrichment through extensive contact with people of other faiths, through interreligious dialogue, was emphasised.

Allowing salvation for other non-Christian religions without any “reservations” or “restrictions,” and recognising the need for dialogue with these people, Knitter (2002:100) regards this as an element of God’s grace in other non-Christian religions.

3.4.4 Religion is “a way of salvation”

The Particularistic point of view, discussed in the previous chapter, explained that salvation is obtainable only in the person of Jesus Christ. Rahner (1978:178-230, 318) agrees, but adds that grace is active also in other religions. By this, he says that, "God is offering the gift of God self through other religious beliefs, practices, and rituals." He bases his belief on the fact that God meets us in social physical forms that are called "sacraments". This has been the core of Catholic theology (Vatican II, 1980:81-82).

Barnes (1989:44) states, "Catholic theology has a much more developed sense of the sacramental and therefore a different conception of the way God reveals Himself." He continues by saying that the more we become aware of the church as a communion of people, marked as a social reality, the identity of other religions as social realities emerges and this would cause a problem for Christianity to deny the possibility that other religions may be "ways of salvation". Being mindful of the social aspect of everyday life of religious people in which God's grace is at work, Küng (1967:25-66) writes, "As against the 'extraordinary' way of salvation which is the Church, the world religions can be called – if this is rightly understood – the 'ordinary' way of salvation for non-Christian humanity" (see also Dupuis 2000:153). Dupuis (2000:153) says that:

God is not only Lord of the church through the special salvation history of the church but also through the universal salvation history of humanity which is bound up with the special salvation history in having a common origin, meaning and goal and being subjected to the same grace of God. Man's religion, being the religion of a social being, is never merely an individualist, subjectivist activity in a purely private zone, but always active in particular embodiment, i.e. a particular religion, a concrete religious community.

According to Shenk (1997:43),

Inclusivists want to avoid monopolizing the gospel of redemption. They acknowledge the possibility of salvation outside of Christian faith or outside the walls of the visible church, but the agent of such salvation is Christ, and the

revelation in Jesus is definitive and normative for assessing that salvation. Jesus Christ is believed to be the center, and other ways are evaluated by how they relate to him. Other religions are not just a preparation for Christ, but Christ is actually present in them.

Barnes (1989:50) says that the Catholic Church declared and their approach is that there is nothing unholy or impure in non-Christian religions. We, as the church, are called to be a witness for Christ, as well as to acknowledge the truths and values that are found in these other religions, and to promote their spiritual good and bring the best out of them. Therefore, Netland (1991:20) says, according to the World Council of Churches, since 1970, dialogue with people of other religions has been understood as the mission of the church.

D'Costa (1986:94) says that this dialogue should proceed in a spirit of open commitment, being receptive and attentive to the other, knowing that the presence of God might already be in the life of the non-Christian or his/her religion. Barnes (1989:50-51) says that all ancient prejudicial attitudes should be buried and a new spirit and vision of God's fatherly love for all humanity, despite their religious background, should be adopted.

3.4.5 The "anonymous Christian"

Rahner's (1980:75) third thesis states:

Christianity does not simply confront the member of an extra-Christian religion as a mere non-Christian but as someone who can and must be regarded in this or that respect as an 'anonymous Christian'. If he has experienced the grace of God – if, in certain circumstances, he has already accepted this grace as the ultimate, unfathomable entelechy of his existence as opening out into infinity – then he has already been given revelation in the true sense even before he has been affected by missionary preaching from without.

Rahner (1980:75) says further that the person who is targeted by the missionary might be someone who is already progressing toward salvation whether through his circumstances or other, without having someone to preach the salvation of Jesus; then the possibility that he is as an “anonymous Christian” should be considered.

There have been some controversies regarding the term “anonymous Christian” but, for Knitter (2002:73-74), D’Costa (1986:86) and others who understand Rahner’s theology, this term says that Rahner only proposed this vision to his fellow Christians. They say it had no reflection on any other person from other religious traditions. For them his sole purpose for producing an idea such as “anonymous Christian” was to “liberate Christians from their negative views of those outside the church and to enable them to realize that God is much greater than they are.” God’s sovereignty allows Him to alter any situation according to his will, whether it increases the number of Christian converts or not.

Dupuis (2000:144) says that Rahner based his “theory on his theological anthropology which is a philosophic-theological analysis of humanity in the concrete historical condition in which it is being created by God and destined to be in union with God. Therefore, we are considered to be the event and the locus of God’s self-communication in Jesus Christ.” What he was saying is that God, by his grace, created us and built his image into us in order to guide us back to Him. We did not seek God, He sought us instead. Dupuis (2000:144) says that, “There is and has to be an anonymous and yet real relationship between the individual and the concrete history of salvation, including Jesus ...”

3.4.6 Limits of the church and for religions

Knitter (2002:74) says Rahner’s invention of the “anonymous Christian” sparked some limitations for the mission of the church, which is to go and “win the lost for Jesus Christ” by converting them into the Christian faith. Rahner (1966:133; 1980:75-77) says that Christians can no longer regard people of other faiths as lost and in need to be saved. Instead, our Christian mission-message should

consider itself as the “historically tangible vanguard and the historically and sociologically constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church.”

Braaten (1995:32) asks if this controversial idea could lead to a case of euthanasia – cultural classes and, in this case, clashes amongst religions of the world? Who could deny one religious group the right to share the truth cross-culturally? Rahner’s (1980:77) response to this challenge is a technical response where he diminishes the emphasis of the church’s task to help the anonymous-Christians to become conscious of their status as God’s children who have received a divine gift of grace.

Barnes (1989:55) says if non-Christians are saved in the same way as the Christians through their historical practices, then such non-Christians are already members of a tradition that is oriented toward its fulfilment in Christ – such non-Christians have already received a revelation in the true sense before being affected by the missionary’s preaching of the Gospel.

The limitation marked for non-Christian religions stems from the fact of Rahner’s (1966:391) theology, namely that salvation is obtainable only by believing in the Lord Jesus Christ, who is indeed the centre of all, unlike John Hick’s “Copernican revolution” that replaces Christ with God at the centre. (John Hick A.D. 1922- , an English Presbyterian minister, “is the most radical” and most controversial of the proponents of a contemporary model for Christian approaches to other faiths, who also created the “Copernican Revolution”. John Hick, who is considered to be the most influential voice of Christian Pluralism, will be studied in more detail in Chapter 4).

For Rahner (1980:78-79), salvation in the end is only obtainable in and through Christ Jesus, therefore non-Christian religions serve as channels that are preparing their adherents to embrace Christianity in the fullness of time.

Storms’ (2006:2) contribution on the topic follows the same line:

The so-called “fulfilment” view of non-Christian religions – this comes from the recognition of undeniable truth and beauty in other faiths, believes these to be incomplete anticipations of what had been definitively revealed in Christ. In other

words, what was imperfectly and only partially revealed in other religions is perfectly and completely revealed in Christianity. The former are thus moving gradually to their consummate fulfilment in Christianity. Christianity does not replace, but fulfills, what is good and true in other faiths.

3.5 THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: FURTHER DEVELOPMENTS

The previous section dealt with the main features that Rahner presents. The next section will continue examining the other important main features presented by the Catholic Church as they were carried forward under the leadership of Pope John Paul II. As regard to Christianity's relationship with other religious groups, in this next section, several themes will be discussed, namely: "Religions can be considered as *rays and not ways of salvation; the Catholic Church and interreligious dialogue; dialogue and its limitations; and the reign of God; the position of the Holy Spirit; the fulfilment theory; liberation theology and other Catholic views.*" This was strongly motivated and evidently visible in the Catholic Church as they engaged with people of other faiths.

3.5.1 Introduction

A pool of mainline churches strongly supports the Christian Inclusivism approach. However, the Catholic Church is the strongest contender for promoting Christian Inclusivism. D'Costa (1986:80) says it has been noted that, since Vatican II, most Catholic theologians have adopted this attitude. Our study will approach this from a Catholic perspective.

Knitter (2002:66) says that, the Catholic attitude towards other religions has not always been favourable in the past, as it is today. There were restrictions that isolated other faiths. Salvation was obtainable in Jesus Christ, provided that one belongs to this Church. The term "outside the Church, no salvation" and later, that "outside the Church, no salvation at all" was possible to obtain, became the familiar tone in Catholic circles. People's pursuit and practice of a

pure Godly living was not enough to qualify for salvation, unless they had any relation with the Catholic Church; God's love was available only through this Church.

Knitter (2002:67) further says that this was not long-lived, as new expansions started to evolve. Their popular terms, "outside the Church, no salvation" and "outside the Church, no salvation at all," were replaced with: "without the Church, no salvation". This gave new meaning to many people of other faiths and meant that they could be outside the Church and still be eligible to obtain salvation, provided they "follow God's voice in their conscience, they will be inside the church or related to the church" (Bevans & Schroeder, 2004:324), as long as they are aware that the "church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation" (RM 55).

Dupuis (2000:85) says that Scripture is not clear on the issue of salvation for the world through the church, or that the church is necessary for the salvation for all who are in fact saved. He warns that caution is required when one asserts such claims and says, "While stating the role of the Church, it did not necessarily claim exclusivity for it ... this could be the result from the long time span from the writings of some third-century writers to the authoritative statement made by the Council of Florence the axiom was running."

Although this was classed as a positive attitude for the way forward, the researcher would then regard this to be a form of a manipulative act on the part of the Catholic Church. The Catholic Church indirectly marked their views as superior to any other, and if their views or rules were not followed or regarded, one would automatically be disqualified or detached from God. Netland (1991:23) says that, *The dogmatic constitution on the church* – one of the principal documents of the Second Vatican Council, *Lumen Gentium 8*, made it clear that the Catholic Church could no longer be regarded as the sole church of the Lord Jesus Christ. By doing this, they would be in error of stating that the church of Jesus Christ subsists in the Catholic Church.

3.5.2 *Nostra Aetate*

According to D'Costa (2000:101) *Nostra Aetate (Latin)*, “*The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church and non-Christian Religion*,” promoted on October 28, 1965, has marked a decisive step forward in the right direction for the Catholic theology of religions.”

Knitter (2002:75/6) says what started out as a concern for the Jews, which would help to foster the right Christian attitude towards anti-Semitism, had a ripple effect, not only of a new theological perspective on Judaism, but in areas where Christians were living in communities where other faiths were practiced. Here, bishops saw open opportunities to extend their religion beyond the confines of Judaism.

D'Costa (2000:102) argues that, notwithstanding of its positive outlook regarding non-Christian religions, it had a setback, namely the still shaky Christian and Jewish relationship. Concerning its optimistic approach, the aim was to focus and build on common beliefs that were prevalent amongst them. This was a huge improvement from the pre-Vatican II history that highlighted “no salvation outside the church,” which never formed part of the *Nostra Aetate*.

D'Costa (2000:101) says ties were broken with anyone who held to the pre-Vatican II history. To them, it was clear that an ever-loving, kind and holy God wants to reach all people of all walks of life and it, therefore, was the church's prerogative and mission to make such a loving and kind God known to people of other religious traditions. Although the Council motivated its people to dialogue with these non-Christian religions and promote the good (Knitter, 2002:76), there remained “fundamental tension between the emphasis upon the necessity of Jesus Christ and the Church for salvation and the affirmation of the possibility of salvation for those with no explicit relation to the Church.” Netland (1991:24) reiterated that, Piero Rossano, secretary of the Vatican's secretariat for non-Christian religions in 1979, holds the view that salvation is obtainable in other religions. He based his view, firstly, by agreeing with D'Costa about the Spirit of Christ being present in non-Christian religions, then states:

... the salvific function of these religions, namely, whether they are or are not paths of salvation, there is no doubt that “grace and truth” are given through Jesus Christ and by his Spirit (cf. John 1:17) ... that gifts of “grace and truth” do reach the hearts of men and women through the visible experiential signs of the various religions (see also Bevans & Schroeder 2004:324).

According to Gustav Thils (1996:131-133):

The salvation of members is not in spite of their religion but it is in and through their religion inasmuch as they embody [God's] universal saving design and correspond to the universal revelation, religions [have] a true salvific efficacy. They have in the eyes of God legitimacy ... and they may be called “ways of salvation” insofar as they express and embody a “providential order” of God for their members ... (see also Dupuis 2000:156).

Netland (1991:24-25) says that Vatican II's conclusion highlights Christ at the origin, the centre and the destiny of other religions. Christ is the beginning and the end and fulfils them so that they can reach the goal of the end times in order that God be God in all.

Knitter (2002:77) says the majority of the Catholic theologians interpret the document of Vatican II as an affirmation that the non-Christian religions do not provide ways of salvation although non-Christians can be saved. The Council rejected Rahner's proposal that qualifies religions as a vehicle of salvation. They do not deny the possibility of God's revelation being present in the other religious groups. However, should they agree on the issue of salvation being provided by these religions, according to them, this would “jeopardize the value of what God had done in Jesus” and, to them, the “rays of Truth was only that rays [were] not enough to enable the full sunlight of God's saving grace to be felt.”

Netland (1991:25) says that, “This has caused difficulty for the post-Vatican II Council to reconcile the fresh recognition of salvation through non-Christian religions with the traditional emphasis upon the normativity of Jesus Christ and the necessity of the Church for salvation.” D'Costa (2000:102-109)

maintains that this question is taking for granted the teaching of the pre- and post-conciliar that says non-Christians could obtain salvation.

Based on a case study by D'Costa (2000:101-109) regarding this question, the conclusion is made that Vatican II is in agreement with the Protestant view that reiterates that genuine revelation and truth are found in other religious traditions, but concludes that they are means or vehicles of salvation upon which they disagree.

3.5.3 *Ad Gentes*

D'Costa (2000:102) and Knitter (2002:76) contend that, *Ad Gentes* (AG 9), *The decree on the church's missionary activity*, directed the attention of the Council to a phrase that Rahner identifies as "elements of truth and grace" in other religions. Could it be said that non-Christian religions are "mediators of supernatural revelation to their followers?"

D'Costa (2000:102) believes that the issue regarding "nature and grace" has sparked division in the Catholic camp and says that there are some

... [t]heologians who argue that the document affirms the possibility that the non-Christian religions are a means to the supernatural revelation meaning that they envisage a very close relationship between nature and grace; on the other hand there are other theologians who envisage a very close relationship between nature and grace.

D'Costa (2000:104) puts forth a fine distinction of appreciation in the context of truth and goodness by saying:

But whatever truth and grace are to be found among the nations, as a sort of secret presence of God, this [missionary] activity frees from all taint of evil and restores to Christ the maker, who overthrows the devil's domain and wards off the manifold malice of vice. And so, whatever good is to be sown in the hearts and minds of men, or in the rites of cultures peculiar to various people, is not lost.

More than that, it is healed, ennobled, and perfected for the glory of God, the shame of the demon, and the bliss of men (AG 9).

Knitter (2002:76) argues that religions filled with both riches and blessings are those that are religious and human. The Church Fathers said that one can find the “seed of the Word”, which is the same Word that is embodied in Jesus Christ, in religions that would give rise to “seeds of contemplation”, that are “a sort of secret presence of God” (AG 9). In conclusion, D’Costa (2000:108) says the Holy Spirit, a mysterious presence in every human heart, works in Jesus’ incarnation and his life, death and resurrection, and is also at work in the church, but is not an alternative to Christ, nor is he a gap-filler of Christ, but brings about in the human heart of people, cultures and religion, “serves as a preparation for the Gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ” who is the fulfilment.

3.5.4 *Gaudium et Spes*

D’Costa (2000:109) says that the *Gaudium et Spes, Pastoral constitution of the church*, is much clearer when it comes to understanding the contributing factor regarding the presence of the Holy Spirit in human cultures outside the church. Its key section declares:

Pressing upon the Christian, to be sure, are the need and the duty to battle against evil through manifold tribulations and even to suffer death. But, linked with the paschal mystery and patterned on the dying Christ, he will hasten forward to resurrection in the strength, which comes from hope. All this holds true not only for Christians, but for all men of goodwill in whose heart grace works in an unseen way. For, since Christ died for all men, and since the ultimate vocation of man is in fact one and divine, we ought to believe that the Holy Spirit in a manner known only to God offers to any man the possibility to be associated with the paschal mystery (GS 22).

This statement speaks volumes regarding the Holy Spirit's presence in other faiths in relation to Christ's atonement on the cross. It constitutes the presence of the Holy Spirit in other religious groups and also acknowledges the elements of goodness and truth within other religions, which serve as a preparation for the Gospel. This allows room for D'Costa (2000:114) to reiterate the importance of the Church's stance regarding the fulfilment theory. He says:

If one were to retain and utilize the category of fulfilment in a very careful sense, then it is not only the other religions that are fulfilled in (and in one sense, radically transformed) their *preparation* being completed through Christianity, but also Christianity itself that is fulfilled receiving the gift of God that the Other might bear, self-consciously or not.

D'Costa (2000:113) says that, Pope John Paul II's, interpretation in *Gaudium et Spes* (26,38,93) says the presence of the Holy Spirit is also evident not only in people's lives but also in society, history, cultures and religions. He describes the free sovereignty of the Holy Spirit as the Third Person of the Trinity, as omnipotent, omniscient and omnipresent as people harmoniously engage with each other. Dupuis (2000:173) says, "Characteristically the *Gaudium et Spes* sees the Spirit of God universally at work in the world, not only nor primarily in the religious aspirations of human beings, but in the human values they unanimously pursue, such as justice and kinship, peace and harmony" (GS 32, 38, 39).

Dupuis (2000:174-179) says this is not a means to minimise the fullness of God in Christ through the Holy Spirit within the Church, but the Church needs to understand, as it enlarges its practice and understanding of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, that it can help them to see how much of the Gospel is still unclear to them. For this reason and more, the Holy Spirit has come to guide, empower and reveal God's truth to the Church as it interprets God's Holy Word, in order to engage with the world at large as it proclaims the Gospel.

3.5.5 "Revelations and not ways of salvation"

Knitter (2002:80) says since Vatican II, Pope John Paul II has been regarded as the most prolific promoter of “greater openness” to other faiths. What was started by Pope Paul VI, best known as the “Pope of dialogue”, was taken forward by Pope John Paul II. This is beyond Pope Paul VI’s conviction that there is only one true religion, i.e. Christianity, and only in the Christian church can one be identified in a true and living relationship with God.

Dupuis (2000:173) says in Pope Paul II’s life journey, it was clear that he pursued an interreligious dialogue amongst the great religions of the world. He believed in the underlying uniqueness of religions, because he was mindfully aware of the living indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in other religions outside the church. According to him, the Holy Spirit was responsible for the fruit that came forth from these religions. There are distinctions in their religious paths, but one directed singular goal.

Dupuis (2000:179) further says in the light of his belief in the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, and of Christ being evident in the existence of other religions of the world, John Paul II is described as being more positive and that he projects a superior disposition toward a broader perspective of God’s grace and salvation in Jesus Christ in, and through, their “sincere practice” in their religious traditions.

According to Knitter (2002:77) Vatican II affirmed a positive conviction regarding the saving grace in other religions, which provides a means of salvation for its followers. The elements of “goodness and truth” are not the only characteristics found that make non-Christian religions attractive, but it also acknowledges the presence of the Holy Spirit that is evident in these non-Christian religions, which makes them unique and allows them to be identified as probable “*ways of salvation.*”

3.5.6 Interreligious dialogue

Knitter (2002:82) says dialogue with people of non-Christian religions has become the core business of the Christian Roman Catholic Church. What once was on the periphery has moved to the centre of Catholic philosophy – dialogue and proclamation be regarded as essential key elements according to Catholic philosophy, if we want to fulfil the mission of the Church.

Knitter (2002:82) says John Paul II's example of a dialogical and a proclaiming church was in his pursuit of ecumenism. He went about taking various steps to improve relations with Jews, including Vatican II's recognition of Israel and acknowledgment of Catholic failures in responding to the Holocaust. Conservative on doctrine and issues relating to women, he was also strongly critical of liberation theology – the belief that the Christian Gospel demands “a preferential option for the poor”, and that the church should be involved in the struggle for economic and political justice in the contemporary world, especially of the Third World, and of those who called themselves Catholics, yet continually questioned the Church's teachings. The *Columbia electronic encyclopaedia* (2007) states that:

In a 1995 encyclical he reasserted the church's condemnation of abortion, euthanasia, and capital punishment. However, he also considered it the church's responsibility to grapple with social questions and was an outspoken commentator on world events. John Paul II issued two encyclicals (1981, 1991) on economic issues in which he praised free-market economies but criticized the inadequacies and injustices of both capitalism and Communism.

The *Columbia electronic encyclopaedia* (2007) further says that John Paul II

... expressed his opposition to the imposition (in 1981) of martial law in Poland and used the resources of the church behind the scenes to support Polish solidarity prior to the collapse of Communism in his native country, actions that also helped bring about the eventual collapse of Communism generally in East Europe and the Soviet Union.

The *Columbia electronic encyclopaedia* (2007) further says that, in his 1998 encyclical, *Fides et ratio*, (relationships of faith) he condemned atheism and faith unsupported by reason, and affirmed that there is a place for reason and philosophy in religion. An independent trade union federation, formed in September 1980, was led by Lech Walesa, grew rapidly in size and political power and soon posed a threat to Poland's communist government by its sponsorship of labour strikes and other forms of intimidation. The *Columbia electronic encyclopaedia*, (2007) describes Walesa as:

A charismatic, forceful, and multilingual man whose own faith was marked by deep piety and mysticism, John Paul II humanized the papacy and managed to connect personally with the many thousands that gathered whenever he visited a foreign land. The days of his last illness, his lying in state and his funeral drew millions to Rome and the Vatican City, where large, often emotionally demonstrative crowds affirmed one last time how greatly he had altered the nature of the papacy and the world's expectations of a pope. He was succeeded by Benedict XVI.

Archbishop Michael L. Fitzgerald (2005), president of the Vatican's Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, who was the speaker at a workshop for American Benedictine Abbots that was held at the Prince of Peace Benedictine Monastery in Oceanside, California, January 29-31, says that, "Interreligious dialogue is a part of the Church's evangelizing mission."

Fitzgerald (2005) says that, in relation to John Paul II's missionary encyclical, *Redemptor hominis* (Latin for "The redeemer of man" is the name of the first encyclical written by Pope John Paul II) (1990), he clearly acknowledges the pivotal function of the Church when it comes to engaging in interreligious dialogue. This manner of thinking stems from his understanding of, and his interaction with, the documents of the Second Vatican Council. This attitude was adopted thus: "Popes have developed the bare outlines of these documents, and Paul VI's journeys and John Paul II's visits, talks, and teachings have

emphasized the importance of relations with people from other religious traditions.”

Fitzgerald (2005) adds that interreligious relations, formal gatherings and learned discussions have their place and that here are many more things going on in these relations than which only involve theological debates. He continues, “Theology arises from experience, and I wish to situate the whole question of interreligious dialogue within the context of everyday life.”

Furthermore, according to Fitzgerald (2005), in the light of what was said in a document of Dialogue and Proclamation (DP) in 1991, which was built on an earlier document of 1984, in the context of religious plurality, he argues and defines dialogue thus:

All positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths, which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment – relations with people of other religions must never degenerate into rivalry or polemics – trying to score points. Where the relationship is positive, it will lead to admiration for what is good in the other religion, and encourage us to deepen our knowledge not only of that religion but of our own as well (DP 9).

Knitter (2002:82) says the Catholic Church firmly believes in the importance of engaging in interreligious dialogue with people of other faith traditions. Their engagement in dialogue with the larger society is not just a form of verbal exchange, but also has other constructive forms of interacting with these non-Christian faiths. They believe that Christians have no right to proclaim the Gospel unless they first understand the meaning of dialogue with these religious groups.

Knitter (2002:84) further says that the Catholic Church’s understanding of what God is doing in the religions, in the light of what God has done in and through Jesus Christ, has helped it to balance and embrace a positive value attitude toward other religions, as well as measure their need to engage in dialogue with these other religious groups.

According to Michael Amaladoss (1997), “The Catholics in Asia focused on their continent and the theme they have chosen was: Jesus Christ the Saviour

and his mission of love and service in Asia: ... that they may have life and have it abundantly.”

The last point that the researcher would like to bring across about Archbishop Fitzgerald’s (2005) talk at the workshop, is the “Forms of Dialogue,” found in the 1984 document, *Dialogue and mission* (DM), where he points out four forms of dialogue that were summed up in DP:

The dialogue of life, where people strive to live in an open and neighborly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations; the dialogue of action, in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people; the dialogue of theological exchange, where specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritage, and to appreciate each other’s spiritual values; the dialogue of religious experience, where persons rooted in their own religious traditions share their spiritual riches, for instance with regard to prayer and contemplation, faith and ways of searching for God or the Absolute (DP 42).

Archbishop Fitzgerald (2005) concludes with this one final quotation from *Dialogue and proclamation*. He says that the Church’s commitment to dialogue flows from the fact that God took the initiative by entering into “dialogue with humanity and from the example of Jesus Christ whose life, death and resurrection gave to that dialogue its ultimate expression.” According to him, this more than depends on the idea that success has been achieved through mutual understanding and enrichment (DP 53).

Amaladoss (1997) says, since we cannot really proclaim the Gospel to people who are free without dialoguing with their own religious perspectives, and since we cannot dialogue with another person’s religion without prophetically challenging it in the name of the Gospel, while being ourselves open to the challenge of the other, proclamation is dialogical and dialogue is proclamation.

3.5.7 Dialogue essential to Christian life

Knitter (2002:101-102) reiterates that the Catholic Church is serious when it comes to dialogue. This chapter described the fuss it made when it stated that Christians do not have the right to proclaim the Gospel if they do not dialogue with people of other faiths. Netland (1991:19) says dialogue with people of other faith groups was strongly motivated at the Fourth General Assembly of the World Council of Churches at Uppsala, Sweden, in 1968 when, in its closing statement, it concluded by saying, "As Christians we believe that Christ speaks in this dialogue, revealing Himself to those who do not know Him, and correcting the limited and distorted knowledge of those who do."

D'Costa (1986:120) says that, dialogue should not be the result of theological strategy or careful planning and reflection, but the Gospel itself demands it as love for one's brother or sister.

Netland (1991:23) says through active dialogue with non-Christian religions, the Catholic Church has developed strong relationships that have resulted in possible conversions and cooperation with people of other faiths. Barnes (1989:121) argues that engaging in dialogue has helped Christians not only to understand people of other religious traditions, but it also has helped them to view them differently. Dialogue has become a necessity for the Christian faith as it "makes us confront not objects or items of thought but of fellow-subjects engaged in the same search, not a series of 'its' but an I who is also a Thou."

3.5.8 Dialogue and its limitations

Although the Catholic Church possessed and projected a positive attitude in their relationship with non-Christian religions, they were subdued by their self-identification and their understanding of the mission as the Church in the world. The uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Saviour for the whole world and salvation only to be found in Him was not to be compromised, nor was it negotiable.

On the topic of the Holy Spirit, his position in the Trinity, and his role in the world, Pinnock (2002) says that Roman Catholicism has valuable insight. He

adds that the Catholic theology is in agreement with Evangelical theology that inclines them not to compromise the finality of Jesus Christ or suffer under the illusion that one religion is as good as any other. He adds that, as Christians, we do not need convincing regarding the “otherness” of the world’s religions, because this is a basis we accept unwaveringly.

Pinnock (2002) continues, “I have come to Asia to be a witness to the Spirit who is active in the history of peoples and nations” and went on to attribute any praiseworthy elements to the Spirit of God.

According to Pinnock (2002) Pope John Paul II’s reasoning regarding why he holds onto this conviction is found in his belief that there are “spiritual treasures in the religions of the world”, therefore, there is a sense of kinship, that is why dialogue is promising – due the presence and the reality of the Holy Spirit, who is actively alive in world history, both before and after Christ, and who inspires humanity’s searches. Pope John Paul II believed that there is one Spirit who seeks to bring forth fruit from the world religions and does not believe or profess these religions of the world as mediators of salvation.

Dupuis (2000:180) argues that another important aspect was the recognition of the role of the church as the universal sacrament of salvation in Jesus Christ. Knitter (2002:85) states, “Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that the Church is the ordinary means of salvation and that she alone possesses the fullness of the means of salvation” (RM 55).

3.5.9 The Reign of God

Knitter (2002:83) says that the understanding of the “Reign of God’s (Kingdom)” reflects the heart of Jesus’ understanding of his mission and message. As Amaladoss (1997) contends, the Gospel is primarily preached as the good news of liberation to those who are poor. He says, “It is the message of the Reign of God, which is manifested, in a new humanity characterized by freedom and

fellowship, love and justice. The call to conversion is an invitation, not only to personal transformation, but also to societal change.”

Amaladoss (1997) further says that, Asian theologians have promoted the Kingdom and the Church as its “symbol and servant”. However, he says that the danger of identifying the Church with the Kingdom makes the Church the exclusive goal of evangelisation, which does not take into account the markings as symbol and servant. In the same breath, he says that we tend to identify the Kingdom with Jesus’ proclamation of the Good News of the Kingdom. According to Knitter (2002:86), the Kingdom of God and the Church are distinguishable but not separable.

Amaladoss (1997) says that one sometimes says that Jesus Himself is not only the Word of God but that He is also the Good News from God and that the Kingdom of God is in Him. He says that to proclaim Jesus, is to proclaim the Kingdom of God, “Just as the Church is always a pilgrim marching towards the fullness of the Kingdom, evangelisation is a continuing process.”

Knitter (2002:86) supports this thought and says, “Without the church, as with Jesus, our hopes for really changing this world into God’s Reign (Kingdom) of love and justice would be without foundation and nourishment.”

3.5.10 Position of the Holy Spirit

Another main feature of Christian Inclusivism is their *position* on the Holy Spirit. Earlier on, this study touched on the issue of the Holy Spirit being present among non-Christian religions. Here, we will pause and investigate what it means, as D’Costa (1990:22-27) draws our attention from the activity of the Father and of the Son in non-Christian religions, and directs our attention to the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, who is unique in his own right.

Amaladoss (1997) says that, “Christians in Asia are particularly sensitive to the ongoing presence and action of the Spirit in the believers of other religions” (cf. John Paul II, *Redemptoris missio*, and 28/29). He further says that this has encouraged them to an attitude of *kenosis* (self-emptying), dialogue, and service,

from which aggressiveness and anxiety are absent. These are the shared attitudes among the believers who undergo similar experiences.

D'Costa (1990:22) says that the Church stands under the judgment of the Holy Spirit and, if the Holy Spirit is active in the world religions, then these religions are vital to Christianity. What D'Costa tries to communicate to the church is that, if the Holy Spirit's presence is "real" and operative in world religions, then the church denies what the Holy Spirit is saying through these non-Christian religions – testimonies from the lives of these people with their foreign faiths can reveal and uncover the shortcomings or the loopholes found in the Christian practices.

Roger Haight (1999:359, 417) recognises that the Spirit is not limited to the Christian world alone but is clearly perceivable in the lives of people in religions other than the Christian faith alone, according to him the Spirit is operating independently of Jesus, but not working or contradicting who Jesus is. He also believes that the Holy Spirit is not limited in space to move beyond Jesus, as well as relating in his own unique way with the people of these different religious faiths.

Amaladoss (1997) also believes that the mission of the Church has its source in the mission of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. He says, "God generously pours out, and never ceases to pour out, his divine goodness, so that He who is creator of all things might at last become 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28) (cf. *Ad Gentes*, n. 2). This is in relation to his plan which He has for the whole universe."

Amaladoss (1997) strongly emphasises Scripture when he says:

Scripture unfolds the plan of Salvation, which is directed not for the individual alone, but it possesses components that shows that it's communal and cosmic and that it includes all dimensions of the human existence (cf. Rom. 8). The mission of the Spirit and of the Son and the mission of the Church are in furtherance and at the service of this mission. God's own mission is ongoing everywhere and at all times and embraces all aspects of reality, transforming them and leading them to the fullness that has been destined for them (cf. Eph 1:10).

As Christians, we should allow the Holy Spirit to help us to be sincere and relevant in our witnesses to the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. By doing this, God's mission, through the power of the Holy Spirit, will find its own way for proper fulfilment as Christians become aware of God's self-disclosure within the religions of the world, and the process of understanding the truth in these religions will also help to enhance their knowledge of these religions. D'Costa (1990:23) believes that, if Christians do not allow the Holy Spirit, who is presently operative in the non-Christian religions, to speak to us, then we as Christians are failing in our walk of faithfulness to the calling as Christians, by not paying attention to God's prompting, due to a lack on our part.

Knitter (2002:89) says that some people grapple with the "interaction" that takes place between the Holy Spirit and Jesus, and that D'Costa strikes a balance by saying that the Holy Spirit reaches beyond Jesus in extent – ("when I'm gone, you will receive a counsellor ..." John 14:15-18") – but does not go beyond Jesus in content ("... who will guide you in all truth and remind you of what I have said," John 14:25-26).

There is another twist to the position on the Holy Spirit in their belief and understanding the Holy Spirit's relationship in the Godhead and other religions. Jonathan Tan Yun-ka (2000) assistant Professor of Minority Studies and Religion at Xavier University, Cincinnati, Ohio, says the Federation of Archbishops Conference (FABC) agrees with John Paul II on one economy of salvation. However, they differ on the existing relationship between Christ and the Holy Spirit. According to them, "Christ is subsumed within the Spirit, while for the Pope John Paul; it is the other way round." Tan Yun-ka (2000) says that John Paul II argues that the Holy Spirit

... is not an alternative to Christ, nor does He fill a sort of void that is sometimes suggested as existing between Christ and the Logos. Whatever the Spirit brings about in human hearts and in the history of peoples, in cultures and religions serves as a preparation for the gospel and can only be understood in reference to Christ. ... The presence of the Spirit in creation and history points to Jesus

Christ in whom creation and history are redeemed and fulfilled. The presence and action of the Spirit both before the Incarnation and in the climactic moment of Pentecost point always to Jesus and to the salvation he brings. So too the Holy Spirit's universal presence can never be separated from his activity within the Body of Christ, the Church (EA 16, emphasis added) (JP II, 361).

The FABC (1992:14) (*FABC I*, arts. 14-15) argues that the great religions of Asia are:

... significant and positive elements in the economy of God's design and salvation. In them we recognize and respect profound spiritual and ethical meanings and values. Over many centuries they have been the treasury of the religious experience of our ancestors, from which our contemporaries do not cease to draw light and strength. They have been (and continue to be) the authentic expression of the noblest longings of their hearts, and the home of their contemplation and prayer. How can we not give them reverence and honor? And how can we not acknowledge that God has drawn our peoples to Himself through them? (see also Tan Yun-ka 2000).

FABC (1992:259) (BIRA IV/3, art. 6) believes that "the same spirit, who has been active in the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus and in the Church, who was active among all peoples before the Incarnation and is active among the nations, religions and peoples of Asia today."

3.6 DUPUIS' BEYOND "FULFILMENT THEORY"

Dupuis (2000:326) argues that the "fulfilment theory" affirms the value of other religious traditions only in a secondary and provisional sense (see also Rahner, 1966:115-134; Hall, 2002:37-50. Hall's article originally appeared in *Pacifica* 15 February 2002: 37-50 and has been reprinted with permission. Gerard Hall SM is the Head of the School of Theology, McAuley Campus):

- (1) It limits God's work or plans in, and for, other non-Christian religions;

- (2) it gives the church an arrogant stance placing itself higher than God; and
- (3) it is a stumbling block for proper dialogue.

Dupuis (2000:303) says that the fulfilment theory gives the church an unfair advantage over other non-Christian religions. He says that the Christian stereotype thinking is a result of the fulfilment theory, which does not allow God to have a “free rein”. Despite the fact that he agrees with Pope John Paul II and D’Costa regarding the presence of the Holy Spirit’s dwelling amongst other religions, Knitter (2002:90-91) says he walks a thin line when he says that the Holy Spirit’s *operandi modus* might be distinctly different, but not contradictory to what God says in his Word in Jesus. Dupuis (2000:294-296, 305-329) says that, although diverse paths of salvation might be considered, however, they do not fall on the same plateau as the Christian faith in that Christianity is the only distinct faith that endorses salvation through Christ Jesus alone.

Hall (2002:37-50) says that by directing his attention to the universal power of the Logos and unbound action of the Spirit, Dupuis affirms the divine presence in historical persons and movements in the religious traditions. This leads him to acknowledge a *two-way* process of “mutual enrichment and transformation” between Christianity and other religions.

Dupuis (2000:302) goes beyond the fulfilment theory and gives credit to the practice of Hindu religion’s way in which they worship the sacred images. He says that the mystery of Jesus Christ is historically mediated *in* and *through* their specific religious beliefs and practices, and because of this God is present to them in a “privileged instance”.

Dupuis (2000:319) recognised the validity and integrity of all non-Christians and that they have a distinction in their relationship with the Christian faith. However, this does not imply an equality of religions, since religious practices and sacramental rites of other traditions can not, according to him, be on the same level as the Christian sacraments which was institutionalised by Jesus Christ.

In relation to his understanding of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, Knitter (2002:91) adds another aspect to his Christian theology by saying that these non-Christian religions have a “lasting role” and a “specific meaning” in the plans God has for humanity. By this, he means that it is not intended for these non-Christian religions to find their fullness in the Christian church.

Dupuis (2002:280-304) argues that what qualified the superiority of Christianity over the non-Christian religions is Christianity’s Christ-centeredness element, as well as the church-centered philosophy. The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ is highly esteemed by him despite the different belief of the Pluralists stance.

Hall (2002:37-50) says that, Dupuis’s main concern was not the “ontological or divine status of Jesus Christ or the crucial function of the incarnation in the divine economy of salvation.” Instead, he is disgruntled with a low operative “Christology which would equate the role of Jesus Christ in Christianity to the role of other Saviour figures in their particular traditions.” He says that, for Dupuis, “Such relativism is dismissed out of hand with reference to the inadequacy of its Biblical and Christological hermeneutics *as well as* to an inappropriate reading of the specific roles of other Saviour figures with respect to their own traditions.”

Another point that the researcher would like to bring to this discussion, is Dupuis’s (2000:3) affirmation that the traditional Christian claim still stands: “Faith in Jesus Christ does not merely consist in trusting that he is ‘for me’ the path to salvation; it means to believe that the world and humanity find salvation in and through him.”

Dupuis (2000:297-300) says that it is important to acknowledge and to take the reality of the mortality of Jesus of Nazareth, serious. This argument would open a door for the Pluralist who would point out Jesus’ human limitations making Him one of the many saviours, like the human saviours being recognised in all the non-Christian faiths. Dupuis (2000:299) says, “Neither the mystery of God nor God’s saving power can be exhausted by even such a sublime revelation as the Christ-event. This means that, while Jesus Christ is ‘the

universal sacrament of God's saving action', he is not thereby the only expression of the divine will to save."

Dupuis (2000:298) recognises the fact that the mystery of the incarnation is unique in Jesus has opened doors for "other saving figures" towards an understanding of the illuminating power of God's Word that the Holy Spirit had inspired. "The Christ-event is certainly the 'culminating point' of God's *one* economy of salvation; but the God who saves is three." Dupuis (2000:282, 292, 303f, 305) says that, Jesus is considered as the "universal saviour" and not as the "absolute saviour". He says further that, "The uniqueness and universality of Jesus Christ are neither "absolute nor relative", but "constitutive and relational". He says that God the Father, through his Son Jesus Christ, has established a union bond that cannot be broken. Hall (2002:37-50) says that Dupuis develops his understanding of these categories in relation to the question of possible multiple paths of salvation.

Knitter (2002:92-93) says although the authenticity of Jesus' constitutive uniqueness is sealed in Dupuis' theology, he does not want this to blur Christian belief and understanding in such a way that it would hamper the Christian approach for open dialogue with non-Christian religions. Therefore, he encourages Christians to "relate what they have in Christ to what the Holy Spirit was doing in the lives of people of other religions, and this calls for dialogue as the Vatican would have it." Dupuis (2000:389) believes that, according to Ephesians 1:10, in the end all faith will come together and the "Reign of God will be accomplished" as the Son of God will deliver the Kingdom of God the Father.

Hall (2002:37-50) says through Dupuis' theology on the insight of being a Christian, Dupuis tries to promote two core factors that contend: To be a Christian is a divine gift, as well as a human and religious limitation.

3.7 LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Tan Yun-ka (2000) (par. 5-9) (JP II, 360-3) says, when one engages in theology in Asia, one must not lose sight of the "concrete realities of [Asian] modern-day

historical, cultural, religious, socio-political and economic realities.” He says that, the rationale for doing so was explained thus: “A critical awareness of the diverse and complex realities of Asia is essential if the people of God on the continent [of Asia] are to respond to God’s will for them in the new evangelisation,” *Ecclesia in Asia* (EA 5) (JP II, 363). He says that the church was not only challenged to pay extra attention to the sensitivity of the sensibilities of the people of Asia, but was suggested to embrace narrative strategic methods which parallel the Asian cultures and pursue “an evocative pedagogy, using stories, parables, and symbols so characteristic of Asian methodology in teaching” (EA 20) (JP II, 368).

James Kroeger (2000:280), says, “... some insights enjoy poetic expression: ‘Contemplating Jesus in his human nature, the peoples of Asia find their deepest questions answered, their hopes fulfilled, their dignity uplifted and their despair conquered’” (see also Tan Yun-ka 2000).

John M. Prior (1999:261) further says that (prior to the main problem with the Asian people) he does not support the acceptance or the rejection of Christ with the “Western Church’s alien tone and idiom inherited from colonial times.” Prior (1999:361) further says, “This is why John Paul II could not understand why the bishops labour the problem as the presence of a foreign Church burdened by a colonial past, as many Asians have put it over the years: ‘Jesus of the Gospels – yes; your Western Church – no!’” This is what he equates as “doctrinal-Christocentrism” (EA 9) (see also Tan Yun-ka 2000).

Vietnamese-American theologian, Peter C. Phan (2000:218) says that, John Paul II recognises “the necessity and validity of the *Asianness* of the Churches of Asia” (see also Tan Yun-ka 2000). Phan (2000:362) argues that John Paul II acknowledges the fact that the Church was not only considered as foreign colonial powers in one part of Asia, but in many parts of Asia this still is so (EA 9, *emphasis added*) (see also Tan Yun-ka 2000). Furthermore, he says that Pope John Paul II fails to recognise that the “foreignness of Christianity in Asia and the perception of its association with colonialism are present realities, and this is not simply ‘in many places’ but in all parts of Asia” (see also Tan Yun-ka). Thomas (1966:21) expresses it thus:

“... The white man’s burden” and the imperial “civilizing mission” whether of Britain in India or the Dutch in Indonesia became a bit too unbearable in its self-righteousness when the sanction of Christian theology was added to it. The Dutch Christians’ political parties continued to justify their rule in Indonesia till the very end on the basis of divine creation and calling. The same phenomenon exists with the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa in its theology in South Africa.

C.S. Song (1982:1-3) gives the following vivid analogy of the theology in Asia by telling a folktale from the Philippines to shed some light on the theological endeavours in Asia:

Christian theology has been overweight, like that big-bellied man. It could hardly walk or run with its huge big belly of undigested food – a belly crammed with schools of theology, theories of biblical interpretations, Christian views of culture and religions. All originating from the churches in the West and pronounced by traditional theology. It became even more obese when the vast space of Asia, with its rich cultures and vigorous religions, and turbulent histories, began to compete for room in that already over-loaded theological belly. The result is painful indigestion.

Song (1986:1-3) adds that their greatest concern was to focus on curing the indigestion through reducing the “weight” and not to regain its ability and dynamics to win the hand of authentic theology to the Asian mind. Song’s (1986 – write-up on the back cover of the book) says that Hoedemaker believes that, if theology is done in this manner and does not labour the application of doctrine, but it recognises the relationship between the suffering God and suffering humanity, which transcends many artificial and alienating distinctions, then it would have positive outcomes.

Tan Yun-ka (2000) approaches this by saying that it is the duty of all Christians to share with the world their own experiences or their testimonies of

their relationships with other people. To be a witness of what Christ has done for them, to them, and through them, is the heart of the Christian message. This would prevent them from projecting a negative dogmatic conclusion, which is filtered from Greco-Roman philosophical language that is strange to the Asian society.

Knitter (2002:94) says that, Josef Kuschel suggests the way that Christians should, and could, do this is to seal the finality of their faith in Christ Jesus in such a convincing manner without jeopardising the claims of “exclusivism, definitivism and superiority” (see also Karl-Josef Kuschel, 1991:389-399). Tan Yun-ka (2000) urges:

Christ should be introduced with his message of reconciliation and solidarity so overwhelmingly significant for our world. This very message, however, could be obscured from the beginning by an untimely emphasis on the uniqueness of Christ’s saving mission and mediation, as if it implied a condemnation of other religions (see also Josef Neuner 2000:541-542).

Tan Yun-ka (2000) further shares another potential Asian Bishop’s approach, by arguing:

What, then, is the appropriate way of presenting Jesus and his message to the people of Asia? It has been made abundantly clear by the Asian bishops that an abrupt presentation of Jesus as the “only Savior” in the Asian context not only is an obstacle to those who search seriously for truth, but is perceived as arrogance, as disrespect of their own religious traditions. Jesus must be presented in the same way by which he presented himself in his own earthly mission. People must be introduced into his life, to his radiant personality as it comes to us in the Gospel accounts. With the growing knowledge and love of his person they may be led, step by step, to the acceptance of his mission and of the mystery of his person (see also Josef Neuner, 2000:542).

Rightly so, Knitter (2002:97) says this was the attitude of the bishops who aimed at not converting people to the Christian faith. They believed that conversion lies in the hands of God and He alone has the authority to indicate one's way home. He says the main concern for authentic and sincere dialogue, according to *The Office of Theological Concerns of the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences* FABC of Asia, was aimed at what they call the "basic human communities" – the well-being of all, rather than the conversion of people of non-Christian religions. Thomas (1966:95) says religion is not the contact point between the Christian and the non-Christian faiths, in essence it lies within the confines of his humanity.

3.8 OTHER CATHOLIC VIEWS

Tan Yun-ka (2000) says that Pope John Paul II reinforced the necessary focus of a Christocentric theology, which not only puts Christ in the centre, but proclaims Him as the only means of salvation. The focus of the Church in its proclamation of salvation for all the people of the world, must be that Jesus is the one and only Saviour of the world, whether He is followed or not.

Tan Yun-ka (2000) says further that, for the Pontiff, this is not only a compromise, but it is not negotiable. The true message of hope cannot be proclaimed without emphasising the pivotal role that Christ plays in the salvation of the world. In a statement, he says that no evangelism has taken place if Jesus was not proclaimed as Lord. To him, this is true evangelism. He adds that, in responding to a certain confusion about the true nature of the Church's mission, the Second Vatican Council and the Magisterium (In the Catholic tradition, the authority of the church to teach religious doctrine) has relentlessly emphasised the supremacy of the proclamation of Jesus Christ as Lord when doing evangelism (EA 19).

Monica Hellwig (1990:109) says, "The Christian faith collapses if the definitive claim for Jesus Christ is denied." Knitter (2002:93) says this is the reason why many Catholic theologians and ministers shy away from the views that suggest that Jesus may be one of many saviours. The grappling concern for

the FABC is on how to go about proclaiming Jesus as the only Saviour for humanity when one lives amongst such a diverse cultural and pluralistic world. Tan Yun-ka (2000) says that, the Japanese Bishops' Conference argued that:

As the Fathers of the early Church did with Greco-Roman culture, we must make a more profound study of the fundamentals of the religiosity of our peoples, and from this point of view try to discover how Jesus Christ is answering their needs. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life, but in Asia, before stressing that Jesus is the TRUTH, we must search much more deeply into how he is the WAY and the LIFE. If we stress too much that, "Jesus Christ is the One and Only Savior," we can have no dialogue, common living, or solidarity with other religions."

Knitter (2002:95, 97-98) suggests that Christians should speak truly about Jesus in a loving and self-emptying way, as God's full and final communication. In a similar vein, Cardinal Julius Darmaatmadja (1999:887-891) indicated to Pope John Paul II that the people of Asia speak of Jesus as a "teacher of wisdom; the Healer; the Liberator; the Compassionate Friend of the Poor, the Good Samaritan." Jesus is in the centre precisely because He "de-centers" Himself, empties Himself, refuses to rule over.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In Chapter three we set out to discuss Inclusivism as a Christian response to religious diversity. The aim of this study was to revisit some of the features of Christian Particularism in the light of Karl Rahner's contribution to this particular field of study and bring a balanced understanding. Knitter (2002:68) said that Rahner was limited in relating to the non-Christian religions, mainly due to the fact that he never studied their religions, nor did he engage in dialogue with them. On the other hand, D'Costa (1986:112) regards Rahner as a dogmatic theologian, not a historian of religion, because of his theoretical reflection on religion.

This study also discussed what Pope John Paul II and Vatican II concluded, based on Rahner's theories, and presented the arguments in question against Inclusivism, and supported it with the defence arguments of Christian Inclusivism.

Not all is good and well in the Inclusivism camp, as Knitter says that there are some ups and downs, although they try hard to make room for dialogue by trying to put proper principles in place, they seem to fall short of filling the gaps. On the one hand, they hold onto their firm belief in the work and life of Jesus Christ and try not to compromise their belief in Christ while, on the other hand, they put themselves in a difficult position of compromise by trying to have a round table dialogue with non-Christians. The principles for dialogue that they instituted prohibit them from having an open dialogue with other religious traditions. Ultimately, this brings about more confusion and frustration and leads to indifference amongst Christians themselves, as well as among the non-Christian religions.

What this model has criticised is its "fulfilment theory". Having said this, despite the fact that this model considers adherents of other faiths as "anonymous Christians", and that being an "anonymous Christian" was not enough, they needed the Christian faith to fulfil them. Knitter (2002:72) says this has made Christian Inclusivism unpopular, more inadequate, and unable to bring about peace amongst the religions in the world.

Chapter 5, which considers an ethic of embrace, will again examine Inclusivism from an additional perspective.

CHAPTER FOUR: PLURALISM AS A CHRISTIAN RESPONSE TO RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY

“Pluralism holds the view that all the religious traditions of humanity are equally valid to the same core of religious reality” (McGrath 2001:546).

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The introductory chapter of this study on religious diversity explained that there is a growing awareness of religious diversity all over the world and it also discussed the two possible understandings of religious Pluralism and how religious diversity has become an ideology of acceptance, as it has become a reality in South Africa and increasingly so in all parts of the world. The focus was on conflicts and clashes between different groups of people and concluded that this is due partly to religious, racial and ethnic violence all over the world.

Chapter two of this study turned the attention to Christian Particularism that says, “... God has revealed the Way and the Truth and the Life in Jesus Christ, and wills this to be known throughout the world” (Kraemer, 1888-1965), as a possible way forward for peace amongst the great religions of the world. In Netland’s (1991:9) words:

Exclusivism maintains that the claims of Christianity are true, and that where the claims of Christianity conflict with those of other religions the latter are to be rejected as false ... God has revealed himself definitely in the Bible and that Jesus Christ is the unique incarnation of God, the only Lord and Savior. Salvation is not to be found in the structures of other religious traditions.

The findings of this study concluded that the spotlight on Christian Particularism has been set at a quite high intensity because, not only is it receiving opposition or resentment for its claims from the outside, but a huge amount of this

repudiation comes from within the Christian world. Based on this given, the researcher concluded that Christian Exclusivism or Particularism, as they stand, is inadequate to establish peace amongst the religions of the world.

Chapter three discussed Christian Inclusivism being defined by D'Costa (1986:80) that it, "... affirms the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions and, at the same time, maintains that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God." Netland (1991:9-10) says:

Inclusivism maintains that the central claims of Christian faith are true, but it adopts a much more positive view of other religions than does Exclusivism (Particularism). Although Inclusivists hold that God has revealed himself definitively in Jesus Christ and that Jesus is somehow central to God's provision of salvation for humanity, they are willing to allow that God's salvation is available to non-Christian religions. Jesus is still held to be, in some sense, unique, normative, and definitive; but God is said to be revealing Himself and providing salvation through other religions as well.

During this study, the findings concluded that much effort is still needed to make Christian Inclusivism appealing and acceptable for all Christians to embrace completely. There are still loopholes that disqualify Inclusivism as adequate, by itself, to establish peace amongst the religions of the world.

This particular chapter will have a closer look at Christian Pluralism as an alternative Christian response to religious diversity. The aim of this chapter is firstly to define Christian Pluralism. We will revisit the main features of Christian Inclusivism, which have been brought into question by the Pluralistic model. We will study the main proponents such as John Hick, Raimundo Panikkar and the Ethical Responsibility Model before we conclude.

4.2 DEFINING RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

The next section will define Pluralism; will investigate who the representatives of Pluralism are; will identify their distinctive features; will study

the objections against Christian Particularism, as well as their responses to these objections, before drawing a conclusion. Vlach (2010) maintains:

Religious Pluralism is the view that all major religions are equally valid and lead to God and salvation. Thus, no one religion is inherently better or superior to any other major world religion. With Religious Pluralism, all the major religions such as Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Islam are equal. For pluralists, there may be differences in rituals and beliefs among these groups, but on the most important issues, there is great similarity. Most religions, they claim, stress love for God and love for fellow human beings. They also point out that most religions have a form of the Golden Rule. Religious pluralists also point out that there are pious people in all the major religions. Religious Pluralism became increasingly popular in the latter half of the twentieth century.

In contrast to those thinkers who emphasise the conflicting aspects of religious pluralism, whom I have referred to (in the section of religious clashes – Samuel Huntington in the introductory chapter of this dissertation), religious Pluralism has become a strong distinctive element in the world's society of religion. Toleration has become one of the vehicles, as Pluralism is considered to be the most desired *ideology* in the world. It not only allows for the coexistence and agreement of the different faiths, but also ceases the opportunity to propagate that this Pluralism be accepted and embraced. As Newbiggin (1988:310-314) says, seeing that we are living in a pluralist society, the fact is that man will always be religiously divided. This is something, which are encouraged or welcomed. He says that the plurality religions and lifestyles should be embraced and celebrated.

Religious *tolerance* has become one of the pillars on which some of the policies on which the interactions amongst world religions are built. It has opened the door for non-Christian religions to challenge Christianity, which has become one of the most ridiculed religions, not only in the world of religion, but especially in the Christian world itself. (A fuller discussion on tolerance will take place in

Chapter five. Here we are just highlighting a few important comments to undergird the idea of religious pluralism more clearly).

Kenneth Samples (1990:39) says that, religious tolerance does not necessarily mean religious indifference. On the contrary, with tolerance, there would be less civil unrest and mass murders and xenophobia would also be greatly reduced. Tolerance is only the first step towards actively enjoying the diversity that other faith groups contribute to a society. Due to its technological advance, America is not only recognised as a country that is truly a global society because of its rich diverse ethnical, racial and religious backgrounds, but also for its loyalty to embrace the principle of toleration. As a result of this, toleration has become the defining element stating that all religions are equally valid. Dueck (2006) says:

In the recent Western context, then, pluralism has served to describe the reality of different cultures (and faiths) existing alongside one another in relative peace within a larger political structure. There is no effort to make value judgments about these cultures; pluralism simply describes the reality that they be allowed to coexist peacefully within the same environment. The assumption is that no perspective ought to be given a privileged position within the broader public conversation.

Samples (1990:39) says that the assault on Christianity has never been as severe as it is today. The 20th century gave rise to unconventional challenges to the historic Christian faith, questioning the validity and relevance of Christianity as never before. Sacks (1991:73) puts it thus: "From Hume to Voltaire onward, religious beliefs became a subject of ridicule and disdain." Sacks (1991:1) says that members of most non-Christian religions have critically challenged Christianity's validation and truth. One of the main reasons could be due to the fundamentalist approach – the attempt to impose a single religious vision on a society by political means ..."

In our democratic world today, the coexistence of religious traditions has made it acceptable for all religions to be recognised as equally valid in existence

and, in practice; all roads lead to Rome; all religions lead to God, as defined by McGrath (2001:546), as religious Pluralism has become a challenging factor to the Christian world today. He declares: "Pluralism holds the view that all the religious traditions of humanity are equally valid to the same core of religious reality."

McGrath (2001:549) adds that each religion is understood to represent a distinctive, yet equally valid, grasp of some ultimate spiritual reality, which some religions term "God" and others define in rather more non-theistic or a-theistic terms. For this reasons, pluralistic writers tend to refer to the spiritual reality that they believe to lie behind all religious terms, such as "ultimate reality" or "the Real", thus avoiding the explicit use of the term "God".

According to some authors, one consequence of religious diversity is evident in Sacks's (1991:62-63, 74) definition of practical Pluralism when he says that, "It gave rise to Liberalism during the 1960s which was carried through in the public domain that resulted in the fragmentation of the American society." Sacks (1991:64) says the symptoms of fragmentation are already clearly visible in the world society as "religious diversity is giving rise to deep intractable conflicts while at the same time undermining the principles by which they might be resolved".

Randolph Bourne's (1970:16) vision for America as a society in which, rather than assimilating to the imagined Anglo-Protestant ideal, immigrant communities adopted the best of what America had to offer, and contributed the best of what their cultures had to offer, so that, "all who are here may have a hand in the destiny of America." The Americans rejected this ideology for a multicultural society in the early 20th century.

In a nutshell, Multiculturalism promotes the notion of accommodating all forms of diversity and allows all cultural practices to be exercised, so that the inhabitants of that culture will not lose their identity in a diverse society, but be able to embrace it patriotically. A more detailed descriptive definition is provided by one of the world's most renowned professors, who has been involved in

research for more than two decades on religious pluralism in a country with a more diverse background than most countries in the world, America.

Diana L. Eck (2000a), an American professor at Harvard University who specialises in Religious Diversity Studies, defines multiculturalism as “a call for greater understanding, tolerance, and appreciation of cultural diversity. In this way, it represents a rejection of ethnocentrism and the cultural superiority complex that characterises modernity in the West. Instead, it offers a “positive value of pluralism”, the belief that religious diversity is the normal state of affairs” (see also Machacek 2003). According to Sacks (1991:6) French sociologist, George Friedmann argues that the Jews faced a simple choice: individual assimilation in the diaspora, or collective assimilation in Israel.

Sacks (1991:20) believes that religious value remains a potent enough force in our cultures that needs to be renewed; in the end it is, and will be, the absolute truth of God’s Word that brings true liberation. This transformational process has impacted the world in many healthy and positive ways. It has embraced ethnic, racial, cultural and religious diversity and has allowed every citizen of the world to practice his/her religion openly and freely without being discriminated against, marginalised or alienated. As Peter Berger (2005:2) remarks, “Pluralism has always meant that different groups have interacted with each other, be it willingly or not ... this interaction has been facilitated under conditions of legally protected religious diversity.”

4.3 OBJECTIONS AGAINST INCLUSIVISM

In order to have a clearer understanding of the Pluralistic argument, this section will deal with objections against the Inclusivist model claims. Knitter (2002:103-106) highlights it in his book, *Introducing theologies of religion*, together with what Tan Yun-ka (2000) brought to the table in his paper titled, “From ecclesia in Asia to a mission of love and service: A comparative analysis of two contrasting approaches to doing Christian mission in Asia.” Relevant arguments will focus

on: “The fulfilment theory”; “How does Jesus save?”; and lastly, “The role and presence of the Holy Spirit.”

4.3.1 The fulfilment theory

Storms (2006:2) advocates:

The so-called “fulfilment” view of non-Christian religion comes from the recognition of undeniable truth and beauty in other faiths, believing these to be incomplete anticipations of what had been definitively revealed in Christ. In other words, what was imperfectly and only partially revealed in other religions is perfectly and completely revealed in Christianity. The former are thus moving gradually to their consummate fulfilment in Christianity. Christianity does not replace, but fulfills, what is good and true in other faiths.

Many of the Asian theologians are not persuaded that the fulfilment theory is the appropriate missiological approach to Asian religions. Their argument rests on their belief that it fails to acknowledge the stance or validity of the soteriological dimensions of non-Christian religions. Jacob Kavunkal (2000:295) argues that:

It does not make sense to claim that the values in other religions or the “intense yearnings for God” experienced in Asia, are to be fulfilled in Christ. They are the result of the presence of the Mystery of Jesus Christ and it would only be presumptuous to say that it “can only be fully satisfied by Jesus Christ”, or to make this yearning as the justification “to proclaim with vigor in word and deed that Jesus Christ is the Savior” (n. 9). Or else we should also be prepared to accept that the yearning for God in Christianity has to be fulfilled in the Asian Religions! (see also Tan Yun-ka, 2000).

Kavunkal (2000:295) states further that, a sign of total arrogance and insensitivity toward non-Christian religions has the potential to backfire if it is considered as a missiological strategy (see also Tan Yun-ka).

In response Tan Yun-ka (2000) says that, it is improper and distasteful and that Amaladoss' response reflects the following:

If it is true that “the Church’s approach to other religions is one of genuine respect” and that “this respect is twofold: respect for man in his quest for answers to the deepest questions of his life, and respect for the action of the Spirit in man” (EA 20), then what right does anyone have to prejudice the extent and meaning of the activity of the Spirit in other religions? ... Who can credibly show that Jesus (or the Church) actually fulfils the “authentic values” of Hinduism, Buddhism or Confucianism? (cf. EA 14). This is a totally *a priori* vision of history. ... As a matter of fact every religion sees itself as a fulfilment of the others (*emphasis added*).

The FABC Theological Advisory Commission’s *Theses on interreligious dialogue* also had their say on this matter. According to their explanations:

The fulfilment perspective to salvation as “a narrowing of the plan and action of God progressively from the nations to the Jews and then to Jesus, to open out again to the world through the Church and its mission” (Theses on Interreligious Dialogue 3.2). Such a perspective points to a missiological perspective that Jesus Christ, as the Incarnate Logos is not the only agent of mission. The Father and the Spirit have both been at the forefront of mission from the beginning of time, and has never ceased to be active as such. To limit their activities to the person of the Son is to limit the mystery of their missionary endeavors unjustifiably (see also Tan Yun-ka 2000).

In the light of Catholic theology, Knitter (2002:104) voices his dissatisfaction with the fulfilment model. He says that, what started out positively, appeared to be so only in words, not in practice. He turns his attention especially to two great contenders of the Catholic theological camp – D’Costa and Dupuis. Both strongly emphasise the centrality of Christ in the Christian religion in theory, but in dialogical form this does not allow for a level playing field that a dialogue

between two requires that is a “mutual fulfilment and enrichment”, according to Pope John Paul II and Vatican II.

4.3.2 How does Jesus save?

Tan Yun-ka (2000) says that Christian theology echoes throughout that Jesus is not only the Christ, or that all fulfilment is in Him, but that He saves, and how He does it has a baffling effect on people, also of non-Christian religions. He says that this has been one of the major talking points at the FABC where Pope John Paul II introduced the theme, “Jesus Christ the only Saviour”. He says further that Pope John Paul II was criticised for being insensitive toward the rich cultures of Asian people.

Knitter (2002:104-105) says that the particularity of Jesus overshadows God’s universal salvific will, so Christians were in the driving position during dialogue. Earlier on, it was conceded that the truth has limits due to historical and sociological constructions. About Jesus, this was believed by many contemporaries who said, “If the Divine truly incarnates itself in the history of one particular human being,” then the writing is on the wall – “the Divine has limits, because incarnation speaks of limitations.”

Therefore, Jesus Christ is not viewed as one who fixes or who is the author of our Christian faith, but as one who points us toward God who is already there. This understanding of Jesus Christ places Him at the same level as all the other divine incarnate leaders.

Sinkinson (2003) says that this has provided the Pluralist John Hick with an open door. He says Hick argues for a paradigm shift in Christian self-understanding. He adds:

The move is from Christ being at the centre of religious faith to God being at the centre. In later work the term “God”, being too religion-specific, was replaced by “the Real” or “Ultimate Reality”. The image of a “Copernican revolution” is primarily a rhetorical device aimed at disabling the inclusivist claim that Christ may be at work in other religions.

Knitter (2002:106) concludes that a question of critique is posed which asks if such a sacramental understanding of Jesus is true to the witness of the New Testament and whether it can “sustain a Christian life and lead to authentic dialogue” is an important question.

From the Scriptural passage found in the Gospel of John 14:15-31, it is clear that Jesus was addressing his 12 disciples, assuring them, his followers, that He would send the Holy Spirit to “them” and not to non-Christian religions, to help and guide “them” in all truth. The fulfilment of this event was witnessed on the day of the Pentecost, when the promise of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit came to pass, and all believers received the Holy Spirit’s baptism and indwelling presence in their lives (Acts 1:8 & Acts 2) and not as inclusivists argue that the Holy Spirit is present in other faiths.

4.3.3 Role of the Holy Spirit in other faiths?

Another point of the Inclusivist defence rests on what happened at Cornelius’s house in Acts 10. The Holy Spirit filled the family after they responded to the Gospel and their confession of Christ. D’Costa, Dupuis, Rosales and Arevalo’s claims about the Spirit’s active presence before and after Christ may be sincere, but stand to negate Scripture that speaks of God’s method of communicating his truths to people of other faiths through angelic messengers. According to them the Spirit’s involvement in these religious faiths does not necessarily prepare them for their fulfilment in Christianity at the end of the age, however. His work is seen as unique in bringing about the fruit in the lives of the adherents of these non-Christian faiths giving them validity to co-exist alongside the Christian faith.

However, Stanley Horton (1977:9-15) says the Holy Spirit convicts the world of unrighteousness and sinfulness. Horton (1977:9-15) argues that if the Holy Spirit were present in non-Christian religions, then He was not working in harmony with the Trinity’s plan and purpose, but contradicting it. Horton (1977:10) believes that, “The Holy Spirit Himself focuses attention on Christ and seeks to Glorify Him (John 15:26; 16:14).” If we agree that He is actively present

in other religious faiths, we need to ask what those activities entail. If He is aligning these non-religious faiths to ultimately embrace Christianity, then that is a direct link to the fulfilment theory. Or, if He preaches a Gospel other than what Christ preaches – then it is Pluralism. One runs the risk when one compromises one's doctrinal beliefs just for the sake of having a dialogue with other non-Christian religions.

4.4 MAIN REPRESENTATIVES

Sinkinson (2003) says that, "Religious pluralism has gained a foothold – both in a mainstream academic position and in popular culture." John Hick is recognised as the most influential and significant exponent of a pluralistic approach to religious traditions. Raimundo Panikkar, Hick's pluralist partner, agrees with Hick that no one religion can make complete final claims about truth and salvific value. These key proponents and their contributions will be individually viewed. This is based on their influential status but also on the fact that they illustrate the diversity within the pluralist model before we will be looking at the Ethical Responsibility Model that has unrelentlessly been promoted by the Asian theologians.

Starting with John Hick, the next section will do a detailed study of the contribution(s) that these Pluralists have made to the discipline of Theology of Religions. Other prominent figures in this model is for instance Paul Knitter 1985, *No other Name? A critical survey of Christian attitude toward the world religions* and African theologians such as Itumeleng Mosala (1985), "African independent churches: A study in socio-theological protest", in *Resistance and hope: South African essays in honour of Beyers Naudé*, edited by Charles Villa-Vicencio and John de Gruchy.

4.4.1.1 John Hick

Hick is recognised as the most influential and significant exponent of a pluralistic approach to religious traditions (McGrath, 2001:549). The next section will study Hick's background and his contributions, which have become main features of religious Pluralism. These features are his "Copernican revolution;" (One divine reality at the center of all religious belief and practice and that all the major religions are historically and culturally conditioned human responses to this reality); his epistemological inquest; his philosophy of Christology; Christianity; soteriology; and revelation and then the study will conclude.

4.4.1.2 Background

Hick (1995:31-32) had his, what he considered as "intellectual doubts", which led him on the path of pursuing to find answers to the "questions" regarding the role and position of the world religions which have been occupying his mind. This has opened the door for him to embark on his quest to find the "truth" that will be examined next.

Hick (1980:2-3) was born in Scarborough, Yorkshire, on 20 January 1922 where he experienced an early conversion into the Christian faith, with a strong evangelical background. He was disturbed by his fellow evangelicals in the way they would relate or think of those people who belonged to different religious traditions. The lack of sympathy for these people, coming from those who claim to have the truth, appalled him.

As a result, Hick (1980:2-4; 1995:29-32) went to study Philosophy and Theology of Religion and took up lectureships in both England and the United States. During his return to Birmingham, he had an almost similar experience as Paul in Acts 17 when he was sent to Athens and surrounded by people who were revering their god. Here, he took a step in the direction of Pluralism. Hick (1980:2; 1995:29-32) describes himself as one who attended church every Sunday, but experiencing the services as boring. Whilst being at college, he searched for the spiritual meaning of life. During his first year of tertiary education, studying law, he describes his experience of religious conversion to

Christianity. Later, he wrote, “I became a Christian of a strongly evangelical and indeed fundamentalist kind.”

Hick (1980:2, 5; 1995:29-32) says during his time of ministry in England, after having joined the Church of England, he remained theologically conservative for many years. He became increasingly troubled by the implications of his Christian theology for other religions. In 1967, upon his return to Birmingham, England, to teach Philosophy at the University of Birmingham, it was noted that, at that time, Birmingham had become a multi-cultural community that housed Muslims, Sikhs and Hindus. During this time, as he engaged with these non-Christian faiths, his views regarding other faiths started to change.

Hick (1980:5; 1995:29-32) says that he started to attend, visit and worship in synagogues and mosques, and in temples and gurdwaras only occasionally. To him, it was clear that, in essence, the same kind of thing took place in them as in Christian churches – it was a process where human beings open up their minds to a higher divine authority, which he calls a *Reality*, “known as personal and good and as demanding righteousness and love between man and man.”

Wan (2007; Knitter 1985:147, 2002:113) describes John Hick (A.D. 1922-) as an English Presbyterian minister, whom he considers to be the “most radical and most controversial of the proponents of a contemporary model for Christian approaches to other faiths.”

It was Hick’s (1980:5; 1995:37) personal friendship with, and appreciation of, the adherents of these other non-Christian faiths that drew him toward them, despite the differences in truth. His relationship with these adherents of other faiths, who project “selflessness” and “saintliness”, led him to believe that it is “unthinkable ... that they should all be condemned to hell”.

Furthermore, Hick’s (1995:37-45) belief in the equality and validity of all religion as ways of salvation, has led him not only to denounce the uniqueness of Jesus as the only Saviour of the world, but also to recognise the position of the other saviours in the non-Christian faiths. With this he has challenged the exclusivist claims, and he argues the “deity and incarnation of Christ as a myth or metaphor.” Craig (2005) says, “Today Hick is no longer even atheist, since what

he calls 'the Real', which is apprehended in the various world religions under culturally conditioned and objectively false religious paradigms, has objectively none of the distinctive properties of the God of theism."

Hick (1973:121-122) says as a professed Evangelical Christian at one time, he began in 1973 to call for a "Copernican revolution" in our Christian thinking about other religious traditions, which we will look at next.

4.4.1.3 The Copernican revolution

According to Knitter (2002:115), the form of Christian practices that escalates in Particularism and Inclusivism in search of God or the "Real" (his term of it) gave Hick a strong indication that Christians recognise the validity of non-Christian religions, or the possibility of these non-Christian religions having equal standing with Christianity. This paved the way for Hick to introduce his "Copernican revolution".

Hick (1973:120-132) argues that Christians need to encounter a paradigm shift from Christ-centeredness to a God-centeredness. Sinkinson (2003) says that, "The image of a 'Copernican revolution' is primarily a rhetorical device aimed at disabling the inclusivist claim that Christ may be at work in other religions."

Hick's (1973:131) "Copernican revolution" involves:

... a shift from the dogma that Christianity is at the centre of realisation ... it is *God* who is at the centre, and that all religions of humanity, including our own, serve and revolve around him.

Hick's (1973:131-132) pluralistic approach entails, "Copernicus Revolution" is his belief that the Ultimate Reality, which he calls "'the Real,' is the ground of all religious experience." He believes that all coexisting religions relate to an ultimate divine Reality who is transcendent in all cultural and historical contexts.

He believes that there is only one divine reality – the Real – that is also the ultimate source of all religions. He also concedes that none of the religious faiths completely understands the Real and these religious faiths are representatives of a valid way in which each religious group conceived and experienced the Real.

Hick (1987:17) has rejected the Absolutism approach. He views people as naturally religious. To make distinctions regarding which religion is “Absolute” or “True” has become unacceptable to him. He says that Absolutism that proposes a realist view of religious fact is in complete opposition to what Naturalism proposes. What Absolutism propagates is that only one system of religious belief is literally true and those other religious systems, which disagree or promote the opposites, are errantly false.

He further says that although absolutism is a subjective term to those whose pledge loyalty to their religious faith, it would not be rejected by those who are open to accept religious Pluralism. According to him all religious faiths are hard at work to bring a moral transformation of its people, therefore, no one religion can claim to produce saints by itself.

4.4.1.4 Hick’s epistemological inquest

Hick’s (1980:177-182) main focus was centred on humanity. This is observed in Hick’s (1980:23) criticism of traditional Christianity’s believe as superior to other religious traditions. He describes religion as man’s interaction with the Transcendent God and not just an Exclusive elect. Hick (1980:183) based this epistemology on the traditional conceptions of Christian doctrine, i.e., the Trinity, Incarnation, and two natures of Christ, due to their “unintelligibility” (see also Wan (2007).

Hick (1980:179-183) believes that religious communities are historical and cultural and our responses to the real Divine are culturally and historically conditioned by religious concepts. He believes that the adherents in each religious tradition respond uniquely to the Divine due to their interpretation and the understanding they have of the Divine.

Although some, like Netland, view Hick as both a philosopher and theologian, Sinkinson (2003) tends to regard him more as a philosopher than a theologian, based on what he observes from Hick's epistemology. Sinkinson (2003) says that, Hick made use of the work of Ludwig Wittgenstein's, "Faith is a way of seeing the world through the lens of religious presuppositions" and employs the term "seeing-as" to describe the way in which we experience and interpret life in terms of psychological expectations. Sinkinson (2003) continues that, "... all experience – including religious experience – is inherently interpretive ... all conscious experience is distinctive in that it is 'experiencing-as.'" However, Netland (1991:204) says this is not the case in religious experience because, in religious experience, the interpretive element is faith.

Knitter (2002:116) says Hick has been influenced by the work of the German philosopher, Immanuel Kant, who draws upon a distinction that we can never really know directly how an image is immediately reflected off a mirror. This is what Hick (1995:58-59) believes of our relationship with the "Real", because the "Real" cannot be perceived or experienced directly. Therefore, he believes that we cannot speak to the Real as if we know the Real directly. What he does believe is that God is or become "incarnate" when we as his children engage in doing his will, by loving our neighbour. Hick (1993b:106) says man and woman are to God what one's own hand is to oneself. What he is saying is that we must understand God's incarnation, in relation to Jesus, metaphorically as a life that was so God conscious that He chose to act through it, and not metaphysically, which claimed that Jesus had two natures.

Netland (1991:204) says in terms of religion, there is a "significant element of cognitive freedom operative in one's worldview. Religious faith is that uncompelled interpretive subjective contribution to conscious experience which is responsible for its distinctly religious character". Sinkinson (2003) adds by saying that, "Faith is a way of seeing the world through the lens of religious presuppositions."

4.4.1.5 Hick's Christology

Hick's (1993b:163) motivation is to make sure that Christians establish a correct Christology, therefore by promoting the notion of pluralism he challenged Christians to renounce their claims of absolutism. According to Hick (1987:22) the Christian faith must only consider Jesus as their supreme saviour. This does not necessarily mean that He is the only saviour of all religions. He calls upon Christians to consider Christianity as one of the major religions that offers salvation and liberation along other religions. Hick (1980:188) argues that Christians should engage and not resist interacting with the adherents of other great faiths.

Hick (1980:54) says the temptation that religions face is the tendency to esteem a human founder to a hierarchical position, attributing divine status to them. According to him what was lacking was the proper usage of language and he wanted to ensure that Christians become aware of this lack that they have. According to him this has given rise to Christians' lack of understanding of who Jesus really was.

Hick (1980:55-56) says to affirm or elevate Jesus as the Son of God incarnate expresses religious significance only for Christianity. He believes that Christians could continue in believing the uniqueness of Jesus Christ without belittling the status of religious founders in non-Christian faiths. He says that it is important that one must be able to distinguish between literal and mythical or poetical language when we speak about "incarnational language".

Wan (2007) says:

Traditional liberal scepticism over the historical documents led Hick to further scepticism over the philosophy embedded in the documents. He argues that the traditional doctrine of the incarnation makes no sense. Instead, key Christian doctrines are to be understood as mythological affirmations. Once we accept that the historical Jesus was just a very good man then the difference between him and other religious figures is a matter of degree not kind.

Hick (1980:55) says the language that describes Jesus was one of poetry that was vastly used by New Testament Christians describing how He had changed

their lives and how they should live in relation with their neighbour as well as with Him. He says that this was not philosophical or scientific. According to him this was metaphorical language, therefore the incarnational language should be interpreted as poetical, not literal, because, by not complying with this, one would claim an exclusive revelation of God.

Hick (1980:75) argues further that it would bring confusion if incarnation is understood in a literal sense affirming that Jesus was God incarnate instead of saying mythically, Jesus is “our sufficient, effective, and saying point of contact with God.” Hick (1973:172) says that when mythical language is confused with literal language; the danger when this happens is that its followers become confused and construed the wrong message which will lead them to wrong conclusions.

In his search for the historical Jesus, Hick concentrates largely on the human side of Jesus. Hick (1993b:2) maintains that Jesus never taught that He was indeed God incarnate and this idea is the establishment of the church. This was the language of his followers especially after his death. Hick (1973:155-179) regards the notion of God and man as the same or one is completely opposed as poetical or mythical language and not literal language.

Hick (1973:150) says further that when people speak about Jesus as “the incarnate Son of God”, it should be done and observed in poetical or mythical language. He strongly emphasised his case by implying that this is clearly evident in the Greek philosophy as well as in Christianity’s ancestry. By not abiding by this rule was to claim absoluteness of one’s religion. Hick (1989:235-336) argues that literal interpretation has no religious significance or sense and therefore, it must be changed to a metaphorical understanding.

Hick (1993a:53) holds Christ in high regard and describes Him as the perfect example of “grace-inspired humanity”. He says that the historical Jesus did nothing but to portray God’s grace. Hick (1973:152-154) firmly proclaims that “in Jesus, God’s love, *agape*, was incarnated, and Jesus’ spirit was inspired by God’s grace.” Jesus is the complete example to man and for man to live by the divine inspiration of God’s spirit (see also Wan, 2007).

Hick (1993b:12) says Christ is “understood in a functional rather than an ontological sense”. He says that Jesus is a perfect model of human response to God, a man filled with the Spirit living an extra ordinary life thoroughly living by faith and freedom within the grace and inspiration of God projecting the divine purpose for human life (see also Wan, 2007).

Hick (1987:23; 1993a:52-56) contends that:

... Jesus’ exemplification might also be found and verified by observation and judgment in other religious traditions. Jesus’ exemplification of divine inspiration does not lay *a priori* claim to the superiority of Christianity in relation to the other world religions. It allows for historical observation and evaluation to decide if this highest degree of inspired life represented in Jesus is also discovered and exemplified in other religious saviors or traditions (see also Wan, 2007).

Knitter (2002:122) and Netland (1991:240-249) argues that Hick’s aim is not to discredit the belief regarding the incarnation of Jesus Christ as the Son of God, but he suggested to Christians that they must embrace, or make more use of, the Spirit or inspirational Christology that is found in the New Testament and not the incarnational Christology, which was (and still is today) a dominant factor throughout the existence of the church. According to Hick (1973:148-154), the Spirit should take centre stage because it was under the guidance and influence of the Spirit that Jesus “received” his divine nature.

4.4.1.6 Hick’s Christianity

Hick (1973:109-110) maintains that the crux of Christianity as a “way of life” lies in its self-perception as a way of salvation. This way of life is presented in Jesus’ teaching and in “patristic literature as an ethical way”. The important element of this Way is to be found in the “belief or faith” expressed in the activity of worship toward God, but is found in the way in which we expressed in our attitude and how we relate to our neighbour.

Hick (1987:16-18) argues that, once Christians regard Jesus as God incarnate, or claim that the Bible is given under, or through, God's inspiration to Biblical authors based on their faith in Him, then this is destructive subjectivism. Hick says that, since humanity in all religious faiths projects and brings forth "Fruit of the Spirit" so to speak, humanity should be considered as being divine by nature, and therefore he plays a leading role in the salvation process. Therefore, according to him, the idea about the predestination of the Christian faith must be ruled out because this creates the notion of Christianity's overall superiority.

Hick (1987:23) continues by maintaining:

For the Christian tradition is now seen as one of a plurality of contexts of salvation, contexts within which the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to God-centred (or Reality-centeredness) is occurring. Accordingly, if it is now claimed that Christianity constitutes a more favourable setting for this transformation than the other traditions, this must be shown by historical evidence. Today we cannot help feeling that the question of superiority has to be posed as an empirical issue, to be settled (if indeed it can be settled) by examination of the facts.

Hick (1987:30) contends that, despite our partial and fallible constitution as we relate to the "Real", religions provide themselves with self-determined criteria after which the goal is to redirect our energies and practices of the human heart from self to neighbour. He says that Christianity can no longer be singled out as the supreme of religions. Instead Christians must accept that Christianity has become part of a bigger religious body or has almost disappeared in a pool of multiple religions in our society and could not be recognised or singled out as the supreme religion that dominates the sphere of the religious world, while claiming superiority or absolute truth over other non-Christian religions.

Hick (1987:30) says in the past Christianity was clothed "cultural glories" and operated in this manner. Today, he says that what was visibly positively perceived in Christianity is evidently observable amongst its counterparts,

therefore, no religious group can be singled out as manifestly superior, including its theological doctrines.

The Gospel of Matthew relates the parable about the farmer letting the weeds and grass grow together and, at the end, they would be separated from each other. Hick (1987:vii, 30) says that we cannot judge or single out any religion as the one better than the other because each one is producing fruit that create a better society, while they are on par with each other.

He says that in a Pluralistic world, Christ could not be highlighted as being more definitive or normative than any other religious figure or concept. As Andrew Kirk (1992:11) elucidates, to confess that Jesus Christ is the only Lord above all other gods says that Jesus is also revealed as Lord in all the other religions, but with a different name. This pluralistic assumption has called upon Christians to forsake their claims as the only unique religion and absolute revelation of God, and make peace with the reality that Christianity is one of the religions amongst the many great religions of the world.

4.4.1.7 Hick's soteriology and revelation

Hick (1985:97) promotes the possibility of a multi-faceted understanding of revelation: "I have spoken of the ultimate divine reality as everywhere 'revealing' itself to human beings, this universal revelatory activity being differently perceived and responded to within the different cultural ways of being human."

Hick (1996:43-44) argues that salvation must be understood in a more general term, other than what traditional Christianity has prescribed. He argues that, man gradually changed and transformed from natural self-centeredness to a radically new God-centeredness and that he calls this transformation "salvation" or "liberation".

Hick (1996:43-44) further claims that if this transformation from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness, is understood, then salvation is available in all the religions of the world without having to go through Jesus Christ. Given

the differences, he maintains that all religions are providers of a definite path to salvation.

Hick (1996:43) says that despite the disagreements regarding the recognised theological differences among the world religions lies in essence the moral fruit that the saints of the religions produce in their lives as they adhere to the call of their religious tradition. Hick (1996:44) contends that, these saints of these different faith traditions engage in religious practise that has an outward positive effect on the globe. He sees these people who are at peace with themselves, producing the fruits of peace. He says further that this kind of behaviour is due to the way in which they perceive and respond to the Real and therefore their religions could be perceived as ways of salvation.

Hick (1987:23) says salvation belongs to humanity and religions are the vehicle to help one to get there. He argues that religions are all equal and en route to discover the one and same "Ultimate Divine Reality", while avoiding the slippery slopes of relativism, which affirms that all religions, no matter how disoriented they appear to be, are leading them there.

Hick (1996:17) says due to the fact that religions could not fully know the "Real", as well as their different cultural and historical backgrounds, religions approach the "Real" distinctly differently by natural inclinations. Hick says that the one most pursued "common soteriological goal, toward which all religions strive" is to denounce the self-centeredness in one's life and embrace, or take up, a new "unexplainable" experience with the Real. He still holds onto his belief that no religion can exalt itself as superior to the others, therefore no religion can claim that they possess the only true salvation or have a more unique relationship with the "Real".

Hick (1987:23, 30) says there is no one absolute religious tradition. All possess the same position and all are unique channels that bring about salvation. He argues that religion is a body which functions in a natural world as it relates to the "Real" who is not known and nor seen by man. He says humans only have each other and, as they interact with each other, they see a reflection or a revelation of God in each other as they function in their different ways. This

is where he opened up for a Pluralistic approach to religion as a means to identify God's revelation to human life (see also Wan, 2007).

Regarding revelation, another observation that the researcher would like to present focuses on the claim made by Christians of the authenticity of the Bible as a revelation of God.

Hick (1973:51) does not consider Scripture as God's revelation, but a "record of the stream of revelatory events". He only considers Scripture as the Word of God, due to the inspiration, the writers received by faith, in order to record it. What attracts him was the "unique significance of the events of which it is an original documentary expression, which became a revelatory through the faith of the Biblical writers," not the method, form or skill recorded. He still considers Scripture as revelation but with less emphasis of importance, despite the record of its adherents past and present.

Hick (1985:93-98) maintains a similar view regarding revelation as held by his other doctrinal views where he emphasises the equality of all religion and the unknowable "Real". According to him, all religions have the same measure of validity as other religions. There are to be no distinctions among any of these religions, because all are on equal footing toward the "top of the mountain" in response to the call of the "Real". His steadfastness to a non-propositional view of revelation has led him to deny any "miraculous interventions in the course of human history" (Wan, 2007).

4.4.1.8 Summary

Hick has posed a serious challenge to both the Exclusivist (particularistic) and Inclusivist Christian theology of religions. His (1973:120-132) "Copernican revolution" approach has dominated his stance as a Pluralist and has influenced like-minded Pluralists who are taking the pluralistic ideology forward with conviction. His Copernican revolution calls one to discard stereotypical mentalities and embrace the notion of religious equality in the world with the

“Real” at the centre of events, and not Christ or the church, as opposing Christian responses promote.

Hick’s (1993:148-164) theology ensures that it not only challenges, but also attempts to “set” Christian doctrines in line with his pluralistic philosophy. Doctrines regarding Jesus as the Son of God (1973:155-179; 1980:55-56), the incarnation of Christ, the Bible (1987:16-34) itself and any claims of truth to which Christians tend to adhere, are being levelled to ordinary means.

Hick (1977:74) recognises the importance of language interpretation. Therefore, he says that, in order “to understand Jesus as the Son of God consubstantially with the Father” was for the Christians of the Greek-Roman world the most efficient method for men and women alike to express, to the surrounding world and within their cultural environment, the uniqueness and significance of Jesus as the one through whom they had experienced transformational change.

Hick’s (1973:51) issue with the Bible was that it is supposed to be understood and read mythologically, therefore it could not be considered to have any supernatural status. According to Hick (1980:55), it was clear that language plays a vital role and if one does not understand the language in which the Bible is written, one would encounter difficulty when it comes to interpreting it. This would lead one to ideas that one’s religion is more superior to other existing religions. He therefore, argues that if “mythic language is confused with literal language,” then false truth claims are established.

Hick (1996:33, 36) also,

... rejects the Bible’s authority and its ability to settle theological issues. He believes that the Bible presents pre-scientific beliefs and cultural assumptions that are no longer acceptable today. He also does not believe that God reveals propositions to people in human language. To Hick, the formulation of theology “is a human activity that always, and necessarily, employs the concepts and reflects the cultural assumptions and biases of the theologians in question.”

With regard to salvation, Hick (1987:23, 31) says that it is to be understood as being present in all religions. All religions are true and lead to the same destination and, therefore, provide the same authentic means of salvation.

Hick's (1996:42-45) understanding is that salvation is the liberation of humanity, which is understood to be the common ground to which all the religions of the world can contribute through inter-religious dialogue and collaboration. The nature or disposition of humanity is not necessarily sinful; rather it contains the sense of deity by which all humanity can make a proper response to "the Reality" through religious practices.

Regarding the church, Hick's relationship and pluralistic philosophy calls for the church to engage in dialogue. This call is experienced strongly in the Catholic Church that believes that proclamation without dialogue is impossible. Proponents, such as Karl Rahner, Jacques Dupuis, Gavin D'Costa, Pope John Paul II and Vatican II, are forerunners for the promotion of dialogue on a level playing ground. This calls for non-Christian religions to walk the tight rope (engage in dialogue) without a safety net (for Christians, Jesus and Scripture) below them. Finally, a summary of the doctrinal different positions held by Hick and Kraemer follows. According to Wan (2007):

In Christology, Hick's position sees Jesus as a human religious leader, while Kraemer insists upon the lordship and divinity of Jesus Christ. Soteriologically, Hick's system supports universal salvation, while Kraemer emphasises the particularity of the redemptive atonement of Jesus Christ. In ecclesiology, Hick's formulation denies the particularity of the Christian Church's position, while Kraemer sees it as God's unique agency for salvation.

Hick (1996:52-57) is not in favour of the New Testament's claims of Jesus' incarnation. He says that:

Jesus was not God and never claimed to be divine. The New Testament expression of Jesus' deity was written by people who did not know Jesus and reflect a gradual deification of Jesus in the minds of Christians. Hick's denial of

the incarnation naturally leads him to reject the “central doctrines of Trinity and Atonement”. He says the idea of the incarnation was a metaphor. To him, Jesus embodied as much of the infinite divine moral qualities as could be expressed in a finite human, but Jesus himself was not divine (see also Vlach, 2004).

One final observation highlights how other theologians, such as H.J. Na, perceive Hick. Wan (2007) says that Na, a theologian from Korea, assesses Hick as “an advocator of religious ecumenism” and that Hick’s intention is strongly aimed at establishing an acceptable ideology of religious co-existence, and collaboration amongst the religions of the world. Wan (2007) says that:

Not a single world religion, but a situation in which the different traditions no longer see themselves and each other as rival ideological communities. A single world religion is, Hick would think, never likely, and not a consummation to be desired. For so long as there are a variety of human types there will be a variety of kinds of worship and a variety of theological emphases and approaches.

4.4.2. RAIMUNDO PANIKKAR

A bird’s eye view description of what made Hick such an influential pluralist has been provided. What was learned from John Hick’s argument is that it rests on the fact that no religion, especially Christianity, can claim superiority over all other religions, due to a lack of insufficient truth regarding the “Divine because all knowledge is historically conditioned or socially constructed and therefore it has limitations” (see also Knitter, 2002:125).

Hick’s pluralist partner, Raimundo Panikkar, who starts his argument with the Divine, agrees with Hick that no religion can make full final claims about truth by echoing, “what is in the heart of every religion exceeds anything a human being, or community, can feel and express” (Knitter, 2002:125). The next section will study Raimundo Panikkar, who has also made an invaluable contribution to the study of Pluralism in a contemporary Pluralistic world. Panikkar’s background, his Cosmotheandric idea, mutual enriching fecundation and his

philosophy of Christology, will receive attention in the subsequent section, followed by a conclusion.

4.4.2.1 Background

Gerard Hall (2002b) SM, currently Head of the School of Theology, McAuley Campus, Australian Catholic University, completed his doctoral dissertation on Raimon Panikkar at the Catholic University of America in 1994. On 21-23 February 2002, he was a keynote presenter at an International Symposium on the interfaith and intercultural hermeneutics of Raimon Panikkar at the Centre pel diàleg intercultural de Catalunya, Barcelona, Catalonia, Spain. This paper was delivered at the Australian Association for the Study of Religions Conference, Griffith University Multifaith Centre, 4-6 July 2003. Here Hall gives a cursory description of Panikkar, who was born in Barcelona in 1918 to a Catalan Catholic mother and an Indian Hindu father. With a committed and dedicated life to interfaith and intercultural dialogue, he attained three doctoral degrees in Philosophy, Science (Madrid University) and Theology (Lateran University). Ordained as a Catholic priest in his early fifties, he left for India where he undertook studies in Indian Philosophy and Religion at the Universities of Mysore and Varanasi.

Panikkar's academic posts move back and forth between professorships at Indian, North American, and European universities. He lived in Tavertet, outside Barcelona, where he continued to study, pray and write, but currently serves as Emeritus Professor of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara. At 70, he still ministers as a Catholic priest, and regards himself as a monk (see also Panikkar, 1993:v-xv, 1981b:111).

Panikkar (1993:ix) has published multiple books and academic articles in a variety of fields and languages. His main works, such as; *The unknown Christ of Hinduism*; *The Trinity and religious experience, worship and secular man*; *The Vedic experience, myth faith and hermeneutics*; *The intra-religious dialogue and the cosmotheandric experience* have labelled him as one of the most notable

religious scholars. Other work of importance includes: *The invisible harmony* and *A dwelling place for wisdom*. What he describes as his final word, *The rhythm of being*, based on his 1989 Gifford Lectures (Panikkar, 1993:x-xi), is still in process.

Panikkar (1981b:111) says that his concern from his early years in India was about the harmony of a pluralistic religious world, despite the fact that he was born into two major religious traditions, Roman Catholic and Hindu. This has allowed him, as Catholic priest, to reflect on a variety of dialogue experiences in Asia, North America and Europe.

Panikkar (1978:2, 1993:v-xv) believes that his purpose in life is to unite people from all walks of life. This is reflected in how he described himself as he grew into his belief: "I left as a Christian, 'found myself as a Hindu,' and 'returned' as a Buddhist, without having ceased to be a Christian."

Hall (2002b) says that this was to "Panikkar ... the implied challenge to the objectivist methodological stance of most writings on religious pluralism, was [raised by] the subjective, personal, religious experience to a new level of methodological importance for religious understanding (see also Panikkar, 1978:55-64). According to Panikkar (1993:v-xv) this could only be encountered when one goes through the process and once this has happened one will draw a different conclusion of the world around oneself. His cosmotheandric vision, which we will be looking at in the next section, validates this interrelatedness.

4.4.2.2 The Cosmotheandric idea

Panikkar (1973a:ix) has developed a cosmotheandric idea of reality, referring to three major religious traditions to which he *belongs*, namely the Christian Trinity, the Vedanta Hindu advaita, and the Buddhist pratityasamutpada. Panikkar (1993:ix-x) claims that this threefold pattern – traditionally speaking, "Theos-anthropos-cosmos" – are invariants of all religions and cultures in the world and adds that, according to the cosmotheandric principle there is an "intuition of the

threefold structure of all reality, the triadic oneness existing on all levels of consciousness and reality.”

Panikkar (1973b:74-75) claims that,

God and man are neither two nor one ... There are not two realities: God and man/world; but neither is there one: God or man/world ... god and man are, so to speak, in close constitutive collaboration for the building up of reality, the unfolding of history, and the continuation of creation ... [this] cosmotheandric experience and reality that dwell within and are made available through the various religious streams of the world.

Panikkar (1981:22; 1993:v-xv) says our cosmopolitan world has developed to a critical position that warns all forms of imperialistic and monistic thinking and acting that no religious group should emphasise the superiority of one religion, culture or tradition over peoples of other diverse faiths.

He says further that religious tradition has a powerful contribution to make toward living in harmony and peace without abandonment of one's faith. Instead, it is due to one's faith that this contribution would play a pivotal role in fostering human unity.

Panikkar (1993:ix-x) says that, the three assumptions that support his theories of his cosmotheandric vision describe reality neither as a monolithic unity nor sheer diversity and multiplicity, but as one. He sees reality, intrinsically as threefold relation.

Every reality is constitutively connected to all other realities. According to him there is relatedness: Every being relates to the other. Panikkar (1993:60) argues that this relates to the ancient idea that every reality brings out the organic unity where every part of the whole participates or reflects the whole. He says reality as symbolic, pointing to and participating in something beyond itself because no part makes up the whole without. He argues that God and the world, nor humans are separate from each other.

Panikkar (1993:viii-ix) believes that, despite the existing cultures and religious differences that are prevalent, the connectedness between people amongst themselves with the world as well as with themselves are real.

4.4.2.3 The Divine

Hall (2002) states that, according to Panikkar, “The divine dimension of reality is not an ‘object’ of human knowledge, but the depth-dimension to everything that is. The mistake of Western thought was to begin with identifying God as the Supreme Being (monotheism) which resulted in God being turned into a human projection (atheism).” (See also Panikkar, 1996:42-44; “The Cosmotheandric invariant” and “The divine dimension” in “The rhythm of being”, Panikkar’s Gifford Lectures, private manuscript, chapters 6 & 7).

Knitter (2002:129) says this would limit the freedom of the Divine and box God in. God, who is evidently operative in the religions of the world, especially in the lives of those people who exist in the different religions of the world, is highlighted as “no common denominator”. Hall (2004), says this has led “Panikkar move beyond God-talk to speak of the divine mystery now identified in non-theistic terms as infinitude, freedom and nothingness ... despite whatever forms of manipulation and control are exercised, the aspect of (divine) freedom remains” (see also Panikkar, 1993:61).

Panikkar (1993:61) says that God is not a *Deus ex machina* with whom we maintain formal relations, but a mystery of the inherent inexhaustibility of all things, at once infinitely transcendent, utterly immanent, totally irreducible, absolutely ineffable. This divine dimension is discernable within the depths of the human persons ... this mystery that is alive in the religions does not exist by itself, instead it has its being anchored in the diversity of humanity and the world (Knitter, 2002:129).

4.4.2.4 Humanity

Panikkar (1993) condemns the technocratic cultures for not recognising the threefold reality of human dimension, which he sees as aesthetic, intellectual and mystical. According to him in these cultures, it is only a two dimensional human experience.

Hall (2004) contends that for him the third dimension of human experience is not remote from ordinary reality, “but a ‘further’ depth-dimension within all human awareness.”

“... if we aren’t aware of the Divine who has its being within us and of the earth that forms us, we don’t know who we are” (Knitter, 2002:127). Hall (2004) says that, “Panikkar’s intention is to show that genuine human experience involves the triad of senses, intellect and mystical awareness in correlation with matter, thought and freedom.” There is an interrelatedness, that exists between the cosmotheandric experience, which is not “just a given, static reality, but is alive, it is growing, and it is changing and dependent on how well the human ingredient is aware of and responds to the Divine and the earthly” (Knitter, 2002:128).

Hall (2004) says, “This cosmotheandric insight stresses human identity with the worldly character and temporal nature of the cosmos [as well as revealing] a human openness towards the infinite mystery that *ipso facto* transcends human thought.”

And Knitter (2002:128) confirms, “... and because they do, they will know the deeper unity of religions that grounds tremendous diversity ... as well as valuing their own religion and at the same time be free of it.”

4.4.2.5 The universe

Panikkar (1993:79) does not believe in the term, “no disembodied souls or disincarnated gods, just as there is no matter, no energy, no spatio-temporal world without divine and conscious dimensions.” Instead, he says, “every concrete reality is cosmotheandric, that is, a symbol of the ‘whole.’ It is not only God who reveals but the earth has its own revelations” (see also Hall, 2004).

Panikkar (1993:77) reminds us that relatedness exists between the Divine, human and the world; they cannot exist without relating to each other. Despite the vast differences; they give life as they interact with each other.

4.4.2.6 Mutual fecundation

Panikkar (1981b:111) says that the guiding principle that should govern the encounter of diverse religions that engage in dialogue should be that it is purely dialogue and nothing else. “The religious dialogue must be truly religious.”

Panikkar (1981b:111) argues saying that, “If the Christian, Hindu or Buddhist approaches the dialogue with the a priori idea of defending one’s own tradition over or against the other we shall have nothing but a good contributory apologetically defense of their religion.”

Panikkar (1987:145) promotes his idea of “mutual fecundation” by saying that this is the only basis for the religions of this world on which to co-exist in peaceful harmony. He says further that this would allow them not only to engage with each other but also, as they draw from each other, they would go in deeper into their own religion and discover their own religious enriching values and treasures. He says by engaging with each other this way would help them not only to discover their difference but also would introduce to them the richness that is locked up in their own faith. He says through this “mutual fecundation” process, religions carry on interacting with each other historically and existentially leading these groups to grow as they influence each other.

Panikkar (1981b:111, 1978:25-37) provides the guiding rules:

- *It must be free from particular apologetics.* When encountering dialogue no one, whether Christian, Hindu or Buddhist, should engage with motives of “defending one’s own tradition over or against the other”.
- *It must be free from general apologetics.* The task of those who engage in interfaith dialogue must not defend religion in general against the non-religious or anti-religious attitudes of secular society. This would lead to

- “an ideological movement” as well to reject “modern secular consciousness”.
- *One must face the challenge of conversion.* One needs to know that, being a “truly religious person is not a fanatic who has all the answers but a pilgrim who is always open to experience of grace and truth” as one engages in religious conversation. One must keep in mind the challenge and risk of losing one’s life or faith in one’s own tradition. One can also become “born again or one’s own tradition transformed”.
 - *The historical dimension is necessary but not sufficient.* All religions risk limiting themselves to particular, historical interpretations, which quickly become truncated ideologies. Religious encounter is a meeting of religious persons who both carry the power and burden of their own religious traditions; yet they also carry the power and burden of reinterpreting that tradition anew, not breaking with past history, but carrying it forward in imaginative ways. Religious persons like all others belong to history; they also change history through responding to life’s contemporary challenges.
 - *It is not just a congress of philosophy.* Those who engage in this discourse must keep in mind that the religious gather in a gathering of people, not minds, not cancelling out the place of philosophy or comparing the various religious systems. About doctrinal comparisons, they must be genuinely dialogical; that means keeping in mind the reality of profoundly diverse worldviews. This important point is stressed here, due to what has been done by “well intentioned Western scholars who assume that only Western philosophy has appropriate categories for understanding the world’s religions.” According to Panikkar, Eastern philosophy has an important and yet “a more sophisticated system for appropriating religious truth”.
 - *It is not only a theological symposium.* Despite the important part theologians play during interfaith dialogue, one need to bear in mind that the dialogue is not chiefly focused on “theological systems of thought”. According to Panikkar, “Theologies emanate from a particular experience,

- revelation or event that is *ipso facto* specific to the particular religious tradition in question. Theologies are primarily concerned with religious beliefs; religious encounter is concerned with religious persons in their entirety.” Faith in a truth that transcends beliefs, doctrines and theological systems and not belief, is at the heart of the interfaith dialogue.
- *It is not merely an ecclesiastical endeavour.* At the heart of the official gathering of the interfaith dialogue, one finds that the leaders of the different faiths are more “concerned with the preservation of their own traditions in a religiously pluralistic world,” whereas the ordinary members of the faith would be freer to “experiment” with new ways and ideas, hoping to encounter a multi-religious experience.
 - *It is a religious encounter in faith, hope and love. Whereas beliefs, ideologies, doctrines and theologies divide, faith unites.* Hope is at once a truly human and a profoundly religious attitude, often linked to the religious notion of sacrifice: one’s eschatological hope for the world and ourselves enters the heart of the dialogue overriding fear, weakness and prejudice. Love seeks truth, but it also impels us toward our fellow human beings, leading us to discover in them what is lacking in us. In faith, hope and love, one yearns for the common recognition of truth that does not obliterate the differences or mute the voices of any tradition.
 - Lastly, *the primacy of intra-religious dialogue.* One needs to know and understand that intra-religious dialogue is primary and it, therefore, is important that “one must first grasp the reality of one’s own tradition,” before one can engage in an inter-religious dialogue (see also Hall, 2004).

Panikkar (1981b:122-123) says, “Mutual fecundation” hinges on three principles: “equal preparation” for the religious encounter on both theological and cultural sides must be made; “mutual trust and openness” must be part of the dialogue and, lastly, the “different issues” must be identified and distinguished to create clarity and avoid any confusion. This creative religious act of engagement is extremely vital because, through it, the essence of religion is revealed.

4.4.2.7 Panikkar's Pluralistic Christology

Panikkar (1980:138-139) defines the work of Christ as not only visible to Christianity through, but that it is seen everywhere. Panikkar (1987:122) says, "Christ is the Lord but the Lord is neither only Jesus nor does my understanding of the word exhaust the meaning of the word ... [in fact He] is the only mediator, but He is not the monopoly of Christians and, in fact, He is present and effective in any authentic religion, whatever the form or the name."

With this way of thinking Panikkar (1980:147) does not allow any religion to make claims of exclusivity regarding their relationship with Christ, instead he wishes to bring about a harmonised coexistence amongst the religions of the world. This ensures that no religion can claim superiority over the other. Panikkar (1980:137, 142) says:

Christ does not belong to Christianity, he only belongs to God. It is Christianity and Hinduism as well that belong to Christ, though in two different levels ... Christ, the only source of every authentic religious experience, is the "ontological meeting-point" between Hinduism and Christianity ... in Christianity Christ is to be brought "forth" and not being brought "in".

Panikkar (1981a:27) says, "[He] is the symbol, which Christians call by name, of the ever-transcending but equally ever-humanly immanent Mystery." He symbolises the connecting unifying binding force between the Divine, man and the universe ... bringing the religious-mysterious experience together that transpires in the cosmotheandric idea (see also Knitter, 2002:132).

Knitter (2002:132-123) says the question that hindered Panikkar was the relationship or the understanding that evolves around the mystery of the historical Jesus and the Christ. He esteems the Lordship claims of Jesus highly in that he affirms that, should you delete Jesus from the equation, you would "dilute the Divine". However, he maintains that Jesus is the Christ but that not all of Christ is Jesus.

Panikkar (1980:142) restricts Christians from claiming any ownership over Christ; with this he qualifies other religions to make religious claims of salvation. With this he dethrones the Evangelical truth claims regarding the historical Jesus and Christ being the same entity. He differentiates between the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history whom he considers as objects of faith and belief, respectively.

4.4.2.8 Summary

In summary, the researcher set out to study the pluralist, Raimundo Panikkar, who has made an invaluable contribution to the field of Religious Pluralism during this past century. In the light of his contribution, his historical background, his cosmotheandric idea and his mutual fecundation were studied, and his pluralistic Christology was also examined.

Panikkar (1981:122) says:

Christ is the Lord, but the Lord is neither Jesus only ... Christendom is the socio-religious structure of Christianity and as such is a religion like any other. It must be judged on its own merits without any special privileges ... God wills that all men should reach salvation ... There is no salvation without faith, but this is not the privilege of Christians, or of any other special group. The means of salvation is to be found in any authentic religion (old or new), since a man follows a particular religion because in it he believes he will find the ultimate fulfilment of his life. Christ is the only mediator, but he is not the monopoly of Christians and, in fact, he is present and effective in any authentic religion, whatever the form or the name.

4.5 “ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITY MODEL”

Thus far, this study has included two of the three prominent pluralists of the past century, John Hick and Raimundo Panikkar, as well as their invaluable contributions that have become the main features of the Pluralistic society. In a

nutshell, Hick's contribution was in the form of his "Copernican revolution" – neither Jesus nor Christianity is the centre of the universe, but God and, therefore, salvation is also found in non-Christian religions. On the other hand, Panikkar strongly emphasises his "Cosmotheandric vision", the interconnectedness between the Divine, man and the universe that constitutes the "Real".

The next section will look at a group of Pluralists who has added another unique dimension to Pluralism. Knitter (2002:135) says the point they stress emphasises our global ethical responsibility for "our endangered globe and all its inhabitants". He says further they call on all religions to allow room for an understanding of one's own religion, as well as others. We will have a look at the work of these men and women who have been in the forefront of promoting this "Ethical Responsibility Model." Themes we will look at are: love for thy neighbour; the suffering universe – searching for common ground; walking in their shoes; and a unique liberation Christology, before drawing a conclusion.

4.5.1 "Love for one's neighbour"

Knitter (2002:135) says that these Pluralists who support and emphasise the ethical responsibility idea believe that the Christian theology must be based on love for our neighbour. This is the guiding principle for our attitude toward non-Christian religions.

It is not only important for Christianity to reflect on past traditions, which are based on Scripture but, more importantly, Christians need to practice what Jesus called them to do, which is to have an *agape* love toward our neighbour. Our theology is lacking if it does not yield the ethical fruits of God's love and justice for the oppressed.

Tissa Balasuriya O.M.I. (2004:544) looks at the negative impact of the new global imperialism, which he calls a "global apartheid", "with the white peoples having most of the cultivable land of the earth. This is the basic inequality on

which many other forms of inequality are built.” He challenges those who call themselves Christian and urge them to help form a global ethic whose core values are based on religion. He also emphasises the need for an interreligious collaboration to reverse the universal injustice, which counters, as Samuel Ryan (1990:134) says, the imperialist mission which projects Christ as a new religious Julius Caesar, who is out to conquer.

Gustavo Gutiérrez (2004:73) examines the question regarding the “unity and diversity of the languages on God and how we can understand that God is love in situations of misery, violence, oppression, exclusion, and the rejection of the most basic rights.” He continues, by saying that God’s love based on Scripture as priority revealed in the Bible is preferential, referring to a fundamental Biblical idea of, predilection and not of exclusion and at the same time universal.”

Social scientist François Houtart (2004:595) says love of, and compassion for one’s enemies will create a “social environment that enables the recapture of humanity”. He stresses the importance of the social Gospel, which speaks about love for one’s neighbour which would bring about transformation of the heart, a required need for social relationships to flourish. This manner of engagement would also create room for reconciliation, which would build stronger social communities.

4.5.2 The suffering universe – common ground

The confronting element that challenges the world of religions is the reality of global suffering of the inhabitants of the world. Ariarajah (2004:14) contends that the world is already globally engaged with reconcilable attempts to bring relief to those in dire straits, while the Christian world searches for means and methods of not only bridging their differences in doctrinal beliefs, but also overcoming their internal differences.

Ariarajah (2004:15) says the call goes out, not only to Christianity to find the Biblical “concept and vision” of unity amongst themselves, but also for the wider group of faiths in an attempt to bring them together. He says the decadent search to find common ground amongst themselves, which was also spurred on by proselytising people of other faiths, has diminished the pursuit for a positive ecumenical enterprise. Ariarajah (2004:21) says the challenge today is for the church to reconsider their approach in relation to their traditional ecumenism theological foundations and open up to the understanding of the *oikumene*, which says:

Would we see mission simply as a message that we bring to, or activities we do in the world, or mission as participation with God and all others in bringing healing and wholeness, justice and peace, and reconciliation and renewal in the world? Would the unity and reconciliation that we strive for only be about the church and its divisions, or mainly about the brokenness of the world around us?

Knitter (2002:138) adds that Pluralists argue that religious practices that have lost their heart and passion for the widespread human suffering without bringing relief nor healing, are labelled as invalid, inadequate, irrelevant and dysfunctional notwithstanding their theological claims. Pieris (2000:20) says as religious people we are not only to stand with those who are poor or who have been forced to be poor, but we are to separate ourselves from the desire of self gain and greed.

José Maria Vigil (1991) says since the Protestant Reformation, the concern for the *poor* has been a never-ending concern for Christians. The related debated question(s) always labours the idea of improving the conditions of the poor amongst us, without betraying the blood of the martyrs and the suffering face of Christ.

Teodoro C. Bacani, Jr. (2005) says that Cardinal Gerlier voiced his concern for the suffering poor as a primary concern of the Church. He says further that for Gerlier, “The effectiveness of our work is bound up with this problem of poverty.” He adds that, by not addressing the issue of poverty that he

considers as the “most relevant aspect of evangelical and human reality, then we are failing in our evangelistic task. The Church must be seen for what it is: the mother of the poor, whose first concern is to give her children bread for both body and soul.”

Bacani Jr. (2005) further says that what influenced Gerlier and his colleagues was the text of the Council’s initial “Message to Humanity” that says:

Coming together in unity from every nation under the sun, we carry in our hearts the hardships, the bodily and mental distress, the sorrows, longings and hopes of all the peoples entrusted to us. We urgently turn our thoughts to the anxieties by which modern man is afflicted. Hence, let our concern swiftly focus first of all on those who are especially lowly, poor, and weak. Like Christ, we would have pity on the multitude weighed down with hunger, misery, and lack of knowledge. We want to fix a steady gaze on those who still lack the opportune help to achieve a way of life worthy of human beings.

Virgilio Elizondo, S.J. (2004:586) says that the *power* that would defeat racism is the recognition and validating of the God-given differences, using it as a platform to overcome racial prejudice. Elizondo says racial prejudice is destructive which leads to exploitation and exclusion of the vulnerable.

Knitter (2002:138-139) says that believers of this ethical responsibility model say that this phenomenon has called the world to come forth and produce a global ethic. This is not just a “list of unchangeable commandments, but it would embody a consensus of ethical values about dignity of the individual, the integrity of the earth, the community and responsibility that unite us all, and the need for justice and compassion.”

4.5.3 “Walking in their shoes ...”

Knitter (2002:139) says Pluralists believe that, “If religious persons first spend time acting together in order to relieve eco-human suffering, they will be able more successfully to talk together about their religious experiences and beliefs.”

Pablo Richard (1995:59-67) contends, “A liberation strategy cannot pursue the emancipation of a country or take power through arms but, from within, must create a new power through civil society” (see also Vigil, 1991). Amaladoss (1992:158-174) says that members of different clans who are known for their conflicting interests have joined together in a uniting force, “by a call that comes to all of them from beyond their immediate religious communities: the call of the suffering and the marginalized” (see also Knitter, 2002:140).

Vigil (1991) maintains that in order to achieve the same goal of liberation the same strategies and paths that now are different from the ones used in the past, should be followed. “Some actions that were revolutionary are considered reformist today and vice versa.” Those objectives that were considered as a priority in the past are seen as secondary, or may even no longer exist. Vigil (1991) says that “the paradigm” or model, if understood properly in the light of the “historic liberation strategy”, is no longer the same. Vigil (1991) says that, if the case is that “a liberation strategy” no longer exists, that another needs to be found, and if it is impossible to find it, then one must be made up. Vigil (1991) says that it is the model for “a liberation strategy, not liberation itself” that has been broken down.

Elizabeth Schüssler Fiorenza (2004:541) states that, “All have been created in the Divine Wisdom/Image of God where there is neither male nor female, white nor black, rich nor poor but multicoloured, multigendered nor more.” She says God created people in his Divine Wisdom, giving gifts and has called each individual differently. According to her this is the “religious vision and praxis of radical democratic equality”.

Knitter (2002:141) says Pluralists of the ethical responsibility model believe that people of different religious faiths, grouping themselves together, being committed to promote justice, will find themselves not only desiring to share religious faith perspectives, but will find new meaning for what would connect them at a “mystical-level”. Vigil (1991) says there is a need for a historic

praxis of transformation, despite the fact that more is needed for this liberation theology today than before.

4.5.4 A unique liberation Christology

Knitter (2002:143) says despite the different notions regarding the Christological understanding or interpretation of Jesus Christ and his role, the concerns of the Pluralist is how you convey the message of Jesus' love without degrading or ridiculing other faiths. He says philosophically speaking, Hick highlights Jesus' symbolic nature and Panikkar sees Jesus as one aspect of the universal Christ. As a liberation theologian, Aloysius chooses to see Jesus as an expression of the Kingdom of God. In other words, Jesus is all about the "Reign" or the "Kingdom of God".

Haight (1999:365) says that, "Liberation works from a social framework that understands the human person in terms of solidarity and dynamic, open interrelationships with others." This means that Jesus' salvation message is being presented, based on its social existence, its impact on groups and general society, as well as the political arena.

Haight (1999:36) says that those who do Christology today, reflect on the "historical Jesus", and work within the theological framework in which they find themselves. Therefore, Liberation Theology views Jesus as the liberator, the one who seems to bring liberation and transformation to one's social world (Knitter, 2002:143), but also one who had a prophetic dimension. It was this prophetic function that denounces the devaluing and oppressing of people as anti-Kingdom. Haight (1999:378) says the function of the Kingdom of God was clearly visible in the life of Jesus, his relationship with God being reflected in his attitude towards people in the public life.

Knitter (2002:144) adds that the proponents of the ethical responsibility model say, "... if the image and implications of Jesus the Spirit-filled liberator do not illuminate and inspire these other images, then something essential to what

Jesus was and was about is missing.” He adds that the Divinity of Jesus is essential to liberation Christology, because it reflects the God whom Jesus represents; and as Haight (1999:383) adds, a God who brings liberation to those who are oppressed by dictators.

Pieris (1996:151) argues that religious people, who describe themselves as religious or have a relationship with God, are called to take up the challenge and engage with those who have been victimised. This has been said about Mahatma Gandhi who lived out the Beatitudes, called the church “not the church” due to its failure to practice the Beatitudes. Haight (1999:383) says that God is the God of the poor and, through Jesus, who restores value to human life. Pieris (1996:150-151) believes that Jesus is the mediator between God and the non-persons of the world. Pieris (2000:20) says further that God became poor therefore anyone who considers himself religious and not adding up to this philosophy, there will be no salvation rendered toward that person.

4.5.5 Summary

This part of the chapter set out with a look at Pluralists who emphasise our ethical responsibility toward the world in a Pluralistic society. Themes we looked at was: love for thy neighbour, suffering universe – common ground, walking in their shoes and a unique liberation Christology. The highlights follow:

Love for thy neighbour. Our theology must be based on love for our neighbour. This is the guiding principle for our attitude toward non-Christian religions.

Suffering universe – common ground: The world must produce a global ethic that is not a “list of unchangeable commandments, but would embody a consensus of ethical values about dignity of the individual, the integrity of the earth, the community and responsibility that unite us all, and the need for justice and compassion.”

Walking in their shoes: There is a need for a historic praxis of transformation, where people of different religious faiths, who group themselves together in a commitment to promote justice, will find themselves not only desiring to share religious faith perspectives, but will find new meaning for that which would connect them at a “mystical-level”.

A unique liberation Christology: This is based on how to convey the message of Jesus’ love without degrading or ridiculing other faiths, despite the different notions regarding the Christological understanding or interpretation of Jesus Christ and his role.

Aloysius Pieris strongly believes in the well-being of the universe. This parallels his strong belief in the well-being of humanity as they engage on a course against any injustice that a marginalised society experiences. For the sake of the survival of the universe, he challenges religious leaders not to turn a blind eye, but to unite in a practical manner while practising their religious belief, or putting their faith in practice when it comes to injustice done to marginalised communities.

4.6 ADDITIONAL SUPPORTING FEATURES OF PLURALISM

The uniqueness of Christ, or of Christianity, has been extremely controversial. The exaggerations of the early Christians who claimed emphatically regarding the status of Jesus as the Christ or his being the unique Son of God and Saviour of the world, have brought rise to unquestionable doubt in pluralistic thought. Pluralistic thinkers deny the uniqueness of Christ as the only way of salvation that he provided, as stated in the New Testament.

The four areas of defence that pluralists wish to make clear are aimed at providing a proper understanding of who Jesus was in terms of his position as: Jesus “God’s Son and Saviour of the universe;” the sacramental Jesus and not “complete absolute”; the Spirit Christology; and lastly, the Christology of mutuality.

4.6.1 Jesus is not the only Saviour of the universe

The call for dialogue has caused hesitation in the Particularistic Christian camp that hold strongly to the belief regarding the uniqueness of Jesus as the Son of God and the Saviour of the world. Knitter (2002:151) says the Pluralists have urged that there is a need for them to rethink, or think these beliefs through. This is a claim that could serve as a stumbling block for non-Christians, as well as Christians, regarding the future of Christianity.

In the words of Wesley J. Wildman (1998:20) “the fault line in the contemporary crisis of Christology; debates over incarnation of Jesus’... self-consciousness are a side issue,” as Joseph O’Leary (1996:205, 207) echoes these sentiments by saying, “The more we listen to those others on their own terms, the more the claim that God is fully and definitively revealed only in Christ seems in need of revision ... We must go to meet the other religions with the assurance of having a savio[u]r, but also with questions about his place on the interreligious horizon” (see also Knitter, 2002:151).

Thomas (1990:50) says that the evidence of this became visible in Kerala, when a theological teacher resigned his position at Bishop’s College, Calcutta, and expressed his desire to join the Gandhian movement. He had to embrace Jesus as a *leader* and not as *Lord*.

Pluralists call for Particularists to redefine their stance regarding Jesus as the one-and-only, or the final Saviour, or the “absolute”, without disapproving or hindering the possibility of dialogue with people of other faiths (Knitter, 2002:152).

Thomas (1990:52) says that, C.F. Andrews maintains that, “... the move from colonial mission to a truly dialogical mission at depth in the relation of Christianity to other religions lies along the path, not of denial but a redefinition of the centrality of Jesus Christ.”

4.6.2 Jesus as a symbolic representative

Knitter (2002:153) says Pluralists see Jesus as a pointer, not a fixer. According to them, “he doesn’t have to fix the bridge between God and humanity’s sinfulness ... his task is to reveal or show to humanity that God’s love is already there, ready to embrace and empower, no matter how often humans have lost their way in selfishness and narrow-mindedness.”

Hick (1977:178) himself argues saying, “That Jesus was God the Son incarnate is not literally true, since it has no literal meaning, but it is an application to Jesus of a mythical concept whose function is analogous to that of the notion of divine sonship ascribed in the ancient world to a king.”

Haight (1999:359, 417) contends that Pluralists hold on to the belief that neither Christ nor Christianity are complete mediators or a satisfactory offer to God, because when the religions of the world allowed God’s revelatory presence to come to them, they opened themselves for self-transcendence through reflection and meditation on God. He says according to the Pluralists, for God to be a reality in the religions of the world, there must be a variety of multiple revelations.

Knitter (2002:155) says that for Pluralists, Jesus as a sacramental Saviour, can stand on equal terms with others but, as a satisfactory Saviour, he must stand-alone. Haight (1999:417) says that, this leaves the door wide open for the Pluralists who challenge Christianity to view other religions also as mediators of God’s salvation.

4.6.3 A Spirit Christology

Knitter (2002:154) says Pluralists’ acknowledgement of Jesus as a sacramental Saviour has created a scoop for them to bring another argument to the table regarding Jesus. Based on their Spirit Christology, the point they argue is that Jesus, as a sacramental Saviour, is not the complete or satisfactory Saviour God demands for man’s sinfulness. Therefore, his salvation is not complete or satisfactory for the whole human race. This rests on the fact that He was human

and needed to be Spirit-filled in order to manifest, but not wear out, God's universal love to all people.

Some contemporary Christologies indicate the following. Friedrich Schleiermacher (1963:94) says, "Jesus' supreme God-consciousness is due to the supreme presence of God to his person." Shailer Mathews (1910:109-138) proposes that Jesus' divinity is due to the "residing Spirit's" presence in him; and Paul Tillich (1963:144) contends, "though subject to individual and social conditions [Jesus'] human spirit was entirely grasped by the Spiritual Presence; his spirit was possessed by the divine Spirit ... God." Jürgen Moltmann's (1990:73) view is that "the Spirit always is the Spirit of Jesus; the Spirit is as it were bound to Jesus."

Haight (1999:447) says despite this meticulous Spirit Christology that explains the divinity of Jesus Christ, Pluralists labour the point that the Spirit is found beyond the person and work of Jesus to "revitalize Jesus as one bearer of the Spirit amongst many others." This means that the divinity of Jesus should be understood in the context or parameters of the Spirit's empowerment of Jesus, guiding and strengthening him without replacing his humanity.

Hick (1973:148-154) says, "The Spirit should take centre stage because it was under the guidance and influence of the Spirit that Jesus 'received' his divine nature." Knitter (2002:156) says embracing this would not only allow for people to understand both his divinity and humanity, but also allows for Christians to proclaim Jesus as normative to the world and also recognise that other mediations of God's salvific will are acceptable – opening the doors wide for a Christology of mutuality. D'Costa (1990:90-91) Jesus calls Christians to be open and engage with others in dialogue.

4.7 OBJECTIONS AGAINST PLURALISTS

Next we will look at some objections, which are made against Pluralists by their Christian counter parts.

4.7.1 Violation of uniqueness

Johnson (1999:2) contends that Pluralists are put off by the differences in the religious belief system; instead, they stress that if these differences in the various religions promote a common “religious experience or result in the moral and ethical improvement of man, this is enough to show that they are valid ways to God”.

Johnson (1999:2) says the Pluralists notably not only disregard but also disrespect the unique differences that exist amongst the religions of the world. According to them, “All religions share a fundamental unity that renders them equally valid as approaches to God which allows them to suggest that the similarities are far greater than the differences.” Knitter (2002:157) argues that those who are strong contenders of this approach are more concerned with the idea of dialogue with other religions that they fail to recognise the unique differences, which are an underlying strength of each religion.

Knitter (2002:157) says further that the fundamental danger of this is “a creeping imperialism that seeks common ground for dialogue in which they set up the rules for this dialogue to take place”. D’Costa (1990:135) argues that a similar phenomenon of this “creeping imperialism” is evident, due to the invasion of Western ideas in a non-European world where people live in a fairly plausible coherent structure. These critics only wish to see what they desire to see without realising that one cannot engage in dialogue, because one’s starting point begins, unintentionally, with one’s subjective religious point of view.

Knitter (2002:158) says that this creeping imperialism is experienced on the ground that you have identified and is much more than that of the other, you having made the observation through your own telescope because, whenever you “try to locate the center of the universal faiths, you’re standing in the centre of one faith”. D’Costa (1990:137) also says that Pluralism itself is one of the views amongst other possible ones and Pluralism’s truth claims are claims that must be set against rival truths. These truth claims must be denied because they cannot pretend to be innocent among their arrogant rivals.

D'Costa (1990:138) argues that the Pluralists become imperialists because they impose imperialism on other religions; "Every proposal for human unity which does not specify the centre has itself as the acknowledged centre." D'Costa (1990:139) contends that there has to be a centre, and if this centre is "God", then the standing question is to which "God" do they refer?

We said that the Pluralists' main concern aims at establishing dialogue on common ground amongst the religions of the world. This "common ground" must avoid traces of imperialism, which is impossible, as well as rules of engagement that allow disqualification of "unfair play". There should be guiding rules on which this dialogue should thrive. People need to have a basis on which they could make entry comments to get the dialogue going.

Allowing people to engage in dialogue without any truth-claims of their religious beliefs would not only be a futile exercise but would be making the "rules" as an "exclusivist-pluralist". As J.A. DiNoia (1990:120-122) contends, all religions must have an angle of approach which must accompany them all along, especially during an engagement of an interreligious dialogue.

However, when religious representatives of different religious backgrounds cross the threshold to enter the dialogue, Pluralists expect all religions to have a common view or understanding of formalised truth-claims that they express in their ideology of religious Pluralism, as already discussed in this chapter. Kenneth Surin (1990:201) says that it is like when you consume a McDonald's hamburger, you are also consuming the American lifestyle. Knitter (2002:160) says their focus is to call all religions to engage and stride toward a new global ethic, "a universal ethic imperative is prioritized over metaphysics and religion ...". What is not made clear is as Raymond Williams (1977:112) remarks, is:

A primary means by which privileged groups mask their hegemony is via a language of common contribution and co-operative shaping; to the extent that such groups can convince all partners in public dialogue that each voice contributes equally, to that extent does the conversation deflect attention from the unequal distribution of power underlying it.

He says further that people in power like to dialogue because it gives them the power to control or manipulate the dialogue, steering it in the direction they intended it to go, although they give the other dialoguers the impression that an equal distribution of power and co-operation prevails during dialogue. This is an “exclusive-pluralistic” truth-claim that overrides their argument regarding the “arrogance” of exclusivists in the light of its truth-claims. Sinkinson (2003) says, “Pluralism offers its own form of Exclusivism in which all rival world views are marginalized.”

4.7.2 Deceptive relativism

This study has pointed out that a main focus of the Pluralists is to establish a common ground upon which all can embark and engage in mutual dialogue – as D’Costa (2000:41) says, “The universal acceptance of liberal modernity as the answer for the problems of the world.” Knitter (2002:162) says that relativism holds the belief that there is no “absolute truth” due to the fact that truth is either too broad or too diverse and injustice is done on the part of those who claim that their truth is authentic and others are not.

He says that in order for interreligious dialogue to go forth harmoniously and undisturbed, Pluralists’ belief should wear no religious labels that would bring an imbalance to the interreligious dialogue, which would not only confuse the dialoguer as they engage, but would also be a sign of imperialism. However, D’Costa (1990:57-59) believes that any interreligious dialogue that engages for the common good of the earth and its inhabitants should have a specific normative content that would not only identify the common gathering, but also avoid relativism.

Knitter (2002:164) regards the advantage of “Imperialism” as a positive good because, based on their religious convictions, people could make invaluable contributions as a result of their religious diversities. This form of dialogue is to be more accommodative, and can embrace setting the pace for true global transformation in the world. (A good philosophical critique of Hick’s

relativistic position is offered by Alvin Plantinga in *Warranted Christian belief*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2000, pp. 43-63).

4.7.3 Jesus – the “only” Saviour?

The final dispute concerns the position of Jesus. Is He the Christ, or is part of the Christ in Him as it is in other “saviours” of the other religions? Or is He “truly” a Saviour along with the other “saviours”? Did Hick’s “Copernican revolution” and his mythological language alter the Christian’s perception of Christ? These are some of the concerns, amongst others, that inspired Christians to do some soul searching in order to strike a defence.

The Pluralists rank Jesus on the same footing as other religious “saviours”. These views are directed by the Pluralist Christian, who is being labelled as being ashamed of Jesus Christ and what He has endured for the whole human race. What Christian pluralists fail to realise is the fact that, throughout the ages, Jesus has been acknowledged as the “only” Christ. However, it seems counter-intuitive to reduce the complex work of Pluralists like Panikkar, Pieris and Knitter to a single attitude like shame. Küng (1991:99) says, “Whether it is convenient or not, Jesus is normative and definitive for the whole of the New Testament: He alone is the Christ of God.”

Dupuis (2000:295) says: “... That the Christians claim to a constitutive uniqueness of Jesus Christ rests on solid ground and has a valid foundation ... the Christian faith in Jesus-the-Christ is firmly grounded in the historical person of Jesus of Nazareth ... the church’s explicit Christology is grounded in the implicit Christology of Jesus himself.”

Braaten (1981:69) states:

The history of the religions once contributed all the Christological titles to the interpretation of the Jesus-event ... That the process is still going on in the openness of world history, engendered by the universal missionary witness to Jesus as the Christ, the Lord and Saviour of the world ... If the apostles and the

church fathers could find anticipation of Christ in the Old Testament, we have the right to expect a similar thing in the text and traditions of other religions.

Braaten (1981:69) also says that the truth of the matter is that for the Christian faith, Jesus Christ is indeed “the way, the truth and the life” (Jn. 14:6), the centre of the universe and of history. They say that Christians are obliged to justify rationally and historically their acts of faith in Christ, in whom the fullness of religious life is found.

Our relationship with Christ is our lifeline and will compromise what we enjoy with Christ by taking a Pluralistic stance and embracing a Pluralistic Christology. Küng (1991:101) says that, by compromising, one stands on dangerous ground of losing one’s Christian identity. He says this is committing religious suicide because your Christian identity is the very thing that would help to establish you in your faith as you live amongst the world of diverse religions.

Hellwig (1990:115) says that, we as Christians see the possibility of meeting the evident human need for redemption from selfishness, bullying, discrimination, and exclusion in and through the person of Jesus Christ because of the beginning He has made and the further developments among his more dedicated followers.

This distinguishes many Christians from many followers of other faiths because, such Christians are weary of multiple religious voices, pluralists who are in favour, are seen as unaware of the supposed power of evil coming from those religious voices. In the name of religion, horrid events and engagements are taking place globally, and anti-pluralist Christians often link this to what they regard as “unholy religious practices”. Barth (1980:132-142) regards this as “unbelief”, as he perceives godless man in the world. Knitter (2002:169) says the challenge for the Christian Pluralist, who acknowledges Jesus as prophet and liberator, is to ask them what the probability is of not serving Him as Lord and King, but acknowledging Him as the “only” Saviour.

4.8 CONCLUSION

This chapter set out to discuss Pluralism as a Christian response to religious diversity. The aim of this study was to study the main proponents who are strong influential contenders for religious Pluralism. We studied an overview of their different backgrounds and examined their invaluable contribution to the world of religious Pluralism.

Hick's contribution is evident in his "Copernican revolution". The "Real" is the centre of the universe, not Jesus, nor the church or Christianity. Therefore, when approaching the Bible, one must read it in a poetical or mystical manner, not literally – especially the claims made about Jesus as the Son of God or the Saviour of the world.

Panikkar's cosmotheandric vision established inter-connectedness between the divine, humanity and the universe. He agrees with Hick's belief that salvation is obtainable in all religions due to this connectedness, although man cannot fully comprehend the Divine.

We also looked at the relentless invaluable contributions made by those Pluralists who promoted the "Ethical Responsibility Model", which believes that, all religious inhabitants of the earth, must express concern for those who are suffering and who have been marginalised as well as the endangered universe.

Knitter (2002:110) says that in spite of their unique contributions, Pluralists agree that proclamation without dialogue is no dialogue at all. Their "rock-bottom" concern or aim is to promote dialogue amongst the religions of the world. They use dialogue as a platform to build peace amongst these religions, or so it seems. Knitter (2002:160-162) says when these religions meet to discuss the strategy of how to bring about peace amongst themselves, in a quest for common ground on which to build peace, this could not be found because, not only does each individual religion stand as an entity that claims religious exclusivity, but the real danger of this model is that the people in power love to dialogue, because they control it to present their own hidden agendas.

This is a clear mark that reflects Pluralism's inadequacy, as it stands, to bring peace amongst the religions of the world. Instead, this strategy may by and

large fuel the existing conflicts, when not reaching desired solutions as we discuss under the dissertation's heading, "Religious Conflict/Clashes" in Chapter 1.

The next chapter will inquire whether an ethic of embrace may contain what is missing in Pluralism, as much as in Particularism and Inclusivism in terms of helping to promote peaceful co-existence between adherents of different religions.

CHAPTER FIVE: THE NOTION OF AN ETHIC OF EMBRACE

“... [Being] aware that he and the whole universe share a common destiny” (C.S. Song, 1982: preface).

“For God so loved the world ...” (Jn. 3:16)

5.1 INTRODUCTION

To reiterate the discussion so far: The introductory chapter of this study on religious diversity stated that there has been massive growth in religious diversity all over the world. The argument was presented in discussing the two possible understandings of religious pluralism and how religious diversity had become an ideology of acceptance as it became a conscious reality in South Africa, and increasingly so in all parts of the world. The impacting dynamics of conflicts and clashes between the world's groups of different people were partly due to religious, racial and ethnic violence universally.

Attention was turned to Kraemer's (1938:107) argument regarding Christian Particularism that says, “... God has revealed the Way and the Truth and the Life in Jesus Christ, and wills this to be known throughout the world,” as a possible way forward for peace amongst the great religions of the world. Netland (1991:9) supports this argument saying:

Exclusivism maintains that the claims of Christianity are true, and that where the claims of Christianity conflict with those of other religions the latter are to be rejected as false ... God has revealed himself definitely in the Bible and that Jesus Christ is the unique incarnation of God, the only Lord and Savior. Salvation is not to be found in the structures of other religious traditions.

In the end, this study stated that Christian Particularism has not only been in opposition or has been resented for its arrogance by other religions, but many of their claims come from within the Christian body itself. This has left Christian Exclusivism or Particularism with little confidence to make authoritative claims as being the religion to follow, because it projects its inability to establish or produce peace amongst the religions of the world due to the questions that it engenders, questions of which an ethic of embrace might have redemptive and *peace-building* significance.

Chapter three discusses Christian Inclusivism as D'Costa (1986:80) defines it, "... affirms ... the salvific presence of God in non-Christian religions while, at the same time, maintains that Christ is the definitive and authoritative revelation of God". Netland (1991:9-10) maintains:

"... that the central claims of Christian faith are true, but it adopts a much more positive view of other religions than does Exclusivism (Particularism). Although Inclusivist holds that God has revealed Himself definitively in Jesus Christ and that Jesus is somehow central to God's provision of salvation for humanity, they are willing to allow that God's salvation is available to non-Christian religions. Jesus is still held to be, in some sense unique, normative, and definitive; but God is said to be revealing Himself and providing salvation through other religions as well.

Despite the positive outlook of Inclusivism, it still has loopholes that disqualify it completely and make it equally inadequate to bring about peace amongst the religions of the world. As stated earlier in this study, although they try hard to make room for dialogue by trying to put proper principles in place, they seem to fall short of filling the gaps. On the one hand, they hold onto their firm belief in the work and life of Jesus Christ, trying not to compromise their belief in Christ while, on the other hand, they put themselves in a difficult position of compromise by trying to have a roundtable dialogue with non-Christians. The principles for dialogue that they instituted prohibit them from having an open dialogue with other religious traditions. Ultimately, this brings about more confusion and

frustration and leads to indifference amongst Christians, as well as the non-Christian religions.

This study concluded that Inclusivism's greatest criticism is its "fulfilment theory", which highlights that all other religious faiths are inadequate to save them and that they need Christianity to bring "fulfilment". Knitter (2002:79) says their religious beliefs are a means to prepare them for Christianity that, ultimately, would complete or fulfil them through Jesus Christ. This has made Christian Inclusivism not only unpopular, but has also proved its inadequacy and inability to bring about peace amongst the religions in the world.

Chapter four presented a complete study of Pluralism as a Christian response to religious diversity, which is in complete opposition to both the Particularist and Inclusivist stance. On the contrary, where they spoke of Christocentric and an ecclesiast-centric theology, their counterpart, Pluralism, emphasised God's salvific revelation that is evident in all religious traditional theology.

The Pluralistic Christian model presents an argument that endorses the validity and equality of all religions, based on its universal practices across the world and, because of this, the truth-claims about Jesus Christ and his salvific significance could not be considered as the only way to God.

Knitter (2002:110) says the "rock-bottom" concern or aim of the Pluralistic model is to promote dialogue amongst the religions of the world. They use dialogue as a platform to build peace amongst the religions of the world, or so it seems. Knitter (2002:160-162) says further that when these religions meet to discuss the strategy of how to bring about peace amongst themselves, in a search for common ground on which to build peace, this could not be found because, not only does each individual religion stand as an entity because of each claiming religious exclusivity, but the real danger of this model is that the people in power love to dialogue because they control it to present their hidden agendas. This is a clear mark that reflects Pluralism's inadequacy to bring peace amongst the religions of the world.

The next chapter will attempt to construct an ethic of embrace from a theological perspective, will first define an ethic of embrace in the context of this study, and then will examine the main representative of an ethic of embrace. Thereafter, will be discussed: some main features that an ethic of embrace encompasses, such as, universal unconditional love; universal unconditional grace; religious uniqueness: working toward a greater common good; postmodernism: objective to religious truth claims; surpassing post-ecumenism; and building friendships with the other. Furthermore, in order to obtain a clear picture of an ethic of embrace, related themes, such as the ethics of reconciliation, tolerance, forgiveness and hospitality, will also be investigated before drawing a conclusion. As concluded earlier in this study, since Christian Particularism raises more questions than the other two models, this chapter on an ethic of embrace aims at presenting or providing support and undergirding those questions that the Particularist model raised.

5.2 ETHIC OF EMBRACE DEFINED

W.A. Dyrness (1994:40) defines an ethic of embrace thus: “Spirit of embrace – the Spirit who ‘issues from the essential inward community of the triune God, in all the richness of its relationship’, who lures people into fellowship with the triune God and opens them up for one another and for the whole creation of God” (see also Jürgen Moltmann, 1992:127). He says that the “Spirit of embrace” will establish people of embrace where the control of an Exclusion System has been ruled out or no longer exists, allowing divine energies of embrace to flow, “forging rich identities that include the other”.

The call for a time to “embrace the other” is now and, as Volf (1996:100-131) reminds us, that the cross of Jesus Christ speaks about God’s forgiveness for all humanity. He says that one of the sinners who were also crucified with Jesus asked Him for forgiveness and to remember him when he is in paradise. He says that the cross reminds us about God who shows tolerance towards all

humanity. Jesus' tolerance for the other sinner, who mocked Him, was witnessed; instead of condemning him, Jesus chose to tolerate him.

Volf (1996:100-131) adds, "The cross speaks about *reconciliation unto God for all humanity*." Christ embraced the one sinner by saying to him that he will be with Him in Paradise, because he recognized and acknowledged the Lordship [of Jesus Christ]. The cross speaks about *salvation for all humanity ... redemption for all humanity ... judgment*. God alone will judge humanity."

5.3 GOD – TRANSCENDENT AND IMMINENT

As Christians we are encouraged through the lifestyle of Jesus Christ as it is pictures in several ways by the New Testament witnesses, by the Gospel passages about the importance of exercising a theology that challenges us to go beyond the boundaries of our own theological securities. What I learn from this is that we have to go into the *camp* of the non-Christian religions and find the contact point, which is their quest of *finding* God; this is the entry point for us to share the gospel with them. God, described by mere finite man, as infinite and independent (*transcendent*) of everything, had no need to send his Son Jesus to live within the confines and limitations of the human body. Jesus has no need to leave heaven's glory and step into time itself to help humanity (imminence) in his quest to find his creator.

Through the life Jesus lived in human form we learned from the Gospels, God self has set the pace for an ethic of embrace by going beyond the confines of heaven stepping into his creation to help humanity find his way back to God. Through this He paved the way for man to not only know Him, but also to have an intimate relationship with Him and each other. Through this relationship, humanity has come to understand and know that he is finite and imperfect and that he is in need of a Saviour, Jesus Christ, to save him from the spiritual bondage and eternal damnation. One such case about the lostness of humanity is the story of Zaccheus, found in Luke 19:1-10. Jesus had no need to go through

Jericho but went ahead to meet Zaccheus, to teach those who followed Him, then and us today, that for this reason He came to save lost humanity.

As He embraced Zaccheus in verse 5 we read, not only were those who have been oppressed by Zaccheus, appalled by this, but also as a result Zaccheus recognised his own inadequacy to bring about change in his own life. Through this embrace a miraculous turnaround took place in Zaccheus' life, to the extent that restitution took place. Through embracing the *other* as Jesus embraced Zaccheus, we the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ are called to do likewise.

How can we as followers of Christ say that we love Him whom we never saw, but condemn our neighbour who has been created in his image? Through parables and direct preaching and teaching about the Kingdom of Heaven, He challenges his followers to embrace their fellow man as He embraced Zaccheus and many *others* like him. Only by embracing the other can they show that they are one with Him and part of his Heavenly Kingdom. Through embracing the *other*, the preaching and teaching of the Gospel will fall on good soil. In his time here on earth and up till today, Jesus has conquered the hearts of many men and women, especially those who were considered as outcasts. As his followers we are to do the same – recognising the image of God in the *other* and embrace the *other*. In the light of God's Word, we will identify key features that would help us to embrace the *other*.

5.4 MAIN FEATURES OF AN ETHIC OF EMBRACE

Although Christ's role and message that He passed on to the church might seem to be a mammoth task to the modern mindset, as the post-modern era has laid down *rules* challenging Christians not to "offend" people of other religious faiths. This has created an internal struggle within the Christian world as we looked at the three models (in Chapters 2-4) trying to establish a way forward of how to fulfil the Great Commission. Christians are commanded by God to stay true to their personal belief in Christ, without compromise. This was the same fate the

early church (Book of Acts) faced between loyalty to God and facing persecution and loyalty to the state and *enjoying freedom*. As we said earlier, embracing the life of Jesus serves as an example for Christians to follow. The practical implementation, alongside the verbal confession of faith, impacts the most in the light of our Biblical understanding of our faith as we read in the Gospels.

Prior to the birth of Jesus, the practice of these polytheistic lifestyles, which oppressed and enslaved people instead of liberating them, was not uncommon. Also, certain elements of Judaism's religious system, which Jesus mainly addressed as one oppressive system, oppressed and enslaved people. Over against a legalistic syndrome Jesus' followers experienced Him as freeing them from legalistic religious practices and showing us how to live here on earth in accordance with the Kingdom of God as we read the Beatitudes in Matthew 5 – 7 as well as in the letters of Paul to the churches. This was to be done by way of *loving* one's neighbour, and not loving only God.

As a starting point, to grasp Jesus' notion of embrace correctly, the church (in this context, "church" is defined as the people, the body of Christ) needs to re-engage with, not only the Person Jesus Christ, but also its neighbour. Jesus Himself set the example by laying down his life for the world. Understanding this unselfish sacrificial act of Jesus will help us to gain a fuller understanding of who Jesus is and the meaning of his Gospel message He gave us to proclaim.

Today the church has *failed* to understand the value of his message due to selfish arrogance ignorance that is reflected in their loveless relation with their neighbour. The church needs to understand that Jesus Christ not only liberated people from ... but He embraced them unto Him, through his compassion for his creation.

The church has isolated or restricted the world from entering into the embrace of Christ. It has become so legalistic in its orientation that one almost feels ashamed to be associated with the Christian community. The church today has not undergone the same measure of persecution as been experienced by the early church – the reality of persecution and being victimised for their faith by the religious oppressors. Despite the persecution the early church faced, they

reflected a more embracing attitude toward their oppressors, whereas today, the church has become the oppressors, victimising adherents of non-Christian faiths. They have undergone almost similar to what Volf (1996:16, 100) describes as “a problem of *identity and otherness*”.

He says, when reflecting on social realities, *identity and otherness* should be at the heart of our theology because we cannot exist without the other. This is how the world has been created, so that the self will find meaning in the other and through that discover one’s own identity. Volf (1996:20-21) says our social orientation that would help address the issue of identity and otherness should be based on “*what kind of self I need to be*” should I desire to live in harmony and peace with others. He also says that the “*social arrangements*” are important and will take care of themselves provided that the right *social agent* is intact. The kind of *social agent* he talks about is the one that is passionate about ensuring “*just, truthful and peaceful societies, and on shaping a cultural climate in which such agents will thrive.*” Volf (1996:25) says that, if Christians really want to make a lasting impact on the social plain and their surrounding community, then the act of “self-giving” should be rooted in the Divine manifestation of the Trinity as reflected by the cross. He emphasises that self-giving is key to dealing with the social dilemma humanity faces today. It is a dilemma that starts with internal soul searching which should take place before external engagement can proceed. Similar to what Volf (1996:29) wants to bring across (see the section, “Drama of Embrace” in Volf, 1996:140-147) this thesis sets out to introduce an ethic of embrace that will help Christians to rediscover and “readjust their identity” in Christ and as we look upon the *other* we will do so in the light of the eternal embracing of our all-loving Trinitarian God who through the cross cancelled out our alienation and gave us a Heavenly Kingdom citizenship.

5.4.1 Universal unconditional love

Knitter (2002:143) says working alongside fellow like-minded people of other faiths presents opportunities to share the love of our Lord Jesus Christ with those

suffering marginalised. After all, the second greatest command is that we should *love* our neighbour equally as much as we love ourselves. Loving one's neighbour is more visible in action, than in words. This was Jesus' burning concern: the love for one's neighbour as the life, vision and reign of the Kingdom of God in the world. It is a reign in which God's love, justice, peace and righteousness would be visibly evident, as well as human love, the desire to live in peace and do justice unto each other and creation, as we live in this world. In the words of Edward Schillebeeckx (1990:111-112):

The Kingdom of God is the saving presence of God, active and encouraging, as it is affirmed and welcomed among men and women. It is a saving presence ... which takes concrete form above all in justice and peaceful relationships among individuals and people, in the disappearance of sickness, injustice, and oppression, in restoration of life all that was dead and dying.

Amaladoss (1992:158-174) says that it was not only his preference for the poor, but also his self-emptying, non-violent love for all, including the oppressors. He adds that a great witness to the world, on the part of Christians, that helps to transform the world, can be seen in the Christian commitment for justice to those who have been victimised by injustice. He says this is a total commitment that is grounded in self-giving, non-violent love for all. This was evident in the life of Jesus Christ. He put action to his words and challenged his followers, then and us today, to do the same if they wish people to believe in the gospel we are preaching.

Brian McLaren (2007:125) says that, when Jesus was in public, He taught people by often using short related stories or parables in order to stimulate, rather than mandate their thinking. He adds that He healed them from disease and demons instead of propagandising or controlling them. What McLaren means by "propagandising" is that Jesus did not tell them what to think while, at the same time, keeping them from thinking for themselves, and what he means with "controlling" is that Jesus did not keep them under "sick demonic systems of oppression". He says that when Jesus ate with people from all walks of life, in

private, He demonstrated that God's Kingdom transforms people through grace and acceptance, not through fear and threats of exclusion.

In a short essay, "Compassion, love of neighbour and the social predicament," social scientist, François Houtart (2004:595) says that love towards one's enemies is not applicable only to personal conduct, but also to the social realm and adds that "Metanoia, which in the Gospel is the condition for salvation, is not merely a personal change of heart, but demands a commitment to social and economic justice and the change of unjust systems." He takes it further by saying that loving one's enemy means that there should be a change in one's attitude of heart. In the same vein he says, "reconciliation as a manifestation of love of enemy" is not only an individual thing, but it is a reorganisation of "social relationships and lasting social change". He concludes: "The love of and compassion for enemies" is important and, because of that, it will bring about a "social environment that enables the recapture of humanity".

God is Sovereign. He acts in accordance with his will, not with man's restrictions and limitations. His mission is to save man and He will do what He thinks is necessary. He wants man to know Him and have a relationship with Him. This is revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ. The love He expressed towards us is clearly visible in his actions toward us. He desires that we express the same kind He expressed toward the adherents of the non-Christian people. Knitter (2002:69) says the love of God not only embraces us, but it comes into us and empowers us to live our lives differently, according to his will.

John 3:16 clearly states that God offers his unconditional holy love for all humanity. As Christians often relate to people of other faiths, it is easy to detect their doctrine and attitudes that surface in their relationship with these people. This is quite visible amongst many Christians today. *We* confine people to our selfish doctrinal belief, making it impossible for them to experience God's *agape* love.

Christ never condemned anybody when He lived amongst humans, and has no intention to start doing so now. Instead, He made time and provided for

people telling them that there is a way. He chose us to show people that way by means of the manner in which we engage with them in our daily interaction and with each other. God's *agape* love for humanity is visible in the life, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ and is visible throughout Scripture re-emphasising his undying love for all of his creation.

Scripture is clear. God is a God of love who desires for all humanity, not only Christians, to share in his love, but all humanity. Volf (1996:23, 29) says this is expressed in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ where, "God does not abandon the godless to their evil but gives the divine self for them in order to receive them into the divine communion through atonement," so also should we, no matter who our enemies are. His answer to a challenging question, that was posed, about embracing his worst enemy who deserves no love at all, reflects a heart that was at peace with God despite the unjustifiable suffering and persecution of his people. Christians tends to miss self-denial seen here in Volf's attitude; the idea that God wants the whole human race to Him as God and that He needs his *agents* to be at peace with Him before we can be at peace with the other. It is in God's own interest to see that man be restored unto Him, whether they are considered to be outcasts, publicans or sinners.

5.4.2 Universal unconditional grace

The researcher agrees with the Inclusivists contributing a positive value act to individual peoples who are at a *disadvantaged position*. As Rahner (1980:61-62) contends by saying that, if there is an offer of grace, then it must be mediated to other non-Christian religions and that, if the Christian revelation is to mean anything, then it must be on the basis that God somehow offers grace to those who have never heard the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Furthermore, Schillebeeckx (1990:87-88) believes that God has become a person for us through grace, and the possibility of affirming the personal character of God is a mystery through creation, which forms the basis of the possibility of associating with God by grace. He adds that grace or revelation would be impossible if, in

some way, our human freedom does not come into touch with the personal God at a certain point.

Christianity should be faithful to the call of proclaiming the good news of the Lord Jesus Christ, by avoiding the idea of marginalising or condemning people of other religions. Christians are admonished to respect the adherents of these different faiths, despite the fact that they choose not to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Failing to do this, Volf (1996:24) calls this not only “cheap grace but also a deceitful ideology”.

Rahner (1980:61-66) brings another valid point across when he says that, despite the fact that their truths have some inadequacies, “They might be channels through which God allows for his grace to travel as the members of these other religions practice ‘godly’ values and principles ‘similar’ to those Christian lifestyle practices such as loving all humanity and creation.” He believes that it is because of our love for others and their love for us that we can be assured that we are loved by the Infinite God. Judging the lifestyles of the adherents of the non-Christian religion, one has to confess that these men and women are closer to accepting the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. They project key elements in their living and have an understanding of what the gospel portrays, whether they are consciously aware of it or not, because it is clearly evident in the manner in which they relate to people and creation. The danger, however, of this is that their loyalty can become misdirected and they might end up worshipping the creation rather than the Creator.

Henry Cloud and John Townsend (2001:67) say that we, as Christians, often forget the element of grace. Being born into the Christian faith has made it more accessible for us to become Christians than those who were born into other religious faiths. This element of grace was not by our own merit, works or choice. Despite this privilege, it has put us in need of God’s saving grace, which is only obtainable by accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour. This does not give us ownership of God’s grace, nor does it give us the right to decide who can, and who cannot, receive this grace. Grace is God’s unmerited favour for humanity.

This means that, not only do we not deserve it, but we also cannot earn it through our works. It is a free gift from God for all who are willing to receive it.

Although people of other faiths might not have received this privilege by natural birth, still, this does not mean that they are excluded from this great grace that we have received from God. God loves them equally and Christ died for them as He did for his followers. Scripture is clear that God allows his sun to rise over the just and unjust, the good and the bad, equally, without any discrimination – this is the extent of God’s grace as we read in Matthew 5:45.

5.4.3 Religious uniqueness: Working toward a greater good

Avril Craige-Knott, a specialist in Schools and Community Non-violence Project for the Quaker Peace Centre in Cape Town, South Africa, said in a conversation in 2008, that it is important to acknowledge the individuality of people. One could echo the same about religions of this world, which allow each to make valuable contributions and an interfaith dialogue. However, Knitter (2002:125, 173) says the strength of all religions lies within the boundaries of their differences. Volf (1996:101) says that it is important that human dignity be respected and that justice for all be maintained, keeping in mind that “all people are equal and free to pursue their interest and develop their personalities in their own way.” Also, he cautioned that respect is a two way street. By this he means that if one desires to be respected then that person must do likewise to the other. He says that, when each party understands and is responsible for their own behaviour and identity, then communal and harmonious living will thrive. To adhere to this is a good point of departure, where differences of each religion are identified and respected. This would create openness for mutual engagement, which could lead to potential *peace amongst the religions of the world*, as well as dealing sufficiently with what Knitter calls the greatest threat of our age, which is “global suffering”.

The Pluralist makes a valid point should any religion deny, or refuse to engage, or try to bring relief alongside co-religious movements, then, according to the advocates of the ethical practical bridge, that religion has lost its purpose

of existence in this world. As stated earlier in this study, our theology should be transpositional, where we would allow the “other” not only to speak, engage or contribute, but also to be willing to receive and embrace those contributions that work towards universal peace.

Ariarajah (2004:15) believes that the search for unity should not be only a passionate plea of “ecumenism” of the churches, but it should focus on a broader sphere where all Christians should take part actively. This might help to bring humanity together. In his proposed global ethic Hans Küng (1991) reflects that there is “a rising global consciousness and an emerging broad consensus based on a still abstract, but sometimes concrete, set of precepts derived from the spirit of a golden rule (doing unto others as they would do unto you, or mutually abstaining from harmful actions).”

McLaren (2007:3) says unlike a “... flattened, watered down, tamed offering us a ticket to heaven after death, Christianity does not challenge us to address what is threatening the earth” and its inhabitants. McLaren (2010:151-157) says further that God is calling the church to engage with the lost and dying world at this very moment. Our salvation is for now and needs to impact our current world bringing about the agape love of God which was also seen in the life of his Son the Lord Jesus Christ as He lived among humanity. Knitter (2002:138-139) says Küng believes that what is needed for the world, is that the religious communities group together and construct a global ethic that would not be only a list of static dictations, but it would, “embody a consensus of ethical values about the dignity of the individual, the integrity of the earth, the community and the responsibility that unite us all, and the need for justice and compassion.”

Küng (1996) proposes three positive guidelines for this global ethic that would bring “religious harmony” together; “It must be related to reality” and says that this global ethic must start where people find themselves and then help them move forward to where they need to be. “It must be generally comprehensible.” By this, he means that it should be kept simple, and avoid all forms of “technical and academic jargon of any kind,” because this not only discourages people, but also confuses the consensus formulation process. Lastly, he says, “It must be

capable of securing a consensus” that emphasises a moral goal, not a numerical unanimity (see also David Lynch, 2001).

David Lynch (2001) says that, on May 22, 1996, in Vancouver, a plenary assembly of the InterAction Council of former Presidents of State and Prime Ministers approved a report which highlights the point that, “Religions command the loyalty of hundreds of millions of people in spite of the world movement toward secularism and consumerism.” Knitter (2002:134-135) says Pluralists believe that “... ethical issues and ethical responsibility [should be] the pillars that will sustain a new kind of interfaith exchange ...” He says that Pluralists maintain that, “A global responsibility means being responsible for our endangered earth and all its inhabitants.” For the religions of the world, this allows a new opportunity to understand each other and each other’s purpose.

People are important to God. Calvary depicts this when Christ died on the cross, bringing about salvation for God’s creation. Through his death and resurrection He highlights the importance of humanity. McLaren (2007:13; 2010:151-157) says that Christianity, being identified as the biggest religion in the world, should spark Jesus’ concerns regarding the global problems that the world is facing, which his lifestyle and teachings, as well as his engagement with people highlighted while He moved amongst the crowds. He says further that, “A biblical and theological vision, a calling, and a process is [are] already happening all around us. The question is whether Christians, overcoming their internal divisions, dare to commit themselves to take part in it.”

Ariarajah (2004:24) adds that as the churches, we are challenged to reorganise our theological foundations of traditional ecumenism and need to widen our understanding of the *oikumene*: Is the mission of the church only a message that we bring, or is it the activities that we do in the world, or is our mission as participating with God and all others to bring “healing and wholeness, justice and peace, and reconciliation and renewal in the world?” Is the church only concerned about its own unity, reconciliation and divisions, or is it concerned with the brokenness of the world around us? In the context where I come from,

the church-body of believers need to re-engage with their surrounding community if they wish to make an enormous impact with the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. The grounds for any minister's fraternal should be based on the love Jesus has for the brokenness of people in the community and not for any other selfish reasons.

5.4.4 Postmodernism: Being open to religious truth claims

One of the greatest challenges Christians are facing is the one of *being open* to the truth claims made by people of other faiths. This does not mean that Christians have to accept or agree that these truth claims are true. However, when Christians engage in an interreligious *dialogue* with these people of other faiths, will create an open door for the advancing of the gospel. There is a strong religious sense amongst the people of the world as humanity is on a quest to find God. By engaging with them, Christians can help guide them onto the right path, toward finding the true God they have been pursuing.

Therefore as Christians, it is important to be aware of the times in which we are living. Albert Greene (1998:3-31) says contemporary scholars describe these days as the "postmodern era" or "postmodernity", a replacement of the era of Enlightenment modernity, or "the age of anxiety". According to Wikipedia,

Postmodernism literally means "after the modernist movement". Postmodernism is an aesthetic, literary, political or social philosophy, which was the basis of the attempt to describe a condition, or a state of being, or something concerned with changes to institutions and conditions (as in Giddens, 1991) as postmodernity. In other words, postmodernism is the "cultural and intellectual phenomenon" ... while postmodernity focuses on social and political outworking and innovations globally, especially since the 1960s in the West.

In other words,

Postmodernism was originally a reaction to modernism. Largely influenced by the Western European disillusionment induced by World War II, postmodernism

tends to refer to a cultural, intellectual, or artistic state lacking a clear central hierarchy or organizing principle and embodying extreme complexity, contradiction, ambiguity, diversity, interconnectedness or interreferentiality, (Postmodernism, George University) in a way that is often indistinguishable from a parody of itself. It has given rise to charges of fraudulence.

Wikipedia says further that,

Postmodernity is a derivative referring to non-art aspects of history that were influenced by the new movement, namely developments in society, economy and culture since the 1960s. When the idea of a reaction or rejection of modernism was borrowed by other fields, it became synonymous in some contexts with postmodernity. The term is closely linked with poststructuralism (cf. Jacques Derrida) and with modernism, in terms of a rejection of its bourgeois, elitist culture.

Knitter (2002:174) defines postmodernity as a response to the high optimism of the Enlightenment movement, a movement that began in the 18th century and which believed that it was gaining ground on “untold progress for humanity”.

With regard to this, the aim of approaching any religious conversation or engagement, one needs to remember that, according to postmodernism, diversity has been the dominating factor even when it comes to defining the truth. Modernists, on the other hand, have pursued a common truth and understanding that would help foster “harmonious living” among peoples of our globe. In spite of their endeavours, they still fail to acknowledge the uniqueness of differences against which postmodernists warned them.

Due to the uniqueness of the many differences, it is important to know that truth(s) will come to the fore, based on the angle from which it is being interpreted or, as Knitter (2002:176) says, through its cultural-religious filters. Therefore, truth should always be interpreted as truths, the many can never become one, as postmodernists would tell you.

This has opened up a new meaning for understanding the uniqueness of culture as it is practiced, pursued and experienced in accordance with its own

line of customs, rituals and ceremonies. Knitter (2002:174-175) speaks of this as “cultural filters” which remind one, “Reason is understood and interpreted differently in different cultures.” One’s cultural and religious beliefs cannot be imposed on another, as this would lead to exploitation, as well as degrading of, the other religion.

In view of the above, postmodernists encourage that truth-claims not be universal. Instead, they should recognise the differences that exist among people of various cultures. The strength of our differences must set a platform for an opportunity to embrace. Knitter (2002:175) says this is contrary to what the Pluralists contend saying, “All narratives must be recognized and treated as providing equally valid epistemic avenues that all ultimately aim for and reach the same truth.” Knitter (2002:175) says further that, despite the differences one would find in some of their narratives, one would still find the connection between them, which affirms a central truth about life.

5.4.5 Surpassing post-Ecumenism

Eddie Sax (1999) says in his article, “The religion of the New World Order Interfaithism” which appeared in the July/August 1999 edition of *Endtime Magazine*, states that the conflicts that take place among the nations of the world are dangerous and result in numerous wars and that global planners maintain that war is unavoidable and will never be eliminated unless there is a rise in a new government that will uproot the “era of the nation-state”. This article adds that, unless governments bring an end to religious conflict, there will never be the desired world political unity. This has led to the “quiet birth” of the United Religions Organization by the New Age global planners, who believe that people should become tolerant and respectful towards each other’s beliefs if the world wants peace.

This is a truth that many Christians find hard to swallow in this day and age. *Traditional* Christianity has laid “unbreakable” solid rock foundations, almost too solid, which makes it difficult for many Christians to distance themselves from

traditional Christian stereotypical thinking and lay hold of an “embracing” type of mentality where they stop living in isolation and start reaching out to people of other faiths in brotherly love, as Jesus commanded them. Although, as Jeremy Bouma (2007) writes,

In recent years, an attitude of exclusivism and exclusion has plagued the Church as various strains within Christianity seem quick to border Jesus in from the “Outsider”, while attacking and alienating the “Other” with little consideration to embrace and partner with them. What is worse, those walling Jesus in the fastest seem to be more content to live out the American Dream – complete with \$93 million church facilities, Christian bookstores, and Purpose-Driven, Live-Your-Best-Life-Now easy listening messages – than the Way of Jesus, even while the Other seems to do a better job at “being Jesus” than the Church; those whom the Church writes off as outside the boundaries of Jesus’ group oftentimes are doing what He would do more often, passionately, and better than his very disciples, a modern-day phenomenon that mirrors an oft-overlooked Gospel pericope found in the Book of Mark.

Bouma (2007) adds that, according to the book of Mark 9:38-41, Jesus confronts this exclusive “Us” versus “Them” spirit in his disciples. Instead of praising them for their so-called concerns they expressed when they heard another exhorting in his name, He rebuked them for limiting, and having a tunnel vision, of who should be involved in the work of his Kingdom. He continues, this “pericope has great implications for the modern church as it relates to the Other ... Jesus’ subversive teachings on who is in and out, establish a robust ethic for modern readers on the art of embracing and partnering with the Other for the good of Jesus’ Kingdom and the world.”

Song (1982:xii) says that this is the kind of Christian theology that is needed – transpositional, not non-transpositional – which says,

... what is experienced and interpreted from one particular aspect of life and faith cannot be transposed to other aspects of life and faith ... what Christianity is and

what it stands for culturally and spiritually are [is] so different from other cultures and religions that it cannot project itself into them. Christianity is Christianity ... and not Hinduism or Buddhism [and therefore] communication between them in the human spirit is not possible.

Song (1982:xii) adds that transpositional Christian theology crosses culture, religion and historical boundaries, only to establish a deeper connection with “the strange and mysterious ways and thoughts of God in creation”. Furthermore, Song (1982:xii) poses the question: Shouldn’t theology be ready to go beyond itself into unfamiliar conditions and be confronted by the bewildering but graceful ways of God with all creation?

John Carroll (1999:13) says that the churches in the Philippines have answered this question and embraced their divine call and mandate from a loving and compassionate God through their struggles, and strives to bring about change and reconciliation in a cosmopolitan society that wars and injustice have dehumanised. This was more notably visible as the National Council of Churches in the Philippines (NCCP) took “a unified stand and action on the religious, civic, moral and social issues which also aimed at protecting human rights and promote mutually acceptable cooperative programs”. He further says, “Peace with justice, true reconciliation that builds a society in which people can live in trust, safety and dignity is at the heart of the Gospel”, despite the spiritual mandate of the church, one of its main functions is to act as a major social actor in many of the countries in which peace and reconciliation activities take place.

Carroll (1999:13) says that, some of the difficulties that churches, as social actors, face are due to the fact that they have often represented, and identified with, certain ethnic groups, or they have allied themselves with the powerful or the elite or, at times, linked themselves closely to groups whose fight or struggle was against the powerful in society. He says, despite the church’s past political and social engagements, the church is called upon to redefine anew what its role is, whether it is to help support the “transition and reconcile” those who have been involved in conflict.

Adding to that, in my context, the church is miserably failing to impact the community with the gospel due to the fact that they are alienating themselves from the people in the community. Jesus commands us in Matthew 28:18-20 that we should go and take the gospel to the broken world. However, the church is calling, afar off, the people come and be transformed instantly, not realising that salvation is a renewable *daily process* that people undergo.

In a final prayer at the World Council of Churches in Uppsala 1968 a group of young Christians from the German Democratic Republic demonstrated through prayer, they feel the need to open up and not to shut themselves off from those outside. They admit that they failed to open up to the blind, the lame, and the immature, leaving them to their own devices. This has allowed for the safety within the church to become an empty thing with no real concern for the church.

Their cry was for engagement and activity that would extend the traditional confines of the church, where their present understanding of what it means to be a Christian does not define their rank in the church, but to be a Christian in a developing world. Despite being in the minority, these Christians have no desire to be limited by the traditional frameworks of their churches. Instead, they seriously regard their Christian position and commitment to serve the world and their responsibility to others.

The desire of God is that his creation lives an ever-embracing life. As McLaren (2007:4; 2010:151-157) says, the message Jesus preached was not about evading the troubled world and embracing heaven's peaceful shores, as believed by many Christians, but actually is "about God's will being done on this troubled earth as it is in heaven". He adds, being a new kind of Christian will certainly start to have more concern about people and this world – both people and nature alike.

This calls for a time to embrace when people of all creeds, race and colour would build on their differences, engaged with each other communally, making this world a better place to live in. As Christians, we pray, "... let your Kingdom come, let your will be done on earth as it is in Heaven ... as we read in Matthew

28:18-20.” In other words, let righteous living filled with peace, joy and love be the order of the day here on earth as it is in heaven.

Volf (1996:100) proposes the central thesis of the chapter on “Embrace” that God’s perception of hostile humanity in divine communion is a model for how human beings should relate to the other... Volf (1996:131) broadens his support for embrace by saying, “... we who have been embraced by the outstretched arms of the crucified God open our arms even for the enemies - to make space in ourselves for them and invite them in – so that together we may rejoice in the eternal embrace of the Triune God”.

God’s command is summed up in this central theme that commissions the church to do as what God did – embrace and reach out to all people, also people of other faiths. This has paved *a notion for an ethic of embrace* – a notion that challenges the church of today, in the name of religion, to embrace beyond the borders and confines of traditional Christianity into a world that is hurting and broken due to ongoing wars.

5.4.6 Building friendships with the “other”

Storms (2004:1) highlights the fact that the world has become a huge global village. At the same time, it has formed a pluralistic society, which is visibly evident in the world today. With the modern technological advances and new inventions, the world has become smaller but even more complex as people of all walks of life, tribes and cultures have become aware of each other and are trying to live together without stepping on each other’s toes when communicating and interacting with each other.

Although many are encouraged to dialogue, this diversity has also created a shaky platform of conflict among these people of different cultural groups. It is becoming more and more difficult to communicate the Gospel’s message of truth, as one is not at liberty to breathe in another’s space. This reality has compelled Evangelicals to become more positive toward people of other faiths, as compared to the historical past. This is not only due to the presence of God’s

divine revelation, but also partly because of the need to live in peace with other nations. Scripture clearly encourages us to show and have a sincere love and a giving attitude toward all people in the world.

Pinnock (1992:107) says in the *Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions*, Vatican II recognised the inevitable evolving unity among the human race and has challenged the church to foster unity and love among men and nations in order to draw them closer to each other. To be successful in doing this, the church's main focus or mission should not only be evangelism (which is a legitimate Christian mission concern), but also should be the struggles for justice and liberation among the many peoples of the world who suffer from social, economic and political oppression. Netland (1991:278-279) says that it must also work in pursuit of global peace and the elimination of the nuclear threat or with the fresh understanding of other religions' *equality* to Christianity.

Johnson (1999) mentions the importance that we differentiate our attitude toward non-Christian religions and toward adherents of these religions. Rejection of their religions must not lead us to reject the people of these religions, nor must we view them as our enemies. According to him, the Biblical account on love for one's neighbour is clear: we should love our neighbour as ourselves, despite their religious beliefs. He says that, instead, we should see them as victims in need of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and God's eternal love and grace, which want to give them freedom from spiritual slavery.

Netland (1991:278-279) says Christopher J.H. Wright, when speaking on mutual respect and acceptance as key elements for inter-faith dialogue, reminds us that, we must remember that people are firstly created in the image of God before we start to look at their backgrounds. He says that whenever we meet anyone of them we must think of them as people who have a relationship with their Creator in which he is accountable too.

Knitter (2002:41-42) stresses the importance for Christians to show mutual and genuine respect for people of different faith in order for dialogue, which is fundamental for evangelism, to take place. Understanding the differences among

the religions of different faiths is crucial, for this will negate or avoid the idea of proselytising which means that adherents of any faith would not try to convince the other to follow another faith, even though for some this seems to be in order. Instead, it should be filled with components of evangelism that is borne on persuasion, invitation and attracting. As Evangelicals we are admonished to seize the opportunity to reflect on the image of Jesus Christ as his light shines upon them, helping them to gain an understanding and meaning that we never would have obtained without Him.

Pinnock (1992:86) says that human beings, despite of our sinful nature, are one of God's creations and that God has predestined us for eternity to be in his presence, or to be eternally separated from God. Because of God's image in one, one has an awareness of God. In the human approach to draw nearer to God, at the same time, it could be a strategy to try and run or escape from him. Wan (2007) says that, this catastrophic conflicting position is man's deepest problem and testifies to his/her indestructible relatedness to God. The quest for God, even when man tries to surpass it, is his/her perennially disturbing and central problem. Therefore, an undeniable point of contact for the message of the Gospel is here. To deny this is virtually to deny the humanity of man.

Hans Küng (1976:92) reminds us as follows:

Not only Christianity, but also the world religions are aware of man's alienation, enslavement, need of redemption ... not only Christianity, but also the world religions perceive the goodness, mercy and graciousness of the Divinity ... not only Christianity, but also the world religions rightly heed the call of their prophets.

5.4.7 Tolerance

Our biased notion of God and his love for only those who turn to the Christian faith has obscured our Christian understanding of the meaning of tolerance. It requires various adjustments if we wish to fulfill the Great Commission. This calls for the development of a proper understanding of tolerance, as well as

recognition of the urgent need for tolerance to become more visible and evident in our daily Christian exercises, should we desire to see not only harmonious living amongst the different religions of the world, but also the advancement of the great Commission that we received from Jesus Christ. We need to understand that differences in society exist, and because of this, there are people who have a different make-up.

David Couchman (2001) maintains that, in the past in most societies, people were defined by what they believed and how they lived. In the Western world it was Christianity and in the Middle East it was Islam, and in Russia it was Communism. He says in the world today, the Christian framework in the West has been replaced by a multi-cultural and pluralistic society, due to this Western society's many different beliefs and value systems.

The Bertelsmann Foundation (2000) says that, the social changes that contributed to the growing confrontational lifestyles, opinions and attitudes, show their ambivalent nature, which creates potential conviction within society. In the modern world, this makes tolerance more essential than ever before as the United Nations (UN) Charter: Declaration of principle on tolerance, 16 November 1995 cautions. The UN (1995) adds that we are living in an age that is marked by the globalisation of almost all spheres of life, such as "the economy and by rapidly increasing mobility, communication, integration and interdependence, large-scale migrations and displacement of populations, urbanization and changing social patterns." Since the whole world is marked by diversity, the increase of intolerance and strife are faced by societies – a global threat to all.

The UN (1995) believes that tolerance is an important part of an individual relationship, whether family-related or community-based. The UN adds that tolerance, and the shaping of attitudes toward being open to mutual listening and solidarity, should be promoted in all spheres of life, such as schools, universities, and through non-formal education, at home and in the workplace. The UN says, "the communication media are in a position to play a constructive role in facilitating free and open dialogue and discussion, disseminating the values of

tolerance, and highlighting the dangers of indifference towards the rise in intolerant groups and ideologies.”

David Odell-Scott, associate professor of philosophy at Kent State University (Religious Tolerance Org), states, “To simply be tolerant doesn’t feel too good. People should have a deep sense of appreciation of people different from them.” This is how God made us – uniquely different. Religious tolerance is not religious indifference. It consists of valuing the rights of another person who holds beliefs that you know to be absolutely wrong. You choose to refrain from discriminating against others who follow a different religious path, even though it is difficult to maintain silence when you know that your religion is truthful and bears much more value than theirs. In this the truth about Christ is being revealed, as one reflects on the lifestyle of Christ through one’s attitude and conduct toward people of other faiths. This is clearly seen in 2 Timothy 2:24-26 where the Apostle Paul instructs Timothy about the importance of a leader exercising tolerance based on Scripture.

With regard to education, *Special Rapporteur* observed that educational programs in general teach concepts of respect and tolerance that are a practicable possibility to children at young ages. This should also be echoed by religions where respect for other religions should also be fostered in adults, through special church educational programmes, where church leaders view it as imperative to ensure that they themselves foster an atmosphere of tolerance among their followers.

Communication between opposing faith groups may, in some instances, be key toward religious tolerance; the emphasis is that even though the religions do not agree with each other, or even not be in good standing with each other, as long as they have reached the level of respecting each other’s rights and the choice to be different. Former U.S. Surgeon General Arthur Kropp (Religious Tolerance.Org) says:

Tolerance is respect, acceptance [of people of other faiths not so much their religious beliefs] and appreciation of the rich diversity of our world's cultures, our forms of expression and ways of being human. It is fostered by knowledge, openness, communication, and freedom of thought, conscience and belief. Tolerance is harmony in difference. It is not only a moral duty; it is also a political and legal requirement. Tolerance, the virtue that makes peace possible, contributes to the replacement of the culture of war by a culture of peace.

He says further that there is clear freedom – and mutual respect and tolerance. The message of the Bible provides reasons for us to be tolerant towards our Muslim neighbour. More than tolerance – it teaches me to love my neighbour just as I love myself. And not just to love my neighbour, but even to love my enemy.

Kropp says that religious tolerance should be a Christian act to extend religious freedom to people of all religious traditions, even though one may disagree with their beliefs and/or practices. This does not require that you accept all religions as equally true, but as Knitter (2002:142) says it leaves room for open dialogue and the opportunity to share your Christian faith as you find yourself shoulder to shoulder alongside them, for a good cause in society.

Furthermore, Paul Copan (Religious Tolerance.Org) states, “Contrary to popular definitions, true tolerance means ‘putting up with error’ – not ‘being accepting of all views’ ... It is because real differences exist between people that tolerance becomes necessary and virtuous.”

Religious tolerance does *not* mean that you cannot compare one religion with another, or compare religion with a secular belief system, or analyse the claims of a religion. Religious tolerance does not necessarily mean religious indifference. On the contrary, there would be less civil unrest; mass murders and xenophobia would also be greatly reduced. Tolerance indicates that it is only the first step towards actively enjoying the diversity that other faith groups contribute to a society (Religious Tolerance.Org). Couchman (2001) maintains that it is not the truth or the belief system of the other, but it often is the attitude we have toward other people and their rights. He says that the issue is not about whether

Islam is a true description of the way the universe works, instead, according to him, it is the act of welcoming our neighbours, despite their religious backgrounds, and extending the same kind of rights and dignity that one wishes to receive.

Bearing in mind that the UN (1995) says that they are very determined to save “succeeding generations from the scourge of war and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and for these ends to practice tolerance and live together in peace with one another as good neighbours ...”

According to the Religious Tolerance.Org, we should be resolving to take all positive measures necessary to promote tolerance in our societies, because tolerance is not only a cherished principle, but also a necessity for [religious] peace and for the economic and social advancement of all peoples as Christ commanded us to live in peace and tolerate each other in the body of Christ but also for those people who are not yet part of his fold; to bear one another for, in this, his glory will be revealed. This exemplifies the ministry of love for all humanity, in which Christ wants to reconcile us to Him. The ministry of reconciliation will be discussed in the next section.

5.4.8 Christians should engage in a ministry of Biblical reconciliation

Our theology should be faithful to the church of Jesus Christ in which it promotes a theology of reconciliation – the nature of the mission of the church in the world. T.F. Torrance (1975:7) says God reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus Christ and has commissioned the church, which is a community of believers, who has been reconciled by Jesus Christ to proclaim the Gospel to the world and, through that, reconcile the world to God. However, the church has allowed the diverse influences of the world to infiltrate its own ranks and this has hampered the sharing of the Good News to the broader world and has led the church to

place too much emphasis on method instead of message and, as a result of this, the church is moving away from God, instead of bringing it closer to Him.

Torrance (1975:7) says that, this has sparked an internal call for reconciliation in the Christian world should it wish to impact the broader world. The Christians are not only challenged to engage in the theology of reconciliation within its own boundaries but, even more, to practice this ministry of reconciliation, to reconcile our “fragmented” world back to its Creator-God. Ariarajah asks: Should the church strive to reach unity and reconciliation amongst itself and its divisions only, or should it be about the brokenness of the world around us?

Balasuriya (1980:18) O.M.I., Director of the Centre for Society and Religion, Colombo, Sri Lanka, says that, this rhetorical question lingers at the threshold of the church. He says, “For Asians [all other] Christians to be able to relate meaningfully to the aspirations of our people and the vast changes taking place in our country [world], we need a freeing of our theology from many categories imposed from abroad and by the past.” Balasuriya (1980:18) believes that many of the theological issues that are affecting the West and Europe do not relate to the current theological situations in Asia [and other parts of the world]. He says that, the West and Europe have always propagated their own interests according to their own needs and concerns, even in the Christian world.

Balasuriya (1980:18) says that, for the Christian theology to have a lasting impact on the world of religions, we must look away from any ulterior motive of self-propagation and self-promotion and focus on the centre of our Lord Jesus Christ’s Christian message of reconciliation should we wish to bring about true reconciliation. Torrance (1975:13) corresponds by saying that we must reorganise our thinking about our fundamental theological relations with Christ in order to develop open institutional structures that would be more appropriate to the actualisation of life in Christ in the world – which will be increasingly transformed by the impact of modern science and its conception of the universe.

Reiterating the words of Carroll (1999:vi) that says, if we desire to see society being restored unto Christ, then the church must not only preach the message of reconciliation along the lines of forgiveness that sets people free from the past and helps them to embrace and build a vision for the present and the future, but equal to this is the call to be actively involved in the lives of those who have experienced injustice as well. As McLaren (2007:34) says that the church has failed to preach what he calls “the truly good news”, that would tackle all forms of “systematic injustice, target significant global dysfunctions, and provide hope and resources for making a better world,” as well as help individuals to experience a fuller life.

McLaren (2007:33) says that, the church has failed significantly to address social injustice in this life due to the fact that they paid too much attention to where people will spend the afterlife. He says that this focused completely on the spiritual need, without giving a thought to the physical and social side of life. He says further that it has failed to address the societal realities, such as “systematic injustice, systematic poverty, systematic ecological crisis, systematic dysfunctions of many kinds,” of this lifetime.

W. Wink (1997:22) maintains that, if the church preaches the message of reconciliation, but fails in its actual engagement or struggle for justice on the side of the oppressed, then “they are caught straddling a pseudo-reality made of nothing but thin air”. This would mean that as Carroll (1999:vi) says, in order to experience true reconciliation, it is important that no stone be left unturned during the “search for a path that heals divisions through promoting sincere dialogue and truth-telling in order that forgiveness might be possible and justice realized ...”

God’s forgiveness and reconciliation is linked to living in peace with one’s neighbour and failure to do so calls God’s forgiveness into question. With a similar logic John de Gruchy (1985:53) says, “For Barth the Christian community or the church is the ‘provisional representation’ of the sanctification of all

humanity, and therefore of God's reconciliation of the world. It is our Christian duty and responsibility to help the world discover the reality of God's reconciliation in Christ, and to express it, however inadequately here and now in society."

Furthermore, De Gruchy (2002:71-72) says:

The way of reconciliation is the way of struggle against a world that has rejected the way of Christ, and Christ as our representative. Yet, despite the world's rejection of Christ and his way, the reality of reconciliation remains: "the reality of the world has been marked once and for all by the cross of Christ, but the cross of Christ is the cross of the reconciliation of the world with God, and for this reason the godless world bears at the same time the mark of reconciliation as the free ordinance of God" (see also Dietrich Bonhoeffer, 1998:147).

De Gruchy (1988:147) says further that, "The church is a sign of the new humanity that God is creating in Christ having broken down the walls that divide the human race into warring factions." This calls upon our theology to be faithful to the church of Jesus Christ in which it promotes a theology of reconciliation – the nature of the mission of the church in the world. Torrance (1975:7) says God Himself reconciled the world to Himself through Jesus Christ and this constitutes the church that is a community who has been reconciled and who Christ sent to proclaim the Gospel to the world by means of reconciling the world to God.

In 2 Corinthians 5:19ff, God who reconciled the world, renewing our relationship with Him through Christ, making Him, who knew no sin, sinful so that we might become God's righteousness. Geiko Muller-Fahrenheit (1997:4) says that this was his supreme act of redemption, a theology of reconciliation that "calls us to find new meaning in love, neighbourliness, reconciliation, and the work of building vibrant, reconciled communities" whereas, McLaren (2007:182) focuses on real life's changing dynamics that will bring people back to the way God intended for them to live – having a reconciled relationship with Him (Cloud

& Townsend, 2001:28) and with each other. This will *produce the fruits of hospitality*, which the next section will discuss.

5.4.9 Christians should produce the fruit of Biblical hospitality

Throughout Scripture, the acts of hospitality have been demonstrated with lasting effects. Today, we not only witness the impact it has on people other than Christians, but we ourselves are a product of an act of hospitality. Someone extended an attitude of love and kindness that vindicated our destiny, and today we have that same opportunity to redirect someone else's destiny through the sharing of the Good News of the Kingdom of God in an attitude of active hospitality and compassion. Ignatius Bau (1985:13) claims that Eric Jorstad, when he spoke on the sanctuary movement in America, said that, "[It is] an act of compassion, an expression of the fundamental Christian concern to love one's neighbour ...". For us, Jesus Christ has set an example, stamping out our responsibility to apply the same theology of hospitality today.

S.C. Barton (1997:501-502) says that, "In Greco-Roman culture, hospitality was thought of somewhat differently than we think of it today; it was understood to be a 'mark of culture' and 'a basic aspect of civilized behaviour'." He says further that:

For [most Westerners today] hospitality is personal and individualistic and has to do with entertaining relatives and friends with the prospect of the hospitality being reciprocated. In the first-century Mediterranean world, however, hospitality was a public duty toward strangers where the honor of the community was at stake and reciprocity was more likely to be communal rather than individual. Further, whereas contemporary Western hospitality has become secularized (so that a common synonym is "entertainment") hospitality in antiquity was a sacred duty (see also Chuck Bumgardner, 2007).

Christine Pohl (1999:41-42) says that, the practise of Christian hospitality in the Greco-Roman world, by the early church, has advanced the expansion of the

Gospel, and has restored the dramatic social barriers by which the initial church was confronted with.

J.T. Fitzgerald (2000:523) has maintained that:

In Jewish thought, hospitality is seen as rooted in both a concept of the Almighty who “loves the sojourner” (e.g., Deut 10:18), and in the story of the Israelites, to whom God said, “You shall not wrong a sojourner or oppress him, for you were sojourners in the land of Egypt” (Ex 22:21). The importance of hospitality is demonstrated positively in the stories of Abraham (Gen 18), Lot (Gen 19), Rebekah (Gen 24), and others; and negatively in the examples of Sodom (Gen 19) and Gibeah (Judges 19), among others (see also Bumgardner, 2007).

Bumgardner (2007) adds that, in New Testament times, hospitality was a social norm. Believers, who travelled, depended on finding lodgings with fellow believers in the cities through which they travelled. For these believers and others it was more preferable to be hosted by believers than finding a room for the night at brothels or inns, which were also where dangerous people would hang out. The idea of hosting fellow believers or even travellers has become a rare commodity amongst the Christian circles today.

The church has *closed the doors of their heart* to this expression of God's love for those who are in need. Christians have become more concerned with meeting their own needs first before they show an act of kindness towards those who are in need. Despite the fact that their needs have been met, they still refuse to exercise the gift of hospitality Scripture requires. The practice of hospitality as seen in the early church is no longer visible in the Christian community, nor in society. God requires of us to show hospitality to all because in doing this the gospel is being preached in practical ways.

Pohl (1999:5-6) says there is a good collection of quotations (Chrysostom, Lactantius, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, and Wesley, as well as 20th century practitioners of hospitality, such as Dorothy Day and Edith Schaeffer) that

support the importance of the early Christian practices of hospitality. Throughout her book Pohl expressed the important role and practices of hospitality played in the history of the church.

Pohl (1999:6, 18, 23, 47) says that even as early as the fourth and fifth centuries, it was instituted by John Chrysostom and others to seek that the act of hospitality became the practice of individuals as well as the church. She adds that people such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and John Wesley, wrote much on this topic, not only focusing on the church's responsibility but more as a part of civic and domestic life. She says that Luther perceived this as a requirement of God, for this is how He had planned for life to be. Furthermore, it served as an act of obedience to God, as well as responding to the need of strangers.

Pohl (1999:64) says the sacramental act of hospitality of the earlier church was an ordinary but valued expression of human care. Calvin, seeing fully and firmly in everyone the face of God, went so far as to say: "... whatever man you meet who needs your aid, you have no reason to refuse to help him." But for Calvin, the common humanity of host and guest provided a basis for respect. Pohl (1999:55) says Wesley encouraged parishioners to visit the poor and sick in their homes and help them as much as possible. He insisted on close, personal relations among people who were very different from one another.

While observing the life of Jesus Christ in the Gospels, we learn that He went to extreme measures to set a precedent by sharing not only words with people, but by living the etymology of the word "hospitality", which He was destined and called to show. To Him, it was not about the accolades that the world would throw at Him for becoming a popular and famous public celebrity according to worldly standards, but being true to the Kingdom of God, even to the point where He mixed with outcasts of society.

Pohl (1999:5, 20-23) contends that Jesus ate with both sinners and tax collectors of his day. In the eyes of the religious public, this was not a

compliment. She says hospitality implicitly opposes social boundaries that those in abusive power enforce. We over power social expectations and bear witness to the kind of love God has for all his creatures when we eat with the lowly and welcome strangers and sinners to our table. Pohl (1999:21) adds that Jesus Himself put those to flight when they opposed his actions of eating with the lowly and social rejects or outcasts.

At a conference for people interested in missional church and church planting tied to the book, *Total church* which The Crowded House hosted, Tim Chester, (2007) says, Jesus often accepted and embraced the attitude of a slave when He washed the disciples' feet. He requested water from the women at the well; allowed a woman to wash his feet at Simon's house; received hospitality from Matthew; was the friend of sinners – not just someone who helped and ate with them.

Dana W. Wilbanks (2006), professor emeritus of Christian ethics, Iliff School of Theology, states that Scripture is clear when it expresses our obligation to extend hospitality to strangers, which is a key requirement for faithfulness. Our neighbours are those who are “at the centre of Christian faithfulness. This is the challenge and the opportunity to love the stranger as yourself, to love the stranger as God loves the stranger, to love the stranger as one with whom Jesus explicitly identifies.”

Arthur Sutherland (2006:xvi, 77-83) argues that the practice of hospitality is portrayed in the success or failure of the church in the community. By following the example of our Lord Jesus Christ, who saw the stranger, the hungry and the prisoner, and whose seeing led to acts of compassion, and by understanding and living out hospitality, shows that we comprehend the mind of God and reflect the purpose of his church that God called into being.

Chester (2007) argues that God's grace to us is apparent where “the poor, the blind, the crippled, the lame in the parable of the great wedding banquet ...

the undeserving and the unimportant are being welcomed by Jesus ... compelling us to enter ... the kingdom of God [which] is good news to the poor because it's a kingdom of grace ... [where] you don't need money or status or brains to be saved."

Pohl (1999:40-41) says that, Scripture clearly demands hospitality. God has welcomed people who once were aliens and strangers to his "household of faith". This has set the precedence for his children to welcome and "make room" for strangers, in both their own personal households and the faith community. She says further that, the true meaning of Biblical hospitality is found in the act of "making room for the stranger", especially for those with a sincere acute need. However, this must not be condensed to any form of social entertaining or for own or mutual gain; instead, Biblical hospitality seeks to help those who are hopeless, lowly and expect nothing in return. She says further that hospitality is a normative Biblical practice that is learned by practising it. It is neither an option, nor a rare spiritual gift.

Pohl (1999:23-27) says an expression of hospitality to strangers is an act of sharing the Good News of our Lord Jesus Christ. This leads to the credibility of the Gospel, as the New Testament portrays Jesus as a gracious host who not only welcomes children, prostitutes, tax collectors and sinners into his presence, but also sups with them. Barton (1997:503, 505) says for both Paul and Jesus; these acts of hospitality were not a mere practical issue, but a fundamental expression of the Gospel and a response to God's hospitality to humanity. He believes that God shows his hospitality by providing us with the "paschal lamb", Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 5:7), who has shown us the meaning of being members of the body of Christ (see also Bumgardner, 2007).

I. Howard Marshall, (2003:145) reiterates that hospitality is a "fundamental outworking of love" and expression of our Christian faith and adds that the relationship between brotherly love and hospitality in the New Testament is noteworthy. He draws his conclusion from Romans 12:10-12 that challenges us

to love one another with brotherly love, going the extra mile without laziness but with fervour and zeal, serving the Lord, rejoicing in hope, being patient in tribulation and constant in prayer, giving to the needs of the saints, and seeking to show hospitality (see also Bumgardner, 2007).

Based on Scripture Sutherland (2006:78-79) reminds us how the early church emphasised sharing meals with each other and those who were poor amongst them – those who were unable to reciprocate. He adds that hospitality is more than a product or service, instead, he says that we might call it “a transformative spiritual practice” where we share ourselves with those not like ourselves without requiring that they first become like us to receive our attention and care.

Pohl (1999:ix, xiii, 6) further adds, despite the fact of need, whether temporary, semi-permanent, or permanent, what is important is that one should express hospitality to strangers as one would to one’s own family or friends. This is an act that would bring out a valuable relationship between guest and host that can only be experienced, not imagined or theorised. As we give of our resources and of ourselves, this would give us joy by receiving grace that comes from the relationship we have with the stranger. By embracing the stranger, or another person in need, through that encounter, we ourselves will be enriched and brought out of our own impoverished state.” She says that, if we make room of hospitality available to others, then more room will become available to us, with more grace and hope.

In Luke 18:12-14 Jesus Himself challenges the church to extend a hand of hospitality to those who are unable to do likewise. Chester (2007) says that, as his children and followers in this broken and divided world, we are to follow the example that He has set for us despite the cost. Our love for Christ must be the driving force behind our motives as we express our love for our neighbour, who might also be our foe. We are admonished in Matthew 25:34-46 to love to such an extent that our neighbour sees it and is drawn to this great God whom we

serve. Chester (2007) adds that the mind of God and the purpose of the church that God calls into being are seen in Jesus' compassionate acts of kindness towards the stranger, the hungry and the prisoner, who's seen led to action. We are to do likewise, practise a theology of hospitality.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an attempt was made to construct an ethic of embrace from a theological perspective. An ethic of embrace was first defined in the context of this study; then, it examined who the main representative was. Thereafter, a discussion followed of some main features that an ethic of embrace encompasses, such as: universal unconditional love; universal unconditional grace; religious uniqueness: working toward a greater common good; postmodernism: being objective to religious truth-claims; surpassing post-ecumenism; and building friendships with the other. Furthermore, related themes, such as the ethics of reconciliation, tolerance, forgiveness and hospitality were investigated in order to get a clearer picture of an ethic of embrace before coming to a conclusion.

5.6 ... IN SUPPORT OF THE CHRISTIAN PARTICULARISM MODEL [POSTSCRIPT]

As concluded earlier in this study, since Christian Particularism raises more questions than the other two models, this section of this chapter on an ethic of embrace is aimed at presenting or providing possible guidelines for those questions that the Particularistic model raises to support and undergird an ethic of embrace.

A second reason why I focus on the Particularist model at this point is that I personally am most sympathetic towards this model. If I can show that this model can be combined with an ethic of embrace it might help to weaken those arguments, against the Particularist model, which assumed that Particularism stands in the way of good relations between religious communities.

It can be concluded that this notion of an ethic of embrace, when applied in the context of the Particularistic model, is the missing link that will help to influence religiously motivated conflicts in a positive way. This would allow for more peaceable exercises as it not only addresses religious conflict in the world, but also would enable the Christian Particularist model to foster *peace* among these religions and, therefore, *peace* among the nations of the world. This immediately raises practical questions.

However, since the present study is neither in practical theology nor missiology, but in systematic theology the aim is not primarily to provide detail answers to such questions. How Christians answer to such questions will depend on their broader theological convictions, which include more than merely their theology of religions. The challenge for those Christians who want to practice an ethic of embrace would be to discover creative ways of putting it into practice in a way that is in line with their other theological convictions. Even where specific practices are not regarded as expectable the manner in which they are abstained from will have to reflect the values of embrace such as respect. Moreover, there are endless possible practices that may make embrace more complete.

The themes: reconciliation, tolerance, forgiveness and hospitality, which are interconnected with an ethic of embrace, demonstrated and has formed an important part of this chapter, as it has evidently been portrayed in the truth and salvific significance of who Jesus Christ is and equally is evident in his life. He is not only the truth, or spoke about the truth and his salvific significance, which is key to the Particularistic model, but was able to demonstrate its practical application through the life He lived before men. He showed us how to embrace our neighbour – this being the will of God.

It is clear that the Particularism model reflects a stronger commitment than the Inclusivism and the Pluralism models. Pluralism and Inclusivism might appear to be more open or more attuned to the ethic of embrace, however, due to their abstract theoretical nature, they fail to combine theory with praxis in their application when it comes to engaging with the adherents of the other faiths. The ethic of embrace challenges Inclusivism and Pluralism and serves as a warning

against these two models because the ethic of embrace does not stay at a fundamentalistic tolerance but in practice, it confronts these two models to embrace and build relationships with these other faiths. Since the ethic of embrace is theory in praxis by nature it will therefore help these two models not only to stay in a theoretical abstract position, but it will also help them to be concretely enriched.

In the next chapter we will look at the potential spin-off effects of an ethic of embrace when applied in context. The outcomes will pave the way to establish an opportunity to develop new relationships and restore old relationships; the reign of the Kingdom; which will build the church as well as impact on the process of working toward *peace-building* amongst the religions of the world, whilst interacting in the dialogue of life.

CHAPTER SIX: THE POTENTIAL OF AN ETHIC OF EMBRACE

“... we who have been embraced by the outstretched arms of the crucified God open our arms even for the enemies – to make space in ourselves for them and invite them in – so that together we may rejoice in the eternal embrace of the Triune God” (Miroslav Volf, 1996:131).

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapters two, three and four provided an exposition of the three Christian traditional views that have been at loggerheads with each other regarding our relationship, as Christians, with people of other faiths. The conclusion that the researcher made was that these views are inadequate and do not offer a firm platform where religious diversity could breathe easily, without creating conflicts, as discussed in Chapter one.

Chapter five presented a notion for an ethic of embrace that would serve as a potential solution, not only helping Christians to cope with the current conditions of religious Pluralism, but also help them to relate to their religious counterparts in ways that would be non-offensive and non-compromising, but worthy of their calling and their identity in Christ Jesus.

Knitter (2002:243) says that it is important for Christians to engage in dialogue amongst themselves, but that it is equally important to extend an invitation to engage in dialogue with people of other religious beliefs.

This will not only create opportunities for Christians to understand other religious practices that are closely related to the teachings of Christ, but will give followers of these other faiths the opportunity to come to understand that Christians are neither arrogant nor brainwashed people who try to enforce Christianity onto all peoples.

Instead, they will come to realise that the only intentions Christians have, or are supposed to have, are not only “good” but, most importantly, it is their act of love and obedience unto God and to the final command that Christ gave them to fulfil – to share the message of his *agape* love and hope with all of humanity.

A notion for an ethic of embrace, as discussed in Chapter five, will spark enormous opportunities and advantages that will foster peace, minimising religious clashes between Christians and adherents of other faiths that have been long standing amongst the religions of the world. The potential of this ethic of embrace to be discussed will promote the *Kingdom of God* here on earth, as well as have an innovative approach toward an inter-religious dialogue in the context of establishing peace and harmony while the religions exist and engage in discourse.

The *value* of understanding the strengths of embrace will provide inroads toward *peace-building* exercises among the religions of the world, which will be discussed in this chapter.

When he visited the Henry Martyn Institute (HMI) in Hyderabad (which calls itself an “international inter-faith centre”), Douglas Norell (2007) said, “... striving to create better understanding between people of different faiths and facilitate the processes of dialogue and reconciliation.” This ethic of embrace will enrich each of the three major positions among Christians when it comes to dealing with religious diversity. It will also help us to exercise a peaceful influence upon religiously motivated conflicts, help to address religious conflicts in the world and foster peace among the religions thus, and peace among the nations of the world.

This chapter will cover the positive impact and effects that an ethic of embrace has when understood and practiced; it will transform society; will establish opportunities that will help develop new relationships and restore old relationships; will also enhance and advance the reign of the Kingdom; and will aid the building of the *church* as well as work toward building *peace* amongst the religions of the world, whilst interacting in the dialogue of life.

6.2 ETHICAL BEHAVIOUR TRANSFORMING SOCIETY

Understanding ethical behaviour is an important aspect of an ethic of embrace. The next section will define ethical behaviour, note the impact it has on working towards peace, as well as promote peace amongst the world's religions.

James Gazell (2008) says, this definition of the phrase, *global ethic*, comes from the theologian Hans Küng in a document on this subject, written by him and endorsed by the Parliament of the World's Religions at its meeting in Chicago in 1993. He says that Küng (1997:3) calls for a global ethic, which maintains that there can only be peace among the nations of the world, if there is peace among the religions of the world. He defines this global ethic further by saying that we do not call for one global religion beyond all existing religions, nor do we call for religious totalitarianism, where one religion rules over all others. Instead, "A fundamental consensus on binding values, unconditional standards and personal attitudes" are called for. He adds that, if this basis is not found in this global ethic, chaos or dictatorship will threaten society.

Hans Ucko's (2005) two definitions of ethical behaviour state:

It refers to well based standards of right and wrong that prescribe what humans ought to do, usually in terms of rights, obligations, benefits to society, fairness, or specific virtues. Ethics, for example, refers to those standards that impose reasonable obligations to refrain from rape, stealing, murder, assault, slander, and fraud. Ethical standards also include those that enjoin virtues of honesty, compassion, and loyalty. And, ethical standards include standards, where the focus is on basic human needs. Such standards are adequate standards of ethics because they are supported by consistent and well founded reasons.

Secondly, Ucko (2005) says that ethics relate to the study and development of one's ethical standards and that this excludes feelings, laws, and social norms that would influence ethics negatively. He believes that it is important that one's standards are regularly examined to ensure that they are well-founded and reasonable. He states that ethics is a constant study of one's own moral beliefs

and own moral conduct, and we should aim at raising the bar by living up to our moral ethical conduct which, in turn, will help to shape our institutions.

Sacks (1991:93) says:

... our still strong convictions that compassion and justice should be part of social order, that human life is sacred, that marriage and the nurture of children are not just one lifestyle among many ... when we see others suffering, we can still feel pain. These are biblical traces that the biblical tradition has left deep within our culture: signals of transcendence that can at times move us to otherwise unaccountable acts of conscience and courage.

In the light of spirituality, Ucko (2005) says that since the time when people lived alongside each other in this world, moral behaviour has been vital for harmonious living. He says further that our ethical behaviour, in essence, deals with right and wrong, as well as our moral obligation toward each other as a code of conduct of high moral values.

Ucko (2005) says that it also depends on:

The social setting, the authority invoked for good conduct could be the will of a deity, the pattern of nature, or the rule of reason. He says that when the will of a deity is the authority, obedience to the divine commandments, e.g. in scriptural texts, would be the accepted standard of conduct. Needless to say that it is here where Christians and Muslims would consider themselves to belong. But others find other sources of authority in relation to ethics. If the pattern of nature is the authority, conformity to the qualities attributed to human nature is the standard. When reason rules, moral behaviour is expected to result from rational thought.

Furthermore, Ucko (2005) says that ethical behaviour, as one's first obligation, would be concerned with the quality of one's relationship with other people and responsibility towards them. He says that, in the *Brothers Karamasov* Alyosha says that all are responsible for everyone else but, on an individual basis, each one of us is more responsible than all the others.

So, we can safely say that the key idea of ethical behaviour is that it is not just a matter of speaking about making a difference in the world, but equally, if not more, it is about uniting as inhabitants of this world, engaged in the praxis of sincere ethical behaviour. In other words, it should be our goal as Christians to strive and align our lifestyles in accordance with our Christian conviction, while practicing proper Christian ethical behaviour that govern and guide our actions and existence, so that other might see that we not only believe, but also surrender our own free will to the will of Jesus Christ.

However, we must note that this level of ethical behaviour stems from people who are at peace firstly with Jesus Christ, then with themselves, before they can be at peace with others. If there is a disturbance in this sequence, then it is impossible for a person, who is challenged to practice sincere ethical behaviour, to succeed. This attitude of Godly ethical conduct will pave the way for redemptive *peace-building* initiatives that promote the impact of an ethic of embrace toward *peace-building* amongst the religions of the world. This will be examined in the next section.

6.3 OPPORTUNITY TO DEVELOP NEW RELATIONSHIPS AND RESTORE OLD ONES

The *famous* words of Jesus, “In this world you will have trouble ... be of good cheer or courage for I have overcome this world ...” were uttered to all those who decided to *follow* Him, as we read in John 16:33. He spoke these words not to enslave Christians or to stigmatise Christians, but to encourage them, based on his current encounters and foreknowledge about the hardships they would face for *following* him. Christianity has been long standing in the line of fire, and will be in the line of fire for some time unless all Christians completely deny Christ and his teachings totally, or unless other faiths see Christianity for what it really is and turn to it completely. The chances that either of these will happen are zero.

As one of the most prominent religions in the world, Christianity has been criticized as being an arrogant religion that not only claims superiority over all

other religions but also sets out to fulfil all other religions. For most part of its existence, the Christian classical view (Chapter 2 of this dissertation) has stated: Christianity has been an “exclusive” religion by teaching that salvation is only for Christians. From the very beginning, this has placed great importance on the message of the Christian missionaries and evangelists, i.e. that those who were not Christians were lost.

Whereas the modern view (Chapter 2 of this dissertation) is that not all Christians, such as the Catholics and Protestants alike, believe that it is necessary for people to believe in Christ in order to be saved. Their belief “in the validity and truth of Christian salvation” is that Christ can save people whether they know his name or not. According to this view, this is due to the role that Religious Pluralism and an increased knowledge of other faiths play today. Küng’s (1976:92) reiteration of this is: No religion can live in grand isolation, being unaware of the existence of other religions. He says that our neighbours are in contact with, and confront us daily with religious issues, now more than ever, whether in direct or indirect confrontation.

Küng (1976:89) adds: “Not only Christianity, but also the world religions are aware of humanity’s *alienation, enslavement, need of redemption ... not only Christianity, but also the world religions perceive the goodness, mercy and graciousness* of the Divinity ... not only Christianity, but also the world religions rightly heed the *call of their prophets.*”

Christians need to realise and understand that most of the teachings of other religions are aligned with the teaching and application of what Jesus instructed the church to do, keeping in mind what Anderson (2002) says:

One way is to agree that other religions are conditionally true so far as they do not contradict the Christian message on decisive points. Another is to recognize that there are grace-filled elements in other religions that lead the people to act like Christians, worshipping the divine and loving their neighbours. Such persons manifest the direct influence of the Spirit of Christ, and can be reckoned as true Christians, even though they don’t know it. The world contains many more of God’s creatures adhering to other religions than there are Christians. How, then,

can we reconcile the Cross of Christ as the source of all grace with the love of God who loves all creatures with an equal and unlimited love?

The crux of the matter is that the challenge that Christians are facing is the need to *restore* their relationship with other religious faiths. This not only would provide clarity of their objectives, but would also allow room for credibility of their Christian faith.

6.4 THE REIGN OF GOD'S KINGDOM ESTABLISHED

In the above quotation, Anderson (2002) rightfully says that we must embrace people of other faiths with the love of Christ and invite them to see the true Christ of the Christian faith so that they, in turn, can understand the true love that Christ wants to share with them through us, as the church. Norell (2007) says this would make an invaluable contribution to the advancement and the fostering of the Gospel to the religions of the world that would sustain life and build community, and Wesley White (2003) seeking truth, justice, and beauty in others, and for others.

The next section will investigate what the potential of an ethic of embrace has in store for the advancement of the Kingdom of God, provided that Christians reflect the true meaning of being *followers of Christ not forgetting*, as was stated in *Die Transvaler* (1966) that the church of Jesus Christ is the church in the world, and for the world, commissioned to tackle every person and every system with the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Should Christians subside this call, then they have failed in their calling.

Throughout his teachings in the Gospels, Jesus spoke adequately about the Kingdom of God, clearly expressing his desire to see his *rule* and *reign* being established here on earth amongst his creation, "let your Kingdom come ... on earth as it is in heaven" as we read in Luke 11:2. "Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth and you love one another unhyprocritically, now choose to love one another deeply from the heart" as we read in 1 Peter 1:22.

In Ephesians 3:1-2 we are reminded that God's grace was given to us for others: "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ: He made himself of no reputation, he emptied himself, and obeyed God fully and completely, not thinking of himself, 'not my will.' As Christians we are encouraged to live our lives in such a way, where we find ourselves working toward the spiritual well being of others.

On the question of Christian identity, Mark Woods (2006), says, "it should seek to [be] grounded ... so firmly in the person of Jesus Christ that people of other religions would be seen neither as threats, nor as targets. The claim of Christian belief is not first and foremost that it offers the only accurate system of thought, as against all other competitors.

Mike McClaflin (2001:204) rightfully says, the Kingdom of God is about living in righteousness, peace and harmony, which will lead to "embody a consensus of ethical values about dignity of the individual, the integrity of the earth, the community and responsibility"; ... the need for justice and compassion ... which will open doors that lead the way to a more effective religious dialogue (Knitter, 2002:139,184-185), being who we are to our neighbours, authentic ... living the Gospel.

Stein (1996:126) says this happens where God is the spiritual ruler within the hearts of humanity. McClaflin (2001:203) says this is demonstrated in a life based on the importance of one's relationship with God and with others, which has already begun in the person and work of Jesus. Woods (2006) says if we have a solid unmovable intimate relationship with Christ, then we can have full confidence in God's relationship with us. What he is saying is that this will help us to live in such a way that bearing the love of Christ in one's heart would disarm all forms of human conflict or separation.

Therefore as Netland (1991:278-279) says, our message must carry the elements that will confront the human problem, which is not a political or social one, but sin, which hinders man's eternal destiny. He says further that there is no greater priority for the church than to proclaim the gospel, which speaks of forgiveness and eternal salvation to those who has never *heard* the gospel. Volf

(1996:114) highlights the same principle by saying that each individual is responsible for their own sin and that each one of them, those that oppressed and those who have been oppressed should repent because the reign of God or the Kingdom of God cannot be built on un-repented or unchanged hearts. Volf (1996:112) says that when Jesus spoke about the Kingdom of God He had no political agenda, but that all should come to the saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the heartbeat of God that, those who are not part of the fold yet, should become part. It is the good news of God's love for sinful humanity that leads people to repentance, granting them his eternal rest.

6.5 BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS THROUGH DIALOGUE OF LIFE

In the light of an understanding of the establishment of the Kingdom of God in the hearts of humans as they connect with God and relate to others, the next section will investigate how the impact, effects and strengths of those relationships are built when Christians choose to engage in the dialogue of life.

Knitter (2002:210) says this would not only lead to a deeper understanding of the religious texts of other religions, but would also lead to a deeper friendship with people of other religions. Samuel Ojofeitimi (2003:12-14), manager of strategic staffing at Cendant Corporation, a New York City based global employer of around 90,000, which is primarily a provider of travel and residential real-estate services in more than 100 countries says, knowing the value of people as being the strength of their company, which is imperative in everything they do; has helped to bring success to their corporation. He further says that they anticipate positive growth in the manner they embrace the differences across their entire business. He says that his company embraces diversity as a corporate way of life and aims to achieve a workforce that reflects its customers and markets.

Likewise, Volf (2006) says that, in seeking for the common good, our mission must not be driven church-centered, instead it must be church-based. He says further that our goal should be built on Scripture where we develop and

establish mature communities who have direction and character, and who enjoy and celebrate their faith as a way of life as they stand in worship in God's presence. A mature Christian community is called and sent by God to live and fulfill the various tasks in the world in which they live. Volf (2006) says that, because of our awareness of the common grace of the one God, as a counter-culture, we work toward his common good.

Ariarajah (2004:15) believes in the importance of the dialogue of life between people of other faiths where there is a working cohesion for the same goal, and where the sharing of experiences, festivals and friendships take place. White (2003) reminds us: "It is only faith communities empowered by the Spirit that have the potential to so mirror the Trinity that they can become purveyors of sociability and agents of social welfare in the same context." He says that the church would only be conceived of as a social agency, if this happens and adds that, before this could take place, we are called upon, firstly, to embrace those who are already in the community that we are in. This is important as this witness will change the "entire tone" of the faith as others perceive it as a community of embrace with arms opened wide, embracing one another.

Woods (2006) says that for Ariarajah, a mission and interfaith expert from Sri Lanka, who participated in an Ecumenical Conversation at the World Council of Churches' 9th Assembly, says that there is an irresistible plurality, a persistent plurality that calls us to build who we are in our relation to others. He says that no one can expect that their faith that they preach will be accepted by people of other faiths due to the fact that there is no religious tradition that lives in isolation any longer. The call for mutual relationships amongst religions is at its highest peak of demand.

Knitter (2002:185, 205) maintains that, when one engages in dialogue with people of different belief systems, this can help one to gain a better understanding of oneself. It has helped to give him a different understanding of who he is, which, in turn, has helped him to reshape his own backyard.

Douglas Bushmen (2008) comments that humanity has been created as a natural social being that needs to relate to others like him/her, in order to live and

develop and reach his/her potential. According to him, because of God's love and others, we exist for the other.

Therese Carroll RSJ, (2007) a Josephite Sister, and former Chair (2003-2006) and trustee and current mission services leader of Catholic Healthcare Limited and a member of Stewardship Board of Catholic Health Australia (former) says that these are democratic communities, where the power is shared by all the members of that community and where all have a right to participate and speak openly to all. The engagement is rooted in Scripture and in the relationships that Jesus found. This is a strong witness of these small communities that would foster healing and empowerment.

6.6 BUILDING THE CHURCH GOD'S WAY

Matthew 5:1-12 and Luke 9:23 define God as a God of peace and for those whosoever wish to be associated with Him and be called his follower, it is imperative that that person resembles and reflects Him in his/her daily engagements with other people – making a Godly contribution towards God's peace. This next section will discuss the process of building the *church* God's way as Christ boldly and adequately disclosed. This has also become a prerequisite for the church as we read in Matthew 16:8.

At the World Council of Churches' 9th Assembly in Porto Alegre 2006, where the "text was on Ecclesiology: Called to be the One Church: An invitation to the churches to renew their commitment to the search for unity and to deepen their dialogue," it was highlighted that, "As God's instrument the church is in the midst of a world of living faiths and ideologies." At this gathering, the church was called to interact in dialogue and to work together with people other than themselves so that its *mission* would bring change to all creatures and the well-being of the earth. Churches should be called to struggle against sin in all its forms below and above, and should work with others to fight against injustice and become victors over violence, as well as alleviate all human suffering and ensure fullness of life for all people.

Wanda Bryant-Wills (2005) quotes outgoing general minister of the Christian Church, Chris Hobgood, in saying that, seeking peace is a serious matter and the walls that are bringing about division, should be broken down. In our endeavours to seek peace that would bring an end to a hostile world, the example of Jesus' method of reconciliation has to be followed.

Patrick Zukeran (2001), a research associate and a national and international speaker for Probe Ministries, maintains that our attitude should reflect compassion and gentleness that depend on God who changes attitudes and minds of those whom we wish to reach with the message of his Gospel. Respect with gentleness, not arrogance, should be experienced by those to whom we witness. Furthermore, he says that, if these qualities are absent, then it is dangerous to attempt to evangelise.

Carroll (2007) adds by saying that, as a social institution, the church is in the world, part of the world, and leaves us no excuse not to engage with the world. The church should do personal introspection of herself should she wish to be a witness to the world. She should be a church who is totally open and honest to herself and the world, recognising her need for God's love and his healing in order to provide the world with that same kind of healing. If the church is to be a true witness of God's love and saving grace, then her relationship with humanity should show justice, peace and joy.

The Family Head of Church Relations, Richard Hardy (2008) says, the church has for too long marginalised the people in our society, and failed to address real life issues; what is needed is for the church to start developing relationships with the community and talk about those issues that are near to the heart. Volf (2006) says that God invites us to embark on a journey towards engagement with humanity where faith guides us to avoid paths that would lead into dark alleys.

The Archbishop of York, Dr John Sentamu (2008) says that the church should start serving communities with the message of God's hope. This, in turn, will help to transform the lives and communities of its nation.

Carroll (2007) adds:

If the Church is called to be this reality in our world [transforming lives], then the world rightly has certain expectations of the Church. The world expects a meaningful relationship with the Church. “The Church is a sign of salvation for the world by being a community that manifests in its very life the things in which St Paul tells us the kingdom of God consists ...” The area of authority is so significant in evaluating the Church as witness to God’s love because it is at the heart of all human relationships and how each person experiences the other, and indeed God’s love in and through the other.

In closing, Jesus’ final command as we read in Matthew 28:19-20; 18:20; 5:13-14, Mark 16:15, to his present disciples and those that would follow, clearly commands the body of believers to engage with the proclamation of the Gospel throughout the world; make disciples; serve as a community of believers; and worship which reflects God’s presence and love of Jesus Christ. We must help Christians to grow and reach full maturity in Christ.

6.7 GOD’S BLUEPRINT FOR BUILDING PEACE

Z.J. Bicket (1977:33) states that, Matthew 5:9 clearly highlights that as followers of Christ, it is in our best interest to be peacemakers, people who seek to promote harmonious living and understanding amongst people of the world. As Jegen (1985:74) reiterates that, “Peace is not only a gift from God, it is also a task we are to perform. It is a precious prize to be won by persevering efforts to live faithfully as followers of Jesus, learning from close association with Him.” This is clearly visible in Sahin Zeynep’s (2008) poem:

Peace is not the product of terror or fear.
Peace is not the silence of cemeteries.
Peace is not the silent result of violent repression.
Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all.

Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity.
It is right and it is duty.

Zeynep (2008) says that, according to William Wendley, in order to transform religious conflicts in communities, we should tap into its resources. This would help to strengthen and complement the work of secular organisations. He believes that it will promote an interfaith dialogue re non-violence and activities that would strengthen and deepen the peace inside conflicts, as well as non-conflict spheres. This will help to work toward the common good of all humanity.

Jegen (1985:81) adds that when we promote peace through caring for someone, we foster the climate of peace and bring out the best in that person. J. Ganguli (1999:7) takes it a step further and says that, in such an environment and atmosphere, everyone can grow, work and play in freedom as they begin to understand and enjoy differences, seeing their richness and that they are adding to life instead of threatening it.

Knitter (2002:246) rightfully reminds us: When we promote peace building amongst ourselves and others, which is an ethical or global responsibility, we shall embark on new friendships with people of other faiths; friendships that will be based and embedded in the true essence of “loving and acting for the well-being of one’s neighbour”. McLaren (2007:125, 159, 181-182) says Christ Himself demonstrated this truth throughout his ministry, engaging and interacting with people from all walks of life, establishing the Kingdom of God ... forming communities who seek peace through building peace amongst them ... crossing boundaries between male and female or Jew and Gentile ... replacing hatred with acts of love and generosity and kindness toward our neighbours ... this brings real peace according to Jesus ... walking the extra mile.

6.8 CONCLUSION

From a theological perspective, this chapter set out to investigate the potential of an ethic of embrace for dealing constructively with religious diversity, as the

religions of the world engage with each other on mutual grounds working toward establishing peace, as they co-exist in the world.

The potential of this ethic of embrace that was discussed, will not only enhance each of the three major positions among Christians to deal with religious diversity, but it will also help to foster, establish and create opportunities to build new relationships and restore old ones. It will also ground the rule and reign of God's Kingdom here on earth, utilising his people to transform society by promoting peace initiatives as they engage in the dialogue of life, as well as reduce religiously motivated conflicts. Understanding the value and strengths of this ethic of embrace will provide inroads toward *peace* building exercises among the religions of the world.

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