

- **God, Reality and Religions: The Understanding of God and Reality in Other Religions and Some Assessments of their Truth Claims**
- *Dieu, la réalité et les religions, la notion de Dieu et de la réalité dans d'autres religions et l'examen de leurs prétentions à proclamer la vérité*
- *Gott, die Wirklichkeit und die Religionen: Das Verständnis von Gott und der Wirklichkeit in anderen Religionen und einige Beurteilungen ihrer Wahrheitsansprüche*

N. O. Breivik, Bergen

RÉSUMÉ

Une théologie des diverses religions demande une solide érudition, mais aussi une vue pénétrante de la manière dont ces religions s'affirment comme des expressions de la vérité. A cet égard, un examen des convictions religieuses concernant la nature de Dieu et la réalité est d'une importance fondamentale. En effet ces convictions déterminent la vie présente et future, la libération et le salut.

Cette étude expose quelques caractéristiques dominantes de la compréhension de Dieu et de la réalité, telles que nous les trouvons dans les religions primitives des Indiens d'Amérique, dans l'Hindouisme et dans les mouvements du "Nouvel Age". Ces traditions offrent des exemples d'orientations religieuses diverses:

sécurité vitale dans un univers régi par Dieu ou transcendance de l'existence dans l'espace et le temps.

Puisque ces convictions sont censées représenter la vérité et demandent une adhésion de foi, leur évaluation est un point critique. Les critères pour évaluer la vérité à ce niveau ne peuvent être déterminés que par la foi. Des éléments fondamentaux dans l'approche biblique des religions humaines sont brièvement présentées par l'auteur. Une saine élaboration de ces éléments est un devoir urgent pour la théologie évangélique. Malgré le rôle positif que les convictions religieuses peuvent jouer comme bases pour la vie sociale et morale, elles ne peuvent jamais satisfaire les besoins ultimes et profonds de l'être humain. En d'autres termes, il n'y a pas d'Évangile dans les autres religions.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Eine evangelikale Theologie der Religionen erfordert fundierte

theologische Kenntnisse, aber auch Einsicht in die Wahrheitsansprüche anderer Religionen. In diesem

Zusammenhang ist der Einblick in die Überzeugungen religiöser Menschen bezüglich des Wesens Gottes und der Wirklichkeit grundlegend, weil diese Überzeugungen die Basis für das gegenwärtige und zukünftige Leben, für Befreiung und Erlösung bilden.

Diese Arbeit weist auf einige der hervorstechenden Glaubensüberzeugungen bezüglich Gott und der Wirklichkeit in den Religionen amerikanischer Ureinwohner (Ur-Religionen), im Hinduismus und den New-Age-Bewegungen hin. Diese Traditionen illustrieren verschiedene religiöse Orientierungen: die Sicherheit des Lebens in einem von Gott geordneten Universum oder die Transzendenz der gegenwärtigen Existenz in Raum und Zeit.

Da diese Überzeugungen den Anspruch auf Wahrheit erheben und Glauben fordern, stellt sich um so dringlicher die Frage nach letztgültigen Beurteilungen. Kriterien zur Beurteilung solcher Wahrheit können nur im Glauben angenommen werden. Es werden kurz die grundlegenden Elemente der biblischen Sicht menschlicher Religionen dargelegt, deren fundierte Ausarbeitung eine dringende Aufgabe evangelikaler Theologie ist. Ungeachtet der positiven Funktionen, die religiöse Überzeugungen als Grundlage für das gesellschaftliche und ethische Leben haben, können sie nie die letzten und tiefsten Bedürfnisse des Menschen befriedigen. Mit anderen Worten: es gibt in den anderen Religionen kein Evangelium.

A conspicuous feature of Western religious life in our days is pluralism. This pluralism not only implies conflicting and competing answers to ultimate existential questions, but also a growing feeling that such answers must be many, that truth in essence is pluriform. This attitude of pluralism has gone deep into the present theological study of religions, questioning, and in some cases openly discarding, the very bases of Christian truth. The emergence of a pluralistic theology of religions leaves no doubt that concentration on the essentials of Christian faith has to be an inherent part of a theological study of religions.¹

An evangelical theology of religions takes its stand on the Biblical revelation, embraced by faith. But before we can understand the answers of God's revelation on the subject of other religions, we must listen to their answers to humanity's deepest problems of life. Our paper will be an elementary, a very elementary indeed, contribution towards such knowledge, concentrating on the understanding of God and reality.

By the understanding of God and

reality we mean humanity's deepest convictions as to the nature of Divinity and of reality. We shall focus on what religious man believes to be the truth about himself and his life, about the cosmos and the ultimate source of existence. These truths are formulated in myths and beliefs. They are the innermost basis of ritual life, of life and society as such. We are dealing with existential answers, convictions by which people live and die, that is, they demand faith. Then the question of assessing their truth-claims becomes urgent, and it becomes more than just a theoretical question.

As regards method, we must avoid generalizing in a classical but obsolete phenomenological way, sweeping across a multiple of religious traditions. We must rather make contact with concrete religious life, and focus on particular contemporary religions. Furthermore, the inexhaustibility of our theme makes it necessary to focus on a few main points.

Our selection of religious traditions is to a large extent determined by the rise of neo-religious movements in the West. By turning to Native American Religions and to Hinduism, we are focussing on at least

two of the sources to which modern humanity turns for spiritual renewal. The New Age Movement, to which we turn last, is a genuine result of this renewal. By this selection, fundamentally different religious orientations are illustrated as well.

1. Primal Religious Visions: Native North America.

Primal religions are not, despite centuries of Christianization and Westernization, phenomena of the past. In many areas they persist, directly or indirectly influenced by Christianity, and they form the basis of innumerable new cultural and religious movements.² Local churches are, largely on the basis of present ecumenical thinking, trying to integrate primal traditions and Christianity in an indigenous theology and an indigenous Christianity.³ Last, but not least, primal religions, especially of Native America, are important sources in neoreligious movements.⁴ These trends can all be observed among the Lakota of S.D., which we take as our point of departure in this section.⁵

One of the most salient features of Lakota, and of Indian spirituality in general, is the unitary vision of reality, of humanity, nature and the spiritual world. Reality comprises visible and invisible dimensions: humanity and nature on the one hand and the spirits and God on the other. Humanity is never the Lord of nature or his environment in nature, but he must live in deep dependence on and respect for nature. Consequently, there existed, and exists today, a deep feeling of inner harmony between humanity and nature.⁶

Nature, however, was always greater than humanity, an incomprehensible mystery, confronting humanity with spiritual dimensions and powers. It is this mystery, this incomprehensibility of the universe, which is reflected in the concept of '*wakan*'. This is a central but most difficult concept in Sioux religious life. On the one hand there are '*wakan*' powers, that is spirits and invisible entities and dimen-

sions in humanity's life and environment. On the other hand '*wakan*' is an expression of the human experience of the universe in its inscrutable and incomprehensible, even threatening, dynamic and spiritual dimensions. Consequently, it has been understood as an equivalent to our categories 'The Sacred' or 'The Supernatural'.⁷

In his care for food and health the Lakota, as for example in his pre-reservation life in the Minnesota forests, had to comply with the *wakan* powers, the spiritual dimensions and the spirits of nature. Foremost among them were the four great powers, related to the primary directions. In visions humanity entered, and even today enters, into personal relationship with *wakan* spirits, a prerequisite for becoming a good hunter or warrior. Healing is dependent upon the spirits and their presence, as seen in the modern day *Yuwipi* ritual.⁸ In Lakota rituals, not least the Sweat Lodge and the Sun Dance, the Great Spirit *WakanTanka* is approached through the Pipe, the central ritual element, and representation of the total universe. On the one hand *WakanTanka* is prayed to as the personal God, chiefly under the name *Tunkasila* (Grandfather)—creator and sustainer of the world. On the other hand *WakanTanka* is viewed as the totality of the *wakan* forces, even as the totality of the universe itself—the mysterious and incomprehensible. The introduction of Christianity has strengthened the personal dimensions of *WakanTanka*, which are prominent in today's religious life.⁹

On 'vision' quests people achieve intimate personal experiences of the spiritual world. But belief in spirits and in God never severs them from human life and society. Religious life aims, as seen in the rites of healing and the Sun Dance, originally a rite of cosmic renewal, at securing nature and human existence in nature. The goal is never a postmortal paradise, but good life within the recurrent rhythms of nature and society. The Sioux case does, however, indicate features of Native American understanding of God

and reality as such, features discernible in primal religions in general.

1. Nature and human life are realities of visible and invisible dimensions. That means: Reality is essentially a unity. Spirits and dynamic forces of life are not unreal, as in agnostic Western interpretations, but are real in the truest sense of the word.

The spiritual and dynamic dimensions are in fact the primary constituents of life and reality.

2. Belief in an ultimate source or reference of existence is prevalent in most societies—God, the all-encompassing source and sustainer of life. As such he is a *deus incertus*, that is ultimately unapproachable, with divinities, spirits, cosmic forces and ancestors as the more immediate reference-points of existence. He is hardly an absolute or transcendent God, existing rather within the closed circle of human and cosmic life, at times even difficult to distinguish from that circle. God in today's African religions, so highly praised by theologians Idowu and Mbiti, is really a God influenced by Christianity. The primary force in religious life in the majority of traditional societies, occupying the place of God, is rather the ancestors, as representations of Life itself.¹⁰

3. The fundamental orientation is towards life and security within the rhythms of nature and society, in harmony with visible and invisible dimensions of existence and not a transcendent divine or paradisaal existence. We mean harmony primarily as regards their understanding, and not as regards concrete experience and emotions. The relationship with nature seems more prominent in Native America, at least in traditional times, whereas the social reality, comprising living and dead, seems more prominent in Africa. In any case, 'the sanctification of life' remains the primary religious orientation in primal societies.¹¹

2. The World Religions: Hinduism

Hinduism is a general term for extremely diversified complexes of heterogeneous ideas and practices on the Indian subcontinent. This diversity on the social, philosophical and religious level is the outcome of immemorial revaluations of archaic structures and of internal innovations throughout the centuries. Running through the diversity, however, at least two recurrent ideas or ideological complexes can be observed: 1) The polarity between the phenomenal world of nature and of man's consciousness on the one hand and the deeper eternal reality on the other. 2) The *karma-samsara-moksha* complex of human destiny and salvation. Despite the atheistic nature of dominant philosophical systems, religious life is inherently concerned with the relationship of man and Divinity.

The most influential Hindu interpretations of God and reality are probably found in the *Vedanta* traditions. The neo-hinduism of Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan was well founded in Vedanta, which also became a bridge to India-inspired new religious movements in the West. Modern Indian theologians regard Vedantic spirituality very highly.¹²

In non-dualist *Vedanta* there exists only one reality—the eternal and immutable *brahman*, the impersonal absolute which is identical with the eternal human Self—*atman*. The phenomenal world of nature and history and of man's consciousness is from the absolute point of view an illusion; that is, it is relative and conditioned. Ignorant of the truth, man takes this world to be the real one, and acts accordingly. Man's present life is conditioned by former *karma*, as present *karma* conditions coming existences. Ignorance and karmic actions bind man to *samsara*, to conditioned existences in space and time, and cause the world to appear in accordance with karmic residues. The ultimate aim of life is liberation from *samsara*. Meanwhile one has to live within the orders of human and social life—the *dharma*, and to bear the fruits of this life, which may bring one closer to

final liberation from the eternal cycles of death and rebirths.

What about God? God is ultimately identical with *brahman*: God is the impersonal absolute which causes ignorance to produce reality in space and time. The personal gods of devotion are all within the *maya*, the world of ignorance.¹³ To illustrate this from the interpretation of Radhakrishnan: *brahman* is Being itself. This absolute is our very Self. The personal divine being—*Ishvara*—is identical with the absolute as seen from the human mind. The world does exist, but it is not ultimate reality. It is an expression of the ultimate. To Radhakrishnan Advaita *Vedanta* represented the universal religion, the real answer to modern humanity.¹⁴

Popular Hinduism, practiced within the ordinary social structures, concentrated on devotion to personal deities. The leading streams of Hindu religious life up to modern times bear the names of these deities: Visnu and Siva. In Visnuism humanity is absorbed in personal devotion to Visnu, Creator and Lord of the universe. Alternatively the focus of devotion is one of his avatars, of which Krishna is the most important, being equated with Deity itself. This devotion—*bhakti*—is the way of liberation. The way of devotion is a central message in the famous Bhagavadgita, to which we now turn.

Humanity, history and nature, that is reality in our terminology, is a grand cyclic process of creation and destruction. By his actions humanity perpetuates his existence within this process, indeed perpetuates the world itself. Within this process, his Spirit or Self is held in bondage. At the same time, God, Krishna, is the one who binds the manifold reality together, since the whole is his body: 'Then did the son of Pandu see the whole universe in One converged, there in the body of the God of gods, yet divided out in multiplicity'.¹⁵ God is both immanent and transcendent. He is *brahman*, and *brahman* is identical with the personal God Krishna. But Krishna is a God of grace, ready to save those who are devoted to him. The aim of human life is to realize

that I am one with divine reality. This will give human life a positive value, but the hope of humanity lies elsewhere, outside human life, in the transcendent.¹⁶

The Bhagavadgita had an enormous influence in the development of *bhakti* devotion and *bhakti* religious thinking or theology. In this tradition we find the influential Ramanuja and Caitanya. The latter became famous for his ecstatic devotion to Krishna, the highest deity.¹⁷ But Krishna was not only the personal Lord, he was at the same time the inner essence of reality, the world process being the eternal play of God. The power that brings forth the external world also creates internal love and devotion. The way of devotion is the way of liberation, culminating in the absorption of the Self in God. Caitanya consequently took the name of Krishna Caitanya: 'He whose mind is Krishna'.¹⁸

The tradition from Caitanya and his successors has had great importance in the cultural and religious history of India, especially in Bengal. During the last century the movement has been renewed, its message reaching even the Western world. The modern ISCON movement, that is the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, is a direct continuation of this strand of Hindu spirituality in Western countries.¹⁹

To summarize our section on Hinduism: To leading Hindu traditions God is personal, but this God seems ultimately to be a manifestation of the impersonal and eternal Reality, identical with the human Self. The world of nature and history is likewise a projection of, a play by, this ultimate reality. Liberation is primarily liberation from the cycles of birth, death and regeneration, a cycle which of course contains temporary joys, but which essentially is a cycle of hopelessness.

3. Modern Western Spirituality: New Age or the New Paradigm

The central core of the spiritual and alternative movements generally called 'New Age' is the creation of holistic views

of humanity and the universe, synthesizing elements from Western occultism, Eastern mysticism and primal shamanism, reinterpreted to meet humanity's modern existential crisis. Individuals and loosely knit groups all over the world, networks drawing from these sources, are propagating the total renewal and spiritual regeneration of humanity. More important perhaps than New Age in its apocalyptic vision is the general understanding of humanity, reality and Divinity—a new paradigm propagated without using the name New Age, but with appeal in all walks of life.

These movements are concerned with the very existence and survival of mankind, thereby striking the deepest sensitivities of life in our time. But survival in the nuclear age has to do with the very understanding of reality and of ourselves, as explicitly stated by F. Capra among others; the crises of Western civilization are manifold: in international politics, in economics, in health care, etc. But the deepest crisis concerns the understanding of humanity and reality. Here, however, at the most crucial of all crises, there are solutions to be found, and consequently, hope for mankind at the turn of the millennium.²⁰

The foundation myth of Findhorn, for more than two decades a midwife of New Age, points to the general understanding of God and reality pervading New Age ideology: Behind immediate physical nature there are spiritual entities—*devas*—manifestations of an ultimate impersonal cosmic energy. Through meditation hitherto unknown spiritual power and insight was released. The new consciousness promoted growth in humanity, in the terrain of Northern Scotland. Harmony of humanity, nature and spirit conditions universal evolution, physically and spiritually. Findhorn became a visible manifestation of the realities of the new Aquarian Age.

If we are to get a fuller understanding of New Age, we have to turn to their leading spokesmen. Among them is Sir George Trevelyan. For him, our ordinary world of experience is diverse and com-

plex. The diversity in nature and human life no one can deny. But behind 'all outwardly manifested form is a timeless realm of absolute consciousness. It is the great Oneness underlying all the diversity, all the myriad forms of nature. It may be called God, or it may be deemed beyond all naming—and therefore, as in the East, be called THAT. If one is of an agnostic turn of mind, one can refer to it as 'creative intelligence'. But from it derive all archetypal ideas which manifest in the phenomenal world. For that world issues ultimately from spirit, and its forms might be conceived as frozen spirit. The quality of being permeates everything, suffuses everything. Divinity is therefore inherent everywhere.'²¹

Another leading New Ager is David Spangler, formerly of Findhorn. Matter, Spangler tells us, is ultimately energy and Spirit. He speaks in fact of 'the inner Christ' in humanity and nature. In addition there is the Cosmic Christ, in a higher sphere above humanity and nature. This Cosmic Christ has partially revealed himself in the religions. Two thousand years ago he became incarnate in Jesus, and revealed the possibilities latent in humanity. Jesus Christ became the prototype, an expression of our own inner Christ-consciousness. Today similar incarnations are gradually taking place all over the planet, thereby fulfilling the prophecies of the return of Christ. We shall all become Christs, just like Jesus in his time. As the Christ-consciousness of Jesus initiated world-wide spiritual growth, the present incarnations will bring mankind to fulfilment: planetary regeneration and spiritualization.²²

Important New Age tenets are the following, forming the basis of a New Paradigm:

1. Our concept of the universe as it has evolved in the wake of Descartes, Newton and Kant is wrong through and through. Though the foundation of modern civilization, it has brought us to the edge of extinction. A total new paradigm, coming to terms with the real essence of reality, is absolutely necessary: Spirit is no projec-

tion of matter, it is rather the other way round.

2. Ultimately reality is Spirit, Intelligence or Creative Energy or (if it is felt convenient) Divinity, organizing outer disparity into an inner system and unity. It was this ultimate reality which was revealed or became incarnate in Jesus, whereby Christ or Christ-consciousness is but another name for this reality.

3. All is One—everything that exists is ultimately of the same nature and reality. In all its variations, New Age views of reality are monistic. There are no fundamental divisions, neither between God and humanity nor between humanity and spirit, neither between masculine and feminine nor between good and evil. The universe is one, and it is a oneness in individual and cosmic evolution, an emergent evolution towards higher integration and spirituality.

4. Turning to the question of God, we are merely facing the New Age understanding of reality from another perspective: What humanity in Christianity and other religions has experienced as God is in fact the inner essence of reality. God is but another name for Spirit, Cosmic Energy, Intelligence. Humanity is separated from God only in his consciousness. To put it in the christianized terminology: humanity has to realize his inner Christ-consciousness of which Jesus was the universal prototype.

If humanity is to survive its present threatened extinction, there is but one way possible: to realize the inner nature of itself and of reality. It is possible to distinguish between two general means of realization: 1) Techniques for altering consciousness, for the personal realization and release of the inner essence through meditation, channelling, etc. These are the ways of direct personal insight and transformation towards harmony, integration and creativity. At present shamanic drumming is an increasingly popular technique. Very often it is part of a total neoshamanic synthesis, reinter-

preting primal visions of the unity of humanity, nature, spirits and Divinity.²³

2) General intentions and efforts to live and act in accordance with the new vision of reality in all areas of life, for example nutrition, food production and health. In this way New Age ideology is continually being infused into alternative medicine, agriculture, paedagogics, etc. More important than spiritual peak experiences are the new styles of life, based upon new visions of it.

New Age is at the same time a view of life, a style of life and a therapy of life. Its formative impulses are legion. From the previous pages the continuities with Hinduism and primal traditions are evident. Reality is an organic and evolving unity of universe and humanity, founded in an absolute and ultimate essence: Spirit, Energy or Intelligence, not renouncing the world ultimately as in Hinduism, but affirming it as in primal traditions. The ecological features are among the most prominent in New Age. By declaring God to be a name for Spirit, and experiencing it as absolute reality, Divinity is absorbed in the total anthropo-cosmic unity. There is no room for personal community between God and humanity: New Age is the dissolution not only of Divinity but also of personal individuality. New Age is not only a denial of God, but strangely as it may sound, equally a denial of reality and humanity.

Having considered some elements in the religious life of humanity, we repeat once more: we have to do with convictions by which people live and die, existential answers demanding faith. Finally the question of assessing these truth-claims becomes urgent.

4. Assessing religious truth-claims: Some Biblical presuppositions.

Assessing religious truth-claims, we proceed from the descriptive and hermeneutical level of religious studies to the normative-evaluating level, demanding normative criteria of truth. Such criteria, whether derived from philosophy or reli-

gious life, can only be embraced in faith, that is in convictional, ultimately non-rational certitude. Evangelical theology is bound to explicate the full Biblical perspective on God and humanity, on what according to Biblical revelation constitutes religious life. That is: 1. The full Biblical truth of humanity's creation in the image of God (Gen 1,27). This truth can never be isolated from: 2. The full Biblical truth of humanity's fall and corruption, which implies: a) Humanity has no true knowledge of God, because who and how God is has become obscure and ambiguous (Rom 1.18ff., Eph 2.13). b) His life and quest for God is influenced or even determined by the world of spirits, nature and history, areas not only of divine but also of demonic influences (Rom 1.23ff., 1. Cor 10.19f.) c) The triune God acts as humanity's sustainer and saviour, calling him to conversion, the answer to this call being decisive for the course of religious life (Acts 14.15ff., 17.25ff.).

These are, very briefly stated, basic Biblical truths about religious humanity, together forming the ultimate foundation as to how religious and social life unfolds within the nexus of human consciousness and experience in nature and history. In conclusion, we shall relate these truths to the world of religions presented earlier.

1. The understanding of God in the religions and in the Christian revelation are essentially different, even if analogous attributes and categories are used in the description of God and humanity's relationship with God. (Even an unbiased descriptive study of religions makes this evident). One test-case: The inner relationship between God and reality (visible and invisible, human and nonhuman) in primal religions vs. Hinduism. The understanding of God in the religions is ambiguous, ranging from the personal to the impersonal, from mono- to poly- and pantheism, arising from humanity's inner dimension of transcendence and feeling for the divine, and formed by the total context of his spiritual experiences. Two other test cases are: The pluriform gods of

Hinduism and the ancestors in primal religions, as representations of Life, elevated almost to divine reality.

2. The Biblical revelation gives ultimate reasons for the immanent dimensions of religious life, including humanity as its locus and agent. We have earlier emphasized that religious convictions are the basis of humanity's social and moral life. This function as such is in accordance with God's creation of humanity, even if the contents of religious convictions are not in accordance with the will of God. With its orientation towards Life, primal religions are really coping with the Divine within the orbit of human life. With all its emphasis on transcending the nexus of reincarnations, Hinduism structures social and moral life. So far religious life satisfies fundamental human needs, but it is a satisfaction mixed with fear and uneasiness, which is especially evident in times of crisis. At the same time, however, religious convictions and rituals, and the spiritual entities to which humanity submits, keep him in bondage, leaving him within an order of existence which he is unable to transcend.

3. The problems of life and death, liberation and salvation are the innermost concerns of religious life. Despite all its efforts at creating meaning in life and release from evil and death, and despite the greatness of these efforts, there is within the range of humanity's spiritual possibilities no gospel. A final test-case: The concepts of grace in *Bhakti* Hinduism and Eastern *Amida* Buddhism (or *Jodoshinshu*). The contexts make it totally clear that these are not concepts of grace in Biblical terms, but the easiest possible ways of self-liberation. In primal societies salvation is essentially a question of securing existence within the limits of nature and society, by means of active ritual life.

Despite man's earnest and innermost spiritual longings, therefore, the deepest problem of life, our eternal destiny, remains unknown and unsolved. It is solved in the life, death and resurrection

of Jesus Christ, God's salvation to all people. Of this truth humanity is convinced by the Word and the Spirit of God, who regenerates to eternal life, regardless of whether we are nurtured in a Christian or a non-Christian tradition.

The final assessment of religious truth-claims can never be made in an attitude of spiritual superiority. There is no difference between us and people of other faiths: we are all to be saved by the grace of God. It is God himself, through his Word and his Spirit, who convinces us of the truth, even in the face of the fundamental questions posed by the plurality of religions and their truth-claims.

- 1 A typical representative of the pluralistic theology of religions is Paul Knitter; see his well-known book *No Other Name?*, London 1985. Cf. H. Blocher's essay in this volume.
- 2 The most spectacular, and the most studied, of these movements are the Cargo Cults of Melanesia. Cf. F. Steinbauer: *Melanesian Cargo Cults*, London 1979 (a general survey) and P. Gesch: *Initiative and Initiation*, St. Augustin 1985 (study of a modern movement).
- 3 Indigenization and contextualization of theology is of course a legitimate, and necessary, concern as such. Cf. T. Tienou: *The Theological Task of the Church in Africa*, Achimota 1990, 9ff. When, however, the indigenous culture is said to be 'a determinant to the ultimate answers this theology gives to the questions regarding the nature of Divinity and humanity', indigenous theology may become, and in fact has become, a channel of traditional spirituality. Quotation from: G. Setiloane: *African Theology: An Introduction*, Johannesburg 1986, 35.
- 4 This is especially evident in the so-called 'neoshamanism', cf. M. Harnere: *The Way of the Shaman: A Guide to Power and Healing*, New York 1980 and K. Meadows: *Shamanic Experience*, London 1991.
- 5 Cf. R. DeMallie & D. Parks: *Sioux Indian Religion: Tradition and Innovation*, Norman 1987.
- 6 Cf. the invaluable study by W. Müller: *Indianische Welterfahrung*, Stuttgart 1991.

- Å. Hultkrantz: *Native Religions of North America*, San Francisco 1987.
- 7 J. Walker: *Lakota Belief and Ritual*, Lincoln 1980, 65ff., R. DeMallie & D. Parks 1987, 29ff., Å. Hultkrantz: *The Religions of the American Indians*, Berkeley 1979, 13f.
- 8 W. K. Powers: *Yuwipi: Vision and Experience in Oglala Ritual*, Lincoln 1982
- 9 W. Müller: *Glauben und Denken der Sioux*, Berlin 1970, 247ff., W. K. Powers 1982, 19ff., R. DeMallie & D. Parks 1987, 28f.
- 10 We basically agree with J. Triebel in his recent study on the nature of God and the ancestors in African traditional religions; cf. his *Gottesglaube und Heroenkult in Afrika*, Erlangen 1993, particularly pp. 86ff. and 253ff.
- 11 E. Zuesse: *Ritual Cosmos: The Sanctification of Life in African Religions*, Athens 1979. According to E. Mantovani the ultimate concern of Melanesian religions is 'biocosmic Life'. *An Introduction to Melanesian Religions*, Goroka 1984, pp. 23ff., 147ff. As for Native America, cf. the above references to W. Müller.
- 12 One of them is S. Samartha, former leader of the WWC Dialogue Programme; cf. his book *One Christ—Many Religions*, Maryknoll 1991, 107ff.
- 13 M. Hiriyanna: *Outlines of Indian Philosophy*, London 1970, 336ff.
- 14 R. N. Minor: 'Sarvepalli Radhakrsnan and Hinduism Refined', R. D. Baird, ed.: *Religion in Modern India*, Manohar 1991, 421ff.
- 15 *The Bhagavadgita* 11,13, quoted from the R. Zaehner edition, Oxford 1969.
- 16 *The Bhagavadgita* 9,33.
- 17 Cf. J. Gonda: *Die Religionen Indiens*, II, Stuttgart 1963, pp. 115ff. for the history of *bhakti* devotion and theology.
- 18 W. Eidlitz: *Krsna-Caitanya: Sein Leben und seine Lehre*, Stockholm 1968.
- 19 J. Stillson Judah: *Hare Krisna and the Counterculture*, New York 1974.
- 20 Cf. for instance F. Capra: *The Turning Point*, New York 1982, part I.
- 21 G. Trevelyan: *A Vision for the Aquarian Age*, London 1984, 7.
- 22 D. Spangler: *Reflections on the Christ*, Findhorn 1981, especially p. 14. Cf. also his book *Revelation: The Birth of a New Age*, Elgin 1976.
- 23 One such synthesis is that of Kenneth Meadows, mentioned in note 4 above.