JOHN HICK:
AN INTRODUCTION
TO HIS THEOLOGY

CHRIS SINKINSON
JOHN HICK:
AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS THEOLOGY

Chris Sinkinson

© Chris Sinkinson

ISBN 1 870137 19 1

Published by:
Religious and Theological Studies Fellowship
38 De Montfort Street
Leicester
LE1 7GP

First published 1995

RTSF publishes a series of booklets and monographs on a wide range of theological topics. For a free catalogue and order form please write to the above address.
I am very grateful to all those who read and commented on earlier versions of this manuscript. Particular thanks to Professor John Hick and Dr Gavin D’Costa for their critical scrutiny and encouragement of the project. Thanks also to Steven Singleton, Tony Gray and RTSF for seeing it through to completion.
# JOHN HICK: AN INTRODUCTION TO HIS THEOLOGY

## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter One: Biographical Sketch</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Early Years (1922-1956)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Developing Philosopher (1956-1967)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Encounters with Pluralism (1967-1972)</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Ambassador for Pluralism (1973-)</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Two: Philosophy of Religion</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 What is Faith?</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Problem of Evil</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Salvation and the After-Life</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Who was Jesus?</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Three: Religious Pluralism</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 The World’s Religions</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Copernican Revolution</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 An Interpretation of Religion</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Conflicting Truth-Claims</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Four: Critical Evaluation</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Universalism</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 The Uniqueness of Christ</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Mythology and Truth</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Christianity and Other Religions</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chapter Five: Conclusion</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Further Reading</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

John Hick has written on many different subjects in philosophy and theology during the course of his long and controversial career. In attempting to introduce the reader to such a large corpus of material it is worth spelling out before we begin the limitations of this booklet.

Rather than being an attempt to give an in-depth account, analysis and response to all the major themes in Hick's work this will provide an introduction to what I consider to be his most significant arguments and contributions to religious studies. The aim of the booklet is to provide a starting point for further reading, reflection and consideration of the crucial issues Hick has placed firmly on the agenda of theology and religious studies.

In order to achieve this end, the booklet is divided into four chapters. The first chapter provides a brief outline of John Hick's career. This will enable the reader to glimpse the development of his thinking and what pressures led to significant changes in his beliefs. The second chapter describes Hick's philosophical analysis of four important themes in theology; faith, evil, salvation and the incarnation. The third chapter involves a sustained account of Hick's most influential suggestion concerning the relationship between Christianity and other religions. A critical evaluation of Hick's interpretation of the world religions will be found in the fourth chapter and this will be followed by a conclusion and short bibliography for further reading.

While this introduction is designed to be understood by those without much interest in philosophy or theology there are a number of technical terms which must be used in consideration of Hick's work. When first used in the text they will appear in bold and will be expressed in a non-technical form.
CHAPTER I

Biographical Sketch

1 Early Years (1922-1956)

John Harwood Hick was born on 20 January 1922 in Scarborough, Yorkshire. His childhood was not marked with any great interest in religion, finding the parish church his family attended a matter of 'infinite boredom'. His only encounter with alternative religious beliefs prior to university was a brief attraction to Theosophy.

Hick initially read law at Hull University and during his first year 'underwent a spiritual conversion' and 'became a Christian of a strongly evangelical and indeed fundamentalist kind'. This conversion experience involved his support of the Inter-Varsity Fellowship Christian Union and, through it, his identification with 'Calvinist orthodoxy of an extremely conservative kind'. Hick had come to believe in the inerrancy of Scripture, the virgin birth and the literal incarnation of Christ.

Hick's interest in religious belief had now been awakened and in 1940 he began to study philosophy at Edinburgh University. It was here that his disillusionment with evangelicalism began. The war interrupted his studies and, as a conscientious objector, Hick served with the Friends Ambulance Unit. Consequently, he did not graduate from Edinburgh until 1948 with a First in Philosophy. Hick did not rejoin the CU after the war as he began to feel that it was too rigid and narrow-minded in outlook. As one example, he felt that some members were intellectually dishonest in their attempts to reconcile the opening chapters of Genesis with contemporary scientific thought.

Hick completed a doctorate at Oriel College, Oxford under H. H. Price. The area of his research lay in the philosophy of religion, and, in particular, the nature of religious faith. His thesis was later adapted and published as his first book. However, in the immediate future his career did not lie in academia. After the completion of his thesis Hick trained for ordination into the English Presbyterian Church (URC). His first pastoral ministry was at Belford Presbyterian Church from 1953 until 1956. During this time he married Hazel Bowers.

Before we consider the next stage in Hick's life we may highlight two notable aspects of this stage. Firstly, Hick was frustrated by what he considered a lack of intellectual depth in many evangelical friends. They seemed unwilling to engage critically with difficult issues. Secondly, we may note that Hick's
major strength and interest lay in philosophy rather than theology. This explains why much of our study will involve a consideration of philosophical issues and the theoretical foundations of Christian belief.

2 The Developing Philosopher (1956-1967)

In 1956 Hick was appointed Assistant Professor at Cornell University and so began his academic career. During this time he developed his doctoral thesis and published it as the book *Faith and Knowledge*. In this work Hick considered the problem of religious epistemology: how we come to know what we know.

He moved to Princeton Theological Seminary in 1959 and soon after an important controversy began. He wished to transfer his ministerial credentials from the English Presbyterian Church to the American Church and this provoked a serious dispute within the Presbyterian Church. Technically, Hick's position at Princeton and in the Presbyterian Church assumed adherence to the 1647 Westminster Confession of Faith. When questioned about his position on the Confession he expressed his doubts concerning 'the six-day creation of the world, the predestination of many to eternal hell, the verbal inspiration of the Bible, and the virgin birth of Jesus'.

His liberal stance particularly on the virgin birth led to a number of the ministers and elders preventing transferral of his ministerial membership. The dispute was finally settled at a national level with the Synod ruling in his favour. Clearly, Hick had departed from evangelicalism but was not yet the radical he was to become. While he did question the historicity of the virgin birth he held an orthodox view of the incarnation.

Hick returned to England in 1963 and lectured at Cambridge University. During this time he published his second major work: *Evil and the God of Love*. This book involves a sustained treatment of various Christian attempts to reconcile the existence of a good God with the reality of evil and suffering in the world (theodicy).

During this stage Hick developed four philosophical insights of particular significance. Each is concerned with the defence of Christianity from various critiques levelled against it. Firstly, Hick developed a philosophical description of ‘faith’ according to which faith is a way of knowing things analogous to more ordinary ways in which we know things. Secondly, Hick sought to express revelation in terms of personal religious experience rather than as verbal information. Instead of identifying revelation with the words of the Bible (propositional revelation) Hick described revelation in terms of
personal experience of the divine. Thirdly, Hick was a keen defender of Christianity against charges levelled at it from a movement that denied the meaningfulness of religious language (positivism). Fourthly, Hick reinstated an ancient and unorthodox answer to the problem of evil which included the affirmation that God will eventually bring all people into eternal life (universalism).

3 First Encounters with Pluralism (1967-1972)

In 1967 Hick took up the H. G. Wood Professorship at Birmingham University and began a phase that would lead to a revolution in his thinking. The most powerful challenge to his theology came not from academic circles but from the City of Birmingham itself. Birmingham had a large multi-faith community including substantial numbers of Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus along with the more well-established Jewish community. Hick became aware of the other major world religions in a way he had never done before. This awareness came largely as a result of his involvement with an inter-religious movement set up in Birmingham to combat racism and in particular the ugly prejudice of the National Front. Hick worked alongside those of other faiths and in so doing was challenged by the faith that they embodied. He writes: ‘Thus it was not so much new thoughts as new experiences that drew me, as a philosopher, into the issues of religious pluralism, and as a Christian into inter-faith dialogue.’ These new experiences led to a significant shift in his thinking. Hick had already come to believe in universalism and had felt that adherents of other religions had exemplified qualities sometimes missing in fellow Christians. The question then arose: how can only one religion be true?

In 1970 Hick began work on a major book that would mark a departure from his previous studies. This would be an attempt to explore conceptions of the future and the after-life (eschatology) with reference to Hinduism, Buddhism and Humanism along with Christianity. No longer would his philosophy be pursued in isolation from the thinking of the various world religions. Furthermore, he wrote a number of shorter pieces designed to explore the possibility that Christianity was not the one true religion, nor even necessarily a religion superior to any others.
Hick’s shorter works on Christianity and other religions were compiled in the 1973 publication *God and the Universe of Faiths.* For reasons already outlined Hick had come to believe that Christianity was not the one true religion to the exclusion of all others. In this book Hick argued that Christianity needed to undergo a revolution in both its self-understanding and its understanding of other religions. According to this revolution, Christianity should regard itself not as the one true way to God but as one option among many available in the world today.

Contributing to this goal, Hick continued research on his next major work, published in 1976 as *Death and Eternal Life.* His research required extensive trips to the East including India (1970/1, 1974, 1975/6) and Sri Lanka (1974) during which he developed his understanding of Eastern religions.

Perhaps the most controversial book Hick’s name has ever been associated with is one that he did not actually write. Hick contributed to and edited *The Myth of God Incarnate* in 1977. This symposium brought together a collection of radical biblical, historical and philosophical studies. Essentially, the contributors argued that historical studies do not substantiate the claim that Jesus either was or even considered himself to be the second person of the Trinity, God the Son Incarnate. Furthermore, the source of this belief is derived more from near Eastern mythology and Greek philosophy than from biblical traditions. Hick’s contribution to the collection used the critical work of other contributors to discount the orthodox view of the incarnation. He then used this work as a basis on which to substantiate his claim that Christianity had no absolute or superior status among the world religions.

In 1982 Hick moved to Claremont Graduate School in California as Danforth Professor of the Philosophy of Religion where he remained until his retirement in 1993. During this period Hick refined and developed his thesis on the world religions culminating in his presentation of the Gifford lectures in 1986. These were published as his major work on the theology of religions: *An Interpretation of Religion.* The essential point of Hick’s thesis is that all the major world religions represent diverse human responses to the same ultimate, transcendent reality. Hick has remained to this day a vigorous defender and promoter of this pluralist position in writings and lectures throughout the world.
CHAPTER TWO

Philosophy of Religion

1 What is Faith?

We shall begin our survey of Hick's philosophical work by considering his theory of religious knowledge. His first published book discussed the nature of knowledge and how we come to have religious belief. While his position has developed greatly there is sufficient continuity in his thought on this subject to be able to draw upon his entire corpus in order to describe his position.

Hick rejects a model of faith that he describes as 'Thomist-Catholic'. According to this model, faith is a matter of assenting to the truth of certain beliefs. In the Christian case, faith would then mean trusting in the truth of the Trinity, the Incarnation and so forth. Instead, Hick's treatment of faith relies on subjective, personal experience rather than intellectual abstraction.

According to Hick, all knowledge involves interpretation. Faith is not some kind of special knowledge entirely distinct from our knowledge of the natural world. In order to see how this might be we may consider the use Hick makes of the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951). Wittgenstein's work drew Hick's attention to the way in which we interpret pictures. You may know the duck-rabbit picture in which there is only one line drawing but looked at in one way can be seen as a duck while looked at in another way can be seen as a rabbit. Wittgenstein describes this experience 'seeing-as'. We see the picture as a duck or as a rabbit. In itself, the picture is ambiguous, being open to either interpretation. Similarly, suggests Hick, we can experience the world in certain ways. Two people may see the same thing in very different ways. A geologist may see an unusual rock formation where an Aborigine sees a sacred place. Hick describes this activity of the human mind 'experiencing-as'.

Consequently, there are different ways in which we may experience the world around us. It all depends on the interpretation we bring to bear upon it. Of course, not just any interpretation will do. I am not at liberty to interpret the book before me as a vacuum cleaner. Parameters exist for the breadth of possible interpretations. We may isolate four levels of knowledge each allowing for a greater diversity of possible interpretations.

The first level of knowledge is that of natural knowledge. At this level there is the least degree of ambiguity about the world and, correspondingly, the greatest extent of agreement among people about how we should interpret
the world. You may wish to interpret the lamp post in the pavement as a large, soft marshmallow but if you walk into it then reality will have a habit of modifying your interpretation.

The second level is that of moral judgement. Situations demanding a moral response offer a greater degree of subjective freedom. Presumably, SS guards at Auschwitz exercised their moral judgement very differently, one would hope, than most people in the same or a similar situation. Nonetheless, there is probably a high degree of agreement among people in the world as to what constitutes right moral judgement.

Thirdly, there is the matter of aesthetic taste. Personal opinion is exercised very much at this level of knowledge. Perhaps everyone has been in the situation of someone about to remark on some unusual work of art that he or she thinks is pure bunk only to have been silenced when a companion has expressed great delight in the piece and remarked upon how meaningful they find it. While there is a very high degree of subjective interpretation and taste involved at this level of knowledge there still remains substantial agreement. Few people experience Constable's paintings as rubbish.

The final level of knowledge is that of religious faith. The difference between this level of belief and those previous levels lies in the fact that religious faith involves a total interpretation of the universe. Faith is not the interpretation of just one aspect of reality but involves our relationship to reality as a whole. So the interpretation of the universe as religiously significant depends a great deal on how we personally see things. In itself, the universe is ambiguous. We all know of atheists who do not believe in the existence of God and the supernatural order but remain rational people. They justify their beliefs by pointing out that they cannot see God, that the existence of evil in the world suggests that there probably is no God and point to alternative explanations of the universe that do not require belief in the existence of God. Yet convinced believers point to the apparent order of the universe, our recognition of evil in the world and the historical evidences for God's intervention in the world as justification for a religious interpretation of the universe. The universe remains ambiguous in this respect because no final, decisive proof may be produced one way or the other. Thus the distinction between religious faith and a naturalistic view of the universe will depend upon how one chooses to interpret the world and this choice will be the product of our experiences of the world. Both believer and non-believer may remain rational in holding their alternative beliefs. Christian faith is a particular form of religious faith according to which 'in the historical figure of Jesus Christ ... God has in a unique and final way disclosed himself to men'.

10
An important aspect of this conception of faith is its emphasis on human free will. The reason why God allows the universe to be ambiguous is because he wishes to safeguard the freedom of human beings to believe or not believe in him. To give absolute proofs or demonstration of his existence would coerce people to believe in him and compromise their freedom to decide. Hick describes God as 'hiding' himself from humanity, leaving us the freedom to recognize or fail to recognize his dealings with us. This hiding of God creates what Hick calls an epistemic distance between human knowledge and the divine reality.

However, the reason why one chooses to believe or not to believe is not pure guesswork or whim. Knowledge in each of the four levels we have described depends upon experience. There are experiences that prevent my interpretation of the book as a vacuum cleaner or the lamp-post as a marshmallow. Similarly, religious faith is justified by personal religious experience or commitment to a tradition in which that experience is evident.

Hick's theory of knowledge has remained largely consistent throughout his career but there is one later development that must be noted. In recent work Hick makes great use of the famous German thinker Immanuel Kant (1724-1804). Hick borrows one major insight from Kant's thought and uses it to develop his own model of religious faith. The insight is Kant's distinction between the world as we know it and the world as it really is. We cannot know directly the world as it really is (the noumenal world). Our experience of the world is conditioned by the structures of our mind that orders the world in a particular way (the phenomenal world). The result is that we must be careful to distinguish between things as we know them and what things are really like in themselves. Hick applies this distinction to religious belief. God and the knowledge of the supernatural are beyond our immediate knowledge. All we can know are the influences of this reality as we interpret them. According to Kant, the structures of our mind are like a pair of spectacles through which we view the world. The spectacles do distort the real world so that we can make sense of it, but without the spectacles we can make no sense of the world at all. For Hick, faith functions in a similar way: through faith we interpret the otherwise unknowable divine reality, shaping it into a form we can at least begin to understand.

Hick's description of faith has much to commend it. It emphasises the personal nature of faith as a subjective response to the world. Those who have faith are not required to provide lengthy philosophical reasons for their beliefs. They are justified in having faith through personal experience. Furthermore, this account does not describe 'faith' as something entirely distinct from 'knowledge'. Rather, faith is seen as one kind of knowledge.
open to the human being. This model also lends itself to a less dogmatic brand of religious belief and we shall see why this should be important to Hick a little later.

This account of faith raises a number of important questions. One problem lies in the apparent arbitrary nature of religious belief. How can one decide which beliefs are true and which are false? Personal, subjective experience can be so unreliable in other spheres that one has reason to be sceptical of beliefs based solely on such experience. Hick's thought offers a further test for the truth of religious beliefs. We may remember that in the case of natural knowledge it is not possible to believe as we choose. If we interpret the lamp post as a marshmallow and walk into it then we will stand (or fall!) corrected by the experience. One cannot believe anything and everything about the natural order of the world. Analogously, religious beliefs may be tested by their practical fruits in helping us to order our lives. This is a pragmatic test of how successful a belief is in peoples lives. Beliefs lead to behaviour and disastrous behaviour probably signifies false beliefs.

2 The Problem of Evil

It is often argued that the perfect design, order, purpose and beauty of the world provide grounds for belief in a good creator God. However, the argument has another side. The imperfection, disorder, extent of purposeless suffering, evil, cruelty and pain provide grounds for disbelief that such a God could exist. The force of the charge is felt particularly in Christian theology because of the kind of God he is understood to be. If God is both omnipotent, able to do anything, and all loving, willing the best for everyone, then the existence of evil either discredits God's power to remove the evil or God's love towards his creatures.

*Evil and the God of Love* is Hick's attempt to outline how Christian belief in God may remain rational in the face of evil. This is called a theodicy. First published in 1966, the basic thesis of the book remains a part of Hick's theology to this day. Hick describes the work as a 'critical study of the two responses to the problem of evil that have been developed within Christian thought, and an attempt to formulate a theodicy for today'. The first response is the classical theodicy that has been dominant in the history of Christian theology. The second response has been somewhat marginal in the West until recent times but Hick seeks to build his own theodicy upon it.

The classical theodicy finds its roots in the sophisticated thought of St Augustine and is also developed by the reformer John Calvin. According
to Augustine, God made all things good. Therefore, evil was not created by God and cannot exist in its own right at all. Hence, evil is 'the corruption of a good substance'.

Evil describes something good that has gone wrong. As evil does not originate in God it must originate in the free will of his creatures. Augustine describes some angels as the first to use their free will to oppose God and, consequently, to 'fall' from heaven. This fall is then paralleled in the choice of the first humans to disobey God. So evil originated in the free wills of angels and humans. Hick describes this 'creation-fall-redemption' narrative as a mythology. According to the mythology evil exists in the world today as humans are 'participating in the effects of their first parents rebellion against their Maker'.

However, God has taken the initiative in repairing the damage by sending his son to make atonement for sinful humanity on the cross. As a result it is possible for God to rescue some from the consequences of the fall through the work of Christ on their behalf. The classical account declares God innocent as regards the cause of evil while placing full responsibility on the shoulders of angels and humans. The problem of evil in the world is the result of God permitting humanity (and angels) the exercise of free will.

Hick argues that this account is incoherent in two ways. Firstly, he questions how a perfect creation could include beings who choose to sin. Hick distinguishes between the freedom to choose to sin and the actual choice to sin: 'If the angels are finitely perfect, then even though they are in some important sense free to sin they will never in fact do so'. Only a flawed created being would make the seriously unwise and immoral choice to sin. Therefore, God remains culpable for a flawed creation and the existence of sin. The second incoherence that Hick points out concerns a further feature of Augustinian and Calvinist theology. According to the classical picture nothing occurs outside of God's power. Human beings remain unable to believe in God without him enabling them to do so. The doctrine that flows from this logic (as well as from certain passages in the Bible and from Christian experience) is that of predestination. God must predestine in advance all that will occur and in particular who will come to repentance and faith and who will be eternally lost. Furthermore, God must have predestined the initial fall of both angels and humans. Hick finds this notion objectionable. The picture of salvation and damnation as the result of divine decree represents 'a failure to think of God and of his attitudes to mankind in fully personal and agapistic terms'.

Irenaeus (130-202 AD) pursued a different approach to the problem of evil. He distinguished between humanity being created in the 'image' of God and humanity in the 'likeness' of God. Because we are made in the image of God we have a special status and potential in God's creation. However, we are called to become like God. Through our struggle against sin and evil we are
involved in a gradual movement toward the likeness of God. Adam and Eve were not made perfect in the beginning. Irenaeus described Adam and Eve as being made like children in the Garden of Eden. There was no 'fall' from initial perfection. Rather sin involved the recognition of weakness, finitude and imperfection. From this state of infancy Adam and Eve were called to grow into the likeness of God. According to this picture, the 'fall' is a necessary step towards God rather than a catastrophic falling out of favour with God.

Evil and suffering are understood very differently in the light of this theology. Rather than being punishments, the evils of the world become the means by which God enables us to grow and overcome sin. Rather than representing separation from God Irenaeus sees the evils of the world as 'a divinely appointed environment for man's development towards the perfection that represents the fulfilment of God's good purpose for him'.

This form of theodicy had also been used by the German theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) and Hick develops it further still. According to Hick's version of this 'soul-making' theodicy 'man, created as a personal being in the image of God, is only the raw material for a further and more difficult stage of God's creative work'. God's creative work involves the permission of evil and suffering in order to prompt the growth toward the likeness of God. The Augustinian theodicy 'looks back' to a fall from grace in order to explain the existence of evil. The Irenean theodicy 'looks ahead' to a time when humanity will, through suffering, reach perfection and then be able to make sense of the problem of evil.

There are two further aspects of Hick's theodicy designed to curtail one major objection. This is the apparent excessive quantity of evil in the world and its indiscriminate infliction on the people of the world. There simply seems to be too much evil for it to be understood in this way and it is inflicted on good and bad alike. The teacher of Ecclesiastes notes how he has seen 'a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness' (Ecc. 7:15). One would think that the wicked people of the world are more in need of the corrective qualities of suffering than the many innocent people who suffer so much. It is at this point in the argument that Hick is willing to appeal to mystery. This is the point at which speculations must end. The rational mind cannot penetrate the profound mystery of awful human suffering. This may remind us of a key theme in Hick's epistemology (see 2.1): the ambiguity of the universe. No explanation can be entirely water-tight and everyone remains intellectually free to make up their own minds about the plausibility of this explanation.
The attraction of this theodicy lies in the rejection of what might be seen as a vindictive image of God central to the classical position. Evil in the world does not imply that God either punishes people through suffering or abandons them to suffering. According to this model, suffering is not a form of punishment but serves an ultimately good purpose in human development. Furthermore, the position does not depend on the complex notions of predestination and a historical fall. According to Hick, God does not overrule human freedom but respects it as the means through which human beings make genuine choices in the face of suffering.

3 Salvation and the After-Life

Hick's 1976 work *Death and Eternal Life* marks a departure from his earlier major works. His work on faith and evil embodied a distinctively Christian approach to the problems. In this work, Hick put into practice conclusions reached in *God and the Universe of Faiths* and sets out to produce a 'global' theology of death. His attempt to explore the nature of death in global perspective involves a survey and assimilation of insights from existentialist philosophy, parapsychology, humanism and some of the major world religions.

The question of what death is and what happens after we die is not often a subject of discussion but Hick tackles it in a characteristically straightforward way. Firstly, as regards the general question of what happens after we die, Hick shows that no philosophical arguments can be formulated that categorically deny the possibility of continued existence. Furthermore, the insights of certain, admittedly fringe, studies in medicine and human physiology provide positive evidence in favour of the possibility (for example, there are accounts of experiences from those who have reawakened after being pronounced clinically dead). Not only are there no findings that rule out the possibility, but the religious faith of the vast majority of humanity depends on the truth of a belief in some form of continued existence after death. Hick disputes the idea that belief in an after-life may be dispensed with while leaving the core of religious beliefs intact. Most religious belief systems are rendered incoherent without this truth claim.

We have already seen that Hick believes in a universal salvation of humanity (see 2.2). This point is pursued here with evidence from the New Testament and some theological justification from the work of the Swiss theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968). Hick rejects the notion of hell as a 'morally intolerable' doctrine. The primary truth claim of Christianity concerning the after-life is the optimism that the self will eventually achieve a state of eternal bliss called
heaven. The resurrection of the body is the mythological picture given of this in Christian thought.

The world views of Eastern religions can cast further light on these conclusions. According to Hick, the concept of returning to life in another form after death (reincarnation), while not a Christian belief, is compatible with Christianity.\textsuperscript{31} The substantial thought underlying the pictures of death in both Eastern and Western religions is that existence will be continued after death. The matter of dispute lies not in whether this will occur but where this will occur.\textsuperscript{32} Hick finds an answer to this question in an image that draws upon both streams of religious thought. Essentially, Hick's description of the process that occurs after death is a progression of the person through further worlds in which he or she will have continued opportunity to achieve the goal of moral and spiritual perfection. Reincarnation and resurrection are both compatible mythological ways of describing this future process. This hypothesis then lends substance to his theodicy. If suffering is the means by which God enables us to develop then it seems incongruous that we should know of many who fail in this life through premature death or inadequate circumstances to have much opportunity to develop in this way. Death does not come to all at equal stages of development. Perhaps no one dies in a fit state to enter God's presence. The postulation of further worlds provides the basis for believing that post-mortem development is possible.

Hick makes two important qualifications to this integration of resurrection and reincarnation. Firstly, he distinguishes between the ultimate state or last things to which we are headed (eschatology) and the penultimate state between death and this fulfilment (pareschatology). Both of these states are pictured in various mythological ways by the different world religions. However, only the second is an appropriate subject of speculation. This is because it is more proximate to our current experience. Being closer to us chronologically it may bear more relation to existence as we know it. However, the first state lies far beyond our rational grasp and, though pictured in various ways by the world religions, is not open to philosophical analysis. This is an important qualification because it allows that while religions may have absolutely different conceptions of what the ultimate destiny of humanity is, these conceptions cannot be held to contradict the conceptions of other religions because they are not susceptible to that kind of rational analysis.

The second qualification has since been dispensed with by Hick. This is the claim he makes in \textit{Death and Eternal Life} that the self truly does exist. Some forms of eastern thinking deny that there is a true self and, furthermore, perceive the concept of being an individual as one of the very notions that
prevents our release from suffering in the process of reincarnation. According to these ways of thinking, the ultimate state is not a matter of individuals enjoying the company of a God distinct from them. Instead, the final state lies in the individual being absorbed into the ultimate reality. Consequently, at this stage in his writing Hick sides with one tradition of Hindu thought against another in retaining belief in the ultimate reality of the self and distinction from the personal God.33

Hick’s theology of death is a genuine example of an attempt at theology in inter-religious perspective. Rather than pursuing his theme in the context of one religion alone, as is most often done, and relying on certain principles of authority provided within that tradition alone (i.e. for the Christian, the authority of the Church, councils, leaders or the Bible) Hick takes up the challenge to produce a truly pluralist theology. Hence, underlying this work and all Hick’s later work is a basic assumption about the nature of religion. Hick specifies this assumption at the outset of Death and Eternal Life:

'It is even possible ... to see the major world religions as pointing convergingly towards a common conception of the eschaton, the final and eternal state, although with partly different expectations concerning the pareschaton...’34

The philosophical basis for this assumption will be outlined in chapter three but we will now turn to another major theme in Hick’s philosophy of religion.

4 Who was Jesus?

One of Hick’s first published articles was a critique of the view of Jesus (Christology) that had been put forward by D.M. Baillie in a 1948 publication. The thrust of Hick’s criticism was that Baillie had failed to provide a Christology that fully reflected the historic position of the Church represented in the creeds. Less than twenty years later Hick came to believe that Baillie had been right all along.

The shift in Hick’s position occurred during his first real exposure to the diversity of the world’s religions. This encounter raised the profound question: how are these religions related to God and to Christianity? If Jesus is the unique incarnation of God on earth then, at best, this relegates other religions to being temporary movements awaiting fulfilment in Christ or, at worst, human perversions blinding people to the truth of Christ as God’s sole means of salvation. Either way, Hick felt that the incarnation created a sense
of Christian superiority over other religions. The dilemma of inter-faith relations provided the impetus in Hick’s search for a new Christology.

Along with the challenge of other religions, Hick also recognised that some biblical studies, in particular higher criticism, were casting doubt on the possibility of deriving the incarnation from the New Testament. Hick’s attraction to these developments eventually led to his editing the collection of essays we have already mentioned published in 1977, *The Myth of God Incarnate*. While the essays represented a diversity of opinions the common theme of the collection cast doubt on the possibility that Jesus was God incarnate in any literal sense. The consensus seemed to be that Jesus did not understand himself in that way and that the source of the doctrine lay more in Near Eastern mythologies and Greek philosophy than in the Bible.

Hick’s basic problem with the incarnation was that it attempted to describe the identity of Jesus as of one substance with God. This notion of ‘substance’ was tied to a particular Greek thought world and meaningless in both the world view of the Bible and of today. In particular, Hick doubted whether the doctrine could ever be stated in a way that can stand up to philosophical analysis. He questioned how it could be possible that one, historical, particular, limited, fallible human can also be the transcendent, universal, infinite, perfect, divine being. For example, if one affirms that Jesus was limited in knowledge or power (as the Gospels might suggest at certain points) then it seems to follow that he cannot be the same individual as the all-knowing (omniscient) and all-powerful (omnipotent) God. Or if one affirms that Jesus was omniscient and omnipotent then it seems questionable that Jesus was ever truly human. According to Hick, affirming the identity of God and Christ is like affirming the existence of a square circle. It is a meaningless description.

Hick sought to describe Christology in terms of relationship rather than substance. His first attempt to do this is to be found in *God and the Universe of Faiths*. Hick describes the traditional view of Jesus being God Incarnate as a ‘static’ concept: an identification of a particular person with a particular divine being. Hick argued for a ‘dynamic’ description of the incarnation. The incarnation is not a fact about Jesus and God but a description of an activity both Jesus and God were engaged in. Jesus incarnated the love of God in his activity. His will was so perfectly matched to that of God that he made it possible to affirm what Jesus willed, God willed. His disciples felt as if in the very presence of God when in his presence.

Hick’s Christology developed further still in the course of his encounter with the world religions. Even the modest description of the incarnation in *God
and the Universe of Faiths is in danger of absolutising the status of the historical Jesus to the detriment of other religions. Consequently, Hick's contemporary Christology must be understood in the light of his attempt to do theology in cross-reference with the teachings of the world religions. Jesus is not to be understood in a unique way but as one of a number of special people who have appeared in the history of religions. Such 'saints' include the Buddha, Zarathustra, Isaiah, Jesus, Mohammed and Guru Nanak. Had Jesus gone East, Hick contends that he would have been understood as an avatar.

In order to answer the question 'who was Jesus?' Hick urges us to strip away later accretions and developments to see once more the figure behind the myths. Here, Hick believes that we find someone 'intensely and overwhelmingly conscious of the reality of God. He was a man of God, living in the unseen presence of God. He was so powerfully God-conscious that his life vibrated, as it were, to the divine life; and as a result his hands could heal the sick ...'. According to Hick, Jesus was not the second person of the Trinity, God the Son Incarnate in any literal sense. The difference between Jesus and other people is the degree to which he incarnated a consciousness of God possible in us all.

Hick has been concerned with two aspects of Christology. Firstly, he has reassessed the identity of Jesus in the light of the world religions. Hick claims that believing the historical Jesus to have an absolute or supreme status is to devalue other religions. Secondly, he has attempted to produce an account of Jesus that is acceptable and meaningful in terms of contemporary thought. To do this he has responded to certain strands of biblical criticism and philosophical thought. Consequently, Hick is genuinely concerned to produce a defence of Christian belief in the light of these major issues.
CHAPTER THREE

Religious Pluralism

1 The World's Religions

'Religious pluralism' may mean two different things. On the one hand, it may simply be a description of an observed state of affairs. In this sense, contemporary British society is marked by pluralism simply by virtue of the plurality of religious traditions, beliefs and values existing in close proximity to each other. On the other hand, it may refer to a specific philosophical position such as that of John Hick. Hick's encounter with pluralism led him to question fundamental Christian convictions. We have seen how, by the sixties, Hick had become doubtful about a number of Christian beliefs, such as the virgin birth, but nonetheless believed that Christianity held the normative, highest form of God's revelation to humanity. Pluralism challenged that conviction: 'If what Christianity says is true, must not what all other world religions say be in varying degrees false?' Hick has never doubted that such a position can be a logical one to hold but it did seem the height of arrogance. The primary problem for Hick arose through experience. His experience of other religions led him to believe that adherents were being transformed for the better through their own belief systems and that the great variety of religious practices conducted in these religions seemed to share a common structure. Through inter-religious relationships, activities and worship Hick came to be convinced that religions were not to be understood as mutually exclusive entities or as in permanent tension with each other. The major shift in his position came with his re-appraisal of the incarnation and subsequent Copernican revolution in his theology.

2 The Copernican Revolution

Hick's new understanding of the relationship between Christianity and the world religions was put forward in God and the Universe of Faiths. He argued that a 'Copernican' revolution was required in Christian self-understanding.

Before Copernicus (a scientist of the 16th century), the dominant model for describing the universe pictured the earth at the centre with the sun, planets and stars revolving around it. This became increasingly difficult to maintain in the light of later discoveries in astronomy. In order to maintain the Ptolemaic picture of the universe 'epicycles' were introduced to explain the odd behaviour in the observed movement of the planets. Copernicus disputed this model entirely and instead described the sun as the centre of the
universe with the earth along with the other planets revolving around it. When initially suggested this caused a great controversy in the Church as the new theory seemed to have grave implications for religious belief. The Church had conceived the earth and humanity to have been central in God's creation and to displace the position of the earth somehow seemed to displace humanity from its important place in the creation.

Hick uses this historic event as a picture of another, at least as important, controversy in the life of the Church. In the later stages of the early Church until modern times, Hick suggests, Christians had believed that outside of Christianity there was no salvation and only a dim knowledge of God. This belief had existed largely without challenge in a part of the world dominated by Christianity. However, the modern period has been marked by a new awareness of the global community in which we exist and the variety of religious beliefs held by human beings. The awareness that the great majority of humanity believe in something other than Christ and show little sign of changing their minds presents a challenge to the belief that Christianity is the exclusively true religion. The older, 'exclusivist' position is analogous to the Ptolemaic view of the universe with the earth at the centre. In recent times, a number of theologians and councils have suggested that while Christ is the means of salvation this salvation may be mediated to non-Christians through their own religions. In keeping with the Copernican model, Hick describes these 'inclusivists' strategies as theological 'epicycles' being added to the Ptolemaic model.

Instead of abandoning the old view of Christianity these theologians try to tinker with the system by providing more lenient ways to account for the world religions. Rather than modifying this model of Christianity, Hick calls for a revolution in the theology of religions. This revolution will no longer see Christ and Christianity as the centre of the religious universe with other religions revolving around them but will see God as being at the centre with all the world religions revolving around God.

3 An Interpretation of Religion

Hick's major work, An Interpretation of Religion, is the most comprehensive statement of his pluralist hypothesis. It is offered as an interpretation of all the major world religions in terms of certain unifying themes. In this work Hick also develops the full implications of the Kantian model.

According to his thesis, each of the world religions represent human responses to the same ultimate divine reality. Hick does not intend to
devalue the diversity of the different religions. On the contrary, he hopes the rich diversity of beliefs will remain. His own work is offered as an interpretation of those varied responses. These responses do not represent fundamentally distinct belief systems. The reason for the diversity of beliefs lies not in a difference in the nature of reality itself but in the different ways human beings experience that same reality. Each religion exists as a cultural whole which influences the way participants experience and understand the world around them. Even the apparently radical differences between a Buddhist conception of the world as illusion with nirvana the reality beyond and the Christian conception of the world as God's good creation with heaven ahead are not entirely irreconcilable. The Buddhist and Christian worldviews represent different ways in which human beings can respond to the same ultimate reality.

Using Kant's model, Hick draws a sharp distinction between the way we know things and what things are really like. On the one hand, there is the Ultimate Reality beyond all possible human experience and rational thought and on the other hand, human descriptions of that Real as God or Nirvana or Allah. These pictures function as symbols to help us understand the reality about which we could never otherwise speak. The radical difference between believing in a personal God or in an impersonal force behind the universe may then be understood as different symbols used by humans to live their lives in the light of the same higher reality.

In a previous work God was at the centre of the universe of faiths. Now Hick recognises the implicit imperialism in importing the word 'God' into the model. Such a word implies a whole Judeo-Christian tradition of the personal God. Hick now prefers the 'Real' as a formal description for that ultimate reality about which we can never speak directly. Furthermore, because of the nature of the Real, he/she/it can never be experienced as an object among objects but rather only as human images of the Real. Therefore, the existence of the Real is assumed to be the case (a 'postulate') rather than being a fact we can know for certain through experience or reason.

An Interpretation of Religion also includes a treatment of the history of religions. This is important because one can point to all sorts of dangerous and sometimes short lived religious phenomena that do not appear to support the idea that all religions are responses to the same reality. One might consider certain ancient religions that involved ritual child abuse or human sacrifice. Or one might consider recent movements that have been exposed for sexual or financial scandals. It seems hard to recognise all of these religions as responding to the same reality and so Hick directs us to an historical survey.
According to Hick, following the work of Karl Jaspers, there was a great period of transition in human consciousness between approximately 800 BC and 200 BC. Religion prior to this time was a matter of humanity trying to preserve social cohesion in the face of the forces of chaos ranged against it. It did not primarily address issues of ultimate concern or direct itself to the welfare and fulfilment of individuals. Rather, religion provided justification for the existence of society and the laws necessary to preserve order. As such, religion was rather a gloomy affair in which an attempt was made to placate the mysterious spirits inhabiting the world.

The period of transition is known as the axial age for during it human consciousness turned on its axis. Several significant figures developed a profound awareness of the divine centre of the universe. They became aware of the love and justice of the divinity which could even bring prophetic judgement on the society itself. The former pessimism concerning the supernatural and personal destiny was replaced by a cosmic optimism. These figures came to believe in an ultimate good destiny lying in the future waiting for the fulfilment of all humanity. The figures of the axial age include the Buddha, Isaiah and Confucius. During this period all the major world religions were given birth.

Since the axial age, the new-found cosmic optimism spread and developed in the consciousness of humanity. More recently formed religions, Christianity, Islam, Sikhism and so on are natural progressions from the insights discerned in the axial age. All the major world religions represent valid options for human religious experience as they have sprung from the deep roots of the axial age and have had their validity proven during the centuries of human experience that have tested them.

This historical account enables Hick to exclude certain belief systems from his treatment and explain certain developments otherwise incongruous with his interpretation. Hick does not need to take seriously bizarre modern religious movements and cults as they do not form part of the mainstream history of religions. Furthermore, Hick is able to explain why some religions have been successful in some missionary work. The missionary successes of Christianity in Europe, the Mediterranean, central Africa and the Americas and the success of Islam in the Middle East and North Africa represent the transition from the pre-axial religion of those areas to the axial age. The era of cosmic optimism occurred late in certain parts of the world.
4 Conflicting Truth Claims

One of the most frequent challenges made against the pluralist hypothesis concerns the truth claims made by religious believers. The range of contradictory claims about reality in the world religions present prima facie evidence against the pluralist case. The pluralist hypothesis must maintain that religions are to do with the same ultimate reality despite making wildly different and sometimes contradictory claims about the nature of that reality. Some claim that there is a personal creator God while others, such as Zen Buddhism and Marxism, deny that there is such a being. Christianity claims that an atonement is required for forgiveness whereas others dismiss this necessity. Some claim that one set of writings are the only scriptures revealed by God whereas others make the same claim for a different set of scriptures. The problem of conflicting truth claims is a very real one.

One way in which some theologians deal with this problem is to deny that religious beliefs are attempts to describe reality but affirm that they serve useful symbolic functions. According to these thinkers, to believe that God exists involves behaving in a certain way and having certain attitudes to life but it does not involve believing that a God really exists such as, by analogy, the way other people exist. This position is called non-realism. Hick has contested the claims of non-realists on the grounds that they fail to do justice to genuine religious beliefs. When religious people describe their faith in God or hope in eternal life they are doing more than using symbols to guide their behaviour.

Hick has defended a form of religious realism from the attacks of a tradition of philosophy known as logical positivism. The positivist claimed that for language to be meaningful it must refer to something that is open to testing by sense experience. For example, if someone claimed that there was a wolf in the kitchen it is obvious how the claim may be tested: go into the kitchen (if you dare!) and see. However, if someone were to claim that there was a wolf in the kitchen that was invisible, undetectable and left no trace of its existence then it would be hard to see what kind of truth test would be possible. The positivists developed a verification principle as a way of dealing with this problem. Put simply, only statements that could be verified, in principle, by sense experience were to be considered meaningful. Otherwise, they were to be understood as mere expressions of feeling on a par with the word 'ouch'. The principle underwent considerable changes during its career in western philosophy. In its weakest and most acceptable form it requires that meaningful statements imply something about observable reality and so be open to confirmation or disconfirmation/refutation with reference to that reality. Pursuing this line of thought, critics of religion have
claimed that the beliefs of religious people are not open to any experimental
testing and are therefore meaningless when understood as realist uses of
language (though they might have non-realist functions).

Hick accepts the main point of the positivists argument: 'to exist is to make
an in-principle experienceable difference'. However, he also believes that
religious beliefs are able to answer the challenge of the positivists. Hick
defends the meaningfulness of religious language by showing that it really
does make statements open to testing by sense experience. The core verifiable
claim made by most religious people is that an experiential state lies beyond
death that will be encountered by everyone at some point in the future. So
religious beliefs are not pure symbols but do refer to experiential reality. This
truth test is known as eschatological verification. Christian belief will be
verified (or falsified) in a future state (the 'eschaton').

Hick defines his own position as critical realism because, while affirming that
the objects we speak of exist independently of our conceptions of them
(realism), he also takes into account the contribution that the critical faculties
of the mind make to our experience. We do not see things as they are. We
experience them in a particular way through the interpretation we bring to
bear upon them (see 2.1). Hick further develops this point (see 3.3) in terms of
the distinction between how things appear to us (phenomenon) and what
reality is like 'in itself' (Noumenon). Consequently, no religious truth claim
should be understood as an absolute, exclusively true description of ultimate
reality. They must be understood as images produced in part by the cultural
and intellectual influences on our thinking. If religious claims are not
absolute then one cannot take conflicting truth claims at face value. They
must first be analysed in terms of the cultural context in which the claims are
made.

We already have an example of this with Hick's interpretation of the historical
Jesus (see 2.4). To declare him the Christ, the second person of the Trinity is
not, according to Hick, to make a purely factual claim about the historical
Jesus. Instead, it is a mythological claim providing some information about
the historical Jesus but more information about Christian experience. It is a
poetic expression of the believer's devotion to a particular way of life and
attitude toward ultimate reality as that reality is glimpsed in the life of Jesus.
Many religious truth claims can be understood in these mythological terms.
Having expressed a detailed philosophical treatment of theodicy (see 2.2)
Hick has, more recently, described the various theodicies as essentially
mythologies.
Hick defines 'myth' carefully in order to avoid the charge that to describe something as a myth is a polite way of describing something as false. He defines the meaning of myth in the following way:

For the conformity of myth to reality does not consist in a literal conformity of what is said to the facts but in the appropriateness to the myth's referent of the behavioural dispositions that it tends to evoke in the hearer.46

A myth is not true because it correctly describes reality but is true because for those who believe in a myth it produces a particular kind of good behaviour. Hence, the mythology of the Third Reich is a false mythology. A true myth would produce good behaviour and most of the mythologies of the world religions are 'true' in this sense.

In the light of this analysis, some truth claims that had been thought to be in conflict may be understood as compatible if they all evoke similar, appropriate behaviour in those who adhere to those claims. At the level of literal truth claims they do remain in conflict but this is not of ultimate consequence because they do not primarily serve such literal functions. Hick does consider certain categories of truth claims that do mark substantial divergence between traditions such as the historical claim of Christians that Jesus died on the Cross and the Islamic denial that this was the case. However, he considers these kind of claims as unsettleable in practice47 and, more importantly, not of the essence of religious belief which is primarily a matter of conforming one's attitude to those appropriate in relation to the ultimate reality.
CHAPTER FOUR

Critical Evaluation

1 Universalism

Hick's career has spanned many years and we have seen a number of changes in his own theological position. In particular his thinking has changed regarding the meaning of the incarnation and the world religions. In many ways it is to be respected and admired when someone's thought develops and changes rather than stagnates. However, radical changes in belief can give rise to fundamental inconsistencies within a position. Hick's work has developed from within a mainstream Christian position. It may be the case that the pluralist hypothesis undercuts the very foundations of his theology. We shall examine this possibility with regard to his case for universalism but the criticism applies more widely.

The pluralist position does not require that all people are finally saved but only that the saved are not a group of people restricted to one particular religion. However, Hick's own attraction to pluralism stems in part from his prior commitment to universalism. If God loves all people and saves all people then it is problematic to maintain that Christianity is the only valid religion. The universal saving will of God lends substance to the case for pluralism. We have seen that the main line of defence for his universalism lies in the character of God: an all-loving and all-powerful God would not allow countless numbers of people to perish in eternity. However, Hick has since suggested that the Christian conception of God should be relativised as one human construction among many that function as responses to the Ultimate Reality. The Ultimate Reality remains beyond human comprehension and characterisation. Hence, to speak of an all-loving, omnipotent God is to use mythological language. According to Hick, mythology describes and evokes the proper orientation towards reality but does not describe Ultimate Reality itself (an impossible thing to do). However, the basis for a literal universal salvation lay in a literal description of what God is like. Therefore, the justification for universalism no longer remains. As Gavin D'Costa expresses it:

'I believe that Hick severs the ground from under his Copernican feet. This is so because in arguing for the Copernican revolution on the premise of a God of universal love, such a position entails precisely that one form of revelation of God is definitive and normative compared to others.'48
The range of teachings in the world religions provide very different accounts of the nature of ultimate reality. Certainly, not all believe that there is a supreme being who is omnipotent in the classical Christian sense. Furthermore, not all even affirm the existence of a personal supreme being. Yet to describe God as 'all loving' requires, at least, a personal God capable of love and relationship. Hick's case for universalism depends upon the truth of the Christian conception of God as personal, all powerful and all loving. The position to which his universalism leads him requires that he remain uncertain about the ultimate validity of universalism.

Another example of how crucial this change of position is may be found at the end of Death and Eternal Life. At this stage Hick was willing to confess that certain schools of Eastern thought must be wrong if his own hypothesis were right. He no longer makes such statements. All major religious traditions have equal insights into the nature of ultimate reality. Consequently, while Hick affirms that the Christian God is a personal manifestation of the ultimate reality, that ultimate being cannot truly be understood as either personal or non-personal. However, the basis of at least his Christian case for universalism and his proposed answer to the problem of suffering depend upon the notion of a personal, purposeful, loving God. His description of Ultimate Reality cannot sustain the notion.

Universalism remains an attractive position. However, it must be asked how far it provides an adequate interpretation of the New Testament. Clearly, we are not free to create reality the way we wish that it would be but must have some source of information about the way things really are. If one accepts that Scripture provides this source of information then the proper interpretation of the New Testament will remain the deciding factor on this issue.

2 The Uniqueness of Christ

It is belief in the uniqueness of Jesus as God Incarnate that prevents many Christians from following Hick along the pluralist road. If Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, then he is God's self-revelation to humanity. Such a self-revelation is necessarily unique and superior to any other ways of understanding God. Furthermore, according to the traditional Christian position, part of the uniqueness of Christ lies in the atonement. The work that Christ came to do on the cross was a unique act of atonement: reconciling a guilty world to himself. Consequently, the person and work of Christ are absolutely crucial, normative and central tenets of the Christian faith and
prevent any attempt to relativise Christianity as one religious option among many.

It is important in responding to Hick’s work to stress that the doctrine of the incarnation does not depend on the early Church creeds of Chalcedon and Nicea but is firmly rooted in the New Testament. Hick is quite right to point out that the ways in which these councils sought to express their understanding of Christ were not ways in which Jesus or the Gospel writers would have expressed themselves in their own time. However, it does not follow that the later creeds diverge from and are incompatible with the faith of the New Testament Church and the teachings of Jesus himself.

Hick subscribes to an evolutionary model of Christology. According to this model, the way Jesus was understood by the later Church had evolved from a much simpler belief held by the early Church. He describes the historical Jesus as an ordinary human being profoundly aware of the divine reality as only a few other figures in history have been. Subsequent reflection by the early Church on their experience of the impact he had made led to poetic attempts to describe him. These are embedded in the New Testament. Much later philosophical thought at the Councils of Nicea and Chalcedon misunderstood the nature of such language and mistakenly attempted to state an ontological Christology. The identification of Jesus with God had poetic and metaphorical value but the councils misinterpreted this language as literal.

A very useful analysis of the relevant data is provided by C.F.D. Moule, latterly Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University, in *The Origin of Christology*. Moule presents a sustained critique of the evolutionary model and suggests a ‘developmental’ analogy as being a more accurate reflection of the evidence. According to this analogy, the way that the later Church described Jesus was a legitimate development from descriptions of him in the New Testament. The beliefs of the later Church were already present in the gospels though in an undeveloped form. We shall isolate a few strands from Moule’s work in order to locate belief that Jesus was God Incarnate in the New Testament.

Moule assesses the various titles that are used in the New Testament to describe Jesus and denies that these are the product of much later reflection or pagan thinking. A title of particular significance in this respect is the word LORD (Greek ‘Kurios’) that is often applied to Jesus. This word was used in Greek translations of the Old Testament to represent the sacred name of God: ‘Yahweh’. Moule notes a lesser sense in which ‘Lord’ need only mean a term of respect, but these are only occasionally used of Jesus. Hence, ‘Kurios’ was
used to signify divinity. As further evidence of this point Moule cites Josephus, the Jewish historian, who referred to the refusal of Jews to declare the Roman Emperor 'Lord' ('Kurios') because this expression was reserved for divinity. Yet it is this title that is used of Jesus in the very early strands of the New Testament. Philippians 2:6-11 provides a clear example of this. This is an early letter in itself but many scholars regard this section as a pre-Pauline hymn, dating it earlier still. The hymn contains the confession that Jesus is Lord (v 9-11) and this is a direct parallel to an Old Testament passage concerning Yahweh (Is. 45:23). The significance of attributing the title 'Lord' to the historical Jesus is a daring pronouncement of his divine status.

Another early indication of how Jesus was regarded is found in the worship given to Jesus. Moule points out that worship is offered to Jesus in the New Testament that should be reserved for God alone. The Greek word for worship ('proskunein') can mean either worship to God or respectful homage paid to a person. However, in the New Testament, the word is reserved primarily for worship of God (Matt. 4:9f, Lk. 4:7f, Ac. 10:26, Rev. 19:10; 22:9). This same worship is offered to Jesus. Furthermore, Moule provides a number of examples of Jesus being described as far more than a man. His significance is taken to be of cosmic, corporate proportions. A useful line of evidence lies in the resurrection accounts that point to both the divinity and humanity of Christ. The resurrection event dominates the New Testament witness to Christ and any attempt to understand him without accounting for the resurrection is suspect. Klaas Runia, a Professor of Theology in the Netherlands, notes that in the contributions to the Myth of God Incarnate it 'is striking that the resurrection of Christ plays hardly any role at all'. This is certainly true of Hick's account in that volume.

Whoever the disciples understood him to be, he was clearly much more than a man. According to Moule the disciples:

'...attribute to him a unique closeness to God and a divine, creative initiative, which marks him off from their conception of what each believer - precisely because of him and through him - may become.'

The evolutionary model pictures Jesus as a man so open to the divine reality that others who met him found in him an example for their own lives and chose to follow him. The model argues that the deification of Jesus was a later subsequent step in Christian thought. Moule challenges such a picture with the evidence. The reason why Jesus was seen to be a model for the believer was the result of, not the cause of, Jesus being understood as God incarnate. Colin Gunton, Professor of Christian Doctrine at London University, criticises the notion that Jesus was later understood as God Incarnate because he was first seen as a great moral example: Jesus is an example because he and he
alone is the incarnate Son who by the enabling of the Holy Spirit remained unfallen where we universally fall'\textsuperscript{56}

While Hick has dealt directly with some issues in New Testament studies\textsuperscript{57} his major objection to the incarnation is derived from philosophical considerations rather than biblical studies. The reason why the doctrine of the incarnation cannot be accepted at face value lies in the incoherence of the concept. According to Hick, any attempt to express the meaning of the incarnation is either treated as heretical by the Church or fails to convey anything intelligible. The Council of Chalcedon expressed the identity of Jesus in the following way:

'...our Lord Jesus Christ...truly God and truly man... of one substance with the Father as regards his Godhead, and at the same time of one substance with us as regards his manhood...

Hick suggests that 'the council in effect merely asserted that Jesus was "truly God and truly man" without attempting to say how such a paradox is possible'.\textsuperscript{59} In other words, the dogmatic assertion does not specify the meaning of the incarnation. Hick has criticised various attempts to spell out the doctrine as either unintelligible or incompatible with Chalcedon.

Hick's objection is to the apparent difficulty of describing a historic human being as both the individual human being, Jesus and the individual divine being, God. This objection has two elements. Firstly, there is the impossibility of describing one person as two distinct people. I cannot be both Matthew and Robert. I could be a hybrid human or either person but I cannot be both simultaneously. Secondly, there is the specific problem of the compatibility of humanity and divinity. If part of the necessary definition of God is that He is all-knowing and all-powerful and part of the necessary definition of being a human is to be limited in knowledge and power (i.e. necessarily something less than God) then it is impossible for someone to be both human and God. Hick describes such a claim as logically similar to the claim that there could be a square circle.

The assumption underlying this claim is that we know that the incarnation is impossible factually because impossible conceptually. We cannot believe the event to have occurred in history unless we can provide a conceptual account of the event. Interestingly, Hick does not deny that the Council of Chalcedon might have been right in its description of Jesus, he only argues that we have no right to believe that it has happened unless we can state exactly what it is we are talking about in modern conceptual terms.
This requirement is highly unreasonable. If an ancient Indian prince were to have travelled to a far country and seen ice for the first time he would probably not understand how it was possible that water could become solid. Upon returning to his homeland he would certainly not be able to explain how this was possible to his contemporaries. Pursuing Hick’s logic neither the Indian prince nor his countrymen would be entitled to believe that solid water was possible. The evidence of eyesight or testimony would not be credible unless the processes and mechanisms involved could be spelled out in contextually meaningful terms. The attempts of the disciples, New Testament writers, early Church and Church Councils to give some propositional statement of their experience of Christ were clearly not attempts to give complete, philosophical accounts of the incarnation. The doctrine of the incarnation as stated by the councils is an attempt to do two things. Firstly, the statements reflect what Christians found to be true of the Scriptures and their experience. To be true to these sources, Christians confessed that Jesus was indeed God and was also human. The second objective of such statements was the identification and exclusion of heresy. Even while the New Testament was being written, false views of who Jesus was were creeping into the Church. Some parts of the New Testament are written to combat such views (such as 1 John). The later creeds were formulated in such a way as to exclude certain erroneous views. The meaning of the incarnation was made better known by excluding certain false views; such as the belief that Jesus only appeared like a human being. It is unfair to empty the doctrine of the incarnation of meaning on the grounds that it cannot be stated in terms of one particular philosophical tradition. The truth of the incarnation is no less literal for being made known to us in the Gospels through narrative.

Hick’s attempt to exclude the possibility of the incarnation also involves an assumption that one knows what it means to be fully God or even to be fully human in order to categorically exclude the possibility of these ever being in harmony in one person. For many Christians, their reading of scripture, understanding of history and personal experience provide the grounds for their belief in a truth that may not be stated in the terms required by Hick. Runia, having attempted to state the incarnation in modern terminology, admits that,

‘[t]he incarnation remains a mystery that can never be “explained”. All we can do is to “describe” it by listening carefully to the witness of Scripture and expounding what this witness ... communicates to us. But even in this exposition the mystery itself remains fully inexplicable...’

60
3 Mythology and Truth

We have already seen that Hick draws a distinction between the form in which we know God and what God is really like (see 2.1 and 3.4). This distinction holds true for all things that are beyond the natural order. Heaven, hell, angels and demons are also human ways of understanding supernatural reality rather than facts about the supernatural. Hick draws a very clear distinction between how we picture and experience supernatural reality (the phenomenon) and what that reality is really like in and of itself (the noumenon). This distinction leads him to make a linguistic observation that there are primarily two forms of language use: the literal and the mythological. Literal language assumes a direct relation between a description of an object and the object described. Mythological language has no such direct relation. According to Hick, metaphor and myth are uses of language that do not intend to specify in a literal sense the meaning of their objects. Rather, they have a function in evoking human experience and inspiring a particular kind of behaviour. Hence, the incarnation was not a literal event in history (describing the identity of Jesus) but a metaphorical expression (evoking appropriate subjective responses in those who use that language). The truth test for mythological language use does not lie in testing how far that language accurately represents its objects but in what kind of behaviour it evokes.

The myth/literal distinction is deeply unsatisfactory when applied to religious language. To attempt to categorise all truth claims as either mythological or literal suggests an unwillingness to engage with the sensitivity of language in general and religious language in particular. Some recent writers have pointed out the difficulty of substantiating the claim that all language with clear ontological import can be expressed in non-metaphorical terms. On the contrary, even in ordinary discourse we must rely a great deal on the metaphorical use of language. How much more so must we rely upon it when attempting to describe aspects of reality that are beyond sense experience. Even in scientific discourse much use is made of metaphorical language. Obvious examples would include descriptions of light and radio ‘waves’. Nonetheless, literal meanings are implied.

This problem becomes most acute with the incarnation debate. Hick understands the incarnation as a mythological picture designed to evoke an appropriate dispositional response in the believer. It is quite true that metaphor must be used in describing the incarnation. Jesus is not the ‘Son of God’ in the same way that men are sons of their parents. Nor is God the ‘Father’ in the same way that men can be fathers. However, the use of
metaphorical language need not imply that the incarnation is a myth any
more than describing light as 'waves' implies light waves are mythological.
According to Hick, the incarnation cannot be understood in literal terms
because it fails to mean anything literally: it cannot be stated without, at some
point, recourse to metaphor, narrative, paradox and mystery. Hick excludes
the doctrine of the incarnation from the status of literal truth because it cannot
be stated in the way required by Hick's theory of language.

The cash value of a mythological interpretation of the exclusive statements in
religious belief is a basis for what is called relativism. According to
relativism, truth claims are only valid within the limitations of a cultural and
intellectual context. They have no absolute or ultimate status. Every major
religion has made unique, absolute or exclusive claims for the status of beliefs
regarding saviours, revelation, scriptures or moral codes. When understood
in terms of Hick's epistemology they cannot be understood to convey absolute
truth concerning ultimate reality. As mythological statements they are
interpreted as a type of language designed to evoke certain patterns of
behaviour rather than attempting to provide literal descriptions of reality. In
accordance with this new understanding of language, religious truth claims
are not in conflict because of differences in meaning (i.e. one claiming that
God is personal and one claiming that God is impersonal) but only if the
behaviour they evoke is at odds. However, Hick points out that the moral
codes and lifestyles of the major world religions have enough in common and
so little in conflict that one can assume all their major myths have equal
validity. Hence, particular claims about the character of God, the location of
revelation and so on have only relative truth value.

The price of this relativism undercuts Hick's entire project. We have seen that
Hick has wanted to maintain that the core of religious belief is literally true
(see 3.4). Hick would not want all religious language to be reduced to the
status of myth. If it were then religion would be no more than a helpful set of
images with an important function but no bearing on reality. In particular,
descriptions of the after-life were understood by Hick to refer to a real event
that occurs beyond death. However, if all the major world religions have
equally valid insights regarding ultimate reality then the bulk of religious
truth claims must be interpreted as myths. The remaining number of literal
truth claims would be alarmingly small. The core literal beliefs that would
remain after such a reductionist account would probably be the existence of a
Higher reality and that life will be extended beyond death.62 There is nothing
specifically Christian about these remaining claims and that is, of course, the
point. These are the residual truth claims of the major world religions when
their various optional, mythological packagings are stripped away.
This program of reductionism raises two serious objections. Firstly, is there enough basis even to protect these truth claims from being re-interpreted along mythological lines? After all, some humanist, atheist and Marxist worldviews have a somewhat religious dimension too. Pluralism is obliged to credit such non-supernatural worldviews with equal validity insofar as they inculcate a pattern of high moral behaviour. If an entire religious belief system is reduced to its mythological function it can still be valued for the behaviour it produces in people without it needing to have any bearing on objective reality. This final step of reductionism may become necessary as one realises that even talk about ‘Ultimate Reality’ or ‘life after death’ involves metaphor, paradox and mystery. The core of religious belief follows the export of the incarnation from the realm of literal truth to the realm of mythological truth. If this happens then pluralism is self-defeating as it ends up denying that there is any ultimate reality informing the plurality of world religions.

The second objection concerns whether many religious believers could accept such a minimalist account of their own religion be they Buddhist, Muslim, Christian or of any other religion. For Christians, Hick’s account lacks the distinctive historical nature of religious truth claims. Christianity is not a religion of an abstract, moral philosophy. It is a religion rooted in claims about particular historical events. As Lesslie Newbigin, missionary and theologian, writes: The Christian faith is a particular way of understanding history as a whole which finds in the story about Jesus its decisive clue.63 Does the pluralist reductionist account offer an adequate description of any given religious world view? If not then Hick’s work fails as an interpretation of religion and must, instead, be understood as a radical reinterpretation of religions and a manifesto for a new development in religious self-consciousness, albeit one which may be more attractive to those of an agnostic persuasion. Harold Netland, a critic of Hick, points this out:

‘Hick, of course, is free to reinterpret such doctrines in mythological terms, but it must be recognised that in so doing he is parting company with the vast majority of religious believers in the major traditions.’64

The pluralist reinterpretation of religions is methodologically agnostic. This means that while Hick may remain a theist in his personal beliefs he must acknowledge when in dialogue with those of other religions that these beliefs are only one set of images among many, including the non-theistic, that help people orient themselves to the Real. Such a procedure is alien to the thought world of most religions. Consequently, one may doubt whether the pluralist hypothesis could ever facilitate greater understanding among followers of
different religions. Rather, it may lead to a mutual reinterpretation and misunderstanding between these people.

4 Christianity and Other Religions

The traditional ways in which Christians have understood other religions tend to be understood in terms of two positions. Exclusivism is often understood as the mainstream position of the historic church. According to this position, salvation and revelation are known exclusively through Christ. Some special knowledge of Christ is necessary in order for anyone to share in that salvation. The Inclusivist position has become particularly prominent in the last two hundred years. This position maintains that salvation remains the work of Christ but understands that salvation to be mediated through the saving structures of the world religions which bear an implicit witness to Christ. Adherents of other religions may then be included in Christ's work. Different thinkers tend to be classified in one of these two positions but there is a great deal of overlap between the two.

Hick does not deny that such positions could be true. He admits that no irrefutable evidence can be produced to prove that they are false. Nonetheless, Hick does argue that they are not very plausible positions to take in the light of the world religions. The wisdom and culture they have engendered, the moral fruits they have produced and the 'saints' that have appeared in the course of their histories all suggest that other religions have their own unique place and value as products of the influence of the ultimate divine reality. Hence, the most plausible account of the world religions pictures them all as various pathways up the same mountainside, all eventually reaching the same summit. This image points to another internal inconsistency in the pluralist account. Pluralism denies the possibility or desirability of having an absolute, cosmic vantage point from which to assess all other religions. Such vantage points are the products of exclusivist religions isolated from the realities of religious pluralism. However, it is just such a vantage point that pluralism claims for itself.65

Hick's theology of religions interprets the central teachings and beliefs of all the world religions in terms of a supposed ethical core. In so doing, all points of disagreement are relativised in importance while a common moral code is isolated as the underlying truth at the root of all religions. The fundamental question that needs to be addressed is whether one can isolate the 'moral code' of a religion apart from the doctrinal framework or belief system in which a religion finds its meaning. Beliefs and 'pictures' of God or Nirvana are not optional, mythological packagings distinct from the ethical core. They
are the underlying truth that provides the meaning of the ethical codes and motivation to pursue them. Religious beliefs, however theoretical they may seem, are indistinguishable from the rituals, practices and lifestyles they produce. If this is true then there are no easy answers to the problem of conflicting truth claims. They represent sincere points of difference between religions demanding that we respect them in their distinctiveness.

As an example of the former point we may consider the Christian understanding of morality and belief. According to Hick, the Christian moral code is summed up by Jesus in the so-called 'golden rule' that we should love our neighbours as ourselves. Furthermore, similar golden rules are to be found in all the major traditions. Hick interprets the purpose of Christian life (and all religious life) as the pursuit of human transformation from self-centredness to reality-centredness. Netland criticises this reductionist presentation of the goal of the religious life:

'...as it stands this is largely a formal formula lacking specific content, and each religious tradition would contribute strikingly different content to the formula.'

For example, the Buddhist concept of the ego and the Christian concept of sin are not two ways of talking about 'self-centredness' they represent distinct beliefs informed by distinct contexts.

What is missing from Hick's account is mention of a central feature in the New Testament account of salvation and ethics; namely, a theology of grace. The New Testament writers are agreed that in Christ there is a new means of human transformation that is not a matter of pursuing a particular ethical code in order to transform oneself. The theology of grace speaks of the initial transformation as the gift of God (Eph. 2:10-11). Transformation begins with the gift of God in Christ and, through this gift, one finds the resources to pursue the Christian ethic. So clear is this teaching in the New Testament that there are even passages written in response to the misuse of grace as a principle of licence (Rom. 6:1, Ja. 2:14). Furthermore, for Christians the 'golden rule' cannot be divorced from its context as the demand that we love God with all our heart, mind and will. A demand that would be counter-productive if required of the Buddhist toward Nirvana.

As distinct from certain schools of Eastern thought Christianity and Judaism are religions rooted in history. The exodus from Egypt is the constant refrain of the Old Testament. In the New Testament the various teachings, no matter how abstract, are all founded on the historical claims concerning the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. The revelation that is central to Christian belief is located in history rather than in human subjectivity. Hence,
Christians are not free to alter doctrine to suit contemporary thinking but must continually reappraise themselves in the light of God's revelation through Christ in Scripture.

We have had reason to dispute the pluralist account of the world religions. However, this is only half of the story. Hick's provocative work in the theology of religions has been presented as the most plausible explanation of religious phenomena. It is not enough to refute his analysis one also needs to present a better alternative. There is not, of course, space here to argue in favour of an orthodox account of Christianity but we shall finish by briefly considering evangelical interpretations of other religions.

We have seen that there is a degree of overlap between exclusivist and inclusivist positions. However, most evangelicals would be exclusivist in their interpretation of other religions. This does not mean that they deny that anyone outside of confessional Christianity can be saved. In fact, most choose to remain agnostic about God's work among the unevangelised. Some, like Norman Anderson, offer suggestions as to how some non-Christians may realise their own sin and need of grace and cast themselves on God's mercy. There is reason to hope that in doing so God will reach out to them in their need. Paul Helm gives further philosophical justification for how this could be so. All these writers agree that salvation is through Christ alone and not through the structures of any religions (including Christianity when understood as a religious institution). However, they do not restrict God's saving activity to those who explicitly confess Christ. However, God's judgement on sin is a righteous judgement and the emphasis on grace reminds us that no one deserves to be saved. Rather than speculate on the details of who will or will not be finally saved outside of the Christian community these evangelicals ask with Abraham, 'Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?' (Gen. 18:25).

The insistence on the exclusiveness of salvation through Christ alone (texts commonly understood to imply this include John 14:6 and Acts 4:12) disputes the possibility that salvation can be gained through other religions. If they are saved, then adherents of other religions are then understood as being saved in spite of their religions rather than through their religions. One might think this would lead only to a negative evaluation of other religions as demonic, idolatorous or human perversions. This need not be the case.

To affirm that salvation is through Christ alone and that this salvation is not mediated through the world religions allows for an interpretation of other religions on their own terms. Rather than interpreting other religions as implicitly witnessing to Christ (and facing the danger of entirely misinterpreting them), the exclusivist can consider other religions as
genuinely ‘other’ and allow them to speak for themselves as to what they believe and teach. Some religions may have goals that are entirely unrelated to salvation as understood by Christians.

The question remains: of what value are non-Christian religions? This cannot be answered in any general sense because they are such diverse movements. However, no one need deny a priori that they may offer and promote much that a Christian values. The Evangelical Alliance statement on other faiths affirms that:

There is much in other faiths which is in harmony with the Christian faith, e.g. the sense of the tremendous majesty of God, so clearly proclaimed by Islam ... and the love and adoration of a personal God, found in Sikhism and the bhakti movements in Hinduism.70

Exclusivists rarely ‘write off’ all other religions as if they were of no value. Nonetheless, they have no desire to compromise the belief that salvation and a relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has been made possible through the atoning work of the Son, Jesus Christ. It is this message of reconciliation that exclusivists believe is of universal validity and significance and thus they make every effort to proclaim this ‘gospel’ throughout the world.
CHAPTER FIVE

Conclusion

During the course of his academic career, John Hick has sustained a prestigious literary output and become known as a leading radical theologian of the twentieth century. He has never shied away from some of the most perplexing and pressing problems facing Christians in the modern world. Central to his endeavours has been what he has considered an 'apologetic' for Christianity today; a justification of religious belief in a largely secular age, a consideration of the problem of evil and a new proposal for the world religions. He has spanned both philosophy and theology in his deliberations and tackled each problem with integrity and honesty. Furthermore, these complex issues have been handled with a clarity of thought that has made his academic books some of the most accessible of our day.

We have had reason to note the trajectory of his career from 'fundamentalist' to 'radical' as he has pursued this range of questions. The pluralist hypothesis, with which we have been primarily concerned, is not some ill-thought out, ad hoc piece of argument. It is the developed philosophy of a man deeply engaged in both academic reflection and inter-religious dialogue. Hick has been a passionate defender and promoter of his conclusions in debate, dialogue and publishing throughout the world.

However, we have also had reason to note deeply unsatisfactory aspects of his thought. There is a problem of consistency regarding the assumption in favour of universalism. We have mentioned scholarly work in biblical studies that have given cause to doubt the sceptical and radical conclusions drawn from the New Testament. There are growing numbers of biblical and systematic theologians who are finding the kind of arguments put forward by the contributors to The Myth of God Incarnate less and less convincing. Hick's treatment of religious language and his philosophical assessment of central orthodox beliefs rest on a particular western stream of 'empiricist' thought that is coming under increasing criticism from various, particularly continental, schools of thought. Finally, we have noted some difficulties in the pluralist hypothesis itself that make it unsatisfactory, not only for Christians, but for mainstream believers in many of the major world religions. For evangelicals, Hick's work remains unacceptable in its description of a Christianity without incarnation, atonement, resurrection, Trinity, special grace or verbal revelation. Hick presents very clearly what is at stake for those who adopt the pluralist hypothesis.
The primary positive assessment of Hick's work that we may note is that he has set a significant agenda for contemporary theology. It is profoundly important that Christians do respond to the questions that his thought has raised and offer accounts of faith, evil, the incarnation and the world religions that tackle the objections he has made. In so doing, orthodox theology will be enriched and the gospel better understood in the present and coming generation.
FURTHER READING

Professor Hick has had an enormous literary output during the course of his career. However, there are some helpful shorter books that provide an overview of his ideas. Paul Badham has compiled a number of Hick's own essays in *A John Hick Reader* (Macmillan 1990). John Hick's *Philosophy of Religion* (Fourth Edition, Prentice Hall 1990) provides not only a useful introduction to philosophy but also brief essays describing his own position on epistemology, theodicy and the world religions.

John Hick's *God and the Universe of Faiths* (Macmillan 1973) provides a basic statement of the pluralist position while *An Interpretation of Religion* (Macmillan 1989) is the most comprehensive statement of and defence for his position to date.

There is a great deal of critical material on Hick. One of the best single volume collections of this material is *Problems in the Philosophy of Religion* (Macmillan 1991). This includes chapters by various writers on the most important themes in Hick's work. There are also responses to each writer by Hick himself. The first part provides a particularly useful discussion of *An Interpretation of Religion*. Paul Helm's *The Varieties of Belief* (George Allen & Unwin 1973) includes an incisive critique of Hick's epistemology (chapter eight). There is a helpful treatment of evil and universalism in a collection of papers edited by Nigel M. de S. Cameron *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell* (Paternoster/Baker 1992). On the incarnation debate, Moule's *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge University Press 1977) is a modern classic. N. T. Wright in *Who was Jesus?* (SPCK 1992) responds to a number of radical writers (though not including Hick) and provides much useful material.

The most comprehensive treatment of Hick's pluralism is provided by Gavin D'Costa's *John Hick's Theology of Religions* (University Press of America 1987). D'Costa also includes a comprehensive bibliography of Hick's published writings up to 1987. Chester Gillis has written a wide ranging response to Hick in *A Question of Final Belief* (Macmillan 1989). Harold Netland surveys the wider problems of Christianity and other religions in *Dissonant Voices* (Apollos 1991) which includes a fine summary of Hick's pluralism and some excellent critical material.

Of course, pluralism is only one attempt to understand the world religions. There are two useful introductions to various ways in which Christians have sought to respond to religious pluralism. These are Gavin D'Costa's *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Blackwell 1986) and Alan Race's *Christians and Religious Pluralism* (SCM 1983). Growing numbers of evangelicals are writing
on these issues. One of the best statements of an evangelical response to pluralism is Norman Anderson's *Christianity and the World Religions* (IVP 1984). While written in a way that will be understood by those without an academic interest in the subject, Anderson includes discussion of major theological positions including John Hick, Hans Küng and Karl Rahner. He also provides a balanced assessment of the fate of the unevangelised. Finally, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (SPCK 1989) by Lesslie Newbigin is well worth careful consideration as are most of the books from his pen.

Notes

John Hick's works are referred to by date only. Full details of these and the other works listed can be found in the Bibliography.

2 The Theosophical movement was a western form of Hindu philosophy.
4 Hick (1992), p. 139.
5 Hick studied theology at Westminster College, Cambridge, as part of his Presbyterian training. His only formal qualification in theology is an honorary doctorate from Uppsala University in Sweden.
6 Hick (1957).
8 Hick (1985), p. 3.
9 Hick (1966).
12 Hick (1976)
14 Hick (1989).
15 Hick (1957), chapter 1.
20 Hick (1966), p. 3.


Hick (1976), p. 259f. On Barth and universalism see his treatment of the doctrine of election in *Church Dogmatics* Vol. II part 2. Whether Barth was in fact a universalist remains debatable.


Hick (1973), Chapter 11.

Hick (1973), Chapter 11.


This is a ‘degree’ Christology in the tradition of Schleiermacher.


See the useful discussion of universalism in Helm in Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*.

Moule, *The Origin of Christology*.

Ibid., p. 35.
53 Runia, *The Present-day Christological debate*.


55 Moule, *op. cit.*, p. 103.

56 Gunton *The Actuality of Atonement*, p. 158.


60 Runia *op. cit.*, p. 108.


64 Netland, *Dissonant Voices*, p. 232.

65 For a useful treatment of this theme see D'Costa, pp. 141-142.


68 Anderson, *Christianity and the World Religions*.

69 Helm in Cameron (ed.), *Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell*, p. 278

70 *Christianity and Other Faiths: An Evangelical contribution to our Multi-Faith Society*, p. 22.
# BIBLIOGRAPHY

## Works by John Hick

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1957</td>
<td><em>Faith and Knowledge</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1966</td>
<td><em>Evil and the God of Love</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1973</td>
<td><em>God and the Universe of Faiths</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1976</td>
<td><em>Death and Eternal Life</em></td>
<td>London: Collins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td><em>God has Many Names</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td><em>Problems in Religious Pluralism</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td><em>Encountering Jesus</em></td>
<td>John Knox Press</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td><em>An Interpretation of Religion</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td><em>Disputed Questions</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>'Straightening the Record: Some Responses to Critics'</td>
<td><em>Modern Theology</em> 6, no2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


## Other Works

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Publisher</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N Anderson</td>
<td><em>Christianity and World Religions</em></td>
<td>Leicester: IVP, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Barth</td>
<td><em>Church Dogmatics</em> vol II</td>
<td>Edinburgh: T&amp;T Clark, 1960</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N M de S Cameron (ed)</td>
<td><em>Universalism and the Doctrine of Hell</em></td>
<td>Carlisle: Paternoster, 1992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G D’Costa</td>
<td><em>J Hick’s Theology of Religions</em></td>
<td>University Press of America, 1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Theology and Religious Pluralism</em></td>
<td>Oxford: Blackwell, 1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Gillis</td>
<td><em>A Question of Final Belief</em></td>
<td>Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Gunton</td>
<td><em>The Actuality of the Atonement</em></td>
<td>Edinburgh: T&amp;T Clark, 1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>P Helm</td>
<td><em>Varieties of Belief</em></td>
<td>George Allen &amp; Unwin, 1973</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Author</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Publisher and Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaspers</td>
<td><em>The Origin and Goal of History</em></td>
<td>New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C Moule</td>
<td><em>The Origin of Christology</em></td>
<td>Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H Netland</td>
<td><em>Dissonant Voices</em></td>
<td>Apollos: Leicester, 1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K Runia</td>
<td><em>The Present-Day Christological Debate</em></td>
<td>Leicester: IVP, 1984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N T Wright</td>
<td><em>Who was Jesus?</em></td>
<td>London: SPCK, 1992</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Christianity and Other Faiths: An Evangelical Contribution to Our Multi-Faith Society*  
Evangelical Alliance
Chris Sinkinson completed a degree in English and Philosophy at Southampton University, before undertaking a research degree at Bristol University on the subject of John Hick and rationality.

He now works full-time with students in the South West of England, and lives with his wife Ros in Bath.

When not thinking theologically, Chris enjoys walking his dog and browsing through second hand book shops.

ISBN 1 870137 19 1
38 De Montfort Street, Leicester LE1 7GP