

Dissertation Title: Wilfred Cantwell Smith's Concept of World Theology:
A Critical Study

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ABSTRACT

Wilfred Cantwell Smith advocates what he calls a '*World Theology*' in his famous book, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion*, written nineteen years after his groundbreaking and thought provoking work, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. In this earlier book, Smith questions the wisdom of thinking and talking in terms of one's religious belief. He wants us to take a bold step forward to move beyond individual religious traditions and to think of religion as the historical and cultural expression of human '*faith*'.

This dissertation thus takes a critical look at the concept of '*World Theology*' as advocated by Wilfred Cantwell Smith. It attempts to uncover the various possible interpretations of this term 'World Theology' that Smith has in mind, and to come up with just one most probably, most likely definition that befits the present global age.

To achieve this, the dissertation goes along the following steps of study:

The first step of the dissertation describes the background of Wilfred Cantwell Smith with the aim of providing answers to the root question of “Where does Smith’s concept of ‘*World Theology*’ (and of the related term ‘*faith*’) originate from?”

The second step repaints the scenario of ‘*World Theology*’ as described by Smith, using both historical and narrative hermeneutics, to draw up an interpretative picture of Smith’s concept.

The third step examines critically this concept of ‘*World Theology*’ to bring into focus the viewpoints of other philosophers on this important topic.

The fourth step looks at the positive contributions that this concept of ‘*World Theology*’ has brought to our lives, especially in three areas of:

the study of religion;

the philosophy of religion; and

theology.

In so doing, we would have had a much deeper understanding of Smith’s concept of ‘World Theology’. We would then be able to ponder over the question of whether the concept of ‘world theology’ as proposed by Wilfred Cantwell Smith could become a reality. We could also recommend to other scholars the various other topics in which Smith had opened up discussions on, for further and deeper investigations.