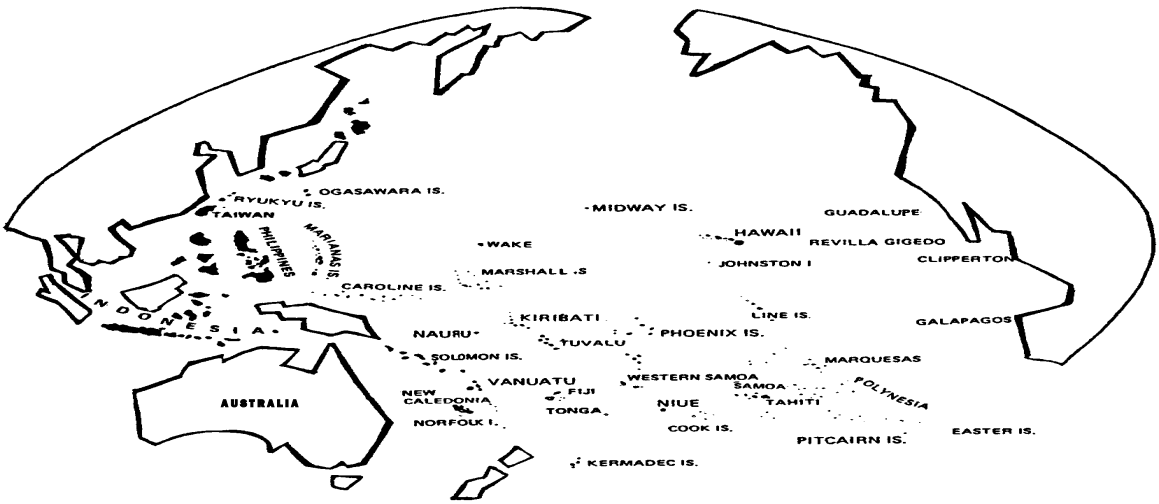
DECEMBER 2019

Volume 13
Number 2

AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL of MISSION STUDIES



Australian Journal of Mission Studies

published by

Australian Association for Mission Studies

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It publishes scholarly Articles in missiology, normally from 2,000 to 5,000 words, if accepted after scholarly review by the Editorial Board.

Reflections
It also publishes Reflections and Reports of up to 2,000 words.

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- Promote the theological, biblical, historical, practical and contextual study of mission, local and global;
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- Encourage cooperation and sharing of research and experience among individuals and institutions engaged in mission;
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Website : *www.missionstudies.org.au*

ISSN 1834-4682

GST-free

SUBSCRIPTION—$50 Australian per year
One annual subscription or membership equals two (2) issues of the journal per year.

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Editorial

Dedicated to interreligious relations

Pat McInerney

Patrick McInerney *is a Columban missionary priest. He spent over 20 years in Pakistan, after which he graduated from the Pontifical Institute for the Study of Arabic and Islamics in Rome (1986), then the Melbourne College of Divinity (2003) and the Australian Catholic University (2009). Currently, he is the director of the Columban Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations and a member of various interfaith and academic organisations.*

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land. I acknowledge their elders past, present and emerging. The Aboriginal peoples have inhabited this land for over 65,000 years. They spoke more than 250 languages and 600 dialects. They formed many societies and nations, with a variety of cultures and spiritualities shaped by the various landscapes: coastal, mountain, plain, desert, saltwater, fresh water, and so on. Hence, cultural and religious diversity is deeply embedded in our national story.

Overlaying this Aboriginal diversity is the multicultural, multi-religious diversity of contemporary Australia. One-third are born overseas. Half have one or both parents born overseas. We have more than 270 ancestries. We speak over 300 languages. We follow over 120 different religions or spiritualities.

Given these ancient underlying spiritualities and more recent overlaying religious diversities, reconciliation and interfaith go hand-in-hand.

The more successfully we engage one, the better we will engage the other. Hence, interfaith relations are of particular significance in Australia.

An account of engagement with indigenous peoples would complement the dialogue with world religions included in this issue. We need to listen and to learn from the spiritual wisdom of indigenous peoples and their connection to the land. This is particularly important in facing climate change and environmental degradation that threaten our common home.

This issue is a breakthrough. Since the topic is *interreligious dialogue*, rather than having only Christians write about it, I invited scholars and leaders from other religions to contribute. In that way, it is not just writing *about* interreligious dialogue, but the issue itself *becomes* an interreligious dialogue. Christian readers will hear the voices of those with whom they dialogue.

Jewish-Christian relations are treated first, because Jesus and his first followers were all Jews who had to engage the Israelite tradition to understand themselves and the novelty that he brought. This first articulation of diversity resulted in a gradual parting of the ways. Unresolved Christian animosity has had tragic consequences for the Jews down through history, culminating in the *Shoah*. The last 60 years have seen a miraculous transformation that is a model for relations with other religions.

Next is the *Contribution of Women*, giving them a priority often not accorded in practice. Modelling how women are or should be involved across the spectrum of interreligious dialogue, Christian, Jewish, Buddhist and Muslim women scholars all contribute to the theme.

Gerard O'Collins then argues that a revitalised Christology of religions can provide a new Christian impetus for interreligious dialogue based on the universal mediation of Christ's priesthood. Christian-Hindu and Christian-Buddhist relations follow. With so many contributions from other religions and from women, we have spread the articles over two issues.

Since Christians and Muslims together make up over 50 percent of the world's population; since Muslim claims contest key Christian doctrines; and since Muslims loom large in popular consciousness due to sensationalist mis-representation in the media, Christian-Muslim relations will be the topic of the next issue of the journal.

The last word is from a Jewish rabbi, whose organisation trains the next generation in intercultural and interreligious awareness ■

. . . it is not just writing about interreligious dialogue, but the issue itself becomes an interreligious dialogue

DECEMBER 2019

Jerusalem where you meet your faith…

Reflection

Ralph Genende

Senior Rabbi Caulfield Shule, Victoria

Deep in the human spirit is the desire to travel, to explore, to discover new places, and meet new people. The Midrash [1], book of Jewish myth and consciousness, locates the urge to travel in the original human being.

Adam, it says, was created out of the dust of the earth. It speculates where the dust came from. God, it suggests gathered the dust from the four corners of his universe, or alternatively from the holiest spot in the world: the epicentre Jerusalem. In other words, says scholar Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik [2], we are both origin-driven (always seeking to return home) and cosmic—conscious, driven to explore all the uncharted lanes of the galaxy. Inbuilt in our psyche is the need to travel in order to discover who we really are.

So ancient myth and contemporary tales focus on the travels of human beings, the odyssey of the human spirit. The Hebrew Bible tells of two momentous spiritual journeys; Abraham's pilgrimage to the holy land, Israel's journey from Egypt to the promised land.

Abraham's journey is pivotal to the three monotheistic religions bearing his name: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Several years ago, a group of Melbourne Jews, Christians and Muslims embarked on a journey to Jerusalem together. I was part of this journey (not the first and not the last from Melbourne; just this year a group of Jewish, Christian and Muslim women took the same trip).

The journey got me not only to reflect on my years of interfaith engagement, but also to encounter first-hand the challenges and limitations, the joys and opportunities of the interaction. It was both harder and easier than I had anticipated and left me both less confident and more convinced about the importance of interfaith dialogue.

There is nothing better for encouraging faiths to recognise what unites and differentiates them than travelling together and, when the destination is Jerusalem, there is nothing more complicated.
Jerusalem united and divided Jews and Christians for centuries. Spiritual birthplace of Jesus, locus of his yearnings and many of his teachings, it is also where he confronts Jewish power and the dream places of his people.

It will become, over the centuries, one of the conflict points between Jews and Christians. It will, during medieval times (especially at the time of the Crusades) represent not only the powerlessness and persecution of the Jews, but also their *replacement* by Christianity. Since the Jews had rejected the Christian messiah, God had rejected them, made a new covenant, and chosen a new Israel.

And it is here in Jerusalem that Muslim conquerors, the Umayads and the Abbasids, the Fatamids, Mamluks and Ottomans would assert their dominance over the city. They too would look down on the Jews because they did not embrace Islam. Islam had supported and superseded Judaism, albeit recognising it as paving the way for the Prophet.

Today, Jerusalem, as capital of the Independent State of Israel, 'continues to be a major obstacle to the restoration of The Caliphate, the imperial dream by Al Qaeda, Hamas and Hezbollah' [3].

Therefore, to arrive in contemporary Israel and to live in Jerusalem for a week with Christians and Muslims is bound to challenge and confront. In addition, this is even though those who self-selected for the joint journey were brave enough to give interfaith, if not peace, a good chance.

Humanity, as Rabbi Sacks [4] has suggested, is constantly threatened by the tension between the unique and the universal. In truth, we are formed by both our commonalities and our differences.

"If we were completely different, we could not communicate, and if we were completely the same we would have nothing to say. Unless we are prepared to make space for the each other we will continue to hate each other in the name of God".

This is the central challenge for Jews, Christians and

Muslims in this tiny fateful land which God summoned Abraham, father of our three faiths some 4,000 years ago.

Our little group had no pretensions about our capacity to meet this challenge, but moving in this contested political and geographical space we hoped to at least acknowledge each other's unique theological space, as well as to pay our respects to the bridges that cross these spaces and the subterranean spiritual tunnels that link our spaces. We did this by exploring Jewish Jerusalem with a Jewish guide, Christian Jerusalem with a Christian guide and Muslim Jerusalem with a Muslim guide.

In each space, we thrilled at our common language and embrace of spirituality. I am struck by how the city touches us all. The Muslims get up at 4.00am to catch the light of the first morning prayers at the Al Aqsa mosque on Haram Al Sharif (Holy Mountain). They are excited by the muezzin's call to prayer, the glimpses of the holy prophet everywhere, but especially in the cobbled corners of the Muslim Quarter.

For the Christians it is the geographical grounding of their faith; a stunning evocation of the real, vital life in the places their Saviour walked and taught. For Eva, one of the Christian participants, it is the capital letter, the comma and the full stop, the full embodiment of her faith. Moreover, everywhere the churches rise majestically punctuating the Old City scape.

For us Jews, it is the familiarity and at-homeness, the joy of being in this vibrant place of Jewish renewal. And also, a mind-shifting experience: to see it in a new and unfamiliar way through the eyes of the other.

For all of us, it is the sense of being in a place that engages not only your mind, but your heart and soul. It encourages you to go deeper; like the multilayered levels of this ancient place, there is always another layer to dig down.

So we dig into ourselves and wonder at the tapping down of the others. We do not always get it—what is it that moves them so wondrously, that bothers them so obviously or angers them so subtly.

That is what we explore as we walk together, share meals and debrief at the end of the day. Jerusalem is both a divided city and an indivisible place. The religions constantly bump up against one another and that is not just figuratively.

That is why I am frankly surprised that our eclectic group attracts so much attention, after all here they are doing this interfaith stuff every day. In addition, there are countless interfaith groups here and across the country.

However, maybe there is just so much else happening here in this dangerous and difficult part of the world. Perhaps they do not have the luxury of contemplation and reflection. Maybe in some very small way we are helping them look at themselves and helping them dream of the possibility of things being different and even better!

But then, there are the fractious and difficult moments. At a Christian Palestinian centre, they angrily compared Israel to apartheid South Africa. There are two of us—Muslim and Jew from South Africa—and we engage in a heated exchange about the veracity of this comparison.

I find it odious having grown up in apartheid South Africa; one Muslim participant accuses me of seeing things from the luxury of a white perspective. I am in despair at our competing realities and narratives. Yes, Israel mistreats some, if not many, of those in conquered territories or West Bank and some of the laws and limitations imposed on Arab settlements and cities are comparable to the separation imposed by apartheid South Africa.

Yet we are in Jerusalem where Muslims and Jews live alongside one another, can eat in the same restaurants, stay in the same hotels and shop in the same places. Not quite apartheid Johannesburg. Politics and fear, competing narratives and victim-hoods seem to break the fragile bonds we have been so carefully nurturing. Black and white thinking asserts that there is no space for other or for the colour grey.

Probably, the most critical challenge takes place at Yad Vashem, Israel's National Holocaust Memorial. One of the Muslim women accompanying us lived through the Lebanon War and as she enters the museum, she is re-traumatised by the images of suffering and war and needs to exit hastily. She is furious and deeply upset and accuses Israel of exploiting the Shoah to gain sympathy.

She is angry at the high school children at the Memorial claiming we are brainwashing them and causing more hatred. The Muslims join her in angry solidarity, the Christians are confused, and the Jews are deeply wounded by what we perceive to be an unjustified attack and a demeaning diminution of our collective trauma.

We spend hours trying to talk through what happened, but the chasm remains. Yet despite the disjunction there are moments we come together in harmony and shared togetherness, revelling in our differences celebrating in our commonness.

The Shabbat brings us together in a Jewish Jerusalem hotel unaccustomed to having Jews, Christians and

Muslims alongside each other. We draw other guests to us, religious Jews from Israel and from across the world wondering at this motley, harmonious group from the Antipodes. They want to know what we are doing there, how we actually manage to travel and talk together and to do it in this edgy city.

They want to emulate us and do the same trip from their hometowns. Now we feel for a brief period that we have touched on something deep and essential, that we have recognised our differences, that we can let go of hate and victim-hood, supremacy and supersession.

That we can learn to re-read our ancient stories of Abraham and Sarah, Hagar and Ishmael which divides Jews and Muslims to reinterpret, the hostility between Esau and Jacob which separates Jewish and Christian readings and understanding of The Scriptures.

Later on we will discover that this is precisely what Rabbi Jonathan Sacks writes about in his monumental study of the sibling rivalry between the monotheistic faiths (*Not in God's Name*, 2015).

Through a close reading of key biblical texts at the heart of the Abrahamic faiths, Sacks suggests that these texts need not divide and cause violence, but become part of the solution.

In the Muslim quarter of the Old City, we meet one extraordinary Sufi imam who still believes that love and respect will prevail and unite all the divided selves and peoples of Jerusalem.

It will come, he assures us, it is an unstoppable fountain of love that will burst from the bedrock under the layers of distrust, hostility and enmity. His bold, large and humble heart opens all of our hearts and the tears flow...

Jerusalem is a place where so much has been lost. It is also a space where so much has been found. On this trip to Jerusalem, I discovered and uncovered more than I anticipated. I also lost some of my idealism, the belief that with enough love and goodwill we could overcome the hostility and distrust of generations.

So, I despair and I dream, I hope and I doubt about the future of our dialogue. I hope because I have witnessed how many Jews and Christians can share a common language.

In addition, I hope because without hope there is only more violence, hatred, and centuries of bitterness to come.

I like to think our small group of Jews, Christians and Muslims found more than they lost, that together we represent the hope that the solution, or at least part of it, will be found not in politics, but in religion; in the genuine seekers of faith in each of our magnificent monotheistic movements.

In conclusion, Israeli poet, Yehuda Amichai, writes so aptly about the quest for a more tolerant, compassionate and thoughtful resolution:

An Arab shepherd is searching for
his goat on Mount Zion
And on the opposite hill I am searching
for my little boy.
An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
Both in their temporary failure.
Our two voices met above
The Sultan's Pool in the valley between us.
Neither of us wants the boy or the goat
To get caught in the wheels
Of the "Had Gadya" machine.

Afterward we found them among the bushes,
And our voices came back inside us
Laughing and crying.

Searching for a goat or for a child
has always been
The beginning of a new religion
in these mountains ■

BOOK REVIEWS

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My journey in interfaith

Jacqueline Ninio

Rabbi Jacqueline Ninio *was born in Adelaide, South Australia. She obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree and a Law degree at Adelaide University. Following law school, she worked as a lawyer, specialising in family law. She then attended rabbinical school at the Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion. Her rabbinical thesis entitled:* Out of the Depths I call to You: Jewish Liturgical Responses to Jewish Communal Catastrophe and Disaster*, delved into the ways that Jewish communities talk to God after tragedy has struck. She received a Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and was ordained as a rabbi in 1998. She began her work at Emanuel Synagogue in Sydney, Australia that year. Rabbi Ninio was the first female rabbi at Emanuel Synagogue and the third Australian born woman to be ordained as a rabbi.*

She has an interest in midrash and liturgy, as well as a passion for storytelling and Jewish folktales. She believes that stories are a powerful medium for sharing ideas, teaching and communicating. She also has an interest in ethics and is a member of a medical research ethics committee. An active leader in the Synagogue's social justice programmes, she is committed to the pursuit of tikun olam*, working to heal the world through deeds and actions. She has been involved in interfaith work, participating in the Jewish communal dialogue with both the Uniting Church and the Catholic Bishops. She is a regular participant on panels and as a speaker about Judaism, but especially issues of women and religion. She believes in the centrality and importance of community, and providing a place where people feel valued, included and treasured. She is married and has one child.*

Introduction

Twenty-one years ago, I was ordained as a rabbi and began working with my congregation in Sydney. One of the first activities in which I was involved was a panel comprised of young women of faith. I joined inspirational women from the Christian, Buddhist and Muslim traditions and we spoke of our connection to the Divine, our sense of purpose in the world and how our faith guided our actions and who we choose to be. Each of the speakers was inspirational and we all found so many places of connection and similarities between us. That day was the start of building relationships and we continue to encounter one another, to share our ideas and speak together, but not so much on *youth* panels anymore!

The journey

From that first formal interaction, I have been privileged over the course of many years to be part of a number of interfaith dialogue groups and involved in numerous interfaith activities and I always grow and learn from these encounters. I am constantly reminded of the incredible depth of connection we have as people of faith walking in this world. So often religion is blamed for conflict and war, it is the target of those who suggest that there is nothing good which comes from religion. They point to the fanatics and extremists in all our traditions without seeing and acknowledging the vast majority who are doing such good in the world. When we come together in dialogue and unity, we can be a counter to the extremist voices in our traditions and we can show a different face of religion to the world: one which encourages diversity of views, one which cares about the other as much as ourselves, one which is working to change and make this world a better place.

Together we can stand and show the ways religion is and has been a force for good. To remember Reverend Martin Luther King Jnr and Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel and so many others who were at the forefront of the civil rights movement in America, not in spite of their religion, but because of it. In 1965, these two men marched together in Selma Alabama calling for an end to discrimination based on the colour of a person's skin. Afterwards they asked the rabbi what it was like and he said, "I felt like my feet were praying."

When I was in America, I met the South African ambassador to the United States, a deeply religious Muslim man, who spoke about the role of religious

leaders in ending apartheid. One of the members of the delegation with whom I was travelling spoke about giving up his youth as a Muslim to fight against the system and standing together with the Jewish community. Both leaders used religious texts as the impetus and inspiration for change. Moreover, when we stand together we can make an even greater impact for good. Creating strong relationships between communities enables us to unite on issues with deep significance to us all and to stand as one to make change, to create a world of harmony and blessing for all.

So often, it is religious communities who are feeding the poor, helping the homeless, caring for the sick and elderly. Our religious texts call us to care for those who are vulnerable, to reach out and give, to create peace between people and between nations. In addition, when we can do so by joining hands in our common goals we create a powerful force for good in the world.

Also, by connecting with one another as interfaith partners we create ties and relationships that we can call upon in times of trouble and struggle. When one of us is attacked or the subject of unfair treatment, the others can stand together with them, creating a powerful statement of unity and force for change. When there were calls to ban the hijab, the Jewish community came out in force supporting our Muslim brothers and sisters. And that was possible because of the connections and friendships that the two communities have created through dialogue and interfaith encounters. We have shared our concerns about climate change and refugee policies in Australia, a much more powerful voice when we are able to do so in the name of all our faith traditions.

We have come together in our suffering and our pain. When an anti-Semitic extremist attacked a synagogue, communities of faith came and stood together with the Jewish community in our grief and mourning. Then, tragically, we were called to do the same for our Muslim friends after the attacks in Christchurch, and our Christian friends after the horrors in Sri Lanka. We were able to be together, supporting, holding and mourning, grieving as one, because when a community of faith is attacked for its existence, for its beliefs, we are all hurt, we feel the wounds and we come together in prayer and comfort, finding peace in our solidarity and our unity. It meant so much to our community that others of faith wrapped their arms around us in our pain.

Our deep connections do not only unite us in tragedy and the face of conflict, we are also blessed to come together for celebrations and times of joy, learning about each other's traditions and holy days. We have welcomed many groups to our synagogue to celebrate Shabbat with us, we have invited our friends of other faiths to our homes and in return, we have been blessed to experience holy moments of community with our friends in their places of worship. The more we can know and understand one another, the more we can grow and flourish as communities living together and we can combat hatred born of separation. There is nothing more powerful than meeting one another as human beings, hearing each other's stories and feeling our fragility and our humanity. When we know one another, we are able to connect in deep and meaningful ways and enrich each other's lives and communities.

Our meeting together as people of faith has enabled us not only to stand together in our similarities, but also to connect within our difference. Many of the interfaith groups of which I am a part have been meeting for a number of years. At first, as in any relationship, we spent time getting to know one another, learning about the many ways we are alike, connecting through our similarities.

We came to understand how much we have in common and how many of our concerns are aligned. We developed a relationship of trust and mutual respect. We learned about one another and it was very special. It was that building of trust and connection which has now enabled us to tackle more difficult topics, to challenge one another, ask questions and discuss the places where we disagree, where we diverge.

We have studied our common scriptural texts and seen how we differ in our interpretations and understanding, the ways in which we begin together and then branch in different directions.

These discussions have enabled us to reach out to one another and express when a comment or statement has caused us pain or hurt. When the words spoken, or actions taken, often unconsciously, have led to a place of upset for the other we are able to speak together with respect and love to resolve the differences or conflict. What may have led in the past to a chasm is now viewed as an opportunity to learn and grow together and all because we have established a friendship grounded in a solid foundation that can withstand difference and help to smooth over potential conflict.

Interfaith dialogue and connections enable us all to grow and change, to see our face in that of the other and recognise the face of God in all humanity. We can come together in our conviction to make this world a better place, to care for those who need it most and to create lands where peace and harmony dwell between people. Each one comes and is changed by the encounter, moved by each other's stories and journeys and that makes interfaith dialogue an essential part of a harmonious, peaceful world ■

Jewish-Christian dialogue

Michael Trainor

Michael Trainor *is senior lecturer in biblical studies with the Australian Catholic University. He co-chairs the Uniting Church-Roman Catholic Dialogue of South Australia and the South Australian Council of Christians and Jews. He chairs the Australian Council of Christians and Jews, is a member of the Australian Catholic Bishops' Council for Christian Unity, and executive board member of the International Council of Christians and Jews.*

In this essay, I seek to explore the nature of Jewish-Christian dialogue. However, some background is needed. First, I briefly summarise the history of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity, explore the New Testament roots of antisemitism and examine the new rapprochement that emerged in the post-World War II period and in the wake of the Second Vatican Council (for Catholics, especially). After summarising key themes on Jewish-Christian dialogue expressed through the pontificates of John-Paul II, Benedict and Francis, I offer some practical consequences for Jewish-Christian dialogue for those of us who come to this from a Christian perspective

Introduction

In his apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*, Pope Francis affirms the relationship that exists between Judaism and Christianity:

> *[W]hile it is true that certain Christian beliefs are unacceptable to Judaism, and that the Church cannot refrain from proclaiming Jesus as Lord and Messiah, there exists as well a rich complementarity, which allows us to read the texts of the Hebrew Scriptures together and to help one another to mine the riches of God's word. We can also share many ethical convictions and a common concern for justice and the development of peoples*.[1]

Pope Francis' 2013 statement acknowledges the differences between Judaism and Christianity, but he affirms this "rich complementarity" between the two traditions. This affirmation sums up and builds upon the growing, open and learning relationship between Judaism and Christianity in modern times, especially since the Second Vatican Council, a point to which we shall return a little later.

However, as history teaches us, this has not always been the case. Antisemitism, an expression first coined in Germany in the 1870s, finds its roots back in the first centuries.[2]

An extremely brief history

The gradual separation between Jesus' followers and Jews who belonged to the Pharisaic-Rabbinic tradition that enabled Judaism to survive beyond the destruction of the temple in 70CE took place over several centuries. Archaeological and literary evidence suggest that in parts of the Mediterranean and European world Jews and Jesus followers lived together with relative ease.[3]

In other places and at different times, especially in European cities during the Middle Ages, Jews were isolated into racially segregated city areas, one could call them quarters or even ghettoes, shunned by their fellow citizens, treated with contempt, accused of crimes, even murder.[4] Two of the most famous instances of such contempt in Medieval Europe were

the (Christian) reaction to the alleged *blood libel* belief, that Jews sacrificed Christian children, namely William of Norwich (1144) and Thomas of Trent (1475), to use their blood for ritual purposes.[5] These attitudes continued in different forms, sometimes subtle, other times expressed in blatant antisemitism.[6]

The holocaust, the product of a long history of antisemitism and the Nazi definitive solution, to exterminate all Jews during WWII, resulted in the deaths of six million Jewish men, women and children.[7] The holocaust was the ultimate, particular systematic expression of racial and ethnic hatred against a people regarded as undesirable and evil.[8] This did not happen, though, in a historical vacuum. Several factors led to it.

Bedrock of Jewish rejection

The origin of such Jewish contempt resides in the very foundational documents of the Christian movement, the New Testament. In the post-70 period, when the gospels were being written, the emerging tensions between the Jesus movement and rabbinic Judaism were "read back" on to the story of Jesus. The *Pharisees* (in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke) and *the Jews* (in John's gospel) were portrayed as antagonistic towards Jesus and his disciples and the epitome of faithlessness. In John's gospel, Jesus tells *the Jews* that their "father is the devil" (John 8.44).

Such attitudes appear to naïve readers of the gospels, devoid of any historical critical consciousness of the gospels' formation, as accurate historical realities confirmed by Jesus' judgement on the Jewish leadership and its people.[9] In time, the Jews are charged with deicide (God killers), because of their alleged execution of Jesus, God's Son.

Their punishment was God's rejection of them. Their role as a covenanted people ceased and their place was taken over by Christianity. This jaundiced historical and theological view of Judaism, evidenced throughout history by essays, pogroms and Jewish urban enclaves in European cities, became the bedrock of their rejection. Its worst expression was the WWII Nazi programme of Jewish extermination through the holocaust.

Following WWII, two events occurred which reconfigured the relationship of Christianity with Judaism, enabled Christians to acknowledge the roots of antisemitism and Jewish rejection, reclaim the deep historical and theological link of Christianity to Judaism, and lay the constructive foundation for inter-religious dialogue.

These two events were the gathering of Jews and Christians at Seelisberg, Switzerland, and the Second Vatican Council in Rome.

Seelisberg (1947)

From 30 July to 5 August 1947, 65 Jews and Christians from 12 countries, representatives from several European universities and the World Council of Churches, the Roman Catholic Bishops' Conference and leaders of other churches gathered at Seelisberg, Central Switzerland, for the "International Emergency Conference on Antisemitism".[10]

The purpose of the conference was to reflect on the current state of antisemitism, its causes and to suggest practical short- and long-term strategies to combat it.

The conference built upon the impetus from an international conference a year earlier in Oxford conducted under the auspices of the British Council of Christians and Jews. It was in a third conference at Fribourg a year after Seelisberg that the International Council of Christians and Jews was formally established.

All three conferences, in Oxford, Seelisberg and Fribourg, contributed to the main elements that provided Christian self-reflection on its history. It realised the sentiment expressed in an earlier 1928 London conference to found a "society of Jews and Christians" that would address religious misunderstanding and intolerance, and promote good will and collaboration between Jews and Christians.[11]

Nevertheless, it was the Seelisberg conference almost 20 years later that articulated, in *Ten Points*, the main theological elements that would become the initial basis for Jewish-Christian dialogue and Christian introspection.[12]

The first four points of the Seelisberg document encourage Christians to "remember" essential truths about its origins, and the last six, to "avoid" misrepresenting Judaism. The document urges Christians to remember that God speaks through both the Old and New Testaments, that Jesus, his mother and the first generations of Jesus' followers were Jewish, and that the most fundamental commandment of love enjoined on Christians is Old Testament teaching endorsed by Jesus.

Christians are urged to avoid misrepresenting Judaism to extol Christianity, identifying "the Jews" and the whole Jewish people as though enemies of Jesus, interpreting the gospel stories of Jesus' passion and death as an act of odium perpetrated by the Jewish people accompanied by God's judgement upon them (as literally interpreted in Matthew's cry of the people in 27.25, "Let his blood be upon us and our children"), and stereotyping Jews as reprobate and accursed.

The 2009 ICCJ Berlin Document:
A Time for Recommitment

In 2009, over 60 years after the publication of the *Ten Points*, the ICCJ met in Berlin to reflect upon what emerged at Seelisberg and to look again at its statement. This time, in the wake of deeper theological reflection that had taken place since Seelisberg and encouraged by what had happened in the Second Vatican Council—to which we shall move shortly—and the emergence of more robust and intentional inter-faith, and especially Jewish-Christian dialogue globally, the ICCJ saw a need to expand on what had been produced earlier at Seelisberg.

The title of the Berlin document expressed the focus: *A Time for Recommitment: Building the New Relationship between Jews and Christians*.[13] The document reflected the need to renew the importance of Jewish-Christian dialogue, to expand the call to Christians and Jews to identify aspects of their respective traditions that required attention and to offer a common voice in attending to concerns of mutual interest. Rather than addressing only the Christian community, as at Seelisberg, the Berlin document acknowledged the need for Jews to identify issues that affected them and influenced their contribution to Jewish-Christian dialogue and participation.

The document's introduction offered an overview of the history of Jewish-Christian relations in the modern era, and the context for the writing of the Berlin ICCJ statement. These were summarised in 12 points. The first four points encouraged Christians to combat religious, racial and other forms of antisemitism, promote dialogue with Jews, develop theological understandings of Judaism that affirmed its distinctive identity, and pray for the peace of Jerusalem.

The second four invited Jewish communities to acknowledge Christian efforts at attitudinal reform, re-examine Jewish texts in the light of Christian reforms, differentiate between fair-minded criticism of Israel and antisemitism, and offer encouragement to the State of Israel to honour its founding documents.

The last four points addressed both Christians and Jews. The document called on both traditions to collaborate to enhance interreligious and intercultural education, promote interreligious friendship and cooperate in global social justice actions, engage in intentional dialogue with economic and political bodies, and network with all whose work responds to the demands of environmental stewardship.

The Berlin document honoured the partnership in dialogue and social collaboration that had grown between Jews and Christians since WWII, explicitly addressed the Jewish community about its reception of Christian attempts at reform and the contribution that Christianity could make to enhance (not substitute) Jewish self-understanding and, in its last point, reflected a growing global awareness of the social issues facing humanity, especially ecologically.

Two points in the document are worth highlighting, given the current state of affairs between those living in Israel and the Palestinian Territories. These points are addressed to members of the Jewish community. They urge just and fair-minded criticism of Israel on the one hand and, on the other, encouragement to the State of Israel to live out its ideals as expressed in its founding documents. This implies, and is explicitly stated, the achievement of "a just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict".

The document further expresses the importance of ensuring the rights of religious and ethnic minorities living within the State of Israel. Such political critique needs to be distinguished from antisemitism. In other words, criticism of the State of Israel in its policies and practices, when it moves away from the intentions of its founding documents and compromises its non-prejudicial protection of the rights of all who live within its borders, especially minorities, is necessary.

But, this is not antisemitism. This clear distinction that the document makes is sometimes lost on those who would like to engage in interfaith, Christian-Jewish dialogue. For some, criticism of Israel's policies and military practices entails a natural criticism of Jews. Thus, the blurring of the lines between the political entity and those who uphold Jewish life leads to a rejection of Jews and a subtle (though at times, not-so-subtle) form of contemporary antisemitism.

It is here, as the Berlin document engages in reflection on the role of the State of Israel and urges Christians to appreciate the centrality, survival and security of this political entity for Jews that the relationship between land and religious identity emerges.

Religious dialogue is not only about spiritual, theological and textual or biblical matters. It also responds to the deep-seated needs of the interlocutor whose identity is intimately connected to space and land. The importance of this cannot be understated for Jews who, up until the foundation of the State of Israel after WWII, were dispersed throughout the world. The establishment of the State did not happen without its struggle, nor without consequences for those who inhabited Israel prior. For this reason, the affirmation in the Berlin document, for the resolution for a "just and peaceful resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict" is a balancing clause.

It acknowledges that those involved in interreligious dialogue are also involved in political and ethical issues that encourage peace. They can offer insights

from their respective traditions that would support those who work towards peace. A final point made in the document encourages Jews and Christians to work together for justice for all.

This commentary on *A Time for Recommitment* highlights the development that occurred in Jewish-Christian relations since 1928 when a "society of Jews and Christians" was first mooted, and the proposals formulated in the Oxford, Seelisberg and Fribourg conferences held between 1946 and 1948. The 2009 ICCJ Berlin conference affirmed more explicitly the Jewish contribution to dialogue, the social, ecological and political setting in which this dialogue takes place, and the partnership needed between Jews and Christians for the enhancement of social change and religious receptivity in the global context.

A major stimulus for this development came from the Catholic Church and the Second Vatican Council with the 1965 proclamation of a watershed Declaration, *Nostra Aetate* (In Our Time) concerned about the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions.[14]

The Declaration: *Nostra Aetate* (1965)

The spirit of the Declaration reveals a fundamental shift in the Catholic Church from being a closed, *perfect society* to one open to the world and cognisant of God's presence within it, especially in religions other than Christianity. The Declaration recognised that the church needed to be receptive to the "truth and holiness" present in other religious traditions.[15]

This affirmation is momentous and leads to the encouragement for Christians to be engaged in "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions".[16] One cannot underestimate this encouragement.

Up until this formal statement by the bishops of the Catholic Church, Christians, especially Catholic Christians, would have seen themselves without need for dialogue with devotees of other religious traditions. These outside the Church, especially adherents of non-Christian religions, would have been viewed either suspiciously, in terms of their religious convictions and God's communion with them, or pagan. *Nostra Aetate* definitively changes this assessment. It affirms the religious contributions, which Hinduism and Buddhism make to humanity, expresses esteem for Islam, acknowledges the history of hostility between Islam and Christianity, and urges mutual understanding and the fostering of social justice, moral values, peace and freedom.[17]

The most important focus of the Declaration is found in section 4, when the Council Fathers reflect on the relationship between Christianity (Catholicism) and Judaism.[18]

This is a ground-breaking piece of interreligious study. It explicitly reverses the historical attitudes that typified Christians in their charge of Jewish deicide and their belief that Judaism had become accursed and replaced by Christianity.[19]

Instead, the Declaration asserted the spiritual bond, which the Church shares with Judaism in its origins, its spiritual patrimony from the patriarchs, especially Abraham, the revelation it has received from the Old Testament, and the Jewish roots of Mary, Jesus and his disciples. This reclamation of the Church's Jewish origins becomes one of the reasons in the Declaration for Christians to foster mutual understanding and respect through biblical and theological study and dialogue.[20] Towards the end of the section, the bishops affirm the necessity of correct catechesis in the presentation of the Jews in Christian teaching and deplore any expressions of antisemitism.[21]

The fruit of the formal Catholic teaching on Judaism that have come from *Nostra Aetate* are seen in subsequent documents, statements and religious educational texts.[22] They are also reflected in the teachings of Popes St John-Paul II (pontificate, 1978 to 2005), Benedict (2005 to 2013) and Francis (2013 onwards).[23]

Post-Vatican II papal teaching on Jewish relations

John Paul's memory of pre-war Krakow and his friendship with Jews as a youth shaped his attitude later as Pope. Vatican II's teaching from *Nostra Aetate* resonated deep with him and acted out its implications in his papacy. He was the first Pope to visit the Auschwitz concentration camp (1979), Rome's Great Synagogue (1986), Israel's Holocaust memorial, *Yad Vashem*, and to pray at Jerusalem's Western Wall (2000).

In his visit to the synagogue in Rome, John Paul II re-affirmed the teaching of *Nostra Aetate*, asserted the unique relationship which the Church has with Jewish people affirming them as siblings (brothers), even elder siblings, and that they are "beloved of God, who has called them with an irrevocable calling". John Paul II declared that God's relationship with the Jews continues and deepens as they move forward towards God in a manner that is unique, definitive and irreversible.[24]

The prayer that the Pope inserted into the Western Wall expressed the bond between Christianity and Judaism, the common paternity and sadness caused by those (Christians?) who have caused pain amongst the Jewish people, and forgiveness:

> *God of our fathers, you chose Abraham and his descendants to bring your name to the nations. We*

> *are deeply saddened by the behaviour of those who, in the course of history, have caused these children of yours to suffer, and asking forgiveness we wish to commit ourselves to genuine [fraternity] with the people of the Covenant*.[25]

The prayer recognised the tragedy of the Holocaust and iterated a theme that John Paul II would repeat often, his sadness at the actions of Christians perpetrated against Jews throughout history and his desire to correct this. In different ways, Popes Benedict and Francis built upon the Jewish-Christian legacy they inherited from John Paul II.

Pope Benedict on Jewish-Christian dialogue

Pope Benedict explored more fully the meaning of dialogue between Jews and Christians. He considered dialogue with Jews quite different from dialogue with other faith traditions, given the particularity of Jewish spiritual heritage and Jews' unique relationship to God. Their faithful witness of God was the foundation of the faith of Jesus and every subsequent generation of Jesus followers.[26] In the spirit of St Paul's *Letter to the Romans*, Benedict in his earlier theological teaching before becoming Pope (as Joseph Ratzinger), acknowledged God's providence revealed in the Jewish people and Israel's particular mission in this "time of the Gentiles".[27]

He believed that interreligious dialogue, though, was not about unification. He wrote:

> *Let us speak plainly. Anyone who expects the dialogue between religions to result in their unification is bound for disappointment. This is hardly possible within our historical time, and perhaps it is not even desirable*.[28]

What he meant by "unification" is not clear. Was it about institutional communion where religious identities become fused into one? It was in a later part of the same piece that he articulated what he believed dialogue to be about, namely, the search for what was positive in the other's belief, with a spirit of openness in the common search for truth, the "pearl" of religion.[29]

This engagement in dialogue was not aimless. It concerned the truth of religion that is in the other, this experience of God, which also assisted in deepening one's inner truth of God. It was open to receive self-criticism, even criticism of one's religion.

However, from a Christocentric perspective, Ratzinger also saw dialogue and proclamation as interrelated. The proclamation of the Gospel to the "other" was, he believed, an articulation of the truth, about which the other in some way was already convinced.[30] The Gospel shed new light upon this conviction in a process that was bilateral. The bringer was also the receptor of truth from the one who also received this truth.

> *[T]he one who proclaims is not only the giver; [but] also the receiver. In this sense, ... the dialogue of religions should become more and more a listening to the Logos, who is pointing out to us, in the midst of our separation and our contradictory affirmations, the unity we already share*.[31]

The effect of open, respectful and humble dialogue resulted, in Ratzinger's understanding, in a deepening in truth (Logos) which interlocutors experienced as communion.[32] This theme of dialogue and the pursuit of truth (the *Logos*) so prominent in Ratzinger's early theological career threads itself consistently in a continued nuanced fashion throughout his papacy.

In the first days of his pontificate, he reaffirmed the teaching of the Second Vatican Council, including *Nostra Aetate*, and interpreted the Council with a "hermeneutic of reform".[33] He stressed the importance of dialogue and collaboration between Jews and Christians, reiterating Christianity's shared spiritual patrimony with Judaism blessed by God's irrevocable promises.[34] In his August 2005 address in Cologne's Roonstrasse synagogue, Benedict reinforced the importance of trustful and loving dialogue:

> *We must come to know one another much more and much better. Consequently, I would encourage sincere and trustful dialogue between Jews and Christians, for only in this way will it be possible to arrive at a shared interpretation of disputed historical questions, and, above all, to make progress towards a theological evaluation of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity. This dialogue, if it is to be sincere, must not gloss over or underestimate the existing differences: in those areas in which, due to our profound convictions in faith, we diverge, and indeed precisely in those areas, we need to show respect [*orally*: "and love"] for one another*.[35]

Benedict believed that this kind of dialogue would lead to shared insight into theological truths that had been a source of disputation, historically contextualised, renewed understanding, friendship and practical witness and action in issues that concern human rights, justice and peace. Benedict's appreciation of dialogue as the quest for truth that he considered ultimately Christological was explicated more fully in this excerpt from his September 2008 address to the French Catholic Bishops on "Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue" in Lourdes, France:

> *The goal of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, which naturally differ in their respective nature and*

finality, is to seek and deepen a knowledge of the Truth. It is therefore a noble and obligatory task for every believer, since Christ himself is the Truth. The building of bridges between the great ecclesial Christian traditions, and dialogue with other religious traditions, demand a real striving for mutual understanding, because ignorance destroys more than it builds. Moreover, only the Truth makes it possible to live authentically the dual commandment of Love, which our Saviour left us. To be sure, one must follow closely the various initiatives that are undertaken, so as to discern which ones favour reciprocal knowledge and respect, as well as the promotion of dialogue, and so as to avoid those which lead to impasses. Good will is not enough. I believe it is good to begin by listening, then moving on to theological discussion, so as to arrive finally at witness and proclamation of the faith itself.[36]

The quest for the Truth in interreligious dialogue, Benedict believed, would lead to the discovery of Christ who "is the Truth". Though he moved towards a Christocentric end-point as the fruit of dialogue, Benedict explicated its principles: dialogue, which was to be respectful, sought mutual understanding. It began first with listening before engaging in theological discourse. It concluded with witness and proclamation.

Pope Francis on dialogue

In the spirit of John-Paul II and Benedict, Pope Francis continued to explore the implications of Vatican II's *Nostra Aetate* in pastoral practice and teaching. He affirmed the Jewish roots of Christianity and decried acts of antisemitism.[37] Further, he continued to underscore the importance of dialogue between members of different faith traditions.

His many visits to Jewish, Muslim and Christian (Latin and Orthodox) countries reveal his desire to engage all, irrespective of their faith traditions, and his commitment to religious truth and expression.[38] Francis believed that authentic dialogue was central to all aspects of human existence and that the Church could make its own contribution to the search for truth. Dialogue was important for this search that was at the heart of the Church's process of evangelisation:

Evangelisation…involves the path of dialogue. For the Church today, three areas of dialogue stand out where she needs to be present in order to promote full human development and to pursue the common good: dialogue with states, dialogue with society—including dialogue with cultures and the sciences—and dialogue with other believers who are not part of the Catholic Church. In each case, "the Church speaks from the light which faith offers", contributing her two-thousand-year experience and keeping ever in mind the life and sufferings of human beings. This light transcends human reason, yet it can also prove meaningful and enriching to those who are not believers and it stimulates reason to broaden its perspectives.[39]

For Francis, as with Benedict, dialogue was essentially interpersonal:

Dialogue is much more than the communication of a truth. It arises from the enjoyment of speaking and it enriches those who express their love for one another through the medium of words. This is an enrichment, which does not consist in objects but in persons who share themselves in dialogue.[40]

The value Pope Francis placed on dialogue, especially interreligious dialogue, is clear. His approach builds on the openness to dialogue expressed by his predecessors. His pastoral visits and willingness to engage with the leaders of different faith traditions reveal a keenness to continue to pursue the path of peace, communion and social commitment. For Francis, these result from an openness in dialogue with faith leaders.

This is evident, for example, in his visit to the United Arab Emirates (February 2019), his meeting with Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed el-Tayeb, the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, and their joint signing of *A Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together*.[41] Both affirm the necessity of a "culture of dialogue." They declare "the adoption of a culture of dialogue as the path; mutual cooperation as the code of conduct; reciprocal understanding as the method and standard".

The nature of Jewish-Christian dialogue

In the light of this history of Jewish-Christian relationship over the centuries, the inspiration that has emerged from *Nostra Aetate* and recent papal teachings, several insights can be explicated concerning the nature of Jewish-Christian dialogue.

1. *Dialogue is interpersonal*. It is the based on respectful relationship between the dialogue partners in their quest for truth and mutual insight. Dialogue is not about *winning over* or *converting* the other to a point of view. It is about the journey of discovery of what is essential for religious truth and conviction.

2. *Dialogue is an expression of love*. As Pope Francis indicated, dialogue can be enjoyable and an expression of love "through the medium of words." This appreciation moves dialogue beyond an intellectual pursuit, but a true encounter with the other person in a way that reveals deep love.

3. *Dialogue is listening*. This is the primary and essential component in inter-religious dialogue. It is not about telling or explaining, but an open heart that respects the dialogue partner and listens to understand the truth revealed in words.

4. *Dialogue has social consequences*. Conversation between friends leads to the pursuit of goodness and its expression with the cultural and social structures that frame the conversation. Dialogue is not for the mutual satisfaction or enjoyment of the interlocutors. Its fruit is social harmony, peace and the common good. It has a social dimension.

5. *Dialogue is truthful*. As Benedict indicated in his 2005 Roostrasse synagogue address, dialogue does not shy away from what one believes or "gloss over" the differences that interlocutors perceive. In the act of truth telling, each comes through respectful listening to understand the position or truth of the other without reservation or correction.

6. *Dialogue brings communion*. As the inter-religious conversation emerges and each of the parties listens deeply to the other, to the depths of their heartfelt convictions of the religious truths out of which they live, a deep sense of communion unfolds. This comes about in the listener who recognises in the other, granting the religious differences that exist between them, that the ultimate depth of truth that is expressed concerns the "Other". This "Other" is the expression of the divine presence, of God. The experience of communion is the encounter with God. Benedict names this experience as wisdom or "Logos".

7. *Dialogue can bring "holy envy" and "holy enjoyment".* The theologian and Lutheran Bishop of Stockholm Krister Stendahl made popular the phrase "holy envy". By this expression, he identified the experience one has in the encounter of the richness and goodness of another's religious tradition.[42] The experience of "holy envy" allows us to see the beauty in traditions and practices of others, while also recognizing the distortions and deficiencies in our own traditions.[43]

Stendahl further considered that the experience of "holy envy" leads to *three rules* for interreligious understanding. These confirm elements of Jewish-Christian dialogue enunciated above:

- Let the other define herself ("Don't think you know the other without listening");
- Compare equal to equal (not my positive qualities to the negative ones of the other);
- Find beauty in the other to develop "holy envy".

- Michael Reid Trice explores "holy envy" from another perspective, the experience of what might be called "holy enjoyment":

I experience your expressions of the "holy" as beautiful. I admire that beauty, and am also somehow formed by it, and even yearn for those very expressions in my own faith life or community. I do not covet the beauty in you as though to control it; I am not required to convert from my own beauty as though to lose it. I experience this beauty as a gift, and invitation, and as a preamble to new cultivation and further invitation in the future.[44]

Conclusion

Trice's comment offers an important insight that might conclude this essay on Jewish-Christian relations and the nature of dialogue.

The valuable fruit that has emerged over the past decades and particularly since WWII concerns more than a rapprochement between Jews and Christians. It is about a fundamental recognition of the centrality of Judaism to Christian self-understanding, history and religious practice.

As the brief historical description of this relationship has shown and the theological elements that have emerged in Christian/Catholic circles since the Second Vatican Council indicate, Christianity cannot be understood without reclaiming its Jewish roots and history, acknowledging its wrongdoings of the past, and moving forward with an open, honest and sincere dialogue to forge a future of peace that has global implications.

Christian leaders and theologians now explicitly affirm the gift of Judaism to Christianity. It is not yet clear what contribution Christianity can make to Jewish self-understanding and identity.

Nevertheless, Trice's point remains. Through Jewish-Christian dialogue, we come to admire the holiness and beauty that is in the religious "other". We do not covet or control these, but see them as gifts, which bring holy "enjoyment" ■

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22. A survey of texts, document and teaching tools is found at: *https://www.ccjr.us/dialogika-resources*. This site from the *Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations* is an excellent resource of documents, statements and educational aids on Jewish-Christian relations from Catholic and Protestant Churches
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29. ibid p111
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32. How is *Logos* to be interpreted? In his address at Regensburg University in September 2006, he concluded, "The courage to engage the whole breadth of reason, and not the denial of its grandeur - this is the programme with which a theology grounded in Biblical faith enters into the debates of our time. "Not to act reasonably, not to act with logos, is contrary to the nature of God", said Manuel II, according to his Christian understanding of God, in response to his Persian interlocutor. It is to this great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures. To rediscover it constantly is the great task of the university"; *http://w2.vatican.va/content/benedict-xvi/en/speeches/2006/september/documents/hf_ben-xvi_spe_20060912_university-regensburg.html#_ftnref1*
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38. For a list of the countries Pope Francis has visited, see *https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_pastoral_visits_of_Pope_Francis*
39. *Evangelii Gaudium*, section 238
40. ibid section 142
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42. Stendahl was not the first to propose the concept of "envying" the rich religious traditions of others, but rather he made popular the phrase "holy envy". Lee Yearley referred to "spiritual regret" in *New Religious Virtues and the Study of Religion*, lecture (Tempe, AZ: Arizona State University, 1994). Yearley affirmed "the recognition of a 'religious good' in the other person's tradition that we cannot share" but nonetheless admire. See also KAPLAN, Edward K. *Spiritual Regret and Holy Envy*, ***Spiritus*** 5, no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp105–106
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DECEMBER 2019

The contribution of women to the mission of interreligious dialogue

Cheryl Camp

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Interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations are an important part of the mission of the Christian Churches. Women have contributed much to this mission through theological scholarship and by initiating and participating in local, national and international women's and mixed-gender interfaith groups. They have been crucial to peace-making negations in some countries. However, because of a lack of knowledge or awareness of women's contribution, at times they are not given the credence they deserve. In addition, when the participation of women in this mission is acknowledged, their capacity for establishing positive relationships with others is emphasised rather than their intellectual contribution. Women significantly contribute the quality of relationality, but they also contribute strongly to the theological foundations of interreligious dialogue. Their greatest contribution is their ability to integrate both the intellectual and relational aspects of the interreligious phenomenon. Acknowledgement of women's holistic approach leads to more balanced, inclusive and productive outcomes

Introduction

Interreligious dialogue is part of the evangelising mission of the Christian Churches (Acts 17: 22-28)

In 1965, the Second Vatican Council of the Catholic Church declared in the document *Nostra Aetate - Declaration on the Relation of the Church with Non-Christian Religions*:

> *Let Christians whilst witnessing to their own faith and way of life acknowledge, preserve and encourage the spiritual and moral truths found among non-Christians together with their social life and culture*.[1]

This mission arises from the Catholic Church's awareness of "its duty to foster unity and charity among individuals, and even among nations."[2] Therefore, the aim of interreligious dialogue between people of different faiths is to build positive relationships that promote mutual understanding and societal harmony.

The Vatican issued other documents on the mission of interreligious dialogue in *Dialogue and Mission* (1984), *Dialogue and Proclamation* (1991) and *Dialogue in Truth and Charity* (2014).

Since 1971, dialogue with people of living faiths has been part of the work of the peak Christian body, the World Council of Churches.

In 1979, the Council published *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* that stated that it is the responsibility of Christians to foster interreligious dialogue "in a spirit of reconciliation granted to us by Jesus Christ".[3]

The words *mission* and *evangelism* are not used very often in the document. This is not to escape Christian responsibility, but it does allow Christians "to explore other ways of making plain the intentions of Christian witness and service," and interreligious dialogue is described as a "fundamental part of Christian service within community" and also as a "vocation."[4]

In 1990, the World Council of Churches issued the *Baar Statement: Theological Perspectives on Plurality* in which the Council declared that:

> *We affirm unequivocally that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of living faiths*.[5]

In 2012, the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Centre for Inter-religious Dialogue (CID) of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) stated in a joint *Communiqué from WCC and CID inter-religious dialogue meeting* that:

> *Dialogue is the best means of overcoming misunderstandings and fostering mutual appreciation and peaceful coexistence between the adherents of different religions in today's multicultural world*.[6]

The aim of this mission of interreligious dialogue is not to proselytise, but rather, according to the Communiqué, to establish positive relationships between people of different religions. This is achieved through mutual theological and philosophical knowledge, understanding, and insight about each other's religion. The practical side of the dialogue is also highlighted in the Communiqué:

> *It is also very important to seek to spread the fruits of such personal encounters to the members of wider society*.[7]

The Communiqué also made a statement about the role of women in interreligious dialogue:

> *We encourage the active participation of women in inter-religious dialogue at all levels, recognizing women's previous initiatives*.[8]

Has women's contribution actually been recognised? Many would claim that the contribution of women to interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations has not been given the credence that it deserves. Part of the reason for this could be attributed to a lack of awareness of what women have contributed to this important mission.

Women' contribution to interreligious dialogue

Women have participated in interreligious dialogue in formal and informal ways. The first World Parliament of Religions (later known as the Parliament of the World's Religions) was held in Chicago in 1893. It is recognised as the birth of international interreligious dialogue. Nineteen women were speakers at this Parliament.

Women scholars

Women have made an important contribution to the discourse on interreligious dialogue in many ways. Women scholars have reflected on the role of women and their contribution to interreligious dialogue. A small sample of scholars who have made a significant contribution to this discourse includes: Azza Karam (Egypt/USA), Kwok Pui-lan (Hong Kong/USA), Kathleen McGarvey (Ireland/Nigeria), Chung Hyun Kyung, **(**Korea), Nam-soon Kang (Korea), Gé M Speelman (Netherlands), Ursula King (UK), Catherine Cornille (USA), Diana Eck (USA), Jeannine Hill Fletcher (USA), Anne Hege Grung (Norway) and Anne Sofie Roald (Norway).

Australian women scholars have also written about women and interreligious dialogue. They include Zuleyha Keskin, Trish Madigan and Gemma Tulud Cruz. Anna Halafoff has written and lectured about interreligious relations and she has a special interest in Buddhism.

Muslim women scholars in Australia

Many women from different religions have contributed considerably to exploring and explaining their religion in the desire to share their theological and sociological insights. Of particular interest in contemporary times are Muslim women scholars who have made a significant contribution to deepening the knowledge base that is necessary for effective interreligious dialogue. These include among others the following Muslim Australian scholars: Zuleyha Keskin, Susan Carland, Shakira Hussein, Samina Yasmeen, Silma Ihram, Ghena Krayem and Alia Imtoual.

International women's interfaith groups

As mentioned, women contributed to the first Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893. Women have also initiated their own international interfaith groups and assemblies as a broad way of addressing critical areas relating to women. The first Asian

Women's Consultation on Interfaith Dialogue was held in Kuala Lumpur in 1989[9] and in 2001 Religions for Peace launched the Global Women of Faith Network, which brought together women of different faiths to promote their leadership, coordinate strategies and work together for peace.[10]

During the first summit of religious leaders held at the United Nations in New York in 2000—the Millennium World Peace Summit of Religious and Spiritual Leaders—very few of the religious leaders invited to speak were women. As a result, of this lack of recognition, women from many different religions and countries formed the Global Peace Initiative for Women (GPIW) in 2002.[11]

In 2015, the Inaugural Women's Assembly was held at the Parliament of the World's Religions gathering in Salt Lake City, Utah, in the United States of America. This was an important step forward for women in the international arena. The women addressed two critical areas: the responsibility of the world's religions to affirm women's dignity and human rights and to share sources of religious and spiritual inspiration for women's empowerment.[12]

National women's interfaith groups

Many women's multifaith groups in Muslim-majority states or areas have aims of peace-building and creating harmony, providing social services and protecting women against violence. Some examples are:

- The Flowers of Peace Women's Circle (Pakistan)
- The Women's Centre for Change in Penang (Malaysia)
- The Faith Based Women Network (Mindanao)
- The Moro Women's Center (Mindanao)
- The Women's Interfaith Network of the Middle East and North Africa (Tunisia)

Many other countries have local, state and national women's interfaith networks with similar aims such as the Africa Women of Faith Network.

Women's interfaith networks in Australia

The publication *Interfaith Networks and Organisations in Australia* (2018) lists 185 interfaith groups in Australia. Of these, only 10 are specifically women's groups.[13] However, they make a significant contribution to the interreligious knowledge base and effective interfaith relations. Many of the participants in these women's interfaith groups are Christians. The conferences and forums of these women's interfaith groups can be described as *holistic* in that they offer an integration of both cerebral and relational activities.

Presentations on theological and sociological topics that relate to the theme of a women's interreligious conference provide intellectual input and relational activities such as story-telling, rituals and group discussions, which provide the opportunity for integrating the theoretical and practical aspects of interreligious dialogue. One Muslim participant in a current study of Christian-Muslim women's interfaith dialogue in Australia described the holistic character of Christian-Muslim Women's interreligious dialogue:

> *I think ideally you need the mix of the two so sometimes the cerebral can be seen as the theory and the intuitive [relational] aspect be seen as the practice … It's not enough for an idea to exist alone* ("Zaynab")[14]

Women as peacemakers and peace activists

Women have contributed in many countries to peacemaking processes in interreligious, sectarian and intercultural conflicts. Azza Karam, for example, provides a wide-ranging account of women's participation in peace-making in many countries throughout the world in her article *Women in War and Peace-building: The Roads Traversed, The Challenges Ahead* (2000).[15] Other scholars, such as Heidi Hudson, Bernadette Ndunguru and Christine Pae Keun-Joo, in studying the role of women in peacebuilding and reconciliation in some African countries and in Korea, emphasise the need for women's contribution to be drawn upon in the peace-building process in order to make it more inclusive and therefore more responsible.[16]

Australian scholar Zuleyha Keskin in her presentation *Women's Role in Peacebuilding: The Muslim Perspective* (2012) described the Muslim perspective on women's role in peace-building by highlighting women's characteristic capacity for compassion which promotes peacebuilding.[17]

Kathryn Marshall and Susan Hayward also describe women's contribution to peacebuilding in their journal article *Women in Religious Peace Building* (2011):

> *Women's abilities to reach across lines of difference in tense environments, lead nonviolent protests, and mobilize communities, as well as their engagement with the theological aspects of gender roles in peace, holds the promise to change discourse and preconceptions about how religious organizations can be involved in peacebuilding work*.[18]

However, women are often allocated a very small representation at the peace-making table; for example during conflicts in Australia's neighbours, Bougainville in Papua New Guinea and Indonesia. The activist groups, Women for Bougainville and Bougainville Women for Peace and Freedom, were heavily

involved in peace-making efforts during the Bougainville civil war in Papua New Guinea (1988 to 1998), yet only 13 out of 75 delegates to the 1997 peace talks were women.[19]

Similarly, in Indonesia during violent interreligious conflict in Maluku (1999 to 2004), the Muslim and Christian women's interfaith groups, Concerned Women's Movement and Young Ambassadors for Peace, played an important role in reconciling warring factions and preventing renewed violence. Their efforts contributed to the signing of a peace accord in 2002. However, women were allocated an extremely small role in formal negotiations, with only three women out of 70 delegates being permitted to participate in the government-supported peace deal between Moluccan Christians and Muslims.[20]

This under representation of women is often mirrored in interreligious dialogue and interfaith activities.

Reasons for the lack of credence given to women's contribution to interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations

Dialogue between religions is usually referred to as "interreligious dialogue" or "interfaith dialogue". Distinctions are sometimes made between "interreligious dialogue" and "interfaith relations." *Interreligious dialogue* is used to refer to the intellectual dialogue of theologies, doctrines, ideas and theories, while *interfaith relations* is used to refer to the relational aspect of encounters between people of different faith traditions. At times, men are considered to make the main contribution to the intellectual or cerebral aspect, while women's main contribution is sometimes considered to be in the area of human relations.

Underlying these ideas are many theories of gender personality differences. These theories attempt to explain gender difference and the consequent differences in role distribution. Such theories have been classified into those that claim major, ontological gender differences (maximalists); those theories that claim there is little difference between genders (minimalists); and those theories that affirm gender differences, but hold that these differences are changeable through social and cultural constructs and through neuroplasticity in which the brain reorganises itself in response to experience or learning (non-essentialists).

Nancy Chodorow proposed the maximalist theory in 1974 that there are certain general and nearly universal differences that characterise feminine and masculine personalities and roles. She held that the feminine personality defines itself by relation and connection while the masculine personality defines itself more by individuation.[21] Men are perceived as having individual personal agency through which they possess the power of subjects who act, create and initiate. Women are perceived as being receptive objects who engage in communion with, or relate to and cooperate with other people. In 2008, Serge Guimond noted that this maximalist view was still evident:

> *The perceived agency of men and the perceived expressiveness and interpersonal sensitivity of women are found over and over, regardless of the epoch, culture or gender of those who provide the answers*.[22]

In addition to these psychological, sociological and cultural theories of gender differences that can relegate women to a secondary position, the theologies of some patriarchal world religions can also be seen to account for the dominance of men in leadership and decision-making roles and the inferior place of women in those religions and consequently in interreligious dialogue.

For women to attain their rightful position in interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations, it is necessary for practitioners to move away from the stance of ontological gender differences to a minimalist or non-essentialist stance that recognises and utilises the potential of both women and men as equal contributors to the dialogue while bringing their own individual gifts to the process.

The necessity for this change was recognised by Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb in their joint declaration on *Human fraternity for world peace and living together* (2019) when they declared that "efforts must be made to free women from historical and social conditioning that runs contrary to the principles of their faith and dignity".[23]

Women's contribution to interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations

A current doctoral research project is focussed on Christian and Muslim women's interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations in Melbourne. Findings from the analysis of interviews with 22 Christian and Muslim women participants show that for over half of the participants, interest in the intellectual content (learning about other faiths) was one of the main reasons for their participation in interfaith conferences.

In addition, more than half of the participants consider their ability to relate positively to others as a notable defining element of women's interreligious dialogue. In women's interfaith conferences, the combination of both these intellectual and relational aspects is used as a holistic methodology of interfaith dialogue.

This combination often consists of the following aspects:

- Theological (systematic and comparative)
- Spiritual (rituals and sharing one's faith journey)
- Physical (activities such as contemplative bush or labyrinth walks, relevant craft sessions, group discussions and meal-time conversations)

In women's interfaith dialogue conferences and forums, this holistic method produces positive results. Berkovic reported such a positive result from the 2010 Jewish Christian Muslim Association (JCMA) Women's forum in Melbourne, *The Elephant in the Room*: "perspectives altered and views changed".[24]

Comparative theological and scriptural input informs the women participants with an understanding of the foundations of the other religion and is therefore basic to effective interreligious dialogue. However, as "Zaynab," a participant in the research project mentioned, "It is not enough for an idea to exist alone".

Intellectual (cerebral), abstract understanding enlightens, but does not necessarily build interpersonal relationships between adherents of different religions. Relational activities integrate cerebral activities with personal experience. This integration offers the possibility of informed and relational engagement.

Conclusion

There has been a tendency to dichotomise theory and praxis in the concepts and practices of interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations. The intellectual and practical aspects of this form of dialogue are not intended to be mere academic or supplementary exercises. Their aim is to bring about the personal transformation of dialogue participants by their gaining of new knowledge, changing attitudes and forming positive relationships.

This form of *subjective* transformation leads to the *objective* transformation of societal conditions that promote societal harmony. The two forms of transformation are essentially interconnected.[25] When women's holistic experience of interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations is not given credence, the connection between these two forms of transformation can be lacking and the aims and outcomes of interfaith dialogue can be rendered ineffective.

According to statements made by peak Christian bodies, for example the World Council of Churches and the Roman Catholic Church, interreligious dialogue is an important part of the Christian mission.

It is the duty of all Christians to participate in this form of dialogue to the extent that they are able to do so. It is therefore essential that women are able to contribute to this important Christian mission to the full extent of their capabilities—theologically, relationally and in leadership and decision-making positions.

When women are able to exercise these capabilities, subjective and objective transformation can occur and interreligious dialogue and interfaith relations can become a more inclusive, balanced and responsible expression of Christian mission.

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Name: **Jacob Joseph**
Thesis: *The Christ Who Embraces: An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India.*

This thesis considers the implications of this Orthodox model of mission in the Indian social context; in particular, how an emphasis on transcendence and liturgy might take political form in relation to Dalit social and theological concerns. It explores theological resources within miaphysite Christology, especially as developed by early teachers of the Church in their treatment of a transcendental and immanent Christology. This theological perspective is then engaged in a contextual debate on the theology of margins in India, namely Dalit Christology, and the importance it places on meaningful engagement in the formation of an Orthodox theology of margins in India.

Award: PhD
Institute: Pilgrim Theological College
Conferred: 2017 and Thesis Submitted
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DECEMBER 2019

Can a Christology of religions revitalise interreligious dialogue?

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This article takes up four themes to illustrate possibilities for a new Christology of religions: the relevance of the theology of the cross; the high priesthood of Christ as central to the discussion; his universal, active presence, along with that of the Holy Spirit; and the efficacy of prayer for "others" joined with Christ's own priestly intercession

Introduction

Current interreligious dialogue has been hampered by a stalemate that affects controversial areas in the theology of religions—at least as it has been developed by Roman Catholics. I think, for instance, of the central debates over the value of "other religions" in mediating salvation. Catherine Cornille, from Boston College, has noted this stalemate and suggested a moratorium in the theology of religions.[1]

Yet this stalemate could be broken by reimagining questions in the light of basic Christian beliefs about Christ. His person and saving work can breathe new life into thinking about the religious "others." A Christology of religions promises much that is possible and fruitful in the encounter with other faith traditions.

The Theology of the Cross

St Paul's contrast between Christ crucified and human wisdom (1 Corinthians 1:18–2:5) stands in judgement on all theologians whose reflections on the situation of the "others" stop short of incorporating Calvary and recognising God hidden in the suffering and the shame of the crucifixion. Martin Luther's conviction, *extra crucem nulla theologia* (outside the cross [there is] no theology),[2] censures those many Christian theologians of religion who indulge "human wisdom" by evading the crucified Christ and refusing to let his crucifixion contribute to what they have to say about the religious "others."[3]

The most mysterious means of divine self-communication, the cross, manifests the sinfulness and lostness of *all human beings.* As well as identifying human beings, it identifies God and shows where God continues to be found—in the lives and bodies of those who are crushed and oppressed.v

The cross of Christ reveals that God is not only *for us* but also *with us* in our suffering—"us" being understood as all men and women. Yet the cross has failed to attract regular attention from those who specialise in the theology of religion. It has not played the major role in this discipline that it should.

The book by Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*,[4] was a magisterial achievement and has rightly become a major point of reference for the theology of religions. Nevertheless, the work has its limits, including a silence about the

sufferings of "the others," which associates them, whether they know it or not, with the passion and death of Jesus.[5] Dupuis dedicated a chapter to "interfaith dialogue,"[6] but failed to present a dialogue that entered into the sufferings of others. When discussing the covenant of God with the Jewish people that has never been revoked,[7] he did not follow the lead of the Second Vatican Council and reflect on the "the hatred" and "persecutions" directed at the Jews.[8]

Vatican II listed "genocide" among the crimes against life (*Gaudium et Spes*, 27), but did not mention by name, either here or in *Nostra Aetate*, the systematic attempt made by the Nazis to eradicate the Jewish people.

Very explicitly, however, a forthcoming book by Michael Barnes, *Waiting on God*: *A Theology of Dialogue*, takes up the interfaith dialogue encouraged by *Nostra Aetate* and puts it in the post-Auschwitz context.[9]

In general, we meet "the other" and Christ himself in experiences of terrible loss and suffering. As Barnes writes in Chapter 7, "God is known not apart from but precisely in the sufferings and darkest moments of our lives." In particular, since Jewish origins and self-understanding shape the Church's very identity, the interfaith theology and dialogue embraced by Christians must not continue to ignore the *Shoah.* Where Christians neglect Auschwitz, whatever they say or practice in interreligious dialogue cannot hope to be fully illuminating and convincing.

The identification of Christ with suffering humanity has been clearly revealed by the criteria for the last judgement (Matthew 25:31–46). The final blessing of the kingdom will come to those who, even without recognising Christ, meet his needs in the people who are hungry, thirsty, strangers, naked, sick and imprisoned.

Blaise Pascal's dictum ("he will be in agony to the end of the world") has classically articulated the crucified Christ's enduring presence in the mystery of all suffering,[10] whether those who suffer are Christ's followers, Jewish people, members of "other" religious faiths, or adherents of no such faith at all.

To express the worldwide presence of Christ in all who suffer, we could well say: "where suffering is, there is Christ (*ubi dolor ibi Christus*)." It is Christ who is constantly revealed on the cross of human suffering: "where the cross is, there is Christ (*ubi crux ibi Christus*)."

Any theology of religions that is truly Christian should incorporate the cross. At the end of his earthly life, the incarnate Son of God showed his worldwide solidarity with all human beings who suffer by being crucified between two others. Sadly, theologies of religion have regularly ignored the horror of Calvary and all that it signifies.[11]

The High Priesthood of Christ

We turn now to the post-Easter situation and the risen Christ's high-priestly intercession for all people—not only for Christians, but also for Buddhists, Confucians, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, followers of traditional religions and the rest, including agnostics, atheists and all those millions of people who profess no particular religious faith at all. The ongoing priesthood of Christ, like his cross, belongs squarely to a Christology of religions. But this priesthood has suffered an astonishing neglect.

The failure of those who have developed a theology of religions to appeal to the intercessory power of Christ the high priest belongs to a widespread neglect of his priesthood as such, which has gone on for centuries. When writing, with Michael Keenan Jones, *Christ Our Priest*: *A Christian Approach to the Priesthood of Christ*,[12] I discovered how very few theologians have ever examined the priesthood of Christ. If theologians remain prone in general to neglect the priesthood of Christ, it would be strange to find them introducing into the theology of religions themes concerned with the priestly intercession of Christ.

One of the very few to investigate the priesthood of Christ was T F Torrance (1913 to 2007). When elucidating the identity and work of Christ as priest, Torrance engaged fully with the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper, with the Letter to the Hebrews (the only New Testament work to call Christ priest or high priest), and with the Eucharist in the life of the Church.

By Jesus' self-consecration and "high-priestly intercession" at the Last Supper, Torrance explained, he intended that his disciples should be "presented to the Father through his own self-offering on their behalf." Torrance understood the Eucharist as the priestly presence of the self-offering of the incarnate, crucified, risen and ascended Christ—a sacrifice in which the faithful share.[13]

While making a notable contribution to a Christian understanding of Jesus' priesthood, Torrance did not examine what this priesthood means for the wider world. He reflected on the relationship between Christ's priesthood and his disciples, "we" who are united with his self-offering and lifted into the closest, priestly union with him.

From the start, the Letter to the Hebrews linked Christ's priestly activity of purifying sin (1:2–4) with the incarnation through which he entered into solidarity

with all human beings. The incarnation allowed the Son of God to become a high priest for everyone. This global perspective also built on the priest-king Melchizedek, who blessed Abraham (Genesis 14:17–20) and was called a "priest for ever" (Psalm 110:4).

The mysterious person of Melchizedek provided a figure who was superior to the (Jewish) Levitical priests.

After three times attributing to Christ an eternal priesthood according to the order of Melchizedek (5:6, 9; 6:2), the author of Hebrews came clean, so to speak, with his strategy: the priesthood of the mysterious priest-king was earlier and greater than the Levitical priesthood (7:1–28).

Christ holds his priesthood "permanently" and lives to make intercession not only for everyone but for always. His priesthood is exercised for all people and for all time.

The Universal Presence of Christ

A Christology of religions is unthinkable unless it encompasses the universal presence of the crucified and risen Christ and of the Holy Spirit. In the second century of the Christian era, Irenaeus of Lyons recognised the universal scope of the divine action through Christ for human salvation: "The Word of the all-powerful God... on the invisible plane is co-extensive with the whole of creation," "rules the universe," and as the Son of God "has traced the sign of the cross on everything" (*Demonstratio*, 34).

In the third century, Origen also highlighted this universal, saving presence: "Christ is so powerful that, though invisible because of his divinity, he is *present to every person* and extends over the whole universe" (*In Ioannem*, 6.15; italics mine). This was not to deny that Christ is present in special, fuller way in the lives of the baptised. But that fuller presence does not mean an absence elsewhere.

Many centuries later, St John Paul II (pope 1978 to 2005) said something similar, while letting the Holy Spirit shape the way he expressed matters. He proclaimed that the full means of salvation are available for the followers of Christ. But this belief does not entail denying the Spirit's powerful presence everywhere.

As John Paul II wrote in his 1990 encyclical, *Redemptoris Missio* (the Mission of the Redeemer), the universal "*presence and activity*" of the Spirit "affect not only individuals, but also society and history, peoples, cultures, and *religions*" (*RM* 28; italics mine).

Through the Spirit's powerful presence, "the others" participate in their own ways in the one divine plan for human salvation centred on Christ.

In their different ways, Irenaeus, Origen and John Paul II suggest that presence and its varieties offer the key for thinking about how divine salvation reaches all people. We live in "world of grace,"[14] a world in which the risen and exalted Christ powerfully demonstrates his personal presence not only for the baptised, but also for all others, and does so through the Spirit.

A Christology of religions involves a Pneumatology of religions, and vice versa. In both cases we face an active and universal presence.

Intercession for others joined with Christ's Intercession

The Second Vatican Council in the *Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity* (Ad Gentes) encouraged bishops "to raise up among their people, especially among those who are sick and afflicted with hardships, souls who with an open heart will offer prayers and works of penance to God for the evangelisation of the world" (*AG* 38).

The same decree notes how prayers offered by contemplative religious enjoy "the greatest importance," since it is in answer to prayer that "God sends workers into his harvest (Matthew 9:38), opens the minds of non-Christians to hear the gospel (Acts 16:14), and makes the word of salvation fruitful in their hearts (1 Corinthians 3:7)" (*AG* 40).

Does such intercession by sharing in the high priestly functions of Christ, constitute a mediation of salvation and contribute to the Christology of religions? So far this question has hardly been raised in the theology of religions.

It can and should be argued that God somehow also works through the mediation of our intercessory prayer rather than unilaterally bringing about everything.[15]

God wants to associate the baptised with the divine work of caring for all "the others." Imitating the divine benevolence that extends to all people, the disciples of Jesus are to love and pray for everyone (Matthew 5:44–45).

Apropos of such genuine love for one's neighbour, Karl Rahner remarked that God is always "the ground" and "mysterious partner" of such love.[16] Since this is true in general, it must prove all the more true at the Eucharist, when the baptised join their prayer for the others to the efficacious prayer of Christ the high priest, who lives forever interceding for all human beings. Christ is the cause, "ground," and "partner" of such loving prayer coming from the faithful.

Here the setting for the Prayer of the Faithful proves highly significant. The First Letter to Timothy did not, or at least did not explicitly, propose the context of the Eucharist when enjoining that "intercessions" be made for ever made "for everyone" (1 Timothy 2:1).

But the Second Vatican Council, when retrieving the practice, stipulated expressly the celebration of the Eucharist as the context in which this prayer for all human beings should be practised.

This prayer of intercession, by belonging to the liturgical celebration, becomes "a work (*opus*) of Christ the Priest and of his Body, which is the Church." *The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* then adds confidently that "no action of the Church," other than the liturgical celebration, "equals its efficacy (*efficacitatem*)" (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*,7).

Hence, inasmuch as the liturgical intercessions for the others share in the priestly ministry of Christ himself, we should expect a generous divine response. It would be strange if this were not the case. Through baptism the faithful already share in the priestly ministry of Christ. They exercise this priestly ministry in a pre-eminent way when they join with him even more closely, by celebrating the Eucharist and praying for the salvation of the whole world.

Conclusion

This article has sketched four themes that should enter into a Christology of religions: a post-Auschwitz theology of suffering and the cross; the priestly intercession of Christ; his universal presence along with his Spirit; and the efficacy of liturgical prayer for others in union with Christ.

Those beliefs about Christ promise to breathe new life into thinking about the religious "others," and break the current impasse. In *A Christology of Religions*[17] I spell out much more fully the case for such an approach and the content that it requires ■

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DECEMBER 2019

Towards a Hindu Christian Dialogue

Rami Sivan

Pandit Rami Sivan *was ordained as Sri Rama Ramanuja Achari. Born in South Africa of a Jewish mother and Christian father, he was raised by Hindu nannies. Baptised as a Christian with a basic education in Christianity and Judaism, he underwent a barmitzvah, eventually formally converting to Hinduism at the age of 15. In 1969, he emigrated to Israel where he spent a decade studying Judaism, Christianity and Islam, as well as training as a registered nurse. He has travelled extensively to spread the Dharma, including in the United States of America, South Africa and Bali, and been inducted as a preceptor (Acharya) into the South Indian Srivaishnava (Iyengar) lineage in 1990, by the pontiff of Sriperumbudur; His Holiness Sriman Varada Yatiraja Jiyar Swamigal, with full rights of initiating others. He spent three years in India undertaking formal study in Yoga-Vedanta philosophy, Logic, Hermeneutics, Sanskrit, and Astrology, as well as specialising in Vedic and Tantric ritual. He studied in the traditional gurukula system in highly respected centres of spiritual and Scriptural learning in Rishikesh, Varanasi, Tirupati and Chennai, immigrating to Australia in 1982 where he had practiced as a Hindu priest and teacher of Yoga-Vedanta philosophy for over 40 years. He is one of the founding members and the current public relations officer of the Australian Council of Hindu Clergy.*

This article emphasises Hinduism as an umbrella of religions, which has the capacity of embracing all, yet at the same time every individual Hindu is given the freedom to choose their personal ishtha devatha*—god… Christian\ Hindu dialogue cannot be fruitful unless a specific sect is chosen for comparison*

Abrahamic and Dharmic Faiths

The world religious landscape of today is bounded by two polarities—Jerusalem and Benares. Jerusalem being the focal point of the three Abrahamic faiths and Benares of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism—the Dharmic faiths.

Interfaith dialogue generally takes place among the spiritual progeny of Abraham, the Dharmic traditions are usually left out—perhaps it is because the distance between Jerusalem and Benares seems too wide to bridge.

The first serious Christian-Hindu dialogue was initiated by the late Father Bede Griffith, who had an ashram in South India named Shantivanam.

He lived among the Hindus, studied Hinduism and had a profound respect and sensitivity to Hindu spirituality. His work involved a syncretism of the best of both faith tradition, which raised the ire of the Indian bishops!

Some scholars have forayed into the area of comparative theology and recently the most outstanding work on Hindu-Christian theology has been done by Francis X Clooney SJ, who has studied the Srivaishnava Hindu sect in depth and written a number of books on the subject:

- *His Hiding Place is in Darkness: A Hindu-Catholic Theopoetics of Divine Absence* (Stanford University Press, 2013)
- *Theology after Vedanta* (Suny Press, 1993).

One of the major obstacles in Hindu-Christian dialogue is the lack of insight into the Hindu philosophical/ theological spectrum.

Hinduism is a blanket term which covers dozens of different religions and scores of sects and sub-sects. Hinduism can best be described as a cooperative or fellowship of seekers rather than a community of *believers*.

Modern Hinduism

Unlike Christianity, in which God is central to the faith and the doctrine of the Trinity and widely accepted by the majority of Churches, the Hindu position on God is extremely flexible ranging from atheism to henotheism within the overarching philosophical framework of pan-en-theism.

The heart of modern Hinduism is the philosophy of the Vedanta, which is based on three textual sources—Upanishads, Brahma-sutras and the Bhagavad Gita.

There are three major schools of Vedanta which differ on the nature of components of reality:

- God (*īśvara*),
- the individual Selves (*jīvas*) and
- matter (particles and fields).
- Non-dualism—nothing exists but God (Brahman/ Isvara) the individual Selves and matter being illusory.
- Qualified non-dualism—God, Selves and matter constitute a single Absolute Reality.
- Dualism—God, Selves and matter are categorically different.

Hinduism, like all religions has three major components:

- Theology/Philosophy
- Mythology through which the theology or philosophy is expressed and formulated.
- Ritual which is the enactment of the ideology.

Held in common

Hindu philosophy is primarily anthropocentric and not theocentric as in the Abrahamic religions. A belief in a personal God is optional and not essential—there are no dogmas per se, but some sects are theistic—holding with devotion to a personal God or Goddess. These are usually henotheist—acknowledging other manifestations of the Divine, but insisting on uncompromised devotion to a single deity.

The focus of all schools of Indian thought is on the existential human condition of suffering, anguish, dis-ease, unhappiness, discontent, feelings of unworthiness, low self-esteem, etc. a condition technically called *duḥkha*.

They all agree that the cause of happiness is cognitive error or misunderstanding (*avidya*) of one's true essential nature, which is a mode or node of Divine consciousness, referred to as a Self (*atman*) rather than a *soul*. A soul generally being a thing created by God and bestowed upon humans, whereas a Self is a spark of the divine having a material body as its expression.

The Self identifies with the body, its connection, possessions, experiences and other concrete factors, and this identification is the cause of one's suffering. The spiritual path is to gradually strip away all these erroneous misidentifications and to uncover and reveal one's quintessential nature as a mode of the divine consciousness—unbounded and blissful.

Some Hindu sects propound a path of devotion and surrender to God and some insist on a path of philosophical dialectic, cultivation of wisdom and meditation. Some rely on works and self-effort and some on the doctrine of Divine Grace.

Divergence

Although there are several sects and versions of Christianity all of them have core elements in common, which have only slight variants.

Hinduism has five core elements which all schools agree upon, but on some of them hold widely divergent views. These five elements are:

- Brahman—the *Immensity*—Totality of Being—the Godhead.
- Atman—the individual Self.
- Samsara—reincarnation
- Karma—the doctrine of the economy of action.
- Nirvana/Moksha—soteriology—the doctrine of ultimate Liberation/salvation.

So a Christian-Hindu dialogue cannot be fruitful unless a specific sect is chosen for comparison and discussion ■

DECEMBER 2019

Catholic–Hindu dialogue in Australia

John Dupuche

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Hindu-Catholic dialogue: why, what, who, how? This article investigates these questions and sets out some possibilities. It relates particularly to the Melbourne scene and proposes a new direction for missiology, focussing not on service and teaching but on witness to religious experience

Why have dialogue with Hindus?

The many Christian denominations have engaged in ecumenism for over a century, because they realised that their long-lasting enmities were scandalous and offended against Jesus' prayer that all should be one.

Dialogue between the Abrahamic traditions is necessary, for their shared faith in the One cannot allow ancient rivalries to continue.

But dialogue with other religions—the work of interfaith dialogue—why?

And, given the focus of this paper, why should there be dialogue between Catholics and the Hindu community which, in Australia, has greatly increased from 270,000 members in the 2011 census to 445,000 in the 2016 census?

The reason for dialogue is clearly given in the watershed document of the Second Vatican Council, *Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Nostra Aetate),[1] which states:

> *The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions… The Church, therefore, exhorts her sons [sic], that through dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions, carried out with prudence and love and in witness to the Christian faith and life, they recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among these men*.

We will come back to elements of this text.

What is Hinduism?

The word *Hindu* was an invention of 19th century British scholars who categorised as *Hindu* all the

traditions in their Raj that were not Muslim or Christian or Sikh or Buddhist.

It is not possible to define Hinduism, despite the many attempts to do so. It is polythetic. For example, a Hindu can be either atheist or monotheist or polytheist, and be all of them at the same time. There are also very many traditions such as Shaivism, Vaishnavism, Yoga, Vedānta, Neo-Vedānta, Tantra, to name only a few. These have *dualist* and *non-dualist* and *qualified non-dualist* forms. Even so, there is a recognisable Hindu *style*, *feel*, *character*, *mood*, a *family resemblance* between the many varieties.

Note that the distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism is porous since they evolved symbiotically. They share the same basic question: how to resolve *duhkha* (inadequately translated as *suffering*) namely the insufficiency and inadequacy, the unreliability and negativity of existence. The term *duhkha* is found in the earliest philosophy of India, the Saṁkhyā. The answers are many.

Who?

The Australian Catholic Bishops' Conference has its *Australian Catholic Council for Inter-religious Dialogue*. Many dioceses have Interfaith Commissions. These can provide a formal dialogue partner.

Who could be the dialogue partner in Hinduism in Australia? Item *m* of the objectives listed in the MOU of Hindu Council of Australia (HCA) reads:

> *To promote harmony and understanding between other religious faiths through interfaith meetings and forums*.[2]

The HCA started actively working in Victoria in April 2014, although it was represented through other Hindu organisations since about 2010. The HCA is in the process of establishing its organisational structures.

The Hindu Council is a valuable dialogue partner, but there are also the many Temples, large and small. Many of their officiating brahmin temple priests come to Melbourne, for example, for a set period of time and do not necessarily speak English; they are celebrants rather than theologians. Temples have councils as well, many of whose members are able and willing to engage in dialogue.

There are also those in universities or individuals in other situations who are well acquainted with the Hindu traditions.

Hindu religious practice occurs very much in the home where families have set up a shrine to their chosen Deity. The family will call on the *purohit*, the brahmin family priest, to perform ceremonies that sanctify the major steps in life such as birth, marriage and death, or other events such a moving into a new house. Some of the *purohit*s will be able to engage in theological discussion, but not all.

Many practitioners of Yoga and Siddha Yoga—to name only those two branches of Hinduism—are Catholics who have retained a sense of the Christian faith, but have found nourishment in the Hindu traditions. The person of Jesus is still meaningful to them. Their Catholic upbringing gave them a thirst for spirituality, but seemed to provide no further nourishment. They also perceive the truth and holiness of the Hindu tradition and feel powerfully attracted to it. A sort of dialogue is taking place in their dual-belonging. Are they not, in this way, examples of interfaith dialogue?

How?

There are classically four types of interfaith dialogue.

The dialogue of daily-life

This occurs in many contexts. One situation that could be noted is the Catholic school.

About 35 percent of Australian students go to non-government schools, many of which are affiliated with a particular religion. In a recent report, the Hindu Council vice president, Mr Surinder Jain, said that many Hindu Australians preferred to send their children to private schools because there was a perception they provided better education and discipline.

He also said that, although religious schools should have the freedom to teach their particular faith, the government's proposed freedom of religion laws should ensure they also employ staff and admit students from diverse backgrounds. "Children in religious schools are growing up never having come across someone of a different religion. That's not good for a harmonious, multicultural society," he said.[3]

Mr Jain has expressed a point of view, some aspects of which are debatable, but he does highlight the value of students in Catholic schools being acquainted with other religions in a way that contributes to social harmony and spiritual depth.

It is for that reason that, in 2018, the Ecumenical and Interfaith Commission (EIC) in Melbourne published a document entitled, *Welcoming Each Other, Guidelines for interfaith Education in the Schools of the Archdiocese Melbourne.*[4] It was endorsed by Archbishop Comensoli, who directed that interfaith education be taught in all the schools of his

archdiocese. It was commended as a document of worldwide significance by Bishop Ayuso (now Cardinal Ayuso), Prefect of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, during the delegation's visit to Melbourne in September 2018.

This document should help in satisfying the needs of Hindus who seek acceptance, tolerance and good relations with the majority faith. They want Catholics to respect their places of worship, their holy days, their customs, so they can feel they are part of a true multicultural, multi-faith society.

The dialogue of action

Nostra Aetate includes the remarkable statement that Catholics should "… through dialogue and collaboration with [Hindus]… recognise, preserve and promote the good things, spiritual and moral, as well as the socio-cultural values found among [Hindus]."

The objects of the MOU of the HCA give priority to preserving and promoting Hindu culture and religion. The question therefore arises as to the ways Catholics can link the aims of *Nostra Aetate* with the aims of the MOU. By doing so, they will give witness to Christ who came not to be served but to serve (Mark 10:45). He is the universal Lord because he is the universal Servant.

In recent times, the EIC in Melbourne joined with members of other religions, including Hindus, in presenting a submission to the Victorian Government concerning the bill on assisted dying. This effort was not successful, but does represent a fine example of cooperation in the dialogue of action.

The dialogue of theological exchange

Why would Hindus wish to enter into dialogue with Catholics? What is the Good News that Catholics bring to Hinduism? Is it the knowledge of Christ Jesus? But is he not, for the Hindu, just another incarnation of Vishnu, to be honoured and worshipped, but since he is only another manifestation he can be safely ignored. Furthermore, to its own questions, Hinduism has its own answers, magnificently expressed in great texts such as the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, the Puranas, in the many sutras and tantras, to mention just a few.

What questions do Hindus and Catholics share? What are their respective answers?

Dialogue means having something essential to say as well as deeply valuing what is heard. The emphasis in Catholic-Hindu dialogue over many years has been theological and in Melbourne we have conducted many events which involved dialogue with other religions, Hinduism included, on matters of doctrine and practice. While this is valuable and necessary, it is not the Hindu emphasis.

The dialogue of religious experience

The question my friends in India ask me is not what I think, but what I have experienced. It is a profoundly challenging question. I can talk theology *till the cows comes home*! But what have I in fact experienced? Is there anything? Dare I say what it is? Do I have the words to express it? Does it sound trivial? Will it be accepted?

Their question gives a clue to how missiology could further be conducted with Hindus. Catholics can give witness to what has *worked* for them, honestly, authentically, in all humility, with thanks to the One from whom all good gifts come, showing not only the intelligence of their words but above all the quality of their spirit. Are they enlightened, empowered and at peace?

Hindus do indeed admire the tradition of service that Catholics have exemplified to a remarkable degree, but they admire above all the highest spiritual and mystical states, the person who manifests the divine, who transcends this world while living in it, who knows the heavenly mysteries and has insight into every earthly situation.

There is great value in dialogue on topics such as re-incarnation or the uniqueness of Christ, just as there is value in working together in the dialogue of action and co-existing harmoniously in the dialogue of life, but the dialogue that is really convincing for the Hindu is the dialogue of religious experience. In what way has Christ Jesus transfigured those who have identified with him? In what way have Christians experienced liberation?

Typically, in Hinduism, the enlightened person does not go in search of disciples. Rather it is the disciple who seeks the master and asks to be taught. This is reflected *mutatis mutandis* in the Johannine approach where disciples give witness to the world simply by loving one another (cf. John 14:35), in contrast to the Pauline process of evangelisation which consists in going out onto the highways and by-ways to proclaim and argue the case for the Good News.

A new missiology means giving witness in the most delicate way, without triumphalism or arrogance, without disrespect or sense of superiority, in simplicity and joy, authentically and modestly, preferring silent witness to unnecessary proclamation. It involves giving witness to one's experience, which is ecclesial as well as individual. It means also attending to the

experience of the Hindus, perceiving all that is true and holy in them, with amazement at the universal and multi-coloured grace of God. In this way, through the experience of each other's experience, the One beyond all forms and names is known.

After blessing the memorial at Gandhi's cremation site, Pope John Paul II told Roman Catholic bishops in Asia to respect other religions, but not to lose sight of their "call to conversion" in the next millennium.[5]

Unfortunately the term *conversion* evoked memories of the excessive zeal of some missionaries, past and present, calling on Hindus to abandon their ancient traditions and adopt a westernised form of Christianity. In an attempt at *damage control*, the bishops of India emphasised that what the pope meant was that conversion is necessary for all people at all times.

The pandits of India would indeed agree, for India with its billion Hindus is sorely tempted by the material success of the West to abandon its ancient faith. The customs and beliefs so easily followed in the 600,000 villages of India can hardly be maintained in the rapid urbanisation of recent times. This threat to Hindu culture has led to reactions such that minorities, including Catholics, are oppressed, sometimes violently.

There is a need for dialogue between the different strands of Hinduism just as there is among Christians. The different schools of Hinduism, due to their acceptance of polytheism, have normally lived at peace with each other.

This tolerance has not prevented vigorous debate as to which tradition leads more simply and more swiftly to the goal of liberation from the cycle of re-birth and re-death. Thus, there is rivalry and competition between traditions, and between gurus as well. The question is not just which tradition is intellectually more coherent and developed, but which tradition *works* for the individual and bears fruit. Effectiveness is the litmus test.

Christians can give witness to the simple and swift and powerful effectiveness of their tradition, as St Paul says:

> *The message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God… we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God* (Corinthians 1:18, 23-24).

Dialogue means giving witness and receiving witness. Catholics will most powerfully dialogue with Hindus by showing the power and wisdom which is theirs through their union with Christ Jesus, and which makes them able to receive with joy the witness of Hinduism. In the paradox of this mutual witness, which cannot be reduced to words, Catholics and Hindus will come to know the One from whom all comes and to whom all returns ■

END NOTES

1. Paragraph 2. *http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html*
2. *http://hinducouncil.com.au/new/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/HCA-Constitution.pdf,* Victoria has its chapter, *http://hinducouncil.com.au/new/state-chapters/vic-chapter/*
3. See *https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/religious-schools-should-be-required-to-enrol-a-mix-of-religions-hindu-council-20190904-p52nu8.html*
4. *Welcoming Each Other* is a sister document to *Promoting Interfaith Relations, Guidelines for the parishes and agencies of the Archdiocese of Melbourne to assist in the promotion of interfaith relations in general and especially in the preparation of interfaith gatherings* launched by Archbishop Hart in 2007. *https://www.cam.org.au/eic/welcoming/index.html*
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DECEMBER 2019

Promoting harmonious co-existence in interfaith dialogues through the Buddhist lens of compassion and interdependence

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It is curious that we live in an era characterised by rapidly increasing interconnectedness while our relations are still influenced by distinct differences and segregations. Our ability to address critical issues that have risen from these global changes have been encumbered by our paramount fixation on 'the other'. Buddhist teachings on interdependence and compassion remind us that there is no division in humanity and thus the challenges we face will not selectively implicate certain groups over others. Buddhism proposes that peaceful relations between faiths are a vital step towards positively influencing sustainable human development. The main body of this paper will address key teachings and practices in Buddhism that may serve as a foundation for an effective, fruitful and ongoing interfaith dialogue. It finishes by including practical examples of how interreligious dialogues have encouraged unity in the past and how this can be scaled internationally

Introduction

There exists an old anecdote in the *Entry into the Realm of Reality* chapter of the *Avatamsaka Sūtra*. It tells the tale of Bodhisattva Maitreya teaching the concept of interdependence to Sudhana, who was on a quest to learn the ultimate truth.[1] In doing so, Maitreya opened a pagoda where he displayed an infinite net that strung together a mirror at every juncture. The infinite array of mirrors was reflected in each mirror, and each mirror was reflected in all other mirrors. This cosmic matrix of reflections is to represent the connectedness of the consciousnesses of all life forms. In this paper, we propose that this Buddhist perspective on interdependence can serve as the basic principle for interfaith dialogues. A pertinent question in an increasingly secular world is

how faith groups can foster the pluralism and prosperity of belief systems today. Most religions continue to exist because they provide adherents meaning to their suffering and offer a path out of their existential difficulties. This means that as long as suffering exists, religions will continue to be relevant.

Buddhism presents a strong affirmation: the First Noble Truth that the Buddha taught states categorically that all existence is characterised by dis-ease (*duḥkha*) and his final (Fourth) Noble Truth offers a path (*marga*) out of such existential dis-ease.

Duḥkha interestingly describes the condition of a wheel that is not turning smoothly. It is unlikely that there could be anyone who has not encountered situations where such feelings exist. Religions often offer solutions out of existential crises either through salvation or liberation. While there are contradictions, variations and disagreements among and even within faith traditions, there exists one common solution and that is compassion. Karen Armstrong agrees that compassion is central to all the major world religions.[2]

Hence, we would like to recommend "compassion" together with "interdependence" as the bases for respectful interfaith dialogues.

The Buddhist perspective on compassion

In Buddhism, compassion is the translation of the Sanskrit term *karuṇā*. *Karuṇā* specifically suggests the absence of hatred and the removal of suffering. Recent studies of compassion reveal that, against popular belief in the innate selfish nature of humans, compassion and benevolence are "an evolved part of human nature, rooted in our brain and biology, and ready to be cultivated for greater good".[3]

In Buddhism, compassion is different from benevolence or loving-kindness (*metta*). The former removes the suffering of others while the latter gives joy to the other.

Buddhist *karuṇā* contains several differences from a standard understanding of the term *compassion* that are worthy of mention. For example, Joseph Goldstein differentiates compassion from pity or commiseration: "This [compassion] isn't pity for others. It's really feeling one's own pain and recognising the pain of others... Seeing the web of suffering we're all entangled in, we become kind and compassionate to one another".[4]

Stemming from the understanding that we reflect all beings in the vast interdependent network of existence, another person's suffering is recognised as a reflection of our inevitable pain encountered in life.

In this way, Buddhist compassion avoids the self-centred separation or superiority that *pity* sets up between the self and others.

Buddhist teachings and practices on compassion

More than recognising the pain of others as equivalent to one's own, *karuṇā* is based on the Buddhist view of equality. According to its teachings, equality is not *sameness*. Human beings experience different conditions due to their distinctive karmic dispositions and hence, cannot be the same. These dispositions are a result of past actions, speech and thoughts.

Such past conditioning influences one's views and beliefs. Unenlightened beings see the differences among people, become attached to the differences, and develop self-identity through grasping at what coheres with their sense of identity. Buddhists consider all sentient beings equal in their unconscious structuring of experiences. Compassion asks for practitioners to transcend apparent differences (whether in physical form, feelings, thoughts, views, and upbringing) to understand the similarities in terms of the nature of how people experience the world.

The famous eighth century Indian Buddhist scholar-monk, Śāntideva, taught compassion training based on the understanding that everyone is equal in their experience of suffering of *duhkha*. According to him, "all equally experience suffering and happiness, and I must protect them as I do myself".[5]

Meditation on compassion is performed through recollecting the kindness of one's carer—parent, friend or guardian—during focussed breathing. It then involves recalling the suffering of the identified carer and allowing the thought of compassion towards him or her to arise. This practice should progress and extend to include all sentient beings equally. It can be acknowledged that one has practised true compassion once one responds in the same manner to an enemy or a stranger in distress as he or she would to the carer.

While this echoes the Golden Rule, it is also vital to note that this recognition includes all beings rather than just those with the same affiliations. For example, it is instinctive for a mother to care for her own child; Buddhist equality teaches that although it may be less intuitive, she should care for a calf with the same respect. Hence, this Buddhist notion of equality does not involve separation or division between living things. As with Indra's net—if one is inflicted with damage, all other mirrors will reflect it in one aspect or another.

Buddhism teaches that wisdom must also be used in combination with compassion. There is a tale of a man who watches an emperor moth struggling out of its cocoon for several hours. The story goes on to

explain the man's overwhelming sadness for the butterfly's struggle, and as a result, "*he took a pair of scissors and snipped off the remaining bit of cocoon"*.[6]

The consequence produced far more suffering than it did relief. The butterfly lived the rest of its life crawling around with a swollen body and shrivelled wings. The theory this story highlights is that deep knowledge and understanding is necessary to practise compassion.

Buddhists understand that any discrimination and distinction comes from a misconception of the true nature of existence. Bound by karmic dispositions, an unenlightened person appropriates what reflects his or her desires. Craving for what appeals and aversion for what one hates constitute the *saṃsāric* results of such ignorance, not realising that these are only reflections of mental images.

Hence, the Buddhist practice of compassion also involves a deep understanding of *karma.* Karma sees that biases and the creating of in- and out-groups are reflected onto oneself and can create undesirable consequences such as isolation or conflict. Conversely, when one approaches another's suffering as one's own, he or she may be liberated from such a struggle.

Compassion and interdependence

Still on the topic of experiences, Buddhists recognise that the self is made up of momentary life elements. Hence, the sensorium (constituting an individual's six sense organs and their corresponding sense objects and consciousnesses), and nothing else, determines a person's entire experience.

The sensorium also presents a great tool for practice through the Buddhists' signature non-self (*anātman*) doctrine. There cannot be a substantive and permanent "self" if the sensorium is constantly changed by processing information from the external environment and inner thoughts.

The ever-changing mental and physical processes are often likened to a stream that "arises, flows, and passes away depending upon nothing but the various conditions that create and sustain it".[7]

Therefore, any clinging to a false notion of self and objects (including mental objects) that support this sense of self will not provide lasting satisfaction. A person awakening to this false and illusory ego personality will also see through the illusion dividing humanity. The *anātman* doctrine sees the meaninglessness of craving, conceit and pride and aims to remove barriers between the self and others.

So far, we have explored an important characteristic of *karuṇā*: equality of giver and beneficiary that is strongly grounded in the tenets of Buddhist teachings. We have tried to introduce the Buddhist concepts of *karma* to explain the reason for apparent differences and *anātman* as the right view to possess for transcending the differences.

Another relevant Buddhist doctrine is *śūnyatā* (emptiness). Emptiness is not nothingness nor voidness; it is understood by the wise who know the way things really are as the absence of intrinsic nature.[8] It is in this deep understanding of *śūnyatā* as the nature of things, whereby all are equal (in the context of *anātman*), that a Buddhist practitioner fully comprehends *prajñā*.

One who perfects the practice of *prajñā* gives with no concept of the fundamental existence of a giver, gift or recipient.[9] The world becomes a level playing field and all boundaries (and identities) become man-made concepts. This then forms an important basis for interfaith dialogues.

There are two levels of emptiness that we would like to touch on. Both are conducive to interfaith conversations. The first level is one of letting go. As a result of the understanding of *śūnyatā*, a Buddhist representative engaging in interfaith dialogues can attain freedom from *duḥkha* by letting go of any notional concepts, whether they are in the phenomenal realm or even supramundane *śūnyatā*. Such abandonment of notions of God or Buddha[10] presents a clean slate for healthy discussions to progress.

When Buddha meets the Gods

Another level of understanding *śūnyatā* is to treat it as an invitation to infinite creative possibilities as a result of non-attachment. Just like a department store stocks a large variety of attire for its customers, the world should also prosper with a diversity of faith groups.

An adherent may find affirmations of his or her faith by consulting other religions. In 2006, Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Paul Cardinal Shan Kuo-hsi acknowledged that both of them became religious leaders because they witnessed wars and vowed to give their lives to the protection of the distressed.

Just before Cardinal Paul passed away in 2012, he told Venerable Master Hsing Yun that there were no barriers between religions and their friendships; they agreed to meet each other again in future lives—as monks in their respective religions—to continue their work for world peace.

This is because both had immense compassion for humanity. Their conditions would have led them to serve all of humanity in the best way they could and

Catholic representatives from the Philippines parading the Santo Niño at the* When Buddha Meets the Gods *event at Fo Guang Shan on 25 December 2018.
(photo: Fo Guang Shan)

hence, religion was only a condition that offered them the opportunity to attend to the needs of others. Faith seen in this light presents no barriers.

Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Thich Nhat Hahn, who were quoted above, advocate Mahāyāna Buddhism. In this form of Buddhism, the ideal archetype is that of a bodhisattva, who has vowed not to attain Buddhahood out of compassion towards all suffering beings. Hence, a *bodhisattva* is a Buddhist practitioner whose intent on enlightenment is based on profoundly altruistic motivation.[11]

Rather than reaching *nirvāṇa* (a condition in which the flames of delusion are extinguished and hence, will not be reborn), a bodhisattva chooses to remain in the phenomenal world to assist others reduce their suffering. Elder monks, such as Venerable Master Hsing Yun and Thich Nhat Hahn, are living bodhisattvas.

Since 2011, Fo Guang Shan in Taiwan has been organising an annual *When Buddha Meets the Gods* interfaith event on Christmas Day in its headquarters in Kaohsiung. On 25 December 2018, this event set the world record of the greatest number of interfaith figurines in one location with a count of 3,478 images.

Over 100,000 Buddhists, Christians, Daoists and devotees of local religions gathered harmoniously and joyously in a spirit of mutual respect to witness the parade of these images. In 2015, Venerable Master Hsing Yun who founded this event said that in the past, religions often contested to be number one and that resulted in numerous conflicts. He started this interfaith event to encourage devotees of different faiths to let go of discrimination and respect one another's faiths.

With his magnanimous heart, Venerable Master Hsing Yun advocates all to treat all images and all faiths as number one. Only then can world peace become more than a slogan. We hope that readers can appreciate the Buddhist doctrinal foundation of this advocacy, ie. how it is grounded in compassion, interdependence, non-self, and emptiness.

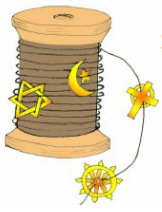
Interfaith dialogues can become the perfect practice grounds for bodhisattvas. By coming together with an *empty* mind, attendees appreciate the other better. It is a way to recognise the suffering of all humanity despite apparent differences in faiths. *Karuṇā* entails a desire to eliminate the suffering of others and prompts one to serve others with no expectations of reciprocity.

In addition, instead of working against one another, religious practitioners can combine resources to help their adherents overcome existential difficulties and flourish. This is made possible because of the inherent interdependence among all beings (sentient or otherwise). Cooperation also helps to dissolve any boundaries between self and others, and the deep-seated selfishness of individuals.

The Buddhist conceptualisation of compassion in its teachings, training and practice places all faith groups on equal footing as they dialogue for the betterment of society together. Compassion is disjointed from projection and connected to a genuine concern for the problem of human suffering. It is tied to a consequentialist ethical viewpoint that aims to derive the maximum benefit for all of humanity, Buddhist or not. Compassion is then able move forth to bridge the gaps between groups of people and relieve human suffering.

Interreligious dialogue at the University of the West

It is this doctrine that catalysed Juewei's aspiration to organise an interreligious dialogue across several campuses and faith groups in Los Angeles. She aimed to initiate progressive and thematic discussions on compassion in daily practice.



A spool threading different faith groups together.
(with permission: Doctor Nancy Cowardin)

In the March of 2010, Juewei facilitated an all-day event for this exact purpose at the University of the West. The logo of the event depicted a spool of thread weaving together the symbols of all major religions.

The concept is derived from Buddhist teachings of interdependence. The Sanskrit *sūtra*—a thread that sews things together—as would one that compiles the

pages of an old book. This image guided the vision of the event: to create unity and strength in humanity.

The keynote speaker was public intellectual, international corporate strategist and investment banker, Doctor Robert Lawrence Kuhn. Doctor Kuhn explored the insights of the world's leading physicists, cosmologists, philosophers and theologians on the reality of human relations and ultimate existence through his television series, *Closer to Truth*. His central argument was that there is no mutual exclusivity in the compendium of explanations that exist in our world today.

Attendees had the opportunity to engage in four different panels which focussed on topics from *Compassion and Yout*h to *Compassion from Birth to Death*. The former panel encouraged young adults to share their understanding of compassion, especially in the context of relationships (romantic, filial and friendly), as well as in pertinent matters such as individualism and the digital age.

Held concurrently was the other panel that stimulated anecdotes of how adherents used their beliefs to support them through life's difficult episodes (death and dying) and explored how the practice of compassion enriched family and community life.

The afternoon workshop on *Compassion in Practice* delved into how practices, such as chanting, song and dance, bonded the members of groups and emboldened compassion. The final panel focussed on compassion in charity and social work. The panel consisted of 11 community faith groups who brought posters of their projects to share with all participants.

In the panel, they discussed how compassion guided them through difficult moments of their projects, the rewards of their voluntary efforts, and tools that were given to beneficiaries so as to create a better standard of living, thereby avoiding further need for the charity and social programmes.

Those facilitating each panel came from distinct professional and belief backgrounds.

As a result, contributions were extensive and diverse.

Interfaith attendees had the opportunity to broaden their perspectives to a scope outside of their familiarity and common knowledge. Amongst roughly 100 audience members there was a genuine interest to want to share and learn. The event resulted in invaluable exchanges, donations and mutual visits. It marked the beginning of future collaborations across different campuses. It also flagged an opportunity to initiate international collaboration as these collaborations could seamlessly be reproduced in other regions beyond California.

Conclusion

The openness and commitment of those involved in such interfaith dialogues is a manifestation of the spool of thread metaphor. For religions to be able to help their adherents face life-changing megatrends, they will need to come together to explore how to remain relevant in this volatile world.

There is an urgent need to recognise that humanity co-arises with its natural and social environment. The Buddhist perspective on compassion and interdependence views all humans as equal in that they are part of a greater whole and hence, should care for one another.

Division and separateness are merely illusions; a conception of the self that has arisen from the process formed through sensory, affective and cognitive interaction with the world. Hence, the Buddhist conceptualisation of compassion can put all faith groups on equal footing as they dialogue for the betterment of society together ■

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Journeying into dialogue

Eamon Adams

Eamon Adams *is a priest member of the Columban Mission Society and has been living and working in South Korea for many years. Born and raised in Northern Ireland, he has expertise in interreligious dialogue, especially with Buddhists, and believes that we need to acquire a sense of wonder at the otherness of many aspects of our world and develop a much more holistic approach to recalibrate our relationship with the society in which we live.*

The phrase "do as I say, not as I do" springs to mind as I start this reflection on interreligious dialogue. When I run workshops on interreligious dialogue, I often ask participants to write a short autobiographical reflection focussing on the part religion has played in their lives.

My self-appointed role in such a scenario is to encourage the participants to investigate some of the nooks and crannies they might prefer to pass over.

In this article, I propose to follow my own advice and, instead of guiding others, delve into my own engagement with dialogue to better understand what has brought me to this juncture on my interreligious dialogue journey.

Tempting as it may be, I think that those involved in interreligious dialogue must be on their guard not to overly simplify situations by overselling the healing properties of interreligious dialogue. It may be good, but it is not a panacea for all ills

To help assess my journey, I will highlight events from different stages of my life and provide a brief analysis, all the time endeavouring to link those occurrences with the subject at hand, interreligious dialogue.

From the outset, let me be clear: my present understanding of and views concerning interreligious dialogue are much more complex and less naively enthusiastic than they were, let's say, 20 years ago.

And as a result, I contend that in the present social, religious and political climate, interreligious dialogue has become too ready an answer to what are often multifaceted and trying problems.

This has resulted in a cheapening and oversimplification of interreligious dialogue in general and, specifically, has left a void in the area of critical engagement with both the concept and practice of interreligious dialogue.

In what follows, I will trace some of my journey into dialogue with Buddhism, as found in South Korea, and provide some personal musings on interreligious dialogue in general. Although I have been involved in dialogue with different partners, such as Shamanists and Confucianists, Buddhists have been my chief partners in both dialogue and academic research.

On reflection, I have never made a deliberate choice for Buddhism; it seems to have been a natural progression and perhaps the result of the directing hand of fate. And after all my efforts to better understand Buddhism, I still find it a fascinating religious tradition and one that never fails to challenge me and call me forth.

Born far from Buddhism

My roots are far removed from Buddhism and are to be found on the north coast of Ireland. Born in 1967, I predated *the Troubles* by two years, meaning that my childhood was lived out against a backdrop of violence and disruption. Fortunately, compared with many in Northern Ireland, my life was relatively untouched by violence and the resulting despair. However, during those years, life in that part of the world made it impossible to avoid violence, sectarianism and a deep-seated sense of insecurity.

At that time, something which became an almost daily routine was sitting round the kitchen table eating breakfast cereal and listening to the radio announce

bad news before going to school. Most each and every morning, the news would carry facts of another bombing, shooting, or equally horrific happening.

The particularly brutal atrocities would elicit a more obvious reaction from listeners, but news of the *odd murder* or *small bombing* would mostly pass with only a tut and shake of the head, barely audible over the crunching noise of Cornflakes being eaten. When life is lived out against such a backdrop, it is important to become desensitised to the abnormality of the situation. The abnormal, while never becoming normal, does become more run-of-the-mill and ordinary.

Unlike the decreasing number of Church attendees in modern day Ireland, during the troubles in the north of Ireland, Catholic churches were extremely well attended, especially on Sundays and Holy Days. My family was no exception to the rule. During my teenage years I was not only quite religious, but I also started to develop an interest in religion as a concept.

As a result of this interest, and although I did not have the vocabulary to describe it at the time, I gradually became aware that the form of religion which predominated in northern Irish society was one which, I thought, lacked context. It was very much a religion which provided comfort, assurance and future promise, but homilies and liturgical celebrations were disconnected from the background of violence.

The more I reflected on this trend the more critical I became of the religion of my daily experience, to the extent of—in pre-digital days—searching out a vinyl copy of Joe Hill's *The Preacher and the Slave* and his timeless refrain of "You'll get pie in the sky when you die."

More than religion

At the height of the Troubles in Northern Ireland, there was little energy in society or in the Churches for ecumenical undertakings, but they did exist. The most famous of these was the Corrymeela Community.[1]

The Corrymeela Community was built on an ecumenical foundation and focussed on reconciling the divided communities in Northern Ireland. In 2015, it celebrated 50 years of working for peace and in 2019 it continues to provide witness, education and space for those who dream of a brighter future.

However, during my teenage years, I had little interest in organisations like the Corrymeela Community, because I never thought that the major problem in Northern Ireland was religious. Yes, religion played a role, for better and for worse, but more as a marker of identity than anything else.

As a result of this belief, I tended to view groups such as Corrymeela as middleclass *do gooder* organisations that had little in common with me or my community. For me, the roots of Northern Ireland's problems lay with civil, political and economic injustices, and not with religion—Protestant or Catholic.

Don't get me wrong. I have the greatest admiration for the work organisations such as Corrymeela did and continue to do in Northern Ireland, but the lesson I learned from those dark days was that it is too easy to focus on religion as the cause of violence and sectarianism.

Difficulties found in societies and cultures are much too complex to be reduced solely to a religious cause. Such a reductionist approach does neither religion, culture, nor society any justice in what are tremendously complicated situations.

Jumping to the present, it seems that this is still a tempting path to take for those of us involved in interreligious dialogue. Even today, it is easy to hear the suggestion that interreligious dialogue will solve *the problem*—whatever that may be—and that if only people would talk, harmony will reign.

Just like the problems which continue to haunt Northern Ireland, other social, national and international problems, too, are multi-layered, convoluted and beyond the competency of any one form of solution—including interreligious dialogue.

Tempting as it may be, I think that those involved in interreligious dialogue must be on their guard not to overly simplify situations by overselling the healing properties of interreligious dialogue. It may be good, but it is not a panacea for all ills.

Apart from the situation in the north of Ireland, two other countries spring to mind when thinking about oversimplifying a situation and subsequently promoting interreligious dialogue as *the solution*. These two countries are places where Buddhism plays extraordinarily important roles: the Union of Myanmar (Burma) and Sri Lanka.

In a recent opinion piece, Audrey E Kitagawa, a leading figure in the Parliament of the World's Religions, refers to Sri Lanka and the terror attacks of 21 April 2019. In her piece, Kitagawa paints a rosy picture of the healing properties of religions and how through dialogue harmony will eventually reign:

> *Interfaith dialogue and co-operation are increasingly important modalities to counter the polarisation of religious communities against each other. Such polarisations destabilise economic prosperity, lives and social tranquillity*.[2]

An examination of both Myanmar and Sri Lanka point to many more fundamental causes of conflict other than religion. Religion is involved and plays various roles within these diverse settings, some for better and some for worse.

However, to naively suggest that religious polarisation causes the destabilisation of economic prosperity, as Kitagawa does, is to misrepresent the underlying and historical causes of such conflicts, causes such as colonialism, post-colonialism and economic inequality.[3]

In fact, it would seem more accurate to say that lack of economic prosperity, social equality and quality of life causes religions to become destabilised rather than the other way about.

Journeying towards Buddhism

I turn now to my on-going relationship with Buddhism. One reason for highlighting my Irish roots, as above, was to point out my original lack of connection with and knowledge of the living Buddhist tradition. Like many young people in the 1980s, I, too, had a deep curiosity about Buddhism and Buddhist philosophy.

When I joined the seminary and started my journey towards becoming a missionary priest with the Missionary Society of Saint Columban, I became intrigued with the ideas and practices of contemplation and meditation in the Christian tradition; but as time passed, I began to look at other traditions, too. Some names of those who influenced me at the time are Thomas Merton, Thích Nhất Hạnh, D T Suzuki, Alan Watts and William Johnston.

It was not only books and religious pursuits which connected me to Buddhism in my seminary years. On the sporting front, I used to practice Aikido, a Japanese martial art, and as with many such disciplines, the deeper my involvement with Aikido grew the more frequent the lectures on topics such as the philosophy of life and culture of Japanese martial arts.

This concretely manifested itself during our times of more intensive Aikido practice, when Zen meditation was incorporated into our routine. I recall that even though it was never presented as a Buddhist practice, as a standalone discipline, many students, at least in our own minds, made connections with Buddhism.

At the beginning of this reflection, when I mentioned my interreligious dialogue journey I did so deliberately to highlight the ever changing and even contradictory nature of my journey.

As I recall my early interest in things Buddhist, I feel a degree of awkwardness because my earliest interest in Buddhism was guided by some of the very things I would now criticise and warn others against.

Undoubtedly, my initial attraction to Buddhism was influenced by a desire for the exotic and the strange, the different and the mystical—a classical orientalist approach to the subject. The Buddhism I read about and was attracted to was very much the type popularised by Japanese scholars, such as D T Suzuki and Masao Abe.

In their works, Buddhism was presented as a philosophical, contemplative and scientific tradition which, while being open to other religions, was in many ways superior to them.[4]

In other words, I began my journey with a philosophical form of Buddhism bereft of piosity, earthiness, myths and messiness. In my defence, however, historically there has been, and remains today, a tendency to portray Buddhism as a rationalistic and individualistic religion of the interior realm which differs from other religious traditions. Richard Cohen highlights this tendency when he writes: “Buddhism, thus stereotyped, is a religion that even Kant could love.”[5]

Although I admit, in my innocence, to having been heavily influenced by this now much criticised understanding of a sanitised form of Buddhism, I have no regrets. It would be different if at this stage on my journey, I was naively to follow the same path and make the same groundless assumptions, in those circumstances I would be disappointed. However, beginnings are precisely that, beginnings, and learning from mistakes and misunderstandings is a crucial part of the wider dialogue process.

Over the years, a lesson I have learned is to follow the path which best fits with and nurtures my enthusiasm for things religious and dialogical, even when haunted by doubt.

At the core of religious, personal and social exchange and interchange lies the fundamental value of communication, which can take place only when at least one party is willing to expose herself or himself to the possibility of being wrong and yet remains willing to take the chance.

Since entering dialogue, either with others or with oneself, can be a daunting experience which demands courage beyond the normal, it is, I think, unrealistic to expect certitude and godlike insight from the very beginning of the journey. In fact, certainty is a luxury denied to those who partake in dialogue whether beginning on their journeys or nearing the end.

Among other factors, the constant sense of ambiguity,

which is intrinsic to dialogue, is difficult to live with on a personal level; however, for institutional religions this is even more of a challenge.

This is, I am convinced, one of the major reasons why all religions—yes, all—have yet to fully open themselves to and embrace the challenges presented by interreligious dialogue. This failure is a topic for another day, but one which should be researched and discussed sooner rather than later.

Meeting with Buddhism

My interreligious dialogue journey has been made up of different stages, but if I had to single out the most important of those stages, two jump to mind: one, my first experience of Buddhism as a living tradition in Korea, and two, my postgraduate religious studies.

I will, in this next section, turn to these in order to illustrate how those experiences subsequently shaped much of my thinking on interreligious dialogue and led me to a more critical outlook on the state of dialogue in today's world. Moving in chronological order, let me first outline my early experience in South Korea.

As part of my formation for ministry, I was appointed to South Korea for a period of about 18 months beginning in late 1988. My early time in South Korea was spent in the capital, Seoul, attending language school and trying to become acclimatised to my new surroundings. During that period, I attended meetings and functions held by a group of foreign Buddhists, mostly westerners, living in Seoul. Some of those in the group had previously lived in countries in South-East Asia and were familiar with the Theravada Buddhist tradition.

This mixture of people and experiences lead to a sort of hybrid form of Buddhism with different types of religious expressions and teachings all at home and finding expression in the group. From my perspective, the most interesting thing was my exposure to the influence of Theravada Buddhism, very much a new experience for me since most of my reading until then was centred round East Asian Buddhism.

Through my attendance at the Buddhist group in Seoul my experience of Buddhism was widened and my understanding deepened. However, this experience was not all positive. Because the majority in the group were western and many had been influenced by Theravada Buddhism, the general atmosphere and direction of the group was quite negative towards the living Buddhist tradition as found in much of Korea.

As mentioned above in relation to my own story, many westerners are under the impression that Buddhism is a rational system of thought without the more ritualistic and earthy religious expressions found in other religions. This was certainly the case with this group in Seoul. Added to this was the Theravada influence which at times, but not exclusively, can present itself as a *pure* form of Buddhism standing in opposition to the Mahayana tradition, much as Protestantism did to Catholicism for much of the modern West: with Buddha and Theravada Buddhism interpreted as the "Martin Luther of the East."[6]

After my time in Seoul, I moved to the city of Mokpo, on the south west coast of Korea. While there, I had a good amount of free time to roam around the city and surrounding countryside. These were indeed happy days and, thinking back, it was this time that supplied me with the outlines and maps through which I would eventually navigate my future interreligious dialogue journey.

Lacking connections in the world of Buddhism and the area, I would check out a map the evening before and the following morning jump on a bus and make my way to a Buddhist monastery or smaller temple, usually in the countryside. There I would hang around watching the goings on, join in different services and, if the opportunity arose, introduce myself to some of the laypeople or Buddhist monks at the monasteries.

As a consequence of my time in Mokpo, my introduction to Buddhism, as found and lived out in Korea, was first and foremost experiential. In truth, experiential in two ways, one positive and one negative. The positive experience was my discovery of Buddhism as a living, messy, welcoming and larger than life tradition very different from the predominantly book-based knowledge I had of Buddhism up until that time.

Sadly, but not unexpectedly, my negative experience came from the group I was a member of, the Missionary Society of Saint Columban. Although some of the priests ministering in Korea with our missionary society were supportive of my interest in Buddhism, many members were not, and they made their opinions known. In many ways this has been a theme running through much of my interreligious dialogue journey: welcomed by Buddhists but stymied by Christians—in my case missionary Catholics.

Lest my observation of having received more of a welcome from Buddhists then Christians is interpreted too literally, let me explain.

It has been my experience that nothing in the field of interreligious dialogue is simple. There are always underlying concerns and circumstances which influence happenings on various levels.

Such agents of influence can be on the social, economic and political levels, while others can be much more personal and even emotional. Therefore, when interreligious dialogue is spoken of, it must be done so within the particular context in which it is found. In other words, interreligious dialogue can never be presented as being transcultural or trans-historical.

In the case of Korea in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Buddhism was in a weaker position than Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic varieties, and as a result was viewed negatively by many missionaries who had ministered for a long time in Korea.

It is my guess that many of my missionary confreres simply took for granted that Buddhism was a religious tradition with little or no future to look forward to and that Christianity was the religion of Korea's future.

Thus, much of the negativity surrounding dialogue with Buddhism can be construed not necessarily as being anti-Buddhist, but rather as the result of the blindness of some missionaries who uncritically accepted the predominant cultural trends of the time, which rejected Buddhism as being a relic of the past.

And, as such, Buddhism was viewed as being incompatible with a fast moving and modern South Korean world.[7] This conclusion I came to later, at the time my attitude was not so understanding.

Lack of flexibility

Reflecting on the preceding few paragraphs, it strikes me that, at times, those who take part in the ministry of interreligious dialogue tend to absolutise it and its reach.

By this, I mean, we can become quite rigid in our interpretation of situations, circumstances and, indeed, dismissive of those who fail to live-up to our dialogical goals and ambitions. This was true in my own case also.

Back in the 1990s and early 2000s, I was as quick as any to promote the positives of interreligious dialogue and, more worryingly, I was quicker than most to grumble about those whom I felt were not on-board with the interreligious project.

I simply wrote such people off as being conservative and out of touch with theological and missionary trends of the day. What I conclude from this is that although many of those who are involved in interreligious dialogue are indeed sincere, their ability to actually dialogue lags behind their rhetoric and enthusiasm.

Returning to my early experiences with Korean Buddhism, I will recount one incident from my time in Mokpo which remains with me to this day and which emphasises the above point about a lack of flexibility. While visiting a large and famous Buddhist monastery, I noticed how many of the local women and farmers from the region would enter the main temple hall and spend their time going around the colourful wall paintings, bowing and presenting incense to them.

I had little idea as to who the figures in the paintings were, but my curiosity led me to ask one of the resident monks in the monastery about them. On hearing my question his answer was straight to the point: "Don't worry about them. Those paintings are only there to keep the local farmers and women happy; they have nothing to do with Seon Buddhism."[8] The monk whom I asked for clarification was a practitioner of *seon* and obviously had little time for the more pietistic worship of the local laypeople.

This experience helped awaken me to the nonchalant way monks, priests, ministers and religious sisters can dismiss and belittle the living faith of others whom they deem ignorant or less spiritual.

The Buddhist monk who gave me the above answer was himself involved in interreligious dialogue activities and was open to other religious traditions.

However, this monk's openness did not extend to his own religious tradition and, by logical extension, neither would it encompass the more popular forms of religious practices found in other religions.

In short, there can exist a strong tendency in the interreligious dialogue ministry towards elitism. And in the case of Buddhist-Christian dialogue this can frequently take the form of emphasising monasticism, as in the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID) movement, meditation and contemplation, and spiritual theology at the expense of popular religiosity.

To recap on two vital points of learning from my early experience of dialogue and Buddhism in Korea:

- I learned that even though it is called interreligious dialogue, the dialogue aspect can be sadly neglected and, as a result, the interreligious dialogue ministry can easily become closed and authoritarian.

- Elitism can often determine with whom we attempt to dialogue and can lead to the exclusion of whole swathes of religious practices, especially of popular religiosity. For example, dialogue with Buddhism frequently homes in on the philosophical and contemplative aspects, but ignores the more popular religious practices.

It is frustrating to admit it, but since first becoming

aware of the two dangers mentioned above, I have not yet succeeded in extracting myself from their influences.

At times, I am sufficiently aware to guard against their subtle influences, but on other occasions I have, before realising, become bogged down in the same old swamp of certitude, elitism and exclusivism in my attempts to dialogue.

Thankfully, all is not lost. Because dialogue is an inherently human endeavour, it can never be carried out with mechanical precision and is, in fact, made better because of the human frailties involved.

These human failings constantly call upon participants to be more vigilant, humble and flexible when attempting to partake in an open dialogue.

A time for study

Having been involved with interreligious dialogue in South Korea for roughly six years, the time came to decide: should I deepen my commitment to the interreligious dialogue ministry or take another turn and continue it solely on a part-time basis. I plumped for the former and enrolled for postgraduate Religious Studies, concentrating on Buddhism. This approach, I hoped, would help me to better understand and appreciate Buddhism as a dialogue partner.

Interestingly, the most significant lesson learned during my time of study was not about Buddhism, but the concept of religion. Reading scholars such as Timothy Fitzgerald, Tomoko Masuzawa and Talal Asad, I became much more aware of the disputed nature of the central concept of religion itself.

Until that time, I had taken the idea of religion very much for granted and, as a result, had taken many of the subsequent categories such as *world religions* and the *religious-secular divide* as givens. Although such academic analysis of what most people take for granted, religion, may seem like an irrelevancy, it is not.

The point of this debate is to sensitise ourselves to the complexities of religion and religions, and help us to grasp the political, economic, ideological and national issues and interests involved in religion.

William Cavanaugh illustrates the point: “There is no trans-historical and transcultural essence of religion, but at different times and places, and for different purposes, some things have been constructed as religion and some things have not.”[9]

Questions that arise from this line of inquiry are: why is one tradition categorised as a religion while another is called an ideology? Why are some practices branded as superstition, while others are called religions?

As pointed out previously, it is often the case that those involved in interreligious dialogue make far reaching judgement calls in relation to which religions are suitable or unsuitable to engage with as dialogue partners. Within religious traditions, too, this can be the case.

For example, the Buddhist monk mentioned earlier who, in one utterance, disqualified a huge number of Buddhist faithful solely on their liking for pious veneration of statues and pictures.

Just to be clear, this is not the case only within Buddhism. It is my impression that all religions are prone to the same type of judgemental behaviour. Admittedly, within the sphere of interreligious dialogue judgement calls are, at times, necessary when issues of integrity and justice are involved, and such judgements are never easy nor are they guaranteed to be correct. That said, it seems to me that many involved in interreligious dialogue, both as individuals and institutions, pay too little attention to fundamental questions and issues such as these.

By way of illustration, let me explain why, when I run workshops on interreligious dialogue, an integral part of them is to deal with the simple, but hugely important question: what is religion? On first hearing, such a question, you would think, is on the level of the multiplication times tables for young people studying arithmetic—a natural part of the process.

However, in reality it is not treated as such. In fact, when such a fundamental question is asked, especially to *professional religious*[10] and those with a longer involvement in interreligious dialogue, often reactions are negative.

Some ask why we are dealing with such simple questions and not the complex issues of interreligious dialogue.

However, more often than not, the answer soon becomes clearer to the participants as they struggle with this *simple question* and realise that *simple* means neither easy nor irrelevant. And when a religion like Buddhism is included in the mix, all the easy answers, such as belief in god or gods, go out the window. That is one of the challenging things about Buddhism, so often it does not fit into our neat western categories.

Some conclusions

Often when I think of things religious and interreligious, the old reframe plays like a soundtrack in my mind: go back to basics. This is because the longer I am

involved in and the more I come face-to-face with the reality of interreligious dialogue in its everyday forms, the more I realise that something has gone astray along the way.

It seems to me that the Christian Churches have jumped on an interreligious bandwagon and swallowed much of the rhetoric that surrounds many of the dangerously undisputed myths about religion, especially the one which points to religion as being the cause of violence and conflict.

Although religionists may not agree that their particular religion is the cause of conflict, they tend to accept that the premise of violent religions is justified—especially the religion of others.

These assumptions are dangerous because they fail to pay proper cognisance to the complexity and fluidity of the very concept of religion and help bolster the already questionable power relationships which exist in much of the world.

William Cavanaugh summarises the situation: "The myth of religious violence should finally be seen for what it is: an important part of the folklore of Western societies. It does not identify any facts about the world, but rather authorises certain arrangements of power in the modern West."[11]

Following on from this, those of us involved in and supportive of interreligious dialogue ought to take a step backwards and reassess some of the basic concepts upon which we have based much of our work. Hence the call to go back to basics.

In a similar vein, it is my contention that we need to revisit the idea of dialogue itself. It may sound strange, but frequently I am struck by the frightening thought that some of the people with the weakest dialogue skills are those of us involved with religion and interreligious dialogue.

Often, we are so concerned about solving problems that we neglect to listen to our partners' words and sentiments—we can fool ourselves into thinking that we not only know the problem, but the solution too, all without listening. Only when we recalibrate our understanding of dialogue, not as a problem-solving technique, but as a form of deep communication aimed at what Revell Howe called, coming "… to know the other as the other" will dialogue begin to blossom.[12]

In other words, dialogue ought not be problem-solving driven, but relationship driven.

To conclude, the above has been an effort to outline some of the experiences that have shaped my thinking concerning interreligious dialogue. The fact is, I remain a strong proponent of interreligious dialogue, but I am now much more critical of many of its undertakings and the assumptions it is built upon.

For these reasons, I believe that for interreligious dialogue to have a worthwhile and authentic future those involved must throw the doors open widely and examine it and its goals in a more critical manner than has been the case until now. Dialogue about dialogue is needed ■

END NOTES

1. For details see the website *https://www.corrymeela.org*
2. KITAGAWA, Audrey E, *Interfaith Harmony*, accessed at *http://www.ft.lk/opinion/365-pebbles-a-year/14-680212* on June 21, 2019
3. A much more nuanced and sensitive appraisal of the situation can be found in HEDGES, Paul and Jude Lal Fernando's paper, *Sri Lankan Attacks and Inter-Communal Relations* accessed at *https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/CO19095.pdf* on July 20, 2019
4. This is too complex an argument to delve into here, but for those interested in a critique of such thinking a good text to start with is Donald Lopez [ed.], *Curators of the Buddha*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995
5. COHEN, Richard, *Why Study Indian Buddhism?* In PERERSON, Derek R and WALHOF Darren R [eds.], *The Invention of Religion: Rethinking Belief in Politics and History,* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), p.24
6. CAVANAUGH, William, *The Myth of Religious Violence*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p.93
7. For example, even from a Buddhist perspective Korea Buddhism has been wrongly painted in a negative light as in CONZE, Edward, *Buddhism: A Short History,* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2008), pp.84-85
8. Seon (선/禪) is the Korean word for the Chinese *Chan* and the Japanese *Zen* form of meditation
9. CAVANAUGH, *Religious Violence,* p.119
10. People such as ministers, monks, sisters, missionaries, brothers and priests
11. CAVANAUGH, *Religious Violence*, p.226. See also his chapter *Anatomy of the Myth* for a detailed and convincing argument against the myth of religious violence, pp.15-56
12. HOWE, Revell H, *The Miracle of Dialogue,* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), p.37

DECEMBER 2019

An Abrahamic Journey focussed on fostering interfaith and intercultural understanding in Australian schools

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A personal interfaith dialogue about dialogue

In my personal experience and in my professional practice, interfaith dialogue has been more about fostering goodwill and understanding between people of different faiths as human beings, than about understanding other religions as collections of beliefs, traditions and practices, than about peace between religions.

My approach is influenced by religious ideas about what is appropriate in interaction between Jews and those of other faiths. However, this approach has broader relevance to interfaith practice, based on the evidence of the effectiveness of a relational model of fostering goodwill and understanding, at least among over 100,000 young Australians and people in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

> *Inter-group contact, simply bringing students into contact with members of groups against which they might have some prejudice, is an effective method to counter prejudice. It is important that participants in such experiences see role models from their own faith or ethnicity showing approval of these encounters*

My journey and work suggest that through the power of cross-cultural and interfaith contact, even adherents of more conservative traditions can be engaged in interfaith bridge building. For various reasons, some people are more likely to be engaged effectively in a predominantly *side by side*—action and reflection oriented mode of interfaith than by a *face to face* talk model.

Interfaith dialogue of action is complemented by a dialogue of words that enable us embrace our differences; however there is a need for caution to ensure that dialogue is truly open and equal to learn about others as they understand themselves. In keeping with a relational, interpersonal approach, I will convey many of my thoughts through personal stories.

My story

I am an unlikely participant in interfaith because of my upbringing. I am an ordained rabbi who was raised, and studied within the orthodox Chabad-Lubavitch Hasidic traditions among a community that mostly consisted of Jews who had migrated from Russia and Ukraine.

One might simplistically call the Chabad community insular, but this would ignore its extensive outreach to Jews who were not affiliated to this community. Chabad's energetic outreach is focussed on encouraging less observant Jews to perform the commandments or Mitzvot and draw them close to increased observance of these practices. The Chabad movement also sought to influence non-Jewish people to adhere to seven basic commandments known as the Noahide laws. This activist tradition has played a key role in my formation into the person I am.

I thank the Chabad movement for, among other gifts, instilling in me the imperative to serve others and to take action.

However, this was a community that did not encourage interfaith dialogue or social contact with non-Jewish people. On the contrary, the word *goy*, (which in Hebrew means nation, but in its common usage in Yiddish is a noun for any person who is not Jewish, often with derogatory connotations) was used routinely without any self-consciousness or hesitation.

This use of language is significant in that it reflects a strongly differentiated Jewish identity in which I thought of people who were not Jewish as profoundly and essentially different from me—thus being categorised by a noun that described them by what they were not, rather than what they were.

The narratives about religious beliefs that were different from ours were negative. A key story we were told when we were young was the Midrashic account of Abraham smashing his father idols after ridiculing those who worshipped these (Midrash Rabba 38:13). This Midrash reinforced an exclusive Truth-claim about the one and only true way to worship.

Churches were mentioned in stories about pogroms, as the locations where the peasants would be stirred up by priests in hateful sermons around the time of Passover. The oblique reference to Easter in these stories was never explicit. The idea that these peasants had some attachment to Jesus or what Jesus might mean to Christians was completely unknown to me as a child.

A deep encounter with a Catholic man shifted me significantly. In late 2001, the late Joseph Sheridan, a Catholic layman, called my synagogue for a chat with a rabbi that was to prove highly significant for my life's journey and work.

Joe was passionately concerned about the situation he saw around him in his Catholic Church. He felt frustrated that it appeared to be about the routines of ritual and the collection plate rather than *God's word*. His sincerity, altruism and spiritual depth opened my eyes to a universal struggle toward ideals such as compassion. My encounter with Joe began, what I would later call, my interfaith journey.

A Chabad goodness and kindness campaign—a barely Interfaith collaboration

The director of the Chabad House of the North Shore, Rabbi Nochum Schapiro, my employer at the time, is a passionate disciple of the last leader of the Chabad movement, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson. Rabbi Schneerson energised a generation of Chasidim to try to hasten the coming of the Messiah through increased good deeds. Rabbi Schapiro is a big picture thinker. He could see great potential of a collaboration with Joe to promote *Goodness and Kindness* among non-Jewish children and encouraged and supported me to create a schools programme.

In early 2002, with Nine/Eleven very much on our minds we decided to broaden the effort to include a Muslim. In May of that year, a group of year six students at St Ives North Primary School, a government school in Sydney, hosted three visitors from three faiths, Muslim, Christian and Jewish, to talk to children about our common values and working together to make the world a better place.

We talked a lot about what we had in common, but barely acknowledged our differences. One Jewish girl went home and told her parents she had decided she would marry a non-Jewish person, because our presentation had taught her that we are all the same anyway.

This students' conclusion is just one illustration of what was wrong with our early approach. While the research literature strongly encourages an initial emphasis on common ground, it calls for acknowledgement of our differences as well.[1]

Jewish Law and my interfaith journey

One cannot reasonably take the faith out of interfaith. However, explicitly acknowledging Christianity and Islam as positive elements in the process of the pursuit of the greater good was a problem for me personally at the time, and for the organisation that employed me.

Orthodox Judaism is governed by Halacha, or religious law. Two Halachic responses were put forward around the time of *Nostra Aetate* by senior rabbinical authorities, Rabbi Moshe Feinstien and Rabbi J B Soloveitchic, and no ruling of equal weight to those of these two *giants* has been issued since.

Rabbi Feinstein was vehemently and categorically opposed to interfaith dialogue. He believed that interfaith dialogue was *"an initiative of the new pope, whose only intent is to cause all the Jews to abandon their pure and holy faith so that they will accept Christianity..."*[2] He also ruled that dialogue was forbidden because closeness with representatives of other faiths implied endorsement of those faiths.

Over 50 years have passed to gather evidence that enables one to dispel the concerns Rabbi Feinstein raised about interfaith dialogue being intended or used for the purpose of proselytising."[3]

However, his concern about implied acceptance of the beliefs of other religions certainly presented a barrier for me in working together with Christians and Muslims. Both of Feinstein's fears, of dialogue

promoting conversion and implied endorsement of other beliefs, continue to be barriers to interfaith dialogue and contact on the part of many conservatively religious people.

It is important for practitioners is to make our intentions clear, as Ray Corbin, a Christian man who played a key role in the Goodness and Kindness campaign, would say explicitly; "We are not here to convert you."

The theological argument about what constitutes endorsement must also be advanced. A Chabad authority consulted regarding our work was the late Rabbi Doctor Jacob Immanuel Schochet.

He wrote to me and Rabbi Schapiro saying that if the "convenor" of a "goodness and kindness" session was not Jewish, then my attendance need not be deemed an endorsement of the other faiths that are presenting.

A Christian friend of Joseph Sherridan, Ray Corbin, generously acted as the convenor, being the main contact for the school teachers and also opened each session. This work-around is one example within a Jewish religious context of a way of dealing with an essentially flawed argument that to seek goodwill toward and understanding of people of other faiths implies agreement.

Rabbi Doctor Schochet's permission also drew on the writing of the other authority to rule on this matter, Rabbi Soloveitchik.

In contrast to Rabbi Feinstien, Rabbi Soloveitchik's approach was to conditionally support dialogue if it was confined to social issues. He wrote:

> *In the areas of universal concern… communication among the various communities will greatly contribute towards mutual understanding and will enhance and deepen our knowledge of those universal aspects of man which are relevant to all of us.*

However, Soloveitchik did not approve of theological dialogue. He wrote:

> *In the area of faith, religious law, doctrine, and ritual… Our love of and dedication to God are personal and bespeak an intimate relationship which must not be debated with others whose relationship to God has been moulded by different historical events and in different terms…. for Jew and Christian will employ different categories and move within incommensurate frames of reference and evaluation.*[4]

Against the backdrop of this guidance, it is clear why my work began as an effort of collaboration on promoting acting on our shared values of kindness rather than seeking understanding between the faiths.

Rabbi Doctor Jonathan Sacks, despite having participated in interfaith for years, advocates a similar approach for a different reason.

He argues that dialogue is "an elite pursuit" that "tends to take place among the few."[5] To have a broader impact he advocates for a "Side by Side" approach rather than "Face to Face".

He gives an example of a 2002 national project in the United Kingdom called "respect" that involved nine major religions in acts of kindness toward people who not members of one's own faith.

The Interfaith Youth Core in the United States of America engaged young people from different faiths in acts of volunteering followed by reflection on what this meant to them from a faith perspective.

Our own work in Australia of interfaith collaboration on a shared purpose, engaging young people in interfaith collaboration for the common good, was another example of side by side.

As the work progressed, it became clear to me that even though I did not want to endorse Christianity or Islam, my God-given task was to promote goodwill between adherents of those faiths and Judaism.

The distinction between getting to know people and learning about faiths, in practice is not clear-cut, because we can only understand our neighbour who lives by her faith if we also understand her deeply held beliefs and cherished traditions and practices.

Therefore, my work has involved both learning about faiths and people, but with a greater emphasis on the latter.

In a conversation I had with Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks at his London home in 2011, I asked him if Soloveitchik's distinction between social and religious dialogue has been superseded by the practical reality of how these topics were intertwined.

Sacks smiled and said, "We interpret Soloveitchik broadly." Sacks also made the point that learning about the religions of adherents of other faiths is essentially no different from learning about different cultures.

Together for humanity

By 2006, I was persuaded by the arguments of Ray Corbin, and a Jewish donor to the work, Jonathan Baral, that the governance of this kind of work must reflect its message and have Christian, Muslim and

Jewish representation on its board of management. Jonathan Baral became the founding chairperson of the new formal entity and its initial financial backer. To recognise the interfaith aspect of the work, the new entity was renamed the *Together for Humanity Foundation*. The multi-faith Together for Humanity Foundation's mission is to foster school students' interfaith and intercultural understanding and in doing so bring communities together.

Context

With a name as grand as Together for Humanity, some might infer that we presume to bring all of humanity together. One Australian Muslim leader suggested that with such a name we would be expected to take a position on conflicts among members of the Jewish, Muslim and Christian faiths in the Holy Land.

However, the focus of our work is in Australia, even if our core principles apply universally. Similarly, the scope of our work and of this article does not allow for a review of the issue of institutional racism. Instead, the focus of our work, and of this article, is more on fostering an understanding and goodwill at the individual and communal levels.

A brief comment about the Australian context at the time of writing would acknowledge that the majority of Australians view immigrants, from diverse backgrounds, favourably; however there has been an increase in the percentage of Australians who report having experienced bigotry based on religion and skin colour.[6]

One impact of prejudice is the degree to which members of minorities do, or do not enjoy, a sense of belonging. The percentage of Australians who feel a great sense of belonging has decreased from three quarters to two thirds over a decade.[7]

The importance of fostering feelings of belonging was made clear to me by Muslim and Aboriginal leaders involved in our work. One day in 2008, I sat with a Liberian Muslim community worker and leader named Mohamed Dukuly, an Aboriginal Arrernte woman from Alice Springs named Heather Laughton and a Jewish educator and storyteller named Donna Jacobs-Sife.

I asked the group what they thought was the core of our work? Both the African Muslim man and the Aboriginal woman said that the key to it all was a deep unmet need for belonging.

The guidance we received from these two leaders led me to believe that we must put a high priority on meeting the needs of those on the receiving end of bigotry rather than just focus on educating all children about the importance of embracing the other.

This led to an expansion of our work to include more intensive work with young people from marginalised groups, including Aboriginal, Muslim and other minority school students.

In thinking about this work, we are aware that divisions can escalate. On one hand, collective exclusion can lead to those on the receiving end to present with "high aggression, self-defeating behaviours… and impaired self-regulation."[8]

On the other hand, alienation is also experienced by Anglo-Celtic residents of communities, who can experience "a sense of dislocation as the shopping street [is] transformed"—for example, by shop signage in languages they cannot read.[9] These tensions increase our motivation to engage diverse audiences.

Principles that inform the work

Together for Humanity acknowledges that it has roots in three faith traditions whose beliefs include: all humans were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27; love your neighbour (Leviticus 19:18); do not mistreat the stranger (Leviticus 19:34); peacemakers are blessed (Matthew 5:3-10); diverse tribes were created so that they may know one another (the Qur'an 49:13).

Many of the underlying principles of this work can be embraced even by people who are not religious. These include the following:

- Every human being is inherently valuable; their dignity should be assured.
- Bigotry is wrong; it should be countered.
- Belonging in one's place is vital for wellbeing, participation;[10] it should be fostered and
- Communities can grow apart, therefore we commit to a shared purpose to bring us together.[11]

Approach: primary and secondary audiences

The primary audience for this work is school-aged children (seven to 18 years of age) who are still forming their views. These students can be broadly divided into three groups:

- Youth who have not had much opportunity to interact with members of groups such as Muslims or Jews, who are often subject to prejudice.
- Young members of minority groups that are typically subjected to prejudice, whose sense of belonging with, and connectedness to, members of other groups including the mainstream is strained.

- Mainstream students drawn to hostile sentiments toward members of specific minorities or migrants in general.

In our work, we take into account that these students have diverse experiences with belonging, connectedness, prejudice, cultural and religious differences, and their relationship with faith. Learning needs and strengths also vary greatly and are influenced by factors such as individual circumstances, socio-economic status and gender.

To assist all these children, we also work with teachers' in their development of interfaith and intercultural understanding and their capacity to apply best practice in fostering these attitudes and related skills in schools.

A secondary audience consists of adult communities. As a consequence of collaboration on our work with children, Together for Humanity also develops goodwill between all who actively work towards or support inclusion, whether they be from different faiths, or identify as secular.

Educational objectives

Together for Humanity's educational objectives are: to reduce children's prejudice, misconceptions and hatred, and to increase their appreciation, sense of belonging, connectedness, empathy, understanding and respect.

We foster hope that communities can overcome our differences and encourage celebration of diversity, and tolerance of beliefs and practices with which one disagrees.

In the school context, a key consideration is the Australian curriculum, which contains a well-developed definition of intercultural understanding and requires that this be taught in Australian schools. Their definition includes the following:

Intercultural understanding (ICU) combines personal, interpersonal and social knowledge and skills. It includes:

- valuing the cultures, languages and beliefs of others; valuing and viewing critically one's own cultural perspectives and practices and those of others;
- recognising commonalities and differences and the variable and changing nature of culture;
- forming connections; cultivating mutual respect and the ability to negotiate difference; communicating and empathising with others.[12]

Our objectives in fostering goodwill between adult communities beyond the school gates are not as well defined at the time of writing. One element that we are keen on is for members of faith communities to be aware that there is goodwill toward them in communities they might otherwise regard with suspicion.

Educational approaches

Students are provided with accurate information to counter false beliefs and stereotypes. To this end, students' curiosity is encouraged.[13] Honest exploration of prejudices is a key strategy. If people think they will be labelled as racist, they are less likely to listen or engage.[14] Youth are engaged through experiential learning activities, humour and play. Open pedagogy and encouragement of critical thinking and dialogue are also recommended to prevent extremism.[15]

However, "'knowledge alone will not reduce prejudice; knowledge is something of a prerequisite to prejudice reduction, not the sole means'."[16] An effective strategy to counter prejudice is to invoke empathy.[17] One effective method for invoking empathy is hearing the stories of others, which can reduce prejudice.[18] For this reason, sharing personal stories is usually part of the Together for Humanity experience.

Inter-group contact, simply bringing students into contact with members of groups against which they might have some prejudice, is an effective method to counter prejudice. It is important that participants in such experiences see role models from their own faith or ethnicity showing approval of these encounters.[19]

It is important to ensure that the experiences of inter-group contact be authentic and positive, as negative contact can be quite harmful.[20]

Research initiated by Together for Humanity into what facilitates Intercultural Understanding found that an integrated and holistic approach leads to demonstrable results.[21]

Schools have different levels of need, resourcing and readiness for addressing Intercultural Understanding. It is therefore essential to offer flexible pathways. Teacher professional learning is a key element of such an approach.

Teachers' own Intercultural Understanding is essential for developing teacher confidence in teaching intercultural skills to their students. Encouraging teachers to develop their own integrated approaches and to share their experiences with other teachers can help spread effective practice.

Activities of Together for Humanity

The primary activities of Together for Humanity are conducting several kinds of educational programmes

that facilitate encounters between school students with people whose faiths and religious practices differ to their own.

These encounters include school visits by a panel of adults from different faiths and sometimes, also children. A defining characteristic of Together for Humanity is that it models its message of coming together with a core staff that includes Christians, Jews and Muslims, these communities represented are also represented in all of the educational teams that work with children and the governance structure that oversees the activities of Together for Humanity.

Together for Humanity also uses the internet to deliver our messages through an online resource that features learning activities and content that integrates learning that fosters understanding with mainstream subjects including English, history, geography and civics and citizenship. From an interfaith perspective, one of its most interesting features is a virtual Question and Answer section with a range of questions including simple queries about religious clothing to more complex matters. This resource has been accessed over one and a half million times at the time of writing. The address for this resource is:

www.differencedifferently.edu.au

At the time of writing, we are also looking to increase our engagement of students who are doing *Studies of Religion* courses. These students approach the discussions with far more depth.

In dealing with these types of discussions, I come back to an aspect of Rabbi Soloveitchik's writing on interfaith dialogue. He was, I believe, rightly concerned that in dialogue between Christians and Jews some of the unique approach of Judaism could be lost.

He was concerned that in seeking a "common language where none exists", the minority faith would mould itself to fit the framework of the majority faith and distort the representation of itself. This concern can usually be addressed if one takes it into account. The example in the following paragraph might assist in illustrating the problem and the need for being aware of imbalances of power and differences in terms of reference.

Distortions in asymmetrical dialogue

At the edge of a dusty playground, outside a school building under a tin roof, sat four people. Auntie Ellen Gaykamangu, an Aboriginal elder from Arnhem Land, smoking a cigarette; Mohamed Dukuly, a Liberian Muslim man; Jarod McKenna, a white devout Christian with dreadlocks; and me, a light skinned, Jewish man from the city.

We were there because the new deputy principal of a small school in the country town of Batchelor, Northern Territory, herself a white city woman, had asked us to run a Leadership Day as part of a two-day seminar with 11-year-old students. Almost all the students were Indigenous.

I asked Auntie Ellen how we could make the Leadership Day culturally inclusive. She said: there are trees. The trees have trunks. Then there are the branches. There are the smaller twigs. Then there are wooden pencils.

I had no idea what she meant. Her response did not seem to answer our question. I asked the question differently and still did not get what we were looking for. I stopped and asked myself: "Maybe this is a 'Zalman you are not listening' moment. Am I asking the wrong question?"

I tried again, but this time I asked Auntie Ellen. Does it make any sense in your way to tell 11-year-old that they can be leaders? Auntie Ellen said no!

Okay, we said, we won't have a Leadership Day. What we are really trying to do is encourage students to feel a sense of agency. That they can contribute to their school community. What does your heritage say on that? Ah! Auntie was in her element. She explained the kinship system and how every person has responsibilities and links to a vast network of people, and custodianship of specific plants, animals and places. The students responded enthusiastically with a range of initiatives including plans for planting a vegetable garden to distribute to the needy, and making a welcoming video for new students about their friendly school. A few months later, the deputy principal reported there was still a different feeling in the school.

This story illustrates both the problem and a way of overcoming it. It is quite natural for people to seek to connect new information to their own experience. The impact of this can be a breakdown in communication.

Awareness of this risk should contribute to asking more open questions and reflection on the degree to which one brings assumptions to the dialogue. One practitioner advocates for listening from a "place of not knowing"[23] as a way of countering the practice of filtering what one hears through assumptions based in one's own experience.

Evaluation

Our on-going internal evaluation involves listening to participants' responses, gathering data such as notes expressing "what I used to think" and "now I know" and reflection on the experiences by presenters. Independent evaluation is undertaken by academics, combining analysis of qualitative and quantitative data from students and teachers.

Some of the draft findings of the evaluation have been:

In bringing students of different religious and cultural backgrounds into contact with each other, stereotypes are reality tested and fears were alleviated as they perceived others similarities, differences and, shared humanity.

Through meeting and interacting with others from diverse cultural backgrounds via Together for Humanity programmes, some participants now saw possibilities for peacemaking. This empowered students to challenge a stereotype that people of their different religious backgrounds could not get along. While hope can motivate change, to shape future trajectories, hope needs agency supported by social processes.[24]

Resilience to cope and deal with real-life prejudice and discrimination was actively promoted and built by the understandings and skills students acquired from Together for Humanity programmes. The evaluation also reported a softening of some *hard* boys, resulting from their participation. Change processes inspired by Together for Humanity programmes, such as understanding that difference does not need to mean conflict and discrimination appeared to provide hope to participants that change is possible and that therefore, potentially peace is possible.

> *It can make peace… it's important to me that we learn about Muslims and their culture, and we make friends. I think it is important to understand that we are all humans, and we should try to get along—*
>
> Student[24]

Our evaluation has been limited to our impact in the school context. The impact on inter-communal sentiment has not been formally evaluated. However anecdotal evidence suggests that members of Christian, Jewish and Muslim communities have responded warmly to the work and it has contributed to their degree of hope that we can truly live together peacefully.

Conclusion and future directions

This article considered my personal journey and the experience of the inclusive interfaith organisation, Together for Humanity Foundation, in fostering understanding, dignity, acceptance of difference as well as people who are different, feelings of belonging together, connectedness and hope.

It highlighted how positive encounters among people from different faith communities are beneficial, including for people, like me, from more exclusivist religious contexts. The barriers to participation include religious objections, but these can sometimes be overcome.

A side-by-side approach that focussed on working together on shared purposes has many benefits including being more suitable for those on the conservative end of the religious spectrum. Another advantage of a *side-by-side* model is that for interfaith activity to be most beneficial, it requires meaningful participation by large numbers of people, and an action-based approach is accessible to a wider range of people.

Arguably, a hybrid mode of dialogue of action and words is ideal, and is an accurate description of the current work of Together for Humanity, which also includes a lot of conversation and learning about each other. When words are part of the experience, caution is needed to avoid the distortion caused by a power imbalance or questions loaded with assumed knowledge.

Although there is much to celebrate about our impact and journey so far, there is a long way ahead for us and for the interfaith movement.

Some questions to address are: how can we see change at the community level—in the case of schools, in the school community, that engages students, parents, teachers, as well as others who might play a part in those communities, especially religious leaders and institutions, sporting clubs and other groups?

How can a broader range of people be equipped and engaged to act as interfaith and intercultural leaders, including children, teachers and religious leaders?

What are the implications of social media and other information technologies on interfaith work? What might a more coordinated approach look like between schools and communities and how might we achieve greater collaboration?

How can we ensure an optimal mix of opportunities for contact that include talk and action? I hope these experiences and reflections will inspire further innovative approaches to interfaith dialogue ■

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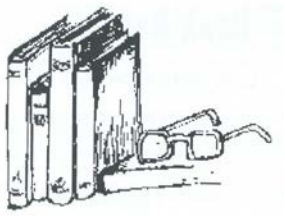


BOOK REVIEW

GETTING BACK ON MISSION

Reforming Our Church Together

by

Catholics for Renewal

This book is not the work of a single author, but the product of a communal effort

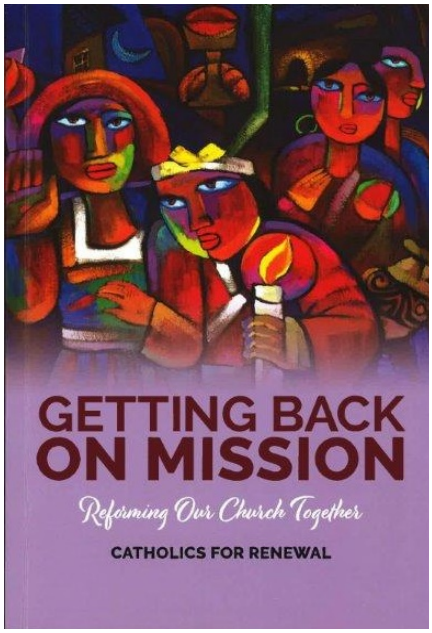
by all members of the* Catholics for Renewal *group

Published by: Garrett Publishing, Mulgrave, 2019, 335pp
ISBN-10: 1925009653
ISBN-13: 978-1925009651

Reviewed by Ross Mackinnon, *retired teacher, technical school inspector, education consultant and active member of his local Uniting Church congregation. He is former Editor of Australian Journal of Mission Studies.*

The Catholic Church in Australia is holding a Plenary Council in 2020/2021. It will be in two sessions—the first in October 2020 in Adelaide, and the second in May 2021 in Sydney.

The Australian bishops have invited Australia's Catholics to respond to the question*: What do you think God is asking of us in Australia at this time?* Catholics for Renewal, a group of concerned Australian Catholics seeking a renewal of the Catholic Church and its mission, has responded to this invitation, and the core of *Getting Back on Mission* is their formal submission to the Plenary Council.



The book is in five parts:

1. God's mission, the Kingdom of God and the signs of the times;
2. People of God;
3. Church governance;
4. Pastoral leadership and parish ministry;
5. Plenary Council: process and procedures.

The first four parts deal with key elements of the Catholic Church and cover an impressive range of subjects such as God's plan and mission, reading the signs of the times; the Australian people, women in Australia and the Church, climate change, migration, Australia's First Peoples, the liturgy, the laity, a charter of rights for Catholics, Church authority, canon law, the Royal Commission into institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, governance and power in the Church, clericalism, the sacraments, bishops, the shortage of priests, selection and training of priests, celibacy, ordination of women and pastoral strategies for parish ministry.

And that is the short list of topics covered! The fifth section moves onto process and procedures to be followed at the Plenary Council scheduled to begin next year—who should be invited, voting, the balance between clerical and lay representation, and so on.

The book's main contention is that the Catholic Church in Australia has lost sight of its mission which is, in the words of Vatican II, *the Church, inspired by no earthly ambition, seeks but a solitary goal: to carry forward the work of Christ himself under the lead of the befriending Spirit* (p7).

And the writers add to this when they say, *The Church exists for one purpose only: to continue God's mission which Jesus gave it. A culture which detracts from this has to be rejected and eradicated* (p129). It is imperative that the Church get back to this basic purpose. If it is to do this, serious reforms are needed.

As the book says:

> *Our Church must get back 'on mission', and the Plenary Council should be a good start. But it is not an enterprise belonging to the hierarchy alone. The renewal of the Church in Australia requires all Christ's faithful to be engaged—in prayer, study, discernment, and dialogue. Everyone has to work together co-responsibly, in communion with the Spirit of faith, hope and love. That way we can find our way back to God's mission, with leadership that is truly accountable, transparent and inclusive* (p43).

The book covers the serious distractions and traditions that have caused the Church to lose sight of its mission. It faces these head on, and the writers offer constructive, practical recommendations for reforms which will enable the Church to get "back on mission".

The writers make their recommendations firmly, clearly and courteously. There is no malice or hysteria in this book. The writers clearly love their Church and are saddened by its shortcomings, but they write in hope that things can change, and are prepared to assist in making changes.

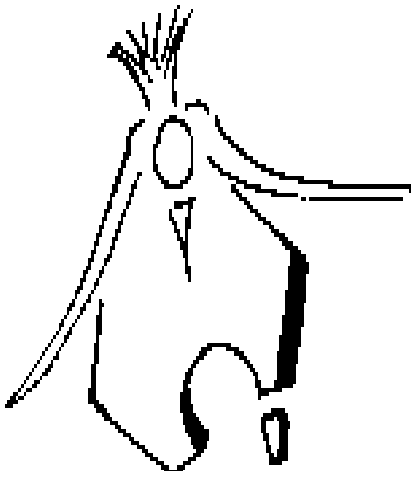
A key theme of this book is the need for lay people to be involved in Church leadership and for women especially to be given an equal place in this regard.

> *… the culture of the Church should reflect Christ-like values and morality in structures, practices and decision-making which promote living the Good News* (p128).

As a Christian who belongs to another denomination, I was impressed with this book and its vision. It is well researched, clear, positive and reader-friendly. Each section is followed by recommendations and questions for discussion. The recommendations have been collated and are found together at the beginning of the book. The footnotes indicate a sound knowledge of Canon Law, scripture, the documents from Vatican II and modern scholarship on mission. The book has an extensive Index.

This book should appeal to anyone interested in the Catholic Church in Australia, God's mission, ecumenical affairs and Church reform. It should be compulsory reading for anyone interested in the forthcoming Plenary Council and for anyone attending that Plenary Council.

My final comment—it is sad that this book is necessary, but I am very glad it has been written and made available not only to Catholics, but also to a wider audience ■



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A DIALOGUE BETWEEN HAIZI'S POETRY AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

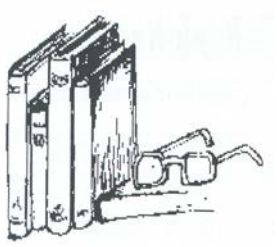
The dialogue situated in the *journey* is both enriching and challenging. Haizi and his fellow poets explored the philosophies of the west, learned some things from it, but found a need to return to their *roots*.

The *journey* that Jesus and His disciples had to make, moving from power/success to weakness/ vulnerability/failure with a return to trust in God is given a new understanding because of the insights gained by observing the *journey* of Haizi and his fellow poets.

Finally there is the *arrival.* For Haizi, it was found to be in suicide—his attempt to be "poetry in action" with the hope of bringing harmony and for Jesus it was found in his death on the Cross. Part IV provides a wonderful meditation on the meaning of death and "new Life".

This brief summary does not do justice to the wealth of facts and insights buried in the text, but it may encourage the reader at least to *dip into* this remarkable work ■

GUIDE TO RENEWING YOUR SUBSCRIPTION
See page 15



BOOK REVIEW

A DIALOGUE BETWEEN HAIZI'S POETRY AND THE GOSPEL OF LUKE

Chinese Homecoming and the Relationship with Jesus Christ

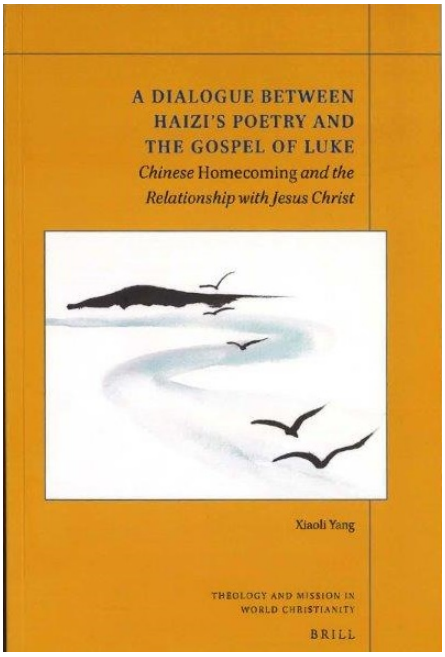
by

Yang Xiaoli

Published by: Brill: Leiden, The Netherlands, 2018, 332 pp
Bibliography, Index of Subjects & Authors, Index of Ancient Sources. A$134.89
ISBN-10: 9004361294
ISBN-13: 978-9004361294

Reviewed by Larry Nemer, *Lector Emeritus in Mission Studies and Church History at Yarra Theological Union (Box Hill) and founding president of the Australian Association for Mission Studies*.

This could turn out to be one of the most significant works in Missiology published in 2018. I say this for several reasons. First, it addresses two issues that have been occupying missiologists for at least the last three decades—mission as dialogue and mission as inculturation.



However, it addresses these two issues in a novel and most creative way. The author does not argue for the importance of these two issues; that is taken for granted. Instead, she sets up a dialogue itself—a dialogue not between two specific people, but rather a dialogue between two classical documents or traditions: the poetry of Haizi, one of the most famous post-Mao poets in China, and the Gospel text of Luke.

The choice of this method allows her to contribute to mission studies in a unique way. First, she chooses poetry as an expression of the Chinese culture. She describes the long 5,000 year history of the importance that poetry has played in China as the people searched for the meaning of life. She is very much at home in the philosophy and religions undergirding this search, and being a poet herself she is able to appreciate the poetic expression that Haizi used.

Interestingly, however, she is looking at this history through Christian eyes. She has a deep respect for her history and culture, and judging from her comments, she can see God working through and guiding the people in their search. Perhaps this is the way that true dialogue starts—by listening for God's revelation in the cultural expressions of one's own historical culture.

She then takes these insights from her own culture and applies them to Luke. Second, she structures these insights around four experiences common to the two texts: *roots, vision, journey,* and *arrival.* In the section on *roots,* she highlights the fact that both texts come at a time of crisis in their cultures. Her treatment of home and homelessness in these two chapters is very enriching. Post-Mao China was moving from an agricultural tradition to an industrialised society. Some of its historical basic values seemed to be questioned and divisions appeared in society. The challenge was how to bring harmony back.

There was also a cultural division taking place at the time when Jesus appeared in Palestine and Jesus sought to bring harmony, adding a whole new dimension to the meaning of *home*. She continues her study of *home* and *homelessness* when she talks about the *vision* that Haizi expressed in his poetry and presents Luke's presentation on the *vision* of Jesus: the Kingdom of God—the hospitality of God.

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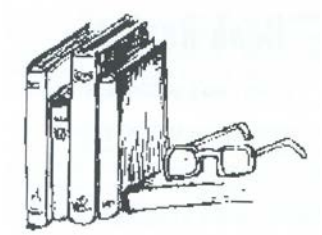

BOOK REVIEW

EXPLORATIONS IN ASIAN CHRISTIANITY

History, Theology, Mission

by

Scott W Sunquist

Published by: IVP Academic, 2017, 318 pages, bibliography, author index, subject index
ISBN: 978-0-8308-5100-3

Reviewed by Stuart Vogel

There is an increasing amount of literature available on the history of Christianity in Asia and on Asian theology today. We need to open up new avenues of exploration that draw together Asia-wide perspectives on themes that have emerged.

Scott W Sunquist is an author to whom one turns with high expectations and he doesn't disappoint in this book.

He moves us into looking at Asian Christianity through four specific lens: Asian surveys, historiography, missiology and education.

In Part One, *Asia,* Sunquist begins with a short overview of Christian movements in Asia today. Chapter Two*, Ancient Christianity in Asia,* takes us through the first thousand years in a brief, but clear and perceptive way. He writes about the Xi'an stele of 635AD that describes the arrival of Christians in China.

For example, "It is one of the most important reminders of the constantly changing fortunes of Christianity in Asia: one moment publicly proclaimed by royalty, the next crushed by the same class" [p.40].

Some readers will find the next chapter, *Ecumenism in Asia,* a major jump in time (the 20th century) and theme (Christian Unity). It may also seem incongruous for chapter four, *Evangelicalism in Asia*, to take us back into the early 19th century. Nevertheless, these chapters succeed in giving us meaningful discussions of these movements in their Asian contexts. They include themes such as the role of women, persecution, the emergence of the indigenous Church and Pentecostalism.

> *In fact, theologically conservative missionaries often reacted against modernism, but stood alongside the poor in their villages. Indeed, Samuel Austin Moffet in Korea, at least at times, sounds more like a* minjung*, liberation theologian than the conservative that he is painted to be. Such is the effect of the context on the missionary*

Part Two, *History*, describes Sunquist's quest to make history the telling of the story of the continuity of the apostolic story from the beginning to its modern expression in Asia. The narration, or telling of this story, attempts to identify the ebbs and flows of the history of Jesus acting in history through God's perspective.

We see glimpses of the triune God present with us in Jesus, who actively and continually brings reconciliation with the world through the servant Church, which is no less than the Body of Christ himself.

Chapter Eight, *World Christianity: transforming history and theology,* is a decisive chapter. Sunquist argues that the history of Christianity in places like China and Ethiopia, along with the traditional approach to the study of Church History, is foundational for a transformation of our understanding of *all* theological disciplines.

We need to understand the Church (ecclesiology) as it is understood beyond the usual western framework. In order for missiology to flourish: "Even our reading and study of the Bible requires a more inclusive historical awareness of the history of interpretation. History is important" [p.144].

Secondly, we need, he argues, to see the diversity of the Church in the glorious Oneness of the whole Church in Jesus Christ. Then we can tackle the issues of migration, indigenous issues, the questions of the rich and poor and women.

In doing so, we see what holds the Church together—the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the Church and the world.

In Part Three, *Missiology*, Sunquist looks at the history of Christian mission in Korea and Shandong and compares mission theory and practice as carried out in China and Korea. The liberal versus conservative debate and divide, to which we have become accustomed today, was less crucial in the 19th and early 20th centuries than we might think.

In fact, theologically *conservative* missionaries often reacted against modernism, but stood alongside the poor in their villages. Indeed, Samuel Austin Moffet in Korea, at least at times, sounds more like a *minjung*, liberation theologian than the conservative that he is painted to be. Such is the effect of the context on the missionary.

In the last chapter, *Mission and Migration*, Sunquist makes the point that Western missions have long emphasised the importance of overseas mission, but not seen mission to our neighbour on our doorstep in the same light.

However, through modern migration patterns, God, through the Holy Spirit, is bringing Christian missionaries to us in the West, and undeniably so in places like New Zealand. In our own time of need, "we should be thankful" [p.246].

Part Four, *Education*, looks at Moffett and two lesser known *educationalists*—Julia Mateer and W Don McClure—in Africa, the secularisation of Christian higher education and Asian theological education. The interaction between the local educationalist and the wider trends in Christian education inside and outside Asia make this a fascinating and informative chapter.

This is an excellent reference for anyone interested in or studying Christianity in Asia ■

continued from page 57

MISSIONARY EVANGELIZATION AND CULTURAL VALUES

The seven cultural values held by the Igbo people that prepared them to receive the Gospel were: a sense of community, a solidarity and sense of good human relations, a sense of the sacredness of life, a sense of hospitality, a sense of the sacred and of religion, a sense of time, and a sense of respect for authority and elders.

After describing these cultural values, he shows how well they fit in with Gospel values. In a subsequent chapter, where he studies papal and episcopal statements about inculturation, he focusses on these same cultural values. Interestingly, he also points out where further inculturation is needed, eg. in traditional ritual actions and in the role of women in spirituality and life.

Finally, towards the end of the book he suggests that perhaps the missionary method of evangelisation in today's world might best be described as inter-religious dialogue. Proselytisation would no longer be the goal, but rather a deeper understanding of the way God has been at work in the local culture and the African Traditional Religion for the sake of being enriched in our understanding of mission and the Gospel.

In this way the mission of the Church, carried out by lay people and the missionaries together, can go forward ■

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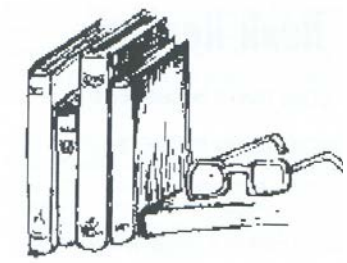
CHRISTIAN MISSION
CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY
PROPHETIC DIALOGUE

He not only argues that the Church must move in the direction of Interreligious Theology, but he also described the method that would need to be used to attain this theology. This reviewer found the article both inspiring and challenging.

In conclusion some words written by Stephen Bevans himself in the closing chapter, *Becoming a Global Theologian: A Personal Journey*, expresses not only his past journey, but also the vision to come:

I began to be convinced of several things. First, there was no such thing as "theology"; there was only contextual theology. Second, theology could only be done adequately with a missiological imagination… Third, theology could only be adequately done from a "global perspective"…

In the last several years I have been fascinated by another aspect of theology that actually goes beyond the global to the cosmic... To think theologically in terms of the new creation story, as Thomas Berry calls it, to think in terms of the vast amount of time, the 13.8 billion years since the Big Bang, to think of the vastness of space in this universe of billions of light years in diameter, to think in terms of the complexity of cosmic and biological evolution—all of this changes completely our understanding of doctrines like creation, redemption, Christology, ecclesiology, and mission itself... Theology needs not only to be contextual in the context of the local, or done in global dialogue, but also to be done in cosmic context and cosmic perspective ■



BOOK REVIEW

MISSIONARY EVANGELIZATION AND CULTURAL VALUES

Re-examining the Growth and Future Challenges of Catholic Christianity in Igboland

by

Gerry Ikechukwu Nworie

Published by: Inspiring Publishers, PO Box 159, Calwell, ACT 2905, Australia;
2018. xix, 254 pgs. Bibliography, Index and Appendix are added.
ISBN: 978-0-6483865-4-4

***Reviewed by Larry Nemer SVD**, retired professor of Mission Studies and Church History at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago), former president of the Missionary Institute London (UK), Lector Emeritus in Mission Studies and Church History at Yarra Theological Union and founding president of AAMS.*

This book explores the extent to which inculturation activities are or are not successful in Igboland. Finally, this book examines to what extent local missionaries have maintained or changed the missionary method they inherited from the European missionaries from over 13 decades ago.

European Christian missionaries evangelised Igboland in the 19th century. The highly religious Igbo people whose culture was imbued by their African Traditional Religion welcomed Christianity both of the Anglican and Catholic traditions. Despite the shortcomings of the first missionaries, this book argues that their presence and message related closely with the family/cultural values of the people and therefore the people not only accepted the teachings of the missionaries, but in time became missionaries to their own people.

This work, which contains a wealth of information on the people of Igboland in Nigeria, offers a needed contribution to mission history since it narrates not only what the missionaries did, but more importantly how the Gospel was received, and highlights an important method of evangelising today—interreligious dialogue with the local culture and local religion.

Anyone who is involved with ministering to an African community or to Africans within a multi-cultural community, or with mission history with a special interest in the19th and 20th centuries, or with present-day missionary challenges will find this book a veritable treasure trove.

As one reads this book one gets a sense of who the Igbo people are. While they have many characteristics in common with other Sub-Saharan African peoples, they live them out in their own distinctive way. They are a deeply religious people. The author spends much time in analysing the names that are given to people. Many of them have a direct reference to God. For this reason, it is important to know their names and respect what they signify.

They have a profound sense of famil,y which includes not only the living, but the ancestors as well. Community is extremely important to them, but they also allow space for individual development. These characteristics are found in their proverbs and ritual practices. The author has used the most recent and abundant sources available on these topics.

While many histories of Christianity in Nigeria have appeared over the last 40 years, the approach taken by this author is different from other historians. He not only describes the missionary activity done and the institutional development of the Church, but he asks the question: what were the people hearing and why were they so accepting of the Gospel?

In other words, he gives us a history of the Church from below. He isolates and discusses seven cultural/family values and then shows how these values continually helped in fostering the growth of Catholic Christianity in Igboland. In this way also the Gospel was inculturated by the people.

Because of their common cultural understandings there was a reduction in the constant tension that exists between Christianity and African Traditional Religion.

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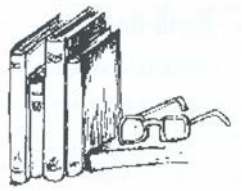


BOOK REVIEW

CHRISTIAN MISSION
CONTEXTUAL THEOLOGY
PROPHETIC DIALOGUE

edited by

Dale T Irvin and Peter C Phan

Published by: Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2018. 293 pp.
Complete Bibliography of Bevans' Writings. Index. A$51.82
ISBN-10: 1626982996
ISBN-13: 978-1626982994

***Reviewed by Larry Nemer SVD**, Retired Professor of Mission Studies and Church History at Catholic Theological Union (Chicago), former president of the Missionary Institute London (UK), Lector Emeritus in Mission Studies and Church History at Yarra Theological Union and founding president of AAMS.*

When his friends and colleagues discovered that Stephen Bevans SVD was retiring from full-time lecturing at Catholic Theological Union in Chicago they wanted to celebrate this event and honour him with a gift that academics greatly appreciate: a *Festschrifft.*

They recognised the great contributions that Bevans had made to the development of Mission Theology ecumenically and globally and decided to present studies that were related to the areas in which he presented important foundational insights: Mission Theology, Contextual Theology and Prophetic Dialogue (Interreligious Theology).

This book can serve either as *An Introduction to the Major Issues Facing Christian Mission Today* or as a post-graduate text on: *Where Is Mission Going Today?* Each of the articles is written by a highly-respected scholar.

Their presentations can easily serve as an *Introduction* because in describing the challenges the various Churches face with regards to mission they provide the historical development of the mission theology of the various Churches and conclude with the most important challenges being faced by those churches today: Roman Catholic—Roger Schroeder (pointing out as future trends a concern for reconciliation and integrity of creation); Orthodox—Athanasius N Papathanasiou (who included much history not generally known in the Western Churches); Protestant—Dale T Irvin (who is able to trace the genius of Martin Luther in the subsequent developments in the Reformation Churches); Pentecostal—Veli-Matti Karkkainen (who in a sense responds to the frequent questions and concerns other missiologists have about Pentecostal Mission Theology).

In the section on Contextual Theology, there are two authors who, recognising the great contribution Bevans made with his *Models of Contextual Theology*, bring valuable insights to the missionary challenge of the Church to develop contextual theologies.

Roger Schreiter's article, *Contextual and Theological Methods*, gives a masterly summary of how this challenge came to be part of mission literature. Anyone who is uncertain of what these words mean would profit really by reading this article.

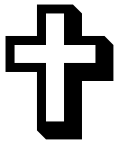
The second article is by Peter Phan and is deeply challenging: *Doing Theology in World Christianity: New Paths, Different Themes, Strange Locations*. Each of the last three phases opens a topic that is worth a review of its own. This article alone is worth the price of the book. Phan's breadth and depth of knowledge on this point is challenging to every missiology scholar working today.

In the third section on *Prophetic Dialogue*, there are articles by Gemma Tlud Cruz and Jose M de Meda on cultural perspectives that come into play when talking about prophetic dialogue by looking at both the developments that took place in Liberation Theology and local Filipino Theology.

However, the article by Anh Q Tran SJ, *Experience Seeking Faith: From Theology of Religions to Interreligious Theology*, may be the most challenging to all of today's scholars on mission and dialogue.

continued on page 56

Thank you to Jan Gray



from Larry Nemer

In Memoriam

Mercy Sister Janette Gray *became a faculty member of the Jesuit Theological College, Parkville, in 2004 and from 2012 until her death in December 2017 was a lecturer and post-graduate research supervisor at the United Faculty of Theology, Pilgrim College, and Yarra Theological Union. She died before she could publish her book based on her doctoral thesis, but the Mercy Sisters were kind enough to publish her doctoral thesis as it had been submitted and approved for a PhD at Cambridge University (UK) in 2019. Its title is:* M-D Chenu's Christian Anthropology: Nature and Grace in Society and Church.

Dear Jan

Since I did not get a chance to celebrate the completion of your thesis with you at *Poppies on Canterbury,* where we always went for lunch whenever you returned from Cambridge, I wanted to write this letter to you even though you are no longer bodily with us and thank you for what you have given me.

I always enjoyed our lunches because you could bring me up to date not only on your research, but also on what was happening in Cambridge and especially could tell me how my friend Nicholas Lash (we had lived together at St Edmund' College for two years), who was your supervisor, was doing.

First of all I want to thank you for the wonderful thesis you have left with us. I cannot remember a thesis that I enjoyed reading more than yours.

I never wanted to put it down.

I think it was because you were talking about events and ideas that were dear to my heart—ideas that I had picked up years ago when first reading *Chenu: the Priest-Worker Movement and the Young Christian Workers* (YCW), a positive outlook on the world as a creation that God saw as *good,* and a deeper meaning of incarnation. I had become interested in the Priest-Worker Movement in France and the YCW in the late 1950s while still a seminarian. But it was only when I arrived in Rome in 1960 to study missiology that I became aware of the important connection Chenu had with both movements.

The Priest-Worker Movement had been suppressed by that time, but I recognised that the theology behind it was at the *cutting edge* of mission theology, even though some traditionalists were not pleased with the idea that *Mission de France* was "authentic" mission.

I devoured the talks and papers that were written in the journal *Parole et Mission* and was convinced by Chenu's argument that to be Church it had to be in mission no matter where it was.

The following summer I had the good fortune to meet some of the early worker-priests and got a personal account of the spirituality that Chenu had brought them. I made a pilgrimage to Lisieux where the worker-priests had held their annual conferences and spent the day thinking about Chenu and the priest-workers.

I was also thinking about his support for the Young Christian Workers, because he believed that the missionary task belonged to all Christians, not just to priests.

Another of his teachings that appealed to me was

his positive attitude to the world. He did not believe that the Church had to be an enclosed citadel protected from the world.

As an Aquinas scholar (rather than an Augustinian follower who seemed to see sin everywhere in the world), he believed that all creation was made good and the Church must be involved in the world.

I was happy to read in your thesis how his positive attitude towards the world influenced the discussions at Vatican II. You point out how "reading the signs of the times" and *Gaudium et spes* in some ways came out of his positive attitude to the world and has now become part of the official teaching of the Church, even though some still find his attitude and the documents of the Council *too optimistic* about the world.

In the early 1960s "inculturation" had not yet become part of the missiological vocabulary. But Chenu talked about incarnation—God becoming one with humanity so that humanity could become divinised (a term he borrowed from the Eastern (Churches) and it was this continuing incarnation within the world that was the evangelising task of mission.

I didn't fully understand what he was saying on this point, but I knew it was not just a new missionary method or strategy that he was suggesting, but it was something much deeper, and I was excited about it.

I was happy to read in your thesis that he himself had never fully developed the idea and so left us with a challenge to give full meaning to his insight. It gave me a whole new attitude to the various cultures and religious traditions in the world.

So thank you, Jan, for being such a marvellous tour guide as you walked me through some of the most formative understandings and attitudes I developed as time went on. Perhaps someday in heaven you can enlighten me further on these matters.

Yours sincerely

Larry

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RESEARCH TOPICS IN AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

Name: **Jacob Joseph**
Thesis: *The Christ Who Embraces: An Orthodox Theology of Margins in India.*

This thesis considers the implications of this Orthodox model of mission in the Indian social context; in particular, how an emphasis on transcendence and liturgy might take political form in relation to Dalit social and theological concerns. It explores theological resources within miaphysite Christology, especially as developed by early teachers of the Church in their treatment of a transcendental and immanent Christology. This theological perspective is then engaged in a contextual debate on the theology of margins in India, namely Dalit Christology, and the importance it places on meaningful engagement in the formation of an Orthodox theology of margins in India.

Award: PhD
Institute: Pilgrim Theological College
Conferred: 2017 and Thesis Submitted
Supervisors: Dr John Flett and Dr Duncan Reid
Contact: *fatherjj@gmail.com*

RESEARCH PROJECTS IN MISSION STUDIES IN AUSTRALIA, NEW ZEALAND AND THE SOUTH PACIFIC REGION

Among the stated *purposes* of the Australian Association for Mission Studies (AAMS) and the *Australian Journal of Mission Studies* (AJMS) are:

- To promote the theological, biblical, historical, practical and contextual study of mission, local and global;
- To encourage cooperation and sharing of research and experience among individuals and institutions engaged in mission;
- To stimulate publications in missiology, including a journal; and
- To build links with those engaged in mission studies in the South Pacific.

To further achieve these purposes, the AAMS and AJMS are looking to highlight the various post-graduate research projects being carried out in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Region by scholars and practitioners in the field of mission studies.

The Association has recently decided that each year it will publish in the AJMS a special new section with *file notes* on each and, if possible, all the research projects being undertaken in Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Region. This edition contains the first of these special sections.

For the 2020 *file notes* the AAMS Committee and AJMS Board cordially invite all research scholars, especially current and very recent Ph.D. candidates, and/or their supervisors, to forward to the AAMS Secretary the following information on their particular research project by 30 April 2020

- Full Name of research scholar/doctoral candidate/student/mission practitioner:
- Working title or brief description (max. 100 words) of the research project/thesis:
- Degree [if any] for which the research project is being undertaken:
- University/College/institution where research is being undertaken:
- Date of anticipated completion of the research project or (if recently completed) the date of completion (month and year):
- Supervisor(s) of the research project/doctoral candidate;
- Contact details for research scholar/doctoral candidate/mission practitioner and/or supervisor:

Please send the above information to:

Dr Darrell Jackson
AAMS Secretary
Whiltely College
50 The Avenue
PARKVILLE VIC 3052

Email: *djackson@whitley.edu.au*
Mobile: +61 (0) 400 849 508

Current and recently completed higher degree research projects in

Australia, New Zealand and the South Pacific Region

Name: **Tania Harris**
Thesis: *Towards a Theology of Contemporary Revelatory experience: Biblical-Empirical Reflections on the Experiences of Pentecostals in Australia*
Award: PhD
Institute: Alphacrucis College
Conferred: To be confirmed
Supervisors: Dr Jon Newton; Angelo Cettolin; Professor Darren Cronshaw
Contact: *tania@godconversations.com*

Name: **Jenny Tymms**
Thesis: *Deep Work: Spiritual Practice in our Workday World*
Award: DMin
Institute: Uniting College, Adelaide College of Divinity
Conferred: 2018
Supervisors: Dr Patrick Oliver, Dr Tanya Wittwer and Professor Darren Cronshaw
Contact: *jennytymms@gmail.com*

Name: **Ken Laffer**
Thesis: *Churches assisting people seeking recovery from alcohol abuse and prostitution: a Western Australian case study.*

This thesis investigates the historical and cultural background to alcohol abuse and prostitution. The analysis includes select legal, medical, historical, government and feminist perspectives and data from interviews with Western Australian persons harmed by alcohol abuse and prostitution. Churches are well placed to assist such harmed persons and the agencies that support them at local, State and Federal levels. Recommendations include: learning about the harm issues; developing pastoral care skills to help persons seeking support; and becoming involved in community support to those marginalised by these harm issues.

Award: DMin
Institute: Tabor Adelaide
Conferred: 2017
Supervisors: Professor Darren Cronshaw; Dr Graham Buxton
Contact: *kenleo@rslmenora.com.au*

Name: **Craig Mitchell**
Thesis: *(Re)forming Christian Education in Congregations as the Praxis of Growing Disciples for a Missional Church*
Award: Doctor of Philosophy
Institute: College of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences—Flinders University
Conferred: October 2018
Supervisors: Professor Andrew Dutney; Dr Deidre Palmer
Contact: cymitch@bigpond.net.au

Name: **Gwyn McClelland**
Thesis: *Legacies of Suffering, Theologies of Hope: Nagasaki Catholics, the bomb and dangerous memory*
Award: Doctor of Philosophy
Institute: Monash University
Conferred: June 2018
Supervisors: Assoc Professor Beatrice Trefalt; Assoc Professor Ernest Koh; Rev Dr Christiaan Mostert
Contact: *gwynmcclelland@gmail.com @gwynjapan*

Name: **Shane Hanley**
Thesis: *The Risk Assessed Church (WHS)*
Award: PhD
Institute: Sydney College of Divinity
Conferred: tba
Supervisors: Professor Darren Cronshaw; Dr Steve Smith
Contact: *pastorshane68@gmail.com*

Name: **Peter Armstrong**
Thesis: *Pedagogy and Pioneering*
Award: DMin
Institute: Uniting College, Adelaide College of Divinity
Conferred: To be announced
Supervisors: Dr Rosemary Dewerse; Professor Darren Cronshaw
Contact: *pfarmstrong@bigpond.com*

Name: **Kamal Weerakoon**
Thesis: *Towards an Evangelical Interpretation of Cultural Hybridity with Special Reference to Christian Migrants from India and Sri Lanka to Australia*
Award: PhD
Institute: Morling College
Conferred: To be announced
Supervisors: Assoc Professor Darrell Jackson; Assoc Professor David Starling
Contact: *kamal.weerakoon@gmail.com*

Name: **Clement Papa**
Thesis: *Tracing the Origins and the Development of Bernard Lonergan's Idea of Redemptive History*
Award: PhD
Institute: Yarra Theological Union (YTU)
Conferred: To be announced
Supervisors: Dr Kathleen Williams;
Contact: *clementpapa@gmail.com*

Name: **Timothy Silberman**
Thesis: *An examination of factors influencing local church involvement in mission among evangelical churches in Sydney*
Award: PhD
Institute: Department of Religious Studies, University of Sydney
Conferred: To be announced
Supervisors: Professor Carole Cusack; Associate Professor Darrell Jackson
Contact: *tsilberman@smbc.edu.au*

Name: **Randall Prior**
Thesis: *Contextualising Theology in the South Pacific With Lessons Learned from the "Gospel and Culture in Vanuatu" Project*
Since published as: *Contextualizing Theology in the South Pacific: The Shape of Theology in Oral Culture,* ASM, Pickwick Publications, Eugene, OR (USA), 2019
Award: PhD
Institute: Pilgrim Theological College, University of Divinity
Conferred: 2016
Supervisors: Rev Dr Larry Nemer SVD
Contact: *priority49@optushome.com.au*

Name: **Sue Holdsworth**
Thesis: *A critical, comparative study of four Church-based, intercultural initiatives in the multi-cultural city of Melbourne. This study is in the disciplines of practical theology, pastoral care and missiology, using grounded theory methods.*
Award: PhD (Conferral, Semester 1, 2020)
Institute University of Divinity, Stirling College, Melbourne, Australia
Supervisor: Revd Dr Alan Niven, Dr Brian Macallan
Contact: *sueholds@gmail.com*

Name: **Titus Olorunnisola**
Thesis: *Jesus in Nigerian Christianity: An exploration of some aspects of Christology that may contribute to peace and mutuality*
Award: PhD
Institute: Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity
Conferred: 2016
Supervisors: Dr Larry Nemer
Contact: *titusolorunnisola@gmail.com*

Name: **San Lian**
Thesis: *Christian–Buddhist Dialogue in Myanmar: A Spirituality of Involvement in Social and Ethical Transformation*

This thesis examines the possibility of Christian-Buddhist dialogue in Myanmar. Buddhists and Christians have traditionally avoided interfaith dialogue and faith and ethnic differences have led to religious marginalisation, violence and ethnic conflict. Politicians have exploited the hatred, mistrust and fear rooted in ethnic religiosity, often fuelling the anger of religious leaders. This thesis advocates interfaith dialogue at the grassroots level, explores the core messages of the Buddha and of Jesus, and proposes interfaith awareness based on the documents of Vatican II, the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences and the World Council of Churches. It also looks at feasible ways to bring peace and social harmony to the broken, fear-ridden hearts of a suffering people.

Award: PhD
Institute: Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity
Conferred: 2017
Supervisors: Rev Assoc Professor Jacob Kavunkal; Dr Oh-Young Kwon

Name: **Heather Weedon**
Thesis: *The Evolving Missiology of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary*

The missiology of the Franciscan Missionaries of Mary has evolved from its beginning in 1877, expanding its self-understanding over the years, particularly following the recommendations of the Second Vatican Council. Further evolutions were due to subsequent events. While there was little change in the missiology of the Institute until the Second Vatican Council, the Sisters continued the Foundress' charism (Blessed Hélène de Chappotin) by following her example and studying her writings. In this way they continued to evolve their missiology according to the signs of the times and the situations in which they encountered others.

Award: ThD
Institute: Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity
Conferred: 2018
Supervisors: Dr John Prior; Dr Larry Nemer
Contact: *Heather.weedon@yahoo.com.au*

Name: **Joseph Echano**
Thesis: *Towards a Theology of Mission in the New Media Age*
Award: PhD
Institute: Yarra Theological Union, University of Divinity
Conferred: 2016
Supervisors: Dr Ross Langmead; Dr Michael Kelly; Rev Dr Jacob Kavunkal

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