Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue as Christian Practice:
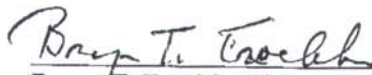# A Practical Theology of Religious Pluralism

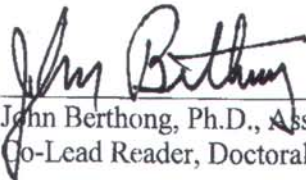## By Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr.

April 19, 2010

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Ph.D. in Practical Theology
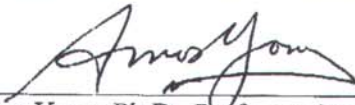
St. Thomas University
Miami Gardens, Florida

Approved in Full by the Dissertation Committee.

Bryan T. Froehle, Ph.D., **Professor** of Practical Theology
Chair, Doctoral Dissertation Committee of Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr.

John Berthong, Ph.D., Associate Professor for Comparative Theology, Boston University
Co-Lead Reader, Doctoral Dissertation Committee of Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr.

Amos Yong, Ph.D., Professor, Regent University
Co-Lead Reader, Doctoral Dissertation Committee of Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr.

Copyright Acknowledgement, Final Format Authority, and Authorization for Use
St. Thomas University
Miami Gardens, Florida

I, Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr., understand that I am solely responsible for the content of this dissertation and its use of copyrighted materials. All copyright infringements and related issues are solely my responsibility as the author of this dissertation and not St. Thomas University, its programs, or libraries.

Further, I understand that the university librarian is the final authority regarding the format check necessary for the official publication of my dissertation as a dissertation, the final step required for receipt of the doctoral degree.

I understand that United States copyright law protects this dissertation against unauthorized use. By my signature below, I am giving permission to St. Thomas University library to place this dissertation in its collections in both print and digital forms for open access to the wider academic community. I also allow the library to photocopy and provide a copy of this dissertation for the purpose of interlibrary loans for scholarly purposes and to migrate it to other forms of media for archival purposes. I freely understand that this is not required for receipt of the doctoral degree and am giving St. Thomas University library these rights of my own free will.

_____   4/19/2010
Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr.   Date

_____   4/19/2010
Bryan T. Froehle, Dissertation Committee Chair   Date

ST. THOMAS UNIVERSITY

INTERRELIGIOUS/INTERFAITH DIALGOUE AS CHRISTIAN PRACTICE:
A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY OF RELIGIOUS PLURALISM

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY AND MINISTRY
IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

NATHANIEL C. HOLMES, JR.

MIAMI GARDENS, FLORIDA

MARCH 2010

UMI Number: 3407646

UMI®

Dissertation Publishing

ProQuest®

To the Holmes Family
Past, Present, & Future Generations

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Christian theologians have explored the issue of religious pluralism for decades. There have been strides towards developing a Christian theology of religious pluralism. These theologies of religion have been on a largely theoretical level. The inadequacies of these approaches, I suggest, lay in a failure to understand that the theological explanation of interreligious/interfaith dialogue flows from practice and practical concerns. I posit that a practical theological framing of Christian interaction with differing religious traditions provides a more effective approach to Christian understandings of religious pluralism.

This dissertation focuses on interreligious/interfaith dialogue as an intentional Christian practice. It articulates a practical theology of religious pluralism through connecting the Christian practices and principles of hospitality and friendship with a theology of religions. Secondarily, it articulates a theology of *interfaith community*, i.e., a theology of contemporary pluralism, and dialogue as the fundamental practice that sustains such a community.

Linking Christian practices with Christian theologies of religion is a relatively new endeavor. The Christian tradition contains concepts and practices that are essential to Christian responses to religious pluralism. Hospitality and friendship are two such foundational concepts and practices. Hospitality is an expression of kindness, care, and entertaining of a stranger. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is impossible a part from hospitality. Friendship provides a deeper connection between individuals and/or groups who do not share the same religious faith. In addition to the display of general concern for humanity, friendship carries the connotations of genuine love and involvement, i.e. the stranger can become like family in a profound sense.

Within the context of friendship, interreligious/interfaith dialogue becomes concrete through life experiences and relationships.

Introduction:

Practical Theology and Religious Pluralism

In recent years, practical theology has become increasingly concerned with globalization and the Christian encounter with the religious other. Christian theologians have explored the issues of religious diversity for the last few decades. There have been strides towards developing a Christian theology of religious pluralism. Up to now, these theologies have been on a largely theoretical level. The inadequacies of these approaches, I suggest, lay in a failure to understand that the theological explanation of interfaith dialogue itself flows from practice and practical concerns. Problems of religious diversity and conflict resolution occur more at the local level in daily life. Too, I posit that a practical theological framing of Christian interaction with differing religious traditions is constitutive to any lasting peace, justice, and loving relations between the world's religions and society. As Johannes van der Ven says, "Western society has become a multicultural and thus a multireligious society, and in consequence practical theology must move towards an interreligious dialogue."[1]

In 2004, the Association of Practical Theology at the American Academy of Religion hosted a forum on religious practice as the context for interreligious engagement. This event reflects the move of practical theology towards the theological discussion of religious diversity. I see this as a much-needed realization among theologians that the challenges produced by the plurality of religions are best approached from a practical aspect. There are practices that Christians can and do engage in that make interfaith dialogue a Christian practice in itself. Jesus' parable of the "Good Samaritan" shows not only that the neighbor can be someone one is ordinarily taught to despise, but also that persons of other religious affiliations are neighbors through whom one is able to encounter God. The Samaritan and the Jew had differing religious traditions. Yet, the Jew encountered God

---

[1] Presentation at *The International Society for Empirical Research in Theology* in Bielefeld, Germany, 2004.

(as love and mercy) through the Samaritan, who was no doubt influenced by his own religious beliefs to help a stranger. Such a display of care and hospitality is a practice of interfaith dialogue.

In this dissertation, I argue that friendship is the most advantageous context for interfaith/interreligious dialogue. The Christian tradition already has long-standing history of theological and spiritual explorations of friendship. The focus has mostly been of "Christian" friendship with little attention towards interreligious and interfaith friendships. I am explicitly arguing for *intentional* interaction and engagement in interreligious and interfaith friendships.[2] This may require simple "eye-opening" in friendships that people may already have with persons who adhere to different faith traditions than their own. It may be that people have friends who they know, spend time and/or work with everyday, but simply have not inquired or been open to inquire about the other's religious beliefs and practices. This can be for a number of reasons, including fear of betraying one's own faith tradition. A theological framework that says "there is no need to learn about someone else's beliefs because your job is to simply convert them to yours" can be another reason. I hope to show that no matter what one's theological stance as it pertains to religious diversity (whether one leans more towards exclusivism or pluralism or somewhere else on the spectrum) dialogue within the context of friendship is a viable and effective vehicle. Intentionality also means reaching out building interfaith and interreligious friendships. This is of course no easy task. It can be daunting, and it is certainly a step of faith. Nevertheless, it is possible through interfaith community groups, interfaith social justice groups, or any form of interfaith community building actions. These groups and communities exhibit theological and spiritual practices that inform interreligious/interfaith encounters at the community level. Accordingly, exploration of interreligious and interfaith communities is indispensable. Communities (interreligious and

---

[2] Though this work calls for intentional engagement, I also acknowledge that dialogue through friendship may also happen in unintentional ways. One may discover an avenue for interfaith dialogue after befriending someone.

interfaith groups, local, national, or international religious communities, etc) cultivate and provide space for relationships and friendships to develop and blossom. Persons learn to embody the principles of dialogue, relationship, and friendship in community.

The terms *interreligious* and *interfaith*, though often used interchangeably in many cases, refer to two separate interactions between adherents of different faith traditions. Interreligious dialogue refers to the dialogue and interaction between differing religious traditions.[3] This does not refer to casual interactions between members of different religious traditions, but to formal encounters of representatives of the various religious traditions.[4] Interfaith dialogue is the encounter and interaction between individuals and/or families who practice differing faith traditions.[5] Therefore, I speak of "interreligious/interfaith" dialogue.

In the first chapter, I will attempt to summarize the essential literature and development of Christian theologies of religion, as well as, lay out the groundwork for a practical theology of religious pluralism. This dissertation presupposes an interconnectedness of belief (theory) and practice (praxis), and chapter two focuses on this intertwining of Christian beliefs and practices. This chapter will also attempt to present interfaith dialogue as a Christian practice itself. Dialogue encompasses more than a conversation, or a meeting between religious scholars. Dialogue is a way of life and practice, and it characterizes the human condition. Furthermore, when one approaches interreligious and interfaith dialogue within a framework of theological and philosophical realism, one sees the dialogue can also be a means of gaining deeper understanding of divine reality.

Chapter three deals with interreligious dialogue in relation to liberation praxis, theology of hospitality, and theology of friendship. Each of these categories is rooted in the Christian tradition

---

[3] Ted Falcon, Don Mackenzie, and Jamal Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi, and a Sheik* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2009), 6.
[4] Bud Heckman and Rori Picker Neiss, eds., *Interactive Faith: The Essential Interreligious Community-Building Handbook* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008), 6.
[5] Ibid.

and produces certain practices as it pertains to interfaith dialogue. Interfaith dialogue can be seen as a mode of liberation praxis in service to humanity for struggle against injustice, poverty, and all systems of oppression. Hospitality is the Christian principle of entertaining and displaying kindness/care to strangers (foreigners). Friendship injects a deeper connection or relationship with those who are not like us.

Interreligious/Interfaith communities move beyond the principles of mere tolerance (as we have seen in various forms of multiculturalism). Chapter four will show how interreligious/interfaith communities intentionally live in cooperation, friendship, mutual study, and the sincere desire to live peaceably with difference. I will draw from specific interreligious/interfaith groups as examples of interfaith interaction in communal settings. These groups demonstrate momentary instances of hospitality and friendship. They also display many of the practices that will be used to articulate a theology of interfaith communities.

Though there are references and examples from various religious traditions, this work is framed from a Christian perspective. It is from a decidedly ecumenical Christian perspective in that I draw from several Christian theological traditions. More importantly, this is a work in practical theology. Practical theology is an effective rubric for exploring and guiding Christian practices of interreligious and interfaith dialogue. The focus of practical theology is the practices of the Christian community as it engages the world in light of social, historical, and cultural conditions that characterizes peoples' everyday life. As such, interreligious/interfaith dialogue as a *Christian practice* situates this topic within the purview of practical theology.

Chapter One:

From Theology of Religions to A Practical Theology of Religious Pluralism

Christian Theology of Religions

Christian theologians have explored the issues of religious diversity, for the last few decades, under the discipline "theology of religions." A theology of religions seeks to account for the existence, meaning, and value of the plurality of religions in relation to God or divine reality. A Christian theology of religions articulates how Christians are to live with persons of differing faith traditions and the relationship of Christianity to other religions.[6] "The Christian theology of religions has come to be the name for that area of Christian studies which aims to give some definition and shape to Christian reflection on the theological implications of living in a religious plural world."[7]

It is essential to highlight that the theology of religions attempts to understand religious diversity within a *theistic* framework.[8] Thus, some religious traditions are unable to develop a theology (theos) of religions in the same manner. While it is possible for different religious frameworks, Christian theology has produced copious amounts of literature in theology of religions. Despite the dominance of Christian voices, a theological understanding and reflection of interreligious encounters is important for people of all faiths because it raises fundamental questions of truth, spirituality, and, perhaps most importantly, ways in which people of different religious traditions must live together peaceably, with mutual respect and love.

---

[6] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 20.

[7] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: SCM Press, 1983), ix.

[8] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward A Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 17.

Theology of religions emerges as a subdiscipline of theology first within Catholic theology stemming from Vatican II, and rapidly appeared in Protestant theology as well.[9] Focus was given to questions such as: Is there salvation apart from the person and work of Jesus Christ? Is there salvation outside the church? How can Christianity be universally valid in light of the plurality of religions? These perennial questions were exacerbated as religions other than Christianity moved beyond traditional national and cultural borders. This point in human history is a time when one can truly speak of *world religions*. Christian theology of religions seek to understand and account for, theologically, the diverse religious longings and commitments among humanity, in spite of Christianity's missionary efforts and claims to spiritual and religious pre-eminence.[10]

There is a distinction between theology of "religion" and theology of "religions." A theology of religion "asks what religion is" and attempts to interpret the universal human religious experience in light of the Christian faith.[11] It also explores the relationship between religion and faith, revelation and faith, and faith and salvation. Since religious experience tends to be embodied in a religious tradition, theology of *religion* becomes theology of *religions*, i.e. the focus moves towards those various institutions, creeds, and belief systems, through which religious experience is expressed. Hence, Christian theology of religions explores the various religious traditions "in the context of the history of salvation and in their relationship to the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Christian Church."[12]

Some theologians wish to jettison the idea of a theology of religions. Wilfred Cantwell Smith advocated a "world theology" instead of a theology of religions from the perspective of only

---

[9] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions* 22.
[10] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism,* 2.
[11] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1997), 7.
[12] Ibid., 8.

one religious tradition.[13] Influenced by the history of religions, he presents a coherent theology of humanity's religious history.[14] Smith argues the problem with the "theology of religions" is that it is mainly from the Christian perspective. A Christian theology of religions benefits those who seek to maintain and defend their religious commitments, but it is not beneficial to those who genuinely want to understand non-Christian theology and religious beliefs.[15] What is needed is a global theology, i.e., "a theology for which 'the religions' are the subject, not the object; a theology that emerges out of all the religions of the world."[16] To illustrate his point, Smith refers to the religions of the world as "religious sub-communities" of the human community. The idea is that humanity shares a common religious history and theology should reflect this unity. What emerges is a theology of the religious history of humanity as a whole. This theology is produced from and for the humanity community, and must be a product of "thinkers who see, who feel, and, indeed, who know men and women of all religious groups, and all centuries, as members of one community."[17] Theologians participate in this community as well. Thus, the theology they generate should aspire to be a theology of the faith of all humanity, or more pointedly, a statement of God that delineates the divers expressions and involvements of God with human beings in all places and in all times.[18]

Smith's proposal has received significant criticism, most noteworthy from Raimundo Panikkar. Panikkar claims that Smith sacrifices difference in order to promote a common denominator among religions and theologies.[19] Instead of Smith's attempt to develop a world theology, which downplays the distinctive beliefs and characteristics of each faith tradition,

---

[13] See also Leonard Swindler, ed. *Toward A Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987).
[14] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Toward A World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religion* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1981), 3.
[15] Ibid., 109.
[16] Ibid., 124.
[17] Ibid., 125.
[18] Ibid., 126.
[19] Raimundo Panikkar, "The Invisible Harmony: A Universal Theory of Religion or A Cosmic Confidence in Reality?" in *Toward A Universal Theology of Religion*, 118-153.

theologians should pursue a path of cross-fertilization of the world's religions highlighting their

differences. There is, then, a need for a pluralistic theology that acknowledges plurality and

diversity, and mutually accepts otherness on its own terms. This happens through dialogical

openness and mutual enrichment through conversation.[20]

James Fredericks advocates a comparative theology as a digression from a theology of

religions.[21] All the approaches of the theology of religions produced thus far are inadequate because

they allow Christians to theologize about religious diversity without moving beyond the Christian

framework.[22] Interfaith dialogue in Fredericks' view should lead to solidarity. Solidarity among the

religions, though, can only be achieved through a comparative theological approach. Doing

theology comparatively means crossing over into the world of another religious tradition and

returning to one's own religious tradition transformed by the truths of the other religion.[23]

Comparative theology is characterized by the "tension" of a theologian's devotion to her/his faith

tradition and the fascination of finding value in the teachings and principles of another faith

tradition.[24] A theologian, therefore, must be open to the possibility of truth and value in other

religions without abandoning commitment to one's own tradition. Unless both of these elements are

present within the theological process one is not doing comparative theology.

Comparative theology should not be conflated with comparative religion. Comparative

theology is not interested in constructing general theories of religion or establishing meta-religious

---

[20] Raimundo Panikkar, "The Dialogical Dialogue" in *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies, ed. Frank Whaling* (Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986).

[21] It is worth mentioning that Francis Clooney has also pioneered the comparative theology approach most successfully. He reframes theology as interreligious, comparative, dialogical, and confessional practice. Clooney's work demonstrates how the hymns, prayers, and commentaries of one religious tradition can speak to similar texts and hymns of another religious tradition. Clooney See for example *Theology After Vedanta: An Experiment in Comparative Theology* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1993), *Seeing Through Texts: Doing Theology Among the Srivaisnavas of South India* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1996), and *Hindu God, Christian God: How Reason Helps Break Down the Boundaries Between Religions* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[22] James Frederick, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), xiii.

[23] Ibid., xii.

[24] Ibid., 97.

theoretical frameworks. The objective is not to study religions from the outside, but to allow a theologian to enrich her/his personal spiritual life and her/his faith tradition by immersing in another tradition. Two specific religious traditions must engage one another. If one is to be a comparative theologian, then one must be competent in Christian theology, as well as, engage in "serious study of another religion on its own terms."[25] In so doing, Fredericks is seeking to avoid the temptation to develop comparisons that simply fit comfortably within Christian theological categories and classifications. This is the fundamental problem with the theology of religions. No theology of religions can genuinely open up Christians to the teachings of other religions.[26] Fredericks suggests we abandon theology of religions temporarily to engage in comparative theology. Instead of a grand narrative of religions, Christian theology ought to undertake contextual experiments of comparisons.

Other theologians continue to work from within the basic framework of a theology of religions but have moved away from *strictly* speaking of a theology of religions in the conventional sense. Jacques Dupuis articulates a Christian theology of religious pluralism, not just a theology of religions. Religious pluralism, he argues, demonstrates a move for merely focusing on the salvific question, to an expanded focus on God's purpose for the plurality of religions in the world.[27] The issue is not only about the possibility of salvation through religions other than Christianity, but also about the presence of in God in other religions. Is God working through the plurality of religions for some ultimate goal for humanity? The multiplicity of religions is not a condition to bemoan. Rather, the implication is that pluralism is significant in itself as a part of God's plan and design for

---

[25] Ibid., 98.
[26] Ibid., 99.
[27] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 10.

humanity.[28] This idea is nicely expressed in a portion of the statement published by the Thirteenth

Annual Meeting of the Indian Theological Association:

> As we perceive the signs of the Absolute Presence also in the lives of
>
> our sisters and brothers around us professing various religions, we ask
>
> in the light of the Divine Truth revealing itself, what we should affirm
>
> about these religions, and how we understand the purpose and meaning
>
> of the wonderful religious variety around us and its role and function in
>
> the attainment of salvation.[29]

This statement was accompanied by a confession of a limited Christian apprehension of God.

Religious pluralism recognizes God's presence in other religious traditions because of God's self-

communication through Jesus Christ, as well as, the fact that Christian articulations of faith-

experience in Christ is limited.[30] As a result, the Christian understanding and communication of

God can be enriched by other faith traditions.[31]

Christian theology of religions brings the awareness that Christian theology cannot develop

in isolation from the influence and views of other religions.[32] Interreligious encounters help shape

Christian identity. Christians are more aware of they are when they encounter those who differ from

them. It is also an important task of Christian theology to verbalize how Christians are to live with

persons of differing faith traditions. In order for this to happen, theologians must engage and seek to

understand other religions. A Christian theology of religions emerges from a genuine dialogue with

the religions.[33] A practical theology of religious pluralism sees interreligious/interfaith dialogue as a

---

[28] Ibid., 11.
[29] Kuncheria Pathil, *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective* (Delhi: South Asian Books, 1991), 340-341.
[30] Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Study of the Indian Attempts Since Vatican II* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1995), 217.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions,* 23.
[33] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 19.

Christian practice.[34] It is within the framework of a practical theology of religious pluralism that interreligious/interfaith dialogue (study, conversation, and understanding) and an articulation of how Christians live in community with persons of different faiths converge.

The History of Religions

Theology of religion and theologies of religions have their roots in the "history of religions." The *Religionsgeschichtliche Schule* (History of Religions)- also called the comparative, historical method in the study of religion- developed in German biblical studies during the 19th century and emphasized the degree to which biblical ideas were the product of the cultural milieu.[35] The history of religions generally approached "religion" as a human phenomenon and sought to delineate historical and structural facts about religion, and the religions, without judging them from particular, especially Christian, perspectives. The modern history of religions came into its own during the latter part of the 19th century when attempts were made to place the methodology of comparative religion and mythology on a systematic basis. Scholars began to explore particular religious histories. Significant comparative religious work was produced as well. Rudolf Otto's comparison of the medieval German mystic Meister Eckhart and the medieval Hindu philosopher Sankara is a primary example.[36]

The history of religions and the phenomenology of religion approaches produced several influential scholars and works. Otto extended his influence on the scholarly world with the publication of his *Idea of the Holy*, which delineated a central experience and sentiment, and

---

[34] "Interreligious" and "Interfaith" dialogue are often used interchangeably to denote the encounter of persons/groups of different religious faiths. Some distinction can be made though. Interreligious can refer to interaction or dialogue between two or more religious traditions or communities. Interfaith can refer to a one-on-one encounter or dialogue between individuals.

[35] Wendy Doniger, *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions* (Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc, 2006), 919.

[36] Rudolf Otto, *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism* (Reprint) (Quest Books, 1987).

elucidated the concept of the holy.[37] Joachim Wach established *religionswissenschaft* (scientific

study of religion) at the University of Chicago, and became the modern founder of the "Chicago

School."[38] Wach maintained three fundamental principles for the comparative study of religions.[39]

First, there must be recognition of the apologetic element in every religious tradition. At the same

time, the comparative study of religions itself must not be influenced by the apologetic interests of

any particular religion. Second, all religions are viewed as "universal options, not subject to cultural

determinism."[40] Third, scholars of comparative religions must not overlook the fundamental

differences of the religions. Furthermore, Wach attempted to relate the insights of the history of

religions to Christian theology. He posited that the history of religions must investigate the divers

understanding of the divine in non-Christian religions, and that Christian theologians should

consider these understandings as well.[41] Wach offered several principles for Christian theologians

as they evaluate non-Christian religions[42]:

1. There is a genuine experience of ultimate reality in non-Christian religions.

2. There are genuine revelations of the divine in non-Christian religions, despite the lack of similarities with Christian revelation.

3. The experience of the holy is integrally related to ethics and morality in all religions.

4. Non-Christians experience the "grace of God", even though they may not recognize it as such.

5. The criterion for indentifying and expressing divine reality in non-Christian religions must be articulated in the terms of each specific non-Christian religious tradition.

6. There is a genuine sense of "worship" in non-Christian religions.

---

[37] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1923).
[38] Wendy Doniger, *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions*, 919.
[39] Joachim Wach, *The Comparative Study of Religions, Edited with An Introduction by Joseph M. Kitagawa* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1958), xliii.
[40] Ibid.
[41] Ibid., xlv.
[42] Ibid.

7. Religious experience in all religions expresses itself in some form of harmony.

These principles have become stalwart in the theology of religions in one form or another.

Mircea Eliade sought to find general, cross-cultural parallels and unity in the religions, especially in mythologies.[43] He had a wide influence because of his substantive studies on Yoga and Shamanism, and his later writings that attempted to synthesize data from a wide variety of cultures.[44] This synthesis incorporated a theory of myth and history. There are two important elements in Eliade's theory. First, the distinction between the sacred and the profane is fundamental to religious thinking and is to be interpreted existentially.[45] Religious symbols and concepts are typically profane in literal interpretation, but are of cosmic significance when viewed as signs of the sacred. Second, that archaic religion is to be contrasted with the linear, historical view of the world. The latter view stems from biblical religion, while the former view tends to treat time cyclically and mythically. Due to the copious and pioneering scholarship of Wach and Eliade, the history of religions has been associated primarily with the University of Chicago. Additional scholars typically associated with the "Chicago School" have included Joseph Kitagawa, Jonathan Z. Smith, Charles Long, Wendy Doniger, Frank Reynolds, and Lawrence Sullivan.[46]

The influence of the methodology of the history of religions extended into biblical criticism. Dubbed the historical critical method, it sought to relate Old and New Testament religion to the religious situation in which these writings develop. Biblical religion develops in reaction to and is affected by the religious beliefs and practices of the surrounding cultures. We can best understand the Judeo-Christian tradition if we investigate and understand the religions with which this tradition

---

[43] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).
[44] See Mircea Eliade, *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 2nd Edition, Trans. by Willard R. Trask* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970) and *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy Trans. by Willard R. Trask* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).
[45] Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, 1.
[46] Wendy Doniger, *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions*, 919.

has and does interact. What we see, I think, in the history of religions and the comparative religions are the seeds of interreligious dialogue. Beginning in the middle of the 19th century religious scholars produced studies that examined parallels and differences of beliefs and practices between Christianity and other religions. These studies demonstrated that previous Christian interpretations were inadequate and needed to be reworked.[47] Max Muller explicitly exhibited the value of engaging the religious and philosophical thought of India.

> And if I were asked myself from what literature we, here in Europe,
>
> we, who have been nurtured almost exclusively on the thought of
>
> Greeks and Romans, and of one Semitic race, the Jewish, may draw
>
> that corrective which is most wanted in order to make our inner life
>
> more truly human life, not for this life only, but a transfigured and
>
> eternal life- again I should point to India.[48]

With this, Muller clearly expresses a willingness to accept the possibility that other religious traditions, particularly those of India and other Eastern religions, can act as correctives for the Christian tradition.[49]

Ernst Troeltsch is another key theorist of the German history of religions school. Like other historians of religions Troeltsch held that the biblical text (and by extension Christianity) could be understood only as one historical phenomenon within a context of other religio-historical phenomena in that period of human history.[50] From this strictly historical approach, parallels between religions and cultures were considered indications of borrowing, and thus, claims to

---

[47] Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,* 26.

[48] F. Max Muller*, India: What Can It Teach Us?: A Course of Lectures Delivered Before the University* (BiblioBazaar, 2007), 21.

[49] Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue,* 26-27.

[50] Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions" in *Christianity and Plurality: Classic and Contemporary Readings, Edited by Richard J. Plantinga* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 209-222.

Christian uniqueness and absoluteness were historically dubious. Troeltsch observed that the tendency of history is not toward unity or universality. Christianity, therefore, cannot be the goal of history. The law of history is that "the Divine Reason, or the Divine Life, within history, constantly manifests itself in always-new and always-peculiar individualizations- and hence that its tendency is not toward unity or universality at all, but rather toward the fulfillment of the highest potentiality of each separate department of life."[51] This law debunks the claim that Christianity is the summation of human history. Christianity is an individual historical phenomenon like all other religions. Troeltsch urged Christian theologians to abandon claims about the absoluteness of Christianity. Instead, they should assume the task of understanding each religious tradition as an individual phenomenon of history, in the context of the civilization in which it is located, and work for mutual understanding.[52]

The history of religions serves as precursor to the theology of religions. Though the theology of religions did not have a prominent place in theological discourse until around the 1960s, the history of religions had already laid a critical foundation and espoused the core principles for future theologies of religious pluralism.[53] I shall show that the history of religions also anticipates a practical theology of religious pluralism. Its insistence of focusing on historical/contextual reality, the functional aspects of a religion, and the exposition of religious experience are akin to characteristics in practical theology. Practical theology expands the foundations given by the history of religions, though, by not only seeking to understand and compare the functionality of religions, but also using religious practices as a context for interreligious interaction.

---

[51] Ibid., 215.
[52] Ibid., 210.
[53] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions,* 22.

Religious Pluralism Typologies & Paradigms

There are several approaches to the theology of religions. A variety of typologies and/or

models was developed to classify the various Christian theological attitudes towards the worlds'

religions. Some theologians prefer the term "paradigm," as opposed to "models," to determine and

understand the basic perspectives and theories being presented as to how the diverse religions relate

to one another.[54] Models tend to be descriptive, i.e., they provide no definitive depiction of a reality

or position, but simply bring awareness to the realities to which that model refers. Thus, models do

not cancel each other out. They need each other in order to provide a complete picture of the reality

in question. Paradigms, on the other hand, are mutually exclusive because each presents a

comprehensive interpretation of reality that conflict with other paradigms. If one finds that a

paradigm is inoperative, one should abandon it and shift to another.[55] I agree with Jacques Dupuis'

aim in exposing the fact that the diverse attitudes of Christians toward religious diversity are sharp

and distinctive- when it comes down to it, after all, if one perspective is correct then the others are

incorrect. I disagree, however, with the idea that there is necessarily a "paradigm shift" in Christian

thought.

Alan Race created the most popular typology for a Christian theology of religions:

exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism.[56] Race fleshes out his typologies by allocating theologians

he feels are representative of each perspective category. It is important to note, though, that his

allocations are not precise descriptions, and no theologian is completely within the confines of any

specific category. Other theologians have suggested alternative schemas. Dupuis and Veli-Matti

Karkkainen offer paradigms akin to Race with different terminology: ecclesiocentrism,

---

[54] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 181.
[55] Ibid.
[56] See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*.

christocentrism, and theocentrism.[57] As I said, Dupuis views these categories in terms of a paradigm shift of Christian theology's views of other religions. This typology corresponds quite nicely with Race's three paradigms, thus I shall incorporate Dupuis and Karkkainen in my discussion of Race.

Exclusivism and ecclesiocentrism describes those who claim there is only one true religion, i.e. Christianity. Ecclesiocentrism asserts that other religions are not necessarily conducive to the search of God, and the only mediation of salvation is in the Christian church, "the locus of faith in Christ."[58] This position is guided by the early church proclamation "extra ecclesia nulla salus", outside the church there is no salvation. Exclusivism maintains that God's revelation in Jesus the Christ is the sole criterion for evaluating and understanding all religions.[59] Race observes that the New Testament theology presents Christian faith as absolute and final. Jesus is depicted as the one true, and only, way to God.

The fact that the early Christian community sought to spread the gospel bears witness to the universal significance they saw in Jesus as the Christ. The early Christians called Jesus God, they prayed to Jesus as God, and they trusted Jesus for salvation with a belief system that maintained that only God could save. Christianity preached that even though Jesus was God, he truly became a human being in all aspects except sin. Jesus' death was to be the means of salvation. Salvation meant that humanity (as a whole) was reunited to God.[60] The exclusivist position is criticized for failing to acknowledge the limitations of our experiences of divine reality (however genuine they

---

[57] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 25.
[58] Ibid.
[59] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 11.
[60]William Placher, *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christ Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 2001), 33.

may be) and the movement and workings of God in all humanity. Exclusivism is also befuddled by

the question of salvation for those who never heard of Jesus Christ or the message of Christianity.[61]

Inclusivism and Christocentrism refers to those who believe that Jesus Christ is normative

for salvation but also acknowledge other religious traditions as having moral value and that persons

of other faiths can receive salvation in Christ through their own faith traditions. Inclusivism has

been an official doctrinal stance of the Roman Catholic Church since Vatican II.[62] Race says there

is a dialectical "yes" and "no" in the inclusivist attitude to non-Christian religions.[63] An inclusivist

recognizes the spiritual power and value in non-Christian religions. One can discern the presence of

the divine in them. Nevertheless, there is no recognition of salvific power. Salvation is in and

through Christ alone. Christocentrism asserts that the affects of Christ's saving work can be found

outside the Christian church.[64] Choan Seng Song, for example, posits that Christ is present

everywhere in creation in the power of the Spirit.[65] God's grace and salvation in Christ is hence

ubiquitous as Christ's presence in creation is ubiquitous. Therefore, Christ is working through the

power of the Spirit, throughout all human history, redemptively moving all cultures and religions

towards reconciliation to God and fulfillment in Christ.

One of the most prominent configurations of inclusivism is Karl Rahner's theory of the

anonymous Christian.[66] Anonymous Christianity refers to the idea that a person can still attain

salvation, through Christ, outside the Christian tradition. Rahner maintained that there is no such

thing as pure nature, only graced nature. He posited the idea of the "supernatural existential" which

---

[61] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "Evangelical Theology and the Religions" in *The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology, Eds. Timothy Larsen and Daniel J. Treier* (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 201.
[62] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 161. See also *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes* (Pauline Books & Media, 1965).
[63] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism*, 38.
[64] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 25.
[65] Choan Seng Song, *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 196-226.
[66] Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith* (New York: Crossroad, 1978), 311-318.

is humanity's existential orientation towards grace.[67] Grace, therefore, is the self-communication of God for all humanity. Grace permeates nature and human existence both explicitly and implicitly. God's grace must be embodied, and the most logical place is in the worlds' various religions. Any Buddhist or Hindu, for example, who experiences God's grace and love in their own perspective religions is also connected with and oriented towards Jesus Christ because Jesus represents the fullness of God's love and grace. Rahner's Anonymous Christian concept was extremely influential on the Second Vatican Council. In *Lumen Gentium*, for instance, it says, "Those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or his church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do his will as it is known to them through the dictates of conscience."[68] Despite its influence, some have been highly critical of his position. For instance, the notion of "anonymous Christians" is considered offensive to non-Christians.[69]

Within an inclusivist-Christocentric model of religious pluralism, one can also find the promotion of a type of Christian universalism.[70] According to this paradigm, the Christian message announced that "God was bringing the 'restoration of all things' (Acts 3:21) - the new age promised by the prophets- when wrong would be righted and humanity reconciled to God."[71] The early church fathers saw the Christian message as universal, i.e., applicable to all humanity. In fact, early Christian theologians such as Origen, Irenaeus, and Gregory of Nyssa posited a "universal

---

[67] Ibid., 123-126.
[68] *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium* (Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1965).
[69] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions,* 196.
[70] I am distinguishing here between "Christian Universalism" as opposed to universalism as a position in general which may be seen as *a version* of pluralism, not inclusivism.
[71] Richard Norris, *The Christological Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 1.

restoration" of all things (apokatasus panton), referring to the reunion and healing of the cosmos to God through Christ.[72]

This theory of *recapitulation* represents an important example of an inclusivist salvific schema in early Christian thought. Recapitulation is a "summing up" of all things in Christ as the second Adam who restores the sinful creation by redeeming from all the sin done in the first Adam-"our Lord summing up universal humanity in himself even to the end, summing up also his death."[73] Christ recapitulates not only the entire human race but also the entirety of the created order. For Irenaeus, for instance, the incarnation was as important for salvation as the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Through the incarnation, Christ fully identified with humanity. Christ restored humanity to God by incorporating us into his obedience to God. In essence, human beings participate in Christ's life, ministry, death, and resurrection.

Irenaeus followed the parallelism between the first and second Adam established by the Apostle Paul.[74] Christ's actions reverse the actions of Adam. Whereas the fall of humanity was caused by the obedience of the first Adam, the restoration and salvation of humanity came through the obedience of the second Adam. By complete identification with humanity, and thus the entire created order, at every point of existence, Jesus as the Christ restored fellowship with God by perfecting humanity and all creation. Christ became "what we are, in order that he might make us what he himself is."[75]

---

[72] Hans Urs Von Balthasar, *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?* (San Francisco, CS: Ignatius Press, 1986), 225-235.
[73] Irenaeus, *Against Heresy* quoted in Donald McKim, *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought* (Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988), 80.
[74] Ibid.
[75] Ibid.

Pluralism is the position that each religious tradition has salvific power in its own right. Theocentricism asserts that the diversity of religions represent multiple ways leading to God.[76] As a paradigm, theocentricism disavows the Christocentric paradigm; with God replacing Christ as the center.[77] Jesus becomes one way of salvation among many, as God uses various mean to bring humanity to God's self. Panikkar refers to this position as *parallelism*. Parallelism represents the condition of a theologian when one affirms the authenticity of one's own tradition, but can neither deny nor assimilate other religious traditions, and conjectures that all religions run parallel and meet in ultimate reality, at the end of human history.[78] There is a possibility that pluralism is an import from Hindu thought.[79] The 19th century Brahmin, Gangadhar Chatterji, most popularly known by his title Sri Ramakrishna, practiced several religions (including Hinduism, Christianity, Jainism, Buddhism, and Islam) to discern the divine reality within each. He found that each religion is merely a different path to the same spiritual reality.[80] Sri Ramakrishna's ideas extended into Europe and America with the establishment of Ramakrishna Mission Centers, as well as, the popularity of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan- both of which influenced Western scholars of religion and theology.[81] In terms of the Christian response to religious diversity, Race argues that pluralism is the only plausible solution and outlook.

John Hick has become one of the most important philosophers of religion and the most prominent proponent of the pluralist position. He developed a pluralistic hypothesis that posits in

---

[76] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions*, 25.
[77] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 186. Again, Dupuis presents theocentricism in terms of a paradigm shift from ecclesiocentricism to christocentricism, and now to theocentricism.
[78] Raimundo Panikkar, *The IntraReligious Dialogue* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1978), xviii.
[79] Solomon A. Nigosian, *World Religions: A Historical Approach, Fourth Edition* (Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008), 508.
[80] Ibid. See Also Sri Ramakrishna, *The Gospel of Ramakrishna* (New York, NY: The Vedanta Society, 1907) and *Teachings of Ramakrishna* (Almora: Advaita Ashrama, 1934).
[81] Ibid.

effect that all religions led to the same ultimate reality.[82] Hick claims that for the vast majority of

human beings, the religion to which they adhere is largely determined by where they are born.[83]

Hick's hypothesis is provocative, not only because it breaks with much of "orthodox" Christian

theology, but also because he used to be a conservative Christian.[84] He then discerned a

"Copernican revolution" in theology, more specifically Christology, which moved from a

christocentric model to a non-restrictive theocentric perspective.[85] In the same way astronomy

experienced a shift from thinking the earth was the center of the universe to the realization that the

earth, along with the other plants in our solar system, revolved around the sun, theology has

realized that Christianity is not at the center of faith. God is at the center of *all* religions, including

Christianity.[86]

Hick says there are two ways one can approach the fact that there are a plurality of

religions.[87] On the one hand, you can look at their inherent distinctions. Each religious traditions

has its own beliefs, practices, ethical norms, art, and cultural ethos, which creates a conundrum for

those who view religion, not merely as a human phenomenon, but as a response and medium of

divine reality. Each religious tradition claims to possess the clearest, most exhaustive knowledge of

divine reality, and hence, the right to proclaim a total allegiance to that particular tradition. Hick

says that the problem in the discussion of the religious plurality is that the focus has remained on

---

[82] John Hick, "A Philosophy of Religious Pluralism" in *Christianity and Plurality: Classic and Contemporary Readings, Edited by Richard J. Plantinga* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999), 339-341.
[83] John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (Westminster John Knox Press, 1980), 61.
[84] See John Hick, *Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion* (Yale University Press, 1993), 139-145.
[85] John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 120-133.
[86] Ibid., 131.
[87] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation" in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity, Edited by Phillip Quinn and Kevin Meeker* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 54.

the divergent belief-systems.[88] When the situation is approached from the standpoint of rival truth-claims no possible coherent depiction and understanding can result.

It is more profitable, Hick proposes, to approach the fact of religious pluralism in terms of how the various religions claim to provide and/or are "effective contexts of salvation."[89] Instead of defining salvation in a narrow, exclusive sense in terms of one particular religious tradition, salvation is defined as a radical transformation of the human situation.[90] Salvation being primarily a Christian term and carrying Christian theological connotations, Hick moves to speaking of salvation/liberation to accommodate all the major religious traditions.[91] Salvation/Liberation takes different forms in different religions, but in any religious form, it denotes the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness.[92]

Emphasis on salvation/liberation is the result of the shift in focus of the major world religions in the "axial age" of the mid-first millennium BCE.[93] One of the core concepts in Hick's argument is the distinction between pre-axial and post-axial religions.[94] Pre-axial religions were primarily concerned with the "preservation of cosmic and social order."[95] The pre-axial religions are the earliest traditions of humanity, i.e., the ancient, pre-literate, often priestly and national religions. These religious traditions are not characterized by a separation between 'sacred' and 'secular' and eschatological theories are largely (though not entirely) absent. Pre-axial religions are characterized by maintaining the status quo. There was no looking to a brighter and better future in

---

[88] Ibid.
[89] Ibid., 55.
[90] Ibid.
[91] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent 2nd Edition* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005), 36.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Hick refers to the major world religions, especially Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, as the "great religions."
[94] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 22.
[95] Ibid.

this world or a world to come.[96] From around 800 BCE to around 200 BCE, there is a shift from

the pre-axial to the post-axial age, identified as the axial age. This period spread over centuries and

produced religious leaders who exercised tremendous insight into the human situation and influence

resulting in the major world religions of today, i.e. the post-axial religions.[97] Post-axial religions

are primarily focused on the quest for salvation/liberation.[98] The great religions view human

existence as fragmented, finite, and filled with suffering and evil. Humanity is in need of salvation

or liberation, as newly defined by Hick.

Hick asserts that the great post-axial traditions (including the Christian tradition) are

concerned with the eradication of self-centeredness toward a re-centering in *the Real*.[99] It does not

matter rather one speaks of salvation, liberation, enlightenment, or awakening, they all point to the

radical transformation and shift from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness. They all have their

actualization in the Real. Hick opts for the term "the Real" because, in the Christian framework,

God is viewed as that which is "ultimately real," and this term "corresponds to the Sanskrit *sat* and

the Arabic *al-Haqq* and has parallels in yet other languages."[100]

The assertions of the pluralistic hypothesis are grounded as much in the fact of the

"universality of religion" as in the plurality of religions. Ideas and practices that are recognizably

religious are ubiquitous. How should one interpret this fact? Hick believes if people interpret this

fact using a religious interpretation, as opposed to a naturalistic interpretation, then they will come

to some basic conclusions. [101] One will accept the finitude of human knowledge and conclude that

---

[96] Ibid., 28.
[97] Ibid., 29.
[98] It is inaccurate to think that the post-axial religions completely replace the ancient religions of the pre-axial age. Elements of the ancient religions persist both independently of the major world religions and within them. Placing pre-axial and post-axial religions in chronological order simply refers to time of origin, not replacement.
[99] John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 18. Emphasis added.
[100] Ibid.
[101] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation," 59. Emphasis added.

one can never know the Real in itself, only as it *appears* in the various human experiences, beliefs, and practices. Furthermore, we will identity the differing conceptions of divine reality in the belief-systems of the world's religions as different *manifestations* of the Real within historical conditions in diverse cultures. Each of the major religions makes a distinction between the Real in itself and the Real as it is expressed within the philosophical and theological structure of each specific tradition.[102] All the religions can be seen as "different receptivities," which "consist of conceptual schemas within which various personal, communal, and historical factors have produce yet further variations."[103] This is what Hick means by the Copernican revolution in theology.

Central to Hick's Copernican revolution is the assumption about the unknowability of divine reality and the inability of human language to name this reality in any definitive way. This assumption is based on the epistemological and metaphysical claims of Immanuel Kant. Kant posited there are only two ways of obtaining knowledge: 1) experience through the senses (a posteriori) and 2) reason, through the use of arguments (a priori). These means can only provide knowledge about the world of phenomena. Human knowledge, though genuine, is knowledge of things as they appear to us, not of reality as it is in itself (*Das Ding an sich*). Kant says, "As appearance, they cannot exist in themselves, but only in us," i.e., knowledge consists in our interpretation of the appearances.[104] One cannot achieve knowledge about the essence of things one experiences. Kant further asserts that God, the soul, and immortality reside beyond the world of phenomena, and therefore, outside of the realm of pure knowledge.[105] Although Kant felt he was securing a place for faith and religion, in actuality he created a problem of theology and religion. Religious knowledge cannot be completely accurate. For Hick, this meant that the revelations,

---

[102] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion*, 236.
[103] John Hick, "Religious Pluralism and Salvation," 59. Emphasis added.
[104] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason, Unabridged Edition, Trans. Norman Kemp Smith* (New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1973), 82.
[105] Ibid., 514-516.

beliefs, and ideas of any particular religious tradition represented only appearances of the inexhaustible divine reality.

Hick contends that exclusivists who deny the transformational parity of all the world's major religions are standing on unjustifiable and unrealistic epistemological grounds. He suggests they have no plausible alternative explanation, especially when the denial is predicated upon personal experience. Some critics reject this claim. While it may be true that an exclusivist cannot deny a parity among diverse religions from the basis of personal experience, she/he can deny it if it is incongruous with other beliefs within her/his religious tradition. [106] Hick's pluralistic hypothesis forces us to take heredity, geography, and our limited understanding of divinity seriously. While it does tease out the similarities among the religions, it fails, however, to take into account the vast and crucial differences of the world's religions.

S. Mark Heim stresses the difference of the world's religions over the similarities. Heim says that Hick's pluralistic hypothesis rests on two faulty assumptions, namely, that there is only one possible religious object (God), and that there is only one possible religious end. [107] The various pictures of "ultimates" within several religious traditions demonstrate the implausible claim of a single religious goal/fulfillment. Hick focuses on the *essential truth* within each religion (because each is created, guided by, and lead to the same God). Hick does acknowledge that there are genuine differences among religions, but he denies that these differences have any soteriological value. Heim sees the move toward a common essence as erroneously dismissing the intractable differences among the religions. These differences prevent any attempt at a reductionist theology of religious pluralism. A more plausible pluralistic hypothesis is one that considers "more than one

---

[106] David Basinger, *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2002), 64-68.

[107] S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1995), 23.

realizable religious aim."[108] This outlook explicates the existence of conflicting truth-claims and affirms the validity of the religions in a more concrete way than other pluralistic theologies.[109] It also deconstructs the Kantian scheme (or any other similar philosophical framework) that characterizes Hick' arguments.

Heim suggests that the reason it is difficult (and frankly, impossible) for theologians to explain how all the religions are the same despite the vast difference in their concepts, practices, and worldviews, is because the religions really are different. Each religion has a different goal.[110] Nirvana and ultimate union with God, for instance, are two different end-points that cannot be reconciled theologically. Heim provides a metaphysical basis to support his claim of multiple religious ends. Foremost is the premise that there must be at least one "noumenal" or religious reality.[111] This can be the Christian God, or Krishna of the Hindu tradition, or any other divine reality. It may also be, however, that there are various divine realities, each of which grounds the diverse religious ends.[112] The notion of multiple religious ends recognizes the truth of each religion in its own right, while acknowledging and maintaining their genuine differences.

Taken to its logical conclusion, Heim's position suggests a plurality of divinities. In a later text, *The Depth of Riches*, Heim situates his position more firmly in the Christian tradition, and more specifically in Trinitarian terms. The trinity provides the Christian framework for interpreting religious pluralism.[113] In maintaining the trinity as a doctrine, Christians are acknowledging that divine reality is pluralistic (or perhaps better stated the divine is both one and many). Using a trinitarian framework, we see that "the simple fact of difference does not automatically imply either

---

[108] Ibid., 130.
[109] Ibid.
[110] Ibid., 149, 215.
[111] Ibid., 146.
[112] Ibid. At this point, Heim says that it is not necessary to uphold either of these positions.
[113] S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 127.

a forced choice between truth and falsehood or a hierarchical division between higher and lower being."[114] Divine life has varied dimensions and is principally relational. There are different religious ends because there are differences in God.[115] Consequently, human relations with the divine (triune God) take various forms. From this Heim deduces that we cannot affirm the reality of the trinity, and at the same time deny the distinctive claims of other religions. In addition, he argues that one of the things that gives Christianity its universal quality is its recognition and allowance of "the fullest assimilation of permanently co-existing truths."[116]

What one gleans from Heim's position is the incontrovertible necessity of differences among and within the religions. Religious traditions do have similar characteristics, goals, ethics, and practices, but they are not identical. At the same time, Heim's argument still falls into a relativistic mode by relegating "truth" to all religious traditions. While one should be amenable to and respectful of the different truth-claims of the religions, one must also recognize that many of these truth-claims cannot co-exist as Heim hopes. The implications of God's impending Day of Judgment in both Christianity and Islam encompass the whole of humanity (and the Earth). This differs greatly from the Jain doctrine that the universe is infinite, operates according to its own inherent dictates and that there is no creator-god/ultimate being or Judgment Day.[117] One of these outlooks has to be right and the other wrong.

Paul Knitter proposes four models to categorize Christian theological attitudes towards other religions: the replacement model, the fulfillment model, the mutuality model, and the acceptance model.[118] Knitter's schema in *Introducing Theologies of Religions* is the most recent in a sequence of attempts to categorize and clarify the various, and contradictory, Christian theological responses

---

[114] Ibid., 128.
[115] Ibid., 168-177.
[116] Ibid., 167.
[117] Solomon A. Nigosian, *World Religions: A Historical Approach, Fourth Edition*, 212.
[118] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002).

to religious diversity. At first, he presented models that were rooted in specific Christian

confessional traditions: conservative Evangelical (views Christianity as the one true religion),

mainline Protestant (recognizes genuine revelation and divine presence in other religions, but not

salvation), and Roman Catholic (religions are genuine ways of salvation, but are fulfilled in and by

Jesus Christ as the norm).[119]

In addition to these confessional models, Knitter also presented a theocentric model (all

religions lead to one divine center), which he said reflected a more "liberal" approach to religious

pluralism.[120] Later, however, Knitter admits that his confessional models were "cumbersome" as it

is arduous to differentiate Christian attitudes along confessional lines. Knitter decided to "sacrifice

precision for clarity" and he acquiesces to Race's three-fold typology.[121] Knitter's most recent

models exhibit similarities to Race's typology. His first three models also relate with Race's three

paradigms, although Knitter has a more detailed stratification.

The replacement model (which touts one, true religion) is divided into two sections: total

replacement and partial replacement. The theological principle of "total replacement" is that non-

Christian religions lack any real spiritual value.[122] Real spirituality comes with a personal

experience of the saving power of Jesus Christ, and God's Spirit whom raised Jesus from the dead.

Only Jesus the Christ can provide a transformative spiritual experience because Jesus is the only

savior. Christianity, therefore, is the only true religion, and God wills that Christianity eventually

take the place of all other religions. It becomes the duty of the Christian community to spread the

message of God's love and redemption as reveled in Christ. The love of God is extended to all

---

[119] Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 73, 79-80, 98, 101, 126-128.
[120] Ibid, 145-165. Knitter favors this model at the time.
[121] Paul Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1995), 25.
[122] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 23.

humanity, "but that love is realized through the particular and singular community of Jesus Christ."[123]

At the heart of the total replacement model is not that Christianity is a superior religion. In fact, the focus of Christianity is not religion, but Jesus the Christ.[124] Jesus Christ is the one true way to God. Furthermore, if there is *one* God, then it makes sense that God would establish one clear-cut path to follow and understand divine reality. To simply accept the notion that there is no absolute truth, and essentially fall into a relativistic worldview, would be to "blindly accept" an axiom of postmodern society.[125] In the place of postmodern relativism, the replacement model maintains the universal and final implications of God's redemptive work in Jesus the Christ.

The partial replacement model recognizes and affirms that God reveals God's self in and through non-Christian religions.[126] Other faith communities, outside of Christianity, enjoy the presence of God within them. Behind this acceptance of revelation in other religions is the premise that "God's ability to speak cannot be limited to Christian circles."[127] Despite the recognition of genuine revelation in non-Christian religions, the partial replacement model does not acknowledge the possibility of salvation in religions other than Christianity. Like the total replacement model, the partial replacement maintains that salvation is only in and through Jesus the Christ.

The fulfillment model touts that non-Christian religions possess value and that divine presence and workings can be found within these traditions.[128] This suggests that Christians are

---

[123] Ibid., 19.
[124] Ibid., 26. Knitter explicates this point through the work of Karl Barth and his notion that religion is unbelief. Barth saw religion and humanity's feeble attempt to understand divine revelation and mystery. Barth insisted that revelation of divine reality comes solely from God in the person of Jesus Christ. Knitter suggests that evangelicals, pentecostals, and other conservative segments of Christianity share Barth basic stance on religion versus a personal encounter with Jesus Christ. For Barth's position on religions and Christianity, see *Church Dogmatics: Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1/part 2 2nd Edition* (T&T Publishers, 1956), 298-301.
[125] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 30.
[126] Ibid., 33.
[127] Ibid., 34.
[128] Ibid., 63.

called to dialogue with other religions, not only preach the Christian message of salvation through

Jesus Christ. At the same time, non-Christian religions are preparations for the gospel. These

religious traditions cannot provide complete salvation for humanity. They find their fulfillment,

"the fullness of salvation," in Jesus Christ and the Christian community.[129]

In contrast to the central focus given to the idea that Jesus Christ is the final and full

revelation of God in the fulfillment model (and to a greater extent in the replacement model), God's

universal love and presence in all religions is the focus of the mutuality model.[130] The core concern

of this model is genuine and fruitful dialogue between Christianity and other religions. The

mutuality model describes three bridges that have constituted the ways in which certain Christians

have tried to surmount the gulf[131] that exists between Christians and persons of differing faiths: the

philosophical-historical bridge, the religious-mystical bridge, and the ethical-practical bridge.[132]

The philosophical-historical bridge posits that all religions are historically (and geographically)

limited, and that it is philosophically feasible for a single divine reality to be the source of all

religions. The religious-mystical bridge says that the divine is greater than any one religious

tradition and present in all mystical experiences. The ethical-practical bridge argues that human

and environmental suffering are a common concern for all religions, thus all religions must work

together to elevate and eliminate this suffering. Overall, the mutuality model, like Race's pluralism

category, affirms that each religious tradition has salvific power in its own right.

The acceptance model develops as a result of the perceived shortcomings of the previous

models. At the heart of this model is the premise that the religions of the world are fundamentally

---

[129] Ibid., 78.
[130] Ibid., 109.
[131] "Crossing the Rubicon" is the preferred image of the proponents of the mutuality model.
[132] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, pp. 112-113. See also John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), ix-xii.

different.[133] One must recognize and accept the diversity of and among the worlds' religious

traditions. To gain a comprehensive grasp of the acceptance model one has to place it within the

context of postmodernity. Postmodernism rejects the centrality of any one tradition or system of

thought, as well as, any attempt to lump all religions under one common theme. Instead, diversity is

considered normative. In order for authentic dialogue to occur, one must realize that each religion is

self-definitive, and one must allow the distinctive nuances of each religion to be brought to the fore.

Besides Knitter's models, Race's typologies, and the categories of ecclesiocentrism,

christocentrism, and theocentrism, Dupuis offers two other possible models:

regnocentrism/soteriocentrism and logocentrism/ pneumatocentrism. Some scholars protest that the

theocentric paradigm incorporates a conception of divine reality analogous to monotheistic

religions, a conception that is not befitting other religious traditions, especially East Asian

religions.[134] The threefold typology established by Race has been influential for the past thirty

years. Nevertheless, there are some sharp criticisms of this schema. One of the most profound

critiques is that this way of thinking portrays a Western sensibility and approach to the diversity of

religions. Consequently, some theologians have moved toward regnocentrism.

Knitter, for instance, sees Jesus' focus as establishing *the Reign of God*.[135] Jesus was not

christocentric, ecclesiocentric, nor even theocentric; rather the God Jesus proclaimed cannot be

known independently of the Reign of God which is meant to be a "this worldly" reality with special

emphasis on those who suffer from injustice and oppression. Jesus' experience and revelation of a

historical God who calls us to an active love that seeks justice for the oppressed and who provides

us with hope that can overcome defeat and death (which moves us to being Kingdom-centered) is

---

[133] Ibid., 173.
[134] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 193.
[135] Paul Knitter, *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility* (Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1996), 89-92.

what makes him unique. This view of what makes Jesus unique is still a relational uniqueness because Jesus' way is one of many other ways of reveling this same reign of God.

By moving from a christocentric and ecclesiocentric model to a Kingdom-centered one, Knitter sets up the framework for a revision of church missions. When it comes to missions, Knitter again argues that our idea of missions must be based on the centrality of the Reign of God in the message and practice of Jesus. There must be a shift from church-centeredness to "regnocentrism."[136] The Christian church is one means for establishing the Kingdom of God. Making disciples of the church is solely for the purpose of realizing the Reign of God on earth.[137] This understanding must be accompanied with a pneumatology that depicts the Holy Spirit as not just the "Spirit of Jesus Christ," but also the Spirit who fills and renews the earth, and who works beyond the church.[138] With the reign of God as the primary objective of the churches' missions outreach, and with the well-being of all creatures as foremost concern, a new perspective of other religions is also needed. For Knitter this is that other religions are not only probable ways of salvation, rather in a Kingdom centered model they are equal ways or agents of the kingdom of God along with the Christian church.

Logocentrism/pneumatocentrism expands upon the Christocentric model. Attention is placed on the pervasive presence of the "Word of God" in the world and human history and/or on the unlimited, omnipresent Spirit of God.[139] In this model, the work of the *Logos* and the *Pneuma* are distinctive from the historical Christ-event. The *Logos* and the *Pneuma* are independent agents of divine salvation, which transcends contextual, historical, cultural, and most importantly, religious boundaries. One can infer this from the words of Jesus in the Gospel of John where he says, "the

---

[136] Ibid., 108.
[137] Ibid., 109.
[138] Ibid., 112-113.
[139] Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 81.

wind blows where it wishes and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it is going."[140] The Spirit of God is unlimited and untamed. The implication is that the Spirit and the Logos are not confined to any particular religious framework. Confinements are annihilated because divine power and presence are beyond the limitations of human/contextual religious traditions.

Each of the categories (exclusivism, inclusivism, pluralism), for example, seems primarily concern with the question of salvation and only from the Christian standpoint. Again, Song assists us by calling attention to the usual demarcation between creation and salvation in Western Christian theology that relegates redemption to the Christian church. Song maintains that a theology grounded in the Asian context rejects such a demarcation. The Christ and Spirit of creation is the same Christ and Sprit of redemption. I think this framework can also be classified as a kind of inclusivism as it still portrays the language and structure of Christianity, and, even if one speaks in the universal language of Logos and Pneuma, one is still speaking of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

Still, other theologians (particularly from the Asian continent) assert that the typological approach of theology of religions has been dominated by Western perspectives that are problematic.[141] Western categories yield no possible solutions because they are mutually exclusive-quite the opposite of an Eastern style, which revolves around a more congenial methodology. Asia is a religiously diverse continent. Interaction and participation in several religions is not uncommon. The standard Western categories betray a "mono-religio-cultural society,"[142] or more accurately, a society where the vast majority of peoples adhere to one specific religion. On a

---

[140] John 3:8. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3ʳᵈ Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).

[141] Aloysius Pieris, "An Asian Paradigm: Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions," in *The Month 26* (1993), 129-134.

[142] Kuncheria Pathil, *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective*, 340.

continent that is multi-racial, multiethnic, multi-cultural, and multireligious, the best approach is more one of dialogue than the traditional typologies.

Towards a Practical Theology of Religious Pluralism

A Brief History of the Development of Practical Theology

As an academic discipline, practical theology has its origins in the nineteenth century.[143] European universities underwent reorganization, and there were questions concerning the legitimacy, necessity, and place of theology (if any at all) in the university. Three things comprise the context for the development of practical theology: the Enlightenment, the modernization of society, and the continuing relevance of the social question.[144] Practical theology emerges within the background of the Enlightenment. One of the doctrines of the Enlightenment was that beliefs are to be accepted only on the basis of reason, not on ecclesiastical authority, scriptures, or tradition. Thus, the experience of the subject (along with rational, subjective deliberation) becomes central in the Enlightenment. Experience became a fundamental source for practical theology, and theology in general.

Friedrich Schleiermacher was one of the first theologians to recognize the value in the Enlightenment, and sought to establish a bridge between modern humanity and the Christian faith by centralizing the experience of the subject in religion (Christian theology).[145] Schleiermacher saw theology as a "positive science," by which he meant a body of scientific elements that are constitutive and requisite for solving practical problems.[146] He divided the study of theology into three fields: philosophical theology, historical theology, and practical theology. Philosophical

---

[143] Duncan Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology* (Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd., 2000), 33.
[144] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 11.
[145] Ibid., 19.
[146] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology Trans. by William Farrer* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007), 91.

theology articulates the "essential nature of Christianity" as a mode of faith, i.e., the fundamental principles and categories of Christian theology.[147] Historical theology examines the development of Christian doctrine and tradition from its inception to the present day.[148] Practical theology was the technical theory through which the scientific endeavors of philosophical and historical theologies are *applied* to the life of the church.[149] Practical theology was seen as the application of philosophical and historical theory to the practice of the leadership in the church.

Schleiermacher developed a theological curriculum that displayed his penchant for relation of thought and practice.[150] For him, theological method must engage history and the life of religious institutions. In the *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology*, Schleiermacher sought to reconcile the biblical and creedal teachings of Christianity with a "modern" Christian consciousness and culture.[151] He maintained that the content of dogmatic theology was empirical and human experienced religious reality must be explicated intellectually.

Schleiermacher's tripartite demarcation of theology derives from a time-honored idiom of the academic disciplines.[152] Ancient Greek thinkers distinguished ethics from physics.[153] Ethics was the speculative science of reason, creating the conceptual lenses for understanding and viewing the world. Physics was the speculative science of nature, assigned the task of understanding the world

---

[147] Ibid., 101. Philosophical theology also determined the manner in which theology as a whole is stratified and differentiated. It seems that philosophical theology constitutes Christian theology for Schleiermacher. He says, "If philosophical theology, as a discipline, were brought to a proper degree of *perfection*, it might form the *commencement* of the entire course of theological study." See *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology Trans. by William Farrer*, 102-103.

[148] Ibid., 101-102.

[149] Ibid., 187-188. Schleiermacher says practical theology is for those in whom a concern for the welfare of the church and the scientific spirit are combined.

[150] Richard Crouter, "Shaping An Academic Discipline: the Brief Outline on the Study of Theology" in *The Cambridge Companion to Fredrick Schleiermacher* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 111.

[151] Ibid., 112.

[152] Ibid., 113.

[153] For a more detailed analysis of the distinction and functions of these categories in *Brief Outline on the Study of Theology* see Walter E. Wyman, "The Historical Consciousness and the Study of Theology" in Barbara Wheeler and Edward Farley, eds. *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education* (Westminster: John Know Press, 1991), 91-119.

as it is in actual experience. From this, Schleiermacher distinguishes between a *critical* theoretical discipline and a *technical* theoretical discipline (what we can call an art).[154] Both relate contemplative to experiential knowing, but in different ways. Philosophical theology as a critical discipline, for example, provides the conceptual language and framework for understanding the world in the Christian tradition. Practical theology, as a technical discipline, exhibits the employment of these concepts in actual practice.

Through Schleiermacher came the birth of practical theology as a distinct academic discipline in the modern university. More than anything, his great contribution is his insistence on linking intellectual insights to specific, embodied contexts. One of the principal functions of practical theology is to affirm that *all theology is practical*. Christian theology cannot be detached from reality. Schleiermacher also taught us the importance of human experience as a source of theology. Though he characterizes practical theology primarily as *applied* theology, these other features of work are of continual import.

With the modernization of society came a shift toward the empirical, especially sociology.[155] Religion and metaphysics acquiesced to logic and empirical perception. A society developed in which knowledge was based on sense experience.[156] Practical theology also became adept in empirical research and analysis. In the nineteenth century, the church was perceived as one social organization among many. Sociology of religion reminds us that religious institutions are affected by other institutions in society and vice versa.[157] An empirical framework makes the church and its actions objects of analysis. Carl Immanuel Nitzsch was the first "empirical" practical

---

[154] Richard Crouter, "Shaping An Academic Discipline: the Brief Outline on the Study of Theology," 113.
[155] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, 38.
[156] Ibid.
[157] See Keith Roberts*, Religion in Sociological Perspective 4th Edition* (Wadsworth Publishing, 2003) and Kevin Christiano, William Swatos, Jr., and Peter Kivisto, *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2002).

theologian.[158] Nitzsch defined practical theology as the theory of the church's practice of Christianity.[159] This led to practical theology's turn to the social sciences as a primary conversation partner. Practical theology, therefore, is not a self-sufficient discipline. Its work is done in connection with other areas of theology and informing disciplines, e.g., social sciences. These other areas are essential because they examine every sphere of human existent, which is pertinent for practical theology. Hence, practical theology is in a "trialectical" relation to scripture-tradition and the findings of the specialized informing disciplines.

The relevance of the social question also contributes to the development and continuing significance of practical theology. For a time, theology was relegated to explication of the spiritual world, with little or no attention given to the material word (i.e., politics, economics, etc).[160] Karl Marx's critique of Christianity as perpetuating structures of oppression (particularly economic) provided a catalyst for a small number of theologians to address the social evils of the day.[161] *Praxis*, consequently, becomes a core of practical theology. Doing practical theology means discerning and articulating a concern or crisis that our world or community is facing. Then, attending carefully with our heads and hearts to the world as it is and to the world as our faith traditions teach us it should be, asking "what must we do?" in the light of our faith, doing it, and then evaluating what has been done. This is a pattern of reflection-action-reflection by members of a community of faith. Practical theologians guide the church into analyzing the causes of suffering in the world and engage in active alleviation of that suffering.

---

[158] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2005), 612.
[159] Ibid.
[160] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*, 51.
[161] See Cornel West, *Prophesy Deliverance: An African-American Revolutionary Christianity Anniversary Edition* (Westminster John Know Press, 2002), 95-130.

There are, then, three discernable orientations in the history of practical theology.[162] The first orientation has a pastoral focus.[163] Practical theology was thought to be primarily for the formation of clergy. It provided the rules, methods, and techniques for pastors. The second orientation has an ecclesial focus.[164] Nitzsch, for instance, describe practical theology as a general theology of the life of the church in his 1847 handbook.[165] Pastoral functions are no longer the focal point. Instead, attention is given to the life and mission of the entire church. Clerical functions are considered within the context of the community of believers with its functions of kerygma, liturgy, sacraments, church discipline, Christian life, and caritas. The third focuses on the relationship between church and society.[166] Practical theology is no longer confined to the boundaries of the church. It engages the systems and structures in society (the world). Theologians must examine the place and function of the church in the world, and then provide a theologically grounded framework for the actions the church should carry out in the world.

Several characterizations of practical theology exist among contemporary theologians. An early stimulus to this discussion came from Evelyn and James Whitehead. They constructed a method for bringing together the Christian tradition, personal experience, and culture resources to address the concerns of ministry.[167] David Tracy divided theology into three categories and indentified three publics to which each type of theology speaks: academy, church, and society. Fundamental theologies are related to the academy, systematic theologies correspond to the church,

---

[162] The term "orientations" indicates the fact that various practical theologians may adhere and promote different positions during the same time period as opposed to the word "phases" which can indicate that only one position dominates a distinct time period.

[163] Johannes Van Der Ven, *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach* (Belgium: Peeters Press, 1998), 35.

[164] Ibid., 36.

[165] Ibid.

[166] Ibid., 38.

[167] Evelyn Whitehead and James Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry Revised Edition* (Oxford: Sheed & Ward, 1995), ix. I am mainly referring to the 1980 edition of this publication. This book, no matter which edition, has had tremendous impact on formation for Christian ministry, practical theology, and Christian theological education. In the preface to the 1995 edition, the Whiteheads acknowledge the influence of Don Browning, Virgilio Elizondo, Bernard Lee, and others on their understanding of theological reflection which contributed to the expanded and revised edition.

and practical theologies correspond to society.[168] Fundamental theology is concerned with

justifying and adjudicating religious truth-claims in accordance with the established approach and

methods of academia. The focus of systematic theology is the reinterpretation of the Christian

tradition for each new situation. Practical theology uses praxis as the criterion of theological

discourse and insists that theoretical activity should be shaped by praxis and situation. John

Westerhoff maintains the standard distinction between fundamental, systematic and practical

theology, and then further stratifies practical theology under the rubrics of the liturgical, moral,

spiritual, pastoral, and catechetical.[169] Thomas Groome has built an impressive practical theology of

Christian education (though he does not use the term "practical theology"). He frames religious

education in terms of shared Christian praxis, engaging a person's entire being in the context of

group dialogue.[170] Don Browning, Thomas Ogletree, David Tracy, Dennis McCann, and James

Fowler, among others, created a groundswell with the publication of *Practical Theology: The*

Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World.[171] This anthology contains groundbreaking

articles on the subject, including attempts at redefining practical theology and demonstrating its

significance as a theological discipline.

There is a debate as to whether pastoral theology and practical theology are synonymous or

distinct disciplines.[172] Different parts of the world place different emphasis on distinctions and

definitions- if a distinction is made at all.[173] In reference to terminology, pastoral theology predates

---

[168] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1981), 56-57.
[169] See John Westerhoff, *Building God's People in a Materialistic Society* (Seabury Press, 1983).
[170] Thomas Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision, Reprint* (Jossey-Bass, Inc, 1999), 184-207.
[171] Don S. Browning, ed., *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publisher, 1983).
[172] Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, Eds., *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2000), 1.
[173] In Britain, for instance, the distinction between pastoral and practical theology is far less rigid than say in the United States.

practical theology.[174] Christians have always been concerned with the pastoral functions and the

guidance, teaching and overall care pastors provide for the faith community. Pastoral theology can

generally be characterized as theological reflection and grounding of pastoral care directed towards

the well-being of Christian congregations. Practical theology, on the other hand, has traditionally be

characterized as more academic, interested in constructing theoretical theological and ethical

frameworks for approaching issues of praxis, within and outside the Christian churches, and

Christian life.[175]

I have opted to place the present work under the rubric of practical theology. Practical

theology allows for a broader approach to theological praxis that is not restricted to the ministerial

functions of churches and pastoral duties. Practical theology is the theological guide by which the

Christian community engages the world and determines the practices of Christian life in light of

social, historical, and cultural conditions. I see pastoral theology as a subfield under practical

theology. The duties of the pastor and the ministries of congregations and parishioners fall within

the purview of Christian life as well. It is when one seeks to explore these practices in relation to

life outside church ministries specifically, that one has to move beyond pastoral theology.

Moreover, I wish to advocate for a *fundamental* practical theology, i.e., that all theology is

fundamentally practical. In this paradigm (fundamental practical theology), all areas of theology,

including church history and biblical studies, fall under the rubric of practical theology. Some

practical theologians have already paved the way for such a claim.

The theology of Paul Tillich is a critical methodological starting point for contemporary

practical theology. Under the influence of existentialist philosophy and the thought of Martin

Heidegger, Tillich took the human condition (contemporary situation) as the point-of-departure of

---

[174] See William Clebsch and Charles Jaekle, *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective, 2nd Edition* (New York, NY: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1983).

[175] Stephen Pattison and James Woodward, Eds. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 3.

his theology. What one sees in Tillich is an honest attempt to make the Christian message relevant to modern society. Practical theology is a critical and transforming conversation between the Christian tradition and contemporary experience. Tillich's method of correlation personifies the fundamental approach of practical theology. The method of correlation discerned the questions from human existence and provided a theological response from the Christian message.

As such, theology is a function that serves the needs of the church. It is supposed to present the "truths" of the Christian faith, as well as, show how these truths are relevant for each era in human history.[176] Practical theology is the critical-reflective process by which the church and the truth of the Christian faith is transformed, becoming relevant to society. Practical theology also has a non-theological side, i.e., it must be in conversation with the social sciences. Tillich says the theologian must utilize current knowledge from the psychological and sociological arena, and have an understanding of the current socio-political and cultural situation of humanity.[177] Practical theology, therefore, becomes a bridge between the Christian message and the human situation. Although Tillich viewed practical theology in the same way as Schleiermacher- as the technical theory through which [historical and systematic theology] are *applied* to the life of the church- he does provide a framework for contemporary and future practical theologians.[178]

David Tracy expands the method of correlation and makes it a more viable approach for practical theology. He argues for a "revisionist" model for doing theology. This model prompts a critical reflection and reinterpretation of authentic Christianity and authentic secular thought within a post-modern framework. The revisionist model holds that "a contemporary fundamental Christian theology can best be described as philosophical reflection upon the meanings present in common

---

[176] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology vol. 1* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1.
[177] Ibid., 33.
[178] Ibid., 32, emphasis added.

human experience and language, and upon the meanings present in the Christian Fact."[179] Tracy

sought to develop a model for theological engagement most appropriate for a pluralistically

theological and cultural context. This model is adequate for our contemporary situation because it

seeks to correlate "revised" secular thought with "revised" Christian fact and investigates the

human situation and identifies revised Christian symbols to address the situation. Tracy's method is

called the mutually critical-correlation method. Whereas Tillich's method of correlation only

identified questions from human existence and provided the necessary religious symbols for

answers, Tracy allows the culture to interact and affect (critique and revise) Christian theology.

Don Browning goes even further than Tracy and redefines Christian theology as essentially

practical.[180] Theology is "critical reflection on the church's dialogue with Christian sources and

other communities of experience and interpretation with the aim of guiding its action toward social

and individual transformation."[181] Contrary to the "theory to praxis model," which begins with

theoretical concepts and seeks to apply those concepts to life situations, Browning proposes a

"present theory-laden practice to a retrieval of normative theory-laden practice to the creation of

more critically held theory-laden practices."[182] All theological norms, even scripture, were

developed in reflection of practices and actions in which the church was already involved. Our

experiences and actions give rise to our reflections and subsequent theories. Therefore, theory does

not precede practice. Rather, practices produce theories. Browning is proposing a fundamental

practical theology.

This present work is an exercise in fundamental practical theology. I see all Christian

theology as fundamentally practical in that its subject matter is the life and actions (praxis) of the

---

[179] David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 43.
[180]Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 7.
[181] Ibid., 16.
[182] Ibid., 7.

church as it engages the world. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is a practical theological concern because it is a way of life. I also see religious practices as a means for interreligious engagement. A person's experiences shape and affect that person's understanding of God and world. One derives beliefs about God and persons of other faith traditions less from propositional-conceptual thinking, and more from encounters with God and persons of other faith traditions. Practical theology reminds Christians of this fact, and in using interfaith encounters and experiences as a point-of-departure for theology of religious pluralism, it expressly affirms that people's experiences influence/shape our theological beliefs as much as thier theological beliefs influence/shape thier practices. The most adequate theology of religious pluralism flows from and is grounded in practice, and the practical concerns of everyday life. If a Christian theology of religions articulates how Christians are to live with persons of differing faith traditions, then the best theological framing of such a task is a practical theological framing.

Groundwork for A Practical Theology of Religious Pluralism

The literature of theology of religions shows signs and provides seeds for a practical theology of religious pluralism. Theologians have explored the affects of religious pluralism on religious communities, politics, and cultures. From this background, one can glean some basic principles. Foremost is the fact of religious diversity in our societies. Religions do not exist in isolation from one another (nor have they ever). Religious diversity not only generates a *clash of difference*, but also the presentation of a variety of options for religious and spiritual fulfillment. Diversity begs the question of a proper theological response to the differing religions. Another fundamental principle constitutive to a practical theology of religious pluralism is the recognition of divine presence and purpose in all the various religious tradition. Although various theological

44

typologies and premises were offered as a proper Christian attitude and response to the plurality of religions, interreligious/interfaith dialogue emerges as an essential response of theologians and scholars. As I shall attempt to show, dialogue is both the proper theological response, as well as, a practice Christians are called, indeed compelled to engage in. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is also a way of life and the encounter of the world's religions is a practical concern that has bearing on peoples' daily lives.

Previous theologies of religions have touched on the practical implications, but now we must delve deeper into these implications. Building on the foundations already discussed, it is now time to shift focus to the connection between a proper Christian attitude and the proper Christian practices and ministerial responses to religious pluralism. Practical theology shows how one can proceed in interfaith dialogue. How else, for example, will Christians realize dialogue as a "Christian" practice if not through Christian education? Practical theology is the place where theology and multiple disciplines meet, where "practice" is examined, and where theological ethics and context feed each other. Above all, practical theology is where we discern the acts of God, through the Holy Spirit, *in the world*- not just the Christian faith community.

Already one can identify the move toward a practical theology of religious pluralism. In many ways, the history of religions was a precursor. Joachim Wach, for example, emphasized three aspects of religion: the theoretical ideas, symbols, and images of a religion, the practical (or behavioral), and the institutional (or social).[183] Wach also had interests in the study of religious experience. Consequently, he became interested in the sociology of religion, attempting to indicate how religious values shaped the institutions that expressed them. Thus, his focus was on the practical aspects of religion. In fact, he defined religion, not in terms of creeds or statements of faith, but rather "the thing a [person] does practically believe…that is in all cases the primary thing

---

[183] Wendy Doniger, *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions*, 919.

for him, and creatively determines all the rest."[184] Practical theology is concerned with the essential interrelation of Wach's three elements. For a fundamental practical theology, there is no separation of theory and praxis in the traditional sense.

Practical theology expands the foundations given by the history of religions by not only seeking to understand and compare the functionality of religions, but also using religious practices as a context for interreligious interaction. While Troeltsch, Wach, and others promoted mutual understanding, and the equality of the world's religions, practical theology is concerned with interreligious dialogue as liberation praxis, collaboration to confront the pressing needs of contemporary societies, and (as expressed in this dissertation) the building of relationships beyond the ramifications of *only* academic study and understanding.

One also sees the move towards a practical theology of religious pluralism in contextual theology. Contextual theology can fall under practical theology. Christians are clearly to engage in actions to bring about justice and mercy, and the Christian message can quickly become irrelevant to today's world if context is not taken seriously.[185] A key characteristic of practical theology is the consideration of social, economic, political, and cultural contexts as constitutive of theological work.[186] Contextual thinking occurs with involvement in real life situations, and   practical theology is a process of generating knowledge by drawing from human experience. It is the reflection of faith in light of contemporary situations, lived experiences, and ecclesial action. On the one hand, it is how people's beliefs speak to thier situations. On the other, it is how beliefs are shaped and interpreted by our social, historical, and cultural conditions.

Contextual theology reminds us every universal claim is made based upon one's contextual situation and personal observation of human existence. This has serious implications when it comes

---

[184] Joachim Wach, *Sociology of Religion* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1944), 383.
[185] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers Inc., 1951), 104.
[186] Terry Veiling, *Practical Theology: On Earth As It Is In Heaven* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 161.

to theology and religion. There are both internal factors (within Christian theology itself) and external factors (outside influences on Christian theology) as to why theology is contextual.[187] The first set of factors has to do with theological shifts within Christianity itself, especially a reconsideration of the nature of incarnation. Incarnation is now viewed as the process of becoming particular, and in and through the particular the divine has become visible, and in some way, but not fully, understandable and logical. The second set of factors includes historical events, intellectual currents, cultural shifts, and political forces. There is a general dissatisfaction with classical approaches to theology in today's world because many theological positions do not relate well with many aspects of nonwestern cultures. Contextual theology also reminds us of the limitation of our knowledge, perspectives, and language in articulating the divine reality.

The limitations of human knowledge of the divine suggest that persons are to look outside of their own context to other contexts to gain deeper understanding of divine reality. Exploration into the differing religious practices is an appropriate context for gaining a comprehensive understanding of the divine reality. Interreligious engagement is an inter-contextual occurrence, particularly when one places it within the setting of daily life. One then has to comprehend how interfaith dialogue affects Christian life and practices, as well as, develop as conception of interfaith dialogue as a Christian practice itself. A task practical theology is properly equipped to handle.

Our Boundary Situation

Practical theology is characterized by the notion of the *boundary*.[188] On the one hand, boundary speaks of the dividing line between separate areas. It acts as a form of protection from

---

[187] Stephen Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition* (Maryknoll, NY.: Orbis Books, 2002), 9-15.
[188] "Boundary/Boundaries" will be used in two ways in this dissertation. The first will be explored here as it pertains to practical theology and the location of Christian theology. The second will be explored in chapter three in relation to a theology of friendship.

that which is foreign or strange.[189] On the other hand, boundary speaks of opportunity, exploration, and discovery. It is the endless possibilities every human being has in life that comes with each new life and/or situation.[190] At birth, people possess the capacity of acting, i.e., beginning something new. Boundary is the place of possibility because one crosses over into unknown territory.

 M.P.J. van Knippenberg approaches practical theology from the perspective of the boundary. Following Tillich (who Knippenberg considers the premier theologian who has made the boundary the subject of theology), Knippenberg suggests that theology operates on the boundary between the Christian message and the changing situation.[191] For practical theology, the boundary more specifically lies between the Christian message and praxis. To engage in boundary experiences is to encounter "otherness," as one seeks to express and live out Christian faith in (ever-changing) contemporary situations.

Overall, theology operates between the message and practices of the Christian faith and contemporary social realities. This makes the boundary a primary, if not the most fundamental, location for Christian theology. Practical theology is most sensitive of this location, as its function was originally to adapt theological insights to new and changing practical situations.[192] Thus, the methodology of practical theology was formed in light of the boundaries Christian faith encounters. Practical theology is the theological opening into Christian practice, and it uses peoples' religious actions within (as influenced by) contemporary situations as a fruitful source for theology.[193] It attempts to create a critical dialogue between theological norms and contemporary experience, i.e.,

---

[189] Bert Roebben and Leo Van der Tuin. *Practical Theology and the Interpretation of Crossing Boundaries: Essays in Honor of Professor M.P.J. van Knippenberg* (Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003), 11.

[190] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition, 2nd Edition, Introduction by Margaret Canovan* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 9.

[191] M.P.J. van Knippenberg, "Boundaries: Fields of Activity for Pastoral Theologians," Inaugural Lecture given at Tilburg University, 1989. Knippenberg has said that Tillich's preoccupation with the boundary as the place of theology has earned him the status of "a guest of honor in the field of pastoral theology."

[192] Stephan Gartner, "Pastoral Care and Boundaries" in Bert Roebben and Leo Van der Tuin, *Practical Theology and the Interpretation of Crossing Boundaries*, 120-121.

[193] Ibid., 120.

to allow contextual experience to shape theological reflection and beliefs. Practical theology mediates between the opposites sides of the boundary and "critically guide the real translation of these opposites into religious acts."[194]

Each new context (changing situation) brings new challenges for Christian faith and theology. The question of how one should live and practice her/his faith in light of this context is a recurring theme. The boundary experience of our time is the reality of religious pluralism. Increasingly, Christians, predominantly in Western society, interact with people of differing faith traditions on a daily basis. In many major U.S. cities and rural areas, for instance, mosques, Hindu and Buddhist temples and monasteries, and Sikh gurdwaras are now present.[195] What Christians find is that the people of different religious beliefs that they work with, have lunch with, and interact with on a daily basis display signs of God's presence and work through them. These lived experiences are essential sources of Christian faith practices and theology. In these experiences of God's presence in persons of other religions, Christians experience other important factors of the boundary. They experience the limitations of their knowledge of God, and the awesomeness of the divine reality, which cannot be confined to any particular set of religious doctrines and traditions. Christians must, therefore, lunge into the boundary, and seek to understand how they are to live and act, as Christians, in a society with persons of differing faiths. The most effective means of this understanding is interfaith dialogue. A practical theology of religious pluralism brings the realization that interfaith dialogue is itself a perpetual Christian practice.

---

[194] Ibid., 121.
[195] Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 1.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue & Christian Identity and Formation

The claim that interreligious/interfaith dialogue is a perpetual Christian practice raises issues of Christian religious education and the affects of learning and teaching other religions on Christian formation and identity. A fundamental task of Christian education is answering the question of the nature of Christianity.[196] What it means to be Christian can only be determined by the convictions and practices of Christianity, and how they are transmitted from one generation to the next. James Fowler sees "the goal of all Christian education, the purpose of formation in the community of Christian faith, as- by the grace and power of God's lively presence in the Holy Spirit- to form men and women through whom God can afford to make [God's] appeal in the world."[197] Education as the "formation and transformation of persons" is a focal point of practical theology.[198] Fowler's work in faith development provides an excellent foundation for interreligious dialogue as beneficial for Christian (and more importantly human) formation. He has built an extensive body of research on faith development, which identifies and classifies a person's attitude towards different ideologies and beliefs in relation to their own religious identity/formation.[199] These stages can be seen in terms of an expanding capacity to love. They include: 1) intuitive-projective faith, 2) mythic-literal faith, 3) synthetic-conventional faith, 4) individuative-reflective faith, 5) conjunctive faith, and 6) universalizing faith. Stages five and six are most relevant.[200] The fifth stage, conjunctive faith, includes an element of *paradoxical thinking or dialectical knowing*, the stage where people love

---

[196] Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, and Colin Crowder, *Theological Perspectives on Christian Formation: A Reader on Theology and Christian Education* (Grand Rapids, MI: W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), xii.

[197] James W. Fowler, "Practical Theology and the Shaping of Christian Lives" in *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*, ed. by Don S. Browning (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publisher, 1983), 148.

[198] Ibid., 155.

[199] James Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development* (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1981). Fowler builds on the work of Jean Piaget, Erik Erickson, and Lawrence Kohlberg.

[200] Ibid., 122-211.

those who think differently.[201] Stage six is the *universalized* stage, when people possess unconditional love for all.[202]

Fowler's stages acknowledge two principles that are beneficial to theology and church ministry. First, religious formation is a process. Growth and development takes place over the sum total of a person's life. Christian education, for instance, is not only learning facts and beliefs, but also learning to make those beliefs a part of our being in the world. Second, Christian faith directs Christians towards stage six. Unconditional love is the grand Christian ideal. God displays the same love in Jesus as the Christ for creation. This universalized, unconditional love creates the openness necessary for interfaith dialogue.

Fowler also argues that there should be a *sacred space* in theology. This is where God speaks to the theologian and the community of believers. What is God saying to us about the diversity of religions? How should Christians live in relation to persons of other faiths, and how should theological formation approach this issue? Some religious education theorist like John Hull have argued that *religious education*, in contrast to *religious nurture* of a particular religious community, necessarily entails an encounter with religious diversity.[203] Moreover, he argues that religious education entails being exposed to various outside perspectives, i.e., the perspectives of philosophy, the social sciences, and other religious communities. The question is whether this is the approach congregations and other groups of Christian religious education should adopt.[204] How does exposure to religious pluralism benefit Christian formation and identity? What are the guidelines for such an undertaking?

---

[201] Ibid., 185.
[202] Ibid., 199-201.
[203] See John Hull, *Studies in Religion and Education* (London: Falmer Press Ltd, 1984).
[204] Richard Osmer and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Religious Education Between Modernization and Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 12.

There are three potential approaches to Christian religious education/formation and pluralism. The first is the catechetical approach, which is referred to as "education in religion or education in faith."[205] This is the introduction of students to one exclusive religious tradition in order to strengthen their religious identity in that tradition. Secularization undermines this approach as societies have moved toward non-religious views and the rejection of one religion as the possessor of absolute truth. This corresponds with the pluralization of society, the influx of different religions in traditionally Christian societies. As a result, some have advocated "education about religion," i.e., an objective approach to the study of religions.[206] Some, however, argue that an "objective" presentation of religions is impossible because all knowledge is permeated by prejudices and presuppositions.[207] Therefore, neither the catechetical nor the objective approach is adequate for religious education and religious diversity. The process of pluralization leads to the necessity of multireligious, and more importantly, interreligious education.[208] Interreligious education is inherently aimed at "dialogical competence" vis-à-vis the diversity of religions and worldviews.[209]

Religious identity formation is, as a consequence, inherently interreligious. Persons become who they are because of their heredity, environment, and experiences of the world. They interpret life and religion in light of the diversity of religions and their understanding of the transcendent (with regards to the existence of multiple religions). Since our environments include persons of

---

[205] Paul Vermeer, "Learning Religion in a Plural Society", in Herman Lombaerts and Didier Pollefeyt, eds., *Hermeneutics and Religious Education* (Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004), 154.

[206] Ibid., 155.

[207] Ibid. Vermeer cites Karl Popper as demonstrating that all knowledge is theory-dependent and thus always remains conjectural. See Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Revised Edition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 71-73. One can also look at the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer. In *Truth and Method* he attacks the "objectivity" of historical objectivist reasoning, positing that prejudices are present in all understanding. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method, Second Edition Translation Revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 300-302.

[208] Paul Vermeer, "Learning Religion in a Plural Society," 157.

[209] Ibid.

differing faith traditions, they become essential elements of our life stories and religious identities. This process is a natural occurrence through which people develop feelings and opinions about other religious traditions. Some opinions are positive and some are negative. Whatever the case may be, one cannot deny the place of religious diversity in Christian education and identity formation.

Christian identity and formation has always been in relation with other religious traditions. One can affirm this if for no other reason than the early Christian community's struggle to differentiate between first century Judaism and Christian beliefs and practices. As a religion, the Christian tradition has its origin in first century Judaism.[210] The most important historical-contextual frame of reference we need to retain that shapes our Christian identity is that Jesus Christ was Jewish. This is simplistic, yet essential. Jesus lived his life as a Middle Eastern Jewish male in the first century; he never used a telephone or spoke English, almost certainly grew a beard, and died in his early thirties.[211] "Jesus and the Apostles spoke Aramaic… as the New Testament writings show, they were firmly rooted in the Old Testament and lived in its world images."[212] To divorce Jesus heritage and identity from Christian self-understanding will always produce a distorted and partial view of what it means to be Christian. Christianity was conceived and born on Jewish soil, within a Jewish context. First century Christianity sought to define its own nature vis-à-vis the Jewish tradition in which it was born.[213] It adapted the concepts and themes of the Judaism of the day for its own purposes- especially the Judaic understanding/image of God.

---

[210] Christian history is replete with supersessionist ideas of Christianity replacing Judaism and/or the complete denial of a Jewish heritage altogether. Some Christian theologians have inaugurated a shift toward not only recovering and honoring the Judaic heritage of Christianity, but also exposing and confronting the Anti-Judaism that has plagued Christian thought since its inception. For example, see Clark Williamson, *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999).

[211] William Placher, *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 33.

[212] Thorlief Boman, *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960), 17.

[213] Justo Gonzalez, *Church History: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996), 11.

A Jewish heritage demonstrates the possibility of Christian formation stemming from another religious tradition. Christians continued to develop their understanding and practice of faith in light of other religions.[214] Besides the fact Christians have adopted spiritual practices from differing religions (e.g., meditation, yoga) and ethical principles (e.g., *ahimsa*, the vow of noninjury made famous by Gandhi), Christians encounter persons of different faiths who they learn from everyday. These encounters certainly contribute to their formation as Christians. The aims of practical theology, via religious education, include both teaching people to understand their religion, as well as, how to live a religious way of life.[215] One begins with learning the basics of one's own religion, but eventually one needs comparative engagement with other religions to gain a deeper understanding of one's own religion.[216] A practical theology of religious pluralism is grounded in the principle that reality is fundamentally relational. Human "being" and identity develops as persons interact and dialogue with other people. In the same manner, our religious identity is forged as we dialogue with persons of other religious traditions, as well as, engage in study of other religious traditions.

Christians can learn from, dialogue with, understand, and teach other religious traditions *only* when we have been, and continue to be, diligent in understanding what it means to be Christian. Simultaneously, one should seek understanding of other religious traditions. This is possible only if Christians perceive interreligious/interfaith dialogue as a vital practice of the Christian community. Given that religious diversity is a fact of human existence, interaction and fostering relationships is indispensable to Christian reality and identity. Christian practice of

---

[214] This is not to say that Christians were/are always accepting and open to other religions. There has always been an exclusivist strand in Christian thought. However, even the total rejection of other religions as false or misguided shows how Christian identity and formation are shaped in light other religions.

[215] Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 35-41.

[216] Ibid., 37.

interfaith dialogue is an expression of Christianity as a way of being in the world. As ambassadors of God's love and care for all creation through Christ, Christians must display the grace of God in us by embracing those of differing faiths.[217] In a sense, it is a matter of one's inner life (a person's fundamental beliefs and values) and outer life (the way one lives and acts in the world) being consistent. There should not be a "disconnection" between a person's faith-life and every other sphere of life in which a person operates, including lives in religiously pluralistic societies. The ambivalence of some Christians studying or listening to other faith traditions is the fear of apostasy, an abandoning Christian faith for another religion (or worse, atheism/agnosticism by way of relativism). We do not have to cease to be Christian in order to recognize, appreciate, and explore God's presence in other religions. Indeed, the seeking and recognizing God's presence and actions in other religions is a practice of Christians, and an important means of experiencing and comprehending divine reality.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue and Spirituality

Focus on religious, interreligious practices, and the presence of the Divine Spirit in interreligious encounters moves us into the realm of spirituality. A variety of spiritualities has emerged with respect to different religious traditions. These spiritualities take shape in rituals and practices. Christian spirituality refers to the Christian life, or the life one should lead because she/he is Christian. In Christian terms, spirituality is "the way our fundamental values, lifestyles, and spiritual practices reflect particular understandings of God, human identity, and the material world as the context for human transformation."[218] All Christian spirituality is rooted in the scriptures of the Judeo-Christian tradition; yet spirituality seeks to interpret (and reinterpret) the scriptures in

---

[217] 2 Corinthians 5:20. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).

[218] Phillip Sheldrake, *A Brief History of Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 2.

light of and for contemporary and cultural conditions.[219] Spirituality indicates the work of the Holy Spirit in human experience. It also denotes the multiple rituals and practices that seek to enhance the awareness of divine reality and presence.

In spirituality we see the integration of Christian beliefs and practices. Theology and spirituality do not exist "apart from concrete historical life."[220] A practical theology of religious pluralism can also be considered a Christian spirituality of religious pluralism in that it asks how the Christian life should be lived in relation to persons of other faiths, and how relationships with persons of different faiths can reveal divine reality and purpose.[221] Popular culture has created a distinction between the terms "religion/religious" and "spirituality." People who wish to shun a tradition-based approach to God, faith or mysticism prefer the term spirituality.[222] Though I do not endorse the strict differentiation of popular culture,[223] there is a distinction between religion and spirituality. Religion tends to be equivalent with specific belief systems and traditions. Spirituality crosses cultural and religious boundaries by focusing on religious practices that inspire the motivation of actions.[224]

In interfaith dialogue, there is the intertwining of belief/theory and practice/praxis in a concrete way. Christians act to shape the world in a way that reflects the reign of God. If the core of Christian belief is love for God and neighbor, for example, then this belief must be borne out in our

---

[219] Ibid.

[220] Mark McIntosh, *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 5.

[221] Michael Barnes, "Theology of Religions" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005), 407.

[222] Richard King, "Mysticism and Spirituality" in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of Religion* (New York, NY: Routledge Publishers, 2005), 306.

[223] I understand the movement away from "organized religions" toward a broader embrace of divine reality. This is really a rejection of conventional interpretations of religious beliefs espoused by church officials who often resist contemporary culture. I think the distinction of popular culture fails to realize that spirituality can also be tradition-specific, and/or spiritual reform can happen from within organized religion and one need not necessarily completely jettison all traditional belief systems.

[224] Michael Barnes, "Theology of Religions," 411.

encounters and relations with persons who are adherents of different religions. An interaction

between Christians and persons of other faith traditions is an orientation in beliefs and practices.

<u>"Practice" in a Practical Theology of Religious Pluralism</u>

A practical theology of religious pluralism seeks to provide the framework of interfaith

dialogue as a Christian practice. Christian practices are also integral to Christian identity and

formation. What does practice mean? Any exploration into practical theology requires clarification

of the concept "practice."[225] There are several characterizations of practice(s). In a broad sense, a

practice is a way or method of doing something on a consistent basis. *Practices* are a set of pattern

activities adhered to by a group of people. In a more narrow sense, practice is doing something

repeatedly or continuously in an effort to perfect one's art or craft. Another depiction of practice is

a pattern of repetitious behavior. Drawing on the social sciences, some scholars see practice as just

about any socially meaningful action ranging from keeping records to family meals.[226] Other

theologians equate Christian practices with the spiritual exercises and disciplines that help people

become more attuned to divine reality.[227] An often-quoted definition of practice is that of Alasdair

McIntyre,

> By a 'practice'… I mean any coherent and complex form of socially
>
> established cooperative human activity through which goods internal to
>
> that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve
>
> those standards of excellence which are appropriate to, and partially
>
> definitive of, that form of activity, with the result that human powers to

---

[225] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976), 435.

[226] See Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997) and Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice Trans by Richard Nice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977).

[227] See Margaret Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

achieve excellence, and human conceptions of the ends and good

involved are systematically extended.[228]

McIntyre's definition of practice has indeed influenced practical theologians, but several

divergences and critiques must be borne in mind. Most notably is that theologians see "practice" in

a theological sense, i.e., the responsive character of Christian practice in relation to God.[229]

McIntyre's depiction is devoid of instances or possibility of divine interaction or cooperative

grace.[230]

Practice(s) can also be defined as "a cluster of ideas and activities that are related to specific

social goals and shared by a social group over time."[231] Some theologians have chosen to place this

definition of practice within a Christian theological context.[232] Thus, Christian practices are the

cluster of cooperative ideas and activities of the Christian faith community, which has taken shape

over time, in response to and with regards to our covenant with and knowledge of God as revealed

through the person of Jesus Christ.

The most essential characterization of practice for our present purposes is practice as

habitus. Habitus speaks of a way of life as formed by the beliefs and actions of a faith community.

Habitus is a disposition of the mind and heart from which actions flow naturally, i.e., practices are

not necessarily intentional, but happen in an unselfconscious way.[233] At this level, beliefs are

expressed in daily life activities and creates a person's or a group's identity. My goal is to establish

interreligious/interfaith dialogue as a perpetual Christian practice. Exploration of other religions is

no longer a threat to Christian faith and witness, but indeed a part of what it means to be Christian,

---

[228] Alasdair McIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981), 175.
[229] Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 21 n. 8.
[230] Sarah Coakley, "Deepening Practices: Perspectives from Ascetical and Mystical Theology" in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, 80.
[231] Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*, 2-3.
[232] Ibid., 3.
[233] Duncan Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology*, 5.

engaging in responsible actions, bearing witness to the love of God and Christ within and without the Christian faith community.

Practical theologians often speak of praxis. Usually practical theology is distinguished from other branches of theology because of emphasis on praxis. Whenever someone speaks of change, transformation, or bringing about the reign of God under the rubric of practical theology, he/she is speaking of praxis. There is an important distinction between "praxis" and "practice." Praxis is action or activity, and it usually refers to transformative practice.[234] It is the intentional and/or meditative actions with the aim of changing a situation. In practical theology, praxis can also refer to the context within which actions take place, i.e., the dynamic context where people interact.[235]

There are two major traditions/ frameworks of praxis of which major theologians have been influenced: the classic tradition and the Hegelian-Marxist tradition. The classic tradition is rooted in Aristotle who "links praxis (action) to theoria (activity of the mind)."[236] For Aristotle "praxis" is creative and self-creative activity. In the Hegelian-Marxist tradition, praxis refers to the actions in response to perceived structural injustices. Aristotle excavates praxis and its relation to thought, and categorizes praxis as a sub-division of practical judgment. For him, the moral life consists in the realization of the ends potential in one's nature.[237] A person accomplishes the end/goal/aim by discerning right actions in every instance of life. Practical judgment is necessary for a person to discern the right actions (praxis) to achieve the right end (telos).[238] The essence of practical judgments is choice and action, and thus there is a fundamental interconnection of intellect, choice,

---

[234] Ibid., 7.

[235] Gerben Heitink, *Practical Theology*, 8.

[236] Terrence Tilley, *Inventing Catholic Tradition* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000), 62.

[237] J. Phillip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 19. Alasdair McIntyre's view of practice is grounded in Aristotelian thought. This is why an integral characteristic of McIntyre's definition is practice as a human activity through which *goods internal to that form of activity* are realized.

[238] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Translation, Glossary, & Introductory Essay by Joe Sachs* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing R. Pullins Company, 2002), 116.

and action.[239] Marx's conception of praxis includes an emphasis on the importance of practical-critical activity, critique of modern capitalism, and critique of ideologies (i.e., false, oppressive beliefs held by those under oppression that consequently perpetuates their oppression). Praxis enters, for Marx, not only when we criticize ideology, but also when we take steps to effect change in society. As he says, "the philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."[240]

Interreligious/ interfaith dialogue, then, is not only a practice but also praxis in the sense that we seek to deter violence, promote peace, and encourage cooperation among the world's religions to confront the evils in the world we all face as human beings. Christian practices must not simply be pragmatic or therapeutic. They should be informed by and contribute to theologically based ethics. A fundamental ethical question in interreligious/interfaith dialogue is one of responsibility towards persons of other religions. What is the ethical response of others? Too often, the reaction to this question has been one of social responsibility in which one asks what can be done for or to the other.[241] This kind of thinking is disempowering as it encumbers the development of mutual responsibility for those whose religions and experiences differ.[242] Responsibility, therefore, must be resituated within the context of genuine relationship among persons from different backgrounds and faith traditions.

Etymologically, "responsibility" refers to listening and responding to a command or words spoken.[243] Responsibility is a call to action that is incumbent upon those who claim to be Christian because of who we consider God to be (i.e. a God of love, mercy, grace, and creator of all

---

[239] Ibid., 106.

[240] Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach* in Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971), 13.

[241] Martin Forward, "Culture, Religious Faiths, and Race" in *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*, 251.

[242] Ibid.

[243] Gabriel Moran, *A Grammar of Responsibility* (New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1996), 37.

humanity) and what kind of world we consider God to desire. Since the etymological definition of responsibility is "response to," ethically one can consider responsibility as an obligation to respond to the crises of the world in a manner in keeping with the ministry and teachings of Jesus Christ. Responsibility encompasses fellowship with God and with other human beings. For "fellowship with God in word and love…reveals our essentially social nature,"[244] i.e., responding to God's word of love leads to fellowship with all humanity, including those of differing religious faiths.

Christian practices are gifts of the Holy Spirit. It is in the power of the Spirit that Christians are able to live according to the examples of Jesus Christ and perform the practices necessary for a practical theology of religious pluralism. Consequently, a practical theology of religious pluralism is guided by a pneumatological focus. Insofar as practical theology is concerned with the praxis of God, a practical theology of religious pluralism is concerned with God's purpose and actions in and through the plurality of religions.[245] God is present in the world through the person of the Holy Spirit. What is, and how can one discern, God's activity through the world's religions in the person of the Holy Spirit?

Christian practices must be rooted in the practices and activities of God. Christians discern God's actions through history, nature, and the experiences of human beings- corporate and individual. Interest in the praxis and practice of God in human life and history indicates that practical theology cannot be concerned solely with the activities of God within the Christian tradition. It explores and applies theological analysis to God's actions and relations with humanity in general, as well as, the relationships and interactions of human beings with one another.[246] Interreligious/interfaith dialogue, subsequently, must become a perpetual Christian practice if

---

[244] Bernard Haring, *The Law of Christ, Volume 1: General Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1963), 38.
[245] Duncan Forrester, *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology*, 7-8.
[246] Ibid., 9.

Christians are to effectively and completely attempt to discern and analyze God's actions and

relations with humanity.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue as Christian Practice

The Move Towards Dialogue

There have been several attempts at interreligious dialogue. The World Parliament of

Religions, for example, was held in 1893. "This assembly brought together representatives of

religions from around the world to converse about the changing world in relation to their own most

cherished beliefs and practices."[247] Vatican II marked a profound turning point in interfaith

dialogue for the Catholic Church. The church expressed the realization that persons of differing

religious faiths were still a part of God's people.[248] Through several official documents, such as

Lumen Gentium, Nostra Aetate, and *Ecclesiam Suam*, the church recognized elements of truth and

holiness in other religions, and Christians (mainly theologians) were encouraged to enter into

dialogue with prudence and charity with persons of other religions. These events were a major

catalyst for paving the way toward a practical theological approach to interreligious/interfaith

dialogue.

The World's Parliament of Religions of 1893 was an unprecedented gathering of religious

representatives. It marked the first formal gathering of representatives of "Eastern" and "Western"

religious traditions. Today it is recognized as the birth of formal interreligious dialogue worldwide.

This international affair included a cornucopia of religious leaders and delegates. It is not

surprising, then, that the Parliament was brimming with diversity and starkly contrasting truth and

faith-claims (which were presented pointedly, with no lack of boldness).[249] Although the

parliament was an intended mustering of religious unity against the rise of atheism and secularism

---

[247] Bradford Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 2006), 208.
[248] Ibid., 222.
[249] John S. Harding, *Mahayana Phoenix: Japan's Buddhist at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Company, 2008), 1.

(irreligion), this purpose did not overshadow the vast differences of core and marginal beliefs between both differing religious traditions and groups within the traditions themselves (e.g. denominations).[250]

A centennial celebration was held in 1993 from August 28th until September 5th to commemorate the 1893 gathering. In addition to being a centennial celebration, the 1993 parliament also surveyed the state of religion in contemporary secularized society and articulated the aim and role of religion in a secularized world.[251] A source textbook was written for the 1993 parliament.[252] Attention was given to the environment and how the World's religions can help address growing ecological concerns. The keynote address given by Gerald Barney and the subsequent document, *Towards A Global Ethic: An Initial Declaration*, drafted by Hans Kung, outlined key principles essential for religious cooperation in bringing any semblance of justice and peace in the world.[253] Among the principles were a commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life, a just economic order, tolerance, and equal right and partnership between men and women. The declaration was an attempt to tease out common values and attitudes among the religions.[254] Some critics said that the declaration is permeated by Western religious values.[255] Others argued, however, that the notions of interconnectedness and interdependence are influences of Buddhist teachings on Western thought- particularly the codependence of humanity and nature.[256]

---

[250] Ibid., 2.

[251] See Wayne Teasdale and George Cairns, eds. *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 1996).

[252]Available at http://www.origin.org/ucs/doc.cfm?e=1&fg=3176.

[253] Hans Kung and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions* (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 1995). Available at http://www.kusala.org/udharma/globalethic.html. An early version is available at http://astro.temple.edu/~dialogue/Center/kung.htm.

[254]William Schweiker, *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In A Time of Many Religions* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004), 14.

[255] Ibid.

[256] Joel Beversluis, *Sourcebook of the World's Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and Spirituality* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000), 17.

The Parliament convened several times since 1993. In 1999, the parliament was held in Cape Town, South Africa. A key feature was the display of the AIDS quilt to highlight the AIDS epidemic in South Africa. Besides this was a call for responsible economic and environmental stewardship.[257] The 2004 parliament gathered in Barcelona, Spain. It concentration was on how interreligious dialogue and cooperation could help mitigate religiously motivated violence, provide access to safe drinking water for countries with little to no clean water supply, and debt relief for developing countries.[258] There is another parliament scheduled for December 2009 in Melbourne, Australia. This meeting will continue focus on environmental issue, especially global climate change, through the lens of indigenous spiritualities, and also issues of aboriginal reconciliation.[259]

Vatican II was unprecedented in its attempts to reform the Catholic Church in light of the modern world. In his opening address, Pope John XXIII expressed the purpose of Vatican II when he asserted that Vatican II "must bring the church up to date and fight against the siege mentality that turned the church away from the world."[260] The council brought a new outlook for many areas of the Catholic Church, including liturgical practices (e.g., Mass could be celebrated in both Latin and the language of the people), the promotion of Christian unity (even recognizing the legitimacy of ordination for Orthodox priests), and the acknowledgment that Christ's presence and work may be found outside the Catholic Church. There was also new, more positive attitude toward other religious traditions.[261] Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam were recognized specifically as religious

---

[257] Marcus Braybrooke, *A Heart for the World: A Program to Transform the World Based On Non-Violence and Compassion* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2005), 77-78.

[258] Sandy Bharat and Jael Bharat, *A Global Guide to Interfaith Reflections from Around the World* (Winchester, UK: O Books, 2007), 5-6.

[259] http://www.parliamentofreligions.org/index.cfm.

[260] Christopher M. Bellito, *The General Councils: A History of the Twenty-One Church Councils from Nicea to Vatican II* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2002), 131.

[261] This is especially expressed in *Nostra Aetate*. The emphasis in this document was on the commonality of all human beings, particularly those who express faith in any religious tradition or supernatural power.

traditions that contained and propagated elements of truth and virtue.[262] What this meant was that

the adherents of these traditions were not only to be viewed as potential candidates for conversion;

rather, Christians were encouraged to learn from the adherents of Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism.

Another example of historic conferences on interfaith dialogue is the Lambeth Conference

of the Anglican and Episcopal churches. The Lambeth Conferences of Bishops has wrestled with

the relation of Christianity to other religions since 1897.[263] Resolution 20 of the 1988 conference

offers guidelines with regards to Christian discipleship and interfaith dialogue. It recognized

interfaith dialogue as part of Christian discipleship and mission with the understanding that:

> (1) Dialogue begins when people meet each other; (2) dialogue
> depends upon mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual
> trust; (3) dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the
> community; (4) dialogue becomes a medium of authentic
> witness.[264]

The resolution goes on to say that though interfaith dialogue is not a substitute for evangelism,

building alliances through interfaith dialogue is an effective way for the world's religions to resolve

issues of peacemaking, social justice, and religious liberty. Theological principles for interfaith

encounters were also presented at the 1988 Lambeth Conference. Of particular note was the pre-

conference study paper of Michael Nazir-Ali, Bishop of Rochester. Nazir-Ali encouraged

interreligious dialogue based on the fact that scripture and experience attest to God's workings in

---

[262] Jonathan Hill, *The History of Christian Thought: The Fascinating Stiry of the Great Christian Thinkers and How They Helped Shape the World As We Know It Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003), 305.

[263] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 123.

[264] Resolution 20, www.lambethconference.org/resolutions/1988/1988-20.cfm.

the cultures of histories of all peoples.[265] He suggested that Christians engage in interfaith dialogue because they believe that all human beings- despite religious adherence- are created in the image of God, and can learn something of God through them.[266]

The World Council of Churches (WCC) is an international ecumenical organization of Christian churches. Dialogue with people of living faiths has been part of the Work of the WCC since 1971 when the Central Committee meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia affirmed that dialogue "is to be understood as the common adventure of the churches."[267] The WCC produced a document composed by the Dialogue sub-unit of the WCC resulting from a four-year study programme on "My Neighbour's Faith and Mine - Theological Discoveries through Interfaith Dialogue."[268]

 The theology of interreligious dialogue, as delineated in the *Baar Statement*, embraces the plurality of religions as signs of divine activity among humanity. This theology is grounded in the premise that there is one God who creates all things and is active in all creation. The different religious customs and beliefs reflect the response of human beings to the presence and activity of God among them in different places, cultures, and at various times in human history. As such, the different religions result from the different encounters various cultures and people have had with the divine throughout history. The religions (those that have existed in the past and those in the present) bear witness to the quest of human beings for salvation, wholeness, enlightenment, divine guidance, and/or liberation. The *Baar Statement* encourages the Christian Churches to acknowledge this fact.

Even the ministry of Jesus attests to God's universal activity in the world. Jesus' preaching, teaching, healing, and service was primarily about establishing the reign of God on Earth. God's

---

[265] Michael Nazir-Ali, "Embassy, Hospitality and Dialogue: Christian and People of Other Faiths," Pre-Conference papers at www.anglicancommunion.org/lambeth/reports/report3.html.
[266] Ibid.
[267] http://www.oikoumene.org.
[268] Ibid.

reign is not (and cannot be) limited to any particular community, culture, or religion. Not only the ministry of Jesus, but also the ministry of the Holy Spirit indicates to divine activity in the religions. The Holy Spirits works to nurture, challenge, sustain, and renew the entire world. Furthermore, the activity of the Spirit is beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations. Accordingly, the WCC recognizes the possibility of salvation in other religious traditions. Because of this recognition, Christians are "called" to allow the practice of interreligious dialogue to transform the way in which we live and do theology.

Besides these historical examples of interreligious dialogue, one could also cite the *International Confucian-Christian Dialogues*. The first and second were held in July 1988 in Hong Kong and July 1991 in Berkeley, CA respectively.[269] The *Doha Conference of Interfaith Dialogue* is another such gathering and interaction of religious traditions.[270] The seventh conference was held on October of 2009. Participants included representatives from Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. Finally, there is the *International Association of Religious Freedom* (IARF), a non-profit charitable organization.[271] It is the oldest international interfaith group working to promote and secure religious freedom. The IARF has a century-plus history of encouraging interfaith dialogue & tolerance, with member groups in twenty-five countries, from faith traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Shinto, and Zoroastrianism.
These examples serve to demonstrate that the Christian theological engagement and use of differing philosophical and/or religious beliefs and practices to shed light on the comprehension and practice of Christian Faith is effectively happening all over the world. They also show interfaith/interreligious dialogue as a necessary and beneficial Christian practice.

---

[269] John Berthrong, *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1994), p. 5. See also Peter K. H. Lee, "Breaking New Ground in Christian-Confucian Dialogue?" in *66 Inter-Religio* 20/ Fall 1991, 67-70.
[270] For more information look at http://www.qatar-conferences.org/dialogue2009/english/index.php.
[271] For more information look at http://www.iarf.net/index.php.

Interrelationship Between Christian Beliefs and Practices

"But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves. For if any are hearers of the word and not doers, they are like those who look at themselves in a mirror; for they look at themselves and, going away, immediately forget what they were like. But those who look into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and persevere, being not hearers who forget but doers who act- they will be blessed in their doing."[272]

This dissertation presupposes an interconnectedness of beliefs (theory) and practices. Christians have always presumed an intertwining of Christian beliefs and practices. As reflected in the passage quoted above, the writer of James argues that this is an essential element of Christian faith. Christianity is not merely a religion of confessions based on theoretical concepts or statements of beliefs. It is about a way of being in the world, i.e. a *lived* faith. Christian faith is a matter of a person's inner life (one's fundamental beliefs and values) and outer life (the way that person lives and acts in the world) being consistent.[273] There should not be a "disconnect" between a person's faith-life and every other sphere of life that person operates in. Christ demands that Christians live out their faith in every area of our lives. This suggests that beliefs and practices are not only mirrors of one another but fundamentally intertwined.

There can be a distinction between beliefs and practices theoretically. One is able to demonstrate, cognitively, what a belief is as opposed to a practice. However, there is no distinction between beliefs and practices in life. Each flows from the other and is affected by the other. All action takes place within the context of action-guiding worldviews and belief-systems.[274] Actions occur based on the beliefs people hold, and actions (both the ones people perform themselves and the ones others perform that affect them) and experiences cause them to revise their beliefs.

---

[272] James 1:22-25 20. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).

[273] Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2004), 8.

[274] Stephen Pattison, *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays* (London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007), 11.

"Beliefs affect actions insofar as they embody expectations about the results of these actions will or would be."[275] After people engage in a particular action or practice because of their belief(s) their "expectations will (seem to) be borne out or not, to varying degrees, and these results then will modify the beliefs embodying those expectations."[276]

Thomas Groome offers the term "conation" to denote the knowing/desiring/doing that engages and shapes the whole being of people as agent-subjects in the world.[277] Conation is directly connected to "wisdom." It is derived from the Latin *conatus*, meaning "a conscious effort or endeavor."[278] Groome's turn to conative pedagogy is an attempt to engage the entirety of a person's *being*. He upholds that Christianity is a way of being in the world, not simply cognitive assent to doctrinal beliefs. Christian identity cultivates a "habitus" of Christian faith.[279] Authentic Christian life and faith is more than a routine that simply engages in "church/Christian" activities.[280] Christian life is life guided by the Holy Spirit as we engage the world- helping people in need, comforting the comfortless, practicing acts of liberation, and (re)connecting with our sisters and brothers of the human community.

What is faith? Tillich offers a significantly deeper understanding of faith. For Tillich, faith is the state of being grasped by ultimate concern.[281] Faith is more a way of being in the world than simplistic cognitive assent to official doctrines. Tillich not only tells us what faith is (ultimate concern), but also what faith is not. Faith is not the affirmation of something in spite of exiguous evidence or substantiation. "One of the worst errors of theology and popular religion is to make

---

[275] Robert Nozick, *The Nature of Rationality* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 99.
[276] Ibid.
[277] Thomas Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, The Way of Shared Praxis* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 27.
[278] Ibid.
[279] Ibid., 129.
[280] Floyd H. Barackman, *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001), 373.
[281] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 1.

statements which intentionally contradict the structure of reality."[282] In fact, faith is not defined as

belief at all. "Faith" is best defined as trust.[283] Still, trust is only one element of faith. Faith is more

than trust in ecclesiastical authorities or sacred writings, "it is participation in the subject of one's

ultimate concern with one's whole being."[284] If faith concerns the whole of one's being, then faith

includes our actions, practices, and the dispositions of our lives as they are shaped by our religious

convictions.

<div align="center">

Correlations Between Theologies of Religions and Christian Practices

</div>

Each Christian theology of religions either emerges out of a set of practices or generates a

set of practices. In fact, Christians already engage in interreligious practices. As was demonstarted,

beliefs and practices are intertwined. Amos Yong correctly discerns that one's theological attitude

towards the "religious other" largely shapes one's Christian practices.[285] Each of the theological

categorical responses to religious pluralism has shaped ecclesiastical practices that correlate to a

particular theological stance. In what follows, there will be an examination of the ways in which

theological attitudes to religious pluralism sustain and promote certain Christian practices.

Religious exclusivism tends to highlight Christian mission and evangelism as *the*

fundamental function of the Christian faith community. An exclusivist theological attitude seeks

proper and effective modes for Christian conversion of the religious and non-religious other. The

idea is that humanity's greatest need is salvation through Jesus Christ. Our deepest needs and

---

[282] Ibid., 34.

[283] Andrew Collier, "Realism, Relativism, and Reason in Religious Belief" in Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London: Routledge Press, 2004), 41.

[284] Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith*, 32.

[285] Amos Yong. *Hospitality & the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 65-95.

desires are fulfilled in a personal connection to Jesus Christ.[286] This focus sometimes overshadows

attempts at commonality between Christians and non-Christians. Despite possible collaboration on

political and social issues, for example, some "exclusivist conceptions of religious truth and

salvation, combined with a spiritual tradition of maintaining personal and institutional separation

from what is 'ungodly,' make it challenging for Christians to ally themselves with non-

Christians."[287]

For many Christians, evangelism is an imperative for the Christian church based on the

"Great Commission" given by Jesus in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark.[288] Moreover, when

confronted by the religious governing body of first century Israel, the apostles boldly proclaimed

that there was no other name by which humanity can receive salvation other than the name Jesus

Christ of Nazareth.[289] This theology of religions maintains that there is no salvific or spiritual value

in any other religion besides Christianity. There is a division between those who are "saved"

(Christians) and those who are not (all non-Christians). According to one view, humanity is

considered to be "fallen" from right standing with God, totally depraved, and/or sinful by nature.

Consequently, all are in need of salvation through Jesus Christ. Therefore, the primary task of the

Christian community is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ and persuade others to convert to the

Christian Faith. A 2001 study revealed, "half of all Americans- 60 percent of the Protestants and 40

percent of the Catholics- reported that they had 'tried to encourage someone to believe in Jesus

---

[286] George Barna, *Evangelism That Works: How to Reach Changing Generations with the Unchanging Gospel* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995), 17.
[287] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (Piscataway,NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 56-57.
[288] See Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).
[289] See Acts 4:11-12. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).

Christ or to accept Him as his/her savior."[290] Evangelism is Christian practice in that it promotes

Jesus the Christ as the only secure means of salvation and connection with divine reality.[291]

The exclusivist paradigm need not resign itself, though, to a pessimistic view of salvation,

i.e., that only a few people will attain salvation. While Christian evangelism does seek to convert

unbelievers into believers in Christian faith, this does not necessarily denote narrow-mildness or

ignorance of other religious and cultural realities. In previous times, Christian evangelism has

operated with little regard for contextual, political, historical, social, and economic circumstances.

Western Christianity operated as if it were the center base for evangelization of the entire world,

and on the presumption that Western civilization was a Christian civilization that aided in

producing other Christians.[292] This vision has collapsed. As Bryan Stone demonstrates, the

evangelistic task is intrinsically social, political and economic.[293] Furthermore, Christian

evangelism is a thoroughly pacifist (i.e. peaceable) invitation to consider the Christian faith (more

pointedly consider Jesus Christ) as the means of (re)connecting with God.[294] At the same time,

Christian evangelism should be dialogical, open for doubt and questioning of the basic tenets of

Christian faith.[295] It is through dialogical exchange that one gains a deeper understanding of

Christian faith.

Religious Inclusivism produces correlative practices that are more open to other religious

traditions than exclusivism. Among the practices that ascribe to an inclusivist view of religious

pluralism is the construction of contextual/local theologies. Contextual theologies are really a

---

[290] Richard Fox, *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession* (San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005), 15.
[291] Bryan P. Stone, *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006), 12.
[292] Stone refers to this as the "Old Christendom Model."
[293] Ibid., 257.
[294] Ibid., 12, 155.
[295] James R. Adams, *So You Can't Stand Evangelism: A Thinking Person's Guide to Church Growth* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans, 1992), 58.

different mode of Christian evangelism and missions. Whereas the exclusivist paradigm sees no value in other religions or the cultures they take shape in, the inclusivist sees especially the cultural practices and mores as essential to spreading the gospel message. Local cultures are perceived as expressions of God's continual creation.[296] Inclusivist theologies of religious pluralism undergird Christian missions that promote the dynamic interaction of church, culture, and gospel. Christian missions of this sort are inclined to emphasize listening to the culture. Listening to the culture implies both valuing a culture for how it is as well as acknowledging the presence of God already at work in and through that culture. Two basic principles are at work: 1) outsiders do not determine what's best and 2) "the prevailing mode of evangelization and church development should be one of finding Christ in the situation rather than concentrating on bringing Christ into the situation."[297]

Inclusivism also opens the way for integrating other religious practices and rituals into Christian life. Some refer to this as religious syncretism. Others prefer calling it *multiple religious participation*. Multiple religious participation is the "conscious (and sometimes even unconscious) use of religious ideas, practices, symbols, meditations, prayers, chants, and sensibilities derived from one tradition by a member of another community of faith for their own purposes."[298] Multiple religious participation differs from religious syncretism in scope. Syncretism is when a religious leader consciously borrows ideas, practices, and rituals from various religions in order to develop a completely new religion.[299] Multiple religious participation is when adherents of one religion borrow from other religions while remaining within their own particular religious tradition.

---

[296] Clemens Sedmak, *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002), 73.
[297] Robert Schreiter, *Constructing Local Theologies* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1985), 39.
[298] John Berthrong, *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic* (MaryKnoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), 35.
[299] Ibid., 27.

African Christianity and the emerging African theologies of the twentieth century are primary examples of an inclusivist theology of religions generating the practice of multiple religious participation. African churches tend to practice Christianity by including elements of African traditional religious practices and principles. African traditional religions are not, for instance, historical in the sense that they find their foundation in a historical founder, nor do they have a tradition of sacred history as such. Their foundations are grounded in the authority of the ancestors (this is particularly the case of most Bantu systems), or in the combined authority of the ancestors and deities in many parts of West Africa.[300]

For this reason, ancestral spirits play a major part in some African churches. African believers consult their ancestors through spirit mediums, or seek guidance from a council of elders who represent ancestral heritage.[301] Honoring ancestral heritage through libations and prayers is common among many West African ethnic groups.[302] While these rituals are largely symbolic, there is a literal belief in the spirits and the ancestors.[303] These rituals bear witness to a strong belief in the afterlife.[304] There is no conflict because this belief is in keeping with the Christian belief in an afterlife. Therefore, there is no need to abandon this cultural heritage.

There are other, sometimes more subtle, examples of religious borrowing. Muslims, who in turn got the idea of prayer beads from Buddhists, introduced the rosary to the Western Christian

---

[300]John Parrot, *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today* (Trenton, New Jersey: African World Press, Inc., 1995), 78.

[301] I recall having two classmates in undergraduate school from Nigeria who shared with us that before they could attend college they had to receive permission from the ancestral spirits via a council of elders. They were without a doubt devout Christians. Yet they maintained pertinent African traditions that they did not consider to be in conflict with their Christian beliefs. This was my first encounter, outside of a textbook, of multiple religious participation.

[302]Robert B. Fisher, *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 35-36.

[303] Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 111.

[304] John Mbiti, *Introduction to African Religion 2nd Edition* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991), 81.

world.[305] Some Christians use Zen Buddhist meditation as a spiritual exercise to enhance their own religious faith.[306] Borrowing from other religious traditions does not necessarily mean one is converting to another religion. The fundamental religious commitments of a person or group remain intact. Ideas and practices borrowed from other religious traditions are meant to augment those fundamental commitments.[307]

Religious pluralism sees all religious traditions as valid paths to ultimate reality. As a result, it tends to expand on the practices of religious inclusivism. Both religious inclusivism and pluralism (and to a certain extent exclusivism) promote cooperation among the religions concerning cultural, social, economic, and political crises of the world. Paul Knitter warns that a purely Christian theology of liberation is too limited in scope and insufficient for human libration around the globe.[308] With the vast majority of the world's population self-indentifying as adherents of a religion, there is little doubt the religion plays a vital role in politics, ethnic conflicts, poverty, etc. Cooperation among religious traditions is critical for the human community. Religious inclusivism and pluralism would argue that each religious traditions provides essential resources (through wisdom, principles, practices, sacred writings) for promoting political, social, and economic equality. One should consider the experiences of all the world's religions (especially the struggles of peoples who are adherents of the many religions), and not simply the perspective of Western Christianity.[309]

Multiple religious participation takes on new meaning in the pluralist framework. At this point, we can begin to speak of *multiple religious belonging* or *multiple religious consciousness*. An

---

[305] John Berthrong, *The Divine Deli*, 29.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid., 36.
[308] Paul Knitter, "Towards A Liberation Theology of Religions" in John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), 179-180.
[309] Harvey Cox, *Religion in the Secular City: Toward A Postmodern Theology* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1985), 233.

individual not only borrows ideas and practices from another religion, but the individual actually

adheres to more than one religious tradition.[310] Multiple religious belonging is presupposed by the

notion that all religious experiences are untied and grounded in one ultimate reality.[311] Multiple

religious belonging is only a problem for those religious traditions that adhere to a strong form of

exclusivism.[312] Religious pluralism is a matter of fact, as well as, a matter of principle.[313] I will

venture to add that religious pluralism becomes a matter of practice as well. The act of multiple

religious belonging becomes a way of life extrapolated and grounded by a pluralist framework.

The notion of multiple religious aims/ends also supports practices of multiple religious

belonging. It is quite possible for someone to feel at home in more than one tradition at a time.

Moreover, certain principles and beliefs of one religious tradition may supplement in ways in which

another religious tradition is lacking. In effect, we see that each set of beliefs from the perspective

religious traditions to which a person adheres satiates spiritual formation in a way that following

only one of these traditions does not.

Each of the theologies of religion produces dialogue in its own way. Either as dialogue for

persuasion of conversion (evangelism via exclusivism), dialogue with indigenous cultures and

beliefs for constructing contextual theologies and indigenous churches (inclusivism), dialogue for

integration of differing religious practices and beliefs (multiple religious participation), or dialogue

as the full participation in several religious traditions (pluralism and multiple religious

ends). Dialogue is constitutive of each of the theological responses to religious pluralism. It is

inherent to the Christian theological tradition. Therefore, dialogue is also an unavoidable form of

---

[310] Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2002), 1.
[311] John Cobb, Jr., "Multiple Religious Belonging and Reconciliation" in Catherine Cornille, ed., *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*, 20-29.
[312] Peter Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2004), 62.
[313] Ibid., 64.

practice. Thus, dialogue is a more likely practice of and means for pursing a practical theology of religious pluralism.

Dialogue as Divine Practice

Dialogue has been an element of the Christian tradition from its inception. Church councils, for example, were gatherings where the bishops, theologians, and other leaders of the Christian community engaged in dialogical exchanges- discussing and settling matters of doctrine and creeds (so all of the Christian doctrines and practices are a consequence of dialogue). These characteristics of Christianity establish dialogue as a Christian practice. The assertion that dialogue is a fundamental Christian practice is rooted in the fact that dialogue is itself a *divine practice*. Human beings are finite creatures, and because of our finitude we are unable to fully comprehend an infinite (and in many ways inexhaustible) God.[314] Knowledge of divine reality is given by God, i.e. through revelation. Revelation is the *self-communication of God* and an invitation to fellowship and participation (at least partially) in the divine life. Dialogue is as fundamental to the Christian tradition as revelation. In fact, revelation carries the same idea as responsibility.[315] Christians must respond to the knowledge and invitation of fellowship that is presented from God. Thus, dialogue is a fundamental Christian practice.

Tillich defines revelation as "the manifestation of the ground of being for human knowledge."[316] He asserts that in order for there to be a revelatory event, there must be objective and subjective poles. Clark Williamson suggests we call these two sides of revelation the giving

---

[314] William Placher, ed, *Essentials of Christian Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2003), 11.
[315] Gabriel Moran, *A Grammar of Responsibility*, 37. Responsibility refers to *listening and responding to* a command or words spoken.
[316] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 94.

side and the receiving side.[317] Tillich's insight shows that revelation is essentially dialogical. Revelation occurs in a particular context, i.e., God discloses God's self to a particular person or a particular group of people. Through revelation, dialogue occurs between both divinity and humanity. There is no revelation where divine reality disseminates knowledge and no one receives it. This would not be an unveiling but a failed attempt of communication. Revelation not only denotes God's self-communication, but the initiation and building of a (dialogical) relationship between divine reality and us.

Stemming from the principle that Christians are able to discern divine presence and actions in other religious traditions and persons of differing faiths, one can assert that to gain a fuller understanding of divine expression revelation should be interpreted not only from within the Christian faith community, but also in relation to other religious traditions. Revelation has a giving and receiving side, and the receiving side includes the entire human community. Christians discover and are able to interpret and understand divine revelation only in relation to other human beings. Since this is the case, it behooves the Christian faith community to recognize interfaith dialogue as a perpetual Christian practice.

Explicating Dialogue

Dialogue is only one form of religious interaction. Dialogue (as a concept) is a specifically modern, originally western approach to religious diversity.[318] It presupposes the enlightenment ideas of individual religious liberty and a separation of church and state.[319] In other words, each

---

[317] Clark Williamson, *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology* (St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999), 45.
[318] Jurgen Moltmann, *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999), 228.
[319] Ibid.

individual must be able to engage in mutual intersubjective communication with the liberty to

express his or her personal religious beliefs without fear of reprisals.

Dialogue is the only proper foundation for a practical theology of religious diversity because it conveys relationality, mutuality, and praxis. Indeed dialogue itself is a practice, which produces speaking, listening, mutual understanding, *and* deliberate actions. Dialogical dynamics are manifest, for example, in worship, liturgy, and other Christian practices. Rituals and sacraments communicate multiple meanings. Dialogue is the key to understanding other religious traditions. through dialogue a person has the ability to come into living contact with another religious tradition through a dialogical encounter and getting to know persons for whom that particular religious tradition is a daily transformative experience.[320]

The dialogical method is rooted in the inductive methodology within Christian theology. In contradistinction to deductive methodologies, which begins with abstract principles taken from ecclesial enunciations, scripture, and patristic, and then moves to explore human implications, inductive methodologies takes lived reality as the point of departure for doing theology. The praxis of dialogue as a fundamental Christian practice and theology exhibits an immersion in the concrete religious experience of others and our own. Practical theology also takes its point of departure in the lived experiences of human life and history. This reflects the "turn to experience" that has taken place within Christian theology beginning with the various liberation theologies, feminist philosophy and theology, and the emphasis on the presence of evil in the world and the centrality of human suffering.

The dialogical method begins with the fundamental awareness of the *radical relatedness* of all reality. Human beings are *social* by nature. The fullest expression of our humanity occurs as we

---

[320] Donald K. Swearer, *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977), 15.

interact and dialogue with others. For Christians this suggests that dialogue with persons of other religious traditions contribute to our spiritual and human development. At the same time, this dialogue and interaction is fundamental to the spiritual and human growth of persons of differing religious traditions. "The way of procedure of the dialogical method is to let the knowledge and experience of other religions gained by one to interact through study, reflection, prayer and contemplation with oneself, to enrich oneself and also to challenge the other."[321] The radical relatedness of humanity does not stop at religious belief systems. In fact, it is precisely because religion plays a prominent role in human life and culture that interfaith dialogue is indispensable.

Dialogue (communication) is not limited to language and discussion. Communication as a concept includes "the transmission and reception of any kind of information between any kind of life."[322] The meaning of dialogue expands when it is considered as a way of life. While dialogue does exist in a "multiplicity of hypostases," it is not solely a form of communication. Rather, dialogue characterizes the condition of humanity.[323] Dialogue is a disposition and a method in that, as Plato conceived it, it is a means for constructing arguments (exchange of positions), clarifying ideas (which guide our live), and discovering truth.[324]

Three overt external factors have contributed to our current dialogical situation. Foremost is the fact of globalization. Globalization refers to the "increasingly interconnected character of political, economic, and social life of the peoples of this planet."[325] Hundreds of millions of people

---

[321] Jose Kuttianimattathil, *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Kristu Jyoti Publications, 1998), 608.
[322] David Crystal, *How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die* (New York: Penguin Group, 2005), 3.
[323] Dmitri Nikulin, *On Dialogue* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), viii.
[324] Richard McKeon, "Dialogue and Controversy in Philosophy" in Tullio Maranhao, ed., *The Interpretation of Dialogue* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 27.
[325] Robert J. Schreiter, *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), 4-5. Globalization is defined in various ways by differing disciplines. There is an enormous amount of literature on globalization. Bibliographies, glossaries, and other information can be found at "The Globalization Website" of Emory University, www.sociology.emory.edu/globalization.

are traveling to and/or taken residence in foreign countries. Accordingly, there are frequent cross-cultural and interreligious encounters (happening on a daily basis). Second, the internet, satellites, and all other forms of mass media and communication have contributed to the "shrinking" of the planet. Human beings now possess the capabilities to connect to people all over the world, in addition to the vast, and seemingly instantaneous, dissemination of information about differing cultures, practices, and events around the world. Third, the interdependence of the world's economies has contributed to our current dialogical situation. This is what C. T. Kurein calls *economic globalization*.[326] Capitalism has influenced the economic systems of the world (in various ways) in one way or another.[327] These factors have brought individuals, nations, and cultures into contact with each other.

Still there must be clarification as to what "dialogue" means for religious pluralism. Dialogue has functioned in several ways in the theology of religions. For example, Aloysius Pieris argues that interreligious dialogue occurs on three interrelated level that he names core-experience, collective memory, and interpretation.[328] A core-experience of a religion is the central, "liberative" experience that gives birth to that religion. Without this core-experience, the religion loses its identity and may cease to exist. Consequently, this core-experience is maintained through collective memory, i.e., the means of perpetuating a religious community. A religion survives only if a community can successfully preserve and transmit the core-experience upon which the religion is based. The impartation of a core-experience requires interpretation, i.e., the "framing of the experience in historical and cultural categories."[329] Pieris posits that "real" interreligious dialogue

---

[326] C. T. Kurien, "Globalization: An Economist's Perspective" in William F. Storrar and Andrew R. Morton, eds. *Public Theology for the 21st Century* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 197.

[327] Ibid., 198.

[328] Aloysius Pieris, "The Buddha and the Christ: Mediators of Liberation" in John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), 162-163.

[329] Ibid., 163.

occurs when persons of differing religions understand and posses an uninhibited openness to, and participation in the core-experience one another's traditions.

James Fredericks contends there are three ways interreligious dialogue can be seen as Christian practice.[330] First, interreligious dialogue serves as a safeguard against Christian triumphalism. Christians should remember that the church does not equate the Kingdom of God. Second, interreligious dialogue reminds us that Christian eschatology is not congruous with theories of progress. "Waiting on the Lord" should not be situated into a developmental or progressive understanding of history. Third, interreligious dialogue as practice is a service to the world. This service is in keeping with the evangelical commandment to love and care for all humanity, not simply those of the Christian faith.

Michael Barnes develops a theology of interreligious dialogue commensurate to the post-modern context of contemporary society.[331] Barnes says dialogue can be seen in two very different ways. The distinction stems from the point of emphasis in the dialogical process, i.e., whether one places emphasis on content or form. In the first instance, dialogue is communication between at least two individuals, from different faith communities, speaking a common language, which results (ideally) in some form of consensus.[332] In the second instance, dialogue is a means of establishing relationship.[333] Barnes considers the second conception of dialogue the more ethical approach because emphasis is place on the dialogical encounter itself instead of content of discussion. Framing dialogue as establishing relationships confirms dialogue as a practice.

---

[330] James Frederick, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 103-104.
[331] Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.
[332] Ibid., 20.
[333] Ibid.

David Lochhead also uses dialogue in the broad sense of relationship and the "fundamental attitude" of the church in the world.[334] From this Lochhead calls dialogue an end in itself. The emphasis on dialogue as activity gives way to dialogue as open relationship. Since interfaith dialogue occurs only when people have a candid relationship, then, Lochhead suggests, relationship is more constitutive of dialogue than the activity of conversation. Though I agree that dialogue is relational and that relationship is constitutive of dialogue, I disagree with Lochhead's subsequent conclusion. In developing his idea of dialogical relations, Lochhead argues that dialogue has no other purpose than itself.[335] I argue that dialogue is the means by which deeper relationships can be forged. Dialogue is an emergent reality with varying stages of relationship elements. For instance, one should not expect the same amount of openness and honestly at the beginning of the dialogical relationship, as persons will have years later. This kind of candidness materializes within the context of friendship.

Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes argue that our current dialogical situation requires what they call *Deep-Dialogue*. Deep-Dialogue denotes something more than just conversation. Rather, it means "to stand on our position, and at the same time seek self-transformation through opening ourselves to those who think differently."[336] Deep-Dialogue is coupled with critical thinking (which they see as a new way of thinking about dialogue).[337] Swidler and Mojzes see Deep-Dialogue as fundamental to all reality, i.e., it is the primal principle that opens the way to a global consciousness which allows common ground between worldviews and perceptions. Deep-Dialogue represents an "awakening" in human thought. There is a "dialogical/critical turn" that provides us

---

[334] David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Impetrative: A Christian Reflection of Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 46.
[335] Ibid., 79.
[336] Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000), 151.
[337] Ibid. Deep-Dialogue and Critical Thinking are considered two sides of the same coin. Therefore, when Deep-Dialogue is mentioned one also automatically means critical thinking as well.

with the conceptual tools to consider varying worldviews in "creative communion."[338] With this there is the capacity to detect global patterns that are undetectable a part from a dialogical/relational understanding of reality. What emerges is a "global narrative" which situates all "worldviews and perspectives within the infinite primal field."[339]

From a practical theological perspective, dialogue is characterized as an essential *practice* of the Christian faith community. Religious practices facilitate experience and knowledge of divine reality.[340] Christian practices are the cluster of cooperative ideas and activities of the Christian faith community, which has taken shape over time, in response to and with regards to our covenant with and knowledge of God.[341] Dialogue as a Christian practice, then, is oriented towards spiritual enhancement, increasing knowledge of divine reality, and relationship building. Dialogue as activity gives way to dialogue as open relationship and medium of revelation concerning ultimate reality. If one takes the theological premise that God is the creator of all humanity, and all human beings have been created in the image of God seriously, then one should also consider meaningful dialogical encounters and relationships with persons of differing religions as genuine mediums of God's revelation and activities in the world.

---

[338] Ibid., 152.

[339] Ibid. By "primal field" Swidler and Mojzes are referring to the "primal principle" of all Reality. This is the first principle or the foundation of all reality. Swidler and Mojzes claim that the greatest thinkers and traditions have been searching for the primal principle throughout human history. In the modern period, the search for the primal principle was characterized by concepts such as immutability, simplicity, and monologue. The modern paradigm, with its concepts, is a fruitless paradigm. This is why Deep-Dialogue combined with critical thinking represents a paradigm shift for Swidler and Mojzes.

[340] See Margaret Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

[341] Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, eds., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 2-3.

A practical theology of religious pluralism has a philosophical component. Renewed interest in practical theology was concomitant with the renaissance of practical philosophy. The title "practical philosophy" refers to philosophical thinkers who accentuate the importance of practical reasoning and wisdom (phronesis) as opposed to theoretical and technical reasoning.[342] Philosophers who have focused on practical reason, hermeneutics, and praxis have exerted considerable influence in contemporary theology (especially practical theology). These philosophers help substantiate how intrinsic dialogue is to human existence. As a matter of fact, the explication of dialogue has its origins in practical philosophical discourse. Two key philosophers (Habermas and Gadamer) are of particular interest because of their influence on practical theology and their insistence on dialogical practice and praxis as intrinsic to human life for sustaining just societies and understanding reality.

Habermas: Communicative Rationality, Consensus, and Dialogue

Jurgen Habermas is a premier philosopher whose work has influenced practical theology. His understanding of action, critical social theory, and especially communicative deliberation and democracy has provided a fruitful framework for theologians. Practical theologians are no exception. His influence is found in the thought of theologians such as Johaness van der Ven and Gerben Heitink.

Habermas distinguishes between four kinds of action: teleological (strategic), normatively regulated, dramaturgical, and communicative.[343] Teleological action is when an actor attains an end or brings about the occurrence of a desired state by choosing means that have promise of being

---

[342] Don Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996), 34.

[343] Jurgen Habermas, T*he Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society. Trans. Thomas McCarthy.* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984), 85-102.

successful. Teleological model moves to strategic with the participation of at least one other actor. Normatively regulated action refers to members of a social group who orient their action to common values. Dramaturgical action refers to participants in interaction constituting a public for one another, before which they present themselves. Communicative action refers to the interaction of at least two subjects capable of speech and action who establish interpersonal relations. Habermas concedes that all four concepts are goal-oriented. However, the means by which they achieve their goal (and sometimes the goals themselves) differ. What distinguishes communicative action from the rest is that through communicative action, actors (free subjects) seek to reach *rational* understanding about a situation and develop a plan of action by way of agreement or *consensus*.

In keeping with Karl Marx, Habermas has one fundamental goal, i.e. developing a theory of society that exposes ideologies and modes of thinking that propagate oppression of the masses and/or totalitarian regimes. Marx established his critical theory on what Habermas calls instrumental reason. Instrumental reason is a conception of reason whereby reason becomes powerful as an instrumental tool for pursuing efficient means toward a given end or goal.[344] The problem with this type of reason is that it does not evaluate the desirability, value, or the potential consequences of the intended goal. This is partially the reason Max Horkheimer and the Frankfurt School sought to develop a critical social theory that is critical of society as well as itself.[345] Habermas employs communicative reason to replace (or revise) the notion of instrumental reason. Communicative reason and action refers to the rationality of social interaction that, in contrast to

---

[344] Gary Simpson, *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian Imagination* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989), 170.
[345] Jurgen Habermas, *Theory and Practice. Trans. John Viertel* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973), 2. Habaermas' intellectual roots can be traced back to Karl Marx through the Frankfurt School of Social Theory and Research.

the philosophy of the subject, takes as its paradigm two participating, communicating partners and the intersubjectively generative power of speech.

Habermas argues that the ability to communicate is a universal phenomenon.[346] There are basic structures and rules that all subjects master in learning to speak a language. Thus, language provides the best possible means for understanding human interaction. There is no unified social "class consciousness" or a collective subjective claim to one particular set of beliefs and assumptions. Humans are socialized beings, but society is pluralistic and not monolithic. Societies are comprised of individuals, each with his/her own ideas. To subsume the variety of individual opinion into one overarching historical meta-narrative negates the very purpose that was being sought, i.e., the liberation of human consciousness from blinding ideologies. "The divergent beliefs and conflicting intentions of different individuals can reasonably be integrated only by means of intersubjective processes of communication and deliberation."[347]

Communication is not simply the ability to construct grammatical sentences. In speaking, humans relate and connect to the world (our particular context), to other subjects, and to their own intentions, feelings and desires. The seeds for Habermas' linguistic turn can be found in Marx. For Marx, language stems from human *interaction*. "Language is practical consciousness…for language, like consciousness only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men."[348] Habermas does not think Marx follows this claim through to the best conclusion. Habermas argues that all legitimate and successful praxis depends on communication (meaningful and rational interaction) and the capacity to reach consensus.

---

[346] Communication can be verbal or non-verbal.
[347] Jurgen Habermas, *Truth and Justification* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 2005), 282
[348] Karl Marx, *The German Ideology* in Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1970), 157.

Habermas develops his "theory of communicative action" in an attempt to overcome the Cartesian dualism of subject versus object, reason versus senses and matter, and mind versus body, that stretches through Western philosophical thought unto Kant. The subject is not only superior, but solitary, i.e. individualistic and egoistic, with no relation to the past or social interaction. Along with this Cartesian worldview came a certain type of reason- what Habermas refers to as the philosophy of the subject. The philosophy of the subject refers to the way in which a subject approaches all external "entities" as objects in order to understand, dominate, and/or ultimately manipulate them for the purposes of the subject.[349] Hegel challenged this Cartesian paradigm by demonstrating the intrinsic historical and social character of the subject. Marx went even further by insisting that "the mind is not the ground of nature but nature that of mind."[350] For Marx, the subject (or human consciousness) is fundamentally embodied and practical. Thus, forms of human consciousness are "encoded representation of forms of social reproduction."[351]

In contrast to the radical subjectivism of Descartes and company, Habermas shifts to a paradigm of language. Language for him refers to *language -in-use*, or speech, not semantics or syntax. The communicative model does not equate language with communication. Language is the means by which one identifies and understands the dynamics of social behavior and social interactions.[352] Language allows us to grasp how communities develop, shape, reshape, and transmit beliefs. Societal norms are established and symbols identified through social communication. Language not only represents or affirms reality but it also embodies and even shapes the social practice of a culture.

---

[349] Instrumental reason and action plays the same role as the philosophy of the subject in Habermas' thought.
[350] Habermas, T*he Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.1,* viii.
[351] Ibid.
[352] Ibid., 101.

Instead of a subject-object relationship, Habermas proposes a subject-to-subject *exchange*.

Communicative action simply says at least two subjects, capable of rational discourse, are the key

to developing a sustainable theory of society, and indeed, complete the enlightenment project of the

progression of the human species.[353] Emphasis is on the progression of the species, not the

individual as in the Cartesian model- a characteristic which Habermas says appears even in Hegel

and Marx.[354] Language is the *medium* of rational exchange and critique. Reason determines the

validity of proposed truth claims and solutions. Each subject makes truth claims or propositions and

gives "reasons" *for* the validity of their claims and *against* counter-claims.

In "Technology and Science as Ideology," Habermas formulates the distinction between

instrumental and communicative action at some length:

> By *purposive-rational action* I understand either instrumental action or
>
> rational choice or their conjunction. Instrumental action is governed by
>
> *technical rules* based on empirical knowledge. In every case they
>
> imply empirical predictions about observable events, physical or
>
> social. These predictions can prove correct or incorrect. The conduct of
>
> rational choice is governed by *strategies* based on analytic knowledge.
>
> They imply deductions from preference rules (value systems) and
>
> decision procedures; these propositions are wither correctly or
>
> incorrectly deduced. Purposive-rational action realizes defined goals
>
> under given conditions. But while instrumental action organizes means
>
> that are appropriate or inappropriate according to criteria of an
>
> effective control of reality, strategic action depends only on the correct

---

[353] Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T. Press, 1990), 295-296.
[354] Gary Simpson, *Critical Social Theory,* 75.

evaluation of possible alternative choices, which results from

calculation supplemented by values and maxims.

By "interaction," on the other hand, I understand *communicative*

action, symbolic interaction. It is governed by binding *consensual*

norms, which define reciprocal expectations about behavior and which

must be understood and recognize by at least two acting subjects.

Social norms are enforced through sanctions. Their meaning is

objectified in ordinary langue communication. While the validity of

technical rules and strategies depends on that of empirically true or

analytically correct propositions, the validity of social norms is

grounded only in the intersubjectivity of the mutual understanding of

intentions and secured by the general recognition of obligations.[355]

Instrumental action is the practical result of instrumental reasoning, i.e. the calculation of

the best means to a given end. There are two criteria for and instrumental action: 1) that the end of

the action is predetermined independently of the means of realization, and 2) it is realized by a

causal intervention in the objective world.[356] Conversely, a communicative action cannot be

determined independently of its vehicle for realization in the objective world, i.e. speech/language.

Further communicative action cannot be brought about causally. That would perpetuate the subject-

object paradigm Habermas is seeking to avoid. Habermas believes that "rational discourse that is

free from both domination and linguistic pathology and oriented towards intersubjective

understanding and consensus is precisely the type of activity appropriate for the public sphere."[357]

---

[355] Jurgen Habermas, "Technology and Science as Ideology" in *Toward a Rational Society: Student Protests, Science, and Politics Trans. Jeremy Shapiro* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970), 91-92.
[356] Jurgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.1*, 285. See also James Gordon Finlayson, *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 48.
[357] Robert Holub, *Jurgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere* (New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1991), 8.

Communicative action and discourse[358] are fundamental for Habermas as he sees it as vital

for social interaction (especially for democratic societies). It is the notion of consensus that is of

significant interest for this present work. The idea of consensus is reminiscent to the platonic notion

of *symphonia*, or harmony and agreement that is the foundation of dialogue.[359] Symphonia indicates

the harmony present in the universe that should be reflected in the structure of and harmony within

the soul.[360] An agreement or consensus is established among interlocutors prior to a conversation,

for example in order to avoid differing definitions or interpretations of the same terms and prevent

the participants from understanding each other.[361] Habermas sees consensus as being reached

through dialogical exchange that provides rational and universally applicable justification of truth

claims.

Habermas employs the term "discourse" (dialogue) only when the presentation of (rival)

truth claims infers that a "rationally motivated agreement could in principle be achieved."[362] The

conditions for such an exchange is what Habermas calls the "ideal context for dialogue." This

context is the core of his communicative action theory. Discourse presupposes an unconstrained and

undistorted communicative situation. Distortions, prejudices, misunderstandings, etc are (in

principle) surmounted within the dialogue itself. This will allow for unhindered self-representation,

rational justification of claims and universal norms, and eventually consensus. All of this is guided

---

[358] Habermas prefers to use the term "discourse" and only uses "dialogue occasionally. He defines discourse as an argumentative-oriented form of communication that expresses truth claims and then tries to justify them by providing rational a basis for each truth claim. Habermas also makes a distinction between discourse and communicative action. Communicative action (or communication) denotes experiences, actions, and/or practical knowledge. Discourse allows for the possibility of theoretical knowledge.
[359] Dmitri Nikulin, *On Dialogue*, 211.
[360] Ibid. See also Plato, *The Symposium* (London: Penguin Books, 1999), 33ff.
[361] Ibid., 212.
[362] Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.1*, 42.

by the proviso: "if only the argumentation could be conducted openly enough and continued long enough."[363]

There are criticisms of dialogue aimed towards consensus. Dmitri Nikulin argues that because of the "ineradicably diaphonic character" of dialogue, the outcome of dialogical exchange will more likely be "dissensus" as opposed to consensus.[364] For Nikulin, dialogue is unfinalizable, there is no settlement in dialogue. Since dialogue is unfinalizable, there is no guarantee of abstract, uniform, and definite agreement. Dialogue only sporadically reaches agreement- and often accidentally.[365] The idea is that consensus in one way or another eclipses the otherness of the other. Dissensus (in the form of allosensus), on the other hand, fully recognizes and acknowledges the difference of the other. It does so through "dialogically unwrapping- and being at the same time the condition for such unwrapping- the inexhaustible contents of everyone's personal other," not by seeking to attain a synthesis between differing positions.[366]

This is an important critique of consensus in dialogue. There is a tendency to eclipse difference with unity or agreement. Quailing contradictions and constructing a monologic view or opinion at the end of dialogue can potentially (and usually seeks to) remove the diverse voices and outlooks that engender diversity. There is also an assumption of certain norms and outcomes that stem from Western notions of dialogue. The argument for dissensus seeks to shatter tendencies to subsume non-Western cultures under Western cultural norms, and highlight "difference" as a necessary component of dialogue. At the same time, consensus in dialogue is in some sense unavoidable. Habermas is concerned with the functions of democratic society and the ways in which all can participant in the building and maintenance of a just society. In order for people to

---

[363] Ibid.
[364] Dmitri Nikulin, *On Dialogue*, 220.
[365] Ibid.
[366] Ibid., 221.

live together, they must have certain rules and laws to govern them that they agree to, arrived at through rigorous rational debate and inquiry.[367] Even the principle of dissensus is a rationally derived agreement, i.e., an agreement to disagree. People accept difference foremost because it is undeniable (diversity is reality), and also because acceptance of difference decreases the potential of violent conflict and/or oppressive activity. The question is, in terms of the functioning of society, what is the way in which people foster and cultivate diversity, and establish principles to govern us all.

The same question applies to the world's religions. Even if a religious diverse community simply accepts the differences in the religions without seeking to validate religious truth-claims there is still a need for certain common principles to guide the relations and interactions of the religions. Indeed, people already invoke some of these principles frequently, namely justice, peace, and tolerance. These principles must be shared by most or all the religions in order for them to be effective and of any relevance.

Gadamer: Bias and Prejudice in Dialogue and Understanding

Hans-Georg Gadamer was a German philosopher in the continental philosophical tradition who sought to explicate the nature of human understanding. Gadamer has exercised considerable influence in practical theology. Don Browning's practical theology, for example, is heavily influenced by Gadamer's practical philosophy. Particularly significant for Browning is Gadamer's point-of-departure in human practice, his assertion that the fundamental structure of human understanding is dialogue or conversation, and his insistence of the role of effective history, bias

---

[367] This is in order to avoid situations of oppression or genocide; something that looms large in Habermas' mind because of his experience of Nazi Germany.

and preunderstandings, and the fusion of horizons.[368] Gadamer's influence in theology has also

been extended by way of David Tracy.[369] Tracy sees postmodern hermeneutics as testing religious

interpretations of texts and/or belief systems. At the same time, since religions themselves, as the

most fundamental part of most peoples' lives, include plurality and ambiguity, interpretation, and

conversation is intrinsic.[370]

Gadamer is essential to this present exploration of interreligious/interfaith dialogue because

his work deals with important themes such as bias and prejudice present in all dialogue,

hermeneutics, and the connection of understanding and phronesis, i.e., dialogue and understanding

are a practical endeavor that is intrinsic to human being-in-the-world. In keeping with the

phenomenological tradition, Gadamer depicts his hermeneutics as "that which happens when

human beings understand, and not as a methodological programme in itself."[371] His hermeneutics

has an anti-methodological character because he believes that the amalgamation of hermeneutical

insights and interpretive method leads to a purely technical notion of hermeneutics, which reduces

it to the level of other modern technologies.[372] It is the philosophical aspect of hermeneutics that

Gadamer wants to stress. In this sense, hermeneutics should be view as practical philosophy

because it promotes human understanding.[373]

In *Truth and Method,* Hans-Georg Gadamer attacks the "objectivity" of objectivist

reasoning (more specifically historical objectivism), positing that prejudices are present in all

---

[368] Robert L. Kinast, *What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?* (New York: Paulist Press, 2000), 53.

[369] Ibid.

[370] David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987), ix-x, 82-114.

[371] Werner Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: SCM Press LTD, 1994), 65.

[372] Ibid.

[373] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science, Trans by Frederick G. Lawrence* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981), 112.

understanding. For Gadamer our hermeneutical situation implies limitations or horizon.[374] The

problem with *understanding* is that we are trying to understand a historical phenomenon (art,

philosophy, culture, ourselves) from a distance and from our own situation/perspective.[375] Each

person approaches a subject or situation with preconceived notions about that subject, or at the very

least, a preexisting criteria of judgment about how to interpret and categorize the information we

discover about the subject. As such, "horizon" is a fundamental concept in Gadamer's

hermeneutics, and it is essential to the concept of "situation." The term *situation* is defined by

saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. A horizon indicates the

"range of vision", i.e., only the things that can be seen from a particular vantage point.[376] Gadamer

maintains understanding is always the fusion of these horizons (the present and the past).

One sees that the influence of Heidegger is explicit in this principle in terms of

understanding and fore-conception, fore-sight, and fore-having. Both Heidegger and Gadamer

propose that every time a person approaches a phenomenon trying to understand it, she/he has

preconceived notions of what it is. As Heidegger puts it, "interpretation is never without a

presuppositionless grasping of something previously given."[377] While Heidegger uses the concept

of "Da-sein" as the means to explore ontology and how understanding and interpretation take place,

Gadamer uses history (as tradition, situation, context, etc). Loosely defined, Da-sein is human

existence (human *being*). There are, however, several features of Da-sein that need to be

comprehended. Da-sein *must be* understood as "being-in-the-world."[378] Being-in-the-world has

several structural factors: 1) "in-the-world" which seeks to determine the ontological structure of

---

[374] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method, Second Edition Translation Revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall* (New York, NY: Continuum, 2004), 302.
[375] Ibid., 300.
[376] Ibid., 301.
[377] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit, Trans by Joan Stambaugh* (New York, NY: State University of New York Press), 141.
[378] Ibid., 49.

the world as such; 2) the *being* which always is in the way of being-in-the-world, i.e. the *who* that is in the world that determines the everydayness of Da-sein; and 3) *being in* as such which suggests that Da-sein cannot be seen as an entity outside or alongside the world.[379]

If any structure to human existence is to be found it is in the human relationship to the world. Heidegger rejects the view that being-in-the-world is essentially spiritual and human *being* embodies this spirituality. This is the claim that human existence is a mirror of a world beyond this world, reminiscent to the archetypal forms of Plato. This way of thinking, says Heidegger, is "motivated not ontologically, but 'metaphysically' in the naïve opinion that human being is initially a spiritual thing which is then subsequently placed 'in' a space."[380] From this one also sees Heidegger's distinction between ontology and "metaphysics." Ontology does not attempt to establish a world behind the world. Rather, it analyzes the structures of being people encounter in everyday life. By establishing "everyday life" and experience as the point-of-departure, Heidegger and Gadamer demonstrate that one cannot help but approach and apply pre-understandings to a text or situation.

Gadamer's dialectical hermeneutics has an interesting construal of experience and knowledge. First, he levels a critique at conventional elucidation of knowledge as "conceptual data" and knowing as a "perceptual act."[381] Experience has it dialectical fulfillment "not in a knowing but in an openness for experience, which is itself set in free play by experience."[382] Experience, then, does not refer to simple data collection and storage. Rather, experience is the largely "non-objectifiable" accumulation of understanding, i.e. wisdom.[383] Since Gadamer characterizes

---

[379] Ibid., 50.
[380] Ibid., 53.
[381] Richard Palmer, *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969), 194.
[382] Ibid., 195.
[383] Ibid.

experience in this vein (i.e., largely non-objectifiable), our experiential encounters, whether with texts or other people, are interpretive encounters. So the basic claim of Gadamerian hermeneutics (and hermeneutics in general) is all knowledge is interpreted knowledge and all experience is interpreted experience.

Gadamer's theory of hermeneutics is significant for this present work because of his insistence on the inevitability of conversation in the pursuit and attainment of truth.[384] Conversation is an inescapable fact of human existence. One is constantly in conversation. Whether one is having an exchange with someone who is bodily present, written correspondence, or reading a book. These conversations (dialogues) have profound effects on on a person. Dialogue, in one way or another, transforms people.

Dialogue is not simply the exchange of propositions.[385] There is serious engagement of self-understanding, as well as, a sincere effort to understand the position, self-understanding, and general framework of one's interlocutors. The participants in a dialogical encounter are interconnected through the dialogue; the conversation creates a space of relation. Dialogue partners should not be thought of as "independent beings only extrinsically related by their conversational exchange."[386] They are defined by the exchange itself as actors, speakers, thinkers, questioners, and answerers. They are both guided by and creating the possibilities dialogical exchange stimulates. The conversation is itself extraordinary because of the relation and transformation it evokes.

Dialogical exchange happens through language. As such, language is a central theme in Gadamer's work. He sees language as the means of "being at home in the world."[387] Language is

---

[384] Robert Sokolowski, "Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics" in Lewis Edwin Hahn, ed., *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer* (Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997), 225.
[385] Ibid.
[386] Ibid.
[387] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics, Trans by David E. Linge* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976), 238-239.

all-encompassing and pervasive in reality. The only way we understand our being is through language.[388] For Gadamer, language is not only an instrument of expression, but also an embodiment of thought.[389] Language is something through which people live and act. It is the bearer of traditions. Language allows us to understand things or concepts, and it is the means by which we grasp and convey information.

Communication/dialogue/conversation is a key concept for practical theology. Inter-human communication is essential to the praxis of Christian faith (or any religious tradition for that matter) because the Christian faith community has been propagated through the communication of faith.[390] Anne van der Meiden suggests that communication is the most fundamental human fact, religious fact, and divine fact.[391] The human fact refers to the fact that communication is fundamental to human life. The religious fact substantiates that essential religious concepts and practices, such as love, justice, and compassion are primarily about relationships, and thus communication is indispensable.[392] Communication is a divine fact because it conveys the notion that God is a God of communion (i.e., God communes and communicates through revelation). From a practical theological standpoint, communication/dialogue stems from divine reality.[393] It follows, then, that dialogue is also a vital key to understanding both human and divine reality.

What one can gather from the hermeneutical and dialogical traditions is the possibility of inquiry, the connection between inquiry and the search for reality and truth, and the necessity (inescapability) of dialogical exchange. Habermas demonstrates the need for a justifiable basis for

---

[388] Joel C. Weinsheimer, *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985), 213. Gadamer's exact phrase is, "*Sein das versanden warden kann, ist Sprache*" (Being that can be understood is language).
[389] Robert Sokolowski, "Gadamer's Theory of Hermeneutics," 228.
[390] F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), 119.
[391] Ibid., 121-122.
[392] Hendrik Kraemer, *The Communication of the Christian Faith* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1957), 21.
[393] F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction*, 122.

beliefs and the ways people live. This does not necessarily denote the destruction of difference. In fact, it is because of difference that there is a need for general principles to govern interactions and the relation of our institutions. Gadamer's highlighting of the hermeneutical circle and prejudice serves as a constant reminder that perceived handle on truth and reality is highly contextual and finite. As the Apostle Paul says, "we only know in part", i.e., all our knowledge is partial knowledge.[394]

Both Habermas and Gadamer illustrate the necessity of communal dialogue in search of truth and reality, and the principles that govern society. Each religion approaches ultimate reality from its particular perspective. Each religious person approaches life and ultimate reality from his/her particular perspective, with the influence of whatever tradition he/she has been shaped by. This implies the necessity of differing perspectives in coming as close to truth as possible. Assumptions and beliefs are open to perpetual questioning. Peoples' conclusions do not have special status; they are staging post to further inquiries.   Dialogue (communication) is the means to bring our beliefs and practices to public (shared) exploration and validation. In dialogue, poeple articulate statements about reality and argue that certain things are true or false.[395] As finite beings/creatures each persons or community can only gain glimpses of divine reality. Knowledge of divinity is deepened by encounters with one another, as persons share and express experiences of divine reality- individually or communally via their perspective religious traditions. The connection between humanity and divine reality allows us to glean what divinity is like through concrete human experiences and dialogue.

---

[394] 1 Corinthians 13:12. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).
[395] F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction*, 128.

Critique of Dialogue

This dissertation is predicated on the premise that "interreligious dialogue" is the most adequate means of broaching the issue of religious pluralism, particularly within the framework of practical theology. It also posits that dialogue is more than a conversation, or a meeting between religious scholars. It is a way of life and practice. Through dialogue, one is not only seeking to understand and compare the functionality of religions, but also using religious practices as a context for interreligious interaction. The most adequate theological explanation of interfaith dialogue flows from practice and practical concerns. Some scholars object to this line of thinking.

John Milbank is a serious voice of agitation for this position. Milbank rejects the claim that practical reason provides a more suitable point-of-departure than theoretical reason.[396] Milbank suggests that what he dubs "the praxis solution" (by which he means political practice and social and ethical theory) is plagued by the same problems of as epistemological reasoning.[397] At the heart of Milbank's critique lies an uneasiness with the claims of religious pluralism, principally the attempt to reduce all religions to a single ultimate reality at the core.[398] He sees this as an attempt to promulgate modern, capitalist, and liberal principles.

Liberal values are inextricably linked to a Hellenic-Roman-Christian-Jewish heritage, as well as, to certain "pragmatic necessities and reconfigurations of power which ensued upon the disintegration of Christendom."[399] At issues is the overt bias for dialogue, stemming from practical reason, involves an ascription to modern liberal Western values that does not acknowledge the systemic and enduring political substructures, which perpetuate these values. These substructures

---

[396] John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1990), 174.
[397] Ibid.
[398] Milbank's essay is a part of a collection of essay leveling critiques of the essays found in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* and the position of pluralism presented in this particular text.
[399] John Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," 174-175.

undermine claims to universality. Milbank suggests this creates a paradox, namely, that the

privileged categories of practical reason for addressing religious pluralism (dialogue, pluralism,

diversity, contextualism), as well as, the touted standards of the pluralist paradigm (social justice,

equality, liberation) are themselves fixed in the globally dominating Western culture.[400] Moreover,

the enthusiastic reception of "the religious other" and the recognition of other cultures is actually

the imposition of Western norms and categories (heavily influenced by Western Christianity) upon

these cultures and the religious other. In other words, instead of creating a space for equality and

acceptance of difference through dialogue (as the pluralist school says is its aim), the turn to

practical reason actually promulgates the very oppressive structures it seeks to dismantle.

        To say that there may be various ways to any particular religious reality (e.g., the Christian

religious reality) is suffer under an ethnocentric illusion. In fact, Milbank argues, the very idea of

dialogue is predicated upon such an illusion.[401] For Milbank, dialogue proceeds with the impression

that there is a common subject matter, and facts that can be accepted relating to this subject matter

by most, if not all, of the participants.[402] Thus, the notion of dialogue assumes coalesce around an

object independent of our personal and communal experiences.[403]

This makes "dialogue" a privileged means of grasping truth and reality. The varied religious

traditions and religious experiences of renowned historical figures (e.g. Jesus, Nanak, and

Muhammad) are merely differing angles of the same reality and truth.

        Emanating from this view of dialogue is the claim that dialogue blurs the fact of difference

among the religions. As S. Mark Heim effectively demonstrated, the religions are different and

cannot be reduced to a single, common origin or even mere angles of a single truth and reality. In

---

[400] Ibid., 175.
[401] Ibid., 177.
[402] Ibid.
[403] Ibid.

dialogue, religious difference is absorbed into an overemphasis of communalities. Dialogue proceeds from the premise that all participants are equal and the religious tradition and/or culture each represents is free of all presuppositions and (more importantly for present purposes) evaluations of the other perspective participants.[404]

Milbank contends that we should not see dialogue a privileged means to truth. There is little to glean from the "voice of an interlocutor, whose vey willingness to speak will probably betray an alienation from the seamless narrative succession of a tradition which never felt the need for dialogical self-justification."[405] For many traditions, the validity is in the continued survival and relevance of their beliefs and practices, and the prominence given to these belief and practices within that particular culture. The "problem" of religious diversity in essence is a Western intellectual/theological faux pas in an attempt to explicate the relation Christianity to non-Christian religions.

The praxis solution is viable only if the assumptions of the pluralist position (also known as the "Myth School") are accepted. The primary assumption is that actions such as feminism, struggles for racial equality, and advocating for economic egalitarianism are possible only when they are connected to a pluralist account of religious diversity. Milbank posits that connecting these movements of praxis to religious pluralism (as characterized by the "Myth School") limits these movements by interjecting Western liberal ideology and the framework of modern Western capitalism. The "Myth School" fails to adequately demonstrate that a pluralist theological paradigm is the only paradigm that takes issues of justice seriously. According to thinkers such as Suchocki,

---

[404] John Milbank" The End of Dialogue," 177. Milbank says that even this premise is predicated upon the attitude that each religious tradition and culture that is participating in the dialogue is accepts the principles of autonomous spiritual freewill (i.e. everyone has the right to practice spirituality as they deem fit) and an open commitment to truth. Of course these are, according the Milbank, impositions of Western liberal values and categories. Thus, the appearance of equality and allowing the "religious other" to speak for his/herself is actually a form of (unintentional) subjugation.
[405] Ibid., 178.

Knitter, and Hick, even inclusivism is linked to attitudes and practices of domination.[406] In the end, Milbank concludes that neither practice nor pluralism provides a sufficient foundation/framework for religious diversity or acts of justice/liberation.

One can take a number of issues with Milbank's overall assessments and conclusion. I would like to hone in on the issue of dialogue- particularly Milbank's claim that dialogue is not a privileged means of accessing truth about divine reality. This is not to say that dialogue is the only means by which we gain knowledge about divine reality. However, interreligious/interfaith dialogue provides greater insight into divine reality then many other modes of accessing truth because of the interaction and exploration of various religious experiences and perspectives. The main problem lies in a failure to view "dialogue" from a realist (metaphysical realism) perspective.

Religious traditions are formed over time and are shaped and influenced by prevailing socio-political, economic, and cultural situations. This does not necessarily mean, however, that religious traditions do not embody elements of truth and reality. *Divine Reality is not a social construct*. There may be several manifestations of the divine, and various interpretations of how human beings relate and understand the divine, but the character of divine reality is independent of any person, group, culture, and historical circumstances. To claim otherwise is to deny that divine (ultimate) reality is indeed "real."

Interreligious dialogue assumes human beings can know about and discuss ultimate reality because this is precisely what religious traditions claim, i.e., religious beliefs and practices stem from encounters, revelations, etc. of divine/ultimate reality. If in fact human experience of the divine is always fragmented and finite, then it follows that a fuller picture of the divine comes only through comparison and critique of information and experiences from several perspectives. In

---

[406] Francis X. Clooney, "Reading the World in Christ: From Comparison to Inclusivism" in Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, 75.

essence, persons gain a more accurate understanding of divine reality through dialogue. In effect, an interreligious/interfaith dialogical community becomes what Charles Peirce calls a "community of inquirers" as it pertains to the quest to understand divine reality. This does not mean one should conceal or deny the cultural aspects of religious beliefs and practices. Culture is an unavoidable and necessary component. As Tillich explains, culture is that which takes care of something, keeps it alive, and makes it grow.[407]   However, people still engage in political and social resolution through interfaith dialogue. Milbank correctly cautions against presuming a common theme and conception of justice, equality, etc. among the world's religions. As was demonstrated, religions differ from each other as much as they resemble each other in some respects. Even if there is agreement that the religions should work to together to promote peace and justice in the world, there nonetheless has to be ways to determine what peace and justice actually is.[408] For this, there is need of some criteria and methods to determine a universally plausible definition of such concepts and principles.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue & Realism

When one approaches interreligious/interfaith dialogue within a framework of theological and philosophical realism, one sees the dialogue can also be a means of gaining deeper understanding of divine reality.[409] Religion has two fundamental aims: cultivating a disposition of life and the quest for ultimate truth.[410] Too often, one of these purposes is emphasized over the other, and at present, many scholars ignore the latter aim all together (or religion is rejected as a legitimate, objective, means of reaching truth). Each religious tradition represents an attempt to

---

[407] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology: Life and the Spirit: History of the Kingdom of God, vol. 3* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 57.
[408] See for example Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979), 91-92.
[409] Robert Cummings Neville, *Realism in Religion: A Pragmatist's Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2009), 3.
[410] Anand Spencer, "Participating in One Another's Rituals: A Christian Perspective," *Dialogue & Alliance, vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 1992.*

understand truth and live it out.[411] Exploring the various religions brings religious persons closer to

discovering "the whole truth."[412] Defining religion as a static set of doctrines and practices neglects

key facts about the world's religions. Religions are best understood as living traditions that grow,

change over time, and are portable. This speaks to the adaptability that is necessary in any quest for

what is true. Susan Haack, for example, juxtaposes science and religion, arguing that science is

preferable because it is primarily a means of inquiry, and religion is not.[413] Haack characterizes

science and scientific inquiry as a "federation of kinds of inquiry."[414] Science relies on reasoning

and experience, not supernatural or ecclesiastical authority. The scientific method is based on

empirical data (including everyday experience) and reasoning, which extends from empirical data,

as opposed to faith, divine revelation, and the like. Instead, data is gathered by various communities

of scientists. Thus, scientific inquiry is the "joint, ongoing efforts of a vast inter-generational

community."[415]

Haack characterizes religion, on the other hand, as a body of creeds and doctrines that must

be strictly observed and obeyed. Religious beliefs require genuine personal commitment that resists

all forms of doubt or deviation. Consequently, Haack argues, disbelief, or incorrect belief,

constitutes sin.[416] Haack sees faith as "commitment in the absence of compelling evidence."[417]

Science cannot accept faith in the religious sense as Haack sees it.[418] Religion, for Haack, is not a

mode of inquiry. Haack says that theology, not religion, is a form of inquiry.[419] Still theology

entertains supernatural evidence and justification. These resources go beyond empirical reasoning,

---

[411] Ibid.
[412] Ibid.
[413] Susan Haack, *Defending Science- Within Reason: Between Scientism and Cynicism* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007), 265-268.
[414] Ibid., 266.
[415] Ibid.
[416] Ibid., 267.
[417] Ibid.
[418] She does admit that many professional scientists hold beliefs in dogmatic fashion.
[419] Ibid., 267.

so theology, unlike science, is "discontinuous with everyday empirical inquiry." Haack's argument is indicative of a general misunderstanding of religion as basic adherence and assent to established doctrines with no regard for exploring the validity of these doctrines. Religious traditions are not primarily body of creeds, but equally a disposition of life and a pursuit of truth. Religious traditions are not primarily body of creeds; rather they are dispositions of life in pursuit of truth and ultimate reality. Theology is a means by which religions pursue truth through reappraising salient doctrines and teachings in light of warranted information from other disciplines or sources of information about human existence and our environment. When we consider that a quest for truth is ingrained in many of the great religious traditions (e.g., the quest for unifying truth as a distinctive feature of the Upanishads and the Hindu philosophical tradition, the adherence to truth as one of the five fundamental practices of Jainism, and Jesus' claim of being the truth, and the one of the tasks of the Holy Spirit as leading the disciples into all truth in the Christian tradition), we discover that "blind allegiance" is not the focus of religious practices.[420] So, a primary aim of religion is to attain (ultimate) truth, not simply propagate conventional beliefs.

Human beings are finite, and all human knowledge (as we have seen in the work of Habermas and Gadamer) is limited. Religious traditions possess partial knowledge of reality as well because the adherents and practitioners are finite. If one accepts the premise that divine reality is present in religious traditions besides Christianity, then a fuller picture of knowledge about divine reality (and reality in general) can be developed from the coalescing of the doctrines, experiences, and practices of the various religions. In other words, interreligious/ interfaith dialogue among the religions is the most effective way to come as close to truth about divine reality as possible.

---

[420] See Vasudha Narayanan, "The Hindu Tradition" and Vasudha Narayanan, "The Jain Tradition" in Willard Oxtoby, ed., *World Religions: Eastern Traditions 2nd Edition* (Oxford University Press Canada, 2002), 29 & 181.

Consequently, the optimum foundation for even the possibility of interreligious/interfaith dialogue is a "realist" viewpoint of reality.

One of the pitfalls of dialogue is the uncritical acceptance of the impossibility of truth-claims or statements.[421] The claims of postmodernism and relativism give credence to this position. Postmodernism is more a broad cultural movement than a coherent school of thought. The postmodern ethos is centerless.[422] Nietzsche is one of the seminal thinkers who was anticipatory of the postmodern view.[423] He provided three fundamental principles: 1) no objective truth is possible 2) no knowledge claim is free from interpretation, and 3) there is no universal criterion to justify the validity of one view over another.[424] Jean-Francois Lyotard's characterization of postmodernism as "incredulity towards metanarratives" is an excellent summary of the postmodern ethos.[425] There is opposition to metanarratives, universality, and generality. More importantly for our present discussion, postmodernism denies that objective truth is possible.[426] Relativism is a key feature of postmodernism. Postmodern thinkers tout the inescapable affect of the environment in which an individual resides on that individual's beliefs and the rationalization given to support those beliefs.[427] Religious beliefs, morals, ethics, and values differ from society to society, from person to person. One should not simply acquiesce to the claims of postmodernism or relativism. Respect for difference does not necessarily mean the abandonment of core beliefs about the nature of reality. These beliefs should be discarded only when they are proven false or unfeasible. While it is true

---

[421] Douglas V. Porpora, "A Propaedeutic to a propaedeutic on Inter-religious Dialogue" in Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London: Routledge, 2004), 111.

[422] Stanley Greenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 19.

[423] See Cornel West, "Nietzsche's Prefiguration of Postmodern American Philosophy" in *The Cornel West Reader* (New York, NY: Basic *Civitas* Books, 1999), 188- 212.

[424] Richard Tarnas, *The Passion of the Western Mind* (New York, NY: Ballantine Books, 1993), 370.

[425] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi* (University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

[426] Roger Caldwell, "How to Get Real" in *Philosophy Now* Issue 42 July/August 2003, 35-38.

[427] Stanley Greenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 14.

that religious knowledge- like all knowledge- is limited, as well as, articulated from a contextual standpoint, it does not necessarily disallow that a religious tradition may have grasped some measure of truth about the nature of reality, human existence, etc. Finite knowledge is still knowledge. The purpose of interreligious/ interfaith dialogue is to both build relationship, plus gain deeper insights into divine reality. Openness to other religions in mutual understanding, care, and love does not negate the fact that each religion may be right about some things and wrong about others- things that are a matter of ultimate concern.

"Dialogue" is sometimes used as code for a relativistic means to reduce the world's religions to one essence or to an "equal playing field," making them merely cultural creations or sets of ethical teachings, with no real insights into reality. Religious beliefs are seen as unverifiable, and religious concepts only have meaning in relation to other religious concepts (limited to a linguistic framework).[428] Thus the only way to engage in dialogue at all one must either relinquish all claims to truth, avoid the discussion of truth all together, or affirm the validity of all religious traditions. This is highlighted in the so-called demarcation between religious and secular reasoning, and even more so in the privileging of science (especially the natural sciences) over religious beliefs among many scholars and intellectuals. Some of which consider religion to be a body of beliefs (creeds), as opposed to being a form of inquiry, that adherents can never question or challenge for fear of divine reprisal.[429] If such is the case, then dialogue among religions is not possible. However, once this limited depiction of religion is abolished, as well as, the unfounded judgment that religions offer no insight into the nature of reality, one discovers dialogue as a genuine and

---

[428] See Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System," in Michael Baton, ed., *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion, Reprint Edition* (London: Routledge, 2004); R. B. Braithwaite, "The Nature of Religious belief," in Basil Mitchell, ed., *The Philosophy of Religion* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1971); and George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster John Knox Press, 1984).
[429] Susan Haack, *Defending Science- Within Reason*, 267.

effective means of mutual interaction in the search for truth (or as close to truth as we can achieve) about divine reality, human existence, etc.

Furthermore, the only way genuine dialogue can occur is when persons affirm the truth-claims of their perspective faith traditions, subject them to constructive criticism, and have a willingness to revise or discard them as needed. Effective interreligious/ interfaith dialogue requires the courage to put a community's embedded beliefs on the line for critical scrutiny, the readiness to posit tentative hypotheses, and *the willingness to place the search for truth above all else.* Critique and revision are near impossible a part from a realist framework. Examining the validity of the religious beliefs and concepts of a tradition is to take that religious tradition's truth-claims seriously.[430] Adopting the secular and/or postmodern conception of relativism, i.e., relegating the validity of religious beliefs to the private realm or solely within a particular religious system can be considered an insult to religious believers.[431] It amounts to a form of patronizing. No matter how one tries to spin it, religious beliefs are either valid or invalid, warranted or unwarranted. Realism acknowledges this fact.

There is no consensus as to the exact definition of realism (or anti-realism for that matter).[432] There are several forms and definitions of realism that provide clues to some consistent themes. Realism has been defined as a claim about what entities exist and the independent nature of these entities.[433] Another definition says that realism is the assertion that something is in some way(s) mind-independent.[434] Still other characterizations argue that there are two aspects to realism,

---

[430] Andrew Collier, "Realism, Relativism, and Reason in Religious Belief" in Margaret S. Archer, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora, *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God* (London: Routledge Press, 2004), 44.

[431] Ibid.

[432] Stuart Brock and Edwin Mares, *Realism and Anti-Realism* (Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007), p 2.

[433] Michael Devitt, *Realism and Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing Company, 1991), 14

[434] Timothy Williamson, "Realism and Anti-Realism" in Ted Honderich, ed., *Oxford Companion to Philosophy New Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005).

namely the claim that certain entities exist and that these entities exist independently of people's

opinions.[435]

Many Christian theologians are exploring issues of religion, realism, and truth.[436] Some

practical theologians have already moved towards a kind of theological realism. Don Browning, for

example, argues that a *hermeneutic realism* is the most adequate epistemological framework for a

practical theology of dialogue.[437] The qualifier "hermeneutic" shows the acceptance of the premise

that all attempts of human understanding unfold within the context of dialogue or conversation.[438]

Browning defines practical theology as "critical and correlational reflection on the church's

transformative actions in the world."[439] Consequently, for him, public practical theology is

concerned with how theology both analyzes and critiques the beliefs and practices of both religious

and nonreligious groups. Hermeneutical realism is a form of *critical realism* (as defined by

philosophers of science and social scientists, most notably Roy Bhaskar).[440] In this sense, it

maintains the delicate balance that while all knowledge is in some sense constructed, we can

nonetheless reach degrees of approximation on reality. So understanding through dialogue (if it is

done well) has the capability to discern and articulate "workable approximations" of accurate

descriptions of reality and principles for ethical ways of living.[441]

The particular brand of realism utilized in this present work is that of Charles Sanders

Peirce. Peirce developed his realism with the understanding that metaphysics is the study of the

---

[435] http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/realism/

[436] See for example, Peter Byrne, *God and Realism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2003) and Robert Cummings Neville, *Realism in Religion: A Pragmatist's Perspective* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2009).

[437] Don Browning, "Feminism, Family, and Women's Rights: A Hermeneutic Realist Perspective," *Zygon, vol. 38, no. 2, June 2003*, 317-332.

[438] Ibid., 318. Browning is following the hermeneutic philosophy of Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur, and Richard Bernstein.

[439] Ibid.

[440] See Roy Bhaskar, *A Realist Theory of Science New Edition* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2008) and Margaret Archer, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson, and Alan Norrie, eds., *Critical Realism: Essential Readings* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1998).

[441] Don Browning, "Feminism, Family, and Women's Rights: A Hermeneutic Realist Perspective," 319.

most general features of reality and real objects. The fundamental question then becomes what does it mean to call something real? To answer this question Peirce follows Duns Scotus' definition. For Scotus something was real if and only if it is independent of, and unaffected by, what anyone in particular may think it to be. This Scotus-Peirce view of reality is a direct negation of the view of reality purported by nominalism. Nominalism says all real being is individual and particular; universals are fictitious.[442] Words are merely signs used to allow and convey human understanding. They do not point to real universal entities. Another consequence of nominalism as it developed in Medieval thought was the notion that God (or divinity) could not be understood through human reason.[443]

Peirce defined nominalism as "the doctrine that nothing is general but names…individualism."[444] Common nouns such as humanity, black, or lion, are mere conveniences for speaking of many things at once, or necessities of human thought. In outright rejection of nominalism, Peirce describes a realist as a logician who holds that the essences of natural classes have some mode of being in the real things.[445] Realism asserts the real existence of the external world as independent of all thought about it. Peirce's turn towards realism was gradual, but it began early in his thought.[446] He sought to avoid what he deemed as pitfalls in nominalism. In

---

[442] Michael Allen Gillespie, *The Theological Origins of Modernity* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008), 14.
[443] Ibid.
[444] Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writing*, *Vol. 1, 1867-1893 Eds. by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1992), xxiv.
[445] Ibid., xxiv.
[446] Max Fisch, "Peirce's Progress from Nominalism Toward Realism," in Kenneth Laine Ketner and Christian Kloesel, eds., *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism: Essays by Max H. Fisch* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986), 184-200.

nominalism, he saw the denial of community, an untenable basis for science, and, while realism is oriented toward the future, nominalism is oriented toward the past.[447]

Peircean realism concurs with nominalism that our knowledge is a social construction that should be subject to constant revision.[448] One of the foundational principles of Peirce's philosophy is fallibillism. Fallibillism is the thesis that no inquirer can claim with absolute certainty to have reached the truth, for new information and knowledge can always enter and shatter fundamental assumptions or widely held propositions. In contrast to nominalism, Peirce maintained that there is an objective reality, independent of what any particular person or group may think or believe, that will be revealed to us at the end of an infinite process of inquiry.[449] He says, "the real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you."[450] The advantageous insight that Peirce offers is the *while knowledge may be a social construction, truth is not.*[451]

Another valuable insight from Peirce is that the aim of inquiry is the shaping of habit (human conduct). For Peirce, ideas (beliefs, arguments, experiences, etc) have a real, indispensable, and decisive effect in the world through the formation of habit.[452] Ideas have casual efficacy. The process of inquiry not only produces conceptual constructions of knowledge, but more importantly, it produces "concrete instantiations" in the form of ways of life.[453] The same applies with religious beliefs. Religious beliefs have casual efficacy. They shape the ways in which people live and

---

[447] Charles Peirce, *The Essential Peirce,* xxvi. The orientation of realism towards the future is important for Peirce as he sees the *possibility* for the attainment of truth and the real in "the long run" after a infinite, rigorous process of communal inquiry.

[448] Kelly A. Parker, *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought* (Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998), 192.

[449]Ibid., 192.

[450] Charles Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" in *The Essential Pierce vol. 1,* 52.

[451] Kelly A. Parker, *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought*, p. 191. Peirce considered this to be the great nominalistic error, i.e., the consideration of truth as well as knowledge as social constructions.

[452] Charles Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Peirce, volume 5, Eds., Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss* (Cambridage, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935), 105.

[453] Kelly A. Parker, *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought*, 185.

interact with each other. Milbank again is correct when he says that religious reasoning is as much inscribed in a particular group of people's habitual action and social organization, as in their conceptual thoughts. However, the interaction of religious ideas and practices from differing religious traditions should not necessarily be relegated to cultural relativism in regards to truth and divine reality. Interreligious dialogue equates to a process of inquiry into religious/divine truth.

What is inquiry? Simply stated, inquiry is a close examination of a matter or thing in a search or quest for information or truth. Peirce used the term inquiry to refer to the struggle, caused by doubt, to attain a state of belief.[454] There is a distinction from being in a state of doubt and being in a state of belief. The state of doubt is one of agitation and discomfort. Belief is a state of calmness and satisfaction. If one finds oneself in a state of doubt, one will strive to regain a state of belief.[455] Doubt stimulates persons to seek for a stable foundation for belief, i.e., when a person's beliefs are questioned or demonstrated to be faulty she/he then seeks clarity for those beliefs or search for more adequate beliefs. This action is essential because peoples' beliefs shape and guide their habits/conduct.

A person's way of being (life) is shaped by beliefs. Thus, it is imperative that people uphold the most valid beliefs as they possibly can. This is especially true of religious beliefs as they have the most profound impact on the ways people live. The clash of religious truth-claims, belief-systems, practices, and worldviews produces doubt. With this doubt, the struggle to achieve the cessation of doubt begins- cessation that occurs only when one discovers the most plausible beliefs or truth-claims. One examines a variety of ideas, concepts, and practices from various perspectives to get a clearer picture of reality. "Hence, the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion."[456]

---

[454] Charles Peirce, "The Fixation of Belief," in *The Essential Peirce vol. 1*, 114.
[455] Ibid.
[456] Ibid., 114-115.

Peirce says that to demonstrate the validity of an idea, the idea must be clear, distinct, and one must demonstrate its consequential effects. Peirce's pragmatic philosophy was essentially concerned with obtaining or clarifying hard words and/or abstract concepts. Maintaining Descartes' principle that such words and concepts should represent clear and distinct ideas, Peirce added practical consequences as the final criterion for understanding words and concepts. He says, "Consider what effects, which might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object."[457] In essence, Peirce suggested that until people grasp the practical (operational) consequences of their beliefs and practices, their theoretical explanations (hypotheses about reality) are merely rational vagueness.[458] Persons understand reality, including divine reality, when they interact with the realities they are seeking to comprehend.[459]

Since Peircean pragmatism assumes a particular form of (scholastic) realism, i.e. general truths and laws are revisable and contingent but nevertheless objectively real and independent of human opinions, it escapes subtle forms of relativism and nominalism, as well as, embraces "the doctrine of absolute chance."[460] The doctrine of chance, which Peirce calls *tychism*, accents growth, variety, diversity and spontaneity in the universe, as opposed to a hard determinism. It also offers the possibility for convergence and agreement among inquirers in an infinite future.[461]

Inquiry is not the task of individuals. Embedded in dialogue is the implication and desire for community.[462] Peirce speaks of a community of inquirers. Inquiry refers to the investigation of a community of learners/seekers of the "real" or truth. Peirce shows that the very idea of truth and

---

[457] Charles Peirce, "How to Make Our Ideas Clear," in *The Essential Peirce vol. 1*, 132.
[458] Donald Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994), 37.
[459] Ibid.
[460] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism* (Madison, WS: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 52.
[461] Ibid.
[462] F. Gerrit Immink, *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction*, 122.

reality is inextricably tied to community. The concept of reality itself implies community. As he

says, "the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the

notion of a community, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of

knowledge."[463] Thus, interreligious/interfaith dialogue is a necessary, unavoidable practice. As

inquires of the divine, the religious traditions constitute a community of inquires of divine reality

without definite limit (i.e., the search for truth and knowledge and union with the divine is not

limited by religious affiliation). The knowledge and wisdom that has been accumulated, and

continues to accumulate, about the various experiences of divine reality reveal glimpses of truth

concerning the divine (and consequently reality in general). As a Christian, for example, I learned

that meditative exercises were spiritually, physically, emotionally, and psychology beneficial from

Buddhist teachings and practices, not my Christian background.

There are several justifications for a community of inquirers. First, a community of inquirers

encourages self-criticism, or in terms of interreligious/interfaith dialogue, self-reflection of one's

personal religious beliefs or the tradition's criticism on itself.[464] Second, a community of inquiry

engenders openness towards criticism.[465] The notion of community itself suggests presentation of

alternative views, critique, and refutation. All perspectives must be entertained and taken seriously.

Third, flowing from the previous principle, is that no belief and/or practice is exempt from scrutiny

(provided there are genuine reasons for doubt and critique).[466] Fourth, community implies the

absence of coercion in reaching consensus among the community of inquirers.[467] Fifth, community

---

[463] Charles Peirce, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities" in *The Essential Pierce*, *vol. 1,* 52.
[464] James Jakob Liszka, *A General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996), 103.
[465] Ibid., 104.
[466] Ibid. An example of this could be the second place status attributed to women in many religious traditions. The question is what possible basis could there be for this assertion in reality?
[467] Ibid.

implies that the validation or warrant of a claim will have a public or universal quality.[468] In

addition, this criteria of "universality" cannot be predicated upon a certain segment within the

community or a hierarchy. The *community* has to determine the criteria for the community of

inquirers.[469] Therefore, the notion of community (more pointedly a dialogical community) itself

provides certain justifications that make this method superior to individual, isolated inquiries, or the

sole perspective from a single religious tradition.

Justification for the community of religious inquirers of divine reality is also seen in the

diversity of reality. Unity and diversity are both constitutive of reality itself. Truth about reality can

manifest itself in several ways.[470] Reality exerts pluralism whilst maintaining its unity. In other

words, reality/truth is singular but is comprised of and expresses itself through multiple properties.

Truth/reality can be considered a singular, higher level with instantiations across kinds of

propositions that are determined by a class of numerically distinct properties.[471] "What is many are

properties that intuitively make or determine that a proposition is true; what is one is truth itself."[472]

This suggests that experiences of the divine will not be monolithic. There have been

different manifestations of ultimate reality, and each of these have been received and interpreted in

various ways. However, this does not necessarily mean that all interpretations of divine reality are

accurate depictions. Divine reality, for example, cannot be both personal and impersonal

concurrently. It may be that there are ways in which ultimate reality manifests itself as personal or

impersonal, but it is a contradiction to say that ultimate reality is both fully personal and fully

impersonal simultaneously. One may discover that the expressions of ultimate reality are both

personal and impersonal at different times, for specific reasons. The laws that govern the world and

---

[468] Ibid.
[469] Ibid.
[470] Michael Lynch, *Truth As One and Many* (Oxford University Press, 2009), ix.
[471] Ibid., 70.
[472] Ibid.

universe, for instance, can be considered divine laws (i.e., established by a personal divine reality) but these laws are not a personal expression of ultimate reality. The only way to learn this is by considering the experiences and depictions of ultimate reality in the various religions.

A community without "definite limit," in Peirce's thought also speaks to the inter-generational character of the community of inquirers. Since individuals have finite lives, we rely on the "long run" inquiry of the whole community. This community is "extended to all races of beings with whom we can come into immediate or mediate intellectual relation."[473] Religious judgments and claims are not simply answerable to one's immediate community, or those who live at the current time, rather the current group of inquirers are in league with an unlimited community of inquirers.[474] In other words, this community is the inter-generational, inter-racial, inter-scientific, and interreligious community that reaches beyond geographical, historical, and contextual bounds. Human inquiry in the present will yield only so much information. Knowledge is built in light of and in conjunction with past information and discoveries. The community also looks towards the future to clarify and produce new information unavailable to the past and present.

The principle of the "long run" is warranted because inquiry over a longer period of time is more valid than limited inquiry. The limited nature of our lives and inferences prevents us from guaranteeing certainty in our arrival at correct conclusions about the nature of reality.[475] Instead, claims or inferences are made with the reassurance that though some or most of the conclusions may be erroneous, the community will arrive at accurate conclusions in the *long run*.[476] The idea is that through inquiry, any erroroneous comclusions and claims a group may temporarily assert will be corrected, i.e., if inquiry is continued long enough. The long run, or the final opinion is best

---

[473] Charles Peirce, "The Doctrine of Chances," in *The Essential Peirce vol. 1*, 149.
[474] Christopher Hookway, *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism: Themes from Peirce* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002), 70.
[475] C.J. Misak, *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 110.
[476] Ibid.

understood as a "regulative principle of inquiry rather than an attainable goal."[477] Nevertheless, Peirce argued that we should not lose trust in inquiry and the ability to achieve answers. For every question, there is an answer, a final answer.[478] Human beings have the capacity to discern what is real through communal inquiry. Peirce says:

> Finally, as what anything really is, it is what may finally come to be
>
> known in the ideal state of complete information, so that reality
>
> depends on the ultimate decision of the community; so thought is what
>
> it is, only by virtue of its addressing a future thought which is in its
>
> value as thought identical with it, though more developed. In this way,
>
> the existence of thought now depends on what is to be hereafter; so
>
> that it has only a potential existence, dependent on the future of
>
> thought of the community.[479]

Peirce is not saying that reality itself is dependent on the outcome, or consensus, of the community of inquirers as such. Rather he is saying that our individual and collective understandings of reality in general, and the world in particular, will be facilitated by approaching that which is "real" in the *long run* of things so long as inquiry is carried on in the community of inquirers.[480] For Peirce, this means a community that both accepts and practices the normative requirements for scientific inquiry expressed in his pragmatic maxim. Under such conditions, there will be more adequate accommodations for the fallibility of individual opinions and beliefs. Opinions shared by the community of inquirers cannot but help to converge in the *long run* with that which is real in the long run. Nonetheless, such an "ideal state of complete information" is in

---

[477] Cornelius De Waal, *On Peirce* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001), 41.
[478] Charles Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Peirce, volume 4: The Simplest Mathematics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933), 61.
[479] Charles Peirce, *The Collected Papers of Charles Peirce, volume 5*, 316.
[480] Patrick Coppock, "The Role of Community in Peirce's Conception of Science" at www.digitalpeirce.fee.unicamp.br/communi.htm

itself only a hypothesis, and thus remains a matter of belief or hope on the part of human beings as inquirers.

The importance of a realist framework and a religious community of inquirers is demonstrated by the profound effects on religious life and practice. Persons' religious lives, now more than ever, are affected by the religious claims and practices of others. Dialogical communities of religious inquirers are cooperative seekers of truth in the hopes that our actions may be oriented towards the "greater good" of humanity in general. Discernment and discover of religious truth is not solely for the purpose of having a plausible theory. It is, more accurately, to have a more plausible basis for our religious (as well as political, social, economic, etc) practices. Demonstrating that a proposition is correct to believe, and thus to live by, is part of truth's (the work of discovering and discerning truth and what is real) job.[481] Religious practices stem from our beliefs about reality. As such, it behooves us to diligently engage in dialogical practice to ascertain as sure a foundation for our beliefs and practices as we can.

Dialogue, Truth, Knowledge, & Power

Practical theology is a goal-oriented discipline. It seeks to affect and when necessary implement change in society/world. Practical theology has a keen socio-political awareness, and intentions of engaging the problems human beings face.[482] Thus, practical theology has a prophetic function, i.e. the theological and ethical interpretation of current events and social situations, as well as, a comprehensive theory of divine human action to address these situations.[483] Understanding power relations, and how power is propagated through truth-claims and knowledge-claims, are included in the scope of practical theology. Following Nietzsche, Michel Foucault argues that there

---

[481] Michael Lynch, *Truth As One and Many*, 71.
[482] John Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 7.
[483] Richard Osmer, *Practical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2008), 139-140.

is an intimate connection between knowledge and power.[484] The changes that occur in human

thought (thought-systems) are caused by the social, political, and economic forces- all the forces

that exercise some control over people's behavior.[485] It is through discourse and interpretation that

knowledge and power are intertwined.[486] Consequently, we cannot ignore the power dynamics that

exist within the dialogical framework.

      This work is deeply grounded in philosophical and theological realism. For some, however,

the very notion of universal claims signifies (possible) instruments of oppressive systems and

ideologies. Julie Hopkins views universal truth claims as sexist, patriarchal, and imperialistic. In the

(patriarchal) West, truth has been considered objective, deduced through rationality, and then

empirically verified. The elites of the ecclesial and political arenas "wielded" power through claims

of objective knowledge and truth.[487] What ensued was the failure to realize or admit that this

"objective" knowledge was value-laden, and in many instances employed as a strategy for

domination.[488] Each person approaches a subject or situation with preconceived notions about that

subject, or at the very least, a preexisting criteria of judgment about how to interpret and categorize

the information we discover about the subject. For this reason, Foucault says westerners should

abandon the pretension of speaking in universal categories.

      For Foucault, each society has a "regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth."[489] Certain

kinds of discourse are adopted and made to function as true.[490] Truth and knowledge, then, are

---

[484] Gary Gutting, *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005), 50.
[485] Ibid.
[486] Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 123.
[487] Julie Hopkins, "Radical Passion" in Daphne Hampton, ed., *Swallowing a Fishbone?: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996), 68.
[488] Sharon Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 21, 72.
[489] Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews 1972-1977, Edited by Colin Gordon* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980), 133.
[490] Ibid.

merely the product of socio-political and economic forces. All the techniques we use to distinguish truth from falsity, to attain knowledge of the truth, and the means by which these truth/knowledge-claims are validated, are functions of power in society.

These critiques are notable if one is attempting to speak of attaining knowledge and truth through dialogue. The use of truth-claims and knowledge-claims as a means to promulgate oppression is of extreme concern for interreligious/interfaith dialogue. One should suffer no illusions as to the cruel intentions some may have and that are at play even as others seek amenable and just dialogical relations for the purposes of spiritual enhancement. However, it is an exaggeration to say that people are completely unable to identify certain power relations and the connections with certain ideologies, truth/knowledge-claims. In the dialogical process itself, presuppositions, social, political, and economic influences can be identified.

In short, it is in the dialogical framework that persons have hope of surmounting attempts of proliferating oppressive ideologies and knowledge/truth-claims. One should continuously bear in mind Karl Marx's insistence on the importance of the critique of ideologies (i.e., false, oppressive beliefs held by those under oppression that consequently perpetuates their oppression). This is best possible, however, through dialogical exchange where various perspectives and experiences are shared and all equality submitted to scrutiny. If in fact divine reality is no a social construction, and human experience of the divine is always fragmented and finite, then it follows that a fuller picture of the divine comes only through comparison and critique of information and experiences from several perspectives. In essence, one gains a more accurate understanding of divine reality through dialogue.

Leonard Swidler offers the "ten commandments" of interreligious and interideological dialogue that can assist us in avoiding the propagation of oppressive structures or of threatening

identity in the dialogical process.[491] The first commandment is that "the primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly."[492] Generally, people's perceptions of others who believe differently than them change as they learn more about them. This is the fundamental difference between dialogue and debate for Swidler. Whereas debate is for the purpose of persuasion (convincing someone to abdicate their position/beliefs in favor of ours), dialogue is so one can learn, and thereby grow from the dialogue (and possibly change ourselves). The second commandment says, "Interreligious, interideological dialogue must be a two- sided project— within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities."[493] Swidler is concerned that exchange happens both between differing faith traditions, as well as, within one's own faith community. Swidler's third commandment says, "each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity."[494]

The fourth commandment states we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice. The fifth commandment (which is fundamental for dialogue to avoid oppression, etc) is that each participant must define his/herself. According to the sixth commandment, each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are. The seventh commandment insists dialogue can take place only between equals. The eighth commandment admonishes that dialogue takes place only on the basis of mutual trust. The ninth commandment says persons entering into interreligious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-

---

[491] Leonard Swidler, "Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for All Systematic Reflection for Today" in Leonard Swidler, ed., *Toward A Universal Theology of Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 16.
[492] Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 20:1, Winter 1983 (September, 1984, revision).*
[493] Ibid.
[494] Ibid.

critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions. Finally, the tenth commandment says each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within."[495]

Dialogue as A Gateway to Friendship

"Religion" is not a docile feature of human existence. Religious beliefs and practices are vibrant forces in peoples' lives and communities.[496] Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is possible because religions are living traditions, thriving through the everyday practices, experiences, and interactions of human beings. Though one must study sacred religious texts and be acquainted with salient doctrines in order to grasp fully what a religion is about, one cannot circumvent the "living texts" of peoples' everyday lives.

Dialogue as practice is fundamentally rooted in everyday life. It is not simply an "official" conversation amongst intellectuals and religious scholars. To be sure, dialogue between the world's religious scholars and theologians are vital to effective theology and practice of religious diversity. Dialogue, though, must be understood in a broader sense. It is not only words or verbal exchange. The most advantageous context of interfaith dialogue is the day-to-day interaction of persons of differing religious traditions and the verbal and non-verbal dialogue that allows communities to function in peace and civility. Dialogue does happen when we engage in meaningful conversations with adherents of different faith traditions. This is an important part of the process. At the same time, dialogue happens through gestures, symbols, emotions, shared work, and/or shared suffering. These instances allow people to forge bonds and relationships that go far deeper than an interreligious dialogue conference. In a theological sense, dialogue not only has a religious

---

[495] Ibid.
[496] Mary Pat Fisher, *Living Religions, 6th Edition* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005), xi.

dimension, it is a religious experience.[497] Dialogue as religious experience and the essential element

of relationship in dialogue opens the way for a practical theology of religious pluralism in

connection with a theology of friendship.

---

[497] David Tracy*, Dialogue With the Other: The Interreligious Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Publishing
Company, 1990), 98.

Chapter Three:

Liberation Praxis, Hospitality, Friendship and Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue

The previous chapters demonstrated that practical theology is concerned with the practices of Christians in everyday life and the Christian community in general.[498] The theological explanation of interfaith dialogue itself flows from practice and practical concerns. Dialogue is constitutive of human existence.[499] As such, dialogue is also characteristic of Christian life and practice. Stemming from the principle that divine presence and actions can be discerned in other religious traditions and persons of differing faiths, one can assert that to gain a fuller understanding of divine expression divine revelation is to be interpreted not only from within the Christian faith community, but also in relation to other religious traditions. Since this is the case, it behooves the Christian faith community to recognize interreligious and interfaith dialogue as an intentional and perpetual Christian practice. Religious practices facilitate experience and knowledge of divine reality.[500] Dialogue as a Christian practice, then, is oriented towards spiritual enhancement, increasing knowledge of divine reality, and building relationship between us, God, and other human beings.

It was also suggested that dialogue is not an end in itself. Interreligious and interfaith dialogue has the capacity to yield insight into the nature of divine reality and human relations as it pertains to religious beliefs and practices. Friendship has already been demonstrated as a fruitful category in practical theology.[501] Friendship is a foundational relationship that can facilitate spiritual development.[502] Christian friendship can be characterized as a means of building a closer

---

[498] Denise Ackerman and Riet Bons-Storm, eds., *Liberation Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theology in Context* (Leuveen: Peeters, 1998), 1.

[499] Dmitri Nikulin, *On Dialogue* (Landham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006), viii.

[500] See Margaret Miles, *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* (Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006).

[501] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), 8.

[502] Ibid.

relationship to God.[503] One can also say that friendship may be a context for understanding different religious traditions or views of ultimate reality.[504] For this reason, friendship provides an effective context for interreligious and interfaith dialogue. Friends share our instances of joy, pain, and they know each other in ways others do not. Friendship allows for intimacy, i.e., people allow their friends into the "sacred spaces" of their lives (including their religious lives). Dialogue is more than words and conversation (dialogue also includes words, deeds, and reactions to the events of life).[505] Accordingly, interreligious and interfaith dialogue can occur among friends in everyday life.

Friendship, however, does not occur instantaneously. The kind of intimacy necessary for the most fruitful interreligious and interfaith dialogue happens over time. People meet as strangers. Prior to friendship one must engage in hospitality. Hospitality is the practice of receiving strangers. Hospitality is the doorway of friendship. Dialogue as a practice opens new possibilities. The possibilities dialogue creates include liberation praxis, acts of hospitality, and the building of friendships. People from different religions engaging in acts and practices of liberation in a cooperative manner help build relationships and friendships. In fact, one can see the process of strangers meeting, acts of hospitality, and the forging of friendships through liberation praxis.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue & Liberation Praxis

In recent years, there has been a surge in the power and importance of the world's religions.[506] While one cannot deny that much violence and conflict has been perpetrated in the

---

[503] See Kristen Johnson Ingram, *Being a Christian Friend: How Christian Friendship Can Help You Draw Closer to God* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1985).

[504] Marcia Prager and Rebecca Kratz Mays, "Friendship Counts Most," in Rebecca Kratz Mays, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots* (Philadelphia, PA: Ecumenical Press, 2008), 121-131.

[505] Marc Gopin, "The Use of Word and Its Limits: A Critical Evaluation of Religious Dialogue as Peacemaking," in David Smock, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2002), 33-46.

[506] Marc Gopin, *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of the World's Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000), 3-12.

name of religion, the notion that religion is predisposed to promote and encourage violence and

conflict is erroneous.[507] If there is to be peace, justice, and the eradication of oppression in the

world, the religions of the world have to lead this effort. A chief focus of practical theology is the

scrutiny and dismantling of systems and contexts of oppression and suffering.[508] For this reason, a

practical theology of religious pluralism also sees the praxis of interreligious/interfaith dialogue as

being geared towards liberation. Interfaith activism has been and continues to be a prominent and

fruitful context of interfaith interaction, dialogue, and relationship development. Interfaith activism

thrives at the local level in community-based prayer services, demonstrations, and other direct

actions.[509] Interfaith dialogue is an integral key to realizing peace and justice in the world.

Interfaith dialogue is not only a practice but also praxis in the sense that religious persons seek to

deter violence, promote peace, and encourage cooperation among the world's religions to confront

the evils in the world we all face as human beings. Hans Kung articulated this masterfully when he

said:

> There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions. There can be
>
> no peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. There can be no
>
> dialogue between the religions without research into theological foundations.[510]

A practical theology of religious pluralism is theological reflection and spirituality with

meaningful analysis and critique of the contemporary state of the world. The task is to explore with

great depth "how Christian theological and spiritual reflection, rooted in the reality of poverty and

in dialogue with other religious traditions and other academic disciplines, can help us understand

---

[507] See William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[508] John Reader, *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 7, 17.

[509] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 55.

[510] Hans Kung, *Global Responsibility: In Search of A New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1991), 105.

better and respond to the challenge of justice and the call to build a more humane global village."[511]

A practical theology of religious pluralism strives to discern and confront the many challenges and conditions in the world. For example, there are 1.1 billion people lacking clean drinking water and 2.4 billion who have no access to basic sanitation.[512] It is the responsibility of all religions to address such issues.

The move towards a practical theology of religious pluralism is also seen in the connection of liberation theology and theology of religions.[513] Liberation theology in general can be understood as a form of practical theology because its focus is on the condition and lived experiences of oppressed and marginalized peoples. Like practical theology, liberation theology takes experience as its point-of-departure, and holds praxis as its criterion. The socio-economic status of Jesus, for instance, has become central to Christian theological discourse by way of liberation theology.[514] Peoples who have suffered oppression in various forms identify with the Jesus who also suffered oppression, poverty, and political disenfranchisement. By using the socio-economic status of Jesus, theologians seek to place Jesus within his historical context.[515]

An example of Christian liberation theology is mujerista theology. Mujerista theology begins with Hispanic women's experience as the source of theology. This style of theology is based on the lives and communities of Hispanic women. Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz argues that theologians must present the voices of Hispanic women in a manner that reflects their varied reality. "That social locality is central to mujerista theology is consistent with our insistence on the lived-experience of Hispanic women as the source of our theology, which calls for a theological method

---

[511] Daniel Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 22.

[512] Rachel L. Swams, "Lack of Basics Threatens World's Poor," *The New York Times*, August 29, 2002.

[513] Paul Knitter, "Towards A Liberation Theology of Religions," in John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), 178-202.

[514] See Carlos Piar, *Jesus and Liberation: A Critical Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1995).

[515] John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew : Rethinking the Historical Jesus. (*New York: Doubleday, 1991), 279-280.

that not only explicitly identifies such experience but also presents it as unmediated as possible."[516] The manner in which Hispanic women's voices are brought to theological conversation is as important as allowing them to be heard. "Often we have seen the experiences of marginalized groups, including Hispanics, molded to fit into accepted forms of theological discourse."[517] Isasi-Diaz views these moldings as attempts to surreptitiously silence oppressed voices. By allowing the questions of theology to derive from the experiences and communities of Hispanic women, Isasi-Diaz allows them to command and reshape Christian theology to speak to the contexts of Hispanic women.

Non-Christian religions can benefit greatly from dialogue with Christian liberation theology. Paul Knitter has provided a framework for such a conversation by articulating a "liberation theology of religions."[518] Foremost is the primacy of praxis and experience in both liberation and practical theology. By taking experiences of suffering, poverty, and oppression as a point-of-departure, the religions will be better able to articulate a proper response and implement actions to address issues of suffering, poverty, etc from the perspective of their particular religious tradition. Liberation is also a plausible basis for religions to work together for through dialogical praxis.

Though religions can work together for liberation and justice, and religious traditions generally promote attitudes and persons having (at least) basic livable conditions, one should avoid the temptation of "essentializing" the various religions.[519] There is an ever-growing diversity among liberationist religious discourse.[520] Besides Christian liberation theology, one can speak of Islamic liberation theology. Such a theology is grounded in the Quran and the teachings of all the

---

[516] Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, *En La Lucha*, *In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993), 62.
[517] Isasi-Diaz, 63.
[518] See Paul Knitter, "Towards A Liberation Theology of Religions" in John Hick and Paul Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987), 179-180.
[519] Miguel A. De La Torre, *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008), 11.
[520] Ibid.

prophets.[521] Allah is at the core of Islamic liberation theology as the creator and sustainer of all life. Allah (God) is sovereign. As such, Allah supports, loves, and protects creation.[522] God's sovereignty is one of compassion, mercy and peace.[523] The name "Islam" means peace, and Islam that teaches God is the source of peace, or orderliness. Allah calls *all* humanity to live in peace.[524]

There is also the recognition (on the part of some Muslims) that non-Muslims share both in the conditions of oppression and in the struggle for liberation.[525] Through stories, parables, and exhortations, the Qur'an aims at creating an ummah (Islamic community), which is a society untied by faith, enjoying good conduct, and dissuading people from evil and indecent behavior.[526] In a sense, the Qur'an encourages the rejection of a spiritual hierarchy and pushes for a spiritual community with each individual working to make sure that society is just and moral.[527] Though Islam speaks in terms of the ummah, people from differing religious traditions are also welcomed to share in this community.

Interreligious/interfaith dialogue is a Christian practice that not only benefits Christians, but also implores Christians to seek out and communicate the ways in which the Christian tradition can enrich the lives of other religions. Hindu religious thought and practice would greatly benefit from dialogue with Christian liberation theology. Very little attention has been given to liberation theology by Hindu thinkers.[528] Some argue there is an undeniable need for a comprehensive

---

[521] Farid Esack, *Quran Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression* (Oxford: One World Publications, 1997), 83.

[522] Muhammad Mashuq Ibn Ally, "Theology of Islamic Liberation" in Dan Cohn-Sherbok, ed., *World Religions and Human Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992), 48.

[523] Ibid.

[524] Quran 10:25. A. Yusuf Ali, *An English Interpretation of the Holy Quran with English Translation and Full Arabic Text* (Bensenville, IL: Lushena Books, 2007).Emphasis added.

[525] Farid Esack, *Quran Liberation and Pluralism*, 36.

[526] Mahmoud Ayoub, "The Islamic Tradition," in Willard Oxtoby, ed., *World Religions: Western Traditions 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 354.

[527] H.A.R. Gibb, "Islam" in R.C. Zaehner, ed., *Encyclopedia of the World's Religions* (New York: Barnes & Noble's Books, 1981), 174.

[528] Ananatnand Rambachan, "Hinduism" in *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*, 117.

articulation of liberation theology/philosopher rooted in the Hindu tradition.[529] The most

immediate substantiation of this claim is the Indian/Hindu caste system. On account of "caste

oppression," many Hindus have converted to other religions or simply rejected religion

altogether.[530] The largest amount of converts from Hinduism to Christianity and Buddhism come

from the so-called "untouchables," popularly referred to as the Dalits. [531]

One of the dominant features in ancient Vedic religious life was ritual sacrifice. The Vedas

(the oldest extant texts of India and Hinduism[532]) are primarily liturgical texts and their use in ritual

has been the primary and invariant function.[533] Sacrifice and prayer to the gods was important for

Vedic religion because blessing from the gods were essential for agriculture and fertility. A

prominent element of Hindu society stemming from Vedic religion is the caste system. The origin

of the sate system is generally considered to be rooted in the Purusa-Sukta (The Hymn of Man) in

the Rig Veda. In this hymn, the gods create the world by dismembering the cosmic giant, *Purusa*.

The passage reads:

When they divided the man, into how many parts did they apportion him?

What do they call his mouth, his two arms, and thighs and feet? His

mouth became the Brahmin; his arms were made into the warrior, his

thighs the people, and from his feet the servants were born.[534]

---

[529] See Agashar Ali Engineer, ed., *Religion in South East Asia: A Liberative Perspective* (Delhi: Hope India Publications, 2005).

[530] Ananatnand Rambachan, "Hinduism," 117.

[531] Ibid.

[532] Gavin Flood, *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2005), 68.

[533] Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 39.

[534] *The Rig Veda, Annotated and Trans. by Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981), 10.90, verses 11-12.

The theme of a well-structured, orderly society pervades this depiction of Indian culture and Hindu tradition. As such, emphasis is placed on the importance of performing one's duty (dharma) so that society will function properly. The idea is every person must remain in his or her place for there to be communal harmony. Eventually the Upanishads (composed circa the sixth century BCE[535]) also developed as a philosophical critique and challenge to many of the long-standing views and interpretations of the caste system. The sacrificial passages, for example, are considered symbolic of offering one's self to what is truly divine.[536] Emphasis is placed on meditation, contemplation, and studying with a teacher, as opposed to sacrificial rituals.[537] One can see the seeds of a liberation discourse and praxis within the Hindu tradition. Dialogue with other traditions can help unearth, clarify, and make these principles central to Hindu society.

There are several foundational concepts and precepts in the Hindu tradition including the Four stages of Life, The Four permissible goals, and the Four Ways to attain liberation. The Four goals provide an excellent basis for Hindu liberation praxis.[538] The Four goals (*purusharthas*) are conventionally identified as constituting a fulfilled life.[539] *Artha* (wealth, power, success, and social prestige) is the first permissible goal and it denotes that the Hindu tradition is not anti-materialistic. This is not to say that materialism should dominate one's energy or focus. Rather it says that involuntary suffering, poverty, or lack does not constitute holiness or some superior spiritual state of being. As a Hindu teacher tells his student in the *Ramacaritamanasa*, "there is no suffering in the

---

[535] Vasudha Narayanan, "The Hindu Tradition" in Willard Oxtoby, ed., *World Religions: Eastern Traditions 2nd Edition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 120.
[536] Gavin Flood, *An Introduction to Hinduism*, 40.
[537] Buddhism develops around the same time as the Upanishads were being formulated. Both signify a moving away from the dominance of the priestly caste.
[538] Ananatnand Rambachan, "Hinduism," 119.
[539] Ibid.

world as great as poverty."[540] The lack of resources, especially as a result of oppressive actions, are

against the fundamental principles of Hindu religious thought and practices.

Along with material security is the pursuit of pleasure and celebration. The second

permissible goal, *kama* (pleasure) indicates that life is not simple survival, but that the pursuit of

happiness is a predisposition of human life.[541] It is not enough for people to have the basic

necessities of food, clothing, and shelter.[542] This is not a fulfilled life. More precisely, a fulfilled life

includes the enjoyments of life- sensual enjoyment, art, music, dance, education, etc. This is a point

many Christian charity efforts and sentiments would do well to consider.

Hinduism offers Christianity yet another system of language that articulates an integral

worldview, i.e., the essential unity of all reality (personal, social, ecological, and divine). The

material universe and the divine realm form a "cosmo-theandric unity."[543] Liberation is impossible

where there are acts of separation between these spheres. There is no human or societal progress,

for instance, if this comes by the destruction of nature.[544] The commission of such destruction

prevents one from achieving liberation. Hindu ethics and notion of liberation suggests that part of

the attainment of *moksa* includes the proper use (dharma) of material resources along with personal

requirements of spirituality.[545]

---

[540] *Ramacaritamanasa, Trans. by R. C. Prasad* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1991), 784.
[541] Ananatnand Rambachan, "Hinduism," 120.
[542] This is not to diminish the importance of these basic necessities in any way. I am well aware that billions of people would be happy to simply have these necessities. The point is show, in the same vain as Jesus, that there is more to life than food and clothing. Our efforts of liberation, justice, and peace should begin with basic necessities, but we should not rest until all humanity has the opportunity to have fulfilled lives.
[543] Sebastian Painadath, "Mukti, the Hindu Notion of Liberation," in *World Religions and Human Liberation*, 74. This unity is articulated in different ways. The most prominent is the distinction between the Advaita Vedanta (non-dualism) and the dualism schools of Hindu thought. One sees Ultimate Reality as essentially impersonal (non-dualism), the other sees Ultimate Reality as personal and distinctive from the rest of reality (dualism).
[544] Ibid.
[545] Ibid.

Hinduism is open to other religious traditions. It is both willing to assimilate positive values from other religions, as well as, offer critical insights.[546] On the whole, Hindu thinkers acknowledge that the most effective liberation praxis should be interreligious in nature.[547] There has been renewed emphasis on the social dimensions of liberation. This move against hyper-subjectivistic spirituality is mirrored in religious movements for justice and peace around the world.

There are other religious principles of liberation as well. Zen Buddhism describes liberation in terms of liberation from the "three poisons," i.e., greed, ignorance, and hatred/ anger.[548] The poisons cause distress, unhappiness, oppression , and suffering. This reminds all religions that oppression, including social and structural oppression, is caused by human characteristics. This is why the Bantu tradition says oppression dehumanizes the oppressor, not the oppressed. *Bumuntu* is an African term which describes human personhood.[549] It refers to "gentleperson, a holy person, a saint, a shun-tzu, a person of Dao, a person of Buddha nature, an embodiment of Brahman, a genuine human being."[550] The antithesis of *Bumuntu* is *Kintu*, a thing. *Kintu* refers to a person who has abandoned his/her moral ground, someone who has lost his/her *Bumuntu* through immoral conduct.[551]

Liberation dialogue among the religions presupposes liberating aspects in most religious traditions. One need not contrasts the quality of liberation discourse in one's own religion with the discourse of another religion. Interreligious/Interfaith dialogical praxis rejects the notion that in order to see one's own religions as fundamentally liberating, one must see another religion as oppressive. This occurred, for instance, in some feminist critiques of the First century Jewish

---

[546] Sebastian Painadath, "Mukti, the Hindu Notion of Liberation"
[547] Ibid.
[548] Ruben L. F. Habito "Zen Buddhism" in *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*, 165.
[549] Mutombo Nuklu-N'Sengha, "African Traditional Religions" in *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*, 222-224. Also for an African Philosophical concept of "person" see Kwame Gyekye, *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995), 198-199.
[550] Mutombo Nuklu-N'Sengha, "African Traditional Religions" in *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*, 222.
[551] Ibid.

society in which Jesus lived. The liberating ministry of Jesus is differentiated from the Jewish

background that was patriarchal and misogynistic.[552] While the spirit of this critique was to provide

sound rationale for feminist Christology, it also displayed some "anti-Jewish tendencies" as it (in a

sense) disconnects Jesus from his Jewish heritage.[553] Instead, we should realize that Jesus' actions

were "typifying a moral impulse strictly within Judaism."[554] So, liberating aspects are often present

in each tradition. They just have to be brought to the fore.

One observes that most, if not all, religions contain elements of liberation praxis. There may

be differing approaches and conceptual responses to the world's problems, but the religions are

responding to common challenges. The most fundamental challenges facing the religions stem not

from atheism, but idolatry.[555] In Christianity, idolatry is generally defined as the worship of a false

god or image. A more precise definition can be a turning away from the true and living God, and

giving your devotion to a false god or a god of our own making. For religious traditions that do not

center on a personal deity, idolatry can be, for instance, abandoning the ways of the ancestors or

disregard for all life forms. Every human being is capable of idolatry. The proper object of our

deepest concern is ultimate reality and our relations with other human beings and our environment.

Tillich says, "only the concern with what is truly ultimate can stand against idolatrous concerns."[556]

A heretic is one who turns away from divine reality, human beings (as ends in themselves and

simply means to an end), and our environment as ultimate concern towards a false, idolatrous

concern (such as domination, greed, oppression, or destruction of life).

---

[552] Maura O'Neil, *Women Speaking Women Listening: Women in Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990), 81.

[553] Katrina Von Kellenbach, "Jewish-Christian Dialogue on Feminism and Religion," in *Christian Jewish Relations, 19, 1986*, 35.

[554] A. Roy Eckardt, "Christians, Jews and the Women's Movement," in *Christian Jewish Relations, 19, 1986*, 16.

[555] Daniel Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 22.

[556] Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (Harper & Row Publishers, 1957), 27.

Daniel Groody argues that the idolatry we are confronting today is "money-theism."[557] Money-theism is the idolization of capital. It means abandoning the worship of the living God to worship the gods of the marketplace.[558] Marketplace idolatry does not only mean turning away from the living God, but also the severing of human relationships and the denigration of the inherent worth of human beings, and the environment. Human beings and the environment lose their value. In our current economic, political, and social systems, "people are measured in terms of their net worth, accumulated possessions, and incomes rather than their human worth, the quality of their character, and their spiritual depth."[559]

The connection between spirituality and justice is seen in Groody's characterization of social injustice and money-theism as sin. The tendency of globalization determining the value of human beings according to socio-economic status- coupled with increasing economic disparities- disrupts our relationships between God, self, others, and nature.[560] As expressed in the values and principles of many religions, these relationships are the key to human fulfillment and global transformation, and their disruption also constitutes sin. Human beings are to engage in these relationships in ways that "generate life rather than death."[561]

Persons are also encouraged to break free of tendencies of being concerned solely for their country, their context, their culture, or their ethnic group. In the Christian tradition (as in other religious traditions), there is a responsibility to working for justice for the entire world. Christians are reminded anew that the scripture says "for God so loved the world," not simply a particular group of people. The same holds true for all the world's religions. All religions bear the responsibility of addressing human concerns (e.g. racism, poverty, sexism, basic health care, etc)

---

[557] Daniel Groody, *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice,* 22.
[558] Ibid., 23.
[559] Ibid.
[560] Ibid., 23-24.
[561] Ibid., 24.

and ecological concerns. The most effective way to accomplish this task is through dialogue and cooperation.

An example of interreligious and interfaith dialogical liberation praxis is the work of the young adult network of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) in Gujarat, India.[562] Gujarat is a multi-religious society that has been plagued by violent clashes between differing religious groups and an atmosphere of general mistrust among the different religious groups.[563] Concurrently, there is rampant unemployment, lack of education, and harmful stereotypes; all of which contribute to religious divisions and suspicions.[564] A devastating earthquake exacerbated these problems in 2001, affecting people across religious, class, and social lines. In an effort to provide humanitarian aid and promote interreligious cooperation IARF initiated a project to rebuild a temple and a mosque.[565] This project included the IARF, the Religious Freedom Young Adult Network (RFYN), local communities, and external agencies. The challenges facing IARF were steep religious intolerance and violence, a vigorous Hindu fundamentalist force that sought to undermine interfaith collaboration, and numerous caricatures that raised questions of the motives of IARF.[566]

Due to the vast devastation (resulting from the earthquake), the barriers to interfaith cooperation were surmounted. Participants were adherents from multiple religious traditions such as Baha'i, Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Jainism.[567] Along with the construction of places of worship and other humanitarian activities, there were interfaith prayer services, group

---

[562] Zulfikhar Akram and Ramola Sundram, "The Gujarat Young Adult Project of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF)," in Eboo Patel and Patrice Brodeur, eds., *Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue to Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 65-74.
[563] Ibid., 65.
[564] Ibid.
[565] Ibid., 66.
[566] Ibid., 67.
[567] Ibid., 68.

discussions, cultural presentations, and visits to different places of worship.[568] All of this fostered

genuine interreligious and interfaith relationships between groups in which cooperation and

relationship seemed impossible. The project helped to facilitate interfaith cooperation between the

Muslim and Hindu communities, for example.[569] Interfaith partnership between Muslims and

Hindus seemed interminably unattainable, but the "suspicion, hatred and intolerance gave way to

understanding and cooperation as they mingled and visited each other's village and homes

freely."[570] The Gujarat project illustrates how interfaith dialogical liberation praxis engenders

interreligious and interfaith relationships. It shows interfaith and interreligious joint ventures are

possible to accomplish the greater good in society. Not only did the participants engage in interfaith

and interreligious dialogical practices, they also completed the construction of the temple and the

mosque and developed friendships with people from different faiths.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue & Hospitality

Hospitality is the practice of receiving strangers[571] as guests.[572] There are several crucial

aspects of hospitality.[573] First, hospitality should be extended without any conditions or expectation

of anything in return. Another crucial aspect of hospitality is the elimination of all potential or

actual hostilities.[574] All parties are to show respect, and avoid any possible obstructions to the

---

[568] Ibid., 69.
[569] These faith communities have a history of violent clashes in Gujarat.
[570] Ibid., 72.
[571] Stranger refers to all forms of difference and otherness, not mere lack of knowledge of a person's name and basic information about them.
[572] John J. Pilch and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Handbook of Biblical Social Values* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998), 115.
[573] Ibid., 115-118.
[574] Ibid., 116, 117.

practices of hospitality. Finally, and most importantly, the stranger does not remain a stranger. The stranger gains a new status, as either friend or foe.[575]

Hospitality is a fundamental and foundational Christian practice. The scriptures admonish us to be "given to hospitality."[576] In other words, we are to be overtaken with hospitality, i.e., continuously receiving, loving, and if need be caring for strangers. As such, interreligious/interfaith dialogue is impossible without hospitality. Receiving those who are "strange" or different from us is the catalyst for conversation, and the possibility of being transformed by interreligious/interfaith encounters through friendship. When explored within the context of religious strangers (the religious other) hospitality is the point-of-departure for dialogue. Dialogical exchange, and consequently friendships between persons of differing religious traditions, is impossible without hospitality. Hospitality is the catalyst for building partnerships.[577] All participants, including God, in this partnership begin as strangers.[578] Gradually this partnership can move closer to a more intimate relationship. This creates the possibility of interreligious/interfaith friendships.

The command for the display of hospitality by the people of God has biblical foundations. The Apostle Paul's exhortation to practice hospitality included welcoming people with different eating or meal rituals was in effect an exhortation for welcoming religious strangers.[579] Israel was never to forget that it was born and developed in a foreign land. God says to the people of Israel, "the alien who resides with you shall be to you as the citizen among you; you shall love the alien as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt."[580] The patriarchs were also considered strangers.

---

[575] Ibid., 117.

[576] Romans 12:13. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament with Parallel Greek, King James Version* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International Publishers, 1992).

[577] Luke Timothy Johnson, *Sharing Possessions* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981), 10.

[578] Ibid.

[579] Amos Yong. *Hospitality & the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 122.

[580] Leviticus 19:34. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition* (New York, NY: Oxford university Press, Inc, 2001).

Abraham was instructed by God to leave his home and live in a "strange land." Israel's progenitor was a "wandering Aramean."[581] It was during Israel's years as strangers that they received revelation about the divine character. Israel experienced God's provision, protection, and continuous presence during enslavement in Egypt as well as the time of wondering in the wilderness.[582] Throughout this time, a religious tradition emerged that emphasized justice, generosity, and hospitality.[583]

There are two Hebrew words that are used to denote "stranger" in the Hebrew Bible: *Ger* and *Nokri*.[584] *Ger* refers to someone who resides outside her/his place of origin.[585] *Nokri* refers to someone who is not an adherent of the religion of Israel.[586] The people of Israel were to display hospitality to people in both categories. Hospitality was to be extended to everyone regardless of religious affiliation. Even though Israel was required to maintain complete fidelity to the "true and living God" (as specified by the first commandment), they were also to love those who practiced different religions.[587]

Several interesting principles stem from the biblical guidelines of hospitality: mercy, peaceable relations, justice, provision of necessities, sacrifice, and unconditional love. These characteristics of hospitality are fundamental for interreligious/interfaith dialogue. The principles of peace and absence of conflict speaks directly to the cordial character that is necessary for dialogue. The scripture says, "If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all."[588] Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan displays the characteristics of mercy, provision of necessities,

---

[581] Deuteronomy 26:5. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[582] Deuteronomy 32:10. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[583] Lucien Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2000), 24.
[584] Ibid., 22.
[585] Ibid.
[586] Ibid.
[587] Deuteronomy 10:19. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[588] Romans 12:18. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*

sacrifice, and unconditional love.[589] The Samaritan's compassion and actions are intimations of God.[590] With this parable, Jesus demonstrates that our neighbors are not solely those who share our religious beliefs and practices. The Samaritan (who by all accounts should have ignored the wounded man by the road because of ethnic and religious conflict) ignores social and religious barriers, and uses his own resources to care for another human being. His actions are themselves acts of interfaith dialogue (as dialogue is not only conversation but also specific practices and actions) because the Samaritan was influenced by his own religious tradition. From this parable one can glean that God works with and through all people, not only those of a particular religious tradition.

Elizabeth Newman suggests that we can better understand what genuine hospitality is by understanding what it is not.[591] Christian hospitality tends to be viewed in terms of "superficial niceness", i.e., a sentimentality that lacks substance and genuineness.[592] Hospitality should be borne out of authentic love and care that characterizes one's life in all aspects. For instance, one cannot be genuinely hospitable and fail to acknowledge and deal with secret prejudices and stereotypes one harbors. In other words, superficial hospitality easily engenders a "kind of self-blindness and an inability to speak the truth."[593] Stemming from superficial hospitality is the misconception of the privatization of hospitality. Society removes hospitality from the public sphere and relegates it to the private sphere when emphasis is placed on external qualities (such as social status, social approval, etc) to the detriment of the values of sacrifice and care for others (even strangers).[594]

---

[589] Luke 10:25-37. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[590] Luise Schottoroff, *The Parables of Jesus* (Minneaspolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006), 136
[591] Elizabeth Newman, *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2007), 19.
[592] Ibid., 23.
[593] Ibid., 24.
[594] Ibid., 26.

Another common misconception of hospitality is that it is contrary to honoring the truth. Displaying concern for truth and asserting truth are typically considered inhospitable.[595] Reinhard Hutter argues that truth and hospitality are interdependent.[596] Hutter is saying that through God's own practices of hospitality (e.g. revelation) Christians receive the truth of the triune God (as communion of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit).[597] Consequently, Christians are called to share in God's hospitality and truth to the world.

The hospitality of the God's people is grounded in God's own character of hospitality. There is no respect of persons with God, no discrimination between Christians and adherents of other religions.[598] The love and hospitality of God is directed towards all of creation. It is not limited to an elite few. Creation in its entirety originates from and belongs to God.[599] Every person has the capacity to be a conduit of divine grace and presence. When one encounters the stranger one not only encounters another person, but also the "ultimate Stranger, the irreducible Other, God."[600] This is why person s cannot reduce others to simple reflections of themselves. We should honor difference because we encounter divine presence in difference.

Worship helps us understand hospitality. Israel's worship focused on the stranger because the people of Israel were themselves strangers and guests of God.[601] The place of worship for Israel was also a place where all were welcome. Neither the tabernacle nor the temple were solely for the people of Israel and their religious practices. Instead, "the Lord's house" was to be a place of prayer

---

[595] Reinhard Hutter, "Hospitality and Truth: The Disclosure of Practices in Worship and Doctrine" in Miroslav Volf and Dorothy C. Bass, ed., *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 207.

[596] Ibid.

[597] Ibid.

[598] Lucien Richard, *Living the Hospitality of God*, 26.

[599] Psalm 24:1. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition*. See also Denis Edwards, *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2010), 39- 43.

[600] Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992), 76.

[601] Ibid., 59.

for all people.[602] Worship is God's invitation to humanity for intimacy and fellowship. Public

worship was an act of God, "the ritual hospitality of the Lord extended to Israel as beloved and

honored guest" along with anyone else who desired fellowship with God.[603] All are invited to enter

into covenant with God. Part of the mission of God's people is to invite and welcome new persons

to the community of faith. Hospitality is fundamental to evangelization. However, this is not the

singular purpose of hospitality. While hospitality is an essential component of evangelism and

missions it is not solely for this purpose. Christians are to welcome followers of other religions to

understand, and perhaps assimilate, the various spiritual practices in relation to divine reality.[604]

Interreligious/interfaith hospitality involves certain fundamental elements: a visible and

welcoming public face, a dialogical posture, and a commitment to public servanthood.[605] The

Christian faith community is called to vigorous involvement in public life, not remain inside the

cocoon of the church building, waiting for the events of the "end times" to handle the fate of the

rest of the world.[606] Instead, Christians are to be actively engaged in meaningful relationships and

dialogue with non-Christians. Christian Church congregations can develop ministries or a group of

members with the spiritual gifts necessary for hospitality (e.g., the gift of helps/assistance,

discernment, and compassion) to interact with strangers in general, and not only those who happen

to attend a worship service or religious gathering.[607] Public involvement is inextricably linked to

public service. As was demonstrated in the previous section on dialogue and liberation, a dialogical

---

[602] Isaiah 56:7. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[603] Patrick R. Keifert, *Welcoming the Stranger*, 60.
[604] Diane Kessler, ed., *Receive One Another: Hospitality in Ecumenical Perspective* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2005), 26-27.
[605] Amos Yong. *Hospitality & the Other,* 134.
[606] See Dennis Hamm, "The Bible and Public Life: Excuses, Abuses, and Some Powerful Uses" in William J. Collinge, ed., *Faith in Public Life, College Theology Society Annual Volume 53 2007* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 15-38.
[607] Amos Yong. *Hospitality & the Other*, 134.

posture, i.e., interreligious/interfaith dialogue is integral for accomplishing common social goals such as justice and the elimination of poverty.

Speaking of hospitality and the receiving of strangers raises issues of normativity. Normativity has a tendency towards xenophobia. People tend to fear those who they perceive as foreign, strange, or different. Accepting the "other," and all the differences the other brings, alters the established norms and identity of a group, community, or nation. What one sees in hospitality as it relates to interreligious/interfaith dialogue is the intentional demise of xenophobic tendencies that reside in all human beings.

The relational and social character that is indicative of human existence is curiously paradoxical. Our affinity for belonging and social identification can produce dire consequences, especially for interreligious/interfaith dialogue. When a group of people feels their identity is being threatened they can collectively exhibit "protective strategies" to protect and strengthen the stability of the group's identity.[608] *Otherness* cuts against the conventions and social agreements or customs that have come to make-up collective identity. Once someone (or the group as a whole) feels threatened, part of the natural response to otherness is to reassert the norms and cast aspersions on anything that deviates from those norms.[609]

Essentially, a group projects fear onto the other. They create a persona that "difference" is to be feared, not embraced. They establish a *cult of normalcy*, i.e. "a set of rituals trained upon demarcating and policing the borders of a 'normal' way of being."[610] Establishing a sacred normativity prevents any authentic encounters with religious others. If our religious identity has been characterized by being guarded and unwelcoming then we should allow our identities to be

---

[608] Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008), 59.
[609] Jean Vanier, *Becoming Human* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1998), 39.
[610] Thomas E. Reynolds, *Vulnerable Communion*, 60.

altered. Christian identity and community, as the community of God, includes hospitality. Christians are to welcome the stranger. This entails acceptance of difference. Christian hospitality is to be extended to the religious other. There can be no interreligious/interfaith dialogue without the extension of hospitality. It is through hospitality that interfaith friendship is possible. As was shown, hospitality is not for friends and family, but for strangers and guests. Unless we have the space and opportunity to encounter persons who are different from us, we will not be able to develop meaningful and transformative friendships. This includes persons of different faith traditions.

Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue & Friendship

The Christian story is grounded in friendship, exhibited in the declaration "no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends."[611] Jesus' statement in the Gospel of John incorporates the element of self-sacrifice into friendship rooted in unconditional love. This framing of friendship differs from characterizations of friends as simply persons who know each other well and are fond of each other. Friendship is the doorway to agape, the Christian idea of love that is uninhibited, inclusive, and universal. This fundamental Christian principle of love, expressed in the biblical tradition and the ministry of Jesus (which not only stressed commitment to God but also confronted the powers that be and embraced the poor and oppressed), calls us to friendship with God and neighbor.

Complementing hospitality with friendship provides a more complete framework for a Christian understanding of interfaith dialogue. When complexified and explored theologically, friendship is a *practice* that is filled with theological possibilities and content.[612] Friendship

---

[611] John 15:13. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[612] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 20. Emphasis Added.

provides insight into the normative implications of inter-relationality.[613] Friendship conveys the idea of relationship and love. Hospitality displays kindness and concern for a stranger's well-being- and doubtless, this stems from the love of God within a person towards all humanity. Friendship, however, moves the stranger and neighbor into a position of loved one (i.e., genuine brotherhood and sisterhood). In point of fact, genuine friendship can be a closer connection or deeper relationship then the connection between family (In this sense, friendship is the strongest bond. Even family members can, and in many instances need to, become friends).[614]

There has been a push towards establishing civility among the religions within the context of liberal democracy.[615] Everyone's religious beliefs are to be respected, and no one should suffer persecution or ridicule on the basis of their religious beliefs. Democratic societies seek to "mandate peace" as it were by guaranteeing the right of religious freedom.[616] While religious freedom is of utmost importance, the legal right of religious freedom and exchange does not necessarily create the space for intimacy and friendship. We may share the bonds of citizenship through our civil and legal rights, but we may not necessarily forge deeper (moral) bonds of friendship.[617] Consequently, neither friendship nor intimacy is able to come into legitimate public discourse. In the context of liberal democracy, there is a separation between the public sphere and the private sphere.[618] One can mandate rules and create laws to govern the public sphere, but one is powerless when it comes to the private sphere, "where citizens are free to rule over their own lives."[619] Buying into the public sphere/private sphere schema renders a fruitful (and broad) discussion about friendship and

---

[613] Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 186.
[614] Proverbs 18:24, *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition*.
[615] Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 43.
[616] Ibid.
[617] Ibid.
[618] Ibid.
[619] Ibid.

intimacy impossible. Friendship and intimacy are relegated to private life. We are, then, unable to address the question of "sharing our lives together, not only as citizens, but as human beings."[620]

A practical theological framing of the friendship is important because the public sphere/private sphere divide is already surmounted in practical theology. There is a fundamental connection of our private and public lives in practical theology.[621] One automatically affects the other. One cannot speak of friendship without speaking of human rights, equality, and the general well-being of the ones you call friend. Practical theology sees intimacy as an essential category, not an ancillary component. Practical theologians do work towards justice and peace in the world, seeking to dismantle systems and attitudes of oppression. At the same time, sharing stories and building (genuine and lasting) relationships is also the task of practical theologians.[622] In fact, it is through such relationships and friendships that long standing peace and justice is most likely possible.

Furthermore, Christians are called by God to not only display hospitality to the stranger in the form of the religious other, but also to display love, care, compassion, and intimacy. Abraham was called the friend of God. In this position, God said that through him (and his descendants) all nations of the world would be blessed. In the same manner in which Abraham was considered the friend of God, Christians too are friends of God. As friends of God, Christians are drawn into divine communion, i.e., to be friends of God, and consequently, friends with others.[623]

---

[620] Ibid.

[621] Parker Palmer, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2004), 8.

[622] Mary Elizabeth Moore, "Dynamics of Religious Culture: Ethogenic Method," in Marian de Sousa, Gloria Durka, Kathleen Engebretson, Robert Jackson, and Andrew McGrady, eds., *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education* (Dordrecht: Spring Publishers, 2006), 415-433.

[623] Hans S. Reinders, *Receiving the Gift of Friendship*, 313.

Friendship in Daily Life

What exactly is a friend and friendship? Friendship is a profoundly intimate and committed relationship that incorporates the fullness of a person's being.[624] Friendship is a "voluntary relationship" with intentions of reciprocal love, care, respect, and an orientation towards justice-seeking community.[625] It is within friendship that one can find the space and apparatus for things ranging from liberation to healing (through physical, emotional, or mental illness).[626]Jan Yager suggests there are three kinds of friends: best, close, and casual.[627] She places these categories on a scale in terms of intimacy with casual friend at the bottom and best friend at the top.[628] A best friend is "someone who is there for you no matter what, someone who puts you first in his or her life."[629] This is a friendship that has withstood the test of time, conflict, and major changes in life. A Close friendship has a high level of intimacy, trust, and reliability.[630] Close friends are people who you are able to share (secretive) details of your life with, even though you may or may not have frequent contact with them. Casual friendship is less intimate than either close or best friendships, but "is a cut above an acquaintance in terms of intimacy and trust."[631]

Interfaith friendships follow a similar pattern, the same principles and definitions can be applied. Causal friendships develop as we encounter people at conferences, lectures, discussions, etc. In close or best friendships, we are more likely to share our most intimate and life-changing experiences, particularly how our religious faith, beliefs and practices come to bear on or facilitate

---

[624] John Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the Care of People with Mental Health Problems* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000), 37.
[625] Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship* (New York, NY: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1991), 29.
[626] Samuel Southard, *Theology and Therapy: The Wisdom of God in a Context of Friendship* (Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989), x.
[627] Jan Yager, *Friendshifts: The Power of Friendship and How It Shapes Our Live*s (Stamford, CT: Hannacroix Creek Books, Inc, 1997), 16.
[628] Ibid., 17.
[629] Ibid., 18.
[630] Ibid., 20.
[631] Ibid., 21.

these experiences. Persons see firsthand how their friends "live" their faith. A religious tradition literally comes alive for us as we see it lived through a friend(s).[632] This is not something that happens instantaneously. Friendships are *emergent realities* constituted by two or more people.[633] Relationships develop over time, and people share their lives, religious beliefs, practices, and experiences together. In the same manner, interfaith dialogue is an emergent reality, especially at the interpersonal level.

Friendship can provide a "space" for strangers to become like family. This is manifest in groups where women, for example, move from situations of fragmentation, physical and/or emotional anguish, and distrust, into a community of sisterhood.[634] Transformation takes place in the lives of these women through the relationships (friendships) they forge with each other. These groups are comprised of persons from varying racial, socio-economic, educational, and (most important for our present purposes) religious backgrounds.[635] Interreligious dialogue flows from the practical concerns women face in everyday life in a variety of situations. Dialogue begins, not from delineation of doctrines or formal theological discussions, but from the lives of persons of differing faith traditions, i.e., how these traditions operate in their everyday lives.

Through friendship, a person gains deeper awareness of his/her interrelatedness as well as the tools to help him/her become more "other-oriented" as opposed to being solely self-oriented. Friendship teaches us how to care for others.[636] Befriending someone carries the demand that one is wholeheartedly committed to the well-being of his/her friend.[637] What one discovers through

---

[632] Consequently, the "community of Inquriers" can be considered a community of friends.
[633] Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 187. Emphasis Added.
[634] Emile Townes, *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1997), 77-81.
[635] Ibid., 80.
[636] Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Pres, 2002), 67.
[637] Ibid.

genuine friendship is selflessness, loyalty, and frequently answering the call to support and/or help friends in times of need. This is impossible if a person is constantly selfish and egocentric.[638]

Friendship sheds light on aspects of our own lives and practices one may be oblivious to.[639] Sometimes it takes a friend to show someone things about themselves, things that are often overlooked or are unwilling or unable to see. In fact, one experiences "optimal self-awareness and visibility only in relationship with a consciousness possessing an equal range of awareness, that is, another human being."[640] Constant growth and evolution through our encounters with other human beings is a natural part of human consciousness and life.[641] This is possible not only because friends may share similarities, but also because they are different and they stand apart from us.

Eliot Deutsch sees "non-self-deception" as a condition of friendship. Someone who suffers from self-deception in a severe manner is incapable of genuine friendship because that person is not a sufficiently centered and aware self.[642] Self-deception is the refusal to acknowledge and own up to one's actions or aspects of one's personality that may be less than desirable. Such refusal of self-awareness and self-examination, according to Deutsch, makes it impossible for that person to maintain genuine and lasting friendships.[643] I disagree with Deutsch's categorical conclusion of the impossibility of friendship based on self-deception. Someone may suffer from self-deception, but the path to self-awareness and self-examination may lie within the context of friendship. Furthermore, *self*-deception does not necessarily prevent sincere love and care for another. Granted, few people are interested in befriending a person who publicizes she is a caring and loving person

---

[638] Lawrence A. Blum, *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality* (London: Routledge, 1980), 192.
[639] Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 69.
[640] Nathaniel Branden, "Love and Psychological Visibility" in Neera Kapur Badhwar, ed., *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 1993), 69.
[641] Ibid.
[642] Eliot Deutsch, "On Creative Friendship" in Leroy S. Rouner, ed., *The Changing Face of Friendship* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994), 20.
[643] Ibid.

but exhibits behavior to the contrary.[644] However, transformation is still possible for such a person. The qualities of friendship can be taught or learned in an actual friendship- if someone is willing to take a *risk* of friendship, and love unconditionally.

Friendship contains within it another Christian gift, i.e., exhortation. Our friends encourage us to stay committed to "important goals, projects, and aspirations", as well as, admonish us to avoid the pitfalls of life.[645] Friends can inspire hope and faith in our lives (particularly in times of hopelessness and despair). This speaks to the power of friendship. For many people, life would be hopeless without friendship.

Aristotle & Friendship

Aristotle's philosophy has immensely influenced the Christian tradition and more specifically ethics and morality.[646] His understanding of friendship is the basis of much of theological and philosophical interpretations of the concept.[647] Aristotle defines friendship as any association of people who spend time and do things together, share in pains and pleasures, and wish for each other's good.[648] The Greek word, *philia* (or *phileo*), takes in all love felt and practiced toward family members, fellow compatriots, and generally those like oneself, and applies towards others who may be different.[649] Aristotle finds its highest form in the attachment between people of good character, present in each for the sake of the being and well-being of the other, while friendship for the sake of pleasure or usefulness are partial and less enduring. For Aristotle,

---

[644] Ibid.
[645] Paul J. Wadell, *Becoming Friends*, 71.
[646] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), xiii-xiv.
[647] Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*, 92.
[648] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics Translation, Glossary, & Introductory Essay by Joe Sachs* (Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing R. Pullins Company, 2002), Books VIII & IX.
[649] Ibid.

friendship is integral to the moral life, and he suggests that friendships are not solely for personal

fulfillment or indulgence, but also for moral and character development.[650]

Virtue and morality are essential for the functioning of society. A moral life is cultivated,

not mainly for the individual (Aristotle praises this aspect as well), but mainly for the community

(polis) as a whole.[651] Society needs virtuous citizens. Each person, however, needs the support and

companionship of society in order to develop a virtuous character.[652] For Aristotle, the moral life

consists in the realization of the ends potential in one's nature.[653] A person accomplishes the

end/goal/aim by discerning right actions in every instance of life. Yet, each person's good develops

only in fellowship with others who seek the same good.[654] The goal was to achieve a certain kind

of society (a virtuous society), which meant certain conditions were necessary- namely, a

community of men (and women and children to a lesser degree) dedicated to the same aims (telos)

working together to make each other's attainment of the good possible.[655]

From this, Aristotle concludes that ideally a civic society ought to be a community of

friends. Friendship in this sense is the "sharing of all in the common project of creating and

sustaining the life of the city, a sharing incorporated in the immediacy of an individual's particular

friendships."[656] Friends share a recognition and pursuit of the good that is fundamental for a society

or any other form of community.[657] Aristotle perceived that the Athenian society of his day was not

a virtuous society. In fact, the happenings of Athens frustrated the achievement and fostering of the

---

[650] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, xiii.
[651] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 2.
[652] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 46.
[653] J. Phillip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction* (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), 19.
[654] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 46.
[655] Ibid.
[656] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 146.
[657] Ibid.

virtues.[658] This caused him to search for another way to cultivate the virtues.   Friendship, then,

replaces the polis as the context within which the virtues are learned and embodied.[659]

Aristotle outlines three kinds of friendship: friendships of usefulness, friendships of

pleasure, and friendship of goodness and virtue. Friendships of usefulness are based on the benefits

one gains from the acquaintance.[660] One looks for the advantage of befriending a particular

person(s) for specific reasons. The friendship ceases when it is no longer beneficial. Friendships of

pleasure are relationships based on attraction and gratification.[661] Aristotle sees this friendship as

short-lived since they are based on fleeting emotions and enjoyment instead of the genuine love for

another person. Friendships of goodness and virtue are "between people who are good and are alike

in virtue, since they wish for good things for one another in the same way insofar as they are good,

and they are good themselves."[662] One is interested in the good for a friend for the friend's sake,

not for one's own. Virtue is cultivated among friends and the friendship has the capacity to endure.

This kind of friendship is the most complete as it is based that which is virtuous and includes

aspects of the other kinds of friendship.[663]

There are many criticisms of Aristotle's conception of friendship, particularly his

understanding and ordering of society. Aristotle's model of friendship became the basis for a

patriarchical model in modern scholarship because he did not consider possible gender barriers as in

any way significant for delineating friendship.[664] In Aristotle's era, only men could have intimate

friendships.[665] In addition, Aristotle's insistence on friendship only for persons of equal status

---

[658] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 49.
[659] Ibid.
[660] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 146-147. It is unfortunate that Aristotle associates this kind of friendship with "foreign guests."
[661] Ibid., 147.
[662] Ibid.
[663] Ibid., 147-148.
[664] Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness*, 92.
[665] Ibid., 93.

prevents friendships from developing among, men and women, husband and wives,[666] parents and

children, definitely not between rulers and servants (or in more modern vernacular upper class,

middle class, and lower class peoples could not develop friendships outside of their class structure).

It is also due to the requirement of equality that friendship is impossible among humanity and

divinity.[667] Human beings are not equal with the gods so friendship is unattainable. This is

diametrically opposed to the fundamental Christian claim of God's extension of love and

friendship.

Despite these valid criticisms, there are aspects of Aristotle's thought that are beneficial for

this discussion. First is the focus on friendship as the basis of community. Aristotle understands that

human beings are social (and political) by nature.[668] Naturally, people build relationships and

friendships that have a profound impact on our lives. The ways in which they build communities

stems from these friendships and relationships. So, friendships and relationships influence politics

and society as a whole in one way or another. Social and political institutions do not exist merely to

serve the interest of a few individuals in society, but rather they are expressions of the social

character of human nature, i.e. humans are social beings.[669] Aristotle sees friendship as the best

possible context for the development of virtuous people, and subsequently, a just society. Second is

the centrality of love. Love is the motivation (active condition) for friendship and the actions

friends do to produce the good in each other.[670] Third is the insistence that the complete kind of

friendship includes the element of equality.[671] In spite of the above criticism of this point in

Aristotle's thought, one can reinterpret Aristotle's meaning in an effective way. Friendship is

---

[666] Aristotle does *subtlety* call into question the claim of superiority of the husband over the wife. See Lorraine Smith Pagle, *Aristotle and the Philosophy of Friendship* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 94.
[667] Dmitri Nikulin, *On Dialogue*, 125.
[668] J. Phillip Wogaman, *Christian Ethics*, 19.
[669] Ibid.
[670] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 150. Love is an active condition because it is a deliberate disposition towards another person.
[671] Ibid., 151.

possible only when persons are presumed to be equals.[672] Equality becomes a precondition; friendship becomes an equalizing way of life. This is why Aristotle can give friendship a greater status than justice. Friendship supersedes justice because (to place it in Christian biblical terms) justice represents the letter of the law; friendship represents the spirit of the law, i.e., one is less likely to oppress, harm, swindle, or commit an unjust act against a friend.

Friendship in the Christian Tradition

Friendship is a long-standing practice within the Christian Tradition. Jesus establishes the preeminence of friendship by moving his followers from a position of servants to that of friends.[673] The church, the Christian faith community, can be considered a community of friends- friends of God and friends of other believers.[674] The church becomes a community of friends through principles and practices such as *koinonia*, communion, sharing of meals, and love. Aquinas said that charity (love) is a kind of friendship.[675] Thus, there are two kinds of love: first is the love for one's friend, and second there is the love of the good things one desires for one's friend.[676]

Augustine reflected on friendship frequently. He used the term *amicitia* when he spoke about friendship.[677] *Amicitia* conveyed multiple meanings, but it mostly referred to friendship as "the bonds uniting two persons in mutual sympathy."[678] Augustine was acquainted with the classical ideal of friendship. From this foundation, he developed a "Christian" (as opposed to a

---

[672] On the down side, the necessity of equality in friendship for Aristotle also means that human beings can only befriend human beings, not gods or things. Aristotle's understanding of divinity differs from the Judeo-Christian tradition in that divinity desires friendship with humanity. Divinity does not abdicate its position of divinity. Instead, humanity is brought closer to divinity through Christ. This is seen in the notion of "deification," i.e., the divine Word became human so that humanity might become divine.

[673] John 15:15. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3ʳᵈ Edition.*

[674] Steve Summers, *Friendship: Exploring it Implications for the Church in Postmodernity* (New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009), 152-159.

[675] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica Volume I Trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province* (Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 312.

[676] Ibid.

[677] Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine* (Staten Island, NY: Alb House, 1964), 213.

[678] Ibid. This definition is the classical understanding of friendship as characterized by Cicero in his *De Amicitia*.

156

"pagan") understanding of friendship.[679] This included four foundational principles, which Augustine felt distinguished his framing of friendship from the "pagan" ethos. Foremost is the principle that God is author and giver of friendship.[680] The second principle stems from the first: friendship is stabilized in God. God is the foundation and provides constancy in friendship. For Augustine, the only true love or friendship is one that is oriented towards God.[681] Third, friendship is revolutionized by grace. So one does not merely wish for virtue for a friend, but rather, you wish for supernatural joy for your friend in this life, and eternal joy in heaven. Fourth, friendship is perfected only in heaven.

There is another distinctive aspect of Augustine's conception of friendship that differs from the definitions of classical antiquity. Classical thinkers said friendship should be restricted to a small circle of people.[682] Augustine, however, suggested that friendship be extended to as many people as possible, though he includes the caveat that both joy and suffering may increase with an increase in number of friends.[683] Although it may not have been his intention, Augustine opens the way for Christians to create and build relationships with people from all walks of life, including persons from differing religious traditions. The only requirement is that these relationships be oriented toward divine reality in the hopes of spiritual development.

The monastic tradition also provides insight into Christian friendship.[684] Christian monasticism developed in structured and unstructured ways. Beginning with Antony (circa 280 C.E.), communities arose throughout the desserts of Egypt, and eventually in both eastern and

---

[679] Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000), 153-156.
[680] Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*, 213.
[681] Steve Summers, *Friendship: Exploring it Implications for the Church in Postmodernity*, 81.
[682] Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*, 232.
[683] Ibid.
[684] See Brain Patrick McGuire, *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350-1250* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc, 2000).

western parts of the Roman Empire.[685] It was a movement that, for those who chose the monastic life, sought to abandon the "world" in order to live (what they considered to be) genuine Christian life in solitude and in communion with God. Antony inspired many to eremitic life, while others chose to live in community with one another (shared meals, prayers, and worship), and developed rules to govern their way of life.[686] The influence of classical culture and literature has less of an impact on the monastic life. Those who embraced the monastic life were typically uneducated members of the rural population, with little or no contact with educated and erudite culture.[687] Consequently, monastic conceptions of friendship display noticeable differences from both classical theories of friendship, as well as, contemporary Christian ideas of friendship.[688]

Friendship was common among those in monastic communities. Friendships based on common spiritual goals and maturity occurred between master and disciples, or between fellow brothers of monasteries.[689] Monastic communities engendered hospitality, spiritual support and guidance, and shared participation in worship and the sacraments, especially the Eucharistic meal.[690] These characteristics afforded opportunities for cultivating meaningful and intimate friendships. These friendships and relationships were for the purpose of growth in the ascetic life.[691] In other words, it was for spiritual development. In this sense, monasticism establishes precedence in terms of building relationships and friendships as an effective means for spiritual growth and development. The difference for us today is that we must expand our circle of friends beyond the Christian communal setting. This suggests that dialogue with persons of other religious traditions

---

[685] Jonathan Hill. *The History of Christian Thought: The Fascinating Story of the Great Christian Thinkers and How They Helped Shape the World as We Know It Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academics, 2003), 77.
[686] Ibid.
[687] Caroline White, *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century* (Cambridge University Press, 2002), 165.
[688] Ibid.
[689] Ibid., 167.
[690] Ibid.
[691] Ibid.

contributes to our spiritual and human development as much as dialogue and relationships with fellow Christians.

"Courage To Be" Friends

The question is whether someone is open to sharing their lives with those who are different from them. Sometimes persons are gripped by fear of that which in unknown or unfamiliar. This fear is justified in the sense that there is a night side to friendship, i.e., not all friendships are positive. Friendship is a risk. One needs courage to befriend strangers, those who are not like them. One can follow in the footsteps of Jesus. Jesus extended the invitation of friendship (as seen in the sharing of meals).

James Frederick suggests that Christians should cultivate friendships with non-Christian in order to do theology comparatively.[692] He views the development of interfaith friendships as fruitful avenues that contain immense possibilities. Frederick does not offer a robust theology of friendship in connection to theology of religions; however, he does establish key elements for such a theology. Most eminent is the acceptance of the stranger and entering into new friendships. Fredericks notes, "All our friends, even our oldest and most valued friends, were once strangers to us."[693] The commencement of new friendships necessitates that one makes room for what is foreign and unknown.[694]

The courage to befriend those who are not like us (the stranger) cuts against what Paul Wadell calls "safe neighbor love."[695] Safe neighbors are only those persons admire and enjoy being

---

[692] James Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999), 173.
[693] Ibid., 175.
[694] Ibid.
[695] Paul Wadell, *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002), 32.

with. Safe neighbor love allows persons to befriend and include into their lives only those who are easy to love and embrace, but exclude those who are difficult to love.[696] Safe neighbor love, however, is not the love we are compelled to possess as disciples of Jesus Christ. The neighbor, as Jesus parable of the Good Samaritan demonstrates, can also be those who differ religiously, ethnically, and socially.

Friendship is a form of human interaction and relationship that is potentially available to and from the whole of the Christian community (and society in general).[697] Focusing on friendship calls the Christian community to continue the ministry of Jesus who offered friendship to the poor, marginalized, oppressed, and anyone else who embraces the messianic call to divine friendship.[698] In this context, friendship is a divine gift offered to all humanity and the church is a community of ambassadors of divine friendship (via love and salvation). The extension of friendship is a necessary task in order for the Christian community to be representatives of God in any meaningful sense.[699]

As a community of friends of God, we are called to bear witness to the Kingdom of God in the world. The church is an extension of the ministry of Jesus Christ. Our friendship with God turns us *toward* the world, not away from it.[700] Thus, mission is integral to the life of the Christian community. Mission is in affect the extension of God's friendship to the world through the Christian community. Augustine expresses this idea when he said, "[A person] loves his friend truly who loves God in him, either because God is in him or in order that [God] may be in him."[701]

---

[696] Ibid.
[697] John Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person,* 38.
[698] Matthew 11:19. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[699] John Swinton, *Resurrecting the Person*, 38.
[700] Ibid., 28.
[701] Marie Aquinas McNamara, *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*, 233.

The idea is that friendship is an avenue of producing faith through the display of love and care. In friendship, one sees the love of God, and God's longing for relationship with humanity.

Christianity should not ignore or abandon its innate missionary character.[702] The practice of mission is intrinsic to the Christian tradition. It is intrinsic because the churches are instruments of God's mission to the World.[703] Mission is "*Missio Dei*"- it is God's mission.[704] Christian mission belongs foremost to God, not the churches. Moreover, one should not view interreligious/interfaith dialogue as antithetical to mission. Commitment to dialogue is not incompatible with commitment to evangelism.[705] Dialogue and mission have similar goals, i.e., in both instances Christians bear witness to their deep convictions and the content of the Christian faith whilst listening to the convictions and tenets of other faith traditions.[706] At the same time, dialogue and missions are not synonymous. Christian Churches still bear the responsibility to proclaim the gospel message and present opportunities for conversion- both to the non-religious and to persons of other religions.

So, interfaith friendship includes the possibility of conversion from one religious tradition to another. Friendship allows people to move beyond superficial and impersonal tactics of conversion (e.g. passing out evangelism tracks, or trying to make a "thirty second" gospel presentation). Instead, friendship allows the presentation of the gospel (preferably through life style as well as sharing the tenets of the tradition) to occur in a more intimate manner, and perhaps over a longer period of time.

---

[702] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 487.
[703] Carlos F. Cardoza-Orlandi, *Mission: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 42-43.
[704] Amos Yong, *Hospitality & the Other*, 131.
[705] David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 487.
[706] Ibid.

Jesus Christ as the Model Friend

"What a friend we have in Jesus. All our sins and griefs to bear… Can we find a friend so faithful, who will all our sorrows share? Jesus knows our every weakness. Take it to the Lord in prayer"[707]

Jesus the Christ is the proto-typical friend in the Christian tradition. Contrary to the pervasive ideology that places friendship solely within the confines of a profit-driven relationship model (i.e., "what can I/we benefit from this relationship"), Jesus establishes friendship as a self-sacrificing relationship that embraces both sameness and difference- particularly those who have been marginalized by socio-economic, political, and religious status. Jesus embraced poor and rich, highbrow and commoners, Jews and non-Jews (i.e. person who practiced the religion of Israel and those who did not).[708] In fact, Jesus invites all to table and the sharing of a meal- the sharing of a meal being a sign of friendship. One can infer from these meals of friendship, which apparently included those who were strangers, that this is a central practice of Jesus' ministry.[709]

For Jesus, and subsequently the church through the celebration of the Eucharist, the custom of eating at table together and sharing meals was an act of friendship.[710] Jesus often shared meals and spent time with his close friends Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. For the Jesus movement friendship was celebrated and practiced "at a great variety of tables." [711] In time, within the early Christian community, the dishonorable charge that Jesus was too often a friend of questionable groups of people (sinners) transformed into a badge of honor.[712] Jesus was a friend to those who

---

[707] "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" is a Hymn by Joseph Scriven written in 1855.
[708] There are numerous occasions in the Christian scriptures in which Jesus' ministry touches the lives of gentiles. See Matthew 8:513. This is the scene when a Centurion (a non-Jewish believer) approaches Jesus for the healing of his servant. Jesus is so moved that he proclaims he has not discovered faith like the Centurion's even in Israel.
[709] Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Rediscovering Friendship: Awakening to the Promise and Power of Women's Friendships* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001), 33
[710] Ibid.
[711] Ibid., 34.
[712] Ibid.

were in desperate need of friendship. Friendship then became symbolic of healing, forgiveness, and reunion with God.[713]

The practice of communion (Eucharist) was instituted in part because Jesus wanted his disciples and ensuing generations of believers to remember what they had accomplished together. Remember "how we healed the sick, and cured the lepers, and relieved those possessed by demons."[714] More importantly, Jesus wanted them to remember the importance of fellowship and friendship. Remember that the Jesus movement was a group of men and women who "traveled together and ate together and were a company of friends."[715] This group did not begin as friends. These friendships were forged over a period of time. Strangers were invited to join this group of friends and, eventually, become friends as well.[716] Jesus not only celebrates the sacred meal with close friends but also strangers- with the intent that they become friends.[717]

One can tell how Jesus defines the "stranger" by his actions and encounters with those who differ from him. The scriptures bear witness to the many people Jesus embraced who did not share his religious framework. The Samarian woman at the water fountain (John 4:3-26), the syro-phonecian woman who needed her daughter to be delivered from demonic possession (Mark 7:24-30), and the Roman official who asked for healing for his servant (Matthew 8:5-13) - all of these people were embraced by the friendship of Jesus despite the fact they held different religious beliefs and practices.

Liberation is constitutive of Jesus' conception of friendship. Jesus confers the title friends on those who follow his teachings and conduct, have a direct relationship with God (through him),

---

[713] Ibid.
[714] Nora Gallagher, *The Sacred Meal: The Ancient Practices Series* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2009), 24.
[715] Ibid.
[716] The invitation of friendship was open to all who were willing to join this group of friends, even though there was the risk of establishing a negative friendship, as in the case of Jesus and Judas Iscariot.
[717] Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Rediscovering Friendship*, 35.

and thus are no longer slaves.[718] In some liberation theologies, Jesus as the Christ is the crucial

manifestation of the divine presence that standardizes God's nature as liberator and savior.[719] Jesus

was considered as a friend (the one who would never forsake you in trails and tribulation) who had

lived under conditions of oppression, proclaimed the divine message of liberation in spite of

oppression, was crucified by his oppressors, but gained victory over them through his resurrection

and the power to liberate others who are in bondage. Again, we see the role of Christ as friend.

Friends can heal and forgive.[720] Friendship can liberate and transform.[721]

Another theme in Jesus' teachings is the "Great Commandment." In several passages of

scripture, we find the scene in which a disciple asked Jesus what the greatest commandment is to

guide our lives as disciples.[722] Jesus' response is a combination of Deuteronomy 6:4 (which says,

"Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your

heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength") and Leviticus 19:18

(which says, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself"). By fusing these texts together, Jesus, by

way of the gospel writers, is making the intrinsic claim that the identity of his followers is defined

by their love for God and neighbor.[723] This was an important point in the early church because the

communities to which the Gospels were written welcomed gentiles (those outside the established

Jewish covenant of which Jesus was a part and from which his ministry/movement derived).[724] This

interpretation of the great commandment allowed persons from differing cultures and religious

backgrounds to fulfill a basic Christian function and identifying characteristic. This also suggests

that Christians are to open their arms to those who are not necessarily members of their faith

---

[718] Ibid., 33.
[719] See for example, Howard Thurman, *Jesus & the Disinherited* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1976), 15-18.
[720] Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, *Rediscovering Friendship*, 40.
[721] Ibid.
[722] See Mark 12:28-34; Matthew 22:34-40; Luke 10:25-37. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[723] Ronald J. Allen, *The Life of Jesus for Today* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008), 48.
[724] Ibid.

tradition. The love of the Christian community (as displayed in daily life) for God and neighbor has no religious boundaries.

Love is the overarching theme of the Christian faith, especially in the teachings of Jesus and the apostles. Some clarity, though, is needed in terms of love as a Christian ideal as it pertains to friendship. Usually friendship is represented by the Greek word *philio*, detached from other Greek words for love, namely eros and agape. Eros is reduced to sexuality and agape is heralded as unconditional love irrespective of friendship or other types of relationships.[725] Tillich defines love as the "urge, desire, or drive toward the reunion of that which is separated."[726] To explicate the nature of love, Tillich recovers the meanings of several Greek terms: *libido* (the movement of the needy towards that which fulfils the need), *philia* (the movement of the equal towards reunion with the equal), *eros* (the movement of that which is lower in power and meaning toward that which is higher), and *agape* (affirms the other unconditionally and is universal).[727] Tillich believed that although agape transcends the other forms of love, libido, philia, and eros are not inherently evil or antithetical to agape. Furthermore, neither instance of love is complete without the other. For Tillich this is particularly true with agape (the most touted Christian form of love) and eros.

Alexander Irvin identifies several important points about the centrality of eros in Tillich's theology, and how it functions. The most significant clarification is that eros is not tantamount to sexuality.[728] This reductionist caricature of eros was already a part of the New Testament world and the early Christian tradition.[729] Even today, many ministers relegate eros to sexual pleasure, or in

---

[725] Alexander Irvin, *Eros Toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), ix.
[726] Paul Tillich, *Love, Power, & Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1960), 25.
[727] Alexander Irvin, *Eros Toward the World*, 8-9.
[728] Ibid., 2.
[729] Ibid., 19-22.

the more denigrating sense, lust.[730] Properly understood, eros is the "source of every movement in

the world."[731] It is the source of human-to-human relationships, as well as, human-divine relations.

Christian love is usually described by the Greek word "agape." Agape has traditionally been

contrasted with eros- agape being the supreme principle of unconditional, emotionless love that is a

matter of will, not of passion. Against such portrayals, Tillich argues that eros and agape must be

seen as expression of the same ontological drive toward reunion of the human to the divine and

human being to human being.[732] Tillich identifies eros as a divine-human power. This is true even

in terms of justice and peace among the religions and in the world. Love is the foundation of all

social and political power structures, the ultimate moral principle, and the source of all moral

norms. The connection between love and justice (as morality) is not accidental. "Love in its erotic

and libidinal qualities guides human beings toward the situation of encounter in which they

experience the moral 'ought-to-be.'"[733] In other words, eros drives Christians (and all religious

persons) towards working to bring about justice in our world using various ways, even through

interfaith dialogue.

It is eros (as Tillich has framed it) that drives Jesus to the self-sacrificing love (agape) of

incarnation, ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection in the hopes of securing friendship (philios) with

humanity. It is love (in all its forms) that prompts Jesus towards friendship with human beings.

Jesus' declaration, "no one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends,"

reveals the depth of divine friendship. The "cross" (in conjunction with the life, ministry, teachings,

and resurrection) is an extension of God's friendship to the world.[734] Jesus' life and death were

---

[730] Ibid.
[731] Ibid., 78.
[732] Ibid., 9.
[733] Ibid., 64.
[734] Every aspect of Jesus' life demonstrates sacrificial love. One can say that even Jesus' life was not his own. It belongs to all humanity.

demonstrations of God's love and an invitation of divine friendship. God offers and receives

friendship in the world through the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It is because of

and through God's love that friendship is made available to all. All people can embrace the victory

and friendship of the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Trinity, Friendship, & Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue

> We believe in one God, Father, all sovereign, maker of all things
>
> seen and unseen; and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God,
>
> begotten from the Father as only-begotten, that is, from the
>
> substance of the Father, God from God, light from light, true god
>
> from true God, begotten, not made, homoousios with the Father,
>
> through whom all things came into existence, the things in heaven
>
> and the things on the earth, who because of us [humanity] and our
>
> salvation came down and was incarnated, made man, suffered, and
>
> arose on the third day, ascended into heaven, comes to judge the
>
> living and the dead; and in one Holy Spirit.[735]

There has been considerable work exploring the Trinity in relation to religious pluralism.[736]

A fully trinitarian understanding of God is necessary for any adequate Christian theological

interpretation or task.[737] The Christian way of life is expressed in the doctrine of the Trinity.[738]

---

[735] William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy* (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980), 49.

[736] Seminal works include: Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man: Icon-Person-Mystery* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973); Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000); Kevin J. Vanhoozer, eds., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1997); and Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Trinity and Religious Pluralism: The Doctrine of the Trinity in Christian Theology of Religions* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004).

[737] David Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God" in Francis Schussler Fiorenza and John P. Galvin , eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Volume 1*(Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 145.

Through the doctrine of the Trinity, Christians seek to comprehend divine reality, and the triune understanding of God is fundamentally how Christians seek to make sense of their lives. The Trinity is a magnificent and familiar symbol from the Christian tradition that is apropos for a theology of friendship. It validates that relationality is at the core of Christian faith. God is communion, i.e., community of persons. Divine reality is built on communion and love.[739] The intrinsic concept of relationality is grounded in and driven by the central Christian ontological assertion about God: God is love.[740] Therefore, the Trinity is one of the most valuable sources for a practical theology of interfaith dialogue.

Roger Haight sees the doctrine of the Trinity as a "narrative doctrine" that developed over time, in light of certain heretical movements, and is necessary (as a narrative) for the life-story and identity of the church.[741] Framing experience and truth as narrative recalls the "existential life forms that generated these experiences and truths, which they in turn carry because they define their subjects, both as individuals and as groups."[742] For Haight, Trinity as narrative grounds the doctrine in the historical and existential life of the Christian community that continues to shape this community in several ways. First, the Trinity as narrative recalls and retells the Christian story, i.e. the distinctively Christian experience of the divine, the historical relations of God with humanity, the story of salvation, and unceasing presence of God within the Christian community. Second, Trinity as narrative represents the core of Christian beliefs about divine reality. God is the creator (and sustaining power) of the world, the savior who appears in Jesus (whom Christians identify as Christ), and is continually present in the Christian community and the world through the Holy

---

[738] Nicholas Lash, "Considering the Trinity," *Modern Theology 2, no. 3* (1986), 192.
[739] Leonardo Boff, *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*, (MaryKnoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000), 39.
[740] David Tracy, "Approaching the Christian Understanding of God," 146.
[741] Roger Haight, "Trinity and Religious Pluralism," in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Fall 2009, Vol 4, no. 4,* 525-540. Haight argues that the doctrine of the Trinity developed as a defense against both Arianism and Sabellianism.
[742] Ibid., 532.

Spirit.[743]   Third, Trinity as narrative helps Christians remember the Christian story. Haight employs

the concept of memory and narrative as articulated by Johann Baptist Metz. Metz demonstrates that

recalling memory/story instills a community's identity.[744]   The narrative animates the Christian

community and gives it purpose and direction.

With this foregrounding, Haight shows how the Trinity as narrative functions in relation to

religious pluralism. He moves way from an interpretation of the Trinity that approaches religious

pluralism from a christocentric perspective. Instead, Haight argues that the doctrine of the Trinity

bears universal appeal if it is viewed from a postmodern perspective.[745]   What this means is that the

experience and articulation of the Trinity (or of divine reality in general) has to be "more subtle and

nuanced than a simple proposal that one's own story is *the* norm for others."[746]   What one should

draw from the doctrine of the Trinity as narrative is the deeper and universal dimensions that allow

both Christians and non-Christian to relate to it through their own experiences and stories. To this

end, Haight offers several principles stemming from the doctrine of the Trinity that he sees as

capable of being "possible" meaningful interpretations of experiences of non-Christians (though

this does not necessarily mean non-Christians will affirm these principles as truth).[747]

These principles include God as creator of heaven and earth, God's revelation within the

world in Jesus Christ, and God as present and empowering religious life. God as creator affirms the

---

[743] Haight is clear that Christians maintain that Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all considered equally divine. The Trinity was a way in which the church maintains the plurality of divine reality without undermining monotheism or falling into tri-theism.

[744] See Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward A Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007).

[745] Roger Haight, "Trinity and Religious Pluralism", p. 534. By postmodern, Haight is not referring to a claim of relativism, which suggests that no common general criteria exist for adjudicating religious beliefs and claim. Instead, he characterizes postmodern as pluralism, which speaks of the significant differences within a single field or matrix of perception and knowledge.

[746] Ibid.

[747] Ibid.

reality of a personal and intelligent being that endows all life with meaning and value.[748] This

principle also affirms human freedom. The revelation of God in Jesus Christ avows that God not

only reveals God's self generally as Creator but also in specific ways in incarnations.[749] God's

revelation in Jesus Christ is the revelation of God's character and the ways God acts generally.

Revelation and incarnation also demonstrate that God enters (or desires to enter) into dialogue with

all humanity, and that persons understand God via cultural contexts, events, experiences, and finite

symbols.[750] Haight sees this as universally applicable because other religious traditions may not

include the incarnation of Jesus Christ in their stories, but they do have other analogous stories.

Finally, the divine Spirit signifies the presence of God in the world, empowering the religious lives

of all religious peoples.[751] Through the Spirit, God is persistently present to all and is operating in

the world in a "personal and loving way, inviting people and communities to self-transcendence."[752]

Haight concludes from his depiction of the doctrine of the Trinity as narrative that we can safely

say that religions are autonomous, noncompetitive, and should be responsive to common humanity.

One can speak of the Trinity in two ways. Immanent Trinity refers to the internal

relationship of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One can also speak of the economic Trinity. This

view focuses on the functions of each member of the Trinity rather than their eternal being in

relation to each other. Tertullian was the first person to introduce the Latin word *trinitas* into

Christian literature.[753] The trinitarian description of divine reality became official doctrine at the

council of Nicea (325 C.E.) resulting in the Nicean creed. The metaphysics of the Trinity is not

---

[748] Ibid., 534-535.
[749] Ibid., 535-537.
[750] Ibid., 537.
[751] Ibid., 537-538.
[752] Ibid., 538.
[753] William Rusch, *The Trinitarian Controversy*, 10.

based upon number (in this case three), but on the basis that the structure of existence- both divine and human- is communal.[754]

A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya posits that when Tertullian coined the term *Trinity* to describe the Christian formula of God, his understanding of the divine community was grounded in an African worldview.[755] Communality is foundational to the African worldview. Scholars- both African and non-African- have tried to classify African religious thought in terms of monotheism and/or polytheism. A more accurate classification, according to Ogbonnaya, is to view the divine as a community of divinity (or in some systems divinities) - what he refers to as divine communalism. Divine communalism is the position that "the divine is a community of gods who are fundamentally related to one another and ontologically equal while at the same time distinct from one another by their personhood and functions."[756] The Christian idea of God is not identical with this particular definition of divine communalism; however, there is a sense of oneness and many that is not in conflict in the African worldview- a notion that Tertullian was aware of and influenced by. Ogbonnaya suggests that Tertullian applied this same communitarian understanding in the concept of the Trinity. Therefore, community, interrelatedness, and friendship are ingrained in the Christian understanding of God.

Ogbonnaya also argues that an African communal understanding of the divine provides a basis for explaining (and exemplifying) the meaning of equality, as well as, clarifying personal distinctions and temporal subordination within community without subjecting differences to

---

[754] Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology, Volume III: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 284, 290, 292-293.

[755] A. Okechukwu Ogbonnaya, *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the Trinity* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1994). This is not to say that Tertullian did not have other influences. Ogbonnaya acknowledges that Tertullian had a working knowledge of Jewish and Hellenistic interpretations of Christian theology. Nevertheless, Ogbonnaya posits that one take a more comprehensive approach by acknowledging all elements of influence in Tertullian's theology.

[756] Ibid., 23.

ontological inferiority.[757] This framework illustrates how various groups of people with physical and cultural differences can live in community without viewing the differences of others as substandard. Accordingly, there is a spiritual connection between every person including the living, those who have died (called the "living dead" or the ancestors), as well as, those who are yet to be born. Community even transcends geographical location. No matter where a person is, she or he is at all times connected to the community. At the same time, the individuality of a person is preserved.[758] This suggests that human "being" is communal in the same way that divinity is communal, i.e., unity and plurality are congruous and constitutive of divine reality and human existence.

One of the fundamental traits of humanity as espoused by the scriptures and the Christian tradition is the "*imago dei.*" Human beings have been created in the image of God. There are several different interpretations of the "image of God" throughout the history of Christian thought. Some thinkers argued that human beings have a *physical resemblance* to God in our previous, non-sinful state.[759] A dominant interpretation in Western Christian thought has been that the *rational nature* of human beings is what is meant by the image of God. St. Thomas Aquinas, for example, viewed the capacity and use for human reason as both a reflection of and participation in the divine logos that created the universe and gave it structure.[760] Besides human reason, *human freedom* has been highlighted as the image of God.[761] Some theologians and philosophers see human beings as autonomous, self-determining, and self-transcending.[762] Each of these interpretations carries serious shortcomings. Physical resemblance is less likely as the scriptures maintain God is a spirit,

---

[757]Ibid., xi.
[758] Strict "individualism" is what is rejected, not individuality.
[759] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology 2nd Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 140.
[760] St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica, Part I, Question 93, a. 4.*
[761] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 141.
[762] See for example John B. Cobb, Jr. and David Ray Griffin, *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition* (The Westminster Press, 1976), 81.

emphasis on reason has (in many cases) led to a devaluing of physical and emotional aspects, and the stress on freedom is usually connected with hyper-subjectivism, or what Charles Taylor calls the "disengaged subject."[763]

Many contemporary theologians agree that the most adequate interpretation or description of the image of God is humanity in relationships with God and others.[764] Human beings are created for and in relationship. Human relationality as the image of God has its origins in the Book of Genesis. Not only do we find the divine proclamation, "Let us make humanity in our image," but also the fact that the man (*ish*) was unfulfilled until God created the woman (*ishi*) to be his companion.[765] It is God who says it was not good for the man to be alone (in contrast to the all other aspects of creation which were declared to be good). Therefore, "the basic form of humanity is co-humanity."[766] Human identity, indeed, what it means to be fully human, is inextricably tied to inter-relationality and community. Human relationships include both divine and human partners. There is little that distinguishes human beings from the rest of creation other than the fact that God decides to enter into relationship with them.[767]

Relational human nature stems from the triune nature of divinity. A model of trinitarian relationality is seen in what has been called "Rahner's Rule," i.e., the economic Trinity is the immanent Trinity and the immanent Trinity is the economic Trinity.[768] This rule describes God's relations with the world in triune form as opposed to stressing the unity of God. Each person of the

---

[763]Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 141; and Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992), 211.
[764] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 141.
[765] See Genesis 1:26-27; Genesis 2:18-22. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[766] John Swinton, *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007), 204.
[767] Ibid., 205.
[768] Karl Rahner, *The Trinity* (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 2001, Reprint), 21-24.

Godhead relates and communicates with creation- especially humanity.[769] God is relational within God's self. S. Mark Heim speaks of the Christian understanding of God as both one and many. God is essentially relational and this is mirrored in human existence. Being is characterized by communion (relationship), consequently, one cannot simply be or exist, one must *exist with*.[770] In other words, "*every-one needs an-other one.*"[771] From this Heim argues that the diversity of religions is a necessary consequence of the differences within divine reality itself.

The Trinity is a model for community and relationality. All of us are part of the human community. A community is more than a group of people with similar interests living in the same location. It is an interacting population infused with difference, but sharing a common vision and goal. The metaphysical structure of human existence is such that all human beings are connected through a spiritual bond. This implies that human beings are interdependent and responsible for the well being of each other. It also implies that there is no inherent hierarchy or superiority for human beings (e.g., according to gender, race, ethnicity, or religious adherence). The same way in which the Trinity exists in love and equality is the way human beings are to behave.

There are some reservations about using the Trinity as a model for social and political relations. Using the Trinity as a social or political programme runs the risk of simply becoming another projection of human society, justifying and promoting Western democratic values.[772] As such, it is no different than using a monarchical (divine patriarch) view of God to justify other forms of governance.[773] Moreover, Trinity tells little of how to relate to one another specifically. Ola Sidgurdson says the term "relation" as it pertains to the doctrine of the Trinity is a technical

---

[769] Ted Peters, *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993), 96-97.
[770] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 195.
[771] Ibid.
[772] Ola Sigurdson, "Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?" in Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande, eds., *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005), 121.
[773] Ibid.

term, and it does not necessarily explicate human relational experiences (social or political).[774] So, the Trinity tells us what it means to exist, not necessarily the kind of relations that are most appropriate for society.[775] For example, the Trinity does not tell "how men and women should relate to one another as males and females."[776] While the doctrine of the Trinity does not explicate sexual difference (nor can it). It does, however, convey the idea that "to-be" is "to-be-related" in difference, i.e., human reality is relationality through and in diversity and pluralism. This foundational principle and view of reality provides an adequate basis for interreligious/interfaith dialogue and developing relationships and friendships. The intrinsic relational character of human existence shows both that individuals are incomplete without interacting and relating to others, and that individual traditions are incomplete without dialogical interaction with other traditions.

Pneumatology, Friendship, and Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue

"When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth"[777]

The Holy Spirit also serves as an example of friendship. The Gospel of John introduces the Spirit as the Paraclete in addition to Jesus.[778] A paraclete is someone who comes alongside another to help, and is an advocate or defense attorney. [779] The term *paraclete* also carries the meanings of comforter, intercessor, and "the one who exhorts and encourages."[780] All of these meanings display the characteristics of friendship. The Spirit is a friend in the same way that Jesus is a friend to the

---

[774] Ibid.
[775] Ibid., 122.
[776] Janet Martin Soskice, "Trinity and 'the Feminine Other'" as quoted in Ola Sigurdson, "Is the Trinity a Practical Doctrine?," 121.
[777] John 16:13. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[778] John 14:16. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[779] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2002), 35.
[780] Ibid.

community of God.[781] Furthermore, the ministry of the Spirit is to the entire world, not only the Christian community. The Spirit reveals the ways in which the world is guilty of sins and estrangement from God.[782] The Spirit also draws human beings to salvation and guides them to truth. Another important factor is that the Spirit is at work in the world, among all humanity. Samuel Solivan argues that the belief that the Spirit works through and with non-Christians should be a comfort to Christians since this shows (at the very least) the Spirit's witness and drawing all humanity to Christ.[783]

Some prominent conceptual themes have developed in contemporary pneumatology that can help to facilitate the integration of the doctrine of the Spirit with the practice of spirituality (or spiritual practices). Chief among these is the conception of the Holy Spirit as an all-embracing and all-pervading dynamic presence that energizes all life (human and non-human).[784] This understanding facilitates a relational, holistic, and embodied spirituality. There is also the affirmation of the eternal, communal relation of the Spirit with the Father and Son, and the Spirit's invitation to all creatures to participate in the divine communion.[785] This principle promotes the social formation of persons.

Based on these trends in contemporary pneumatology one can glean three principles guiding a pneumatological practical theology of religious pluralism and interreligious/interfaith friendship. First is the diversity of creation and continual creative work and activity of God through the Holy Spirit. Creation mirrors plurality and diversity, and the Spirit continues to foster diversity through various avenues, especially through the religions. Second is the omnipresence, even ubiquity, of

---

[781] As discussed above.
[782] John 16:8. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.*
[783] Samuel Solivan, "An Hispanic American Pentecostal Perspective" in S. Mark Heim, ed., *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998), 41.
[784] F. LeRon Shults and Andrea Hollingsworth, *The Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008), 93.
[785] Ibid.

God's presence through the Holy Spirit. The divine cannot be confined to a particular religious

tradition or religious boundaries. Third is the gift of discernment of the Spirit. Careful judgment and

sensitivity is necessary as it pertains to discerning healthy and non-healthy interreligious/interfaith

friendship as well as discerning the presence and absence of the divine in certain religious beliefs

and practices.

The opening verses of the Hebrew Scriptures reveal the role of the Spirit in creation.

Throughout the scriptures, there are affirmations of the divinity of the Spirit as well as the activities

of the Spirit in relation to creation and human affairs. It is imperative to acknowledge both the

divinity of the Holy Spirit and the full membership of the Spirit in the Trinity. By so doing one

acknowledges the Spirit as having a central role in the world and among the various religions.

Wolfhart Pannenberg suggests the way to do this is to discard theological claims of *filioque* (the

notion that the Spirit proceeds from both the Father and the Son, thus making the Holy Spirit

subordinate to the Father and Son).[786] By rejecting the idea of filioque, Pannenberg moves "beyond

traditional Christocentrism and [elevates] the Spirit as the trinitarian member most specifically

operative in the world."[787] Through the work of the Spirit, one sees the saving work of God in

creation as a whole. The Holy Spirit is the life-principle or "force field" of *all* living things.[788]

The entire creation participants in the life of God through the continual creative work of the

Spirit. The Spirit is the means of the immanence of God in creation and the means of the

participation of creation in the divine life.[789] Pannenberg uses the term "ecstatic" to describe all life.

In effect, this means "each organism lives in an environment that nurtures it, and each organism is

---

[786] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, vol. 2* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 304-305.
[787] Stanley Grenz, "Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Winter 1989, 26, no. 1,* pp. 196-210.
[788] Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology vol. 2*, 76-77. Emphasis Added.
[789] Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Pneumatology*, 122.

oriented by its own drives beyond its immediate environment, on which it is dependent, to its future and to the future of its species."[790] This speak of the continuity between the creation, the constant renewal of life in the world by the Spirit (Psalm 104:30), and the *eschaton*, the completion of creation by the power of the Spirit. As the Spirit is present in all creation, the Spirit is also present in the religious expressions of human beings, which subsequently produced the various religious traditions of human history.[791]

Michael Welker posits a pluralistic pneumatology.[792] In contrast to pneumatologies that understand the Holy Spirit's work primarily as creating union and unity, he argues that the Spirit creates and fosters diversity and plurality. In this sense, plurality produced by the work of the Holy Spirit attest to God's plenitude and glory.[793] Pentecost is a prime example of the Spirit's actions towards plurality and diversity. Through the pouring out of the Spirit, God effected a "world-encompassing, multilingual, polyindividual testimony to Godself."[794]

Friendship embraces difference and individuality. At the same time, there is a deep connection, a love and respect of common humanity. Some theologies of religions often stress either the essential unity of religions or their differences. [795] A more accurate picture is that unity and diversity are both constitutive of reality. Religious traditions can have similar characteristics, goals, ethics, and practices, but they need *not* be identical. Losing sight of both the similarities and differences of the religions can hinder real, relationship building dialogue. A pneumatological theology of religions is a beneficial basis for such a claim. It provides Christian theological grounds for the preservation of difference or "otherness", as well as, interaction and dialogue.[796] The many

---

[790] Ibid.
[791] Stanley Grenz, "Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions," 204-205.
[792] Michael Welker, *God the Spirit* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004).
[793] Ibid., 25.
[794] Ibid., 235.
[795] This is seen the works of John Hick and S. Mark Heim especially.
[796] Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 11.

tongues of Pentecost and gifts of the Spirit demonstrate the possibility of a common language for the different "language-religious systems" and languages to speak to each other in understandable ways.[797] Through the power of the Holy Spirit, barriers of race, gender, ethnicity, politics, social status, and even divisive religious beliefs and practices are surmounted. This allows for friendship and relations with persons of differing faiths.

Creation itself reflects God's predilection for diversity.[798] At the same time, creation is interconnected. God's Spirit is the instrument of this diverse creation, and the source and means of all relationships and communities.[799] Communication, relationships, and the coexistence of diversity and unity are possible because of the presence of God's Spirit in the world and in every person. Thus, difference is necessary for dialogical relations. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue should not call for preconditions vis-à-vis a religious tradition abdicating conventional beliefs in order to engage in dialogue. Assumptions, presuppositions, and the basic tenets of one's faith are integral components of interfaith dialogue. Interreligious/interfaith friendship is the context where difference is honored even as union (via a relationship) emerges.

The Christian Tradition affirms the ubiquitous presence of God. Throughout this dissertation, there has been an assertion of the divine presence at work in the world and in persons of all faith. A theology of religious pluralism in connection with a theology of friendship is unfeasible without such a guiding principle. Pneumatologically speaking, this is the assertion of the universal presence of the divine through the Spirit. God is connected to every part of creation. The manifestation of the Spirit happens in unexpected ways.[800] Amos Yong claims that the world's religions are neither accidents of history nor encroachments on divine providence. Rather they are

---

[797] Acts 2:4-11. Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 1.
[798] Daniel Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding*, 109.
[799] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward A Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003), 45.
[800] Samuel Solivan, "An Hispanic American Pentecostal Perspective," 42.

instruments of the Spirit, assisting in the fulfillment of divine purposes in the world.[801] The Judeo-

Christian tradition is consistent in the idea that the "Spirit" has been "poured out on *all* flesh" (i.e.,

the divine presence and activity is at work among all human beings, not a select few).[802] Flowing

from this activity is the principle that God is no respecter of persons.[803] God does not discriminate.

This suggests the activity of the Holy Spirit in the world is not necessarily limited to the Christian

community. In fact, the Spirit is active in all creation in different cultures, religions, and various

groups of people.

The claim of the Holy Spirit's universal presence is an affirmation of the theological

doctrine of divine omnipresence.[804] Stanley Grenz argues that one should turn the traditional

understanding of omnipresence on its head.[805] Theologians should no longer define omnipresence

as God being near to all things. Instead, omnipresence should be defined as all things being present

to God in themselves. Nothing is hidden from the divine view. Everything is present to God in its

fullness.

Albert Knudson posited that omnipresence means that space constitutes no barrier or

limitation to the divine power. The divine activity extends to all parts of the universe, and is as

operative in one part as in another. This notion also has a practical root, as seen in scripture.

Persons needed to know that divine help was available wherever they were and that nothing could

be hidden from the divine presence.[806] The problem is defining it in metaphysical terms. Knudson

rejects the idea of a divine substance filling all space because this view is inconsistent with divine

---

[801] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 46.
[802] Acts 2:17; Acts 10:34. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition.* Emphasis added.
[803] Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 186.
[804] Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 251.
[805] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002), 92
[806] Albert Knudson*, Doctrine of God* (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1930), 275

unity (whatever occupies space can be divided). Part of what it means to be omnipresent is to be *present* at every point with one's *entire* being. This is done only through an infinite self-consciousness. It also means immediate action in the world that extended to all things. Divine presence signifies divine agency, and this is how divine-human relations should be conceived, i.e. divine interaction and engagement with all creation.[807] God is present within every aspect of creation giving it worth, dignity, and value.

It follows that the different religious traditions also have value, dignity, and worth because of divine presence. In keeping with Knudson, one can assert that divine reality is *fully present* in the various religious experiences and expressions of humanity. The divine is not confined to a particular religious tradition. There are no boundaries (religious or otherwise) on divine presence. One would be able to find traces of divine manifestations in any tradition or cultural context in which God chooses to reveal God's self. Since divine presence is ubiquitous and discernable in various religious contexts, dialogue (most affectively through the development of interreligious/interfaith friendships) is again substantiated as a necessity for attaining truths, knowledge about divine reality, and how human beings should live and interact. One simply has to be open, patient, and sensitive to the discernable traces of divine presence in other religions.

One of the gifts of the Spirit is the gift of discernment. Friendship is a viable context for dialogue and spiritual development; however, the intent is not to romanticize friendship. One should not ignore the possible "dark side" of friendship. There are imperfect, and possibly emotionally and spiritually harmful, relationships that ensue under the guise of friendship. For this reason, Aelred of Rievaulx insisted that a great deal of deliberation and evaluation be undertaken prior to committing to a friendship with someone to avoid disastrous and emotionally damaging

---

[807] Ibid., 277

consequences.[808] Even with discernment, one must realize that friendship may lead to disappointments. Andrew Greeley suggests that one of the most beneficial characteristics of friendship is that it is a challenging and demanding game (a game that one can lose).[809] A promising relationship can end unexpectedly or in ruins. Friendship is a risk. Nonetheless, if one is not willing to take risks one will never have friendships.[810] One should listen to the dictates of the Spirit and trust the Holy Spirit to lead and guide into appropriate, non-harmful, interreligious/interfaith friendships.

A pneumatological framing of interreligious/interfaith dialogue and friendship also provides a theological basis for teasing out the "emergent possibilities and actualities" of interpersonal relationships.[811] This is particularly true in terms of interfaith dialogue and the moving of spiritual/divine presence within and through the lives of persons of differing faith traditions. The scriptures speak of the relational work and building of the Spirit, especially in terms of conviction, edification, and sanctification. All of these things are seen as taking place over a period of time, which is key to building meaningful interreligious/interfaith friendships.

"Discernment of the Spirit" is also vital in terms of identifying the presence and work of the divine in differing religious traditions and practices. Though one affirms the presence of divine reality in the world outside the Christian community (and even outside of the major world religious traditions, institutionalized religions, etc), one should also recognize the reality of the demonic, i.e. the evil that functions under the guise of religion. Spiritual discernment broadly understood is a "divine gift and a human activity aimed at reading correctly the inner processes of all things-

---

[808] Aelred of Rievaulx, *Spiritual Friendship, Trans. by Mary Eugenia Lakser, Introduction by Douglas Roby* (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977), 18.
[809] Andrew Greeley, *The Friendship Game* (Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1970), 17.
[810] Ibid.
[811] Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 186.

persons, institutions, events, rites, experiences, and so on."[812] One must be vigilant to identify idolatrous ideology, oppressive systems of thought and practice, and false truth claims.

Since there are evil actions that occur and function under the guise of religion, one should not simply accept all forms of religious practices without proper investigation and (non-condescending or contemptuous) scrutiny. Recognition of divine presence in the world does not necessarily equate to total acceptance of all supposed representations of the divine. This again is a trap of relativism, the idea that beliefs are justified only within and by the belief-system to which a person or culture adheres. Horrendous acts (e.g., human sacrifice, wars, terrorism, etc) have been perpetrated in the name of religion and justified on religious grounds.[813] Conversely, there are also many ways in which religion has benefited humanity. The task is to distinguish between actions and teachings that are beneficial and detrimental. Interreligious/interfaith friendship is an advantageous context to discern such beliefs and practices. As one gets to know someone, one is better able to learn the other's actual beliefs and practices. One is also in a position to question these beliefs and practice from a space of love, respect, and with the well-being of the other person in mind.

Yong speaks of the ways the Spirit is present, active, and *absent* in the religions.[814] He posits that God is universally present through the Spirit and uses the religions for divine aims. There is also the presupposition that the Spirit's goal is to usher in the kingdom of God. In view of that, the Holy Spirit is present and active in the aspects of the religions where characteristics of the kingdom of God are exhibited. Yong then says that besides the universal presence and activity of the Holy Spirit there are resistant and retarding elements also present in the religions (Christianity

---

[812] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 129.
[813] See Charles Kimball, *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs*, *Revised and Updated* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2008).
[814] Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 250.

included) that work against the manifestation of the kingdom of God. So the Spirit is absent from the religions when the manifestation of the kingdom is prevented or divine purposes are frustrated.

One of the key criteria of discernment is the practices our religious concepts, rituals, and customs produce. If religious beliefs and customs produce life-giving, life-affirming practices, we can say with some degree of certainty that the divine is present in these beliefs and customs. One could hardly deny the work of Mahatmas Gandhi, Dorothy Day, Martin Luther King Jr, or the Dalai Lama was and is permeated with the presence of the Spirit despite the divergence in religious traditions. By the same token, if certain religious beliefs and customs produce oppressive practices we can say with some degree of certainty that the divine is *not* present in these beliefs and customs. Atrocities such as slavery, genocide, and misogynistic tendencies were (and even remain) justified on religious grounds.

Finally, as it pertains to a pneumatological practical theology of religious pluralism, we turn to the fruits of the Spirit. For Christians, interreligious/interfaith friendship is impossible without the fruits of the Spirit as a source and guide. The scriptures offer nine principal fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.[815]   Love is the foundation from which all the other fruit extend. It is self-sacrificing, unconditional, and to be extended to all humanity (regardless of religious differences). Peace not only refers to inner strength and tranquility, it also denotes the respect and civility in the midst of diversity. Patience indicates longevity, the time and effort one puts into building friendship over time. Kindness is about taking initiative towards others. In order to make friends one must be friendly, and this includes initiating interfaith relationships.[816] Generosity is reaching out to others offering assistance in times of need. Faithfulness signifies our commitment to God and the extension of God's kingdom through

---

[815] Galatians 5:22-23. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3ʳᵈ Edition*.

[816] Proverbs 18:24. Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study New Testament with Parallel Greek, King James Version* (Chattanooga, TN: AMG International Publishers, 1992).

interfaith friendships. It also signifies the commitment necessary for friendship. Gentleness is a display of humility and tenderness towards other religions. Humility is when one admits that his/her knowledge of divine reality is not exhaustive. One freely admits one can learn things about ultimate reality from other traditions. Self-control speaks of both restraint from superimposing one's beliefs and practices on others, as well as, leading a disciplined life of interfaith relations. Finally, joy is what one experiences when she/he engages in friendship.

Characteristics of Interreligious/Interfaith Friendship

Friendship provides a fertile and rewarding space for interfaith dialogue. Foremost is the integration of persons of differing faiths in daily life. Our friends are present at our most vulnerable times. We share our deepest thoughts and beliefs, hopes and fears with our friends. In short, we live our lives (and our faith) in the presence of our friends. Friendship is not rigidly and solely defined by commonalities. Instead, friendship is defined by trust, openness, compassion, forgiveness, and meaningful memories, and shared experiences that influence each other's lives and practices. Friendship is a "foundational way in which we orient our lives."[817]

Persons encounter other people, throughout the course of their lives, who have such a profound impact upon them that they transform the way in which they see the world. This is a transformation of worldview and way of being in the world. Few people leave such an indelible mark. This can be a mentor, teacher, author, or especially a friend. Such people need not be of the same faith tradition. This is the most significant point of all. A transformation of this magnitude can occur through anyone we encounter or with whom we have relations. The scriptures warn not to take counsel from ungodly people.[818] The admonishment is to avoid or disregard the advice of

---

[817] Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*, 8.
[818] Psalms 1:1. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition*.

persons who deny the reality, presence, and principles of God. This does not necessarily suggest persons who are adherents of different religious traditions. What one finds in persons of differing religions is the presence of the divine. As was demonstrated, if one takes a pneumatological theology of religions seriously, then one must acknowledge that "the Spirit blows where it wills," i.e., the Spirit works through whomever the Spirit chooses. Barriers should not hinder the fruitful and life-changing connection between two or more people- be they racial, gender, ethnic, or religious.

The friendship of a pastor, rabbi, and sheik provide "real life" substantiation for the claims of interreligious and interfaith friendship.[819] Each one is calling for an expansive perspective for interreligious and interfaith relations, which they refer to as inclusive spirituality.[820] These interfaith friends believe that elevating the conversation to a "spiritual level" will show how different belief systems can lead to the same place of cooperation, spiritual enhancement, and friendship.[821] These religious leaders discovered that, through sustained and fruitful dialogue, friendships can develop that help to allay fears and misnomers that fuel religious intolerance.[822] They also discovered that friendship was a fruitful context for sharing their faith as well as other life experiences.[823] For this pastor, Rabbi, and Sheik, interfaith dialogue led to a genuine friendship that extends beyond religious tolerance to a deep commitment of listening and mutual transformation.[824]

There was a process for this interfaith friendship. This included exploring the spiritual practices of each other's traditions.[825] A five stage approach to interfaith friendship is also

---

[819] Ted Falcon, Don Mackenzie, and Jamal Rahman, *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi, and a Sheik* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2009).
[820] Ibid., 1.
[821] Ibid., 2.
[822] Ibid., 9.
[823] Ibid., 103.
[824] Ibid., 28.
[825] Ibid., 135-155.

posited.[826]   Throughout the process or stages, it is imperative to keep in mind that interfaith

friendship is not for the purpose of converting someone (though this may occur).[827] The first stage

is moving beyond separation and suspicion. Stage two is intentional and deep inquiry into the

tradition and life of the religious other. The third stage is the candid sharing of one's religious

beliefs and practices, both the good and bad aspects. Stage four is when the relationship moves

beyond safe territory. The final stage is the exploration of spiritual practices from other traditions.

These stages reflect the sharing of stories, beliefs, and practices between persons of differing

religions and how friendship develops through this process.

Finally, there are certain characteristics of interfaith friendship to be considered, namely

loyalty, commitment (trust), openness (candidness), communication, compromise, compassion, and

forgiveness. These are also the very characteristics that sustain interreligious/interfaith community.

Friendship rests on loyalty.[828] Loyalty (not in the sense of fanaticism that can lead to inimical

actions) is faithfulness or devotion to one's friend. In order for an interfaith (or any) friendship to

work, there must be deep dedication to the friendship, which allows it to survive the vicissitudes of

life. Commitment follows in the same vein. Commitment is the glue that holds friendship together

whatever happens.[829] Friendship includes elements of vulnerability, i.e., a person trusts someone

with the most intimate parts of themselves, and that person trusts them. Commitment is an act of

entrusting someone with your friendship as well as being trustworthy with theirs.

---

[826] Ibid., 7-26.
[827] Ibid., 3.
[828] George P. Fletcher, *Loyalty: An Essay on the Morality of Relationships* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993), 7.
[829] Alan Loy McGinnis, *The Friendship Factor: How to Get Closer to the People You Care For* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2004), 179.

The key to any relationship (particularly interreligious/interfaith dialogical friendship) is openness (in the sense of being able to be candid).[830] If interreligious/interfaith dialogue is going to be effective, there must be an environment in which persons are comfortable with expressing their beliefs and practices without fear of judgment or reprisal. Friendship helps people to receive each other in a spirit of openness.[831] It is a space where people can share both convictions and doubts they may have about their faith traditions. Someone may be more willing to admit to themselves and others that they are searching for answers and meaning, perhaps outside of the orthodoxy of their particular religious tradition within the context of friendship. Not only is friendship a space of sharing, it is also a space of listening, and a willingness to be shaped and transformed by the other person(s). Therefore, openness speaks of both a safe space of sharing, as well as, a sacred space of listening. As a friendship develops, one embraces freedom of expression and allow room for others to enjoy the same freedom.[832]

In keeping with openness, the next characteristic is communication. Communication is the cornerstone of any relationship because it provides stability and it is the means through which people grow together and are transformed by the relationship.[833] Communication is how someone gets to know and build intimacy with another person. Communication also helps avoid misunderstandings and solve problems that may arise in friendship. For interreligious/interfaith dialogue, communication is essential.[834] Along with communication, there is compromise. This can refer to the manner in which dialogue occurs (e.g., the definition of terminology) and/or even one's understanding of divine reality as a result of encountering a differing perspective. So, compromise

---

[830] David A. Cichocki, *Maintaining Stable Friendships: An Investigation of Strategic and Routine Communication* (Dissertation.com. 1997), 42 & 64.
[831] Vinita Hampton Wright, *Days of Deeping Friendship: For the Woman Who Wants Authentic Life With God* (Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2009), 10.
[832] Ibid.
[833] David A. Cichocki, *Maintaining Stable Friendships*, 20-21.
[834] This was demonstrated in Chapter two of this dissertation.

represents a willingness to change one's opinions and practices based on insights gained from interfaith friendship. Compromise also bespeaks sacrifice. For instance, a person will sacrifice time, money, and effort to help friends.[835] The scripture affirms that love does not seek its own benefit, i.e., when a person loves someone she/he tends to act in ther other person's best interests, not their own.[836] Nevertheless, this is something that should be reciprocal.[837] Genuine friendship benefits all participants because we all essentially have needs to be met from friendship. In fact, an essential part of being human is being needy, i.e., human beings are in need of union with other people and God.[838]

Compassion is an important characteristic of interreligious/interfaith friendship. In the Christian tradition, *passion* speaks of the suffering and death of Christ. Though the crucifixion of Christ is interpreted in various ways, one common theme is that Christ's sufferings were for the benefit of others and his death and resurrection defied the demonic forces of sin and oppression.[839] Again, one is reminded of the compassion that Jesus displayed both in his ministry and in his suffering. One would be hard pressed to call someone friend and then ignore their suffering, injustices they may be facing, or actually cause their suffering and/or oppression.[840] Compassion means little if it is only an idea. It should be employed as an attitude towards others.[841] Besides empathy and concern for justice, compassion refers to delicacy and gentleness as well. The manner in which people relate to each other (the words they use, their tones, controlling their tempers most of the time) also has tremendous consequences for successful friendships.

---

[835] Gilbert C. Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 36.
[836] Ibid.
[837] Ibid., 36-52.
[838] Ibid., 40.
[839] David A. Brondos, *Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007), 45.
[840] The Dalai Lama and Nicholas Vreeland, *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life* (New York, NY: First Back Bay Publishing Company, 2002), 11.
[841] Ibid., 22.

Forgiveness is fundamental when speaking of friendship because no relationship has a future without forgiveness.[842] Friendship "assumes that we grow into understanding, that in our growing we learn to forgive."[843] There may be times when one disappoints or offends friends. Friendship is a risk. There may be disagreements, argument, betrayal, or other things that cause strife, and threatens to destroy the friendship; however, despite these kinds of circumstances some friendships are salvageable. In other words, persons are to employ forgiveness in the hope of reconciliation. There is a process of recovery that includes shock and denial, anxiety about whether or not the offense or disagreement will occur again (causing more damage), apathy alternating with anger, acceptance, taking steps toward personal healing, and finally, moving toward reconciliation.[844] This demonstrates that reconciliation and forgiveness is no easy task. It should not be taken for granted or frivolously. It takes serious work to rebuild trust and intimacy once this has been broken. Reestablishing or saving a friendship takes time, attention (perhaps even counseling), reflection (i.e., painstakingly searching to see what went wrong, how, and what can be done to prevent it from happening again), and establishing rules for handling future conflict and disagreement.[845]

The Christian tradition requires that we forgive those who have wronged us, and accept the forgiveness of those we have wronged. When the Apostle Peter inquired of Jesus about the number of times he should forgive someone, Jesus' reply was "seventy times seven."[846] Jesus did not seek to establish a certain amount of times to forgive someone; rather his response signifies the inexhaustible character of forgiveness. The reason is simple; this is how God responds to human

---

[842] Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999), 260.
[843] Vinita Hampton Wright, *Days of Deeping Friendship*, 10.
[844] Jan Yager, *When Friendship Hurts: How to Deal with Friends Who Betray, Abandon, or Wound You* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002), 113.
[845] Ibid., 114-115.
[846] Matthew 18:21-22. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition*.

beings when they commit sins against nature, other human beings, or divine law. Forgiveness is a divine/spiritual practice and is required for those created in the image of the divine. Without forgiveness, relationships and friendships cannot endure.

<div align="center">**Chapter 4:**</div>

<div align="center">**Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue, Friendship, and Community**</div>

Experiences of dialogue, debate, conversation, and communication presuppose and foster solidarity and friendship (personal and civic).[847] Friendship is a fundamental context for practical philosophers such as Habermas and Gadamer.[848] It is also a fundamental context in practical theology.[849] The dialogical character of human existence and dialogical exchanges engender a vision that points to the "practical need to cultivate *dialogical communities*."[850] Dialogical communities prompt us to embody the principles of dialogue and friendship in our everyday practices.[851] Community cultivates and provides space for relationships and friendships to develop and blossom. Persons learn the principles of dialogue, relationship, and friendship in community. It is also necessary to explore the theological concepts and practices that inform interreligious/interfaith encounters that occur at the community level.[852] Therefore, a practical theology of religious pluralism also seeks to articulate a theology of an *interfaith community*, i.e., a theology of contemporary pluralism, and dialogue as the fundamental practice that sustains such a community.

Christians are called of God to interreligious/interfaith dialogue as an intentional and perpetual practice. Developing interreligious/interfaith friendships is a viable context for dialogue. An interfaith community presupposes a context where people *intentionally* live in cooperation with the potential of developing genuine friendships. Different religious institutions have different goals for interreligious/interfaith dialogue, but religions by and large concur that understanding and

---

[847] Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), xv.
[848] Ibid.
[849] John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*, 8, 19-20.
[850] Richard J. Bernstein, *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism*, xv. Emphasis added.
[851] Ibid., 223.
[852] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 120.

harmony among the religions are "enhanced by intentional encounters with religious others."[853] The theme of community resurfaces because people of different religious traditions already live together, work together, and have interactions. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue does not necessarily seek to create interfaith community. Rather, interreligious/interfaith community already exists, as people in the United States, for example, can attest.[854] The aim is to make these interactions more intentional and beneficial in terms of sharing religious beliefs and practices, and being transformed by interreligious/interfaith interactions. In addition, it is within community that the tools and principles of interreligious/interfaith dialogue and friendship are fostered.

Interreligious/interfaith friendships possess generative effects. Genuine, grace infused friendship generates something for both individuals as well as a larger community.[855] Peter Slade's examination of *Mission Mississippi*, the largest interracial ecumenical church-based racial reconciliation group in the United States, outlines how interracial friendships effectively address social justice.[856] In other words, friendship is the key to building a real interracial and just community. The same can apply for interreligious/interfaith friendship and community. Centralizing friendship in interfaith/ interreligious dialogue alters power relations between individuals and groups.[857]

Diana Eck makes a distinction between diversity and pluralism that is commensurate to a practical theology of interfaith community.[858] Diversity speaks of the fact of plurality. Difference is a fact of existence. Pluralism, on the on other hand, is the intentional commitment that creates a

---

[853] Ibid., 128.
[854] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 276.
[855] Mary Hunt, *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*, 99.
[856] Peter Slade, *Open Friendship in a Closed Society: Mission Mississippi and a Theology of Friendship* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009).
[857] Eleanor Hume Haney, "What is Feminist Ethics? A Proposal for Continuing Discussion," *Journal of Religious Ethics 8, no 1, 1980*, 115-124.
[858] Diana Eck, "From Diversity to Pluralism" in *On Common Ground World Religions in American* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997).

common society from diversity. Pluralism occurs when persons of differing religious traditions build relationships and engage in interreligious dialogue and actions to create community. Eck further explains that pluralism is only one of many responses to diversity.[859] Exclusion and assimilation are other forms of reactions to diversity. Exclusionists tend to feel threatened by diversity and display xenophobic characteristics, including advocating against the admission of persons of different religions, races, and cultures into their society.[860] They view the very presence of difference as an assault on the core values of their society or country.[861] Assimilationists receive those who are different but implore them to abandon their differences and peculiarities and conform to the dominant culture and/or religion.[862]

In contrast to the exclusionist and assimilationist positions, pluralism embraces diversity with all its differences in hopes of creating a genuine community. This is guided by several principles of pluralism.[863] First, pluralism is active engagement with diversity to build a community. Second, pluralism requires knowledge of our difference, not only tolerance of other religions/cultures. Third, pluralism does not mean the abandonment of one's faith commitments. On the contrary, one is encouraged to maintain her/his beliefs, but also be open to critical reflection. Fourth, pluralism speaks of unity, but not uniformity. It does not seek to create one "umbrella" religion under which all religions can fit. Fifth, pluralism requires dialogue and relationship, not necessarily uniformity and consensus on matters of faith.

To flesh out a vision of interreligious/interfaith community, and the pluralism Eck presents, an operative understanding of community is necessary. Several theologians and philosophers have

---

[859] Ibid.

[860] Ibid.

[861] We see this in American society in the debate concerning immigration, and even the vandalizing of advertising by the Muslim faith community seeking to educate the American public about Islam, especially those who have conflated Islam with terrorism because of the influence of the mass media.

[862] Diana Eck, "From Diversity to Pluralism"

[863] Ibid.

explored community. The Christian ideal of community is the *ecclesia*.[864] The proper etymology of

the Greek word "ecclesia" (the term translated as church), particularly in the Gospel of Matthew, is

"an organized assembly, whose members have been properly called out from private homes or

business to attend to public affairs."[865] This implies that the Christian community is, by definition,

called by God to engage in practices and praxis that affects the world. The domain of Christian

practice extends beyond the boundaries of Christian denominations and congregations. This

definition does not suggest that Christians are superior to other groups in the world. Instead,

Christianity is one community of faith among many (along with communities of no religious

affiliation).

Several models have been used in ecclesiology to classify or define the Christian faith

community.[866] Some ecclesiologies have incorporated principles from several different models.[867]

The Church, by nature, is a communion of grace structured as a human society.[868] It also sanctifies

the members of the Church, and praise and worship of God is central. The Church is charged with

the responsibility of evangelism and mission (i.e., sharing the gospel) as well as healing and

consolidating the human community.[869]

Community is essential for the Christian faith because community is necessary for

formation and development of faith. Communitarian theorist often stress that human beings are

relational beings, as opposed to the usual liberal democratic concept of human beings as

---

[864] Christopher O'Donnell, *Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church* (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1996), 33.
[865]B. H. Carroll, *Ecclesia: The Church* (Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer Inc., 2006), 15.
[866] Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church, Expanded Edition* (New York, NY: Image Book, 2002), 8.
[867] See Avery Dulles and Patrick Granfield, *The Church: A Bibliography* (Wilmington, DL: Michael Glazier Publishers, 1985).
[868] Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 196.
[869] Ibid.

disconnected individuals and unencumbered selves.[870] This is not to say that *individuality* is

diminished in community. Instead, full individuality develops occurs within community.[871]

Individuals are shaped by and oriented towards their communities, but they are also more than the

sum of the influences of their environment and communities.[872] People gradually develop a will to

act in relation to others in ways that build community, which has the potential to lead to political

and social praxis.[873]

In view of the fact that community tends to produce praxis and particular practices that

influence one's being in the world, some critical practical theological characterizations of the

church and community in general are helpful. Practical theology focuses on the ministry, actions,

and mission of the Christian community in the world. For example, the notion of community (or the

corporate and the communal) is fundamental to Christian ministry (and by extension Christian

identity).[874] The Christian community is a community that recognizes and relies on each person's

contribution.[875] So the gifts of each person is less about that particular individual's spirituality, but

more about how that individual's gifts help to sustain and strengthen the Christian community as a

whole. As Christine Pohl observes,

> Paul describes the right functioning of the church as the body of Christ in
>
> which there are many parts but one body, and all parts are important. 'To
>
> each,' Paul says, 'is given the manifestation of the spirit for the common
>
> good.' In this same chapter, Paul recognizes weakness in the midst of a

---

[870] Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), 22.

[871] Ibid., 23.

[872] Amitai Etzioni, "Old Chestnuts and New Spurs," in Amitai Etzioni, ed., *New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1995), 16 & 18.

[873] Mark R. Warren, *Dry Bones Rattling*, 23.

[874] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potter: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 198.

[875] Ibid., 199.

rightly functioning body and notes that, within the community of the

church, when one suffers, all suffer together. At the end of his description

of the right functioning of the body, Paul writes, 'And I will show you a

still more excellent way…. the way of love.' He asks, 'What should be

done then, my friends?' and he answers, 'Let all things be done for

building up [the community].'[876]

Thus, the communal character of Christian ministry and identity entails *practices* that build up and

strengthen the entire community of faith.[877] The community of faith is itself called to be "an agent

of reconciliation" and service to the whole world.[878] This suggests that the principles of Christian

community are to be extended to persons who reside outside the Christian faith, i.e. persons of other

religious traditions (and persons who are not adherents of any religious tradition). One can infer that

interreligious/interfaith relations are a part of Christian identity and community.

More importantly, the understanding that interreligious/interfaith relations are intrinsic to

Christian identity and community produces practices that are designed for the betterment of the

entire world. Every human being is to benefit from Christian ministry and connection with God.

This is, in part, what it means to call the Christian community a community of disciples. During the

latter phase of his public ministry, Jesus formed a community of disciples as an alternative society

that represented a new, different way of life.[879] The disciples were the select group of people chosen

for personal and intense training so they could understand the real message of Jesus, and were

entrusted with carrying out this message after Jesus' crucifixion and, subsequent, resurrection and

---

[876] Christine Pohl, "Reflections on Excellent Ministry," *The Pulpit & Pew Theological Colloquium* (Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2001).

[877] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potter*, 199. Emphasis added.

[878] Ibid.

[879] Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985), 31-35.

ascension. Jesus and the disciples constituted a contrasting society and worldview.[880] This

community is created with the intent to attract attention, "like a city set upon a mountaintop or a

lantern in a dark place."[881] The same holds true for the contemporary Christian community as

community of disciples. Its primary mission is to imitate and proclaim the transcendent values of

the Kingdom of God to the rest of humanity.[882]

Christian clergy play a significant role in helping Christian adherents to understand

Christian ministry and identity in this way. Pastors (ordain clergy in direct leadership and service of

a specific congregation) and clergy (Christian ministers in general including those who are not

assigned to a particular parish or congregation) influence and shape a congregation's perspective

and general way of being.[883] Since clergy are the primary teachers and transmitters of the tenets of

the Christian faith (via preaching, leading worship, pastoral care, counseling, etc), the beliefs and

practices that are/become characteristic of a congregation's ministry and identity are guided and

shaped by them. In this sense, Clergy are producers of religious culture.[884] They draw from a tool

kit of cultural and religious objects and concepts to construct practices and rituals that support

Christian faith development and lifestyle.[885] As clergy fulfill their functions, they "draw on beliefs,

symbols, and practices from the Christian tradition to construct narratives and interpretive

frameworks that helps members locate themselves and find meaning" as the congregants live their

daily lives.[886] Consequently, pastors and clergy facilitate supportive relationships and help build

community.[887]

---

[880] Avery Cardinal Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 200.
[881] Ibid.
[882] Ibid.
[883] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potter*, 25.
[884] Ibid.
[885] See Ann Swidler, "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 51: 273-286.
[886] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potter*, 25-26.
[887] Ibid., 26.

The role of clergy, then, is vital for interreligious/interfaith friendships and community. In the same manner clergy help to facilitate supportive and healthy relationships and build community within the congregation, clergy can also encourage members of a congregation that interfaith/interreligious encounters are not only acceptable, but also inherent to Christian identity and ministry. The theological attitudes of pastors often (though certainly not in all cases) guide the theological attitudes and responses of the congregation. If a Christian community is to practice interreligious/interfaith relationships in intentional ways, then pastors and clergy must lead this charge through sermons, teachings, and church events and ministries aimed at such interfaith relations.

The task of interreligious/interfaith encounters and relationships does not remain only with pastors and clergy. Christian congregations are charged with the task of cultural production, i.e., transmitting Christian religious rituals, beliefs, and practices to new Christians as well as the larger society.[888] The methods of transmission include worship (public worship ceremonies) and religious education.[889] These venues are usually thought of as being only for Christians, but each is open to non-Christians as well. In other words, the Christian faith tradition is open to all humanity, and it is a part of Christian identity and mission to share the best the Christian tradition has to offer. Congregations' lived witness of the Christian tradition provides the social bonds, spiritual customs, and community connections that are necessary for a diverse society.[890] The diversity within Christian congregation, for instance, reflects the growing diversity in the United States. Encountering "difference" within the context of worship on a frequent basis provides an excellent basis for encountering the religious other.

---

[888] Mark Chaves, *Congregations in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004), 8.
[889] Ibid.
[890] See Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997).

Many contemporary Christians (Catholics and Protestants) have accepted the "people of God" ecclesiology, though the principles associated with this ecclesiology are not always lived out.[891] The idea of "people of God" is and must be viewed differently in our own time, while remaining faithful to biblical inspiration and foundation.[892] The concept "people" is constituted by a shared life: life suffered and assumed in common. The term "people" does not refer to a group of individuals seeking to care only for themselves.[893] Communion in faith, sacraments and government is not sufficient to constitute the unity of the church as people of God.[894] They constitute spiritual communion, but they must be embodied in a human community.[895] "What unifies the followers of Jesus is rooted materially and concretely- it is embodied in a people."[896] The Church is the people of God because of shared corporeal (i.e., bodily) cultural life.[897] Comblin emphasizes the interaction of bodies in community life along with the recognition of similarities even in difference. He sees the failure to accept difference, particular of bodies, as the source of racial and ethnic conflict. What is specific to the Christian community is shared faith and witness, i.e. following the teachings of Jesus and living by them in the same manner as the apostles did.[898]

Comblin's characterization of community and "people of God" as broader than faith, sacrament, and institutional hierarchy opens new possibilities for what community can mean for people of differing faith traditions having shared experiences and practices. Community is not constituted by particular religious institutional hierarchies. People of God are those who practice the teachings and principles of God. A community is a "people" with shared memory and events in

---

[891] Jackson W. Carroll, *God's Potter*, pp. 199-200.
[892] Jose Comblin, *People of God, Edited and Trans. by Phillip Berryman* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 68.
[893] Ibid.
[894] Ibid., 69.
[895] Ibid.
[896] Ibid.
[897] Ibid., 70.
[898] Ibid.

which they are unified because they acted together.[899] Community results, generally, not by choice

but by de facto situations.[900] These situations provide shared meaning and identity even between

peoples of different races, ethnicities, or religious affiliation.

Some social scientists have identified four contemporary typologies of local churches in a

world where the terms "local" and "global" are more fluid then in times past.[901] While not

exhaustive, these typologies represent contemporary emerging practices of church institutions and

individual church members. The first typology is the Church as an *idealized moral community*. This

type of local church holds that the Christian tradition is the preeminent guiding moral authority in

society as opposed to other forms of moral authority such as human reason or natural law.[902] Moral

behavior and standards flow from the church community. Stanley Hauerwas and John Milbank are

used as examples of theologians who give credence to this typology. Hauerwas argued for a faith

community whose primary task is to reflect on its own narrative and practices.[903] Milbank

maintains that Christian theology should not acquiesce to other disciplines and surrender its status

as a meta-discourse.[904] Hauerwas and Milbank's positions (and this typology in general) can be

criticized for failing to consider and engage with the life experiences of all human beings.[905]

The second typology is a *liberation theology model*, which makes the experiences of poor

and marginalized peoples the point-of-departure for theological reflection.[906] Local congregations

engage in political and social praxis oriented towards transformation of situations of oppression,

poverty, etc. The strength of this model is its commitment to using social analysis to confront and

---

[899] Ibid., 69.
[900] Ibid.
[901] Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies, and Frances Ward, eds., *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook* (London: SCM Press, 2005), 76-87.
[902] Ibid., 81.
[903] See Stanley Hauerwas, *The Character of Community* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981).
[904] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason, 2nd Edition* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1.
[905] Helen Cameron, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies, and Frances Ward, eds., *Studying Local Churches*, 82.
[906] Ibid., 83.

surmount conditions of oppression existing outside the community of faith (i.e., the local Christian community is concern about the wider non-Christian community).[907] The weakness is a failure to take a comprehensive approach to social analysis, ignoring the multicausal nature of poverty and oppression.[908] Consequently, the church community can fall prey to fruitless nostalgia, reminiscing of a so-called time of perfect harmony of church and community that supposedly existed in the past.[909]

The *local/institutional model* is when the local congregation represents the national (or international) institutional church.[910] This model tends to foster long-lasting relationships and bonds between families, friends, and the institutional church maintains ties with the local communities, families within the local communities, and important local events.[911] Though the local/institutional model is operative in most areas, it is in decline in poorer communities.[912] There is a growing trend for churches that are increasing numerically to expand the conceptual restrictions of geographical locality. A good deal of new members are persons from outside the local (geographical) community.[913] The downside of this model is the tendency to react slowly in recognizing and embracing change (or difference). As such, the traditions of this model often fail to connect with and facilitate contemporary "patterns of lifestyle and identity."[914]

The network model represents a more fluid concept of church as institution and the involvement of individual church members in larger social networks.[915] Groups are formed by individual church members, or these members join existing groups, with the goal of addressing

---

[907] Ibid.
[908] Ibid.
[909] Ibid., 84.
[910] Ibid.
[911] Ibid.
[912] Ibid.
[913] Ibid.
[914] Ibid., 85.
[915] Ibid.

particular social issues, e.g., workers' rights, fair wages for women, and/or immigration. Participation in these networks often leads to connections with more powerful networks, especially if a church member becomes a key, active participant.[916] Individual church members are at the forefront of movements and actions for social transformation apart from their local church affiliation. The implication is that this model allows Christian communities to respond more rapidly to social issues that affect the larger community without institutional bureaucracy. At the same time, church identity is not firmly established as the members are integrated into a larger social network.[917]

Looking at the connection between congregations and community is significant too because the members of congregations (Christian communities) are also members of the larger society.[918] Furthermore, congregations themselves are institutions within society. In both instances, congregations have a profound impact on the larger society. In fact, "the spiritual energies generated in congregations help to shape the social structures of communities."[919] The connections of congregations and its members to other institutions and groups in the community allow particular congregations to engage in activities outside of its walls.[920] Congregations and members also have opportunities to encounter and become connected with persons of different religions. Connections to outside organization (e.g. nonprofit organizations) prevent congregations from being secluded, sheltered from the happenings in the community around them.[921] It is these connections that help cultivate community.[922]

---

[916] Ibid.
[917] Ibid., 86
[918] Nancy Tatom Ammerman, *Congregation and Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 360.
[919] Ibid., 3.
[920] Ibid., 360.
[921] Ibid., 362.
[922] Ibid.

The Christian community is a microcosm of the larger communal human reality. Viewing the Christian church as fundamentally a *community* of faith (among other communities of faith and spiritualities) serves as a model for the general human community and illustrates relationality and interconnectedness as the essential nature and condition of all human beings. The writer of the Gospel of John suggests that genuine human life only occurs in community, in relationship with others.[923] In effect, community is intrinsic to all reality. The individuality of each human being is rooted in communal existence. Persons are fully human only in relation with others.

Christianity is not the only religious tradition in which community is constitutive of religious experience and life. In Native American/First Nations traditions, experiences of divine reality are simultaneously personal and communal.[924] Religious ceremonies, rituals, and cultural practices are ways of spiritual expression and communion with divine reality.[925] At the core of all of these practices is the community.[926] These activities are communal activities, for community members. The ways in which one experiences ultimate reality is profoundly shaped by one's community. The connection to community extends beyond human ties. Native teachings view creation as a "complex web of life or a sacred circle."[927] All creation is interconnected and interdependent. Human beings are not privileged creatures, but rather one group among many "persons" that inhabit the earth.[928] As such, one's religious experiences are also shaped by one's life at a specific geographic location in relation to the whole of creation.[929] This is why Native

---

[923] See Raymond Brown, *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Love, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979), 131-135.

[924] Stuart M. Matlins and Arthur J. Magida, *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006), 217.

[925] Ibid., 218.

[926] Ibid.

[927] Ibid.

[928] Ibid., 219.

[929] Ibid., 218.

religious activities are usually attached to specific locations.[930] The places that are identified by Native Americans as their homelands and the communities that exist (or existed) there are central to their religious experiences and practices. The religious practices and beliefs of Native peoples are inextricably tied to their experience of the natural world "as the cathedral of their Creator."[931]

Thus creation is comprised of "four-legged 'persons' and winged 'persons'" as well as human persons.[932] All persons are part of the moral, political, and more importantly, spiritual community.[933] Acknowledging the entire creation as members of the community is also recognition that the earth, including all members of the earth's perspective communities, is sacred.[934] These communities include other religious traditions. One can interpret the principle that all life (species, communities, cultures and traditions) is interconnected and comprise the moral, political, and spiritual community as an indirect affirmation of interreligious/interfaith community. The plurality of religions signifies that creation is richly diverse, and peoples of different religious traditions are interconnected and interdependent as inhabitants of the earth.

There are some other important theological and philosophical insights concerning community. Jurgen Moltmann speaks of the interconnection of knowing and community. In order for community to be possible "we must know each other; and in order to know one another, we must come into contact with each other and enter into relationship with one another."[935] An interreligious/interfaith community is no exception. Illusions and misunderstandings about religious beliefs and practices are dispelled and debunked so persons from different religions can form genuine relationships and friendships. Persons from different religions should embrace and get to

---

[930] Ibid.
[931] Ibid.
[932] Ibid., 219.
[933] Ibid.
[934] Ibid.
[935] Jurgen Moltmann, "Knowing and Community" in Leroy Rouner, ed., *On Community (*Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991), 162.

know each other as they are. If not, they will be unable to avoid the temptation to "reflect [themselves] in the others and accept them according to [their] image in order to subject them to [their] ideas."[936]

Patrick Hill explores reconciliation between diverse communities.[937] He speaks of the religious quest for community. Hill is referring to the various attempts in human history to surmount the isolation, misunderstandings and misrepresentations of differing traditions (intentional or unintentional), and hostility among individuals and groups.[938] Conflict and difference is overcome through establishing commonalities, i.e., common beliefs, principles, and practices, in order to build and secure sustained interactions and relationships (kinships) that can somehow be identified as a community.[939]

Community, however, is defined in various ways. Every definition of community "is only a definition of a particular kind."[940] Community can be characterized as a term that describes an existing set of relationships.[941] Community can also be seen as the opposite of fragmentation, disconnection, detachment, and marginalization.[942] In this sense, community allows for the possibility of shared vision for the future of humanity and cooperative praxis, i.e. the ability for diverse communities to work together towards that future.[943] Still, community can be defined as common participation, solidarity, and the essential connection and communion that exist between family and/or a clan or tribe.[944] Such community requires that each member of the community strives for the preservation of the whole community (as opposed to a rugged individualism that

---

[936] Ibid.
[937] Patrick J. Hill, "Religion and the Quest for Community," in Leroy Rouner, ed., *On Community*, 149-161.
[938] Ibid., 149.
[939] Ibid.
[940] Ibid.
[941] Raymond Williams, *Keywords* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 66.
[942] See Peter Block, *Community: The Structure of Belonging* (San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009).
[943] Ibid.
[944] D. A Masolo, "Western and African Communitarianism: A Comparison," in Kwasi Wiredu, ed., *A Companion to African Philosophy* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2006), 491.

places self above the community).[945] In the Bantu theological and philosophical framework, this connection extends to the entire human community. There is a social and spiritual unity and connection among all humankind.[946] One can infer that humanity, in all its diversity (including religious diversity), is in some way a community of plurality through a spiritual connection.

A romantic notion of human beings working with God to create a universal community seems to be embedded in some Jewish and Christian traditions.[947] Community is seen as the ultimate aim of the divine. Hill lifts up some caveats to the notion of building community. He warns that one should not uncritically conflate community with morality and holiness.[948] Hill's warning and criticism is not necessarily to detract from the idea that community is in keeping with divine aims, but rather that one should bear in mind that the idea of community is viewed by some as totalitarian and repressive. Governments, religious institutions, and other groups have a propensity to portray community as an eradication of individuality and diversity.

For community, the acceptance and integration of diversity is the primary issue. Hill proposes four dimensions of respecting diversity.[949] The first dimension focuses on the value of diversity while at the same time establishing commonalities.[950] Valuing diversity implies viewing diversity as a benefit, not a detriment. The thought that commonality is more important than diversity has to be discarded if there is to be genuine community.[951] At the same time, genuine community requires the attitude that difference is more significant than commonality be jettisoned as well. There is coexistence of diversity and unity. This means that in some cases "what is

---

[945] Ibid.
[946] Ibid.
[947] Patrick J. Hill, "Religion and the Quest for Community," 150.
[948] Ibid.
[949] Ibid., 151-156.
[950] Ibid., 151.
[951] Ibid.

207

common is more important for some purposes than what is diverse, and sometimes the opposite is true."[952]

Besides the valuing of diversity there is the examination of the consequences of creating and sustaining particular communities, what Hill calls the ecology of community.[953] One looks at the origin and decline of community as well as the principle and values people perceive they have in common. The ecology of community also explores the "overall consequences" of forming a community.[954] Exploration of the consequences of community moves beyond the intent (i.e., the intentions to build a community devoid of conflict and anarchy) to raising questions of the actual implementation and practicing of racial and gender equality, egalitarian principles, rights of minorities, the place of voices of dissent, and the extent to which government actions are repressive. One should be aware of the kind of community is being built and sustained.[955] To determine the kind of community being formed one must identify the various kinds of interests that are *consciously* shared by the group.[956] You can also measure the kind of community and its direction, in part, by the freedom of interaction with other communities.[957]

The third dimension of respecting diversity is the place of *separateness*, i.e., "the periodic withdrawals of groups or individuals from a larger community."[958] This suggests that an individual's or a group's *self-imposed* isolation (perhaps for the purposes of meditation or spiritual renewal) is beneficial to the larger community.[959] Personal time is an essential part of spiritual, physical, and psychological renewal. During times of separation from the broader community,

---

[952] Ibid.
[953] Ibid., 152.
[954] Ibid.
[955] Ibid.
[956] John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, Reprint* (Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2010), 96. Emphasis added.
[957] Ibid.
[958] Patrick J. Hill, "Religion and the Quest for Community," 153.
[959] The fact that this is "self-imposed" is key. The marginalization of a specific segment or person of the community is considered oppressive and unjust.

individuals gain a sense of clarity about themselves and the community to which they belong. A better understanding of themselves and the gifts they can contribute is advantageous for the community as a whole.

An important point is that it is not solely individuals but also certain groups from within the larger group that need separation as well. This is especially true in cases where the larger group has (knowingly or unknowingly) suppressed the narratives and history of a specific segment of the society. Women, for example, need separation to develop tools and language to articulate their distinct experiences a part from the definitions and characterizations given by an androcentric society or community.[960] Rosemary Radford Ruether argues that because of the dearth of the experiences, reflections, and opinions of women from theological dialogue, the prevalent theology of the day is saturated with tendentious claims of male superiority and female subordination.[961] It was incumbent upon women within the Christian community to isolate themselves in order to identify the oppressive language and structures at work in Christian churches, and begin to try to dismantle them. As a result, the Christian community as a whole has benefited greatly from feminist and womanist critiques, and has matured as it pertains to the theological conceptions of women and the role of women in the Christian tradition.[962]

The last dimension requires "conversations of respect" between differing communities.[963] These conversations entail intellectual reciprocity. Reciprocity includes openness to (at the very least intellectual) transformation. One is not necessarily seeking to convert or convince the other

---

[960] Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church* (New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1986), 38.
[961] Rosemary Radford Ruether, "The Feminist Critique in Religious Studies," in Thomas E. Dowdy and Patrick H. McNamara, eds., *Religion: North American Style, 3rd Edition* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997), 161-169.
[962] See Linda Japinga, *Feminism and Christianity: An Essential Guide* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1999) and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in The Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
[963] Patrick J. Hill, "Religion and the Quest for Community," 154.

that one's belief-system is superior.[964] Instead, the intent is to learn from the other as well as share

valuable insights from one' own tradition. Inherent to conversations of respect is the understanding

that all knowledge is partial and fragmented.[965] Thus, we need the perspectives of others to gain

deeper understanding about the nature of religion, nature, societal and communal structure, and

reality in general. Participants are co-learners, exploring and searching for meaning, understanding,

and effective praxis.[966]

Each of Hill's dimensions is significant for interreligious/interfaith dialogical communities.

Respecting diversity and difference is what makes dialogue possible. Each religion is unique in its

own way. Concurrently, the religions share many commonalities. It is "difference" that makes

dialogue necessary (for mutual understanding and greater insights into the nature of reality or

shaping a better world) and commonalities that provide the basis for possible interaction and shared

praxis. The valuing of pluralism (diversity) is at the heart of interreligious/interfaith dialogue. Over

emphasis espoused by certain theologies of religions on either the essential unity of religions or

their differences misses inherent commonalities and important distinctions among all the religions.

Next is the exploration of the consequences of a community of different religions. One

should consider the possible benefits and pitfalls of interreligious/interfaith community and

cooperation. Interaction between groups with different values and truth-claims can produce the

kinds of conflict that is detrimental to cooperation, subverting the entire endeavor. There may also

be the imposition of values of a dominating religion on another religion that is a minority in a

particular society. In such cases, an interreligious/interfaith community becomes repressive and

unreflective of the intentions and principles of the architects of that interreligious/interfaith

community or organization. The ecology of community allows people to explore and determine

---

[964] Ibid., 155.
[965] Ibid.
[966] Ibid.

whether the intents and goals of forming an interreligious/interfaith community are actually being lived out.

In addition to individuals' self-imposed isolation for purposes of personal spiritual enhancement, the principle of "separateness" alludes to the need for each religious tradition to speak for itself and be understood in its own terms within a community of religions. It is important for adherents of a particular religion to isolate themselves in order to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the doctrine and precepts in their own tradition that may be beneficial to the larger community or society. This isolation for deeper understanding is necessary for conversations of respect, i.e., dialogical interaction among religions in a community. Mutual intellectual and spiritual enrichment among religions is impossible without each religious group having a firm grounding in its own tradition. The requirement of conversations of respect for community refers to the fact that practices of dialogue are constitutive of any community, especially interreligious/interfaith communities.

The pragmatic philosophy of Charles Peirce and Josiah Royce provide further adequate explication of community.[967] A practical theology of religious pluralism (informed by a trinitarian-pneumatological theology of religions) provides theological grounds of interreligious/interfaith relations, praxis, and communities. The pragmatic philosophy of Peirce and Royce provides philosophical language for a discussion of community, relations, and communication. Peirce's semeiotic demonstrates that community is not comprised of individual (autonomous) selves. It is a community of relations (and engagement).[968] He does not merely assert the reality of society. Peirce illustrates how society or community is more than a simple collection of individuals by showing

---

[967] Donald L. Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1994), 36, 76.
[968] James Hoopes, *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press), 39.

how a general, semeiotic relation among individuals is possible.[969] *A group of people becomes one person through communication and sharing of their thoughts*.[970] One can venture to include the sharing of religious principles and practices of faith.

Community allows the possibility of dialogue, and dialogue is the core of community. Dialogue is not possible without community or communal language to interpret dialogical encounters. Human realty is infused with language.[971] To interpret dialogical experience one should employ a communal or triadic construct of experience, as opposed to a dyadic, or di-polar, construct of experience. A dyadic construct of experience depicts experience as a subjective interrelation of concrete precepts with abstract concepts.[972] A triadic construct of experience, on the other hand, depicts experience as a social process that exhibits three kinds of relational variables: evaluations (including sensations, feelings, hypotheses, deductive predictions, and inductive verifications), actions (choices, interactions, and forging social links), and tendencies (habits, the way people orient their lives).[973] Donald Gelpi argues (based on Peirce's philosophy) that without a triadic construct of experience there is no adequate way to explain how two persons can talk about a third thing. [974] Interrelating concepts and precepts within a "subject" does not produce legitimate communication. In other words, dialogue (particularly as conversation, discussion, or as a means of refining habit) is impossible within a (nominalistic) dyadic framework of experience.[975] Dialogue stems from communal and social experiences, and forging dialogical relationships.

---

[969] Ibid., 85-86.
[970] Charles Sanders Peirce, *Peirce On Signs: Writings on Semiotics, Edited by James Hoopes* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1991), 187-188. Emphasis Added.
[971] See Sue Patterson, *Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 73-93.
[972] Donald L. Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology*, 3.
[973] Ibid.
[974] Ibid., 36.
[975] Ibid.

Royce visualized community as a living and spiritual togetherness of individual persons

which collapses neither into individualism or collectivism because it allows for the uniqueness of

each individual while uniting all in one spirit of love.[976] There are varying qualities to communal

life. Royce distinguishes between a genuine community and an inauthentic community.[977] Genuine

communities are life-giving and life-affirming. Inauthentic communities are destructive to the lives

of their members. There is a difference in the aims and values between genuine and inauthentic

community. Groups with egocentric and self-serving goals (where associations and relationships are

formed for the benefits these associations bring) will almost certainly disintegrate into self-

destructive behavior and principles.[978] Communities that cultivate positive, life-giving dispositions

tend to foster "genuine sharing of life among their members over an extended period of time."[979]

An authentic community is a product of a *time-process*.[980] A community requires a shared

history and conscious memory.[981] The time process allows individual persons to expand their

personal identities to take on that of a community. Simultaneously, the individual attains maturity

and autonomy through community over time. The necessity of time for a community is gleaned

from an analogy of human individuals.[982]   An individual is characterized by the coherence of past

and present experiences, which are directed towards a common future.[983] In similar fashion a

community is formed through shared past and present experiences, and is oriented towards a

common future. In this regard, an authentic community develops over an extended period of time in

---

[976] Josiah Royce, *Josiah Royce: Selected Writings edited by John E. Smith and William Kluback* (New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1988), 18.
[977] John J. Markey, *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church* (Hyde Park, NY: New City Press, 2003), 129.
[978] Ibid.
[979] Ibid.
[980] Josiah Royce, Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity with Introduction by John E. Smith and Foreword by Frank M. Oppenheim* (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001), 243.
[981] Ibid.
[982] Josiah Royce, "The Community and the Time-Process," in *Josiah Royce: Selected Writings*, 273.
[983] Ibid., 276.

order to develop a robust shared history. Only then can individuals be shaped by and representative of a community.

For Royce, there are two basic levels of reality: individuals and communities.[984] These two types of reality form a "sacred pair."[985] Furthermore, Royce (following Peirce) characterizes an individual person as a community.[986] Any individual's life that is made consistent and coherent by a choice of a plan of action and constituted by a common past, present, and future, "where the past is interpreted to the future through the present and is interpreted through specific *deeds* and *actions*," exists as both a community and a person.[987] There is also the sense that the community acts through the individual.[988] Though the actions of the individual are autonomous to some extent they are also representative of the community to which that individual belongs and participants. Likewise, a community acts as an individual. A community, as a product of time and developing a history, shares a common mind along with the traditions, practices, and institutions that allows the community to think and act as a unit.[989]

Royce shows that a person's individuality remains intact in several ways. First is the fact of individual sensory experience.[990] Each person has an individual *bodily* existence. No one, for example, can feel another person's physical pain. Second, each individual has an individual mind that is not directly accessible by others.[991] Besides individual bodies and minds, each person makes and executes voluntary decision and actions.[992] At the same time, persons do not experience

---

[984] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity,* 122-124.
[985] Ibid., 193-194.
[986] Ibid., 123.
[987] John J. Markey, *Creating Communion*, 129. Emphasis added.
[988] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 240.
[989] John J. Markey, *Creating Communion*, 131. See also Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 240.
[990] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 236.
[991] Ibid., 236-237.
[992] Ibid., 238.

themselves or the world as individualistic monads that occasionally interact and relate to others.[993] Each person's individuality is rooted in community. Human actions and practices derive from the essential social nature of reality and social cooperation. Social cooperation produces languages, customs, and religions.[994] Human beings are interconnected and interdependent. Dependence refers to the fact that a person's life and full humanity derives from other lives without losing individuality.[995] There is an underlying unity of all human beings though each acts autonomously.[996]

The underlying unity and interconnection of humanity necessitates dialogue and dialogical communities. Knowledge results from a dialogue of minds.[997] Dialogue is fundamental for acquiring knowledge about anything, and engenders and generates actions and practices. Royce argued that the world is comprised of communities of interpretation (i.e., communities with particular understandings of the world and how human beings should live together).[998] People's characters and daily lives emerge out of a process of interpretation, discovery, and communicative interaction.[999] The implication is that human beings are intrinsically interconnected, and dialogue between these communities is necessary to achieve the best possible interpretation (understanding) of the world, divine reality, human interaction, and the principles that generate shared practices that promote the common human good.

A Community of Religions in Dialogue

We are rapidly entering the age of interspiritual community. This new
axis period will be characterized by the emergence of a profound

---

[993] John J. Markey, *Creating Communion*, 130.
[994] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 239.
[995] Josiah Royce, *Josiah Royce: Selected Writings*, 128.
[996] John J. Markey, *Creating Communion*, 130.
[997] Ibid.
[998] Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, 336-338.
[999] John J. Markey, *Creating Communion*, 128.

215

sense of community among the world's religions and spiritual

traditions; it will also draw them into deeper relationships with other

areas of human culture, particularly the sciences, arts, economics,

politics, and media. The unfolding and expanding reality of this

community will slowly dissipate the fears we have collected over the

millennia, and it will reveal the precious gift of interspiritual

wisdom.[1000]

The importance of the notion of community for a practical theology of interreligious/interfaith stems from the connection between community and ethical development, especially in terms of ethical attitudes and practices towards humanity in general. The history of human morality and ethical dispositions begins with a sense of community, starting with the family or tribe, and then gradually extending outward encompassing the region, nation, ethnic group, members of one's religious tradition, and then all human beings.[1001] Community (or the sense of community) contains an awareness of kinship, interdependence, relationships, various kinds of friendships, and shared visions and goals.[1002] As a result, community engenders moral principles such as respect (for difference and otherness) and compassion (in light of the ills and suffering in the world), and leads to a sense of moral obligation for other human beings.[1003]

Cooperation among the world's religion is "historically possible" because of a move towards "the community of religions."[1004] The phrase *community of religions* refers to the move across the world, groups from all major religious traditions, calling for partnership and

---

[1000] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*(Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000), 125.
[1001] Steven C. Rockefeller and John C. Elder, eds., *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue- An Interfaith Dialogue* (Beacon Press, 1992), 144.
[1002] Ibid.
[1003] Ibid.
[1004] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 125.

responsibility between the religions for the common good of the entire world.[1005] This call for partnership and shared responsibility is the underlying attitude of the interreligious/interfaith movement. The interreligious/interfaith movement promotes practices among the religions that cultivates reverential and appreciative dialogue to assess and understand the critical issues our times (e.g., global warming, religiously motivated violence, poverty and hunger, etc) and formulate ways in which the religions can respond individually and together.[1006] Interreligious/interfaith community and cooperation too opens the way for "interspiritual wisdom," i.e., "the growing understanding by the world's contemplative traditions of the common elements and fruits found in practical mysticism and spirituality."[1007]

The praxis of the community of religions ranges from eco-justice and proper environmental stewardship to advocacy for a just and sustainable world order.[1008] Other practices include non-violent movements and debt-relief assistance for "third-world" nations. At the 1986 Snowmass Conference, an interfaith conference with representatives from Buddhism, Tibetan Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Native American Spirituality and Religions, and Christianity, several common practices to all these traditions were identified:[1009]

1. Practices of compassion

2. Service to others

3. Practicing moral precepts and virtues

4. Training in mediation techniques and regularity of practice

5. Attention to diet and exercise

[1005] Ibid.
[1006] Ibid.
[1007] Ibid.
[1008] Ibid.
[1009] Thomas Keating, "Points of Similarity Found in Dialogue" in Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 137-138. Emphasis added.

6. Fasting and abstinence

7. The use of music and chanting and sacred symbols

8. Practice in awareness (recollection, mindfulness) and living in the present moment

9. Pilgrimage

10. Study of scriptural texts and scriptures

11. Relationship with qualified teachers

12. Repetition of sacred words (mantra, japa)

13. Observing periods of silence and solitude

14. Movement and dance

15. Formative community

These practices reflect the recognition that the principles, beliefs, and practices within each of the religious and spiritual traditions have the capacity to transform human being's attitudes and actions towards each other, other species, and the earth itself.[1010] They also demonstrate that community is central to the world's religions. The community of religions is sustained by interreligious/interfaith dialogue. As demonstrated by the Snowmass Conference, and other interreligious/interfaith conferences of this kind, dialogue reveals common practices, principles, and encourages cooperative praxis for peace and justice.

[1010] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 125.

Religious Practices as an Avenue of Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue

Community identity and religious identity comprises and stems from religious practices. Religious practices are a context for interreligious/interfaith engagement.[1011] Some scholars argue that in order for comprehensive dialogue to occur one must "pass over and return," i.e., experience one's dialogue partner from within that person's tradition and then return to one's own tradition enriched.[1012] Since a person's faith is not entirely assent to certain beliefs and doctrines, but also an investment of that person's entire being, then one needs to participate to some extent in that person's traditions and practices in order to experience the emotional and symbolic impact of that tradition.[1013] This experience enriches one's own spiritual life and enhances one's practice of one's own religious tradition.[1014] Observation and/or participation in the practices and rituals of other religions transforms interreligious/interfaith dialogue into "dialogue-in-action."

Rituals are a means of dialogical communication because the participants are active agents, i.e., they participant in the creation and development of their culture and religious tradition through ritual practices.[1015] Rituals play a decisive role in shaping and expressing a religion as a way of life.[1016] Communities (especially religious communities) are formed through rituals and practices. Thus, an advantageous means for understanding and building dialogical relations is through studying and/or participating in religious rituals and practices. Religious rituals and practices must be understood within a semantic framework, and the meaning of any action or practice depends on

---

[1011] John Berthrong, "An exploration of the study of religious practices as an avenue for interreligious engagement and its implications for Practical Theology," paper presented at The Association of Practical Theology, November 20, 2004 forum entitled "Horizons in Practical Theology: Religious Practices as a Context for Interreligious Engagement."

[1012] Leonard Swidler and Global Dialogue Initiative, "The Deep-Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Personal and Communal Deep-Dialogue" in Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 141.

[1013] Ibid.

[1014] Ibid.

[1015] Anne-Christine Hornborg, "Praxis Dialogue: Catholic Rituals in Native American Contexts" in Patrik Fridlund, Lucie Kaennel, and Catharina Stenqvist, eds., *Plural Voices: Intradisciplinary Perspectives on Interreligious Issues* (Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009), 37.

[1016] Ibid.

its relation to other ways of acting and being.[1017] Dialogue occurs through observation and/or

participation in religious rituals, ceremonies, and gatherings. Examples of religious practices as

interreligious/interfaith dialogue include interfaith/interreligious marriages, participation in

interfaith/interreligious ceremonies, and interfaith/interreligious monastic lifestyles.

Participation in another person's religious practices and/or rituals is a "step toward a real

dialogue of live-in experience."[1018] A precondition for inter-ritual participation is recognition of the

plurality of religions.[1019] This entails the acceptance of each religious tradition existing in its own

right. Flowing from this principle is another precondition, namely the recognition, not only of the

plurality of religions, but also of the diversity *within* the religions themselves. The distinctiveness

within each religion should be respected, especially as one participants or observes religious rituals,

ceremonies, and gatherings. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue through religious practices and inter-

ritual participation is impossible without such preconditions.[1020] In fact, Interreligious/interfaith

relationships are impossible altogether without these preconditions and openness to the possibility

of transformation through such relationships.[1021]

Interreligious/interfaith engagement within the context of religious practices is

challenging.[1022] This is especially true if someone is *participating* in the religious practices of

someone else. The question is how one can fully participate in a religious ritual different from

her/his own and maintain full commitment to her/his own religious tradition? "The difficulties

largely arise from the conception of worshipping together in a sense which implies that the whole

---

[1017] Catherine Bell, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford University Press, 1992), 220.
[1018] Anand Spencer, "Participating in One Another's Rituals: A Christian Perspective," *Dialogue & Alliance, vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 1992*.
[1019] Ibid.
[1020] Ibid.
[1021] Ibid.
[1022] Ibid.

gathered congregation participates equally in the whole service."[1023] In other words, one feels

unfaithful to one's own religious convictions. Rituals have sacred meanings for a religious

community, and furnish that community's identity. Consequently, some people may not wish to

participate.[1024] Non-participation, though, does not preclude observation and understanding. One

does not have to fully participate or practice religious rituals, ceremonies or customs in order to

have genuine interreligious/interfaith dialogues or relationships.

On the other hand, if one decides to participate in another religious custom, ceremony, or

practice one should have a disposition of openness and emptiness.[1025] Openness refers to the

possibility of transformation through interreligious/interfaith dialogue and relationships.[1026]

Emptiness refers to the posture of allowing the religious other to speak for him/herself.[1027]

Openness breaks down the emotional, intellectual, and conceptual barriers that may prevent

someone from seeing transformational value in another religion. Religious absolutism, i.e., the

notion that one' religion possesses all possible knowledge about ultimate reality, is an example of

such barriers. In this sense, a religion encloses itself, and denies possibility of insight into truth or

ultimate reality beyond its marked boundaries.[1028] Openness, then, constitutes the awareness of

dimensions of knowledge and experiences beyond our own- even our own religious traditions. The

removal of barriers such as religious absolutism allows persons to "enter into loving, respectful

relations with all human beings" from all religious traditions.[1029]

[1023] Marcus Braybrooke, ed., *Interfaith Worship* (London: Stainer and Bell, Ltd, 1974), 5.
[1024] Philip Morgan, *Can We Pray Together: Guidelines on Worship in a Multi-Faith Society* (London: British Council of Churches, 1983), 1.
[1025] Anand Spencer, "Participating in One Another's Rituals: A Christian Perspective"
[1026] Masatohsi Doi, "Dialogue Between Living Faiths in Japan," in Stanley J. Samartha, ed., *Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths* (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1971), 34.
[1027] Ibid.
[1028] Anand Spencer, "Participating in One Another's Rituals: A Christian Perspective"
[1029] Ibid.

One cannot determine the identity of another religious tradition and its adherents based on one's own assumptions or religious framework. Instead, one has to understand the religious other as that person understands her/himself in relation to her/his religious tradition. In order to experience genuine interreligious/interfaith encounters one must have a sense of emptiness. The sense of emptiness:

> does not mean confessing to a theological deficiency in one's position.
> On the contrary, it speaks for the recognition of a new source of
> strength, hitherto remaining undetected. By virtue of its very adequacy
> and relevance, it opens itself for looking beyond itself, and evokes in
> one a creative need for the other.[1030]

One is transformed through interreligious/interfaith encounters when one allows the religious other to speak for her/himself. Therefore, emptiness and openness are congruous. With openness and emptiness comes the possibilities "to correct and to be corrected, to fulfill and to be fulfilled, to change and to be changed."[1031] Observing and/or participating the religious practices and rituals of others produces the possibility of the transformation of one's religious worldview, religious values, and understanding of ultimate reality.[1032] From a Christian perspective, to experience God as love in a broad sense is to love persons of other religions, and enter into meaningful and transformative dialogical relationships with them.[1033]

Inter-ritual participation is based on the theological principle of God ubiquitous presence in the religious history of humanity.[1034] God is at work in the lives and traditions of all peoples at all

---

[1030] "Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths: The Ajaltoun Memorandum," in Stanley J. Samartha, ed., *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movements* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971), 18.
[1031] Anand Spencer, "Participating in One Another's Rituals: A Christian Perspective"
[1032] Ibid.
[1033] Ibid.
[1034] Ibid.

times.[1035] The theological concept of omnipresence, i.e., the pervasive presence of God through the Holy Spirit, signifies that the divine is not confined to a particular religious tradition or religious boundaries. The divine presence is at work in the world and in persons of all religious traditions. Anand Spencer posits that from a Christian viewpoint, God is the creator of all. The various religions approach the divine through their various rituals and practices. Therefore, the divine is present in the customs and rituals that are acceptable to God and, as a result, Christians are allowed to participate in other religious rituals and practices.[1036]

Worship Gatherings

One of the foremost practices that can facilitate interreligious/interfaith dialogue are the worship services or religious gatherings of the religions. Visitors are welcome at most religious gatherings (though they may have to follow certain guidelines). Usually one attends a worship service or religious gathering when he/she is invited by a friend or an acquaintance.[1037] (This is a form of hospitality in connection with friendship). At these gatherings, one is able to see religious practices and beliefs up close and in action (this is called dialogue through *observation*).[1038] There are some important terms and definitions. The terms "worship service" and "interfaith prayer service," for instance, are distinct.[1039] A worship service is a gathering for a particular religious tradition.[1040] The elements of this gathering reflect only the beliefs of that tradition. Components of a religious gathering generally entails, prayer, reading of scriptures or retelling of a sacred story, a sermon or teaching, and ceremonies or rituals that constitute the basic identity of that particular

---

[1035] Ibid.
[1036] Ibid.
[1037] Clark Lobenstine, "Dialogue through Observation and Participation- Interfaith Prayer Service" in Bud Heckman and Rori Picker Neiss, eds., *Interactive Faith: The Essential Interreligious Community-Building Handbook* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008), 77.
[1038] Ibid.
[1039] Ibid., 78.
[1040] Ibid.

religious tradition. These beliefs, ceremonies, and practices tend to be the primary beliefs, ceremonies, and practices that function in the daily lives of religious adherents. One is able to learn a great deal about a religion and the people who practice it (at least from the perspective and interpretations of that gathering). It is imperative that one display respect for the practices of the religious gathering you are attending. Knowing some of the basic terminology that may be used in that gathering, for instance, can be an important sign of respect.[1041]

The advantage is there is no limit to the times of visitation one can have without converting to that particular religion (with the permission of that local religious community or congregation). The more frequent one attends religious gatherings or special ceremonies of a particular religious tradition, the more one becomes familiar with the beliefs and practices of that tradition. It is possible for one to enhance her/his own spiritual life through the insights and wisdom that tradition offers.[1042] In addition, one may gain insight into her/his own religious tradition or may be encouraged to be more committed to studying and practicing her/his tradition. Emperor Asoka alluded to this in the Twelfth Rock Edict, which was against religious intolerance and discrimination within a community. He says, "one should honor other religions because in doing so one's own religion benefits, and so do other religions."[1043] Respect entails gaining knowledge of other religions. Persons are encouraged to "listen to and respect the doctrines professed by others."[1044] The admonishment, however, stresses that one should be learned in the "*good doctrines* of other religions."[1045] Asoka urges people to discern religious doctrines that are beneficial for

---

[1041] Ibid., 80.
[1042] Ibid., 38.
[1043] See N.A. Nikam and Richard P. McKeon, *Edicts of Asoka* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, Midway Reprint, 1978), 51-53.
[1044] Ibid.
[1045] Ibid. Emphasis added.

spiritual enhancement and the good of the community in general from those that are divisive and non-life affirming.

An interfaith service encompasses elements from multiple religious traditions. Representatives from the participating religions are equals in the planning and execution of this kind of gathering.[1046] An interfaith service can proceed in several ways. At an interfaith prayer service, for example, participants can either have interfaith prayers or pray from their own traditions. There can be joint prayers or general prayers that seek to include elements from all the religions present. Conversely, there can be a time when each participant (or representative(s) from a religious tradition) offers a brief prayer from their own tradition.[1047] No matter the procedure, interreligious/interfaith services include leaders and adherents as "full and equal participants" from the planning stages to completion.[1048] Each person who attends the interfaith service should feel comfortable to participate unreservedly, enabling them to reach the "highest level of inspiration, without any compromises of conscience."[1049]

Interreligious/Interfaith Marriages

Interreligious/interfaith marriages are another excellent example of how people from different religious traditions build effective relationships despite the difficulty and fundamental differences of religious beliefs and practices through a religious practice itself.[1050] Interreligious/interfaith marriage (and family) is pertinent because communities are comprised of families of all sorts. So, the topic of interreligious/interfaith marriage derives from the heart of community, especially interreligious/interfaith community.

[1046] Clark Lobenstine, "Dialogue through Observation and Participation- Interfaith Prayer Service," 78.
[1047] Ibid.
[1048] Ibid., 82.
[1049] Ibid., 83.
[1050] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 270.

Interreligious/interfaith marriage can be defined in different ways. Some define it as a connection or union between persons who are seen as following different traditions in a general sense, such as protestant and Catholic, Sunni and Shi'ite, or Muslim and Buddhist, and Hindu and Christian.[1051] In other words, while some couples may be from two entirely different religions, others may be from different denominations or sects within the same religion. For others, the basic meaning of interreligious/interfaith marriage is when a couple is from two different religious traditions.[1052] An interreligious/ interfaith marriage occurs when a couple creates a bridge between one set of beliefs and practices of a tradition with another through love, partnership, and mutual respect.[1053] Each religious tradition's uniqueness makes it evident that "interreligious" and "interfaith" signifies more than dissimilar principles and ideology.[1054] The entire being of a person is formed and shaped by her/his religious tradition. For that reason, interreligious/interfaith marriage is not about the joining of a couple who simply disagree on inconsequential religious jargon and practice. Rather, it is a genuine joining of *different kinds of people* with different views of reality and (perhaps) how human beings should live in light of that reality.[1055]

Interfaith marriages and partnerships press the limits of institutional religious rhetoric and practices of interreligious/interfaith dialogue.[1056] Interfaith marriages affect the core of identity formation and promulgation, i.e., the family.[1057] Religious institutions developed policies and public statements that reflected the challenges interfaith marriages posed to the boundaries of the institutions beliefs and practices. For instance, Catholics were concerned about preserving

---

[1051] Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 12.
[1052] See for example Abdullahi A. An-An' Im, *Inter-Religious Marriages Among Muslims: Negotiating Religious and Social Identity in Family and Community* (New Delhi, India: Global Media Publications, 2005).
[1053] Susanna Stefanachi Macomb, *Joining Hands and Hearts: Interfaith, Intercultural Wedding Celebrations A Practical Guide for Couples* (New York, NY: Fireside, 2003), 9.
[1054] Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America*, 12.
[1055] Ibid.
[1056] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 128.
[1057] Ibid.

community and religious identity, and Jews were concerned about issues of descent and Jewish cultural survival.[1058] Consequently, attitudes towards religious mixed marriages change dramatically in terms of support and acceptance. In Judaism, for example, anxiety about interreligious/interfaith marriage is embedded.[1059] At the core of Ancient Judaism was a prohibition against idolatry.[1060] There was (and is to a certain extent) constant fear that a spouse of a different religion would entice a devout Jew to commit idolatry.[1061] This is evident in the Hebrew scriptures: "Do not intermarry with them, giving your daughters to their sons or taking their daughters for your sons, for that would turn away your children from following me, to serve other gods."[1062] Although the number of Jews marrying persons of other religions is increasing, resistance to this practice remains the norm for Judaism at the denominational level.[1063]

In contrast to Judaism, traditions such as Hinduism and Buddhism offer no official opposition to religiously mixed marriages.[1064] Hinduism and Buddhism are generally open to the beliefs and practices of other religions. Therefore, the practice of marrying persons outside of the Hindu and Buddhist traditions is in keeping with the philosophical openness of these traditions.[1065] The official stance of these traditions, however, does not necessarily translate into the decisions and everyday practice of the adherents of Hindus and Buddhists. Among many Hindus and Buddhist in the United States, there is a commitment to preserve a sense of religious and cultural identity as minorities in a predominately "Christian" society.[1066] At the same time, there are a number of

---

[1058] Anne C. Rose, *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America*, 49.
[1059] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 128.
[1060] David Novak, *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 36-38.
[1061] Ibid., 38.
[1062] Deuteronomy 7:3-4. *The New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3rd Edition*.
[1063] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 129.
[1064] Ibid., 132.
[1065] See Kate McCarthy, "Reckoning with Religious Difference: Models of Interreligious Moral Dialogue," in Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle, eds., *Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative Religious Ethics and Interreligious Dialogue* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998).
[1066] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 133.

marriages between Hindus, Buddhist, and other religious followers. This practice has increased

especially among Hindus and Buddhists who are college educated.[1067]

Religiously mixed married couples have to reconcile their differing religious traditions.[1068]

They construct, what is sometimes called, "blended spirituality" through a distinctive combination

of each others' religious beliefs and practices (this is most evident in the wedding ceremony

itself).[1069] Each couple differs from another in terms of which elements from their perspective

religions provide an effective spiritual blend. Questions and issues about religious practice tend to

materialize more often than issues of religious belief among religiously mixed couples.[1070]

Religious practices inextricably ties one person of faith to another person of the same faith. Such

practices provide coherence and links adherents of the same faith community.[1071] This is not to say

beliefs are unimportant. Rather, religious practices generate more specific, public boundaries

between religious traditions.[1072]

Religious practices are considered to be interchangeable or, at least, complimentary.[1073]

Some couples feel that participating in one another's religious practices are acceptable, particularly

if it fills a spiritual void.[1074] A Christian married to a Hindu, for instance, participates in meditation

to seek "mindfulness."[1075] This is thought to be an enrichment of that Christian's prayer life.[1076]

Another example is that of a Christian who fasts from sunup to sundown during Lent in the same

way her husband fasts for Ramadan.[1077] Adopting or imitating practices from a spouse's religious

---

[1067] Ibid., 132.
[1068] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 270.
[1069] Ibid.
[1070] Ibid., 271.
[1071] Ibid.
[1072] Ibid.
[1073] Ibid., 272.
[1074] Ibid.
[1075] Ibid.
[1076] Ibid.
[1077] Ibid.

tradition is acceptable as long as it does not replace or impinge on the more essential practices of one's own religious tradition.[1078] One does not lose one's religious identity in an interreligious marriage. Instead, a new religious identity emerges that includes another person (along with that person's beliefs and practices) based on love, trust, respect, and openness, with emphasis on the individual, and not necessarily the entire tradition that person represents.[1079] Religiously mixed couples develop "discursive strategies- ways of speaking and thinking- that disaggregate religious identities."[1080] Such strategies break down broad religious categories (e.g. Jew or Muslim) and elevate the spouse's personal character as it is shaped by his/her religious tradition.[1081] The spouse is more personalized in ways that "do not entirely disassociate him or her from the larger religious category but succeed in nuancing that category and demonstrating its internal diversity."[1082]

Interreligious/Interfaith Monasticism

Monasticism is a religious practice is also an avenue of interreligious/interfaith dialogue. Monks and nuns of different religions maintain similar spiritual practices, e.g., meditation, prayer, and celibacy.[1083] Organizations such as the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue foster interreligious/interfaith dialogical relationships through religious practices on a daily basis. Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID) is an organization of Benedictine and Trappist monks and nuns who live in community and engage in the intentional development of interreligious and inter-monastic dialogue through spiritual practice and experience.[1084] Dialogical relationships are

---

[1078] Ibid., 273.
[1079] Ibid.
[1080] Ibid., 277.
[1081] Ibid.
[1082] Ibid.
[1083] See William Skudlarek, *Demythologizing Celibacy: Practical Wisdom from Christian and Buddhist Monasticism* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008).
[1084] http://monasticdialog.com/index.php

fostered between Catholics and contemplative practitioners of diverse religious traditions.[1085] MID

was originally named the North American Board for East-West Dialogue.[1086] The purpose of MID

was to assume a leading role in interreligious/interfaith dialogue and develop dialogue between

Christianity, particularly Catholicism, and Eastern Religions.[1087] This was in keeping with the

declarations of Vatican II that recognized elements of truth and holiness in other religions as well as

encouragement to enter into dialogue with persons of other religions.[1088] MID represents an

interreligious/interfaith community in action. It publishes a bulletin (which features articles on the

experiences of dialogue of the monks, nuns, or other visitors of MID), establishing connections and

networks through conferences and other gatherings, and hosts interreligious/interfaith dialogue

sessions.[1089]

Examples of Interreligious/Interfaith Communities

Several interreligious and interfaith organizations promote and work to build bridges

between religious traditions. Most of these organizations are interreligious/interfaith communities

themselves, and they promote interreligious/interfaith community around the world. One should

note that these interreligious/interfaith organizations, and more pointedly the members who

comprise the organizations, do not promote a theological religious pluralism that suggests all

religions have a common metaphysical aim or source.[1090] There are no intentions to create a single

world religion.[1091] The intention is to bring the world's religions together for the overall betterment

of humankind. In the process, someone may be transformed by the practices and teachings of

---

[1085] Ibid.
[1086] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 152.
[1087] Ibid.
[1088] Bradford Hinze, *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments* (New York, NY: Continuum Press, 2006), 222.
[1089] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 152-53.
[1090] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 123.
[1091] Ibid.

another religious tradition. One may even gain insight into some truth about divine reality. Nevertheless, the intention is not to determine a superior religion or eradicate the differences that exist between the religions. Rather, the goal is to foster interreligious/interfaith relationships and cooperation that enable persons from different religions to engage in transformative praxis and practices.

The International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF) serves as a prime example of a community of religious traditions (as well as community of cultures and ethnic groups). IARF is the oldest worldwide community of religious organizations.[1092] This organization consists of interreligious, interracial, interethnic, and intercultural communities. IARF is comprised of approximately eighty-three member groups in twenty-seven countries.[1093] IARF considers itself a community of communities. This interreligious/interfaith community is based on interpersonal sharing, openness, understanding, compassion, service, and solidarity.[1094] The goal of IARF is to build cooperation among the world's religions to address political, social, and economic issues. It engages in projects such as "emergency relief, cooperative development projects, and women's center."[1095] IARF also addresses issues of religiously motivated violence, economic justice, and ecological crises.[1096]

The North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) is a nonprofit organization that is dedicated to supporting and facilitating communication between interfaith organizations in the United States, Mexico, and Canada.[1097] NAIN is an association of organizations (a community of communities).[1098] It hosts meetings and provides information and services to various religious

---

[1092] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 151.
[1093] Ibid.
[1094] Ibid.
[1095] Ibid.
[1096] Ibid.
[1097] Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America*, 85.
[1098] www.nain.org

traditions (including Wiccans and Humanists) to encourage spiritual exploration and interfaith dialogue.[1099] The individuals and member groups of NAIN probe the diverse spiritual and practical resources of the religions, and bring these beliefs and practices to bear on contemporary issues on international, national, regional, and local levels.[1100] NAIN only maintains minimal staff and personal as it sees its role primarily as facilitating networking possibilities of different religious and denominational organizations by providing information and opportunities for meetings and interaction.[1101] For this, NAIN uses the coalition model for cooperative interaction based on serving the needs and promoting the aspiration of all member organizations."[1102]

Youth and young adults have played a significant role and are at the forefront of the interfaith movement. Interfaith Youth Core Movement (IFYC) is an international youth organization that organizes at grassroots levels providing youth with tools and opportunities for interreligious/interfaith interaction and engaging in interfaith cooperative project. This organization operates on nine integrated principles: a theory of encounter, a theory of interfaith, a theory of identity, a theory of pluralist civil society, an assets-based theory of youth development, a theory of religion, a theory of service, a theory of constructive alternative-building, and a theory of religious discourse.[1103] IFYC considers encounters between persons of different religious traditions as "reflexive moments."[1104] Youth are taught to experience these reflexive encounters in ways that strengthen their own faith, learn about other faiths (in a manner that is enriching as opposed to competitive), and identifies common grounds for cooperation.[1105]

[1099] Ibid.
[1100] Joel Beversluis, ed., *Sourcebook of the World's Religions 3rd Edition*, 153.
[1101] Ibid.
[1102] Ibid.
[1103] Eboo Patel and Mariah Neuroth, "The Interfaith Youth Core: Building Chicago as a Model Interfaith Youth City," in Eboo Patel and Patrice Brodeur, eds., *Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue to Action* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 171-173.
[1104] Ibid., 171.
[1105] Ibid.

The theory of interfaith refers to the actual engagement of interfaith relationships, not simply gaining knowledge and information about another religion. Interfaith is "when our experience of the diversity of modern life and our connections to our religious traditions cohere such that we develop faith identities which encourage us to interact with others in *intentional* and *appreciative* ways."[1106] Identity is understood as a way of being, believing and belonging.[1107] Institutions foster identity. As such, IFYC seeks to build institutions that foster identities that view cooperation among differing traditions as a way of life.[1108] A theory of pluralist civil society holds that "diversity" refers to a "community of communities."[1109] Religious communities are essential in building cooperative relationships. Assets-based youth development allows youth to articulate their own experience and encourages them to actively engaged in interfaith relationship building.[1110] This perspective views youth as having an equal and vital place at the table of interfaith work. Youth are also considered to be on the "frontlines" of building interreligious/interfaith relationships and alliances for spiritual enhancement, and peaceable co-existent among differing religious traditions. Following Wilfred Cantwell Smith, IFYC considers religion as a "cumulative historical tradition" with multiple features.[1111] The focus is more on religious communities and individual practices rather than a religious system. IFYC looks for ways in which religious traditions and communities inspire and orient adherents towards practices of social action and interfaith relations.[1112] The theory of service says that service to humanity is intrinsic to all religious traditions, and this fact provides a common ground for the differing religions.[1113] The theory of constructive alternative-building emphasizes the commonalities among the different religions.

[1106] Ibid. Emphasis added.
[1107] Ibid.
[1108] Ibid.
[1109] Ibid., 172.
[1110] Ibid.
[1111] Ibid.
[1112] Ibid., 173.
[1113] Ibid.

IFYC argues that differing religious communities too often see each other "through the prism" of divisive issues and insurmountable differences.[1114] The theory of religious discourse is the fundamental rejection of the privatization of religion.[1115] IFYC seeks to help youth develop a "positive public language of religion" that allows them to articulate how their particular religious traditions translate to positive and constructive actions and practices in the public sphere.[1116]

Using storytelling (recounting of narrative) as a methodology, IFYC teaches youth to be "scholars of their own experience," and through storytelling, surmount major obstacles by creating possibilities for various kinds of conversations, i.e., the possibility of multiple narratives to co-exist.[1117] The key to effective interfaith/interreligious dialogue is the recognition and respect of each other's identity.[1118] Identity develops through narrative, i.e., the act of telling one's story, the events, experiences, institutions, and beliefs that make a person who they are.[1119] Stanley Hauerwas explains the role of narrative in identity formation:

> Narrative plays a larger part in our lives than we often imagine. For example, we frequently introduce ourselves through narrative. To be sure, any story with which we identify 'ourselves' can be and should be constantly tested by the history we have lived. But the telling of the narrative is itself a reinterpretation of history. We see that because the self is historically formed we require a narrative to speak about it if we are to speak at all. One should not think of oneself as exemplifying or being some individual instance of a self, but one understands in what

---

[1114] Ibid.

[1115] For the privatization of religion see Robert Bellah, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2007).

[1116] Eboo Patel and Mariah Neuroth, "The Interfaith Youth Core: Building Chicago as a Model Interfaith Youth City," 173.

[1117] Eboo Patel, April Kunze, and Noah Silverman, "Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work," in Rebecca Kratz Mays, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots* (Philadelphia, PA: Ecumenical Press, 2008), 41-42.

[1118] Ibid., 36.

[1119] Ibid.

his or her selfhood consists only insofar as he or she learns to tell that particular story.[1120]

Narrative is inherent in one's identity formation. It is a key method of how a person "works out" who they are, and may become.[1121] Narratives have generative effects on human imagination and help to provide explanations about God, world, and self.[1122]

The generative effects of narrative build both individual and communal identities. Cultures, traditions, and communities worldwide, throughout history, employ narratives to create, sustain, and transmit communal identity: stories of origins (e.g. cosmologies or national histories), and destiny (i.e., where a community is going).[1123] Hauerwas says that "community" is the outcome of a process that begins with narrative.[1124] The central narratives of a religious tradition eventually create and form a community. Hauerwas also argues that the relationship between self and community is understood only through narrative. He says,

> Narrative is the characteristic form of our awareness of ourselves as
> *historical* beings who must give an account of the purposive relation
> between temporally discrete realities. Indeed, the ability to provide
> such an account, to sustain its growth in a living tradition, is the central
> criterion for identifying a group of people as a community. Community
> joins us with others to further the growth of a tradition whose manifold
> storylines are meant to help individuals identify and navigate the path
> to the good. The self is subordinate to the community rather than vice

---

[1120] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 26.
[1121] Benedict Carey, "This Is Your Life (and How You Tell It)," *New York Times, May 22, 2007*, Health Section, Online Edition.
[1122] Eboo Patel, April Kunze, and Noah Silverman, "Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work," 37.
[1123] Ibid.
[1124] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom*, 24.

versa, for we discover the self through a community's narrative tradition.[1125]

So, narrative is instrumental for communal as well as individual identities. The symbolic code (its symbols and rituals) of any culture or religion are embedded in and expressive of its narrative structure.[1126] Narrative also helps the individual to locate his/her identity in relation to the larger narrative of the community. Each persons' story is an intricate thread that is woven together with other narratives as part of a larger narrative of a community.

IFYC uses storytelling as the primary means to build interfaith relationships among youth.[1127] Storytelling, as a methodology of interfaith relations, encourages persons of different faith traditions to detect and analyze a variety of values they have in common.[1128] Storytelling also allows persons to share his/her *own* experience. There is less room for error and assumption when people are allowed to think and speak for themselves while sharing and shaping their identities. By allowing people to speak for themselves, personal storytelling circumvents encounters that focus on competing notions of "Truth," and instead presents human existence and experiences of life as nuanced, possessing "the unique quality of being both infinite and common."[1129]

IFYC believes its storytelling methodology differs from two other methodologies of interreligious/interfaith dialogue it identifies, namely dialogues of theology and dialogues of politics.[1130] Dialogues of theology refer to the gathering of religious leaders, ordained clergy, congregational leaders, and intellectuals representing their perspective religious traditions to discuss

---

[1125] Ibid., 28.
[1126] Bernard J. Lee, *Jesus and the Metaphors of God: The Christs of the New Testament* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1993), 28.
[1127] Eboo Patel, April Kunze, and Noah Silverman, "Storytelling as a Key Methodology for Interfaith Youth Work," 42.
[1128] Ibid., 41.
[1129] Ibid.
[1130] Ibid., 42.

the nature of the divine. Dialogues of politics are when different religious groups (religious leaders and adherents) meet to discuss conflicts over land, resources, political policies, or social/civil unrest. Examples of this include Jews and Muslims discussing Israel Palestine, Hindus and Buddhists discussing Sri Lanka, and Muslims and Christian discussing issues of resources in Nigeria. While IFYC sees dialogues of theology and politics as vital to broader interreligious/interfaith relations, IFYC maintains that persons who already posses pluralist relationships have the capability for more productive conversations.[1131]

IFYC combines storytelling with *shared values* and *common action* to complete its methodology.[1132] The principle of "shared values" says that while the world's religions contain distinctive qualities and diversity they also all hold certain values in common.[1133] Grand values such as justice, compassion, hospitality, charity, and service are particularly highlighted by IFYC. These values provide points of agreement and interreligious/interfaith interaction.[1134] Having shared values as a point-of-departure for interfaith dialogue and cooperation seeks to avoid possible situations that can lead to conflict.[1135] The principle of "common action" promotes using shared values as a catalyst for cooperative interfaith projects for the common good.[1136] These projects are comprised of a group of people from different backgrounds and religions, and are for the direct benefit that group's community. The methodology of common action is "service-learning."[1137] Service-learning is a comprehensive experiential learning methodology. It is a combination of meaningful social service, education, and reflection.[1138] In other words, it combines learning with

---

[1131] Ibid.
[1132] Adam Davis, ed., *Hearing the Call Across Traditions: Readings on Faith and Service* (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2009), 287.
[1133] Ibid., 288.
[1134] Ibid.
[1135] Ibid., 289.
[1136] Ibid.
[1137] Ibid.
[1138] Ibid.

and from persons of other faiths, reflection on the experience of cooperation and possible

transformation, carried out within the context of service to the larger human community. Shared

values and religious principles are put into *concrete action*.[1139] The dialogical encounter occurs

within this concrete action. One learns about another's faith, not only through the sharing of

religious beliefs, but also through the lived experience of cooperative projects. In essence, one sees

another person's faith-in-action.

This triune methodology serves to advance three goals: deepening of religious identities,

recognizing shared values, and cooperative action. Deepening one's religious identity involves

mining one's religious tradition for fundamental principles that call for service to others.[1140]

Deepening one's religious identity also provides tools for a person to speak publicly, i.e., be in a

position to share the essential beliefs, principles, and practices with others who are not adherents of

that particular tradition. The ability to share one's experiences of faith publicly and listening to the

faith experiences and traditions of others leads to greater understanding, respect, and relationship

with others.[1141] The goal is also to help persons discover shared values within perspective traditions.

One learns that many of the same principles that call him/her to serve others (even across religious

boundaries) are also present in the other's religious tradition.[1142] This further demonstrates the

importance of storytelling. Sharing stories allows persons from different religions to "develop

mutually enriching relationships" and work together for the common good.[1143] Making a connection

between one's religious commitment and service to others is crucial. Interreligious/interfaith

dialogue should always lead to action.[1144] Engaging in interreligious/interfaith collaborative and

---

[1139] Ibid.
[1140] Ibid., 287.
[1141] Ibid.
[1142] Ibid.
[1143] Ibid.
[1144] Ibid., 288.

cooperative praxis is vital to building interreligious/interfaith relationships and working for the common good.[1145] Open sharing of experiences and narratives, discovering important differences (with the possibility to enrich the spiritual lives of others in the group) as well as common values, and shared praxis are constitutive of interreligious/interfaith friendship.

The United Religions Initiative is yet another glaring example of an international interreligious/interfaith organization that is itself an interfaith community, and also seeks to build interfaith community (in many instances by way of friendship). United Religions Initiative (URI) is an international organization that engages in projects for improving the human condition, operating on a small-group "cell" model.[1146] URI was founded in 2000 by an extraordinary global community committed to promoting enduring, interfaith cooperation on a daily basis, and ending religiously motivated violence.[1147] The United Religions Initiative now includes thousands of members in over sixty-five countries representing more than 100 religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions.[1148]

URI is a global community with spirituality as it core. Members from diverse backgrounds pioneer interfaith dialogue and peacebuilding skills. Its core organizational principles include inclusive membership, self-organizing initiatives and decentralized governance. Together, persons of different religions construct effective dialogical networks, exchanging the best practices for local, regional and global organizing.[1149] This deepens interreligious/interfaith friendships and fosters solidarity between differing religious traditions and communities. URI believes "that people everywhere when inspired to cooperate for the common good, will find solutions to end religiously

---

[1145] This is reminiscent to Hans Kung's declaration that there can be no peace in the world without peace among the religions.
[1146] Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*, 296-299.
[1147] http://www.uri.org
[1148] Ibid.
[1149] Ibid.

motivated hate and violence and will create initiatives that build cultures of peace, justice and healing."[1150]

The United Religions Initiative had its genesis at a 1995 interfaith service hosted by William Spring, an Episcopal Bishop of San Francisco at Grace Cathedral, commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the United Nations Charter in San Francisco.[1151] The vision for what would become the United Religions Initiative was articulated at this event. The aim was to create a "global forum where the religions of the world would meet on a daily basis in mutual respect, prayerful dialogue, and cooperative action to make peace among religions so that they might become a compelling force for global good."[1152]

A foundational principle and method that contributed to the success of creating URI is appreciative inquiry. Appreciative inquiry reflected the values of the group that would later become the United Religions Initiative.[1153] Utilized during the first URI summit, appreciative inquiry facilitated the discovery of shared values, and the forging of a shared vision of this interreligious/interfaith organization among a religiously diverse group of people.[1154] This diverse group included religious and spiritual leaders as well as lay religious members with vocations in business, the arts, education, medicine, and science.[1155] Appreciative inquiry also helped to outline plans and actions to flesh out URI's vision.

To engage in interreligious/interfaith cooperation, URI establishes "cooperation circles."[1156] Cooperation circles are membership groups of URI comprised of people from different religious traditions. This includes local or virtual groups consisting of at least seven members representing at

---

[1150] Ibid.
[1151] Charles Gibbs, "The United Religions Initiative at Work," in David A. Smock, ed., *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2002), 116.
[1152] Ibid.
[1153] Ibid., 118.
[1154] Ibid.
[1155] Ibid.
[1156] http://www.uri.org

least three different religious, spiritual, or indigenous traditions. At present there are 398 cooperation circles in 67 countries representing over 100 religions.[1157] These groups, and the individuals within each group, work together in acts of interfaith cooperation and building understanding between the world's religions.

Although URI is guided by foundational principles and a common vision, there is a certain autonomy within the cooperation circles. Each circle establishes its own purpose and guidelines for membership and decision making. Each cooperation circle also bears the responsibility of "developing financial resources to meet its own needs, and to help meet the needs of other Circles and communicating the best practices, stories, and highlights of activities with other parts of the URI."[1158]

URI's cooperation circles epitomize interreligious/interfaith dialogical communities. Cooperation circles foster environments for social interfaith interaction, dialogue, and understanding through organizing interfaith civic and religious events and promoting the practice of sharing meals and conversation among persons from different religions and ethnic groups. Cooperation circles "exchange stories and reports of how they are deepening interfaith respect and creating cultures of peace in their communities."[1159] They also engage in interreligious/interfaith praxis, for example, actions of intervention to help bring peace and stability in war zones (or at least provide assistance, food, and spiritual upliftment), actions and protests for arms reduction, and increasing AIDS awareness and prevention.

The examples, of MID, IARF, NAIN, IFYC, and URI (and other organizations and communities) demonstrate that community, or the various interreligious/interfaith communities and groups, have the potential to foster durable and genuine interreligious/interfaith relationships and

---

[1157] Ibid.
[1158] Ibid.
[1159] Ibid.

cooperation. These communities and organizations embody the principles and practices of authentic interreligious/interfaith hospitality, friendship, and liberations praxis. In addition, they instill these values and practices in the members of the communities. These communities provide reasonable substantiation for the notion that the practice of interreligious/interfaith friendship and cooperative liberation praxis is an effective means of interreligious and interfaith dialogue. They also show that many Christians are already engaged in such practices. Interreligious/interfaith dialogue and friendship is fundamental to Christian spiritual development, deeper understanding of divine reality, and fulfilling the mandate of building the kingdom of God.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackerman, Denise and Riet Bons-Storm, eds. *Liberation Faith Practices: Feminist Practical Theology in Context.* Leuveen: Peeters, 1998.

Adams, James R. *So You Can't Stand Evangelism: A Thinking Person's Guide to Church Growth.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans, 1992.

Aelred of Rievaulx. *Spiritual Friendship, Trans. by Mary Eugenia Lakser, Introduction by Douglas Roby.* Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1977.

Allen, Ronald J. *The Life of Jesus for Today.* Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2008.

Ammerman, Nancy Tatom. *Congregation and Community.* New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

_____. *Pillars of Faith: American Congregations and Their Partners.* Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997.

Appiah, Anthony. *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Aquinas, St. Thomas. *Summa Theologica Volume One Trans. by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province.* Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007.

Archer, Margaret S, Andrew Collier, and Douglas V. Porpora. *Transcendence: Critical Realism and God.* London: Routledge Press, 2004.

Archer, Margaret, Roy Bhaskar, Andrew Collier, Tony Lawson, and Alan Norrie, eds. *Critical Realism: Essential Readings.* New York, NY: Routledge, 1998.

Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics, Translation, Glossary, & Introductory Essay by Joe Sachs.* Newburyport, MA: Focus Publishing R. Pullins Company, 2002.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition, 2nd Edition, Introduction by Margaret Canovan.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Badhwar, Neera Kapur, ed. *Friendship: A Philosophical Reader.* Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press, 1993.

Barackman, Floyd H. *Practical Christian Theology: Examining the Great Doctrines of the Faith.* Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 2001.

Barna, George. *Evangelism That Works: How to Reach Changing Generations with the Unchanging Gospel.* Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1995.

Barnes, Michael. *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University
   Press, 2002.

_____. "Theology of Religions" in *The Blackwell Companion to Christian Spirituality*.
   Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2005.

Barth, Karl. *Church Dogmatics: Doctrine of the Word of God, vol 1/part 2 2nd Edition*. Edinburgh,
   Scotland: T&T Publishers, 1956.

Basinger, David. *Religious Diversity: A Philosophical Assessment*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate
   Publishing Company, 2002.

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Bellah, Robert. *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*. Berkley,
   CA: University of California Press, 2007.

Bellito, Christopher M. *The General Councils: A History of the Twenty-One Church Councils
   from Nicea to Vatican II*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2002.

Bernstein, Richard J. *Beyond Objectivism and Relativism: Science, Hermeneutics, and Praxis*.
   Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988.

Berthrong, John. *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue*.
   New York, NY: SUNY Press, 1994.

_____. *The Divine Deli: Religious Identity in the North American Cultural Mosaic*.
   Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999.

Beversluis, Joel. *Sourcebook of the World's Religions: An Interfaith Guide to Religion and
   Spirituality*. Novato, CA: New World Library, 2000.

Bevans, Stephen. *Models of Contextual Theology: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Maryknoll,
   NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Bhaskar, Roy. *A Realist Theory of Science New Edition*. New York, NY: Routledge, 2008.

Bharat, Sandy and Jael Bharat. *A Global Guide to Interfaith Reflections from Around the World*.
   Winchester, UK: O Books, 2007.

Block, Peter. *Community: The Structure of Belonging*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler
   Publishers, 2009.

Blum, Lawrence A. *Friendship, Altruism, and Morality*. London: Routledge, 1980.

Boff, Leonardo. *Holy Trinity, Perfect Community*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000.

Boman, Thorlief. *Hebrew Thought Compared with Greek*. Philadelphia, PA: Westminster, 1960.

Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.

Bourdieu, Pierre. *Outline of a Theory of Practice Trans by Richard Nice*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1977.

Braybrooke, Marcus. *A Heart for the World: A Program to Transform the World Based On Non-Violence and Compassion*. Winchester, UK: O Books, 2005.

_____. ed. *Interfaith Worship*. London: Stainer and Bell, Ltd, 1974.

Brock, Stuart and Edwin Mares, *Realism and Anti-Realism*. Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.

Brondos, David A. *Fortress Introduction to Salvation and the Cross*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2007.

Brown, Peter. *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000.

Brown, Raymond. *The Community of the Beloved Disciple: The Life, Love, and Hates of an Individual Church in New Testament Times*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1979.

Browning. Don S, ed. *Practical Theology: The Emerging Field in Theology, Church, and World*. San Francisco: Harper & Row Publisher, 1983.

_____. *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1996.

_____. "Feminism, Family, and Women's Rights: A Hermeneutic Realist Perspective," *Zygon, vol. 38, no. 2,(June 2003)*, pp. 317-332.

Cameron, Helen, Philip Richter, Douglas Davies, and Frances Ward, eds., *Studying Local Churches: A Handbook*. London: SCM Press, 2005.

Cardoza-Orlandi, Carlos F. *Mission: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002.

Carey, Benedict. "This Is Your Life . and How You Tell It," *New York Times, May 22, 2007*, Health Section, Online Edition.

Carroll, B. H. *Ecclesia: The Church*. Paris, AR: The Baptist Standard Bearer Inc., 2006.

Carroll, Jackson W. *God's Potter: Pastoral Leadership and the Shaping of Congregations.* Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006.

Chaves, Mark. *Congregations in America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004.

Christiano, Kevin, William Swatos, Jr., and Peter Kivisto. *Sociology of Religion: Contemporary Developments*. Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2002.

Cichocki, David A. *Maintaining Stable Friendships: An Investigation of Strategic and Routine Communication*. Dissertation.com, 1997.

Clebsch, William and Charles Jaekle. *Pastoral Care in Historical Perspective, 2nd Edition*. New York, NY: Jason Aronson Publishers, 1983.

Cobb, Jr., John B. and David Ray Griffin. *Process Theology: An Introductory Exposition*. Santa Ana, CA: The Westminster Press, 1976.

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan ed. *World Religions and Human Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1992.

Collinge, William J. ed. *Faith in Public Life, College Theology Society Annual Volume 53, 2007*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.

Comblin, Jose. *People of God, Edited and Trans. by Phillip Berryman*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

Cornille, Catherine ed. *Many Mansions?: Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2002.

Cox, Harvey. *Religion in the Secular City: Toward A Postmodern Theology*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1985.

Dalai Lama and Nicholas Vreeland. *An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*. Boston, MA: Back Bay Publishing Company, 2002.

Crystal, David. *How Language Works: How Babies Babble, Words Change Meaning, and Languages Live or Die*. New York, NY: Penguin Group, 2005.

Davis, Adam ed. *Hearing the Call Across Traditions: Readings on Faith and Service*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2009.

D'Costa, Gavin, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1990.

De La Torre, Miguel A. *The Hope of Liberation in World Religions*. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2008.

De Waal, Cornelius. *On Peirce*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2001.

Devitt, Michael. *Realism and Truth*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Company, 1991.

Dewey, John. *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education, Reprint*. Charleston, SC: Forgotten Books, 2010.

Dogmatic Constitution on the Church: Lumen Gentium. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1965.

Doniger, Wendy. *Britannica Encyclopedia of World Religions*. Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc, 2006.

Dowdy Thomas E., and Patrick H. McNamara, eds., *Religion: North American Style, 3rd Edition*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997.

Dulles, Avery and Patrick Granfield. *The Church: A Bibliography*. Wilmington, DL: Michael Glazier Publishers, 1985.

Dulles, Avery. *Models of the Church, Expanded Edition*. New York, NY: Image Book, 2002.

Dupuis, Jacques. *Toward A Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1997.

_____. *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001.

Eck, Diana. *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*. San Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001.

_____. *On Common Ground World Religions in American*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1997.

Edwards, Denis. *How God Acts: Creation, Redemption, and Special Divine Action*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2010.

Eliade, Mircea. *Patterns in Comparative Religion*. Lincoln, NB: University of Nebraska Press, 1996.

_____. *Yoga: Immortality and Freedom, 2nd Edition, Trans. by Willard R. Trask*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970.

_____. *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy Trans. by Willard R. Trask*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004.

Engineer, Agashar Ali ed. *Religion in South East Asia: A Liberative Perspective*. Delhi, India: Hope

India Publications, 2005.

Esack, Farid. *Quran Liberation and Pluralism: An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity Against Oppression*. Oxford, UK: One World Publications, 1997.

Etzioni, Amitai, ed. *New Communitarian Thinking: Persons, Virtues, Institutions, and Communities*. Charlottesville, SC: University of Virginia Press, 1995.

Falcon, Ted, Don Mackenzie, and Jamal Rahman. *Getting to the Heart of Interfaith: The Eye-Opening, Hope-Filled Friendship of a Pastor, a Rabbi, and a Sheik*. Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths Publishing, 2009.

Farley, Barbara and Edward Farley, eds. *Shifting Boundaries: Contextual Approaches to the Structure of Theological Education*. Nashville, TN: Westminster John Know Press, 1991.

Finlayson, James Gordon. *Habermas: A Very Short Introduction*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Fiorenza, Francis Schussler and John P. Galvin, eds., *Systematic Theology: Roman Catholic Perspectives, Volume 1*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991.

Fisher, Mary Pat. *Living Religions, 6th Edition*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 2005.

Fisher, Robert B. *West African Religious Traditions: Focus on the Akan of Ghana*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998.

Fletcher, George P. *Loyalty: An Essay on the Morality of Relationships*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Flood, Gavin. *The Blackwell Companion to Hinduism*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2005.

_____. *An Introduction to Hinduism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996

Flyvbjerg, Bent. *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How it Can Succeed Again*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

Forrester, Duncan. *Truthful Action: Explorations in Practical Theology*. Edinburgh, Scotland: T&T Clark Ltd., 2000.

Foucault, Michel. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews 1972-1977, Edited by Colin Gordon*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Fox, Richard. *Jesus in America: Personal Savior, Cultural Hero, National Obsession*. San

Francisco, CA: HarperSanFrancisco, 2005.

Frederick, James. *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004.

_____. *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1999.

Fridlund, Patrik, Lucie Kaennel, and Catharina Stenqvist, eds. *Plural Voices: Intradisciplinary Perspectives on Interreligious Issues*. Leuven, Belgium: Peeters, 2009.

Gadamer, Hans-Georg. *Reason in the Age of Science, Trans by Frederick G. Lawrence.* Cambridge. MA: MIT Press, 1981.

_____. *Truth and Method, Second Edition Translation Revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall*. New York, NY: Continuum, 2004.

_____. *Philosophical Hermeneutics, Trans by David E. Linge*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1976.

Gallagher, Nora. *The Sacred Meal: The Ancient Practices Series*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, Inc, 2009.

Gelpi, Donald. *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology*. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1994.

Gillespie, Michael Allen. *The Theological Origins of Modernity*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2008.

Gonzalez, Justo. *Church History: An Essential Guide*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1996.

Gopin, Marc. *Between Eden and Armageddon: The Future of the World's Religions, Violence, and Peacemaking*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2000.

Greeley, Andrew. *The Friendship Game*. Garden City, NY: Image Books, 1970.

Greenz, Stanley. *A Primer on Postmodernism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996.

_____. *Theology for the Community of God*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

_____. "Commitment and Dialogue: Pannenberg on Christianity and the Religions" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Winter 1989, 26, no. 1,* 196-210.

Groody, Daniel. *Globalization, Spirituality, and Justice: Navigating the Path to Peace.* Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007.

Groome, Thomas. *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision, Reprint.* Somerset, NJ: Jossey-Bass, Inc, 1999.

_____. *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry, The Way of Shared Praxis.* Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998.

Gutting, Gary. *Foucault: A Very Short Introduction.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Gyekye, Kwame. *An Essay on African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme.* Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1995.

Haack, Susan. *Defending Science- Within Reason: Between Scientism and Cynicism.* Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2007.

Habermas, Jurgen. *Towards A Rational Society: Student Protests, Science, and Politics. Trans. Jeremy Shapiro.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1970.

_____. *Theory and Practice.* Trans. John Viertel. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1973.

_____. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.1. Reason and the Rationalization of Society. Trans. Thomas McCarthy.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1984.

_____. *The Theory of Communicative Action. Vol.2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason. Trans. Thomas McCarthy.* Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1987.

_____. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity.* Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T.Press, 1990.

_____. *Truth and Justification.* Cambridge, MA: M.I.T.Press, 2005.

Hahn, Lewis Edwin ed. *The Philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer.* Chicago, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1997.

Haight, Roger. "Trinity and Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, Fall 2009, Vol 4, no. 4,* 525-540.

Hampton, Daphne ed. *Swallowing a Fishbone?: Feminist Theologians Debate Christianity.* Sewanee, TN: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996.

Haney, Eleanor Hume. "What is Feminist Ethics? A Proposal for Continuing Discussion," *Journal of Religious Ethics 8, no 1, 1980*, 115-124.

Harding, John S. *Mahayana Phoenix: Japan's Buddhist at the 1893 World Parliament of Religions*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing Company, 2008.

Haring, Bernard. *The Law of Christ, Volume 1: General Moral Theology*. Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1963.

Harris, Maria and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

Hauerwas, Stanley. *The Character of Community*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

_____. *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer in Christian Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983.

Heckman, Bud and Rori Picker Neiss, eds. *Interactive Faith: The Essential Interreligious Community-Building Handbook*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2008.

Heidegger, Martin. *Being and Time: A Translation of Sein und Zeit, Trans by Joan Stambaugh.* New York, NY: State University of New York Press.

Heim, S. Mark. *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1995.

_____. *The Depth of Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000.

_____, ed. *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism*. Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 1998.

Heitink, Gerben. *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.

Hick, John. *God Has Many Names*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1980.

_____.*Disputed Questions in Theology and the Philosophy of Religion*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993.

_____. *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*. New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1973.

_____. "Religious Pluralism and Salvation" in *The Philosophical Challenge of Religious Diversity, Edited by Phillip Quinn and Kevin Meeker*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000.

_____. *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent 2nd Edition*. New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005.

_____. *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995.

Hick, John and Paul Knitter, Eds. *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1987.

Hill, Jonathan. *The History of Christian Thought: The Fascinating Story of the Great Christian Thinkers and How They Helped Shape the World As We Know It Today*. Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2003.

Hinze, Bradford. *Practices of Dialogue in the Roman Catholic Church: Aims and Obstacles, Lessons and Laments*. New York, NY: Continuum Press, 2006.

Holub, Robert. *Jurgen Habermas: Critic in the Public Sphere*. New York, NY: Routledge Press, 1991.

Honderich, Ted. *Oxford Companion to Philosophy New Edition*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2005.

Hookway, Christopher. *Truth, Rationality, and Pragmatism: Themes from Peirce*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2002.

Hoopes, James. *Community Denied: The Wrong Turn of Pragmatic Liberalism*. Ithaca, NY: Cornel University Press.

Hull, John. *Studies in Religion and Education*. London: Falmer Press Ltd, 1984.

Hunt, Mary. *Fierce Tenderness: A Feminist Theology of Friendship*. New York, NY: Crossroads Publishing Company, 1991.

Immink, F. Gerrit. *Faith: A Practical Theological Reconstruction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005.

Irvin, Alexander. *Eros Toward the World: Paul Tillich and the Theology of the Erotic* Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991.

Isasi-Diaz, Ada Maria. *En La Lucha, In the Struggle: A Hispanic Women's Liberation Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1993.

Jeanrond, Werner G. and Aasulv Lande , eds. *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue*.

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Jeanrond, Werner. *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance*. London: SCM
        Press LTD, 1994.

Johnson, Luke Timothy. *Sharing Possessions*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1981.

Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason, Unabridged Edition, Trans. Norman Kemp Smith*.
        New York, NY: St. Martin's Press, 1973.

Karkkainen, Veli-Matti. *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical, and
        Contemporary Perspectives*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003.

_____. *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and
        Contextual Perspective*. Grand Rapids, MI: BakerAcademic, 2002.

_____. "Evangelical Theology and the Religions" in *Timothy Larsen and Daniel
        J. Treier. The Cambridge Companion to Evangelical Theology.*
        Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

Keifert, Patrick R. *Welcoming the Stranger: A Public Theology of Worship and Evangelism.*
        Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992.

Kessler, Diane ed. *Receive One Another: Hospitality in Ecumenical Perspective*. Geneva, Belguim:
        WCC Publications, 2005.

Ketner, Kenneth Laine and Christian Kloesel, eds. *Peirce, Semeiotic, and Pragmatism: Essays
        by Max H. Fisch*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986.

Kimball, Charles. *When Religion Becomes Evil: Five Warning Signs*, *Revised and Updated*. New
        York, NY: HarperOne, 2008.

Kinast, Robert L. *What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?*. New York, NY: Paulist
        Press, 2000.

King, Richard. "Mysticism and Spirituality" in *The Routledge Companion to the Study of
        Religion*. New York, NY: Routledge Publishers, 2005.

Knitter, Paul. *Introducing Theologies of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

_____. *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World
        Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

_____. *One Earth Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility.*
        Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1995.

_____. *Jesus and the Other Names: Christian Mission and Global Responsibility*.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1996.

Knudson, Albert. *Doctrine of God*. New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1930.

Kraemer, Hendrik. *The Communication of the Christian Faith*. Cambridge, UK: Lutterworth Press,
1957.

Kung, Hans and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *A Global Ethic: The Declaration of the Parliament of the
World's Religions*. New York, NY: Continuum Press, 1995.

Kung, Hans. *Global Responsibility: In Search of A New World Ethic*. New York: Crossroad
Publishing Company, 1991.

Kuttianimattathil, Jose. *Practice and Theology of Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Study of the
Indian Attempts Since Vatican II*. Bangalore, India: Kristu Jyoti Publications,
1995.

Lee, Bernard J. *Jesus and the Metaphors of God: The Christs of the New Testament*. Mahwah,
NJ: Paulist Press, 1993.

Liszka, James Jakob. *A General Introduction to the Semeiotic of Charles Sanders Peirce*.
Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1996.

Lochhead, David. *The Dialogical Impetrative: A Christian Reflection of Interfaith Encounter*.
Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988.

Lohfink, Gerhard. *Jesus and Community*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1985.

Lynch, Michael. *Truth As One and Many*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Lyotard, Jean-Francois. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, Trans. by Geoff
Bennington and Brian Massumi*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press,
1984.

Macomb, Susanna Stefanachi. *Joining Hands and Hearts: Interfaith, Intercultural Wedding
Celebrations A Practical Guide for Couples*. New York, NY: Fireside,
2003.

Maranhao, Tullio ed. *The Interpretation of Dialogue*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press,
1990.

Marina, Jacqueline. *The Cambridge Companion to Fredrick Schleiermacher*. Cambridge:
Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Markey, John J. *Creating Communion: The Theology of the Constitutions of the Church*. Hyde

Park, NY: New City Press, 2003.

Marx, Karl. *Theses on Feuerbach* in Richard Bernstein, *Praxis and Action: Contemporary Philosophies of Human Activity*. Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1971.

_____. *The German Ideology* in Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man*. New York, NY: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1970.

Matlins Stuart M., and Arthur J. Magida. *How to Be a Perfect Stranger: The Essential Religious Etiquette Handbook*. Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths Publishing, 2006.

Mays, Rebecca Kratz ed. *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots*. Philadelphia, PA: Ecumenical Press, 2008.

Mbiti, John. *Introduction to African Religion 2nd Edition*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann Educational Books, 1991.

McCarthy, Kate. *Interfaith Encounters in America*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

_____. "Reckoning with Religious Difference: Models of Interreligious Moral Dialogue," in Sumner B. Twiss and Bruce Grelle, eds., *Explorations in Global Ethics: Comparative Religious Ethics and Interreligious Dialogue*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998.

McCarthy, Thomas. *The Critical Theory of Jurgen Habermas*. Cambridge, MA: The M.I.T.Press,1996.

McGinnis, Alan Loy. *The Friendship Factor: How to Get Closer to the People You Care For*. Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Press, 2004.

McGuire, Brain Patrick. *Friendship and Community: The Monastic Experience 350-1250*. Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications Inc, 2000.

McKim, Donald. *Theological Turning Points: Major Issues in Christian Thought*. Atlanta, GA: John Knox Press, 1988.

McIntosh, Mark. *Mystical Theology: The Integrity of Spirituality and Theology*. Oxford, UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishers, 1998.

McIntyre, Alasdair. *After Virtue*. Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1981.

McNamara, Marie Aquinas. *Friends and Friendship for Saint Augustine*. Staten Island, NY: Alb House, 1964.

Meier, John P. *A Marginal Jew : Rethinking the Historical Jesus*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1991.

Meilaender, Gilbert C. *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981.

Metz, Johann Baptist. *Faith in History and Society: Toward A Practical Fundamental Theology Trans. J. Matthew Ashle*. New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2007.

Migliore, Daniel. *Faith Seeking Understanding: An Introduction to Christian Theology 2nd Edition*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.

Milbank, John. *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason, 2nd Edition*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006.

Miles, Margaret. *Practicing Christianity: Critical Perspectives for an Embodied Spirituality* Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2006.

Misak, C.J. *Truth and the End of Inquiry: A Peircean Account of Truth*. Oxford,UK: Clarendon Press, 1991.

Moltmann, Jurgen. *God for a Secular Society: The Public Relevance of Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1999.

Moltmann-Wendel, Elisabeth. *Rediscovering Friendship: Awakening to the Promise and Power of Women's Friendships*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2001.

Moore, Mary Elizabeth. "Dynamics of Religious Culture: Ethogenic Method," in Marian de Sousa, Gloria Durka, Kathleen Engebretson, Robert Jackson, and Andrew McGrady, eds., *International Handbook of the Religious, Moral and Spiritual Dimensions in Education*. Dordrecht: Spring Publishers, 2006, 415-433.

Moran, Gabriel. *A Grammar of Responsibility*. New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1996.

Morgan, Philip. *Can We Pray Together: Guidelines on Worship in a Multi-Faith Society*. London: British Council of Churches, 1983.

Muller, F. Max. *India: What Can It Teach Us?: A Course of Lectures Delivered Before the University*. Charleston, SC: BiblioBazaar, 2007.

Neville, Robert Cummings. *Realism in Religion: A Pragmatist's Perspective*. Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2009.

New Oxford Annotated Bible, New Revised Standard Version, 3ʳᵈ Edition. New York, NY: Oxford
　　　　　University Press, Inc, 2001.

Newman, Elizabeth. *Untamed Hospitality: Welcoming God and Other Strangers*. Grand Rapids,
　　　　　MI: Brazos Press, 2007.

Nikam, N.A. and Richard P. McKeon. *Edicts of Asoka*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago
　　　　　Press, Midway Reprint, 1978.

Niebuhr, H. Richard. *Christ and Culture*. New York, N.Y.: Harper & Row Publishers Inc.,
　　　　　1951.

Nigosian, Solomon A. *World Religions: A Historical Approach, Fourth Edition*. Boston, MA:
　　　　　Bedford/St. Martin's, 2008.

Nikulin, Dmitri. *On Dialogue*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2006.

Norris, Richard. *The Christological Controversy*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980.

Novak, David. *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: A Jewish Justification*. Oxford: Oxford University
　　　　　Press, 1989.

Nozick, Robert. *The Nature of Rationality*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993.

Ogbonnaya, A. Okechukwu. *On Communitarian Divinity: An African Interpretation of the
　　　　　Trinity*. St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 1994.

O'Donnell, Christopher. *Ecclesia: A Theological Encyclopedia of the Church*. Collegeville, MN:
　　　　　The Liturgical Press, 1996.

O'Neil, Maura. *Women Speaking Women Listening: Women in Interreligious Dialogue*.
　　　　　Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1990.

Osmer, Richard and Friedrich Schweitzer, *Religious Education Between Modernization and
　　　　　Globalization: New Perspectives on the United States and Germany*.
　　　　　Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003.

_____. *Practical Theology: An Introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans,
　　　　　2008.

Otto, Rudolf. *The Idea of the Holy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1923.

_____. *Mysticism East and West: A Comparative Analysis of the Nature of Mysticism
　　　　　Reprint*. Wheaton, IL: Quest Books, 1987.

Oxtoby, Willard ed. *World Religions: Eastern Traditions 2ⁿᵈ Edition*. New York, NY: Oxford

University Press, 2002.

Palmer, Parker. *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishing, 2004.

Palmer, Richard. *Hermeneutics: Interpretation Theory in Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Heidegger, and Gadamer*. Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1969.

Panikkar, Raimundo. "The Dialogical Dialogue" in *The World's Religious Traditions: Current Perspectives in Religious Studies, ed. Frank Whaling*. Spring Valley, NY: Crossroad Publishing Company, 1986.

_____. *The IntraReligious Dialogue*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1978.

Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1976.

_____. *Systematic Theology, vol. II*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991.

Parker, Kelly A. *The Continuity of Peirce's Thought*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 1998.

Parrot, John. *Reinventing Christianity: African Theology Today*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press, Inc., 1995.

Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World: Gaudium et Spes. Boston, MA: Pauline Books & Media, 1965.

Patel, Eboo and Patrice Brodeur, eds. *Building the Interfaith Youth Movement: Beyond Dialogue to Action*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006.

Pathil, Ku.ncheria. *Religious Pluralism: An Indian Christian Perspective*. Delhi, India: South Asian Books, 1991.

Patterson, Sue. *Realist Christian Theology in a Postmodern Age*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Pattison, Stephen and James Woodward, Eds. *The Blackwell Reader in Pastoral and Practical Theology*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2000.

Pattison, Stephen. *The Challenge of Practical Theology: Selected Essays*. London, England: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2007.

Peirce, Charles. *The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writing, Vol. 1, 1867-1893 Eds. by Nathan Houser and Christian Kloesel*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University

Press, 1992.

_____. *The Collected Papers of Charles Peirce, volume 5, Eds., Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935.

_____. *The Collected Papers of Charles Peirce, volume 4: The Simplest Mathematics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1933.

_____. *Peirce On Signs: Writings on Semiotics, Edited by James Hoopes*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 1991.

Peters, Ted. *God as Trinity: Relationality and Temporality in Divine Life*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1993.

Phan, Peter. *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 2004.

Piar, Carlos. *Jesus and Liberation: A Critical Analysis of the Christology of Latin American Liberation Theology*. New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 1995.

Pieris, Aloysius. "An Asian Paradigm: Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions," *The Month 26* (1993), 129-134.

Pilch, John J. and Bruce J. Malina, eds., *Handbook of Biblical Social Values*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1998.

Placher, William. *Jesus the Savior: The Meaning of Jesus Christ for Christian Faith*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

_____, ed. *Essentials of Christian Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 2003.

Plantinga, Richard J. *Christianity and Plurality: Classic and Contemporary Readings*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1999.

Pohl, Christine. "Reflections on Excellent Ministry*," The Pulpit & Pew Theological Colloquium.* Durham, NC: Duke Divinity School, 2001.

Popper, Karl. *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Revised Edition*. Oxford, UK: Clarendon Press, 1986.

Race, Alan. *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*. Maryknoll, NY: SCM Press, 1983.

Rahner, Karl. *Foundations of Christian Faith*. New York: Crossroad, 1978.

_____. *The Trinity*. New York, NY: Continuum Press, 2001.

Ramakrishna, Sri. *The Gospel of Ramakrishna*. New York, NY: The Vedanta Society, 1907.

_____. *Teachings of Ramakrishna*. Almora, India: Advaita Ashrama, 1934.

Reader, John. *Reconstructing Practical Theology: The Impact of Globalization*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008.

Reinders, Hans S. *Receiving the Gift of Friendship: Profound Disability, Theological Anthropology, and Ethics*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2008.

Rose, Anne C. *Beloved Strangers: Interfaith Families in Nineteenth Century America.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001.

Ruether, Rosemary Radford. *Women-Church*. New York, NY: Harper & Row, 1986.

Reynolds, Thomas E. *Vulnerable Communion: A Theology of Disability and Hospitality*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2008.

Richard, Lucien. *Living the Hospitality of God*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 2000.

Roberts, Keith. *Religion in Sociological Perspective 4th Edition*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 2003.

Rockefeller, Steven C. and John C. Elder, eds., *Spirit and Nature: Why the Environment is a Religious Issue- An Interfaith Dialogue*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1992.

Roebben, Bert and Leo Van der Tuin. *Practical Theology and the Interpretation of Crossing Boundaries: Essays in Honor of Professor M.P.J. van Knippenberg.* Piscataway, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2003.

Rouner, Leroy S. ed. *The Changing Face of Friendship*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994.

_____. *On Community*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1991.

Royce, Josiah. Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity with Introduction by John E. Smith and Foreword by Frank M. Oppenheim*. Washington DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2001.

_____. *Josiah Royce: Selected Writings edited by John E. Smith and William Kluback.* New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1988.

Rusch, William. *The Trinitarian Controversy*. Philadelphia, PA: Fortress Press, 1980.

Russell, Bertrand. *The Problems of Philosophy*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1979.

Samartha, Stanley J., ed. *Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths*. Geneva, Belgium: World
           Council of Churches, 1971.

_____. ed. *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movements*. Geneva, Belgium: World
           Council of Churches, 1971.

Schleiermacher, Friedrich. *Brief Outline of the Study of Theology Trans. by William Farrer*.
           Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2007.

Schottoroff, Luise. *The Parables of Jesus*. Minneaspolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2006.

Schreiter, Robert. *Constructing Local Theologies*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1985.

_____. *The New Catholicity: Theology Between the Global and the Local*. Maryknoll,
           NY: Orbis Books, 1997.

Schweiker, William. *Theological Ethics and Global Dynamics: In A Time of Many Religions*.
           Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2004.

Sedmak, Clemens. *Doing Local Theology: A Guide for Artisans of a New Humanity*. Maryknoll,
           NY: Orbis Books, 2002.

Sheldrake, Phillip. *A Brief History of Spirituality*. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Shults, F. LeRon and Andrea Hollingsworth. *The Holy Spirit*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans
           Publishing Company, 2008.

Simpson, Gary. *Critical Social Theory: Prophetic Reason, Civil Society, and Christian
           Imagination*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989.

Skudlarek, William. *Demythologizing Celibacy: Practical Wisdom from Christian and Buddhist
           Monasticism*. Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2008.

Slade, Peter. *Open Friendship in a Closed Society: Mission Mississippi and a Theology of
           Friendship*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Smith, Wilfred Cantwell. *Toward A World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of
           Religion*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1981.

Smock, David, ed. *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*. Washington, DC: United States
           Institute of Peace, 2002.

Spencer, Anand. "Participating in One Another's Rituals: A Christian Perspective," *Dialogue &
           Alliance, vol. 6, No. 3, Fall 1992*, 3-9.

Song, Choan Seng. *Jesus in the Power of the Spirit*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994.

Southard, Samuel. *Theology and Therapy: The Wisdom of God in a Context of Friendship*. Dallas, TX: Word Publishing, 1989.

Stone, Bryan P. *Evangelism After Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2006.

Storrar, William F. and Andrew R. Morton, eds. *Public Theology for the 21ˢᵗ Century*. London: T&T Clark, 2004.

Summers, Steve. *Friendship: Exploring it Implications for the Church in Postmodernity*. New York, NY: T&T Clark, 2009.

Swams, Rachel L. "Lack of Basics Threatens World's Poor," *The New York Times*, August 29, 2002.

Swearer, Donald K. *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions*. Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1977.

Swidler, Ann. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies," *American Sociological Review*, 1986, 51: 273-286.

Swindler, Leonard. *Toward A Universal Theology of Religion*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987.

_____. "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious, Interideological Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 20:1, Winter 1983. September, 1984, revision*, 267-287.

Swidler, Leonard and Paul Mojzes. *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2000.

Swinton, John and Harriet Mowat. *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research*. London: SCM Press, 2006.

Swinton, John. *Resurrecting the Person: Friendship and the Care of People with Mental Health Problems*. Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2000.

_____. *Raging With Compassion: Pastoral Responses to the Problem of Evil*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007.

Tanner, Kathryn. *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997.

Tarnas, Richard. *The Passion of the Western Mind*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books,

1993.

Taylor, Charles. *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992.

Teasdale, Wayne and George Cairns, eds. *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of the Parliament of the World's Religions*. New York, NY: Continuum Press, 1996.

Thurman, Howard. *Jesus & the Disinherited*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press 1976.

Tillich, Paul. *Systematic Theology vol. I*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951.

_____. *Systematic Theology: Life and the Spirit: History of the Kingdom of God*, *Vol. 3* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1963.

_____. *Dynamics of Faith*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1957.

_____. *Love, Power, & Justice: Ontological Analysis and Ethical Applications*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1960.

Tilley, Terrence. *Inventing Catholic Tradition*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000.

Townes, Emile. *Embracing the Spirit: Womanist Perspectives on Hope, Salvation, and Transformation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Press, 1997.

Tracy, David. *Blessed Rage for Order*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1996.

_____. *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* . Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1987.

_____. *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism*. New York, NY: The Crossroads Publishing Company, 1981.

_____. *Dialogue With the Other: The Interreligious Dialogue*. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990.

Tutu, Desmond. *No Future Without Forgiveness*. New York, NY: Doubleday, 1999.

Urs Von Balthasar, Hans. *Dare We Hope That All Men Be Saved?*. San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 1986.

van Der Ven, Johannes. *Practical Theology: An Empirical Approach*. Belgium: Peeters Press, 1998.

Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House Company, 2005.

Vanier, Jean. *Becoming Human*. New York, NY: Paulist Press, 1998.

Veiling, Terry. *Practical Theology: On Earth As It Is In Heaven*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005.

Vermeer, Paul. "Learning Religion in a Plural Society", in *Hermeneutics and Religious Education Eds. Herman Lombaerts and Didier Pollefeyt*. Leuven, Belgium: Leuven University Press, 2004.

Volf, Miroslav and Dorothy C. Bass, Eds. *Practicing Theology: Beliefs and Practices in Christian Life*. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2002.

Wach, Joachim. *The Comparative Study of Religions, Edited with An Introduction by Joseph M. Kitagawa*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1958.

_____. *Sociology of Religion*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1944.

Wadell, Paul J. *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Pres, 2002.

_____. *Becoming Friends: Worship, Justice, and the Practice of Christian Friendship*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2002,

_____. *Friendship and the Moral Life*. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989.

Warren, Mark R. *Dry Bones Rattling: Community Building to Revitalize American Democracy*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001.

Weinsheimer, Joel C. *Gadamer's Hermeneutics: A Reading of Truth and Method*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985.

Welch, Sharon. *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation*. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985.

Welker, Michael. *God the Spirit*. Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2004.

West, Cornel. *Prophesy Deliverance: An African-American Revolutionary Christianity Anniversary Edition*. Westminster John Know Press, 2002.

_____. *The Cornel West Reader*. New York, NY: Basic *Civitas* Books, 1999.

_____. *The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism*. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989.

Westerhoff, John. *Building God's People in a Materialistic Society*. Greenwich, CT: Seabury Press, 1983.

White, Caroline. *Christian Friendship in the Fourth Century*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002.

Whitehead, Evelyn and James Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry Revised Edition*. Oxford, UK: Sheed & Ward, 1995.

Williams, Raymond. *Keywords*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Williamson, Clark. *Way of Blessing, Way of Life: A Christian Theology*. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 1999.

Wiredu, Kwasi ed. *A Companion to African Philosophy*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing Company, 2006.

Wogaman, J. Phillip. *Christian Ethics: A Historical Introduction*. Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993.

Wright, Vinita Hampton. *Days of Deeping Friendship: For the Woman Who Wants Authentic Life With God*. Chicago, IL: Loyola Press, 2009.

Wuthnow, Robert. *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.

Yager, Jan. *Friendshifts: The Power of Friendship and How It Shapes Our Live*s. Stamford, CT: Hannacroix Creek Books, Inc, 1997.

_____. *When Friendship Hurts: How to Deal with Friends Who Betray, Abandon, or Wound You*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2002.

Yong, Amos. *Beyond the Impasse: Toward A Pneumatological Theology of Religions*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2003.

_____. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005.

_____. *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*. Waco TX: Baylor University Press, 2007.

_____. *Hospitality & the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor.*

Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008.

Zaehner, R.C. ed. *Encyclopedia of the World's Religions*. New York: Barnes & Noble's Books, 1981.