From Inclusivism to Pluralism:
A Spiritual and Theological Journey in the Footsteps of Bede Griffiths

by
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1. Bede Griffiths

Bede Griffiths was not a theologian who would have worked out a systematic theology. He was a spiritual seeker on a continuous journey. Any new impression in Indian spiritual life would create resonance in him, and he tried hard to integrate it into his Christian experience. If one wants to find a headline summarizing his thought one should use the term "beyondness". Whatever he discovered – and he was so curious and childlike in getting excited about new dimensions of spiritual insights – he would reflect and realize that even this new excitement was but one step – "you have to go beyond" was one of the most cherished sentences he would use all the years of our friendship.

Beyondness – this is Bede's deepest insight. During his first years in India – cf. his book "Return to the Centre" (1976) - he was still selective and even judgemental, enjoying advaitic insights but distancing himself from the erotic mysticism of Krishna for his command of "immoral actions", for instance. But more and more he realized what was beyond these religious expressions, and he became a searching citizen in several spiritual worlds.

What was so special about Bedeji (using the Indian honorific term which expresses respect, gratitude and love at the same time)? Bede was a person of a warm heart and an investigating, curious intellect at the same time. With typical British reluctance to show emotions a special tenderness surrounded him, a gracious gentleness which impressed me every time we met, always fresh and with amazement, even after more than 20 years of knowing each other. He was deeply enchanted with India and had even a romantic perception of the Indian village though he lived there right in the midst of all the dirt and noise and even so much of human quarrelling. He was able to infect others with his love for India and thus to awaken a curiosity and depth in all the travellers who would gather at Shantivanam at tea time or in the chapel or in front of his hut for philosophical explanations or private counselling. His deepest intention was, to reconcile the contradictions of the intuitive and the rational, of religious experience and science, of arts and philosophy which had torn apart Western culture so deeply.

What was his attitude towards Christianity? He loved the church as the mystical body of Christ, and he suffered under the rationalistic and ritualistic distortions of the Christian heritage. He felt the truth in the Upanishadic expression of the Oneness of reality and at the same time celebrated mass according to the Catholic ritual. Certainly, indigenous elements such as Sanskrit mantras, readings from the Holy Scriptures of India, Tamil hymns and so on were part of the daily liturgy. But the mystery of the sacrifice of the mass remained the centre of daily life in Shantivanam. Bede was open to non-catholic Christian traditions, but it did not bother him too much to study the differences. He opted for an existential inclusivism. For him, the great mystical traditions were the answer to overcome the differences within

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Christianity and between the different religions of the world. Thus, Islam was of interest to him only with regard to its mystical traditions, especially in the form of the non-dualistic philosophy of religion as exposed by Ibn Al Arabi. Bede felt that this understanding of reality came close to Shankara, and even Mahayana Buddhism as interpreted by T.R.V.Murti and D.T. Suzuki seemed to him not so different from the great sayings of the Upanishads, the Gita and the great Christian mystics.

However, during the last years of his life he suffered more and more under the impression that *all* present day religions are masculine in their character. Bede who had left his monastery in England precisely for that reason and had embarked on his adventure to India, wanted to discover the feminine side, both in the religions and in himself. This was the main concern of the last months of his life, especially after his first stroke which had brought him the gift of a deep spiritual experience of "the mother", as he would say. This feminine side, he said, needs to be developed and nurtured. All the dualities of world and God, nature and mind, heaven and earth, male and female need to be integrated, and this was, so Bede, the task for our generation and the next ones to come.

Bede has always remained a Christian, if the usage of this terminology is proper altogether. However, he had heard an echo in the Hindu contemplative experience which he had discovered first in the great mystic texts of Christianity. So in a way he is an example for dual religious citizenship, Christian and Hindu, and the question how this can be expressed theologically was present to him all the time. In later years he went *beyond inclusivism* in realizing the beauty and truth of other religious expressions in their own right, i.e. without seeing only the echo of the Christian experience in them. He was on the way towards a pluralist model. Yet, more than that, he took the Great Mother not only as a symbol, but as a mental and even political basic attitude from which a transpersonal pattern of our understanding of God and world would emerge so that our life should become more harmonious, softer, more graceful and gentle. This was his message.

In honouring Bede Griffiths' contribution to World Spirituality we need to address the questions *of theological pluralism* and of *multiple religious identity*. Solutions to the quest for a multiply religious identity must be concerned with *internal* pluralism that exists in any tradition and in each believer, whereas the *external* pluralism which results from the same problem of syncretic historical identities is being addressed by the pluralistic theology of religions. The first one describes the internal relationships within a given identity of a religion (or religious believer), the second one describes the relationship between traditions. Therefore, a theology of multiple religious identity and a (pluralistic) theology of religions are closely interconnected.

Solutions to both questions would have to be worked out as a Trinitarian theology.[1] The whole creation is derived and depending on God, so all that is bears the divine dignity and possibility to be a link with its origin. Christ as God incarnate makes the universal reality of God a historical presence under all broken and incomplete experience of the human condition (the cross), and God the Spirit universalizes this historical presence and delimits it again into a universal realm of divine presence not bound by human historical delimitation. In so far as all the works of the Trinity (creation-redemption-sanctification) are not divisible in His

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[1] This insight I owe very much to my first year in India 1975-76, when I spent a considerable time in the presence of Bede at Shantivanam and discussed the mystery of the trinity with him under the inspiration of the thought of Monchanin, Abhishiktananda and Panikkar. I cannot go into details here. The structure would follow the line of Trinitarian thinking I have suggested in: The Unity of Reality. God, God-Experience, and Meditation in the Hindu-Christian Dialogue, New York: Paulist Press 1991.

external work (*opera trinitatis ad extra indivisa sunt*) the presence of the One God in all His acts is not limited to any culture, religion, language etc. Therefore, *in principle* any historical identity can be an identity of/in/with the One Triune God. Whether this is so *in reality* needs to be looked into carefully, as I will show at the end of this paper. I will start with two preliminary remarks before I enter into the arguments proper.

First, simultaneous belonging to different traditions, groups, religious symbol systems etc. is a historical fact. I want to look into the question: What does that mean logically and theologically? Logically, we have to clarify the terms identity and plurality/pluralism. Theologically, we have to clarify the concepts of truth and salvation and their relationship.

Second, there is also a psychological and/or epistemological problem to be considered: There is an unavoidable incongruence in human development. What we learn during the first years of our life we learn differently from the learning processes in later life. The mother tongue is picked up differently from later modes of acquiring languages. In early years, due to the plasticity of the brain, synaptic links and structures are shaped which form the patterns of processing information that are hardly changeable later. Alterations and additions are possible, but a basic formation is being acquired which shapes our "character". The early years are fundamentally formative. Later knowledge is acquired additionally and interpreted into the early structures or into what has already been there. Thus, I may be able to add identities later, but this is qualitatively different from earliest identity formation, for later identification processes are clustered around what is already there. This well established incongruence has consequences for the building of identities including religious identities. I exclude here the question whether it is possible to grow up in two mother tongues or two religious primary identities simultaneously in early childhood. Evidence seems to suggest that this is possible. In most cases, however, we come across the fact that additional identities are acquired later in our lives. How? And what is identity after all?

2. Remarks on the Problem of Identity

The notion of identity may be considered in our context in two ways, first as a philosophical or epistemological term, second as a psychological and sociological term. Philosophically, identity is established in case something refers to itself. The problem lies in the term "itself". Something is given as representation to itself in as much as an objectification of a subject happens. If this is so, the identifier and the identified are the same and not the same at the same time. Interestingly enough, time comes into play here. Between the subject and the object in the process of cognition there is no difference in space, but in time. Identity implies identification, and this is a temporal process. In other words: identity is not a fact but a process in the making. Much more would have to be said here, but this may suffice.

Secondly, psychologically identity means a cluster of dependencies: we depend on relations established during the process of maturing, relations to the parents, to language and environments etc., generally speaking: psychological identity is a function of social processes which are continuously interpreted and reinterpreted in a changing identity matrix. The relation is not symmetrical: "my" identity is depending on given relations, and my own interpretation is always some reformulation, representation of what has been experienced. Identity is a shift of a "something" into a new context, and this context is my present experience. Since this experience is shaped by fields of relations that differ during my life and in several social contexts, I naturally live in different psychological identities which are marked and shaped by different social contexts. To give an example:

As a Saxonian living in Bavaria I have an identity as a Saxon, remarkably recognizable by my accent in German. As A German living in Europe I have an identity as German, remarkably recognizable by my German accent when I try to speak English or any other European language. As a person living, say in Africa, I will easily identify as a European and not as an American – especially in these times, i.e. assume an identity that is not only given but partially chosen for obvious reasons. If some ET would visit planet earth I would be easily identified as human as being different from ET's.

Thus, the construction of identity has two notable marks: first, it is a process which leads to ever changing results, second, identities overlap and can be simultaneous like defined systems such as Chinese boxes, where one includes the other. But sometimes and in certain contexts identities may exclude each other – such as the gender difference when identity is an identifying process in Gender relations, which however do not exclude the different subjects from being identical as humans.

What has been said so far holds true for religious identities. Consider the term Hinduism. We know that Hinduism comprises different religions in terms of typological definitions of religion used by scholars in religious studies. But for those looking from this side of the river Indus all those behind the other banks were called Hindus, Buddhists included, by the way. Later the term became more refined, and Buddhists were excluded, but even today Hindus often regard Buddhism as an aspect of their own religion, namely "Export-Hinduism".

It is a similar case with Christianity. Are Protestants and Catholics both "Christians"? In a sense yes, but under other considerations "no", as Cardinal Ratzinger may want to have it. (Whether Pope Benedict XVI. holds the same view still remains to be seen!) In certain Asian languages different terms are used to translate the difference, and all depends on the psychological, political and social circumstances. In times of persecution in Japan all the different Christian religions were one subject of persecution, thus establishing one identity. But in terms of organizational structure, self-definition and also theological identity which was and is historically constructed we have to speak of differing and perhaps different identities.

Thus, already the notion of identity shows that identity is a construct in multiple relationships which are to be interpreted in a host of multiple or plural parameter. Thus, if we look into identity we cannot avoid facing reality as a pluriform and pluralistic field of references. Identity constitutes "I" and "we" in facing and interpreting something or somebody as "other". Thus, identity is pluriformity. But how to understand pluriformity or plurality or, taking this descriptive term in general terms as the fabric of religious reality: religious pluralism?

3. Remarks on the Notion of Pluralism

3.1. Historical Developments

Historically, modern Western religious pluralism is a political and intellectual attitude developed after painful historical experiences of religiously justified wars in the 17th century in Europe. Christianity was divided confessionally and politically. Therefore a first step was a *pragmatic pluralism* in politics which politically acknowledged the claims of different forms of Christianity in view of the impossibility to implement any further a monolithic form of culture based on the monotheistic principle "One God, One emperor/pope, One rule, One society". This concept never was political reality but since the times of Roman emperors it

remained the ideological claim of centralized power based on religious monotheism. The modern liberal and pragmatic principle of a division of power (executive system, legislative system, juridical system) is the basis for the freedom of the individual (Locke, Montesquieu) and as such the acknowledgement of a pluralistic structure of human relations over against a monistic system.

This pragmatic pluralism did not yet have a sharp theoretical foundation, because truth was still regarded to be one, based on a pre-critical theory of correspondence of fact and true expression. The truth of science and the truth of religion had not yet been clearly separated. This changed with the age of enlightenment in the 18th century. Here a *theoretical pluralism* was developed, though with different and ambiguous political consequences. The argument was based on a distinction between the truth of reason and the truth of faith. Faith was not any more subject to rational proof, because Kant's critical investigation showed that we know what we know through the categories of the limited human mind which are both innate (time, space, causality) and culturally conditioned (language). Religion became a matter of practical reason, and the best example of the consequences was Lessing's Nathan who states that the true ring cannot be known theoretically but should be tested practically. This allows for a suspended judgement and gives space to tolerance in the limits of the requirements of reason. Theoretical pluralism has different connotations which need to be distinguished and which have had different historical consequences:

- *Logical pluralism* (Chr.Wolff, I.Kant) which makes the distinction between knowledge and opinion. Mathematical truth cannot be compromised because they are subject to the rational distinction between true and false, but opinions wherever they occur are based on factors of pro and con, they are provisional knowledge and need not be exclusive, i.e. the other opinion can be appreciated and tolerated, even if one has good reasons not to share it.
- *Pragmatic pluralism* (W.James, A Pluralistic Universe, 1901) in the context of a theory of knowing argues against any monistic presuppositions which want to establish one metaphysical principle only but tries to understand religions and their ideas on the basis of their specific history.
- *Political Pluralism* (H.J.Laski, A grammar of politics 1925, et al.) is the product of 19th century social developments and requires that individuals are free to organize themselves in order to express their differing interests and to fight for them in legally organized form. Not only the plurality of political parties but also the organization of unions, cultural movements, pressure groups etc. are part of the principle that the social consensus is being negotiated in the discourse and civilized antagonism of group interests.
- *Historical Pluralism* (O.F.v.Gierke, Das deutsche Genossenschaftsrecht, 1868-1913) is a modern development based on the sociological insight that different groups (economic classes, milieus, religious denominations etc.) make different historical experiences in one and the same historical context which should have legal consequences in so far as between the private sphere of the individual and the public affairs of the state there is the "Genossenschaft", i.e. freely organized groups (family, societies, churches) which differ in perception of and interests concerning the social process so that a specific perspective of a "social law" could mediate the pluralities into a workable pluralism. This debate provoked the wider insight, that the history of a society is pluralistic in itself both in terms of historical experiences and in terms of the perception and construction of historical identities.

The present concept of a *pluralistic society* within the framework of a market economy and the organization of society in democratic setting is based on all these aspects and historical developments. It is the organized exchange balancing out different (and even contradictory) interests of individuals and groups based on the principle of equal or just *participation*:

Ideally, each individual as such or in organized groups should be able to participate economically in the "free market" and politically in the process of communication and opinion making in a society. Therefore, the law is to guarantee fair play and access to all possible resources. The question is not a question of truth but of equal access to the means of participation in the social processes of a civil society. All religious truth claims should be subordinated under this principle.

Religions, however, in most cases have a different agenda: They claim the possession of truth *and* salvation due to special revelation and – in the case of proselytizing "world religions" – propagate their way of life as the *only* way to human fulfilment. Thus, a pre-critical unity of cognitive and existential truth is innate in most theological systems. Modern "protestant" movements (in Christianity as well as in Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, even Islam and other religions) may try to apply Kant's critical distinction to argue for a separation of the questions of *truth in terms of knowledge* and *salvation in terms of existential conviction*, but the so called "fundamentalist" reaction denies this disentanglement because of the fear of loss of identity and values. The present debate about a pluralistic theology of religions is by no means only a matter of intellectual clarification but has much to do with this political and institutional setting.

3.2. Systematic Distinctions

The question of a multiple religious identity is directly connected with the factual plurality of religions in a shared space of living and the theoretical recognition of this plurality as a consciously recognized pluralism. Based on these historical developments certain logical distinctions in the notion of theological pluralism might prove to be useful. First, we need to recall that the pluralistic theology of religion(s) is a reaction against *exclusivism* and *inclusivism*. Without this background the thrust of the argument of the pluralist theory would be missed. We cannot go into the details of the development and typology of these views[2] but want to highlight only some special implications.

Exclusivism has a twofold basis first in a theological argument and second as a claim of social power. Theologically, exclusivism is based on the exclusive claim to a specific revelation which is to be recognized as divine intervention and thus, is beyond rational arguing. This is a supranaturalistic claim which historically appears in different forms. It is an abstract claim because it cannot avoid stating that any transcendental or supranaturalistic "content" needs to be mediated by a set of semiotic structures which are culturally relative. Any exclusivistic claim is made in language, and symbols of language are particular, related, changing and subject to interpretation, i.e. language is a net of communication which is to be disclosed in hermeneutical discourses. In other words, this net of communication is inclusivistic of differences in semantic notation and connotation. Therefore, in cognitive terms exclusivism is a self-contradiction. As a claim of social power exclusivism is collective self-aggrandisement and historically often has been a cover for greed and political power. It is the attitude of clerical systems which cling to structures of power, and exclusivism in the political and the religious arena is the ideology of the establishment. Psychologically speaking exclusivism often is based on fear and uncertainty, because it avoids the open argument and vulnerability in meeting opposing views and the claims of the other. Religious reformers such as Gautama, Jesus, Nanak, Ramakrishna, Gandhi and others opposed those exclusivistic claims by pointing out that they are an expression of idolatry: the limited symbol is being idolatrized as absolute.

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[2] A very comprehensive overview dealing with nearly all possible options of a theology of religions with historical details and systematic expositions has been presented recently by M. Hüttenhoff, Der religiöse Pluralismus als Orientierungsproblem. Religionstheologische Studien, Leipzig 2001.

Inclusivism is a form of paternalism. It tries to include the other into the own. In cognitive terms this is unavoidable, as I will argue at the end of this paper, but in social terms this is dangerous. Because here the otherness of the other is negated, and acceptance of differing views and values is possible only in as much as it can be argued that the other finally is not other at all – difference is negated or declared to be unimportant, and the claim is that all is the same. Here it is important to investigate into the motivation of the argument. Two options seem to occur: a) If the other is regarded to be the same but not equal, the position is a kind of cynic denial of the rights of the other; b) if the other, however, is taken to be equal in all aspects of life (soteriological, economical and social) the position would lead to the acceptance of mutuality. And as a position of *mutual* inclusivism it is in a certain way an unavoidable option.

The argument of the pluralist concerning the theology of religions is to point out the problem of inclusivism (a). The pluralist option here is a principal theological option for the possibility that the other in his/her otherness can reach the fulfilment of life. This does not mean that all what the other claims is to be taken as truth. It means that in principle his/her view and/or values for principle theological arguments *may be valid or true.* The theological option for a pluralist position needs to be looked at in an analytic way, because under this "theological option" a number of different aspects of pluralism are often being discussed without a proper distinction between

- metaphysical pluralism
- philosophical pluralism
- epistemological pluralism
- cultural pluralism
- theological pluralism.

These aspects cannot be established on these same level of theoretical consistency, and they need to be treated briefly in order to enhance our analytic tools for an operational set of arguments concerning possible pluralistic option(s).

Metaphysical pluralism might be a theoretical option, but to me it seems to be unsatisfactory because the human mind seeks unity, simplicity (elegance) in the explanation of the world and finally a unified world view. Looking into the history of metaphysics as well as the history of physics this is obvious: Thinking looks for the unity of knowledge.
Philosophical pluralism is a logical question. Whether different logics are possible or not is debatable. In principle, different worlds can be imagined, and they might have different philosophical principles. If it is being argued that even the laws of nature are subject to historical change (in macro-spheres and macro-times) different principles of different worlds can be envisaged. However, we need to be aware that even these different imagery needs to be interpreted in our present languages and logical systems, otherwise they could not become subject of our cognition. Thus, a strict philosophical pluralism would be irrelevant, to say the least.
Epistemological pluralism is impossible because any cognition needs to be expressed in a semantic framework that is given, for it is the basis for intersubjectivity. But since the intersubjective system of language is the precondition for mental consistency of the individual, it is not only a matter of communication between individuals, but a matter of mental stability of the individual itself. Any new cognition is related to what is already known. Otherness is relational alterity. These relations follow patterns of historical contigency, thus the other is a related aspect of one's own identity – in terms of notions as well as attitudes – and always in the making. In the making means that new impulses or

experiences are interpreted in terms of known ones. That is to say, all "newness" can be known as such only in so far as it is not totally new or other but related. Even if a person would be strictly bilingual he/she may certainly change perspectives, but at a given time he/she needs to operate under the perspective of one semantic system in order to construct a consistent experience. And both perspectives need to be and are correlated in the process of a continuous translation. Therefore, epistemological pluralism is a contradiction in itself.
Cultural pluralism is a matter of political ethics. It has to do with fairness and justice. Natural diversity and cultural diversity are something given before humans have an option to argue for or against it. Even if one would hold the view that different cultures and languages are a hindrance to the development of humankind and that the difference of forms of life should be overcome, one would have to express this view and argue for it in different languages and cultural patterns of communication. Cultural pluralism is a historical datum, and to acknowledge it is to give rights and empowerment to marginalized groups. Therefore, it is an ethical imperative.
Theological pluralism is the position that differences in the interpretation of the world do not imply that the other is excluded from salvation. The question of truth and the question of salvation are distinguished. It does not claim that any other religion (or one's own religion for that matter) is "true" as such, but that truth and untruth might occur everywhere, whereas salvation is not dependent on a specific expression of trith. Truth claims need to be justified according to criteria which are subject to intellectual analysis and debate on the basis of coherence and consistency, irrespective of the belonging to any tradition. From a Christian perspective, it is argued, to accept such a pluralism is necessary because plurality is empirically given in the order of creation. An other example is the religious history of India: philosophical positions can be contradictory and mutually exclusive, but all those positions are not decisive for salvation (*moksha*). Rather, *moksha* is a matter of seeing the relativity of any possible view and transcending it existentially. In Indian parlance, truth (*satya*) is not only acknowledged but realized or experienced (*anubhava*). Here, you can be wrong but saved.

4. The problem of Truth and Religious Constructions as the Foundation of Values

Theological concepts depend on a community which accepts those concepts intersubjectively. Thus, the community seems to be the presupposed basis for any debate on values. On the other hand a community is formed as a coherent structure only because of a specific identity. Identity, however, is shaped both by delimitation from other identities and by building up structures of a worldview which is the basis of tradition, collective memory and a consistent structure of rules. Therefore, it seems to be this set of assumptions and beliefs as collective memory which is the presupposed basis for any community. In other words, we cannot focus on either of the two factors without looking at the other factor at the same time: *Community comes into being because of a shared set of collective ideas, and those ideas live only in a specific community.*

Here we will focus only on one aspect of the complex matter, i.e. the problem of the consistency of a set of values which seem to shape a certain culture, country, continent or tradition. The philosophy implied here could be expressed in one sentence:

> *It is as it should be for things are what they are precisely in being expressed that way.*

However, such unquestioned ideas, paradigms or sets of rules are taken for granted only as long as there is no alternative and no need for comparison and a selective process of acquiring the tradition. As soon as a society is confronted with alternative models of living and different rules, it needs to construct a new identity, for even a conscious foundation or philosophical reasoning for a certain standpoint is qualitatively new over against a tradition which had been taken for granted. As soon as there are competing ideas it is also (but not only) a matter of consistency to formulate a religious value system which is convincing and acceptable to a society. Thus, the question of truth comes in.

4.1. Truth

But what is truth? Truth is not just a theoretical or epistemological question but an existential concern as we can learn from Hebrew *'emeth* (trust), Greek *aletheia* (revealing the covered) and Sanskrit *satya* (self-expression of being as it is). Here comes in Bede Griffiths' most important contribution: His interest was less the theoretical argument, but the living model of an authentic response to the calls of life. And these calls led him due to a comprehensive openness and *beyondness* to a pluralistic outlook.

Here, we cannot go into the details of the philosophical problem of truth as it has been discussed in Western and other philosophical traditions.[3] It suffices to keep in mind that any discourse on this question needs to cultivate an awareness that the question itself is culturally conditioned: There is not one universal question of truth which might be answered in different material ways through cultural conditioning, but the very *structure* of the question of truth or the whole *concept* of truth is different in different cultures, both diachronically and diatopically. Thus, Indian Buddhism developed the concept of *satyadvaya*, the two levels of being or truth (*satya*), viz. the conventional or relational level and the absolute or holistic level.
This was modified in China where the model is not a hierarchy of levels but an organic harmony of the interplay of mutually dependent forces. This Chinese concept of „truth" as the balanced harmony of mutually dependent forces or powers found its specific expressions in Confucianism, Taoism, Chinese Buddhism etc., but it was always there and is a distinct paradigm compared to the Indian model of hierarchies and levels.[4] Very different from the Indian and Chinese concept is the Greek and European model of truth. But even one culture develops different models of truth in the course of its history. So "truth", i.e. the construction and methodology of truth is also subject to historical change.

Let us look briefly into the European tradition in order to substantiate the point.
As has already been noted, both the notion of truth and the methodology to find truth are historically conditioned. What European history is concerned, I shall distinguish three models which differ from the models of other cultures as I have just mentioned:

- an *onto-theological* model which lasted from the pre-Socratics until the Realists in the Middle Ages;
- a model centered on *subjectivity* which lasted from Nominalism until German idealism;
- *language analysis* ever since.

Most thinkers of Greek Antiquity and the Christian tradition until Nominalism believed in an ontology which could express general notions about reality. Parmenides, Plato and Aristotle

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[3] I have discussed some basic methodological points concerning a cross-cultural debate on „truth" in: M.v.Brück, Wahrheit und Toleranz im Dialog der Religionen, in: Dialog der Religionen 1/1993, pp. 3ff.
[4] Cf. M.v.Brück/W.Lai, Buddhismus und Christentum, München 1998, pp. 621ff.

held the view of identity, continuity or at least of correspondence between being and thinking in the concept of *logos* or *nous*. Unchanging and „true" structures as well as things could be known in their suchness. How? By participating in these eternal structures. That is to say: to attain the proper knowledge of reality is the basis of ethical quest and the foundation of certainty. A statement which has been proved true once was true for ever. Aristotle[5] holds that the relation of each being towards truth is the same as its relation to being as such. Therefore, the congruence of being and knowing makes possible the *theoria* of philosophy, i.e. the possibility of talking truth. In this line of thinking Thomas Aquinas[6] defines truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei.* This theory of correspondence has been developed and refined in different ways, but in any case it presupposes that, without doubt, the „thing" or the matter can appear to reason as it is. Christian theology added, that the basis for the correspondence of the knowing and the known is nothing else than God. Would not the divine *logos* be present in human thinking, nothing could be known as true. Participation in truth is participation in the Divine. Hence, what became known as true was divine, beyond any doubt. However, in human history this participation in the Divine was made difficult (or nearly impossible) due to human freedom and striving for independence from God (the *hybris* of the Greeks) which Christianity called sin. The paradox is, that man in using his freedom given by God unavoidably deviates from God at the same time. And this is why human history is the struggle and fight for truth, for positions, claims and values. The paradox could be solved only by an act of highest freedom of God himself: his self-sacrifice.

This structure of thinking was convincing as long as its foundations were generally accepted: the correspondence of divine and human *logos*, or the ontic order and the order of thinking. However, at the peak of the Middle Ages and especially during the Renaissance the eternal divine order got a competing realm to deal with: the reality of matter, which was held to be „objective", that what could be known through senses and experiment. But even here we still have the basic structure of the old view: Things change temporally, but in space they exist eternally, they change in time, but this change follows a course which is predictable as long as all the initial conditions would be known. Now it was the world that was limitless in time and space and thus „the world" (or matter and nature) inherited what before were the characteristic marks of God. Therefore, even in this model the traditional ontological structure remains the same: Truth once known remains constant in a given system.

These ideas and ways of thinking were shattered by nominalism, by later sceptical theories and, in our century, by modern physics and recently by neurosciences. Now, all notions, ideas and concepts which we are using are not any more grounded in a superhuman realm of ideas, but in the human mind. All we can think is a construction made by our own mind. That is, ideas do not refer to God or some immovable order beyond but to the human being itself. Therefore, the foundation of truth can be sought only in human subjectivity - *cogito ergo sum.* Finally, there is not any more an assumption about a correspondence of being and thinking, but only the self-affirmation of the human subject.

To shorten a long philosophical development we can summarize and comment on the consequences of this view: *Truth does not become subjective, but it rests on an intersubjective process of communication.*

Whatever this may mean for other fields of experience and thinking, here it suffices to note that this development led to the relativity of truth and the relativity of all criteria for truth, the

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[5] Aristotle, Metaphysics 993 a 30
[6] Thomas Aquinas, De veritate q. 1,1.1; Summa theol. q.16,a.2 ad 2

relativity of values and the lack of an „ordering centre"[7]. This had and has consequences for the search of identity - not only for the individual and its „meaning of life", but also for the coherence of societies. In other words, relativity means also plurality of truths and values, of ethical principles and ideas.

I cannot go here into a discussion of truth in different Asian traditions. In Asia we do observe processes of pluralization, too, both in India and in China. But the consequences have not been the same.

4.2. Truth and Language

Summarizing what has been discussed so far we can say:
Any concept of truth depends on language. All human language is metaphorical, i.e. the concepts of space, time, causality, matter, being, consciousness, truth and so on are metaphors which are mutually dependent and related to each other. They are not just descriptive but imply reflections which depend on the social construction of a trans-individual communication of consciousness and contexts. Language (and concepts) does not only communicate information about something given, but evokes images and motivations. Those motivations are communicated in structures of communication which form the matrix of a social pattern. This pattern is not a pre-stabilized harmony, but it is historically contingent and needs to be called a product of cultural processes.

Therefore, there is nothing like „the" Asian values (or even Chinese values) or „the" Christian European tradition, but there are complex *historical* processes which construct precisely those concepts for the sake of social and political coherence of a given society. Expressed in a different way: *Tradition is not something given in the past, but a process of construction in the present*. And today, no doubt, it can be said that those processes - be it in China or Europe - follow pluralistic patterns.

5. Christian Truth claims, Pluralism and the Question of Multiple Religious Identity

The possibility of a religious pluralism and perhaps a multiple religious identity depends on intellectual, emotional, social and institutional concerns and decisions. *Intellectually* the consistency of different views on God, humankind and the world needs to be attained, at least in principle, because it would be difficult to combine totally contradicting views without loosing intellectual integrity. *Emotionally* it is most difficult to combine different religious identities because religious emotions are being formed uniquely during childhood. If during this period of life different emotional religious identities are combined it may be possible to belong emotionally to different traditions, but in most cases there is one religious formation during childhood and the other ones are being added later during adolescence and/or adulthood. This implies an emotional difference towards the different traditions which cannot be bridged later in life. It is similar to having acquired a mother tongue and added knowledge of different languages in later life. Like languages, religions are being learned differently during different periods in life. Thus, one may develop later in life multiple religious identities, but the emotional belonging is not in the same way and the relationship to the respective traditions is different in each case. *Socially* it is certainly possible to belong to different religious groups at the same time, though, as history shows, in most cases by

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[7] W. Heisenberg, Wandlungen in den Grundlagen der Naturwissenschaft, Stuttgart 1959, p. 139

combining allegiance to different religious groups individuals in exchange and cooperation with other individuals forms a new group identity which may emerge as a new religion. *Institutionally* the problem depends entirely on the regulations of the institutions which may allow belonging to other religious institutions or not. In case of Christianity, Islam and Orthodox Judaism this is hardly imaginable, in parts of Christianity (Quakers), Liberal Judaism, Hinduism and Buddhism this is possible or might become possible. It depends on the ideological structure which legitimizes the institution, in most cases this is the question of *theology*. I want to share some reflections only on a possible Christian answer:

1. Different identities do not necessarily exclude each other but can complement each other. Therefore, local, regional and global identities can be related to each other. This holds true for political identities as well as languages, i.e. dialects, regional languages, communication in a „world language" etc. In similar ways religious identities can be related to each other. Different identities influence each other through processes of amalgamation and exclusion. Identities are shaped in ever changing contexts and they are always a process.

2. Economic and cultural globalization requires a networking of political and mental processes which transcend individual as well as national structures; even the difference between nature and culture (technology) is being challenged. This process implies a dramatic evolution of consciousness which changes traditional identities. Traditionally religions have been central sources for identity, and that is why they are challenged by those processes in their very structure as traditions. Under the condition of modern pluralism the formation of identity is different than in the past, i.e. more than ever a simultaneous participation in different identities is not only possible but more and more the rule. This implies simultaneous participation in communities of tradition and values which have been different or even separated before. This has consequences for the claims and reclamation of tradition by institutions which form their identity in clinging to and constructing traditions. Such institutions are churches, theological communities etc.

3. Human history is the struggle for truths under the condition of contradicting truth claims. This implies that each perception and the following knowledge necessarily remains relative and particular. Cultures and religions which have reached beyond regional boundaries have established their identities in competition to each other and stabilized themselves in excluding the claims of the other – constructing the other as the strange or the enemy. Truth is conditioned by language, and language is metaphorical, i.e. notions as space, time, causality, matter, being, consciousness, truth etc. are metaphors related to each other and conditionally interdependent. Those notions are not merely descriptive but they imply a contextual reflection which is dependent on processes of consciousness formation. Language does not only communicate information about given facts, but it evokes images, motivations etc. The result is that when we talk about truth the problem is that we are not talking only about the possible congruence of thinking and facts (*adaequatio intellectus et rei*), but about a communication of experiences.

The claim to have the truth more adequately than other traditions has led to violence in the past, because truth claims were established by force so as to achieve not only political dominance but also psychological stability of the subject who absolutizes relative truth claims.

The pluralism of truth claims in the present day world is the result of the history of reason and sciences, but it is also the consequence of social modernization and the experience of cross-cultural relations and interaction.

4. *Religious* sentences are true in as much as an *unconditioned* reality is expressed or represented. Finally it is the certainty that things are as they are and that this suchness is finally good. This is what we can call the religious dimension of truth, as the Hebrew word *'emeth* signifies truthfulness and reliability of God, and this is his truth which humans participate in, in so far as they dwell in God's *'emeth* (Ps 26,3; 86, 11 etc.). Thus, "truth of God" is not a definition or expression about God, but - as subjective genitive - a self-expression of God to be in truthfulness what he always has been in spite of all our experiences and reasons of relativity. In spite of all our relative knowledge and expressions such or similar absolute expressions form the identity of religions. Those expressions, however, need to be experienced, they cannot be transmitted any more by authoritative communication. Therefore, the contemplative dimension of religion plays an ever growing role precisely under the conditions of religious plurality.

5. Truth, however, is not only a matter of cognition nor is it identical with understanding, but it is finally ungraspable. This is the existential or religious dimension of truth which can be enacted and realized in rites, in ethical decisions but also in the realization of structures of thinking, such as in that which has to be assumed with necessity. But its main area of realization is meditative experience. Each one of these realizations is dependent on culturally conditioned perceptions and interpretations, i.e. on cognition which is relativized by language. However, this does not mean that those realizations would be arbitrary. Because we have to maintain the principle which is also to be acknowledged in cross-cultural discourses so as to enable rational exchange: the *principle of coherence.* Accordingly, a sentence can at least temporarily assumed as being true, if it is coherent. A sentence is coherent, if it can be integrated into a system of meaning without contradiction. However, the principle of coherence is only a necessary but not a sufficient condition of truth, because it cannot explaine what a system of sentences finally is, i.e. the whole or the one is being presupposed but not explained. It remains a relative assumption. Furthermore, the principle of coherence is insufficient for obviously immoral acts such as killing on the basis of religious and ideological reasons can be argued for quite consistently and without contradiction.

6. Hence, more criteria are required so that truth can be ascertained and distinguished from untruth. I would like to mention one important criterion, and this is the *principle of integration.* Integration means that sentences and modes of behaviour must in a rational way be integrated into the relative system of values of a specific religion or society. However, in principle a relative system is open. In Christian parlance: knowledge of truth is a matter of the eschatological future, i.e. in the present we have truth in the mode of search for it. But now we do have the criterion of love which becomes conscious and knowable in relational patterns of cognition, feeling and action, but it can lead only to relative decisions. This is precisely the place for a productive argument in interreligious controversy.

7. The basic attitude and motivation which follows from these explanations is esteem for the otherness of others and a tolerance which does not exclude the search for truth or the dialogical discourse which is to establish more coherence in the search for truth. However, a dialogical discourse cannot be built any more on the attempt to gain one's own identity by disgracing the other or at the expense of the other. In analogy to the field of the political notions of security in partnership I have suggested to introduce the term of identity in partnership (*Identitätspartnerschaft*). Tolerance then is not a careless "letting be" but the openness for the other and the own so as to work out the creativity of possibilities in the otherness of the partners in discourse and encounter. Tolerance requires mutual criticism, because this is a sign of loving solidarity. Otherwise religion would become irrelevant.

Let me give an example and try to formulate what this could actually mean under a Christian perspective: When St. Paul encourages people to critically investigate everything and retain the good (1Thess 5, 21) there is the need for a criterion for he good. He mentions three of them (1 Thess 5,16-18):

a) *joy and happiness* which dwells in persons who are able to transcend themselves in prayer and thus live in the spirit, not in the ego,
b) *contemplation* or continuous prayer, which is the very nature of self-transcendence, because it gives freedom from fear to loose one's identity and thus is the precondition for dialogical openness and tolerance, for to possibly give up one's concepts and other ego-stabilizers is the prerequisite for growth and mutuality.
c) finally *thankfulness* which allows to accept the other or even the strange and unknown in an attitude of respect and even awe.

8. Truth is one, but under the conditions of space and time it can appear only in different and relative expressions. Christian faith depends on the claim that God has revealed himself for the whole of humankind in Jesus Christ. But as the revealed one (*revelatus*) he is at the same time and always the hidden one (*absconditus*). God becomes man, but man is not God. This sentence implies that the human cannot grasp fully the divine. God discloses himself in loving kindness, but not in grasped knowledge. This is to say that even in his revelation God remains a secret and mystery. He is and will always be the greater one.

9. Religions are not true by themselves, i.e. by their own claims. There are sound reasons internal to the Christian experience that truth may not be limited to one tradition but rather could or would appear everywhere: a) because God reveals himself also in creation and in a universal history of salvation, b) because many who do not call Christ by his name (they do not say „Lord, lord") obviously do fulfil his will in many different ways according to the standards set forth by the gospel (cf. Mt 25). Whether this is the case or not can be ascertained case by case empirically on the basis of a proper historical hermeneutics.

10. The criterion for Christian theological insights is the revealed God who presents himself in Jesus Christ as unconditional love. This love sheds light on the hidden aspect of God or God as a mystery. Even if God remains greater, other and unknowable in his being he would not contradict himself – at least it is obvious that this is the Christian hope and faith. That is to say that his otherness does not and cannot contradict his love. In this way God is the *non-aliud*, the non-other (Nicolas of Cusa). This is the basis for the Christian trust that relative human knowledge can correspond at least in principle with the final truth even if this truth remains hidden and ungraspable.

11. We need to make a clear distinction between a rational and relative dimension of truth on the one hand, and a trans-rational and existential dimension of truth on the other hand. A rational truth falsifies its opposite, at least in as much as it is a contradictory contradiction. Existential truths however can refer to a deeper level where the opposite may be true as well and yet remain true, because God as coincidence of opposites is the truth himself. Such a seeming contradiction are the two opposed sentences that God on the one hand is historically completely revealed in Christ (the relative historical truth) , yet on the other hand he is the one universal love which is not yet fully understood, recognized and experienced under any historical conditions (the necessary truth of reason).

12. This has consequences for the theological interpretation of the truth claims of other religions. Religions (including Christianity) are not true by themselves (or because they identify themselves as „religions") but only in as much as God is present in them. What does that mean? It is, of course, metaphorical parlance. If God is present or not can be ascertained only by the consensus of a community which needs to test and give proof of respective claims. Any such claim is a claim under a specific, i.e. relative perspectivic view. That is to say it is dependent on a standpoint under historical conditions which expresses the claim of certainty in uncertain language and experience. In dialogue of such different and differing perspectives happens what we call the actual history of religions. Religious identification as process happens in these discourses, thus any religious identity shaped in cross-cultural contexts is in-formed by multiple sources coming historically from different tradition. It is a matter of conscious recognition to be aware of this fact. How this multiplicity is expressed psychologically and in terms of social organization may differ. Some may feel they are Hindu and Christian, some may feel they are Hindu as Christian, some may exclude the other option and say they are "only" this or that, but in referring to the other and representing their identity over against the other they have logically included the other already into their identity formation.

Here, we could speak of different degrees of identification. Since we said in the beginning identity as identification depends on time, we must be careful not to neglect this factor in interpreting the psychological aspect of identity formation: I have a mother tongue, and probably also a "mother-religions". What is added later is learned and cognized in different ways than the primary formation. It is added, interpreting, deepening, correcting etc. something which is already given. Even if I as a born Christian would convert to Hinduism (whatever conversion might mean) I would still be primarily shaped in this specific Christian form. The same holds true the other way round, of course. Thus, identities overlap, but they are not on the same level. This is why I do not claim to be a Christian *and* a Hindu, but a Christian who is formed, changed, hopefully deepened etc. by Hindu identity. But even if would want to – I do not cease to be shaped by Christian identity primarily. Christianity is my religious mother-tongue, though I may want to express my experiences and beliefs much more clearly in Hindu language and symbols.

These different levels have a direct bearing on the question of identity and emotional aspects of religious identification. It is easier to build up multiple religious identity in intellectual and even social regards, it is much more difficult if not impossible to do so in emotional regard. What I have experienced in childhood once and for ever has shaped me in unique ways that cannot be erased in later adult life. In Bede Griffiths' case this was most touchingly expressed in his talk about God as the Mother. Here, at the end of his life, his experience of reality as "Mother" was a symbolic expression of his experience of tenderness and all-encompassing love precisely in the aftermath of the pain of the stroke. The Divine Mother expressed itself as the human mother and vice versa, and Bede relived an experience of "utter dependency" (Schleiermacher) in the realization of this mutually dependent love. To him, like for so many mystics, love is this mutuality of active and passive flow we experience in total surrender, expressed in the primary experience of motherly love.

13. The question of truth and the quest for salvation have to be distinguished. God's salvation does not depend on my religious identity or multiple construction of identities, for it cannot be conditioned by the human search for truth. In his house are many mansions, an insight which surpasses any possible religious cartography and identification processes. If in principle human beings in other religions could never be in the realm of salvation they would need to be won over into one's own camp, i.e. one would need to proselytize them for ethical reasons

because otherwise one would contribute to deprive them of the highest possible goal of life. And there would be no place for dialogue, but for a conversion to one's own system of cognition and life. That is to say the whole world would need to be converted to Christianity (or Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism) respectively, and this would lead to intolerance and bloodshed as history shows. This, however, cannot be the will of a loving God (not to mention the problem of fulfilment of people and peoples who have lived before the alleged oneness of humankind under one religious flag).

A theology considering the pluralistic option like any theology has a hermeneutic and an apologetic dimension at the same time. Hermeneutically it explains how biblical sentences get a new dimension of meaning in the context of plurality, i.e. plurality appears to be an expression of the multidimensionality and richness of God's unconditional love. Apologetically this insight is related to the expressions, i.e. sentences, convictions and patterns of behaviour, of all present day religions. Pluralistic theologians claims that there must be many paths in which salvation can be expressed, and they can mutually correct, encourage and supplement each other. However, any possible pluralistic position itself is also a related and relative position, it does not escape the perspectivic dimensionality, because humans always stand in a *specific* tradition of language, history, religions and values, which is the relative framework for any expression of truth, untruth and distinction between the two. That is why, in the footsteps of Bede Griffiths, I would like to call this method an *inclusivistic* pluralism.