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# IS JOHN HICK'S CONCEPT OF THE REAL AN ADEQUATE CRITERION FOR EVALUATING RELIGIOUS TRUTH-CLAIMS?

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As is well-known, John Hick has done much to advance the popularity of the concept of religious pluralism over the past several years. As a Christian, Hick has worked assiduously to revamp the faith so that Christians will finally start to acknowledge the salvific nature of the other great world religions. Hick's goals are, to a certain extent, understandable. For too long Christians have often been arrogant in their assurance of the truth of their position, when in fact humble thanksgiving is the proper attitude for the Christian to assume in light of God's gift of redemption through his Son. However in his zeal to create a version of Christianity which does not suffer from 'theological imperialism', or 'the scandal of particularity', Hick reduces the truth or falsity of all religious experience to what he terms the 'Real'. In other words, any religion which establishes a genuine relationship between the devotee and the Real (i.e. God) must be considered a valid form of faith. Proof that one is in contact with the Real is evidenced in a changed life, in a turning away from selfishness towards selflessness. In short, there is ongoing moral improvement in the person's life. However, two serious, insurmountable problems arise from this view of religion: one, it allows for religions which are based on seemingly false premises to be labelled 'true', and two, it precludes, *a priori*, an honest *evidential* comparison and contrast between the conflicting truth-claims of the various religions.

To begin with, let us look briefly at Hick's criterion for determining a religion's truth: the concept of the Real. Once a person begins to renounce his or her self-centredness in favour or Reality-centredness, what is the result? It is what Hick terms salvation/liberation, although the traditional Christian understanding of salvation is not foremost in Hick's mind here:

> *salvation is not a juridical transaction inscribed in heaven, nor is it a future hope beyond this life (although it is this too), but it is a spiritual, moral, and political change that can begin now and whose present possibility is grounded in the structure of reality.*[1]

[1] *John Hick, 'A Pluralist View,' in Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 43.

Hick is not denying an 'afterlife' in the Christian sense, but his definition of salvation/liberation is primarily a 'here and now' one. The result of this is an awakening to the 'peace and joy and compassionate kindness toward all life'.[2] Basically, Hick is defining religion as a turning away from selfishness, and a turning towards God, or the Real. This change of heart makes it possible for members of the religions to become, to put it simply, better human beings. And, since every culture, regardless of its religion, contains many examples of devout men and women whose lives seem to be getting 'better', this is for Hick proof that all religions are equally salvific:

> *Their [the religions] soterical power can only be humanly judged by their human fruits, and ... these fruits seem to me to be found more or less equally within each of the great traditions.*[3]

Hick's insistence that all religions are equally valid, and therefore equally salvific, has mainly been confined to the major world faiths (Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism). However if a genuine encounter with the Real is the test for spiritual veracity, why should not this criterion apply to other, lesser-known religious groups, or religions with fewer adherents than the great world faiths? Surely Hick, who has so tenaciously fought for the concept of religious pluralism, would not want to deny the validity of one's spiritual life simply because that person does not belong to one of the five 'major' religions? It is here that Hick's notion of the Real encounters its first serious hurdle. I have in mind religious 'cults', or unorthodox religious groups which make claims that most other thoughtful religious people will find hard to accept.

For example, what is one to make of the Nation of Islam, the radical 'black' version of Islam, currently led by Louis Farrakhan? This group has attracted thousands of members of the African-American community in the United States. However, it is well-known that many orthodox Muslims (both in the US and abroad) reject the group as heretical (because, for one thing, its theology is based not only upon the Koran, but also many extra-Koranic teachings). It is also a fact that the group's spokesmen have made numerous anti-white, but especially anti-Jewish, remarks in the press. So frequent have been these attacks that

> *Farrakhan and his aides are now characteristically known as 'bigots' who have labelled Jews 'bloodsuckers', Judaism a 'gutter religion', Israel 'an outlaw state', and Hitler 'a very great man (albeit 'wickedly great').*[4]

It is therefore little surprise that, when Farrakhan spoke at New York's Madison Square Garden in 1985, the Jewish Defence League organised a 'Death to Farrakhan' march.[5] If all this were not enough

[2] Ibid, 50–51.
[3] Ibid, 44.
[4] Michael Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998) 185.
[5] Ibid, 184.

to ignite the ire of Jews, a publication put out by the Nation, entitled *The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews*, accuses Jews of playing a disproportionately large (almost demonic) role in the African slave trade.[6]

The racist rhetoric of the Nation of Islam is unavoidable, really, given the nature of the sect's cosmological beliefs. The Nation's beliefs about the origin of the world and the creation of man are, to be blunt, somewhat cartoon-like, and it is hard to imagine anyone who is not within the Nation taking them seriously.[7] To put it briefly, Allah created humanity, but all the first men were of the so-called Asiatic black race (Asia being the original name for earth). These first blacks were created in a pristine state, and were 'not the true source of moral evil in the world, for the production of such misery is against their nature'.[8] (It is only when blacks reject the truth of Allah and Islam that they can be said to cause evil.) Whites, however, are a different story entirely. They were not 'created' by Allah, but rather 'made' by an evil one named Yakub. This Yakub groomed his creations ('white devils', if you will) to the point where they became the masters of the globe and held blacks in thrall.[9] It is this evil domination of blacks by whites which continues to this day, and which the Nation of Islam has so forcefully railed against. Ironically, this all sounds very similar to what various *white* supremacist groups believe when they describe people of colour as 'mud people', inferior beings who are to be distinguished from the superior white race, whose members are the true descendants of Adam.

Surely, such a religion that teaches the inherent evil of Jews, black superiority and white inferiority, cannot be a true expression of Hick's 'Real'? Surely no-one in touch with the loving being Hick insists on equating with the Real could be responsible for the theology of the Nation of Islam? But wait a moment. The Nation of Islam *does* seem to do, in many cases, what Hick claims true religion should do: change one's orientation from selfishness to the 'Other'. The Nation of Islam can boast several moral success stories. For example, the Nation has 'gained national recognition and respect' for liberating inner-city black neighbourhoods which were formerly controlled by drug dealers and addicts.[10] The Nation of Islam can also boast great success in converting and rehabilitating many black men who are incarcerated in the nations prisons: 'NOI [Nation of Islam] officials have received numerous awards for their rehabilitation programs'.[11] Farrakhan himself has 'become a respected presence in

[6] Ibid, 185.
[7] For a good summary of the Nation's outlandish beliefs about human origins, see Anthony B. Pinn, *Varieties of African American Religious Experience* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998) 128–34.
[8] Ibid, 151.
[9] Ibid 132–33.
[10] C. Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994) 271.
[11] Mattias Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad: Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996) 306.

mediation and counsel' concerning the black-on-black gang violence which has wreaked such misery in the black community.[12]

Even if Hick were to claim that the overt racism of the group indicates they are not truly in touch with the Real, I would respond, why not? Their racism is a sin, but all truly religious persons manifest sin in their lives. Sin in one area (racial prejudice) does not cancel out all of the obvious turnings toward the Real which Nation members make in other areas, any more than a sincere Christian's trouble with, say, pornography or a bad temper, does not nullify all the truly Christian traits he or she evidences in other areas. All Hick's criterion of the Real requires is that religious persons are making moral progress, that they have turned away from self and toward the divine; moral perfection is never attainable. When one sees the well-groomed, smartly dressed members of the Nation of Islam passing out literature on the streets of major US cities (some of whom no doubt terrorised those same streets before their conversion), it is hard to think that they are not morally progressing, albeit imperfectly, towards Hick's Real.

In fact, the culmination of the Nation's positive influence can clearly be seen in Farrakhan's crowning achievement, his famous Million Man March. This was not a gathering of a few fanatics to spread racial hatred, as is so often the case with 'skinhead' and KKK rallies. This was the largest civil rights march in the history of the United States, and it drew anywhere from 650,000 to 1.1 million persons.[13] That this was a 'respectable' civil rights march can be judged by the black civil rights luminaries and scholars who supported and or attended it: Rosa Parks, Jesse Jackson, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Maya Angelou, and Cornel West.[14] West's words seem to sum up best the positive nature of the event:

> *the Million Man March was an historic event – called by Minister Louis Farrakhan, claimed by black people of every sort and remembered by people around the globe as an expression of black men's humanity and decency. Never before has such black love flowed so freely and abundantly for so many in the eyes of the world.*[15]

Here Hick would seem to be caught on the horns of a dilemma of his own making. The Nation of Islam teaches racial superiority along with racial hatred; this racism has its roots in Allah himself, and his racist preference for blacks over whites. Surely this cannot be a religion which is truly in touch with the divine, with what Hick terms the Real. Yet many of its members have changed their orientation in a way which Hick insists is a mark of true religion. And, in Hick's system, it is not the *content* of the religion, but only its *results* in the lives of the faithful, which determine its validity. Using Hick's criterion, those whose lives have been changed by the Nation of

[12] Lincoln, *Black Muslims* 271.
[13] Lieb, *Children of Ezekiel* 190.
[14] Ibid, 190.
[15] Ibid, 190.

Islam seem to indicate that the transforming power of this religion is quite powerful, and quite real.

A similar problem is posed for Hick by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints – the Mormons. Most Christian scholars would define them as a cult, not because they wish to denigrate Mormons, but because they are characterised by the things which are usually associated with cults. They take an established religion (Christianity) and add their own unique interpretation to it (the Book of Mormon); they have their own 'inspired' religious leaders (the leader of the Church, or the Prophet, the first of which was Mormon founder Joseph Smith); and they demand unswerving allegiance from their followers, and freely practise excommunication if their behaviour is unsatisfactory.

However, be they a cult or not, the Mormons have a widespread reputation for morally upright living.[16] I personally know several Mormons, and they are obviously devout, sincere people. Their devotion to God and family, and their eschewal of vices like drinking, smoking, and pre-marital sex, are well-known. Many readers of this essay could probably confirm this through personal encounter with Mormons in their everyday lives. Yet there is a problem with Mormonism: it is, in my estimation of the evidence, demonstrably *false*. Or, at the very least, it rests upon foundations which seems to have very little going for them in terms of verifiability. Many religions do not offer much in the way of negative *or* positive evidence for their truth-claims, so it is difficult to assess the veridicality of such faiths (for instance, can anyone prove one way or another that the Nirvana of Buddhism does or does not exist?). But unlike some religions, which are not capable of being decisively proven to be true or false, Mormonism *can* be shown to contain so many errors that its likelihood as a true path to Hick's Real must be seriously questioned.

The first problem arises from the Book of Mormon itself. It was supposedly discovered by Mormon founder Joseph Smith, who translated it from the original 'reformed Egyptian' via the use of a type of magical spectacles. The only problem here is that Reformed Egyptian does not exist, nor has it ever existed, according to 'every leading Egyptologist and philologist ever consulted on the problem'.[17] But the content of the Book of Mormon proves even more troubling. The Book claims to be a history of two ancient civilisations, one which left the Tower of Babel region and relocated to the east coast of what is now Central America around 2250 BC (according to Mormon reckoning). The second group left Jerusalem just before the Babylonian captivity, and settled on the West Coast of South America.[18] Of course, outside of the Book of Mormon, there is

[16] Walter Martin, *The Kingdom of the Cults* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1965) 167, 169. This book is considered by many to be the standard reference work on religious cults. And although Martin is quite critical of the Mormons, even he admits their reputation for 'clean living,' 'sound moral traits,' and devotion to church and family. Thus, they seem to be in tune with Hick's concept of the Real.

[17] Gardell, *In the Name of Elijah Muhammad* 172.

[18] Ibid, 178.

absolutely no evidence that such civilisations ever left the Middle East for the New World. In addition to this, the Book claims that there were thirty-eight great cities which were established in the Americas after the arrival of these transplanted Middle Eastern races. However, the

> *Mormons have yet to explain the fact that leading archaeological researchers not only have repudiated the claims of the* Book of Mormon *as to the existence of these civilisations, but have adduced considerable evidence to show the impossibility of the accounts given in the Mormon Bible.*[19]

Much like the cosmology of the Nation of Islam, the alleged history of the Book of Mormon must seem utterly fantastic to anyone who is not a dedicated Mormon.[20]

Finally, there are the 'prophetic' utterances of Mormonism's founder, Joseph Smith. If he was a prophet, as Mormons to this day believe, his prophetic skills (or lack thereof) may have got him stoned to death in ancient Israel, where false prophets were not suffered to live! His prophecy concerning the American Civil War predicated that England would become involved, and that the conflict would escalate into a world war. He also predicated that he would occupy his home in Nauvoo, IL 'for ever and ever'. The truth is that neither he nor his descendants remained in the house. In fact, the house was destroyed by fire, and the Mormons eventually sojourned into Utah.[21]

What are we to make of Mormonism then, in light of John Hick's criteria for determining a religion's truth? Without a doubt Mormon people seem to be living moral, 'holy' lives, which Hick insists is proof of a genuine encounter with the Real. However, what would a critical scholar like Hick do with the obviously false historical framework of the Book of Mormon? He certainly is not reluctant to discount portions of the Bible which he does not believe are historically accurate,[22] and the Bible is undoubtedly more firmly rooted in history than the Book of Mormon! What would he make of

[19] Ibid. 183. It must be realised that these are not mere archaeological discrepancies, as are often found when the Christian Bible is examined. There are parts of the OT, for example, which cannot be verified by archaeology, and some parts which seem to be undermined by it, but on the whole, there is obviously an historical basis to the OT writings. And it has long been recognised that the NT is firmly anchored in historical reality. See, for instance, F.F. Bruce, *The New Testaments Documents: are they Reliable?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1943) 80–99. This is not so with the Book of Mormon, where all the historical foundations of the book seem to be fabricated.

[20] For a thorough refutation of the 'historicity' of the Book of Mormon, see Martin, *Kingdom of the Cults*, 178–87.

[21] Ibid, 190–91. As with the seriousness of the historical inaccuracies mentioned above, so with these false prophecies. Joseph Smith is not a minor figure in the history of Mormonism, who can be allowed a bit of prophetic 'leeway'. He is the founder of the religion itself, and his false predictions do not bode well for the faith he claims to have discovered.

[22] Hick, *Four Views*, 31–36.

the false prophecies by the religion's 'inspired' author? As with the Nation of Islam, Hick would have to ignore these glaring problems, since, according to his theory, Mormons are genuinely engaged with the Real, based on the lives they lead.[23]

How might Hick respond to such criticisms as those listed above? First, he rightly concludes that not all religions are valid paths to the Real. The twisted religious ideas of, for example, the Nazis, Jim Jones, or David Koresh, certainly are not salvific, for obvious reasons. Plus, many religions/cults are too new, and a fair assessment of their validity cannot yet be made.[24] With this I fully agree. However, the Nation of Islam and the Mormons cannot be so easily dismissed, for, as previously explained, both religions meet Hick's criterion for religious validity. Also consider Hick's comments, taken from a passage where he is discussing the way to determine the validity of cults, and those faiths which are not among the major world religions:

> *[a]ny judgement about them has to be based on a close examination of each particular movement, and all that one can say in general is that the same criterion must apply as in the case of the great world faiths: are they effective contexts of the salvific transformation of human beings from self-centredness to a new orientation centred in the Real as authentically known in a particular human way?*[25]

Both the Nation of Islam and the Mormons provide a way for their adherents to make this transformation. And although Hick believes that a religion may be a genuine path to the Real, while at the same time containing elements 'that have little or no religious value, or indeed that work directly against the salvific transformation',[26] I do not think this approach will work in the case of the Nation of Islam and the Mormons. For the problems I have pointed out with these religions (i.e., racism, and dubious scriptural records) are not peripheral matters. Rather, they lie at the very core of each religion. The inherent evil of the white race, and the inherent superiority of the black race, are essential to Nation of Islam theology. And the Mormon religion itself would not be possible without the Book of Mormon.

The above-mentioned discrepancies encountered with the Nation of Islam and the Mormons are a serious problem for Hick, who sets up

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[23] The same approach I have taken with the Nation of Islam and the Mormons could probably be taken with atheists, as well. They, of course, deny belief in any type of religion whatsoever, yet it is common knowledge that there are many 'good' atheists among us. How would Hick explain the existence of atheists who lead charitable, loving lives? Surely they are not in touch with the divine? Or, if they are, it is a 'secret' relationship, similar perhaps to Rahner's concept of 'anonymous Christianity.' Surely Hick, given his Christian commitment, would condemn atheism as a false worldview. Yet how to explain the reality of 'good' atheists?

[24] John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: the Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 44.

[25] Ibid, 110–11.

[26] Ibid, 44.

a self-created, arbitrary criterion to determine what true religion is (self-improvement through contact with the Real). I suggest that one should examine the evidence (or lack thereof) for each religion and evaluate it, the same way one would evaluate the evidence for any other sort of truth-claim, secular or otherwise. Someone who does not share Hick's definition of religion could simply examine the religions described above (and all others as well), look at the pros and cons of each, and decide if the religion being scrutinised is true. For someone who believes God (or the Real) is a God of love, that person would have to reject the Nation of Islam's cosmology and theology, which portrays God as caring more for dark-skinned than for light-skinned persons. Someone who takes seriously the question of scriptural records (and this includes the closely-related matters of archaeology and history) upon which an 'historical' religion like Mormonism is based, would necessarily have to reject that religion, for the history espoused in the Book of Mormon seems to be entirely fanciful.

But such an honest look at the evidence for the world religions is something that Hick simply will not consider.[27] Why? For one thing, he does not think it is possible to acquire *enough* empirical knowledge about any of the religions in order to be certain that that particular religion is 'true'. Hick states that, because we cannot empirically prove, beyond a doubt, the truth of any religion,

> *[religious truth-claims] are not matters concerning which absolute dogmas are appropriate. Still less is it appropriate to maintain that salvation depends upon accepting any one particular opinion or dogma concerning them.*[28]

The kind of absolute evidence Hick desires is quite unrealistic, considering we almost never have this type of evidence regarding the most important decisions we make every day. I, for instance, may drive a certain route to work. I may consider it to be a very safe route (light traffic, no hairpin turns, etc.). I consider the road in question so safe that I drive it every day, almost certain that nothing untoward will happen to me on it. Of course, I could be wrong – tomorrow, on that very road I could be involved in a fatal car crash. Yet I consider this event so unlikely that I am willing to continue

[27] One reason for Hick's reluctance here is the fact that he believes his interpretation of religion will allow the world religions to live in a more harmonious atmosphere, once such exclusionary religions like Christianity stop insisting the Christian faith is the only true faith: 'a religion that accepts the other great traditions as equally authentic can join with them to promote international peace and to solve the problems of planetary ecology and two-thirds world poverty, malnutrition and disease, and the vast periodic disasters of war and famine', in John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993) 134. These wonderful things may indeed come about if religious claims to exclusivity cease, but the issue at hand is how does one know if a religion is true or false? As laudable as the goals mention by Hick are, they really do not have anything to do with the determination of which, if any, religion is in tune with the Real.

[28] Hick, *The Metaphor* 145.

driving that road. In short, I am 'dogmatic' about the safety of this road! Or, take for example, a man who has been married for twenty-five years. His wife is devoted to him, and has never shown him anything but love and affection. Now, it is possible that when she says she is going to the local mall, she is really going to meet a man with whom she is having an extra-marital affair. The husband would never consider this because, based on the evidence of twenty-five years of faithful marriage, the idea is preposterous. He, too, is 'dogmatic' about his wife's fidelity. Not because he can empirically prove beyond a doubt that she is faithful, but because the *evidence* (not ironclad proof) indicates that she is so. If such deeply important things like life and death driving decisions, and life-long marriage relationships do not require 100% empirical verification, why should a religious decision? The simple fact is, there is no area of life where we have absolute certainty, yet we continue to go on making very important decisions based on what evidence we *do* have.[29]

Hick's lack of confidence concerning religious evidence results in an inability to see that the issue of truth claims must be addressed, or else one is forced to accept outright contradiction among the religions (that the major world religions do indeed teach mutually exclusive concepts of man, sin, God, salvation, revelation, et al., has been pointed out more than enough times, so there is no need to belabour the point here). But it is not just contradiction of the theological kind, which Hick, of course, explains away by teaching that various, equally valid paths to God are available. The contradictions are *historical* in nature. This is especially apparent when addressing the issue of Christ's death on the cross. In the NT, of course, we are told that Christ dies on the cross, and that he was resurrected. However, the Koran denies that Christ died on the cross.[30] Here Hick makes the following statement:

> *All that one can say in general about such disagreements, whether between two traditions or between any one of them and the secular historians, is that they could only properly be settled by the weight of historical evidence. However, the events in question are usually so remote in time, and the evidence so*

[29] I am indebted to the work of Christian apologist John Warwick Montgomery here, who often employed this sort of thinking when arguing for the strength of the evidential approach to Christianity. See, for instance, his *Human Rights and Human Dignity* (Edmonton: Canadian Institute for Law, Theology, and Public Policy, Inc., 1986) 152–54.

[30] To Hick's credit, he does credit the NT version as an 'historical report', while he labels the Koranic version a 'theological inference – that God would not allow so great a prophet to be killed' (*The Metaphor*, 146). It must also be admitted that Hick is not here presenting an in-depth study of what happened to Christ on the cross. He is using the cross experience to show how historical records can vary from one religion to another. Still, I think the criticisms which follow are entirely warranted, based on Hick's overall approach to obvious contradictions among the world's religions, and his apparent disinterest in analysing religious truth claims from an evidentialist viewpoint.

*slight and uncertain, that the question cannot be definitively settled.*[31]

I find this statement to be quite surprising. First, he does not seem to take seriously the fact that the very truth, indeed, the very existence, of both Christianity and Islam rest on the issue of what happened to Christ on the cross. If Jesus did not die, as the Koran asserts, then Christianity is based upon a lie, and Christians are, as Paul once said, the most miserable of all men. If, however, Christ did die upon the cross, and later rose, then it is Islam that is based upon a false premise (i.e., that Jesus was only a prophet, rather than the One whose resurrection verified the early Christians' claim that he was indeed the divine Messiah).

What I find truly astounding is that Hick thinks that the evidence for the death of Christ upon the cross to be 'so slight and uncertain'. Has Hick's desire for religious pluralism, based on his concept of the Real, blinded him to the great amount of evidence which has been put forth by Christian apologists in support of the NT's description of Christ's death and resurrection? This evidence has been set forth and vigorously defended by numerous scholars,[32] so there is no need to re-state it here in-depth. Simply put, when one considers the major pieces of evidence, it is far easier to accept the authenticity of the resurrection narrative found in the NT, rather than to posit alternate explanations (such as the now thoroughly discredited 'swoon theory', where Christ allegedly fainted on the cross, then was later revived). Some of the major pieces of evidence are as follows.

One: The tomb of Christ was empty. Had he not risen, hostile Roman and Jewish authorities could have easily produced the body, thus squelching any talk of a risen Messiah. Such talk would have been blasphemy to the Jewish religious leaders, and potentially seditious as far as the Romans were concerned. The idea that the disciples stole and hid the body, then later claimed that Christ was resurrected, is ludicrous. The disciples suffered greatly for the gospel that they preached. They certainly gained no worldly benefits from preaching their message. Ultimately, tradition tells us, most of them died as martyrs. It is highly unlikely that twelve men would suffer and die for a religion they knew to be based on a lie.

Two: The resurrection must have actually occurred, for it is these appearances which obviously turned a rag-tag group of Jewish

[31] Ibid, 146.

[32] The literature in the area is enormous, but some of the best works are as follows: *Did Jesus Rise from the Dead?* Ed. Terry L. Miethe (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987). This work contains a debate between Christian apologist Gary Habermas and renowned atheistic philospher Antony Flew (the debate is rather one-sided, however, as Flew is unable to refute any of Habermas' arguments supporting the NT account of the resurrection). In a similar vein, see the debate between William Lane Craig and John Dominic Crossan, in *Will the Real Jesus Please Stand Up?* Ed. Paul Copan (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1998). Also of interest is Stephen T. Davis, *Risen Indeed: Making Sense of the Resurrection* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), and John Warwick Montgomery, *Where is History Going?* (Minneapolis: Bethany Fellowship, 1969) 37-74.

peasants into the mighty evangelists who began to preach the resurrection and divinity of Christ. How else would we explain the fact that these simple men, who were so dejected when their Master was executed, suddenly became witnesses unto death for that same Master? That these resurrection appearances were only visions, or hallucinations, is entirely untenable, for no twelve men (not to mention the 500 that Paul mentions!) can be expected to have the same hallucinations!

Three: The story of the resurrection was preached in the presence of 'hostile witnesses', that is, Jewish authorities who would have gladly discredited the story had they been able to do so. Suffice to say that the death and resurrection of Christ is easily the best-attested event in the NT, if not the entire Bible. Can we know with 100% proof that this happened? No, but as I pointed out earlier, such proof is never required when it comes to making important decisions (like, for instance, a religious decision to believe in Jesus because of the NT evidence that he rose from the dead, thus verifying his divinity). Even Hick himself, in the passage quoted above, says that the 'weight of historical evidence', not proof beyond all doubt, is required to resolve such issues. The weight of the historical evidence clearly favours the NT account of what happened to Jesus on (and after) the cross. The importance of this kind of evidence for the Christian faith cannot be overestimated, for such evidence simply does not exist for any of the other world religions. Consider Islam, for example: John Warwick Montgomery writes, concerning the evidence for the resurrection juxtaposed with the evidence for the Islamic faith, that '[n]o such attesting evidence for Muslim revelational claims can be marshalled, for it simply does not exist'.[33]

Hick also seems unwilling to admit just how central the death and resurrection of Christ is to the Christian faith. In one of his works, where he is discussing the 'historical' beliefs which separate different religions from each other, he lumps the resurrection of Christ in with such beliefs as the Buddhist belief that Buddha literally flew from India to Sri Lanka, the Muslim belief that Muhammad flew between Mecca and Jerusalem, and the Jewish belief that, at Joshua's command, the sun remained immobile in the sky for twenty-four hours.[34] Now, the problem here is that the resurrection of Jesus is a central (indeed, *the* central) belief for the Christian. A Muslim could dispense with Mohammed's airborne travel, as could a Buddhist with the story of Buddha's flight, and nothing of essential theological significance would be lost to either religion. These miraculous stories are really not important to either religion in terms of their respective theologies and belief systems. As for Joshua's commanding the sun to stop, this is hardly an essential part of Jewish theology. Besides, Joshua is not even the founder of Judaism! But Christianity stands

[33] Montgomery, *Human Rights* 119. For Montgomery's critique of Muslim attempts at apologetics, see his 'How Muslims do Apologetics', in *Faith Founded on Fact* (Newburgh, IN: Trinity Press, 1978) 81–99.

[34] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 363–64.

or falls based upon the historicity of the resurrection. Ironically, it is Christianity which can offer solid empirical evidence that the miraculous event upon which it is based actually happened.

A final word must be said regarding Hick's incorporation of Kantian thought into his pluralistic theology. When confronted with criticism of his views, Hick has often sought refuge in Kant's theory that there is a difference between reality as such, and the *perception* of reality which we as human beings experience. Hick believes that, as each human has a different perception of the outside world, so human experience and interpretation of God can vary. This, combined with different historical and cultural settings, goes far in explaining the variety of religions in the world:

> *It is the variations of the human cultural situation that concretise the notion of deity as specific images of God. And it is these images that inform man's actual religious experience, so that it is an experience specifically of the God of Israel, or of Allah, or of the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, or of Vishnu or Shiva.*[35]

This view, however, faces serious problems, especially in regard to the criticisms I have raised. First, it does not resolve the historical contradictions among the world's religions. If the Christian perception of reality is that Christ died on the cross, while the Muslim perception is that he did not, *one* of these perceptions must be erroneous. Kant can be invoked to explain these different interpretations, perhaps, but one must still decide which perception is historically, objectively, true. Similarly, Kant might be used to explain, but certainly not defend, the racist teachings of the Nation of Islam, since racism clearly violates Hick's own definition of what it means to be in touch with the Real. And, I definitely do not see how he could use the Kantian theory to defend the glaring historical fabrications which are the basis of the Book of Mormon. The events the Book purports to describe either happened, or did not happen. It is a question of historical fact, not human perception.[36]

Clearly, Hick's criterion of the Real is not an adequate basis for assessing religious truth claims. We must not look only at the moral

[35] John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1980) 105–106.

[36] Hick offers the following example of how human perception can view the same object differently. He uses an intentionally ambiguous drawing which, depending upon how one looks at it, either looks like a rabbit or a duck. Hick explains that the drawing will look like a rabbit to one who is acquainted only with rabbits. However, if one is familiar only with ducks, he can see in the drawing nothing but a duck (*A Christian Theology of Religions*, 24–25). This is true as far as it goes, since the object in question is only a drawing. However, if it were an actual object, it would be either a rabbit, or a duck. It would have an objective reality, and this reality is in no way dependent on the viewer's perception. If the object is actually a duck, and the onlooker perceives it to be a rabbit, he is simply wrong. Surely, such errors occur in the realm of religious perception, too, which at least partially explains the glaring contradictions among the world's religions.

improvements in the lives of religious believers (admirable as these changes may be), but rather at the religions *themselves*. A man or woman may evidence moral and spiritual improvement, yet still adhere to a faith that espouses racism. Can such a faith truly be a path to the Real? Equally, one may lead an exemplary moral life, yet be a member of a religion which rests on allegedly historical scriptures which in fact have no basis in reality. Is the path to the Real based upon myths masquerading as fact? Christianity, on the other hand, can boast of moral growth in the lives of its followers but, unlike other faiths, it can *also* offer convincing evidence that it is a religion based on empirical fact.