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The 'other'

I

RELATIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND JEWS, 1914–2000

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It is something of an under-statement to describe 1914 to 2000 as a significant period for Jewish–Christian relations. Two key events included the destruction of European Jewry during the Nazi Holocaust of 1933–45 and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. These had profound implications for modern Jewish identity and also posed powerful challenges to the Christian churches in terms of traditional attitudes and theology. Ultimately, the scope and content of any survey of Christian interaction with the Jewish other in the twentieth century are determined by these events.

One problem that must be addressed from the outset relates to the boundaries of the interaction. It is important to recognise the fragmented nature of the Jewish community in the modern world, just as for the Christian community. Ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Liberal and Progressive, Reconstructionist, and a wide range of secular Jews are among some of the groups that comprise the Jewish 'community' that has emerged since the Enlightenment. In contrast to a common view of Christianity as being religiously or theologically defined, Jewish identity is more complex and can be expressed in ways that are often regarded as non-religious. One way, Zionism, the movement for the establishment and maintenance of a Jewish state, is in many of its forms entirely unreligious, even anti-religious. Again, a large proportion of the six million Jewish victims of the Holocaust did not, in fact, regard themselves religiously as Jews, but rather as secularists or as assimilated Christians of Jewish descent. It seems necessary, despite the

dangers inherent, to speak of Jewish culture in the widest possible sense. Having said that, the explicitly religious dimensions of Jewish–Christian interaction during this period will be the primary focus here.

The Nazi Holocaust, the systematic, state-sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six million Jews together with many millions of others, was perpetrated by Germans and their collaborators at all levels of society and throughout many Christian countries. It raises a number of profound questions for humankind in general, but this should not detract from the specific problems that it poses for Christianity. Few historians today would support the so-called 'rhetoric of continuity', the claim to trace a direct path from the 'teaching of contempt'[1] and the hostility that emerged between early followers of Jesus and other Jews in the first century, to the racial, pseudo-scientific, eliminationist, anti-semitism of the twentieth. Nevertheless, Christian anti-Judaism, while not a sufficient cause, was surely a necessary one. Despite the anti-religious tendencies of the Third Reich, Nazi propagandists were quick to tap into a rich vein of anti-semitism that lay close to the surface of European Christian culture. Thus the Munich 1936 edition of Martin Luther's selected works included his virulent polemic 'On the Jews and their lies' (1543).[2] Such materials reinforced racist propaganda and made it possible for an ostensibly Christian society to turn a blind eye to the treatment of the Jews. Those who professed a Christian faith could be found among death camp staff and mobile killing squads as well as among the bureaucrats and technocrats who administered the process of liquidation. Peasants throughout eastern Europe acquiesced in the confiscation of Jewish property and justified the treatment of the Jews as punishment for the ancient crime of deicide.

At the institutional level, the Roman Catholic church has been criticised for its 'silence' and for the inadequacy of its diplomatic efforts during the Holocaust. Eugenio Pacelli, the future Pius XII (1939–58), implemented a concordat or treaty with the Nazis only six months after they came to power. It gave international credence to the Nazi regime and seriously undermined Christian resistance by pledging non-interference in political matters. During Pius XII's papacy, a fear of the godless Bolsheviks and a determination to maintain a general policy of neutrality for the sake of its followers and for diplomatic reasons compromised the position of the Vatican with regard to

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1 Jules Isaac, *The teaching of contempt: Christian roots of anti-semitism*, trans. Helen Weaver (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1964).
2 H. H. Borcherdt and Georg Merz (eds.), *Martin Luther: ausgewählte Werke* (Munich: 1934–8), vol. III, pp. 61–228. The 1922 and 1948 editions did not include this treatise.

the Nazi treatment of the Jews. In his 1942 Christmas message, Pius XII refrained from explicitly mentioning either the Nazis or the Jews, although he spoke of 'hundreds of thousands of persons who, without any fault on their part, sometimes only because of their nationality or race, have been consigned to death or to a slow decline'. Claims that the church secured the lives of thousands of Jews through diplomatic channels and by hiding large numbers in monasteries are contentious, although towards the end of the war Pius XII did encourage church representatives in Germany and Hungary to provide humanitarian assistance to Nazi victims.

Protestantism under the Nazi regime was complicated by the establishment in 1933 of the German Evangelical church, a federation of Lutheran, Reformed and United territorial churches. A right-wing faction, the German Christians' Faith movement, gained control. In addition to suggesting that the Old Testament and Paul's epistles should be expunged from the canon on the grounds of their Jewishness, the 'German Christians' supported the doctrine of Aryan racial supremacy. Opposition arose in the shape of the Pastors' Emergency League, founded by the Lutheran Martin Niemöller, and in May 1934 the synod of Barmen established the Confessing Church, with the Lutheran Dietrich Bonhoeffer among its leading pastors. Despite some successes in opposing the 'German Christians' and Nazis, such as the role they played along with others in pressuring the government in 1941 to find alternatives to the euthanasia programme for the mentally ill and disabled, the leadership of the Confessing Church was fragmented – and ambiguous in its attitude towards the Jews. Niemöller was imprisoned from 1937 until the end of the war and Bonhoeffer was arrested in 1943 and executed in 1945. The Nazis were able to take full advantage of lack of unity and internal conflicts within the Protestant church. Those few Protestant leaders who protested against the treatment of the Jews often did so despite a theologically negative attitude to Judaism. Thus at the same time as teaching that Christians should not persecute the Jews, Bonhoeffer and Niemöller both explicitly maintained that the suffering of the Jews was punishment from God for the ancient rejection and murder of his Son, and looked forward to the conversion of Israel.[3]

After the death and destruction of the Holocaust, the birth of the modern state of Israel in 1948 represents the second most significant development in Jewish–Christian relations in the twentieth century. The very concept of a

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3 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *No rusty swords: letters, lectures and notes 1928–1936*, ed. and trans. Edwin Robertson (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 225–6; Martin Niemoeller, *Here stand I!*, trans. Jane Lymburn (Chicago and New York: Willett, Clark & Co., 1937), p. 195.

Jewish state represents a challenge to traditional Christian and Muslim theologies. The Jews were represented for many centuries as adherents of a superseded religion and murderers of God. In punishment for their stubborn perversity, they were exiled from their land, denuded of political power, condemned to wander the earth. Despite this, philosemitic traditions have co-existed in Christian thought and the modern Zionist project has therefore met with a range of Christian responses.

The term 'Christian Zionists' covers a wide spectrum of groups with a variety of perspectives, from biblical literalists who regarded the return of the exiles to Israel as a stage in the divine plan that heralds the return of Christ, to liberal thinkers whose pronounced ecumenicalism and internalisation of the lessons of the Holocaust led them to unconditional support for Israeli state policy. In the sense of a romanticised, mythologised view of the Jewish people, Christian Zionism was an important influence in the period in question. An example of this was the role that religion played in the proclamation of the Balfour Declaration in 1917.[4] This document made public the British government's support for 'the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people'. There were a number of British statesmen, including Arthur Balfour and Prime Minister Lloyd George, whose familiarity with scripture encouraged them to see their support of Zionism as fulfilment of a historical mission. To them the announcement that signalled the intent to return the land to the ancient people of Israel, an announcement made just as British forces were poised to capture Jerusalem from the Ottoman Turks, appealed as a grand symbolic gesture of historic justice. It would be simplistic to regard the declaration solely or even mainly in terms of religious agendas. Nevertheless, the intersection of religion and politics at this point cannot be ignored in any account of why Britain set aside the interests of the Arab inhabitants of the land, who made up around 90 per cent of the population (10 per cent of whom were Arab Christians). In his own account, the Zionist leader Chaim Weizmann concluded that British statesmen 'believed in the Bible, that to them the return of the Jewish people to Palestine was a reality, so that we Zionists represented to them a great tradition for which they had an enormous respect'.[5] In the second half of the twentieth century, Christian Zionists were popular with successive Israeli governments in so far as they

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4 The declaration took the form of an open letter from Arthur Balfour to Lord Rothschild, 2 November 1917.
5 Chaim Weizmann, *Trial and error: the autobiography of Chaim Weizmann* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 200.

publicly supported government policies and channelled funds and Jewish immigrants from Russia and eastern European countries to Israel.

The Roman Catholic church took a more hostile stance towards Zionism and the Jewish state. In 1904 Pope Pius X had informed Theodor Herzl, the father of political Zionism:

> We cannot prevent the Jews from going to Jerusalem, but we could never sanction it. The ground of Jerusalem . . . has been sanctified by the life of Christ. As head of the Church I cannot answer you otherwise. The Jews have not recognized our Lord, therefore we cannot recognize the Jewish people . . . [T]o support the Jews in the acquisition of the Holy Places, that we cannot do.[6]

In December 1917 the Allies captured Jerusalem and, despite Vatican concerns over Protestant control, Pope Benedict XV could speak in 1919 of 'the rejoicing of all good men' that the holy places had been freed from 'the domination of infidels' and had 'finally returned into the hands of Christians'.[7] The possibility of Jewish control provoked a different reaction, however. In discussions of the 1947 UN partition plans, the Vatican supported the idea of the internationalisation of Jerusalem, and after the 1967 Six Day war it lobbied for the international status of Christian holy places. The Vatican refused to recognise the new state after its establishment in 1948 and continued this refusal even when Pope Paul VI spent a day in Israel in 1967. The traditional position softened under Pope John Paul II, who in 1980 spoke publicly of Israel and of the right of the Jewish people to a homeland. Formal recognition of the state of Israel by the Church of Rome came in December 1993.

Arguably, the rapprochement of Jews and Christians and the development of inter-faith relations at an international level had at least as much to do with the emergence of the state, confounding Christian traditional attitudes to the Jews, as it did with guilt relating to the Holocaust and the 'teaching of contempt'. From 1922 until 1948 the British had attempted to implement the League of Nations mandate for Palestine. This had involved the facilitation of Jewish immigration, Jewish settlement, and self-governing institutions, whilst preserving the civil rights of all the inhabitants of Palestine. Despite its formal internationalist credentials, the mandatory power had been ostensibly Christian, the first such administration there since the crusades. However, Christian political domination over Jews ended with the

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6 Theodor Herzl, *The complete diaries of Theodor Herzl*, ed. Raphael Patai, trans. Harry Zohn (New York and London: The Herzl Press, 1960), vol. IV, pp. 1602–3.

7 Speech to the College of Cardinals, cited in H. Eugene Bovis, *The Jerusalem question, 1917–1968* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1971), pp. 6–7.

UN recognition of Israel. The military victories of the Israeli War of Independence (1948) and the Six Day war (1967) against multiple Arab armies were impressive and unexpected. In contradiction to the negative images of the Jew as stateless, weak and parasitical, the modern Israeli state proved itself militarily and diplomatically effective, culturally vibrant and self-confident. The 1967 war was also significant because, to many Jewish observers, the churches had failed for the second time to speak out against the threat of Jewish annihilation. The embryonic inter-faith dialogue was shaken but eventually regained its balance, resulting in an increased comprehension among Christians as to the significance of Israel for the Jew. In addition to the theological challenges, the new state also posed new practical dilemmas. Following the Holocaust, Christians were faced with the delicate issue of how to approach the power-relations between Israelis and Palestinians. Steering a course between the claims of social justice and allegations of anti-semitic bias proved difficult.

It is against the background of the Holocaust that a number of controversial episodes in recent Jewish–Christian history can best be understood. All reflect a Jewish fear of the 'Christianisation of the Holocaust', that is, a perceived tendency of the church to emphasise Christian victimhood and heroism in such a way as to undermine the uniqueness of the Jewish experience. From the 1970s, US and western European Jewish communal institutions became fiercely protective of the memory of those murdered members of the Jewish people who, in contrast to other groups and largely without external support, had been targeted by the Nazis for total elimination. The counter-reaction by some Christians was to condemn what was regarded as the Jewish claim to a monopoly on suffering. On occasion, such criticisms were coloured by anti-semitic undertones.

The announcement in 1984 of a proposal to build a Carmelite monastery at the concentration camp Auschwitz brought about an inter-communal crisis. Jewish groups argued that the Christian contemplative and commemorative project was in fact an appropriation of the archetypal symbol of Jewish suffering during the *Shoah*. A decade of acrimony and bitter polemic followed, reaching its nadir in 1989 when an American rabbi led a group of protesters on an assault on the camp in prison dress, denouncing those who apprehended him as Nazi anti-semites, and a Polish cardinal publicly warned the Jews not to abuse their power over the media of many countries by making impossible demands. Matters appeared to be resolved in 1993 when the nuns left the old convent, following the direct intervention of the Polish bishops' conference and a letter from the pope, but controversy was reignited

in 1998–9 when a Catholic extremist supervised the planting of a 'forest of crosses' on the same site. Charges of misappropriation were similarly made in relation to the beatification (1987) and canonisation (1998) of Sister Theresa Benedicta of the Cross, a Carmelite nun who was killed at Auschwitz in 1942. Jewish groups protested because Sister Theresa, a convert to Catholicism, had been born Edith Stein and was murdered at Auschwitz as a Jew. More generally, the beatification of individuals whose attitude towards the Jews was suspect provoked much criticism. The canonisation in 1982 of Maximilian Kolbe, a priest who bravely saved the life of another prisoner at Auschwitz by taking the condemned man's place in 1941, was problematic in that Kolbe's pre-war activities had included the editorship of a magazine which had included anti-semitic material. Proposals to beatify Pius XII likewise caused considerable consternation among those who interpreted the record of his wartime papacy negatively. Jewish groups were also angered by the meeting of Pope John Paul II with the Austrian president Kurt Waldheim in 1987, after allegations were made associating Waldheim with Nazi war-crimes.

Other areas of Jewish–Christian conflict in the twentieth century derive from more ancient quarrels. Attitudes towards conversion is one example, attitudes towards Jewish Christians another.

From a Jewish perspective, conversion to Christianity represents the betrayal of one's culture, traditions and heritage, but attitudes towards the apostate have been complex as the celebrated case of Brother Daniel showed. A Polish Jewish Zionist, Oswald Rufeisen was active during the Second World War as a resistance fighter. He infiltrated the German police and used his position to warn the local Jewish community of plans against them, saving around 150 lives. Following his capture and escape, he took refuge in a Carmelite monastery and in 1942 was converted to Christianity. Even after joining the order in 1945 and taking the name Daniel, Rufeisen maintained a Jewish self-identity and in 1962 he applied for citizenship in Israel under the Law of Return. In their rulings, the judges were sympathetic to Rufeisen, admiring of his wartime record, and recognised that he was a Jew according to Jewish religious law (*halakhah*). Ultimately, however, it was regarded as too profound a break with the past for Rufeisen to be granted citizenship as a Jew under the Law of Return. The so-called lachrymose history of the Jews remains a significant influence in the modern Jewish psyche, a powerful factor in determining Jewish identity in the Jewish state.

The issue of Jewish Christianity was also fraught. While 'Hebrew Christians' in the nineteenth century tended to affiliate closely with non-Jewish churches, the 1970s saw the emergence of 'Messianic Jewish' groups

that distanced themselves from gentile Christianity. Moshe Rosen, a Hebrew Christian missionary who had become critical of the influence of 'gentilisation' upon Jewish believers in Jesus and who was concerned to emphasise Jewish ethnic identity, established a San Francisco-based evangelical group which became known as 'Jews for Jesus' and which aimed its message at both gentile Christians and Jews throughout America. For many within the wider Jewish community, Jews for Jesus came to represent Messianic Judaism *per se*, largely as a result of their high profile and often confrontational witnessing on college campuses and at airports. Ironically, opposition to such groups unified an often-fragmented Jewish community. Incidents such as those in 1980, when the Jewish Defence League removed a *Torah* scroll from a Los Angeles messianic congregation and picketed their synagogue, indicated the strength of feeling. The Jewish press was unanimous in its condemnation of what were regarded as deceptive Christian conversionary tactics and the misappropriation of Jewish religious symbols. Christian leaders involved in inter-faith dialogue were also critical, recognising the offence caused to Jews and disturbed themselves by what they perceived as the misrepresentation of Christianity. One prominent exception to the general rule was the Reform rabbi Dan Cohn-Sherbok, whose study *Messianic Judaism* (2000) concluded that Messianic Judaism could be regarded as a legitimate expression of Judaism since it was no more radical than was the rejection of a supernatural God by Reconstructionist Jews and since many of its adherents were in fact more observant than many Reform Jews.[8]

The intense reaction and suspicion generated by apostasy is useful in understanding Jewish reticence regarding inter-faith dialogue. A key obstacle is the perception of many Jews that 'dialogue' equates to a more subtle continuation of a traditional policy of mission. The German Jewish philosopher and theologian Martin Buber (1878–1965), in his seminal *Ich und Du* (*I and thou*, 1922), distinguished between two kinds of interaction: *I–it* monologues, where the partners were unequal and regarded each other as resources, and *I–thou* dialogues, where the partners' attitudes were characterised by mutuality, openness, directness and presentness. The key to religious dialogue was, he suggested, acknowledgement of the mystery of the other's faith-reality. 'We are not in a position to appraise the meaning of their confession because we do not know it from within as we know ourselves from within.'[9] Such an

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8 Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Messianic Judaism* (London and New York: Continuum, 2000).
9 Martin Buber in Stuttgart, January 1933, cited in Fritz A. Rothschild (ed.), *Jewish perspectives on Christianity* (New York: Crossroad, 1990), p. 134.

attitude precluded the possibility of true dialogue being conducted with any missionary objective in mind. Buber's influence among Jews in this context was limited, but among Christian (especially Protestant) thinkers his views had a profound impact. Many characteristics of his model for dialogue were later adopted by inter-faith groups such as the Council of Christians and Jews, which was established in Britain in 1942 to counter anti-semitism and to cultivate mutual understanding. Certainly, Buber contributed to a shift in intellectual climate so that, following the Holocaust and the establishment of Israel, it was possible for statements to be issued by a range of Protestant denominations recommending a cessation of attempts to convert Jews.

Twentieth-century official church pronouncements represent a remarkable development, a tectonic shift, in the intellectual history of Jewish–Christian relations, although the limited readership of such documents should always be borne in mind. As early as 1947, an inter-denominational statement was issued in Seelisberg which condemned Christian teaching that inculcated anti-semitism and also unwarranted or coercive Christian mission. Later Protestant state-ments typically reflected a non-triumphalist attitude and were respectful of post-biblical Judaism, recommending a reassessment of traditional church teachings such as deicide, and emphasising the Jewish roots of the Christian religion. The Synod of the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland (1980) was a particularly striking example. It accepted 'Christian co-responsibility and guilt for the Holocaust', it recognised Jewish self-definition, Israel's permanent election, and the state of Israel, it rejected supersessionist teaching, and, cru-cially, it was explicit in condemning conversion of the Jews. 'We believe that in their respective calling Jews and Christians are witnesses of God before the world and before each other. Therefore we are convinced that the Church may not express its witness towards the Jewish people as it does its mission to the peoples of the world.' Such documents encouraged Jews to engage more robustly with Christian institutions that continued to maintain a missionary stance. An international chorus of disapproval met a US Baptist statement issued in 1996, which stated, '[W]e direct our energies and resources toward the proclamation of the gospel to the Jewish people.' For the Jewish community, however, greatest interest was directed towards the pronouncements of the Vatican; for many, the pope's authority over the largest body of Christians on earth was regarded as absolute and of critical significance for future relations. Thus the Catholic church's decision in 1959 to remove from its Good Friday liturgy the term 'perfidious' as a derogatory reference to the Jews was greeted positively. In *Nostra aetate* (*In our time*, 1965) it expressed its wish 'to foster and recommend . . . mutual understanding and

respect' and argued that '[a]lthough the Church is the new people of God, the Jews should not be presented as repudiated or cursed by God, as if such views followed from the holy scriptures'. This and other documents that followed tended to be well received by Jewish groups who, nevertheless, made their expectations of further progress clear. The 1998 publication of 'We remember: a reflection on the Shoah', however, met with considerable criticism. While welcoming any attempt to address the subject of the Holocaust and the record of the church during that period, critics disapproved of the defence made for Pius XII and the emphasis on Catholic heroism, and of the apparent distinction between the 'the errors and failures . . . [of the] sons and daughters of the Church' and the culpability of the church itself.

The changes in attitude of the Christian churches were related to some extent to developments in scholarship. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries a number of Jewish writers, including the German Reform rabbi Abraham Geiger and the co-founder of Anglo-Liberal Judaism Claude Montefiore, argued that Christian scholarship had severely misrepresented Judaism in both the ancient and the modern periods, and that Jesus should be regarded as a Jew of one sort or another (e.g., a Pharisee, or a prophet in an age of law).[10] Their works were neglected. Jewish scholarship was taken more seriously within the world of biblical and New Testament studies after the Second World War. Partly this was due to the influence of a few American and English Christian scholars, such as the Presbyterian George Foot Moore and the Unitarian Robert Travers-Herford, who were highly critical of previous Christian (especially German) representations of 'late Judaism' and the Pharisees.[11] Partly it was due to contributions of American and European Jewish scholars who, having successfully entered the academy, sought to confront some of the Christian assumptions underlying it. Partly it was due to the uninhibited writings of Jewish historians living in the land of Israel, such as Joseph Klausner and David Flusser for whom Jesus, as a Jew, was a part of the Jewish national heritage.[12] Whatever the reason, the impact of the so-called 'Jewish reclamation of Jesus' and related developments helped bring

10 Abraham Geiger, *Judaism and its history* (New York: M. Thalmessinger, 1866); Claude G. Montefiore, *Some elements in the religious teaching of Jesus* (London: Macmillan, 1910).

11 George Foot-Moore, 'Christian writers on Judaism', *Harvard theological review* 14:5 (1921), 197–254; Robert Travers-Herford, *The Pharisees* (London: G. Allen & Unwin, 1924) and *Judaism in the New Testament period* (London: The Lindsey Press, 1928).

12 Joseph Klausner, *Jesus of Nazareth: his life, times, and teaching*, trans. Herbert Danby (New York: Macmillan, 1925; Hebrew original 1922); David Flusser, *Jesus*, trans. Ronald Walls (New York: Herder and Herder, 1969).

about a wider re-examination of Jesus, the apostle Paul, and first-century Jewish society from a specifically Jewish perspective. One consequence was the discouragement of the practice of maligning Judaism so as to make Jesus appear radically original.

The growing body of Jewish New Testament scholarship and the implications for understanding the relationship between Jews and Christians affected theologians, too. In *Faith and fratricide* (1974) and other writings, the American Catholic feminist Rosemary Radford Ruether developed the work of the British Anglican James Parkes and the French Jewish historian Jules Isaac in identifying the root cause of anti-semitism with Christianity.[13] Convinced that Jewish rejection of Jesus as Christ had inevitably led to the denigration of Judaism, Ruether came to question the legitimacy of high christology itself. As she put it, 'Anti-Judaism developed theologically in Christianity as the left-hand of Christology.'[14] For others, such revisionism was not adequate and a systematic overhaul of Christian theology, and the place of Judaism in it, was required. This culminated in the American Episcopalian Paul van Buren's three-volume *A theology of the Jewish–Christian reality* (1980–8), which attempted to unify Christian and Jewish revelation in terms of a single covenant and which saw the church's primary mission as a protector of Jewish *Torah* fidelity and statehood. Such landmarks in the intellectual landscape of inter-faith relations were, however, by no means representative of attitudes within the wider Christian community or even Christian scholarship in general.

In terms of Jewish–Christian relations the twentieth century has seen an attempt by increasing numbers of Christian individuals and institutions to recognise the legitimacy and vitality of post-biblical Judaism and to confront their traditional stereotypes and theologically informed prejudices. The unique relationship between the Jewish and Christian faith communities as a result of their shared origins, the resulting prejudices and difficulties in relating theologically to one another, and the communities' long memories of the often traumatic history of the interaction of their peoples, means that the relationship between Christianity and the Jewish other remains fragile.

13 James Parkes, *The conflict of the church and the synagogue: a study in the origins of antisemitism* (London: Soncino Press, 1934); Isaac, *The teaching of contempt*; Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Faith and fratricide: the theological roots of anti-semitism* (New York: Seabury Press, 1974).

14 Rosemary Radford Ruether, 'Anti-semitism and Christian theology', in Eva Fleischner (ed.), *Auschwitz: beginning of a new era: reflections on the Holocaust* (Jerusalem: KTAV, 1977), p. 79.

II
RELATIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND MUSLIMS

DAVID THOMAS

To European Christians at prayer on the outbreak of the First World War Islam was a matter of little concern, for Muslims lived in lands far away. By the turn of the millennium, however, indifference had given way to engagement with Muslims as neighbours in faith, and anxiety about the threat from Muslim extremists to livelihood and life. There has been no more dramatic change among Protestant and Catholic churches during the twentieth century than in their attitudes towards Islam, and the changes in these attitudes have been more fundamental than in any other period in the fourteen hundred years of shared Christian and Muslim history. They arise from an array of related factors, both those connected with the dramatic transformation experienced by the Islamic world, and also those that have issued from fresh Christian insights about non-Christians, and new moves towards them.

In 1914 almost the whole of the Islamic world was either under the direct rule of a European power or within its sphere of influence. The Ottoman empire, although in effect controlled from European capitals, constituted the one major sovereign Islamic entity, and Muslims everywhere looked to the sultan in Istanbul as the caliph, successor to the Prophet Muhammad as leader of the worldwide Muslim community and symbol of Muslim unity and aspirations. All this changed after the war when the empire was dismembered, and particularly in 1924 when the caliphate was abolished. Its former domains were split into separate states, and under Western influence these were compelled rapidly to come to terms with new political, economic, technological and cultural realities. Some Muslims enthusiastically embraced reform, though many were wary, sensing the potential threat to their traditional beliefs.

As the twentieth century progressed and European powers in turn relinquished their empires, other new states in Africa and Asia with substantial Muslim populations came into being and were faced with the same challenges of modernity as the former Ottoman possessions. Muslim communities in these states often experienced a dilemma between participating in the construction of a national life that was established on European values and norms, and at the same time striving to retain their traditional beliefs and practices. While Muslims in many new countries, for example in Africa, did

not react immediately, in south Asia the only solution to this dilemma was seen as separation. Hence the founding of Pakistan, where Muslims could live according to the principles of their faith.

In the course of the latter decades of the century especially, self-confidence grew, boosted by the symbolic lead of the Ayatullah Khomeini in Iran, and Muslims all over the world became more conspicuous as people of strong religious sentiments who resisted Western influences. The reasons for this are highly complex, though prominent among them are the new oil wealth that enabled governments in parts of the Arab world to finance Islamic mission; widespread disillusionment with failed secular governments and a yearning for the certainty of religious values; and disenchantment with Western policies towards the Islamic world, particularly their myopic loyalty to Israel, leading to discontent with foreign ways.

In the middle of the century a number of prominent intellectuals voiced their rejection of extraneous influences and called for a return to religious ways. Among the most critical the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906–66), whose two-year stay in the United States exacerbated his vehemence against the West, diagnosed Europe as suffering from a 'hideous schizophrenia that put to an end any working relationship between religion and practical life'.[15] While others were not so outspoken, many realised that the Islamic world was faced with an urgent challenge to rediscover itself, whether by returning to the teachings of scripture in their unalloyed form, or by reinterpreting them in the new circumstances in which Muslims lived.

Of course, in some parts of the world Christians and Muslims had existed beside one another for centuries. In the middle east, Egypt and Iran, Christian communities lived as religiously defined clients, *dhimmis*, of Muslim governments, while in south-eastern Europe, the Philippines and parts of west Africa, Muslim communities lived among larger Christian populations, and in Nigeria the two faiths were roughly equal. As might be expected, modes of co-existence had been worked out over time that enabled adherents of the two faiths to continue in tolerance and some security. But there was by no means peace and good will: the inter-necine fighting in Lebanon, Sudan, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo at various times in the century were all characterised, whether accurately or not, by Christian–Muslim hatred. The atrocities committed in the name of religion served as a regular reminder of

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15 Sayyid Qutb, 'That hideous schizophrenia', in P. Griffiths (ed.), *Christianity through non-Christian eyes* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990), p. 80.

the danger of religious differences and of the ambiguous potency of two religions that claimed to embody peace.

The differences between the two faiths and the urgent need for sober reappraisal of how they might approach one another with respect were brought home to Western Christians by the migration of Muslims to their countries. In the decades following the Second World War there was a steady influx of mainly manual workers from former colonies and allies, particularly into Germany from Turkey, into France from Algeria and Morocco, and into the United Kingdom from India and Pakistan.[16] Governments may originally have assumed that these workers would either leave after a short period or gradually merge into the host society. But not only did the majority stay, they settled into ways of life more characteristic of their old than their new surroundings. And thus communities of Muslims became integral parts of many cities and towns in western Europe, with their languages, foods, styles of dress and places of worship unmistakable indications of their presence.

Whether they were actively welcomed or merely tolerated at first, their continuing presence necessitated proper treatment by society and law. In the United Kingdom the Muslim outcry against Salman Rushdie's *The satanic verses* in 1988 and its barely veiled insults to the Prophet Muhammad shocked many in the wider community into realising the pronounced religious sensitivities of Muslims, and the stark difference between their insistence upon protection for revered sacred truth and the forbearance typical of many churchgoers. In France the exclusion from school in 1989 of two Muslim girls for wearing headscarves as signs of faith demonstrated the great difference between the laicised French state and Muslim citizens who regarded the public expression of faith as part of their lives. Both incidents raised fundamental issues about the right to preserve Islam in a non-Muslim context, freedom of expression, and the clash between religion and the state. How were the churches to respond?

A further event that impressed the Muslim presence on Christian minds was the overthrow of the shah of Iran in 1979 and the construction of an Islamic republic under the Ayatullah Khomeini. This experiment in statecraft focused the hopes of many Muslims, Sunnis as well as Shi'is, for a polity based on Islamic teachings. In many ways, Khomeini became a leader for Muslims worldwide and a symbol of a strong, self-sufficient, Islam.

16 J. S. Nielsen, *Muslims in western Europe*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

It is not surprising in light of renewed confidence among Muslims that in the latter years of the twentieth century extremist groups emerged prepared for fighting, killing and even martyrdom to usher in Islamic principles and ways of life and exterminate influences and threats from the West, or that the American commentator Samuel Huntington should predict increasing hostilities between the Islamic and Western blocs as part of an inevitable clash of civilisations.[17] Whether the extremist Muslims or Huntington were correct in their analysis or predictions is seriously open to question, though their perceptions of the divide between two cultures and faiths are indicative of the progressive problem of a resurgent Islam perceiving the West with its Christian foundation as an opponent, and in turn being seen in its fundamentalist intransigence as a real and present threat.

This is the background against which the attitudes of the churches changed through the twentieth century. In the 1920s it was possible for British Christians to write openly of Islam as a benighted and corrupt religion for which the only remedy was mass evangelisation. By the turn of the millennium, however, the rhetoric had changed (even though sentiments frequently had not) and Christian leaders were sometimes speaking of Muslims as partners in faith, and recalling the contribution of Islam to the foundations of modern European civilisation.

In the early part of the century Christians, and especially those whose churches operated missions in formal or informal conjunction with colonial powers, typically looked on Muslims as adherents of a repressive faith that stood in need of the gospel. For example, a report prepared for the Church of England Assembly in 1926 diagnosed the needs of Islam as follows:

> The educated classes, searching for light, need the mind of Christ to illuminate life with the high purpose of sacrificial service; the women of Islam, fettered by the laws of a barbaric age, need the emancipating power of the Gospel to lift them to their rightful place in both home and social life; the peasant and illiterate classes, frequently attached to some dervish order or other, need to know the fatherhood of God and the goal of their quest for the divine; and the Sufi mystic, seeking an experience of God, needs to be brought face to face with Christ as the Way, the Truth, and the Life.[18]

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17 Samuel P. Huntington, 'The clash of civilizations?', *Foreign affairs* 72:3 (1993), 22–49.
18 *The world call to the church, the call from the Moslem world* (London: Press and Publications Board of the Church Assembly, 1926), p. 10.

The report makes clear repeatedly that the entire Islamic world is supine and ready to respond if the opportunity is only seized. Its sentiments anticipate the thoughts of the Dutch missionary Hendrik Kraemer as he was preparing for the 1938 International Missionary Council conference at Tambaram, southern India. Kraemer wrote: 'Islam in its constituent elements and apprehensions must be called a superficial religion ... Islam might be called a religion that has almost no questions and no answers.'[19] At the conference itself Kraemer's Barthian insistence upon the discontinuity between Christianity and other religions made a great impact. But he did not entirely carry the day, and the final conference statement left it an open question whether 'the non-Christian religions ... may be regarded as in some sense or to some degree manifesting God's revelation'.[20]

Coincidentally, the inclusivist stance (as it would now be termed) of the participants who recognised continuity between religions was echoed in the 1943 encyclical of Pope Pius XII, *Mystici corporis*, albeit in what has the appearance of a grudging concession: 'Even though by a certain unconscious desire and wish, they [all non-Catholics, including non-Christians] may be related to the Mystical Body of the Redeemer, they remain deprived of so many and so powerful gifts and helps from heaven.'[21] Here for the first time an official Catholic document held open the possibility that those outside the church, including those who were not Christians, might be saved. The thought it indirectly expresses momentously reverses the ancient dogma *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, 'outside the church there is no salvation', and anticipates the groundbreaking teachings of the Second Vatican Council in the 1960s. It also contains in brief the insight articulated by the Jesuit theologian Karl Rahner (1904–84) that since God's grace is given to all through Christ, both those within the church and outside, all who respond to it can be called Christians, and those who respond unknowingly are 'anonymous Christians'.[22]

Rahner reached this insight on *a priori* theological grounds. In this he contrasts with another great Catholic thinker about relations between Christians and others, the French scholar Louis Massignon (1883–1962), who

19 Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian message in a non-Christian world* (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1938), pp. 216–17.
20 *Tambaram-Madras series. International Missionary Council meeting at Tambaram, Madras, December 12th to 29th, 1938* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939), vol. I, pp. 210–11.
21 Quoted in F. A. Sullivan, *Salvation outside the church? Tracing the history of the Catholic response* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1992), pp. 132f.
22 Karl Rahner, 'Christianity and the non-Christian religions', in *Theological investigations*, vol. V (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1966), pp. 115–34.

through years of immersion in Islamic mystical thought recognised Muslims as children of Abraham, guided by the Spirit.[23]

This is close to the teaching contained in the single most important document issued on Islam by any church in the twentieth century, or indeed before, in which the influence of these and other progressive scholars can be traced. This brief document was promulgated towards the end of the Second Vatican Council, on 28 October 1965, under the title 'Declaration on the relationship of the church to non-Christian religions', known from its opening words as *Nostra aetate*.

Its paragraph on Islam gives a detailed account of Muslim beliefs and practices, and underlines the fellowship with Christians these signify:

> The Church also has a high regard for the Muslims. They worship God, who is one, living and subsistent, merciful and almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men. They strive to submit themselves without reserve to the hidden decrees of God, just as Abraham submitted himself to God's plan, to whose faith Muslims eagerly link their own. Although not acknowledging him as God, they venerate Jesus as a prophet, his Virgin Mother they also honour and even at times devoutly invoke. Further, they await the day of judgement and the reward of God following the resurrection of the dead. For this reason they highly esteem an upright life and worship God, especially by way of prayer, alms-deeds and fasting.[24]

Traditional Catholics would find nothing objectionable here, but might be surprised by the statement that follows: 'This sacred Council now pleads with all to forget the past, and urges that a sincere effort be made to achieve mutual understanding.'[25]

Such idealism may be thought unrealistic. If so, it is matched by omission in the preceding description of any feature of Islam that might cause offence within the church, for example, direct references to the Prophet Muhammad and the Qur'an. A document that at first appears open and welcoming, in fact turns out have decharacterised true Islam.

But this was inevitable in light of the general statement about all non-Christian religions that prefaces the accounts of Islam and other faiths in the document. Here it is said that although the church 'rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions', it nevertheless recognises a duty 'to proclaim

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23 P. Rocalve, *Place et rôle de l'Islam et de l'Islamologie dans la vie et l'oeuvre de Louis Massignon* (Damascus: Publications de l'I.F.E.A.D., 1993).

24 Translated in Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious dialogue: the official teaching of the Catholic church (1963–1995)* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media, 1997), p. 38.

25 Ibid., p. 39.

without fail, Christ who is "the Way, the Truth and the Life" (Jn 14:6)',[26] thus highlighting the tension between the desire to accept the other as partner, and the imperative to proclaim Christian truth. This tension is not resolved by the council, and it became a major challenge for Christian thinkers in the decades that followed.

At the time of the council in 1964 Paul VI issued his encyclical *Ecclesiam suam* in which he mentioned Muslims warmly. His successor John Paul II likewise recalled the teachings of *Nostra aetate* in his first encyclical *Redemptor hominis* (1979), while in his later *Redemptoris missio* (1990) he stressed the presence of the Holy Spirit in individuals and societies throughout the world. However, he also made clear that the chief task of the church is mission, and that dialogue with Muslims and others is only one expression of this: 'Dialogue should be conducted and implemented with the conviction that *the Church is the ordinary means of salvation* and that *she alone* possesses the fullness of the means of salvation.'[27] Neither the pope's many visits to Islamic countries, his welcoming of Muslim leaders, nor even his dramatic invitation to world religions representatives to convene at Assisi on 27 October 1986 for a day of prayer for peace compromised this order of priorities – in fact, at the Assisi meeting each religious group performed its prayers separately.

The new importance which the Catholic church attached to relations with other faiths was signalled by the creation in 1964 of a secretariat for non-Christians within the curia; in 1988 this was renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. In accordance with its mandate, this council has produced documents on the tension hinted at in *Nostra aetate*, notably *Dialogue and witness* (1984) and *Dialogue and proclamation* (1991),[28] in which dialogue is explained as part of the wider evangelical task. In 2000 this relationship was made uncompromisingly clear in *Dominus Jesus*, a document from another Vatican dicastery, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith: 'Inter-religious dialogue, therefore, as part of her evangelizing mission, is just one of the actions of the Church in her mission *ad gentes*.'[29]

In the Protestant churches there have also been clear gestures of openness towards Islam, though in a less distinctive manner. Formal relations were

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26 Ibid., p. 38.   27 Ibid., p. 102.
28 Vatican Secretariat for non-Christians, 'The attitude of the church towards the followers of other religions: reflections and orientations on dialogue and mission', *Bulletin* 19:2 (1984), 126–41; Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, 'Dialogue and Proclamation: reflections and orientations on interreligious dialogue and the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ', *Bulletin* 26:2 (1991), 201–50.
29 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *'Dominus Jesus' on the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the church* (Vatican City, 2000).

developed by the World Council of Churches (WCC) which, after prepara-tory consultations at Broumana, Lebanon, in 1966, and Kandy, Sri Lanka, in 1967, about the advisability of meeting Muslims, organised a first meeting at Castigny, Switzerland, in 1969, and a multi-religious meeting at Ajaltoun, Lebanon, in 1970. In these gatherings the very different emphasis of the WCC from the Catholic church became apparent. Unable to speak with a single voice owing to the variety of churches from which it was constituted (the differences expressed at the Tambaram conference in 1938 had not disappeared), the WCC did not issue magisterial statements but emphasised the importance of faiths living side by side in respect and with practical co-operation.

In 1979, the WCC issued a key document on inter-religious relations, *Guidelines on dialogue with people of living faiths and ideologies*.[30] This is char-acterised by a recognition of the diversity of views about inter-religious matters among Christians, and consequently it advocates co-operation between faiths to build a 'community of communities' in which difference is tempered by respect.

As with the Catholic church, the member churches of the WCC recognised the tension between dialogue and mission, but were no more able to resolve it. The problem was graphically summed up in 1979 by Stanley Samartha: 'Dialogue emerged out of the womb of mission and it has never been easy for mission to cut the umbilical cord and to recognise the independence of the growing child without denying the relationship.'[31]

These developments among the Catholic and Protestant churches have taken place against the background outlined above of increasing self-assertiveness among Muslims in their homelands and adopted countries, escalating militancy among extremist Muslim groups, and widespread rejec-tion of the West, leading often to distrust of the intentions behind Christian gestures of dialogue. Thus, while dialogue is acknowledged and pursued at the highest levels in the churches, the degree of its impact upon more than a few Muslims must be questioned. For many, the churches' gestures of out-reach are seen in the same context as Western governments' actions in acting promptly to free oil-rich Kuwait in 1991 but doing too little too late to help Bosnian and Kosovo Muslims a few years later. Many reject dialogue as insincere, and a few resist it with armed force, while only some, mainly intellectuals living in the West, see the benefits of deepening mutual under-standing and of furthering discussion towards greater honesty and respect.

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30 Geneva: World Council of Churches Publications, 1979.
31 Stanley Samartha, 'Guidelines for dialogue', *Ecumenical review* 31 (1979), p. 130.

It must also be questioned whether the progress made by the official bodies in the churches has been noticed by many churchgoing Christians, or even their priests and ministers. In parts of the world where the two faiths have co-existed for centuries, official church statements have effected little widespread change in attitudes, although there has been an exponential increase in the number of specialist inter-faith meetings concerned with the differences between Christianity and Islam. The practical reality of Muslim neighbours or relations through conversion or marriage has brought home to some the necessity of knowing about and reflecting upon Islam, but for many this continued to be a marginal matter even in the years approaching 2000. All was to change with the atrocities of 11 September 2001, which concentrated in all minds the vigour of Islam (in whose name they had been committed), and raised for Christians greater challenges of comprehension and collaboration than their predecessors in 1914 could ever have imagined.

III
RELATIONS BETWEEN CHRISTIANS AND BUDDHISTS AND HINDUS

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DAVID CHEETHAM

Buddhists

The history of relations between Christians and Buddhists in the twentieth century is varied and reflects many regional differences and specific historical circumstances. In this sense, an account of such a varied relationship cannot adopt a uniform approach or easily summarise the complexities of encounters and discussions that have taken place. On a theoretical level, an account might be given of some of the conceptual dialogue or comparative work that has been undertaken by individual scholars reflecting on dialogue and encounter with the other. Given the differences that surely exist between a theistic and a non-theistic religion, this has been a very creative discussion, but it is also work that has been undertaken more by Christian theologians than Buddhists.[32] Nevertheless, besides 'conceptual' or purely theological encounters, some understanding of Christian relations with Buddhists in

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32 Notable exceptions include Thich Nhat Hanh, *Living Buddha, living Christ* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1995) and the Dalai Lama, *The good heart* (London: Rider, 1996).

the twentieth century must also be gleaned from considering the impact of nineteenth-century Christian missionary activities. This has significance not just as a key to comprehending particular historical encounters – for example, that in Sri Lanka – but also for understanding the sense of 'colonial guilt' that has often accompanied reflections in the second half of the twentieth century on 'the other'. Speaking in general, Christianity's reflection on its colonial past has initiated new postures towards other faiths and some radical gestures by some towards inclusion and dialogue.

Whereas in the West there are many Christian inter-faith groups who have been happy to 'cross over' into the Buddhist tradition to explore and incorporate some of the practices and meditation techniques, this is not necessarily repeated in other countries. For example, within India, Christian dialogue with other religions (although a more natural disposition within the south Asian consciousness) has often been tempered by a need to preserve identity. In the most recent times, the phenomenon of conversions from Scheduled (or Dalit) Castes has resulted in a certain competitiveness between Christians and Buddhists to win these groups. In Sri Lanka, the history and memory of tensions between Christians and Buddhists during the colonial era has continued to exercise an influence over contemporary efforts at understanding and has made the idea of 'common ground' a sometimes painful and difficult notion. Paradoxically, it was the actions of Christian missionaries that spurred on Buddhists to adopt far more sophisticated and aggressive 'missionary' methods ('Protestant Buddhism') in the defence of Buddhism against its opponents and in the propagation of Buddhism. The imitation of missionary methods proved to be crucial in establishing a Buddhist counter-propaganda machine. And so one of the results of this strife was the production of some of the strongest Buddhist polemics against Christianity (and the existence of God), which echoed some of the earliest debates that took place between Buddhists and the brahminical traditions of Hinduism.

Nevertheless, in places like Sri Lanka (and Cambodia), the Buddhist actions against Christian attempts to proselytise stem not from authentically Buddhist traditions about 'the other', but from a defensive mentality that has developed in the context of militant Christian missions. If dialogue between Christians and Buddhists in these parts of the world is to be positively advanced then it will first be necessary to rebuild trust and respect. This process has been given a significant boost by key figures such as Lynn de Silva (1919–82), a Sri Lankan Christian, who has sought to move the prevailing atmosphere away from diatribe and towards dialogue. The tangible outlet of this has been the founding of the journal *Dialogue* in the late 1960s. This

journal has published articles on a wide range of significant themes, including the existence of God, the idea of the soul, working towards shared ethical practice, monastic life, globalisation and women in religion. Another figure (who took over from de Silva as editor of *Dialogue*), Aloysius Pieris (b. 1934), established the Tulana Research Institute in Sri Lanka in 1974 to promote Christian–Buddhist understanding.

From within the Roman Catholic tradition, one of the most prominent figures in Christian–Buddhist encounter was the monk and priest Thomas Merton (1915–68). Merton was attracted to Buddhism – particularly Zen – and explored the similarities (academically and in practice) between Christian mysticism and Buddhist thought. With Christian mysticism, in particular, he was drawn to the idea of the God who transcended all human comprehension and speech. Such approaches could help in finding points of contact with the Buddhist tradition. In similar vein, others have sought to highlight the notions of *kenosis* (divine self-emptying) in Christianity when seeking to make contact with the concept of *sunyata* (emptiness) in Buddhism.

In a West increasingly affected by the disorientation of a 'postmodern condition', and widespread interest in 'Eastern' techniques of meditation and spirituality, Buddhism has gained ground and a significant number of converts – at least when it comes to meditation practice. (Nevertheless, Western converts to Buddhism are still outnumbered by those 'ethnic' Buddhists in Western countries who trace their roots to Asia.) Moreover, in Christian theological reflection, there have been attempts to connect with Buddhism through postmodern theologies, so much so that such terms as 'Christian Buddhism' have gained a certain currency in postmodern theological thinking. Thus, the anti-realist British theologian Don Cupitt has called for a new Christianity which is 'Buddhist in form, Christian in content'.[33] Also, process theology (with its stress on 'becoming' rather than 'being') has found some affinity with the Buddhist worldview: for example, the North American process theologian John Cobb has been a prominent figure in Christian–Buddhist dialogue, particularly with Masao Abe of the Kyoto school. In the United States, the founding of a new journal (and conference series), *Buddhist–Christian studies*, by the university of Hawaii in 1980 (later under the auspices of the Society for Buddhist–Christian Studies) has provided another significant forum for discussion. Nevertheless, it has not always been easy to ascertain the common ground that would provide a

33 D. Cupitt, *Taking leave of God* (London: SCM, 1980), p. xiii.

platform for meaningful exchange and progress. There are differences such as: ideas of the self or non-self, the cycle of rebirth or the single life, salvation by 'grace' or effort, sin or ignorance, etc. However it is also possible that identifying such polarities is misleading. This is because the sheer diversity of beliefs and practices within the two religions means that they sometimes find themselves close together. An example of this might be the ideas of grace or saviour in Christianity in dialogue with comparable notions in the Amida traditions of Pure Land Buddhism. However, some remain sceptical that common ground is really possible and worry that it is potentially sought at the cost of losing the distinctiveness (and the support) of the different traditions. So a possible question might be, 'Does Christian–Buddhist exploration represent a genuine movement within the two religions towards each other, or is it only the concern of a few "enthusiasts"?' Only time will tell. In fact, it is possible that both traditions really see the other as providing illumination in some areas of their traditions whilst leaving other areas untouched (or 'unsurpassed'); that is, there is a sense of *complementarity*. Such complementarity has characterised the profound work of Aloysius Pieris with the joining of Buddhist *gnosis* and Christian *agape*. Nevertheless, it is possible that 'complementarity' can sometimes result in little challenge at the level of basic worldviews; that is, the traditions just talk past each other.

Looking to the future, Whelan Lai and Michael von Bruck warn: 'The isolation of specific elements has . . . led to false assessments and lack of understanding in Buddhist–Christian dialogue.'[34] When it comes to the study of each religion we should remember that both are socially and historically embedded, which means that we cannot easily distil certain practices or philosophical worldviews for comparison and dialogue. Nevertheless, perhaps on a religious level, Christians and Buddhists are likely to continue to engage one another on matters relating to the nature of reality and the human condition and its solution. Neatly summing up the paradoxes of the encounter, Elizabeth Harris quotes Bishop Kenneth Fernando when he said that 'the strongest point about Christianity is that it has a Saviour. The strongest point about Buddhism is that it has no Saviour.'[35]

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34 W. Lai and M. von Bruck (eds.), *Christianity and Buddhism: a multi-cultural history of their dialogue*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2001), pp. 252–3.
35 Bishop Kenneth Fernando, cited in E. Harris, 'An interfaith future between Christianity and Buddhism: what cost? What benefit?', *World faiths encounter* 24 (November 1999), p. 17.

Hindus

Out of the nineteenth century, but resonating into the twentieth, are such figures as Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902). Vivekananda's eloquent speech at the first World Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 had a profound impact on the future of Christian perceptions of Hinduism. Here was an effective spokesperson who turned the tables on 'fulfilment' ideas within Christian missiological reflection by (following Ramakrishna) suggesting all religions were equally valid. Moreover, he interpreted Jesus in the context of the *advaitic* tradition: that is, Jesus was just one manifestation of ultimate reality. Vivekananda's speech also drew a distinction between the materialist West and spiritual/mystical East, and although this is a hasty and erroneous idea it has nevertheless become a powerful paradigm that continues to influence popular prejudices. Another figure from the nineteenth century who powerfully articulated the sentiments that have emerged in some quarters of contemporary India is Dayananda Saraswati (1824–1883), the founder of the Arya Samaj, who bitterly criticised Christianity (together with other religions) for its exclusivist claims and for its policy in seeking conversions. There was in Saraswati's writings a desire to assert the supremacy of the 'pure' Vedic vision and revelation, which is superior to others; such sentiments are now the slogans of some contemporary Hindu fundamentalist groups in India.

Sarvapalli Radhakrishnan (1888–1975) is a majesterial figure whose vision concerning Hinduism's relationship with the other was influenced by Vivekananda and Ramakrishna. He also perceived *Vedanta* to be the ultimate expression of true religion which encompasses and includes the best within Christianity and other faiths. His tenure in the Spalding Chair for Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University (1936–49) meant that Hindu–Christian dialogue gained a certain distinguished pedigree in the wider theology of religious debate. In addition, there is the massive influence of Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948) who has had an enormous impact on the popular imagination. He admired Jesus (along with other great religious figures) as one who exemplified love and *ahimsa* (non-violence).

Critics of Christian–Hindu dialogue have pointed out the academic nature of much of it and its reflection of Western liberal Christian concerns. To what extent is the imperative towards dialogue a genuine issue in the Hindu mind? The echoes from the colonialist past have also been instrumental in causing suspicion about 'inter-religious dialogue' as a latent imperialist exercise that is merely an advanced version of earlier 'comparative' concerns. Or else, others

have pointed out the need to recognise that within India itself the dialogue partners must include not just the high-caste brahminical representations of Hinduism, but also the unique predicaments and 'theological' expressions of the Scheduled Castes, or Dalits. It is in these lower castes that the conversions towards Christianity have been most evident, usually for socio-political reasons more than actual conversions to the gospel message.

Looking at the encounter between Hindus and Christians in India in the twentieth century, one can be struck by the diversity of opinions, from the uncompromising views of some conservative groups who would draw a sharp distinction between Christianity and the superstitions of an 'idolatrous' Hinduism, and those who have sought to absorb Hindu ideas and create a truly 'Indian' Christianity. In many cases this amounts to more than just inculturation. For example, one of the most distinctive features of Christian encounters with Hinduism has been the development of Christian ashrams. Famous innovators include Henri le Saux (1910–73) – later named Swami Abishiktananda – who founded the Saccidananda Asrama in south India, and the English Benedictine, Bede Griffiths (1906–93), who sought to reinterpret Christian metaphysics in line with Hindu philosophies, preferring monism over dualism. The Roman Catholic Brahmabandhav Upadhyaya (1861–1907), from a Bengali Brahmin background, argued that the Christian message 'must assume the Hindu garment which will make it acceptable to the people of India'.[36] He tried (unsuccessfully) to persuade the Vatican to accept his proposals. Moreover, P. Chenchiah (1886–1959) maintained that Christian converts in India should regard Hinduism as their 'spiritual mother'.[37] Nevertheless, not all express the same enthusiasm, and so other voices, like the Indian theologian Y. D. Tiwari, are concerned that the 'wide use of Hindu terms will weaken the Christian message'.[38]

India has produced some outstanding Christian theologians who are eager to engage with the Hindu culture and who have made distinctive contributions to the debate about Christianity and other religions. As well as those quoted above, they include such names as S. Samartha, P. Devanandan, A. J. Appasamy and M. Amaladoss. Looking to the future, Klaus Klostermaier makes a bold claim when he writes: 'Doctrinally Hinduism outside of India is very liberal; the openness for new ideas of modern Hindus in the west is so

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36 Cited in J. Russell Chandan, 'The development of Christian theology in India', in R. S. Sugirtharajah and C. Hargreaves (eds.), *Readings in Indian Christian theology* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1993), p. 8.

37 Ibid.   38 Y. D. Tiwari, 'From Vedic dharma to the Christian faith', in ibid., p. 137.

great that dialogue is almost pointless.'[39] This reflects Klostermaier's view that the actual context of Hinduism in 'Bharat Mata', as he puts it, is crucial for understanding Hinduism and the socio-political complexities that affect the dialogue between different religious and social groups. However, the vast and multifarious nature of Hinduism in India should not prevent us from taking seriously the evolving diasporic expressions of Hindu belief and practice that will surely have an impact on future encounters. Furthermore, certain groups (inside and outside India) such as the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) or the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) have influenced a 'semiticisation' of Hinduism (in order to make it more dogmatic, 'national', creedal and missionary) that will also have an important influence. In addition, perhaps, there is the increasing interest in the stereotypical 'mystic East' within some branches of 'new age' thinking in the West (largely through the popular culture of the 1960s) to consider. These new and evolving developments may indicate that the kind of encounter between Christians and Hindus will become more varied, complex and challenging in the twenty-first century.

IV
THEOLOGIES OF RELIGIONS

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DAVID CHEETHAM

Although it cannot be maintained that the 'theology of religions' as an important question for Christians is only a twentieth-century problem, it is nonetheless the case that the issues with which it is concerned have become increasingly prominent and acute. Various reasons might be offered for this: the increase in knowledge about other faiths, the dispersal of peoples and diasporic experience that has brought multi-culturalism into Western towns and cities. Moreover, there is the effect of globalisation and the communications revolution. In the West, perhaps also the collapse of confidence in the intellectual products of the European Enlightenment and in Western reason have been among significant factors that have led towards greater attention being given to insights from beyond purely Western canons and to greater openness to other traditions. Moreover, articulate voices have emerged from

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39 K. Klostermaier, 'The future of Hindu–Christian Dialogue', in H. Coward (ed.), *Hindu–Christian dialogue: perspectives and encounters* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1989), p. 264.

areas that have a colonial past and these give new expressions to Christian theology and practice which are often critical of Western styles and methodologies. Many of these voices – especially Asian ones – have made important and informed contributions to the theology of religions.[40]

Some have seen it as the most important issue to have emerged in recent times: thus one missiologist remarked: 'This is *the* theological issue for mission in the 1990's and into the twenty-first century.'[41] Nevertheless, the twentieth century has brought forth a variety of different approaches to this issue; in fact, the *issue* itself is defined variously – reflecting sociological, political and ethical concerns as well as 'theological' ones. In this case, it is also more representative to speak of 'theologies of religions'. Moreover, it would be a superficial analysis indeed that merely sought to associate theologies of religions in the twentieth century to the collection of phenomena or trends mentioned above. Furthermore, to seek to construct an account which portrays the development of thinking in this field as a uniform progression away from less 'tolerant' traditional perspectives towards more inclusive or pluralistic ones would, at best, be misleading and at worst appear deliberately programmatic. Instead, it would be more correct to speak of the great deal of creativity and diversity – the sheer multiplicity of theologies of religion – that has characterised Christian reflection on 'the religious *other*' in the twentieth century. This has not always been original thinking; instead it might be said that in some cases the more standard 'exclusive' or 'inclusive' positions within the Christian tradition have undergone further elaboration and exploration and have benefited from greater erudition than in earlier times.

In the twentieth century, Christian theological reflection has been informed by a range of factors including academic theological work, the concerns of missionaries, emerging theologians from previously colonised areas such as India, students of comparative religion and inter-faith 'pioneers'. The vastly increased knowledge of the religious 'other' that began with missionary scholarship in the nineteenth century is clearly an important factor in the development of, first, comparative religion and, second, religious studies (and the 'inter-faith movement' as another offshoot). Such knowledge

40 See, for example, M. Amaladoss, *Making all things new: dialogue, pluralism and evangelisation in Asia* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990); S. Samartha, *One Christ, many religions: towards a revised christology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991); S. Samartha, *Courage for Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981); R. Panikkar, *The unknown Christ of Hinduism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1981).

41 G. H. Anderson, 'Theology of religions and missiology: a time of testing', in C. van Engen et al. (eds.), *The good news of the kingdom: mission theology for the third millennium* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993), p. 201.

has also profoundly interrogated some older stereotypes (or myths) concerning other religions which were the imaginary 'dialogue' partners of the past. Nevertheless, the reasons for some of the more major theological contributions have resulted from influences that are not directly related to Christian reflections on other religions. If we look at one of the most influential theological figures of the twentieth century, Karl Barth (1886–1968), we see that the main reasons for his seemingly uncompromising view of religions as 'unbelief' stemmed not from an actual encounter with other faiths, or from a reflection on the place of the non-Christian within the Christian scheme, but from his vehement rejection of what he perceived as an impotent theological liberalism that resided in European universities at the end of the nineteenth century. Nevertheless, the separation of 'given' revelation from natural, or liberal, theology had a profound consequence for theologies of religions, and the Barthian view has been championed by conservatives who have wished to stress the radical discontinuity between Christianity and other faiths. The influence of Barth cannot be under-estimated and he is often placed into an 'exclusivist' camp (although it is possible that such a designation may actually represent a myopic reading of his work). There are background traces of his concerns to be found in many contemporary theologies, including the post-liberal theologies of the second half of the twentieth century and the 'radical orthodox' school to name but a few. Thus the post-liberal G. Lindbeck articulated an influential cultural-linguistic model that seeks to affirm the importance of the *intra-textual* (as opposed *extra*-textual) narrative of the Christian community, and is suspicious of ideas of 'common ground' or universal understanding. Also, influenced by the more 'radical orthodox' theological strategies, the Roman Catholic theologian Gavin D'Costa has stressed the tradition-specific character of religious discourse which means that our starting points are never 'above' the different religions, but from within them. In addition, this emphasis on the cultural location (or cultural integrity) of religious life has led to new theologies of religions which are keen to emphasise *difference*, rather than commonality, as being significant in the encounter and dialogue with other faiths. For example, the North American theologian S. Mark Heim has been innovative in stressing the multiple nature of the goals of different religions. That is, there are different 'salvations' which are not reducible to a single soteriological essence. This stress on difference, it is argued, makes the encounter and discussion between Christianity and other faiths more provocative, surprising and challenging.

More inclusive or universalist theologies of religions have their origin in the experience of missionaries, particularly in India, in the nineteenth and

very early twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, earlier efforts at comparative work by some missionaries often betrayed what many perceived as colonialist influences and presumptions of superiority. This has led to questions of the motivation of Christians engaged in inter-faith dialogue. However, also from the middle of the nineteenth century came missionary voices that sought to be more inclusive of other religious traditions and interpret the Christian message as 'fulfilling' other religions. That is, they were seen as 'preparations' for the gospel. This notion of fulfilment found a sophisticated voice in J. N. Farquhar, author of *The crown of Hinduism* (1913). Farquhar's work has become a classic 'inclusivist' statement in the theology of religions and the impact of his thinking was felt at world missionary conferences held at Edinburgh (1910) and, even more, at Jerusalem (1928). In 1932–3 the influential Laymen's Foreign Missions Inquiry's multi-volumed *Re-thinking missions* (1932) was an avant-garde work which sought to reassess the traditional notion of mission as converting the heathen and asserted the value of the continued existence (rather than replacement or 'conversion from') of other faiths. This caused a significant controversy – being enthusiastically welcomed by liberals and heavily criticised by evangelicals – and formed the background of a pivotal world missionary conference held in Tambaram (1938). Here a Dutch scholar, Hendrik Kraemer, advanced a Barthian line in stressing the discontinuity between Christianity and other faiths. This was resisted by those who had sympathies with Farquhar and others, but the line taken by Kraemer was a definitive milestone for conservative thinking. This has remained the line taken by most conservatives in, for example, the Frankfurt Declaration of 1970.

From within the Roman Catholic tradition, Karl Rahner is another major theological figure to have dominated Catholic theological reflection on other religions in the twentieth century, not least because of his profound influence on the development of the thinking and statements on this issue in Vatican II (1962–5). Rahner's is a very profound contribution which began not as a deliberate reflection following a personal encounter with other faiths, but as a theological reflection within the Catholic tradition: a reflection on the love of God together with a complex and unique anthropology which saw God's grace as present in the very nature of humanity ('supernatural existential') and, as a further extension of this, that all of nature is 'graced'. The grace of Christ is present in other religions and therefore we may speak of the other as an 'anonymous Christian'. Moreover, other religions may be understood as 'ways of salvation'. The essence of what Rahner recommended found its way (though not in its entirety by any means) into the documents of Vatican II,

which has radical implications for the theology of religions in the Catholic tradition. Thus *Lumen gentium* (1964) recommends dialogue and suggests that those in other faiths can achieve salvation through actions that are 'moved by grace' and the 'dictates of conscience'. *Nostra aetate* (1965), whilst affirming the uniqueness of Christ as 'the way, the truth and the life', nonetheless declares that one cannot reject what is 'true and holy' in other religions. Around this time, the Indian Catholic thinker Raimundo Panikkar published *The unknown Christ of Hinduism* (1964), which sought to discern the hidden Christ in the *advaitic* tradition of Hinduism. This important 'inclusive' work echoes something of Farquhar's thought fifty years earlier and has remained an influential work. Other prominent inclusive voices in the Catholic tradition include Jacques Dupuis who has sought to speak of the 'mutual complementarity' of religions.

During the early 1970s, the British philosopher and theologian John Hick proposed a 'Copernican revolution' in theology and recommended that all religions be seen as valid responses to the ultimate reality (the 'Real') behind them. His hypothesis has served as a major sophisticated statement of the pluralist position which has gained significant influence in the debate about other religions at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

In popular discussions it has become commonplace to use the threefold typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism when describing or 'categorising' some of the positions outlined above.[42] This is a paradigm that will continue to be useful and influential, but it has also been criticised for restricting the debate within its threefold boundaries or even for being overly programmatic in its tendency to suggest a progression from exclusivism towards pluralism. It is possible that some of the theologies of religions that emerge in the future will seek to address the issues without reference to this paradigm. This will undoubtedly create new discourses and thinking in the field which will enrich the debate still further.

It is clear that consideration of other religions and their competing claims to truth will continue to play a crucial role in the theological reflection of the twenty-first century. Moreover, current political tensions generated by divisions between peoples and acts of terrorism mean that critical theological and wider reflection on the relations between different cultures and religions will be increasingly perceived as an important task. Indeed, above other issues, it will be the theologian's response to 'the other' in light of contemporary

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42 See A. Race, *Christians and religious pluralism* (London: SCM, 1983).

challenges that will be most keenly followed by those outside the Christian community in a world under the spectre of fundamentalism and terrorism. Some theologians have perceived an urgency to work towards more practical theologies. One instance of this is the 'global ethic' which was drafted by the Catholic theologian Hans Küng and launched at the 1993 World Parliament of Religions under the slogan: 'no peace among the nations without peace among the religions'. Moreover, others, such as P. Knitter, have called for theologies of religion which reflect the need for justice and peace. However, the nature of that reflection will be diverse, and the debate will continue to reflect the wide range of concerns, from the more particular and traditional to the more plural and universal, together with changing theological or intellectual trends and allegiances. Moreover, as the global inter-cultural experience gains even greater fluency in the future, it should be expected that non-Western Christian voices will increasingly inform and direct the future debates within this important theological concern.