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Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths

The Lutheran World Federation – A Communion of Churches

Deepening Faith, Hope and Love in Relations with Neighbors of Other Faiths

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Editor

on behalf of
The Lutheran World Federation

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Foreword

In 2004, an overall initiative was begun by the Lutheran World Federation's Department for Theology and Studies under the title, "Theology in the Life of Lutheran Churches: Revisiting Its Critical Role." One of this program's central objectives is to deepen and expand how theology is understood and pursued in relation to today's pressing challenges in different contexts around the globe. Rather than just talking about theology, the overall intent has been to do constructive theological work in relation to those challenges. Seminars have gathered theologians in different parts of the world: in 2006 in Arusha, Tanzania, and in Breklum, Germany; in 2007 in Höör, Sweden, and in St Paul, USA. In 2008, seminars have been planned in Hong Kong, China, and in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa. A concluding seminar will be held in 2009, in Augsburg, Germany.

The first book in the Theology in the Life of the Church series, *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections*,[1] was published in late 2007. This second book in the series grew out of the seminar in Breklum, Germany, where the focus was on Christian–Muslim relations. Here, however, the set of authors and scope have been expanded to include theological reflections on interreligious relations in general.

The Department for Theology and Studies has been addressing interfaith relations since the mid 1980s, with various studies, consultations and publications, most recently, *Bridges instead of Walls. Christian–Muslim Interaction in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria*.[2]

It is hoped that this new book will provoke Christians, as they pursue interreligious relationships today, to engage in deeper theological reflections, rather than assuming these are to be avoided. The editor, Rev. Simone Sinn, appropriately focuses on faith, hope and love as basic dimensions of our Christian identity. All three dimensions are at stake in interfaith relationships: Who is the God we believe in? How do we want to live together with our neighbors? What vision do we have for our society and for the future? She insists that, from a theological point of view, there needs to be an integrated perspective, where faith, hope and

[1] Karen L. Bloomquist (ed.), *Being the Church in the Midst of Empire: Trinitarian Reflections* (Minneapolis: The Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran University Press, 2007).

[2] Lissi Rasmussen (ed.), *Bridges instead of Walls. Christian–Muslim Interaction in Denmark, Indonesia and Nigeria* (Minneapolis: The Lutheran World Federation/Lutheran University Press, 2007).

love deepen and mutually enhance our interreligious relationships. The authors, writing from out of their own areas of concern and expertise, together indicate how the different aspects of this come alive and need to be pursued in various venues. May the writings here provoke your own further theological reflections and a deepening of relations with neighbors of other faiths.

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Introduction

Simone Sinn

The quest for good interreligious relations

Today, many churches are concerned to develop and deepen relations with people of other faiths and interreligious relations are a priority for churches at the local as well as the international level. Also in the public sphere, there is a general recognition that good interreligious relations are vital. This prominence and sense of urgency have an ambivalent effect on the matter itself. On the one hand, interreligious relations are no longer subject to the expertise of a few committed persons and a growing number of people are becoming actively involved in dialogue processes. On the other, such prominence leads to a very heated atmosphere and people easily become nervous as they feel the need to find quick solutions to complex problems. While an increased public awareness of the importance of interreligious relations is desirable, some caution is necessary with regard to the accompanying haste and breathlessness. Building relationship among neighbors of different faiths is a long-term process that involves serious commitment and vision.

In this process, we must first define what we actually mean when we speak of "good" interreligious relations. What are the criteria for such good relations? In order to answer this, we might easily draw on other realms that are influential in the public sphere. In economic relations, a criterion for a good relationship would be profitability; in political relations, the criteria would be security and freedom. The economic and political aspects of interreligious relations are undeniable. Nevertheless, drawing primarily on these realms would be shortsighted. As we search for a criterion for good interreligious relations, we have to remain, first of all, within the religious realm proper and engage theological and ethical aspects of the notion of "good."

Peace and justice are concepts that might immediately spring to mind. Numerous interfaith events at all levels are dedicated to these themes and have considerably influenced interreligious efforts.[1] A theme recently

[1] For example, the Inter-Faith Action for Peace in Africa (IFAPA), see **www.lutheranworld.org/Special_Events/Peace_Summit/IFAPA-20050425.html**

put forward by Muslim leaders was the concept of love of God and love of neighbor, which was developed as the key theme in their October 2007 statement, "A Common Word between Us and You."[2] This important document links scriptural, theological and ethical considerations with regard to Christian–Muslim relations and can be seen as a starting point for more in-depth hermeneutical, theological and ethical reflections.

Faith, hope and love as the hallmarks of good relations

This publication seeks to lift up the interrelatedness of faith, hope and love in interreligious relations. It argues that this interconnectedness is a hallmark of "good" relations between people of different faiths. Thus, one underlying assumption of this book is that interreligious relations are not primarily to be judged by the outcome, as is often the case in economic and political relations, but are guided and sustained by faith, hope and love. These three basic dimensions include the relationship to God, the relationship to the future we envisage in faith and the relationship to fellow human beings. These relationships need one another, they do not stand alone.

Bringing together these three dimensions is an alternative to two popular positions. According to one, we have to concentrate on common ethical values and joint social action as the unifying bond so that we do not get bogged down in divisive theological differences. This position is reminiscent of a slogan used by some in the ecumenical movement: service unites, doctrine divides. Another position maintains that since religions are irreconcilably different, interreligious cooperation that neglects theological differences takes place on highly precarious ground; thus, peaceful coexistence is recommended rather than engaging one another's faith. Interreligious dialogue processes, however, have shown that neither of these positions holds true. From a theological point of view, there needs to be an integrated perspective, where faith, hope and love are mutually enhancing.[3]

[2] See **www.acommonword.com**

[3] Aasulv Lande speaks about the interrelationship of truth-dialogues, social dialogues and an "ultimate" dialogue: "Truth dialogues and social dialogues thus work interactively and cannot actually be distinguished. They are, however, vulnerable and intermediate attempts to reach determinate aims. I therefore look for an 'ultimate' dialogue, one that fundamentally reflects human existence and connects us with the ultimate, with God. This is not a dialogue to obtain peace and truth; it is rather a dialogue which reveals ultimate peace and truth." Aasulv Lande, "Dialogue, for Heaven's sake," in John O'Grady and Peter Scherle (eds), *Ecumenics from the Rim. Explorations in Honour of John D'Arcy May* (Münster: Lit, 2007), p. 416.

Faith points to the existential dimension at stake in interreligious relationships. For people of faith, the relationship to God enables and sustains life. Faith is not simply one aspect of their lives, but the very basis of their being. Their understanding of God's relationship to them shapes their vision and ways of life. Faith as an holistic way of being in this world has to be clearly distinguished from ideology. In the midst of reifying religious identities, there is a danger that faith becomes an ideology immunizing itself against reality instead of engaging it. Interreligious dialogue is an important space where the meaning and genuine characteristics of faith can be rediscovered.

Hope is the eschatological dimension of religious belief. In the midst of the human struggle constructively to deal with present challenges, hope opens up a new horizon, with God at the center. God enables and sustains human life and human relationships. The image of a reconciled community is at the heart of many metaphors and stories describing the hope entailed by faith. Its theocentric perspective frees us from the bondage of human boundaries, gives us courage to be in dialogue with people of other faiths and theologically qualifies the prophetic critique of distorted religious elements in one's own and other traditions.

Love stands for the committed relational dimension between human beings. It involves developing relationships that empower others and means acting in ways that are supportive of them. Wherever people are liberated from anxieties pertaining to their own well-being, they can freely care for that of others. The Good Samaritan is the prime example for Christians as they cross ethnic, cultural and religious boundaries and give assistance in concrete ways. Nevertheless, much more remains to be done. The challenges posed by socioeconomic, political or other asymmetries in interreligious relations must not be underestimated; working toward just and participatory structures is vital.

Faith, hope and love open up a space for being with the other. Thus, it is clear that what constitutes a "good" relationship is a living process that engages existential, eschatological and committed relational dimensions that are mutually enhancing and might at times be a helpful corrective for one another. For example, when faith is in danger of making us blind, love calls us to be in relationship with our neighbors of other faiths. When love faces an impasse, hope moves us toward a greater vision. When hope carries us away to lofty spheres, faith grounds us existentially. In critical moments, preference needs to be given to love as Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:13.

In interreligious encounter, important existential formation takes place that requires substantial theological reflection. It is an occasion for rediscovering the importance of good theology and theological competence.

Conditions for good interreligious relations

Often the encounter between people of different faiths takes place in a loaded atmosphere. People have to work through heavy histories and experiences at the personal as well as at the communal level before they can really listen and talk to the other. Many factors contribute to making dialogue and joint action difficult. What does the church do in order actively to provide conducive conditions? Do congregations give time and space for people of different faiths to meet and constructively to discuss issues of common concern? Are pastors, social workers and youth leaders well prepared to accompany such processes?

Developing and deepening good interreligious relations is first of all to be pursued at the grassroots' level, where people meet in concrete contexts to discuss, work or celebrate together in tangible ways. Thus, we move from a stereotypical image of the other to actual persons with a distinct life story and with their particular way of being in this world. Here, in the midst of human encounter, people experience God's presence in unprecedented ways. Does the teaching and preaching in the church foster such encounters? Does it open the way from the "imagined" other to the "real" other? Does theology take into account the wisdom and expertise of those involved in the dialogue of life?

The complex interreligious situation is often aggravated by the fact that the local contexts are influenced by developments at the national, regional and global levels. How do churches assess and analyze these complex relations? What kind of resources and resource persons do they use from within and beyond their own church? How do they reflect on and take into account what happens in and to minority churches in other parts of the world?

The Breklum consultation

Many member churches of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) perceive the need for mutual sharing and exchange with regard to Christian–Muslim

relations. In response, the Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) organized a consultation under the theme "Beyond Toleration? Assessing and Responding Theologically to New Challenges for Christian–Muslim Relations," 1–3 December 2006, at Breklum, Germany. The consultation was held in collaboration with the North Elbian Center for World Mission and Church World Service and jointly planned with Dietrich Werner.

Taking place in the aftermath of the cartoon crisis, the consultation's attention focused especially on the changing interreligious situation in Europe. The majority of the twenty-eight participants came from this region, along with some theologians from other parts of the world. After hearing from and discussing analyses from different regions of the world, the consultation explored several theological questions related to this issue.

In his opening presentation, Viggo Mortensen, Denmark, warned that Europe may be on the brink of developing *quasi* apartheid societies. While his concern was shared by a number of participants, interesting examples of inculturation were noted. Göran Gunner, Sweden, pointed to a distinctly Swedish form of Islam, with Muslims adapting some "local" rituals in order to become more "Swedish."

Asian and African participants stressed the influence of cultural, economic and political factors on Christian–Muslim relations. As Manmasih Ekka pointed out, "In India, both Christianity and Islam are regarded as foreign, and must together face the power of a Hindu majority." Leonard Mtaita, Tanzania, suggested that "If we do not find ways to live together, we may not live at all," and Carol Schersten LaHurd, USA, pleaded that "We must move beyond tolerance to genuine relationships with Muslims, rooted in accountability and respect."

The sections of the book

With this publication, the LWF makes select contributions from the Breklum consultation available to a wider audience. In addition, theologians from beyond this consultation were invited to provide theological reflections. As a result, the book's focus is broader than Christian–Muslim relations. The analyses and reflections delve into the different aspects involved in interreligious relations and include ecclesial, societal, pedagogical and biographical dimensions and gender issues. The concept of a dialogue of hope is investigated and theological reflections on salvation and the Triune God in interreligious dialogue are explored in the book's final section.

This book can be likened to a stained glass window, composed of different pieces of colored glass, through which shine the themes of faith, hope and love. Readers are invited to reflect on interreligious relations in their contexts in light of the multifaceted dimensions discussed here. What ecclesial structures in your church help or hinder dialogue with people of other faiths? What space for interreligious learning does your church provide? Who is involved in dialogue processes and who is not? How do you speak of God's promises and God's grace in a plural world? What images of hope nurture and sustain my relations to people of other faiths? It is hoped that the articles will help deepen your understanding of questions such as these.

Lutheran–Muslim relations: past and present

Johannes Ehmann provides historical clarifications for examining Martin Luther's perspectives on Islam. Ehmann systematically presents historical findings and shows how Luther's theology of justification is the basis for Luther's position on the Turks. Furthermore, Ehmann explores how, especially for European churches, the distinctions made in Luther's treatise on temporal authority are still relevant as they help to distinguish between integration efforts and interfaith dialogue. Detlef Görrig's contribution describes recent developments in Christian–Muslim relations in the region where the consultation took place. He looks into the asymmetries involved in dialogue, describes certain projects and initiatives and presents his synod's recent findings. Görrig depicts how a church in a majority situation takes responsibility for being in dialogue with religious minorities.

The message of the Breklum consultation, "Beyond Toleration. Toward Deeper Relationships with Muslims," brings together the main findings of the consultation and thereby points to perspectives from different contexts. An assessment of the current situation is provided and theological responses are discussed. The message addresses past, present and future challenges and makes recommendations to the LWF and its member churches.

Societal challenges for interreligious relations

Martin Lukito Sinaga examines how the church's sociological form, in his case an ethnic folk church in the Batak land of Indonesia, influences the way it relates to the wider society and people of other faiths. Sinaga criti-

cally examines the European missionaries' theological and ecclesial legacy and draws on a Malay theologian's "theology of neighborology." Against the background of her Kenyan experience, Hazel O. Ayanga describes how fear of losing one's identity drives many dysfunctional interreligious dynamics. In order to overcome such dynamics she argues for hospitality to the stranger as being fundamental to interreligious relations. Her call for respect for the other person's faith and meaning system resonates with what Göran Gunner puts forward in his contribution. He explains recent developments in Scandinavia and describes the complex but important interrelationships between rights, duties, integration and respect.

Identity and faith formation

This section focuses on the individual's experience and development in multireligious contexts. Friedrich Schweitzer presents the findings of empirical research in Germany and beyond on how children and youth grow up in the presence of many faiths. He argues for taking seriously the perspectives that children and adolescents bring to interreligious encounter. Reflecting on the implications for Christian education, Schweitzer appeals for consistently including a syllabus on other faiths that corresponds to the respective age group, developmental stage and social location. The aim of such is that the learning experiences will "lead to an integrated cognitive and affective familiarity with other faiths." Drawing on her personal experience as a young Japanese woman, Emi Mase-Hasegawa describes the multifaceted dimensions of identity. She reflects on the historical and religious heritage and the cultural context in which her search for identity is situated. Over against the popular notion of "belonging," she proposes *metanoia* as a key concept and unfolds the more dynamic and reflexive notion of "relationship."

Women in interreligious dialogue

Drawing upon her experience with women dialogue groups and involvement in the national Norwegian official dialogue processes, Anne Hege Grung critically and constructively discusses gender as a crucial dimension in Christian–Muslim dialogue. She describes how patriarchal patterns are divisive across religious affiliations and pleads for actively including gender perspectives in dialogue. Helene Egnell from Sweden reflects on what it means for women to speak from the margins, "a good

place for dialogue." Furthermore, Egnell shows that "change," "otherness" and "difference" are key concepts in feminist as well as in interreligious discourses that can mutually enhance and deepen one another.

Reimagining salvation and hope

Kristin Johnston Largen revisits Christian soteriology in light of interfaith dialogue. She unfolds the meaning of "bearing witness" as a two-way process and with the help of a concrete example shows how important theological learning processes take place in interreligious dialogue. Johnston Largen makes a case for cultivating an attitude of trust and hope in God alone.

Discussing the ambivalent impact of "Abrahamism," Barbara Bürkert-Engel pleads for a paradigm shift. Instead of going back to the seemingly common historical roots epitomized in the figure of Abraham, she wants to overcome this retrospective approach and argues for moving toward a dialogue of hope instead. By exploring scriptural insights, she shows how in such a dialogue current interreligious endeavors are informed and nurtured by eschatological images and visions.

The Triune God in interreligious dialogue

Risto Jukko examines the strengths of a Trinitarian approach to a theology of religions in postmodern society. He takes up recent insights in the theology of religions and brings Lutheran emphases into that debate. He is convinced that the tension between relating to the theological tradition while being open to the religious other is creative and innovative; it should not be disregarded but taken seriously. Paul S. Chung delves into a theological interreligious dialogue on the Trinity by discussing the relation between Trinitarian thinking in Christian theology, triadic structures in philosophical Taoism and insights from Jewish Wisdom. Chung thereby reflects on the relation between God's transcendence and God's immanence, highlighting God's act of saying as the crucial link.

The task before us: enhancing interreligious competence

Interreligious dialogue is a pioneering endeavor that takes place at the borders, making these visible and questioning them. The quest for good rela-

tions with people of other faiths is challenging and at times even unsettling. Today's multireligious situation calls for a maturity in matters of faith that sadly is still lacking. Frozen religious identities on the one hand and heated religious conflicts on the other are signs of this lack of maturity. What is needed is the competence to speak about one's own faith in a non-aggressive way and to listen to people of other faiths attentively. Being mature means to be able to live with ambiguities and differences and requires the ability to be self-confident as well as self-critical. This maturity is nurtured by a lived out spirituality and good theology.

The ability constructively to reflect, communicate and act in situations where people of different religious affiliations meet constitutes the core of interreligious competence. Such competence allows for differing theological positions but requires considerable knowledge of the other and multiple skills.[4] It involves the basic dimensions of our human existence: social and emotional aspects, similar to those needed in intercultural encounter; cognitive and communicative aspects, i.e. knowledge about one's own and other religions and the ability to listen to people of other faiths; being articulate about one's own faith, its theological and hermeneutical aspects, i.e. the ability to discern the faith questions at stake by referring to the Scriptures, symbols and practices.[5]

Interreligious competence includes the ability to reflect on religious matters from within and from without. In other words, to speak about religious concepts and practices from within a specific faith perspective, to do religious studies and look at matters of faith from the outside and to analyze religious concepts and practices with tools provided by the social and cultural sciences. From this perspective we soon realize that the essentialist concepts of "Christian identity," or "Buddhist identity," etc., become questionable. There is not only considerable diversity within any given faith tradition, but also a constant discourse on what it means to be a Muslim, or a Hindu. According to Klaus Hock,

> Religions are to be seen as (trans)cultural phenomena that are in ceaseless flux and permanent change, with their alleged "substance" deriving

[4] At the Breklum consultation, Dietrich Werner recommended the establishment of regular joint Christian Muslim formation programs for future leaders of Christian–Muslim dialogue.

[5] Difficulties involved in trying to "understand" people of other faiths are constructively examined in Ricca Edmondson, "Interreligiöses Verstehen–Kultursoziologische Probleme und Paradoxien," in Michael Bongardt and Anand Amaladass (eds), *Verstehen an der Grenze. Beiträge zur Hermeneutik interkultureller und interreligiöser Kommunikation*, Jerusalemer theologisches Forum 4, (Münster: Aschendorff, 2003), pp. 45–79.

> from processes of transcultural communication. Therefore we will have to abandon static concepts and "essentialistic" categories in favor of dynamic categorizing qualifications.[6]

Therefore, good interreligious relations are ones that take the dynamic character of religions seriously. The task of theological reflection is to enable discernment in the midst of these processes; the task of interreligious competence is to make productive use of theological reflection and to participate in interreligious discourse in fruitful ways. What we mean by "fruitful" will vary according to context and the actual challenges that need to be addressed. This book suggests that a dialogue that helps to deepen faith, hope and love is a fruitful endeavor. Such dialogue helps the participants to become maturer in an holistic sense, it helps them to develop a faithful, hopeful and loving heart—in the anthropological sense of the word—and thereby it fosters good interreligious relations.

[6] Klaus Hock, "Beyond the Multireligious–Transculturation and Religious Differentiation: In Search of a New Paradigm in the Academic Study of Religious Change and Interreligious Encounter," in Viggo Mortensen (ed.), *Theology and the Religions. A Dialogue* (Grand Rapids, Michigan/Cambridge, UK: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), pp. 62f.

Lutheran–Muslim Relations: Past and Present

Martin Luther and Islam

Johannes Ehmann

Introduction

We must all take a stance on Islam, regardless of whether or not we like Islam, see it as a religious or political movement, a cultural enrichment, or a threat. We are called to take a position, at least if, as active and alert citizens, we wish to play a role in the political process and to assume responsibility for our society. For example, at the local level, we must take position when it comes to the construction of new mosques. In Germany, the federal states (*Länder*) are responsible for educational and cultural policies, including matters such as Muslim religion classes in public schools, or the continuing debate on women teachers wearing headscarves. This expands further to the level of national foreign policy and the consideration of state interests abroad with their potential domestic ramifications. A case in point is the limited but still quite visible German military presence in Afghanistan and related concerns about potential Islamist terrorist attacks in Germany not to mention those kidnapped in Iraq.

To be sure, the German people are not terribly keyed into religious distinctions. A great deal of human interest, ability and the will to differentiate are required in order to know whether the "Turkish" neighbors are really Turkish Muslims and not Christian Syrians with Turkish passports. Who can say whether the mother from kindergarten, who seems to take Islam quite seriously, is "just" a Muslim or in fact a radical Islamist? Questions such as these lead to fear and mistrust between individuals and entire communities.

Whenever states define themselves as religiously neutral or impartial, questions of faith and religion seem to be secondary—and often inconvenient—matters. However, there are certain consequences when religions evolve into being a political factor or are recognized as always having been such. Not only do Muslims then need to be asked about their attitudes toward the German constitutional state, but Christians also need to be questioned about their relationship to the state and to other religions.

State authorities often focus on a uniform definition of religion, one which may satisfy their needs and those of many lawyers, but which

does not adequately describe any religion in particular. And too often we Protestant Christians demonstrate a strong interest in the state's efforts to support integration while unfortunately showing a blatant disinterest in interfaith dialogue. There is a disinterest in true dialogue between religions, which acknowledges and takes seriously religious convictions in all their differences, and openly addresses matters that may be controversial or even contradictory.

Martin Luther's life and work are instructive. We have much to thank Luther for, not only for the Reformation, but also a wide array of related matters that to this day serve us as points of reference. This is my point of departure for the following considerations which focus on the fundamental questions of Luther's theology as a basis for exploring Islam. We need to bear in mind that most of Luther's relevant commentaries are now nearly five centuries old. For example, Luther almost always referred to Muslims simply as "the Turks." These Turks were not the neighbors or guest workers of our day, but instead posed an imperial threat from the east, occupying wide swathes of Christian territory and in 1529 coming close to capturing Vienna.

For Luther, Islam is nearly always personified by Muhammad, who was known to him only through certain murky traditions. Nonetheless, this seemed sufficient for him to inveigh against the prophet of Islam, at times quite vehemently. To be certain, Luther's polemics also touched upon serious questions, which are comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, with the questions that we may and must pose today: questions of faith, the relationship between the state and religious communities, human rights and religious freedom.

Luther's views on the Turks, repentance and crusades

How did Luther's ideas evolve with regard to Islam? For Luther, Islam was not at first a topic of its own. Rather, it evolved from his critique of the papal church and the church's criticism, in turn, of Luther's repentance theology. "To do battle against the Turks is to strive against God."[1] This statement pointedly illustrates Luther's position in his Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses (May 1518). This point was bound to be mis-

[1] *Cf.* The papal bull "Exsurge Domine" (15 June 1520, Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1484) in relation to Martin Luther, "Explanations of the Ninety-Five Theses," in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 31 (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1957), p. 92.

construed and to raise the hackles of the Roman Curia. However, this was not in fact prompted by the general question of whether to resist the Turks militarily but specifically by Luther's view on the medieval concept of religious crusades against the infidels. This concept had returned to Western awareness following the fall of Constantinople and had recently received Pope Leo X's support. Luther countered that not a war against non-believers, but only repentance before God could earn God's mercy. Already in the early phase of his independent thought (around 1517/18), Luther developed the stance that God is not pleased by wars of religion from which he never retreated. Nonetheless, this did not imply a high estimation of Islam as the pope wished to view it or, as many believed, a betrayal of the resistance to the Turks. From the very beginning, Luther's position was born out of his justification theology, and he was ill disposed to any thought of justification by works.

Luther's views on temporal authority and the estates of the realm

Soon Luther had to explain away misunderstandings of his views on the Turks. By the 1520s, Luther had already formed a firm position based on his theology. This occurred long before his better-known writings and sermons on the Turks, a topic that other Reformers also pursued. Luther expounded on his views concerning the Turks in strictly theological terms. The Turks and Islam were to evolve into a topic for separate discussion only in Luther's later writings. Consequently, the Turks are mentioned in nearly every one of Luther's writings, and in the same—often unjust—polemic attacks on "papists," *Schwärmer* (Anabaptists) and Jews.

Luther's concept of temporal authority, known since the twentieth century by the inelegant name of the "Doctrine of the Two Kingdoms," posited church and world together under one single regiment of the one God, while also pointing to the distinction within this regiment between the church and the state. God rules the church through the gospel even as Christians still need the law. God reigns over the world by the law—understood as natural law—and by the sword. The worldly kingdom cannot itself be governed by the gospel. The decisive thrust of Luther's theory (or his social ethics) is that it places the world under God's rule, just as it does the church. At the same time, however, Luther liberates the world from clerical authority. Luther was confronted

with the religiously justified claims of the pope, as the representative of Christ on earth, to a worldly power greater than that even of the emperor. Luther's counterargument stated, first of all, that the rule of the gospel knows no power, but only the authority of the Word: *non vi*, *sed verbo* (not by force, but by the Word). Secondly, Luther determined that Christians cannot shirk their worldly responsibilities under the cover of Christianity, spirituality, or their devout withdrawal from the world. As citizens, Christians must swear, even though as Christians they may not swear; they must wage war, even though they must not murder; and they must judge, even though according to the New Testament they should not. They must do all this to stave off chaos in the world. Christians thus carry out God's will in their service to the worldly and not only to the spiritual domain. According to Luther, the work of mothers, milkmaids, farmers and councilmen all serve God as well as that of pastors and even better than the work of monks. Luther thus differentiated between the church and the world, but only to reestablish the relationship between the two. They were not, however, to be intertwined. No spiritual power was to seek worldly force or to achieve its own goals through worldly means—precisely Luther's charge against the pope. But similarly, no worldly power attempted to appropriate God's will for its own sake. Luther saw both the Turkish sultan and Muhammad as having violated this principle. They not only attempted to expand their own power, as all bad rulers do, but also sought to spread their religion by force.

We must look very carefully and closely at this matter. Luther showed considerable admiration for the Turkish state. He applauded the Turks' laws against vanity and laws promoting cleanliness, as well as their strict laws against criminals and directives for regular prayer. Luther did not change his mind with regard to the Turks, but had what can be seen as a very modern perspective: statesmen and politicians need not be Christians in order to serve others well, as God inscribes the natural law into the hearts of all people. They know that they should not kill, should not steal and should not commit adultery. In his writings,[2] Luther ceaselessly emphasized that the Turks did precisely that in accordance with their Qur'an. From Luther's point of view, the Qur'an demanded

[2] *Cf.* in particular Luther's "main writings" on the Turks and Islam, "On War against the Turk" (1529), in Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 46 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1967), pp. 157–205; Heerpredigt wider den Türken (Sermon against the Turks, 1529), *WA* 30/2, pp. 160–197; Verlegung (=Widerlegung) des Alcoran Bruder Richardi, prediger Ordens, Anno 1300 (Refutation of the Alcoran of Brother Richard, Preaching Order, 1542), *WA* 53, pp. 272–396.

killing in religious wars, required looting and theft (as he characterized its rules on sharing the spoils of war) and through polygamy undermined marriage and thus the entire household.

Although it is evident that Luther misunderstood Islam, it is striking that Luther's charges against Islam could easily be transferred into today's context. These include the accusation that Islam is an aggressive religion that supports terrorism, that it seeks to establish its own religious law as universal, and that it does not recognize human rights, particularly with regard to women. While some of these charges may seem plausible, others are rather questionable.

Luther's understanding of prophecy and Scripture

Luther concentrated more on Muhammad's beliefs and Islamic doctrine than on political matters. Taking the concept of "prophet" as the point of departure, he examines the new teachings brought by a prophet and the divine signs that might attest to it. Since he investigated Islam, equipped only with the Bible and the information available to him at the time, he came to a negative judgment. He concluded that Islam,

- Rejects the Trinitarian nature of God, believing it to refute God's unity
- Denies Christ being God's son, due to Islam adopting a false, physical understanding of his sonship and because this seemed to view Mary as a goddess
- Rejects Jesus' death for our sins, speaking instead of his crucifixion as a type of illusion, and thus denying God's will for salvation
- Touts itself as the final revelation, surpassing the revelations of Judaism and Christianity, and charges Jews and Christians with altering the Bible, which Islam claims predicted the coming of Muhammad.

The core of this line of questioning has remained practically unchanged over the past 1300 years. Any authentic interfaith dialogue will have to grapple with these issues. We cannot escape from responding to questions, such as all religions being somehow connected by the same God,

nor with excuses pointing to the Abrahamic foundations of the three monotheistic religions.

Luther not only consistently rejects Islamic doctrine but also Muhammad's prophetic claims, using as his standard Deuteronomy 18 (the law concerning prophecy in the Old Testament). The passage clearly expresses that the prophet's validity can only be tested by whether his prophecies are fulfilled (*cf.* Jer 28). Therefore, Luther cannot accept Muhammad as a prophet.

The Turkish threat and Luther's understanding of Islam

How did Luther know anything about Islam? Throughout his life Luther attempted to come to a better understanding of Islam. There were more than enough reports, adventure stories, horror stories and all manner of fanciful claims. If only he could discover something truly authentic. Luther at first relied on a text, *Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (On the Rites and Customs of the Turks), which he later published himself with his own preface.[3] Luther also used the text that is today considered to have been the most influential in the field at the time, Nicolas of Cusa's *Cribratio Alkorani* (A Scrutiny of the Qur'an).[4] These writings may seem to us today to be polemic or simply ignorant. They did, however, represent attempts to find actual information on the Turks. Most Islamic literature of the time was written in Arabic, and throughout the High Middle Ages, almost no one had been able adequately to translate the Qur'an, let alone writings from the traditions of the various Islamic legal schools, into Latin. Polyglot Jews often served to bridge this gap, but they were also often confronted with appalling mistrust; they often posed the same questions to Christianity as did the Muslims.

In my opinion, Luther was the author of two great milestones in the history of Western religious understanding: his German translation of

[3] *Cf. WA* 30/2, pp. 205–208. For an English translation, see Sarah Henrich and James L. Boyce, "Martin Luther—Translations of Two Prefaces on Islam: Preface to the *Libellus de ritu et moribus Turcorum* (1530), and Preface to Bibliander's Edition of the Qur'an *(1543)*," in *Word and World*, Volume XVI, Number 2 (Spring 1996), pp. 258–62, at **www.luthersem.edu/word&world/Archives/16-2_Islam/16-2_Boyce-Henrich.pdf**

[4] Ludovicus Hagemann (ed.), *Nicolaus de Cusa*, *Cribratio Alkorani (Opera omnia iussu et auctoritate Academiae Litterarum Heidelbergensis ad codicum fidem edita)*, vol. VIII, Philosophische Bibliothek 420 (Hamburg: Meiner, 1986).

the *Confutatio Alcorani* of 1300 in 1543, and in the same year, his support for a Latin edition of the Qur'an, published in Basel.

Luther and the literature on Islam

Confutatio Alcorani was the work of the Florence born Dominican monk Riccoldo of Monte di Croce, himself in mission to the Muslims. He undertook numerous journeys, upon which he based his claim to solid foundations in Arabic and a good understanding of Islam. In retrospect, whether or not these claims were valid is another question. Of great note, however, is Riccoldo's comprehensive treatise, which he produced in Florence around 1300. As a good student of Thomas Aquinas, Riccoldo's goal was to refute Islam using scholastic theology and a rhetorical method of connecting and differentiating, based on Aristotle's Nicomachean ethics. Riccoldo believed that while Muslims were in error regarding their faith, some Muslims were morally sound and in search of the truth, while others could be characterized as covert Christians lacking only a small measure of the truth. There was, however, to be no salvation for Muslims who lacked ethical standards, i.e. Christian standards.

What could Martin Luther, the Reformer, opposed to Aristotle and scholastic theology, possibly do with such a text? After all, the *Confutatio Alcorani* was nearly 250 years old by Luther's time. Upon reading the *Confutatio* several times, he first concluded that it was too critical of Islam and shed far too negative a light on Islam, compared to the church of the pope. But by the 1540s, although Luther remained quite critical of Riccoldo's work, he had come to the conclusion that it was an accurate portrayal of Islam.

Therefore, in the end, Martin Luther decided to translate this scholastic critique of Islam.[5] But as he translated from Latin into German, he also translated it from a scholastic to a reformation tradition. While he remained true to the portrayal of Islam presented by Riccoldo, he fashioned it into his own new Reformation oeuvre. In a most interesting endeavor, Luther made numerous meticulous omissions and additions—all in accordance with the academic understanding of his

[5] Johannes Ehmann (ed.), Ricoldus de Monte Crucis, *Confutatio Alcorani* (1300): Martin Luther, Verlegung des Alcoran (1542). Kommentierte lateinisch-deutsche Textausgabe, Corpus Islamo-Christianum: Series Latina 6 (Würzburg: Echter, 1999).

age—thus successfully using his translation to write a pastoral text for the congregations.

The Protestants had to cope with the Turks' military victories as well as the accompanying rape and pillage. Although they were under pressure from the Catholic authorities, they were nevertheless forced to fight with the Catholics against the Turks. Others had even hoped for Turkish rule and faith, which for them bore the promise of success, money and women. That was only one part of the equation. Luther himself increasingly saw the fight against Islam as the pope's fight, and thought the pope to be worse than Muhammad and the Turks. In his opinion, the pope murdered the inner person while the Turks destroyed only the outer person. In unforgiving times, Luther could indeed strike an unforgiving tone, and at around the same time, he wrote the following song:

> Lord, keep us steadfast in thy Word.
> And curb the Turks' and papists' sword
> Who Jesus Christ thine only Son
> Fain would tumble from off thy throne.[6]

This was a poem for children [!], a song, or, more accurately, a prayer that was to set them straight as to whose side they would be on if the empire were, by God's verdict, to fall to the Turks—or if after defeating the Turks, the pope should turn to persecute the Protestants.

However, despite Luther's adamant and most outrageous and regrettable polemics, we must recognize that the main points have not changed since. They continue to address views on God and Jesus Christ, the validity of the law, religiously inspired violence, as well as views on faith, and the motivation of ethics being faith or the concept of merit.

Luther's support for the Basel edition of the Qur'an

One could well imagine that Luther would not only reject the Qur'an, which he called "*ein schendlich Buch*,"[7] or "book of shame," but would also attempt to suppress it. However, this was not the case. He dem-

[6] Helmut T. Lehmann (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 53 (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1965), p. 305.

[7] As part of a longer passage in a letter of evaluation to the Basel Council, *WA.B*[riefwechsel] 10, No. 3802, lines 32–47.

onstrated this when Robert of Ketton's Latin translation of the Qur'an was to be reproduced in Basel without the permission of the governing council; Oporinus, the printer involved, was sent to jail as a result. Luther extended his support to the printer and even furnished prefaces to the new edition, his own and one by Philipp Melanchthon (in Luther's name). Luther believed that any reasonable person could only respond to the Qur'an with indignation or ridicule, and therefore supported reproducing the edition.

While this was perhaps not a particularly good reason for supporting the edition, the Basel Qur'an of 1543 became an important milestone in the slow development of Islamic studies in the West. Apologetic polemics played a role in Luther's decision to support the publication, as did freedom and the courage to promote an authentic view on Islam. Of course, Luther could not possibly form a truly authentic view on Islam. He depended too much on sources that he was not able to read critically. But he demonstrated a clear will to avoid using false arguments in interreligious dispute. The manner in which his polemics against Islam all too often went beyond mere impoliteness and crossed the line of obscenity may perhaps have been inexcusable, but there is an explanation: Luther thought that, through a true understanding of the Qur'an, he had been able to come to know Islam adequately enough to expose it as a religion of libertines and epicures. Luther thus fought to the full extent of his rhetorical capacity "against the Turks and the Turks' God,"[8] as he put it in a letter in 1529.

At the end of times

Very few people now know what it means if church bells still ring at three o'clock in the afternoon. The three-o'clock bells are in fact known as "Turkish bells" and their ringing dates back to the height of the Turkish threat. Three o'clock was the liturgically set time for prayers against Turkish gains, for the Christian troops, for protection from physical harm and against false beliefs and the like. The song mentioned above was also part of the princes' liturgical instructions for prayer of repentance.

[8] "*Ego vsque ad mortem luctor aduersus Turcas & Turcarum Deum*," *WA.B* 5, No. 1484, pp. 6–19.

Thus we return to repentance as the sole weapon against enemies—the Turks and the pope—who threatened both body and soul.

The sense of near hopelessness in this form of repentance and prayer reflected the general atmosphere of the sixteenth century. This was characterized by apocalyptic thought, long before Luther provided it with further impetus. Drought, failed crops and famine, monsters and comets—all these were nothing but God's warning from heaven that the world was quaking and trembling at the seams. Adding to the fears of war and mortal threats to the soul, God seemed to be at the end of his patience with the world. Or perhaps, more positively, God was seen as having mercy on the remaining true believers by manifesting his longed-for last judgment. The era was marked with interpretations of the Book of Daniel and the Apocalypse. Luther himself believed that he was living at the end of time, although he denounced astrologers who sought to calculate the precise end of the world. It was clear to him that the worst would come just before the end, and that this was evident in the pope's threats and the Muslim Turks. Yet we must emphasize that, for Luther, it was the pope who represented the Antichrist and not Muhammad or Islam, as many have falsely understood.

For Luther, our world today would be completely unthinkable. Religious pluralism within a state would be inconceivable, even though he himself laid the foundations for this development. When one believes that the end of the world has come, everything seems to be of crucial importance; this view led to death and martyrdom both in Hungary and the Hapsburg lands. In spite of the terrible, even hysterical, times in which he lived, Luther was neither resigned to passive defeatism in civil affairs, nor did he by any means contemplate a theologically justified "crusade." Luther was also convinced of the blessed nature of resisting Islam and the Turks—not, however, due to divine merit to be earned through a crusade or promises of a general indulgence of sin, but due to soldiers simply following their authorities.

Summary and conclusion

It may be that these considerations have moved us further away from Luther. This is especially true if we are seeking to use his theology to establish criteria for pursuing a theological and political dialogue based on faith and civil responsibility. Nevertheless, I continue to uphold the

basic view that Lutheran theology can play a constructive role in today's world. The following suggestions may be helpful as especially European societies face the challenge of integrating Muslims into societies, which have predominantly been shaped by Christianity.

- The very fact that we are able to make distinctions with regard to religion and the state is chiefly the result of the Reformation's drive to disentangle—though not to separate completely—specifically Christian values and practices from civil ones.

- Lutheran theology realizes that state force cannot be used to bring about earthly utopias or a heavenly paradise.

- Christian action does not therefore lead to the establishment of theocratic structures or of religiously and ideologically excessive societies. Both would lead to catastrophic conditions.

- The distinction between two different forms of divine rule encourages Christians and the church to support the integration of immigrants with an Islamic background.

- This distinction also frees them to differentiate in general between integration and interfaith dialogue.

- As citizens, Christians are called to participate in integration efforts, as they act in service of the state and society.

- As Christians, they are called to participate in dialogue efforts, both in service to the church and in direct obedience to Jesus Christ.

- Hence, the state may not introduce any religious requirements, not even the "creed" that "we all believe in the same God." Similarly, however, the church cannot demand any religious preconditions for integration efforts. Both of these would represent an inadmissible commingling of church and state.

- Likewise, it is the primary task of the church in a modern state to prevent the hindrance of such a process of distinction by any sort of countermovement, which could also be Islamic.

- The freedom of academic research leads to transparency and must not be used as a pseudo-neutral weapon in an attack on Islam.

- In particular, Islamic academics and artists should be taken seriously in their struggles with fundamentalism.

- Taking this distinction seriously would serve our political culture well by calming the situation in general. To quote 1 Peter 2:17, as did Luther and the 1934 Theological Declaration of Barmen: Fear God, honor the king!—all in service of peace and justice.

Christian–Muslim Dialogue in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church

Detlef Görrig

The territory of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church, the northernmost church in Germany, stretches from the Danish border in the north to the river Elbe in the south, and from the North Sea in the west to the Baltic Sea in the east. Of the 4.5 million inhabitants in this part of Germany, forty-seven percent are Protestant and seven percent Roman Catholics.

The Muslim population in this area is estimated at 150,000 to 200,000 concentrated mainly in the large cities such as Hamburg, the second largest city of Germany, and Kiel, capital of Schleswig-Holstein. In the more rural Schleswig-Holstein, there are fewer Muslims and church membership is over twenty percent higher than in Hamburg.

The development of the Muslim community in North Elbia dates back to the 1950s, when Persian traders in Hamburg founded the Islamic Center of Hamburg. The Imam Ali Mosque, which until today remains one of the most representative architectural monuments of Islamic life in Hamburg, was opened in 1961. During the same period, the Ahmadiyya movement founded the Fazle Omar Mosque in another part of the city.

In Hamburg, there are today about fifty different mosques and prayer rooms and more than two hundred Protestant churches and chapels. Beside the Imam Ali Mosque, the central mosque, Merkez Camii, founded in 1969, is one of the bigger mosques in the city. Due to the growing number of Muslims in Germany, mostly Turkish immigrants who came to Germany during the 1960s and 1970s, the church began to provide information on Islam for Christians, most of whom had never before been in contact with Muslims.

Churches and parishes had to deal with integrating Muslim children in church run kindergartens, Muslim teenagers in church initiated youth programs, and provide marriage guidance counseling for Christian–Muslim couples. In 1992, a pastor with special responsibility for Christian–Muslim Dialogue was installed in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church. The pastor was to establish and maintain contact

with mosques and other Islamic institutions, such as the Schura, a local umbrella organization for Islamic communities founded in 1999, and initiate and organize Christian–Muslim dialogue at all levels of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Furthermore, the pastor is part of the Interreligious Forum of Hamburg, established in 1997 by representatives of different faiths including Alevis, Buddhists, Catholics, Hindus, Jews and Muslims, participates in the ecumenical study group's committee on dialogue with Islam, provides information on Christianity and Islam, and mediates in situations of conflict.

Meanwhile there is an increased awareness of Christian–Muslim dialogue among the Christian and non-Christian population of northern Germany. During the Second Gulf War and the war in the former Republic of Yugoslavia, Christian prayer groups joined with Muslims and other religious people in order to express their common yearning for peace and justice. After 9/11, these prayers continued. In areas with a large Muslim population regular meetings between Christians and Muslims were held, dealing not only with religious questions but also with social issues of common interest and concern such as violence among young people in schools and in the neighborhood.

Such activities and encounters help establish trust despite differences. Increasingly, Christian groups are visiting mosques or Islamic prayer rooms in their neighborhood and vice versa. Pastors and imams have exchanged greetings on the occasion of the main religious festivals. When advent coincides with Ramadan, Christians are invited to the evening reception on Iftar and Muslims are invited to join advent celebrations in order to share their insights on fasting and waiting. In some areas, special ceremonies and services at the beginning of the school year have been developed that allow both Christian and Muslim children to attend.

Over the last two decades, many people, Christians and Muslims alike, have committed themselves to Christian–Muslim dialogue. We can see its impact on daily life, such as the taking into account of religious and cultural sensitivities in hospital and pastoral care, respect for different customs and food prohibitions and establishing Muslim graves in public and church owned cemeteries. Nonetheless, some problems are rooted not so much in religious but in cultural, social and political differences.

- Most Muslims in Germany are descendents of migrants. Therefore, we are not only talking about dialogue between people of different religions but different nationalities and/or ethnic backgrounds.

Sometimes the first obstacle is the language barrier. For example, some Turkish imams do not speak any German at all and since Turkish is generally not taught in German schools, most Germans do not speak any Turkish.

- As in other European countries, most Muslims have menial jobs and only a small, but growing, number of Muslims are highly educated. As a result, the dialogue between Christians and Muslims is sometimes also a dialogue between people from very different social and economic backgrounds. What can already be complicated in a mono-religious setting becomes even more complicated if not only the religious but also the social gap needs to be bridged.

- The economic impact of globalization (high unemployment, income cuts and inflation) and the threat of terrorism after 9/11 have put considerable pressure on society and are not conducive to an intensive and open exchange between Muslims and Christians. Prejudices and generalizations, suspicion and uncertainty, hinder dialogue. A certain "Islamophobia" exists among some Christians, especially among those who do not have personal contacts to Muslims, but base their understanding of Islam only on the press, which focuses mainly on negative aspects.

The North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church's declaration, "Living as Good Neighbors. Christian–Islamic Dialogue within the Area of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church," February 2006, is the result of lengthy discussions and serious reflection involving Muslims. The declaration, passed by the synod, acknowledges the value and necessity of Christian–Muslim dialogue as "a contribution towards peace within our society."[1] It encourages parishes to continue Christian–Muslim dialogue and addresses the congregations directly, "We therefore request the congregations of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church to make contact with the mosque communities in their neighborhood, or if this is already the case, to intensify the existing relations."[2]

[1] Hans-Christoph Grossmann (ed.), *In guter Nachbarschaft. Dokumentation der Synode der Nordelbischen Evangelisch-Lutherischen Kirche zum Thema "Christlich-islamischer Dialog" im Februar 2006* (Hamburg: Reformatorischer Verlag, 2006), p. 97, or at **nordelbien.de/download/synode_statements/reader.pdf**

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

It is important to note that here contact and dialogue with Muslim neighbors are being seen as part of the church's daily life and work. It is not something that can or cannot be done. This is encouraging and helpful especially for those who have been involved in Christian–Muslim dialogue for many years and have sometimes been regarded as somewhat exotic by their fellow Christian. Now there is a clear and reliable basis for dialogue activities as an important field of Christian work.

There is, however, also a growing awareness that dialogue between Christians and Muslims cannot be taken for granted and that differences and problems might occur in this process. The synod refers to some controversial questions that might arise in the dialogue including, "Different understandings and methods of interpretation of Scripture, xenophobia, gender equality, minority rights, religiously motivated violence."[3] While the declaration is too short to go into any depth it does clearly state that "we publicly oppose a general suspicion towards Muslims as a result of terrorist attacks" and "the vast majority of people of Islamic faith distance themselves absolutely from such misuse of their religion."[4] It also addresses politicians and state authorities: "We expect those in a position of political responsibility to do more than has been done so far to further the integration of people from other parts of the world, and to strengthen the integrative forces in our society."[5] In other words, building a society with people whose religious, national and ethnic backgrounds differ widely is a challenge and task for the church as well as politics.

Religious instruction in public schools

Religion is one of the standard subjects taught in German state schools. Protestant and Roman Catholic teachers are trained in state universities as teachers of religious knowledge. Attending religion classes is optional, especially at the primary school level. In secondary school, there is usually a choice between religion and other subjects such as philosophy or ethics but many pupils opt to take religion as a regular subject. In Hamburg, the church in cooperation with the educational authorities

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[4] *Ibid.*, p. 98.

[5] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

and members of other faith communities, has over the past ten years successfully developed curricula for religious instruction for pupils of different faiths. This signals that religion does not have to separate, but can be learned side by side through mutual interaction.

Intercultural weeks in Hamburg and Kiel

Activities and events focussing on intercultural encounter are organized in many large North Elbian cities. In autumn 2006, a series of such events took place. For a period of three months, different religious, social and cultural groups and organizations organized over one hundred such events. Once a year, mosques organize an open day, where everyone is invited to see a mosque from inside. In Kiel, churches are involved in an interreligious working group that organizes meetings and provides the opportunity for common prayers. Christians and Muslims celebrated the Roman Catholic harvest festival and Ramadan together. In Hamburg, more than twenty activities around the Middle East were organized by the North Elbian Center for World Mission and Church World Service of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Visits to mosques as well as information on political and religious issues in Israel and Palestine, the Coptic Church in Egypt, or about the perception of the Arab world in the West were part of the program. All these activities where supported by the local political authorities, which has helped to attract the attention also of those who are not religiously but culturally interested. The idea is to show the existing diversity and pluralism in urban areas and to deal with it in a peaceful and encouraging way.

Living as good neighbors

In early 2007, a project initiated by some North Elbian pastors together with the chairman of the board of the Schura Schleswig-Holstein organized dialogue events in six different cities and towns over a period of six months. Each meeting focussed on a certain topic, starting with children's books on Jesus and Muhammad, Jesus in the Bible and in the Qur'an, to customs and rituals around death and mourning in the two religions. The Christians and Muslims involved in this project (around seventy people) shared their traditions and religious perceptions and

gained a better understanding of the similarities and differences between themselves and their neighbors.

The Protestant church of Germany acknowledges that there is no peaceful alternative to interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims if we want to be good neighbors to one another. However, opinions are divided as to how this dialogue is to take place. In light of the threat of terrorism, some prefer a more critical and skeptical attitude towards Islam and Muslims, emphasizing existing differences and interpreting them sometimes as unbridgeable contradictions. Others point to what Christians and Muslims have in common and suggest dealing with critical issues in a more diplomatic way. Theologically the positions of Protestants, including Lutherans, range from more exclusive to more inclusive and pluralistic approaches. Crucial for the present and the future will be which position helps to let Muslims and Christians live as good neighbors. In light of the fact that of Germany's population of 80 million, three million are Muslims, there can be no doubt that Muslims constitute a small yet visible minority who are establishing a lasting community within German society. Therefore the synod of the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church concludes,

> When we join together with our Muslim neighbours to stand up for our common concerns, we do it in the public interest. The differences between our religious communities are not blurred in any way by these actions. On the contrary, in this way Christian–Islamic dialogue makes a contribution to the peace to which we are called as Christians through the Gospel.[6]

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 99.

Beyond Toleration. Toward Deeper Relationships with Muslims

A Consultation Message to Churches of the Lutheran Communion (LWF)

Introduction

The Lutheran World Federation (LWF) Department for Theology and Studies (DTS) held a theological consultation December 1–3, 2006, in collaboration with the North Elbian Center for World Mission and World Service (NMZ, Hamburg) at Christian-Jensen-Kolleg in Breklum, Germany. The purpose was to assess the present situation after some decades of LWF work in the area of Christian–Muslim relations, and to focus on responding theologically to the new challenges member churches face. The following message draws on the papers, discussions, and, on the last day, deliberations of the consultation participants.

Strategically, this event was held in northern Europe near the end of a year during which various incidents have evoked new tensions and questions. Most of the participants came from this region: Germany, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, Latvia, and Slovakia. They shared many models and examples of how Christian–Muslim relations are being pursued, especially in the North Elbian Evangelical Lutheran Church. Participants also came from and brought somewhat different perspectives from Brazil, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Tanzania and the United States. By coincidence, this consultation met at the end of a week in which Pope Benedict XVI made an historical visit to Turkey, and the Evangelical Church in Germany (EKD) released a major new theological statement on Christian–Muslim relations.

This was the second in a series of theological seminars related to the LWF program, "Theology in the Life of the Church." A discussion of this message and of differing perspectives will take place on the Web site for this program: **www.luthersem.edu/lwfdiscuss** (under track 2).

Assessing the current situation

There is great variety in the contexts and character of Christian–Muslim relations in the world today. Disturbing images and dynamics are present in many societies. However, it is problematic to generalize because of the different histories, asymmetrical numbers and power of Christians and Muslims, and the pivotal cultural, political and economic realities affecting these relations.

In some European countries where Christians are in the overwhelming majority, Muslims have been present for many years. Nonetheless, they are still not integrated, and experience considerable discrimination. In some historically Lutheran countries, such as Denmark, the identities of the nation and the church have been so intertwined, if not merged, that probing questions and tensions have arisen due to the increasingly visible presence of Muslims today. This has also inspired new initiatives for dialogue.

In Indonesia, the largest Muslim country in the world, minority Christians and majority Muslims have coexisted for centuries, despite some tensions. In India, Christians and Muslims share a common minority status over against the dominant Hindu religious influence. In Palestine, there have been long-standing good relations between Christians and Muslims. In African countries, the relative proportion of Christians and Muslims varies greatly, with continuing rivalries and tensions in many places. It is often difficult to ascertain who is in the majority. In some African and Middle Eastern countries, small Christian minorities feel threatened by state-supported Islam and the growing influence and radicalization of Islamic-associated movements.

We affirm and raise up the long established relationships between Muslims and Christians living together as good neighbors, even as members of the same families, and of working together for the common good in everyday tasks, especially in times of need and disaster. Such committed Christian–Muslim relations, and the ongoing dialogue that is a natural part of such living, are an important witness and learning for those for whom interfaith encounters may feel new and strange. This has also led to the emergence of expressions and adaptations of Islam that are not monolithic, but marked, for example, by their African, European, North American or Asian contexts.

For some decades now, important dialogue initiatives have been undertaken by the LWF and the member churches, as well as within the

ecumenical movement. Innovative models and significant insights have come from this work. Locally organized dialogues are increasingly taking place between Christians and Muslims. But these pioneering initiatives have yet to become a broad, participatory movement that reaches and affects large proportions of our churches and communities, who still have few ongoing interactions in which they really get to know actual persons who are Muslim. On the basis of our experiences, we strongly believe all Christians and Muslims need and can benefit from such shared personal encounters.

People are highly susceptible to generalizations and polarizing stereotypes fueled by the mass media. This has escalated in such places as the USA, for example, where the number of people holding negative images of Islam has doubled in the past four years. Christians in many countries increasingly say or imply that "the Muslims" are the source of many of the problems they face. In recent years in Germany, the designations, images, and related emotions have evolved from "guest workers" to "foreigners" to "Turks" to "the Muslims" to "the Islamists."

Longstanding images of the "other," which largely are creations of people's imagination, play powerful roles. For example, European identity has long been based, in part, on deeply rooted images of an "other" against which European identity and Enlightenment traditions developed, while a more strident Muslim identity is reinforced by what is alleged to be the Christian West's crusading mentality. There is an urgent need and responsibility for churches to counteract and speak up against the negative stereotypes and misuses of religion, and to contribute to the emergence of national identities that are truly inclusive, rather than relying on negative images of an "other."

The tendency to use religious symbols and motivations covertly as well as openly for ideological and political purposes has dramatically increased since 2001, whether by militant extremists without state power or by nation states who misuse their power. The misuse of religious faiths and their symbols by social, economic, political, and media powers exploits and distorts the dynamics of conflicts. Radicalism and revivalism are fueled by both Muslim and Christian self-appointed spokespersons who use fundamentalist, exclusivist language. The continuing conflict in the Middle East and the "war on terrorism" throughout the world are not only violating human rights and international law, but also adversely affecting Christian–Muslim relations in many settings throughout the world.

Passive, disinterested coexistence alongside each other will not suffice, without actual encounter and authentic solidarity in joint struggles for the common good. Superficial forms of toleration do not result in social integration and the overcoming of discrimination, which isolates and often radicalizes. Instead, we need to encounter one another as persons and to engage in serious discussion over our differences. Many Muslims indicate they want genuine respect and are open to engaging with those of other faiths.

Responding theologically

What motivates us as Christians to move beyond mere toleration to meaningful engagement with others is the heart of the gospel narratives: Jesus was continually crossing boundaries and entering into dialogue with others. He began not with abstract doctrines or statements, but by engaging with actual human beings.

The gospel calls us to know, engage with and serve our neighbors. Mission means that we are sent by God to our neighbors. This sending should encourage us to meet our Muslim neighbors in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, and without hidden agendas. Such meetings are opportunities for both Christians and Muslims to share their honest witnesses with each other, to speak of what they share in common, as well as where they differ.

Such an orientation can help communities counter the tendency to turn inward to solve their identity and security needs and encourage them instead to embrace dynamic rather than static identities and faith understandings. We discover the multiple facets of and shape our identities through such interfaith experiences: we can no longer see ourselves simply as Christian and Muslim "blocks." We experience the diversities within each religious group.

As we do so, we discover that we all in some sense are "strangers" on our different journeys with God, open to God's ever-new surprises. Such designations as "insiders" (those who belong) and "outsiders" (newcomers) are transformed. Rather than some being the hosts and others the guests, mutual hospitality is involved. Although these personal encounters may begin on many levels, as people of faith, we must be open to engaging with actual questions of faith.

These encounters and engagements motivate church members to ask deeper questions regarding the content and meaning of the Christian faith

than they might have otherwise. In that sense, this is a wake-up call. The experience of dialogue does not compromise, but can deepen our own faith understandings. The reality is that many Muslims may be clearer about who they are and what their faith teaches than are Christians.

Thus, the increasing presence and witness of Muslims in our midst is exposing a serious void: many Christians lack a basic understanding of their own faith and religious traditions, how to interpret Scripture and how to reflect theologically on realities they face today. There is an urgent need for continuing to educate Christians about the Christian faith—basic catechesis—and its meaning in their lives, as well as the need for basic education about what Muslims believe. The experience of minority churches living in majority Muslim situations and churches forming within Muslim contexts may be helpful in this regard. However, it is crucial that this faith formation itself be dynamic and dialogical, rather than impose static, formulaic answers.

What then are theological avenues for Lutheran Christians to pursue as they relate to other faiths? One promising possibility is living more deeply from out of the Triune understanding of God. Far from being a *skandalon*, for Christians this is the transcendental condition for interreligious dialogue, permitting us to take the other in all seriousness, without fear or violence. It provides a flexible, relational model that opens up the possibility of a dialectical plurality in unity, open to the other, yet without losing its own strong sense of identity, anchored in Jesus Christ. The Trinity implies that there must be principles of transparency, companionship, and equality in our relations with one another and others. This provides a basis for dealing theologically with increasing religious plurality.

The Spirit of the Triune God sustains Christian practices that move us beyond fear and open us up to the future. We dialogue in the hope that we will reach fuller understandings. We extend mutual hospitality, open to what new surprises may await us. We seek forgiveness that can move us beyond the impasses of the past to reconciliation and peace.

Addressing past, present, and future challenges

There is a critical need to deal with the past, and honestly face what was said and done and how this may affect Christian–Muslim relations today, including past and continuing actions of nation states. Where

might forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing of memories be necessary? Although the Lutheran tradition is fundamentally open to religious freedom and the existence of other religious faiths, negative rhetoric Luther used against the Turks and as reflected in some confessional writings must be revisited and reassessed. So too must the history of mission activity and of colonialism in Muslim contexts.

Muslim–Christian dialogues are affected by Jewish–Christian relations and cannot be disassociated from them theologically. Yet, they are distinct, demand their own approaches, and should be pursued in ways that do not jeopardize Jewish–Christian dialogues.

As we face the challenges of living together as Christians and Muslims in the present and for the future, agendas for theological dialogue must be set mutually, in conversation with Muslims. From our perspective and experience as Christians, we suggest that potential themes might include,

- How do we each understand revelation and the will of God?
- How do Scripture and the Word of God "live" in our respective traditions?
- What do prayer and spirituality mean in our traditions?
- How do we understand God's justice? Does it consist of legal codes to be implemented, or is it an ideal to be sought yet never fully codified?
- What are the key practices of hospitality in each of our traditions?
- How can we come together to further basic ethical values in society in the face of increasingly secularized and material values?
- If both traditions understand God to be the creator of the universe, from this common ground, how might we work together on ecological and environmental challenges?
- In the face of poverty, natural disasters, disease and human conflict, how can we work together (*diapraxis*), drawing upon the commitment to justice and peace in both of our faith traditions?

In a mature dialogue, difficult questions must also be discussed, such as how can we understand and address human rights (especially of women) and freedom of religion, especially as this relates to majorities and minorities today. How do we each relate faith and culture? How do we each understand the law as it relates to society?

Both traditions have important religious concepts regarding the future of humankind and the earth in general. More extreme apocalyptic worldviews are prominent in some segments of Islam as well as in some segments of Christianity, and often are used against each other. Responding to these and other attempts to predict the future and to reduce the freedom and creativity of God could be a common theme for discussion.

Recommendations to the LWF and member churches

A theological review process should be undertaken to assess the ambivalent historical heritage of Lutheranism with regard to Muslims, to clarify what is historically conditioned and what still needs to be overcome, and resulting in a theological declaration to be officially acted on by at least the LWF.

- Further systematic theological work is needed, drawing especially from global Lutheran perspectives, on how Christian faith and practice relate to other faiths.

- Joint formation programs for future leaders and multipliers of Christian–Muslim dialogues, and curricular resources to prepare leaders for interfaith relations should be developed.

- Mutually agreed upon codes of conduct should be developed for interfaith relationships and practices (such as marriages and funerals) in local contexts.

- Church related and secular news should provide more coverage of positive and promising examples of Christian–Muslim cooperation.

- Intentional efforts should be made to close the gap between official church statements and exchange of greetings by religious leaders, and the assumptions, realities and practices in local settings.

- Churches should reciprocate the "open mosque" hospitality practice of Muslims by designating specific days when Muslims and those of other faiths would be raised up in prayer and intentionally welcomed to visit "open churches."

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Societal Challenges for Interreligous Relations

A Long Road to the Neighbor. Notes from an Indonesian Christian

Martin Lukito Sinaga

The church's relationship to neighbors of other faiths is shaped by its social reality, its sociological form. The type of community in which the church has been established decisively influences interfaith relations. In the case of the Batak land in Sumatra, Indonesia, where I come from, the missionary movement led to the formation of a folk church (*Volkskirche*) as an ethnic church.[1] In the following we shall examine the impact this ecclesial self-understanding has on the way in which we relate to neighbors in the wider society. Second, we will assess the theological legacy of the missionary movement and its impact today and, third, we will take into account contemporary theological considerations. Finally, we will look at what it means to be the church as an active and participatory agent in society.

The ecclesial legacy

While denominationalism in Indonesia has ebbed, the ethnic church has flourished. The missiologist Lothar Schreiner, who lived for ten years in the Batak land, points out that the *traditio fidei* of German Rhenish missionaries was a salvation conscious individualism. The church was understood as a fellowship of reborn souls. Besides this theology, according to Schreiner, a semi-mystical idea of the *Volk* was implanted,

[1] Gerry van Klinken comments on the way *Volkskirche* was viewed in missionary circles: "Folk churches offered the opportunity to christianize an entire culture, not merely by reforming social institutions like marriage and labor, but by creating a sense of ethnic identity, greater than the clan but smaller than Netherlands-Indies (colonial state), that previously had not existed at all." Gerry van Klinken, *Minorities, Modernity and the Emerging Nation: Christians in Indonesia. A Biographical Approach* (Leiden: KITLV Press, 2003), p. 13.

influenced by a certain type of German national Protestantism of the time.[2] The aim was the Christianizing of the whole people, that Christianity should permeate the whole *Volk* and for church and people to become one and the same entity. Gustav Warneck was one of the promoters of such a regressive historical ideal of *Volkskirche*, where Christianity and the people were merged.[3]

Establishing this type of folk church was a way to preserve a premodern, primal way of life. The ancient regime of the primal social structure was retained and the church left isolated from open encounter with modern society. In the current context of global pluralism, the church therefore appears as a conservative, ethnically-based community, or even an isolated primal community. It is quite difficult for this sort of church to encounter society today, where plurality is openly recognized.

Dramatic events were connected to this issue and became political matters[4] in the biggest ethnic church of Indonesia, The Protestant Christian Batak Church (HKBP), which today has about three million members. It started in 1987, when the former head of the Indonesian Council of Churches, Soritua Nababan, was elected bishop (*Ephorus*) of the HKBP. Progressive in his thinking, he called the church to engage with broader social issues. He wanted to reshape this folk church into a more public church. But the traditionalists resisted this, since an open church would likely be in conflict with what was then an authoritarian Indonesian government. They believed that the church should only focus on internal issues. The government favored the church being only a church of the Batak (ethnic) people, rather than promoting popular critique. The traditionalist wing thus signed a pact with the authoritarian regime to expel Nababan. After ten years of conflict, with many people being tortured and the development of a civilian militia, the notion of being a folk church continued, although the HKBP realized that they were suffering and that the internal division was insurmountable.

[2] See Lothar Schreiner, *Adat und Evangelium. Zur Bedeutung der altvölkischen Lebensordnungen für Kirche und Mission unter den Batak in Nordsumatra* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1972), pp. 286–287.

[3] For a thorough analysis of this ideal of a *Volkskirche*, see Werner Ustorf, *Sailing on the Next Tide: Mission, Missiology and the Third Reich* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2000), pp. 18–29.

[4] It is political since an international human rights institution made a complete report on this church, see Human Rights Watch/Asia, *The Limits of Openness* (New York, 1994), pp. 88–108.

Yet the question of the neighbor continued to be pressing: how can this rather isolated form of Christianity become more open? How can a new form of church, a post-ethnic church, be promoted?

The theological legacy

Attention needs to be given to the theological thinking as it was handed down by missionaries in the folk church. A. C. Kruyt, an early twentieth-century missionary in eastern Indonesia, proposed a "theology of conversion" from heathendom to Christianity. He said pretentiously, "becoming a Christian means for him [the Indonesian]: making his own the ancestors of the Hollanders."[5] As animistic traditions are not propositional but bound to a practical or embodied logic and tied to culturally specific practical activities,[6] conversion to Christianity involved the rationalization of religious life. Becoming a Christian meant acquiring a relatively coherent belief system, a universalized doctrine and superior rationale to explain life. Kruyt sought a progressive openness in the hearts and minds of the primal/local peoples toward Christianity.

Interestingly, while working in Central Celebes, Kruyt later de-emphasized theology in favor of piety; Christian orthopraxis such as church attendance was more important than correct belief. This indicates that through interaction with primal Indonesians and their culture, Christianity acquired a dual character. Being a Christian first meant adhering to a certain institution where membership was important, and theology has become one layer above other layers of religious life. Conversion meant entering modern schools, thinking through a rational belief system, and using modern medicine to cure local diseases (mostly cholera). Those two institutions, school and hospital, belonged to the church; participating in these institutions was regarded as a Christian practice. But when sickness was not healed, when the future seemed unclear and no Christian explanations could help, then people consulted their ancestors, calling them through a shaman who was a channel for the spirit.[7]

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[5] Quoted in van Klinken, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 12.

[6] *Cf.* Albert Schrauwers, *Colonial "Reformation" in the Highlands of Central Sulawesi, 1892–1995* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), pp. 198–199.

[7] Mary Margaret Steedly, *Hanging without a Rope: Narrative Experience in Colonial and Postcolonial Karoland* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), provides a good study on a surviving shaman in North Sumatra, Indonesia.

James Haire's research on Halmahera Island confirms this. There was a dichotomy when the theological meaning of the local spirit (*gikiri*) was addressed in relation to the Christian God.

> This dichotomy, however, was also carried over into Christianity, because while accepting the Christian God the Halmaherans continued in recent years to accept the limited authority and efficacy especially of the *gikiri* and village spirits within their own sphere.[8]

Although Christ is called the Great *Gomanga* (Living Dead Spirit, or the Senior Living Dead)—with the "dualism" seemingly overcome—what actually occurred is that the local theological notion of the divine incorporated the living and the dead into one family.

The above notion and the importance of adhering to formal church membership created a stable dualism in local Indonesian Christianity. In the case of the HKBP of North Sumatra, there was a strategy to avoid authentic encounter: the church acts as a formal religion and thus promotes cognitive meaning in life (as taught by the missionaries in the modern theological institutions), while the primal religious heritages were regarded as *adat*, i.e. customary law and practical precepts of daily life.

There were incidents, however, when this stable dualism was challenged. The duality between the layer of formal and rational theology and that of local/primal religious expressions developed an antagonistic dynamic when power was at stake. Then, a theology of purity was promoted or even enforced.

A famous example during the colonial era, when the Protestant Dutch *Gereformeerd* mission flourished and built some significant Christian local communities, is the "Sadrach affair." Kiai Sadrach (b. 1835) tried to promote "contextual" theology. He was one of the Javanese people seeking to perfect their spiritual lives. At the time, there was a religious thirst for new spiritual symbols capable of satisfying the inner cry for cosmological *gnosis*. After learning from local missionaries, Sadrach became a spiritual guru, a teacher of the soul and a mediator between the self and the divine. Spiritually he was in tune with the primal cry, and in times of colonial distress, he gave the Javanese the answer to finding their place in the totality of life. His church was very similar to

[8] James Haire, *The Character and Theological Struggle of the Church in Halmahera, Indonesia, 1941–1979* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1981), p. 256.

the primal community of solidarity, using *slametan*, social gathering, and sharing as a way of *koinonia*. This movement was quite popular and in 1891, Sadrach's followers in central Java numbered 6,374.

An "inquisitor" of the Dutch Reformed Missionary Society, Lion Cachet, came to investigate, and the Sadrach community was purged. The full-fledged religion of the Dutch *zending* (mission) replaced this contextual "primal Christianity." The project of purifying the church of any Javanese traces was begun. The mission hurriedly erected a strong, militant and modern community, which it was believed would hamper the growing power of the Islamic anticolonial movement.[9] This, however, turned out to be a lofty dream as Sadrach's followers who cooperated with the missionaries only numbered around 150.

This sort of purified theology, especially as it is carried over into today's transitional era in Indonesia, faces a considerable hurdle. The theological tools are inadequate for coping with the social and religious conflicts common in a pluralistic developing country. Theological reflection on the neighbor still remains to be developed.

This can be seen clearly in the case the communal conflict and violence in Ambon, Moluccas, which began in 1999 and has resulted in around 10,000 casualties. While the Muslim–Christian civil strife was stirred up by outsiders,[10] this event revealed the ever increasing alienation between Ambonese Muslims and Christians. This has to do with the religious and theological purification process inside both communities, one by the universal Muslim brotherhood and the other by the well established Protestant Moluccan church. In the Moluccas, and elsewhere in Indonesia, theological purification leads into a blind alley with regard to other neighbors.

[9] See Th. Sumartana, *Mission at the Crossroads: Indigenous Churches, European Missionaries, Islamic Association and Socio-Religious Change in Java 1812–1936* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 1993), pp. 59–114.

[10] It was the combination of the paramilitary, local élites and global enterprise which produced such a brutal civil strife in the Moluccas. For a complete report, see Zairin Salampessy & Thamrin Husain (eds), *Ketika Semerbak Cengkih Tergusur Asap Mesiu: Tragedi Kemanusiaan Maluku di Balik konspirasi Militer, Kapitalis Birokrat dan Kepentingan Elit Politik* (Jakarta: Tapak Ambon, 2001).

Contemporary theological considerations

Sadayandy Batumalai, a Malay Christian, introduced the so-called "theology of neighborology."[11] What he proposes is a plea for the Malaysian churches (also the Malay Indonesian and Filipino churches) to be with their neighbor and to realize that every Christian's destiny is bound up with that of the whole Malay community. Thus, the experiences and expressions of being a faithful Christian should be connected with the cultural life and experiences of their Malay Muslim neighbors.

This theology starts by seeing that the Christian communities' cultural context is the medium for Christians to relate to "others." Theology should be a reflection on a living faith with practical implications in the cultural arena, an arena in which Muslim neighbors also express their faith. Christians are called to share their faith based *Muhibbah* (Arabic, goodwill or affection) with their neighbor, so that a mutual *Muhibbah* will be celebrated in their cultural life. The church can be rooted in that common culture through its engagement with Muslim neighbors.

Theology is a discernment of God's transforming action among the peoples of different faiths. This theology sees Christ as a friend of others, as a Lord who explains and shares his care with the neighbor. In following our Lord, we are called to be with the neighbor and to share Christ's care with them. Despite an Islamic resurgence, also politically, in some southeast Asian societies, this "neighborology" must persistently express how the loving that comes from faith in Christ will transform political divides in this region. Thus, this theology is prophetic; the Word of truth should be the very practice of the churches. Although churches are in the minority in Asia, they need to be prophetic in insisting on this, since it is quite tempting for churches to compromise this Word for the sake of their own survival.

According to Batumalai, what follows is the ministry of intercession. Being a church always means a living community that cares for and shares the burdens of a society. After engaging in the lives of its neighbors, the church should bring the cries of the people into its own spiritual life. Praying for other neighbors is a theological necessity in the life of the churches.

[11] See Sadayandy Batumalai, "A Malaysian Neighborology: To Know Malaysia is to Love Malaysia," in Yeow Choo Lak (ed.), *Theology and Religious Plurality* (Singapore: ATESEA, 1996), pp. 88–100; also see Göran Wiking, *Breaking the Pot: Contextual Responses to Survival Issues in Malaysian Churches* (Lund: Studia Missionalia Svecana XCVI, 2004), pp. 119–145.

Neighborology reflects a possible way to renew the folk churches in Indonesia. The shared culture of Indonesia becomes the platform for churches engaging with their neighbors. According to the progressive Indonesia Islamic intellectual, Nurcholish Madjid, the notion of *kemaslahatan* (Indonesian, well-being of the people) is often mentioned as the common denominator for every religious action in society. Churches in Indonesia have already begun to take this new stance toward their neighbors as a sign of a renewed folk church. When we truly love our neighbor, we follow Christ as well as promoting a new structure of social openness where prejudices can be overcome.

A neighbor theology also has its local Christian expression in Java: *siwering kawilujengan* (Javanese, meaning sphere/radiation of salvation). A senior figure of a local Javanese church, Jerobeam Mattheus,[12] has proposed the notion of all religions existing "within the shelter of God's grace" to explain why Christians share their resources with their fellow Muslims.

Challenges today

Apart from ecclesial, theological and cultural legacies, our situation as faith communities today is also considerably influenced by global developments. We witness different forms of religious resurgence: religious beliefs are being instrumentalized for political interests, religious identities are driven by fear of the other and radicalized, and faith has become a product on an highly competitive religious market. Next to these negative developments, however, we find also positive aspects of religious resurgence: an intensified search for meaningful religious belief and for participatory religious structures, a new quest for religions' potential for peace, locally and globally, and a source of hope in midst of all difficulties.

What is the church's contribution to society in the era of globalization? In face of terrorism and the war against terror, the notion of security is becoming much vaunted in Asia. Also for the churches, who are often in a minority situation, global security plays an important role. Barriers between communities are enforced in order to protect their identity. In the face of such developments, there is an urgent need for theological

[12] See Sumartana, *op. cit.* (note 9), pp. 149–150.

reflection that asks deeper questions about identity and the human condition. Where the vulnerability and fragility of the human being are denied, we have to speak out and challenge this attitude. At the same time, we have to be a communion where fragile and vulnerable people find consolation and where those in despair find a home. Our churches need to be close to people's lives, in their pain and in their joys.

As many churches still reflect much of the ethnic or class partition in their societies, they need seriously to think about how to address the social fragmentation in society. Religious activities need to become engaged with societal life and with changing unjust conditions. There is a need for churches to be committed agents in civil society and part of a movement that nurtures social hope. The situation of our societies and the human being is very complex today. We need other religions in order to comprehend our humanity in a more holistic way.

Hospitality in the Context of Interfaith Relations

Hazel O. Ayanga

Introduction

The world in which we live today is one of exponential change. We have become each other's neighbor in ways that a few years ago were not possible. We are in contact with one another without necessarily having to leave our living rooms or offices. We can do business, argue, agree or disagree without ever seeing the person with whom we are conversing. This neighborliness is a result of globalization.

Economics, politics and the entire spectrum of human relationships are understood and interpreted within the framework of globalization, a process involving power politics and economics. But more than anything else, globalization involves a restructuring of relationships between people who have suddenly been thrust into close proximity with one another. In many cases, this proximity is virtual, via the Internet, mobile phone, radio and television. But people are also forced to live, work and spend leisure time together. We often spend the whole day, sometimes late into the night, with our virtual neighbors. This global village is not specific to people of the same religious persuasion and thus, people of different faith traditions and worldviews find themselves rubbing shoulders on a daily basis.

The theological challenge is obvious. How do we relate to those whom we perceive to be different from ourselves? Can we dialogue with our neighbors of different religions and faiths? In the context of globalization, interfaith dialogue and relations become crucial.

Interfaith relations and identity

One of the major fears people of different faiths face when they come together is the possible loss of identity. The fear is valid because often the desire to convert is mistakenly interpreted as dialogue. Thus, in Christian–Muslim relations, Muslims are often afraid that the Christians' major aim is con-

version rather than conversation. Their fear has been validated on many occasions and has often led to the rejection of dialogue. In Kenya, as in other parts of the world, Muslim children have felt uncomfortable going to Christian schools because they were often asked to conform to Christian ways of behavior. In this way, they are actually being asked to renounce their Muslim identity. Inadvertently, the children are being taught that there is something wrong with the Islamic way of dressing and behaving. Christian children acquire a superiority complex which is unhealthy for any interfaith relations and dialogue. The same can happen to Christian children who for one reason or another attend Islamic educational institutions.

Situations such as these prevent both Muslim and Christian children from having open fruitful relations with one another, already at an early age. Having knowledge of and understanding the other are basic to interfaith relations. It is in knowing and understanding that we keep our identity and help others to keep theirs. How can the stranger (the person of a different faith) be defined? Is it they who must change and become like us? We will return to these questions later. Suffice it to say that identity based on proper knowledge and understanding should not be threatened by interfaith relations.

There are ways in which the community of faith assumes that those "outside" are already doomed and are heading for total destruction. In this respect, Christine Pohl's words are of a great challenge.

> Christians have a significant stake in being able to maintain distinctions while not allowing differences to be translated into liabilities in terms of basic rights, entitlements and protection.[1]

Christians need to be careful not to try to turn strangers into Christians before welcoming them to the dialogue table.

In interfaith relations, it may be important to recognize and emphasize that we share a basic human identity. In interfaith as in ecumenical relations, can we start from the basic premise that we are all human beings and that, from the biblical perspective, we are all equal in the image of God? It is necessary that we keep in mind another common identity that we share, namely that we are all strangers on earth, seeking a better and eternal home.

Interfaith relations are about sustaining our identity while recognizing the other and welcoming them in our midst with respect and empathy.

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[1] Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), pp. 82–83.

Being able to balance the tension between keeping and protecting our identity and respecting the other person's identity is key in interfaith relations. It is in this light that some of our questions about diversity and inclusion need to be examined. How do we keep the boundaries which create our identity as Christian communities while at the same time listening to and being open to those of different faiths?

This tension is depicted throughout the Bible. The story of Israel is one of separation and distinction as God's people. Yet, in spite of this, they are expected to welcome the stranger, the alien. Israel's history depicts the constant and lifelong tension between responsibility—loving and welcoming the stranger and remaining faithful to their calling—identity and separation. Christians are enjoined to be separate and distinct from those around them. Yet this cannot be at the neglect of the neighbor, the stranger and the needy.

Identity is important, but Christians are required to go beyond the boundaries to seek out those outside the circle. The moral of the story of the wheat and tares is that the two can grow together. In the final analysis God alone knows and recognizes our true identity. It is therefore possible to have interfaith relations and ecumenical dialogue without losing one's identity as a Christian.

Hospitality as God's welcome

Biblical teaching emphasizes hospitality to all including the stranger or the other. As pointed out earlier, the mandate to be hospitable is not given in a vacuum. It is based on God's own hospitality. The New Testament describes several incidences of God's hospitality to all human beings. The invitation to salvation in Jesus Christ is extended to all and sundry. It is based on God's love and grace regardless of who we are or what we have done. The New Testament tells the story of God's welcome to the banquet table (Lk 14:14). God welcomes all and sundry to the feast. There is always room at the table. Christians need to emulate this, constantly inviting others to the banquet table. Invitation is relational. It involves creating a relationship with the other. It involves dialogue. Christians therefore do not have an option. They are required to have a relationship and dialogue with those of different faiths and persuasions.

The story of the Good Samaritan is an example of the kind of hospitality that creates community by opening channels of communication even among strangers. Here we are confronted with a case of extreme

differences: ethnic, cultural and religious. But the stranger is the one who goes beyond the barriers of difference to offer hospitality to the "enemy" who is in need. The need creates the connection. The universal need to have a relationship with God should be the basis for our interfaith relations, the basis for our hospitality to fellow human beings.

Interfaith relations are necessary because they are part and parcel of God's will and purpose for human beings. The church needs to equip itself with a prophetic commitment to bear witness and extend hospitality.[2] Although the practice of hospitality is a mandate, in the context of interfaith relations, the practice faces many challenges. One such challenge has to do with our identity, which we have discussed above, and our community.

Hospitality as respect and recognition

For interfaith relations to work, they need to be carried out in the context of hospitality and include respect and recognition. For Christians, respecting the faith and practice of people of other faiths is very difficult because of the normative classification of religion Christians constantly engage in. Based on the truth claims of one's own faith, this is the process which classifies religion as either true or false. However important this might be, we cannot take this as a starting point for interfaith relations and dialogue.

A few years ago, a colleague was bereaved. The whole department went to console him and was at the burial service. Some of us were not Christians, but very close friends of our bereaved colleague. The other people at the funeral were aware of this. One of the speakers was not ready to be hospitable or kind. He said that if he were to find a Muslim in heaven, he would wage war against God! This was not only in bad taste, but it was later to affect the friendship between our colleague and our non-Christian friends. It made it difficult or even impossible for them to discuss matters of faith, essentially closing the door to any dialogue that might have resulted from the friendship.

It is necessary that we recognize the struggles of people of other faiths to know God, even if it may be difficult to respect and recognize other people's faith. This is because matters of faith are generally very close to the heart. Each one believes that their particular faith is the true one. For this reason, we find it hard to see the other person's point of view. So how

[2] Christie Cozad Neuger, *Counseling Women: A Narrative, Pastoral Approach* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2001), pp. 104–105.

then can we have meaningful relations? I suggest that we try to employ a phenomenological approach. Two concepts in phenomenology are particularly helpful in interfaith relations and indeed in any other type of relations, viz. the reduction and performance of empathetic interpolation.

Reduction is the ability to bracket out questions of truth and reality in order to concentrate on the question of meaning. In other words, we can concentrate on what the faith of the other person means to them rather than on whether it is true or not. Whether what they believe in is real or whether it exists out there can be bracketed out.[3] This attitude can help us to create an atmosphere of respect and recognition for the other person's point of view without necessarily trying to win them over, or without ourselves being won over to the other side.

Empathetic interpolation refers to the observer's or researcher's ability to see things from the perspective of the believer. This is the result of the ability to bracket out our own previously held ideas and prejudices about other religions and those who practice them. This makes room for objectivity and respect for opposing views and beliefs without passing judgment. Both bracketing out and empathetic interpolation enable us to look at the other person on an "as is" basis rather than on the basis of what they ought to be or what they could become.

These two concepts have been criticized as being unrealistic. The criticism is valid to the extent that one cannot completely bracket out their past experiences, which inform their value judgments and prejudices. Nevertheless, if practiced seriously, they can help us to be respectful and mindful of what other people hold dear and sacred. Putting into practice these concepts can lead to tolerance, a theological concept emphasized throughout Scripture. The parables of Jesus constantly emphasize the need to tolerate one another until the end of time.

Hospitality as an expression of faith

In recognizing and emulating hospitality as God's welcome, the Christian expresses faith and hope in the final outcome of God's activity among human beings. In other words, the Christian believer is expressing faith in the

[3] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Introduction to Phenomenology," in Joseph Dabney Bettis (ed.), *Phenomenology of Religion: Eight Modern Descriptions of the Essence of Religion* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 8.

eschatological reality[4] which God has promised and towards which we must all strive. Hebrews 11:1 describes faith as the evidence of things hoped for. It is the certainty that what we hope for is waiting for us even though we cannot see it up ahead. In other words, by being hospitable and welcoming others to our church and community we are playing out what God has already done in Jesus Christ, but also what we anticipate that God will do in the future.

For this reason, we dare not shut the door to any one; we dare not close our boundaries. In our immediate experience, we may not see this happening; we may even wonder whether it will ever happen. But faith based on Scripture tells us that God will indeed bring together people from different nations, cultures and persuasions to the eschatological table prepared from the beginning of time. The gospels constantly show that it is dangerous for Christians to assume that they know God's mind in relation to those of different faiths. As Letty Russell puts it, "there is a reversal of our expectations about who is invited to God's eschatological banquet." [5]

Conclusion

More so than during any other period in history, interfaith relations are required, in fact they are thrust upon us. The church therefore needs to find ways and means of making such relations both useful and meaningful for those involved. I have suggested that such relations can only make sense if they are carried out in the context of the age-old biblical mandate of hospitality that must go beyond the sharing of food and other necessities among people of similar faith traditions. In biblical terms, meaningful hospitality is one that is extended to the stranger, the one who is not of the household of faith. Hospitality should be based on mutual respect and recognition of the other person's faith and meaning systems. It must be based on love for the other and not on criticism and condemnation.

Biblical hospitality involves hope that is based on faith in God's goodness and mercy for all who seek to know and love God. Just as God has welcomed us to love and serve, so we must welcome others who are partners with us in the struggle. God has the final word, we are there to serve, to love and to hope.

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[4] Letty M. Russell, *Church in the Round; Feminist Interpretation of the Church* (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993), p. 150.

[5] *Ibid.*

Interfaith Encounter in a Multireligious Society

Göran Gunner

Many years ago, I was watching the Olympic Games on television with my son, who at the time was five years old. He was in the mood of betting on the winner. In the one hundred meter race for men, he told me, "I am sure the black one will win." When I looked at the runners, all of them, with the exception of one, were black; they came from the USA, Jamaica and Nigeria. But my son insisted that "the black one" would win. When I asked him to point him out to me, he pointed to the only white European runner since he was the one wearing a black outfit. I learned then that already at an early age we learn how to look upon and relate to one another.

Some years later I received an Easter card. The small card was decorated with a colorful Easter rooster and the printed text read, "Happy Easter." Usually I neither receive nor send such cards. But this one had come from one of the Muslim leaders in Stockholm. I was somewhat confused and decided to ask him why he was sending Easter cards. His answer was simple, "Because I have seen you as a Christian." We were partners in an interfaith dialogue group. Then he asked, "Isn't Easter the biggest celebration in the year for you," and when I agreed he remarked, "Then I just wanted to wish you a Happy Easter." I learned that he looked upon me as a co-religious person and wanted me to enjoy the celebration on "my" religious holy days. I was ashamed that I had never sent him a greeting during his holy days. Interfaith encounter must be reciprocal, even in the tiniest of details.

Maybe these are naïve examples. Obviously there is a need for deep reflection and to find ways of relating to one another in a religiously, ethnically and culturally rather diverse society. In many Western cities, numerous interfaith and intercultural encounters take place at the personal level. My next door neighbor is a Muslim, my children have Muslim and Syrian Orthodox classmates, one of their teachers is Jewish, the bus driver is Buddhist, or Christian, or atheist. My students belong to different denominations and religious confessions. As a scholar, a member of society and a Christian, I daily encounter people of other faiths.

Today, adherents of different faiths and people with no religious affiliation are part of Western society. This implies that interfaith encounter

is an integral part of the human experience. Here I reflect on some of the challenges multireligious societies have to face, referring mainly but not exclusively to Sweden. What are the experiences of religious communities in their contact with society and government? Will religious beliefs and values be problematic for Western society? These questions will lead us to the question of human rights and the freedom of religion.

From monoreligious to multireligious societies

For centuries, Scandinavian societies were homogeneous. The Lutheran churches were state churches, of which all citizens had to be members. Lutheranism was the glue that kept society together as one nation and one faith. Even if the individual Lutheran churches in Scandinavia have developed differently, as have the countries, the situation remains rather homogeneous.

While the Lutheran church remains a state church in Denmark and Norway, in Sweden, church and state were "divorced" in 2000. Nonetheless, the long-term connection between church and state, as well as the church's involvement in the creation of the welfare state have created close links between the people and the church. Today, 83 percent of the Danish population are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Denmark, in Norway 82.7 percent are members of the Church of Norway, and 75.6 percent of all Swedes are members of the Church of Sweden.

Like many other Western European states, the Scandinavian countries have gone from being mono- to being multireligous. Today, 200,000[1] Muslims live in Denmark, 70,000 in Norway, and in Sweden the figure varies from about 100,000[2] to the more commonly used figure of 350,000. There are about 35,000[3] Catholics in Denmark, while there are about 100,000[4] Catholics and over 105,000[5] Orthodox Christians in Sweden. The Jewish community in Sweden dates back to the eighteenth century when Jews were allowed to settle in the country and to practice their faith. Today, the community consists of about 20,000 Jews, the majority of whom live in the

[1] **www.religion.dk**

[2] *SST:s Årsbok 2006* (Sundbyberg: Samarbetsnämnden för statsbidrag till trossamfund, 2006).

[3] **www.religion.dk**

[4] *Op. cit.* (note 2).

[5] *Ibid.*

capital Stockholm. Of the approximately 13,000 Jews living in Stockholm, over 5,000 belong to the Jewish Congregation and eight hundred keep kosher rules.[6] About 3,000 Jews life in Denmark, and 1,500 in Norway.

Scandinavian societies have undergone a dramatic transformation due to immigration, refugees and asylum seekers. The aim of Swedish immigration policy is to establish a multicultural society, where all citizens enjoy equal rights, freedom of choice and a life in partnership. An "All-Over-Sweden-Strategy"[7] means that immigrants are settled throughout the country so that Swedes equally share in the related economic burden and positive experiences. Furthermore, this strategy aims to counter possible negative images. Since the 1940s, Sweden has developed from a homogeneous Protestant (Lutheran) society to a multicultural and multireligious society with about fifteen percent of the population coming from abroad.

By and large, Scandinavian society is secular.[8] A recent study carried out by the Church of Sweden's Research Department investigated religiosity in a small Swedish town, Enköping. Of the 2.1–3.9 percent of the town's population who attend a religious service every weekend, 1–2.5 percent visit a service in the Church of Sweden. The same number visit a service in any of the "Free Churches" (Reformed, Baptist, Pentecostal) and 0.1–1.0 a so-called "immigrant denomination" (Muslim, Eastern and Oriental Orthodox, or Catholic). Approximately thirteen percent of the population will pray every day, sixteen percent believe in a personal God and approximately forty percent believe there is something after death, but do not know what.

Who is a foreign believer?

A Swede who had converted from Christianity to Islam said that the day he became a Muslim, he also became a foreigner in Sweden. Society no longer considered him a Swede but as coming from abroad, since he was a Muslim and had taken a Muslim name. This is not the first time that someone was

[6] David Fischer, *Judiskt liv. En undersökning bland medlemmar i Stockholms Judiska Församling* (Spånga: Megilla-Förlaget, 1996).

[7] Tomas Hammar, "A Crisis in Swedish Refugee Policy," in Åke Daun, Billy Ehn, Barbro Klein (eds.), *To Make the World Safe for Diversity. Towards an Understanding of Multi-Cultural Societies* (Tumba: The Swedish Immigration Institute and Museum, 1992).

[8] Viggo Mortensen, "Mapping, Analyzing and Interpreting Religious Pluralism in Denmark, Europe and Beyond," in Viggo Mortensen (ed.), *Religion & Society* (Højbjerg: Forlaget Univers, 2006), pp. 47–58.

considered "foreign" because of their choice of religion. In the mid-1850s, Swedish society was Lutheran but a discussion had started about what to do with Christians of other denominations such as Baptists and Catholics who had come without the approval of the authorities. After 1860, it became possible to leave the Lutheran church under the condition that one joined a religious community recognized by the Swedish state. A small Baptist community in Dalarna, in the Swedish countryside, consisting of ordinary farmers applied to be recognized as such a dissident community. Permission was granted by the state and the farmers were labeled "foreign believers."

But it is not always necessarily a question of religion. Swedes of Middle Eastern background and belonging to the Christian Orthodox or Catholic traditions may experience being considered foreign, not to speak about Protestant Christians from Kinshasa or Addis Ababa. At the same time, people joining the New Age movements or Western types of Buddhism are not considered to be foreign. Most of those who join these groups are "traditional Swedes" and no one seems to regard the religion as "foreign."

Western European societies are still largely influenced by Christian values and traditions. If you were to ask the proverbial "man" on the street, they would probably say that Swedish society is not specifically Christian since they are not used to define society in these terms. It is just "our society" and it is Swedish. It is not a question of religion but one of culture. Yet people in Sweden who are not Western Christians look upon Sweden as a Christian society. For instance, the entire system of holidays is bound to the Christian calendar: Easter, Christmas and Pentecost are red-letter days when schools and places of work are closed.

There are ongoing discussions as to where to celebrate the end of the school year. The overwhelming majority of schools still use a church building for the ceremony on the last day before the summer break. In many places, a priest or pastor will make a speech and even if the hymns used are about nature and the upcoming summer they essentially remain Christian hymns. Many would argue that this is just tradition and that children are supposed to be present whether they are Muslims, Buddhists, Christians or atheists.

Advent and St Lucia are celebrated in schools and parents are invited to see their children dressed up as St Lucia (the Queen of Light), her attendants or as Father Christmas. With candles on their heads or in their hands, they sing songs, most of which have Christian origins. Almost every home as well numerous shops, public squares and streets are decorated with the star of Advent, angels and other symbols reminding the passersby that Christmas is immanent.

This kind of exposure to one religious tradition at school is being questioned. Since preschool already provides an opportunity for interfaith encounter, children should already then be exposed to the different religious traditions and festivals.

Christian students respond to people of other faith

Over the last ten years, I have asked students of theology attending a class on religions in dialogue and confrontation to write down their own theology and ideas on religions other than Christianity. Their answers included positions ranging from pluralistic to inclusive and exclusive views. The result depended very much on their personal situation. In systematizing their answers, a clear pattern emerged:

- The type of local congregation/denomination one attends is of utmost importance. What one has learned during one's formative years will influence one for years to come and even one's whole life.

- The more "evangelical" (in the conservative sense) the greater the tendency to use Bible quotations as answers; the more liberal, the greater the tendency to use life experience.

- Age seems to be important—the younger one is the more exclusive the perspective.

- Gender makes a big difference—men tend to exclude while women tend to include, which is combined with the age factor.

- Those with international exposure will tend toward inclusive or pluralistic positions. Those who have never been abroad tend to be more exclusive. The same goes for the exposure to people of other faiths in one's immediate neighborhood.

Ordinary Swedes, blue and yellow Islam and baptized Buddhists

Interfaith encounter is of mutual benefit to the people involved. Not only traditional believers need to reflect on the situations in which they meet

people of other faiths; others also need to consider their faith in the new setting, including those individuals who have converted to a faith other than the majority faith. They do not bring with them Middle Eastern or Southeast Asian culture but "traditional" culture. In Islam, for example, that would imply that Muslims coming from other countries need to join hands with those born in the new country. At the same time, they inevitably relate to the majority faith. The same goes for people from a Muslim background who convert to Christianity. The common language tends to be the language of the country.

The Church of Sweden Research Department's extensive research on religion and spirituality corresponds to other research conducted in this field. Generally, Muslim immigrants seem to feel at home. The Buddhists are mainly converts or people from aboard married to ethnic Swedes. Those individuals defining themselves as Muslims practice Islam to a complete, high or moderate degree. The majority will celebrate Ramadan but only seldom visit a mosque. They pray to the same extent as Christians, but Muslims believe in a personal God and claim to have greater religious experiences than people in general. They work longer hours than ethnic Swedes but earn less money.[9]

There is a tendency among young Muslims, especially those born in Sweden, to talk about a Swedish Islam, sometimes referred to as "blue and yellow"[10] Islam. They talk about an Islam that is adapted to the Swedish way of organizing life in society, i.e. democratic election of leadership. They sometimes look at themselves as a new force and distance themselves from traditional and international limits, wanting to be the Swedish face of Islam. They want to build up a solid religious identity, to be fully accepted in Sweden, their homeland, and to facilitate integration into a society in which Muslims must actively participate. They want to remain independent of outside influence and have therefore often refused funding from abroad, fearing that this might have strings attached. As a result, it has sometimes taken years to raise adequate funds for constructing mosques.

In interfaith encounters, it is important to remember that the individuals affiliated to a particular religion do not necessarily constitute a united entity. Buddhists, Christians, Jews and Muslims identify with different traditions, organizations and groups. In a Western setting,

[9] Kajsa Ahlstrand & Göran Gunner (eds), *Guds närmaste stad* (Stockholm: Verbum 2008).

[10] The colors of the Swedish flag.

they represent a cross-section of the community of believers. There are signs that an ethno-religious mobilization may be understood as a local defense strategy.[11] They mobilize for recognition, identity and survival. Some people's religious affiliation is only nominal. Different groups sometimes have only little to do with one another or might not even recognize the other as belonging to the faithful. Just as the majority population are secularized but members of the Lutheran church, possibly attending church for weddings and funerals, there are Muslims who are not religious or even hostile to official Islam. It is important for society as well as for people involved in interfaith encounter to learn how to differentiate between secular and religious Muslims.

Conversion, integration and rights

Conversions or the changing of religious status are sensitive issues especially if the question of majority vs minority is involved. In the late 1990s, the Church of Sweden carried out research on conversions. We know that some ethnic Swedes convert to Islam and that a few imams are ethnic Swedes, as is the chairperson of the Swedish Muslim Council. Some are university professors or young intellectuals, others have a Christian mother and Muslim father or are married to a Muslim partner. Although there are no official statistics, in Sweden the number of converts to Islam seems to be lower than from Islam to Christianity. Among the converts to Christianity, there are prominent persons and a few of them are working as priests or pastors.

Another sensitive issue is the relationship to the Middle Eastern immigrant churches. The Syrian Orthodox Church is the largest of the Orthodox churches represented in Sweden, all of which are actively involved in ecumenism and partners in the Swedish Christian Council. They emigrated from Muslim countries where they had suffered hardship and were even persecuted. When it comes to interfaith relations with Muslims, they often consider traditional Swedes as naïve and lacking knowledge about the Muslim faith and the "real face" of Islam.

Maintaining a religiously diverse society and enabling religious communities to live side by side is not a question of assimilation as is sometimes

[11] Åke Sander, "The Status of Muslim Communities in Sweden," in Gerd Nonneman, Tim Niblock and Bogdan Szajkowski (eds), *Muslim Communities in the New Europe* (Reading: Ithaca Press, 1996).

supposed by the majority population. If people's religious beliefs are not respected there is a risk that certain religious groups withdraw, isolating themselves from society and claiming to be the only ones who believe in accordance with God's will. I believe that properly functioning rights provide the key for successful integration, create respect and a climate in which different faiths as well as atheism can coexist. Citizens are ready to perform their duties in society if they feel that they have equal rights. In such an environment, religious communities can maintain their religious preferences and hopefully become interfaith bridges.

Human rights

It is assumed that in modern societies human rights are protected and respected by the state and not primarily by cultures or traditions, as was previously the case. Consequently, the state is bound to fulfill the commitments prescribed by the human rights instruments. Realizing and protecting these rights is not easy, especially there where citizens do not belong to the same ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious group as the majority or the governing body.

Occasionally, states as well as representatives of religious traditions have dismissed human rights as having "national and regional particularities and various historical, cultural and religious backgrounds."[12] But is this not a way of upholding traditional privileges and power structures? It is important to acknowledge that human rights are "universal, indivisible, interdependent and interrelated."[13]

Besides the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) are the most comprehensive catalogues of rights. Together they combine civil rights and relate to such issues as health, labor and culture. Other conventions pertain to racial discrimination, the discrimination against women, torture and the rights of the child.

Human rights constitute a dynamic body of laws and legal documents founded on the principle of the individual's inherent dignity, recognizing

[12] *Final Declaration of the Regional Meeting for Asia of the World Conference on Human Rights*, called the Bangkok Declaration, 1993, at **www.unhchr.ch/html/menu5/wcbangk.htm#I**

[13] *Vienna Declaration 1993* (section I§5), at **www.unhchr.ch/huridocda/huridoca.nsf/(Symbol)/A.CONF.157.23.En?OpenDocument**

the rights of all human beings to freedom, justice and non-discrimination. Each and every person will have the same rights in relation to the state and should be protected against the abuse by and excessive power of the state.

The human rights system presupposes that states are of goodwill and in favor of implementing these rights for their people. Yet, we know that human vulnerability, discrimination, the misuse of power and an unequal distribution of resources continue to exist. Still, there is no other alternative than universally trying to protect us as human beings.

Professor Abdullahi Ahmed An-Na'im, a Sudanese Muslim scholar and outspoken African advocate of human rights, says with reference to monitoring and evaluating human rights that

> Since we cannot be anywhere else than our own "home" location long enough, with sufficient resources, understanding of the local situation, and ability to achieve sustainable change, the best we can do is to invest in empowering local actors to protect their own rights.[14]

Civil society, religious communities and individuals must take human rights seriously in local settings.

The freedom of religion

It is necessary for religious communities and a prerequisite for sustainable interfaith relations that the following rights be protected: the right to religious freedom and freedom of belief (civil and political), the protection of freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of choice for the individual and a fair relationship between minority and majority.

In Sweden, freedom of religion is interpreted as meaning: first, everyone has the right freely to conduct their religious practices as long as they do not harm society; second, everyone has the right to associate with others taking part in religious meetings; third, religious services should not be prohibited but open to anyone; and fourth, individuals are not obliged to belong to a religious community at all, and are therefore protected whether or not they are religious.

[14] "Towards a More People-Centered Human Rights Movement," in Diana Amnéus and Göran Gunner (eds), *Mänskliga rättigheter–från forskningens frontlinjer* (Uppsala: Iustus 2003).

However, sometimes the government's interpretation of what it means to be religious does not concur with that of the religious authorities. For instance, if the religious act of kosher slaughter is performed in Sweden, the slaughter, even if licensed by the religious authorities, is considered a criminal offense and punishable under Swedish law which prohibits this traditional slaughter. At the same time, Sweden is proud of having what is known as absolute freedom of religion. Slaughter based on religion is not considered a question of freedom of religion, but one of animal welfare. The Swedish interpretation of freedom of religion talks about freedom for that which is central to a religion. If it is not possible to slaughter according to the religious prescriptions, the observant believers are told that this is not central to their religion. What the Swedish authorities have done is to exclude the question of religiously motivated slaughter from the religious agenda.

What matters are normative ways of interpreting laws. The fact that the Swedish reality of freedom of religion might be questioned by certain religious minorities seems to have come as a surprise to the authorities. What does freedom of religion in a society really mean? It is important that freedom of religion is not restricted to religious concepts but includes rituals and religious action. Freedom of religion and freedom of choice for the individual are important values.

Basically religion becomes a personal matter. This seems to fit quite well with traditional Protestant ways of expressing the faith, as it developed in a society with a state church. But what happens when the performance is not codified through the common history of church and state, when individuals join a religious community structured with religious beliefs other than the traditional one? As long as it follows the pattern of belief as an intellectual activity, there are no problems. Everyone is allowed to believe according to their own ideas. Since social or collective rights are not obvious, the idea of multiculturalism as equality, freedom of choice and partnership will be left up to each person according to their own convictions.

Respect and integration: lessons for religious communities and society

Living side by side demands respect. All people of faith need to experience that it is possible to be both a believer and a faithful citizen.

Religious communities may be regarded as mini models of integration. Places of worship, be they Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, etc., sometimes provide a space where race, culture, gender, age and country of origin do not matter. Some local religious communities, traditional or newly established, are integrated communities and constitute examples for interfaith dialogue and society in general.

The ethical dimension in religion may contribute to society in general. In a multireligious and multicultural society, there is a need to express a common value system without renouncing the individual character of each religion. In this respect, the ethical dimension of religion may have a substantial contribution to make to society.

The interfaith situation may help society as well as believers themselves to figure out the difference between faith and its cultural manifestations. It is difficult to differentiate between religion and culture and between religion and custom. Some may consider customs directly sanctioned by God. They allow no room for compromise and the custom becomes an integral part of their religious belief. For example, female circumcision is not part of Islam but rather a local custom practiced among Muslims and Christians. Hence, for society to prohibit this custom would not interfere with religious belief *per se*.

Religion can divide as it can unite. Societies may have adequate knowledge of what have been traditionally majority religions but usually not about other faiths. Religious communities may also lack knowledge of the other faiths, leading to misconceptions and stereotypical images of the other. Education is required if religions are to become uniting. This also applies if society and its institutions are to understand religion, and religious communities are to respect one another and live together in one society.

Identity and Faith Formation

Children and Youth Growing up in the Presence of Many Faiths: Implications for Christian Education

Friedrich Schweitzer

It is no coincidence that religious education has been one of the first disciplines of theology and ecclesial work to take up the challenges arising from the copresence of different faiths. Most likely, two parallel developments have played a role in shaping the awareness of the need to address these challenges. In many countries, the first encounter between children and adolescents of different religious backgrounds takes place in an educational context. When children enter preschool, or later, primary school, they are often grouped together with children from a given area or neighborhood, quite independently of their religious backgrounds. Consequently, educators—including Christian educators working in such institutions—are faced with the question of how to work with children and adolescents from very diverse backgrounds. They soon realize that education has much to contribute to establishing good neighborly relationships between different faiths. Moreover, they have observed how easily children seem to accept other children without wondering or worrying too much about differences, be they cultural or religious. It seems likely that by fostering children's openness vis-à-vis the other, relationships between different faiths in adolescence and adulthood can be improved significantly.

More needs to be said about children's and adolescents' views of the other than merely praising their openness. Through the work of developmental psychology and other contributions from recent research on childhood and adolescence[1] we have come to understand that children and adolescents have their own ways of making sense of things. They have their own worldviews as well as their own ways of constructing the world as it is called, for example, in constructivism. This also holds

[1] *Cf.* Friedrich Schweitzer, *Lebensgeschichte und Religion. Religiöse Entwicklung und Erziehung im Kindes- und Jugendalter*, revised edition (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007).

true for their faith and understanding of religion as well as their views on denominational or religious affiliations or memberships. The views and attitudes need special attention; specific approaches are required if they are to become good neighbors to people of other faiths.

There is more to this than only strategic considerations. Respecting their ways of viewing, constructing, or understanding other faiths has to do with our basic attitude towards them. In religious education, the plea for not treating children as objects but as subjects in their own right has resulted in a powerful reorientation of attitudes to education. Approaches based on children's rights, including their right to religion,[2] as well as their active and creative roles within the processes of nurture and education, have rightfully gained considerable influence in many societies and churches. Consequently, our starting point for thinking about children and youth in the context of interfaith relationships should not be the adults who deem it necessary that the younger generation learn about certain things for their later lives. Instead, we should start with the children and youth themselves.

In this article, I shall address the age span between early childhood and the late teenage years. As will become clearer in the following, many questions related to different faiths cannot be addressed without taking into account both, the stages of childhood and of adolescence.

Growing up with other faiths: family, school and congregation

Before experiencing the presence of other faiths in the educational institutions, children grow up within their families and often without immediate contact or exposure to the plurality of religions. Nonetheless, the increasing number of mixed marriages create a religiously plural environment. In many countries, marriages between members of different Christian denominations have become quite common. In Germany, for example, one third of all church weddings are Protestant–Protestant, one third Catholic–Catholic and one third Protestant–Catholic.[3] Denominational

[2] Friedrich Schweitzer, *Das Recht des Kindes auf Religion. Ermutigungen für Eltern und Erzieher* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2000); Friedrich Schweitzer, "Children's Right to Religion and Spirituality: Legal, Educational and Practical Perspectives," in *British Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 27, no. 2 (March 2005), pp. 103–113.

[3] Michael N. Ebertz, " 'Heilige Familie'–ein Auslaufmodell? Religiöse Kompetenz der Familien in soziologischer Sicht," in Albert Biesinger and Herbert Bendel (eds), *Gottesbeziehung in der Familie. Familienkatechetische Orientierungen von der Kindertaufe bis ins Jugendalter* (Ostfildern: Schwabenverlag 2000), pp. 16–43.

diversity has become part of family life. The number of Christian–Muslim marriages is still much smaller, with only a few thousand weddings per year in Germany.[4] Moreover, at least in the West, families no longer function as a safe haven where children are familiarized with the religious convictions that they will adhere to for the rest of their lives.[5] It is important to note that this is not due to secularization or a general loss of religiosity within the family. Contrary to earlier assumptions regarding the increasingly secular character of the family, today most social analysts maintain that families may not nurture their children religiously in the sense of church membership and the official creed of the church, but that they have not ceased to be committed to religious interests.[6] A family's religious interest and orientation tend to focus on their needs and priorities, for instance around the main events in the family life cycle such as births, weddings and funerals. In terms of content, "family religion," as some observers have called it,[7] is often highly individualized in the sense of each family member's individual project rather than a faith conviction shared with a congregation or a whole church. While this holds true for many Christian families, it does not necessarily apply to those from other religious backgrounds. Muslim families, for example, often tend to be much more committed to the formal teachings of Islam as well as to its implications for nurturing children.

It is important to bear this in mind when we think about the encounter of children from different religious backgrounds; such prior experiences shape their encounter in important ways. For example, this encounter may take on the following form: children from a broadly Christian background, who have only experienced some form of individualized Christianity in their families, come together with children from a Muslim background characterized by the parents' more or less strict adherence to Islam or at least by the parents' continuous attempts to transmit Muslim convictions to their children. We can also imagine a

[4] Regine Froese, *Zwei Religionen–eine Familie. Das Gottesverständnis und die religiöse Praxis von Kindern in christlich-muslimischen Familien* (Freiburg/Gütersloh: Herder/Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), p. 14.

[5] *Cf.* Friedrich Schweitzer, *The Postmodern Life Cycle: Challenges for Church and Theology* (St Louis, MI: Chalice, 2004).

[6] Albert Biesinger, Hans-Jürgen Kerner, Gunther Klosinski and Friedrich Schweitzer (eds), *Brauchen Kinder Religion? Neue Erkenntnisse–Praktische Perspektiven* (Weinheim, Basel: Beltz, 2005).

[7] Ulrich Schwab, *Familienreligiosität. Religiöse Traditionen im Prozess der Generationen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1995).

very different situation, such as a Christian minority in a predominantly Muslim or Hindu environment.

Whatever the situation, we must always take into account the concrete situation in which children encounter other faiths. Becoming good neighbors to people of other faiths manifests itself in very different ways and consequently entails different tasks for Christian education. Christian education should address the encounter of different faiths within the context of educational institutions, regardless of whether these institutions include some kind of religious education or not.

Since, by their very nature, Christian congregations tend to be religiously homogenous, they do not allow for encounters with other faiths—unless they make a conscious effort to reach out to non-Christian communities. In the past, in Germany, only very few congregations have taken this seriously. As theological rationales for reaching out beyond one's own religion are accepted, attempts to do so are becoming more widespread. From the perspective of Christian education, congregations should make a conscious effort to include children and adolescents in such activities, not only by having them accompany the adults but also by developing special programs for them. Such programs will be more effective if they are informed by what we know about how children and adolescents regard other faiths.

What do we know about the responses of children and adolescents?

The need to help children and adolescents to become good neighbors to people of other faiths is not generally accepted. In a number of countries, most notably the United Kingdom and Germany, heated debates are taking place about the negative effects the exposure to different religions might have on children and adolescents. Most often, such debates refer to efforts within religious education in schools to include different religions in the curriculum. While fears of syncretism and relativism have often played a dominant role in the minds of the general public, some religious educators have pointed to the important potential that the educational exposure to different faiths might hold for dialogue and the peaceful coexistence of religions. Most of these discussions have taken place at the political level. Empirical research on the children's and adolescents' responses is rare, but its results are quite interesting and deserve our attention.

In the 1960s, against the background of Piaget's developmental psychology, the American psychologist, David Elkind (1961–1963), traced the different steps or stages in the understanding of different religious affiliations—Protestant, Catholic and Jewish—from childhood into adolescence. His findings show that perceiving and understanding different religions are closely related to the general (cognitive) development during childhood and adolescence. For example, in their references to different religions, younger children tended to focus on very concrete characteristics that can be observed in outward behavior, while references to inner convictions come only much later. Another challenge was in differentiating properly between different categories of membership in order to realize that, for example, a person can be Irish without being Catholic, or Catholic without being Irish.

Elkind's pioneering work has not been continued by other Piagetians. The well-known American psychologist and educator, James W. Fowler,[8] for example, points to the applicability of Piaget's stages of faith development to the encounter between people of different faiths. However, at least to my knowledge, he has not studied this special aspect empirically. The same holds true for Fritz Oser, whose theory of religious development can be considered the major European version of recent Piagetian-type work in the area of religion.[9] In our own research,[10] which is mostly focused on Protestant and Catholic children, we encountered statements from children between the ages of seven and nine that fit very well with Elkind's earlier observations. In the first place, we were quite impressed by the ways in which children tried to make sense of the terms "Protestant" and "Catholic." Some of them maintained surprising theories concerning the question of how one becomes Protestant or Catholic. They suggested that the pastor would announce this after baptism or that it depended on what is written on the baptismal font. Others assumed that you could only tell when a child is two or three years old. Still others assumed that it depended on the year in which a child is born (in an even year the child will be Catholic…). Our first conclusion was that the children's and adolescents' views deserve respect because they are part of their general development and attempts to make

[8] James W. Fowler, *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981), pp. 172–197.

[9] Fritz Oser and Paul Gmünder, *Der Mensch–Stufen seiner religiösen Entwicklung. Ein strukturgenetischer Ansatz* (Zürich: Benziger, 1984).

[10] Biesinger, Kerner, Klosinski and Schweitzer, *op. cit.* (note 6).

sense of the world. Children encounter such terms as "Protestant" and "Catholic," "Muslim" or "Hindu," in the same way as other concepts or things that are new to them. Secondly, children and adolescents need educational support in their development in this respect. Their independent answers deserve respect but will not always lead to an accurate understanding.

Others such as Robert Jackson and Eleanor Nesbitt,[11] who worked with Hindu children in Britain, have pointed to the contextual nature of children's and adolescents' understandings of different religions, including their own. They found that the different contexts in which children grow up should be taken into greater consideration than psychological approaches have tended to do. According to these authors, the point of reference for understanding children's and adolescents' views on different religions should not be the body of doctrines maintained by these religions, but the way in which religion is actually lived by the people in question—children, adolescents and their families. In the case of Hindu children growing up in Britain, Jackson and Nesbitt have successfully shown how these forms differ markedly from their counterparts in other parts of the world. They are greatly influenced by the experiences of migration and living in the UK, but also by their families' patterns of life. As a possible consequence, Jackson[12] suggests that the concept of religions be dropped altogether. He believes this term to presuppose separate religious bodies or entities that do not exist in real life, at least not in children's and adolescents' everyday lives. According to him, only ethnographic approaches can do justice to religion in real life.

Some critics of multifaith religious education in the UK, or of interreligious learning in Germany, suggest that the simultaneous encounter with different religions could be confusing especially for younger children.[13] Our own research indicates that this is not necessarily the case if the commonalties as well as the differences between religions are clearly spelt out. Children need both: opportunities to develop a clear religious identity that can give them a sense of belonging, as well as opportunities to encounter other faiths in order to develop dialogical skills and tolerant attitudes.

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[11] Robert Jackson and Eleanor M. Nesbitt, *Hindu Children in Britain* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books, 1993).

[12] Robert Jackson, *Religious Education: An Interpretative Approach* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1997).

[13] For an overview of the discussion, see Karl Ernst Nipkow, *Bildung in einer pluralen Welt* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998).

Our knowledge of the ways in which children actually perceive and understand different religions remains very limited. Yet, it is easy to see that children have their own ways of making sense of the different faiths they encounter. Their interests and questions differ from those of adults and even more so from those in theology.

This also holds true for adolescents, although not in the exact same sense. Their views and understandings are quite different from theological expectations. Over the last decades, our own research as well as many other studies on youth and religion in the Western world have shown that religious individualization is what is most characteristic of the young adults' religious outlook and attitude. This concept should not be confused with the psychological ideal of individuation that refers to individual maturity in the sense of autonomy and independence. Individualized religion means that it is left to the individual what they want to believe and that religious affiliations and authorities do not play a normative or authoritative role. The adolescents interviewed often said that they "somehow" believe in "something" but that their faith is different from that of the church. They want to believe, yet find it impossible to believe in what the church teaches.

In a study related to religion and globalization,[14] we also made interesting observations concerning religious relativism. Religious individualization is not the same as relativism but they can go together. Many of the adolescents we interviewed believe everyone has the right to believe—or not to believe—whatever they like. Our interviewees tended to take for granted that no one should be allowed to interfere with this right. Accordingly, every faith is of equal value, depending only on individual preference. While this understanding sounds rather individualistic and relativistic, the adolescents we interviewed surprisingly did not adopt this kind of religious relativism for themselves. While advocating for attributing equal value to all religions they stated that they would not be prepared to consider changing their own religious affiliation. As one of them put it, "They have their faith and we have ours … everyone should decide for themselves … . But I do not say that it could also be right because then I would throw away my religion or my faith. I do believe in my God. In any case, I accept it [the other faith], it is okay but not for me."

Adolescents' views regarding different faiths have to be understood against this background of religious individualization. This has a number

[14] Friedrich Schweitzer and Jörg Conrad, "Globalisierung, Jugend und religiöse Sozialisation," in *Pastoraltheologie* 91 (2002), pp. 293–307.

of important consequences. Above all, we must reconsider the concept of other faiths. From a theological perspective, it is quite obvious what other faiths mean. The point of reference is the Christian faith as it is defined by its biblical foundation, its creedal expressions and doctrinal interpretations. For the adolescents, however, the point of reference is less obvious. Most likely, they will start out with what they consider their own faiths and, according to their understanding, this faith is not identical with that maintained by the church and theology. Sometimes the adolescents in our studies seemed to perceive different denominations and religions as agencies operating in a market type situation. The individual may or may not use their services. In any case, the adolescents did not feel that they were part of the church in a way that would be consonant with the assumptions of Christian ecclesiology.

At the same time, the adolescents clearly felt the need to make sense of the religious plurality they encounter. For example, when we asked them about Protestants and Catholics they spontaneously answered by referring to other religions as well. The copresence of different religions confronts them with challenges that are of importance to them.

Adolescents encounter religious plurality in special ways. In many cases, the presupposition for their encounters is not a clear religious or Christian identity but some type of individualized religion. Any educational approach to working with adolescents must take this presupposition seriously.

From this perspective, there is a clear need for additional studies on children's perspectives on other faiths as well as on adolescents' ways of making sense of the religious plurality they encounter. Christian education has been very slow to take up this task and to conduct the empirical research this requires. In today's world, becoming better neighbors to people of other faiths must include children and adolescents, their education in schools and congregations and be based on familiarity with their views and attitudes. We will hardly be able to reach this goal without putting more emphasis on empirical research.

Perspectives for Christian education

In this final section, I shall point to a number of practical perspectives for Christian education. In doing so, I shall draw on the previous sections. It should also be clear that Christian education is not the immediate

result of empirical observations but has to take into account additional theological and educational considerations.[15]

The most important insight is the need to be aware of the differences between children's and adolescents' specific views on other faiths, on the one hand, and the general expectations of theology and the church on the other. Obviously, it is not enough to take other faiths seriously in theology and in the church. We need to ask how children and adolescents perceive and understand other faiths and how they make sense of them. This clearly goes beyond the traditional understanding of the task of didactics. Doing justice to children's and adolescents' perspectives is not the same as simplifying them so that children and adolescents can understand them. Instead, it implies being prepared to encounter them as partners in dialogue—partners who bring their own perspectives, no less so than partners in the dialogue with other faiths.

We need to design a *quasi* curriculum of other faiths corresponding to different age groups, developmental stages and social locations. Drawing on developmental psychology, some educators have designed such a curriculum for religious education in schools.[16] According to this model, every age level should address certain aspects and questions related to other faiths. The overall aim is to design a sequence of consecutive steps that build on each other and, in the end, lead to an integrated cognitive and affective familiarity with other faiths. Each step should be designed in such a way that it will meet the needs and interests of the respective age group or level of development. Similarly, others have tried to describe such possibilities for congregations,[17] starting from meeting people from different religious affiliations in childhood and leading to more reflexive forms of familiarity in adolescence and adulthood.

Certainly in most Western countries, and possibly in many others too, adolescents approach other faiths from a position deeply characterized by religious individualization. From the beginning, we must be aware of this presupposition in our approach. It does not make sense to presuppose a clear Christian identity with adolescents who feel quite different about their own faith. This is also why in Christian education

[15] For the best overview of the German discussion on interreligious learning, see Biesinger, Kerner, Klosinski and Schweitzer, *op. cit.* (note 6).

[16] Johannes Lähnemann, *Evangelische Religionspädagogik in interreligiöser Perspektive* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1998).

[17] Fowler, *op. cit.* (note 8), pp. 172–197.

in the context of different faiths it is crucial to go beyond familiarizing young people with the respective teachings of church and theology. We have to design ways of integrating such teachings into the lives of young people in a way that makes sense to them. This implies that we need to identify the questions and contexts in which the issue of other faiths becomes of interest to the adolescents themselves.

As I have tried to show in my earlier work,[18] religious individualization is often considered a presupposition for religious tolerance. Many adolescents told us that everyone has the right to their own faith and that no one should be allowed to interfere with this right. Yet, upon closer examination, this kind of tolerance turns out to be no more than skin deep, and not based on any deeper familiarity with different faiths. Consequently, the adolescents' attitudes can hardly be considered an effective antidote, for example, against prejudice. This is why it remains important to put special emphasis on education for tolerance even in situations of religious individualization. Moreover, we should help children and adolescents to realize that, from a Christian perspective, tolerance is not an attitude that they should maintain in spite of the Christian faith with its claim to universal truth, but exactly because of this faith itself. It is easy to see that given this need for education for tolerance based on faith, models for religious education focussing only on ethics, such as the global ethics project designed by Hans Küng,[19] do not suffice. The more or less exclusive focus on such ethical norms as the Golden Rule, characteristic of such models, falls short of the questions relating to faith.

Finally, the need to focus on the theological aspects of the encounter with other faiths should be taken as a challenge for exactly those fields in Christian education (i.e. Sunday school or confirmation classes), which in many cases have so far not been involved with different faiths. These fields tend to focus mainly on doctrinal questions, often much more so than religious education in schools. Becoming good neighbors to people of other faiths should be considered an important task for Christian congregations in the twenty-first century. Children and adolescents should not be left alone with the challenges of growing up in the presence of different faiths.

[18] Friedrich Schweitzer, "Religious individualization: new challenges to education for tolerance," in *British Journal of Religious Education*, vol. 29, no. 1 (2007), pp. 89–100.

[19] Hans Küng, *Projekt Weltethos* (Munich: Piper, 1990).

Searching for Identity amid Neighbors of Other Faiths in Japan

Emi Mase-Hasegawa

Interreligious encounters are taking place, explicitly and implicitly, in all realms of society. Amid these encounters, people ask, Who am I? Where do I belong? Here I explore my own search for identity as a Japanese Christian woman.

Japan's indigenous faith is Shinto (the way of the *kami*/gods), which has its roots prior to 300 BCE. The animistic beliefs of primitive religion developed into a community religion with local shrines for household and guardian gods. In the early fifth century, Confucianism was introduced as a code of moral precepts rather than a religion. In the middle of the sixth century, Buddhism came to Japan from India via China and Korea. In the early ninth century, Japanese Buddhism promoted an institutional synthesis with Shinto. During the Kamakura period (1192–1333 CE) of great political unrest and social confusion, many new Buddhist sects emerged offering hope of salvation to warriors and peasants alike. Mutual respect and the coexistence of Shinto and Buddhism characterized Japanese Buddhism.

In the sixteenth century, Jesuit missionaries brought Christianity to Japan, which spread rapidly in the second half of the century. However, Christianity was strictly banned after 1614. In 1858, Christian missionaries were again allowed to enter the country. Along with the Roman Catholic and Russian Orthodox churches, Protestant missionaries came, including the first Lutheran missionaries in 1892. A third period of Christian mission followed after Japan's defeat in World War II in 1945. In 1947, freedom of religion was guaranteed in the Constitution.[1] Several new religious movements appeared, some of them based on Shinto, others related to certain Buddhist sects of mixed religious orientation. At this stage, Lutheran churches and educational institutions were established in the major cities of Tokyo, Kobe and Osaka.

[1] Article 20 of the Constitution: "Freedom of religion is guaranteed to all. No religious organization shall receive any privileges from the state, nor exercise any political authority. No person shall be compelled to take part in any religious acts, celebration, rite or practice. The state and its organs shall refrain from religious education or any other religious activity." *Cf.* **www.kantei.go.jp/foreign/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html**

Yet, despite Christianity's long history in Japan, according to a 2007 *Christian Almanac* survey, only 0.6 percent of the total Japanese population are Christian. Forty-four percent of the population are Buddhist and 50.3 percent Shinto.

Identity in the given context

Normally we identify ourselves with our name, nationality, gender and religion. My parents named me Emi, meaning grace and beauty. Mase is my father's family name, and Hasegawa my husband's family name. I am Japanese, with black hair, brown eyes and fairly yellow skin. I hold a Japanese passport, and I have the right to vote in Japan. I am a woman and mother of two children. I am a Christian, a member of the Japan Evangelical Lutheran Church (JELC), and I worship in Kyoto. Is this all there is to my identity?

I married while I was living in Sweden where, at the registry office, my husband's last name was added after my maiden name: I became Emi Mase-Hasegawa. When we returned to Japan with our son, I learned that parents have to have the same surname. I had to leave out my maiden name and was registered as Emi Hasegawa. I began to struggle with a sense of invisibility. Emi Mase suddenly disappeared as if she had been killed. I had to change all my documents. Moreover, in Japanese society, you are called by your family name even among friends. Suddenly, I was called Ms Hasegawa. I suffered from having lost my name, and realized my name implicitly carried on an old feudal custom.

Japan and Japanese are the "place" and the "consciousness" that confirm the identity of most Japanese. Normally, the word "people" is used to denote a nation, but ironically the Japanese can be described as a "race." Race is used for smaller groups such as tribes and clans, unified by language, blood relations (kindred), or a patron saint (*uji-kami*) belief. The latter half of the nineteenth century, the Meiji restoration, saw a kind of national union movement to center the nation on the family of the emperor. At the time, state Shinto was forced to become the cause of nationalism through the myth of "the same race." In this sense, race began to correspond to family kinship. Moreover, race can be a fiction that links people to their nation, which in turn becomes a religion demanding that people sacrifice their lives. Such extreme nationalism became a stain on Japanese history. Patriotism and race need to be carefully examined, lest they fall into the trap of ethnocentrism.

Along with other children of the postwar generation, I was taught that the status of women had improved, there was no disparity in income and

that girls had equal access to education. After Japan's defeat in World War II, Japanese women's rights were improved in legal and political terms. Women who had stayed at home, endured miserable lives and had been subordinated by men in the prewar days, stood up for themselves.

Only as an adult did I realize that unjustifiable discriminatory structures still exist in Japanese society with regard to outcast people (*buraku*), the indigenous people (*Ainu*), Korean residents in Japan and women's status in the family registry. Still today, the continuation of the household system is of vital importance in Japanese culture. When state Shinto was idealized during the Meiji period (1868–1912), the role of women as daughters, sisters and wives became subordinate. Thus, this tradition is only 150 years old. What has happened to the positive understanding of womanhood in the religio-cultural context, in which, according to a Japanese myth, Amaterasu, the sun goddess, ruled the country?

As a Christian in Japan, I belong to a very small minority. Endo Shusaku (1923–1996), one of the best known Japanese Christian authors, explicitly deals with this issue in his novels. He once expressed his agony with the following metaphor: being a Japanese and Christian, I feel like someone dressed in a Western suit which does not fit. All my life I have been trying to make it fit like a Japanese kimono.

Christianity (Lutheranism) was the religion I received from my parents. When I realized that all my relatives and most of my friends were not Christian, I began to question my own faith because I was "different" from them. This feeling of uneasiness grew stronger. I am a Japanese woman, not a man, and that cannot be changed. But why am I a Christian? I respect both the Buddhist faith and the Shinto way of celebrating nature and the ancestors. Yet, why am I a Christian? Christianity has had a long history of forceful, arrogant and imperialistic missions in Japan. How then can a Japanese person become a Christian with good integrity and self-respect?

Japan today is one of the world's leading economic powers and consumer societies. As a result, human care, gentleness and sympathy are forgotten. Social problems have emerged, including divorce, organ trade, prostitution and depression, especially among the young. Mental health crises are among the most serious problems facing society, and "mental health care education" (*kokoro no kyouiku*) is being promoted by the government. However, since in Japan religion and state are separated, religion plays no role in education, and people are reluctant to talk about religion. This is in contrast to South Korea, Japan's neighbor, where Christianity has had a far greater influence and played a significant factor in the liberation and independence of the South Korean people. In Japan, Christianity

was banned for 250 years during the period of national isolation (1639–1853); during World War II it was regarded as the enemy's religion, and after Japan's defeat it was seen as the conqueror's religion. Today, Japan is totally secularized; religion has little influence on the postwar generation.

Encountering my heritage

Japanese Christians

In Japanese Christian history, martyrs are remembered with admiration, but Japanese apostates have been forgotten. *Kakure Kirishitans* (hidden Christians) are descendants of apostates who maintained their Christian faith for 450 years. During the time of severe persecution (1617–1873), Japanese officials forced Christians to step on the *fumie*, a metal image of Christ or Mary, as a visible sign of unbelief and renunciation of their faith. The *Kakure Kirishitans* declared themselves openly as Buddhists, and denied Christ whenever the authorities questioned them, in order to escape suspicion. They lived a double life: Shinto/Buddhists socially, and Christians privately. During a cruel persecution of Christianity, the *Kakure Kirishitans* managed to survive in rural areas under the protection of a Shinto shrine and Buddhist temple. Since there were no pastors to administer the Eucharist, each community used different variations of idiosyncratic religious prayers and practices. The bonds in the community became very strong. In light of the situation these *Kakure Kirishitans* had to face, it is ironic that although their original aim was to keep their Christian identity and faith, they ended up with an extremely syncretic mixture of Christianity, Buddhism and Shinto. They admired a maternal Christ (*Maria Kannon*) who accepts the poor, despised and insignificant.[2]

In the nineteenth century, when missionaries were again allowed to enter the country, it was decided that the teaching of Christianity that had been handed down by the *Kakure Kirishitans* was useless, and their baptisms not valid. The urgent issue for missionaries was to convert them to "orthodox" Christianity. The *Kakure Kirishitans* were regarded as heretics and had to be reeducated in order to become true Christians. Some groups rejoined the Roman Catholic Church, others did not. The latter are despised by the former and called *Hanare* (detached or separatists). Nonetheless, they kept their faith as a custom and tradition, and handed it down to their children.

[2] *Cf.* Endo Shusaku, *Silence* (New York: Taplinger Publishing Company, 1980).

Those who reconverted to Catholicism started to build a cathedral on the top of the hill of Urakami, Nagasaki, which was completed after thirty years. Nagasaki seemed to be a place where Christianity could flourish. Yet in summer 1945, the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, only 0.5 km from the cathedral. The cathedral was completely destroyed. Eight thousand five hundred Japanese Christians were killed. More than 200,000 lost their lives and 700,000 innocent lives suffered from the painful aftereffects. People lost everything materially and spiritually. They asked, Can this be God's judgment? Why does the God of love appear as a God of wrath who destroys? So much suffering and pain are found in the history of Japanese Christians.

The cathedral was rebuilt in 1980, and today the remains of the bombed statues of saints today stand in front of the entrance to the cathedral. They were completed charred by the heat rays, and parts of the body, nose or head are missing. Miraculously, the face of Our Lady was found among the debris. It was placed in the cathedral, where she continues to long for peace.

Pain and suffering in Asia

I remember women in my neighboring countries, who live in pain and whose life scars cannot be healed. During the 1930s and 1940s, Japan invaded its neighbors, suppressed and exploited them and destroyed their dignity. I hear the pain of Japanese women and mothers who had to stand on both sides: being supporters and also victims of the war. As a Japanese citizen I hate myself for being an invader; as a Japanese mother, I sympathize with mothers who had to send their children to war as mere weapons; and as a woman, I truly apologize to women in neighboring countries, who live in pain. I am triply bound and I suffer. Is there a way for reconciliation?

Reconsidering Christian identity

Uchimura Kanzo (1861–1930) is a respected Christian who influenced post-war thinking in Japan. He strongly opposed the missionary motivations of dominance and triumph and believed that there is a spirit in every human being. The inspiration of the Almighty helps them understanding of the truth. Christianity comes directly from God, without any intermediary. For Uchimura, Christianity does not constitute church, dogma, theologies, bishops, doctors of divinities and foreign missions, but love.[3] He believed that

[3] Uchimura Kanzo, *The Complete Works of Kanzo Uchimura*, vol. 3 (Tokyo: kyoubunkan, 1972), p. 154.

Jesus Christ who was crucified explicitly represents love. Uchimura said, "I look away from churches, and look unto Jesus."[4] His personal conflict with missionaries and his separation from the established church led Uchimura to establish the *Mu-kyoukai*. This indigenous, "non-church" Protestant movement, sharply confronted Western, ecclesiastical triumphalism.[5] For Uchimura, church meant house of the Lord, the community of Christ, which is a personal fellowship of the Holy Spirit. According to the gospel, Christ tried to create a unique spiritual congregation, not on the basis of the rule of law, but on the basis of faith grounded in love. His non-church ideology rejected the clergy, hierarchy and the sacraments; it is Bible centered and depends on the inner light. He declared his devotion to Jesus and to Japan and lived as a Japanese Christian. His understanding of Christianity is expressed in his twin loyalties, known as the "two Js" (Japan and Jesus),

> I for Japan
> Japan for the world
> The world for Christ
> And all for God.[6]

Uchimura is often viewed as a nationalist because of his strong opposition to Western missionaries. However, with the above saying, he was radically challenging the idea of nationalism. Uchimura sees Christianity as each individual's personal relationship to God, regardless of where one is born, not as a triumph of one doctrine over another. The love of God takes care of the world. Japan and "I" are in relationship to the world, and Christ subsumes Japan into the world and leads us all to God. Thus, it is possible to establish an identity that transcends conservative

[4] *Ibid*. p. 50.

[5] Emil Brunner visited Japan in 1949. He was interested in the non-church movement in Japan which was similar to an idea of his own. Emil Brunner, "Die Christliche Nicht-Kirche-Bewegung in Japan. Gottlob Schrenk, dem Mann der Mission, zum 80. Geburtstag," in *Evangelische Theologie*, Heft 4, 1959 (Japanese translation in 1959). Although Uchimura's main idea was not realized, as the group later formed itself into a church, it was a church with no clear understanding of the concept of the church, having no connection with any denomination, no guidance except the Bible, and no regular pastor of the group. "It is the universe created by God. It is nature. This is the church of the non-church believers in this world. Its ceiling is the blue sky, and it is inlaid with stars. Its floor are green fields. Its carpets are colorful flowers. Its musical instruments are pine trees. Its musicians are the birds of the forest. Its pulpit is the top of the mountain, and the Holy Spirit is its only pastor. This is the church that belongs to us, the believers of non-church. The non-church is indeed a church. Only those who have no church have the best church." Uchimura Kanzo Zenshu, "*Mu–kyoukai-ron*" [The Concept of Non-Church], *Non-Church*, March, 1901, p. 1–2.

[6] It is engraved on Uchimura's gravestone. *Cf.* Uchimura Kanzo Zenshu, *Complete Works of Uchimura Kanzo*, vol.XV (Tokyo: Iwanami Shoten, 1993), p. 599.

nationalism! "Our citizenship is in heaven" (Phil 3:20), and "Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother" (Mk 3:35).

Jesus was a revolutionary. He broke with the Asian tradition of family bonds based on kinship by advocating a relationship based on faith. Jesus refused family veneration and strongly affirmed faithfulness to God. It was a major change in how family was viewed. Judgment has been passed on Japanese nationalism, whose unity was on the basis of the family, with the emperor at the center. But what of the new relational family based on faith in God? The church needs to become a "place" where people find a new identity, rather than focusing on maintaining its own authority, formalities, prejudices or patriarchal customs.

Metanoia

Faith is a gift from God. With faith, Christians can trust in God's grace and be obedient to God's teachings. With faith, Japanese Christians can understand their suffering and painful history in relation to God. God is justice, and God's wrath an expression of love.[7] God punishes people and seems to abandon them, but still God is gracious, loving and compassionate toward them.

Japan is the only country in the world that has been bombed with the atomic bomb. This experience gave Japanese Christians deep faith—aware of God's wrath and trials, yet still trusting in God's love. Faithfulness leads to hope, because even in life's trials and tribulations, one can trust in God's salvation.[8] With my faith, I trust in God's justice and salvation; because God's compassion/love works through human repentance, conversion and transformation. Tanabe Hajime (1885–1962) has explored the concept of *metanoia* in relation to the Japanese context.[9] Against the horizon with God at the center of the universe, Japan can only hope for reconciliation, because God's wrath is God's love. Continuously, the bombed victims cry for peace and ask the world to abolish nuclear weapons. With *metanoia*, I recall the meaning of Article 9 of the Constitution; I regard it as a prayer of all humanity.

[7] It is my understanding of Luther's *Deus absconditus* (Hidden God).

[8] Romans 5:3–5, "… suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given to us."

[9] Tanabe Hajime, *Zange-do toshiteno Tetsugaku* (Philosophy of Metanoetics), trans. by Takeuchi Yoshinori (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

> Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes.
>
> In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized.[10]

Only through *metanoia*, can past hatred be buried because it recalls how sinful we are and forces us acknowledge that we can trust in and hope for God's salvation. This is the loving theology in which Japan can find its identity and contribute to the world. God requires only love, the return of love and the love of peace. God does not ask for pain but for peace. Against the horizon with God at the center, the light of hope can shine through the errors of history. I live, move and have my being in the love of God. I find my new identity as a person, "I in relationship to God."

"Then Jesus told his disciples, 'If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me'" (Mt 16:24). Here I receive the courage to refuse to carry traditional racial consciousness as a Japanese woman, but to carry the pain and suffering of people. The cross I carry is for the recovering Asian community. The starting point is remembering, hating, agonizing with history as my own story and with *metanoia:* repentance in conversion and transformation.

Harmony in diversity

While in Japan Christians are a minority, they are spiritually actively involved in various social and cultural activities. As my faith places me in a minority position, I learn deep faith from friends of other faiths. In Japan, as well as in other parts of Asia, the concept of God is vague. The value of One God, One Truth is based on a monotheistic worldview. Yet in Shinto, people believe in the existence of "eight million gods;" the divine is coherent, but uncountable and unutterable. A lower case "g" is used, because using capital letters for God and Truth implicitly forces people to have the same value and one common goal.

In a plural value orientation, harmony in diversity is shared and the concept of God might be expressed as *mu*/emptiness/fullness/openness/harmony.

[10] **www.solon.org/Constitutions/Japan/English/english-Constitution.html**

Truth is "not one, not two." Consequently, people are tolerant of those who name the divine differently as *kami*, Buddha, or God. He/She/It is like an all embracing life force. Many Japanese go to shrines, temples and churches and worship—all of them without hesitation. They see no problem in belonging to two or more religions, and most Japanese respect individual religiosity and regard religions as dynamic entities that should be transformed with people and culture. This attitude toward a diversity of religious life is sustained in harmony with a plural value orientation. Harmony in diversity has played an important role in the Japanese religious and cultural environment.

A criticism of this Japanese pluralistic situation is that it appears that people are indifferent to the religion of the other. This needs to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, who can be so sure that one is the devotee and the other is not? Faith and prayer are means of relating to God that are personal, not accessible to others. Buddhists say, "If you meet Buddha, kill him." I understand it this way: "If you think you understand God, kill the thoughts." The divine reality is called God in Christianity and in other monotheistic religions and it is at the center of faith, yet God is beyond our thoughts and cannot be named or conceptualized by human reason alone. God is hidden, but responds and is revealed in relationship. Martin Luther taught us *sola fide*, and this is based on *sola gratia*—faithfulness in God's eternal grace/compassion. All believers have faith in divine reality, although with different names. Religious pluralism in Japan is not a theory, but exercised daily by people as they respect adherents of other religions.

Some years ago, in a paper favoring religious pluralism, I concluded:

> With the attitude of mutual respect, pluralists should recognize that they take the initiative to be the conductor of the orchestra. They can listen to others, and make harmony. The pluralist conductor needs patience and tolerance to listen to the different sounds and regard them all as unique, important and necessary to create harmony. At the same time, he needs humility. Under such a conductor, each player can seek his/her own sound in depth, and the music will be a celebration of diversity in harmony. [11]

After the presentation, a German theologian approached me and gently gave me some advice. With a smile, he said, "I love music, and I once wanted to become a conductor. Don't you think the conductor is a dicta-

[11] "Harmony of Diversity," is the title of my presentation at the international conference on, "The Pluralist Model—A Multireligious Exploration," Birmingham, England, September 2003. My paper was published in *The Japan Mission Journal* vol. 57, no. 4 (Winter 2003), pp. 259–269.

tor in the orchestra?" I was shocked to learn how people from different backgrounds perceive things so differently.

For me the conductor is one who brings out the best in each member of the orchestra. S/he is more of a servant. It is like a hidden God appearing in Jesus Christ. Today, I use the metaphor of polyphony, which I have learned from friends of other faiths. *Wasan* is a Japanese Buddhist chant in which there is no conductor. The monks sit in the big hall, chant the sutra and make glorious polyphony. I truly believe that through the work of the Holy Spirit, harmony in diversity is fulfilled in God's *kairos*.

Conclusion

> [F]or in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith. … There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:26–28).

The proverb "a frog in the well does not know the ocean" informs us that anyone can have a narrow view and be content with their own environment. Often this happens when one is materially fulfilled because the questions of who I am, when I live, what I need, where I belong and how I see are all that matters. It is an egocentric identity. Jesus taught us not to seek one's identity in one's belongings. In the process of seeking my identity, I found that there is no such thing as an identity as a Japanese, as a woman, or as a Christian. I finally found myself in relationships: with friends of other faiths, with history and with God.

God gave us a new commandment: to love one another (*cf.* Jn 13:34–35). The ministry of reconciliation (*cf.* 2 Cor 5:18) takes place only for those who repent and deny their ego because those become humble and only seek for God's forgiveness through grace and compassion. Tanabe states that "history is calling on people of all nations to practice *zange* (repentance) in order to build up societies of fellowship."[12] Faith indicates hope, the conviction of salvation. Thus, deepen your faith, do not blame others who are different, respect the dignity of difference and make harmony in diversity. One cannot change history nor others, but through *metanoia*, common ground can be found. *Metanoia* is a loving theology in which I find my new self, and which I serve, pray and hope.

[12] Tanabe, *op. cit.* (note 9), p. 296.

Women in Interreligious Dialogue

Christian–Muslim Dialogue: A Gendered Arena. A Norwegian Experience

Anne Hege Grung

In early May 2007, the Norwegian Muslim–Christian dialogue made the headlines on the BBC Web site[1] and in the Norwegian press. In the eyes of the media, years of patient and devoted dialogue among Christian and Muslim leaders, who had together respectfully and constructively dealt with numerous crises and challenges—cartoon crisis in 2006, 9/11, invasion of Iraq, recurrent incidents of islamophobia in Norwegian politics—had never been as newsworthy as the story of a cancelled soccer match.

What was intended to be an enjoyable end to a daylong conference for Christian and Muslim clergy ended up as a gender-political issue. The friendship building football match between Muslim and Christian clergy was called off after a row over the participation of women players. Two days before the match was to take place, female clergy who had been invited to be part of the church's team were told by the organizers that they could not participate in the football match after all. The reason given was that the imams had indicated that some of them were uncomfortable about possible close physical contact with the opposite sex during the match. At first, the organizing committee decided that the match should take place albeit without female participation. In response, some of the female players who had been refused participation told the organizers that if the match were to take place they would leak the story to the press. Since the match appeared to go ahead as planned the women went to the media. As a result, the match was finally called off. Headlines such as, "Imams refuse to play football with women ministers in Oslo" meant that the organizers had to face the fact that despite their good intentions and focus on dialogue and building community, the message that had transpired was that "Muslims oppress women," and that being in dialogue with Muslims means having to exclude women from certain activities.

[1] At **news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/europe/6628929.stm**

The Church of Norway has been involved in Christian–Muslim dialogue for the past fifteen years. In 2006, the Contact Group between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council of Norway played a crucial role in preventing conflicts surrounding the cartoon crisis from escalating. Globally, interreligious dialogue has become an integral part of the life of many religious communities and an established discipline within different theological frameworks. I believe that there is a need continuously critically to evaluate dialogue activities as well as their theological framework. Questions regarding who benefits and how and what values we want to promote in the processes of dialogue need to be asked.

The controversy over the soccer game can be used to illustrate how Christian–Muslim dialogue and gender issues are related at the level of principle. I am aware that in doing so I take the calculated risk of drawing even more negative attention to this particular story. Nonetheless, the discussions following this event are too important to be ignored. Calling off the match had provoked the above mentioned reaction in the media. While this situation was unfortunate for the organizers, I believe that the other two options would have been more detrimental to the current Christian–Muslim dialogue in Norway. One option would have been for the match to go ahead but without the participation of the invited women clergy. The other would have been for the match to go ahead with the participation of women clergy. However, this would have violated the integrity of the male Muslim players. In both cases, the integrity of the dialogue participants would not have been respected.

Traditionally, Christianity and Islam are patriarchal religions, although their traditional gender models are legitimized in different ways. Even if gender equality is embraced as a "Christian value" by some Lutheran and other Protestant churches, Christianity remains overwhelmingly patriarchal in its structures. Islam is also male dominated in terms of its leadership and perspectives. Consequently, when these two religious traditions enter into dialogue it is likely that, unless explicitly challenged, the open or more underlying patriarchal structures within the two traditions will be confirmed or even strengthened. This would have been the case if the soccer game had taken place without the participation of women. This is what happens if Christians entering into dialogue with Muslims silently exclude women from their delegations, which is a conscious or subconscious way of trying to adhere to an imagined Muslim custom of not including women in such events.

In the current Western political discourse, Islam is repeatedly linked to the oppression of women. The stereotypical Muslim man oppresses

women and all Muslim women are collectively oppressed. When Christians entering into Christian–Muslim dialogue try to adjust their appearance and behavior to an imagined stereotype, this indicates that the patriarchal structures within the churches have not been confronted, or that there is no awareness of gender and gendered power structures.

Including women is not enough to secure a gender perspective nor to ensure a critical view of patriarchy. Gender awareness and investigating gender differences are a first crucial step if we want to change religious structures and for the dialogues to become spaces where gendered power structures are being challenged.

Views regarding ideal gender models and roles vary among Christians and Muslims and across the two communities. It is important to remember that both within the Christian and Muslim traditions we find feminist theologians who clearly state that a change needs to take place within the two traditions in order to end the theologically legitimized oppression of women.

Interreligious dialogue as a gendered arena

The pressing question in Christian–Muslim dialogue is whether the patriarchal heritage is being challenged, or merely confirmed, and whether discussing such gender issues as the existing gender models in Christianity and Islam, is being avoided in order to prevent "unnecessary tension." Experience from the ecumenical dialogues shows us that this is what often happens. Consequently, the question arises whether the two dialogue settings, ecumenical and interreligious, are comparable. Ecumenical dialogues often seek agreement on theological points or praxis. Their starting point are different positions, their aim is in theory or practice (or both) to realize the unity of the church. Interreligious and interfaith dialogues are not subject to the same expectations in terms of reaching agreements or showing alleged unity. Differences are generally acknowledged and the aim is not agreement—at least not on "inner" theological matters. The acknowledged differences could theoretically make the interreligious and interfaith space more diverse and thus more open to difficult questions. However, this presupposes that these questions are articulated and discussed. The commitment to interreligious dialogue, its status and how it will be implemented are crucial questions. The dialogue space may be open but it may also be

more vulnerable and less binding for the participants. Interreligious dialogue can be seen as a tool for transformation at another level—as a space to try out thoughts and to get inspiration and new insights for viewing one's own and other traditions differently.

Gender perspectives on Christian–Muslim dialogue in Norway

Dialogue initiatives and activities in Norway include: encounters and discussions between religious and political leaders on different issues; a growing number of grassroots initiatives between people in neighborhoods or religious communities; collaboration between religious leaders at the local level, organized, ad hoc and longer term; academic dialogue which at present includes people from outside the country as eighty-three percent of the Norwegian population are members of the Church of Norway. Gender issues, particularly women's issues have been on the agenda of the Contact Group between the Church of Norway and the Islamic Council of Norway, which was established in 1992.[2] The group initiated a women's Christian–Muslim dialogue project, which in 2000 resulted in a book[3] written by two members of the group. Even if this publication did not explicitly deal with gender roles or had a specifically feminist aim, it recorded these women's experiences and gave visibility to women as dialogue partners. This group also dealt with such issues as female circumcision and forced marriages among some Muslims groups in Norway, taking joint standpoints against both. On the whole, Norwegian Christian–Muslim dialogue initiatives deal with specific issues rather than the more general analysis of gender roles and gender based power imbalance within the area of dialogue and the faith communities at large.

Most of those involved internationally in dialogue work are men—at least at the "higher" levels—reflecting the fact that most religious as well as political leaders are men. In her article, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions,"[4] Ursula King states that overall

[2] Leirvik Oddbjørn, *Islam og kristendom. Konflikt eller dialog*? [Islam and Christianity–Conflict or Dialogue?] (Oslo: Pax, 2006), p. 29.

[3] Anne Hege Grung and Lena Larsen, *Dialog med og uten slør* [Dialogue With and Without the Veil] (Oslo: Pax, 2000).

[4] Ursula King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions," in John D'Arcy May (ed.), *Pluralism and the Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions* (London: Cassell, 1998).

women are marginalized and excluded in literature on interreligious dialogue and, at the official level, in actual dialogue work.

Interreligious dialogue and equality

The values of interreligious dialogue are often defined as equality and understanding between people of different faiths. The need for dialogue critically to engage with current power discourses and structures is often emphasized. We also need to include the gender perspective. Christian–Muslim dialogue could help achieve equality and understanding not only between people of different faiths, but also different genders. The media coverage of the cancelled soccer match is an example of how newsworthy stories are which insinuate that "Muslims discriminate against women" and therefore may confirm the stereotypical image of Islam in the "West" where questions of gender are expected to create tension between Muslims and society at large. I believe that we need to work against all forms of discrimination, religious, cultural and gender related and initiate dialogues that are truly inclusive. Only in this way can dialogues obtain the broad legitimacy they need, among women and men in the churches and mosques.

The Discourse at the Margins: A Feminist Approach to Religious Plurality

Helene Egnell

When women meet for interfaith dialogue, it is a discourse at the margins. In this essay, I shall argue that this marginality is not a problem, but an asset. The margins are a dynamic and creative space, where traditions can be reshaped and identities negotiated through the interchange of women's and other marginalized groups' experiences of lived faith.

"The margins is a good place for dialogue," so Diana L. Eck in a report on the World Council of Churches' consultation on women and interfaith dialogue in 1988 at Toronto.[1] In many aspects, marginality appears to be a central concept in the context of feminism and interfaith dialogue. I have found that interfaith dialogue among women is a discourse at the margins, making conscious use of this marginality.

First, women meet in the shared experience of being marginalized in their respective religious traditions, of being "the other." In my dissertation, *Other Voices. A Study of Christian Feminist Approaches to Religious Plurality East and West*, I studied various women's interfaith projects and conferences. What characterized these initiatives was that a "common we" quickly evolved, based partly on the conscious employment of a methodology to create a safe space through building relations, partly on the shared experience of being marginalized by patriarchal religious traditions and on the critique against and commitment to changing these traditions.

Second, marginalized religious groups are part of the dialogue. The 1988 WCC conference in Toronto was maybe not the first to involve Native American religious traditions, but it was the first do bring Native American religious tradition into multilateral dialogue and to bring representatives of Wicca[2] into a WCC interfaith dialogue.

[1] Diana L. Eck, "Moderator's Report, Working Group on Dialogue: 'Women and Interfaith Dialogue—The Experience of the Toronto Consultation'," in *Current Dialogue* 16 (August, 1989), p. 20.

[2] Wicca is a nature based religion found in various countries throughout the world.

Third, it appears that in interfaith projects involving women, the so-called "dialogue of life" is always present as a basis for dialogue. To a large extent, this is connected to the so-called "little traditions," or "religion as practiced," of which women are the custodians and which scholars and official representatives of the male dominated "great traditions," or "religion as prescribed," often regard as being marginal.

Finally, most of the women's interfaith projects I described in my dissertation are all but forgotten. For example, the great WCC women's conference in Toronto 1988 is not mentioned as a major interfaith event on the WCC Web site, and has had virtually no impact on the WCC's interfaith work. Every time women meet in an interfaith setting, it is considered a novelty, a "groundbreaking event."[3] This means that the experiences from women's interfaith initiatives are not taken into account when helping to facilitate interfaith dialogue.

Margins—borders

But marginality is not only accidentally an aspect of women's dialogue projects. First, there is an awareness of the need to bring marginalized voices into the dialogue—not only women's voices, but also those of other marginalized groups such as aboriginals, Dalits, the disabled and GLBT (Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender) persons.

According to one of the participants in the Women's Interfaith Journey, a project run by the Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, in every society there is always a "key issue" which interfaith dialogue must deal with. According to her, in the case of India, the key issue is the caste system.[4] Dialogue must take its vantage point in the perspective of the oppressed.

Second, and most important, there is an awareness that "the margins are a good place for dialogue," and that "the reach is not so far," as Diana Eck said. It implies that "the investment in centrist positions is not so great" as when people from the center meet in dialogue.[5] There is less vested interest in orthodox positions, less need to defend one's own tra-

[3] This is how in 2003 a program with women discussing interfaith issues at the Tanenbaum Centre for Interreligious Understanding in New York was presented—fifteen years after the WCC consultation in Toronto.

[4] Helene Egnell, *Other Voices. A Study of Christian Feminist Approaches to Religious Plurality East and West. Studia Missionalia Svecana* (Uppsala: Uppsala University, 2006), p. 72.

[5] Eck, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 20.

dition—instead a greater readiness to criticize one's own tradition. This is the critical part of a feminist theology of religions at the margins.

The margins are a very lively and creative area. For me, Eck's expression "the reach is not so far" invokes the image of the margins of two religious traditions as a border between two countries. People who live along two sides of a border often have much in common, perhaps as much if not more so than with people who live in the capital. The language often merges into a kind of common dialect—at least that is the case along the borders between Sweden and Norway, or Sweden and Finland. Interchange and commerce take place at the borders; some of it legal, some maybe not. In the case of religions, we can understand the "great tradition" as the capital, and the "little tradition" as the borderland.

Reshaping traditions

Postmodern cultural theories claim that cultures are not unified wholes, with clear borders, into which foreign elements cannot be incorporated without destroying the whole. Rather, cultures are in constant flux, constituted by the processes taking place at the margins, or the borders, where elements from neighboring cultures are tested, incorporated and changed in the process. So the borders are dynamic and creative places.

The same can be said of religious traditions. In *Theories of Culture*, Kathryn Tanner claims that Christianity, as all other religions, is constantly changing due to the influence of culture, society and other religious traditions. According to Tanner, "the distinctiveness of a Christian way of life is not so much formed *by* as *at* the boundary; Christian distinctiveness is something that emerges in the very cultural processes occurring at the boundary."[6]

Drawing on Tanner's reflections on Cultural Theory, Sheila Greeve Davaney claims that Christian identity is a common focus for engagement, debate over beliefs and interpretations, rather than agreement. This debate takes place within the boundaries of the Christian community, but "the recognition that humans are multitraditioned and, hence, don't reside neatly within those confines, that traditions are not utterly impermeable to each other […] all suggest that wider debate, with all its problems, must also be developed."[7]

[6] Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture. A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1997), p. 115.

[7] Sheila Greeve Davaney, "Continuing the Story, but Departing the Text: A Historicist Interpretation of Norms in Theology," in Rebecca S. Chopp and Sheila Greeve Davaney (eds), *Horizons in Feminist*

Although Tanner and Davaney do not have interfaith dialogue in mind, I find that their thoughts can be applied to this area. The boundaries of religious traditions are a dynamic field where exchange occurs and change is achieved. Today there is a conscious movement to transform religious traditions, of which the feminist movement is a part. All religious traditions are being reshaped by women, who often make use of the marginalized elements of their tradition to enhance the liberating, life-giving qualities of religious faith.

One biblical story, which is highlighted in both feminist theology and the theology of religions,[8] is Jesus' encounter with the Syrophoenician/Caananite woman in Mark 7:24–30/Matthew 15:21–28. For me it is symbolic that this story takes place in a borderland, "near Tyrus and Sidon." This is where Jesus meets a woman of another faith and culture, who challenges his understanding of his mission and transforms it.

Change, otherness and difference

Change is a key word in the areas of feminism and interfaith dialogue. This is closely connected to the perspective of marginality. Eck observed that at the Toronto consultation changing religious traditions were not seen as being threatening to women. Rather, it was seen as "normative"—the participants at the conference perceived that religious traditions are always changing, that this is good and that they were actively engaged in changing their traditions.[9] If interfaith dialogue from a feminist perspective takes place at the margins, or borderland, where the "little tradition" is in focus and one is aware of processes of change and willing to evaluate elements from other traditions, then it could be extremely dynamic and creative.

Another key word connected to marginality is "the other." Interfaith dialogue is basically about how I relate to the religious other. Women have experienced being defined as "the other" in many ways, also within their religious traditions. In our encounter with "other others," we can make use of this experience, which can be defined as an experience of marginality.

The concepts of difference and diversity appear frequently in feminist reflections on the theology of religions. As a feminist, one is aware

Theology: Identity, Tradition, and Norms (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997), pp. 213–214.

[8] For examples of this, see Egnell, *op. cit.* (note 4), pp. 220–221 and 257–258.

[9] Eck, *op. cit.* (note 1), p. 21.

that there is great variety within one's own religious tradition, and is ready to embrace this diversity. Feminist theologians are critical of those brands of theology of religions which either want to minimize differences between religions or reify them. Difference should not be regarded as a problem, but an asset in dialogue.[10]

Are the margins a good place?

We then have to ask whether the margins are really a good place for women, or if we are merely reifying our marginality by keeping the marginalized at the margins? Is it counterproductive to privilege the margins in women's dialogue? Privileging the margins is a form of epistemological priority that lately has been questioned within feminist theory. And from a postcolonial and postmodern perspective there is the whole question of whether we can really talk of a center and a margin—are there not many centers where different power structures are in place, and diverse places at the margins? Reality is complex, different power structures intersect.

Furthermore, we must question whether the women who take part in interfaith conferences are really marginalized? After all, they are literate, academically trained women who can afford to travel around the world. Can you choose a place at the margins and at the same time claim a place at the center?

I would like to answer those questions as follows. Whereas we no longer have a romantic perception of the margins as having an ontological status of giving the "right" or "true" perspective, we need to pay careful attention to the perspective of the marginalized. It is also true that reality is more complex: there is more than one center and one margin. The dynamics of women's interfaith conferences also reflect the complexity of center-margin dynamics. Women from the global South have pointed to the Western bias in dialogue. For instance, in the case of the Women's Interfaith Journey, Dalits forced Brahmin women to acknowledge their complicity in oppressive structures. While there is an awareness that some women are more marginalized than others, to some degree or another all women have experienced marginalization. This then can be the basis for being in solidarity with those who are more marginalized.

[10] *Cf.* Jeannine Hill Fletcher, *Monopoly on Salvation: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* (New York and London: Continuum, 2005).

My main point is that according to Cultural Theory the margins are a dynamic place. This is where renewal takes place through encounter: feminist theology, Dalit theology, black theology, are the creative areas of theology today. Therefore, in order to be relevant, interfaith dialogue needs to take place in this dynamic space at the margins.

Can the margins become the center? Or, is the renewal that feminism and other progressive movements stand for destined to remain marginal, and not allowed to change the whole picture? Increasingly, women step into positions within religious institutions previously denied to them. It is a slow process and the outcome remains uncertain. Is it possible to bring the marginalized perspective into the center without either distorting the perspective or becoming/remaining a marginalized "hostage"?

A feminist theology of religions needs to be developed that deepens the reflection about such concepts as "the other," "difference/diversity" and "change." With the help of these concepts, the learnings from women's interfaith projects can be analyzed and developed into tools for renewing interfaith dialogue and the theology of religions.

Reimagining Salvation and Hope

Rethinking Salvation: Christian Soteriology in Light of Interfaith Dialogue

Kristin Johnston Largen

Introduction

In 1953, Paul Tillich, one of the twentieth century's greatest Lutheran theologians, in lectures given at Union Seminary in New York City and published in *A History of Christian Thought*, traced the development of the Christian faith from the early centuries up to modernity. As expected, Tillich discusses in detail the controversies within the early church regarding the persons of the Trinity and the natures of Jesus Christ. Particularly interesting and relevant for us today is the way in which Tillich emphasizes that the question of salvation lies at the heart of the various doctrines. In the opening paragraph, discussing the Arian controversy, Tillich writes,

> The really decisive issue, its basic meaning and permanent significance, had to do with the question: How is salvation possible in a world of darkness and mortality? This has been the central question ever since the apostolic fathers, and it was the question involved in the great trinitarian and christological controversies.[1]

Tillich's observation serves as a helpful reminder that for the Christian church the doctrine of salvation was, and continues to be, a foundational expression of identity. It not only factors heavily into the theological differences that separate denominations today, but even more so, it continues to be a major stumbling block to interfaith dialogue. The simple reason for this is that any Christian understanding of salvation is tightly bound to a particular understanding of God, a particular interpretation

[1] Paul Tillich, *A History of Christian Thought*, ed. by Carl E. Braaten (London: SCM Press, 1968), p. 70.

of the nature and person of Jesus Christ, and a particular doctrine of human nature. Thus, none of these assertions can be simply abandoned, or even modified without generating the uneasy feeling that the pearl of great value has been lost. Yet, this is precisely what seems to be required of Christians when they engage in dialogue with other religious traditions; even the possibility of such conversations seems to put those all-important assertions at risk. It should not be surprising then that many Christians refuse even to consider the possibility of any religious dialogue whose primary purpose is one other than conversion.

However, such a solution is not without its own problems, which are themselves rooted in Scripture and the Christian tradition. Both these sources of Christian theology testify to God's redeeming love for all of humankind, indeed, for the whole of creation. This love, and the saving grace that accompanies it, are unqualified, eternal and boundless. One could argue that this universal love and grace are the primary message of the Gospel of Luke, for example. It is indisputable that God wills salvation for the whole world—God became incarnate in Jesus Christ for that explicit purpose—but once that belief is affirmed, difficult questions immediately arise. Does this salvific will include those who have never heard the gospel? Does it demand belief before it is efficacious? Does it automatically exclude faithful practitioners of Judaism, for example, or of other religious traditions? It no longer seems so clear.

It seems then that when Christians look outside their own faith tradition, they are caught between the Scylla of particularity and the Charybdis of universality. In his book, *Theology and Religious Pluralism*, Gavin D'Costa argues that the questions Christians raise about salvation and its relationship to other religious traditions focus on two seemingly irreconcilable axioms: first, the traditional belief that salvation comes through Jesus Christ alone; and second, that God desires the salvation of all humankind.[2] This seems to place a tension at the heart of the gospel, causing thoughtful Christians of all stripes to wonder if they must abandon the first axiom in order to profess the second, or if they must sacrifice the second in order to preserve the first. Neither solution seems satisfactory.

I shall argue that the Gordian knot these two axioms seem to have tied is not as hopelessly tangled as it first appears. Certainly, there are obstacles to dialogue with other religious traditions, particularly around the doctrine

[2] Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), pp. 4–5.

of soteriology. Engaging in interfaith dialogue involves a risk, namely the chance that long-held convictions might be seen in a new way, and unquestioned assumptions might be challenged. This cannot be avoided. However, the risk of dialogue has another side; loss is not the only potential outcome. Rather, dialogue with another religious tradition also offers the opportunity to learn something new about one's own faith, and to move toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of one's God; indeed, it offers a deeper affirmation of one's core beliefs, albeit in a new language. The fact remains that even in spite of the risks, interfaith dialogue holds the promise of great gain. In light of this fact, Peter Hodgson wrote that it is time for Christians to realize that other religious traditions "can also be an important resource for their own theological reflection, and can contribute to the very substance of Christian theology."[3] I shall argue that this is especially true when the topic under discussion is salvation. Furthermore, I would go so far as to say that a Christian doctrine of soteriology is actually deepened and enriched through the dialogue with other religious traditions. In that vein then I shall make a constructive proposal for a fresh examination of Christian soteriology that argues the following three points.

First, I would like to suggest that in a Christian articulation of salvation, the role of other religious traditions is not primarily negative. That is, given the Christian affirmation of the universality of God's plan for salvation that includes even those who do not believe in Jesus Christ, Christians are called to rethink their understanding of how God chooses to be in relationship with non-Christians. What this means is that Christians are not called to convert believers of other religious traditions, but rather to bear witness. Second, I shall argue that Christians can gain new insight into Jesus Christ's salvific work through the dialogue with other religions. That is, Christians can learn something new about their own faith, and gain a new perspective on their understanding of God's work in the world through learning from believers of other traditions. This leads to my third conclusion: in light of the gracious presence of the Holy Spirit at work in other religious traditions, Christians are called to a charitable attitude when it comes to interfaith dialogue. This implies trust in one's own truth claims about salvation, recognizing that this is an area in which God alone makes definitive pronouncements and hope regarding what Christians believe is possible for their neighbors of other faiths.

[3] Peter Hodgson, *Christian Faith: A Brief Introduction* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), p. 31.

Bearing witness

It is particularly appropriate to begin with the concept of bearing witness since dialogue between people, rather than theoretical comparisons of dogma, is inherent in the notion of bearing witness. This points us to the fact that when we talk about religious pluralism, the need for interfaith dialogue and the relationship between Christianity and other religious traditions, we are first and foremost talking about human beings; only secondarily are we talking about doctrines. Religious traditions are living entities and their meaning is expressed only in and through the believers who practice them, never apart from them. According to Gavin D'Costa,

> Religion involves *believers* practising, worshipping, theologizing, philosophizing and so on. Religions cannot be reduced to their founding event(s) or revelation, be it a founder, a text, or both; nor can they be reduced to a set of propositional statements and theories … . Whatever shape or form such community may take, the practising community and its traditions must be kept in the foreground.[4]

This reminds us that when ordinary Christians usually encounter other religions it is not through heavy theological tomes, but through personal interaction with friends, family members, colleagues, etc. Stanley Samartha, former member of the Church of South India and the first director of the World Council of Churches' Sub-unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, writes,

> The term "religious pluralism" is a heavy, academic concept which should be broken open to reveal the vast number of people and the faiths they live by. It refers to millions of *people*—neighbours of other faiths—who share the common life or community with us. We are bound together in the bundle of life. Our destinies are intertwined. Christians share with their neighbours of other faiths the struggles and sufferings of human existence no less than its joy and satisfaction. Our neighbours, too, have their answers to the mystery of life and the tragedy of suffering. These answers, developed through centuries, satisfy them; and they are not seeking alternatives, particularly in the Christian camp. In terms of spiritual depth, intellectual power, cultural richness, and social solidarity, they

[4] Gavin D'Costa, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 118.

> do not regard themselves in any way inferior to Christians. Despising the religions of other people and claiming superiority to one's own can sometimes be a form of racism.[5]

Interfaith dialogue is not primarily concerned with doctrines or institutions, but with people: the religions of the world have faces and names—a fact that must always be kept in the foreground, particularly when discussing salvation. This requires that in working toward a new understanding of soteriology, Christians must attend to the following two theological questions: Where is the place of people of other faiths in Christian theology? And, where is their place in relationship to God and to Christians themselves?

In the following, I shall expand on the concept of bearing witness in light of these two questions. I have been influenced by Tariq Ramadan, who in the chapter on interreligious dialogue in his book, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, lifts up one particular concept in Muslim thought that he argues could be helpful in furthering interfaith dialogue. This is the concept of *dawa*. *Dawa* is often translated as "preaching," "call," or "invitation to Islam" and thus, according to Ramadan, it has "come to express the missionary character of Islam."[6] Like many Christians, many Muslims view conversion as the prime goal of missionary engagement, but Ramadan suggests that the concept of *dawa* connotes something different. Ramadan asks, What does it mean to "invite" someone into the experience of Islam? He proposes,

> to "invite" is first to "bear witness," as much by one's behavior as by the context and form of what one says, what the message of Islam is. It is not a matter of wanting to convert, because people's hearts are God's domain and secret. It is a matter of bearing witness, which is an invitation to remember and meditate.[7]

With this disposition in mind, he suggests some helpful rules for engaging in dialogue, not for the purpose of conversion, but for building relationships of trust, accountability and joint action.

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[5] Stanley J. Samartha (ed.), *Courage for Dialogue. Ecumenical Issues in Inter-religious Relationships* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1981), p. 89.

[6] Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 208.

[7] *Ibid.*

What might this understanding of bearing witness look like in a Christian context? I would argue that when Christians use the language of bearing witness, they are thinking about their own activity of telling the story of Jesus Christ, sharing the gospel message with others and testifying to God's work in their own lives. The term witnessing is often used in this context, and the meaning this term conveys is the act of sharing one's faith with another. Unfortunately, this act is closely linked to a language which, in a twenty-first-century context, is perhaps not helpful. I here am referring to such phrases as "saving souls," "counting converts" and "bringing people to Jesus."

This understanding of bearing witness/witnessing has been, and continues to be, a central focus of much of Christian missionary activity throughout the world. Often, the most vigorous arguments against interfaith dialogue come from those who are afraid that such conversation will replace the act of bearing witness to [that is, "converting"] another. A good example of such an argument is to be found in Hendrick Kraemer's book, *The Christian Message in a non-Christian World*. Although dating from 1938, it is worth revisiting Kraemer's argument, as it still holds sway among many Christians today.[8]

At the outset of the book, Kraemer writes, "Evangelism, or the witness of the church in relation to the non-Christian faiths, has therefore to be the main concern of this book."[9] In Kraemer's view, the act of witnessing has a very clear meaning. The main impetus of Christian missionary activity, which Christians must always retain, is "the certitude of having the apostolic obligation towards the world of witnessing to Christ and His new Kingdom."[10] In this context, bearing witness refers to telling the story of Jesus Christ and the promise of salvation, and necessarily includes bringing people to the Christian faith. Thus, Kraemer argues that "the aim of all missionary work has therefore to be the clear and persevering witness in words and acts to Christian truth and life and the building up of living Christian communities… ."[11] In fact, when we

[8] There are, of course, a wide variety of perspectives in missiology, and the view represented by Kraemer is by no means the only one; the theology of mission has come a long way since 1938. However, Kraemer's theology is still very much alive in the hearts and minds of many Christians today, and therefore still valuable as a point of comparison.

[9] Hendrick Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1938), p. v.

[10] *Ibid*., p. 59.

[11] *Ibid*., p. 87.

read further, we find that for Kraemer this expanding upon and enlarging the church is the only goal of Christian witness. He says,

> The conclusion we have in view is that the only valid motive and purpose of missions is and alone can be to call men [*sic*] and peoples to confront themselves with God's acts of revelation and salvation for man [*sic*] and the world as presented in Biblical realism, and to build up a community of those who have surrendered themselves to faith in and loving service of Jesus Christ.[12]

To be fair, in many places Kraemer evidences a genuine sensitivity to other religions and insists upon the need for "indigenization," so that the gospel message can be faithfully proclaimed in words and concepts understandable and relevant to lives and cultures very different from those of the Western missionary. He is respectful of the world's different religious traditions, and also humble when it comes to his own, recognizing the need for constant reform of Christian missionary activity itself, which too often evinces an illegitimate attitude of haughtiness and condescension toward those outside the church. Nonetheless, this attitude does not change the fact that for Kraemer conversion is at the heart of bearing witness, and belongs "to the core of the missionary enterprise."[13] Many churches today still consider this to be the primary, if not exclusive, understanding of Christian witness.

Let us now return to the concept of bearing witness as described by Ramadan. I find his definition of bearing witness as "an invitation to remember and meditate" very helpful. It reminds Christians that when they tell their story, the story of Jesus Christ and his impact upon their lives, they are not telling it exclusively for the benefit of the other, not solely for the purpose of conversion. Rather, they are reminding themselves of what exactly it is that they believe, and are taking an opportunity to reflect more deeply on their faith. In this way, the very act of sharing the story of God's salvific action in Jesus Christ draws Christians into further reflection on how salvation is experienced in today's world, and what it means to be saved in Jesus Christ. Thus, bearing witness becomes an act of genuine conversation and openness, mutual reflection and transformation.

However, I would go further than Ramadan here. The phrase "bearing witness" can also convey a different meaning, which complements rather

[12] *Ibid.*, p. 292.

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 296.

than contrasts the meanings I have described above. In addition to using the word "bear" to refer to that which we possess and share with another [such as in the phrases "bearing greetings," or "bearing gifts"], we also use the verb bear to refer to something we take upon ourselves—for example, bearing the burden of another. Here, bearing does not refer to sharing something of mine with another, but taking something from another onto or into myself. I propose, then, that Christians should modify their understanding of bearing witness so that it does not merely include the act of telling the story of one's own religious tradition, but also includes the act of receiving the religious witness of another, not only inviting one to share one's own perspective, but accepting the invitation to share the perspective of another. This, too, is a central aspect of Christian "witness" in the face of other religious traditions, and it leads us to a deeper, more profound understanding of "bearing witness" that is much better described as "an exchange of witness" between two faithful believers of different religious traditions.

> How does this relate to the topic of salvation? In my view, one of the central benefits of such an understanding of "bearing witness" is that it reminds Christians that they are not the only ones who have something relevant and significant to say about God's economy of salvation. As Christians, we confess that the God who saves us is the same God who created all things and called them good. Therefore, we can also affirm that God's salvific activity is not limited to those within the boundaries of the Christian church. Thus, Christians have something to learn from believers of other religious traditions about the manifestations of God's presence, the forms of God's self-revelation and the ways in which salvation is experienced in the world today. Through the dynamic power of the Holy Spirit, God is present in people of all nations, in all religions, by virtue of God's universal salvific will. As Karl Rahner wrote in his *Theological Investigations*,
>
> God's universal will to save objectifies itself in that communication of himself [*sic*] which we call grace. It does this effectively at all time and in all places in the form of the offering and the enabling power of acting in a way that leads to salvation.[14]

Rahner argued that this is true for all human beings, regardless of whether they know it or not, or confess Jesus or not; the fact is, it belongs to the

[14] Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. XIV, trans. by David Bourke (New York: The Seabury Press, 1976), p. 288.

essence of humanity to be in relationship with God. This makes dialogue with believers of other traditions of critical importance, since without an "exchange of witness," Christians miss much of what God is doing in the lives of God's people. Therefore, this deeper understanding of bearing witness allows Christians to expand their own understanding of salvation, and experience from others the creative ways in which God wills and works salvation, both inside and outside the church.

Finally, this understanding of bearing witness points to the fact that in terms of God's plan of salvation, the role of believers of other religious traditions is not primarily negative. Given the mutual transformation to which the exchange of witness between believers of different traditions naturally leads, Christians find themselves genuinely able to treasure beliefs that are different from their own, rather like a fine musician treasures the gifts of an excellent dancer. In such a case, the gifts are not compared to determine who is the best; instead, the exchange of inspiration, technique and passion sheds light both on one's own and the other's gifts, enhancing the experience of each without diminishing either.

Learning through dialogue

Let us move to the consequences such an exchange of witness has for one's own Christian self-understanding and one's own relationship with Christ. I argue that Christians can gain new insight into Jesus Christ's salvific work through dialogue with believers of other religious traditions. Instead of weakening or eviscerating Christian doctrinal claims, in interfaith dialogue, Christians are actually rewarded for their efforts with a deepened appreciation of who God is and how God has chosen to reveal Godself in the world. Gavin D'Costa says it this way:

> Christians through dialogue may discover new aspects within their own tradition which have either been obscured, forgotten or were never properly present… . Christians from many countries have offered testimony to the newfound depths within their own tradition and faith which had been, up to the time of their meeting with people from other religions, hidden or obscured.[15]

[15] Gavin D'Costa, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 122.

Since the Enlightenment, Western philosophy in general has accorded great privilege to the individual. The concept of individual selfhood has grounded not only important philosophical movements, such as existentialism, but also formative political movements, such as the American Revolution, which started in defense of individual rights and freedoms. Indeed, it can be argued that American society in general was and is founded on the principle of the individual. This emphasis on the individual has had important ramifications on theology, particularly in the doctrine of salvation. In its articulation of the doctrines of sin, anthropology and certainly soteriology, much of Protestant thought since the Enlightenment has emphasized the individual's relationship with God rather than the role of the community. So for example, in the twentieth century, Protestant doctrine evidenced an understanding of sin that was primarily explicated in terms of the individual's turning from God, and individual pride and self-love. It was feminist and liberation theologians of the late twentieth century who called attention to the inherent social and structural qualities of sin, and brought social categories into the definition of sin.

Similarly, the doctrine of salvation has also suffered from an exaggerated emphasis on the individual. In contemporary American society, many Protestant denominations focus on the individual's decision for Jesus, and ask the question, When were you saved? It is as if for this discrete individual there is a specific moment when salvation becomes a reality in response to their affirmation of faith. This view of salvation drives the popular *Left Behind* novels, which dramatize the Rapture with stories of families, friends and workers who are all separated in an instant, with some being taken up to heaven with Christ, and others being left behind to fend for themselves on earth. This vision of salvation would be impossible without an understanding of personhood that emphasizes unique and distinct selves, separate and detachable from one another. I argue that such a concept of humanity and the related understanding of how salvation is experienced have become such an integral part of much of Christian theology that they are no longer even noticed, and other alternatives are hardly mentioned.

This, however, is not the only way to view human beings—indeed this is not the only way to view the universe as a whole. For example, Buddhism has a much different understanding that does not have as its foundation discrete individuals. In Buddhism, the autonomous self is one of the most fundamental illusions of an unenlightened mind. Instead,

for centuries Buddhism has used two related terms to help practitioners gain insight into the true nature of existence. The first is s*unyata*, emptiness, and the second is *pratityasamutpada*, which is sometimes translated as "dependent origination." Both terms point to the same reality: the fact that every being is empty of independent, autonomous selfhood and only exists through its participation in a complex web of "interbeing" upon which everything in existence depends. What we call an individual, then, is actually only the transitory expression of a specific confluence of dynamic relationships that are themselves only temporary and ever changing. According to the Western mindset, we often imagine individuals to be like the building blocks children play with—Legos, for example: we can pop them together and pop them apart again without ever changing their shape; and they abide through time unchanging in form and substance. In this view of reality, the Legos come first, and what we make by putting them into relationship with each other—a car, a house, the Eiffel Tower—comes second. Buddhism describes reality the other way around: there are no individual Legos that exist outside of the relationships they have with each other; and they cannot be popped apart without radically changing their shape. The relationships between the Legos are what make the Legos what they are—without the relationships the Legos would not even exist. In fact, the individual Legos themselves are constantly coming into and going out of existence as the relationships which constitute them ebb and flow. An analogy is that of a parent and a child. The word "parent" describes a person, but in reality, "parent" is not an attribute of a single individual—the word requires a relationship, a relationship to a child. Without a child, a mother is not a mother, and without a mother, a child is not a child—you cannot have one without the other; without the relationship, the parent and child do not exist. So, in the same way, in Buddhism the whole world is seen to be deeply interrelated.[16]

If Christians were to adopt such a view of reality, what ramifications would that have for a doctrine of salvation? According to the Buddhist understanding of the world, a "left behind" theology would be impossible; there is simply no way to pluck one or two individuals out of the matrix in which they find their existence without fundamentally distorting who they are. This means that any doctrine of soteriology would have to

[16] For a more extensive treatment of this subject, one that is directly related to interfaith dialogue, see James Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), particularly chapters 2 and 3.

consider the social network in which individuals live, and wrestle with how salvation comes not just through one-on-one relationships, but also in and through families, communities and cultures. "Decision theology" could no longer be the exclusive means for describing how salvation is experienced; and the deep, wide work of the Holy Spirit in and through all creation would have to be contemplated anew.

This example certainly fits D'Costa's description of an "obscured or forgotten" aspect of the Christian tradition. A more relational ontology certainly has been a part of Christian doctrine for centuries, as evidenced in Catherine Mowry La Cugna's excellent treatment of the Trinity, and humanity's own fundamental relatedness in her book, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life*.[17] It is worth noting that with its emphasis on ecclesiology and the *locus* of the church as the place *par excellence* of God's salvific activity, Catholic theology in particular has in the last few centuries emphasized this relational understanding of humanity much more consistently than Protestant theology.

Clearly, Christians have much to learn about their own tradition from dialogue with other religions. The simple fact is that others often can articulate religious truths Christians simply have overlooked. Others can give Christians a new perspective on old doctrines that allow them to discover new truths and new ways of articulating the Christian faith. All this leads me to conclude that if Christians continue to try to construct a faithful theology in the twenty-first century without taking the doctrines and truth claims of other religious traditions into account, their understanding of God will be narrow and short-sighted. As a result, they will continue to miss important ways that God's salvific activity is present in and among God's people.

Cultivating a disposition of trust and hope

When dealing with the doctrine of salvation, it is right and good, I believe, to end with a theocentric focus, lifting up the fact that it is God who is the author of salvation, not human beings. Generally speaking, this is a good practice for all theological reflection, simply because as God is the primary declarer and revealer of God's own being, humans

[17] Catherine Mowry La Cugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

enter into the practice of theology exclusively through the open door of God's self-revelation. We do theology only through the grace of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Thus, anytime we speak about God's being, God's work, or God's relationship to us, we are responding to a prior invitation from God. This is particularly true, however, when the topic is salvation. Perhaps more than any other area of Christian theology, the doctrine of salvation, throughout history, has been distorted and misused by one group to exclude and demonize another, both inside and outside the Christian church.[18] This blind arrogation of a prerogative that is God's alone—that is, redeeming to eternal life and judging to eternal damnation—must be repudiated; and Christians must find a new way forward that allows them both to proclaim the gospel and hear the witness of others, while still allowing for the freedom of the Holy Spirit to work in the ways God chooses, for the ends that only God can see.

Toward that purpose, I would like to suggest two specific dispositions Christians can and should adopt toward believers of other religious traditions. These do not weaken the power of the Christian witness to God's salvific work in the world, but recognize and validate the power of the witness others bring to the table. I argue for a disposition of trust and a disposition of hope.

First, let me describe the disposition of trust. By this, I refer to the Christian's trust in the power of God at work for good in the entire world. This may seem obvious to Christians at first but, as history shows, it is a much easier attitude to cultivate in theory than in practice. Due to human sinfulness, humans continually turn from God and toward themselves, attempting to replace faith with security, things unseen with things seen. Humans become anxious about truths that they cannot scientifically prove, paths whose ends they cannot see, and surprising new discoveries that unsettle the view of the world they thought was fixed and unchangeable. It is much safer and far easier to delineate firm boundaries between right and wrong, true and false, adamantly refusing to let anything cross over—including God! Somewhere along the way in this course of action, however, humans stop trusting God and start trusting themselves and their own doctrines of who God is and what God is doing in the world. This, then, becomes not only an issue of trust, but also one of faith.

[18] *Cf.* Francis A Sullivan, *Salvation Outside the Church?: Tracing the History of the Catholic Response* (New York: Paulist Press, 1992), provides an excellent resource on the doctrine of salvation through the history of the Catholic church in particular.

In the world today, where the religions of the world exist side by side, Christians are called to turn again to God and to trust again in God's work and will. Cultivating an attitude of trust, Christians are free to admit that they do not know definitively how and where God is at work in other religions, because they trust in God's good will. Christians are free to abandon the need to pronounce either definite salvation or judgment on believers of other religious traditions, because they trust that God alone makes those determinations in God's great wisdom. Finally, Christians are free to let go, to stop worrying about what interfaith dialogue will mean for the gospel, because the power of gospel is not the possession of any individual Christian to keep or lose, but rather rests in Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection.

In these conscious acts of trust in God's will, wisdom and revelation, Christians will find that their faith is strengthened and that they have the courage they need to follow where the Holy Spirit calls them and see what the Holy Spirit shows them. As Peter Hodgson writes, "The deeper our faith in Christ, the more open we become to truth wherever and however it is revealed."[19] Without trust in God, Christians lose this openness to the movement of the Spirit in the world today and close themselves off from participating in the new things God is continually doing in their lives. In the conclusion to his recent book, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, Paul Knitter stresses the importance of keeping an open mind to all the different possibilities inherent in interfaith dialogue, and trusting in the promise of the new insights and understanding such dialogue brings. As he closes his analysis, Knitter addresses the reader directly, expressing the hope that at the very least, "the book has also convinced you that you'd better not try to build a fence around your standing place."[20] Trusting in God means movement, and when the Holy Spirit comes blowing through, fences just get in the way.

Finally, I propose an attitude of hope, a hope that is confident in God's mercy for others in the same way that Christians are confident in God's mercy for themselves. There are many different ways to articulate what this hope might look like. I offer two ways here. The first example is from Karl Barth's theology, which might seem like an odd choice in relation to interfaith dialogue. It is well known that for Barth, all religion, including Christianity, must be judged as unbelief from the

[19] Hodgson, *op. cit.* (note 3), pp. 127–128.

[20] Paul Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006), p. 239.

standpoint of God's revelation, which equally condemns all religions as sinful human strivings toward God. Barth argues that this is so because all religion represents human beings' attempts to justify and sanctify themselves. Under the guise of "religion," humans try to name, define and position God on their own terms, to satisfy their own needs and desires. Thus, Barth says,

> From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and willfully evolved by man.[21]

"Religion is never true in itself and as such … No religion is true."[22] However, for Barth, Christianity is an exception to this rule, but not because of anything in itself. Instead, the only thing that saves Christianity from idolatry is the presence of Jesus Christ. In light of Christ's presence in Christianity, Barth makes the following comparison between a justified sinner and a true religion: just as all humans are sinful and only justified by something outside of themselves so also all religions are false and sinful. Yet one religion has been verified by something outside of itself, and that is Christianity. For Barth, Christianity is a true religion by virtue of divine election, not by anything inherent in itself. Thus, Barth concludes,

> In spite of the lying and wrong committed, in spite of the futility of the means applied, God is really known and worshipped, there is a genuine activity of man as reconciled to God. The Church and the children of God and therefore the bearers of true religion live by the grace of God.[23]

Now, this might lead us to believe that Barth has no hope for anyone outside the church, since without Christ's presence, all other religions are futile and false. Yet, because Barth was convinced of the prodigality of God's grace and mercy and because for him this trumps all other

[21] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, vol. 1/2, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1956), p. 302.

[22] *Ibid.*, p. 325.

[23] *Ibid.*, p. 344.

theological categories, he also recognized that the divine election that occurs for each human being through Christ cannot easily be narrowed down or restricted. God has created each person for blessedness, to be "objects of the love of God," and this reconciling work of God's is ongoing. Barth uses the metaphor of an ever-widening circle of Jesus Christ and his community, which, of course, begs the question of how wide the circle will ultimately be. This is Barth's answer:

> It is His [*sic*] concern what is to be the final extent of the circle. If we are to respect the freedom of divine grace, we cannot venture the statement that it must and will finally be coincident with the world of man [*sic*] as such (as in the doctrine of the so-called *apokatastasis*). No such right or necessity can legitimately be deduced … . But, again, in grateful recognition of the grace of the divine freedom we cannot venture the opposite statement that there cannot and will not be this final opening up and enlargement of the circle of election and calling.[24]

Even though Barth could see no truth in a religion without Christ, because he knew the radical nature of God's grace that speaks a resounding "Yes" to all humankind, Barth could hold out hope that in the end, God's grace would triumph for all people, not just Christians.

Raimon Panikkar approaches the issue of hope from a very different perspective, one that is profoundly shaped by his own interreligious makeup, and his deep conviction that the Holy Spirit is equally at work in all religions. In a 1965 essay, Panikkar says that fundamentally the Christian is always an optimist when it comes to thinking about God's relationship with humanity, precisely because the Christian knows so well God's ability to create life out of death, raise a nation out of dry bones, and make a way where there is none. Thus, hope is an integral aspect of the Christian faith—but not simply hope for oneself. Hope that is turned in upon itself is not really hope at all, but another form of sinful self-love. Panikkar writes,

> If I hope in God and in God's salvation, my act of hope embraces, as it were, the whole world, or at least, the more it includes the world, the deeper is the hope; but in any case the act of hope always includes something more than hope in one's own private salvation. This would not only be

[24] Barth, *op. cit.* (note 21), pp. 417–418.

> presumption and blasphemy, it would also be a contradiction in terms, as it would not longer be hope in God, but mere confidence in oneself. If I hope to be saved not because of myself, but because of God, I cannot make any distinction between the hope that God will save *me* and the hope that he [*sic*] will equally save *others*. The act of hope in God is an act which hopes in God as the goal, end and aim of every being.[25]

For Panikkar, Christian hope is a form of resistance to evil and rejection of the false borders Christians put up to separate themselves from others. What's more, Christian hope is a powerful manifestation of love—love of God and love of neighbor; as such, it is not dispensable or optional for Christian faith today. Writing even more boldly, Panikkar argues that "to hesitate in believing in the salvation of the world or in the power of redemption is a sin against hope."[26] Hoping for others what Christians hope for themselves is a concrete way for Christians to love their neighbors who believe differently than they do. Thus, it becomes a means of cultivating a deeper trust in God and a deeper reliance on the work of the Holy Spirit.

Conclusion

I hope to have shown the great promise interfaith dialogue holds for the development of a twenty-first-century Christian doctrine of salvation. Through a deeper understanding of "bearing witness," a greater openness to learning from religious traditions different from one's own and the cultivation of an attitude of trust and hope in God alone, Christians can forge a new way forward theologically. It is a way that remains faithful to the gospel and also to the wider work of the Holy Spirit that blows through the religious fences that divide us, drawing us into new understandings of God and of the world. This is the aspiration; may we have the courage to strive for it.

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[25] Raimundo Panikkar, "The Relation of Christians to their Non-Christian Surroundings," in Joseph Neuner (ed.), *Christian Revelation and World Religions* (London: Compass Books, 1967), p. 155. In his earlier work, Panikkar went by the spelling "Raimundo." In his later work, he uses "Raimon." That is why I use Raimon in my writing, but cite him as he was listed as an author in 1967.

[26] *Ibid*., pp. 154–155.

When Abraham's Children Leave Home. Toward a Dialogue of Hope

Barbara Bürkert-Engel

The rediscovery of Abraham

In the realm of modern interfaith dialogue, "Abraham" is *en vogue*. The mythical trans-religious ancestor of continuous migration enlightens people of our times in such a way that they are able to transgress their own well-known self and to discover the other. Referring to Abraham as a starting point has been intrinsic to all three monotheistic faiths from their very beginnings. Yet, it was only under the conceptual umbrella of an "Abrahamitic/Abrahamic ecumenism," [1] that Jews, Christians and Muslims realized the theological potentials of a common origin and shared ancestry. Ultimately, belonging to the same family, deriving from the same seed, this "Abrahamism"[2] ensured and comforted many of those pioneering modern monotheistic dialogue, and became a source of inspiration for all willing to work for peace and reconciliation among religions. Since the 1980s, "Abrahamic" has been the *cantus firmus* of trialogue, at least in the West.

In Abraham, Jews, Christians and Muslims could recognize their specific faiths rooted in somewhat mythical pre-religious times, *prae religio*, at least a pre-Jewish, pre-Christian and pre-Muslim era, which introduced *quasi* pure scriptural monotheism into religious history. Abraham became the symbol of this innocent era. And he regained new life. In the words of Karl-Josef Kuschel,[3] one of the two most influential

[1] The concept can be retraced via Vatican II to Louis Massignon. *Cf.* Neal Robinson, "Massignon, Vatican II and Islam as an Abrahamic Religion," in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations 2* (1991), pp. 182ff.; Sidney Griffith,"Sharing the Faith of Abraham: the Credo of Louis Massignon," in *Islam and Christian–Muslim Relations* 8 (1997), pp. 193ff.

[2] *Cf.* Tarek Mitri, "The Abrahamic Heritage and Interreligious Dialogue: Ambiguities and Promises," in *Current Dialogue* 36 (2000).

[3] *Cf.* Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Abraham: A Symbol of Hope for Jews, Christians and Muslims*, trans. by John Bowden (London: SCM Press, 1995); Karl-Josef Kuschel, "Children of Abraham. On the Necessity of an Abrahamic Ecumene between Jews, Christians and Muslims," in *Convergence.*

German proponents of this new paradigm, "For a long time I thought that the exegesis on Abraham had reached its final stage. There was nothing else to be learned from these narrations. They were without any thrill, depth or call."[4] It was only interfaith dialogue that "made me reread the Old Testament and the New Testament sources, and I understood, that Abraham was of crucial significance to me as a Christian as well."[5]

The Abrahamic paradigm as a theological challenge

It is difficult to overestimate the influence of this "father Abraham" on those engaged in theological dialogue. Some of the opportunities and challenges of this new paradigm include:

- Exegetical studies have thoroughly examined the theological intentions of the Abrahamic narration, the genesis of their traditions and the specific qualities of the protagonist in the different religions. They have displayed a closeness and similarity as well as distance and difference between the respective scriptural sources.

- The duality of Abraham's two sons increasingly gained theological significance. The sympathetic way in which the book of Genesis preserved and narrated the stories of Hagar and Ishmael was acknowledged. Ishmael too had received enduring blessings and promises. The first-born moved out of his exegetical shadow, the "wild man" lost his negative connotation. In him, Islam was attributed a specific place not only within the community of Abraham, but also in God's history of salvation.

- It had been the one and only God who put God's name and blessing on both sons. Was there an inner logic then to acknowledge

Biannual Publication of the International Catholic Movement for Intellectual and Cultural Affairs (Geneva, 1999), pp. 34ff.; Karl-Josef Kuschel, "One in Abraham? The Significance of Abraham for Jews, Christians and Muslims Today," in Michael A. Signer (ed.), *Memory and History in Christianity and Judaism* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2001), pp. 183ff.

[4] Karl-Josef Kuschel, "Abrahamische Ökumene: Chancen und Risiken," lecture, 24 April 2002, Munich, at **www.freunde-abrahams.de/fa_dt/Doku/kuschel.html**

[5] *Ibid.*

that the same and only God was at work within the three different religions of this family tree?[6]

- The history of blessings given and promises made to Abraham and his sons calls Jews, Christians and Muslims into a community of heirs. Willingly or unwillingly this heritage binds them together. They can share in this spiritual heritage only by caring for each other's well-being and assuming certain responsibilities.

- The New Testament follows the genealogical line of argument from the first verse onwards (Mt 1:1), but supplements it with a spiritual one. Abraham's household is enlarged by spiritual children (Gal 3:3). Difficult issues and often acrimonious relationships with the Jewish people arose out of this argument in later scriptural exegesis and church history.

Despite the different aspects of the current debate, the concept of an "Abrahamic ecumenism" generally works along these theological lines. Now the genealogical argument is enlarged; the Abrahamic family constitutes the special and irredeemable relationship between three "sons," including the Pauline spiritual derivation. Genealogy is complemented and deepened by the spiritual dimension. Membership in this family proves true only by an Abrahamic trans-religious spirituality: to listen to and obey the divine call; to be willing to leave and to give up inherited theological certainties and to move into an unknown setting; to pray for each other (inspired by the mystical insights of Louis Massignon[7] regarding Abraham's three prayers).

The radiant Abraham: dialogue projects

Due to the radiance of the Abrahamic figure, different groups and dialogue initiatives have independently chosen this name to identify themselves. In most cases, they originate in the Western world: in France or Bosnia and Herzegovina, the USA, Germany or Spain, some of them reaching "back" into Abraham's homelands, the region of the Middle East. Examples

[6] *Cf.* Berthold Klappert, "Abraham eint und unterscheidet. Begründungen und Perspektiven eines nötigen Trialogs zwischen Juden, Christen und Muslimen," in Rudolf Weth (ed.), *Bekenntnis zu dem einen Gott? Christen und Muslime zwischen Mission und Dialog* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), pp. 98ff.

[7] Louis Massignon, *Les trois prières d'Abraham* (Paris: Cerf, 1997).

include the Abraham Fund Initiatives working among Jewish and Arab citizens of Israel and the Abraham Path Initiative projected to run from ancient Haran to al-Khalil/Hebron.[8] The "Children of Abraham," members of the Jemael International Network of Love, work for spiritual peace in the Middle East. Munich's "Freunde Abrahams" are evangelical Christians dedicated to the idea of a modern Jerusalem Council.

In the interfaith arena, "Abraham" has become a code. Festivals and summits, evening classes and retreats are organized in his name.[9] Abrahamic teams[10] make public speeches and offer interreligious programs. Abraham is well suited as a title for a compendium on the formation of interreligious competence.[11]

Interreligious variations on Abraham's dwelling require a certain measure of theological humor: The most recent Evangelische Kirchentag in Germany invited to an "Abraham Zentrum." In the US, "Abraham salons" were established as an answer to 9/11. Abrahamic enthusiasm tends to neglect the theological significance of the fact that Abraham spent his whole life in a tent and never owened an estate (besides the burial ground for his wife Sara). Today, nomadic Abraham might even get a house[12] of his own! *La maison d'Abraham*,[13] a pilgrim's hostel on the way from Jerusalem to Jericho, gives architectural structure to Abraham's hospitality. It is worth mentioning, that the Jewish synagogue in Vienna, Pazmanitengasse 6, was founded and run (until its demolition by Nazis in November 1938) by a group called *Aeschel Avraham*/tent of Abraham. This group sensed

[8] *Cf.* **www.abrahampath.org**. "The purpose of the Abraham Path Initiative is to open up a route in the Middle East retracing the footsteps of Abraham. Against the backdrop of conflict in the Middle East that has become a global symbol of intractable strife and despair, the path—with televised images of rabbis, priests, and imams walking together—will introduce millions around the planet to new possibilities for mutual respect. The initiative will serve as an example of a new mode of interreligious engagement, bringing Jews, Christians, and Muslims—and people of other faith traditions as well—together on the basis of what they hold in common."

[9] For example, Three Faith Forum in Great Britain; Abrahamische Foren (intercultural council in Frankfurt am Main, Germany); Abrahamsfeste in Marl, Germany.

[10] An initiative of the Abrahamic Forum of the intercultural council in Frankfurt am Main.

[11] Katja Baur (ed.), *Zu Gast bei Abraham. Ein Kompendium zur interreligiösen Kompetenzbildung mit Praxisbeispielen aus dem schulischen Religionsunterricht und benachbarten religionspädagogischen Arbeitsfeldern* (Stuttgart: Calwer, 2007).

[12] The German House of Abraham initiative intends to turn a former Christian monastery into a place where Christian, Jews and Muslims are welcome to meet and share their spirituality, at **www.haus-abraham.de**.

[13] It was founded in the 1960s by the Secours Catholique Caritas France, see **maison-abraham.com**

the dichotomy between a well-planed Abrahamic housing structure and the original cultural, spiritual and existential setting.

These initiatives demand our respect and thankfulness. In times of terror and a proclaimed clash of civilizations, they constitute an important contribution to cooperation and better understanding between religions.

Questioning Abrahamic approaches

Looking at different projects one can discern that in most cases Abraham came in second. He provided an hermeneutical bridge between one's own actions and the scriptural traditions. "Abrahamic ecumenism" functions as a paradigm, a theological construction in order to understand, to interpret, to insure and to inspire. Over the years, various aspects of this paradigm have been criticized.[14]

It is questionable whether the term "ecumenism" is really adequate or whether it is misleading as it is derived from a Christian context and refers to an intra-Christian movement with the ultimate goal of "unity in diversity."

From a feminist perspective, the paradigm argues along traditional, patriarchal lines, working on the basis of an exclusively male family tree. Consequently, women in dialogue are left with the option of either feeling included in the male pattern, with the help of some theological gymnastics (and we are well trained in doing so), or to bring in some female protagonists. So, Abraham and his two sons were joined by Sara and Hagar.[15] Yet, history has burdened the two women with a complex *Wirkungsgeschichte* (Saracens; hagarism). A fictitious account of Sara and Hagar[16] turned out to be theologically lightweight.

Though deriving from and aiming at dialogue, the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism is exclusivist. Arguing theologically within the framework of the three monotheistic religions (in an Iranian context, Zoroastrianism may be added as a fourth), it excludes per definition all other religions or religious

[14] For example, Tarek Mitri, *op. cit.* (note 2); Friedmann Eißler, "Gibt es eine abrahamische Ökumene? Zur Konstitution eines Begriffs und seiner religionstheologischen Implikationen," in Ralph Pechmann and Dietmar Kamlah (eds), *Soweit die Worte tragen. Wie tragfähig ist der Dialog zwischen Christen, Juden und Muslimen?* (Gießen: Brunnen-Verlag, 2005), pp. 261ff.; Alexander Kissler, "Abschied von Abraham. Im Karikaturenstreit forcieren die Kirchen die Zivilreligion," in *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (14 February 2006); Matthias Morgenstern, "Sackgasse Abraham. Sieben Thesen gegen den abrahamischen Dialog," in *Evangelium und Kirche. Informationen* (1/2006), pp. 13–14.

[15] *Cf.* Sarah-Hagar Initiative, Akademie Arnoldshain/Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

[16] Lydia Thalmayer, *Abraham und das Vermächtnis seiner Frauen. Eine ökumenische Vision der Versöhnung zwischen Juden und Arabern* (Oberursel: Publik-Forum, 2001).

groups outside the biblical and qur'anic traditions as non-abrahamic. Even when invited to join a dialogue platform, for example in a local setting, these other religions are the late comers, added to the family of dialogue whose members are already familiar with each other. As they enter the stage as "other religions," different premises are needed, e.g. religious pluralism.

This intrinsic exclusivism may be illustrated with a story that is well loved in dialogue. Although Islamic, it echoes Jewish and Christian oral traditions as well. The setting is just after Abraham's intended sacrifice of his son.

> The moment of truth is just past; the father's hand is stayed. As the boy lies stunned on the altar, God gazes down with pride and compassion and promises to grant his any prayer. "O Lord, I pray this," the boy says. When any person in any era meets you at the gates of heaven—so long as they believe in one God—I ask that you allow them to enter paradise.[17]

The theological interest in Abraham resulted in attention also being given to his first-born son. The biblical Ishmael traditions added new perspectives to a theology of dialogue. Naumann rightly[18] warns of theological naivete. While the Hebrew Bible has preserved the Ishmael traditions, placed the promises given to him next to Abraham and woven the story of the one into the other, it does not assimilate the two covenants. There is no easy way of theological integration. The religious other, symbolized by Ishmael, is entrusted to God's caring love, yet he remains the other, the stranger, alien and frightening.

Tarek Mitri adds another aspect to this theme:

> Islam is placed, in the Christian history of salvation, under the sign of Ishmael rather than Abraham. A "mystery of Ishmael" grounds itself in a text of the Old Testament that has no respondent in the rest of the Hebrew Bible, let alone in the New Testament. In this way, the Abrahamic heritage is not inclusive, inter-communal or ecumenical but an object of an unequal distributive sharing. Christian Abrahanism pretends to reconcile but it turns into a denigration of Islamic integrity and universalism.[19]

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[17] Cited by David van Biema, "The Legacy of Abraham," in *TIME* (30 September 2002), at **www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1003355,00.html**.

[18] Thomas Naumann, "Ismael – Abrahams verlorener Sohn," in Rudolf Weth (ed.) *Bekenntnis zu dem einen Gott? Christen und Muslime zwischen Mission und Dialog* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 2000), pp. 70–89.

[19] Mitri, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 21f.

The rediscovery of our father Abraham evokes a wave of enthusiasm, yet one cannot help question whether everybody has read and taken into consideration the exegetical data. Judaism, Christianity and Islam share the figure of Abraham and narrate stories that sound familiar to the other. Yet variations, alternatives, contradictions and even negations are not mere products of coincidence or mistaken transmission. While developing their self-conception, all three religions used the figure of Abraham to demonstrate their own righteousness and their specific way of believing. Abraham not only guaranteed the original, pure call to faith, but "our father Abraham" declared the earlier as illegitimate, overdone or corrupt and the own one as the only heir. Abraham became "Abraham *avenue*/our father," Abraham the witness to Christ, Abraham the constructor and purifier of the Kaaba remembered five times a day in prayer. Our Scriptures, oral traditions, writings of the church fathers and *tafsir* (science of explanation and interpretation of the Qur'an) illustrate this process of acquisition. To keep silent on these basic intentions of our traditions shows either theological blindness or dishonesty. Abraham makes an excellent study object on theological constructivism. This causes Bruce Feiler to confess, that understanding how each faith, and seemingly each generation, concoct their own Abraham has liberated him to create his own, whom he whimsically calls "Abraham No. 241." [20]

Finally, the concept of Abrahamic ecumenism implies a dichotomy of perspectives: it aims at a better understanding of and reconciliation for the good of society and the world, yet its theological line of argument goes backward. By definition it works with the retrospective: it compares traditions and digs into and uncovers historical religious material and journeys backward on a semi-archaeological search. The target is an original Abraham, his context and life story, including marriages and descendants, hospitality and prayer, the geography and spirituality of migration. The underlying longing of this theological ancestral research is assurance: (as Christians and Muslims) we want to be part of it; (as Jews, Christians and Muslims) we belong together. Shared heritage adds up to responsibility, trialog implements it. It is the root, the common family tree that carries and grants sustenance.

Psychology has taught us a lot about what individuals need in order to develop a stable and open personality. Knowing where I come from and where I belong is fundamental to the development of identity. This is also true in the religious realm. In order to engage in dialogue, to listen to and to share my convictions with others, I need profound knowledge

[20] Bruce Feiler, *Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths* (New York: Harper Collins, 2002).

of my own tradition and the place I occupy within this religion and its community of believers. There is nothing wrong with the stabilizing, reassuring function of a retrospective perspective. The problem arises when this project develops a kind of narcissism. The retrospective becomes the predominant perspective and we forget to face the future.

Teleology as the didactic orientation of biblical narration

Yet, Christian faith is teleological: it is God's future that qualifies the present, it is the promised that makes us rethink and review our lives and relationships. The Hebrew Bible is driven by this teleology: the narration of exodus is told from generation to generation as a preparation for future challenges. The stories of the good beginning, of rescue and guidance intend to strengthen and encourage. The didactical focus does not rest on the protagonists, neither on Adam and Eve, nor Abraham and Sarah, but on God's promise and willingness to be the savior of God's people. God to whom we pray as the coming savior is present and leads us into the future. It is for this reason that the Hebrew Bible in its Jewish version ends with the magnificent vision of a pilgrimage of all people; due to the Christian rearrangement of the canon, this intrinsic teleology has become blurred. The story of Abraham breathes this didactic as well. The well-known *lech-lecha*, the call Abraham received, has a linguistic prolongation, *al*/into, into the land I will show you and a long line of sons and heirs I will be giving you. The narrative and theological foci lie in teleology, the orientation towards the open space of God's future.

Shortcomings in vision and hope

As Christians we are called, not into the succession of Abraham, but into hope (Eph 4:4), the *Logos* of Christian identity is not Abrahamic descent, but Jesus of Nazareth. Yet looking around, we realize that Abraham is "in," hope is "out." There is a remarkable lack of eschatology running all throughout the interreligious field, secular society, large parts of our churches and Protestant theology as a whole.

While economics and strategic business papers elaborate on "visions" and "missions," German society is currently suffering from a lack of visionary ideas. In our political and individual lives we dispassionately restrict our thinking to feasibility. We recognize the impact of climate change and

have access to information on how to escape disaster, yet we are afraid of the costs this may entail. A kind of communitarian depression has gripped nearly every part of society. It is expressed also in the lyrics of songs by Heavy Metal or Tokyo Hotel, bands the next generation is influenced by.

As Christians, we are not spared this prevailing depression in our societies of which as individuals and churches we are a part. In 2006, the council of Protestant churches in Germany published a paper[21] on the future of the church which has given rise to considerable controversy. Therein the perspectives for the twenty-first century are primarily outlined in terms of economic reasoning: how can we finance what we want to afford and how do we advertise it? Recent interfaith documents display the same lack of visionary vigor. The prevailing tenor is that of theological conservatism. They react to events, affirm Christian theological heritage and advocate "profiling" in dialogue, meaning Christian identity by demarcation.

The checkered role of eschatology in (Protestant) theology

Throughout the history of our churches and theologies certain aspects have contributed to this lack of spiritual vision:

- Suffering and persecution form the hermeneutical setting of most of the New Testament writings on hope, at least within the epistles. For the early church, hope meant the essence of the Christian faith. It was by "perseverance in hope" (1 Cor 13:13; 1 Thess 5:8) that the church proved itself to belong to its Lord. However, time moved on and the suffering church became the triumphant one. The hymns of enduring hope (2 Cor 12:9) were transformed into the spiritual realm and into the future (Col 1:3–5). Not surprisingly, our central creed, the *Apostolicum*, names only three themes of Christian hope.

- In German Protestant theology, Kant's philosophy[22] prepared the ground for an ethical and moral interpretation of "the last things," which was later echoed by "present eschatology." Liberal theology understood the things to come as a moral call for inner-worldly convergence toward

[21] Kirchenamt der EKD (ed.), *Kirche der Freiheit—Perspektiven für die Evangelische Kirche im 21. Jahrhundert: ein "Impulspapier" des Rates der EKD* (Hanover: EKD, 2006).

[22] Immanuel Kant, "Das Ende aller Dinge," in *Akademie-Textausgabe, vol. VIII, Abhandlungen nach 1781* (Berlin: Reimer, 1912), pp. 325ff.

a transcendent ultimate goal. With Rudolf Bultmann,[23] the eschaton is stripped of the dimension of time and identified with the Christ event. As such, it is to be believed, not hoped for.

- We cannot help but understand the theological reluctance toward eschatology as a subject of dogmatic teaching also in light of ecclesiastical history. Since the time of the Reformation, this has been a reaction against radical thinking and chiliastic movements in- and outside the churches, e.g. enthusiasts and pietist groups awaiting a New Zion or materialistic and political interpretations of the kingdom of heaven. After World War I, eschatology enjoyed a period of revitalization; the "last things didn't remain the last ones."[24] Yet, after a long and complex history of wandering around through various branches of dogmatic thinking, eschatology has remained a mere postscript in dogmatics.

Interfaith dialogue has not been spared this linguistic and conceptual impoverishment of the Christian hope. The two most interesting German systematic projects of the past decade, one responding to a Christian–Muslim (Reinhard Leuze),[25] the other to an interreligious (Perry Schmidt-Leukel)[26] setting, completely omit the subject of eschatology.

An exception was Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt's theology after the *Shoah*. Shortly before his death, he published the third and final volume of his eschatology.[27] It is not by accident that his eschatology arose out of a life-long commitment to Christian–Jewish dialogue. I owe him a lot as one of my teachers during a study year at Hebrew University Jerusalem. I favor the title of his opening chapter "hope—the way of the future"[28] as a promising alternative to the concept of an Abrahamic ecumenism.

In this essay I do not intend to sketch the contours of an eschatology in the context of interreligious thinking, but merely to initiate a discussion

[23] Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus Christus und die Mythologie: Das Neue Testament im Licht der Bibelkritik* (Hamburg: Furche-Verlag, 1964).

[24] Karl Barth, *Die Auferstehung der Toten* (Munich: Christian Kaiser, 1926), p. 59.

[25] Reinhard Leuze, *Christentum und Islam* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1994).

[26] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Gott ohne Grenzen: Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005).

[27] Friedrich-Wilhelm Marquardt, *Was dürfen wir hoffen, wenn wir hoffen dürften?: Eine Eschatologie*, vol. 3 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996).

[28] *Ibid.*, vol 1.1, para. 1, pp 31ff.

on whether and how the dimension of hope might help Christian–Muslim encounter gain a perspective that makes it literally forward-looking.

Hope as subject of eschatology

> Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect" (1 Pet 3:15–16).[29]

Traditionally, hope has been discussed within the systematic framework of eschatology. Since eschatology was understood as the teaching on the last things, hope too became "eschatologized." Its essence moved from a fundamental mode of faith to a dogmatic belief in details of future events to be dealt with after everything else was said.

Eschatology as a domain of dogmatic thinking follows a twofold agenda: it asks for the reason of hope (formal eschatology), and it asserts what we can and should expect (material eschatology).

Justified by faith in hope

Christian hope (*elpis*) has a continuously joyful note (Rom 12:12),—although it has been and often still is wrested from suffering. It emanates neither from an overall querulousness, that finally revokes everything and hopes for nothing but in the hereafter, nor is it nurtured by fear of the Day of Judgment. It is neither a sentimental feeling nor an outflow of a general sanguinity. On the contrary: Christians pin their hopes on the future when there is no reason to be optimistic. As their hope is grounded in Jesus Christ himself (1 Tim 1:1) they humbly believe it to be "a better hope" (Heb 7:19). Only as people set free by Christ are we able to hope. Nothing but this justification by God can bear lasting hope. Faith and hope, soteriology and eschatology, are inextricably interwoven (Heb 11:1). The old Adam not only is hopelessly lost, he is hopeless. Only the new person in Christ is able to hope.

At the same time, it is central to Christian faith that our justification by God is only believed, hoped for (Rom 8:24). Karl Barth puts it as follows, "Christianity that isn't altogether and totally eschatology, has

[29] New International Version.

nothing and none to do with Christ at all… Therefore can we aim to be anything better or more than people of hope?"[30]

A focus on justice

Justification by God through faith in hope forms the core of formal eschatology and it pushes the issue of justice into the core of material eschatology (Gal 5:5). The theological conjunction of hope and justification by faith marks the distinction between a Lutheran understanding of hope and other approaches such as that of a world ethos[31] that displays justice primarily as an issue of ethics.

When sharing our visions of the future in interfaith dialogue, Christians will insist on the primacy of justice. We understand justice as a multidimensional response to God and God's work of salvation—social, economic, political and legal justice on a national and global scale; just access to and distribution of resources; justice between genders and in relationships; reconciliation between conflicting individuals, parties and groups.

Interreligious statements tend to focus on justice primarily in economic terms. Due to liberation theology as well as the historic peace churches, Christians rediscovered the indissociable cohesion of economic and social justice that is fundamental to biblical thinking. If we continue along this path it will lead interreligious dialogue into most interesting and controversial debates.

This article was being written while 250,000 people meet in Cologne for the thirty-first Evangelische Kirchentag, the largest Protestant gathering in Germany, which is held every second year. At the same time, the G 8 summit took place in Germany. During these days I wondered what effect it might have, if the Kirchentag were not so much focused on popular topics such as Islam and violence, religious freedom[32] or male dominance within Muslim communities, but were to agree on and published together with Muslims a statement on justice.

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[30] Karl Barth, *Römerbrief* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1978), p. 298 (author's own translation). In his later writings he backed away from this pan-eschatological totalitarism as "… die Hoffnung selbst als eine besondere Dimension der christlichen Existenz gewissermaßen verdampfte und verschwand." Karl Barth, *Kirchliche Dogmatik IV/3 /2* (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1979), p. 1047.

[31] Hans Küng and Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Erklärung zum Weltethos. Die Deklaration des Parlaments der Weltreligionen* (Munich: Piper 1993) [A Global Ethic. The Declaration of the Parliament of the World's Religions (London: SCM, 1993)].

[32] Sabine Schiffer, "Was ist mir noch heilig? Islam und Gewalt–Zwischen Meinungsfreiheit und Achtung religiöser Gefühle," Einführungsvortrag, Cologne, 8 June 2007; Wolfgang Huber, "Wie hältst du's mit der Religionsfreiheit?," Impulsvortrag, Cologne, 7 June 2007.

The eschatological square

The primacy of justice is affirmed by the fundamental importance of *dikaiosyne* in Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven. There are four dimensions of eschatology: the present, the future, the individual-anthropological and the cosmological.[33]

What we say about hope needs to reflect these four dimensions. The eschatological square will take corrective action against concentrating on one aspect only. Islamic teaching on the future is almost exclusively eschatological; for centuries this has also been true for the Christian *doctrina de novissimis*. Yet, today, most mainline Christians, at least in the West, are lost for words concerning issues of future eschatology. They cannot attribute a theological meaning to these metaphors besides a vague yearning for retributive justice and something that might survive one's individual end. Death announcements witness to this resignation to the bare physical facts and the lack of inner images on a life to come. Esoterism, a popular religious movement in our society, responds to death by "preponing" the lost hereafter into a former existence that can allegedly be remembered by "recirculation."

Justice as a theme of future eschatology leads us to the issue of a Last Judgment as "remuneration" at or after the end of time. Here, too, Muslims will experience restraint on the side of their Christian partners. While *al-fatiha*, the nucleus of the Qur'an and Islamic spirituality, holds the theological tension between eschatological justice and God's mercy together, Christians enter the complex intersection of dogmatic teaching on divinity, soteriology and eschatology. Tradition provides us with a variety of answers that contribute to the observable theological restraint.

Vagueness and scantiness as characteristics of Christian eschatology

In God's freedom, God binds Godself to God's promises. It is faith in the trueness (*chesed*) of God that gives Christians certainty in matters of hope. However, contrary to claims throughout church history, to believe

[33] In contrast to tradition that favors other models of systematization. *Cf.* Johann Gerhard (*Loci theologici*, VIIIf.) differentiating between micro- and macrocosmologic eschatological events, or between God acting inchoatively or consummatively; *Cf.* Paul Althaus, *Die letzten Dinge: Entwurf einer christlichen Eschatologie* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1922), who argued from within different coordinates: an axiological time transcending and a teleological apocalyptic axis.

in the concord of the promised and material hope does not allow for any kind of calculation, neither with regard to time nor sequence. The details of Christian hope are and remain veiled, indiscernible—precisely for the sake of our hope through faith (Rom 8:24; Heb 11:1).

This inner tension between certainty and the vagueness of material eschatology is part of our contribution to the encounter with Islam. There we meet a much more precise and detailed agenda.

From the very beginning, Muhammad called his followers to remember the final judgment (Q 53:57–58). Teachings on the Last Day, the resurrection and gathering of the dead, the Last Judgment as the day of reckoning (Q 38:53) and decision regarding heaven or hell and the life hereafter belong to the inner core of the qur'anic message. The prophets will appear and function as witnesses to their people and, God willing, intercede on their behalf. The Qur'an uses colorful and dramatic metaphors to describe paradise and hell as places of recompense and penalization. Tradition has added other eschatological details:[34] the interim judgment, the interrogation at the grave, or the waiting period. All three classical Islamic cultures brought forth colorful book illustrations including metaphorical elements such as scales, bridges, angels, a trombone, or the fire of hell.

We will need to apprehend and respect this detailed imagery of the time to come: our own history of systematic theology and ecclesiastical art prohibits theological arrogance. The Middle Ages had developed almost a contour map of hell; old-Protestant orthodoxy was sure about the timetable of the last things; Orthodox icons or Michelangelo were experts not only in ecclesiastical painting but in the scenarios of hell and perdition.

The content and metaphors of Christian eschatology are bound to the biblical Scriptures, namely texts of promises, messianic prophecy, Jesus' teaching on the kingdom of heaven and passages of the Epistles. It might be tempting to be inspired by the imagery of other religions. Since a Persian miniature of al-Biruni has been used as a book cover,[35] the idea of Jesus and Muhammad functioning along side each other on the Day of Judgment and addressing their respective people, gained popularity in Christian–Muslim encounter. The notion is beautiful and

[34] *Cf.* Adel Theodor Khoury and Peter Hünermann (eds), *Weiterleben–nach dem Tode? Die Antwort der Weltreligionen* (Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder 1985).

[35] Johann-Dietrich Thyen, *Bibel und Koran. Eine Synopse gemeinsamer Überlieferungen* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 1993).

comforting, it derives from an Islamic *tafsir* on Isaiah 21:6–9. Yet, we do not owe "gentleness and respect" only to the other, but also to our own tradition and its very deliberate self-restrictions. The Lutheran *sola Scriptura* allows us to say little more than that we are waiting for the second coming of the Messiah, the resurrection of the dead, God's Judgment in the presence of the Son of Man and a time to come, in which God will be all in all.[36]

This abstaining from detailed imagery on the eschatological future both individual and cosmological, resulted in a void of visions that has been taken over by apocalyptic extremists. In modern times, fundamentalists on both sides extended these to frightening scenarios that could easily be exploited for theological and political gains. We know about the mis-usage of Armageddon in US policy; in the Islamic world, suicide bombers feel free to administer paradise and God's Day of Judgment.

Narration as the linguistic style of hope

Our churches have accepted the discrepancy between the predominantly narrative style of the biblical Scriptures and the theological tradition with its heavy-loaded dogmatic teachings. The church of the future will be a story telling one; hope and the future need the language of our faith; our inner images need to be nurtured. Only by narration will we be able to share our visions and hopes with others.

In early 2007, I was invited to a theological consultation taking place at Kaduna/Northern Nigeria, a place where Christian–Muslim relations are extremely tense. One of the most precious things I took home was a bundle of small papers, on which I had scribbled down the stories some of the bishops, ministers and deacons had shared with us during the conference. In the midst of physical threats, violence and burning, they remembered amazing little events of Christian–Muslim neighborliness, reconciliation and forgiveness. One of them described the time after the community center in his parish had been torched by Muslims. One day a Muslim neighbor came over with a whole bag of rice to feed those who were doing the reconstruction work. Stories such as this one nurture hope.

[36] In contrast, *cf.* in the Middle Ages four individual anthropological parts (*quattuor novissima: mors tua*, *iudicium postremun*, *gloria coeli*, *dolor inferni*), supplemented by Johann Gerhard with two cosmological parts: *resurrectio mortuorum* and *consummatio mundi*.

Towards communities of hope

According to biblical tradition, feeding and being fed are strong images of hope. In Isaiah 25 the future communitarian meal is described: all participants sit together at the table of their God, enjoying equal rights. They are guests in the house or rather in the open space of a generous God.

Our traditions deeply value the great metaphor of hospitality. It inspires us to rethink our social and political behavior toward the stranger and therefore holds greatest significance in a world of growing xenophobia and walling off. The Abrahamic tradition includes a well-known story of hospitality towards the stranger (Gen 21).

It is exactly at this point that one can easily grasp the difference between the two lines of argument at stake here. Abraham's hospitality was organized hierarchically: the host will welcome the guests and will make the rules to be followed, so everybody can feel comfortable and at ease; they will stay only temporarily and then leave again. In contrast to this, the eschatological meal knows only guests, a community based on and oriented toward this vision knows only equals. They are colorful, they are different, they may like one another or not, yet they have the same status: the right to stay, eat, share and enjoy. Obviously, this vision surpasses our present day goodwill affirmations and actions in interfaith encounter. Furthermore, if taken seriously, it may contribute to liberating ourselves from fighting for our social importance as churches in an increasingly secularized society and humbly to accept what we are: guests on our journey through.

The end takes us back to the starting point: Christians and Muslims encountering one another first and primarily as people of hope will meet Abraham again on this way, yet differently. They are no longer genealogists of an Abrahamic ecumenism nor seeking guidance and theological assertion in a mythical ancestor. Rather, through Abraham they describe the relationship between faith and hope in their specific and distinctive ways. The "Christian" story of Abraham narrates the adventure of moving by faith in God's promises. This faith has nothing but hope to rely on (Rom 4:18). The Abraham story of Muslims (and Jews) illustrates unconditional commitment and devotion, faith that is prepared to give up everything, even hope (of descendants).

The Triune God in Interreligious Dialogue

The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Theology of Religions in Postmodern Society

Risto Jukko

Postmodern society and the theology of religions

It has often been said that we in the West live in a postmodern world. In philosophical terms, postmodernism shares something with the critique of Enlightenment values and the end of philosophy's presumptive role as a privileged, truth telling discourse. The same can be applied *mutatis mutandis* also to theology. Furthermore, it has often been said that we are living in a world that has lost its way, in a period that lacks direction, vision and orientation, a period of relativism and nihilism. Postmodernism rejects the possibility of a metadiscourse. Instead, there are many short stories, competing with each other, each claiming the right to exist. Postmodern culture does not provide one truth that unites everybody and everything. Rather, it emphasizes pluralism in every sense. It is rather like a marketplace, where all kinds of truths are on sale. The same applies to religions. In Western postmodern society, Christianity no longer holds a monopoly in the pluralistic marketplace of religions. But if this is true, if Christianity is just one of many competing religions, what then should be its attitude towards others, towards non-Christian religions?[1] Can it give up its universal claims?

The Roman Catholic theologian, Jacques Dupuis, argues that "Christian theology of religions studies the various traditions in the context of the history of salvation and in their relationship to the mystery of Jesus Christ and the Christian church."[2] In the twentieth century, three

[1] I use the term "non-Christian" in a categorical, not a pejorative or qualitative sense.

[2] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1999), p. 8.

theological perspectives or paradigms[3] can be distinguished within the Christian theology of religions: exclusivism (i.e. saving knowledge of God occurs only in Jesus Christ);[4] inclusivism (i.e. Christ is the means of God's saving self-communication, even among those who do not profess him consciously); and pluralism (i.e. there are many parallel ways to God). These perspectives or paradigms are very broad typologies which try to cover most Christian attitudes to non-Christian religions. They have an indicative value and are not to be applied rigidly, although basically they are mutually exclusive. These perspectives can be contested, and the typology can be reduced or broadened. They are useful because they emphasize one or both of the two crucial Christian theological axioms: that salvation is given only in Christ by God, and that God wants everybody's salvation.[5] The terminology[6] has been various, as no concept is totally univocal. All the models are looking for an abstract lowest common denominator or essence that all religions share.

These three typologies mentioned, i.e. exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, are not the only ones. According to John Hick's "Reality-centeredness" theory, all religions are in different ways oriented toward that which they view as the "Central Reality" or "Divine Absolute." For Hick, there is no real equivalence between human knowledge and "Divine Reality." Religions have the power to transform people from self-centredness to "Reality-centeredness."[7] Paul F. Knitter has proposed models called

[3] "Paradigm" is understood here in a sense analogous to that of Thomas S. Kuhn, i.e. a whole set of methods and procedures dictated by a central problem solving model. See Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

[4] The church's attitude from the fifth century to the Middle Ages was basically that "outside the church there is no salvation." The Council of Florence (1442) announced: "*Firmiter credit, profitetur et praedicat, 'nullos extra catholicam Ecclesiam exsistentes, non solum paganos,' sed nec Iudaeos aut haereticos atque schismaticos, aeternae vitae fieri posse participes, sed in ignem aeternum ituros, 'qui paratus est diabolo et angelis eius'…*" Heinrich Denzinger, *Enchiridion Symbolorum* 1351.

[5] Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions. American Society of Missiology Series*, No. 7 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995), p. 121, remarks that from the patristic period to the twentieth century there has always been a tension between two beliefs in the Roman Catholic Church: God's universal salvific will and the necessity of the Church for salvation.

[6] See Jacques Dupuis, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 181–184, on the discussion on terminology related to Christian theology of religions.

[7] See John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2004). However, Hick's theory seems to be nothing more than another version of pluralism. *Cf.* Paul Varo Martinson, "Speaking the Truth: Contemporary Approaches to Religious Pluralism," in J. Paul Rajashekar (ed.), *Religious Pluralism and Lutheran Theology. LWF Report 23/24* (Geneva: The Lutheran World Federation, 1988),

"regnocentrism" or "soteriocentrism." In the first model, he argues that all religions are destined to be visible signs of the presence of God's reign in the world. All can and ought to contribute to the growth of God's reign among persons and peoples. In the second model, he unites liberation praxis and interreligious dialogue. There are also other models that can be described as "logocentrism" and "pneumatocentrism."[8]

Nevertheless, these paradigms do not yield a satisfactory answer to the theological challenge of non-Christian religions. We have to consider the specificity and singularity of each religious tradition, instead of imagining a kind of hypothetical center for them. Especially Asian theologians have mostly been critical of this threefold typology. In their opinion, this kind of categorical thinking reflects a Western way of thinking. Be that as it may, more and more Western theologians agree with their critique.

What then is a possible answer to the theological challenge of other religious traditions? It must be elsewhere, it must be beyond these three categories. We have moved from a pluralistic to a postmodern mode. As a matter of fact, we can speak of a kind of post-pluralism,[9] in the sense that post-pluralism guarantees the differences and incompatibility of religions without making an effort to create a unifying, leveling theory of their sameness.[10] Christians and Christian theologians are obliged to hold onto their religious identity, and engage in a theology of dialogue, or theology in dialogue.

Joseph DiNoia argues that we must recognize that religious communities actually propose distinct aims for human life, as well as the legitimacy of such claims from the perspective of their faith. It is normal and legitimate that Christian theologians interpret their aims from their perspective, but the opposite is also true. S. Mark Heim proposes a new kind of pluralism which would recognize the different ultimate destinies proposed by the various religious traditions to their adherents. Religious diversity and plurality not only need to be tolerated, but theologically engaged, practically and theoretically. In fact, the theological discipline called "theology of religions" comes out of this debate. Today this is one of the major issues in Christian dogmatic theology.

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pp. 40–73, who states that "the supposed pluralism of Hick is really a reflex of an ontological absolutism, a non-historical stance, which makes culture decidedly secondary." (p. 70).

[8] See Dupuis, *op. cit.* (note 2), pp. 194–198.

[9] See S. Mark Heim, *Salvations. Truth and Difference in Religion. Faith Meets Faith Series* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997), p. 226.

[10] For example, see Nicholas Rescher, *Pluralism: Against the Demand for Consensus* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

Towards a Christocentric and Trinitarian approach

We need a flexible and relational model or paradigm that allows for plurality in unity. The usual typology of three positions in the theology of religions (exclusivism–inclusivism–pluralism) is not helpful and the other suggestions are no better. In our postmodern society, the church's situation is to a certain extent similar to that of the early church when, some 2000 years ago, the Christian narration, the Christian story, began in the eastern Mediterranean. Christianity was born and developed in a religiously and culturally pluralistic environment. Therefore, the fathers had to construct their theology, which resulted in the credos that express faith in a Triune God. If the doctrine of the Trinity was the answer at the time, and if the situation of the church and faith today is to a certain extent similar to that at the time, we can find the answer to the theological challenge of other religious traditions in the doctrine of the Trinity. It explains the ontological possibility of incarnation and immanence, creation, redemption, history and eschatology, and consequently dialogue and mission. Therefore, it makes the theology of religions possible and meaningful. True plurality is only possible when it is based on Trinitarian grounds. In the Christian theology of religions, we must take the Triune God's nature, Christ's central position and the history, culture and religion of people seriously. This position can be described as dialectical. Its answer to non-Christian religions is "yes" and "no" at the same time. It is open to the other, without losing its own strong identity. This concept of *simul* is not unfamiliar to Lutherans and Lutheran theologians.

The Trinity brings us unavoidably to Christology. S. Mark Heim argues,

> Yet the Trinity is unavoidably Christocentric in at least two senses. It is Christocentric in the empirical sense that the doctrine, the representation of God's triune nature, arose historically from faith in Jesus Christ. And it is so in the systemic sense that the personal character of God requires particularity as its deepest mode of revelation.[11]

For Christians, Jesus Christ is the only means of salvation, and constitutive of salvation for the whole of humankind. This is a universal statement, addressed to Christians as well as to non-Christians. This Christology must

[11] S. Mark Heim, *The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology of Religious Ends* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2001), p. 134.

be set in the Trinitarian context, which seems to be the only way forward in the theology of religions. The debate concerning Jesus Christ's unicity is at the heart of the discussion on the Christian theology of religions. It is clear that if Christology is detached from the center, there is a danger of detaching the Christian faith's most essential characteristic. In Christianity, Christ is the only mediator between humanity and God, and the only savior of the human race. All salvation takes place through him and because of him. The incarnation is a paradox, because Christians believe that in this particular case, the absolute has come and is present in the contingent, the only God is present in the singular. But the *Logos* does not work alone. He is sent by the Father, and he gives his Spirit. Indeed, there is a human and divine nature in the Trinity: Jesus Christ is at the same time fully man and fully God. The doctrine of the two natures of Christ means that the Christological debate of the first Christian centuries has to begin anew. As a logical consequence of the Trinitarian renaissance at the end of the twentieth century, especially Asian theologians attach great importance to the question of Christ's uniqueness. Twenty-first-century theology must tackle the Christological issues anew, not only for Christianity's sake, but for that of all religious traditions. As Paul Varo Martinson states, "in other circumstances, such as ours today, a simple repetition of the New Testament Christology is not sufficient."[12]

Christology is of great advantage to Christian theology. Without the doctrine of the Incarnation, Christian theology would have difficulties to maintain the idea that God is both transcendent and immanent. Muslims want to emphasize that God is beyond knowing but also immanent. In Islam, as in other religions, there is a need to overcome the absolute transcendency of the divine being, and the history of these faiths is characterized by efforts in this direction. Indeed, the Incarnation gives us a clue as to how to engage the postmodern generation of ours with the biblical narrative. Carl Braaten says that "Christ is the place where the contradiction between God and humanity gets resolved—actually and necessarily."[13]

Christology inevitably and consequently leads us back to the Trinity. In the second half of the twentieth century, an important aspect of theological discourse was the recognition that the Trinity is not only important in its relation to the creation, but also in the way its inner being is described.

[12] Martinson, *op. cit.* (note 7), p. 67.

[13] Carl E. Braaten, "Lutheran Theology and Religious Pluralism," in *Rajashekar*, *op. cit.* (note 7), pp. 105–128, here p. 121.

As God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, God's being is love. God's being is communication and interaction. This has very important consequences for the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue.

First of all, as the Triune God's being consists of equal relations and the mutual interaction of three divine persons, this is the model on which human relationships, *imago Dei*, should be built. If we emphasize monotheism too strongly, it could legitimize political absolutism or monarchy and patriarchal hierarchy. On the contrary, if we take God's Triune being seriously, there should be no place for discrimination or hierarchical power wielding. The doctrine of the Trinity is a basis for another type of community, based on equal relations. Gavin D'Costa argues that "the divine Triune God might actually represent the possibility of relations between gendered persons that are characterized by loving, forgiving, relational and redeeming indwelling."[14] According to Leonardo Boff,

> The sort of society that would emerge from inspiration by the Trinitarian model would be one of fellowship, equality of opportunity, generosity in the space available for personal and group expression. Only a society of sisters and brothers … can justifiably claim to be an image and likeness (albeit pale) of the Trinity, the foundation and final resting-place of the universe.[15]

In light of the doctrine of the Trinity, God reveals Godself as infinite love, who creates companions and wants them to participate in God's inner life, "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8).

Second, as the persons of the Trinity communicate, there must be communication and interaction between all Christians. This challenges ecumenical theology. There must also be communication and interaction between Christians and non-Christians. This takes place at the level of the theology of religions and interreligious encounter and the word "dialogue" has often been used for this purpose. While the concept is notoriously complex, interreligious dialogue means, among other things, engagement: we must explore the truths of Christianity in dialogue with others, in dialogue with their teachings and traditions. If we do so, we will understand our tradition and our own beliefs anew. Besides, this will build bridges of friendship

[14] Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke Ltd., 2000), p. xiv.

[15] Leonardo Boff, *Trinity and Society. Theology and Liberation Series* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), p. 151.

and respect between Christians themselves and between Christians and non-Christians. That God is Triune means that there must be principles of transparency, companionship and equality in our relations, not only among ourselves, but also between us and them, the others.

Third, combined with the Christocentric emphasis, the doctrine of the Trinity allows Christianity to maintain a genuine openness to God in history. As genuine openness implies taking non-Christian religions seriously, the church is as a result opening itself up to genuine change, challenge and questioning. The only possibility to keep this ferment alive is to build on this Trinitarian theology. It is clear that the Trinitarian foundation of the theology of religions can provide a fruitful field for further study and reflection. The plurality in unity encountered in the Trinity[16] enables the church to do justice to the diversity and richness of the world, and yet to maintain its unity and reject relativizing forms of pluralism. In other words, based on the Triune God, the church is an open society, characterized by hospitality and the eagerness to see the activities of the Triune God, even there where we would not normally expect. According to Kevin J. Vanhoozer,

> the Trinity is the Christian answer to the identity of God. The one creator God is Father, Son and Spirit. This is an identification that is at once exclusivistic and pluralistic. And because this God who is three-in-one has covenanted with what is other than himself—the creature—the identity of God is also inclusivistic. The Trinity, far from being a *skandalon*, is rather the transcendental condition for interreligious dialogue, the ontological condition that permits us to take the other in all seriousness, without fear, and without violence.[17]

A Lutheran position

What does Lutheran theology have to say to all this? Basically, the Lutheran Confessions do not have much to say about the theology of

[16] *Cf.* the title of Risto Jukko, *Trinity in Unity in Christian–Muslim Relations: The Work of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007).

[17] Kevin J. Vanhoozer, "Does the Trinity Belong in a Theology of Religions? On Angling in the Rubicon and the 'Identity' of God," in Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed.), *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1997), pp. 41–71, here pp. 70–71.

religions. It is not difficult for a Lutheran theologian to admit that God is at work in various non-Christian religions to witness to Godself, but encounters with non-Christians were not what the Lutheran Reformation was about. Daniel F. Martensen states that

> Lutherans often react to the prospect of interfaith dialogue with quiet reservation if not fear and anxiety. Playing into this reaction is fear of loss of Lutheran identity, expectation of a compromise of doctrine, worry about syncretism, and suspicion that there will be a loss of the missionary imperative and/or ecumenical theological focus.[18]

Most Lutheran theologians, at least among the LWF member churches, would probably choose the Christocentric position, because the Lutheran soteriological position emphasizes the necessity of Christ, faith and the relationship between law and gospel. "Lutherans see the gospel of Christ as the final medium of revelation and the critical norm in the development of any theology of religions."[19] However, as Theodore Ludwig has noted, Lutherans do not have an explicit doctrine of salvation.[20] Luther himself allowed for the possibility of Gentiles to be saved by

> accidental mercy, of which no assurance had previously been given through a promise. In this manner Naaman, the King of Nineveh, Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-Merodach, and others from among the Gentiles were saved by accidental mercy.[21]

This implies that Luther thought that there was God's saving grace toward those who were outside of God's covenant with the Jews.

This soteriological position aside, the theology of creation has always been important for Lutherans. In humankind's religious experience there is a continuing revelation. There is the general revelation through creation and law (*Deus absconditus*) and the specific revelation through covenant and gospel (*Deus revelatus*). There is the mystery of God,

[18] Daniel F. Martensen, "Lutheranism and Interfaith Dialogue," in S. Mark Heim (ed.), *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 175–187, here p. 176.

[19] *Ibid.*, p. 177.

[20] Cited in *ibid.*, p. 178.

[21] Martin Luther, "Lectures on Genesis, Chapters 1–5," in Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 1 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 302.

the hidden God, in the world.[22] We can also note that Luther said in the Large Catechism:

> For, as explained above, we could never come to recognize the Father's favor and grace were it not for the Lord Christ, who is a mirror of the Father's heart. Apart from him we see nothing but an angry and terrible judge. But neither could we know anything of Christ, had it not been revealed by the Holy Spirit.[23]

Undeniably, the doctrine of the Trinity is the foundation of the Lutheran *Liber Concordiae*.[24]

Therefore, going back to tradition and rediscovering those items which have been forgotten or ignored, such as the doctrine of the Trinity, can be very fruitful. It can offer such values that postmodern society needs and respects: real tolerance, real hospitality, real openness, real dialogue. What is still more interesting and challenging is that the Trinitarian concept of God means that the Triune God is always more, always beyond tolerance or our concepts, beyond our expectations, always surprising

[22] "To ignore the religions would be to amputate a portion of God's dealings with human history and the world." Braaten, *op. cit.* (note 13), p. 113.

[23] Martin Luther, "The Large Catechism, Second Part: The Creed 65," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2000), pp. 439–440. The text goes on (66): "These three articles of the Creed, therefore, separate and distinguish us Christians from all other people on earth. All who are outside this Christian people, whether heathen, Turks, Jews, or false Christians and hypocrites–even though they believe in and worship only the one, true God–nevertheless do not know what his attitude is toward them. They cannot be confident of his love and blessing, and therefore they remain in eternal wrath and condemnation. For they do not have the Lord Christ, and, besides, they are not illuminated and blessed by the gifts of the Holy Spirit." *Cf.* The Creed 56 (p. 438): "Outside this Christian community, however, where there is no gospel, there is also no forgiveness, and hence there also can be no holiness." Leif Grane, *The Augsburg Confession: A Commentary* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing House, 1987), pp. 36–37, remarks, "… primary emphasis will be placed on the 'economic' Trinity as is clearly expressed in the language of God as creator, redeemer, and sanctifier in the Catechisms."

[24] *Cf.* "The Augsburg Confession, Article I," in *ibid.*, p. 37: "The churches among us teach with complete unanimity that the decree of the Council of Nicea concerning the unity of the divine essence and concerning the three persons is true and is to be believed without any doubt. That is to say, there is one divine essence which is called God and is God: eternal, incorporeal, indivisible, of immeasurable power, wisdom, and goodness, the creator and preserver of all things, visible and invisible. Yet, there are three persons, coeternal and of the same essence and power: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. And the term 'person' is used for that meaning which the church's authors used in this case: to signify not a part or a quality in another but that which subsists in itself. They condemn all heresies that have arisen against this article, such as that of the… Mohammedans, and all others like them." If I am right, Muslims are included in this list because they deny the Trinity.

us. Interreligious dialogue and encounters with non-Christian persons can be firmly based on the Triune God and Christian identity.

There must be a strong commitment to the Christian tradition, and at the same time real openness to the values of non-Christian religions. This constitutes an inevitable tension. Nonetheless, we should not try to overcome this tension, but rather try to keep it creative and innovative, because our Christian identity is challenged every time we authentically meet with the other. One of the challenges we face is to learn something about the other and their religious tradition, study it and then reflect what this means with regard to our own Christian and Lutheran tradition. This does not mean that the importance of mission would be neglected in exchange for dialogue. As Carl Braaten says: "There is no reason to choose between the two forms [evangelical outreach and interreligious dialogue]."[25] This means that within the Trinitarian framework of communion and mutual interdependence, an authentic encounter with any non-Christian becomes possible in dialogue and mission.

[25] Braaten, *op. cit.*, (note 13), p. 124.

God's Act of Saying: Trinitarian Self-Communication

Paul S. Chung

Introduction

The Christian doctrine of the Trinity tells us about God, fully incarnated in the person of Jesus Christ in the presence of the Holy Spirit. This doctrine affirms that God the Father (*Abba*) of Jesus Christ, refers to the Trinity as one God, including the Son and the Spirit in divine life and fellowship.

In the ancient church, the doctrine of the Trinity was an attempt to dialogue with the Greek metaphysical-philosophical tradition. This teaching tried to translate a biblical tradition of the God of Israel and God's *Logos* into the language of Neoplatonic philosophy. However, in the resulting Trinitarian formulation, the God of Israel (Yahweh) was unfortunately set aside for the sake of Greek metaphysical ontology. God's dynamic being, "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14), was understood instead in terms of classical theism.[1] The relation of the Father, Son and Spirit in the immanent Trinity (God in God's self) and in the economic Trinity (God for us) dominates the theological discourse in the East and West. Such a debate can lead to a problematic neglect of the God of Israel in the life of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and also of Moses (Ex 3:15).

Furthermore, this presupposes a Christian hermeneutic for addressing how the Triune God is saving the world. The challenge is how to understand the Trinity contextually in the face of religious pluralism. Theological imagination here becomes necessary and significant, yet can be controversial and provocative. An hermeneutics of audacity and retrieval is called for, to appropriate the Christian meaning of the Trinity cross-culturally, with suspicion toward the non-biblical metaphysics long associated with it. In doing so, the Christian concepts of faith, hope and love can also be articulated differently.

[1] The Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria interpreted the divine voice in Exodus 3:14 as "he who is" or "that which is." *Cf.* Ted Peters, *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a New Era*, 2nd. ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 92.

Here I consider a Christian theology of the Trinity in view of Jewish–Christian relations and interreligious discourse on the Trinity. I propose a Trinitarian theology of God's act of "saying" to engage with Jewish–Christian thinking and the Taoist concept of *Tao-te-ching*. First, I shall discuss Trinitarian theology in a dialogical context with Buddhism (Masao Abe) and Neo-Confucianism (Lee Jung-Yung). With a critical view toward some limitations of this interfaith discourse on the Trinity, I shall then propose a promising dialogue with philosophical Taoism as stated in *Tao-te-ching*, and with Jewish wisdom of the Kabbalah, for reconstructing Trinitarian theology. I will discuss Taoist and Jewish insights into the Trinitarian metaphor, and in the process get at a biblical understanding of the particularity and universality of the Trinity. I then engage critically with John Hick and Raimon Panikkar, and propose a contextual model of the Trinity in light of God's act of saying in the face of the reality of religious pluralism.

The Trinitarian situation and imagination in an interfaith context

In Buddhist–Christian dialogue, Trinitarian language meets a Buddhist aphorism: "Do not look at the finger! If you do, you will miss the moon." Trinitarian thinking gains its meaning as an interpretive imagination sees the moon scattering its light over rivers and lakes. Masao Abe, a Japanese Buddhist philosopher, discusses Jürgen Moltmann's theology of the Trinity from a Buddhist perspective. Moltmann is interested in articulating a theology of the Trinity based on Jesus' death. For Moltmann, this implies a revolutionary concept of God.[2] For him, a theology of the cross should be relevant to a theology after the *Shoah*[3] because *Shoah* is taken up in the Father's grief over the death of the Son in the presence of the Spirit. Abe questions Moltmann's statement that "God is dead on the cross and yet is not dead."[4] To overcome this paradoxical relation between God's

[2] Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology*, trans. by R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (London: SCM, 1974), p. 204.

[3] I avoid the term holocaust, because in biblical language holocaust originally means the sacrifice of an animal by slaughtering and burning it (Gen 22). When this term is applied to the extermination of European Jewry, it would offer a religious idea of legitimization with respect to the destruction of the Jews.

[4] Moltmann, *op. cit.* (note 2), p. 244.

death and non-death, Abe introduces the Buddhist concept of *sunyata*, absolute nothingness (zero). For Abe, a Christian concept of the unity of three persons in one Godhead would presuppose a fourth being, because the fourth being is the Father, Son and Spirit wrapped up into the one. At the point of the great zero, Abe argues, the unity and the Trinity of God are fully and harmoniously realized and fulfilled without any conflict.[5] In contrast to Moltmann, Abe's proposal of zero Trinity inevitably leads to the total *kenosis* or death of the Father in the Son's death. Comparing zero to *Nichts* or *Ungrund*, as found in the Christian mystical tradition such as Meister Eckhart, Abe paves an interfaith way to a relationship between Trinitarian theology and mysticism.[6]

In a Christian–Confucian context, the Asian theologian Lee Jung-Yung was inspired by the *Book of Changes*, a Confucian classic. He proposes a Trinitarian theology of change from an East Asian perspective. God the Father appears as the Tao in the complementary movement of *yin* (Spirit) and *yang* (Son). As he argues, "*yin-yang* symbolic thinking, which is also both/and thinking, is none other than one (unity) in three (diversity) as well as three (diversity) in one (unity)."[7] A *yin-yang* way of thinking offers Lee an hermeneutical "in" principle. But overly emphasizing this connecting principle, Lee discards the concept of the origin of relations in the Trinitarian life. Because of change, the Son proceeds from the Father and the Spirit (*paterque*), the Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son (*filioque*), and the Father proceeds from the Son and the Spirit (*Spiritusque*).[8] Lee removes what is distinctive in a Christian theology of the Trinity, in terms of the origin of relationships. His language of the Trinity is fused "in" the world's religions.

The Christian theology of the Trinity can be understood as an hermeneutical program advocating God's history of salvation through Jesus

[5] John B. Cobb and Christopher Ives (eds), *The Emptying God: A Buddhist–Jewish–Christian Conversation* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1998), p. 24.

[6] According to Meister Eckhart, there are two aspects of the *bullitio* of divine emergence and relations in the Trinity, and the *ebullitio* of creation of the world and the incarnation of the *Logos* in the soul believer. Eckhart's dialectics affirm the self-manifestation of the Godhead in Jesus Christ who is incarnated and reborn in human soul. Eckhart's language of *bullitio* and *ebullitio* in a Neoplatonic sense is different from Buddhist language of non-dualism. Christian mystical dialectics refer to identity in difference, compared to the Buddhist logic of non-duality. *Cf.* David Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other: The Interreligious* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), pp. 81–82.

[7] Lee Jung-Young, *The Trinity in Asian Perspective* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996), p. 59.

[8] *Ibid.*, p. 152.

Christ and the Spirit against mythical conceptions of gods. In an interfaith context, several theologians have attempted to contextualize the Christian self-understanding of the Triune God for the purpose of dialogue with the wisdom of non-Christian religions. An hermeneutical imagination is demanded in interfaith contexts for exchanging love and wisdom. But such discourses have not fully entered into discussion with Jewish and Taoist perspectives, which is what I shall seek to do here next.

Trinitarian logic in philosophical Taoism and Jewish wisdom

Moltmann explored the possibility of dialogue with philosophical Taoism of Laozi, in attempting to appropriate the wisdom of Tao as a Chinese mystery of the world for its Christian relevance. In Moltmann's view, Tao is only known through Tao, as God is only known through God. This epistemological principle is similar in both cases.[9] Sharing Moltmann's interest, I propose an understanding of the triadic movement of Tao for constructing a mode of the Trinity in terms of God's act of saying, rooted in God's transcendence.

In the text of *Tao-te-ching* (*The Scripture of the Way and its Power*), there is a dynamic triadic movement of Tao through *de* (realization and fulfillment of Tao in history and nature in terms of living and abiding with Tao) in the presence of *qi* (cosmic spirit). "The Way that can be told of is not an Unvarying Way."[10] The root meaning of Tao is the path or way of guiding or establishing communication. The transcendence of Tao in its formlessness and ineffability is interpreted as both the initial beginning and the source of life, standing in relation to all living creatures. At the level of absolute truth, the permanent Tao refers analogously to the biblical idea of *Ehyeh* ("I shall be"). This biblical idea of God resists the human attempt to conceptualize God through words.

Tao, as both the Great Way and the Great Void, is greater and more comprehensive than the universe. The Tao cannot be named or clearly conceived in human words due to its mystery and freedom. Tao gives birth to the One; who gives birth to two and three and subsequently up to ten thousand creatures. *De*, a realization or expression of the Tao in

[9] Jürgen Moltmann, *Science & Wisdom* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003), pp. 172–193.

[10] *Laozi*, translated into English by Arthur Waley, revised and annotated by Fu Huisheng (Beijing: Hunan People's Publishing House, 1999), p. 3.

actual and natural living like a river. The Tao is the ground or womb from which *de* and *qi* originate; all life springs from, follows and finally returns to it through the guidance of *de* and *qi*. Metaphorically expressed, Tao is like a mother or mystical womb, and is closely associated with the Great Void. The Great Void is efficacious like the belly and capable of emanating *de* and producing breath *qi* at will.[11]

Similarly, in the Jewish mystical book of *Zohar*, we read

> Three emerge from one; one stands in three;
> Enters between two; two suckle one;
> One suckles many sides. Thus all is one.[12]

In Exodus 33:21–23, we read that there is a place "by God," and God shows God's back to Moses. In John 1:1, God creates a place alongside God: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." This indwelling place of God originates in the God of Israel who says, "I am who I am" (Ex 3:14). According to Martin Buber, the *Kiehyeh imakh* ("I will be there with thee," Ex 3:12), is the "assurance of God's direct support" in which the word *ehyeh* reveals the meaning of the mysterious name of God. Therefore, God who says "I am who I am" signifies that "God shall be there as whom God shall be there."[13] This God ahead of us does not contradict God's incarnational immanence in history.

Characteristically, the God of Israel has its own name.[14] Israel is the body of faith, denoting a physical indwelling of God in Israel. The dialectic between God's transcendence and the physical immanence of the name of God is evident in 1 Kings 8:13f. (the temple as the house for God to dwell); Exodus 40:35 (the glory of YHWH filling the tabernacle); and Leviticus 16:16 (God's indwelling in the midst of people's uncleanliness). To the degree that God enters into the world of human beings, appearing in a definite place and dwelling in it, Judaism also has an incarnational character.

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[11] Paul S. Chung, "The Mystery of God and Tao in Jewish–Christian–Taoist Context," in Paul S. Chung *et al* (eds), *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium: Theology of Minjung in Fourth Eye Formation* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2007), pp. 243–251.

[12] Daniel Chanan Matt (ed. and trans.), *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment. The Classics of Western Spirituality* (New Jersey: Paulist, 1983), p. 21.

[13] Martin Buber, "The Election of Israel: A Biblical Inquiry (1938)," in Asher D. Biemann (ed.), *The Martin Buber Reader* (Plagrave: Macmillan, 2002), p. 25.

[14] Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), p. 91.

In Christianity, this incarnation is concretized in the person of Jesus Christ. If the Christian Trinity does not remove the name of the God of Israel, and if the Trinity does not separate the incarnation of God's Word in Jesus Christ from the indwelling of God in Israel, then a Trinitarian understanding of God in the name of the Father, Son and the Spirit overcomes its supersessionist and patriarchal language in light of the tetragrammaton (referring to four letters of YHWH).

Furthermore, in the Genesis account (Gen 17:20, 23), not only Isaac/Israel but also Ishmael, through circumcision, comes into God's blessing. "I will bless him and make him fruitful and exceedingly numerous … I will make him a great nation." The God of Abraham hears the outcry of the oppressed Hagar. God who elects Israel is also the advocate for Ishmael and Hagar. The God of Israel is not an exclusive God, nor an apathetic God who is incapable of suffering, enthroned high above in heaven without feelings. In the rabbinical literature, there are an abundance of biblical texts and explanations that speak of God abasing Godself and making Godself the servant of Israel. In this regard, the Christian understanding of God in the Trinitarian expression bears witness to the One who loves Israel, Ishmael/his descendents, Christians and people of the world in the reconciliation of Christ and in the freedom of the Spirit. This God is a God who is foundational for the common hope of Israel and the church, standing under God's one covenant, which includes Ishmael's descendents who are under God's blessing of Abraham.

The Christian concept of hope can be articulated in confessing the God of Israel and Ishmael and the father of Jesus Christ. At this juncture, Luther's provocative notion of God's irregular grace regarding Ishmael and his descendents is strikingly:

> For the expulsion does not mean that Ishmael should be utterly excluded from the kingdom of God… .The descendents of Ishmael also joined the church of Abraham and became heirs of the promise, not by reason of a right but because of irregular grace.[15]

In the biblical context, God dwells in the transcendence, in the temple of Jerusalem and with humility in the human heart and spirit (Isa 57:15). This threefold indwelling of God transcends all human logic. This is

[15] Jaroslav Pelikan (ed.), *Luther's Works*, vol. 4 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1964), pp. 42–44.

similar to Tao, *de* and *qi*, which is analogous to the Judeo-Christian notions of God as wisdom (Word) and Spirit. In the triadic self-evolution of the Tao, *de* and *qi* do not replace the void of Tao. *De*, as God's speech, became flesh in the presence of *qi*. The Chinese word Tao is also a verb: "to speak." A Chinese translation of St John's Prologue reads, "in the beginning was the Tao." This is a Christian appropriation of Taoist wisdom in China and Korea in translating the Bible. Nevertheless, God's speech remains a mystery as *de*.

Tao moves through progressing and returning. This homecoming is destined for all through *de*, in the presence of *qi*. Analogously, Jesus Christ may be the embodiment of Tao and embraces, as *vere homo*, the ideal holy person in realizing and fulfilling God's virtue (divine nature in creation) and Torah (divine law). However, God remains free even in this embodiment. Jesus' words are not in competition with God, nor do they replace God. Likewise, Israel accepts a concept of *Elohim* in interaction with its religious environment. The name of God remains the subject in its predicate of *Elohim*, or Father, Son and the Spirit.

The Tao emits vital energy and gives rise to change. Like a mother, the Tao creates the world and also nourishes it with its powerful energy, *qi*. The cosmic energy *qi*, emanating from Tao, brings forth all forms of life in primal unity with the Tao in the circular balance of *yin* and *yang*. *Qi* is like life giving water. The Taoist triadic idea of Tao, *de* and *qi*, can offer a basis for interpreting God's movement through the Son in the presence of the Spirit.

Analogous to Tao, there is a double movement of Jesus in coming from and returning to the Father (Jn 14:28). All things originate from and return to the one dynamic movement of God outward through the Son and the Spirit. In begetting the Son in the presence of the Spirit, God invites all living creatures to participate in the life giving love, shalom and righteousness of God, who is reconciled to the world. A theological discussion of religious pluralism without reference to God's reconciliation would be susceptible to a metaphysical pluralism, radically relativizing every different contextual understanding and experience with the divine reality. God's reconciliation points to the God who assumes and loves the reality of pluralism through the embodiment of God's life (the Word: *de*) and through God's dynamism of sustaining and guiding creaturely life (Spirit: *qi*). This "other" hermeneutical imagination marks a point of encounter of the different horizons between the Christian concept of the Trinity and Taoist wisdom of Tao-*de*-*qi*, which can enrich God's

good news in Jesus Christ through the Spirit for all. Therefore, we believe in "one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all" (Eph 4:6).

Theological reflection on God's transcendence in Trinitarian history

In the biblical understanding of the God of Israel, YHWH is the God who will be with God's people. In Trinitarian teaching, Gentile Christians attempted to clarify who YHWH was by articulating God's historical action through Jesus Christ in the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Son and the Spirit are grounded in God proper, by becoming God's representational instances, like God's "two hands" in a metaphorical sense (see Irenaeus). As God represents the divine reality *ad extra* for the creaturely world, so the eternal Son of the Father is the Word who became flesh, in Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew born of a Jewish mother, Mary, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Between the eternal Son, the Holy Spirit and the eternal Father, there is a living and dynamic fellowship, each in communion with the other (*perichoresis*). Understood this way, God's self-communication through Jesus Christ in the presence of the Spirit is no less than what God has done in Christ for us and the world. The Triune God is the God of love in freedom.

From St Paul's perspective, Christ will not sit at the right hand of the Father for all eternity, but will one day return the lordship to the Father, so that the Father again will be "all in all" (1 Cor 15:28). Human understanding of God in the mystery of the Trinity remains partial and incomplete until this is fulfilled. If the Trinity is an interpretation of God in covenant with Israel and the Father of Jesus Christ, it should first of all be oriented towards the Hebrew Bible. The Trinity articulates the revelation of the name of God in the threefold historical events: 1) in God's coming to Israel (including God's blessing of Ishmael); 2) in God's coming in Jesus Christ; and 3) in God's coming to all through Pentecost. At this juncture, the Christian discourse of hope is centered on a God who will be all in all retaining universal significance, creating a space for hope of people of other faiths toward the transcendental eschatology of God.

In his confession of *Sh'ma Yisrael* (Mk 12:29–30), Jesus affirms the God of Israel. Responding to one of the scribes, Jesus said that "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one." Trinitarian

theology needs to be critiqued not only for its Neoplatonic tendencies, but in terms of its practical missional direction God's presence or nearness is communicated through the Trinitarian confession. God's relationship with Jesus (or vice versa) is understood as the relationship between Father and Son, in which God's "humanity" is in relationship to the Holy Spirit. God's kingdom is righteousness, shalom and joy in the Holy Spirit (Rom 14:17). The God of Jesus Christ whom we know in the Spirit, is God who exists as God in love and communion with Christ and the Spirit. Yet within a Trinitarian framework, God's transcendence or freedom remains a mystery beyond human conception.

Karl Barth argues that the Word made flesh is revealed radically and fundamentally "in Jewish flesh." Thus, "Jesus exists in solidarity with the representatively and manifestly sinful humanity of Israel."[16] Israel is an adequate prefiguration of Jesus' prophecy. Barth's understanding of incarnation in its Jewish context and his epistemological principle *esse sequitur operari* [17]are significant. God's being is explained only through action.[18]In this light, *theologia crucis* (theology of the cross) plays a constitutive role in acknowledging who God is for us. Jesus' sacramental identity with those who are the least (Mt 25:39) sharpens the socio-ethical dimension of the Trinity.

Significant here for a theo-political orientation of Trinitarian theology is Bonhoeffer's seeing worldly events from below, "from the perspective of the outcast, the suspects, the maltreated, the powerless, the oppressed, the revived—in short, from the perspective of those who suffer."[19] God enters into all other reality in order to change it materially.[20] In Jesus Christ, the coming of God's kingdom becomes an eschatological reality of God's promise; in Christ, God's Torah will is done and fulfilled. In Israel there is the one God who rules (Dt 6:4). However, God's unity and

[16] Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* VI/1, ed. by G. W. Bromiley and T.F Tolerance (London/New York: T. & T. Clark, 2004), pp. 171–172.

[17] For Barth, "*esse sequitur operari*" (the knowledge of being follows the knowledge of activity) implies in human knowledge of God that God's activity in historical revelation comes first, preceding human natural and ontological knowledge of God. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, *ibid.*, p. 82.

[18] *Cf.* Barth, *Church Dogmatics* II/1, *ibid.*, 28.1, "The Being of God in Act," pp. 257–272.

[19] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), p. 17.

[20] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Werke*, vol. 10, ed. by Eberhard Bethge (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1986–1999), p. 436; *cf.* Andreas Pangritz, *Karl Barth in the Theology of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*, trans. by Barbara and Martin Rumscheidt (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1989), p. 33.

oneness are manifest in the act of God's coming. The coming of the God of Israel in the historical forms of God's presence is essentially the root of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity.

Theology of religions and the myth of the Trinity

In speaking of a Christian understanding of God in a Trinitarian history, we basically assume that, in a pluralistic culture, theology must be public rather than private or particularistic. Understanding God as Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier determines other theological and anthropological discourses of faith, hope and love in relation to neighbors of other faiths. Rather than being subsumed in a totalizing theology of religions, a Trinitarian hermeneutics can become a basis for interreligious dialogue and cooperation, without dislocating the incommensurability or uniqueness of any religion. A prophetic messianic way of Jesus Christ finds its *locus* in God's universal reign in the presence of the Spirit in the world, inviting the many to God's life giving mystery. Thus, Trinitarian theology can become a postfoundational hermeneutics of God's act of saying that recognizes that God can speak to Christians through religious others.

This Trinitarian interpretation of divine reality can learn from a Taoist framework (*Tao de qi)*, while distancing itself from Taoist naturalism and syncretism. The Trinitarian interpretation of divine reality proposed here does not reduce different, unique lived experiences, liturgical expressions and belief systems into a higher monism. God is not identical with the Hindu theandric vision. God's mystery is not a mythical cosmic Hindu perspective of humanity's union with totally transcendental reality (as in Panikkar's vision).

In Hindu–Christian relations, Panikkar daringly attempted to reconstruct the cosmotheandric (referring to a unitive vision of God, human beings and the universe) mystery of God in terms of a hybrid between the Trinity and Advaita, in which God is in all and all is in God. The theandric insight, which is at the center of the Upanishads, is expressed well in the statement, "The finest essence here—that constitutes the self of this whole world; that is the truth; that is the self (*atman*). And that's how you are."[21] What is then Brahman? "That from which these beings

[21] Chandogya Upanishad, 6.13, in *Upanishads*, trans. by Patrick Olivelle (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), pp. 154–155.

are born; on which, once born, they live; and into which they pass upon death—seek to perceive that! That is Brahman!"[22]

Panikkar sought to relate the Christian Trinity to the absolute Brahman of Hinduism and *sunyata* in Buddhism. The Father emptying Godself into the Son is called the cross of the Trinity or integral immolation of God in the Trinity.[23] In contrast to the Christian tradition, Panikkar applies a total *kenosis* to the Father in light of Buddhist emptiness. The Father has no being; the Son is his being. The Spirit is the communion between the "I" of the Father, the "Thou" of the Son and the "We" of the Trinity.

Panikkar's radical apophatism (transcendental negativity) of the Father in a Hindu Vedanta framework, becomes a basis for religious relativism and pluralism. Hinduism is given a special role in illuminating the mystery of the Spirit. The historical life of Jesus Christ as a Jew disappears into the myth of the Father's *kenosis*. Panikkar's thinking is grounded in the diverse and multiple spiritualities of Hinduism and Buddhism, rather than in a Christian self-understanding of God revealed in the history of Israel and in Jesus Christ through the Spirit. Buddhism, as the religion of the silence of the Father, occupies its place in Trinitarian universalism. However, in his typological simplification of Buddhism into the religion of the Father's silence, the Buddhist principle of relationality (dependent co-arising) and non-discriminating compassion are left behind. Hinduism as the religion of non-differentiation of the Spirit takes the place of the *Logos* centered Trinity in Christianity. Consciousness of the world's religions displaces the Christian discourse of *perichoresis* (divine life in communion and permeation without confusion among divine persons) in the Trinitarian life. Instead, Panikkar is committed to the *perichoresis* of world religions.

Panikkar's advaitic Trinitarian structure syncretizes religions in favor of a mythical god, who does not care for human life in its social, ethical and cultural dimensions. A prophetic witness to God in God's historical action is left behind and replaced by a mythical god within the Hindu Vedanta framework. I contend that the Christian Trinity should be understood as a theological program of demythologizing such a mythical idea of God.

Similar to Panikkar, John Hick attempts to integrate all different religious experiences and paths into the Great Integrator, or the Eternal One in itself. The Eternal One becomes the ultimate foundation for Adonai, Allah,

[22] Taittiriya Upanishad III.1.1., in *ibid.*, p. 190.

[23] *Cf.* Raimundo Panikkar, *The Trinity and the Religious Experience of Man* (Maryknoll: Orbis; London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1973), p. 60.

non-personal Brahman, Vishnu or Shiva, Tao or the Buddhist principle of Dharmakaya—it is plurality of divine personas. The Eternal One has no right to challenge human limited consciousness and experience. This Eternal One is incapable of communicating or speaking to us, renewing and transforming our life for participation in love, shalom and righteousness (the divine attributes) and reconciliation in the world. Faith than becomes merely an "act of cognitive freedom and responsibility,"[24] rather than a gift of God through the power of the Spirit, which engenders faithful trust and commitment to God's love in freedom. Instead, human cognitive consciousness and rationality are elevated to control and instrumentalize the Eternal One.

Furthermore, the God of Israel is degraded as a divine persona different from Shiva, Krishna, or Buddha. Hick argues that many gods are "different persona formed in the interaction of the divine presence and human projection."[25] God not only needs many names but also many personae (masks). Should this meta-narrative by applied to all different religious experiences and communities, totalizing and reducing them to the Kantian concept of "god" in self? Drawing from a Kantian metaphysics of *noumenon* and phenomenon, Hick categorizes Christian ideas (e.g. incarnation, resurrection and eschatology) into attributes of mythological concepts. In order for God to have many names, Jesus Christ is radically reduced to a holy human person, a human being who was exceptionally open and responsive to God's presence.[26] In Hick's view, Christian discourse on the Trinity is mythological in character. If Hick speaks of all gods known within particular religious traditions as humanly experienced personae of the "Real in Itself," he espouses a pluralistic Trinity of the divine persona for his theology of religions.[27]

God's Trinitarian self-communication

The Trinity is a Christian self-understanding of God's act of saying through Christ and the Spirit. Starting from the act of God speaking, a Trinitarian

[24] John Hick, *God has Many Names* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), p. 50.

[25] *Ibid.*, p. 53.

[26] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (London: Macmillan, 1989), pp. 271–72. Further, see John Hick, *The Metaphor of God Incarnate: Christology in a Pluralistic Age* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993), p. 105.

[27] Hick, *The Metaphor*, *ibid.*, p. 108.

understanding of God is not reduced to a product coming out of the interaction between divine phenomena and human projection. Against Hick's divine mask theory of Trinity, God *in se* comes to us, as the speech event. God's act of saying, as *viva vox evangelii* (the living voice of the gospel), which takes place in the proclamation of the Word, Scripture, liturgy, sacraments and human experiences are not to be relativized for the sake of a dualistic, agnostic, self-centric God, nor a Hindu cosmotheandric polytheism. Rather, Trinitarian thinking offers an hermeneutical insight for transcending human projection and postulated myths of religious pluralism.

Given the dynamism of divine speech, I draw special attention Luther's provocative and irregular way of thinking. Regarding the relationship between the Hebrew Bible and the Greek Bible, Luther regards the gospel as the oral Word to which the Scriptures bear witness. The gospel as good news is carried out in speech. Thus the Greek Bible should be understood in the sense of the living voice.[28] Luther's deliberation on the living voice of the gospel is integrated into the content of the gospel, namely *mutuum colloquium et consolatio fratrum* (in his Smalcald Articles of 1537). This is a necessary form of the gospel alongside preaching, the sacraments and the ecclesial office.[29] Luther's theology of the gospel, as *viva vox Dei*, corresponds to an important explanation in Hebrews 1:1: "God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets." The Word of God in Jesus Christ cannot be understood apart from God's act of saying through all ages, against a plural horizon of effects. God's speech points to an open event in the sense of mutual colloquium and brotherly and sisterly comfort.

Therefore, according to Luther's irregular way of thinking, God's act of saying is not simply limited to the confessional language of the church. As Luther argues,

> God has to speak in a different way. If God opens the mouth, and lets a word forward, so it works…Also God has grasped, with this short word, the whole of the gospel and kingdom of Christ, so that nobody can eradicate it.[30]

[28] *WA* 12, 275.9–11.

[29] Martin Luther, "The Smalcald Articles," in Robert Kolb and Timothy J. Wengert (eds), *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), p. 319.

[30] *WA* 24, 390, 27v.

As far as God speaks, God provides faith to us through the Word in the presence of the Spirit. Faith is proven by the hearing of the gospel, which retains its mystery and source in the Word of the living God. Thus, faith is the event in which God comes to us with the grace of justification.[31] Once we are justified by faith in *viva vox Dei*, we are called to be active disciples in service of the living Word of God, rather than remaining passive and quietistic onlookers. That is, we become coworkers with God (*cooperatio hominis cum Deo*).[32]

From the perspective of God's act of saying, Luther proposed a more profound and rich theology of the Word of God than Karl Barth's theology of God's Word. If all creatures are masks of God (Martin Luther), God may speak to us through the wisdom of other religions and cultures in a completely different and unexpected manner.

Within a biblical context, in the Spirit exploring and searching the depths of God (1 Cor 2:10), God becomes the one known through the Spirit. The Spirit is the Spirit of God's self-knowledge, because the Spirit is from God (1 Cor 2:12). If God is not communicated to us by the Spirit, God remains unknown to us. Our understanding of God is thus based on God's self-communication. The Spirit is God who questions, explores and illuminates God. This Spirit in the Trinitarian life is the demythologizing ground for mythical conceptions of many gods or masks. No one comprehends what is truly God except through the Spirit of God (1 Cor 2:11). Here, Trinitarian language leads to an hermeneutics of suspicion regarding mythical concepts of God and, at the same time, an hermeneutics of retrieval for the biblical understanding of God as manifest in history.

The Spirit, deeply and mysteriously bound up with God, is the Spirit of love in protest against death, putting to death the deeds of the body (Rom 8:13). The Spirit blows where it will, and it is not confined to the sphere of the church. Jesus affirmed this by reading from the prophet Isaiah: the Spirit is the Spirit of anointing the prophet who brings good news to the poor, release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, letting the oppressed go free, and proclaiming the year of the Lord's favor. This Scripture is fulfilled in the hearing of the congregation in the synagogue (Lk 4:18-19, 21). Already in Jesus' time, the *ochlos* (the

[31] Hans J. Iwand, "Theologie als Beruf, Vorlesung," in Helmut Gollwitzer, *Glauben und Wissen*, *Nachgelassene Werke*, vol. 1 (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1962), p. 243.

[32] *WA* 40 I, 447, 22f. *Cf.* Helmut Gollwitzer, *Krummes Holz–aufrechter Gang: Zur Frage nach dem Sinn des Lebens* (Munich: Christian Kaiser Verlag, 1985), p. 313.

poor and marginalized) were excluded by the religious authorities. Jesus, the partisan of the lowest of the low (Mt 25:45), fulfilled the Spirit of emancipation and protest against the culture of death.

The Son as the Word of God is connected with the concept of eternal begetting (*generatio*) through the Father. The metaphor of the generation of the eternal Word or Son implies that God speaks anew to humanity in Jesus. Jesus Christ is what God says to us in an ongoing and new way. If God's internal work (*opus ad intra*) is identical with God's work for the world (*opus ad extra*), the actuality of God is connected with the historical actuality of Jesus. Understood this way, the concept of the generation of the eternal Son has nothing to do with the mythical localization of Jesus as the second essence (*ousia*) of God. Jesus Christ as *vere deus* and *vere homo* becomes possible without displacing the transcendence and freedom of God, and also in his relationship with Israel. Jesus Christ as truly divine and truly human is the way of God's saying, with reference to God's dynamic event of eternal and historical generation (Mt 1), not in the sense of *homousious*.[33]

The objective basis of Christian faith is the God who speaks to us in the fellowship and communion with the Word and the Spirit. In Luther's view, God the Father gives Godself not only to us, but also to all creatures. All creatures, however small, help provide the comforts and necessities of life. For the Reformer, faith in God implies that God the Creator gives Godself to all creatures by looking after human beings and indeed all creatures in this earthly life.[34] Faith in God is embedded in the believer's heart by listening to what God speaks through Word and sacrament, diaconal work and also through all creatures (as masks of God).

In classical Chinese (for example, the *I Ching*), to believe and to be worthy of faith, are expressed by the word *xin* (containing the signs for a human being and for speech). Therefore, to believe means to let speech act. For Confucius, *xin* is one of the cardinal virtues: one believes in a person who is worthy of confidence, in whose word one can trust. A person with *xin* is one who is in harmony with the *qi*, the spirit or cosmic virtue. If one has *xin*, trustful speech, one is the incarnation of cosmic virtue. Tao can be understood as the Way that gives and enables

[33] Athanasius' affirmation of the Son in one essence with the Father leads to his rejection of divine possibility. The death of Jesus on the cross had no effect on the divine *Logos*, because the divine *Logos* as very Word and God is impassible and incorruptible. See Ted Peters, *God—The World's Future: Systematic Theology for a Postmodern Era* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), p. 106.

[34] Luther, "The Large Catechism," in *op. cit.* (note 29), pp. 432–433.

all ways, and refers to the source that empowers human beings to think and meditate. The mystery of divine saying conceals itself in the life world of Tao, so that the divine act of saying reveals itself as the Way in communication with others. Tao manifests itself as *aletheia* in the act of thoughtful and mysterious saying. Tao comes to us as language. Language that speaks through discourse is grounded in the primordial silence. "Authentic silence is possible only in genuine discourse."[35]

If Christian faith is grounded in the event of divine speech, understood as a gift of the Spirit, faith is active in love in relation to others. God the Infinite, who breaks into my Christian consciousness, encourages me to be faithful and committed to those with whom Christ identifies himself (Mt 25:40). Prophetic diakonia arises out of faith in the Triune God and the gratitude of God's justifying grace; this is the objective basis of Christian love and hope. God's act of saying, which took place in Israel and Christ, occurs here and now. It mobilizes Christian faith in love and hope toward the coming of God. God's final coming, however, is not at human disposal. God is a becoming and transforming reality in the coming of God's Future.

Understood biblically, incarnation contradicts a Greek idea of totally identifying the essence of God and Jesus Christ.[36] The concept of the immanent Trinity is not fully justified in a biblical sense, because the Scriptures witness to God's action *ad extra* in an historical sense. Nevertheless, the teaching of the immanent Trinity finds its meaning in the words *generatio*, *spiratio* and *processio*, in a metaphor of God's begetting the Son in the presence of the Spirit. The Spirit is an event in communal life between the Father and Son. This Spirit event refers to a dialogical reality in God, referring to God's historical action in a Trinitarian sense. The immanent Trinity has its meaning vis-à-vis the economic Trinity, which risks human projection of God through human experience or reducing God to the iron cage of human rationality. What the immanent Trinity intends is that God is not at human disposal. God who loves in freedom is more than human necessity. The immanent Trin-

[35] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time. A Translation of Sein and Zeit*, trans. by Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), p. 154. Later Heidegger altered his view by stating that silence as such is "Ent-sprechen," a corresponding. See Martin Heidegger, "The Way to Language," in Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, revised and expanded, ed. by David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), p. 420.

[36] *Cf.* Gavin D'Costa, "Christ, The Trinity, and Religious Plurality," in Gavin D'Costa (ed.), *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1996), p. 18.

ity critiques any human projecting onto on God.[37] God's relationship with God's Son in the genealogy of Israel can be understood as God's eternal faithfulness and creative companionship with God's Son. The eternal *spiratio* is concretized in the risen Jesus who greets his disciples by breathing on them (Jn 20:22).

In God's covenantal relationship with Israel, we hear St Paul referring to the Jews as "enemies of God for your sake" (Rom 11:28). In God's covenantal faithfulness to Israel, Paul argues for an eschatological proviso against any Christian finalizing of eschatology. Thus God, who exists in a Trinitarian reality of becoming, speaks to us in a completely different and unexpected manner. God's act of saying may take place outside the walls of the church. If so, Christian discourse on the Trinity retains Paul's theology of justification and, at the same time, his eschatological reserve vis-a-vis the triumphalism of the church. Thus, St Paul's solidarity with Israel in Romans 11:2 ("God has not rejected his people whom he foreknew") becomes foundational for Trinitarian solidarity with the godless as well as people of other faiths. In listening to the uncomfortable and even ominous voices of God's saying through the face of the other, God's transcendence and freedom in the Trinity can become a driving force for Christian openness toward a reality of religious pluralism and ethical responsibility in face of others.

Religious "others," as free communicators of God's saying, accompany Christians by witnessing to God in ways that are analogous to the Word and the Spirit. Human words can be a genuine witness and attest as real parables to the dynamic speech event of God's saying. In the Trinitarian reality of becoming, neither godlessness nor paganism are insurmountable barriers and obstacles for God.

In light of God's reconciliation in Christ with the world, Bonhoeffer retrieved one of Luther's provocative insights: "The curses of the godless sometimes sound better in God's ear than hallelujahs of the pious."[38] In agreement with this irregular theology, Karl Barth also audaciously states, "…we will certainly be prepared at any time for true words even from what seems to be darkest places. Even from the mouth of Balaam

[37] *Cf.* Catherine Mowry LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991), p. 211. Here, I am not convinced about dethroning God *in se* for the sake of Karl Rahner's rule, according to which "the economic Trinity *is* the immanent Trinity, and vice versa."

[38] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Act and Being: Transcendental Philosophy and Ontology in Systematic Theology*, ed. by Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr. and trans. by H. Martin Rumscheidt (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), p. 161.

the well-known voice of the Good Shepherd may sound, and it is not to be ignored in spite of its sinister origin."[39] The internal relationship of God with God's self (Gen 6:6, Ps 106:45) indicates that God is transcendent beyond God's self for the sake of humanity.

In light of the living God's dynamism and freedom, it is important to affirm Trinitarian language as the concept of God's act of saying, which is the basis for religious and cultural pluralism. Christian virtues of faith, hope and love find their *locus* in ethical discipleship in relation to others. Through this discipleship, we follow God who loves all in divine freedom and transforms an unreconciled reality through Trinitarian fellowship and self-communication with Israel, the church and all people of the world.

[39] Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV/3.1, *op. cit.* (note 16), p. 119.

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Churches are facing complex interreligious realities. These require a multidimensional approach that addresses theological as well as societal aspects. In this book, faith, hope and love are seen as three basic dimensions in interreligious encounters that can be constructively engaged and further deepened. Given this starting point, writers from different parts of the world develop theological reflections arising from their specific interreligious engagement and research. The intent of this book is to deepen commitment to and theological discernment within interreligious relations.

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> **"The contributors provide valuable insights for theologians, church leaders and all those who must engage theologically with interreligious realities today."**
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