

# The limits of an ethic-centric inter-religious dialogue

A scientific essay in systematic theology

by Derek Suchard

## De grenzen van een op ethiek gebaseerde interreligieuze dialoog

een wetenschappelijke proeve op het gebied van de Theologie

#### Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
aan de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus prof. dr. C.W.P.M. Blom,
volgens besluit van het College van Decanen
in het openbaar te verdedigen op maandaag 30 januari 2006
des namiddags om 1.30 uur precies
door

Derek Jerome Suchard geboren op 13 januari 1955 te Toronto, Ontario, Canada

## Promotor: Professor Dr. Jean-Pierre Wils

Leden van de manuscriptcommissie:

Prof. Dr. H.J. Häring, voorzitter

Prof. Dr. W. Dupré

Prof. Dr. F.J.H. Vosman (KTU te Utrecht)

#### The limits of an ethic-centric interreligious dialogue

#### a scientific essay in Theology

Doctoral thesis

to obtain the degree of doctor

from Radboud University Nijmegen

on the authority of the Rector, Prof. C.W.P.M. Blom,

according to the decision of the Council of Deans

to be defended in public on Monday, the 30th day of January 2006

at precisely 1:30 pm

by

Derek Jerome Suchard born in Toronto, Ontario, Canada on 13 January 1955

## Doctoral supervisor: Professor Dr. Jean-Pierre Wils

Members of the doctoral thesis committee:

Prof. Dr. H.J. Häring, chairman

Prof. Dr. Williem Dupré

Prof. Dr. F.J.H. Vosman (Catholic Theological University, Utrecht)

#### © 2006 Derek Suchard

ISBN-10: 90-9020276-5 ISBN-13: 978-90-9020276-1

All rights reserved. Nothing in this work may be reproduced, stored in an automated database system or published in any form, either electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording or any other way without the express written consent of the copyright holder.

#### **Table of Contents**

١.	Inter-religious dialogue: the current state of affairs	1	
II.	Inter-religious dialogue in the modern era: an overview	5	
III.	Stating the problem	27	
V.	Models of dialogue	35	
٧.	Applying the models	48	
VI.	Dialogue	61	
VII.	To Defend and Explain: the Apologetics	67	
VIII.	The Collationes of Pierre Abelard	82	
X.	Nicholas of Cusa and the Peace of Faith	93	
X.	Rings of the Father: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing	114	
XI.	Review	129	
XII.	Initial conclusions	133	
XIII.	Hindus and Muslims: a suitable case for study	135	
XIV	. Where do we go from here?	146	
Epilogue16			
Annex 1: Declaration Toward a Global Code of Conduct 16			
Nederlandse Samenvatting17			
Literature17			
Index			
Curriculum vitae			

### I. Inter-religious dialogue: the current state of affairs

Inter-religious dialogue and discussions of the relations among the world's religions have become such pervasive topics in the past decades that one may be forgiven for thinking that it has always been thus: men and women of goodwill from the various faiths that constitute the rainbow of religious experience in our world seeking one another out to discover what binds them and, sometimes, to work together against the ills that sometimes seem poised to destroy, if not the world, then at least the human component in it.

It is true that individual religious thinkers through the centuries have often pondered issues of one Truth against another, or against others, and the meaning of the existence of those so-called Truths in light of revelation of one type or another. That has not, however, been a primary activity of any religious organisation until quite recently.

Of the religions still extant, Christians of virtually all hues have been more concerned with their Gospel-inspired mission of saving the souls of the world -- a mission that they have interpreted as replacing wrong belief with Christianity -- than with exploring any common Truths they share with the objects of their rescue efforts.

Muslims, too, have shared this missionary passion since their revelation of 1400 years ago, working hard right up to the beginning of the modern era and, perhaps with renewed vigour, starting again in the new millennium to try to expand the House of Islam at the expense of the House of War.

Jews, on the other hand, have spent much of the past two millennia trying to draw as little attention to themselves as possible, theologically, preferring survival in a largely hostile, largely European, world.

Hinduism has on the whole had much less difficulty with questions of the existence of other religions, having accounted for them in its theology, while Buddhists, according to some, appear to have avoided the issue entirely by dispensing with what virtually all other religions consider central: the presence and/or existence of a deity or pluriform godhead, and some form of personal or social relationship with that deity or godhead.

Increasingly, though, with the passing of the years, peoples with vastly differing views of the Ultimate Reality have come to live more closely together, both in time and space, and have been forced, if only for reasons of good neighbourliness, to explore the faiths around them with a more open mind. With increasing frequency, starting slowly and building steadily to the almost Babel-like proportions seen today, discussions have been taking place at a host of levels,

from local religious community groups and individuals, to the halls of academe and the corridors of political power and the organisations of worship of the various faiths.

As one might expect from a interaction with so many participants from so many perspectives, until quite recently there was never much of a consensus as to what the purpose or aims of the dialogue, as it came to be known, might be.

For some, it was simply a way to end hostilities between the faiths. For others, the formation of a common front against godless atheists and sinners. Others still longed for the creation of a power for good in the world, the religious united against poverty, war, human suffering in all its manifestations. And others, a very small minority, looked forward to the creation, one way or another, of a single Religion, a single Faith, that would unite humanity in a single worshipping mass.

Some noteworthy fringe movements to the contrary notwithstanding, the latter objective has had the least success. It has simply not proved possible or even desirable for most believers from whatever faith to simply admit that they and all who preceded them have been in such grievous error that much of what they believe should be tossed aside and a new belief, comprising some of what they believe and some of what others believe, should be adopted.

The other objectives, however, have had significantly more success. There are instances of Muslims, Christians, Jews and Hindus, for example, making common cause on issues of public morality. The number of religious organisations, whether churches, mosques or temples, who have united in projects to relieve suffering caused by war, poverty and disease is truly remarkable.

The successful projects, however, give the lie to the claim that what is going on here is 'dialogue', at least according to one definition of that term. In order to work together, the various religions are indeed engaged in deep discussion to dispel misconceptions held by others about them and to have their own misconceptions dispelled, but the discussions they are having do not as a rule go to the heart of what the religions believe is the core of their faith with the objective of incorporating what they learn into a new Truth, which is what a dialogue by definition should do.

The dialogue appears to have stranded in an ethical cul-de-sac, concentrating on matters of this world, this humanity and questions not so much of theology but of ethics.

The humanity of the participants and those they seek to help has become the touchstone against which all is being measured. To be sure, the assumption is made that the desire to cease fighting, to help the poor, to cure the ills that plague the world, are based in the participants' faith and their God-given responsibility for Creation, but as recent developments have shown, that may not

be an absolutely essential requirement to achieve the stated goals of that cooperation.

For all the bad press Communism has received over the past hundred years, sincere communists, for all their atheism, are genuinely concerned for the welfare of their fellow man. Humanists, too, are no less concerned about reducing the horrors of war than religious people are (and sometimes more). Trade unionists, basing their activities on the benefits of collective action, can be just as effective in improving the lot of their fellow citizens as a battalion of believers.

To achieve the stated objectives of the modern inter-religious dialogue, therefore, it appears not even to be necessary to participate in it. The issues are ethical and not *per se* religious or theological. Even what may be the most publicised and well-known dialogue initiative by religious people, the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, shows its bias in its very title. That does not mean that believers should not participate in discussions of ethical matters, but they should not be confused with theologically driven *inter-religious* dialogue as such.

Inasmuch as the dialogue seems to have developed a focus on the ethical then, it is not unreasonable for a theologian to ask whether there is a theological purpose to the dialogue, and if so, what that purpose might be.

That is the driving thought behind this dissertation and one that will inform all of the research that follows.

It is quite possible that the research will show that there is *no* theological use for inter-religious dialogue as it is being conducted today. Should that prove to be the case, it does not necessarily follow that it is therefore useless and should be abandoned.

In the first place, those of us who have made religion and theology our study will continue to find it interesting to discuss both the content and the meaning of other faiths with our colleagues from those faiths. In addition, it does constitute another peaceful point of human contact, and all of those are to be cherished. We would, however, be forced to consider that, while not without its uses, the current dialogue is, theologically speaking, of peripheral interest only, if of any interest at all, to the core business of what our faiths are about, whatever that may mean and however diverse those 'core businesses' might be.

This study is made up of several components.

The first part will look at the development of dialogue in the modern: what it is, how it came to be and how it is perceived. From that will arise several models of dialogue as exemplified by some of the dialogues being held today. That will include an analysis of dialogue, as such. Those models will then be compared to try to determine whether there are any common elements that may assist.

The second part looks at the historical development of views of other religions by Christian thinkers through the centuries and the relations between and among them. The main focus is on the development of Christian thought. That approach reflects to a certain extent my own background: I know the development and the writers of Christianity better than the development and writers of other faiths. A second reason for beginning from the perspective of the Christian historical development is that, all of its colonial baggage notwithstanding, Christianity can be said to have played a driving role, if not *the* driving role, in getting interreligious dialogue started and in keeping it going.

The first part concludes with an examination of a study of multi-faith communities *in situ* to see how they have dealt with some of the issues that have been encountered thus far. The end of the second part will try to answer the original question posed: what is the theological use of inter-religious dialogue?

In the third part, I shall propose a way of increasing the theological component of dialogue and look at the consequences of doing so.

## II. Inter-religious dialogue in the modern era: an overview

Some would argue that inter-religious dialogue, far from being a creation of the modern era, is something that religions and their adherents have long been involved in, in sometimes-heated albeit informal discussion with one another. In keeping with the general project of modernity, however, that reasoning continues, the discussion has now—at first slowly and then with increasing speed—become formalised, institutionalised and globalised, with an increasing number of participants and scope of activity.

While that point of view proceeds from a very loose definition of what dialogue is and what it is intended to achieve, we can accept it at one level, that there have long been discussions among believers from different belief systems as to how they relate to one another in the Divine scheme. The nature of this work, however, prevents it from presenting an exhaustive history of the development of the dialogue and the motivations of all or even many of its participants. I shall therefore attempt only to capture some of the milestones that have characterised and influenced the dialogue, in the full realisation that others may choose other moments and that the dialogue has never had and may never enjoy unanimity of purpose or method among all its active or potential participants.

From a Christian perspective, the internal reflection on questions that are still crucial to the discussion being carried out today have always been closely related to the question of mission, of carrying the message of Christ's saving grace to the unsaved.

For many hundreds of years, the question of dialogue and relations with other faiths was principally an academic one. Roman and post-Roman Europe had been nominally Christianised, and the pagan holdouts were considered solely as rearguard elements of an already defeated opponent that needed only to be ultimately weeded out. Heretical movements, and especially those that posed a numerical threat, such as the Cathars and Albigensians, were considered rebellious factions that endangered the saving message (and the power) of the Church and their destruction was elevated to the level of a Crusade. In neither

Commemorated, among other ways, in a cheerful little religious-pop song of 1963 entitled *Dominique*, by the Belgian so-called Singing Nun, Soeur Sourire, in which she recalls that "Dominique, notre Pere, combattit les Albigeois". Soeur Sourire, "Dominique" in Entre Les Etoiles, (Philips LP 33 t. 8.719), 1963. That crusade is also credited with being the inspiration of the now-infamous saying Caedite eos! Novit enim Dominus qui sunt eius" (Kill them all! The Lord will know his own.), attributed to Papal envoy, Abbot Arnaud-Amaury.

case, was there any consideration given to entering into a discussion of equals. The presence of a substantial and unconvertible Jewish population within a Catholic and Orthodox Europe, on the one hand, and, later, the forces of Islam across virtually the whole of the southern frontier, on the other, did provide some cause for some thinkers to consider the place of these faiths in the divine plan.

The explosion of exploration, conquest and colonisation by Europeans of the Americas, Asia and Africa at the end of the 15<sup>th</sup> and beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries and the missionary activity that accompanied it, however, must be considered as the beginning of a new religious paradigm for the Europeans, brought on by the realisation that the God of Abraham—of the Christians, Jews and Muslims—for the first time in a millennium would again have to contend with faiths that knew Him not and nations and peoples that had apparently fared well without that knowledge.

Coincidental with—but not separate from—that paradigm shift, philosophers, scientists and theologians in Europe had begun to undermine many of the assumptions on which the church had relied. Propelled by the findings of a new breed of natural scientists, the Aristotelian worldview so staunchly defended by the Church, was being demolished. The Reformers of the 16th and later centuries – Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, etc. -- had turned their backs on the heretofore-unquestioned authority of Rome. Enlightenment rationalists such as Immanuel Kant, Voltaire and the Deists were undermining the validity of Church's inspiration.

To greater and lesser degrees, institutionalised doubt and a willingness to question and to re-examine First Principles had become the order of the day.

While all that was going on internally, however, the contemplation on the relationships among the religions and the theological importance of non-Christian religions was taking place in the background as far as the vast majority of believers were concerned. Relatively few of them met or had any contact with members of other faith communities.

This began to change in the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a very few university faculties, stirred on by the new science of anthropology,<sup>2</sup> began offering courses in comparative religion. These were essentially phenomenological exercises, detailing the external rites and practices, with some little attention paid to the qualitative aspects of the belief systems themselves. Only slowly did a widespread attitude develop that these belief systems could be

Nelson, John K. 1990. The Anthropology of Religion. A Field Statement for the Department of Anthropology, University of California, Berkeley

positively examined and compared with or contrasted to their Christian counterparts.

#### The World's Parliament of Religions 1893

To commemorate the 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 'discovery' of the 'New World' by Christopher Columbus, the United States planned the World's Columbian Exhibition for 1893 as a bold and brash celebration and display of all the best in business, invention, science and industry of that era.<sup>3</sup>

To counterbalance that materialistic vision, a Chicago lay-member of the Swedenborgian Church, Charles Carroll Bonney proposed a series of non-materialistic international congresses in keeping with his idea that "[s]omething higher and nobler (...) is demanded by the enlightened and progressive spirit of the age."<sup>4</sup>

Religion was but one of twenty congresses held simultaneous with the Exhibition,<sup>5</sup> but it was arguably the one with the deepest and most lasting impact.

The religious congress, eventually known as the World's Parliament of Religions, was scheduled as 17-day event in the autumn of 1893, concurrent with the Columbian Exhibition. For its time and our own, its ambitions were grand: "to unite all Religion (capitals his. DS) against all irreligion...to present to the world [...] the substantial unity of many religions in the good deeds of the religious life. [...Where the religions could present] their common aims and common grounds of union. [...To secure] the coming unity of mankind, in the service of God and man."

Bonney's intentions as revealed by the above statements in a preliminary report to the Exhibition, are remarkable not only for what they reveal about how far he at least had come in his considerations of other faiths, but also for what they reveal about how far or how little the discussion has progressed since.

Bonney recognises that Religion in many of its forms can form common cause against irreligion. This implies, of course, that they have something in common which irreligion does not share. Second, he first looks to outward signs, "good deeds of the religious life," or in other words, ethical conduct. Third, Bonney sees that Religion has common aims, though he doesn't specify what those are, and—the signal danger for those for whom syncretism is the danger lurking behind much of what passes for dialogue today—common grounds of union.

Seager, Richard Hughes, (ed.), The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893 (La Salle, II: Open Court), 1993, p. 3

Seager, Religious Pluralism, pp 3-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>δ</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

None of these three points would be out of place in any discussion of interfaith dialogue today, though the emphasis and order would probably shift depending on the nature of the particular dialogue and the participants.

In many respects, the 1893 Parliament must be considered a success. There were participants from many religions, from many countries (though representatives were predominantly from the United States). It had many successful spin-offs:

- Academic -- an increasing number of universities added history of religion or comparative religion to their offerings following the Congress;
- inter-faith -- many organisations today, including the International Association of Religious Freedom, The World Congress of Faiths, and others owe their philosophical beginnings, if not their organisational ones, to the Congress;
- Christian ecumenical -- following on the Congress, the first steps were taken that would eventually lead to the seminal 1910 Edinburgh Conference on World Mission; the World Council of Churches and its ecumenical and missiological activities are the most lasting contemporary expressions of that.

That the Parliament essentially disappeared off virtually everybody's radar until almost its centenary is not necessarily a sign of failure. It had a purpose that it fulfilled and it led to other initiatives that are still bearing fruit today. In any case, it was a first step on a path that is far from ending.

#### Signs of the time

In addition to the materialistic challenges that the first World's Parliament of Religions was intended to face, a substantial philosophical change as regards religion was taking place at about the same time.

First among these might be considered the development of the historicalcritical method (including form criticism, literary criticism, and others) of Biblical

#### inter-religious dialogue

studies. With its origins with Richard Simon in 1678, historical-criticism attempts to apply scientific principles to matters Biblical.

At the time of the World's Parliament, historical-critical studies had led to the development of the History of Religions School in Germany, which denied any special status for religion in general and Christianity in particular, subjecting it to the same historical examination as all other subjects. A major result of the School was the publication of *The Absoluteness of Christianity* by Ernst Troeltsch in which the very idea of claims to absoluteness of Christianity or any religion *on the basis of human knowledge and analysis* was disputed. It might well be, according to Troeltsch, that there is an absolute religion, but the evidence of it in the earthly realm of his time and the whole of history until then was not available. The arrival on the scene of Paul Ricoeur's three so-called "Masters of Suspicion" – Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, and Friederich Nietzsche -- who posited ulterior motives and origins for Christianity and religion, and the acceptance of those ideas among first, the intellectual and later the general population in the West, also contributed greatly to the weakening in many people's minds of Christianity's claims and an openness to positive views towards other religions.

#### 1910 Edinburgh Conference on World Mission

Growing directly out of the 1893 Parliament, but delayed due to the complexities of organisation, the 1910 Edinburgh Conference was a conscious attempt to deal with the problem of Christian mission in a religiously plural world. It has become accepted as marking the beginning of the modern ecumenical movement, as it was one of the first times that delegates from missionary societies of many

\_

McCarthy, John F., "Two views of historical criticism", in *Living Tradition: Organ of the Roman Theological Forum*, No. 77, September, 1998. Simon was a Catholic priest and is called the father of historical-criticism. His two major works are *Critical history of the Old Testament* and *Critical History of the New Testament* (*Histoire critique du Vieux Testament* (1678) and *Histoire Critique du texte du Nouveau Testament* (1689) respectively) His work, however, was placed on the Vatican's Index of Prohibited Books, he was expelled from *l'Oratoire*, a group of priests occupied with training seminarians, and use of the method was discouraged. Much of the work that followed in the field was non- or even anti-Catholic until relatively recent times.

While this current work clearly lacks the scope to examine this development in depth, it may cautiously be proposed that without historical-critical studies, Christianity would not have developed whatever openness it now displays towards other faiths, especially as regards the examination of commonalities of origin and intention with Christianity.

Troeltsch, Ernst, *The absoluteness of Christianity and the history of religions*, David Reid (trans.), third edition (Richmond, VA.,: John Knox Press) 1971. I have discussed Troeltsch extensively in my Master's thesis (Suchard, Derek, *Faith without Borders? An inquiry into the limits of theological pluralism*, Prof.Dr.Th.Witvliet en A. Hoekema (supervisors), 100: SCR.51.nr.5 (University of Amsterdam) 2000.

different churches united in their goal of "the evangelisation of the world in that generation." <sup>10</sup>

The conference spoke of the Christian encounter with other religious traditions as being of "the same order as the meeting of the New Testament church with Greco-Roman culture, demanding fundamental shifts in Christian self-understanding and theology. The evangelistic thrust of the conference, therefore, was predominant in the overall Edinburgh message."<sup>11</sup>

A marketing executive in a major corporation might be tempted to characterise the conference as a competitive analysis and a seminar on how to position Christianity in various markets with the express aim of increasing market share. As described in a contemporary newspaper report, the "missionary specialists" had largely gathered "to exchange views on the ways and means of executing the Lord's command to preach the gospel to the whole creation."

The emphasis of one day's seminars, for example, was "The Missionary Message in Relation to Non-Christian Religions", which was described as "a liv[ing] question to every thoughtful person"

This is certainly a far-cry from, in fact is the antithesis of, most of what passes for inter-religious dialogue at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The speakers on that day were primarily concerned with marketing issues: how to make the Christian message palatable to members of other faiths, whether Chinese, Hindu, animist or Muslim. The question of benefits or insights that could be reciprocated was completely foreign to the delegates. <sup>12</sup>

For all its one-sidedness, the Conference did achieve much that is still bearing fruit today in inter-faith dialogue. It was the absolute assurance of the participants that they could and should learn as much as possible about the other faiths. That they did it in order that Christianity might better shine would today in many circles be roundly criticised, but for the time, it was a revolutionary approach that until then had been only adopted individually by missionaries in the field. In 1910, it was elevated to a formal methodology, though its results could not have been predicted.

#### The Christian Message in a non-Christian World

In 1928, a second Missionary Conference was held, in Jerusalem, where the topic of rising secularism dominated the agenda. Charles Bonney of the 1893

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> "Interfaith Dialogue (Dialogue, Interfaith)" entry from the Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement published jointly by the World Council of Churches and Wm. Eerdmans (1991).

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

Morrison, Charles Clayton, "The World Missionary Conference, 1910", in *Christian Century*, July 4-11, 1984, p. 660, (reprinted from the July 7, 1910, issue)

#### inter-religious dialogue

World's Parliament would certainly have been no stranger here, as delegates unanimously accepted a closing document in which the positive values of other religions were affirmed and a closing of religious ranks against the unreligious was called for.<sup>13</sup>

The apparent unanimity, however, was deceptive, and led to an increasing split among the missionaries. This split came to a head just prior to the 1938 World Conference in Tambaram, India. A report edited by W.E. Hocking was "critical of the exclusive attitude of Christians towards other faiths and claimed that the challenge to the Christian faith came not from other faiths, but from anti-religious and secular movements."<sup>14</sup>

This report was the cause of much dispute and led to Dutch missionary Hendrik Kraemer, at the time working in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia), being asked to write "a book on the biblical and theological basis of the Christian attitude to other faiths." <sup>15</sup>

As the study book for the conference, Kraemer's *Christian Message in a non-Christian World* had a lasting effect far beyond the conference.

The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement records that

Kraemer, following Karl Barth, insisted that the biblical faith, based on God's encounter with humankind, is radically different from all other forms of religious faith. Admitting that God's will shines through, albeit in a broken way, in the all-too-human attempts to know God in all religious life, Kraemer maintained that the only true way to know the revealed will of God is by responding to the divine intervention in history in Christ. Both Barth and Kraemer emphasised the uniqueness of the revelation in Christ and considered Christianity as a religion to be as human as any other. But neither could avoid giving, at least by implication, a unique place to Christianity in so far as it had become the vehicle through which this unmatched revelation of God is lived and proclaimed." 16

Kraemer's book was influential both in Tambaram and beyond, but never enjoyed unanimity. There were many dissenting voices who could not find themselves in Kraemer's view that "that the gospel was in discontinuity with other religious traditions." <sup>17</sup>

15 Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup> "Interfaith Dialogue"

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup> "Interfaith Dialogue".

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

The conclusion of the conference, while slightly favouring Kraemer's view, did record that "Christians are not agreed on the revelatory character of other religious traditions. It also noted that it was "a matter urgently demanding thought and united study" within the ecumenical movement. <sup>18</sup>

#### World Congress of Faiths

It will be noted that, with some exception possibly being made for the 1893 Parliament, all of the activity within the organised Church up to that point had primarily involved talking about rather than with other faiths. In short, there was no dialogue. This does not mean that no formalised dialogue was taking place, only that it was largely outside the boundaries of institutionalised Christianity, in the hands of some smaller organisations, such as the World Congress of Faiths.

The World Congress of Faiths grew out of a Religions of Empire conference held in London, England in 1924, and was intended to bring together representatives of all the faiths under the sway of the then British Empire. <sup>19</sup> It may be considered unique in that presenters talking about a particular belief were expected to actually be adherents of it, rather than having a scientist or theologian interpreting it for the audience. <sup>20</sup> A major motivation for the conference was the need for the different faiths to be able to achieve a modus vivendi. Only one-sixth of them, for example, were Christian. "Of the Empire's 460 million people, about 210 million were Hindus, about 100 million were Muslims and about 12 million were Buddhists."

Four years before the Tambaram conference, English Christian mystic Francis Younghusband began preparations for a World Congress of Faiths. This was to be an actual event to take place 3-8 July, 1936, as well as an ongoing organisation. Younghusband's purpose was not, he said, to formulate "another eclectic religion (...) [but to] help members of all faiths to become aware of the universal experience that had been his." 22

Younghusband wanted to meet at a mystical level, transcending institutions and dogma. His motives, however, and the motives of the organisation which hardily survives under the World Congress of Faiths name, were not always well accepted by the outside. The Archbishop of Canterbury at the time of the first World Congress of Faiths in 1936, Cosmo Gordon Lang, says he declined an

Braybrooke, Marcus, *A wider vision: A history of the World Congress of Faiths*, (Oxford: Oneworld Publications) 1996, p. 9

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 11

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 32

invitation to take part personally in the conference "for the reason that this might be taken to imply that I thought that Christianity was only one of many religions in spite of being as I believed the true religion based upon Divine Revelation."<sup>23</sup>

The Second World War put the WCF's grand ambitions of a truly international congress on hold. That, coupled with the fear of many outsiders especially in organised Christianity that the WCF was actually a syncretist movement, may have prevented it from achieving the stature and influence of other groups, such as the World Council of Churches, for example. The WCF has not been entirely without influence, however. In the 1990s, Archbishop Runcie of the Church of England did speak at a WCF event, and the focus of the WCF has shifted from "transcendent unity to valued diversity." Many of its guiding principles, however, appear to me to have been taken over by the WCC and others, which may make the WCF redundant as a separate body.

#### Religion as unbelief: Karl Barth and Church Dogmatics

As we have seen, the organised Christian churches did not entirely embrace the apparent increasing confluence of religions as the 20th century progressed. There was a very strong group that held fast to the uniqueness of Christianity, despite the efforts of Ernst Troelstch and the History of Religions School to demonstrate that that uniqueness and absolutivity was nowhere inherently apparent.

The challenge that that presented was taken up by Swiss Reformed theologian Karl Barth when he published the German text of Volume 1, Part 2 of his magnum opus, Church Dogmatics in 1938.

That book, which deals at great length with the doctrine of the Word of God, devotes a not inconsiderable part to the question raised by Troeltsch *et al*, in dealing with three issues that are relevant to this study:

- 1. What is religion?
- 2. What is the significance of the elements that Christianity shares with other religions?
- 3. What is the source of the Truth of Christianity against the untruth of other religions?

Barth makes a clear opposition between the Revelation of God and human religion, based on two principal points. In the first place, Revelation is God reaching out to humanity while religion is humanity reaching out to try to find God:

"[R]eligion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His Revelation wills to do and does do. It is the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 36

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 wilfully evolved by man."24

As such, it is an acknowledgement of unbelief, in that it does not rely on the Revelation of God, which "encounters man on the presupposition and in confirmation of the fact that man's attempt to know God from [man's] own standpoint is wholly and entirely futile."25 If man "really can know God, [that] capacity rests upon the fact that he really does know Him, because God has offered and manifested Himself to [man]."26

That applies to Christianity as well as to other religions, Barth states, and it is possible to have a Christian religion of unbelief. That occurs, inter alia, when the Bible, for example, is seen to be a book of religion. For although "it is a Law, that is, an order and command and direction for the new life of the people and children of God (...) [i]t is not a book of religion. From first to last it is the proclamation of the justifying and sanctifying grace of God."27

It is, however, incontestably true that Christianity shares common elements with other religions in form, belief and practice, and that is not a surprise:

> "The religion of man is always conditioned absolutely by the way in which the starry heaven above and the moral law within have spoken to the individual. It is, therefore, conditioned by nature and climate, by blood and soil, by the economic. cultural, political, in short the historical circumstances in which he lives. "28

Religion, therefore – all religion – is "never true in itself and as such." That is as true for Christianity as for all other religions. Christianity, too, "stands under the judgement that religion is unbelief, and that is it not acquitted by an inward worthiness, but only by the Grace of God."30 And that judgement applies to all external forms, all human activity related to God.

27

Barth, Karl, Church Dogmatics, Volume 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 2, G.W. Bromley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (trans.), (London: T&T Clark International), 2004, p. 302.

Ibid., p. 301.

Ibid.

Ibid., p. 312

Ibid., p. 316.

Ibid., p. 325

Ibid., p. 327

#### inter-religious dialogue

There are other religions which appear to approach Christianity in some ways, Barth refers most favourably to the Buddhist Pure Land Sect and the True Sect of the Pure Land, which approach the Protestant view of unmerited justification most closely,<sup>31</sup> but that is deceptive, and because it lies outside the Revelation of God, is as much unbelief as all other religions.

For Barth, Christianity and all other human religions, in and of themselves, must be seen as earthly manifestations that, through no merit of their own, are either bathed in the divine sunlight or cast into the shadow when that light does not fall. They cannot by themselves determine where that light will fall, cannot move themselves into the light, or out of it.<sup>32</sup>

Does Christianity have any "right" to a claim as the "true religion" then? Yes, but not because of anything it does. Only because God elected it, and did not elect any other, although He could have done. When a Christian elects God, therefore, it is only an acknowledgement of an election *by* God that has already taken place. And inasmuch as God did not elect any other religion, Christianity may be said to be *the* True Religion, not in pride or boasting, but in total humility and powerlessness.<sup>33</sup>

#### The Second World War

Of the two world wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the First World War is often cited as the more important theological event, leading as it did to interbellum nihilism on the one hand and to what some have called the revitalisation of Protestant theology that began with the publication of Barth's *Letter to the Romans*.<sup>34</sup> Be that as it may, the Second World War is, in my opinion, more significant as regards the inter-faith dialogue. With a speed that would have otherwise taken decades to achieve, the realisation that Hitler's and the National-Socialists' intention and attempt to eliminate the Jewish people owed a great deal to the Christian churches' attitudes towards the Jews over 1500 years, the mainstream churches, almost as a bloc, assumed – to greater and lesser degrees and with significant regional differences – an unaccustomed humility as regards dealings with the Jews in particular and non-Christian religions in general.

The support of the 'Christian' West – Europe and North America – for the reestablishment of the State of Israel, owed a significant debt to the guilt felt at the unintended complicity in Hitler's plan.

33 ....

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 340-344

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 353 ff.

First edition in 1918.

The period between the wars, which saw the rise of Fascism and Nazism throughout Europe, and the increasing isolation of Europe's Jewish communities, also saw the first stirrings of a positive shift in Christian attitudes towards Christianity's "beloved brother." <sup>35</sup>

In 1924, the Presbyterian Church of England, for example, established a sub-committee that issued a conclusion downplaying the urgency of converting the Jews and encouraging mutual cooperation.<sup>36</sup>

In 1928, the National Conference of Christians and Jews was established in the United States, "[d]riven by a rise in xenophobia, a strengthened Ku Klux Klan, anti-Catholicism, and anti-Semitism...prominent leaders for the Christian and Jewish communities (...) came together to form a human relations organisation dedicated to addressing the nation's inter-group problems: The National Conference of Jews and Christians for the Advancement of Justice, Amity and Peace."<sup>37</sup> 38

All these initiatives notwithstanding, it was the Second World War, and the years immediately preceding it, and especially beginning with Kristalnacht in 1938,<sup>39</sup> that saw a sea change in Christian-Jewish relations. In 1941,<sup>40</sup> the Council of Christians and Jews was formed in England, "against all forms of discrimination and (...) to promote 'the fundamental ethical teachings which are common to Judaism and Christianity.' "<sup>41</sup>

From a letter from Pope John Paul II to Catholic Priest Romuald-Jakub Weksler-Waszkinel. Quoted in Cohen, Roger, "For a Priest and for Poland, a Tangled Identity." In *The New York Times on the Web*, 10 October 1999. The priest had discovered at the age of 35 that he had been born to a Jewish mother but given to a Catholic Polish woman to raise. He chose the priesthood of his own volition. His name is a combination of his original Jewish name and his adopted Catholic name.

Braybrooke, Marcus, *Children of One God: A History of the Council of Christians and Jews*, (London, England and Portland, U.S.A.: Vallentine Mitchell) 1991, p. 1-2.

National Conference for Community and Justice web site: <a href="http://www.nccj.org/nccj3.nsf/htmlmedia/history.htm">http://www.nccj.org/nccj3.nsf/htmlmedia/history.htm</a>, (3 February 2003). The organisation changed its name in the 1990s from the National Conference of Christians and Jews to "better reflect its mission to build whole and inclusive communities. The historic name confused many, who believed that NCCJ was an interfaith organisation.[T]he new name is not a change in vision, but rather an affirmation of our abiding commitment to embrace the diversity of our nation."

Note: When Internet references are no longer available on the web sites cited, they can be found on The Internet Archive by entering the URL as shown in the reference. The Internet Archive web site is: http://www.waybackmachine.org/.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>39</sup> Braybrooke, *Children*, p. 7

Coincidental with, though they couldn't have known it at the time, the proclamation of "The Final Solution to the Jewish Question" by the National-Socialists.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>41</sup> Braybrooke, *Children*. p. 11.

#### inter-religious dialogue

During the Nazi period and the war itself, the active and passive complicity of the German and other European churches<sup>42</sup> with the Axis anti-Semitic campaign became all too obvious and slowly the realisation built that the Church's attitude through the centuries had contributed significantly to the attitudes that had made the Final Solution possible, if not inevitable. Many churches have subsequently apologised for their part in the anti-Semitic culture, though it would be a far cry to say that Europe, especially, is free of anti-Semitic and racist tendencies.

#### **Decolonisation and migration**

After more than 400 years of European colonisation of Africa, Asia and the Americas, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw the dissolution of those empires in one-tenth of that time. Small island outposts remain, but essentially, national self-determination has become the order of the day. This has curiously not led to the splendid isolation of the former colonisers, but rather to the acceleration of multi-cultural, multi-faith communities as thousands of citizens of the former colonies migrated to the former seat of empire, bringing their faiths – previously known only to those who had been sent out as servants of empire – with them and forcing previously homogeneous societies to quickly adapt to mosques and temples and customs that challenged many of the assumptions on which their previous missionary efforts had been based. For Europeans and North Americans, familiarity with the Other no longer came through the interpretation of world travellers, but through daily dealings with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, etc.

The colonisation wave of the 1950s and 1960s was followed in Europe in the 1970s and later by the "guest worker" wave, when Western Europe went in search of workers to perform those jobs that Western Europeans would not do at the lower end of the socio-economic scale. Those workers, largely rural males, then brought their families<sup>43</sup>—first wives and children, later parents and extended family members—and, against the intention of the original program, stayed. These Turks, Moroccans, Palestinians, etc., became visible minorities who slowly, and not yet entirely, are integrating into the fabric of European society.

This is not intended in any way to denigrate the efforts of the so-called Confessing Churches in Germany, which actively opposed the Nazi program and hundreds of whose clerical and lay members were arrested, sent to concentration camps and killed. See, De Corneille, Roland, *Christians and Jews: The Tragic Past and the Hopeful Future,* (New York: Harper ChapelBooks) 1966, p 16-58.

In the Western-European context, Switzerland is the exception, with very strict rules about repatriation and employment of family members for guest workers.

The pool of newcomers expanded even further beginning in the 1980s and 1990s with the development of a structural stream of refugees, both real and economic, from non-Christian countries, adding to the numbers of those who are adding to the inter-cultural and inter-religious mix of Western Europe.

A new-found national humility by the former European powers and a need for these different groups to co-exist peacefully, led first the politically correct, then the population in general to accept that peoples of different faith were not only not necessarily evil, but quite demonstrably as moral and ethical as "we" ourselves.

The positive effects this has had on dialogue as currently conducted cannot be overstated. For now dialogue is not only about countries and groups far away, but about good relations with neighbours, which adds a serious element of urgency to the process.

#### "All that is true and holy"

For a missionary religion, which Christianity certainly is, dialogue is a puzzle. If one has the truth, after all, then it is one's duty to proclaim it. How then can one have a dialogue of equals? For the Roman Catholic Church, the answer is that inter-religious dialogue, "is part of the Church's evangelizing mission." <sup>44</sup> Notwithstanding that position, the Church has made some serious openings to other faiths, creating some creative solutions to approaching dialogue.

One of the most creative, and simultaneously one of the most problematic, has been the recognition, expressed in the Vatican II document Nostra Aetate that "[t]he Catholic Church rejects nothing of what is true and holy in [other] religions (...) which (...) often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men."<sup>45</sup> This was not a declaration of relativism, however. Christ remains the revealed truth and it is the duty of the Church to continue to proclaim that truth. It has made it possible, however, for the Church to engage in dialogue on something more closely resembling equal ground.

It made it possible to consider non-Christians and their religions in terms other than as the damned.

A second important concept that gained authority as a result of Vatican II, that of anonymous Christianity, is the brainchild of Catholic theologian Karl Rahner.

"Anonymous Christianity means that a person lives in the grace of God and attains salvation outside of explicitly

See, Dominus Jesus. On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, published by the Congregration for the Doctrine of the Faith, (6 August, 2000)

Nostra Aetate, in Francesco Gioia (ed.), Interreligious Dialogue: The official teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995), (Boston: Pauline Books & Media), English edition, 1997, p. 38. Nostra Aetate was promulgated in 1965.

constituted Christianity... Let us say, a Buddhist monk... who, because he follows his conscience, attains salvation and lives in the grace of God; of him I must say that he is an anonymous Christian; if not, I would have to presuppose that there is a genuine path to salvation that really attains that goal, but that simply has nothing to do with Jesus Christ. But I cannot do that. And so, if I hold if everyone depends upon Jesus Christ for salvation, and if at the same time I hold that many live in the world who have not expressly recognised Jesus Christ, then there remains in my opinion nothing else but to take up this postulate of an anonymous Christianity."

Originally formulated in Rahner's *Theological Investigations*, anonymous Christianity recently received even greater weight, when *Dominus Jesus* was promulgated in 2000, with such statements as: "Therefore, the sacred books of other religions, which in actual fact direct and nourish the existence of their followers, receive from the mystery of Christ the elements of goodness and grace which they contain."<sup>47</sup> And further: "(...), the salvific action of Jesus Christ, with and through his Spirit, extends beyond the visible boundaries of the Church to all humanity. Speaking of the paschal mystery, in which Christ even now associates the believer to himself in a living manner in the Spirit and gives him the hope of resurrection, the Council states: "All this holds true not only for Christians but also for all men of good will in whose hearts grace is active invisibly. For since Christ died for all, and since all men are in fact called to one and the same destiny, which is divine, we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the paschal mystery".<sup>48</sup>

The idea of anonymous Christianity, while elegant in resolving the difficulties inherent in a pluralistic constellation of religions, has not been particularly well received outside the Church, and has critics within it as well.

Non-Christians find that it has a triumphalist air...that regardless of what they themselves say, they can at heart be anonymous Christians without their knowledge or consent. This seems again to be putting dialogue, as currently constituted, at a level of theological second place, as it doesn't, in fact, much matter, what one believes: anonymous Christianity is at work anyway.

48 Ibid., II.

Rahner, Karl, *Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982* (New York: Crossroad), 1986. p. 15.

Dominus Jesus. On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church, I, published by the Congregration for the Doctrine of the Faith, (6 August, 2000)

On the other hand, some Catholic critics<sup>49</sup> find anonymous Christianity an offence to the dogma of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*, which in its starkest form states:

"[The Holy Roman Church] ... firmly believes, professes and preaches that 'no one remaining outside the Catholic Church, not only pagans,' but also Jews, and heretics, and schismatics, can ever become partakers of eternal life; but that they will go into the 'eternal fire prepared for the devil, and its angels," (Mt. 25:41) unless before the end of their life they are joined (*aggregati*) to it. For union with the body of the Church is of so great importance that the sacraments of the Church are helpful to salvation only to those remaining in it; and fasts, almsgiving, other works of piety and the exercises of a militant Christian life bear eternal reward for them alone. 'And no one can be saved, no matter how much alms one has given, even if shedding one's blood for the name of Christ, unless one remains in the bosom of the Catholic Church.'50

#### World Council of Churches

The World Council of Churches, a largely Protestant body born in 1947 at a General Assembly in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, was originally about crossing doctrinal divides among Churches. In 1961, mission took on a more important role with the integration of the International Missionary Council (IMC), which had earlier been so crucial in the development of philosophies underlying dialogue with the conferences at Edinburgh, Jerusalem and Tambaram (see above). (The IMC had been invited to join when the organisation was being planned in 1938, but at Tambaram the decision was taken to continue as a separate body.)

The integration of the IMC into the WCC also gave more prominence to the issues that the IMC had debated so strongly internally since Edinburgh in 1910 as regards the proper relationship towards other religions. It was not immediately resolved, as a history of the development of inter-religious dialogue by the WCC

The conservative Roman Catholic organisation, *In Hoc Signo Vinces*, for example, believes that 'anonymous Christianity' is "tantamount to heresy...As St. Thomas Aquinus pointed out in his Summa Theologica, an unknown cannot be loved. A man who does not know God, who does not know Our Lord Jesus Christ, cannot love Him. Thus, he fails to properly fulfill his purpose on this earth, and cannot expect to be rewarded for it in heaven. "E-mail to the author, dated 8 January 2005.

Extract from "Decree for the Copts at the General Council of Florence", 1442. Cited in Jacques Dupuis, S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 1997, pp. 95-96.

attests. At the WCC's Fifth Assembly, held in Nairobi in 1975, which was attended for the first time by "five persons of other [unspecified] faiths" the subunit on interfaith dialogue presented its first report to the assembly. It became apparent that the question of dialogue continued to be divisive: "some felt that dialogue would lead to the kind of syncretism so feared at the 1928 Jerusalem meeting. Others wanted to defend the uniqueness and finality of the revelation in Christ and feared that the dialogue enterprise compromised that faith. Still others saw in interfaith dialogue a threat to mission, which they saw as fundamental to the being of the church itself."

Voices from Asia "defended dialogue as the most appropriate way for the church to live in a pluralistic world."

The sub-unit's report was sent back to the drafting group which met the assemblies concerns with the addition of a new preamble.<sup>52</sup>

Those divisions are still at work today, but much progress has been made at the WCC and in individual churches in formalising dialogue situations and in creating guidelines for it.

#### World's Parliament of Religions 1993

Despite widespread press coverage at the time, the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 disappeared almost without a trace for almost a century after it was held. The official proceedings, which were published shortly after the Parliament "promptly disappeared into the stacks of university libraries." <sup>53</sup>

As its centenary approached, the Parliament was 'rediscovered' and a Second Parliament of Religions was scheduled, also for Chicago, in 1993.

The 1993 event, in contrast with its century-earlier predecessor, was not associated with any celebration of Columbus's discovery or any other event, and some commentators have expressed the feeling that it was in fact a collection of Parliaments rather than just one.<sup>54</sup>

While participation was much broader in 1993 than it had been a century earlier, many of the goals were similar: to exchange information about one another's beliefs, to allow the Other to express his beliefs freely with no one

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>51</sup> Ariarajah, S. Wesley, "Dialogue, Interfaith" in *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1991.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

Seager, Richard Hughes, (ed.), *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions, 1893* (La Salle, II: Open Court), 1993. P. xiii

See Seager, Richard Hughes, The Two Parliaments, the 1893 Original and the Centennial of 1993: A Historian's View, in Teasdale, Wayne and George Cairns, (eds.), *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, (New York: Continuum) 1996, p.27.

feeling obliged to accept or refute them. In that, it shared many of the characteristics of inter-faith meetings that followed up to the present day.

Though it is still, after less than a decade, too early to tell what the total influence of the second parliament will be, one result of it seems likely to have a very long and influential life ahead of it: The Global Ethic.

The Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, drafted by Swiss Catholic Theologian Hans Küng and signed – adopted seems too strong a word as the signatories signed as individuals and not as organisations – by 143 attendees, is designed to present to the world an ethic that can be applied to many of the world's problems. In the section entitled Principles, the Declaration states:

"Hundreds of millions of human beings on our planet increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. There are tensions between the sexes and generations. Children die, kill, and are killed. More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities because of social, racial, and ethnic conflicts, the abuse of drugs, organised crime, and even anarchy. Even neighbours often live in fear of one another. Our planet continues to be ruthlessly plundered. A collapse of the ecosystem threatens us.

Time and again we see leaders and members of religions incite aggression, fanaticism, hate, and xenophobia - even inspire and legitimise violent and bloody conflicts. Religion often is misused for purely power-political goals, including war. We are filled with disgust.

We condemn these blights and declare that they need not be. An ethic already exists within the religious teachings of the world which can counter the global distress. Of course this ethic provides no direct solution for all the immense problems of the world, but it does supply the moral foundation for a better individual and global order: A vision which can lead women and men away from despair, and society away from chaos.

We are persons who have committed ourselves to the precepts and practices of the world's religions. We confirm that there is already a consensus among the religions which can be the basis for a global ethic - a minimal fundamental consensus

concerning binding values, irrevocable standards, and fundamental moral attitudes"

The Introduction, written by an editorial team of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions and originally intended as a press release, covers it briefly:

"We are women and men who have embraced the precepts and practices of the world's religions:

- We affirm that a common set of core values is found in the teachings of the religions, and that these form the basis of a global ethic.
- We affirm that this truth is already known, but yet to be lived in heart and action.
- We affirm that there is an irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for families and communities, for races, nations, and religions. There already exist ancient guidelines for human behaviour which are found in the teachings of the religions of the world and which are the condition for a sustainable world order."

The organisers of the 1893 Parliament would have been proud and would certainly have been able to find themselves in this declaration: it is a practical expression of the common values of the religions, finding common ground on which to work together to remedy the ills of this world.

And, as the Declaration covers only those ethical principles which are common to religions, there was still plenty of room for the different believers to have joint action while retaining their individual beliefs. This is the hallmark of Dialogue today, as we shall see further.

#### State of play

Starting in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and carrying on as the 21<sup>st</sup> century opens, dialogue has grown to become a standard feature of modern religious life and study. The Catholic Church has its Secretariat for Relations with Other Religions, the WCC its team for inter-religious relations and dialogue. Other churches, temples, synagogues and mosques are involved at various levels with dialogue in one or more of the four distinct areas of dialogue identified by the WCC:

- the dialogue of life the interaction of believers of different faiths in day-to-day life situations
- bi-lateral or multi-lateral dialogues formal meetings between representatives of faith communities
- academic dialogues among academics of different faith traditions

spiritual dialogue
 where believers come together to participate in faith situations.

The WCC has published *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths* and *Ideologies*, noting that there are still many questions remaining, including:

What is the relation between the universal creative/redemptive activity of God towards all humankind and the particular creative/redemptive activity of God in the history of Israel and in the person and work of Jesus Christ?

Are Christians to speak of God's work in the lives of all men and women only in tentative terms of hope that they may experience something of Him, or more positively in terms of God's self-disclosure to people of living faiths and ideologies and in the struggle of human life?

How are Christians to find from the Bible criteria in their approach to people of other faiths and ideologies, recognising, as they must, the authority accorded to the Bible by Christians of all centuries, particular questions concerning the authority of the Old Testament for the Christian Church, and the fact that the partners in dialogue have other starting points and resources, both in holy books and traditions of teaching?

What is the biblical view and Christian experience of the operation of the Holy Spirit, and is it right and helpful to understand the work of God outside the Church in terms of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit?

#### Christians should approach dialogue, however

- with repentance, because they know how easily they
  misconstrue God's revelation in Jesus Christ, betraying it in
  their actions and posturing as the owners of God's truth
  rather than, as in fact they are, the undeserving recipients
  of grace;
- with humility, because they so often perceive in people of other faiths and ideologies a spirituality, dedication, compassion and a wisdom which should forbid them making judgements about others as though from a position of superiority; in particular they should avoid using ideas such as "anonymous Christians", "the Christian presence", "the unknown Christ", in ways not intended by those who

proposed them for theological purposes or in ways prejudicial to the self-understanding of Christians and others;

- with joy, because it is not themselves they preach; it is
  Jesus Christ, perceived by many people of living faiths and
  ideologies as prophet, holy one, teacher, example; but
  confessed by Christians as Lord and Saviour, Himself the
  faithful witness and the coming one (Rev. 1.5-7);
- with integrity, because they do not enter into dialogue with others except in this penitent and humble joyfulness in the Lord Jesus Christ, making clear to others their own experience and witness, even as they seek to hear from others their expressions of deepest conviction and insight. All these would mean an openness and exposure, the capacity to be wounded which we see in the example of our Lord Jesus Christ and which we sum up in the word vulnerability.

The WCC notes, however, that dialogue cannot easily be defined. Its mission, however, is somewhat more clear:

Dialogue (...) is a fundamental part of Christian service within community. In dialogue Christians actively respond to the command to "love God and your neighbour as yourself". As an expression of love engagement in dialogue testifies to the love experienced in Christ. It is a joyful affirmation of life against chaos, and a participation with all who are allies of life in seeking the provisional goals of a better human community. Thus "dialogue in community" is not a secret weapon in the armoury of an aggressive Christian militancy. Rather it is a means of living our faith in Christ in service of community with one's neighbours.

Whether this is sufficient, theologically, will be looked at in some depth further.

In fact, what we see is that since the 1893 Parliament, after more than a century of discussion and debate, positions have not changed very much. The discussion has certainly become more formalised, a wealth of information has been exchanged and much misinformation has been falsified, especially at the level of the church, synagogue, mosque and temple-goer.

I believe, however that the discussion has gone as far as it can under the current terms of engagement and that we are collectively now starting to repeat

ourselves in a circular discussion that, so far, offers little prospect of moving beyond this point.

Whether this must remain so will be discussed at length further.

#### III. Stating the problem

Prior to beginning in earnest and without prejudice to any eventual answer I might arrive at in my research, I formulated what I believed then might be some possible solutions to the question I had posed, which was simply:

What is the theological purpose of the current inter-religious dialogue?

A 'theological purpose' is defined as a purpose that goes to the heart of a faith, rather than dealing with secondary issues, regardless of how important and worthy of pursuit in their own right they may be.

To compound the matter even more, however, any answer would also have to go to the heart of the faiths of multiple participants, preferably all of the legitimate participants, <sup>55</sup> if it were to stand a chance of being accepted as a satisfactory answer

Briefly stated, the answers include:

- 1. None
- 2. Helping all believers to realise that there is no true faith (i.e. all faiths are equally wrong)
- 3. Helping believers of other faiths to recognise the one true faith
- 4. Helping believers to realise that the different faiths are components of the one true faith
- 5. Helping believers to recognise that there is no current faith that qualifies as the one true faith but that mankind is collectively *en route* to it and the dialogue is part of the journey (open-ended, see 6, below)
- 6. Helping to bring about the creation of a single world faith (close-ended, see 5, above)
- 7. Other, not yet formulated or discovered<sup>56</sup>

Below, I shall address each of these hypothetical answers in turn, testing them against the stated and implied objectives of major players in the modern interreligious dialogue.

#### 1. None

Some illegitimate participants, which I have discussed at length elsewhere, include, but are not limited to satanists, Cargo Cult-like belief systems, beliefs such as those espoused by the Heaven's Gate community (because they have postponed dealing with theological issues), which posit extra-terrestrials as the source of humanity's idea of the Creator and others.

Other potential outcomes of dialogue within the confines and with all the limitations of the dialogue as currently practised have been formulated by others. See, for example, Kozlovic, Anton Karl, "Seven Logical Consequences of Interreligious Dialoguing: A Taxonomy of Praxis Possibilities" in *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Volume 8, Number 1, September 2003.

Although the concept of nothing tends to receive a generally negative reception in this proactive, positive, forward-thrusting world, it may actually be a positive answer. It may very well be possible that the current inter-religious dialogue has no relation to the core business of religions today. It may be restricted to dealing with the secondary issues, with the participants agreeing to suspend the core dialogue as such and to concentrate on the secondary issues (from a theological point of view) that unite them.

- 2. Helping all believers to realise that there is no single True faith (i.e. all faiths are in error to greater or lesser degrees).
  - Under this scenario, all extant belief systems are equally flawed. Whether that means that there might ever be a single True faith or that we are destined to persist in ignorance is a question that this solution would have to then deal with.
- 3. Helping believers of other faiths to recognise the one True faith
  The implication of this is that dialogue is 'mission' as it has traditionally been
  viewed, and the participants are mutually trying to convert one another. The
  powers of persuasion or divine revelation that this would require have
  been lacking or absent these past several millennia and I see no reason why
  that situation should change now..
- 4. Helping believers to realise that the different faiths are components of the One True Faith

This would require at least some of the faiths and/or believers to accept that they have been in error and the adherents of one faith to stand fast in the face of the same type of criticism that others are giving to them. A corollary to this possible answer, and one that is quite often heard is that dialogue serves to help believers of other faiths be better Hindus, Muslims, Christians, Jews, etc., etc. The assumption here is that there is value in the Other's faith that we should help them to hold on to and develop.

5. Helping believers to recognise that there is no current faith that qualifies as the One True Faith but that mankind is collectively *en route* to it and the dialogue is part of the journey (open-ended, see 6, below) Ernst Troeltsch<sup>57</sup> supported this position to a certain degree, seeing even in Christianity a belief that had quite a long way to go before reaching its final form, at which point it would converge with all the other religions in an Orwellian 'all religions are equal but some religions are more equal than others' formulation. New Age adherents are particular supporters of this perspective. In an interview for a paper during my Master's period, one

28

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>57</sup> Cf. Troeltsch, *The absoluteness of Christianity and the history of religions* 

#### inter-religious dialogue

influential Dutch New Age figure, Ronald-Jan Heijn suggested the image of being on Jesus' way, but riding in Buddha's vehicle.<sup>58</sup> One might also think in this regard of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

# 6. Helping to bring about the creation of a single world faith (close-ended, see 5, above)

In this scenario, the participants in the dialogue become or are made aware that they are inadequate, as in scenario 5, but that the end is in sight, and that everyone should contribute to achieving it. Ba'hai might serve as an example of this scenario.

# 7. Other, not yet formulated or discovered Self-explanatory.

To attempt to answer the question of whether any of these possible answers is acceptable as an explanation of the theological purpose or use of inter-religious dialogue, I shall look at each one through the prism of the World Council of Churches guidelines on dialogue. Not because I necessarily privilege those above other organisations' or individuals' guidelines, but because any acceptable answer has to be applicable to all the participants, including the WCC. If it cannot apply to them,, then it is, by definition, irrelevant regardless of whether it applies to anyone else.

The first and seventh I shall leave to the end as they may justifiably be considered to be two sides of the same coin, a coin that need only come into play if the other options have been exhausted.

The second answer states that the theological objective would be to help all believers understand that there is no single True Faith, that all are in error.

Articles 12 and 13 of the World Council's *Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions*, quickly rules this option out:

12. As witnesses, we approach inter-religious relations and dialogue in commitment to our faith. At the heart of Christian belief is faith in the triune God. We affirm that God, the Father, is creator and sustainer of all creation. We hold the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the centre of God's redeeming work for us and for the world. The Holy Spirit confirms us in this faith, renewing our lives and leading us into all truth.

Hinayana: the vehicle of individual liberation; Mahayana: the vehicle of universal salvation; Vajrayana: the vehicle of tantra.

13. We are convinced that we have been called to witness in the world to God's healing and reconciling work in Christ. We do this humbly acknowledging that we are not fully aware of the ways in which God's redeeming work will be brought to its completion. We now see only dimly, as in a mirror, for we now know only in part and do not have the full knowledge of what God has in store (cf. 1 Cor. 13.12-13).

Clearly, adherents of this position cannot accept that their faith is 'wrong' in the meaning of the formulation of this possible option, thereby ruling it out.

In possible solution number three, dialogue participants would be trying to help those whom they are in dialogue with to realise the one True Faith, in this case Christianity.

Article 17 of the Guidelines states that

Salvation belongs to God. We therefore dare not stand in judgement of others. While witnessing to our own faith, we seek to understand the ways in which God intends to bring God's purposes to their fulfilment.

Those in dialogue according to the WCC's principles, then, are not actively engaged in conversion or proselytising activities as such. And further, in Article 23:

In dialogue we strive towards mutual respect. Dialogue partners are responsible for hearing and listening to the self-understanding of each other's faith. *Trust and confidence comes from allowing partners to define themselves, refraining from proselytism, and providing an opportunity for mutual questioning, and if appropriate justified criticism.* (italics mine. DS) Such practices promote an informed understanding of each other, which becomes the basis for all other relationships.

In option four, dialogue participants are helping one another to see that all faiths are part of a single larger Faith, in this case, Christianity. This would be the 'invisible Christianity' and 'anonymous Christians' that have so enraged some non-Christians in recent years.

Hinduism, in this option, is filled with Christians and all that is good in Hinduism is a sub-set, or weak echo of what there already is in Christianity. So, too, with Islam, albeit with perhaps a different sub-set.

Article 14 of the WCC's Guidelines, however, closes this door to us:

Many Christians have found it difficult to make sense of, or relate creatively to, the reality of other religious traditions.

However, as Christians, we believe that the Spirit of God is at work in ways beyond our understanding (cf. John 3. 8). The activity of the Spirit is beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations. We should seek to discern the Spirit's presence where there is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5. 22-23). The Spirit of God is groaning with our spirit. The Spirit is at work to bring about the redemption of the whole created order (Rom. 8. 18 - 27).

#### And in Article 18:

Dialogue must be a process of mutual empowerment, not a negotiation between parties who have conflicting interests and claims. Rather than being bound by the constraints of power relations, partners in dialogue should be empowered to join in a common pursuit of justice, peace and constructive action for the good of all people.

In option five, all the participants agree that, while there is no single true Faith *yet*, there is one in reality and we are all en route to it together.

Here, the same objection as applied to option two again makes itself felt. The WCC member churches do not believe that there is no single true Faith. Even if there may be more, (see option four, above), Christianity in their view is True. Perhaps, not fully, as we "see through a glass darkly," but True nonetheless.

And finally, in option six, the participants are all working towards the realisation of a single universal, True Faith.

All the reasons that have negated the previous options combine to render this one ineffective as a possible theological motivation for inter-religious dialogue as it is currently being conducted.

Before I return to consider the possibilities offered by options 1 and 7, I would like to digress slightly to consider an aspect of the dialogue that has so far, both here and elsewhere, received remarkably little comment as regards inter-religious dialogue: the religious aspect.

One of the most-often cited motivations for engaging in inter-religious dialogue is to lessen tensions between and among religious groups and to work together to improve the world.

This familiarisation dialogue, in which the participants try to learn more about one another and so prevent problems has several problems associated with it, not least of which is that it appears to be remarkably ineffective. Not only have we had the disappointing example of the Catholics and Protestants of Northern Ireland for the past forty years, more recently we have the ten-year long conflict in the Balkans, where Catholics, Orthodox and Muslims have set about one

another with remarkable frequency and intensity. And Israel and Palestine, now in its sixth decade of discord with few signs of easing tensions.

More broadly, we have many Muslim organisations threatening violence and actually carrying it out (as of this writing, most recently in Madrid in March 2004 with nearly 200 fatalities) against what the perpetrators claim is a Christian-Zionist Crusader conspiracy.

It is also unclear to me whether in this familiarisation dialogue A is trying to let B get to know him so that B won't attack A or whether A is trying to get to know B so that A won't attack B.

Regardless of which is the case, the logic behind both is flawed.

If A is trying to let B get to know him so that B won't attack A, the implication is that it is B's ignorance that is causing the trouble. The dialogue is then trying to remove B's ignorance. The implication here is that if B's prejudices were correct, B would be justified in attacking A. If A is trying to get know B so that A won't attack B, the implication is that there is something about B that, if it were true, would justify A attacking him. The purpose of the dialogue then is to establish that that aspect is lacking, thereby removing A's justification for attacking him.

Whatever else they may be, neither of those motivations may be said to be theological in origin, and can therefore not serve as an answer to our query.

A further complicating factor is the uncertainty of the 'religious' element of inter-religious dialogue.

Whether operating from a sincerely felt desire to end conflict among the adherents of the various religions, or wanting to promote better conduct based on principles explicitly arising from the faiths they profess, the dialogue itself is not about addressing core issues of the religions with an intention to modify them in a substantive way. That may be justification for holding a dialogue on those secondary issues (see below) among religions or among believers from different religions, but then it becomes a dialogue by religions and not a religious dialogue.<sup>59</sup>

In other words, an inter-religious dialogue must be constrained by some element of content to faith-based organisations or individuals. With its current focus on simply finding out what the Others believe, learning to work together on mundane projects, and learning that the Others are not the demons we may have believed, the dialogue does not meet this criterion sufficiently.

Furthermore, all of these elements combine to create a negative motivation for a dialogue that is not about fundamental issues. We are talking among ourselves

-

See also Smart, Ninian, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, (Berkley: University of California Press), 1996.

#### inter-religious dialogue

in order to *not* kill one another and to work together to reduce war, pollution, poverty, human rights violations, etc.

These are all goals worth striving for, but they also contain within them the seed of the potential destruction of the dialogue. If the dialogue were ever to get to the stage where the religions had exchanged all possible information about one another, had decided that the Others were valuable human beings whose beliefs did not justify killing and/or converting then, had ended poverty, pollution, etc., there would be no further reason to carry on the dialogue.

On the basis of the above, and in consideration of the stated and observed motivations for the modern inter-religious dialogue, I come to the conclusion that either options number 1 or 7 are the only choices left open to us:

Either there is no theological purpose of inter-religious dialogue and we should simply accept that and get on with our lives, continuing the mundane dialogue between and among the different faiths in the limited context that we have grown accustomed to, or there *is* a theological purpose, but it has not yet been formulated and brought into active play. That is a separate, but related, issue from whether it *should* be brought into play. That will form part of the discussion of the next part of this investigation.

### Secondary issues and the concept of husbandry

In this chapter, I have referred several times to 'secondary issues.' That merits some further explanation.

'Secondary' is often logically interpreted as signifying 'less value than "primary",' but for my purposes that is only partly true. I use 'secondary' to refer to issues which, however important, do not speak to the stated ultimate goal of a faith. They may be important as expressions of values which the faith calls for and elicits from believers, but carrying them out is not the primary goal of the religion.

As an example, the oft-stated goal of Christianity is the salvation of each individual human soul so that it can be and will be reunited with God in Heaven, rather than being damned for eternity. Once someone has become a Christian, there are some behaviours and attitudes which will be expected, based on the statements of Jesus in the Gospels, often as further worked out in the Epistles, by the Church Fathers and in proclamations by the Church. These include loving those who hate you, no divorce, no fornication, honesty in dealings with others, and others.

Similar statements may also be made in respect of Islam. One of the Five Pillars of Islam, for example, is giving to charity to help those who are less able to help themselves.

Another important element is the question of good husbandry based on the Creation stories of Genesis, and specifically Genesis 1: 26-28.

26 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, [a] and over all the creatures that move along the ground."

27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."

This has been interpreted as giving humanity the responsibility to tend the world as a garden or farm, to ensure that the environment is sustained and can sustain the people who have been placed here. Go This God-given duty, however, is not often seen as the primary purpose of the creation of humanity, either in a Jewish or Christian context, but as an assignment to be carried out. Not an unimportant assignment, to be sure, but also not the principle purpose. In fact, the Christian should believe that this Earthly system will eventually pass away, to be replaced by a New Earth. In that regard, while the need to care for the poor and the environment, to put an end to hostilities, etc., are a logical result of the values that the religious will adopt when they become Christians, and can be seen as a fulfilment of a Divine assignment, they are secondary when seen against the backdrop of the ultimate purpose of, for example, Christianity. That does not mean that they are not important or that they should be abandoned, but the primary purpose of the Faith is something else.

See, for example, Boersma, Jan J., *Thora en Stoa over mens en natuur. Een bijdrage aan het mileudebat over duurzaamheid en kwaliteit.* (Baarn, Netherlands: Uitgeverij G.F. Callenbach b.v.). 1997.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>61</sup> cf. Romans 8:20–22, 2 Peter 3:13, Revelation 21:1, Hebrews 1:10–12

# IV. Models of dialogue

As with every discussion, it will be important for what follows to first set a paradigm, a hermeneutic framework in order for the reader to be clear about my assumptions and starting points. That may even be more than usually critical in the meta-discussion that we are here engaged in about dialogue.

Any inter-religious dialogue model with ambitions for completeness will be based on a combination of several components.

First, there will be a starting point based on the, for want to a better word, political relations among the religions prior to the commencement of the dialogue.

Second, the mutual perception of the religions, their intrinsic value and their participation in the Truth will be an important consideration.

Third, the motivation for wanting to enter into dialogue, either to achieve a particular goal or to forestall a particular eventuality.

Fourth, the immediate objective that the participants hope to achieve.

And finally, the form the dialogue is to take.

The third and fourth points may seem interchangeable, but in fact, they are not.

One's *motivation* for entering into dialogue, for example, might be to prevent the outbreak of hostilities among adherents of the different groups. An associated *objective*, on the other hand, might very well be, *inter alia*, achieving regular meetings of adherents to keep lines of communication open. An alternative objective might be to develop ongoing study groups to increase and maintain mutual familiarity over time.

In the following section, I shall look at the way various theorists have looked at each of these components. I shall then try to determine whether the writers we have heretofore looked at can be placed within a model based on a mix of those components.

# 1. Starting points: Inter-religious relations

Before dialogue can begin, the participants must have arrived at a particular place in terms of attitude. That attitude will reflect basic attitudes and intentions of both institutions and individuals towards one another.

Spanish theologian Raimon Panikkar<sup>62</sup> has identified five positions which will determine the nature and set the tone of the communication between and among faiths:

- isolation and ignorance
- indifference and contempt
- · rejection and conquest
- co-existence and communication
- appropriation and dialogue

In a condition of isolation and ignorance, the faiths will know little or nothing of one another, but will also have little interaction because of their mutual isolation. In this situation, no dialogue is possible.

When in contact, but in a condition of indifference and contempt, religious adherents will be convinced of their own faith's – and perhaps their own individual – superiority. Social intercourse, however, may be peaceful, thanks to the element of indifference: the members of one group simply can't be bothered to worry about the Other.

In an environment of rejection and conquest, adherents *do* care about the Other, but only as an object to be crushed and, if possible, eliminated.

Religions in a condition of co-existence and communication will already have made some contacts and have reached a point where they are capable of having relations that do not involve destroying, eliminating or subjugating the other.

And finally, those who have achieved a state of appropriation and dialogue, have reached a degree of unity, at least in terms of their relations with one another. Their social intercourse may be said to be the equivalent of being members of the same group, albeit with different beliefs and opinions.

In my view, these stages do not necessarily represent an ascending chronological progression and, as we shall see in the discussion below of the case in India, it is quite possible to move from a condition of co-existence to one of rejection and conquest.

## 2. Mutual perception: the view of the Other

The second component to the dialogue model is based on the view of the Other. I think it would not be unreasonable to say that modern discussions of inter-religious dialogue have as a starting point that there are three categories

Panikkar, Raimon, *El Diálogo Indispensable: Paz entre las religiones*, (Barcelona: Ediciones Peninsula), 2003, p 24. It is interesting to note that the Spanish title, which translates directly into English as "The Indispensable Dialogue: Peace among the religions" differs slightly from the original Italian title, which translates into English as: "The indispensable encounter: Dialogue of the religions."

#### inter-religious dialogue

which all forms of dialogue must seriously address at some point, regardless of any other principles that guide them: whether the dialogue is inclusivist, exclusivist and syncretist.

The inclusivist position, represented strongly if not led by such writers as John Hick and Paul Knitter, sees in "all" religions a part of the truth that is withheld from mere mortals. All paths are therefore equally valid. Or, more to the point: all paths are equally invalid. While making that distinction – valid vs. not valid – may appear to be unnecessary sophistry, it is, in fact, quite important for the inclusivist discussion as it is carried out. If I take the position that my religion is as valid, i.e. true, as yours, I actually require no input from you. The dialogue, therefore, while it may be interesting and even engaging, is essentially unnecessary. If, on the other hand, I take the position that both of our religions are equally invalid, i.e. untrue, because they are incomplete for whatever reason, then I am beholden to engage with you in the pursuit for the Truth that we both seek. That removes or at least reduces the arrogant posturing the would be required if I were trying to convince you of the superiority of the path I follow. And that also characterises the inclusivist dialogue of today, in which each participant non-judgementally listens to the positions of the Other.

Much has been written and said about how dialogues are to be conducted according to the inclusivist model. The principles may be encapsulated in formalised systems, such as Leonard Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue," Paul Knitter's "How to Dialogue," and the guidelines drawn up by the World Council of Churches.

The use of 'all'—which goes back farther than Troeltsch *et al*—is, in my opinion, highly contentious. What is usually meant is 'all major' religions, including the Abrahamic religions, major Asian religions and philosophies (such as Confucianism), and increasingly, African tribal religions and some of the New Age religions. What is usually not included are such things as Satanism, Norse neo-pagan belief systems and some others. I have discussed this difficulty at some length in Suchard, D, *Faith without Borders*.

Some authors make a distinction between 'inclusivist', in which Christians accept "the salvic richness of other faiths, but then views this richness as the result of Christ's redemptive work" and pluralist, which, from a Christian perspective, "moves away from insistence on the superiority or finality of Christ and Christianity towards a recognition of the independent validity of other ways." See for example, John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a pluralistic theology of religions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books), Seventh Edition, 1998, p. viii. For my purposes, 'inclusivist' has the meaning of Knitter's 'pluralist'.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>65</sup> Swidler, Leonard, Dialogue Decalogue, in The Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 20:1 (1984).

Knitter, Paul, John B. Cobb, Jr., Monika Hellwig and Leonard Swidler, Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue. (Philadelphia: Trinity International), 1990.

Many of the formalised systems have elements in common with those encapsulated in Swidler's Dialogue Decalogue. An abridged version is shown below.

First commandment: The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, that is, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly.

Second commandment: Inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue must be a two-sided project - within each religious or ideological community and between religious or ideological communities.

Third commandment: Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity.

Fourth commandment: In inter-religious, inter-ideological dialogue we must not compare our ideals with our partner's practice, but rather our ideals with our partner's ideals, our practice with our partner's practice.

Fifth commandment: Each partner must define himself...Conversely, the interpreted must be able to recognise herself in the interpretation.

Sixth commandment: Each participant must come to the dialogue with no hard-and-fast assumptions as to where the points of disagreement are.

Seventh commandment: Dialogue can take place only between equals...Both must come to learn from each other.

Eighth commandment: Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust.

Ninth commandment: Persons entering into inter-religious, interideological dialogue must be at least minimally self-critical of both themselves and their own religious or ideological traditions.

Tenth commandment: Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within"; for a religion or ideology is not merely something of the head, but also of the spirit, heart, and "whole being," individual and communal.

In Christianity, the exclusivist position, which fairly describes the position of the Roman Catholic Church, many Fundamentalist<sup>67</sup> churches, and others, believes that whatever value one may find in other religions, *it* has the highest, if not the only, truth. Only through the one faith can one achieve salvation, paradise or unification with God. The exclusivist position is also well represented in Islam. It has a negative side, which is used to justify the acts of independent terrorists, such as Al-Qa'ida, the Muslim Brotherhood and others, and of some state activities, including prohibition of proselytisation in Muslim countries and support of anti-Western groups. On its positive side, it itself proselytises to extend the reach of the House of Islam.

The most concise exclusivist statement may well be that included in the Roman Catholic Catechism:

39. In defending the ability of human reason to know God, the Church is expressing her confidence in the possibility of speaking about him to all men and with all men, and therefore of dialogue with other religions, with philosophy and science, as well as with unbelievers and atheists.

When linked with the statement in the Decree for the (see above, p. 20), it becomes clear that, although what 'dialogue' itself may be is not set out in the catechism, it is about conveying the Church's view of God to others. That is also reinforced in a Papal encyclical, *Ecclesium Suam*, where dialogue is defined as part of the mission to communicate the gospel to everyone, because "[i]n order to share Christ with the world, the Church must first meet the world and talk with it."

Less clear is whether the Church has anything to learn about God from other religions. That point is taken up in other documents. In *Nostra Aetate,* for example, the question is dealt with at more length:

From ancient times down to the present, there is found among various peoples a certain perception of that hidden power which hovers over the course of things and over the events of human history; at times some indeed have come to the recognition of a Supreme Being, or even of a Father. This perception and recognition penetrates their lives with a profound religious sense.

I use the term Fundamentalist (with capital) here and further to distinguish between those churches who have developed according to their vision of being "fundamental in doctrine" and those Christians, Jews, Muslims and others who are simply labelled fundamentalist by outsiders, regardless of their own beliefs.

Religions, however, that are bound up with an advanced culture have struggled to answer the same questions by means of more refined concepts and a more developed language. Thus in Hinduism, men contemplate the divine mystery and express it through an inexhaustible abundance of myths and through searching philosophical inquiry. They seek freedom from the anguish of our human condition either through ascetical practices or profound meditation or a flight to God with love and trust. Again, Buddhism, in its various forms, realises the radical insufficiency of this changeable world; it teaches a way by which men, in a devout and confident spirit, may be able either to acquire the state of perfect liberation, or attain, by their own efforts or through higher help, supreme illumination. Likewise, other religions found everywhere try to counter the restlessness of the human heart, each in its own manner, by proposing "ways," comprising teachings, rules of life, and sacred rites. The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men. Indeed, she proclaims, and ever must proclaim Christ "the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6), in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself.

Nostra Aetate,68

There may, thus, be something in other faiths, but it is only a reflection of the ray of Truth. The Church must proclaim "Christ (...) in whom men may find the fullness of religious life, in whom God has reconciled all things to Himself." <sup>69</sup>

This point was made even more strongly by Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger,<sup>70</sup> Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, in an address during the meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May 1996.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>68</sup> Gioia, Francesco (Ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue. The official teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995),* (Boston: Pauline Books and Media), pp. 37-38.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

Now Pope Benedict XVI

## inter-religious dialogue

The presentation, entitled "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today," can be seen equally as an attack on and a defence against, the relativism represented by the inclusivist position, especially as represented by the American Presbyterian John Hick and the former Catholic priest Paul Knitter.

On the other hand, the notion of *dialogue* – which has maintained a position of significant importance in the Platonic and Christian tradition-changes meaning and becomes both the quintessence of the relativist creed and the antithesis of conversion and the mission. In the relativist meaning, *to dialogue* means to put one's own position, i.e., one's faith, on the same level as the convictions of others without recognising in principle more truth in it than that which is attributed to the opinion of the others. Only if I suppose in principle that the other can be as right, or more right than I, can an authentic dialogue take place.

According to this concept, dialogue must be an exchange between positions which have fundamentally the same rank and therefore are mutually relative. Only in this way will the maximum cooperation and integration between the different religions be achieved. The relativist dissolution of Christology, and even more of ecclesiology, thus becomes a central commandment of religion. To return to Hick's thinking, faith in the divinity of one concrete person, as he tell us, leads to fanaticism and particularism, to the dissociation between faith and love, and it is precisely this which must be overcome.

Against that relativism, Cardinal Ratzinger places the incarnate God, the Jesus of both history and faith:

In man there is an inextinguishable yearning for the infinite. None of the answers attempted are sufficient. Only the God himself who became finite in order to open our finiteness and lead us to the breadth of his infiniteness responds to the question of our being. For this reason, the Christian faith finds man today too. Our task is to serve the faith with a humble spirit and the whole strength of our heart and understanding.

Note: "Only the God himself who became finite."

The syncretistic position, for which the late German theologian Dorothee Sölle can be considered a proponent at a mystical level, <sup>71</sup> and the Ba'hai at an operational level, considers that every religion is but *pars pro toto* and, effectively indistinguishable: there is, in fact, only one reality which underlies all religion and that should also be reflected in practice.

Syncretism is anathema to adherents of both the inclusivist and exclusivist positions, though for different reasons. For the latter, it is a mirror image: everything is backwards. For the former, it represents a conclusion they are not willing or able to draw, intent as they are in allowing all participants to remain firm in their own traditions and while helping others to grow stronger in *theirs*.

Syncretism is increasingly common, both in the advanced societies of the West and in Asia and Africa, as well. When South American descendants of the aboriginal peoples combine the Spirit of the Mountain with Satan, when Filipinos mix Catholicism with visits to pay respects to their ancestors, when clergy such as Bishop Milingo in Zambia blend Christianity with "animistic practices and paraphernalia," they represent what Church members fear and Church critics claim has always been part of Church practice. <sup>73</sup>

One's perception of other religions, one's theology of pluralism, is crucial to the discussion of the inter-religious dialogue, for that will determine how one approaches the dialogue. Academically, discussion has sorted itself along three basic—though not always clearly demarcated—lines: inclusivism, exclusivism, and syncretism.

There are other dialogue paradigms, of course.

A widely used typology (...) distinguishes four forms in particular: dialogue of life, where people naturally relate together across religious boundaries in the course of their daily living; social dialogue, where people of various faiths collaborate with one another in the cause of peace and justice; intellectual dialogue, developing a dialogue which can explore different beliefs and their claims to truth; and spiritual dialogue, where people open themselves to the force of one another's

See Sölle, Dorothee, *Mystiek en Verzet:'Gij stil geschreeuw'*, Harmina van der Vinne (trans.), (Baarn, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Ten Have), 1998.

See Mahiaini, Wanyeki, "Shouldn't the boot be on the other foot? OR Isn't it time for the African church to teach rather than to be taught? (and certainly not by the pagan West!)" in <a href="http://www.philipproject.org.uk/justification.htm">http://www.philipproject.org.uk/justification.htm</a>, (7 February 2004).

Such as the absorption by the Church in England of pagan holy oak trees, as shown by the many Holy Oak and Holyoke churches, and virtually all of the modern European and North American Christmas celebration. Ironically, one of Raimon Panikkar's (see above) most influential lectures, on Blessed Simplicity, were delivered at Holyoke, Massachusetts, in 1980.

religious experiences. In addition to these four, we were privileged to witness what might be described as a fifth form of dialogue: the sharing of the cultural and artistic expressions of different traditions.<sup>74</sup>

Notwithstanding the existence of other dialogue paradigms, I have elected to follow the inclusivist-exclusivist-sycretist paradigm as being the source of the greatest concern or hope among participants. That is because they go right to the heart of the dialogue as dialogue and will determine the breaking point, if there is to be one. An exclusivist 'dialogue' can only go so far before the participants agree that they have reached the end of fruitful discussion. An inclusivist one will go farther, and a syncretist farther still, but perhaps farther than the participants are willing to go.

Each of these positions has its difficulties as far as dialogue is concerned.

At the current state of the debate, the inclusivist position is almost entirely concerned with what I have termed theologically secondary issues, and those in a negative fashion. To wit: in order to reduce poverty, protect the environment, promote women's liberation, prevent nuclear destruction, we have to collectively recognise that all paths are equal and enter into discussion on that basis.<sup>75</sup>

The exclusivist position, as stated clearly by the Catholic Church, the self-named Christian Fundamentalists and others, rejects what it perceives as relativism by the inclusivists, and affirms that its position is the correct one above all others. From the perspective of dialogue, this must *a priori* lead to failure to dialogue on matters theological, though contact on the secondary issues is still possible.<sup>76</sup>

The much less popular syncretistic position, finds its problems as regards dialogue in the fact that virtually no religion wants to be considered just a part of a greater whole, which would mean diluting its own messages. Dialogue with a syncretistic agenda has, since the time of the first World's Parliament of

<sup>&</sup>quot;Report of a regional consultation of the Network for Inter-Faith concerns in the Anglican Communion (NIFCON)," held at United Theological College, Bangalore, 2003

For a clear illustration of this range of positions, see Hick, John and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Towards a Pluralistic Theology of Religions,* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books) 1998.

For a clear outline of one version of this position see, Cardinal Ratzinger *Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today,* (<a href="http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZRELA.HTM">http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZRELA.HTM</a> (December 2001) (Cardinal Ratzinger, Prefect of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, gave this address during the meeting of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith with the presidents of the Doctrinal Commissions of the Bishops' Conferences of Latin America, held in Guadalajara, Mexico, in May 1996. Following the publication of *Dominus Jesu* in 2000, Cardinal Ratzinger and others were often in the news defending what many thought was a position untenable in these times.

Religions, not been possible at an institutional level, nor do I feel that it is likely to be any time soon.

After more than a century of discussion and debate, the basic range of positions has not changed very much..

I believe, however that the discussion has gone as far as it can under the current terms of engagement and that we are collectively now starting to repeat ourselves in a circular discussion that, so far, offers little prospect of moving beyond this point.

Whether this must remain so will be discussed at length further.

## 3. Motivation: why dialogue

By motivation, I mean the impetus for even considering dialogue. The situation at the time of writing, post-11 September 2001, wars involving (primarily) Western forces and Muslim regular and irregular forces in Afghanistan, Iraq and elsewhere, increasing anti-Semitism in Europe, provides one of the clearest motivations in many years for many people: to stop wars and save lives.

Major motivators for many authors writing before and after 11 September 2001 also include the sad state of planet Earth environmentally, the inequitable distribution of resources among the world's peoples, the need for equal rights for women, the threat of nuclear or other extinction level event.

## 4. What do we want to achieve: Objectives

The fourth important part of a dialogue is its objective: why do I want to achieve?

A number of authors have formulated objectives for dialogue in general and for inter-religious dialogue in particular. For the World Council of Churches, for example, "Dialogue (...) is a fundamental part of Christian service within community. In dialogue Christians actively respond to the command to 'love God and your neighbour as yourself'. As an expression of love engagement in dialogue testifies to the love experienced in Christ." Dialogue, then, is another way of presenting the message of Jesus. Furthermore, it "can be recognised as a welcome way of obedience to the commandment of the Decalogue: 'You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour'. Dialogue helps us not to disfigure the image of our neighbours of different faiths and ideologies." The council of the commandment of the Decalogue: "You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour'. Dialogue helps us not to disfigure the image of our neighbours of different faiths and ideologies."

Seen from that perspective, dialogue is a way to de-demonise the Other and, one may hope, to be de-demonised in the Other's eyes.

World Council of Churches, Guidelines for Dialogue

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>78</sup> Ibid.

The Dialogue and Witness (2003) course at Viriginia Theological Seminary (United States), in its Models of Dialogue module, identified three potential objectives.

**Socratic dialogue** – purpose is to lead someone from darkness to life: "I will communicate the truth to you through dialogue". Appears to be the least tolerant or humane. It is actually the most humane because it takes the dialogue partner seriously and believes that there is an actual truth to be found and that with reason it will be found. Everyone is guided by a moral truth, not necessarily the right one.

**Personalist** – goal is not to persuade someone you have the truth, Goal is mutual understanding. Not encounter ideas, goal to encounter the mystery of the Other. Buber made most popular with book *I* and *Thou*. Not dream of converting. Would be very rude to do this. Goal of this type of dialogue is to encounter the mystery of the person, not the truth of their ideas. We are formed by democracy and tend to take the presuppositions of wider society to our personal truths. None of us is resolved. This form of dialogue is empty. Doesn't say anything about you. Your commitments are part of who you are.

**Pragmatic** – goal is not to persuade someone of the truth or to encounter the mystery of the person. Goal is to just get along. Only kind of dialogue possible (that) becomes manipulative. <sup>79</sup>

#### Forms of dialogue

Based on a number of factors including the four components already discussed above, but also including such things as the level of the dialogue—academic, institutional, national, municipal, neighbourhood or personal, dialogue can take a number of forms.

At the most informal level, it could consist of Muslim and Jewish neighbours getting together for coffee and chat.

At its most formal level, we get to such things as the Council for the Parliament of the World Religions.

In between those two extremes, there are such things as conferences, seminars, inter-faith prayer groups, etc., etc.

45

http://www.vts.edu/2003/Spring Semester 2002/CCE/comparative Christian ethics Feb 1491.htm (No longer available; not archived in The Internet Archive).

A number of dialogue form models will serve to illustrate. Drawn up by Joseph Phelps, <sup>80</sup> and presented by the Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, these models are intended to deal with specific issues, and, though not all are specifically directed at inter-religious dialogue, they offer some useful points for that dialogue.

## The Public Conversation Project (PCP)

This model stems from the approach used by family therapists. Representatives of the two sides of the conflict spend the evening together. After dinner, they sit in a circle with their opponents and answer questions about how they got involved in the conflict, what the main issues are and what concerns them about their own positions. Then they ask each other questions and at the end reflect on their experience of participating in the dialogue. There is no pressure to come up with solutions or proposals for action. The goal of this dialogue is to allow people to talk from their personal experience, rather than argue in favour of their positions.

### Common Ground Network for Life and Choice (CGN)

This model has the goal of helping fighting groups to find common ground. First, a steering committee consisting of representatives of the two sides meets to discuss possible common issues and prepare for a dialogue workshop. Next, a few volunteers are trained by someone from CGN to be small-group facilitators. The workshop itself takes a whole day. Participants meet in a large group and introduce themselves and their positions on the issue. After that, participants talk about their personal experience with the issue in small groups. They take true or false test on their beliefs and then try to answer the same questions from the position of the opponent. This helps to identify similarities, differences and misperceptions of the parties about each other.

## The Paired Congregations

This model brings together two churches to discuss issues of mutual concern. The process consists of four two-hour sessions dedicated to (1) setting the ground rules and exploring why participants are interested in the issue, (2) identifying different perspectives on the problem, (3)

Phelps, Joseph. "Some Contemporary Dialogue Models." MCS Conciliation Quarterly. Spring 1996. Pp. 9-10.

approaching the issue from the position of faith, (4) suggesting an action plan for dealing with conflict created by differences in views.

## The Interfaith Health Program

This model (...) unites people of faith on the basis of ethics of caring for the poor, sick and needy. It believes that bringing them together to do practical work will make them to talk to each other. Dialogue becomes a secondary issue, developing in the context of practical work for God.

The four models shown above all have their counterparts in inter-religious dialogue, though in somewhat different forms. The first three, the Public Conversation Project, the Common Ground Network for Life and Choice, and the Paired Congregations, most closely resemble the various formalised styles of inter-religious dialogues held at academic and institutional levels. The first two, in addition, also refer to groups that are in conflict. The primary difference, though, is in the setting of an agenda with, in some instances, plans for resolving divisive or troubling issues.

The fourth model, the Interfaith Health Programme, is characteristic of many inter-religious programmes at local levels, when different faith communities come together to deal with local problems, without necessarily making faith issues central to the activity. Bonding occurs through common action.

# V. Applying the models

Having developed some principles by which inter-religious dialogues can be modelled, it would greatly simplify matters if those principles could be applied to the current inter-religious dialogue to help us advance our inquiry into the theological purpose of that dialogue.

One should actually speak of inter-religious dialogues—plural—for they are legion. Within academia, there are books and numerous periodicals which regularly feature scholarly articles dealing with inter-religious dialogue. Not to speak of the conferences, seminars and other gatherings that scholars and researchers participate in.

Then there are supra-institutional dialogues, such as the Council for a Parliament of World Religions, where adherents but not official representatives of many of the world's faiths meet for non-binding discussions.

More formally, there are the various dialogues conducted by the official religious institutions, i.e. churches, synagogues, temples, etc. The dialogues that the World Council of Churches members participate in can also be brought under this heading, even though each member church, such as the Church of England and the Lutherans, may and does also conduct its own dialogue activities.

On a local level, individual churches, synagogues, mosques and temples, as well as individuals in neighbourhood or work settings can engage in dialogue, either through local multi-faith organisations or bilaterally.

Before proceeding, therefore, it will be necessary to examine the various types of dialogue as we did we the authors in the first section, and see whether one can speak of *an* inter-religious dialogue.

In this chapter, then, I want to look at the types of dialogue exemplified by

- a. The World Council of Churches (Geneva, Switzerland)
- b. The Council for a Parliament of World Religions (Chicago, USA)
- c. The Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies (Amman, Jordan)
- d. The Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue (Xavier University, Cincinnati, USA)

## The World Council of Churches (WCC)

As discussed in Chapter I, the World Council of Churches has a long record of service in inter-religious dialogue, going back to its formation shortly after World War II when internal discussions on inter-religious dialogue that had begun at the World Missionary Conferences (Edinburgh, 1910 and Jerusalem, 1928) were continued at the Amsterdam and Evanston WCC Assemblies and beyond. Those

discussions led to the so-called Ajaltoun Memorandum, which led to the creation of a new WCC sub-unit concerned with Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies in 1971. The work on inter-religious dialogue became increasingly formalised and organised within the WCC and in 1979, the first "Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies" was published.

Those guidelines were revised in 2002, and reissued as "Ecumenical Considerations for Dialogue and Relations with People of other Religions."

An important element in the Ecumenical Considerations is the motivation behind dialogue: why do the participants engage in it?

Paragraphs 5-9 outline the motivation clearly and, but for one exception in formulation, the motivation would be recognised by all the writers we looked at in the first section: in the face of increased interaction due to refugee streams and economically motivated migration, believers of different religions encounter one another more frequently, sometimes in "tension and fear", 81 with the development of "communal tensions," 82 in "conflict and violence" 83 and in "polarisation." 84

Applying Panikkar's list, then, (see page 36) we find an apparent conflict: are the societies in conflict or in dialogue? Most likely a combination, with some engaging in dialogue to mitigate the conflict of some others.

The WCC recognises, however, that Christianity contains within itself inherent anti-dialogic elements, most notably the core belief in the triune God, including the belief that "the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (is) the centre of God's redeeming work for us and for the world." This need not be limiting for a particular type of dialogue, however, inasmuch as

"(...) we are not fully aware of the ways in which God's redeeming work will be brought to its completion. We now see only dimly, as in a mirror, for we now know only in part and do not have the full knowledge of what God has in store (cf. 1 Cor. 13.12-13).

"14. Many Christians have found it difficult to make sense of, or relate creatively to, the reality of other religious traditions. However, as Christians we believe that the Spirit of God is at work in ways beyond our understanding (cf. John 3. 8). The

<sup>&</sup>quot;Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions", http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/glines-e.html (2002), Paragraph 5.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., paragraph 6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>83</sup> Ibid., paragraph 7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>84</sup> Ibid., paragraph 8.

lbid., paragraph 12.

activity of the Spirit is beyond our definitions, descriptions and limitations. We should seek to discern the Spirit's presence where there is "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal. 5. 22-23). The Spirit of God is groaning with our spirit. The Spirit is at work to bring about the redemption of the whole created order (Rom. 8. 18 - 27)."

Such an attitude precludes triumphalist proselytisation, and creates space for one's dialogue partners to come with their spiritual contributions. One must then inquire as to the purpose of such a dialogue, if conversion is not the objective.

As discussed above, an important element in the dialogue as proposed and practised by the WCC is the reduction of social conflicts, tensions, communal discord, etc.

A second, equally important objective is to create relationships that allow members of different groups as well as different organisations themselves, to participate in dealing with "public issues of moral concern." In order to do so effectively, the different religious faiths must "discern their common values, decide to what extent they can express themselves with one voice, and discuss how they can avoid being manipulated by political forces." 88

Both of those objectives speak to the ethical rather than the theological objectives or purposes of the dialogue. That tone continues in Paragraphs 18-26 of the Guidelines, which outline the theoretical bases for dialogue.

## Dialogue is

- A process of mutual empowerment
- Inspiration to grow in faith
- An affirmation of hope and life
- Not an end in itself
- A means of building bridges of respect and understanding
- A way to nurture relationships
- Context-based
- A striving for mutual respect
- Cooperative and collaborative
- Inclusive.

\_

Ibid., paragraphs 13-14.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>87</sup> Ibid., paragraph 9.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

And the objective: "(To build) bonds of relationship with those considered 'the other' is the goal of all dialogues." Neither conversion nor the creation of a new religious paradigm is the purpose, therefore.

The WCC identifies three types of dialogue processes:

"(...) The most common, *multi-lateral* and *bi-lateral dialogues*, are where representative groups of people come together to discuss a subject relevant to the communities concerned. The relationship of religion to the family, to education, to the state, etc. has been one subject of discussion encouraged by the WCC between Christians and Muslims in recent years (bi-lateral dialogue). On the other hand, a multilateral dialogue in India dealt with the theme of "Religious Identity in a Multi-Faith Society"; its main aim was to deal with the problem of increased violence between religious factions in India. In addition to clarifying points of differences, such dialogues hope to facilitate the building up of trust and openness between religious groups.

A second type of organized dialogue could be called academic dialogue where exponents of different religious faiths meet and discuss the theological/philosophical bases of their traditions. Here genuine attempts are made to arrive at a common appreciation of the way in which each religious tradition has sought to explain and approach reality. These dialogues help in breaking down prejudices and misconceptions accumulated over centuries. They enrich, enlarge, challenge and correct the way some religions have understood and approached religious life in other traditions.

Yet another form of dialogue may be described as *spiritual dialogue*. Here believers attempt to meet each other, as it were, in the "cave of the heart". They expose themselves to each other's spiritual and worship life. Often such dialogues take the form of participating in the prayer or mediation practices of others. This type of dialogue remains controversial because Christians are not agreed on whether it is possible to participate in the spiritual life of their neighbours without compromising their own faith. "90"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>89</sup> Ibid., paragraph 21.

<sup>90</sup> See http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/ interreligious/glines-e.html

The WCC also has a periodical devoted to inter-religious dialogue in its various facets. *Current Dialogue*, published by the WCC's Office on Inter-religious Relations, contains contributions from members of a wide range of religious faiths and perspectives. Its contributors primarily include academics and clerics and the tone of the articles is uniformly pro-dialogue.

A quick glance at the contents of the July 2003 issue shows the kinds of articles that may be expected in any issue.

- The Future of Inter-religious Youth Education in the U.S. [T]he attacks of September 11 [2001, DS] have underscored the need for inter-religious youth education. (...) Given the dramatic nature of 9/11, the conclusions that youth have drawn about 'the other' are not to be underestimated.
- Jews, Muslims and Peace
   With ongoing violence sapping the spirits of Israelis and Palestinians,
   and with the Iraq war generating shock waves throughout the Middle
   East, we call on our fellow Jews and Muslims to join forces with
   concerned Christians to transcend this cycle of death and destruction.
   Jews and Muslims should be spiritual allies, not adversaries.
- Inter-religious Dialogue, Conflict and Reconciliation
   Differences [among the religions, DS] may be there, but since we are
   each on different paths up the mountain, or on different spokes of a
   wheel, there is no reason for these to lead to conflict. (...) Doctrine is
   better avoided as we search rather for a common ethic, as well as a
   common spirituality.
- Opportunities and Challenges for Muslim Peacebuilding after September 11

   (...)[T]he dramatic turn of events triggered by the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001 has ironically led to an unprecedented interests among Americans in Islam and Muslims. (...) The critical challenge, however, facing inter-religious advocates is how to sustain and transform this renewed inter-religious solidarity and energy into a powerful grassroots inter-religious movement for peace and justice.
- Christian-Muslim Realities: Historical Realities and Today's Relationships
   It is not uncommon to see people rushing to explain terrorist violence in the light of what they perceive to be distinctive about Islam. Thus, they fail to see that such violence is not grounded in traditional Islamic values.
- Jewish-Christian Dialogue can enrich Christian Hermeneutics Dialogue demands the intellectual, moral and, at the limit, religious

ability to struggle to hear another and to respond – to respond critically and even suspiciously when necessary, but only in dialogical relationship to a real, not a projected, other.

- Understanding Oneself [sic] through the Other The Jewish-Christian dialogue has been described as a path for Jews and Christians to go from pogrom to peace, from Shoah to shalom, from Holocaust to hesed. While this may be shorthand language and the Jewish-Christian dialogue certainly addresses more than a tragic past, it is true that the Holocaust, the Shoah, more than anything else prompted Jews and Christians to examine deeply engrained [sic] roots of mistrust, hatred and fear that culminated in one of the worst evils in human history.
- Religious Minority Liaison and Information Centre Religious Freedom and the Rights of the Individual Charter of Good Conduct

The one common thread running through all these articles, and in the vast majority of articles in other issues of *Current Dialogue* is the need for the dedemonisation of the *Other* and the need to get along and to cooperate with one another in this world, regardless of the Other's religious orientation.

## Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR)

The revival of the Parliament of the World's Religions in 1993 to celebrate the centenary of the first Parliament of Religions in 1893 led to the creation of the Council with a much more clearly and narrowly defined mission than its predecessor a hundred years previously.

The modern Council's mission is

"(...) [to] cultivate harmony between the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its other guiding institutions in order to achieve a peaceful, just, and sustainable world." <sup>91</sup>

#### Because

"We live in a world of difference. Yet, we are interdependent. Nowhere is learning to live with difference more important than religion. Too often, religion is misused as an instrument for division and injustice, betraying the very ideals and teachings that lie at the heart of each of the world's great traditions. At the same time, religious and spiritual traditions shape the lives of billions in wise and wonderful ways. They gather people in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>91</sup> Cf. http://www.cpwr.org/ (2004)

communities of shared beliefs and practices. When these diverse communities work in harmony for the common good. there is hope that the world can be transformed." 92

The methodology that CPWR uses, which implements the 'co-existence and communication' aspects of Panikkar's relational list, involves "dialogue and nurturing relationships among people of difference."93 This has resulted in "a framework for expressing many visions of a just, peaceful and sustainable future (and) [i]n the process, religious and spiritual communities have discovered a shared commitment to ethical principles. This shared commitment has opened the way for a new era of cooperative action among the world's religious and spiritual communities as well as with the world's other guiding institutions. The well-being of the Earth and all life depends on such a collaboration."94

CPWR's goals are expressed practically in a host of programmes, ranging from awarding the Paul Carus Award for Inter-religious Understanding to providing a forum for peace activists to come together in The Goldin Institute for International Partnership and Peace to running the InterFaith Service House residence for believers of different faiths to running the quadrennial Parliament of World Religions and the associated Parliament Academy academic credit programme.

Although its motivation is formulated negatively, as a reaction to division and hatred. CPWR has a positively formulated vision:

> "The vision of the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions is of a just, peaceful and sustainable world in which:

The Earth and all life are cherished, protected, healed and restored

Religious and cultural fears and hatreds are replaced with understanding and respect

People everywhere come to know and care for their neighbours

The richness of human and religious diversity is woven into the fabric of communal, civil, societal and global life

http://www.cpwr.org/what/what.htm (2004)

Ibid.

Ibid.

The world's most powerful and influential institutions move beyond narrow self-interest to realise the common good

Religious and spiritual communities live in harmony and contribute to a better world from their riches of wisdom and compassion

All people commit to living out their highest values and aspirations<sup>,95</sup>

That positive vision notwithstanding, the keynote document promulgated by the CPWR is the *Declaration of a Global Ethic*. Composed under the leadership of Dr. Hans Küng, and published during the 1993 Parliament of World Religions, the Declaration begins:

"The world is in agony. The agony is so pervasive and urgent that we are compelled to name its manifestations so that the depth of this pain may be made clear.

Peace eludes us ... the planet is being destroyed ... neighbours live in fear ... women and men are estranged from each other children die!

This is abhorrent [emphasis theirs. DS]

We condemn the abuses of Earth's ecosystems.

We condemn the poverty that stifles life's potential; the hunger that weakens the human body, the economic disparities that threaten so many families with ruin.

We condemn the social disarray of the nations; the disregard for justice which pushes citizens to the margin; the anarchy overtaking our communities; and the insane death of children from violence. In particular we condemn aggression and hatred in the name of religion."96

The solution identified and endorsed by this group of believers for dealing with this litany of complaints, however, is an ethical and not a theological declaration. The Global Ethic, in fact, contains not a single reference to a deity, a revealed

\_

http://www.cpwr.org/who/who.htm (2004)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>96</sup> Küng, Hans (Ed.), *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, Global Ethic Foundation for inter-cultural and inter-religious research, education, encounter (1993), p. 2

Truth, a transcendent reality, or any of the several and various attributes common to religions. At one level, that is to be expected...the Declaration is *not* an attempt to syncretise a new belief, but rather an effort to find a *modus vivendi* for the inhabitants of the Earth involving sustainable development of people and the environment.

## The Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies

The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, based in Amman, Jordan, was established in 1994 under the patronage of Prince El Hassan bin Talal, brother to the then-king of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, Hussein, and uncle to the current king, Abdullah.

When it was founded, the focus of the Institute was to provide "a venue in the Arab world for the interdisciplinary study and rational discussion of religion and religious issues, with particular reference to Christianity in Arab and Islamic society." <sup>97</sup>

RIIFS was originally intended "to serve as a centre for the study of Christian and Jewish traditions in the Arab/Islamic world and for the enhancement of understanding of regional diversity with a view to lessening Middle Eastern tensions. Initially focusing on religion, religious diversity and the Middle East, the Institute has broadened its scope to encompass the interdisciplinary study of cultural interaction world-wide." <sup>98</sup>

More recently the focus has expanded to "include all issues pertaining to religious, cultural and civilisational diversity, regionally and globally." <sup>99</sup>

Reflecting its academic nature, the principal vehicle for RIIFS publications (in its English-language programme) is the semi-annual *Bulletin*.

The *Bulletin* has mirrored the shift in the Institute's focus. A glance at the table of contents from the first issue (Spring 1999) show an overwhelming emphasis on religious issues.

Abdul-Rahim Abu Husayn. Duwayhi as a Historian of Ottoman Syria

Zayde G. Antrim. Renegotiating Islam: The Reception of al-Ashmawi's Al-Islam al-Siyasi in the Egyptian Press Gerald Obermeyer. Civilization and Religion in Ancient South Arabia

http://www.riifs.org/purpose/purpose.htm (2004)

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, Lessening Tensions in a Tumultuous World: The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, in *Forced Migration Review* Number 13, (June 2002),. P. 47 <a href="http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR13/fmr13.18.pdf">http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR13/fmr13.18.pdf</a> (2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>99</sup> Ibid.

#### inter-religious dialogue

L. Michael Spath. Riccoldo da Monte Croce: Medieval Pilgrim and Traveller to the Heart of Islam

Articles from the Conference on Religion and Community:

Crosscultural Patterns of Coexistence in Contemporary

Gerald Obermeyer. Introduction

Klaus-Peter Köpping. Collective Identity and the Discourse on

Cultural Hegemony in Japanese Syncretism

John Crook. The Struggle for Political Representation in Ladakh

John A. Saliba. Understanding New Religious Sects in

America: The Search for Community

Seteney Shami. Islam in the Post-Soviet Space: Imaginative

Geographies of the Caucasus and Central Asia

More recently, however, articles of a religious nature have taken a more modest position among other articles. The Spring/Summer 2003 issue of the Bulletin consisted entirely of papers from the conference on health and social justice. The Fall/Winter 2002 issue did have more religiously oriented articles, but not overwhelmingly so.

## Essav

*Michael C. Hudson.* Information Technology, International Politics and Political Change in the Arab World

#### **Articles**

S. Nomanul Haq. Greek Alchemy or Shi'i Metaphysics? A Preliminary Statement Concerning Jabir ibn Hayyan's zahir and batin

Jan Nederveen Pieterse. Fault Lines of Transnationalism:

**Borders Matter** 

Axel Havemann. Historiography in 20th-Century Lebanon:

Between Confessional Identity and National Coalescence

RIIFS also has an Arabic-language programme, with a quarterly publication, *Al-Nashra*. *Al-Nashra* focuses on inter-religious issues particularly between Islam and Christianity in a Middle East context.

An analysis of the *Bulletin* articles appears to show two things. First, that the inter-religious focus of the Institute seems to be aimed at the de-demonisation of the *Other*, especially Islam, by trying to show what Islam really is. Second, that there are cultures and civilisations involved that affect and are affected by religions.

Whether the decision to shift the focus from the religious to the inter-cultural or inter-civilisational pre- or post-dates the publication of Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* is beside the point. It is, however, worth noting the similarity between the visions of RIIFS and Huntington:

"In the modern world, religion is a central, perhaps *the* (italics Huntington's. DS) central force that motivates and mobilises people. (...) The Cold War division of humanity is over. The more fundamental divisions of humanity in terms of ethnicity, religions and civilisations remain and spawn new conflicts." <sup>100</sup>

It will be interesting to see in the future whether RIIFS continues further along the path it has most recently gone down, leaving religion slowly behind as cultural and civilisational issues are given prominence. Should that occur, then yet another commentator would have ignored the crucial role that religion plays in modern society, as Huntington correctly reminds us.

## The Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue

The Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue, associated with the Roman Catholic institution Xavier University of Cincinnati, Ohio, USA, is named after Edward Brueggeman, S.J., former chairman of Xavier's department of theology and a leading figure in the mid-western United States for interfaith cooperation. Brueggeman hosted a regional television programme, 'Dialog' which ran for more than 20 years.

The Center that bears his name is relatively young, having had its inaugural event in 2000. It positions itself as a centre for dialogue in opposition to the model of polemical monologue that the media-dominated modern Western world offers.

Proceeding on the basis of principles stated by Hans Kung and the Parliament of World Religions ("There will be no peace in the world until there is peace among the religions and there will be no peace among the religions until there is dialogue among the religions." 101), the Center sees its mission as fostering dialogue in order to resolve many of the world's problems, many of which it feels are caused by the "lack of dialogue among the religions." 102

The Brueggeman Center's focus is on dialogue that is

- 1) inter-religious,
- 2) interdisciplinary

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* (London: The Free Press), 2002, pp. 66-67.

http://www.xu.edu/dialogue/mission.cfm (2004)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>102</sup> Ibid.

- 3) intercultural
- 4) inter-institutional.

As befits an institute associated with a university, the Brueggeman Center has a number of university-level programmes. These include the Brueggeman Symposium and the Brueggeman Chair in Theology and Annual Lecture Series.

The Brueggeman Symposium is a lecture series devoted to a unifying theme. Past themes have included the "Millennium Peace Celebration (September 2000), Religion and Ecology (September 2001), Religion and Human Rights (September 2002), and The Changing Role of Women in World Religions (October 2003), Global Religious Fundamentalism, 2004."

The Brueggeman Chair is a sponsored annual professorship. Benedictines, Muslims and Jews have held the Chair at different times.

The majority of the Center's other work has strong roots in the local Cincinnati community.

They include:

## The Town Hall Meeting

A cooperative programme involving the World Affairs Council, the labour organisation AFL-CIO, the Southern Ohio District Export Council, Xavier's ethics/religion and society program, the centre for business ethics and social responsibility to provide "expert-led dialogue on the vital issues and impacts of globalisation" <sup>103</sup>

#### **Diverse Traditions**•Common Ideals

A collaboration with the International Visitors Council, the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati, the National Conference for Community and Justice and the Hillel Jewish Student Center on a series of events aimed [at exploring] "the intercultural and interfaith impacts of [the attacks in New York City and Washington, D.C. on] 9/11 on various populations in Cincinnati."

## **Artistic Expressions of Faith**

A collaborative activity with the Cincinnati Art Museum, the Taft Museum of Art, Hebrew Union College and the Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati to present "an annual series of lectures and discussions that explore the ways various cultures and religious traditions express their religious experiences." <sup>104</sup>

\_\_\_

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

## **Special Focus Programs**

A series of programmes for discussing issues relevant to the community.

## "Healing Deadly Memories"

Developing teaching materials designed to improve relations between Christians and Jews, especially in regard to the role of the Jews in the Christians' historical interpretation of the Paschal story.

In addition, the Center also welcomes suggestions from outside itself for new programmes that might fit in with the Center's aims.

Like the Jordanian Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies, the Brueggeman Center, too, has seen its focus shift.

"The centre was originally called 'The Brueggeman centre for interreligious dialogue'. While inter-religious dialogue remains the distinguishing characteristic and integrating force, the Center's name was altered in June 2003 to recognise an expanded mission and program direction. If dialogue is to have real impact, the Center's parameters needed to be expanded to include other academic disciplines, representatives from the business community, government and civic society."

As we have seen time and again, inter-religious dialogue is *de*creasingly focused on matters theological, but in almost all cases is *in*creasingly concerned with the profane and the ethical as an important, if not the primary, focus of the activities, even if religion continues to be the glue which holds the meeting programmes together.

\_\_\_

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

# VI. Dialogue

This study has so far concentrated more on what those advocating inter-religious dialogue want to achieve and why and somewhat less on how.

That conscious choice of emphasis up to this point has made it possible to cover a lot of ground rather quickly, but has not absolved us of the responsibility of returning now to look at the dialogue part of inter-religious dialogue. The purpose of our quest, after all, has been to try to ascertain the *theological* point of inter-religious dialogue, a dialogue which the Roman Catholic prefect of the Pontifical Council, Cardinal Francis Arinze, has described as 'an essential element of Christian witness.' 106

That 'witness', however, may be more of a problem than some might like. If it implies, as has traditionally been the case, preparing the hearer of the witness for conversion, then the question arises of whether it should properly be referred to as dialogue at all. If 'witness' is not intended to prepare someone for conversion, and is not preparatory to syncretism, which most observers would say it is not, then what is the point? It becomes little more than an exchange of information.

That may, in fact, be part of the explanation for the drop-off in interest in interreligious dialogue among the 'believer in the street'. (S)he doesn't quite get the *theological* point. Believers may well see and understand the potential benefits of working together on issues such as human rights, the environment, poverty, etc. Important as these issues are, however, they are not the core issues of any of the faiths. At best, the ways that members of particular faiths deal with them are based on values that arise from the faith, but they are not the reason that those who make a conscious choice for a faith choose it, nor are they the reason that adherents of a faith remain faithful.

I am aware, of course, that the above raises the important question of what the 'core business' of a particular faith is. Is Christianity, for example, about repentance, about ensuring that the greatest numbers possible get to heaven? About achieving the Kingdom of God on Earth?<sup>107</sup> About something else?

<sup>106</sup> http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=8763 (2004)

This is complicated, of course, by the perspective of some that Christianity, for example, does not have a core 'business.' In a letter to the author from the Dr. Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, following a lecture series at Salisbury Cathedral in 2003, Dr. Williams wrote that he doesn't like to speak of 'core business' in Christianity, preferring instead to speak of a 'core relationship.'

And what is the 'core business' of Judaism? To achieve the arrival of the Messiah? To live a good life? To ensure adherence to the Torah?

And Islam's core business? To establish the House of Islam everywhere on Earth? To convert as many as possible to ensure their arrival in Paradise? The questions outnumber the answers thus far: but the issue goes to the heart of the inquiry, for if we're not talking about 'core business' issues (apologies to Dr. Williams), then what is the dialogue about?

A more basic question that needs to be dealt with first, of course is: what is 'dialogue' anyway?

To this point, I have been proceeding on the basis of an intentionally false assumption, namely, that the meaning of dialogue itself was self-evident and required no further elucidation. Nothing could be farther from the truth, however. It is my contention, in fact, that the use of the term 'dialogue' is been an important factor in unnecessarily complicating analysis of real-world inter-religious discussion.

What is the problem? Quite simply, that not everyone agrees on what dialogue actually means.

To begin at the beginning, 'dialogue' itself is derived from the Greek διαλογος (*dialogos*), which in turn is derived not from "two people speaking" as many people believe, but from "through" (dia) + "word" (logos).  $^{108}$ 

Physicist and dialogue theoretician, the late David Bohm has identified several different types of dialogue.

The first kind is more like a discussion, which has a great deal in common etymologically with 'percussion' and 'concussion' and traces its ancestry back to the Latin *discutio*, to scatter or dissipate. In a discussion things are taken apart and analysed. These kinds of dialogues, so called, can be encountered at forums like the United Nations when nations negotiate over such things as reducing nuclear arsenals or CO<sub>2</sub> levels. <sup>110</sup>

For Bohm, these are not 'dialogues' at all, because they are not concerned with core issues, but rather superficial 'window-dressing' activities. Yes, we can discuss reductions of nuclear arsenals, but discussing the existing world order of nation states that makes having such arsenals seem like such a good idea to some people is not on the agenda. In Bohm's view, the idea that there are items which are not on the table, not negotiable, untouchable, makes it no dialogue at

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>108</sup> The implication, then, is that 'through words" we arrive somewhere other than where we started.

Bohm, David, On Dialogue, (London: Routledge) 1996, p. 6-7.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

all.<sup>111</sup> Also, the idea that one side can win and the other lose (I'll keep my nuclear arsenal, you give up yours), takes the wind out of the sails of those who think this is dialogue. If someone loses, in Bohm's view, there has been no dialogue.

In order to qualify as a dialogue, therefore, nothing can be left off the table. All basic assumptions—and "all the pressures that are behind our assumptions"—are up for grabs. Everyone is placing himself or herself in a position of openness, with no preconceived notion of where it will all end.

Bohm states that all the different opinions that one has are the "result of past thought (....) This is all programmed into your memory. You may then identify with those opinions and react to defend them.(...) Dialogue is really aimed at going into the whole thought process and changing the way the thought process occurs collectively." <sup>112</sup>

It is this looking at the thought process that concerns Bohm initially, for thought has created, in the sense of having organised, the world around us. Thought has built the roads and buildings, thought has created the nations. And thought has created religion:

"separate religions are entirely a result of how we think."

#### And further on:

"Thought produced the nation., and it says that the nation has an extremely high value, a supreme value which overrides almost everything else. The same may be said about religion." <sup>113</sup>

Another problem-child in the area of dialogue, according to Bohm, is science. For scientists, despite what the general public may think, may very well hold different views of the truth, which makes it hard for them to get together.

Bohm cites in this regard the relationship between Albert Einstein and Niels Bohr, two leading physicists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. When the two first met, Einstein expressed feelings of love for Bohr. Over time, however, as "they finally came upon a point where they had two different assumptions, or opinions, about what was the way to truth (...) they gradually drifted apart. (...) [Eventually, at a party], Einstein and his associates stayed at one end of the room and Bohr and his associates stayed at the other end. They couldn't get together because they had nothing to talk about. They couldn't share any meaning because each one felt his meaning was true. How can you share if you are sure that you have truth and the

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>112</sup> Ibid., p. 9

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>113</sup> Ibid., p. 10

other fellow is sure he has the truth, and the truths don't agree? How can you share?"

Bohm would have preferred Einstein and Bohr to have met, had a dialogue and moved beyond relativity and quantum physics (the subjects which divided them) into something new.<sup>114</sup>

Which is precisely where the problem with the current inter-religious dialogue, as dialogue, lies, for that way lies syncretism, which most organisations involved in dialogue fear like the plague.

A similar point has been made elsewhere. Who participates in authentic interreligious dialogue? Do we ever see the Pope sitting down in true dialogue with the Ayatollah, or either sharing with the Chief Rabbis of Israel? No, we do not. Why? Because these men cannot accept "Not in Heaven" [recognising their religion's limitations] as a prerequisite for genuine dialogue. As defenders of particular and mutually exclusive faith traditions, the best these men could hope for is a cordial exchange of doctrine. <sup>115</sup>

In virtually all of the mission statements of organisations involved in interreligious dialogue, two things stand out.

First, respect for the beliefs of others, to hear what they are saying without trying to impose your views on them.

Second, enough respect for your own beliefs to prevent it being watered down in an effort to close the gaps between you and your dialogue partners.

Which is not to say that syncretists are not among us. They certainly are, trying to merge mystical systems, to blend ritual practice. Formally, however, and to a certain extent, not unreasonably, the participants in inter-religious dialogue are firm in their desires to not surrender or water down their own beliefs.

Christians are not prepared to surrender their Messiah because Islam cannot see Jesus as the Son of God (Al Quran, Sura 4:171). The Jews are not about to surrender their Messianic expectation because the Christians believe He has already been. Hindus are unlikely to surrender their belief in reincarnation because of Christianity's alleged insistence that one lives once and dies once.

In Bohm's view then, we are not involved in dialogue, real dialogue, at all. Nor will we be until we put core issues on the table and are willing to see them transformed into something else.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>114</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-37

Shapiro, R. M., "Moving the fence: One Rabbi's view of interreligious dialogue." In M. D. Bryant & F. Flinn (Eds.), *Interreligious dialogue: Voices from a new frontier* (pp. 31-40). (New York: New Era/Paragon House) (1989). Cited in Kozlovic, Anton Karl, "Who Should Be Allowed to Participate in Official Interreligious Dialogues? A Review of Issues" in *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2001.

For Bohm, that means seeing "that there is no 'road' to truth. (...) [W]e share all the roads and we finally see that none of them matters. We see the means of all the roads, and therefore we come to the 'no road.' Underneath, all the roads are the same because of the very fact that they are 'roads' – they are rigid."

Of course, one of the contentions of many religions is that, despite what Bohm says, it is not true that 'none of them matters.' Christianity states that quite clearly:

The many references to *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* discussed above demonstrate that sufficiently as does much of Scripture.

Muslims leave a bit more room for manoeuvre, but still claim fervently:

"There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his apostle." <sup>117</sup> (Many Quran references, including Sura 3).

The Jews, too, believe that the interpolation of Adonai into history *does* matter, both for themselves as a people and for the whole world (Qol Ha-Olam).

Bohm would have dialogue not be restricted from taking the participants to a place where they could see that none of the roads matter, but many if not most of the participants in today's dialogue are not willing to go as far as Bohm would take them.

So, for example, the World Council of Churches, in its Guidelines on  $Dialogue^{118}$ :

12. As witnesses, we approach inter-religious relations and dialogue in commitment to our faith. At the heart of Christian belief is faith in the triune God. We affirm that God, the Father, is creator and sustainer of all creation. We hold the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ as the centre of God's redeeming work for us and for the world. The Holy Spirit confirms us in this faith, renewing our lives and leading us into all truth. <sup>119</sup>

And the Council for a Parliament of World Religions:

119 Ibid.

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>116</sup> Bohm, On Dialogue, p. 38

<sup>117</sup> The charmingly alliterative: La Ilaha Ila Allah. Mohammed rasul Allah.

World Council of Churches, Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions, http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/glines-e.html (2004)

Encouraging religious and spiritual communities to develop their own rationales for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, and address the critical issues.<sup>120</sup>

Bohm does leave us a more limited form of dialogue, for those who are not yet ready for the whole experience, but we must be aware that it is limited.

In that form of dialogue, which may in fact reasonably deal with non-core issues, one is dealing with particular issues simply in order to get the process of dialogue happening and achieving some small good into the bargain is acceptable. It would be better if it were then to lead to a broader dialogue, where basic assumptions are included, but something, in Bohm's view is better than nothing.

It raises the question, however, of whether such a limited *inter-religious* dialogue could ever touch the core business, the theological heart of a faith. If it does not, can it lead us to the answer to the question of the theological point of inter-religious dialogue? Do we have, in fact, an inter-religious dialogue, or a dialogue of the religious?

Council for a Parliament of World Religions, *How we do it*, <a href="http://www.cpwr.org/how/method.htm">http://www.cpwr.org/how/method.htm</a> (2004).

# VII. To Defend and Explain: the Apologetics

One's view of the theological use of inter-religious dialog will depend to a large degree on one's mental model of the religious constellation. A firmament containing a single star, after all, precludes the inclusion of others in one's thinking. It will depend in equal measure on one's view of dialogue itself: what it is and what its role is.

In the next few chapters, I shall be examining the theological and dialogical models of thinkers and from the times of the Church Fathers up to the beginning of the modern time.

The earliest participants in inter-religious relations from a Christian perspective were the founders and Church Fathers. They differ from those who will follow in that later participants—although they were official or self-appointed representatives of a faith that is dominant in their societies, both nationally and regionally; representatives of a faith with hundreds of years of history and a staunch tradition that had already withstood assaults from without and within, with varying degrees of success, as far as inter-religious dialogue is concerned—were minority voices preaching dialogue and co-existence against a chorus emphasising monologues, missionary work and triumphalism or absolutism.

Such was not always the case. At one time, the Christian church was compelled to adopt a much more modest position in relation to the society and other religions around it and, from a position of numerical, political and social weakness and inferiority, approach these issues much more circumspectly. That period lasted for approximately 400 years, 121 and began to change only when

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>121</sup> Such figures are tossed around in historical circles with a degree of casualness that disguises the significance of such a period of time. To put those 400 years in perspective, bear in that the world in which we live today could not even have been considered 400 years ago, in the early 1600s. Regardless of the obvious technological advances, just thinking of the relations among the countries and civilisations, Europe vs. Africa, Europe vs. Asia, Europe vs. the Americas, the Americas vs. everyone else; the rise and fall of the great (in terms of size, not of moral superiority) European colonial powers, the rise of the Enlightenment itself, the disappearance of feudalism, the rise and sometimes fall of capitalism and communism, the completion of the Reformation, the Counter-Reformation, the great migrations-compulsory or otherwise-etc., etc., demonstrates that it's more than a mere 400 years...it's 400 years!! The figure of 400 years is somewhat arbitrary in any case. Others may choose a different cut-off. The Catholic Encyclopaedia, for example, closes the period off at 476 C.E., with the fall of the Roman Empire in the west, and the writing of The City of God by Augustine. Inasmuch as the principles seen in those early centuries were repeated throughout the period of the Church's expansion throughout Europe and later in Asia, Africa and the America's, the exact time frame is moot. I am therefore not inclined to argue the point with much vigour.

Christianity had managed to supplant the previously dominant faith in, first, the Roman Empire and, later, countries outside the Empire, and become the official religion. 122

The written record of such dialogue as there was at that time is today grouped together as Apologetics, writings to defend and explain Christianity. To a modern media-sophisticated audience, the early writings of the Church can best be described as elements of a communications plan for a start-up organisation facing problems on several fronts.

First, it is a spin-off organisation with its roots in an already successful entity, the nationally based Judaism of the people of Israel.

Second, it is an organisation undergoing an internal struggle to define its precepts, principles and organisational structure, with a number of competing visions vying for dominance.

Third, it is fighting for share of mind against an overwhelmingly numerically superior field of competitors with hundreds of years of history and an established position in the society.<sup>123</sup>

And fourth, from its earliest days, it is fighting against physical annihilation as, initially, according to the few reports available, the Jewish establishment and, not very much later, the forces of the Roman empire actively worked for its destruction through the execution of its leaders and rank-and-file membership on the one hand and attempts to discredit its beliefs on the other.

Each of these threats demanded a different response, and all of them from a perspective of weakness rather than the position of strength and dominance that would later characterise its dialogue positions.

\_

I note in passing that even in countries where Christianity had become de jure the official religion, it was not always immediately successful in replacing the previously existing cultus. Although we seldom stop to think about it, in Egypt, for example, a former Roman colony, the old beliefs (old even then, with a history measured in thousands of years) involving Osiris, Isis, Set, etc., were still being practised up to the time that the forces of Islam conquered that country in the 600s C.E..

We are so accustomed to seeing Christianity as the dominant force that it is often difficult for readers to internalise these figures and see them for what they really are. Although accurate figures are *impossible* to come by, calculations by some (Stark, R., *The Rise of Christianity: A Sociologist Reconsiders History*, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press) 1996, cited in McKechnie, Paul, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church*, (Leicester, U.K.: Apollos), 2001, p. 56) indicate that at the middle of the third century (approximately 250 C.E.), Christians, by the broadest definition possible, and including perhaps the Gnostics as well, amounted to no more than 1.9 per cent of the population of the Roman Empire. Represented by analogy, that is like saying that slightly less than the population of Austria in 2000 (7.1 million out of 8.1 million) was Christian, and the rest of the population of the European Union (approx. 378 million in the 15-nation Union in 2000) was not. (Source: US Census Bureau International Population Database.)

## The early church and the Jews

The *ex post facto* nature of the New Testament means that while, outside of faith, they cannot necessarily be taken as accurate representations of the relationships between the Jesus movement and the Jewish establishment prior to and immediately following the death of Jesus, it is certainly possible and reasonable to view them as representative of relations in the period that followed shortly thereafter. And those relations were not uniformly good. The Church that is revealed in the New Testament is one that looked to the Jewish establishment as the cause or at least the instigator of the death of Jesus and, doubly damnable in their eyes, as having refused to recognise Jesus as the messiah who had been promised and prophesied.

The followers of Jesus felt that the Church was the fulfilment of Judaism, however, and the realisation of the prophecies. This was not uniformly accepted by the Jewish leadership and community, however, and when, the reports say, some Jews believed that some Christians (though they were not yet called that) were saying that "Jesus the Nazarene is going to destroy this Place [the Temple. DS] and alter the traditions that Moses handed down to us[,]<sup>124</sup>" they convicted Stephen and stoned him, thus creating the first Christian martyr. For such heresies against Judaism, Saul, the later Apostle Paul, is said to have began working "for the total destruction of the Church; he went from house to house arresting both men and women and sending them to prison."

The first view that the Christians had of the Jewish establishment, then, was two-fold, source and oppressor. At no time during those early days, however, did the Church think of itself as anything other than Jewish. Its members kept the holidays, worshipped at the Temple at the appropriate times, and, when abroad, used the synagogues as their earliest meeting houses. 126

When, under the guidance of Paul, the Church expanded its target audience to include the gentiles, dispensing with some key elements, including circumcision and the need to follow the laws of kashrut, the stage was set, however unintentionally, for the marginalisation of the Jewish elements within the Church. The marginalisation accelerated with the destruction of the Second Temple and the dispersal of the Jews from the land of Israel until the sheer numerical difference between the Gentile and Jewish Christians became so great

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>124</sup> Acts 6: 14 (New Jerusalem Bible)

<sup>125</sup> Acts 8:3

Even, according to Acts, being invited to address the congregation, as at Antioch. See Acts 13: 13 ff. and Acts 17.

that the latter were forbidden to insist that the former follow Jewish practice in matters of the Sabbath, the Torah and other matters.

By the middle of the second century C.E., the breach had become as complete as it would remain until the modern time. A summary of the issues that divided the two is succinctly provided by Justin Martyr in his *Dialogue with Trypho the Jew*, written in about 160 C.E..

The Dialogue is believed by some to be a record of an actual dialogue between Justin and a rabbi of note in approximately 135 C.E. and written down some time later. It is interesting to note that it is set at a time when both the Christians and the Jews were under attack from the established order, the Christians due to their supposed obstinacy in refusing to sacrifice to the Roman gods and the Jews in Israel for political reasons arising form their repeated attempts to toss the Romans into the sea and regain political independence.

Though the Church is more than a century old at the time the dialogue takes place, not only have the old enmities not died, new slanders have arisen.

"Is there any other matter, my friends, in which we are blamed, than this, that we live not after the law, and are not circumcised in the flesh as your forefathers were, and do not observe Sabbaths as you do? Are our lives and customs also slandered among you? And I ask this: have you also believed concerning us, that we eat men; and that after the feast, having extinguished the lights, we engage in promiscuous concubinage? Or do you condemn us in this alone, that we adhere to such tenets, and believe in an opinion, untrue, as you think?"

The matter of the slanders are not the issue, Trypho replies, but the matter of the Law is key.

Trypho professes his amazement that, although the

"precepts in the so-called Gospel are so wonderful and so great that I suspect that no one can keep them, (...) we" {the Jews) cannot understand how Christians, who suppose themselves "better than others", are in no way different from the peoples whom they live among, neither keeping festivals nor sabbaths, nor circumcision and "further, resting your hopes

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, Chapter X, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (trans.) in "Early Christian Writings" (http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html)

on a man [who] was crucified (...) while you do not obey his commandments (...) and do not obey the Law." 128

To this Justin replies that, despite their differences, the Jews and the Christians do have some things in common, beginning with God himself.

Justin's reply is a familiar one: although there is but one God, whom the Jews and Christians share, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the universal and final revelation of Jesus supersedes the Law as passed down by Moses, which is particular, much as a new covenant replaces those that preceded it.<sup>129</sup>

This Justin supports with numerous quotes from the Hebrew scriptures, which, though in the process of being surpassed by the then-still developing New Testament canon in terms of having pride of place among Christians, were still considered authoritative.

In fact, Justin implies, the Hebrew Scriptures prefigure and announce Christ and Christianity, and the Jews misinterpret them.

I also adduced another passage in which Isaiah exclaims: "'Hear My words, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David. Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the people: nations which know not Thee shall call on Thee; peoples who know not Thee shall escape to Thee, because of thy God, the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified Thee.' This same law you have despised, and His new holy covenant you have slighted; and now you neither receive it, nor repent of your evil deeds. 130

The "evil deeds" are not without consequence, however. They serve as the basis for the troubles Israel is now experiencing, specifically the war with the Romans which the Jewish nation is in the process of losing. And the most precious of Jewish symbols, that of circumcision, will serve to identify those who will suffer.

For the circumcision according to the flesh, which is from Abraham, was given for a sign; that you may be separated from other nations, and from us; and that you alone may suffer that which you now justly suffer; and that your land may be desolate, and your cities burned with fire; and that strangers

<sup>128</sup> Ibid.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., Chapter XI.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., Chapter XII.

may eat your fruit in your presence, and not one of you may go up to Jerusalem. 131

Justin then continues with a long and detailed accounting of how the Jews' understanding of the Law is incorrect and the source of all their woes and that salvation will only be possible through Christ, whose circumcision of the heart is "far more excellent." In fact, the Christians' understanding of the Law is so superior, the words of the Scriptures no longer belong to the Jews but have been bequeathed, as it were, to the Christians.

They are contained in your Scriptures, or rather not yours, but ours. For we believe them; but you, though you read them, do not catch the spirit that is in them. 133

Of dialogue as that is understood today, there is no hint here: Justin intends only to persuade, not to learn. At one point, he even loses his patience with Trypho for refusing to understand.

"If I were to be quarrelsome and light-minded like you, Trypho, I would no longer continue to converse with you, since you are prepared not to understand what has been said, but only to return some captious answer.<sup>134</sup>

Whether that lack of openness is understandable, given the antagonistic history between the two groups, is beside the point.

Though this dialogue is between a Christian and a Jew, it is highly unlikely that it was widely disseminated or read outside Christian circles. That should not come as a surprise, even apart from the fact that literacy levels were, by today's standards, low and that distribution meant manual copying. More important is the one-sidedness of the discussion. It is clearly a missionary document that cannot be expected to have been received with enthusiasm by the Jews whom it holds in such disdain, having been relegated to the status of has-beens.

The question of the relationship between Christianity and Judaism surfaces again in the Letter to Diognetus, an anonymous letter from the second century.

In that eponymous letter, the writer tries to explain the difference between Jews and Christians to his correspondent. That difference seems to have been virtually indistinguishable to outsiders. Christians share with Jews the rejection of

132 Ibid., Chapter XXIV

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>131</sup> Ibid., Chapter XVI.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., Chapter XXIX

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., Chapter LXIV

### inter-religious dialogue

the idolatry of the Roman empire and the worship of one God as master of the universe. 135

Jews are in error, however, according to the letter writer, "in regard to their food and their superstition concerning the Sabbath, their flaunting of their circumcision, [and] their hypocrisy in fasting and the feasts of the new moon…"<sup>136</sup>

He concludes that Christians justly abstain from the common follies and errors and from the exaggerated ritualism and boasting of the Jews.<sup>137</sup>

These two examples will serve to demonstrate that relations between Judaism and Christianity in the time of the early Church were anything but amicable, and would get much worse through the centuries before, recently, in some quarters, they began to improve. Dialogue then was out of the question. 138

### **Gnostics**

The second broad group against whom the Great Church felt it had to fight in the early centuries included the Gnostics and other groups now referred to as heretics<sup>139</sup>. These groups held views of Jesus' message, his nature, the role of the church, the role of Jesus' mother Mary and a number of other subjects that differed both from the views of the Great Church and from one another.

The teachings that the Gnostics disseminated included a theon of two Gods, the God of the Old Testament, cruel and stern, and the God of the New Testament, a God of love. The material world was created by the Old Testament God, who is therefore responsible for all of its imperfections. The God of the New Testament was the redeemer. Other teachings included the belief that Jesus, being God, did not really suffer on the cross, but an apparition took his place. Such teachings went directly against the developing dogmas of the Church and

<sup>-</sup>

De Benedictinessen van Bonheiden, *De Verdedigers van het Geloof. De Apologeten,* second revised edition, (Bonheiden, Belgium: Abdij Bethlethem) 1984, p. 138,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>136</sup> Ibid., p. 139

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>137</sup> Ibid., p. 140.

The enmity was reciprocated by the new post-Temple Jewish leadership. Christian views on the Virgin Birth of Jesus were mocked, and references to the supposed illegitimate father of Jesus, a Roman centurion called Pantera, were included in the Talmud (Sanhedrin 67a, among others). Christian beliefs in other areas were also ridiculed.

The word 'heresy' in English derives from the Greek for 'choice, doctrine.' In its negative religious connotation, it refers to doctrines and positions that differ from those of the Great Church. A Germanic translation, 'ketter' in Dutch, 'ketzer' in German, derives from the Cathars, a 'heretical' group of medieval Languedoc (today, France).

See, for example, De Vries, Theun, Ketters. Viertien eeuwen ketterij, volksbeweging en kettergericht. (Amsterdam: Querido) 1998, pp. 53-69.

were an attractive alternative for some, such that Gnosticism threatened to undermine the Church altogether. 141

One may reasonably ask whether a discussion, however, brief, of the relationship between the Great Church and the 'heretics' is appropriate in a discussion of the theological meaning of inter-religious dialogue. That question mirrors the contemporary question of whether ecumenicalism is part of or something different than the current inter-religious dialogue. At one level, of course, it seems to be something different. After all, all of the participants in the ecumenical dialogue—for the most part united in the World Council of Churches. with varying degrees of participation from the Roman Catholics, the Eastern Orthodox churches and others—are nominally Christian churches who split off from a one-time unified Great Church. The differences between the churches, however, are not insignificant. Questions of salvation, the relationship between faith and repentance, the literal versus allegorical interpretation of Scripture, the nature of the Holy Trinity, baptism and a host of other issues divide the Christian churches just as much as the questions of the relationship between the Old Testament and the New, the nature of Jesus (divinity vs. humanity, physicality vs. spirituality), the creation of the world, the role of women, etc., etc., divided the socalled heretics from the Great Church.

Today, as it did in the days of the early Church, all protestations to the contrary notwithstanding, the ecumenical discussion parallels the inter-religious one. With at least one crucial difference.

A major motivation for the ecumenical discussion is to restore some form of unity. That is certainly not the purpose of the inter-religious dialogue, and would lead to a syncretism that would be unacceptable to most, if not all, of the Christian participants.

### Irenaeus against heresies

Diatribes against the heretics were published by some of the most important of the apologetics, including Tertullian (who later joined a sect that was later deemed heretical itself, the Montanist sect) and Irenaeus. Irenaeus was so

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>141</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>quot;[the World Council of Churches] is a community of churches which recognise in each other elements of the true church." See <a href="http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/ecumenical/index-e.html">http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/ecumenical/index-e.html</a> (December 2001). Some efforts have been made to set up a third parallel dialogue among the Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam. Those efforts, while vigorous and vibrant, seem to have not yet evolved to the formalised state or the scale of the Christian ecumenical debate, which, it can be argued, they would be the logical extension of.

absorbed by this fight that it led him to formulate what is today recognised within virtually all branches of Christianity as the New Testament canon.

As regards his opposition to the heretics, and following the model of the communications plan introduced above, we may say that Irenaeus was concerned that all those preaching any message related to Christ or Christianity stay 'on message'. And when they didn't, he felt compelled to combat their "their craftily-constructed plausibilities" by composing a treatise "in order to expose and counteract their machinations."

Their offence is:

(...) [to] falsify the oracles of God, and prove themselves evil interpreters of the good word of revelation. They also overthrow the faith of many, by drawing them away, under a pretence of [superior] knowledge, from Him who rounded and adorned the universe(...). By means of specious and plausible words, they cunningly allure the simple-minded to inquire into their system; but they nevertheless clumsily destroy them, while they initiate them into their blasphemous and impious opinions respecting the Demiurge.<sup>144</sup>

His task is not an easy one, for, as he notes:

Error, indeed, is never set forth in its naked deformity, lest, being thus exposed, it should at once be detected. But it is craftily decked out in an attractive dress, so as, by its outward form, to make it appear to the inexperienced (ridiculous as the expression may seem) more true than the truth itself.<sup>145</sup>

No hint here, or in any other anti-heretical document, of any recognition of anything holy in any of the heresies. No acknowledgement that the 'heretics' may have been making a serious effort to deal with some of the difficulties raised by the presentation of the story of Jesus and the Church by the Great Church. Could Jesus, being God, suffer? Was God the Father the same as the God of the Jews? What was the relationship between Jesus the son (Son?) of Man and God? The Gnostics certainly presented alternative answers to these questions, but their answers were dismissed as mere error or as lie, perversion and falsehood that needed to be rooted out in order to save the credulous from damnation. A couple of examples will suffice.

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>143</sup> Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 1:1 (Gnostic Society Library, <a href="http://www.webcom.com/~gnosis/library/advh1.htm">http://www.webcom.com/~gnosis/library/advh1.htm</a> (March, 2004)

<sup>&#</sup>x27;'' Ibid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>145</sup> Ibid., Book 1:2

Chapter IV:3. (...) For these doctrines are not at all similar to those of which our Lord said, "Freely ye have received, freely give."(4) They are, on the contrary, abstruse, and portentous, and profound mysteries, to be got at only with great labour by such as are in love with falsehood.

#### And further:

CHAP. XIII.-THE DECEITFUL ARTS AND NEFARIOUS PRACTICES OF MARCUS.

I. But(2) there is another among these heretics, Marcus by name, who boasts himself as having improved upon his master. He is a perfect adept in magical impostures, and by this means drawing away a great number of men, and not a few women, he has induced them to join themselves to him, as to one who is possessed of the greatest knowledge and perfection, and who has received the highest power from the invisible and ineffable regions above. Thus it appears as if he really were the precursor of Antichrist. For, joining the buffooneries of Anaxilaus(3) to the craftiness of the magi, as they are called, he is regarded by his senseless and cracked-brain followers as working miracles by these means.

That Irenaeus and the other apologists actually had reason to be concerned about a real threat to Christianity will become clear when one reviews the history of Manicheism. Founded by Mani, who was born into a Jewish-Christian family in Persia, Manicheism borrowed some ideas from Zoaroastrianism and joined them to Christianity in an attempt to correct what Mani thought were errors transmitted by all the other prophets through the ages.

Long after most of the other major heresies had been crushed or otherwise eradicated, Manicheism, in one form or another, including the Paulicians and, later, the Albigensians, was still around in Europe and Asia, and only a crusade by Pope Innocent III and a virtually simultaneous though unrelated suppression by the Ming emperors in the 14<sup>th</sup> century put an end to them in Europe and Asia respectively.

Manicheism was not the only threat to Great Church Christianity, however, and attacks were composed against a wide range of beliefs that took elements of Christianity, especially Jesus as the Christ, and twisted them out of the shape that the Great Church followed.

### The Pagans

To varying degrees, the campaigns against the Jews and the Gnostics had elements in common. They were designed to preserve what the Great Church held to be non-negotiable Truths and to stay the course in terms of consistency of message.

Quite a different strategy was followed in regard to the dominant religious belief of Empire, derisively called paganism.

While the name itself constitutes a not-insignificant part of the campaign, in a not unsuccessful attempt to position it as the superstitious belief of farmers and the uneducated, paganism presented a major threat to Christianity due to its close relationship with the established forces of Empire. This became increasingly problematic with the passage of time and the deification of, first, dead rulers such as the Divine Julius (Caesar), and later, the living ones, who, perhaps in imitation of the classic role of the Egyptians and Babylonians, were elevated to be sons of Jupiter even while living. Failure to sacrifice to the Emperor was a capital offence in the Empire, both as a mark of poor citizenship and as a threat to the well-being and stability of the Empire.

Christianity's relationship with the pagan Empire was two-fold. On the one hand, there was a need to spread the gospel and to convert, and thereby save, the souls of the Romans, who would otherwise be lost. On the other hand, there was a need to save the body of the Church from the significant pogroms and persecutions which periodically took place in an attempt to wipe out these immoral atheists.

Faced with this double-edged problem, the Church adopted a double-edged communications strategy to deal with it.

First, to convince the powers-that-be that, contrary to what was being bandied about widely, Christianity was not only not an immoral cult that indulged in strange sacrifices, but was rather among the most desirable of citizens, paying taxes, respecting the law, and keeping the peace.

And second, to proselytise among the Romans and slowly, to win them over to the Church, to the point where, as Tertullian, perhaps prematurely, triumphantly crowed: "We are but of yesterday, and we have filled everything of yours--cities, islands, forts, towns, conciliabula, even the camps, tribes, courts, palace, senate, Forum. We have left you only the temples."

Tertullian, Apologia, It should be noted here that proselytisation may not have been the primary, or even secondary, key to success of Christianity. Sociologist Rodney Stark, in his *The Rise of Christianity*, (HarperCollins, 1997) notes that other factors may have been more important, including sexual restraint among Christians, leading to less venereal disease; prohibition of abortion, leading to a lower death rate among women of child-bearing years; better hygiene and

Where the apologetics aimed against the Jews and heretics were characterised primarily by their polemics and merciless attacks, those directed at the imperial forces were of a completely different nature, conciliatory, explanatory, in search of common ground.

## Apologia of Justin Martyr

The Apologia of Justin Martyr will serve to illustrate.

The tone is set in the salutation:

To Emperor Titus [...] and to his son Virissimus the philosopher and Lucius the philosopher [...] the friend of the sciences and to the holy Senate and all the Romans [...] I, Justin [...] in the name of them who, of all peoples who are unjustly hated and oppressed, and to which I belong, direct this argument and plea.

Justin begins, then, with the flattery common both then and now to those in authority, unusual only in that it is of a completely different tone than documents directed against those with whom the Church has a great deal more in common.

The flattery and the attempt at persuasion continues.

Reason demands that those who are truly pious<sup>147</sup> and philosophers, should honour and love only truth and refuse to follow the beliefs of the elders if these prove to be unvirtuous.

Justin's flair with a pen certainly belies those who claim that the early Christian writers were less skilled at argument than their pagan counterparts. This text follows all the rules of persuasion. For who would not want to be counted among the truly pious and philosophers who honour and love truth? In the same vein, Justin continues.

It will become apparent whether you truly are as one can hear everywhere, pious and wise (philosopher) and upholders of the law and a friend of science.

Justin is concerned that Christians have been arrested and, by that very fact, are considered to have been guilty: one doesn't arrest the innocent after all. Justin does not yet claim innocence for all those arrested. But pleads for an honest inquiry.

care for the sick, especially during outbreaks of plague, that presents a Darwinian survival strategy that accounts for the absolute and relative increase in the numbers of Christians among the Roman population.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>147</sup> A play on one of the Emperor's names: Pius.

We therefore ask that the lives of those whose names have been brought to you be investigated, and if they are found guilty, let them be punished as criminals, not as Christians. If someone is found not guilty, however, let him be acquitted as a Christian who has done nothing wrong.

The bulk of the *Apologia* is given over to presenting the facts of Christian practice, baptism, Eucharist, etc., to distance it from the slanders that others have told of it for various reasons. The tone is everywhere reasonable and conciliatory. Nowhere is the faith of the Romans attacked, and nowhere are the Romans attacked for their errors.

In fact, Justin tries to show something of what the Church and the great thinkers of antiquity—and therefore also the Romans—have in common.

In the same way, Plato said that Radamanthys and Minus will punish the unjust when they come to them. We say that the same will happen, but that the judge will be Christ and that their souls will be united with the same bodies and they shall suffer eternal punishment, not only for a period of a thousand years, as he (Plato) said.

## Letter to Diognetus

A more actively critical though equally conciliatory approach can be seen in the Letter to Diognetus.

The Letter was written by an anonymous correspondent—with possibilities ranging from Quadratus, a missionary bishop, to Theophilus, Clement, Apollos, Marcion, Apelles or Aristides and even Justin Martyr—to the Diognetus of the title at some time between 100-150 C.E.

The letter is clearly a proselytising document directed at a follower of the pagan religion of Rome.

After commencing with general praise in regard to Diognetus's inclination to listen to the arguments concerning Christianity, the writer wastes no time in getting down to business.

Come, cleanse yourself of all the prejudices that hold your thoughts in thrall and shake off the deceptive life and become a new man as from the beginning, for you are going to hear a new teaching. See not only with the eyes, but also with reason, what substance and in what form are made those things that you call gods and think are gods.

Diognetus's gods are of stone, copper or wood, and they will, over time, be destroyed, the same fate that will befall Diognetus if he doesn't see the error of

his ways. For can they be gods who have to be locked up in a cupboard at night, and guarded against thieves by day?

Should one be a Jew, then? Perhaps, insofar as they refuse to worship manmade gods. But, considering their "superstitious" belief in the efficacy of the laws of kashrut, circumcision, fasting, and sacrifices, perhaps not. For those are ridiculous beliefs, our writer says.

But what is a Christian, and how does one differ from 'normal' people. Hardly at all, according to our writer:

For the Christians don't distinguish themselves from other people in their language, country or clothing. They don't live in their own cities, speak no deviant dialect and don't live differently. [...] They live in the cities of the Greeks and the barbarians, as fate decreed and they live according to the values of the country [...].

But for all that binds them, yet there is that which separates them.

They live in their own countries, but as strangers, they fulfil their civic duties and bear all as foreigners. Every foreign country is their homeland and every fatherland for them a foreign country. They marry like everyone else and bear children, but they do not dispose of their new-born children. They share their table but not their marriage bed.

And so on. Christians are the same, but different. The Christians are to the world what "the soul is to the body."

Nor is the philosophy of the philosophers sufficient.

What men actually knew who God is before He Himself came? Unless someone believed the hollow, empty words of smooth-talking philosophers. Some of them taught that fire is God—the fire where they shall end up, they call God—others call water God, or some other element that God made. [...] But those are all fables and lies from those deceivers.

The pagans, then, live in error. Not of their own making, surely, but from the liars and teachers who have led them astray. They will be destroyed as if they were the wooden idols they worshipped unless they accept Christianity, the soul to the worldly body, the added value to existence, their salvation.

# Apologetic as dialogue

The position of the early Church Fathers, then, differs substantially from the later writers we shall look at, and certainly differs from the contemporary participants in

### inter-religious dialogue

the inter-religious dialogue who are more inclined to look for something of the holy in their collocutors.

The Church Fathers were looking towards expansion, to the benefit of the individuals to be saved, of course, but explicitly exclusivist and rejecting the contributions of other faiths: there is one way, one truth and one life, and no one, whether the pagans of the Empire, be it the remnants of Greek society, the then still extant Egyptian classical religion or the Roman pantheon, nor the heretical Gnostics, nor the Zoroastrians or Buddhists of the East, could 'come to the Father' but by means of that single path. Where they did acknowledge any positive elements in other faiths, it was strictly as foreshadowing of the One Truth of Christianity.

Their goals were conquest at both the macro level, whole societies and peoples, and the micro level of the individual. The relations between the religions, using Panikkar's list, was one of 'rejection and conquest' from both sides. The established pagans were trying to eradicate the Christians and the Christians were trying to overcome the pagan society around them.

The apologists, though they applied honey to the one and vinegar to the other were unanimous in their view that there was nothing that would save the non-Christian soul and that conversion was therefore the only option. This is a strictly exclusivist perspective, to use the modern divisions, and provides a strong foundation for those modern Christian churches for whom dialogue, as currently practised, is quite rightly something to be approached with caution and not to be embraced: that way lies syncretism!

Nor can one easily describe their process of approach as dialogue. Any discussion or debate was strictly designed to demonstrate the superiority of Christianity, the Christian message and Jesus the Christ over all other religions and gods. Regardless of how one defines dialogue, what the apologists were engaged in was anything but.

# VIII. The Collationes of Pierre Abelard

Many of the those who have made inter-religious dialogue a main feature of their work have shared the view that searches for common ground among the various religions have required the intervention of someone or something outside the context of the searchers themselves.

That trend has a long and honourable tradition, and is also characteristic of the text that we now turn to, *Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian*, by Pierre Abelard, though with a significant difference.

Abelard (1079-1142) was born in Brittany, France, of minor nobility and, in a classic tale of small-town boy makes good, moved to Paris at a young age and in a relatively short time became the brightest star in the city of lights, making as many admirers as enemies.

He set up his own private exegetical schools (the University of Paris was still more than a century in the future) and became renowned for his use of rhetoric and dialectic.

One of Abelard's most often cited works in the area of interreligious dialogue is a text that Abelard called *Collationes*, (Comparisons) but that is more commonly (though inaccurately) known today as *Dialogus inter Philosophum*, *Judaeum*, *et Christianum*, Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew and a Christian.

# The Dialogue

As others have noted, the *Dialogue* is not a dialogue among the three participants named, but rather one in which a pagan philosopher is matched against a Jew and a Christian<sup>148</sup> working in tandem to counter his arguments. This will present some difficulties later, as we shall see.

The scene of the dialogue draws on the biblical and classical tradition of using dreams as a dramatic device. The first-person narrator—read Abelard—dreams of three men coming to him with a request that he adjudicate in their dispute over their "different religious faiths." One is a philosopher, one a Jew and one a Christian.

Abelard's own title *Collationes*, avoids this inaccuracy, but the text is better known as the *Dialogus* and translators are divided about how they should render it.

Abelard, Peter, Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian, in *Ethical Writings*, Paul Vincent Spade (trans.) (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), p. 59

According to some sources a Muslim philosopher, perhaps Averroes, a noted commentator, as was Abelard himself, on Aristotle.

The purpose of their dispute is to help the philosopher find the one faith, "among the different religious faiths facing" him which is most in agreement with reason. He would then be able to choose the best religion for him.

We must be careful here, for we are not dealing, as the parliamentarians of religion would in 1893, with a distinction between believers and non-believers, theists and atheists. The Philosopher has a faith, is a believer in "the one God," but it is a god of natural religion that would later be more familiar to the Deists of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the Philosopher has come to his understanding of God through philosophy and reason, building on natural religion, without divine intervention or revelation.

Having conducted his own inquiries, the philosopher has "discovered" that the Jews are "fools" and the Christians "crazy"<sup>152</sup> but is not put off by that. Rather, he enters into discussion with them, to no conclusion, and agrees finally to put the matter to the judge, even though the judge is also an adherent of one of the contesting faiths because "we were unable to find anyone who did not belong to any of these three groups."<sup>153</sup>

There are some elements of dialogue present here. The adjudicator in this discussion is, first of all, human (Unlike the judges who will be presented by Nicholas of Cusa in a following chapter). No divine intervention or explanation is needed here to settle the argument. Secondarily, although formally outside the discussion, the judge is a member of one of the two or three—depending on how one counts—contesting beliefs. This is an entirely human discussion among theoretical equals in accordance with the principle set by Habermas of "vulnerable forms of innovation-bearing, reciprocal and unforcedly egalitarian everyday communication." 154

Neither the Jew nor the Christian contribute to the prefatory discussion, and the unnamed judge agrees to take on the role of adjudicator, with protestations of inadequacy, also because he may learn something from it.

The dialogue itself deals with a number of themes, none of which would be out of place in a modern college or university religious studies program.

Between the Philosopher and the Jew, the primary theme is first principles, and especially authority:

- by what authority does one believe?
- by whose authority do the Jews follow the Law?

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>151</sup> Abelard, *Dialogue*.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>153</sup> Ihid n 60

Habermas, J., 1985, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, quoted in <a href="http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm">http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm</a>, (March 2004)

who must submit to the authority of the law?

In the dialogue between the Philosopher and the Christian, we move from first principles towards issues of a more eschatological nature:

- what is the ultimate (human) good/ultimate (human) evil?
- how is one to achieve the ultimate good?
- what is one's ultimate destination?

## Dialogue Between the Philosopher and the Jew

In the shorter of the two dialogues, the Philosopher begins by assuming that the "natural law" is primary, "both in time [and] in nature as well." Natural law, which he equates to the "science of morals we call 'ethics'" is superior in regards to other forms of religion inasmuch as what is "simpler is naturally prior to the more multiple." Other religions, including both Judaism and Christianity, have added something which "seem[s] altogether superfluous" to the natural law through their scriptures. He may therefore go first.

The philosopher's first question is directed to both of his collocutors simultaneously: how did they come to their faith—through reason or simply because it was the faith of their fathers? His own hypothesis, that one simply adopts the faith of one's fathers, he dismisses derisively as inadequate. The more so because people "even break into such craziness that they aren't embarrassed to profess that they believe what they admit they can't understand."

The Jew takes up the challenge thus made, protecting himself with the assurance that any inadequacy on his part will be compensated by the Christian, wearing, as it were "two horns in the two Testaments he's armed with" making him able to "fight the enemy more strongly." <sup>157</sup>

The Jew begins by dividing the faith life into two parts, childhood and adulthood. As a child, one follows unquestioningly the faith of one's fathers, but as an adult, reason keeps one believing.<sup>158</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>155</sup> Abelard, *Dialogue.*, p. 63.

One may wonder why "faith," revelation or some other element of the religious experience was not also included among the choices, but Abelard's binary option does serve to focus the attention on the most basic division that relates to most people. The study of the psychology of conversion was certainly not very advanced in Abelard's time and even if it were, conversion is often felt, rightly or wrongly, by those going through it to be a conscious, reasoning experience. For completeness, I anticipate some critics and note here that although advances in religious anthropology, sociology and psychology over the past decades have contributed much to the understanding of how religion develops in individuals and groups, and Abelard's binary choice is oversimplified, it is not thereby invalidated as an outline of the operative systems at work in developing belief and faith.

<sup>157</sup> Abelard, *Dialogue*, p. 64.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>158</sup> Ibid., p. 65

### inter-religious dialogue

That reason is explained in terms of obedience to the Law.<sup>159</sup> If one believes that a higher authority has relayed an instruction through an intermediary, one cannot be faulted for obeying the instruction in good faith, even if it were not delivered personally.

In addition, the Jew continues, obeying the Law is also a way of showing one's love for God through deeds, an option not open to those who don't have the law. 160 And finally, if obeying the Law does no good, it also does no harm, so one must either find fault with the Law or "stop asking why we follow it." 161

The Jew continues with a recitation of how much hardship and persecution Jews must put up with simply because they are Jews and follow the Law. 162

The Philosopher then commences with an examination of whether the choice to follow the Law is based on a correct or incorrect intention. 163

Intention is a key concept to understanding Abelard's work, for it underlies the whole of his ethics. In his work on the subject, entitled *Ethics*, <sup>164</sup> Abelard makes *intention* the most important component of action as regards sinfulness, supplanting even action or desire. Acts, according to Abelard, are not in and of themselves sinful. The intention behind the act is what must be considered. He gives the example of a runaway servant who kills his master in order to prevent himself being killed. In that his intention was not to kill his master, but to prevent his own death, the servant should not be accused of murder. A significant problem with granting intention such an exalted status was perceived early on by one of Abelard's strongest contemporary critics, Bernard of Clairvaux, when he opined that "[h]ell was filled with good intentions and desires." <sup>165</sup>

In the context of the *Dialogue*, the question for the Philosopher is therefore whether the intention is sufficient for the Jews to put up with all of the trials and tribulations that they are faced with:

\_\_\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>159</sup> In his original Latin text, Abelard consistently uses the word "lex" for Law. This is not surprising or unusual, but as an interpretation of Torah does not sufficiently cover the didactic aspects at work in the Hebrew תורה.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>160</sup> Abelard, *Dialogue*, pp. 66-67.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid., p. 67. This compares easily with Pascal's Wager: if there is no God, then believing in Him does no harm, but if there is a God, then believing in Him does me good while not believing in Him does me Harm...I therefore choose to believe in him.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>162</sup> Ibid., pp. 67-68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>163</sup> utrum haec intentio recta sit an erronea.

Abelard Peter, Ethics, in *Ethical Writings*, Paul Vincent Spade (trans.) (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.)

L'enfer est plein de bonnes volontés ou désirs. Often incorrectly attributed as original—in the paraphrase 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions'—to other speakers including Mark Twain, George Bernard Shaw, James Boswell, Samuel Johnson and John Ray.

Surely there's no religious faith that doesn't believe it serves God and doesn't do for His sake the things it supposes to please Him. Yet you don't for that reason approve of all other people's sects; you try to defend yours alone or to put it far ahead of others. 166

The Philosopher then embarks on a long discussion of the merits of the natural law in the Biblical period prior to the formalised institutionalisation of Judaism, when the Adamite, the Noahite and the Abra(ha)mic covenants—which he sees as equivalent to the natural law—were quite sufficient. The natural law was quite simple: love for God and neighbour. This in contrast with the natural law whose simple faith and obedience had already secured for Abraham "and his seed the promise of the land and of future multiplication."

The Philosopher places the beginning of the decline with the introduction of circumcision, from which, he notes, no reward, either in this life or the next, is attached. 167 168

Furthermore, the Philosopher continues, the natural law must be considered sufficient for most people, inasmuch as circumcision and other outward works characteristic of the Law were given only to the Jews and not to other peoples.

The Jew begins his reply by noting that while the natural law may be sufficient for salvation, that does not exclude the possibility of circumcision and other outward forms having positive contributions to make for the Jews. The first of these is the idea of separating the faithful from the unbelievers around them after Abram had been led from his land and kinfolk. These practices so separated the faithful from the surrounding peoples, that there was little chance of intermingling. The surrounding peoples is the idea of separated the faithful from the surrounding peoples, that there was little chance of intermingling.

To the question of rewards, the Jew notes that it appears true that there are only earthly rewards attached to following the requirements for circumcision, cleanliness, and the laws of kashrut which prohibit the eating of certain foods.

Nulla quippe est fidei secta, quae se Deo famulari non credat et ea propter ipsum non operetur, quae ipsi placere arbitratur. Non tamen ideo sectas omnium approbatis, qui solam vestram defendere aut longe ceteris nitimini praeferre. Abelard, Peter, *Dialogue*, p. 69.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>167</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

Abelard devotes much attention to circumcision, almost to the point of fixation. It has been noted (cf. Irvine, Martin, The Pen(is), Castration, and Identity: Abelard's Negotiations of Gender, a paper presented at Cultural Frictions: Medieval Cultural Studies in Post-Modern Contexts Conference, October 27-28, 1995), that this may bear a direct relation to his own castration. Be that as it may, it detracts nothing from the content of the Dialogue itself, any more than Kierkegaard's unrequited love weakens the power of *Fear and Trembling*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>169</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

That is deceptive however, and only reflects that the requirements were issued at a time when the "people were still carnal and rebellious." <sup>171</sup>

The Philosopher notes that those restrictions don't apply to real sins, such as murder or adultery, which are not atoned for by sacrifice, which is how violations of the cleanliness laws are dealt with, but by death, which doesn't allow for purification leading to salvation. And this is, for the Philosopher, a key point, returning to the issue of intention which he brought up earlier. For "[j]ust as the soul's guilt is brought on by its willing (its *intention*. DS), so it is at once pardoned through its contrite heart (...)"

The Philosopher concludes this part of the dialogue, even though the Christian has not yet contributed anything to answering the question the Philosopher posed to both of them in regards to the question of the origin of faith, by taking the position that the others "can recognise that I need not submit to [the] burden [of the Law]." <sup>172</sup>

## Dialogue Between the Philosopher and the Christian

Having exhausted the discussion of the first principles with the Jew, one might have expected that the same theme would be taken up with the Christian. The authority on which Christian faith rests is, after all, different from that which supports Jewish faith, involving as it does the intervention of God in the world through incarnation. That discussion, however, is left untouched and the theme becomes teological: what is the ultimate destination of mankind and what is the best route to get there?

Turning to the Christian, the Philosopher follows what will later come to be known as an evolutionary or developmental theology in expressing the expectation that the Christian's Law "should be more perfect, stronger in its reward, and more reasonable in its teaching, the later it is." <sup>173</sup>

After some initial banter, the Christian, in contrast to what we saw in the dialogue with the Jew, takes the initiative and redefines the terms of the discussion to, in fact, anticipate the conclusion by obtaining the agreement of the Philosopher that they are talking about the same thing, but from a slightly

Compare some Islamic explanations of the blessings of Paradise (including food, shade and fair maidens, all of which evoke many fond imageries to the Arab living in the harsh desert), in which the pleasures of the afterlife are explained in physical terms in order to underline that Paradise is superior to what is available here on Earth.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>172</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

That position ignores, of course, or at least downplays the possibility of impurities creeping in, which is a common theme in early Protestantism, the Catholic Reformation and, on a somewhat smaller scale, the Jesus Movement in North America and Western Europe in the 1970s which attempted to strip Christianity of all the excess baggage it had accumulated over 2000 years and return to the supposed purity of the undoubtedly somewhat mythical Early Church.

different perspective: the Philosopher's ethics is the equivalent of the Christian's divinity studies. The difference in focus is that the Christians concentrate on the destination, where the ethics should lead, and the Philosopher on the means of arriving at that destination through proper action.<sup>174</sup>

The philosophers seek reasons, where the Jews seek signs, the Philosopher quotes the Gospel, and that also demonstrates the superiority of Christianity over Judaism: that Christian preachers succeeded in converting Greeks through reasons. Greeks who were not only inquirers into these subjects, but their discoverers as well.

The Christian notes that the Philosopher appears hereby to have surrendered the battle and should therefore no longer "legitimately hesitate about our faith." <sup>175</sup>

The Philosopher then notes that many of those conversions were at the point of a sword and it was only after the conversion of the rulers that Christianisation really took hold anywhere.<sup>176</sup>

And when, the Christian continues, one agrees that in Christ "both the natural law was restored and the perfect discipline of morals was handed down by no one but him," one must agree that it's enough to be saved. 177

The importance of reason, of investigation, in Christian faith, is agreed by both parties with the Philosopher taking the position that faith that does not submit to reason—in opposition to Gregory's dictum that 'faith for which human reason supplies a test has no merit'—is itself without merit, leaving as it does no grounds for discussion. The Christian does not dispute that, but qualifies it with the note that there sometimes appear to be reasons when there are none.<sup>178</sup>

Having taken rather a long and circuitous route in establishing the terms under which their dialogue is to proceed, the discussion begins in earnest with the subject of the dialogue being decided as the comparison of views concerning what the ultimate good is and the road by which one can reach it.

The ultimate good, according to the Philosopher, is that which "makes anyone who has arrived at it blessed." <sup>179</sup> Its opposite, ultimate evil, is that which, when attained, makes one wretched.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>174</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

lbid., p. 95. Both of these points can be considered throwbacks to the original dialogue between the Philosopher and the Jew as to the question of the source of belief. Curiously, this theme is not further developed using the argument from the first dialogue that, after conversion, whether by sword or any other means or inducement, individual reflection keeps one believing.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>177</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>178</sup> Ibid., p. 96.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>179</sup> Ibid., p. 99

Ultimate good may also be called virtue, which is to be achieved by "the study of moral literature, exercise or taming the flesh, so that the good will that is firmed up into a habit can be called virtue." The blessed, in the Philosopher's view, are those of a "strong in good morals (…) the virtues."

When asked, the Philosopher agrees with the Christian that Philosophers also put value "on the soul's immortality and on a kind of blessing in a future life," in return for their merits. And later, that "a human being's ultimate good, or 'final good' as it was called, is the future life's blessedness and virtues are the way to get there."

It should be noted here that Abelard may be setting the scene for serious problems later. He seems to be positing salvation or justification through merit the way that one gets to the ultimate human good-through the building up of credits through virtuous behaviour. The role of the intercession of the third Person of the Trinity, held by Christians to be singular and decisive, is not even touched upon, let alone emphasised. 183 Even the person of Jesus, in fact, does not play much of a part in these dialogues, which may appear odd in a dialogue whose stated purpose is to determine which religion the Philosopher should choose. When one considers, however, that the dialogue is to be based on finding the religion that is most in accordance with reason, then it perhaps becomes less of a problem for some. If, that is, one accepts that that objective is a reasonable one, a position that many will have difficulty with, as it seems to eviscerate Christianity's unique saving proposition among the religions. 184 We may note a certain irony in the fact that a dialogue that is supposed to be about religion spends very little time discussing the religious. Only a short time later, Abelard wrote Ethics, which one would assume from the title to be a philosophical elaboration of a system of ethics. In fact, though philosophy of ethics does play a part in it, much more attention is paid to elements of the religious life, such as sin, confession, repentance, etc., in Ethics than in the Dialogue.

Ultimate *human* good and ultimate *human* evil—as distinct from ultimate good and evil—are the subject of the next section of the dialogue, with some considerable discussion of the role of credits and debits accumulated by virtuous or non-virtuous acts. The conclusion reached by the Christian, and not in any

<sup>181</sup> Ibid., p. 100-101

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>180</sup> Ibid., p. 100

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>182</sup> Ibid., p. 103.

I leave it to my colleagues of dogmatics and church history to work this out further, but it seems to me that, read in isolation, a danger that all texts are prone to, one could easily conclude that one was dealing with what some would unhesitatingly label a heretical document.

<sup>184</sup> Gospel of John 3:16.

significant way contested by the Philosopher, is that ultimate human evil and good are "his ultimate hatred or ultimate love for God" respectively, directed as they are to achieving, or rejecting, the ultimate good, which is God. Here Abelard reflects back on a point raised during the dialogue between the Jew and the Philosopher, but now, the hatred or love as such is sufficient to please or displease God. And the hatred or love extends beyond this life, and those who are being punished increasingly hate the Author of their punishment, while those who are being rewarded increasingly love Him. 186

A key concept in this ultimate human good, the Christian continues, is seeing the blessedness of God, <sup>187</sup> for whoever sees God will see his blessedness increase, not solely through the act of seeing, but progressively through the act of increasing understanding.

The Philosopher then asks whether the "vision of God that blessedness consists of can be increased or diminished by some difference of place, or whether it can be displayed to all in all places equally, or if some fixed place is allocated to it (...)" 188

The Christian's reply is clear: "(...) In fact, he's the one (...) shouldn't be said so much in to be *in* a place (...) as to enclose inside himself all places, containing even the very heavens (...)"<sup>189</sup>

And later: "Indeed, the Lord Jesus plainly implies that this paradise everywhere consists in the very vision of God, when, on the day his soul, having suffered in the flesh, descended into hell to set his own people free from there, he said to the thief who acknowledged him, 'Amen I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise.' 190

And yet later: "The venerable teacher Augustine, who was also most expert in your (the Philosopher's. DS) teachings, explained this carefully. He said 'We are near to or far from God, not in places but in morals." 191

The Philosopher then inquires as to those references in the Old and New Testaments that seem to indicate physical location and/or movement, i.e. Jesus to heaven, sitting at the right hand of the father, etc. 192

IDIU.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>185</sup> Abelard, Peter, *Dialogue*, p. 123

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>186</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>187</sup> Ibid. pp. 123-127

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>188</sup> Ibid. p. 128.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>189</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>190</sup> Ibid., p. 129.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>191</sup> Ibid., p. 130.

American stand-up comedian George Carlin, raised in the Roman Catholic tradition but noted for his strong anti-church stance, took this concept of physical location and movement to its

That, the Christian explains, needs to be understood mystically, prophetically, and not "judaically" or literally.

The dialogue concludes with a discussion that goes back to Abelard's earlier point, the importance of intentions. 193

Nothing, whether action or object, can be said, according to the Christian, to be in and of itself good or evil, but the intention makes it so. And so can one, in Shakespeare's phrase, appear to be 'cruel to be kind.'194

At this point, the dialogue ends, but is not concluded. The closing words indicate that it goes on, in fact, for some time. What is discussed, though, is not for us to know.

The dialogue not being concluded, we don't know whether, eventually, the Philosopher is persuaded. Certainly agreement has been reached on a number of points, but he has not at any stage said, 'yes, you're right, I must become either a Jew, a Christian or anything else'.

#### Observations

Abelard's choice of a human as adjudicator in this matter, his choice of mens mensura mundi, well in advance of the rise of humanism, and before some of the writers who will be presented below, sets him apart from many commentators. even as his choice of a dream setting places him firmly within the tradition of others who have dealt with this subject.

Abelard reveals some limited inclusivism in this work, especially when he has the Jew say that the Christian, who has "two horns" in his two Testaments which he is armed with, will be able to answer questions that the Jew, cannot. This us — believers — against them—non-believers—model will also be seen again in other writers, up to and including the organisers of the Parliament of Religion (1893) who wanted to make common cause against the atheists.

One may also see an inclusivist tendency in Abelard's emphasis on the omnipresence of God, in fact, the in-ness of the world in God. For such a model must perforce include even the non-believers, regardless of their spiritual state.

That does not mean, however, that Abelard is attempting to do away with the dictum "Extra Ecclessiam, nulla salus," for hell continues to have a role to play in his theology.

<sup>193</sup> Abelard, *Dialogue*, p. 142 ff.

logical and humorous conclusion when he used it to prove(?) that God couldn't be omnipresent if He had to move from place to place, and therefore, was also not all-powerful, as he would be "subject to physical laws (...) making Him only slightly superior." (Carlin, George, "Religious Life" in An Evening with Wally Londo featuring Bill Szlazo, (Little David Records, LD-1008,

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>194</sup> "I must be cruel, only to be kind," Hamlet. Act iii. Sc. 4.

Abelard's dialogues, in contrast to the dialogues of Socrates, for example, are in fact true dialogues (even though slightly weighted towards one side), with each participant raising critical issues and not merely raising facile questions for *the master* to dispose of. This makes them fit starting points for discussions covering a wide range of topics in a variety of settings. Even his lack of a definite conclusion could be placed in a post-modernist framework in which discussions never can be completed.

His inclusivist elements notwithstanding, however, the model Abelard has chosen is clearly exclusivist. He rejects any positive truth from his dialogue partners, except as superseded by Christianity, and his objective is individual conversion through mission. Abelard, then, remains firmly within the boundaries set by the Apologists: there is one Truth and Christians have it; non-Christians or heretics do not. All are, however, participants in the one great drama of salvation, either as saved or damned, simply because there is but one single World, which is 'in' God.

Does Abelard offer a way out of the maze we have set ourselves, offering an explanation of the theological use of religious dialogue? While he does contribute some significant points, and makes significant contributions to the process of dialogue itself, the stated purpose of his dialogue—to identify a religion that is reconcilable with logic and reason, and therefore fit to be adopted by a non-believer—falls well short of the goal of inter-religious dialogue in the modern day. It may well be acceptable as a theory of mission, of conversion, but we must look elsewhere to find an answer to *our* original question

## IX. Nicholas of Cusa and the Peace of Faith

Cardinal Nicholas Cusanus (1400-1464) is one of the first important thinkers of the modern age, living as he did on its cusp, where the renaissance began the slow disintegration of medieval feudalism, where calls for reform if not yet Reformation began to be heard in the European Church, where the Western Church again took pride of place over the Eastern, and, more important for our purposes here, where the ongoing confrontation with the Muslim world led to the destruction of the Byzantine empire and, as a result, of the Byzantine Church as a dominant force in Christianity.

It will be helpful for our purposes to locate Nicholas in his context, for that informs both his contribution and his contradictions. The Hundred Year's War between France and England was on-going; in Bohemia, the Hussites had produced the first viable heterodox Christian community within the borders of Western Europe; in the face of the Muslim advance, the Eastern and Western Churches were trying, with varying degrees of enthusiasm and very near success, to heal the schism that had separated the two halves of Christendom for nearly 400 years.

It was Nicholas's relationship with the latter occurrence that has led to his lasting influence. As a papal envoy, he had been dispatched to Constantinople as part of the discussions regarding the council that would discuss—and briefly succeed in—healing the rift between the patriarchies of Rome and Constantinople. When the city was conquered in 1453, Nicholas, along with many of his contemporaries, was shocked, as much by the violence of the conquest as by the paradigm shift that the fall engendered.<sup>195</sup> How could Constantinople fall? Had God chosen the side of Islam? Would all of Christendom be next?<sup>196</sup>

In a fever of activity (in the three months immediately following his learning of the catastrophe in Constantinople, in addition to his other duties), Cusa wrote one of his most important works, *De Pace Fidei* — On the peace of faith — in which he set out a plea for terrestrial peace in the form of a celestial dialogue, on the

<sup>195</sup> Van Cusa, Nicolaas, Godsdienstvrede, Jos Lievens (trans.) Jos Decorte (commentary), (Kampen: Uitegeverij Kok Agora) 2000, pp. 7-8

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>196</sup> I note in passing the similarities in reaction to the fall of Constantinople and the attacks on New York City and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001, less than five months before this writing. Everywhere in the Western world, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, similar cries about the clash of civilisations, calls for retribution, and extensive discussions about the relationship between Christian civilisation, so-called, and Muslim civilisation (an inaccurate term by which is usually meant countries including the Arabic-speaking, Islamic-confessing civilisations of the Maghreb and contiguous Islamic countries through to Pakistan).

basis of the determination that the religions of the nations and their adherents already share the same faith, regardless of whether they realise it, and that recognition of that fact among the peoples would lead to the end of religious wars.

While it would certainly add to the drama of the moment if it were true, it is *not* so that Nicholas was shocked into the revelations contained in *De Pace Fidei* by the events of May 1453. The whole of the philosophical and theological underpinnings of the work had been laid a decade and a half before, during a return voyage from Constantinople where he had been serving as a papal emissary to a council dedicated to preparations for the Ferrara-Florence councils aimed at the ending of the East-West schism. Rather, May 1453 seems to have galvanised him into writing a more popular treatment of a much more substantial, though theoretical, version of the same subject already dealt with in 1440 in *De docta ignorantia*, — On learned ignorance — which was inspired, according to Nicholas, by a revelation "from on high" 197 in 1437. 198

### De Pace Fidei

De Pace Fidei purports to be the record of a vision had by someone who was familiar with Constantinople through having visited it in the past. So upset is he on hearing of the "horrors perpetrated by the Turkish sultan"<sup>199</sup> that he prays to God to limit the persecutions of the faithful.<sup>200</sup> As a result of the prayer, the man is granted a vision<sup>201</sup> "perhaps due to his long contemplation," which shows him that

Nicholas of Cusa, Selected Spiritual Writings, H. Lawrence Bond (Trans. and introduction), The Classics of Western Spirituality # 89, (New York: Paulist Press) 1997, p. 6. In fact, even the sequence of the material handled reflects the earlier work.

The importance of the revelation notwithstanding, I also note that Nicholas was not alone in some of the views contained in *De docta ignorantia*, and they may owe more to his time in Constantinople than is commonly stated. At the council of Ferrara-Florence (1438-39), for example, to discuss the East-West schism, the representative of the Eastern Church (and a Platonist) Gemistus Plethon stated that he was convinced that "there would soon be but one religion in the world." When asked whether that would be Islam or Christianity, Plethon replied, "neither." (cf. *Godsdienstvrede*, p. 27)

<sup>199</sup> Cusa, Godsdienstvrede, p. 47

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>200</sup> Ibid.

Some have seen in the fact that it is a vision an acknowledgement by Nicholas that his dream is unachievable. cf. *Godsdienstvrede*, p. 8. Considering that all the points raised in *De Pace Fidei* have been extensively treated elsewhere, such as in *De docta ignorantia*, which was addressed to no less than a cardinal of the Vatican, it seems to me that too much may have been read into this. Apart from this literary device, how else would one have God, Jesus, the apostles, and all the representatives from the world's faiths gather to have this dialogue?

religious peace is possible, if only "the right steps were taken in an honest effort." <sup>202</sup>

He was carried up to a 'spiritual'<sup>203</sup> height, where sages sat in conference with the denizens of heaven, under the chairmanship of God to discuss the question of the complaints that had reached heaven from many quarters regarding taking up arms in the name of religion, and "using (...) power to force others to renounce their old, familiar faith or to kill them'.<sup>204</sup>

One of the wise, who had been appointed to watch over the nations of the earth, introduces the subject by reminding God, the assembled audience, and more importantly, the reader, that everything humanity has is from God, down to its very soul. This has as a result that every human being already has everything (s)he needs to turn the 'eye of the soul<sup>205</sup>,' towards God, if (s)he were inclined to do so.

Here we may see a foreshadowing of what is to come, for in noting the human capacity for turning towards God, Nicholas puts no conditions on it, nor does he refer to turning towards Jesus, following the Koran, etc. The implication is that every human being, in his or her current, unchanged, natural state, need only want to approach God to be united with the highest love and 'return to his origins.' <sup>206</sup>

But, he continues, most people live lives that are nasty, brutish and short, and have no time 'to seek out the hidden God.'

Prophets have therefore been appointed to the peoples, 'to act as [God's] representatives,' to set up cults and laws and to teach the illiterate.<sup>207</sup>

Different prophets for different peoples at different times.<sup>208</sup>

It is, continues the wise one, "characteristic of human existence on earth to view long-lived customs as laws of nature and to defend them as truth. Thus arise serious differences of opinion, when one community prefers its belief to that of another."<sup>209</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>202</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>203</sup> Latin = spiritus; a state of mind above the rational that is necessary to achieve 'learned ignorance.' cf. Cusa, *Godsdienstvrede*, p. 48.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>205</sup> In contrast to human reason and other faculties based on the senses. Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>206</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>207</sup> Ibid., p. 50

<sup>208</sup> Ibid. Compare, Koran, Sura 40:78—"We have sent forth other apostles before you; of some you have already heard, of others We have told you nothing. (…)"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>209</sup> Ibid.

To resolve this crisis, then, direct intervention by the object of all humanity's worship is required.<sup>210</sup> After all, the sage continues, "You are the only one that people worship in all of what all of humanity worships, nobody attempts to achieve anything but good, which is what You are...in every spiritual search, everyone is only looking for the truth, which You are.<sup>211</sup>

This is possible because God is "unknown to all and indescribable," which is why there are different religions that appear to look in different ways and use different names.<sup>212</sup> If God should so choose, however, then all the troubles would cease and "All people would see that there is but *one* single religion in the diversity of religions." That realisation would not result in the disappearance of the variety of practices, nor is that desirable: diversity leads to more piety.

The sage completes his speech with an appeal that God intervene, as he can according to his wishes, to stop the religious violence.<sup>213</sup>

Here ends Part I of *De Pace Fidei*. Before moving on to look at Part II, I should like to pause briefly to reflect on some of the aspects raised in the first part.

Some commentators have wondered how *De Pace Fidei* was ever published at all, or, once published, how it managed to avoid being put on the Index of Prohibited Books.<sup>214</sup> This is not an idle question, especially given the general tenor of the time in which it was written. One might reasonably expect that the concept of a single religion but a diversity of religious expressions would have set mid-1400 Inquisitional alarms bells ringing. Only twelve years previously, at the Council of Florence, the Decree of the Copts had been published in which the axiom, *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*—outside the Church, no salvation—had been promulgated in its most rigid form.<sup>215</sup> On the other side of the coin, it is interesting

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>210</sup> Ibid., 51.

Ibid., I have elsewhere (Suchard, D. Faith without Borders?) criticised the indiscriminate use of the inclusive in such statements. In fact, as in the case of Satanism, to name but one example, 'good' is not what the believers pursue. This should be considered distinct from the Calvinist position that "all men are inclined to evil," and represents those for whom a conscious choice has been made against 'good' or 'truth.'

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>212</sup> Ibid. Compare the Hindu expression: "There is but one God, but He has many names."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

Dupuis, Jacques, S.J., Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism, (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books), 1997, p. 108

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>215</sup> Ibid. In his book, which has been criticised by the Vatican for what it sees as errors in Catholic teaching, Dupuis traces an inverted-V graph for the development of the *extra ecclesiam* doctrine, rising from the beginning of Christianity until 1442 (Council of Florence) after which, under the influence of the discoveries of new faiths following Columbus's voyages, it began a downward trend.

### inter-religious dialogue

to note that Nicholas's plea for the end to religious conflict did not stop him from helping to organise what would prove to be an abortive Crusade (under Pius II) against the Turks to retake Byzantium in 1564, after a nine-year delay caused by political disputes.

A number of key themes have been developed in Part I. They mirror to a great extent the content of Chapter One of *De Docta ignorantia*, entitled *'How knowing is not knowing*. <sup>216</sup>

As in *Pace Fidei*, *Docta Ignorantia* begins with a discussion of the nature of things and how "by divine gift there is within all things a certain natural desire to exist in the best manner in which the condition of each thing's nature permits. Toward this end all things work and possess the appropriate instruments." In other words, everyone seeks good and has the ability, by the grace of God, to find it. 218

With irrefutable logic, Nicholas continues that "no sound mind can reject what is most true" and the same "sound [mind] and free intellect knows as true that which, from an innate searching, it insatiably longs to attain (...)"

The inquiry, however, must needs be proportional, for "all who investigate judge the uncertain proportionally by comparing it to what is presupposed as certain." That becomes problematic when the infinite enters the equation, for "the infinite escapes all proportion, the infinite as infinite is unknown."

Nicholas concludes Chapter One with a conclusion that "if the desire for knowledge is not in vain, surely then it is our desire to know that we do not know. If we can attain this completely, we will attain learned ignorance."<sup>220</sup>

It is a different form of ignorance that afflicts humanity in Part II of *Pace Fidei*. With the freedom granted by the divinity, humanity chose to pursue "the stimulus of the sensual life that comes from the world of the lord of darkness."<sup>221</sup>

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>216</sup> Bond, H. Lawrence, (Trans. and introduction), *Nicholas of Cusa, Selected Spiritual Writings*, The Classics of Western Spirituality # 89, (New York: Paulist Press), p. 87

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>217</sup> Ibid., pp. 87-88.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>218</sup> Ibid. Compare this with the Aristotelian view of virtue, where virtue is described as being the best that one can be, given the parameters—physical limitations and context—within which one must work. In fact, though when read in isolation by the modern reader, Nicholas may seem to be coming up with concepts that were revolutionary for his time, he is firmly anchored in the philosophy that preceded him. The title of *De Docta Ignorantia*, for example, and several of its concepts are directly borrowed from [Pseudo-]Dionysius the Areopagite. One also hears echoes of the Alexandrian Hypatia, the Greek Proclus, and others. See further, De Crescenzo, Luciano, *Storia della filosofia medioevale*. (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadore Editore S.p.A.) 2002.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>219</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>220</sup> Ibid. p. 89

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>221</sup> Pace Fidei, p. 53.

Only through the use of prophets had God been able to "recall errant humanity" to the path of righteousness.

That call was not completely successful, however, God says in *Pace Fidei*, and it was necessary to send the Word "who covered himself with human Being and ultimately brought light to humanity, which was enslaved to its too-free will.'222

Through his blood witness, the Word showed humanity that there was eternal life, which "is nothing but the ultimate desire of the inner person [and] (...) the truth [that eternally] (...) gives eternal nourishment to the spirit."

Nicholas here gives a preliminary taste of what will later cause his greatest difficulty: the incarnation and person of Jesus. He very nearly succeeds, and then at the last moment fails in resolving this very difficult issue in any pluralistic theology.

It will be helpful here if we pause to look in some depth at a crucial element of Nicholas's philosophy, discussed at great length in *Docta Ignorantia*: the concept of infinity and how that must lead to an admission of ignorance on the part of the thinking person.

A number of key points will need explanation here: maximum, unity, minimum, contracted, infinity, coincidence.

**Maximum:** maximum is quite simply that which nothing is greater than. In Nicholas's lexicon, maximum is the absolute *one* (italics mine. DS) and all things are in this maximum.<sup>224</sup> The Maximum is believed by "the indubitable faith of all nations" to be God.<sup>225</sup>

**Unity:** is equal to Being and coincides with maximumness; nothing is opposed to it.

**Minimum:** Because the maximum has no opposition, the minimum is coincident with the Maximum, "and therefore the maximum is in all things.<sup>226</sup>

**Contracted:** a lesser—and therefore finite—form than the maximum from which all contracted things come. The "universal unity exists in a contracted way

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., p 53-54

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>222</sup> Ibid.

Docta Ignorantia, p. 89. It is statements such as these that have led to the charge that Nicholas is a pantheist and therefore, heretic. (See, for example, De Vries, Theun, *Ketters: viertien yawn ketterij, volksbeweging en kettergericht,* (Amsterdam: Querido) 1998, p. 494.) We shall encounter others later. As will become apparent later, I do not subscribe to this view.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>225</sup> Pace Fidei, p. 54

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

### inter-religious dialogue

as universe, and its unity is contracted in plurality, without which it cannot exist."227

**Infinity:** The place where there is one only and all are one.<sup>228</sup> Not the sum of finite elements. Equal to the Maximum and the Minimum.

**Coincidence:** The reconciliation or harmonisation of contradictions at the infinite. I.e. maximally (infinitely) large = maximally (infinitely) small.

The infinite is such a central feature of Nicholas's thought, that it is probably worthy of some digression to cover his treatment of it, for it provides the basis for his reasoning that there is only one religion and none of the current religions meet the criterion.

It is, first of all, important to realise that for Nicholas, the infinite is not merely the sum of all that is—"(...) where we encounter a greater and a lesser, we do not reach the simply maximum."<sup>229</sup> An infinite line, for example, would not be the sum of all lines, for when one had accumulated all lines into a very long line, it would still be possible to add another line to it, which is a reflection of number, and it would therefore not be infinite. Even more to the point, an infinite line composed of an infinite number of two-metre long lines would not be longer than an infinite line composed an infinite number of one-metre long lines. In that regard, from the perspective of the infinite line, a line of two metres is equal to a line of one metre. even though in our contracted universe, a two-metre line is clearly longer than a line of one metre. There cannot, therefore, be a progression into infinity. 230 This is as true for the physical universe as for abstract philosophical concepts. Furthermore, the intellect can only approach the absolute truth of a thing by means of a likeness, and a likeness, however closely it approximates the absolute truth of what it represents, can never attain the ultimateness of that absolute truth. Truth, therefore, can never be apprehended "precisely as it is." 231

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>227</sup> Ibid. Recent work in the field of physics regarding string theory or membrane theory and postulating the possible existence of 11 dimensions and a theoretical infinite number of parallel universes—of which the one in which we live is but one—collected in a so-called multi-verse in no way damages this theory. The finite universe is merely expanded, but must still, from Nicholas's perspective be resolved in the one unity, which is the Maximum, which is God.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>228</sup> Ibid., p. 22

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>229</sup> Docta Ignorantia, p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>230</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

lbid., p. 91. Nicholas calls the ultimate truth of something its *quidity*, or whatness, and notes that it is unattainable in its purity, and though it has been pursued by all philosophers, none has found it. The problem of *quidity* has also been taken up in popular literature. One thinks especially of the science-fiction work of Robert Heinlein who granted to one of his literary creations the ability to *grok* something, that is, to perceive its quidity. Heinlein obviously accepted the difficulty inherent in grokking, as the character involved, Valentine Michael Smith, although human, had been raised and educated by Martians, and had great difficulty in passing

Even within the contracted universe in which we live, no two things, however much they resemble each other will ever achieve precise equality.<sup>232</sup>

The ultimate, or infinite, which cannot be approached by comparison—for two things can never achieve precise equality—is therefore Unity, or God, Which/Who is the absolute Maximum and Minimum. The implication is, therefore, that God, the Maximum, is actually "all that is possible." All that is, therefore, arises (flows, issues, comes forth) from that Maximum *in a contracted way.* <sup>234</sup>

The only conclusion the reasonable person must reach, therefore—if one accepts Nicholas's premises—is that no one can ever come close to perceiving God precisely as He is, an admission that goes far beyond negative theology and into, in Nicholas's phrase, learned ignorance.

In Part III of *Pace Fidei*, the celestial gathering continues and the Word who became Flesh, speaking on behalf of all, reminds the host that although God's creation is perfect, the free will that has been granted to humanity must regularly be called back to the one Truth "that every free spirit must needs see" and the "whole diversity of religions brought back to one true religion."

The King of Heaven agreeing, the angels are directed to summon the wise men of the world together so that they can be made to see the wisdom of the one true religion and take that message back to their fellows, who are suffering under the differences of the differing religions. The conversion, though, will not be forced. Rather it will be accomplished "with the common assent of all people, in one mind agreeing to be led to a single, henceforward inviolable religion."

The following peoples are represented in the conclave: the Greeks, representing the classical philosophers; the Italians, representing the Western civilisations; the Arabs, for simple Islam with its stark monotheism; the Indians, who are the representatives of the Eastern religions; the Chaldeans, who may represent the peoples of the Mesopotamian peoples; the Jews, representing

on his ability to his fellow earthlings. (Heinlein, Robert, A Stranger in a Strange Land, (New York: Putnam) 1961.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>232</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>233</sup> Ibid.

Here again, we encounter the stumbling block that has led some to consider Nicholas to have been a pantheist, for in Nicholas's view, the rock and the tree are just as much the result of a creative act by God as people are, and some part of the Maximum resides in them and also in humanity. In looking for a model to help get around this hindrance, I was drawn to the computer software programming possibilities of the Java object-oriented programming language where objects *extend* other objects and, while they may contain some of the qualities of the programming object they extend, they are not that object.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>235</sup> Pace Fidei., pp. 54-55

#### inter-religious dialogue

Christianity's antecedents; the Scythians, or barbarians; the French, representing Scholasticism; the Persians, representing Moslem mysticism; the Syrians, representing, interestingly, not Moslems per se, but peoples with a long philosophical, theological tradition; the Spanish, representing a country where Islam, Judaism and Christianity (still in 1453, and again today) co-exist; the Turks (in 1453 the greatest perceived threat to Christian Europe, considering the events in Constantinople) representing Islam in general; the Germans; the Tartars, representing the uncivilised peoples; the Armenians, representing those who defend baptism; the Bohemians, representing the Hussites with whom Nicholas had had close dealings 20 years earlier and where his first conciliatory attitude manifested itself publicly; and the English, representing the heresy of Wycliffe.

These representatives of what for Nicholas must have seemed the chief participants in his theological constellation, are addressed in three parts each by a different collocutor: The Word, and the apostles Peter and Paul.

The Word addresses the first eight, which are concerned with the nature of God, the Trinity, and related issues that are analogous with the first two commandments related to the oneness of God and the prohibition against worshipping other gods or false idols.

Peter addresses the next five. This section concerns the nature of Christ, his divinity, and of his death and its significance.

Paul, the teacher of the peoples, addresses the final four, which concern rite, ritual and dogma.

The structure of the book seems too neat to have been coincidental. The first section can quite easily, for example, be seen as the Old Testament section, the second as the New Testament section and the third the post-Scriptural, or Church section.

Alternatively, the Word can be seen as giving the Torah, Peter, the Prophets and Paul the Writings.

More likely, however, and in keeping with the theme of the Trinity that so preoccupies Nicholas, as we shall see, the Word speaks of God the Father, Peter speaks of God the Son, and Paul, of God the Holy Spirit working through the Church.<sup>236</sup>

In any case, I believe it highly unlikely that Nicholas chose his speakers at random or because he thought his argument too weak in some points, as some commentators do. See, for example, *Pace Fidei*, 78, footnote.

## The Word

## The Greek

The Greek, representing classical philosophy as a whole, begins by wondering how peoples can be brought to accept another religion than the one they may have fought so hard to defend.

The reply is that there is but one religion, though there may be many expressions of it. This is illustrated by a philosophical dialogue such as one finds in Plato and other classical philosophers, regarding the question of whether there is but one source-wisdom out of which all other wisdom flows. The answer which the Word and the Greek ultimately agree on is a principle that stands at the heart of Nicholas's thought: simplicity or unity precedes all diversity, and the simplicity is infinite and therefore never attainable by anything else. The Greeks, according to the Word, call that ultimate simplicity wisdom.

#### The Italian

Carrying the preceding point further, the Italian joins the discussion and notes that the simple wisdom contains all that can be said, because word is in the wisdom and the wisdom is in the word.

Was everything created in wisdom? asks the Word. And is that the same as saying that everything was created in the Word? The Italian answers in the affirmative, because the Word of the Creator can be nothing other than his wisdom. To the following question of whether wisdom is a creature or a creator, the Italian answers that God creates everything in wisdom, and therefore must Himself be the wisdom of the created wisdom. The Word agrees and concludes that wisdom must be eternal, the origin and the most simple, which means that wisdom is the one, singular and eternal God.

#### The Arab

The question of polytheism is raised by the Arab, representing the simple, monotheistic beliefs of the Moslems. How can polytheists be brought to accept the singular God and the singular religion? To resolve this problem, the Word moves to the concept of the godhead, which all polytheists accept, and in which all of their gods participate, and which precedes all the gods. There is, therefore, a single creative creator that precedes the many gods, which is equal to the one God. There can, after all, be only one creation. For if there were more, they would be preceded by a single creation. The polytheists, then, would have to be brought to worship the creator God rather than the subordinate gods in order for them to participate in the one religion without forcing them to cast off their own religion.

Nicholas dealt with the issue of polytheism at length in *Docta Ignorantia* (Chapter 24): "Pagans also gave names to God according to God's various relations to creatures. They called God Jupiter because of the marvellous goodness. (...) They also named God Saturn because of the depth of thoughts and inventions regarding the necessities of life; Mars because of victories in war..."

The difference between the Jews, who were worshipping the "one, infinite God whom they did not know, while the pagans themselves were worshipping God in God's unfoldings, that is they were worshipping God wherever they beheld God's divine works."<sup>238</sup>

The problem arose when the pagans "were led astray, for they did not take what was unfolded as an image but as the truth. As a consequence, idolatry was introduced among the common folk, while the wise, for most part, correctly believed in the unity of God (...)" 239

### The Indian

The Indian then asks what the position should be regarding idols. Here the Word offers a double solution, depending on the intent of the worshipper. If the idols are used to illustrate what is permitted in the true cultus of the one God, then they are permitted. If, on the other hand, the idols are themselves considered divine or are used to distract believers from the one true religion, they must be destroyed.

But, replies, the Indian, the people have come to rely on the oracles that are often associated with the idols. The Word replies that the oracles are frauds by the priests, and if they sometimes give correct answers, then it is simply coincidence or, even worse, the work of the evil spirit. When the Indian replies that even the Indians will accept this and it is to be hoped that they will then destroy their idols, as the very sensible Romans, Greeks and Arabs have done, but that will not resolve the problem of the Trinity, which seems to imply polytheism, with three Gods.

Nicholas devotes a lot of time to the discussion of this very crucial point, including, in addition to the Indian, the Chaldean, the Jew, the Scythian and the Frenchman in it.

In a simplification of a much more comprehensive treatment of the question of the Trinity that he had already dealt with in *Docta Ignorantia*, Nicholas states that God is one and three-one. One in that he has already demonstrated that there

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>237</sup> Docta Ignorantia, 124

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>238</sup> Ibid., 124-125

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>239</sup> Ibid., 125

can only be one creative God, and three-one in that within the infinity of God, there is unity, the equality of the unity and the connection between the unity and the equality. Further, though there may be three correlations "which in God are called persons, [they have] actual being only together in unity."<sup>240</sup>

For Nicholas "the Father is actually God, the Son actually God and the Holy Spirit actually God; the Son and the Holy Spirit are actually in the Father; the Son and the Father are actually in the Holy Spirit and the Father and the Holy Spirit actually in the Son." He notes, however, that these are only human ways of speaking about God and the Trinity and that must, by definition, be contracted and therefore unable to see God or the Trinity, as they truly are.

In terms of our discussion here, the whole issue of the Trinity creates or, if you like, identifies, a crucial problem in any attempt to find a single acceptable religion among the peoples. For the other two Abrahamic religions, the problem is especially critical. How does he deal with it? By restricting his explanation at this stage to the metaphorical, Nicholas glosses over the objections the Moslems and Jews may raise to his solution of one and three-one, having their spokesmen agree that it is a reasonable explanation. It will again arise during the discussion of the nature of Christ. Jewish scholars especially, have noted, however, that Nicholas does not do justice to the Jewish perspective—strict, non-Trinitarian monotheism—on this issue, <sup>241</sup> especially when the Jewish spokesman in *Pace Fidei* says that the Jews "will gladly agree when they see that the [Trinity] is the simplest form of fertility," and claimed that one of the prophets (unnamed. DS) "had revealed the Trinity to us, if only summarily."

The Scythian—for Nicholas the simple, peasant folk—has no question, but receives the brief to agree that the explanation of the Trinity is so clear that the peoples will obviously accept the reasoning "if they hear the explanation that we have heard."

The Frenchman reiterates that support, but notes that a great disagreement remains in the world, namely the question of whether the Word has become human to redeem humanity. At this point the Word concludes and passes on to Peter to discuss this further.

#### Peter

Before we begin our examination of Peter's presentation of the role of Christ in the search for a single religion, I want to pause briefly to note that Nicholas

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>240</sup> Docta Ignorantia, p 145.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>241</sup> Pace Fidei, p. 73

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>242</sup> Ibid.

#### inter-religious dialogue

through Peter makes an assumption here that modern writers might be loathe to without also including a treatment of the question in the dialogue: assuming that a) Jesus is the Christ and b) that even those who disagree with the belief that the Christ is God would agree that Jesus is the Christ.

Peter begins by addressing the Frenchman's question, noting that some have denied that God's Word is God. Based on the previous section, where the Trinity was discussed at length, Peter doesn't intend to go into this aspect of the question at great length. It is sufficient for him to repeat that it is so. "He who accepts that God's Word has become flesh or man, must also believe that the person whom they call God's Word is also God."

#### The Persian

This section is the longest single dialogue in *Pace Fidei*, including sections 30–41 or nearly one-sixth of the total. The Persian represents two Moslem theologians, Al Ghazali and Ibn Sina, who together may be said to have provided the link between classical philosophy and European scholasticism.

How, asks the Persian, could God, who is unchanging, become a man? How could the creator become a creature?

This question seems to be a direct challenge from classical philosophy, and specifically Plato, who argues in *The Republic* against God "being a magician" who would change his shape which could only result in a lowering of his state, as all conditions that are not God are lower than God. For God to change his shape would be a lie, and God is Truth, therefore God would not adopt another shape, though he would be capable of it. "The Gods," quoth Socrates, "are not magicians who transform themselves, neither do they deceive mankind in any way." 244

Peter begins not by discussing whether God could become flesh, but by examining again the question of the perception of Christ and his humanity. Peter asks the Persian what he means when he calls Christ "God's Word."

The Persian, perhaps referring to sura 5:110 of the Koran, replies that Christ received not the divine nature but divine grace, by which he was the messenger of God's message.

Plato, The Republic, Benjamin Jowett (trans.), (New York: Airmont Publishing Company) 1968, p. 93.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

What then, Peter asks, is the difference between Christ and all the other prophets, who also received divine grace? A difference of degree, replies the Persian: Christ was the greatest of the prophets.<sup>245</sup>

This difference of degree Peter compares with the distinction between a royal messenger and the royal heir. One has authority, the other "the living, free and unlimited word of the king." The heir shares (is equal to) the royal nature of the king, which gives his message more authority. So, according to Peter, should Christ also be seen: as sharing the divine nature of the heavenly King.

To this the Persian replies that Christ could be another God, if Peter's reasoning is correct, because the parable of the king and the heir implies two people. By removing the numeric distinction between the king and the heir, Peter tries to resolve the difficulty. The authority remains, regardless of who brings the message. "(...) the royal power is one, both in the father and the son. In the father it is as if the power were not begotten, in the son as begotten or in the living word of the father."246

Inasmuch as even the Moslems believe that Christ was the highest possible prophet, Peter continues, and they accept that He embodied the Word of God, then they must accept that he was God. The Moslems also accept Christ's miracles, such as the raising of the dead, which no human could have accomplished. And if His human nature could not achieve that, then his divine nature must have. And if He possessed the divine nature, then it also follows that he was God.

What about the Jews, then, the Persian continues, who accept "nothing of Christ "247

Here Nicholas weakens his own case for the search for a single religion. having Peter say: "They can read all that about Christ in their scriptures, but because they follow the literal meaning, they refuse to come to insight. But the resistance of the Jews will not hinder unity. There are few of them and they will not be able to disturb the whole world."248

Nicholas was more thorough in discussing Jesus as the Christ in Docta Ignorantia, when in Chapter 4 (Section 203), he refers to "countless infallible proofs that he is the one whose coming at some future time all creation awaited

Though Moslems consider Mohammed to have been 'only' a prophet, extending the line including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and Jesus, most Moslems would be surprised, I think, to see Jesus elevated above Mohammed as the greatest.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>246</sup> Pace Fidei, p. 83

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>247</sup> Ibid., p. 90

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 91

from the beginning and whose appearance in the world he had himself foretold by the prophets."<sup>249</sup>

He then combines a number of preceding arguments to arrive at the conclusion of Jesus' divinity:

"Since through all things God is in all and through all things that are in God, (...) and since both these statements must be considered together, in union, as God is in all things in such a way that all things are in God, and since the divine being is of the highest equality and simplicity, hence God, while in all things, is not in them according to degrees, as if communicating Godself by degrees and in parts. But none can exist without a difference of degree; for this reason all things are present in God according to themselves with a difference of degree. Since, therefore, God is in all things in such a way that all are in God, it is clear that, without any change to God and in the equality of being all things, God exists in unity with the maximum humanity of Jesus, for the maximum human can only exist maximally in God." 250

## **Syrian**

The Persian is followed by the Syrian, representing a long and varied philosophical tradition. The dialogue now turns to the role of Christ, whom the interlocutors have just agreed was God. The Syrian wants a proof for the unity of God and Christ. The proof, says Peter, is that every religion believes in some form of resurrection of the spirit. But, he says, only God is immortal, and the rest of creation, mortal and temporary. The resurrection of the spirit, however, implies a unification of the mortal with the immortal, the temporary with the eternal. In order to accomplish this, Christ, the perfect human is necessary to provide a link to the perfect God. That is the salvation, for without Him, no unity would have been possible. The other religions believe the same, Peter continues, and have rituals to prepare their souls for unity with the eternal. "Christ is assumed by all those who hope to achieve eternal happiness<sup>251</sup>," which is eternal life.

Again, it is the Jews who spoil things, by claiming that the Messiah, whom they believe, according to Peter, would be able to achieve those things that Jesus did, has not yet arrived. Peter brushes that aside, saying it is sufficient that the other peoples acknowledge and recognise that fact.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>249</sup> Docta Ignorantia, p. 178

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>250</sup> Ibid., p. 179

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>251</sup> Pace Fidei, p. 93.

## **Spaniard**

The question then arises as to the Virgin Birth of Jesus. The Spaniard, representing the country that then, and for nearly 40 years after *Pace Fidei* was written, was a country of Christians, Jews and Moslems, wants to know how to deal with this question.

Peter follows his own logic, and notes that the perfect man could not have come from an imperfect father, but only from the Holy Father, God. An imperfect father could not have passed on perfection. So, too, with the Virgin. A virgin, says Peter, is the height of fertility and virginity. Jesus had "Him as father from whom every human father receives his fatherhood. And He has her as mother who had sexual intercourse with no man." <sup>252</sup>

This theme was also dealt with in *Docta Ignorantia* (Chapter Five, section 208). God's motive here is, having taken pity on human weakness, to clothe the Word in a form that humans could understand

#### Turk

The Turk then, following the pattern established in *Docta Ignorantia*, raises the issue of the crucifixion. The question here is whether Christ was crucified at all, and if so, by whom. Peter affirms that we must believe in the crucifixion because of the evidence of the martyrs who died proclaiming it. But why was it necessary?

As an example of how worthless this world is, Peter says, and to more loudly proclaim the kingdom of heaven, which was best done "by the witness of his blood;" 253 and to be fully obedient to God. 254 Heaven having been hidden before Christ, there was no belief and no hope of achieving union with the divine. Human nature had to be raised to the highest rank and able to participate in the divine nature. Additionally, Christ's death was necessary for him to cast off his human form and regain his divine nature. 255

#### German

From the German comes the question of the nature of life eternal, contrasting what the Jews and the Moslems are said to believe with what the gospel promises. The Jews have only temporary promises, the Moslems promises of sexuality, the German says. Christians believe in an angel-like asexual existence. How is one to reconcile these inconsistencies?

The answer lies, says Peter, in how one reads the scriptures. Sexual feelings are part of the finite world of the senses and are not necessary in the eternal. The

<sup>253</sup> *Pace Fidei*, pp. 96-97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>252</sup> Ibid., 95

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 96

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>255</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

Moslems, therefore, must read their scriptures figuratively and not literally. The prophet, in order to keep the people away from idolatry, promised them a future that was no less pleasing than the physical world they were accustomed to.

And what about the Jews? the German continues. They after all have only the promise of finite prosperity. The fact that Jews are often martyred for their belief indicates a belief that goes beyond the Law, and that does not arise from it. They therefore have a faith, and the faith, Peter says, assumes Christ. QED

With the German, Nicholas concludes the section concerning Christ and His place in the One religion that Nicholas is seeking. The Tartar then introduces the question of the religious life, and specifically the question of the variety of rites and rituals.

## **Paul**

#### **Tartar**

As is fitting for this subject that concerns the practices of the Church, Peter now retires and the apostle Paul, teacher to the peoples, takes over in an explanation that shares much, and perhaps for the time, too much, with the future Reformers, especially Luther.

In response to how the diversity of rite and ritual can be reconciled, Paul notes that they are only the outward signs of the inner faith and, in any case, it is faith and not works that will save the soul. If one accepts that, he continues, then it becomes irrelevant that there is a diversity of practice, not only within Christianity but among all the religions.

The Tartar accepting that reasoning, the question then arises as to how faith saves.

Paul's answer is that faith saves through belief in God, the same God who made a promise to Abraham, and through that belief one becomes acceptable to receive the grace of God. The faith of Abraham, whose promise was fulfilled in Christ. The implication is, based on the preceding, that belief in God equals belief in Christ and vice versa. And, as all the religions believe, regardless of whether they know it, in the one God, even if that is in the form of the Godhead, then they believe in Christ.

Works do have a part to play, however, for "faith without works is dead."

But, counters the Tartar, all the peoples have their different laws from different prophets, the Jews from Moses, the Moslems from Mohammed, the Christians from Jesus, and other peoples from other prophets.

In keeping with Nicholas's principle that all diversity comes from unity, Paul notes that there is one prime law, that you love God. All other laws can be reduced to that one.

#### **Armenian**

The Armenian then inquires about the baptismal font. Baptism is, after all, necessary according to Christian belief.

Inasmuch as other religions, especially the Jews and the Moslems, are also familiar with ritual bathing, Paul says they should have no trouble accepting baptism as an outward symbol of their belief, as Christ initiated.

So, the Armenian continues, we must accept baptism because it is necessary to be saved. It is most necessary to believe, Paul says. For adults, baptism is not essential, if one has not had the opportunity to be baptised. Infant baptism should encounter even fewer objections from Jews and Moslems, who already allow their male children to be circumcised at the age of eight days for religious reasons. In fact, they should applaud the introduction of baptism, even if they then decide to also retain circumcision.

#### **Bohemian**

The Bohemian—representing the Hussites of Bohemia whom Nicholas had had such close contacts with twenty years before the writing of *Pace Fidei* and for whom the communion in both kinds (bread and wine) was a principle point—asks about how the various peoples can be brought to accept the communion and transubstantiation.

For Paul that is no problem. In the first place, communion is but a symbol of the eternal life that we have received through the grace of God. In the second place, the same faith that allows one to believe everything else about Christ, his mission, God, etc., must allow one to believe in transubstantiation. Only the spirit is capable of grasping this mystery, for it is a mystery that plays only at the spiritual level. Communion is not absolutely necessary for salvation, Paul continues, noting that there are circumstances when one may refuse it. What is important is belief. On that basis, the other religions can also determine which of their rituals are worthy of keeping and discarding, as long as the belief is kept strong.

## **Englishman**

Then comes the Englishman, to inquire about the other sacraments, marriage, priesthood, confirmation, Last Rites.

Uniformity, Paul says, is not the goal here. For one thing, it disturbs the common peace. In addition, one must take the weakness of people into account, as long as it does not put eternal life at risk. marriage and the priesthood should prove little difficulty, Paul continues, although the other peoples will agree that both sacraments are more pure in Christianity.

As regards other Christian practices raised by the Englishman, church offices, fasting, prayer, etc., Paul again claims not to want uniformity. In fact, he says,

piety may increase with diversity as each people strives to outdo the other in pleasing God.

Pace Fidei comes rather abruptly to a conclusion. The dialogue, we are told, continues, and holy scriptures are brought together and compared. The final conclusion that is reached is that there is only one true religion. It happens, however, to contain all the points of Christianity, which, as soon as all the peoples come to see that will lead to the end of religious wars and conflicts.

Regardless of how one looks at his argumentation, it is not so that the charge can be made against Nicholas that he unfairly treats the question of the one religion only from the perspective of his Christianity, from the divinity of Jesus, from the question of the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, and the host of other particularities that Christianity is heir to. According to his thesis, all religions participate in the infinite in degrees, including Christianity, albeit Christianity, in his view, to a greater degree than the others. If his thesis has any merit at all, then it is beholden upon him to illustrate how Christianity fits into this great model. It would be inappropriate for him, and unfair to his faith and his office as a prince of the Church, to have tried to concoct a model which ignored these crucial elements of Christianity as he saw it. For if his Christianity could not fit into the model, then the model is flawed.

Nor is it unfair for him to attempt to find a place in the model for competing(?) religious beliefs. It is for representatives of the other religions who are inclined to apply a similar model from their perspective to follow a similar path, but then with the core elements of Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, etc., as the foundation upon which the other faiths must rest.

But is it a model that we can apply today to the inter-religious dialogue? Throughout *Pace Fidei*, there rings an undertone of triumphalism. Christianity will overcome because, unbeknownst to all the other religions, they already agree with it. They are, to anticipate Rahner by more than half a millennium, invisible Christians.

Using this model, then, dialogue should be used to arrive at the point that the *Pace Fidei* dialogue reached, to allow the other believers to realise that Christianity is the most perfect religion. It is not, however, *the* one religion that Nicholas introduced early on. <sup>256</sup> Reading between the lines, therefore, one could make a case for Nicholas being in favour of a general cease-fire in the religious

111

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>256</sup> This is a similar point to that raised by Ernst Troeltsch in his 20<sup>th</sup>-century work, *The absoluteness of Christianity and the history of religions*, in which he argues that absoluteness, or in Nicholas's terms, the infinite, is far removed from every religion, including Christianity, though Christianity may have elements that are closer to the absolute than other religions are.

wars so that everyone could realise that there was still work to be done in progressing towards that one religion. That process would have to start, according to Nicholas, by recognising that though we are still far from achieving that one religion, all religions are still part of the one religion, and if that were recognised, it should allow people to stop slaughtering one another in the name of faith and achieving the Pax Fidei. By selecting Christianity as the normative opening gambit in the theological peace negotiations, Nicholas opens the way for other faiths to present their cases.

All current participants in the dialogue, however, have made it a prime directive that seeking that new religion, often denigrated as syncretism, should precisely not be the point of the dialogue. And there is probably too much history and too great a power imbalance to even attempt it.

As a model of dialogue, however, the model that Nicholas presents to us in *Pax Fidei* is no dialogue at all. Unable to resolve the issues themselves, the peoples of the world leave it to God to resolve, after which they meekly agree with all the points raised and promise to spread the word among their citizens.

The status quo ante of the dialogue, using Panikkar's model, is one of rejection and conquest, but Nicholas is clearly trying to move initially to a position of co-existence and cooperation and, perhaps eventually to appropriation and dialogue.

His model is inclusive to a certain extent, with an emphasis on peaceful coexistence. Conflicts will thereby be resolved, leading to peace at the macro level of nations and peoples.

Nicholas's dialogue is no more real dialogue than Plato's or Socrates' was, however. On the one hand, the subservient listener and poser of questions, on the other, the source of wisdom. The model that Nicholas presents is for adherents of different religions to ignore one another and to consult God directly. Its value in helping us determine the theological use of the current dialogue among believing individuals and faith institutions is therefore, probably, limited.

On the other hand, his dialogue-through-publication, a meta-dialogue in which the questions are addressed at an academic and institutional level and then allowed to flow down and influence the actual one-on-one dialogues taking place, through, for example, the popularisation of abstract works such as Nicholas's own *De Docta Ignorantia* which later led to *Pax Fidei*, may offer some solace.

There may be more use in discussing the objective of his dialogue. The creation of millions of 'invisible Christians' was not his goal, after all, but his means. His stated goal was to put an end to inter-religious warfare, or international warfare that used religion as pretext or motivation. In that regard, it is important that Nicholas in his time took time out to consider the role of his faith in conflict. If anything, that consideration dominated Nicholas's career; first the

#### inter-religious dialogue

Church's conflict with the Bohemians, then the schism with the Byzantines, concluding with the conflict with Islam.

Leaving aside for the moment the sad observation that neither he nor anyone else for that matter has had much success, at least so far, in eliminating or reducing religious-based conflicts, I want only to state briefly here that I don't think that this objective, this theological use of dialogue, is one that should be pursued except as a sideline of the main purpose, which will be discussed at length further.

Another possible theological objective, the realisation among believers that every human being already has everything needed to turn the 'eye of the soul' towards God, if (s)he were inclined to do so, regardless of one's religious affiliation, and in so doing finding happiness, may offer a more fruitful avenue.

Using modern terminology, Nicholas must clearly be placed in the inclusivist camp. Not only are all people yearning for the same thing – Good, which is God – but all of their faiths are but differing expressions of a common Truth.

His promotion of the most important elements of Christianity as the basis for that Common Truth work against applying his model unabridged in the modern dialogue, but, in contrast to the apologists and Abelard who preceded him, he at least sees a positive theological contribution from the other faiths. In that, he is not limited to the ethical, where good conduct leads to peace, but good, peaceful relations among the religions on the basis of their shared spiritual basis would result in the unlikely event that his model were to be accepted.

# X. Rings of the Father: Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Jumping forward a couple of centuries, and northward by several degrees of latitude, we turn now to a writer who presented his work in a different form of dialogue. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729-1781) was a Saxon by birth, and came from a line of magistrates, burgermeisters (mayors), and theologians. His ambition from a young age was to be a popular playwright in the style of Molière, and insofar as he succeeded in penning the most frequently performed piece in the German theatre repertoire, *Minna von Barnhelm*, one may say that he succeeded.

In addition to plays, Lessing also wrote essays, poetry, and some letters which have been survived. Several of his writings will be useful in my present investigations, which I shall anchor around one of the best known, if not quite the most successful of his plays, *Nathan the Wise*, (1789) with particular attention to what has, perhaps incorrectly, become accepted as the defining exposition of Lessing's theology, the parable of the rings.

To most modern Western readers, *Nathan the Wise* will likely not appear a play of any particular power. Many of the ideas discussed in it have become, if not commonplace and generally accepted—certainly in believing circles—then at least familiar to many people. In its day, however, it was a play that challenged the laws, customs and assumptions of its society.

In contrast to Nicholas, Lessing's primary concern and the focus of his philosophical project was not Islam – though Islam plays an important role in *Nathan* – but Judaism, and specifically the question of the position of the Jews in post-Thirty Years' War Prussia and others of the fragmented German states.

That position was far from enviable. Restrictions in movement, housing, education, occupation, and prescriptions as to clothing all served to keep, in this case, German cities, for all intents and purposes, free of Jews.

It is important to remember that the ideas that we, post-Kristalnacht,<sup>257</sup> have come to associate with German, White Supremacist, Russian nationalist and,

On the nights of 9 and 10 November 1938 throughout Germany, 101 synagogues and almost 7,500 Jewish businesses were destroyed, 26,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps, Jews were physically attacked and beaten and 91 died in actions by members of the armed militia of the National Socialists, the Sturmabteilung (SA) in what has been called the first action of the Holocaust. See further, Austin, Ben S., *An introduction to the Holocaust* (http://www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/ knacht.html (March 2004). See also Shirer, William L., *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* (New York: Fawcett Crest), 1960, pp. 580-589 and Dawidowicz, Lucy, *The War Against the Jews 1933-45*, (Middlesex: Penguin Books), 1975, pp. 136-141.

### inter-religious dialogue

increasingly in recent years, Moslem anti-Semitism since the Nazi period—the role of das Volk, Aryans, pure blood, etc.—were not yet part of the anti-Semitic arsenal. The great Russian anti-Semitic forgery The Protocols of the Elders of Zion had not vet been written, nor had German Idealist philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte's 258 concept of the Jews forming a "state within a state" with divided loyalties been formulated. The stereotypical image of the Jew in Eastern Europe, the Hasid with his distinctive clothing and earlocks that was later so caricatured, was not yet common as Hasidism was only just getting underway in Lithuania and Poland. Prejudice against the Jews, restrictions in social, occupational and physical mobility, and other factors, were based almost solely on religious grounds, or at least on grounds that were religiously based.<sup>259</sup> Additional elements, such as the restriction that Jewish beggars might not enter Berlin for fear of bringing plague with them, were the result of economic conditions arising out of the inability of most Jews to participate in the economic life of the society around them. Non-religious elements did play a part, however, such as the argument that the Jews "Asiatic temperament" made them unfit for emancipation under the Enlightenment.<sup>260</sup>

Prior to *Nathan*, Lessing had written another play that roused the ire of the large anti-Jewish segment of the population. Entitled simply *The Jews*, the short play took as its point of departure a Jew who possessed all the qualities a gentleman of that time was expected to possess. It was not well received. Critics complained that it did not reflect the reality they saw around them, where ignoble Jews—perhaps made ignoble by exclusion and projection in equal measure—were expected and therefore found.

One Jew at least, however, had managed to break through this image, at least to some degree, and was contributing fully to the German Enlightenment: Moses Mendelssohn. Originally from the German state of Dessau, Mendelssohn had come to Prussia following his teacher. Among his other accomplishments, he was

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>258</sup> See Dawidowicz, Lucy, *The War Against the Jews* 1933-45, p. 54

The complaint against Jews that they were usurers, for example, arises from the prohibition against Christians lending money at interest, leaving the field in Europe open only to the Jews. Dawidowicz, Lucy, *The War Against the Jews 1933-45*, p. 52.

Ibid. The idea of national temperament, though largely albeit not entirely, discredited in the modern time, was a major part of even the educated understanding of humanity of the time of the Enlightenment. Peoples from the northern climes of Europe, for example, were thought to have been made more industrious by the features of the weather which required them to work harder to survive. Southern peoples, on the other hand, were thought to have been made more soft by the less difficult conditions of their environment, though they were still thought able to react in times of crisis. See also, Speelman, Patrick J., Henry Lloyd and the Military Enlightenment of Eighteenth-Century Europe, (Westport, CT/London: Greenwood Press) 2002, pp. 66-67.

a philosopher and essayist among whose major concerns was how to break through the self-imposed mental ghetto walls that he felt the Jewish community had put up around itself in mimicry of the physical ghetto walls thrown up around them by the European societies.

Lessing and Mendelssohn became close friends, and it was through Lessing's intervention—by publishing some essays that Mendelssohn had sent him without first asking his consent—that Mendelssohn broke through into the ranks of Berlin intelligentsia. It is considered highly likely that Mendelssohn served as the model for the character of Nathan. 261

It was, however, not Berlin only or Mendelssohn only that inspired Lessing. Family tradition also played a part. Grandfather Lessing for example, as early as 1669 had defended a Disputatio politica with the theme "On Religious Tolerance". His paper "On the toleration of religion" defended tolerance on the quite practical grounds that it had led to "so many years in peace" in Germany. 262 Lessing's own experiences, especially when he travelled through the city-states of Italy, where he saw on the one hand the shabby and shameful treatment of the Jews in the Papal city and, on the other hand, their enlightened, tolerant treatment in Livorno <sup>263</sup>

## Nathan the Wise

## The story

The scene opens at an unspecified date, sometime between October 1187 (the retaking of Jerusalem immediately prior to the Third Crusade<sup>264</sup>) and 1193, in

An alternate reading of the inspiration for Nathan is that Lessing was disappointed that the German and French lodges of the Freemasons did not allow Jews to join. Lessing was a member of the Freemasons and that was a disappointment in its turn to his friend Mendelssohn. See also, Ryder, Matthew M., "Goethe, Lessing and Schiller: German Dramatists, Freemasons, Poets and Romanticists", (http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/ryder.html (June 2002). In the year of Lessing's death, 1781, the torch passed swiftly to another's hand, and when Mendelssohn was asked by the Alsatian Jews to make a plea for their emancipation, he asked another friend, Christian Wilhelm von Dohm, an historian, political writer and Prussian diplomat to do it for him. Dohm wrote the essay Über die bürgerliche Verbesserung der Juden (On the Civic Betterment of the Jews), Berlin, 1781, based on the same idea that we shall encounter in Nathan, that "the Jew is a human being even before he is a Jew." Cited in Dawidowicz, Lucy, The War Against the Jews 1933-45, p. 52.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>262</sup> See Kuschel, Karl-Josef, Jud, Christ un Muselmann vereinigt? Lessings "Nathan der Weise", (Dusseldorf: Patmos) 2004.

Ibid.

It is only possible to ascertain the supposed date from the fact that a Templar was taken as a prisoner to Jerusalem, which Saladin's forces had reconquered in 1187 after nearly a century in crusader hands. In the Third Crusade, in which the English king Richard I (Lionheart) and Phillip II (Augustus) of France—originally with the assistance of Frederick Barbarossa of Prussia, who drowned en route, causing the disintegration of the Prussian crusader army—attempted,

### inter-religious dialogue

Jerusalem, where the Sultan, the Kurd Saladin (d. 1193), who had established the Ayyubid sultanate uniting Syria and Egypt with himself as head, was staying to supervise the rebuilding of the city.

Nathan, the play's eponymous protagonist, is a Jewish merchant and trader who has just returned from a business trip. Upon his return, he learns that there had been a fire during his absence and his beloved daughter Rachel had only just been saved from a fiery death by the timely intervention of a Knight Templar. He is told of the fire by Daya, the Christian companion to Rachel.

The knight, who, it appears, spends all his time pacing morosely under the trees at a nearby oasis, was captured in a battle between Saladin's forces and the Crusaders at Tibnin<sup>265</sup> and was to have been killed<sup>266</sup> until Saladin thought he saw his dead brother Assad's<sup>267</sup> face in the face of the young knight. Daya also relates that Rachel is completely in love with her saviour from the flames, but he won't have anything to do with her, relations between Templars and Jews being what they were.<sup>268</sup>

Nathan wants to express his gratitude to the knight for having saved his daughter and goes for a meeting. After some initial unpleasantness, again because the Templar feels he has to uphold his order's poor opinion of Jews, Nathan and the knight agree to have their relationship be based on the fact that they are both men, and neither of them very important or great, rather than on the fact that one is Christian and the other Jewish.

Having overcome his initial reluctance, the knight agrees to come to Nathan's house and meet Rachel, so she too can express her gratitude. Daya, the

partially successfully, to regain some of the territory of the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem that had been gained during earlier Crusades and then lost.

As *Nathan* is a play and not a historical document, Lessing may be forgiven his rather loose use of historical dates. Tibnin featured twice in actions between Crusaders and the Moslem forces of the Holy Land. Once when it was captured by Nur Ad-Din, Saladin's predecessor as sultan, in 1162, after the Second Crusade, and once in 1197, after the Third Crusade and the death of Saladin.

During major field campaigns, the Moslem forces were quite likely to kill Templars when they found them (a courtesy that was equally likely to be reciprocated). That was not always the case during sieges, however. For more details on the conduct of the Third Crusade, see Maalouf, Amin, Rovers, Christenhonden, Vrouwenschenners: De kruistochten in Arabische kronieken, José Lieshout (trans) (Amsterdam: Rainbow Pocketboeken) 2001, and Reston, James, Storia della Terza Crociata (Edizione Piemme) 2002. (Warriors of God: Richard the Lionheart and Saladin in the Third Crusade. (New York: Doubleday, 2001))

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>267</sup> Assad is not based on a real brother of Saladin.

Those relations can best be described as mutual fear and loathing. The monastic Knights Templar had no compunctions about killing Jews, and did so with great abandon whenever the chance presented itself, which was frequently. The Jews of Europe and of the Kingdom of Jerusalem learned quickly to expect no Christian charity from these knights.

companion is thrilled at that prospect, for she has a secret agenda. She is only in service to Rachel because her husband, whom she accompanied from Europe to the Levant on a Crusade, was killed. She believes that if she can get Rachel and the knight wed, they will return to Europe, taking her, as faithful handmaiden, with them.

Once he actually meets Rachel for the first time since the rescue, the knight, Curt van Stauffen by name, falls madly in love with her, his duty to his order notwithstanding. He pledges never again to step into the house unless Nathan agrees to their marriage. Nathan, however, on his guard since he has discovered the knight's name, is not yet prepared to give his permission until he has checked one or two things.

In the meantime, we have also been introduced to Saladin, a character based on the historical person Yusuf Salah ad-Din, renowned throughout the Muslim world as the one who freed the Holy Land, seen from the Muslim perspective, from the Crusaders. Saladin is going through a bit of a financial rough patch at the moment because the tribute from Egypt is late. After consulting with his sister, the always reasonable and understanding Sittah, and with his chancellor of the exchequer, Al-Hafi, Saladin agrees to approach Nathan with a request for bridge financing until the funds arrive from Egypt.

For reasons which are never made too clear, Saladin doesn't want to ask Nathan directly for the money when they meet, but asks him instead "what faith, or moral law, has most appeal for you." For, so reasons Saladin "Of these three Religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam) only one can be the true one." 271

Without wanting to digress too much, I note here in passing that for all his good qualities, Saladin's reputation, to the degree that it is based on his successes against the Crusaders, has been highly overrated. In fact, with the exception of one battle, Hittin—Which Saladin's forces won because of stupidity on the part of the Knights Templar, who opted to attack in the middle of the day without securing a source of water—and the immediate aftermath (which saw Saladin's forces retake many of the Crusader cities) as a result of many of the Crusaders having been killed at Hittin, Saladin lost virtually every encounter with the Crusaders of the Third Crusade, led by Richard I (Lionheart) of England, and might very well have lost Jerusalem as well had Richard not decided to cancel the attack before it began. See also, Maalouf, Amin, Rovers, Christenhonden, Vrouwenschenners: De kruistochten in Arabische kronieken, José Lieshout (trans) (Amsterdam: Rainbow Pocketboeken) 2001, and Reston, James, Storia della Terza Crociata (Edizione Piemme) 2002.

Lessing Gotthold Ephraim, 'Nathan the Wise,' Act 3, Scene 5, Bayard Quincy Morgan (trans) in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm, and other plays and writings, Peter Demetz (ed.) (New York: Continuum) 1991

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>271</sup> Ibid.

The parable of the rings has not always been used to show the benefits of suspending absolute truth. In Gesta Romanorum, a medieval (13th/14th century) collection of anecdotes, to which moral reflections are attached, the story, "Of the Triple State of the World", is told of a knight who had three sons. On his deathbed, he bequeathed the inheritance to his firstborn; to the second, his treasury; and to the third, a very valuable ring, of more worth indeed than all he had left to the others.

But the two former had also rings, and they were all apparently the same. After their father's death the first son said. "I possess that precious ring of my father."

The second said, "You have it not -- I have."

To this the third son answered, "That is not true. The elder of us has the estate, the second the treasure, and therefore it is but meet that I should have the most valuable ring."

The first son answered, "Let us prove, then, whose claims to it have the preeminence."

They agreed, and several sick men were made to resort to them for the purpose. The two first rings had no effect, but the last cured all their infirmities.

The message that was to have been taken from this version is that the knight is Christ. The three sons are the Jews, Saracens [Muslims], and Christians. The most valuable ring is faith, which is the property of the younger, that is, of the Christians. 272

So, too, are there other ring stories in a similar, though not identical vein. The Dominican Etienne de Bourbon (d. 1261) wrote one of a ring with healing power and three daughters. And Old French story "From the real ring" (ca. 1270-1294) a contemporary Crusade-era tale which tells symbolically of a struggle among three brothers, representing Christianity, Judaism and Islam. As Karl-Josef Kuschel notes, all of these stories share the fact that they are told by Christians, for Christians, and 'prove' the superiority of Christianity. 273

Nathan feels that the Sultan has laid a trap for him:

"(...) I must tread warily!—But how?— To be a Jew outright won't do at all.— But not to be a Jew will do still less. For if no Jew, he might well ask, then why

<sup>272</sup> See Ashliman, D.L., (ed.) "The Three-Ring Parable: tales of Aarne-Thompson type 972" (http://www.pitt.edu/dash/ashliman.html), (1999))

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>273</sup> See further, Kuschel, Karl-Josef, *Jud, Christ und Muselmann vereinigt? Lessings "Nathan der* Weise". 2004.

Not Mussulman?—That's it! And that can save me! Not only children can be quieted With fables.—(...)"<sup>274</sup>

The fable Nathan tells, the Parable of the Rings, has become probably become more famous than the play which spawned it,.

## Parable of the Rings: the story

In eastern lands, lived a man who had a beautiful ring of opal that had the magic power that whoever wore it, and trusted its strength, would be beloved of God and men. Upon his death, he bequeathed it to his best-loved son on condition that that son would also pass it on to his best-loved son, and so on through the generations. After several generations, however, the ring came into the possession of a man who had three sons whom he loved equally, and to whom he had at various times promised the ring. When he was at the point of death, and loathe to go back on his word, he ordered two extra and superficially identical rings to be made, so each son would receive the ring. Each son does in fact receive his ring, unbeknownst to the others and each thinking that he alone has it, which would give him the right to rule in his father's place.

When the sons discover that the others, too, have received rings, legal proceedings are initiated to have their rings declared authentic. The loving father, after all, could not, would not have lied. The other brothers must by lying. The judge declares that he is unable to decide. But should the ring not cause the wearer to be loved. Which then is the most loved? No one answers. Or no one is most loved. Could it be that all rings are counterfeit and the real ring is lost? The solution provided by the judge is that each son carry on believing that he alone has the true ring. And in a thousand, thousand years, to return to judgement when "a wiser man than I will sit as judge upon this bench."

Saladin humbly realises that the 'thousand thousand years' is not yet passed and that he is not the wiser judge. He therefore does not feel competent to make the choice that he originally asked Nathan to provide the information for.

"Go, go," he says, "but be my friend." 275

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>274</sup> Ibid., Scene 6

The presence of Saladin in the story has also inspired others. There is a supposed (though unproven and suspect) historical record of a somewhat similar meeting having been hosted by Saladin's son, Gazi Al-Zaher Usef Ibn Ayub Al-Salah during which a certain Abbot Georgi from the monastery of "St. Simon the Fisherman" disputed with three Muslim clerics at Aleppo as to the veracity of the two religions. The document's questionable provenance stems from the fact that the dispute is supposed to have taken place in October 1165, eighteen years before Saladin's forces took Aleppo. An online version is available at

#### inter-religious dialogue

The parable of the rings is not original to Lessing, but goes back to Boccacio's The Decamerone, some 400 years previously. Boccacio's Nathan was called Melchisidek, and his ring had no more power than as a symbol of power and authority. Whoever received the ring became the pater familias with all the rights and privileges pertaining thereto. Melchisidek, however, in contrast with Nathan, was painted by the lady Filomina in her story in *The Decamerone* (the third story of day one) as simultaneously a miser and one who loaned money out at usury. Although Melchisidek is a moneylender, Saladin in Boccacio's story feels, for reasons which are unclear, that Melchisidek will refuse to loan him the funds he needs to replenish the national exchequer because of the costs of wars and high living. Lessing's Nathan seems cut from a completely different cloth, however, more in the style of the second Decamerone story of day one, told by Neïfile, in which an honourable Jewish businessman, Abraham by name, is brought to conversion, not by the sword but by the logic of seeing the clergy, up to and including the Pope, committing all the sins, with special emphasis on the sins of the flesh, and yet the Church continues to expand. This, he claims, must be evidence of the power of the Holy Spirit. Nathan doesn't go nearly that far, but does have all of Abraham's nobility and purity of spirit.

The sons in Boccacio's parable are not particularly deserving, either. Each of them more than the other lusts after the authority that possessing the ring conveys and almost coerces his father into granting it to him. When the litigation follows to determine the rightful heir, no decision is possible.

Lessing brought some changes to the story, making the sons deserving; granting to all three sons the right, or obligation, to exercise the authority of the father with the final decision to await the final judgement; making Nathan's primary business that of import and export with money-lending only as a secondary activity; and making the ring desirable not for its temporal power but for its ability to make the bearer loved and respected. That may also reflect the different relationships between the Church and society between the two periods. Boccacio's Church was very much concerned with temporal power. By the time of Lessing post-Reformation and Enlightenment, the Church was very much involved with winning the hearts and minds of the Europeans with the clear

http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/christ-muslim-debate.html (June 2002). The original document is said to be in the hands of the family of Karim Hakkoum of Portland, Oregon, U.S.A., but all attempts to contact the family or anyone involved with the translation have proven fruitless. It is not known whether Lessing was aware of the supposed existence of the meeting recorded in the document or of the document itself.

awareness that believers now had choices that didn't involve Inquisition and/or execution as a consequence.<sup>276</sup>

## The story continues

After finishing telling the parable, Nathan and Saladin become the best of friends. Saladin also learns of the relationship with the Templar and, by so doing, is reminded that he exists. The Templar, meanwhile is beside himself with sadness at the possibility, for Nathan has not yet given him an answer, that he may not be able to marry the lovely Rachel. The conniving Daya, however, still intent on getting back to Europe, tells a secret to the Knight that she expects will turn all to her advantage: Rachel is not as she seems; not Jewish, but Christian. She doesn't know that, however. The Knight is confused and seeks advice from the last person he might be expected to, the Orthodox Patriarch, no friend of the Templars in general and of our Knight in particular. So alerted to the situation, though not yet knowing who is involved, the Patriarch vows to get to the bottom of it and punish the evil-doer who would dare to rob a Christian child of its heritage and, even worse, to raise it without any faith at all, but what "reason would require."

While all this has been transpiring, Nathan has been conducting his investigations arising from learning the Templar's name and finally comes with a decision about the proposed marriage of Von Stauffen to Rachel. It may not proceed. Not, however, because of a gulf between their faiths, but rather due to a lack of distance between their bloodlines. Rachel and Von Stauffen, it appears, are siblings. And it is no wonder that Von Stauffen closely resembles Saladin's brother, for Assad was his father. And Rachel's.

Though it is never explicitly stated, both of the children are therefore Muslims by birth, though one raised a Christian and one a Jew. The curtain falls on general joy among all the participants.

At the time of its publication, *Nathan* was not universally praised. The religious community, for example, and especially the dominant Lutherans of Lessing's Prussia, were "irritated" because the play "further emphasised that 'real' religion is manifest in (...) experience and practice, now seen primarily as the "essential" religion of love and reason. The consequences of the separation of justification

The parable of the rings continues to evolve. In 2004, on the web site of the True Jesus Church of Anaheim California, (<a href="http://www.tjc.org/article.cfm?id=B336EE2B-6838-4944-AF28-6C8A6C549E45">http://www.tjc.org/article.cfm?id=B336EE2B-6838-4944-AF28-6C8A6C549E45</a>) (no longer on the site and not archived in the Internet Archive), the story of "Saladin's Golden Ring" is told. In that version, which the author says is borrowed from Lessing (making no mention of *Nathan the Wise*) the story as recounted in *The Decamerone* is told, but with the character of the Jew replaced by Saladin.

and sanctification were increasingly clear as faith was being reduced to morality."<sup>277</sup>

For all its unique qualities, *Nathan* blends seamlessly with Lessing's other work and with his philosophy in general. As a work of theology and philosophy, it highlights Lessing's belief that practice is always superior to theory. "He writes for action, and not primarily for vague and speculative theory, although unlike British and French 'Enlighteners' he preserves a strong interest in metaphysical speculation. When he writes about theory it is in the service of shaping a personal stance."

As he did in the play *Minna von Barnhelm*, Lessing strongly rejects in *Nathan*, "theoretical or formal codes because they get in the way of concrete and practical human behaviour."

## Nathan, the Enlightenment and civic society

It can hardly be doubted that *Nathan* is quite firmly located in the Enlightenment: its emphasis on the revolutionary values of *fraternité*, *egalité et liberté* and on the need relate with one another as people rather than as members of religious or other communities make that abundantly clear.

*Nathan* is strongly founded on the holy trinity of the Enlightenment:

- the rejection of the religious interpretation of history
- the elevation of a secular or materialist interpretation in its stead, and
- the need for societal reform<sup>280</sup>

This was an elitist goal to a certain extent, as many proponents of the Enlightenment did not believe that religion, which was felt to be a natural development of mankind, could ever be eradicated. Voltaire's battle cry "Ecrasez l'infame"—crush the infamy of Christianity in particular and religion and superstition in general—was never likely to be successful among the vast majority of the population. The objective was therefore to remove religion from its dominant and oppressive position. To that end,, Nathan makes a large contribution, beginning with its critique of religious and religio-political violence as a means of repression and control, which place it strongly in the Enlightenment

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>277</sup> Lindberg, Carter, "Do Lutherans Shout Justification But Whisper Sanctification?" in *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 20

Frei, Hans, "Religious Transformation in the later Eighteenth Century", a paper presented as part of The Rice Lectures, Rockwell, February 1974, Lecture One: Lessing and the Religious Use of Irony, (Transcribed and edited from material in the Yale Divinity School Library Hans Frei Archive, Box 10 – Folder 168-9 by M.A. Higton.)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>279</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>280</sup> Speelman, Patrick J., *Henry Lloyd and the Military Enlightenment of Eighteenth-Century Europe*, (Westport, CT/London: Greenwood Press) 2002, pp. 62.

tradition and make it again as relevant today as it was when it was written, albeit for somewhat different reasons.

Nathan is imbued with potential violence with a religious tint. First, of course, is the character of Curt von Stauffen, whose very existence depends on religious violence. As a Knight Templar, his primary mission is the domination of the Holy Land and its liberation from the Muslims. His secondary mission is the killing of Jews, Muslims and other non-Christians. The character of Saladin, too, is not without its share of religious-based violence. It forms the basis for his questioning of Nathan, his attempt to catch Nathan out by claiming superiority for Judaism or Islam, with the unspoken threat of violence if the answer is not satisfactory. The Patriarch of Jerusalem, of course, who is outraged at the prospect of someone having raised a Christian child as a Jew or, even worse it seems, as a non-believer, is another character for whom violence is not a tool that one need necessarily shy away from. Even among the minor characters, violence threatens. Daya, for example, is willing to denounce Nathan to the Patriarch if it will serve her desire to get back to Europe, regardless of the consequences for Nathan.

As noted by Jean-Pierre Wils,<sup>281</sup> the Enlightenment has at its foundation the conviction that "when religious differences are resolved by force, they cause irrevocable damage." For that reason, religion must take a step back from politics. And, in order to prevent violence over the long term "it is necessary to de-absolutise and de-dogmatise the religious question of truth."<sup>282</sup>

Nor is this connection of religion and violence necessarily an artificial one, concocted by the critics of the religious establishment. It must be recognised that "although religion has been used to justify violence, violence can also empower religion." <sup>283</sup>

The spread of Christianity among the Asian, African and American colonies of the European powers<sup>284</sup> is the most often cited expression of this empowerment, but its success within, first, the Roman empire, and later, Europe as a whole is no less an illustration of how violence *may reasonably be considered the single* 

Wils, Jean-Pierre, De Dialectiek van de Verlichting en de logica van het geweld, (The dialectics of the Enlightenment and the logic of violence), in P. Valkenberg (Ed.), *God en geweld* (Budel: Uitgeverij Damon) 2002.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>282</sup> Ibid., p. 95.

Juergensmeyer, Mark, *Terror in the Mind of God, The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, (Berkley/Los Angeles/London: ) 2001, p. 242, cited in Jean-Pierre Wils, p. 91.

Referred to by comedian George Carlin as 'nailing [religious] sandals onto the natives' feet.' Carlin, George, "Religious Life" in An Evening with Wally Londo featuring Bill Szlazo, (Little David Records, LD-1008, 1975)

greatest cause for the spread and maintenance of Christianity. And it is against this background of violence that Lessing through Nathan, protests.

The rise of Deism and 'natural theology' as inseparable elements of the Enlightenment, was one of the key ways of accomplishing that de-absolutisation and de-dogmatisation. When there are no detailed religious differences to resolve by force, when religion is separate from politics and where religion imposes no absolutes and no dogmas, the result is what the modern industrialised world recognises as a secular democracy with the separation of church and state, religion which has lost its right to use violence as a weapon of offence or defence. Some would also say that another result is a religion—certainly in the case of Christianity and Islam—where questions of absolutes are not merely window-dressing but form what some would define as the core of their being-that has lost its raison d'être. This question will loom much larger in the discussion of the modern dialogue further on.

A crucial element of this step to remove absolutes from the public debate is the rise of scepticism, the belief that one cannot be sure of what one knows, certainly when the questions at issue are not empirically verifiable. That was linked in religion with what has become known as 'natural theology,' the idea that revelation was not actually necessary: human beings came naturally equipped with all the knowledge of God, or the potential to know all that was necessary, without any further mediation from God or any other messenger.

Nathan does not go quite that far. He seeks rather a suspension of theological argument and distinction, not its abolition.

## The Parable as Model for Dialogue

A well-known quote from Lessing states: "If God held all truth in his right hand and in his left the everlasting striving after truth, with the risk that I should always and everlastingly be mistaken, and said to me 'Choose!' in humility I would pick the left hand and say, 'Father grant me that: Absolute truth is for thee alone.' "

That is certainly the position taken by Nathan and accepted by Saladin in the play. Both disavow claiming absolute certainty in favour of the search that could last millennia.

At first glance, The Parable appears to fit in well with the current inter-religious dialogue as commonly perceived. Its conclusion that no one is to force his or her claim until "a thousand, thousand years" have passed and that all are to proceed on the basis of equality, with none forcing his or her ideas on the other appears similar to the practice of joint discussion and common action.

That perception is fatally flawed however, if one is to be able to speak of dialogue in any meaningful way. In fact, the Parable grants to everyone the freedom to believe that he or she is in possession, and perhaps sole possession,

of the Truth, which will become apparent after the 'thousand, thousand years.' It also introduces the element, however, that everyone must be prepared to accept the possibility that, in fact, his or her belief may not be the Truth, in which case we will collectively have spent the thousands of years in Error.

This scientific, Enlightenment-spawned, doubt-based position is, in fact, contrary to the stated objectives of the current dialogue, where each believing community is invited to contribute to the collective religious feast on a basis of equality. Every faith, the dialogue presumes, has something to contribute, in contrast to the Parable's position that only one will be found to be right if we only wait long enough. Even the Roman Catholic position, often felt to be against dialogue, states that there is 'that which is holy' in other religions.

Only the humility of Lessing's Saladin, who perceives that he is not able to judge the result, may have something in the way of the present dialogue, where conscious humility in regards to other believers is the order of the day.

Having discarded what is commonly thought to be the heart of *Nathan the Wise*, however, we have not completely dispensed with Lessing. For he has provided us along the way with a model that more closely resembles the current dialogue

The first example of this model takes place before the play actually begins, when the Templar rescues Rachel from the flames. Faith did not enter into his calculation, and yet he acted according to a morality that states that human life is valuable, that the weak must be protected, and that honour should guide one's conduct. This we may typify as an unconscious model as he did not formulate it as a position in regards to Rachel in particular, or Jews in general, before he acted.

An extension and philosophical defence of the model is provided by Nathan, himself, in his discussion with the Templar:

Templar: I must confess,

you know just how the Templars ought to

think.

Nathan: Templars alone? and merely ought? and

merely,

Because the Order's rules command it so? I know how good men think; I know as well

That all lands bear good men.

Templar: But different,

You grant?

Nathan: Oh yes: in color, dress, and shape.

Templar: And more or less in one land than the

other.

(...)

Nathan: O come, we must,

We must be friends!—Disdain my folk, as

much

as ever you will. For neither one has

chosen

His folk. Are we our folk? What is a folk?

Are Jew and Christian sooner Jew and

Christian

Than man? How good, if I have found in

you

One more who is content to bear the

name of man!<sup>285</sup>

Here we see what appears to be a closer reflection of the status of the current dialogue. The enmity apparently caused by the different beliefs is set aside and, in recognition of a common humanity, friendship results.

Here Nathan asserts, and Van Stauffen agrees, that one's religion comes from one's culture, with the unspoken implication that he who is born a Christian could as easily have been born a Jew and vice-versa.

Appearances can be deceiving, however, and the relationship that has developed is, in fact, the opposite of what the current dialogue is seeking, in form if not in substance.

The inter-religious dialogue as conducted in the modern age seeks not to locate the common humanity of the participants, but their shared spirituality and the religious contribution that each makes to the whole. It seeks to unite the powers concentrated by faith rather than those that flow out of humanity. The purpose of the dialogue, however, and the purpose of the friendship that Nathan offers and Von Stauffen accepts do have something in common: by setting aside their differences, they are at the least able to act jointly and positively. At best, this can be considered an a religious solution, one step removed from the anti-religious potential suggested by Von Stauffen when he notes:

But when and where has pious frenzy, claiming The better god, intent on forcing him Upon the world at large, revealed himself in blacker form than here, and now?

In support of that statement, whenever someone acts out of religious motives in *Nathan*, evil is either the motivation or the result. The Orthodox Patriarch of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>285</sup> Nathan the Wise, Act II, Scene 5.

Jerusalem, for example, tries to enlist Von Stauffen to kill Saladin. The same Patriarch also tries to hunt down Nathan—though he doesn't know whom he should be hunting—for the sin of not raising Rachel as a Christian, or as a believer in any faith. When acting out of his Christian faith, Von Stauffen expresses nothing but hatred and contempt. It is only when religious allegiance is put on hold that the actors are able to allow their humanity to shine through.

Lessing's intent is noble, and not entirely dissimilar from that of Nicholas of Cusa: religious peace on Earth, or at least a cessation of hostilities among the believing communities. His method, however, is one of suspending one's religious truth, of ignoring it in relations with individuals with other beliefs and proceeding solely on the basis of humanity.

That constitutes a modification of the probable inspiration for the parable of the rings, the Koran itself. As a responsible artist, Lessing had delved into the Koran in a German translation by G. Sale.<sup>286</sup> There he would have encountered several Suras referring specifically to the question not of suspension of Truth, but of waiting for the Final Judgement of Allah on who was right. See further, for example, Koran, Sura 5:48: We have ordained a law and assigned a path for each of you. Had Allah pleased, He could have made you one nation: but it is His wish to prove you by that which He has bestowed upon you. Vie with each other in good works, for to Allah you shall all return and He will declare to you what you have disagreed about."<sup>287</sup>

In Lessing's model, conflict is to be avoided, leading to social integration at the level of the individual in society. Exclusivism, leading to the rejection of the Other, is suspended, but not cancelled. Is Lessing inclusivist or exclusivist? Although arguments can be made for both positions, the stronger case has to be made for the exclusivist at a theological level: one day we shall know which Truth is true, but that is not granted to us today. Lessing's inclusivism remains firmly grounded in social intercourse.

While this does present a viable solution to the problem, it does not do so in such a way that allows one's religious faith to act as a positive element in the relationship that develops. It asks, in fact, that one's religious faith be suspended and taken out of the equation. As such, it appears to fail a crucial test in the present inquiry, which is to identify the theological rather than the humanistic use and application of the inter-religious dialogue.

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>286</sup> See Kuschel, Karl-Josef, *Jud, Christ und Muselmann vereinigt? Lessings 'Nathan der Weise'*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag GmbH & Co) 2004. P. 220.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>287</sup> Dawood, N.J., *The Koran*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Classics) p. 393.

## XI. Review

Having identified some of the defining characteristics of models of dialogue in the first part of this study and having examined some major writers on the subject in the second part, is it now possible to determine where the writers that have been discussed fit? Even though the writers predate the theories by several hundreds of years, I believe that it is possible.

### **The Apologists**

The Apologists, alone of all those we have looked at in that they were writing from a position of weakness, have a dual model, one directed at the corridors of power and one at the pagans that surrounded them.

From the former, they were seeking a *modus vivendi* in order to continue and grow. From the latter, they were seeking conversion. They wanted therefore to reject without being rejected, with the ultimate goal of becoming the dominant or even the only faith of empire.

Their model can therefore best be characterised as:

# Exclusive-rejecting leading to conquest at both the macro and the micro levels.

The Truth of their own position was, for them, so overwhelmingly obvious that no others had anything positive to contribute. Anything positive in other faiths, such as the Greek worship of the Invisible God commented on by the apostle Paul, was simply foreshadowing, or a weak echo of the one Christian Truth. To avoid eternal damnation, both individuals and societies needed to see the Error of their ways and the Truth of Christianity. Partial solutions incorporating something of the others were totally unacceptable.

## Pierre Abelard

Relations among the religions of Abelard's world were not much different than would later be the case when Nicholas of Cusa would write. In Europe, Christianity was incontestably dominant, though with an entrenched Muslim presence in the Iberian peninsula. The First Crusade was still in the near future and the fall of Constantinople more than a century, and for Abelard, the threat of Islam must have seemed very small indeed.

Of far more interest were the works of the philosophers of antiquity, especially Plato and, even more, Aristotle. And it was to these that Abelard directed his attention in the Collationes. For Abelard, Christianity was the extension and replacement for Judaism, both of which could be brought to bear against the

pagan philosophers. One may reasonably wonder whom Abelard was arguing against. His ultimate goal cannot be in doubt, however. It was conversion...the acknowledgement by the philosopher (he had given up on the Jew entirely) that Christianity was the superior *philosophy* and any reasonable person should adopt it. The fact that the debate in the Collationes remains unfinished may give one cause for thought, but the general thrust of his intent is set out quite clearly.

One could summarise Abelard's model as:

# Exclusive-rejecting, mission oriented leading to conversion at the micro level.

For Abelard, as with the apologists, there was only one True Faith, Christianity, and all others led to damnation. Christianity was also the most reasonable faith, and anyone who spent any time thinking about it properly, in the true spirit of searching, could not help but come to the conclusion that that was the case. It was the responsibility of the Christian to transport that message to each individual heathen searcher with the objective of saving their souls. The one inclusivist element in Abelard's dialogue, is the acknowledgement that all men find themselves in God's universe; even more strongly, in God, in whom the universe resides.

#### Nicholas of Cusa

The inter-religious constellation facing Nicholas of Cusa can best be described, following Panikkar, as one of 'rejection and conquest.' The two faiths that Nicholas was most concerned with were Christianity and Islam, both of which were (and, to greater or lesser degrees, are) convinced of their own Truth at the expense of the other. Moving to the second model component, mutual perceptions, one could say that both Christianity and Islam of the time were convinced that the Other was unclean and needed to be convinced of that fact and converted or be eradicated. The Other had no participation in the Truth.

Nicholas's motivation for wanting to enter into the dialogue was, if we are to take him at his word, and we have no reason not to, the fall of Constantinople and the ongoing inter-religious hostilities. And his objective was to create a state of peace among the religions, not only between Christianity and Islam, but expanded to include all the religions that he knew at the time, with the exception perhaps of Christian heretics.

Nicholas's dialogue form transcended human participation and went directly to a form of lecturing by the Word, Peter and Paul. Nicholas, then, does not propose any form of human inter-religious dialogue at all, perhaps feeling that the matter was too complex for humans to be successful.

Nicholas's solution of the problem may seem to some to be exclusivist, with Christianity replacing all the others. In my view, however, I think it could

reasonably be characterised as inclusive, inasmuch as Nicholas's conclusion is that all religions contain elements that have been brought to completion in Christianity, if they would only recognise that.

To summarise Nicholas's dialogue model, we could refer to it as:

# Inclusive/co-existence-oriented, conflict resolving leading to peace at the macro level.

Nicholas believed that there had been revelation in other faiths, but that all revelation, if followed to its logical conclusion, leads to a Truth which Christianity is closest to, even if not yet in full possession of. That recognition of the commonality of the faiths that lead all people to yearn for the Good that is God, was reason for Nicholas to plead for peace among the religions and peace among nations. It was no longer necessary to eradicate the unbeliever, merely to help him to recognise the ultimate result of the faith he already held. Christianity becomes the *primes inter pares*, but no longer the sole possessor of the Truth.

## **Gotthold Ephraim Lessing**

Lessing's concerns were far less geopolitical than Nicholas's, and went to the individual *casu quo* his friend and colleague Moses Mendelssohn before extrapolating to the group, specifically the Jews. The Jews were being treated inhumanely and contrary to the principles of the Enlightenment, and that needed to stop.

The mutual perception of the two religions concerned was one of mutual contempt. For the Christians of Lessing's Germany, Jews were really, physically unclean, as well as having been spiritually befouled by their failure to recognise Jesus' divinity and having killed him. For the Jews, the Christians simply were evil, oppressing them and not living up to the Gospel.

Lessing's motivation was, therefore, the poor conditions for the Jews and their treatment at the hands of Christians and the officially Christian state.

His objective, then, was to bring them into the Enlightenment and the mainstream of German and European life.

Lessing, however, does not provide a simple answer to the question of inclusivism vs exclusivism. The Parable of the Rings, for example, is exclusivist, though we will have to wait until the final judgement to know who was right. His working, pragmatic solution, however, is to suspend the question and to get along first as humans. In that, he is inclusivist. His preferred form of dialogue reflects that: one on one relations between individuals, not groups or institutional religions.

A summary of Lessing's model might read:

Suspended exclusivism-rejection, conflict avoiding leading to integration at the micro level.

Lessing seems quite content to let believers hold on to their religions, as long as it did not interfere with the day-to-day business of co-existence. Conflict was to be avoided on the basis of shared humanity, leaving religion out of the equation as much as possible. Even when forced into dealing with the issue of Truth in the confrontation with Saladin, Lessing's Nathan prefers to avoid it entirely rather than engaging in a religious contest that was unbalanced in terms of power relationships and objectives and could only lead to trouble.

## XII. Initial conclusions

Whatever else the writers described above are involved in, in terms of their own religious practice, when it comes to dialogue, they all fall neatly, intentionally or otherwise, into one of the four models we had identified earlier, and curiously, it is not one of the explicitly religious ones.

The position of the apologists, that all must give way before the overwhelming blinding shaft of Truth that is Christianity, has long since been abandoned by Christian participants in dialogue, though not in equal measure. Regardless of whether they believe that other faiths contain some elements of the 'true and the holy', Christian dialogue participants have put aside the call to active mission and proseletysation in favour of explorations of what binds humanity in their common search for truth

The same applies to Abelard's logical conclusion that reasonable people must come to see the simple superiority of Christianity through reason. Even if that is true, the dialogue participants, within the context of the dialogue at any rate, are not engaged in demonstrating that superiority to their fellow participants. Each may bring his own contribution, which will be viewed without prejudice and which others will try to see from the Other's point of view, from inside.

Nicholas of Cusa's search for common ground in the unity in diversity of practice, does bear some resemblance to some elements of the philosophy of the dialogue today. There may be something 'true and holy' in the Other and we are required to find that and cherish it. So, too, the emphasis on Christianity as the most perfect of the extant faiths, even if not perfect itself, can be seen in the dialogues of some participants, but it is not one that leads immediately to a move to mission. Nicholas's solution falls out of contention, however, when the structure of his dialogue is put under examination. His dialogue is no dialogue among believers but a submission to the revealed will of God.

The model that most closely resembles the current state of inter-religious dialogue seems to be Lessing's. Not the model of the Parable of the Ring, for none of these participants is willing, or even if willing, able to suspend his or her own claims to Truth.

Lessing's other model, however, in which Nathan and the Knight Templar agree to leave off challenging each other's claim to Truth and deal with each other first and foremost as humans, bears more than a passing resemblance to the situation as it obtains today in most inter-religious dialogue.

As it turns out, that may be just as well. For dealing with the issues that the participants have identified as the prime motivation for most of the dialogues—

war, poverty, exploitation, environmental issues, the threat of nuclear, chemical or biological destruction, etc., etc.—even when there is a strong religious component, such as, for example, in India, where Hindus and Muslims face these issues daily, seems to be most successful when Lessing's model of humanity is followed rather than, for example, Nicholas of Cuss's model of uniformity.

In the next chapter, I shall look at some recent research that demonstrates that point, and then examine the question of the consequences for inter-religious dialogue.

## XIII. Hindus and Muslims: a suitable case for study

One of the main arguments used by those who are heavily involved with interreligious dialogue is that it will promote better relations in our streets, our cities, our countries and our world. If we find an open space in which to meet and 'truly listen' to the religious Other, we will, first, stop being cruel to one another and, second, be able to work together for the good of all.

Even apart from the fact that, as noted above, this is not a theological objective, but may more properly be seen to be best counted as a not-unimportant, but secondary one, seen from the point of view of religions' core business, it appears that, although the absence of any support in daily reality or headlines for that position seems to have dampened the enthusiasm of its adherents only slightly, recent research demonstrates that, in order to achieve what those involved in inter-religious dialogue say is one of their major motivations for participating, we may have to ignore the religious element entirely and find whatever assistance we need in the Civil Society.

As evidenced by the selection of readings that we have examined earlier, we can state that religious-oriented political and social unrest is not a recent invention. Nor is it, however, contrary to common and oft-stated belief, an invention of the Christian or of the Muslim world.

As long ago as 800 B.C.E., the Athenians were reassuring the Spartans that their common religious heritage made them logical allies against the hated Persians, who worshipped different gods.<sup>288</sup>

That may well be or have been so in a situation where nations stand against nations, or, as Huntington would have it, civilisations stand against civilisations, but what of those situations—such as India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, the Philippines and Indonesia—where two or more major, though not necessarily equal, blocks of believers live in the same towns and streets in what Huntington refers to a 'cleft countries' torn between two civilisations? Who is then your ally and who your enemy? Can a Muslim live in peace with a Hindu?

If one were to go solely from the newspaper headlines, one's initial response to the previous question would have to be in the negative. It seems quite clear

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>288</sup> Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* (London: The Free Press), 2002, p. 42.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 137-138.

that India is proof that, as the Dutch say: 'two faiths on one pillow: the Devil sleeps between them.'

Is that so, however?

Ashutosh Varshney, associate professor of political science at the University of Michigan, has conducted an innovative study into the Indian situation.<sup>290</sup> Initially motivated by an outbreak of the international inter-religious and intercivilisational conflict and violence related to<sup>291</sup> the predominantly Muslim state of Jammu and Kashmir in India—a source of discord between both India and Pakistan and between Indian Muslims and the Indian state—Varshney then expanded his inquiry to cover all of India and the relations between Hindus and Muslims in the sub-continent.

In his search to "understand the sources of communal violence," Varshney wanted to identify "why Hindus and Muslims had riots in some parts of India, but [...] conducted their lives reasonably peacefully in others."<sup>292</sup>

The puzzle, as Varshney formulates it, is that "[d]espite ethnic<sup>293</sup> diversity, some places—regions, nations, towns or villages—manage to remain peaceful, whereas others experience enduring patterns of violence. Similarly, some societies, after maintaining a veritable record of ethnic peace, explode in ways that surprise [...]. Variations across time and space constitute an unresolved puzzle in the field of ethnicity and nationalism."

The standard methodology for approaching this problem, Varshney says, is to study the commonalities of the violent situations.<sup>295</sup> This, he feels, in inadequate inasmuch as it fails to account for those situations which share all the commonalities of the violence, except for the violence. The question then arises of how to explain the lack of violence where it doesn't occur.

To resolve this shortcoming, Varshney proposes to include a study of ethnic peace to complement the studies of ethnic violence in order to arrive at a well-rounded theory.

The key of the new methodology was to discover the variance, the element that was different between violent and peaceful communities and that therefore could account for the difference in inter-ethnic relations.

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>290</sup> Varshney, Ashutosh, *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India*, Second Edition, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press) 2002

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>291</sup> Varshney, and Nelson Mandela in 1960, for that matter, insist on the distinction between the two. Though violence without conflict cannot be, conflict without violence most certainly can.

<sup>-</sup> Ibid., p. xiv

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>293</sup> Varshney defines 'ethnic' as any *ascriptive* group identity, including religious.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>294</sup> Ibid., pp 5-6.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>295</sup> Ibid., p. 6

The next question became the level of granularity, national, state, regional, town, village, neighbourhood, etc.

An analysis of reports of rioting and deaths in rioting over a period of 45 years (1950-1995), showed that, contrary to popular belief, rioting and ethnic violence was a highly localised affair.

Although nearly 70% of Indians live in rural settings, only 4% of deaths in communal violence occurred there.<sup>296</sup> Conclusion: Hindu-Muslim violence is primarily an urban phenomenon.

Within the urban group, however, there is also disparity. Eight cities (Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Hyderabad, Meerut, Aligarh, Baroda, Delhi and Calcutta), though they represent only 18% of India's urban population, account for 49% of all urban deaths. Eighty-two per cent of the urban population, has "not been riot-prone'.<sup>297</sup>

All states, even states containing violent cities, had far more peaceful municipalities than violent ones. The level of granularity, therefore, should be the town, Varshney concluded.

In search of the variance, therefore, Varshney chose six cities, three from the list of eight riot-prone cities and three peaceful ones, and paired them up.

Pairs were decided, first, on the basis of roughly similar Hindu-Muslim percentages in the city and second, on other factors that the cities in the pair shared in common.

The pairs were Aligarh and Calicut, Hyderabad and Lucknow and Ahmedabad and Surat.

The reason for selecting the similarity in demographic proportions as the minimum control was due to the nature of political discourse in India, in which the "the size of the [ethnic] community is considered to be highly significant."<sup>298</sup>

The conclusion that Varshney came to, and which will be set out in more detail below, was that "the pre-existing local networks of civic engagement between the two communities stand out as the single most important *proximate* (italics Varshney's. DS) cause. Where such networks of engagement exist, tensions and conflicts were regulated and managed; where they are missing, communal identities led to endemic and ghastly violence."

Varshney breaks 'local networks of civic engagement' down into two types, associational and quotidian.

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>297</sup> Ibid., p. 6-7.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>298</sup> Ibid., p. 8

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>299</sup> Ibid., p. 9

In associational engagements, members of the two communities meet in nonstate associations, including, but not limited to, trade unions, reading clubs, entrepreneurs associations, film appreciation clubs, festival associations and sports clubs.

Quotidian relationships are such things as encountering one's neighbours in the street, members of the two communities eating dinner at one another's houses, children playing together, etc.

Varshney concludes that "[b]oth forms of engagement, if robust, promote peace; contrariwise, their absence or weakness opens up space for communal violence. Of the two, the associational forms turn out to be sturdier than everyday engagement, especially when people are confronted with the attempts by politicians to polarise ethnic communities."300

Varshney identifies two links between civic life and ethnic conflict.

The first is "prior and sustained contact between members of different communities [which] allows communication between them to moderate tensions and pre-empt violence, when such tensions arise owing to an exogenous shock [...]. In cities of thick interaction between different communities, peace committees at the time of tension emerge from below [italics Varshney's. DS] in various neighbourhoods; the local administration does not have to impose such committees on the entire city from above [idem]. Such highly decentralised tension-managing organisations kill rumours, remove misunderstandings, and often police neighbourhoods. If prior communications across communities does not exist, such organisations do not emerge from below."301

The second link is the existence of associational integration: "If unions, business associations, middle class associations of doctors and lawyers, film clubs of poorer classes, and at least some cadre-based parties are integrated, even an otherwise mighty politician-criminal nexus is unable to rupture existing links. Everyday engagement in the neighbourhoods may not be able to stand up to the marauding gangs protected by powerful politicians, but the organised strength of unions, associations and the integrated cadres of some political parties—those not interested in ethnic conflict—constitute a formidable obstacle for even politically shielded gangs."302

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>300</sup> Ibid., pp 3-4.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>301</sup> Ibid., pp 46-47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>302</sup> Ibid., p 47. I note here that some of the elements that Varshney refers to do not necessarily apply to every instance of inter-ethnic conflict outside India. He, too, acknowledges that there may be differences in other circumstances (i.e. Northern Ireland, the United States), and welcomes other researchers to continue in other countries along the line he has set out to further the science of peace studies as he has defined them.

## City pairs

# **Aligarh and Calicut**

Varshney begins the delineation of the similarities between the two cities of Aligarh and Calicut by noting that both cities are respected centres of Muslim learning.

Aligarh is home to the Muslim University (AMU), which is "a symbol of the educational and political aspirations of a critical mass of Indian Muslims." Calicut is "the centre of culture and education for Kerala Muslims (...) It is the headquarters of several leading Muslim institutions and organisations: the Muslim League, the Muslim Educational Society and the Muslim Service Society. (...) The Calicut University was especially set up to make higher education accessible to Muslims of the area.

The similarities continue: "(...) starting in the 1970s, both cities have developed a substantial Muslim middle class." Muslims from both Aligarh and Calicut migrated to the Middle East "in large numbers after the oil price increases of 1973." And finally, the Muslim population of the two cities is quite similar: approximately 35% in Aligarh since 1951 and approximately 37% in Calicut.

The question then arises as to why the city of Calicut enjoys an almost total lack of inter-communal violence while Aligarh "is among the most riot-prone cities of India."

Varshney posits two possibilities that might at least partially explain the differences:

First, that the two communities in Calicut are deeply engaged in the civic environment. This "makes it hard for politicians to play the politics of religious polarisation." Even parties that successfully exploit communal differences in, for example, Aligarh, such as the Hindu nationalist party, BJP, are unable, even when they try, to foster animosity in Calicut. 305

In Aligarh, by contrast, both BJP leaders and Muslim leaders use communal polarisation as a principle political strategy, with violence often a part of the calculations.  $^{306}$ 

A second important distinction relates to the historical development of the two cities in regard to intra-Hindu relations.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid., p. 121

\_

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>303</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>305</sup> Ibid., p. 121-122

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>306</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

The dominant political stream in Calicut related to Hindu caste issues rather than Hindu-Muslim issues. The politics of today continues along those lines with more inter-caste than inter-religious tension. In Aligarh, where "a declining Muslim aristocracy, part of the ruling class in pre-British times, was unable to come to terms with a framework of political participation that relied on elections, not nominations and quotas. Rather than accepting the egalitarian implications of democratic rule, the former Muslim aristocrats wanted to protect their privileges, to which the rising Hindu middle classes were opposed."307

When tensions from outside the cities explode, as during the 1989-1992 period when Hindu nationalists agitated to destroy the Baburi mosque in Ayodhya, the two cities react differently.

In Calicut, "all (italics Varshney's. DS) political parties, including the Muslim League and BJP, supported the local administration's efforts to maintain law and order. The city-level peace committees, formed with the participation of political leaders, were the key tension-management device," and the press also played a great part in guashing rumours that would have fanned the flames.

In Aligarh, by way of great contrast, "horrendous violence" broke out and the local press went out of its way to encourage it, printing "blatant falsehoods in order to incite passions."308 Furthermore, "Aligarh's remarkably fragile local mechanisms of peace were insufficient to deal with the situation, as they had repeatedly been in the past fifteen years." And criminals with connections to the communal politicians and the communal press were able to kill without being called to account. Effective city-wide peace committees could not be formed because "it was difficult to get the BJP and Muslim politicians together."

In Calicut, on the other hand, the politicians were crucial to promoting peace and, perhaps even more important, peace committees, which provided levels of communication and information all the way down to neighbourhood level, provided a non-violent outlet for people's anger, becoming a central part of the "constructive enterprise in Calicut." 309

Varshney's explanation for the difference in the responses of the two cities is based on their inter-communal relationships:

In Calicut, for example, nearly 83% of Hindus and Muslims often eat together in social settings, compared with only 54% in Aligarh. In Calicut, 90% of families report that their children play together, compared with only 42% of Aligarh

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>307</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>308</sup> Ibid., p. 123.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>309</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

children. Nearly 84% of Hindus and Muslims in Calicut visit one another regularly. In Aligarh, only 60% visit, and then infrequently.<sup>310</sup>

Associationally, the differences are even starker. In Calicut, clubs of all kinds, both religious and non-religious, abound. And there is a great deal of "interreligious interaction in non-denominational organisations."

Economically, Calicut is highly dependent on trade, rather than manufacturing, and an "overwhelming proportion of these traders were members of trade associations." Many of these trade organisations drew their membership from the various religions and "in 1995, as many as 11 of 26 trade associations (...) had Hindu, Muslim and Christian officeholders."

Aligarh, on the other hand, has a slightly different economy, with a manufacturing base in locks. The trade association representing these usually small manufacturers consciously chose to actively engage in politics, in contrast with Calicut, which has a non-politics rule to prevent division. As a result, a separate trade association for the religious and for the secular grew up. The supporters of the religious organisation supported the BJP; Muslim traders joined the secular group. 312

The distinction continues at the employee level. Industrial Aligarh has few unions, and thus few union halls where workers from the different communities could meet and interact. Commercial Calicut has a vibrant trade union community and membership based on workers' perception of which organisation will get them a better deal rather than on community issues.

In less formal contacts, where relationships are not imposed by the work one does but by one's own interests, the differences become even starker.

Calicut, which enjoys the highest level of literacy in all India, also has a wide variety of social clubs: reading clubs, film clubs, science societies, theatres, etc. which have both Hindus and Muslims as members.<sup>313</sup> In Aligarh, the numbers of such are considerably lower.

In short, where people get together in both formal and informal non-State settings, they develop relationships of trust that transcend communalism and provide a buffer for those times when the situations threaten to explode. In municipalities, such as Aligarh, where those networks do not exist, neither does the buffer.

-

<sup>310</sup> Ibid., 126-27.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>311</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>312</sup> Ibid., 128.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid., p. 129

## **Hyderabad and Lucknow**

The next pair of cities shares similarities with Aligarh and Calicut, in both its peace and its violent history.

Hyderabad is here the more violent of the two, with a record of repeated violence since 1938, propelling it to a prominent position in the list of most violent cities and leading to the development of "an institutionalised riot system—connecting politicians, criminals, parts of the local administration, and the press." Lucknow, on the other hand, has managed to avoid violence leading to fatalities even through the "two biggest nation-wide shocks in the century: India's partition in 1947 and the demolition of the Baburi mosque in December 1992 in Ayodhya."

Demographically, Hyderabad and Lucknow have minority Muslim populations (approximately 36% and 29% respectively). At the level of elites, there is significant integration between Hindus and Muslims. In Hyderabad, however, the integration does not filter down to the masses living in the inner cities. In Lucknow, integration is pervasive at the level of both the elites and the masses.

Another similarity is that in Hyderabad, as in Aligarh, the dominant political antagonisms are between Hindus and Muslims. In Lucknow, as in Calicut, the dominant divisions are within one of the two religions. While in Calicut, the divisions were among the Hindus along caste lines, in Lucknow, it is the Muslim Sunni-Shia divide that dominates.<sup>314</sup>

Economically, the two cities are even more different than Aligarh and Calicut are. The dominant sector in Lucknow is embroidering clothing. In that sector, Hindus and Sunni Muslims are strongly represented, giving them an integrated contact that the Sunnis and Shi'ites, for example, do not share.

The Hindus tend to be the owners of the businesses, and the Muslims the contract or piece workers.<sup>315</sup> That also adds a level of inter-dependency and symbiosis: if inter-religious or inter-ethnic violence broke out, the economy of the whole city would collapse.

Hyderabad, by contrast, is a city with a much more advanced economy. There are several large industries, but no economic symbiosis.

And in the small to medium enterprise (SME) sector, even clients and vendors divide along ethnic lines, thus preventing the development of another potential zone of contact.<sup>316</sup>

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>314</sup> Ibid., pp. 172-73

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>315</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 180

This largely economic interaction model continues in times of stress. In Lucknow, the relationships of trust lead automatically to the formation of neighbourhood peace committees from below. In Hyderabad, peace committees, when needed, are imposed on the community from above by the local administration. The Hyderabad strategy tends often to fail, primarily because the local political leadership of the BJP and the Muslim party hate each other and are already "committed to a political strategy of polarisation." 317

### **Ahmedabad and Surat**

This final city pair looks at the very critical question of how two historically peaceful communities can degenerate into violent ones.

Ahmedabad and Surat share some characteristics with the other city pairs: the Muslim population consistently between 12% and 15% since the independence of India in 1947, and different patterns of inter-communal violence, with Ahmedabad being the victim of endemic violence<sup>318</sup> and Surat being peaceful, with one notable exception.

These two cities are also the most tightly controlled, being in the same state, in contrast with the other pairs, which were north-south matches. Furthermore, the political context for Ahmedabad and Surat has been the same for both for nearly two centuries, which cannot be said of the other two pairs.

The comparison of the violence in the two cities goes back as far as the 1920s and the introduction of national politics by Gandhi. Gujarat, the state where both of the cities are located, was also Gandhi's home state. There was thus extra pressure on Gujarat to serve as the shop window from which to display to the rest of India and the world what India could become.

Gandhi and his Congress Party cohorts not only built a cadre-based political organisation, "which succeeded as mass-level organisation to an extraordinary degree," but they also formed "labour unions and a whole variety [of] organisations for social change.

Between 1920 and 1947, while "there were many provocations and occasions for big riots in the two cities (...) the large array of civic associations, consisting of political, business, and social organisations, either successfully pre-empted communal rioting or controlled its spread." <sup>319</sup>

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., p. 220

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>317</sup> Ibid., p. 203

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>319</sup> Ibid., p. 222

More recently, however, those tightly knit ties that bind the communities together, have "become quite fragile of late. Its capacity to resist and neutralise the riot-entrepreneurs has decreased."

The role of Gandhi in this discussion is quite crucial, especially in the context of the current inter-religious inquiry. Gandhi made Hindu-Muslim peaceful coexistence a key element of his politics. To the extent that he succeeded, however, it appears that it was not on the basis of some idealistic mantra, but the result of a conscious effort to integrate the two communities, multiplying the points of contact so they were at least touching if not always embracing. The violence, when it came, seems to have been the result of the disintegration of those points of contact.

Surat's peaceful coexistence lasted longer, until 1992 and the burning of the Baburi mosque. Five days of riots in the city ended with 197 people killed, of whom 175 were Muslims. "Of the many riots that broke out in the aftermath of the Baburi mosque demolition, only Bombay's violence surpassed the brutality, arson and plunder witnessed in Surat."

In both cities, there were changes in the four key elements at work in the state and the cities--cadre-based political parties, Gandhian voluntary associations, business associations and labour unions.

Politically, the Congress Party decline and the rise of the Hindu nationalist BJP were felt in both cities equally.

The same can be said of the voluntary associations, the Gandhian associations declined, while Hindu nationalist organisations rose.

Labour unions declined in strength, but to varying degrees: in Ahmedabad they only lost strength, in Surat, they collapsed entirely.

The biggest difference, however, was in the business associations, which declined in Ahmedabad, but increased in strength in Surat.

And when push came to shove, it seems to have been that slight difference which spared Surat to the degree that it did in 1992.

Ahmedabad on the other hand, has had a regular history of problems. Beginning in the 1980s, "Ahmedabad had riots with alarming frequency: January 1982, March 1984, March-July 1985, January, March and July 1986, January, February and November 1987, April, October, November and December 1990, January, March, and April 1991 and January and July 1992." 321

But since Surat, too, has had seriously violent arguments, does that not negate the arguments that Varshney has been making so far. It appears not,

-

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 239

<sup>321</sup> Ibid.

### inter-religious dialogue

because a major contributing factor to Surat's violence was the presence of many new immigrants in the shantytowns, hard workers who worked six and seven days a week 12 hours a day, leaving no time for interacting with members of any other communities. And when the rioting started, it was limited to those shantytowns and did not penetrate the old city, where the inertia of the good relations of the past held.

#### Conclusions

Although even Varshney says that the road of inquiry that he has opened up must still be travelled by other researchers in other countries—the United States, Northern Ireland, etc.—indications are that he has stumbled onto a key element of inter-religious, inter-communal, inter-ethnic, inter-Civilisational peace. The more integrated communities are, regardless of their inter-religious ties and relations, the stronger they will be in resisting temptations to attack the Other for ills real or imagined.

### Relevance to dialogue

What does that mean for this present inquiry? It may very well mean that interreligious dialogue, with its emphasis on improving relations among peoples, among classes and among religions, is not necessary, is not necessary in its present form, or is even harmful to its own project by drawing attention to what divides rather than what binds.

It also means that cooperation between and among religious communities for other ethnically based projects, whether that is fighting poverty or working for the environment, human rights or any number of other projects may not be the result of inter-religious dialogue, but rather the motivation for it. Rather than dialogue leading to cooperation, cooperation, it seems, leads to dialogue.

It seems to me that it also means that the whole enterprise needs to be reexamined from its theological starting points to determine what the theological content of the dialogue is and/or should be.

# XIV. Where do we go from here?

The reasons why the inter-religious dialogue has had so little result from a theological perspective is quite straightforward: it hasn't been able to get off the ground. Literally. It has been almost entirely Earth-bound, trying to identify the elements that the religions share in this world.

All of the dialogue that has so far not resulted in syncretic creations – and much that has – has concentrated almost entirely on our common humanity and working together to make this world a better place and stop killing one another.

That is all fine and well as far as it goes, but the problem is that it doesn't go very far theologically. That is not too surprising, when one considers that on the dogmatic front there cannot be much unity without surrendering what each believer considers key.

A Christian cannot accept the Muslim belief that Jesus was not the Son of God. Nor can a Muslim accept a Christian denial of Mohammed's personal revelation.

Perhaps then we have to look elsewhere, remembering that "at the beginning, God created the *heavens* and the Earth." Perhaps we need to direct our attentions heavenward.

In some respects, this will be a problematic approach, inasmuch as the very concept of what the heavens are is subject to the same shifts in meaning and understanding as is everything that humanity turns its hand to.

From a, first, Jewish, and later, Christian perspective, the story of the heavens begins at the very beginning, with its creation simultaneous with the Earth.

Reflecting the knowledge, understanding and revelation available to the peoples of the Ancient Near East at the time, the heavens were initially described as waters held back from the Earth by a vault or dome, and the location of the sources of light. 323

The vault of the heavens was the domain of the birds and flying insects. Beyond that, the early Biblical writers were somewhat vague, leaving speculation in respect of the nature of the heavens for later writers and priests.

Such a view of heaven is not without its problems, as witness the oft-cited quote from cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin of the officially atheist Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, broadcasting from space in 1961 during the first manned space flight when he reported: "I don't see any God up here."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>322</sup> Gen. 1:1.

<sup>323</sup> Gen. 1:1-19

Those early heavens were part of a tri-partite whole comprising the Heavens above, the Earth in the middle and Sheol, the residence of the dead.

In that early view, the Heavens were occupied by the sky gods, Earth by living human beings and Sheol by the infernal gods and the dead. 324

That view was fine-tuned during the course of the development of the Hebrew Bible, banishing the sky gods and leaving the Heavens to JHWH, with the other components remaining more or less the same. 325

Throughout the time recorded in the Old Testament, the heavens received relatively little attention and mainstream Judaism right up to today tends to prefer to emphasise the world it knows by experience than the heavens of speculation. As the website Judaism 101 notes, however, "it is possible for an Orthodox Jew to believe that the souls of the righteous dead go to a place that is similar to the Christian heaven", 326 drawing on reference in the Torah to, inter alia, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob being "gathered to their fathers." 327

That rather simple view became more complicated over time and was far more complex at the time of the story of Jesus' crucifixion, where Jesus is first said to descend to Sheol, and then, with the thief on the cross next to Him, to "Paradise", prior to returning to Earth at the Resurrection, before returning to the Heavens at the time of the Ascension.

Through the Middle Ages, the hierarchical cosmology developed even further, with Dante Alighieri postulating a 10-part universe (see Figure 1) in The Divine Comedy, with the Earth at the lowermost point, and God at the uppermost. The intermediate layers were populated by various groups including Breakers of Vows, who were relegated to the Moon, Lovers on Venus, Theologians at the level of the Sun and so on.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>324</sup> McDannell, Colleen & Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A history,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1988, p.4.

http://www.iewfag.org/olamhaba.htm (2004)

Ibid.

Still later, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) devised a universe said to be based on his own personal experience of having visited Heaven, and consisting of five levels: Earth, the spirit world, Natural Heaven, Spiritual Haven and Celestial Heaven.

While Dante's view, shared by other medieval theologians, scientists and mystics, almost certainly a reflection of the prevailing Ptolomeic Earthcentric view of the world, in which the heavens shared physical space with the known universe with the Earth at its centre, a view which has been discounted astronomically in virtually all its parts,328 it does contain within it an important insight, which I shall explore further when I return to look at those models in more detail below.

The Jewish view is complicated by the concept of *Olam ha-ba*, the world to come, which can be interpreted as both the spiritual afterlife and

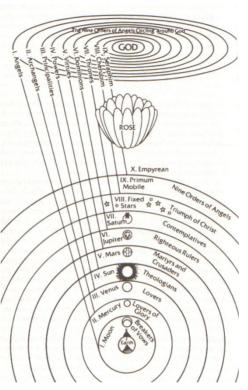


Figure 1: Dante Alighieri's celestial universe

the messianic age. But Heaven for Judaism is not an end-goal as it is in Christianity or in the Muslim Jannah, however. "Judaism is not focused on the question of how to get into heaven. Judaism is focused on life and how to live it." Ideally, mitzvoth, commandments, are not carried out for their potential of ensuring entry into Heaven, but "because it is our privilege and our sacred obligation to do so. We perform them out of a sense of love and duty, not out of a desire to get something in return." 330

\_

The remaining undiscounted element being the observation that, in an infinite universe, each individual point in it, including the Earth, must be the centre when viewed from that point. From a conversation between the author and Benjamin Suchard, 2002.

<sup>329</sup> iewfag.org.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

That contrasts sharply with the Christian view, whereby although carrying out God's will should also ideally be done out of love of God or Jesus, failing to do so will result in a punishment, traditionally referred to as going to Hell. Fulfilling the obligations, however, will ensure that one will get to heaven. Some will dispute this, citing the Pauline injunction against relying on the power of works, and the sole criterion being belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. 331 In practice, however, with the issuing of indulgences (a practice which has not yet completely disappeared in the Roman Catholic Church, witness the issuing of indulgences for visiting Rome during the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000<sup>332</sup>), the distinction between venal and mortal sins, and, in the first place, believing in Jesus as the Messiah as promoted by the Church as a prerequisite (extra ecclessiam nula salus) Christianity has certainly given the impression that there are things that one must do and others that one must not do, if one wants to get to Heaven.

The primary issue – how does one get to Heaven -- having been dealt with in Scripture and commentaries on it, most commentators have concentrated on the question of what Heaven is like, how is it organised, how do the inhabitants spend their time, and other questions of that nature.

Much of the early work draws on the work of the neo-Platonists, especially Philo of Alexandria, creating a world much like the Greek Elysian Fields. In Philo's vision, for example, death "restores the soul to its original pre-birth state.(...) the true philosopher's soul survives bodily death and assumes 'a higher existence immortal and incorporeal. (...) In heaven, the soul joins the incorporeal inhabitants of the divine world, the angels. In certain cases, it advances even higher and lives in the world of ideas. If it moves even higher, it can live with the Deity itself."333

As Christianity developed, however, the New Testament "eliminated the notion of compensation (...) [heaven became] the promise that Christians would be permitted to experience the divine fully."334 This had the result that, in contrast with the Jewish focus on living in the world, "the followers of Jesus rejected the world and focused their eyes on a future with God alone."335

What that future consisted of has shifted somewhat over the centuries. In the vision presented by the writer of Revelation, Heaven is rather like a constant liturgy, the ultimate in God-focus, with the assembled denizens of heaven

<sup>331</sup> cf. John 3:36; Matthew 25:41; John 14:1-3; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18;1 Corinthians 15, etc.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>332</sup> See Incarnationis Mysterium: Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000 (1998)

<sup>333</sup> McDannell, Colleen & Bernhard Lang, Heaven: A history, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1988, p. 17-18.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 23

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., p. 24

standing before the Throne of God in a perpetual act of worship,<sup>336</sup> with one's place in the throne room dependent on one's level of purity, twenty-four elders at the front, followed in descending order to the multitude of men and women at the back.<sup>337</sup>

The next stage of the development, represented by Irenaeus of Lyons, looked to Heaven to compensate for losses suffered during the first centuries of persecution, when the goodness of the world was withheld from the Christians by oppressive imperial forces.<sup>338</sup>

An alternate view was presented by, for example, the young Augustine of Hippo, who foresaw a continuation of the ascetic life, and still another view, developed by the elder Augustine as the threat to Christianity declined, saw it as an ecclesiastical community which was "more mundane, more human and less theocentric'. 340

With the fall of the Western Empire, and the development of the medieval world over a millennium and the beginnings of cities, heaven changed again, becoming an idealised metropolis, with beautiful buildings and lovely roadworks.

In keeping with the world developing around them, writers envisioned the heavenly Jerusalem, seven castles in the immediate area and some smaller fortresses round about<sup>341</sup>

"The popular medieval image of heaven included an urban and courtly leisured class, preoccupied with splendour, from beautiful clothes to magnificent architecture to splendid festivities. Worldly splendour was enhanced, glorified and made permanent. All with a clearly theocentric focus, however, retaining the 'liturgical focus of the book of Revelation.' 342

The rise of Scholasticism brought a new emphasis, and it became common now to wonder about the physical position of Heaven in the universe and the implications for that on the activities that took place there.

Drawing heavily on Aristotle, the Scholasticians conceived a universe "made of concentric spheres and levels"

The innermost region, consisting of "hell inside the Earth," gave way to progressive and increasingly perfect spheres leading to the outermost sphere, the firmament, beyond which lay heaven, divided into two levels. On the first

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., pp 42-43

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>336</sup> Ibid., pp. 39-41

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>338</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>339</sup> Ibid., p.48

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>340</sup> Ibid., p. 68.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>341</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>342</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

level, lived the angels and the blessed. At the uppermost level, however, dwelt the Holy Trinity.  $^{343}$ 

For Thomas Aquinas, this heaven was a place of extreme inaction, movement being an indication and promoter of 'both death and decay.'344

Over the centuries, however, others disagreed. Some saw heaven as a continuation of the godly works that were carried out on Earth. Still others as a place for reunion with loved ones, either lovers, spouses or children. Throughout these various heavens, and those which followed, a great deal of attention was paid to the degree to which the saints would interact with one another and with God. Questions of the relations with children, spouses, parents and others, as well as with God, Jesus and Mary, occupied the attentions of the theorists, academics, churchmen and laymen, to a great extent

These themes continued through the Reformation, Counter-Reformation, and into the modern, hyper-schismatic times, extending in to the point where some believers have created heavens for their dearly departed household pets.

At the time of the dawn of Modernism in Europe, with René Descartes, Immanuel Kant, Friederich Schleiermacher and others leading the charge and coinciding with the explosion of scientific knowledge in astronomy, genetics, archaeology, and so forth, the theologians' view of heaven began to change somewhat.

Detailed exposés of day-to-day celestial activities began to be less emphasised, and questions of whether one would encounter one's parents, children, friends and siblings began to take a back seat, inasmuch as they could not in any event be proved. Beliefs concerning the afterlife have been reduced "to a minimum in the hope of developing a more rational and hence a more acceptable and believable heaven." 345

Combined with a growing distaste and disbelief even among laypeople, theologians were faced with the quandary of how Heaven should be dealt with. Some opted for a symbolist solution, finding the "meaning of Christianity [not] on the surface of theological language to be easily read, but [...] deep within traditional religious images. To unlock the meaning of those symbols, though a difficult task, is the mark of true spiritual understanding."<sup>346</sup>

<sup>344</sup> Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>343</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>345</sup> Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>346</sup> Ibid., p. 327.

Others, beginning especially in the late 1800s and early 1900s, developed a more radical approach. Led by Walter Rauschenbusch, they developed what has become known as the Social Gospel.

The American Rauschenbusch felt that Christians "should concern themselves with the society in which they lived. [...] For Rauschenbusch and other activists in the Social Gospel movement, the Kingdom of God was not an idealised life in heaven but a reality which should be accomplished on Earth."<sup>347</sup>

Perfection was therefore, "not an individual goal accomplished after life but a social goal to be achieved on this earth. Heaven was not a reality of after death, but the symbol of a perfected world here and now."<sup>348</sup>

The proponents of both the Social Gospel and the more traditional eschatological heaven have been in my view rightly criticised from a theological perspective as supporting a non-Biblical separation of Heaven and Earth.

From both a pre-Christian Jewish perspective and an early Christian perspective, such a division does justice neither to the messianic expectation or to Christ's Kingdom of Heaven, which is *at hand*.

In an article in the theological periodical Concilium<sup>349</sup> in 1979, Christian Duquoc analyses the historical development of the separation and concludes that maintaining belief in that separation is to be "unfaithful to the orientation of the New Testament."<sup>350</sup>

Duquoc places the cause of the separation in the failure of the Christianisation of the Roman Empire, and the later collapse of that empire, which seemed to indicate that the promised Kingdom was not at hand.<sup>351</sup>

Furthermore, the elevation of the Church to the pre-eminent position within the Empire, first as official religion, later as Earthly potentate, served those who were able to exploit that position for their own ends.<sup>352</sup>

The result was the "expulsion of heaven, which ultimately acquired no more than a moral relationship to the Earth. Heaven became an object of individual reward that no longer had a connection with temporal existence." <sup>353</sup>

One way of dealing with this separation was the creation of a "sphere in which human domination arose." Heaven, then, became the antithesis of Earth. That

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>347</sup> Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>348</sup> Ihid

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>349</sup> Duquoc, Christian, "Heaven on Earth", in *Concilium*, Heaven issue (1979:3).

<sup>350</sup> McDannell & Lang, *Heaven*, p. 97.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>351</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>352</sup> Ibid., p. 90-91.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>353</sup> Ibid., p. 91-92.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>354</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

later became apparent in the Social Gospel, where humans were deemed responsible for creating heaven on Earth, but that that had little or nothing to do with heaven as such.

Those who were dissatisfied with what the Social Gospel implied also developed theologies, including process theology in the United States, and the work of the former Dominican Jacques Pohier.

Duquoc criticises these and other theologies for turning heaven into the opposite of Earth. He finds in them, however, an intuitive understanding of an important point: "that God's blessing begins here and now, and that the world here and now is given to humanity to serve as the place in which mankind can develop its happiness."355

The Heaven of Islam shares some similarities with that Christian view. Sura 2:29 of the Koran states, for example, that Allah created the Earth and then created seven Heavens in the skv. 356

The prophet Mohammed is said to have visited Heaven (referenced only once, in Sura 17:1 of the Koran, but expounded extensively in the commentary on the Koran, the Hadith – specifically in *Mishkatu 'I-Masabih*), being taken by the angel Gabriel first to the temple at Jerusalem and then through the seven stages of heaven, where he meets, in ascending order, Adam; John and Jesus; Joseph; Enoch: Aaron: Moses: and Abraham.

Some modern Muslim commentators, though, have expanded the numbers of heavens, as Jannah, exponentially, with everyone getting the Jannah that is appropriate to their level of spiritual development in Islam<sup>357</sup> and their desires.<sup>358</sup> For some that might mean simply "purely the closeness of Allah. For them a different type of Jannah is promised in the Holy Koran. (...) That is the highest type of Jannah."359

As to what goes on there, Islam is – all protestations from critics that it will be focussed on sex with virgins and young boys, and eating grapes notwithstanding purposefully vague. According to many commentators, modern and classical, everything is allegory, mathal in Arabic, and many Koran verses discussing

<sup>356</sup> N.J. Dawood, (trans.), *The Koran*, (Penguin Classics), p. 336

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>355</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>357</sup> Speech by the late Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, (as Khalifatul Masih V supreme head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Movement) in the London Mosque, 18 July, 1984. Available from http://www.askislam.com/Concepts/Heaven/Answer 161.html (2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>358</sup> Ibid.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>359</sup> Ibid.

heaven, and hell for that matter, are said to include the word *mathal* to indicate that it is allegory.<sup>360</sup>

Out of the images from Christianity, Judaism and Islam, then, we have models that share two elements:

- A hierarchical Reality including various degrees of purity and development
- 2. Communication and interaction among those degrees.

In all three of those religions, there are stories of inhabitants of one level travelling to another. Angels regularly make the crossing, to communicate to free Paul from prison, for example, to bind the mouth of the lions when Daniel was placed among them, to take Mohammed to the seven heavens.

The Reality that lies behind that concept can be conceived in a multitude of ways.

The simplest and most common is a simple division between the Heavens and the Earth.<sup>361</sup> Figure 2 illustrates that most simple of models.

The implication of that is that there is a clear distinction between the two parts of the reality, but that there is some communication and movement possible between them. That would, of course, only be possible if they shared a common Reality.

Another way of looking at it, however, shows that the physical universe is enclosed in and is therefore part of Heaven, as shown in Figure 3.

Heaven Earth

Even the newest Figure 2: Simple view of the division of Heaven and Earth. theories in the world of

physics take nothing away from that model, and even if it turns out that there are a near-infinite number of universes making up the multiverse (see Figure 4), it would still fall under the model shown in Figure 3, (next page) with a slight variation.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>360</sup> Khalifa, Dr. Rashad (trans.), Quran, The Final Testament, Appendix 5.( 1990)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>361</sup> Earth, of course, referring to the entire physical universe and not only to the 'little blue planet, third from the Sun'.



Figure 3: The Earth as a sub-set of the heavenly Reality.

Other, similar, models are possible, but they all contain within them that element of a shared Reality that, from a religious perspective, transcends the simply physical and envelops it or is in communication with it in some way.

It is that that can provide us with a starting point for giving the inter-religious dialogue a theological dimension and purpose without requiring the religions to surrender what is most dear to them.

It is important for the various religions to emphasise that the Reality that includes the Earth also

includes the Heavens. Any 'going to' involved with Heavens must therefore only be a transfer from one part of the Reality to another. If that is so, then it is incumbent upon us to not put off until that transfer takes place the conduct that will be expected of us when we get there.



Figure 4: A multiverse view of the heavenly - earthly Reality.

Because there is no 'there.' 'There' is also 'here.' An analogy of how that could be is provided by Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad during a speech he made in London in 1984.

"Like in one space, the waves are coexisting, the television waves are coexisting with each other and the radio waves, and with heat waves, and they're not interfering with each other, and they don't know each other's value. Yet the space allotted to each of them is the same. (...) When you begin to understand things of this nature, you begin to project this into a future, which is even finer in concept than the human imagination can ever reach."

There is, however, great disagreement among the religions as to what Heaven is, what will go on there, and what is required to get there. One element, however, that seems beyond dispute is that, whatever the details, it is the home of YHWH, Allah, God, gods, the One, etc., and therefore also the locus of all Truth and all Good. And, as shown above, it is part of our Reality. That gives, I believe a good starting point for the next phase of the inter-religious dialogue: what conduct is appropriate for the residents of the Heavens that we all now are?

Speech by the late Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, in the London Mosque, 18 July, 1984. Available from http://www.askislam.com/Concepts/Heaven/Answer 161.html (2004).

There are, of course, serious and significant dogmatic differences among and within the religions as to what heaven is and signifies. Discussing those will be a sign of whether it is even possible to hold a true dialogue in the spirit of David Bohm.

Adopting that line of inquiry and dialogue allows us to go to the heart of the core business of the religions, without requiring anyone to surrender his uniqueness. The transformation that Bohm requires of real dialogue will arise out of the new consciousness and awareness. Those who believe that the other religions are in error will not be forced to abandon their beliefs and accept that all religions are equal, but will be required to look more towards themselves and see how they should themselves behave. Over time, that may lead to a transformation of relations among religions, among believers, and, by extension, achieve many of the objectives of the current dialogue and have additional ones, as well.

That is the emphasis of this approach. *I* become less interested in what the Other should do, and very concerned about what *I* should do. Can *I*, as a citizen of Heaven, deny others of my fellow Citizens rights to housing, food, life, or medicine? Can *I* impose my political will or use my economic strength to bend others to my bidding?

Is that fitting for the Citizen of Heaven that I believe myself to be?

This is not the same as the Social Gospel, for several reasons.

In the first place, the Social Gospel, as indicated by its name, was a strictly Christian affair. I am calling for the expansion of this principle to all religions, major and minor by whatever metre-stick one chooses to measures.

In the second place, though the fruits of such an approach may resemble the Social Gospel in the exterior phenomenon, that is not its goal. The goal is to achieve a sea-change in the believers, rather than exclusively being focused on doing good works, though they would undoubtedly result. From an interior perspective, it constitutes a paradigm shift in terms of how believers see themselves and others.

And thirdly, the purpose is not, as one Social Gospel proponent hoped, to initiate the beginning of the Messianic time, but to begin to act now as if that time were already upon us in some way, which it is.

The phenomenological model for this attitude can be found, perhaps ironically for some, in the armed forces of the modern Western world.

Most of the modern armed forces have a concept either called Conduct Unbecoming, or reflecting the same ideas, which are:

Behaviours and attitudes which others expect of me and which I expect of myself, simply because I am a Member of the armed forces.

In the U.S. Army, for example, it is covered under U.S. Code Title 10, Subtitle A, Part II, Chapter 47, Subchapter X (The Uniform Code of Military Justice), Section 933, Article 133:

# Conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman

Any commissioned officer, cadet, or midshipman who is convicted of conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman shall be punished as a court-martial may direct.

Just what 'conduct unbecoming' means is not specified the U.S. or other military code, but is taught and, usually, internalised throughout the military career. The basic premise is that officers, and, to a lesser extent, Other Ranks, are expected to conduct themselves in a manner appropriate to their status as a serviceman. So, too, should it be with the religions. My relations with the Other should not only reflect *his* characteristics, but my own.

Police forces, which may be considered paramilitary in organisation and operating principles, also have similar codes.

The Police Act of the Canadian province of British Columbia, for example, sets out a category of offence known as 'discreditable conduct.'

# Discreditable conduct <sup>363</sup>

**5** For the purposes of section 4 (1) (a), a police officer commits the disciplinary default of discreditable conduct if

- (a) the police officer, while on duty, acts in a disorderly manner or in a manner that is
- (i) prejudicial to the maintenance of discipline in the municipal police department with which the police officer is employed, or
- (ii) likely to discredit the reputation of the municipal police department with which the police officer is employed,
- (b) the police officer's conduct, while on duty, is oppressive or abusive to any person,
- (c) the police officer contravenes a provision of the Act, a regulation, rule or guideline made under the Act, or does not comply with a standing order of the municipal police department with which the police officer is employed,

B.C. Reg. 205/98, O.C. 725/98, Deposited June 11, 1998 effective July 1, 1998, *Police Act*, Code of Professional Conduct Regulation

- (d) the police officer withholds or suppresses a complaint or report against any other officer,
- (e) the police officer fails to report to an officer whose duty it is to receive the report, or to Crown counsel, any information or evidence, either for or against any prisoner or defendant, that is material to an alleged offence under an enactment of British Columbia or Canada, or
- (f) the police officer suppresses, tampers with or fails to disclose to an investigating officer, or to the discipline authority of a respondent, information that is material to a proceeding or potential proceeding under Part 9 of the Act.

The idea of behaviour that is based on religious beliefs is hardly new. The 613 commandments and directives of the Torah serve that purpose for Judaism. For Christians, the Sermon on the Mount, in conjunction with other statements of Jesus and the epistle writers serves.

For Hindus, the Bhagavad-Gita can be considered a good starting point.

Other groups, too, have similar codes of conduct that are required simply because of one's own status.

The Pashtun of Afghanistan, for example, have a code known as Pashtunwali, described as an "indigenous honour code and religion of the ethnic Afghan people." <sup>364</sup>

Pashtunwali consists of a number of elements, based around four key concepts:

Melmastia (Hospitality): To show hospitality to all visitors, regardless of who they are, their ethnic, religious, or national background, without hope of remuneration or favour.

Badal (Justice): To seek justice over time or over space to avenge a wrong. This applies to injustices committed yesterday or 1000 years ago if the wrong-doer still exists.

Nanawatay (Settlement): Nanawatay derives from the verb "to go in" and is used when the vanquished party is prepared to go in to the house or huira of the victors and ask forgiveness.

http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Pashtunwali (2004)

Nang (Honour): Nang is composed of the various points below that a tribesman must observe to ensure his honour, and that of his family, is upheld. <sup>365</sup>

Islam has the Five Pillars of faith, prayer, alms, fasting, pilgrimage, which all Muslims are expected to adhere to.

Other types of groups also have such principles. The Boy Scouts, for example, have both an oath and a law.

#### Scout Oath

On my honour I will do my best
To do my duty to God and my country
and to obey the Scout Law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong,
Mentally awake, and morally straight.

### **Scout Law**

A scout is trustworthy, helpful, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent.

The idea of a code of conduct, a code of honour, is therefore not new. What is new is to apply the same principle to the transcendent Reality that surrounds us. An important question for the participants in inter-religious dialogue, then, based on the fact that we share the heavenly Reality, by whatever name we call it, is how such a citizen of Heaven should conduct himself, solely on the basis of the fact that (s)he *is* a citizen, or at least an inhabitant, of Heaven.

For one thing is certain. For believers, there is only one Reality, and though we may dispute the Other's vision of it, it does not change the fact that there can only be the one. Separate from the question of God, Allah, Krishna, is the question of the believer, and by extension, of all humanity, in this part of the Heavenly realm.

The solution thus formulated, while it may seem a radical departure, is in fact already present in most, if not all, of the extant religious traditions.

In its most common form, it will be found in prayer, which are directed to, in the case of the Christian, the living and present Christ. It is the present that is of most concern here. Charismatic Christians take that presence even further, and believe that they are in fact filled with the Holy Spirit during prayer and worship. It doesn't get much closer than that.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>365</sup> Ibid.

In interpreting the word "place" – "makom" in the story of Moses wanting to see God on Mount Zion, Jewish teacher Rashi<sup>366</sup> said that it should be read to mean "I encompass the world; the world does not encompass Me (Bereshit Rabba 68:9: Shemot Rabba 45:6)." That is further extrapolated to mean "that God is always nearby; there is no corner of the cosmos that is bereft of God's presence."

It is also reflected in the names of some Jewish synagogues: Emmanuel – God is with us.

The Buddha believed that his enlightenment put him in touch with the One.

Most often it will be found in the mystical traditions which plead for developing an immediate, that is to say, unmediated, connection with the Divine.

Mystics and mysticism have led a precarious existence in many of the religions that now participate in the inter-religious dialogue. Outside the structure and discipline of the establishment, they believe they are in direct communication with the Divine, with Heaven, with no intervention needed by other Earthly agencies.

That they are often looked at somewhat askance by members of the establishment is often criticised as fear by that establishment of losing control, as a matter of power. The other side to the issue, though, is that mystics are operating without the checks and balances that, in the Christian context, were imposed by the Pauline letters<sup>368</sup> and may teach things that do not occur in the Scriptures and may be considered heretical within the organised Church, especially when that teaching is based on a claim of higher authority. And that happens regularly. The fact that some mystics, some purported mystics, and others have preached other things than an unmediated access to God and Heaven does not, however, necessarily void all of their insights. Either in Christianity or in other faiths.

Another, perhaps more important, way of looking at this position is to try to view it from the point of view of – from a Christian/Jewish perspective – God in the Heavens. From that perspective, there really is only one Reality, for He has created the so-called visible universe within His Divine Reality. Any separation of the two spheres must therefore, be applicable only from the perspective of humanity's limited field of vision and then when viewed only from our perceived reality. Support for this view can be found in both Hebrew and Christian scripture.

<sup>366</sup> Rabbi Shlomo Yitzchaki, 1040-1105 CE

See Chancellor Ismar Schorsch, **Ki Tissa/Shabbat Parah 5761**, Exodus 30:11 - 34:35, *March 17*, 2001 http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/parashah/5761/kitissa.shtml (2004).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>368</sup> 1 John 4:1

### inter-religious dialogue

See, for example:

Genesis 1:1 Genesis 14:19 Genesis 14:22 Genesis 24:3 Exodus 9:29 Deuteronomy 4:39

Zechariah 5:9 Acts 7:49 Acts 17:24

The same logic must also apply whether the Divine is Allah, Ahura Mazda, Krishna or the 28 levels of 'heaven' and 6 levels of existence in the Buddhist samsara, or circle of existence.

So the idea of a Heaven that is an inseparable part of this Earth is not all that outlandish or far-fetched. In fact, it should be considered part of the orthodox package of beliefs in many religions. If we were to more consciously acknowledge it, we could provide a real impetus to the inter-religious dialogue which currently seems to be flagging.

Lessing proposed a commonality of humanity based on that humanity. What I plead for here is a commonality of humanity based on the common religious values that derive from our common origin, *presence* and future in the Heaven which we now know only through a glass, darkly.

In terms of implementation, the Declaration Toward a Global Ethic by the Council for a Parliament of World Religions can provide a good starting point, though for this purpose it should be reformulated positively rather than negatively as it currently is.<sup>369</sup>

Rather than being necessary only to stave off all manner of ills that humans, by commission or omission, are responsible for, we should be striving for identifying the conduct that is becoming to Citizens of Heaven. That also removes a built-in problem with the Declaration as it stands, which is that, hypothetically if

\_

This is not to deny the value of the Declaration as it stands; quite the contrary. It was, however, never intended to serve as a common dogma or religious basis for all the religions. The introduction states quite clearly that it was not intended as a religious document. Its purpose in its current form was to create an ethic for all people, religious and non-religious. In that, it is highly successful. One of the issues, however, is that it *appears* to be a declaration of the common ground of religions, and therefore a suitable starting place for inter-religious dialogue and others have modelled their motivations and declarations on it or on the philosophy behind it.

not in reality, there could come a moment when it is no longer necessary in its a negative formulation because the problems it was designed to resolve have been resolved. The environment has been taken care of, illness, poverty and war are no more, and so on.

With a positive formulation, it would never reach its conclusion, because we imperfect humans must always strive to achieve perfection, but we shall never achieve it. Certainly not in this iteration of the Heavenly Reality anyway.

# **Epilogue**

It is a truism to state that people tend to create religions in their own images.

The religions of ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, for example, clearly reflected the complex hierarchical nature of their ruling structures with a strong emphasis on infighting among the gods (among whose numbers were counted the earthbound kings and Pharaohs) and the importance of the naturally occurring patterns of flood and drought and manmade disasters such as military invasion as expressions of divine benevolence or wrath.

Pre-agricultural societies tend(ed) to place even more emphasis on natural forces controlled perhaps by wood spirits, rain spirits, drought spirits, etc.

So, too, with the development of urban society in the Ancient Near East and Europe did the divinities take on characteristics of kings, with dedicated court heralds and messengers in the forms of angels (hence the name).

And I, who live in a world and a universe that, from an Enlightenment, Western perspective, is seen to be One, regardless of the smaller national and political (and planetary?) divisions that separate us, am also guilty of following that pattern, seeing a single Celestial unity that transcends the religious differences that so brightly colour our world.

While I fully accept the charge and by this study am giving my testimony in answer of it, I believe that the solution that I propose cannot simply be dismissed by pointing out that peculiarity of its inspiration.

I look forward to passionate debate with colleague researchers on the points I have made and the conclusions I have reached. It may be that others, from a different hermeneutic starting point, cannot even follow the logic I propose. Others may disagree strongly for other reasons. The ensuing dialogue will certainly be lively.

Derek Suchard 2005

# Annex 1: Declaration Toward a Global Code of Conduct

A reworking of the Declaration of a Global Ethic from the World's Parliament of Religions 1993

The religious communities of the world through inspiration, insight or revelation, recognise and acknowledge that the Earth and the visible Universe are but a small but inseparable part of the total Reality which is the seat and source of the Holiness from which we draw and derive our salvation and which is our ultimate goal.

We further acknowledge that our condition as residents of that place of Holiness obliges us to conduct ourselves in the present in a manner befitting our status and that we heretofore have erroneously thought and believed was reserved for a time after our Earthly death.

That we have thus far collectively failed to live up to that obligation is evidenced by the fact that hundreds of millions of human beings on our planet increasingly suffer from unemployment, poverty, hunger, and the destruction of their families. Hope for a lasting peace among nations slips away from us. There are tensions between the sexes and generations. Children die, kill, and are killed. More and more countries are shaken by corruption in politics and business. It is increasingly difficult to live together peacefully in our cities because of social, racial, and ethnic conflicts, the abuse of drugs, organized crime, and even anarchy. Even neighbours often live in fear of one another. Out planet continues to be ruthlessly plundered. A collapse of the ecosystem threatens us.

Time and again we see leaders and members of religions incite aggression, fanaticism, hate, and xenophobia - even inspire and legitimate violent and bloody conflicts. Religion often is misused for purely power-political goals, including war. We are filled with shame and disgust.

Even if that were not the case, however, it would be no less incumbent upon us to conduct ourselves in a manner appropriate to our Celestial status.

We believe that the precepts and practices of the world's religions offer a consensus for a code of conduct that can apply to believers in their conduct among themselves and in their conduct toward non-believers, who are no less fellow Citizens of the One Reality.

### WE BELIEVE

That, inasmuch as all have a responsibility for a liveable world, and that involvement for the sake of human rights, freedom, justice, peace and the

preservation of the Earth is an obligation appropriate to our station, regardless of our different religious and cultural traditions;

That we as religious women and men who base our lives on an Ultimate Reality and draw spiritual power and hope therefrom in trust, in prayer or meditation, in word or silence have a very special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and of each individual.

At no point in its history has humanity possessed, as it does today, sufficient economic, cultural and spiritual resources to introduce a better global order. It is incumbent upon us to apply those resources to the building of a better world. Our time has experienced greater technological progress than ever existed before, and yet we are faced with the fact that world-wide poverty, hunger, death of children, unemployment, misery and the destruction of nature have not abated but rather to some extent increased. Many peoples are threatened with economic ruin, social disarray, political marginalisation and national collapse.

In such a critical situation humanity needs not only political programs and actions, but also a vision of a peaceful living together of peoples, ethnic and ethical groupings, and religions; it needs hopes, goals, ideals, standards. But these have slipped from the hands of people all over the world. It is a responsibility of the religions, despite their frequent historical failures, to demonstrate that such hopes, ideals and standards can be grounded, guarded and lived. This is especially true in the modern world: whether a state guarantees freedom of conscience and religion, pays lip-service to those principles, or explicitly rejects such individual freedoms, each individual is nonetheless personally responsible to act according to values, convictions and norms which are valid for all humans regardless of their social origin, skin colour, language or religion.

We are convinced of the fundamental unity of the human family, both on Earth and in the context of the Ultimate Reality in which we willingly or unwillingly share. We wish to formally proclaim the full realization of the intrinsic dignity of the human person, of inalienable freedom, of the equality in principle of all humans, and the necessary solidarity of all humans with one another.

We have learned that the realization of justice in our societies and in ourselves depends on the insight and readiness to act justly; that action in the favour of rights presumes a consciousness of duty arising from both the head and heart of women and men:

That rights without morality internalized within us cannot long endure.

By a Global Code of Conduct, we do not mean the imposition of a single set of the beliefs and principles of one religion above the others, but a fundamental consensus of binding values, unconditional standards and personal attitudes arising from different visions, insights and revelations of the shared Ultimate Reality.

The Fundamental Demand: Every Human Being Must Treat Every Other Human Being Humanely

Although we are aware that our various religions and ethical traditions often offer very different bases for what is helpful and what is unhelpful for men and women, what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is evil and we do not wish to gloss over or ignore the serious differences among the individual religions, those differences should not hinder us from proclaiming publicly those things which we already hold in common now, to which we jointly feel obliged, each on the basis of our own religious or ethical grounds.

We all know that now as before all over the world women and men are treated inhumanely: They are robbed of their freedom and their opportunities; their human rights are trampled under foot; their human dignity is disregarded. But might does not make right! In the face of all inhumanity our religions and ethical convictions demand that every human being treat every other human being humanely!

That means that every human being -- without distinction of sex, age, race, skin colour, language, religion, political view, or national or social origin -- possesses an inalienable and untouchable dignity. And everyone, individuals as well as the state, is therefore obliged to exercise and to honour that dignity and guarantee its effective protection. Humans must always be the subjects of rights, must be ends, never mere means, never objects of commercialization and industrialization in economics, politics and media, in research institutes and industrial undertakings. Furthermore, no human being in our age, no social class, no influential interest group, no power cartel nor any state stands "beyond good and evil." No, all men and women, as beings with reason and conscience, are obliged to behave in a genuinely human, not inhuman, fashion, to do good and avoid evil!

That each human being is worthy of receiving such treatment is a direct reflection of the fact that each human is worthy and capable of and responsible for granting it. This is reflected in the so-called Golden Rule which is present in many of our religions and has been maintained in them for thousands of years: What you do not wish done to yourself, do not unto others. More positively formulated: What you wish done to yourself, do to others!

This should be the irrevocable, unconditional norm for all areas of life, for family and communities, for races, nations and religions. Self-determination and self-realization are thoroughly legitimate -- so long as they are not separated from human self-responsibility and global-responsibility, from responsibility for fellow humans and nature. Every form of egoism, however, every self-seeking, whether

individual or collective, whether in the form of class thinking, racism, nationalism or sexism, is to be rejected. For these prevent humans from being authentically human and deny the Celestial citizenship to which all are part.

The Golden Rule implies very concrete standards to which we humans wish to and should hold firm when they concern the welfare of either individuals or humanity as a whole. There are above all four ancient guidelines for human behavior which are found in most of the religions of this world.

#### Four Irrevocable Directives

# 1. Toward a Culture of Non-violence and Respect for Life

In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the teaching: You shall not kill! Or in positive terms: Have respect for life! Concretely that means that no one has the right to torture, injure, and certainly not to kill, any other human being and does have the obligation to put an end to such practices when they are encountered. And no people, no race, no religion has the right to hate, to discriminate, and certainly not to exile or to liquidate a "foreign" minority which is different in behaviour. different in belief.

Young people should therefore learn already at home and in school that violence may not be a means of settling differences with others. Only thus can a culture of non-violence be created. All people have a right to life, bodily integrity and the development of personality insofar as they do not injure the rights of others. Of course wherever there are people there will be conflicts. Such conflicts, however, are to be resolved without violence. This is true for states as well as for individuals, for political power-holders should always commit themselves first of all to non-violent solutions within the framework of an international order of peace -- which itself has need of protection and defence against perpetrators of violence. Armament is a mistaken path; disarmament is a commandment of the hour. There is no survival for humanity without peace!

A human person is infinitely precious and must be unconditionally protected. But likewise the lives of animals and plants which inhabit this planet with us deserve protection, preservation and care. As human beings we also have responsibility for the air, water and soil precisely with a view to future generations. The dominance of humanity over nature and the cosmos is not to be propagated, but rather living in harmony with nature and the cosmos is to be cultivated. We speak for a respect for life, for all life.

To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religions and ethical traditions means that in public as well as private life we must not be ruthless and brutal but rather concerned for others and ready to help. Every people, every race, every religion must show tolerance, respect, indeed, high appreciation for

every other. Minorities -- whether they be racial, ethnic or religious -- need and are entitled to our protection and our support.

### 2. Toward a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order

In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the teaching: You shall not steal! Or in positive terms: Deal honestly! And, in fact, no humans have the right to rob or dispossess -- in any manner -- other humans or the commonweal. Conversely, no humans have the right to use their possessions without concern for the needs of society. Where extreme poverty reigns, theft will time and again occur for the sake of survival, if indeed complete helplessness and overwhelming despair have not set in. And where power and wealth is accumulated ruthlessly, feelings of envy, resentment, and yes, deadly hate inevitably will well up in the disadvantaged. This leads all too easily to a diabolic circle of violence and counter-violence. There is no global peace without a global order in justice!

Therefore young people should learn already at home and in school that property, be it ever so small, carries with it an obligation and that its use should at the same time serve the commonweal. Only thus can a just economic order be built up. But if the plight of the poorest billions of humans, particularly women and children, is to be improved, the structures of the world economy must be fundamentally altered. Individual good deeds and assistance projects, indispensable as they are, are not sufficient. The participation of all states and the authority of international organizations are needed to arrive at a just arrangement.

Wherever those in positions of power threaten to repress those under their control, institutions threaten persons, might oppresses right, resistance -- whenever possible, non-violent -- is called for.

To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religions and ethical traditions in today's world means the following:

Instead of misusing economic and political power in ruthless battles for domination, we must utilize them for service to humanity: In a spirit of compassion with those who suffer and with special care for the poor, handicapped, aged, refugees, the lonely.

Instead of thinking only of power and unlimited power-politics in the unavoidable competitive struggles, a mutual respect, a reasonable balance of interests, an attempt at mediation and consideration should prevail.

Instead of an unquenchable greed for money, prestige and consumption, once again a sense of moderation and modesty should reign! For in greed humans lose their "soul," their inner freedom, and thus that which makes them human.

### 3. Toward a Culture of Tolerance and a Life in Truthfulness

In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the teaching: You shall not lie! Or in positive terms: Speak the truth! In fact, no woman or man, no institution, no state or church or religious community has the right to speak untruth to other humans. This is especially true for:

The mass media, to whom the right of freedom of the press and freedom of reporting for the sake of truth is assured and to whom the office of guardian is thus granted: They do not stand above morality, but remain duty bound to human dignity, human rights and fundamental values; they are duty bound to objectivity, fairness and the preservation of personal dignity and have no right to intrude into the private human sphere, to manipulate public opinion, or distort reality.

Artists and scientists, to whom artistic and academic freedom is assured: They are not dispensed from general ethical standards and must serve the truth in sincerity.

Politicians who, if they lie in the faces of their people, have frittered away their credibility and do not deserve to be reelected.

Young people should learn already at home and in school to think, speak and act in truthfulness. All humans have a right to the truth. They have a right to necessary information and education in order to be able to make decisions that will be formative for their lives. Without an ethical fundamental orientation they will hardly be able to distinguish the important from the unimportant in the daily flood of information today. Ethical standards will help them to discern when facts are twisted, interests are veiled, tendencies are played up and opinions absolutized.

To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religions and ethical traditions in today's world means the following:

Instead of dishonesty, dissembling and opportunistic adaptation to life, cultivate the spirit of truthfulness also in the daily relationships between fellow humans:

instead of spreading ideological or partisan half- truths, seek the truth ever anew in incorruptible sincerity; instead of confusing freedom with arbitrariness and pluralism with indifference, hold truth high;

instead of chasing after opportunism, serve in trustworthiness and constancy the truth once found.

# 4. Toward a Culture of Equal Rights, and Partnership Between Men and Women

In the great ancient religious and ethical traditions of humankind we find the teaching: You shall not commit sexual immorality! Or in positive terms: Respect and love one another! Concretely that means: No one has the right to degrade

another to a mere sex object, to lead her to him to or hold her or him in sexual dependency. Sexual exploitation is to be condemned as one of the worst forms of human degradation. Wherever -- even in the name of a religious conviction -- the domination of one sex over the other is preached and sexual exploitation is tolerated, wherever prostitution is fostered or children are misused, there resistance is commanded.

Young women and men should learn already at home and in school that sexuality is fundamentally not a negative-destructive or exploitative but a creative force. Its function as a life-affirming shaper of community can be brought to bear all the more as it is lived out with responsibility for one's own happiness and that of one's partner. The relationship between men and women does indeed have a sexual dimension, but human fulfillment is not identical with sexual happiness. Sexuality should be an expression and reinforcement of a love relationship lived as partners. Conversely, however, some religious traditions know the ideal of a voluntary renunciation of the full use of sexuality; this renunciation can also be an expression of identity and meaningful fulfillment.

The socially institutionalized form of marriage, which despite all its cultural and religious variety is characterized by love, loyalty and permanence, aims at, and should guarantee, security and mutual support to the husband, wife and children, and secure their rights. It is in marriage that the relationship between a woman and a man should be characterized not by a patronizing behavior or exploitation, but by love, partnership and trustworthiness. All lands and cultures should develop economic and social relationships which will make possible marriage and family worthy of human beings, especially for older people. Parents should not exploit children, nor children parents; rather their relationship should reflect mutual respect, appreciation and concern.

To be authentically human in the spirit of our great religious and ethical traditions in today's world means the following:

Instead of patriarchal domination or degradation, which are the expression of violence and engender counter-violence, mutual respect, partnership, understanding and tolerance;

Instead of any form of sexual possessive lust or sexual misuse, mutual concern, tolerance, readiness for reconciliation, love. Only what has already been lived on the level of personal and familial relationships can be practised on the level of nations and religions.

# To maintain our own dignity

When we know what conduct is expected of us, not because of standards imposed by others, but because of what we know our condition to be, and fail to act accordingly, or worse, to consciously act contrary to those precepts, we

#### The limits of ethic-centred

diminish and lose respect for ourselves. The consequence of that is that we lose respect for others. It is therefore incumbent upon us to constantly monitor our own conduct and correct ourselves. It is also our responsibility to, in an atmosphere of respect and concern for the Other, to point out to that Other when (s)he fails to meet the standard that is appropriate for him or her.

### A Transformation of Consciousness

All historical experience demonstrates the following: Our earth cannot be changed unless in the not too distant future an alteration in the consciousness of individuals is achieved. This has already been seen in areas such as war and peace or economy and ecology. And it is precisely for this alteration in inner orientation, in the entire mentality, in the "heart," that the religions bear responsibility in a special way. Here we remain aware, however, that a universal consensus on many disputed individual ethical questions (from bio- and sexual ethics through mass media and scientific ethics to economic and political ethics) will be difficult to attain. Nevertheless, even for many questions still disputed, differentiated solutions should be attainable in the spirit of the fundamental principles jointly developed here.

In many areas of life a new consciousness of ethical responsibility has already arisen. Therefore, we would be especially pleased it if as many as possible national or international professional organisations, such as those for physicians, scientists, business people, journalists, and politicians, would compose up-to-date codes of conduct, and are pleased that so many already have.

Above all, we would welcome it if individual religions also would formulate their very specific expressions of codes of conduct: What they on the basis of their faith tradition have to say, for example, about the value of self and of the Other, the meaning of life and death, the enduring of suffering and the forgiveness of guilt, about selfless sacrifice and the necessity of renunciation, compassion and joy. All these will be compatible with a Global Code of Conduct; indeed can deepen it, make it more specific and concrete.

On the basis of our religious convictions we commit ourselves to a common Global Code of Conduct and call upon all women and men of good will to make this Declaration their own.

### **Nederlandse Samenvatting**

Dit proefschrift poogt een antwoord te vinden op de vraag of de huidige interreligieuze dialoog een theologische component heeft of zich alleen met ethische kwesties bezig houdt.

Allereerst wordt de historische ontwikkeling van de dialoog geschetst vanaf 1893, het waarin het Wereldparlement der Religies werd gehouden in Chicago (VS). Het motief achter dit congres was om één front van gelovigen van allerlei godsdiensten te vormen tegen de niet-religieuzen. Al is dit congres min of meer in vergetelheid geraakt, het heeft wel geleidt tot een toename in aandacht op de universiteiten voor de steeds pluriformere wereld en tot de totstandkoming van allerlei organisaties die relaties met andere religies hoog in het vaandel hebben staan.

De ontwikkeling van verschillende van deze organisaties, waaronder de Wereldraad van Kerken, het Wereldcongres der Religies alsmede verschillende bijeenkomsten van de Conferentie voor Wereldmissie, wordt behandeld om de langzame verandering in het isolement van het Christendom tegenover de andere religies in kaart te brengen.

Belangrijke bijdragen van onder meer Karl Barth (die stelde dat het Christendom geen religie was) en Hendrik Kraemer, de schrijver van het gezaghebbende boek *De Christelijke Boodschap in een niet-christelijke Wereld*, worden bediscussieerd.

Ook de invloed op de interreligieuze dialoog van de twee wereldoorlogen van de 20<sup>ste</sup> eeuw, het einde van het kolonialisme en de totstandkoming van de jongste golf vluchtelingen en niet-westerse immigranten naar voornamelijk Europa wordt behandeld.

Vervolgens wordt een viertal posities omtrent interreligieuze relaties behandeld, met voor ieder een apart hoofdstuk.

De christelijke Apologeten komen als eerste aan bod. Hun tweeledige strijd om enerzijds vernietiging door de Romeinse autoriteiten te voorkomen, en anderzijds hun missie om de boodschap van de Kerk te verkondigen, zorgde ervoor dat zij een precair bestaan leiden met een voornamelijk verdedigende houding tegenover de buitenwereld. Zowel de relaties tussen de Christenen en de Joden als tussen de Christenen en de Staatsgodsdienst van het Romeinse Rijk worden bekeken.

# Samenvatting

Wat de relaties met de Joden betreft, wordt de *Dialoog met Trypho de Jood*, door Justinus Martelaar (geschreven rond het jaar 160) bediscussieerd. Volgens Justinus hebben de Joden de Tenach verkeerd gelezen, niet inziend dat het een vooraankondiging van Jezus was. De Tenach is dus nu van de Christenen, die het hebben verdiend, en niet meer van de Joden. Hier is van dialoog geen sprake. Justinus wil alleen bekeren.

Een tweede groep die aangevallen werd waren de Gnostici, afvalligen die de boodschap van Christus een andere wending wilden geven en op een andere manier wilden interpreteren. De voornaamste criticus van de Gnostici was Iraenus wiens boek *Tegen Ketterij* het gezaghebbendste werk was. Er was volgens Iraenus niets heiligs aan het Gnosticisme, en dus ook geen dialoog, alleen polemiek.

Wat de Romeinen betreft waren de Apologeten veel milder. Niet over de inhoud – de heidenen waren immers verdoemd – maar over de presentatie. *De Apologia van Justinus Martelaar* waarin hij zowel probeert de machthebbers te vriend te houden alsook te laten zien dat de Christenen goede staatsburgers waren, wordt als voorbeeld bediscussieerd.

De anonieme *Brief aan Diognetus* laat de andere kant van de zaak zien. Deze brief is een duidelijke poging om Diognetus te bekeren, zonder dat de schrijver open staat voor een vergelijkbare beweging richting Diognetus. Het Christendom is de Waarheid, en iedereen dient zich te bekeren.

Dit hoofdstuk wordt afgesloten met de conclusie dat de toenaderingspogingen van het werk van Apologeten niet als model voor dialoog kunnen dienen omdat zij geen elementen van dialoog in zich hebben.

In Hoofdstuk IV wordt *De Collationes* van Petrus Abelardus onder de loep genomen.

Dit boek, wat het verslag van een droom over een dispuut tussen een filosoof (wellicht Moslim) een Jood en een Christen zou zijn, gaat uit van de wens van een Jood en een filosoof om de beste religie uit te kiezen. In feite is het meer een dispuut tussen de filosoof enerzijds en de Jood en de Christen anderzijds. Het komt erop neer dat voor Abelardus het geloof van de Christenen, naast de openbaring, ook het meest rationele geloof is. De filosoof dient zich dus te bekeren, als logisch gevolg daarvan.

Deze discussie heeft meer weg van een dialoog. Eerst gaat de Jood in discussie met de filosoof, daarna de Christen met de filosoof. Het gebrek aan dialogische aspecten ligt erin dat de Christen helemaal niet open staat voor de meningen van de anderen. De anderen moeten gewoon inzien dat het Christendom het beste, het rationeelste is. Wel is er een tweedeling naar voren gekomen: de gelovigen – de Jood en de Christen – tegenover de ongelovige filosoof.

Wegens zijn missiegerichte karakter heeft deze dialoog weinig te bieden in het kader van de huidige dialoog.

De volgende schrijver die aan de orde komt is Kardinaal Nicolas Cusanus en zijn boek *De Pace Fidei* ( Over de vrede van het geloof). In reactie op de verovering door de Turken van Constantinopel, een gebeurtenis die een echo lijkt te vinden in de aanvallen op de VS door Al-Ka'ida in 2001 en daarna,, schrijft Cusanus zijn boek met de bedoeling een omgeving te creëren waarin alle gelovigen zonder oorlog met elkaar kunnen leven. De setting is een visie waarin de schrijver wordt getransporteerd naar de hemel om een congres van vertegenwoordigers van alle religies bij te wonen. Onder leiding van Het Woord, Petrus en Paulus, wordt er flink gediscussieerd, met als uiteindelijke bedoeling te laten zien dat, hoewel de andere religies iets van het Heilige in zich hebben, het Christendom erboven uit stijgt en het dichtste bij de Waarheid staat. De toehoorders zijn echter niet met elkaar in discussie maar wonen een hoorcollege bij. Er is geen onderlinge interactie en dus geen dialoog.

In Hoofdstuk VI komt het werk van Gotthold Ephraim Lessing ter discussie, met de nadruk op zijn toneelstuk *Nathan de Wijze*. Lessings probleem was de relatie tussen de grotere Duitse en Europese samenleving enerzijds en de Joodse gemeenschap anderzijds. Hij zag dat de Joden in Europa geen deel hadden aan de Verlichting tot dan toe en dat wilde hij ter sprake brengen. Dat deed hij door middel van een toneelstuk waarin vertegenwoordigers van het Christendom, het Jodendom en de Islam samen hun relatie moeten uitwerken. Lessing houdt het publiek twee spiegels voor. De ene door middel van een parabel van ringen, waarin de conclusie wordt getrokken dat niemand in staat is de echte Waarheid te kennen tot het einde der tijden. Men moet zich dus afzijdig houden van alle waarheidsclaims. Zijn tweede spiegel houdt hij voor in de echte interactie tussen de partners. Daarin wordt de conclusie getrokken dat men met elkaar moet omgaan op basis van een gedeelde humaniteit, los van de geloofskwesties.

# Samenvatting

Na de verschillende schrijvers te hebben doorlopen, wordt er een metadialoog over dialoog geïnitieerd. Er wordt eerst gekeken naar verschillende dialoogmodellen die vandaag de dag in omloop zijn onder de interreligieuze dialoog partners.

Modellen van Raimon Panikkar, John Hick, Paul Knitter, Kardinaal Ratzinger (nu Paus Benedictus XVI), Leonard Swidler, de Katholieke Kerk, de Wereldraad van Kerken, Dorothee Sölle, en verschillende universiteiten en theologische hogescholen worden bekeken vanuit het perspectief van de praktijk van de interreligieuze dialoog zoals die tegenwoordig wordt gevoerd.

Daarna wordt er een poging gedaan om de schrijvers uit het eerste deel binnen een van de modellen te plaatsen om te kijken of die schrijvers iets gemeen hebben met de dialoogvoerders van vandaag. De conclusie wordt getrokken dat het model van Lessing het dichtst bij de echte dialoog staat.

Vier voorbeelden van lopende dialoog worden daarna bekeken: de Wereldraad van Kerken, de Council for a Parliament of World Religions, het Koninklijke Instituut voor Interreligieuze Studies (Jordanië), en het Edward B. Brueggeman Centrum voor Dialoog (VS).

Ook worden verschillende fora voor dialoog bediscussieerd om de gedeelde elementen te isoleren.

De conclusie wordt getrokken dat de gemene deler van de verschillende soorten dialoog is dat zij allemaal te maken hebben met ethische vraagstukken en de moeilijke, onverenigbare theologische kwesties links laten liggen omwille van de praktijk.

De casus van de Hindoes en Moslims van India wordt geanalyseerd aan de hand van onderzoek van Ashutosh Varshney van de Universiteit van Michigan (VS) om te kijken hoe deze gemeenschappen in de praktijk de ethische kwesties al dan niet oplossen en wat de relatie hiervan is met de interreligieuze dialoog. De conclusie wordt getrokken dat de successen, voor zover er van succes mag worden gesproken, niet als resultaat van interreligieuze dialoog komen, maar van een goed georganiseerde 'civil society' waarin leden van goede wil uit de verschillende gemeenschappen, in hun dagelijks leven en bij sociale gebeurtenissen regelmatig in contact met elkaar komen. Om die ethische kwesties op te lossen blijkt interreligieuze dialoog dus helemaal overbodig.

In Hoofdstuk X wordt het begrip 'dialoog' zelf onder de loep genomen. Wat is het en zou het ooit kunnen bijdragen aan oplossingen voor de

praktische kwesties die de aanleiding zijn voor vele interreligieuze dialogen? Voornamelijk aan de hand van de theorieën van David Bohm, wordt de dialoog geanalyseerd om te kijken hoe het werkt en wat de relatie is met religie. Volgens Bohms theorie kan dialoog alleen slagen wanneer de partners bereid zijn om van hun verschillende werkelijkheden een nieuwe werkelijkheid te maken die de werkelijkheid van elke partner overstijgt. Bohm stelt grenzen aan zowel wetenschappelijke als religieuze dialoog omdat zij allebei met ultieme waarheden worstelen. Voorbij een bepaald punt kan men niet komen. Interreligieuze dialoog die tot de kern van de waarheden gaat kan dus niet, aldus Bohm.

In Hoofdstuk XI wordt een aantal mogelijke theologische doeleinden voor interreligieuze dialoog geponeerd. Zij zijn:

- 1. Er bestaat geen theologische doeleinde.
- 2. Het doeleinde is om alle gelovigen te helpen realiseren dat er geen echt waar geloof bestaat (alle religies hebben het mis).
- 3. Het doeleinde is om de gelovigen van andere religies de ene ware Godsdienst te doen erkennen.
- Het doeleinde is om alle gelovigen te doen erkennen dat de verschillende geloven deel uit maken van de ene ware Godsdienst.
- 5. Het doeleinde is om alle gelovigen te doen erkennen dat er nog geen bestaand geloof is dat het Ware is, maar dat de mensheid er naar onder weg is en dat de dialoog deel is van die reis.
- 6. Het doeleinde is om de totstandkoming van een verenigde wereldgodsdienst te realiseren.
- 7. Anders, nog onbekend.

Deze mogelijkheden worden voor de spiegel van de huidige dialoog gehouden om te kijken of er aanknopingspunten zijn. De conclusie wordt getrokken dat maar één van deze, de zevende, voldoet aan de eisen van de huidige dialoog. Het logische gevolg daarvan is dat de huidige dialoog geen theologische basis heeft die als gemeenschappelijk gezien kan worden onder de dialoogpartners.

Hiermee is de hoofdvraag van deze dissertatie beantwoord. Ik wil echter nog een mogelijkheid voorstellen, die naar ik meen aan zowel de bedoelingen van de huidige dialoog tegemoetkomt én een theologische basis geeft voor de dialoog in de toekomst.

# Samenvatting

Ik constateer dat de dogmatische moeilijkheden tussen de geloven hen afschrikken van echt theologisch bezig te zijn. Zij zijn, als het ware, aardegebonden. Door modellen van de hemel, vanuit verschillende godsdiensten gezien, erbij te betrekken, wil ik echter de ruimte creëren om die aardgebondenheid te doorbreken.

Ik merk op dat alle religies een hemel, een paradijs, een hiernamaals hebben dat a) beter is dan de huidige wereld en b) onlosmakelijk verbonden is met deze wereld.

Aan de hand van Christelijke, Joodse en Islamitische teksten en commentatoren laat ik zien dat het zichtbare heelal nu al deel uit maakt van de hemel. Alle inwoners zijn dus al in de hemel, al zal hun gedaante en status nog wijzigen in de toekomst na de dood. Als inwoner van de hemel, is het dus nodig dat zij zich, los van hun dogmatische achtergronden, gedragen tegenover hun medehemelbewoners op een manier die consistent is met hun status. Dat geeft dus een gedeelde theologische basis voor hun onderlinge relaties en de interreligieuze dialoog: om de betekenis van "nu al in de hemel zijn" te verkennen. Op basis daarvan bekijk ik een aantal gedragscodes om te laten zien dat het idee van gedrag op basis van wie men is, al lang geaccepteerd is.

Ik besluit met een herschrijving van de "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic" van Hans Küng vanuit het perspectief van het gedrag dat men van een ingezetene van de hemelen mag verwachten.

Derek Suchard

#### Literature

Abelard Peter, Ethics, in *Ethical Writings*, Paul Vincent Spade (trans.) (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.)

Abelard, Peter, Dialogue between a Philosopher, a Jew, and a Christian, in *Ethical Writings*, Paul Vincent Spade (trans.) (Indianapolis/Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.), p. 59, 60, 63, 64-70, 75, 89, 93-96, 99-101, 103, 123-130, 142

Ariarajah, S. Wesley, "Dialogue, Interfaith" in *The Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1991.

Ashliman, D.L., (ed.) "The Three-Ring Parable: tales of Aarne-Thompson type 972" (http://www.pitt.edu/dash/ashliman.html), (1999))

Austin, Ben S., *An introduction to the Holocaust* (http://www.mtsu.edu/~baustin/ knacht.html (March 2004).

Barth, Karl, *Church Dogmatics*, *Volume 1, The Doctrine of the Word of God, Part 2*, G.W. Bromley and T.F. Torrance (eds.), G.T. Thomson and Harold Knight (trans.), (London: T&T Clark International), 2004, p. 301, 302, 312, 316, 325, 327, 340-344, 353.

Boersma, Jan J., Thora en Stoa over mens en natuur. Een bijdrage aan het mileudebat over duurzaamheid en kwaliteit. (Baarn, Netherlands: Uitgeverij G.F. Callenbach b.v.), 1997.

Bohm, David, On Dialogue, (London: Routledge) 1996, p. 6-7, 9-10, 36-38

Braybrooke, Marcus, *A wider vision: A history of the World Congress of Faiths,* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications) 1996, p. 9, 11, 32, 36

Braybrooke, Marcus, *Children of One God: A History of the Council of Christians and Jews*, (London, England and Portland, U.S.A.: Vallentine Mitchell) 1991, p. 1-2, 7, 11

British Columbia Reg. 205/98, O.C. 725/98, Deposited June 11, 1998 effective July 1, 1998, *Police Act*, Code of Professional Conduct Regulation

Cardinal Ratzinger, "Relativism: The Central Problem for Faith Today", (http://www.ewtn.com/library/CURIA/RATZRELA.HTM (December 2001)

Carlin, George, "Religious Life" in *An Evening with Wally Londo featuring Bill Szlazo*, (Little David Records, LD-1008, 1975)

Chancellor Ismar Schorsch, Ki Tissa/Shabbat Parah 5761, Exodus 30:11 - 34:35, March 17, 2001 http://learn.jtsa.edu/topics/parashah/5761/kitissa.shtml (2004).

Cohen, Roger, "For a Priest and for Poland, a Tangled Identity." In *The New York Times on the Web,* 10 October 1999.

Council for a Parliament of World Religions, How we do it, http://www.cpwr.org/how/method.htm (2004).

Dawidowicz, Lucy, *The War Against the Jews 1933-45,* (Middlesex: Penguin Books), 1975, pp. 52, 54, 136-141.

Dawood, N.J.(Trans), *The Koran*, (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin Classics) pp. 336, 393.

De Benedictinessen van Bonheiden, *De Verdedigers van het Geloof. De Apologeten,* second revised edition, (Bonheiden, Belgium: Abdij Bethlethem) 1984, p. 138-140

De Corneille, Roland, *Christians and Jews: The Tragic Past and the Hopeful Future,* (New York: Harper ChapelBooks) 1966, p 16-58.

De Crescenzo, Luciano, *Storia della filosofia medioevale,* (Milan: Arnoldo Mondadore Editore S.p.A.) 2002.

De Vries, Theun, *Ketters. Viertien eeuwen ketterij, volksbeweging en kettergericht.* (Amsterdam: Querido) 1998, pp. 53-69.

Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement, entry on "Interfaith Dialogue (Dialogue, Interfaith)" (World Council of Churches and Wm. Eerdmans) (1991).

Dominus Jesus. On the unicity and salvific universality of Jesus Christ and the Church I & II, published by the Congregration for the Doctrine of the Faith, (6 August, 2000)

Dupuis, Jacques, S.J., *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books), 1997, pp. 95-96, 108

Duquoc, Christian, "Heaven on Earth", in Concilium, Heaven issue (1979:3).

Frei, Hans, "Religious Transformation in the later Eighteenth Century", a paper presented as part of The Rice Lectures, Rockwell, February 1974, Lecture One: Lessing and the Religious Use of Irony, (Transcribed and edited from material in the Yale Divinity School Library Hans Frei Archive, Box 10 – Folder 168-9 by M.A. Higton.)

Gioia, Francesco (Ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue. The official teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, (Boston: Pauline Books and Media), pp. 37-38.

Habermas, J., 1985, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, quoted in http://www.infed.org/biblio/b-dialog.htm. (March 2004)

Hick, John and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness. Toward a pluralistic theology of religions*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books), Seventh Edition, 1998, p. viii.

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, "Lessening Tensions in a Tumultuous World: The Royal Institute for Inter-Faith Studies", in Forced Migration Review Number 13, (June 2002),. P. 47 http://www.fmreview.org/FMRpdfs/FMR13/fmr13.18.pdf (2004).

http:// www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/glines-e.html, "Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other religions", (2002), Paragraphs 5-9, 12-14, 21

http://encyclopedia.thefreedictionary.com/Pashtunwali (2004)

http://www.cpwr.org/ (2004)

http://www.cpwr.org/what/what.htm (2004)

http://www.cpwr.org/who/who.htm (2004)

http://www.cwnews.com/news/viewstory.cfm?recnum=8763 (2004)

http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/christ-muslim-debate.html (June 2002).

http://www.jewfaq.org/olamhaba.htm (2004)

http://www.riifs.org/purpose/purpose.htm (2004)

http://www.vts.edu/2003/Spring Semester 2002/CCE/comparative Christian ethics Feb 1491.htm (No longer available; not archived in The Internet Archive).

http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/ecumenical/index-e.html (December 2001).

http://www.xu.edu/dialogue/mission.cfm (2004)

Huntington, Samuel P. *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order,* (London: The Free Press), 2002, pp. 42, 66-67, 137-138

Incarnationis Mysterium: Bull of Indiction of the Great Jubilee of the Year 2000, (Vatican: The Holy See), (1998)

Irenaeus, Against Heresies, (Gnostic Society Library, http://www.webcom.com/~gnosis/library/advh1.htm) March, 2004, Book 1:1, 1:2

Jerusalem Bible, The: Reader's Edition, (New York: Doubleday) 1968

Juergensmeyer, Mark, *Terror in the Mind of God, The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, (Berkley/Los Angeles/London: ) 2001, p. 242, cited in Jean-Pierre Wils, p. 91.

Justin Martyr, Dialogue with Trypho the Jew, Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson (trans.) in "Early Christian Writings"

(http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/text/justinmartyr-dialoguetrypho.html), Chapters 10-12, 16, 24, 29, 64

Khalifa, Dr. Rashad (trans.), Quran, The Final Testament, Appendix 5.( 1990)

Knitter, Paul, John B. Cobb, Jr., Monika Hellwig and Leonard Swidler, *Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue.* (Philadelphia: Trinity International), 1990.

Kozlovic, Anton Karl, "Seven Logical Consequences of Interreligious Dialoguing: A Taxonomy of Praxis Possibilities" in *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Volume 8, Number 1, September 2003.

Küng, Hans (Ed.), *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, Global Ethic Foundation for inter-cultural and inter-religious research, education, encounter (1993), p. 2

Kuschel, Karl-Josef, *Jud, Christ und Muselmann vereinigt? Lessings 'Nathan der Weise'*, (Düsseldorf: Patmos Verlag GmbH & Co) 2004. P. 220.

Lessing Gotthold Ephraim, 'Nathan the Wise,' Act 3, Scene 5, Bayard Quincy Morgan (trans) in Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, *Nathan the Wise, Minna von Barnhelm, and other plays and writings*, Peter Demetz (ed.) (New York: Continuum) 1991

Lindberg, Carter, "Do Lutherans Shout Justification But Whisper Sanctification?" in *Lutheran Quarterly*, Vol. XIII, No. 1, p. 20

Maalouf, Amin, Rovers, Christenhonden, Vrouwenschenners: De kruistochten in Arabische kronieken, José Lieshout (trans) (Amsterdam: Rainbow Pocketboeken) 2001

McCarthy, John F., "Two views of historical criticism", in *Living Tradition: Organ of the Roman Theological Forum*, No. 77, September, 1998.

McDannell, Colleen & Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A history,* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press), 1988, p.4, 8, 17-18, 23-24, 39-43, 47-48, 68, 74, 78, 84, 90-92, 94, 97,323, 327, 333

McKechnie, Paul, *The First Christian Centuries: Perspectives on the Early Church,* (Leicester, U.K.: Apollos), 2001, p. 56

Morrison, Charles Clayton, "The World Missionary Conference, 1910", in *Christian Century,* July 4-11, 1984, p. 660, (reprinted from the July 7, 1910, issue)

National Conference for Community and Justice web site: http://www.nccj.org/nccj3.nsf/htmlmedia/history.htm, (3 February 2003).

Nicholas of Cusa, *Selected Spiritual Writings*, H. Lawrence Bond (Trans. and introduction), The Classics of Western Spirituality # 89, (New York: Paulist Press) 1997, p. 6, 87-88, 54-55, 87-91, 94, 124-125, 145, 178-179

Nostra Aetate, in Francesco Gioia (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: The official teaching of the Catholic Church (1963-1995)*, (Boston: Pauline Books & Media), English edition, 1997, p. 38.

Panikkar, Raimon, *El Diálogo Indispensable: Paz entre las religiones,* (Barcelona: Ediciones Peninsula), 2003, p 24.

Phelps, Joseph. "Some Contemporary Dialogue Models." MCS Conciliation Quarterly. Spring 1996. Pp. 9-10.

Plato, *The Republic, Benjamin Jowett (trans.), (New York: Airmont Publishing Company)* 1968, p. 93, 97

Rahner, Karl, Karl Rahner in Dialogue: Conversations and Interviews 1965-1982 (New York: Crossroad), 1986. p. 15.

Report of a regional consultation of the Network for Inter-Faith concerns in the Anglican Communion (NIFCON), held at United Theological College, Bangalore, 2003

Reston, James, Storia della Terza Crociata (Edizione Piemme) 2002.

Ryder, Matthew M., "Goethe, Lessing and Schiller: German Dramatists, Freemasons, Poets and Romanticists", (http://www.freemasons-freemasonry.com/ryder.html (June 2002).

Seager, Richard Hughes, (ed.), *The Dawn of Religious Pluralism: Voices from the World's Parliament of Religions*, 1893 (La Salle, II: Open Court), 1993, pp. xiii, 3,4, 5

Seager, Richard Hughes, The Two Parliaments, the 1893 Original and the Centennial of 1993: A Historian's View, in Teasdale, Wayne and George Cairns, (eds.), *The Community of Religions: Voices and Images of the Parliament of the World's Religions*, (New York: Continuum) 1996, p.27.

See Mahiaini, Wanyeki, "Shouldn't the boot be on the other foot? OR Isn't it time for the African church to teach rather than to be taught? (and certainly not by the pagan West!)" in http://www.philipproject.org.uk/justification.htm, (7 February 2004).

Shakespeare, William, Hamlet, Act III, Scene 4

Shapiro, R. M., "Moving the fence: One Rabbi's view of interreligious dialogue." In M. D. Bryant & F. Flinn (Eds.), *Interreligious dialogue: Voices from a new frontier* (pp. 31-40). (New York: New Era/Paragon House) (1989). Cited in Kozlovic, Anton Karl, "Who Should Be Allowed to Participate in Official Interreligious Dialogues? A Review of Issues" in *Marburg Journal of Religion*, Volume 6, Number 2, June 2001.

Shirer, William L., *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* (New York: Fawcett Crest), 1960, pp. 580-589

Smart, Ninian, *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World's Beliefs*, (Berkley: University of California Press), 1996.

Soeur Sourire, "Dominique" in Entre Les Etoiles, (Philips LP 33 t. 8.719), 1963.

Sölle, Dorothee, *Mystiek en Verzet:'Gij stil geschreeuw'*, Harmina van der Vinne (trans.), (Baarn, Netherlands: Uitgeverij Ten Have), 1998.

Speech by the late Hazrat Mirza Tahir Ahmad, (as Khalifatul Masih V supreme head of the worldwide Ahmadiyya Movement) in the London Mosque, 18 July, 1984. Available from http://www.askislam.com/Concepts/Heaven/Answer 161.html (2004).

Speelman, Patrick J., *Henry Lloyd and the Military Enlightenment of Eighteenth-Century Europe*, (Westport, CT/London: Greenwood Press) 2002, pp. 62, 66-67.

Swidler, Leonard, Dialogue Decalogue, in The Journal of Ecumenical Studies, 20:1 (1984).

Troeltsch, Ernst, *The absoluteness of Christianity and the history of religions,* David Reid (trans.), third edition (Richmond, VA.,: John Knox Press) 1971.

Van Cusa, Nicolaas, *Godsdienstvrede*, Jos Lievens (trans.) Jos Decorte (commentary), (Kampen: Uitegeverij Kok Agora) 2000, pp. 7-8, 27, 47-55, 73, 78, 83, 90-91, 93, 95-97, 99

Varshney, Ashutosh, Ethnic Conflict and Civic Life: Hindus and Muslims in India, Second Edition, (New Haven & London: Yale University Press) 2002, pp. xiv, 3-9, 46-47, 120-124, 126-129, 172-173, 178, 180, 203, 220, 222, 239,

Web site of the True Jesus Church of Anaheim California, (http://www.tjc.org/article.cfm?id=B336EE2B-6838-4944-AF28-6C8A6C549E45)

Wils, Jean-Pierre, De Dialectiek van de Verlichting en de logica van het geweld, (The dialectics of the Enlightenment and the logic of violence), in P. Valkenberg (Ed.), *God en geweld* (Budel: Uitgeverij Damon) 2002., p. 95

World Council of Churches, *Ecumenical considerations for dialogue and relations with people of other* religions, http://www.wcc-coe.org/wcc/what/interreligious/glines-e.html (2004)

World Council of Churches, Guidelines for Dialogue

## Index

Α

Abelard, Peter, 82–92, 113, 129–30, 133 Albigensians, 5, 76 Anonymous Christians, 18–20 Apologists, 92, 129 Austin, Ben S., 114

В

Barth, Karl, 11, 15, 173 Bohm, David, 62–66, 156, 177 Bonney, Charles Carroll, 7, 10 Braybrooke, Marcus, 12 Buddhism, 1, 12, 40, 81 Byzantium, 97

C

Carlin, George, 90, 124
Cathars, 5, 73
Cobb, John B., Jr., 37
Columbian Exhibition, 7
Council for a Parliament of World Religions (CPWR), 48
Council of Christians and Jews, 16

D

Dawidowicz, Lucy, 114, 115, 116
De Benedictinessen van Bonheiden, 73
De Crescenzo, Luciano, 97
De Vries, Theun, 98
Declaration Toward a Global Ethic, 3, 22, 55, 161, 178
Dupuis, Jacques, S.J., 96

Ε

Edinburgh Conference on World Mission 1910, 8, 9–10 Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue, The, 48, 58–60, 176 Exclusivism, 39, 42, 43, 131

F

Frei, Hans, 123 Freud, Sigmund, 9

G

Gnostics, 73-76

Н

Hakkoum, Karim, 121 Hellwig, Monika, 37 Hick, John, 37, 41, 176 Hinduism, 1, 30, 40, 111 History of Religions School, 9 Hocking, W.E., 11 House of Islam, 1, 39, 62 House of War, 1

HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal, 56

I

Inclusivism, 37, 42, 43, 128, 131
International Association of Religious Freedom, 8
International Missionary Council, 20
Irenaeus, 74, 75, 76, 150
Irvine, Martin, 86
Islam, 6, 30, 39, 52, 57, 62, 64, 68, 74, 93, 94, 100, 111, 113, 114, 118, 124, 125, 129, 130, 153, 154, 159, 175

J

Joseph Cardinal Ratzinger, 40 Justin Martyr, 70, 78, 79

# K

Kant, Immanuel, 6, 151 Knitter, Paul, 37, 41, 176 Kraemer, Hendrik, 11, 12, 173 Kristalnacht, 16, 114 Ku Klux Klan, 16 Küng, Hans, 22, 55, 178 Kuschel, Karl-Josef, 116

#### L

Lang, Bernhard, 12, 147, 149, 152 Lessing, Gotthold Ephraim, 131 Lindberg, Carter, 123

#### M

Maalouf, Amin, 117, 118 Mahiaini, Wanyeki, 42 Marx, Karl, 9 McDannell, Colleen, 147, 149, 152

### N

National Conference for Community and Justice, 59
National Conference of Christians and Jews, 16
National Conference of Jews and Christians for the Advancement of Justice, Amity and Peace, 16
Nelson, John K., 6, 136
New Jerusalem Bible, 69
Nicholas of Cusa, 93–113, 114, 128, 129, 130–31, 133, 134, 175
Nietsche, Friederich, 9
Nostra Aetate, 18, 39, 40

# Ρ

Panikkar, Raimon, 36, 42, 49, 130, 176 Paul F. Knitter, 41 Phelps, Joseph, 46 Plato, 79, 94, 102, 105, 112, 129 Presbyterian Church of England, 16

### R

Rahner, Karl, 18, 111 Reston, James, 117, 118 Roman Empire, 68, 152 Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies, The, 56–58 Ryder, Matthew M., 116

# S

Seager, Richard Hughes, 21
Secretariat for Relations with Other Religions, 23
Shakespeare, William, 91
Shirer, William L, 114
Simon, Richard, 9, 120
Smart, Ninian, 32
Sölle, Dorothee, 42, 176
Speelman, Patrick J., 115, 123
Stark, Rodney, 77
Syncretism, 7, 21, 42, 43, 61, 64, 74, 81, 112

#### T

Tertullian, 74, 77 The Royal Institute of Inter-Faith Studies, 48 The World Congress of Faiths, 8 Troeltsch, Ernst, 9, 28, 37, 111

### U

US Census Bureau International Population Database., 68

# ٧

Varshney, Ashutosh, 136, 137, 138, 139, 140, 144, 145, 176 Voltaire, 6, 123

# W

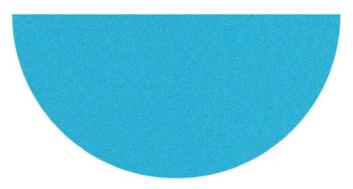
Wils, Jean-Pierre, 124
World Conference 1938, Jerusalem, 12
World Congress of Faiths, 13, 12
World Council of Churches, 8, 13, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31, 37, 44, 48, 49, 50, 52, 48–53, 65, 74
World's Parliament of Religions, 7, 8, 21, 44, 165

Younghusband, Francis, 12

## **Curriculum vitae**

Derek Suchard obtained his Master's degree in the social-cultural study of religions at the University of Amsterdam (2000) after a long career as a journalist, editor and translator.

Derek is the president of the Netherlands Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, Amsterdam and a member of the Netherlands chapter of the International Association of Religious Freedom.



The limits of an ethic-centric inter-religious dialogue



For more than 40 years, many of the religions of the world have been involved in a process of dialogue, exploring what they share, what divides them and what is simply unique to each. Over time, however, the discussion has come to focus increasingly on matters of ethics, of practical expressions of the values contained in the different faiths. That leads to the inevitable question of whether what is taking place is actually an inter-religious dialogue or simply a dialogue of the religious.

In this Ph.D. dissertation to complete his doctorate at Radboud University (Nijmegen, Netherlands), under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Jean-Pierre Wils, Derek Suchard examines past and current models of inter-religious dialogue, explores the theological limits of dialogue that focuses on ethical issues, and looks at the question of whether such dialogue is really dialogue at all.

Derek Suchard obtained his M.A. in the social-cultural study of religion at the University of Amsterdam (2000) under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Theo Witvliet.