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Christians and Interreligious Dialogue: Rationales, Methods and Issues

by

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ABSTRACT

In recent years the subject of interreligious dialogue has become increasingly important for Christians and other religions. It is widely accepted that interreligious dialogue fosters greater understanding, respect and cooperation between religious traditions. This thesis will investigate three questions: (1) why should Christians engage in interreligious dialogue?; (2) how should interreligious dialogue be conducted?; and (3) what are the main problems and dilemmas facing Christians in dialogue?

It will be argued that interreligious dialogue is an ethical obligation for Christians in the modern pluralistic context. It is asserted that dialogue is an obligation for Christians on the basis of Jesus' commandment that his followers must love their neighbours as themselves. It is contended that loving one's neighbours requires respect for their religious differences in an attitude of dialogue.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Loleen D. Youngman because she was the first person who supported me to pursue a career in religious studies. Whereas other people may have questioned this unconventional subject of study, she encouraged me to follow my interests. Without her encouragement, it is unlikely that this thesis would have been written. I am very grateful to her for all her help.

I also dedicate this thesis to my brother Grant just because I feel like it.

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INTRODUCTION

> "In the future when people look back on the 20th Century, they will see the interpenetration of the different world religions as being the most significant thing that happened in the 20th Century."

> Arnold Toynbee[1]

When we look back at the previous fifty years, it is remarkable how much global integration has occurred. Modern travel, transportation, and technology have brought us unprecedented exposure to our neighbours. Global integration has also brought increasing contact between members of different religions. Until modern times the vast majority of Christians lived in relative isolation, ignorance and distrust of other world religions. However, meetings between Christians and members of other faiths are extensive today. Indeed, Toynbee claims that the 20th Century will be remembered not for nuclear power, visiting the moon, or the computer revolution but for the extensive interpenetration of religions. Today, interaction with other religions is unavoidable. Whether one likes it or not, methods of respectfully communicating with other religions are needed in order to mitigate the tensions that arise from increasing interdependence. Interreligious dialogue is proposed by this thesis as an effective way to resolve religious tensions and to build the foundations of understanding and respect between religious communities.

Global integration has also been accompanied by profound developments in Christian theology. Traditional attitudes towards other faiths, long taken for granted, are now seriously questioned. For example, it was traditionally assumed that members of other religions were ignorant and spiritually inferior. However, widespread contact with members of other faiths has convinced many Christians that these views are false. Sincere, kind-hearted and respectful people can be found in other faiths. Global integration

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[1] As cited in *Interfaith Bridges*. Vol. 1, No. 1 (Fall 1993), 6.

has allowed this fact to be widely experienced and recognized. As a result, the following questions are now commonly debated in Christianity:

- *How should Christians relate to followers of other religions?*
- *What is the most appropriate attitude for Christians towards other faiths?*
- *Should Christians be open to learning from other religions?*

Since the 1960s, a consensus has emerged among the Roman Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox communities that dialogue is the best way for Christians to interact with other religions. Both the Vatican and the World Council of Churches have embraced dialogue in official documents and pronouncements.[2] However, there is still considerable disagreement among Christians about how interreligious dialogue should be conducted and what goals should be sought. Furthermore, not all Christians agree that dialogue is a good idea. This thesis will explore the following important questions in the theory of dialogue: (1) Why do scholars argue that interreligious dialogue is important for Christians? (2) How do scholars propose that interreligious dialogue should be conducted? and; (3) What are the main problems involved in the philosophy of dialogue from Christian perspectives?

ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK

This work is organized into three broad sections. The first section surveys the history of Christian attitudes towards other religions. It is shown that Christians have a long record of intolerance towards other faiths which contradicts the spirit of Jesus' teachings.

Thereafter, the second section examines the rationales advanced by

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[2] The World Council of Churches is an umbrella organization of Protestant (and Orthodox) groups which meets every few years to discuss matters of faith and doctrine. The official documents alluded to above are: *The Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions* (Vatican, 1965); and *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (W.C.C.,1979).

scholars why interreligious dialogue is needed for Christians. Four rationales will be outlined and evaluated for their comparative merits. They are called: (1) the sociological rationale, (2) the epistemological rationale, (3) the ethical rationale, and (4) the theological rationale. It will be argued that the ethical rationale is superior.

The third section investigates the main issues in the philosophy of dialogue for Christians which are listed as follows:

(1) Is it possible for Christians to reach a responsible theological position that respects the teachings of other religious traditions while retaining the uniqueness of Christianity. How do scholars propose to accomplish this task?

(2) Are there any conditions for interreligious dialogue which must be met before dialogue can begin, or is interreligious dialogue an unconditional obligation for Christians?

(3) Should Christians focus their attention on the common ground between religions or on the differences dividing religions?

(4) Is it legitimate for Christians to proselytize (missionize) in dialogue or is mission the antithesis of dialogue? Must the Christian understanding of mission be renewed in the modern pluralistic context or remain the same?

(5) One of the main obstacles to Christian participation in dialogue is the fear of losing or watering-down one's identity. Why do some Christians fear syncretism in dialogue? Are their fears well-founded or are they misleading?

(6) Should absolute truth claims be a valid component of interreligious dialogue? What arguments have been advanced for and against absolute truth claims in dialogue?

(7) Is a revision of traditional Christology required for dialogue with other religions?

(8) Should Christians conduct a dialogue with everybody or only certain groups? In other words, should there be limits to dialogue?

(9) Who represents whom in dialogue? Must dialogue be between high level authorities or can anyone engage in it?

METHODOLOGY

The subject of interreligious dialogue will be investigated within the discipline of the philosophy of religion. A comparative approach will be used to contrast different positions and arguments on dialogue for their respective merits and flaws. The arguments will also be studied for their philosophical coherence and logical consistency.

In recent years, many books and articles have been written on interreligious dialogue. However, a survey of these works reveals much repetition for few books offer new ideas. I will focus on the seminal works that are landmarks in the literature on dialogue as well as writings which offer new and innovative approaches to the subject. Among the authors that I will address are John Cobb, David Lochhead, Monika Hellwig, John Hick, Klaus Klostermaier, Paul Knitter, Hans Küng, and Leonard Swidler. The only area in the literature on dialogue that I *will not* explore is that of hermeneutics.[3] A goal of this thesis is to combine the main arguments for dialogue together from various sources. I believe that the case for dialogue will be greatly strengthened once diverse arguments have been integrated together and studied for their comparative merits. To my knowledge, no book has successfully combined the various approaches to dialogue in a comprehensive study.

Finally, this thesis intends to examine the official positions of the Roman Catholic Church and the World Council of Churches (W.C.C.) on interreligious dialogue. Both organizations have approved the practice of dialogue for their respective communities in official documents. However, many Christians are still unaware of these documents. At a recent conference I attended, someone called the Vatican's major document on interreligious dialogue, entitled *Nostra*

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[3] The relationship between hermeneutics and dialogue is a big subject and could be a thesis topic on its own. For those readers interested in exploring the relationship between hermeneutics and dialogue, see David Tracy's *Dialogue with the Other* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1990); and *Plurality and Ambiguity* (New York: Harper and Row, 1987).

aetate, "the best kept secret of the Roman Catholic Church."4 Although *Nostra aetate* represents a monumental change in the official attitude of the Vatican towards other religions, it is still widely unknown by Catholics and non-Catholics alike. In this study, we will have the opportunity to examine the views of *Nostra aetate* and the corresponding W.C.C. document on dialogue.

THESIS STATEMENT

The main argument of this work is that interreligious dialogue is not only a good idea for Christians but more strongly, an ethical obligation based on Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself (Matthew 22: 39-40). It is argued that loving one's neighbour requires an attitude of respect and dialogue instead of intolerance and monologue. Interreligious dialogue allows Christians a way to manifest love of one's neighbour in the modern religiously pluralistic context. I do not assume that interreligious dialogue is an obligation for *all* religious persons. My contention is simply, yet profoundly, that interreligious dialogue is an obligation *for Christians*. It may be the case that other religions find this line of reasoning insightful, but it is not presumed that the arguments advanced by this work apply to other religions.

There are many different kinds of Christians and it may be asked, is dialogue obligatory for all types? Monika Hellwig writes "Christian communities and denominations today will not all agree to particular proposals concerning

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4 I overheard this statement at the *1993 Parliament of the World Religions* held in Chicago, August 28-September 4, 1993. "Nostra Aetate" can be found in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents* (Collegeville M.N.: Liturgical Press, 1984), 736-742.

dialogue."[5] Indeed, many fundamentalist Christians[6] are not interested in interreligious dialogue at all. It is the contention of this work, however, that all Christians, *including fundamentalists,* are obligated to exemplify the attitude of dialogue towards others because the commandment to love one's neighbour is common to all.

Three other arguments are woven throughout this work which bolster my thesis statement.

First, it is argued that Christians need to be open to change for renewal and growth. Openness requires dialogue. Christians have often closed their minds towards change because they feared that new ideas may corrupt their faith. However, openness to new ideas can lead to growth and prevent stagnation. The scholar John Cobb concurs. He writes Christians must "be increasingly attentive to what non-Christians have to teach and will be ready to be changed through new insight."[7] Interreligious dialogue is a way to revitalize Christianity. The health of Christianity is directly correlated with its openness to other religions.

It will also be argued that proper ethical practice needs to become foremost in their daily lives of Christrians. Rather than asking the question 'What creeds must I believe to be a Christian?', modern Christians ought to ask 'What must I do to be a Christian?'. Historically, *orthodoxy,* or "correct thinking", was considered by Christian theologians to be more importance than *orthopraxis,* or

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[5] Monika K. Hellwig, "Bases and Boundaries for Interfaith Dialogue: A Christian Viewpoint," in Richard Rousseau (ed.) *Interreligious Dialogue* (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1981), 69.

[6] I use the word fundamentalist here, and henceforth, to indicate those Christians who follow a literal interpretation of the bible. No pejorative connotation is intended.

[7] John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Towards A Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), x.

"correct practice". However, many Christians were orthodox[8] in their beliefs yet behaved deplorably in their practice. For example, some "orthodox" Christians used to burn people if they did not conform to their particular version of Christianity. I agree with Camps' claim that Christian theology "can only be carried on within the context of praxis. In other words, human beings can only know and appreciate Jesus ... if they lead a life that is in agreement with that Spirit."[9] According to an *orthopraxis* model of Christianity, Christians, even if they are orthodox, who kill members of other religions are not true Christians. It will be argued that correct ethical behaviour, or *orthopraxis,* should again become a central principle of Christianity as it was in the early days of the Jerusalem church.

A third argument of this thesis is that dialogue is needed in Christianity to overcome past historical injustices. Until modern times, Christians were highly intolerant towards religious diversity. Two biblical scriptures were often used by church figures to disparage non-Christians. These scriptures were John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 which claimed that Christ is the only way and name to salvation.[10] Church figures interpreted these scriptures to mean that "outside the church there is no salvation."[11] It followed from their teaching that members of other religions had to convert to the church to be saved and those who refused to

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[8] The word orthodox with a small o = correct thinking whereas the word Orthodox with a large O = specific Christian groups such as the Greek or Russian Orthodox Churches.

[9] Arnulf Camps, *Partners in Dialogue: Christianity and Other World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1993), 214.

[10] John 14:6 reads "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me.'" ; and Acts 4:12 reads "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." *The Holy Bible: The Revised Standard Version.* (New York: New American Library, 1962), 103; 114.

[11] This statement is a translation of the latin phrase *extra ecclesiam nulla salus.* For an excellent study of the historical origins of this dogma see: Joseph Osei-Bonsu, "Extra Ecclesiam nulla Salus": Critical Reflections from Biblical and African Perspectives." in Peter Phan (ed.) *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Paragon House, 1990),131-146.

convert were labelled as infidels and often burned and hanged. The merits of other religions were rarely appreciated for their own right. The modern attitude of dialogue, in contrast, shows appreciation for other religions without any hidden agenda aimed at conversion. A new interpretation of John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 will be advanced by this thesis which will be based on an ethical understanding of these passages.

WHAT IS DIALOGUE?

We should now turn and consider the precise definition of dialogue used in this thesis. The word dialogue has a specific meaning when it comes to interreligious discussion but first let us consider other common meanings of the term.

Historically, and etymologically, the word dialogue comes from the ancient Greek roots *dia* (between) and *logos* (word). The Greek philosopher Plato used the term in his writings to refer to a way of searching for truth. "In Plato's dialogues, Socrates is portrayed as one who uses a method of question and answer; through dialogue, he hopes to arrive at a better understanding of truth. The concept of dialogue then, has a distinguished and ancient intellectual pedigree."[12]

When it comes to religious matters, dialogue is quite a new word. According to one scholar, the term "interreligious dialogue" appears as a subject heading in the *Religious Index to Periodical Literature* only in the mid 1960s.[13] Since that time, the term "interreligious dialogue" has referred to a process of reciprocal communication between members of different world religions based on openness, respect and appreciation of different viewpoints.

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[12] David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 46.

[13] Ibid., 46.

In order to help elucidate what interreligious dialogue is, Emerson Colaw defines what dialogue *is not*. He makes the following points:

- Interreligious dialogue is not a sermon. A sermon is a monologue, while dialogue is a two way process, give and take.
- Interreligious dialogue is not accusation and defense. Nobody wins and nobody loses. Both partners should benefit from the process.
- Interreligious dialogue is not a debate.
- Interreligious dialogue is not proselytization.
- Interreligious dialogue is not negotiation.[14]

Dialogue and negotiation are often used as synonyms but the scholar Paul Mojzes writes that negotiation is more self-centred than dialogue because the "partners in negotiation are generally uninterested in the others' welfare, but are looking out the best they can for their own interests."[15] In contrast, dialogue is a mutual exploration of issues where the other is considered a partner rather than a rival. Dialogue involves communicating with members of other religions in an attitude of respect, open-mindedness, and humility where one listens to what the other has to say with interest and appreciation.

On a more advanced level, scholars define dialogue in one of three ways which may be distinguished as (1) epistemological, (2) sociological, and (3) attitudinal. Let us look at each type of definition individually.

Leonard Swidler defines dialogue in an epistemological manner. He writes "dialogue is a conversation between two or more persons with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the

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14 Emerson Colaw, "Why Dialogue?" in Jakob J. Petuchowski (ed.) *When Jews and Christians Meet* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988),178.

15 Paul Mojzes, "Types of Encounters Between Religions," in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.) *Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies Towards the Outsider* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 7.

other so that he or she can change and grow."[16] Thus, Swidler accentuates the knowledge, or epistemological, dimension of dialogue.

Other scholars define dialogue in a sociological manner. According to this approach, dialogue is an instrument to build greater respect, cooperation, and peace at different levels *of society.*

Dialogue can also be defined as an attitude or a way of life. The most famous exponent of this approach was the Jewish scholar Martin Buber whose book *I and Thou* influenced many Christian scholars of dialogue such as David Lochhead. According to Lochhead, "It is the relationship of honesty and openness more than the activity of conversation, that is constitutive of dialogue."[17] His definition emphasizes an attitude rather than the proposed benefits of dialogue.

Variations in these three types of definitions are commonly found in the literature on dialogue. However, in recent years Paul Mojzes explains that:

> Some people make no effort to explain what they mean by the word dialogue. Some use it vaguely, applying it to almost any meeting between religious groups, regardless of the attitudes and motives brought to the meeting. .... Some more correctly identify dialogue as a specific type of encounter characterized by the equality and freedom of the participants, by a give-and-take situation, by an attempt to solve common theoretical and practical problems without aiming to misuse the partner or win a victory.[18]

Leonard Swidler calls this problem "term inflation." He writes, "Once the term dialogue has become fashionable, not only does everyone want to use it they

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[16] Leonard Swidler, *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 3.

[17] Lochhead, 77.

[18] Paul Mojzes, "The What and How of Dialogue," In M. Darrol Bryant and Frank Flinn (eds.), *Interreligious Dialogue -Voices From A New Frontier* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 203.

often overuse it."[19] One example of this problem is Christians who "consciously or unconsciously adopt the term dialogue as camouflage in order to carry on more effectively their old polemic and proselytization."[20] However, it has been clearly stated that dialogue is not proselytization so Christians who use the term in this sense are misleading their audience.

The following definition of dialogue is adopted by this thesis as our starting point. This definition was selected because it encompasses the three main types of definitions outlined above:

> [D]ialogue is a way by which persons or groups of different persuasions respectfully and responsibly relate to one another in order to bring about mutual enrichment without removing essential differences between them. Dialogue is both a verbal and an attitudinal mutual approach which includes listening, sharing ideas, and working together despite the continued existence of real differences and tensions. Dialogue is a conscious process in which partners seek to give and take without recourse to force and intimidation.[21]

It is likely that this definition would be met with widespread agreement among the scholars of dialogue.

PRELIMINARIES

A few more preliminaries are helpful before we proceed. In the literature on dialogue, one often comes across different adjectives that can confuse a reader. For example, "interfaith" dialogue and "interreligious" dialogue are sometimes used as synonyms. However, other scholars use the adjective "interfaith" to specify *dialogue among Christians* rather than dialogue between

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[19] Swidler, 67.

[20] Ibid., 66.

[21] Mojzes, "The What and How of Dialogue", 203.

members of different religions. Ordinarily, the term used to describe dialogue between Christian denominations is called *ecumenism.*

The above semantic variations often complicates understanding for the reader. Consequently, for the sake of clarity this thesis will use the phrase "interreligious dialogue" throughout to refer to dialogue between persons from different world religions.[22] However, it will be necessary occasionally to use other adjectives if they are used in quotations of scholars that are cited.

Finally it should be remembered that interreligious dialogue is the activity of religious persons, not of religions in the abstract. One scholar reminds us that "It is never the religions themselves that converse but individual people who embody those religions."[23] Furthermore, Klaus Klostermaier writes, "dialogue is primarily the meeting of human beings. Hindu-Christian dialogue [for example] is not so much the meeting between Hinduism and Christianity as between individual Hindus and Christians, each professing his [or her] own faith."[24] I would add another point. Not only are individual Christians and Hindus involved in dialogue but also they come from specific denominations within their respective traditions. Too often scholars make the error of referring to a religion as if it is a monolithic entity thereby ignoring internal diversity. In reality, what is called Christianity involves many diverse communities. A meeting labelled "Christian-Buddhist dialogue" for example, could involve Theravadin Buddhists and Roman Catholics, or Pure Land Buddhists and Greek Orthodox Christians. These dialogues would be very different because the underlying presuppositions of the groups are different, yet both are broadly labelled

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[22] Therefore, interreligious dialogue does not have to be about religious issues. Interreligious dialogue simply involves two or more persons or groups from different religious backgrounds communicating with each other in an attitude of mutual respect and openness.

[23] Harvey Cox, *Many Mansions: A Christian's Encounter With Other Faiths* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 5.

[24] Klaus Klostermaier, "Hindu-Christian Dialogue," in Stanley J. Samartha (ed.), *Dialogue Between Men of Living Faiths* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1971), p. 20.

Christian-Buddhist dialogue. In the future more precision will be necessary in the literature on interreligious dialogue. This thesis is careful to retain the human dimension of dialogue.

The preceding overview of arguments, definitions and terminology provides a useful introduction to the theory of interreligious dialogue. In this thesis interreligious dialogue refers to an attitude of openness towards members of other religions which respects their religious differences. This thesis contends that interreligious dialogue is an obligation for Christians to fulfil their commandment to love one's neighbour. It could be said that the practice of dialogue is a way to manifest Christian love for modern times.

Chapter 1:
A SURVEY OF
CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES TOWARDS OTHER RELIGIONS

It is useful to survey the history of Christian attitudes towards other religions in order to place dialogue in its historical context. This chapter will illustrate how dialogue differs from previous Christian attitudes towards religious outsiders.

The question 'How should Christians relate to other religions?' is as old as Christianity itself. Since the very beginning of their faith, Christians interacted with Jews in Palestine. It is sometimes forgotten that Jesus was a Jew and his apostles were also Jews. Originally, the term "Christian" was not used by Jesus' disciples to self-consciously define their identity vis-à-vis other Jews. Rather the first Christians viewed themselves simply as Jews of a different perspective who followed "the Way" of Jesus. Only with the advent of Paul's teachings did debates arise over the validity of Jewish law for the gentiles which generated a clear break from the mainstream Jewish tradition. When Paul's epistles and the Gospels began to circulate, serious theological and doctrinal antagonism developed between the two communities that later degenerated into bitterness and hostility. Eventually, the word "Christian" was used in Antioch to distinguish followers of Jesus from other types of Jews.[25]

In addition to interacting with Jews, the original Christians were also faced with how to relate to the "pagan" Roman Empire. For the first several centuries of the Common Era, the Roman Empire persecuted Christians violently. Ironically, this persecution fuelled the growth of the church. However, the oppressed Christians eventually became the oppressors. Donald Swearer explains that:

> In the first three centuries the church was basically on the defensive against other religions as it sought to maintain itself

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[25] Acts 11: 26.

against paganism. For the next twelve hundred years the church's policy towards non-Christian religions changed from the defense to attack, and Christian intolerance became more unyielding than the previous attitude of the Roman Empire had been towards Christianity.[26]

When the Church formed an alliance with the Roman Empire, the dominant attitude towards other religions became hostility. Ecclesiastical authorities taught that the church was the only path to salvation and all the other religions were false. Other religions were seen as lies, works of the devil, or at best as · badly mistaken. Christian animosity to outsiders was enshrined in the dogma "outside the church there is no salvation" (*Extra ecclesiam nulla salus*).[27] This attitude is called *exclusivism* because religious outsiders are "excluded" from salvation. For centuries *exclusivism* was the dominant posture of the church towards other religions.

The attitude of exclusivism was not limited to outsiders and also applied internally towards "deviant" believers. Church leaders taught that a particular set of Christian beliefs, called "orthodox beliefs", was the only correct one; and it followed that all other sets of beliefs were wrong (heretical). The intransigence and narrowness of this mentality led to some of the worst atrocities in Christian history. Hans Küng describes some of the results of orthodox exclusivism as follows:

> Christianity has a terrible history of the persecution of heretics and those of other beliefs (above all the Jews). Since the emperor Theodosius the Great, who in 391 declared Christianity the state religion and banned other cults, heresy has been regarded as a crime against the state. So the enemy of the church is also the enemy of the empire and is punished accordingly. As early as 385 the Spanish heretic Priscillian was executed for heresy in Trier along with six companions in Trier. Martin of Tours and others had

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[26] Donald Swearer, *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions* (Philadelphia: Westminister Press, 1977), 29.

[27] For an excellent study of the historical origins of this dogma see Joseph Osei-Bonsu, "Extra Ecclesiam nulla Salus" cited fully above in footnote 11.

objected. Ambrose, Pope Siricius and Christianity in general condemned what seems to have been the first killing of Christians by other Christians for differences in belief. But people got used to it. Pope Leo the Great already pronounced himself satisfied with these proceedings. Not to mention the later fury of the Inquisition: in Seville alone in 1481 around 400 people were burned; by the year 1783 the number of those burned is given as 31,000. And who does not know that the connection between the Inquisition and witch-hunting in Catholic and Protestant areas led to actions which make one's hair stand on end, and was only dismantled at a relatively late stage.[28]

When we look at examples of Christian exclusivism towards other religions, one of the most notorious events was the Crusades. It is shocking that some Christians today still consider the crusades to be a glorious event. Not only were the crusades shameful for the crimes perpetrated against Muslims and Jews but also deplorable for the distrust they generated between Western Christians and Eastern Orthodox Christians.[29] Furthermore, Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount were forsaken by the Crusaders who murdered thousands of Muslims and Jews. Even today, mention of the crusades to Muslims generates bitterness that undermines interreligious dialogue.

Another Christian attitude towards outsiders in the Middle Ages was segregation. During the fifteenth century ecclesiastical authorities segregated European Jews into ghettos.[30] Jews were segregated, it was said, to prevent the Christian masses from being "contaminated" by Jewish ideas. Anti-Jewish

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[28] Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1993), 82.

[29] In the fourth crusade (1204 C.E), Western Christians en route to the Holy Land, stopped in Constantinople, the capital of Eastern Christianity, and attacked and looted the city creating immense bitterness towards Western Christians.

[30] At the Forth Lateran Council of 1215 segregation of the Jews became the official policy of the church. However, this policy was only widely enforced after the Council of Basil in 1434. See Rosemary Radford Ruther, *Faith and Fratricide: The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1979), 210.

church attitudes incubated a climate of anti-semitism in Europe which eventually fuelled the holocaust. Suffice it to say, Christian attitudes towards the Jews were less than favourable and other examples of anti-semitism could be cited that are too horrible to recount.[31]

The above attitudes of hostility and segregation were the primary postures of the Church towards other religions during the Middle Ages. Historians call the period after the fall of the Roman Empire "the Dark Ages" and it seems that this term is also appropriate to describe the church's attitude towards other religions during the same era. Although examples of compassion can be found in the lives of individual Christians such as Francis of Assisi, their examples stand out against the dominant climate of Christian hostility towards other faiths.

Although it was a dark age, there were a few lights in the darkness. On a few notable occasions (they can be counted on the fingers of one hand) daring Christians went against the tradition of hostility by making gestures of peace and goodwill towards other religions. The most famous of these was the attempt made by Cardinal Nicholas of Cusa to foster peace between Christians, Jews and Muslims. During the siege of Constantinople by Muslim forces in 1453, Nicholas published *De Pace Fidei* (On the Peace of Faith) which presents a fictional dialogue between members of different religions.[32] Nicholas appealed for religious peace between Jews, Christians, and Muslims and provided the first thoughtful treatise on conciliation between the three faiths.

Another light in the darkness occurred in medieval Spain where

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[31] Martin Luther's remarks about the Jews are one example. For readers who are interested in learning more about this history the following books are excellent: (1) Jules Isaac, *The Teaching of Contempt: Christian Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: Holt, Rinhart and Winston, Inc., 1964); and (2) Randolph L. Braham (ed.) *The Origins of the Holocaust: Christian Anti-Semitism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986);.

[32] John Patrick Dolan (ed.) *Unity and Reform: Selected Writings of Nicholas de Cusa* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1962).

Christians, Muslims and Jews often conversed together.[33] However, their trialogues flourished and were sponsored by Muslim authorities rather than Christian rulers. When the Christians completed their reconquest of Spain in 1492, the era of goodwill ended because the Christians, ascending to power, replaced the goodwill with the terror of the Spanish Inquisition. The new Christian rulers expelled all the Jews from Spain in 1492, the same year incidentally that Christopher Columbus set foot on America.[34] Thus, the period of religious tolerance in Spain during the Middle Ages was short lived.

European expansion, spearheaded by Columbus and others, opened up new parts of the world to Christian missionaries. Spanish missionaries were very brutal towards indigenous peoples and showed little respect for native religions.[35] However, as time passed some missionaries began to develop more respect towards native cultures. For example, Jesuits who travelled to Asia began to take time to learn about the cultures they encountered and discovered that in many ways Asian religions resembled Christianity in their belief structures and ethical systems. The information that the Jesuits collected, helped to build the data for the study of comparative religion.

The rise of knowledge about other religions slowly led to a paradigm shift in the dominant ecclesiastical attitude from hostility to what is variously called inclusivism or competition which espoused debate with members of other religions instead of warfare. Church figures attempted to "demonstrate" the superiority of Christianity through polemics, arguments, and logic. It was acknowledged that other religions possessed *some* truth, but it was insisted that the church alone possessed the absolute Truth. Christianity was seen as

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[33] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, "Mission, Dialogue and God's Will for Us," *International Review of Mission*, 77 (1988): 368.

[34] I deliberately use the words "set foot" instead of "discovered" because native peoples already had flourishing cultures when Columbus arrived.

[35] For example, during the Spanish conquests of South America in the 16th century, Christian missionaries forced indigenous peoples to convert to Christianity or they were tortured.

the fulfilment of other religions because it "included" (which is where the term "inclusivism" derives its name) the greatest insights of other religions. Many scholars, however, criticize the attitude of inclusivism for its arrogance. To claim that one has the most advanced religion is to imply that all other religions are inferior. Nevertheless, inclusivism is a big step towards greater acceptance of religious diversity compared to exclusivism.

Two other Christian attitudes were tolerance and indifference. Paul Mojzes explains that these attitudes are not the most healthy postures towards non-Christians although they are much more benign than hostility or segregation. Mojzes explains that:

> There is a form of living side by side characterized by apathy or indifference and usually more than a little ignorance about the other. While active antagonism may be missing, there is a self-satisfaction which typifies this model which simply has no need of the neighbour. Each community lives by itself, perhaps even side by side. At times apparent harmony prevails, but not infrequently antagonism and distrust fester beneath, only to erupt in open hostility or warfare in a moment of crisis. A casual observer may fail to see the lurking problems which are masked by indifference, for this is what indifference does well - it does not solve problems - it merely prolongs them.[36]

In the same way the attitude of tolerance implies an underlying current of tension towards those "tolerated". Mere tolerance, like indifference, may erupt into hostility in times of strained relations. Obviously tolerance is more humane than suppression but Mojzes points out that tolerance is usually "a concession or privilege from above, rather than an inherent value. If it is offered from above it may be withdrawn from above."[37] Therefore, the previous Christian attitudes of hostility, segregation, inclusivism, indifference and tolerance are all problematic and do not foster lasting religious cooperation.

Understandably, many Christians find the preceding examples of past

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[36] Mojzes, "Types of Encounters Between Religions", 6.

[37] Ibid., 24.

attitudes to other religions to be shameful. John Cobb writes to his fellow Christians, "when we review the past with eyes that are opened to the greatness and goodness of other Ways, we are driven to repentance for our arrogance. .... But if we are to repent wisely and well, that is, if we are to turn into a new and more appropriate course, we cannot simply ignore our past. We must understand it and build upon it as well as criticize it."[38] Christians must learn lessons from their history. Too many people lost their lives for one to deny the legacy of past Christian intolerance. An obvious lesson from this past is that if Christians had engaged in dialogue rather than monologue, it is likely that much of the religious violence and bloodshed could have been avoided. A study of past Christian attitudes leads to an awareness that dialogue with other religions is long over due.

In the early twentieth century, interest in dialogue began to grow among Protestant theologians, especially Nathan Söderblom. Protestants led the movement towards greater dialogue and openness in Christianity. The two world wars temporarily postponed this movement but the devastation and disillusionment of the wars added to the climate of opinion that dialogue was needed to avoid future conflicts. After the second world war the World Council of Churches was formed in 1948 which promoted greater ecumenism and the spirit of dialogue.

However, it was not until the 1960s that widespread Christian interest and participation in dialogue blossomed. Many scholars give credit to the Second Vatican Council of 1962-5 as the primary impetus of the contemporary dialogue movement. The Second Vatican Council brought revolutionary changes in the official attitude of the papacy towards other religions. Previous centuries of Christian intolerance were condemned and Catholics were instructed to embrace dialogue. Pope Paul VI declared:

> Dialogue is demanded nowadays ... It is demanded by the dynamic course of action which is changing the face of modern

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[38] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue,* 1:

society. It is demanded by the pluralism of society, and by the
maturity of man has reached in this day and age. Be he religious
or not, his secular education has enabled him to think and speak,
and to conduct a dialogue with dignity (*Ecclesiam suam,* no. 78).[39]

For the first time in history, Catholics were encouraged to seek dialogue with members of other religions in their daily lives. Today, Leonard Swidler states, Catholics are now leading the promotion of dialogue among the world religions. Therefore, the traditional attitude of hostility or exclusivism is no longer the official position of the Vatican towards non-Christians. Today the tenor of Christianity is not *extra ecclesiam nulla salus* but *ecclesia in dialogo.*

There are four historical developments that led to the attitude of dialogue in Christianity which can be summarized in the following list:

(1) Global integration allowed increasing exposure to different ideas, beliefs and other religions;

(2) Shifts in the philosophy of knowledge taught people that one's perspective is always limited by cultural, linguistic, historical and hermeneutical factors. This view slowly influenced the understanding of religious beliefs.

(3) The declarations of Vatican II exhorted all Catholics to embrace interreligious dialogue which opened the floodgates of cooperation with other religions.

(4) The anti-semitism underlying the Nazi holocaust forced many Christians to reconsider their bitter relationship with the Jews. Many modern scholars insist that the attitude of dialogue, which respects Jewish identity, is the only appropriate way for Christians to interact with Jews in the post-holocaust era.

Today a new problem faces Christians. Members of other religions doubt that Christian interest and motives in dialogue are genuine. A Christian invitation to dialogue is often viewed as a devious attempt at conversion. It is not

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[39] As cited in Leonard Swidler, "A Dialogue on Dialogue" in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.), *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 77.

surprising that African tribes, for example, who were subjugated to Western colonialism often associate Christianity with oppression. They fear that they will lose their traditional identity and culture if they engage in interreligious dialogue with Christians. Given the past history of Christianity, their concerns, one must admit, do not lack foundation.

A final Christian attitude towards other religions deserves mention. This attitude is called "pluralism". The philosopher John Hick is the most famous Christian proponent of pluralism. Hick argues that the world religions are paths to the same goal, and therefore a plurality of ways to salvation are possible. The attitude of pluralism, much like dialogue, is very respectful towards other religions. However, the primary emphasis of pluralism is seeing other religions as ways to salvation. Therefore, the philosophy of pluralism is predicated upon the soteriological validity of other religions whereas dialogue is not. Consequently, it is not necessary to agree with the pluralist claim that other religions are valid paths to salvation in order to support dialogue. The philosophy of dialogue can stand on its own foundations. Nevertheless, the theory of religious pluralism complements the philosophy of dialogue and is an ally in the quest to make Christians more open-minded towards other religions.

In conclusion, seven common attitudes can be distinguished in the history of Christianity towards other religions. They are: (1) Hostility; (2) Segregation; (3) Tolerance; (4) Indifference; (5) Competition; (6) Dialogue; and (7) Pluralism. The following visual aid illustrates these attitudes:

Hostility	Segregation	Tolerance	Competition	Dialogue	Pluralism

<Exclusivism>   <Inclusivism>   <Cooperation>
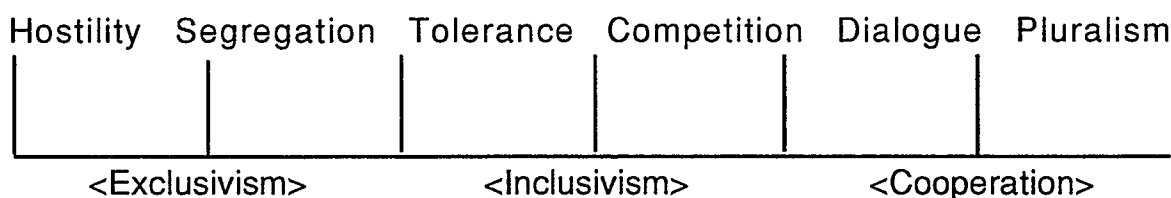
Generally speaking, church attitudes towards other religions have been predominantly on the left of this scale with a recent shift to the right. It is possible that other Christian attitudes existed and this chapter does not presume to be exhaustive but it does intend to illustrate the preponderant Christian attitudes

over the centuries.

The conclusion of this chapter is that past Christian attitudes towards other religions demand a new attitude of repentance, cooperation, and dialogue with members of other faiths. Additional arguments will be advanced in the next chapter to show that dialogue is not just one attitude among many, but the most appropriate attitude for Christians. These further rationales make an even stronger case for dialogue.

Chapter 2.
RATIONALES OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

The case for dialogue does not stand or fall on one argument alone because many rationales can be advanced. There are four main ways to defend dialogue which I call: (1) the sociological rationale; (2) the epistemological rationale; (3) the ethical rationale; and (4) the theological rationale. In the literature on dialogue, no book or article exists which combines all of these rationales together and provides a comparative analysis. This chapter intends to make some pioneering steps in this area.

(1) THE SOCIOLOGICAL RATIONALE

One often hears on television, after outbursts of religious violence, that dialogue and reconciliation between two hostile religions are needed to avoid further bloodshed. This is an example of sociological rationale because dialogue is promoted as a way to reduce religious tensions and conflict *in society.*

The sociological rationale is premised on the fact that humanity is interrelated. It is said that since modern western societies are religiously plural, dialogue is needed in order for religions to co-exist peacefully. In the past, when religions did not engage in dialogue, many suspicions arose between them that ended in violence. According to Hans Küng, some violence could have been avoided if the world religions had tried to solve their problems using dialogue instead of warfare.[40] For Küng, the primary purpose of interreligious dialogue is to build peace between religions.

In addition to facilitating religious peace, the sociological rationale is also used to address social problems. Herbert Jai Singh writes:

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[40] Küng, 104.

> [R]eligions have shown increased interest in social and political action for the amelioration of man's lot on earth; this in turn has set the stage for inter-religious dialogue. ... The common struggle of humanity for food, dignity, and justice ... clears the air for dialogue ... It is the discussion of actual concrete problems that brings into focus underlying fundamental traditional beliefs.[41]

Indeed, there are several social problems facing the world religions that seem to beg for joint action. They include hunger, discrimination, denial of human rights, anti-semitism, racism, crime, and destruction of the environment. If followers of the world religions worked together at the local, national and global levels they could make an immense contribution to the benefit of humanity. Obviously, dialogue and cooperation are necessary in order to make joint action feasible and successful.

Dialogue can also play a constructive role in addressing the social dimension of anti-semitism. Dialogue with Jewish partners can take steps towards building trust between the two communities, and to begin a process of healing.[42]

A third social issue facing Christianity is poverty. In recent years, a branch of Christian theology has emerged in Latin America, called Liberation theology, which emphasizes the plight of the poor and the homeless.[43] Liberation theology has begun to influence the theory of interreligious dialogue used by such scholars as Paul F. Knitter and Harvey Cox. Knitter proposes the following liberation-theology model of interreligious dialogue for Christians.

Knitter argues that representatives of the world religions need to engage

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[41] As cited in Sharpe, 85.

[42] Although dialogue between Jews and Christians is needed to remove anti-semitism on the social level, the main roots of anti-semitism are theological. Unless Christians are willing to face the theological roots of anti-semitism in the New Testament then it is unlikely that the foundations of anti-semitism will go away despite the plesantaries exchanged in dialogue.

[43] Gustavo Gutiérrez is attributed with founding liberation theology in the publication of his book, *A Theology of Liberation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1976) .

in interreligious dialogue to liberate the world's poor from suffering and oppression.[44] He argues that finding solutions to suffering, poverty and oppression should be the primary motivation for interreligious dialogue because Jesus served the poor and taught his disciples to do likewise.[45] Knitter asserts that working towards liberation from suffering requires cooperation and dialogue with other religions.

It is helpful to look at two "real-life" examples of socially motivated dialogue to see how this rationale works in practice. It should be remembered that dialogue involves real people. Eric J. Sharpe writes that although dialogue "is a practical activity, it is possible to write about it purely in terms of theory."[46] The following examples are offered to show readers how real social problems have served as the impetus for dialogue.

The first example is from in David Lochhead's book entitled *The Dialogical Imperative*. Lochhead recounts an incident which occurred in Vancouver B.C.:

> In July 1983, the government of the Province of British Columbia introduced a "legislative package" that ... threatened programs designed for the poor and the handicapped, [and] abolished the office responsible for the enforcement of human rights ... As a result, a statement was drafted ecumenically [by Christians] to be read at a protest rally ... [However,] it became clear that the other religious communities in Vancouver were equally as concerned, if not more so because of their minority status, with the threat to human rights that seemed inherent to the government program. The result was that the original Christian statement ... became, with a little editing an interfaith statement that was read to the rally

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[44] Paul F. Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?" in Leonard Swidler et al. (eds.), *Death or dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 34. He uses the word "liberation" to mean emancipation from secular sources of oppression rather than spiritual liberation such as the Hindu concept of *moksha*.

[45] Ibid., 40.

[46] Eric J. Sharpe, "The Goals of Inter-Religious Dialogue," in John Hick (ed.) *Truth and Dialogue*. (London: Sheldon Press, 1974), 78.

by the chairperson of the local interfaith council, a Muslim.[47]

This example illustrates that common concerns (in this case a threat to human rights) can unite different religions to confront common threats. However, the example also illustrates that a common crisis is often needed before actual dialogue begins. Consequently, a weakness of the sociological rationale is that it often works *a posteriori* (after the fact) after the problems have emerged. Religious believers often wait until a grave problem confronts them before taking the initiative to engage in dialogue. Küng suggests that a preventative ethic is needed among the world religions in order to prevent conflicts from arising in the first place. He advocates the formation of a global ethic that provides some common norms, values and principles to foster interreligious cooperation. By engaging in *preventative dialogue*, followers of different religions can weed out the roots of potential conflicts before they cause harm.

Küng's dream for a global ethic was realized at the 1993 *Parliament of the World's Religions* held in Chicago, U.S.A., in which representatives of religious groups from around the world drafted a "Declaration of a Global Ethic." This declaration was signed by almost all of the religious groups present. When one surveys the history of religious interaction, the signing of the "Declaration of A Global Ethic" is one of the most remarkable accomplishments in the history of interreligious dialogue. (A copy of this document is found in the Appendix.) Ironically, little publicity of this event occurred by the mainstream media.[48] The implications and impact of this document will probably only begin to be felt in the 21st century.

Another example of socially motivated dialogue comes from a surprising source: the concentration camps in the Second World War. Leonard Swidler

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[47] Lochhead, 72-73.

[48] I am aware of the document only because I attended the 1993 Parliament of The World's Religions as a student researcher and observer. I suspect that the main reason why the media failed to report the Declaration was that the document does not make "exciting" reading. The media seems to prefer headlines which emphasize conflict rather than cooperation.

writes about Catholics and Protestants who found themselves together in the camp at Dachau because of their resistance to the Nazis. They:

> began to ask each other why they did what they did, and through dialogue were surprised to learn that they held many more positions in common than those positions that separated them. In fact these encounters and others like them fostered the Una Sancta Movement in Germany, which in turn was the force that moved the Catholic Church in the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) officially to embrace ecumenism and interreligious dialogue after many centuries of vigorous official rejection.[49]

In summary, sociological rationales seek the betterment of humanity. Dialogue is presented as a panacea to resolve religious tensions, to build peace, to ameliorate suffering, to resist oppression, to end anti-semitism and racism, and to facilitate religious cooperation. The common principle uniting these arguments is that dialogue makes society a more compassionate place in which to live. The sociological rationale is often called the "common sense" approach to interreligious dialogue because few people deny that we all need to get along peacefully.

(2) THE EPISTEMOLOGICAL RATIONALE

Whereas sociological arguments focus on the merits of dialogue in society (such as increased cooperation and peace), epistemological arguments focus on the quest for greater truth and knowledge in dialogue.

The epistemological rationale can be introduced creatively by the following parable:

> Once upon a time a certain king ...gathered together a number of beggars blind from birth and offered a prize to the one who could give him the best account of an elephant. The first beggar who examined the elephant chanced to lay hold of the leg, and reported the elephant was a tree trunk; the second, laying hold of the tail, declared that the elephant was like a rope; another, who

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[49] Swidler, "A Dialogue on Dialogue."

seized an ear, insisted that an elephant was like a palm leaf; and so on. The beggars fell to quarrelling with one another, and the king was greatly amused.[50]

The lesson of this parable is that followers of different religions are like blind men who grasp different parts of the divine. Each religion advances a different view of the divine which appears to contradict the others'. However, if the followers of the world religions shared their views in dialogue, it is possible that a greater understanding of the divine may emerge.

Of course, atheists and Theravadin Buddhists will object that there is no elephant! However, their perspectives can also be explained by this parable. An atheist is like another blind man who grasps *the air* between the legs of the elephant and, feeling nothing, assumes that the elephant does not exist. The parable illustrates that the atheist's view is only one among many; thus the atheist also needs to engage in dialogue with religious believers. The parable teaches that the reverse is also true and religious believers must be open to what atheists have to say.

A second objection to this parable concerns the possibility that two blind men may grasp the same part of the elephant and give different descriptions of it. In this case, it is likely that one description will be more accurate than the other. However, the problem is knowing which of the descriptions is the most accurate. That is why the elephant parable emphasizes the virtue of humility rather than who's view is more accurate. The parable teaches that we are all blind persons whose conjectures about the elephant are always partial and finite. Therefore, followers of the world religions should be humble in their vocalization of the divine and acknowledge room for improvement. Religious viewpoints are not a case of black and white but emanate many colours of the rainbow. Hellwig concludes that in dialogue followers of different religions should present the truth they see it, but "conscious that it cannot be the whole

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[50] Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan, *Eastern Religions and Western Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940), 308-9.

truth, the absolute truth, unconditioned by our particular cultural, linguistic, historical and personal bias." [51]

The question of religious truth is deeply associated with the epistemological rationale of dialogue. Scholars such as Swidler and Mojzes argue that the primary purpose of interreligious dialogue is to explore new horizons of religious truth. They argue that Christians "need to engage in dialogue with those who have differing cultural, philosophical, social, religious, viewpoints so as to strive toward an ever fuller perception of the truth."[52]

An implicit presupposition of the epistemological rationale is that insights of truth can be found in other religions. Some Christians reject this presupposition and believe that only Christianity knows the truth. However, Küng points out that "any unprejudiced person knows that the boundary between truth and untruth is not *a priori* identical with the boundary between one's religion and any others. Those who keep their heads will concede that the boundaries between truth and untruth often run through one's own religion. How often we are right and wrong at the same time!"[53] The Vatican stated that truth transcends the boundaries of Christianity when it announced "dialogue should be initiated with courage and sincerity, with the greatest freedom and reverence ... recognizing the truth everywhere, even if the truth demolishes one so that one is forced to reconsider one's own position, in theory and in practice, at least in part."[54]

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[51] M. Hellwig, "Response 1" in *Death or Dialogue: From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press Int., 1990), 101.

[52] Leonard Swidler, "Religious Pluralism and Ecumenism from a Christian Perspective" in Charles Wei-hsun and Gerhard E. Spiegler (eds.) *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogues: An Analysis and Sourcebook of Developments Since 1945* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1989), 343.

[53] Küng, 81.

[54] *Humanae personae dignitatem*, Austin Flannery, *Vatican II* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1975), 1005; 1010.

Because some Christians deny that insights on truth can be learned from other religions, it is incumbent on proponents of dialogue to show that Christians can learn from others. John Hick has advanced the following rationale to seek this end.

Hick founds his rationale on the premise that the divine transcends complete expression in words. In the Bible there is strong support for Hick's premise. Isaiah, for example, stated that "God's thoughts and ways are always higher than human understanding" (Isaiah 55:8-9). The early Church Fathers also agreed that God is beyond full human knowledge. Augustine wrote that "God transcends even the mind" (*De Vera Religione*, 36:67) and several centuries later Saint Thomas Aquinas declared that "He knows God best who acknowledges that whatever he thinks and says falls short of what God really is" (*In librum* 6 *De Causis*).[55] This theme is also reflected in the following words of John of Damascus: "God is infinite and incomprehensible; and all that is comprehensible about God is His infinity and incomprehensibility."[56] These examples are sufficient to illustrate that there is a strong current in Christianity that teaches God is greater than human understanding and more religious truth can always be learned.

The reader may notice some irony in the previous statements because if it were truly *impossible* to say anything about God then these writers should say nothing at all. Instead, their remarks suggest several attributes of God. First, their words imply that God exists which would give God an attribute of "being." Second, the pronouns used assume that God's gender is masculine. Therefore, it is doubtful that these scholars really mean that God is *completely incomprehensible* because their language implies otherwise. But in any case,

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[55] As cited in Jóhn Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 238.

[56] As cited in Demetrios Constantelos, "The Attitude of Orthodox Christians Towards Non-Orthodox and Non-Christians" in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.) *Attitudes of Religion and Ideologies Toward the Outsider* (Lewistown, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 73.

the preceding remarks suffice to illustrate that in Christianity, God is *partly* incomprehensible and thus not limited to any description, proposition or dogma. It follows that all statements about God, including scriptures, are limited approximations of God. The profound result of this simple argument is that Christians can always augment their faith with new religious insights from others. The "principle here is that the mystery [of God] always exceeds our grasp of it, and thus we must remain ever open to something more that can be given to us."[57] Hick suggests that this "something more" can be discovered in interreligious dialogue.

It is interesting that mystics of various traditions agree that words cannot do justice to the full magnitude of the Divine supporting Hick's argument precisely. But even mystics, who assert that their experiences are inexpressible, sometimes go on to describe them in propositions. When mystics translate their mystical experiences into the level of language, differences in interpretation arise which are perfectly natural because of linguistic, cultural and contextual reasons. However, mystics usually subordinate their differences to the overriding principle that the Divine is beyond words. Their comments are usually offered only as pointers to a greater and immeasurable Divine.

It is said that Christian groups who insist that they alone possess the "absolute truth" are not capable of engaging in epistemological dialogue because if they believe that "their particular perception of religious truth is the only correct one, then genuine dialogue does not take place. What occurs is merely a series of monologues."[58] But according to Swearer a "Christian does not possess the truth; rather he [or she] possesses faith ...[which is continually actualized] through genuine dialogue with his neighbour."[59] It is still possible for

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[57] M. Darrol Bryant, "Inter-faith Encounter and Dialogue in a Trinitarian Perspective" in Peter Phan (ed.) *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 10.

[58] Swearer, 41.

[59] Ibid., 49.

Christians to engage in other forms of dialogue, such as sociological dialogue, without renouncing absolute truth claims but absolute truth claims are incompatible with the epistemological model of dialogue, according to Swearer and Swidler.

However, many other scholars disagree. For example, Hellwig finds this position to be too exclusionary. She writes:

> To say that those who are sure of an absolute hold on the truth cannot dialogue because they are not open to learning, implies a narrower definition of [epistemological] dialogue than I like to employ. I believe there can be a genuine dialogue simply for the purpose of information and mutual understanding of positions. I may be convinced that Christians have a hold on the truth of divine revelation absolutely and yet, because I live in Pakistan, be courteously and genuinely curious to know and understand as much about Muslims and their religion as possible.[60]

Indeed, Hellwig makes a very valid point. Epistemological dialogue is not limited to truth issues but encompasses any aspect of learning from another religion.

The epistemological rationale of dialogue may be summarized in the following flow of reasoning: (1) religious truth is always partly mysterious. In other words, the infinite God cannot be limited in finite propositions or words;[61] (2) it appears that every religion has partial insights on truth because goodness can be found in all religions; (3) thus, it follows that interreligious dialogue is an epistemological tool for Christians to enrich their knowledge of others and to gain a deeper understanding of the divine or religious truth.

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[60] Hellwig, "Response 1", 101.

[61] Although some Christians feel that the infinity of God was incarnated in Jesus, the early Church councils make it clear that God, the Father, was not exhausted in Jesus.

DIALOGUE AND OPENNESS

A second approach to the epistemological rationale focuses on the value of openness to change. Many contemporary scholars argue that Christianity must make itself relevant to the modern pluralistic context. Reuel L. Howe's book, *The Miracle of Dialogue* (1963) provides some excellent reflections on the topic of openness to others. Howe argues that the "Church must never lose its power to maintain dialogue openly and undefensively with other points of view."[62] Although other Christians worry that Christianity will become "contaminated" with strange ideas, Howe writes that Christians should "not be afraid of change. Instead of being defensive in the face of new human insights and discoveries, the listening Church is able courageously to enter into dialogue with these, fully confident that out of it the truth of God will appear as it always has."[63] The scholar Monika Hellwig agrees with Howe and adds that "a maturing faith is necessarily a changing one."[64]

A new form of Christian theology has developed in recent years, called Contextual theology which argues that change is necessary in order to make Christian teachings relevant to different cultures and contexts:

> The current ecumenical agenda has been influenced by the emergence ... of what has come to be called "contextual theology." This movement has recognized that the words we use to speak about God, about human nature and destiny, take on a meaning in relation to the particular context in which they are spoken. "God loves every person" has a different meaning if spoken in an affluent North American congregation than when spoken in the slums of Calcutta. ... The differences between rich and poor, between powerful and powerless, have become important

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[62] Howe, 74.

[63] Ibid., 133.

[64] Monika K. Hellwig, "The Thrust and Tenor of our Conversations," in Leonard Swidler et al. (eds.), *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 49.

considerations in ...[Christian theology] today.[65]

To illustrate the relationship between culture and religion we will consider another example. A Black portrait of Christ in Africa is more congenial to Africans than an image of Christ depicted as White since the colour White is often associated with colonialism. In contrast, images of Christ in Europe are White rather than Semitic because Europeans are able to relate to Christ better in their own image. Many Christians argue that in order to succeed among different cultures Christianity must take on different cultural visages.

Change can lead to decay or renewal. In the past, many Christians feared change and closed doors to strange beliefs. However, since the 1960s, the Vatican has viewed change as a vehicle to bring renewal and states:

> All Christians should do their best to promote dialogue between persons of every class, as a duty of brotherly and sisterly charity suited to our adult and progressive age ... *The willingness to engage in dialogue is the measure and the strength of that general renewal which must be carried out in the Church.*" [Italics mine.][66]

It is notable that the Vatican describes dialogue here as a "duty" of an "adult age". These are powerful words. The word "adult" implies that former ages were either "adolescent" or "childish" which is a revealing remark about previous church attitudes towards other religions.

The importance of openness is emphasized in Donald Swearer's book *Dialogue: The Key to Understanding Other Religions* (1977) which offers the following parable on the merits of openness:

> Two men were seated together in a train compartment riding from Oxford to London. One was middle-aged and slightly heavyset, with a certain bearing of wise experience. The other was younger, with a tense, rather aggressive air. The older man tried several times to engage the younger man in conversation but

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[65] Lochhead, 1.

[66] Austin Flannery, *Vatican Council II* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1975), 1003.

> with no results. The latter either sat immobile in deep concentration or jotted notes on a pad of paper he held in his hand. As the train reached its destination the younger man finally broke out of his silence and introduced himself as an Oxford student headed for a debate in London on Britain's entry into the common market. The older man smiled, wished him well in the debate, and said he was sorry he would not have a chance to hear it but that he was going to a meeting at the Prime Minister's on the same subject. "You see," he said, "I have been responsible for drafting our common market negotiations."[67]

The moral of this parable, according to Swearer, is that "too often like the young debater we close ourselves off to unprecedented opportunity in the realm of the spirit as well as the world. In the posture of dialogue, faith discovers truth. From this discovery we grow as religious persons."[68]

In conclusion, the health of Christianity is directly correlated with its openness to change. Christians need to be attentive towards other viewpoints for Church renewal and growth.

(3) THE ETHICAL RATIONALE

It is the position of this work, that the ethical rationale of interreligious dialogue is the strongest and most tenable. The ethical approach claims that Christians should engage in interreligious dialogue *because* Jesus' commanded his disciples to love their neighbours as themselves (Matthew 22: 39-40 and Mark 12: 28-34).[69] Dialogue, in other words, "becomes the new

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[67] Swearer, 49-50.

[68] Ibid., 49-50.

[69] The term love in this chapter refers to the Christian concept of *agape* (neighbourly love) in contrast to *eros* (romantic love) or *phila* (brotherly love). All subsequent references to the word love imply *agape*.

name for the perennial Christian vocation to love the neighbour as ourselves."[70]

Anyone with a cursory knowledge of the New Testament will be aware that *agape* is the central principle in Jesus' life and teachings. The entire New Testament resonates with love for others. The most famous instances are found in Matthew 22: 39-40 and Mark 12: 29-30 which, even the most cautious scholars agree summarize Jesus ethical teachings.[71] Let us consider Mark 12: 29-30. Here Jesus is asked which is the greatest commandment in the Law? He replies as follows: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength, and You shall love your neighbour as yourself. There is no other commandment greater than these." Ironically, Jesus gave two commandments as if they were one, teaching that both are equal obligations for Christians.

Jesus stated that the practice of *agape* should be so definitive for Christians that it should distinguish their identity. In the Gospel of John, Jesus exclaims, "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35).

Since love is the central commandment for Christians, then the logical question is 'What does love require?' At a bare minimum, this thesis contends that love requires an attempt to listen to one's neighbours and to respect that they have religious beliefs that differ from one's own. After all "how can we love and reverence someone to whom we do not also listen in return, ... earnestly seeking to appreciate and fairly appraise her or his answers as well as questions?"[72] Love of one's neighbour requires an attitude of openness and respect. Therefore, love requires an attitude of dialogue. Reuel Howe suggests

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[70] Bryant, 6.

[71] Victor P. Furnish, *The Love Command in the New Testament* (London: SCM Press Ltd., 1973), 194.

[72] A. Durwood Foster, "Christian Motives For Interfaith Dialogue" in Peter Phan (ed.), *Christianity and the Wider Ecumenism* (New York: Paragon House, 1990), 29.

that "if a person is to speak to God, he must really speak to his neighbour; that if he would love God, he must love his neighbour; and that in loving his neighbour, he will be found of God and loved by him."[73]

In addition to loving one's neighbour, Jesus also taught Christians to love their enemies (Matthew 5:44; Luke 6: 28). The appeal to love one's enemy is unpalatable to many Christians but one scholar points out:

> Jesus said nothing about people deserving our love but a great deal about our responsibility to love. Christian love does not therefore depend upon reciprocation from the other person. We must love regardless of how the other person acts. Although love may turn an enemy into a friend, it does not always happen that way. When it does not happen we are still under obligation to love."[74]

The concept of love of enemies adds weight to the position that Christians must dialogue with others regardless of who they are. For Christians, "love, is the supreme motive that underlies, informs, and consecrates all others ... Thus, love must also be the preeminent motive of Christian interfaith dialogue. For love ought to be the motive of all Christian motives. ...[Foster adds that] the best dialogue is impelled and propelled by love, though not by the "sloppy agape" that has no spine of intellectual as well as practical justice and rigor."[75] Therefore, interreligious dialogue with other religions should, according to Foster, be accompanied by the exercise of reason. In other words, Christians in dialogue should use their head as well as their heart.

What are some potential objections to a rationale of dialogue based on love? First, it might be claimed that one's "neighbour" is limited to fellow

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[73] Howe, 139. This view is very similar to that of Martin Buber's position. Real dialogue, according to Buber, is to step onto holy ground. See Martin Buber, *I and Thou* translated by Walter Kaufmann (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1970), 124-125.

[74] Roger H. Crook, *An Introduction to Christian Ethics.* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1990), 90.

[75] Foster, 28.

Christians only. However, Jesus makes clear in the parable of the Good Samaritan that this view is false. When Jesus was asked by a lawyer "Who is my neighbour?" he responded with the following story:

> A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers? He said, "The one who showed mercy on him." And Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 30-37, RSV).

This parable teaches that one's neighbour is not limited to the same religious community because it was a non-Jew (the Samaritan) who stopped to the help the injured man:

> [N]eighbourly love is shown to transcend what otherwise appear to be obvious and logical cultural, religious, and ethnic barriers. Jesus does not seek to define "neighbour" as if a class of neighbours could somehow be distinguished from a class of "non-neighbours." Instead, he offers the parable to exemplify the character and extent of neighbourly love, and to urge its performance. ... Love is not just an attitude but a way of life.[76]

Consequently, the parable of the Good Samaritan removes the objection that love is restricted to members of the same group. The parable "summons concrete acts of obedience in response to encountered need. The appeal to "Go and do likewise" is central to the parable, ... "neighbour" is the next person

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[76] Ibid., 60.

encountered".[77]

A second possible criticism of the ethical rationale is that it may be argued that true love requires converting others to Christianity to "save" their souls. If the Christian religion is considered the only path to salvation then true love, it is asserted, necessitates compelling others to become Christians. This view of Christian love, however, is spurious. Lochhead explains that:

> [I]t is possible to make certain authoritarian assumptions about God combined with a neurotic view of how a parent loves a child through controlling his or her every move, in order to think of love. as doing "what is best" for one's neighbour. "What is best," of course, is defined by us, not by our neighbour.
> When the New Testament speaks of loving our neighbour as God has loved us, it is not speaking of this kind of neurotic "love" and it is not using a monarchical model of God or Christ. It is the servanthood of Christ, not his "Kingship" that is the paradigm that lies behind the commandment.[78]

Therefore, Lochhead rejects the patronizing view of love that Christians need only to teach; rather, he points to the example of Jesus as servant to others.

A final objection that could be made about the ethical rationale of dialogue is that one can still love one's neighbours without actually engaging in dialogue with them. A solitary monk or nun, for example, may hypothetically love his or her neighbours but cannot engage in dialogue because no . neighbours are present. This objection expresses a misunderstanding of what has been argued. It was argued above that *the attitude of dialogue* is obligatory for Christians. This attitude consists of listening to others with respect, open-mindedness, compassion, and humility. Although actual dialogue may not be possible because no neighbours are present, as soon as a neighbour is encountered, an attitude of dialogue is required rather than monologue. Therefore, the solitary monk is not necessarily failing his obligation to have the

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[77] Ibid., 202.

[78] Ibid., 80.

attitude of dialogue despite the fact that no dialogue partners are readily available.

In conclusion, the ethical rationale of dialogue is based on Jesus' central commandment for Christians to love their neighbours as themselves. It was argued that loving one's neighbour requires an attitude of dialogue. Secondly, it was shown that one's neighbour is not limited to fellow Christians but includes members of other religions. Therefore, no one should be outside the scope of Christian love and dialogue. Given the centrality of the love commandments in Christianity, Lochhead writes "the importance of dialogue ... becomes clearer. We come to see dialogue not so much as an activity among other activities but as a quality that needs to pervade all our conversations and all our relationships."[79] In other words, dialogue for Christians becomes a way of life. Paul Knitter writes:

> if the entire law and the prophets are indeed summarized in the law of love of neighbour, then respecting and listening to our non-Christian neighbours has a clear priority over subjecting them to doctrinal claims about the finality of Christ and the inadequacy of extra-biblical religion. The ethics of love takes precedence over the doctrine of uniqueness.[80]

(4) THEOLOGICAL RATIONALES

Another common approach to dialogue involves theological rationales. We will only consider two of them called: (a) *pneumatology*; and (b) *Logos christology.*

(a)*Pneumatology*

A weakness in the literature on interreligious dialogue is an absence of

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[79] Lochhead, 76.

[80] Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?", 26.

commentary on Orthodox perspectives. The Orthodox church is the predominant Christian community in Greece, Russia, Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Although Orthodox Christianity is one of the three main branches of world Christianity, few Orthodox viewpoints are cited in Christian studies on interreligious dialogue. Orthodox scholars have made some important contributions to the philosophy of interreligious dialogue and have advanced their own rationale founded on *pneumatology* (theology of the holy spirit).

The leading scholar of Orthodox attitudes towards other religions is Demetrios Constantelos. According to Constantelos, the Orthodox attitude towards non-Christians is determined by their conception of the Holy Spirit and its revelation in the cosmos.[81] Constantelos asserts that the Holy Spirit continues to provide revelation today because "the Spirit moves where it wills" (John 3:8). Revelation, therefore, is not finite but an ongoing process across cultures and time:

> The Spirit is an ever-present reality such that revelation is never finished but always active, unveiling things and invisible realities, making intelligible incomprehensible mystery, building bridges over fortresses viewed in the past as islands in themselves, tearing down walls perceived as impregnable. It is the Spirit which moves where it wills, whose presence and operation is everywhere and all encompassing. The Spirit of God may not be where one would like to see it and it may be where one refuses to see it. Thus it is impossible to define the boundaries of God's people.[82]

Some Christians will argue that new revelation is not valid today. However, one scholar writes that "God is infinite and limitless. He is free to inspire anyone and free to grant his vision to anyone, anywhere. The humility that arises from an understanding of the theology of God's limitless power

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[81] Demetrios Constantelos, "The Attitude of Orthodox Christians Towards Non-Orthodox and Non Christians", in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.), *Attitudes of Religion and Ideologies Toward the Outsider* (Lewistown, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 69.

[82] Ibid., 69.

awakens in our hearts the desire and respect for an interfaith movement."[83] According to this view, to deny the possibility of ongoing revelation is to limit the infinity of God.

In summary, Orthodox Christians argue that it is "on the basis of *pneumatology* that Christianity can improve its relations with other faiths."[84] Although disagreement regarding the double procession of the Holy Spirit divides the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches, the implications of the Holy Spirit working beyond all institutional boundaries offers . rich potential for the future of interreligious dialogue. Dialogue becomes an occasion for further revelation, a new disclosure of the divine.

(b) *Logos Christology*

In the opening verses of the Gospel of John, Jesus is described as the *Logos* (or Word of God). According to Cobb, an understanding of Jesus as the *Logos* provides a springboard for interreligious dialogue. He explains that in the early church, Logos christology "encouraged a positive view of the thought of pre-Christian peoples, including their religious thought. This positive view in turn encouraged the assimilation of much Greek philosophy by the leading thinkers of the church."[85] In the same way, Cobb argues, that *Logos* christology could be used today to assimilate ideas from other religions. Just as the very

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[83] Avtar Singh, "Fences Around God" in M. Darrol Bryant and Frank Flinn (eds.), *Interreligious Dialogue -Voices from a New Frontier* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), 105.

[84] Constantelos, 78: For other studies in this area see John Meyendorff, "The Holy Spirit as God," in *The Holy Spirit*, ed. by D. Kirkpatrick (Nashville, 1974); and George Khodr, "Christianity in a Pluralistic World -The Economy of the Holy Spirit," in *The Orthodox Church in the Ecumenical Movement*, ed. by C. G. Patelos (Geneva, 1978).

[85] Cobb, 14-15; 6. For an excellent chapter on the merits of Logos theology for other faiths, see A.C. Bouquet, *Christian Faith and Non-Christian Religions* (Welwyn, England: Nisbet, 1959).

earliest Christian communities felt that God, in the form of the Logos, worked outside Christianity to inspire the Greek philosophers, Cobb argues that the God could also work today to inspire the views of other world religions in the form of the *Logos*. Although this rationale of dialogue remains undeveloped in the literature, it has solid foundations for further exploration. Indeed, if God is at work among all peoples, then dialogue is a way to "discover what treasure God has distributed among the nations of the world."[86]

REFLECTIONS ON THE RATIONALES

We have seen that there are many arguments for dialogue. However, scholars disagree about which of the rationales is the best. According to Knitter and Küng, interreligious dialogue should not begin with discussions about doctrine or beliefs, but with a focus on common social problems. In contrast, Swidler and Mojzes argue that the prime impetus of dialogue should be the pursuit of greater knowledge and truth:

> For Swidler, interreligious dialogue is still primarily an encounter of minds and ideas and beliefs - an intellectual pursuit which, however, is not to remain only intellectual. But that is where we start. He defines the purpose of dialogue as "learning more truth about the subject from the other" and holds that "communication in ideas and words" is "indeed the primary meaning of dialogue." True, he immediately adds that if this communication does not lead to "action and spirituality" it is "sterile." But the implication is that action or spiritual exchange will be the outcome of the primary exchange in "ideas and words."[87]

As we have seen, Knitter prefers a sociological approach to dialogue where helping the poor is emphasized over discussions about theological doctrines.

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[86] Hendrik M. Vroom, *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1989), 262.

[87] Paul Knitter, "Response 1" in Leonard Swidler et al. (eds.), *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 88.

However, Mojzes claims that the sociological approach to dialogue is off course. He writes "[m]ere cooperation for practical purposes, in which ... religious views are of no concern to the partners, is not dialogue. Dialogue comprises both theory and practice."[88] Knitter would surely object to Mojzes' claim that his liberation-model of dialogue is not a valid theory. Furthermore, it is not unreasonable for Christians to postpone epistemological dialogue on religious beliefs if urgent social problems are faced. Although religious beliefs may not be explicitly the topic of a dialogue, they will likely affect the discussion of social issues because our deepest beliefs and values affect our ideas. Mojzes' statement ignores this fact. For these reasons, Mojzes is rash to dismiss the sociological approach so quickly. It is likely that some rationales will suit certain Christian groups more than others. Various denominations can use various rationales when deemed appropriate. A plurality of approaches is healthy. On a comparative level, however, the ethical rationale is superior to the other approaches because it does not have an Achilles heal.

Let us consider the Achilles heal of the epistemological approach. To refresh our memories, the epistemological approach contends that dialogue with other religions is helpful for learning and expanding one's understanding the divine. However, it could be responded that if Christ is the only way to salvation (based on John 14:6) then interreligious dialogue is *ultimately* unnecessary. Many fundamentalists are unwilling to acknowledge that they can learn from other religions. They believe that they already possess the full truth in Christ. There are three responses to this problem: (1) one could dismiss fundamentalists as closed-minded; (2) one could attempt, by reason, to open their minds to different viewpoints; or (3) one could find an alternative rationale of dialogue which would be more congenial to fundamentalists. It is the third option which is fulfilled by the ethical rationale. The ethical rationale cannot be undermined by John 14:6 because dialogue is obligatory for Christians

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[88] Mojzes, "The What and How of Dialogue", 203.

regardless of the soteriological validity of other religions. For this reason it is proposed that interreligious dialogue, based on love of one's neighbour, is likely to gain the most acceptance among Christians. The ethical approach avoids the controversy surrounding absolute truth claims because a Christian may still assert that Christ is the only way to salvation but engage in dialogue out of love for one's neighbour. From this angle, interreligious dialogue is an inescapable obligation for Christians.

Although Leonard Swidler presents excellent arguments to contend that deabsolutization of religious truth claims is warranted in today's world,[89] it is unlikely that many Christians will give up their truth claims unless a new more tolerant interpretation of John 14:6 is accepted. In recent years, new interpretations of this controversial scripture have been advanced that future generations might accept.

According to Knitter, it is the duty of modern theologians to raise ideas that not only will enlighten but also will disturb the community of believers because the community is challenged and may grow as a result.[90] Therefore, new interpretations of truth claims need to be discussed in modern times rather than being dismissed as heretical. I advance the following interpretation of John 14:6 as food for thought. Here, Jesus claims that "No one comes to the Father except through me." I have often wondered what Jesus meant by the word "me" in this passage. Did he mean that he is literally the son of God and people must worship him alone, or did he mean that he is love and people can only come to the Father through practicing love? I propose that it is more compatible with

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[89] These arguments are briefly as follows: (1) Historians teach that a text can only be understood in its historical context; (2) The sociology of knowledge teaches that our perspectives on a issue will always be influenced by our class, culture, gender etc.; (3) Linguistic philosophers teach that all language is inherently limited; (4) The study of Hermeneutics teaches that all knowledge of a text is also *an interpretation* of the text. This insight of hermeneutics extends to religious knowledge. See Leonard Swidler, "What is Dialogue?", in Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes (eds.), *Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies Towards the Outsider* (Lewistown, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 28.

[90] Knitter, "Response 1", 97.

Jesus' life and teachings that the word "me" in John 14:6 refers to the latter.[91] I suggest that John 14:6 should be understood based on Jesus' ethical teachings rather than later church creeds and formulations. Then John 14:6 would mean that "no one comes to the Father except through love" *rather than* "no one comes to the Father except through proclaiming that Jesus is the son of God." This interpretation is much more amenable towards other world religions and allows the possibility of salvation for non-Christians provided they are loving persons.

Traditionally it was taken for granted by Church authorities that Jesus' claim "No one comes to the Father except through me" meant the same thing as "outside the church there is no salvation." However, this traditional interpretation is inherently flawed because the Church and Christ are not the same thing. Therefore, it is misleading to insist that John 14:6 means salvation can only be found in the Christian church. Rather I contend that John 14:6 means salvation can be found in what Christ represents for humanity which is *agape* or love.

The sociological rationale of dialogue complements the ethical approach. Both approaches emphasize the value of orthopraxis, or good works, in the lives of Christians. Both approaches claim that Christians can only really understand Jesus if they follow his ethical commandments and work for justice and love."[92] Knitter writes, "the last judgment scene in Matthew implies [that] our Christian identity and our eternal salvation will be decided not by how faithfully we proclaimed Jesus as the one and only saviour but by how faithfully we fed the hungry, clothed the naked, and visited those in prison (Matt. 25:31-46)."[93] Therefore, the emphasis of the sociological approach is similar to the ethical

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[91] Indeed, I John 4:8 and I John 4: 16 state that "God is Love" which supports and strengthens my version of christology.

[92] Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?", 41.

[93] Knitter, "Response 1", 96-97.

approach but the main weakness of the sociological approach is its reliance on *a posteriori* reasoning (see page 27).

Perhaps the main reason why Christians have been slow to embrace an orthopraxis model of dialogue is due to the strong current of antinomianism in Christianity. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* defines antinomianism as "a general name for the view that Christians are by grace set free from the need of observing the moral law."[94] Luther's doctrine of Justification by Faith, for example, taught that Christians were saved by faith alone without good works. Whatever Luther's intentions, this view can easily lead to moral indifference and irresponsibility for one's actions. However, proponents of orthopraxis point out that *The Epistle of James* requires good works for Christians:

> What use is it, my brethren, if a man says he has faith, but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet do not give them what is necessary for the body, what use is that? ... For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.(James 2:14-26)

It makes sense that good works should be important for Christians, for unless Christians are responsible for their actions, then the doctrine of free-will is futile. I contend that the role of good works needs to be *resurrected* as a defining feature of Christian life and identity. I insist that good works includes the act of engaging in dialogue with others.

In conclusion, it has been shown that Jesus commanded Christians to love their neighbours regardless of their neighbours' religious background. Furthermore, it was shown that love of one's neighbour requires action. "Not just possession of the commandment [to love one's neighbour]... but the

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[94] F. L. Cross (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (London: Oxford University Press, 1958), 62.

manifest reality of the love it commands is to characterize Jesus' disciples."[95] Therefore, *agape* is to be practiced by Christians in concrete ways. Interreligious dialogue is a concrete way to express *agape* in modern times.

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[95] Furnish, 138.

PART II.

ISSUES IN THE PHILOSOPHY OF DIALOGUE

There are many interesting theological issues that arise in the philosophy of interreligious dialogue for Christians. These issues and questions can be summarized as follows:

(1) Should Christians focus their attention on the common ground between religions or on the differences dividing religions in dialogue?

(2) Are there any conditions for interreligious dialogue which must be met before it can begin, or is dialogue an unconditional obligation for Christians?

(3) Are absolute truth claims a valid component of interreligious dialogue? What arguments have been presented both for and against absolute truth claims in dialogue?

(4) Is a revision of traditional Christology required for dialogue with other religions?

(5) One of the main obstacles to Christian participation in dialogue is fear of losing Christian identity. Why do some Christians fear syncretism in dialogue? Are these fears well-founded?

(6) Is it legitimate for Christians to proselytize (missionize) in dialogue or not? Is mission the antithesis of dialogue? Must the modern Christian understanding of mission be renewed in the pluralistic context or can it remain the same?

(7) Who represents whom in dialogue? Must a religious dialogue be between high level authorities or can anyone engage in it?

(8) Can Christians reach a responsible theological position which respects the validity of other religious traditions while still retaining the uniqueness of Christianity? How do scholars propose to accomplish this task?

(9) Should there be limits to those with whom Christians engage in dialogue? In other words, should Christians conduct a dialogue with everybody

or only certain groups?

Each of the preceding questions will be investigated in the following chapters. We will now take up the first of the questions.

Chapter 3:
THE COMMON GROUND DEBATE IN DIALOGUE

What is the best starting point for dialogue? Should Christians focus on the common ground between religions or on the differences dividing religions? Two schools of thought are found on these questions. The first school insists that dialogue should emphasize what religions share in common because their past relationships' have been too antagonistic. The second school, in contrast, argues that it is precisely the differences between religions that make dialogue interesting.

Let us consider this debate in more depth. Küng posits that in the past when religions focused on what divided them in the past, bloodshed often resulted. According to Küng, "the credibility of all religions, including the smaller ones, will in the future depend on their putting more stress on what unites them and less on what divides them. For humankind can less and less afford religions stirring up wars on this earth instead of making peace; making people fanatical instead of seeking reconciliation; practising superiority instead of engaging in dialogue."[96]

Indeed, many people in the west today are disillusioned with Christianity because of its history of intolerance towards other religions. Jesus taught his disciples to love their neighbours but many Christians have perpetrated horrible crimes against their neighbours.[97] It is not surprising that people can become

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[96] Küng, xvi.

[97] Non-Christians never seem to criticize Jesus; their criticism is against Christians for not living up to Jesus' teachings.

disillusioned when Christians are violent towards other religions instead of displaying cooperation and goodwill. Dialogue is important so that Christians may cast off the yoke of hypocrisy and regain ethical credibility.

Possible Areas of Common Ground

In her article, *Bases and Boundaries of Interfaith Dialogue: A Christian Viewpoint* (1981), Monika Hellwig outlines some areas of common ground between the "Abrahamic religions".[98] She lists four areas: (1) a common belief in monotheism; (2) a common heritage of biblical ancestors providing similar roots and points of reference; (3) similar notions of a covenant with God making each religion feel unique; and (4) a common recognition that God is ultimately a mystery and beyond compete explanation in words.[99] These areas provide useful departure points for dialogue between the Abrahamic religions; however, it would be a mistake to assume that they are useful for dialogue with the Eastern religions. It is often assumed, for example, that all religions worship the same God. John Hick is guilty of making this assumption. For many years, he advocated a theocentric model of dialogue between the world's religions. However, it was pointed out to Hick that his theocentric model is flawed because not all religions believe in God. Therefore, Hick's assumptions of theocentrism and monotheism, cannot be assumed *a priori* as the starting point of dialogue with Eastern religions.[100]

Other scholars have suggested that mystical experience provides

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[98] The term "Abrahamic religions" applies to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam which all trace their spiritual ancestry to the common forefather Abraham.

[99] Hellwig, 75; 82; 72.

[100] Hick now concedes this point in his most recent writings, and uses the term "the Real" instead of God. See *An Interpretation of Religion*, 236. (cited in full above).

common ground between the world religions.[101] According to Thomas Merton, the mystical traditions of Asia (Buddhism and Taoism) share "great similarities and analogies" in the realm of religious experience with Christianity.[102] Indeed, mystics from around the world describe similar religious experiences despite their divergent religious traditions.

A third proposed area of common ground between the world religions is the concept of "faith". Wilfred Cantwell Smith introduced his interpretation of "faith" into the vocabulary on dialogue in his book, *The Meaning and End of Religion*. Here he distinguishes two aspects in all religions which he calls "faith" and "cumulative tradition." The term "cumulative tradition" refers to the transmission of observable data such as scriptures, theological systems, social institutions, conventions, and moral codes from one generation to another. In contrast, Smith defines "faith" as an intuitive contact with the divine however you choose to envision it. Underneath the different doctrines of the world religions, Smith argues that they all share a common faith. Different doctrines originate from the fact that world religions developed in varied cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts.

Bernard Lonergan supports Smith's hypothesis. Lonergan writes, "By distinguishing faith and belief we have secured a basis ... for an encounter between all religions ... Beliefs do differ, but behind this difference there is a deeper unity ... faith."[103] According to Lonergan, faith is the common ground which underlies different religious beliefs. Knitter agrees and writes:

> When members of different religions meet ... they can find a
> common bond not ... in their doctrines and rituals but in the depths
> of their own hearts ... [O]n the basis of our shared universalist faith,
> we can understand and see through the differences between our

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[101] For example see: Jerald D. Gort et al., (eds.) *On Sharing Religious Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 1992).

[102] *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1973), 311, 315.

[103] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology.* (New York: Crossroads, 1972), 119.

doctrines.[104]

Thus, Smith, Knitter, and Lonergan all propose a faith-based model of dialogue.

Two criticisms of this faith-based model can be made. First, the word "faith" comes from a Christian-Jewish vocabulary which may not be appropriate for the Eastern religions. Smith himself is aware of this problem and writes that he "has been working towards forging a new conceptualization for faith that will be appropriate for other traditions as well."[105] Smith originally introduced the term "faith" to remove confusion surrounding the meaning of the word religion. However, it is unclear if by replacing the word religion with the word faith he succeeded in removing the ambiguity.

A second criticism of Smith's use of faith is that it excludes secularists from any constructive role in dialogue. Smith defines secularists as "those of a certain modern type who have no use for faith at all."[106] Some scholars are uncomfortable with Smith's exclusionary attitude towards secularists because it is implied that secularists have nothing valuable to teach religious believers in dialogue.[107]

Despite these criticisms the concept of faith has been popular in the literature on dialogue. By distinguishing between faith and beliefs, the above scholars hope to find common ground for dialogue. As Panikkar says, "by

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[104] Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Towards the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 46.

[105] Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards A World Theology* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1981), 128.

[106] Ibid., 52.

[107] However, the scholar Hugo Meynell feels that at least three lessons that can be learned from secularists: (1) Christians are sometimes too other-worldly, neglecting the problems of society. In contrast, secularists remind Christians that the world matters; (2) Christians often focus too negatively on the body; in contrast, secularists remind Christians that their bodies are important; and (3) Christians can enhance their understanding of economic and social justice by engaging in dialogue with secularist Marxists. Personal interview with Dr. Meynell: March 17, 1994 (University of Calgary).

acknowledging that a single faith may express itself in contrasting and even contradictory beliefs, dialogue would start."[108]

The most promising area of common ground between the world religions is ethics. Swami Vivekananda remarked in 1893:

> If the World's Parliament of Religions has shown anything to the world, it is this: It has proved to the world that holiness, purity, and charity are not the exclusive possessions of any church in the world, and that every system has produced men and women of the most exalted character.[109]

It is a fact that all the world religions share some common ethical principles and values. Values such as love, goodness, honesty, peace, kindness, compassion, and charity form the basic fabric of the world religions. These values provide an area of common ground between religions where dialogue could be immensely fruitful. The best example of a common ethical core is the "golden rule" which is found in all the world religions.[110] Monika Hellwig believes that the "sharing of ideals and values is the best way of finding what is really common between two

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[108] Panikkar, 9.

[109] As cited M. Darrol Bryant and Frank Flinn (eds.), "Scouting the Frontier," in *Interreligious Dialogue: Voices from a New Frontier* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), xi.

[110] For example, Confucius taught, "Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you" *(Analects 15: 23)*. Judaism teaches, "What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow man: that is the law and all the rest is commentary" *(Talmud, Shabbat: 31a)*. Buddhism teaches, "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful" *(Udana-Varga, 5:18)*. Hinduism teaches, "This is the sum of duty: do naught unto others which would cause you pain if done to you" *(Mahabharata 5: 1517)*. Islam teaches, "No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself" *(Sunnab)*. Jainism teaches, "In happiness and suffering, in joy and grief, we should regard all creatures as we regard our own self" *(24th Tirthankara)*. The Bahai scriptures teach "Blessed is he who preferreth his brother before himself" *(Baha'u'llah, Tablets of Baha'ullah, 71)*. And finally, in Christianity it is stated: "However you want people to treat you, so treat them" *(Matthew 7:12 and Luke 6: 31)*. These references are from a pamphlet titled *The Temple of Understanding*, (No date or location given).

traditions."[111] Dialogue on comparative religious ethics could provide a springboard for future cooperation.

This approach to dialogue was officially supported at the "World Conference of the Religions for Peace" held in Kyoto, Japan in 1970. At the end of the conference a declaration was drafted which read as follows:

> Bahai, Buddhist, Confucian, Christian, Hindu, Jain, Jew, Muslim, Shintoist, Sikh, Zoroastrian and others - we have come together in peace out of a common concern for peace.
>
> As we sat down together facing the overriding issues of peace *we discovered that the things which unite us are more important than the things which divide us. We found that we share:*
>
> • A conviction of the fundamental unity of the human family, of the equality and dignity of all human beings;
> • A sense of the sacredness of the individual person and his conscience;
> • A sense of the value of the human community;
> • A recognition that might is not right, that power is not self-sufficient and absolute;
> • A belief that love, compassion, unselfishness and the force of inner truthfulness and of the spirit have ultimately greater power than hate, enmity and self-interest;
> • A sense of obligation to stand on the side of the poor and the oppressed as against the rich and the oppressors;
> • A profound hope that good will finally prevail [Italics mine].[112]

The Kyoto declaration testifies to the value of the common ground approach to dialogue. However, we will now turn to consider the other side of the coin. Many scholars warn that religious differences should not be neglected in dialogue. They also must be heard.

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[111] Monika K. Hellwig, "The Thrust and Tenor of our Conversations," in Leonard Swidler et al. (eds.), *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 98.

[112] *Proceedings of the Kyoto Conference on Religion and Peace*, as cited Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 63.

Why are Differences Important in Dialogue?

John Taylor writes that "it is not enough to limit our search to the areas of common ground, though these will always give us deep satisfaction when we find them," but differences must also be addressed.[113] Although the common ground approach to dialogue is appropriate because of the long history of distrust between the religions, it is also true that an interreligious dialogue about religious differences can be enriching.

Many Christian scholars such as Harvey Cox, Arnulf Camps, and John Cobb feel that discussion of the differences between the religions is just as important as that of the similarities. They insist that the common ground approach to dialogue undervalues the significance of religious diversity and leads to a homogenization of religious beliefs. They argue that Christians should frankly acknowledge serious differences and not pretend that the differences do not exist.[114]

· Several scholars have explored the subject of religious differences in depth. They argue that many *prima facie* differences between the world religions can be explained by the fact that religions developed in a different cultures. Swidler provides a very illuminating analysis of types of religious differences in his book *After the Absolute: The Dialogical Future of Religious Reflection* (1990). He identifies three types of religious differences: (1) complementary differences; (2) analogous differences; and (3) contradictory differences.[115]

An example of a complementary difference is an emphasis on prophetic

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[113] John Taylor, "The Theological Basis for Interfaith Dialogue," in John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (eds.), *Christianity and Other Religions* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1980), 224.

[114] Bryant and Flinn, "Scouting the Frontier", xviii-xix.

[115] Swidler, *After the Absolute*, 62.

religion rather than mystical religion. Both the prophetic and mystical dimensions of religion are different but complement each other. Thus, Swidler feels that "complementary differences will indeed be true differences, but not such that only one side could be valid."[116]

An example of an analogous difference would be the concept of God in Christianity compared to the notion of *sunyata* (emptiness) in Mahayana Buddhism. Both God and *sunyata* play equivalent roles for the traditions and are analogous. Swidler acknowledges that contradictory differences between the world religions exist but feels that "the complementary differences will usually far outnumber the contradictory."[117] He does not elaborate what the contradictory differences are and leaves this work to other scholars.

Hugo Meynell argues that four major religious differences which cannot be reduced to cultural variations. The following questions illuminate these differences: (1) is there a God or not? (2) is there an afterlife or not? (3) is there a special revelation or not? (4) is there goodness and evil or not? The world religions disagree on these questions. For example, Theravadin Buddhists deny that a God exists which contradicts the view of the Abrahamic religions.

I propose that in addition to Meynell's list, there are two other important differences which should not be overlooked. One of them is between Hindus and Buddhists. These two religions vigorously disagree about whether or not humans possess *atman* (divine selves). Buddhists largely distinguish themselves from Hindus by rejecting the Hindu belief in *atman*. The seriousness of this difference should not be undervalued in western eyes.

Another major difference between the world religions is the conflicting understanding about the concept of the Messiah. Whereas Christians believe that Jesus was the Messiah, Jews deny this claim. Jews point out that Jesus did not bring the age of peace, foretold in the scriptures, that was supposed to

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116 Ibid., 62.

117 Ibid., 62.

accompany the Messiah. Christians respond that Jesus will return to do so. Since Jews do not believe this, there remains a contradiction in both traditions' understandings of the Messiah.[118]

What are the implications of the above differences for followers of the world religions? The existence of contradictory differences means that religious believers will often have to choose between them. Paul Mojzes remarks that no attempt should be made to camouflage differences for the sake of superficial agreement, but that differences should serve as mutual enrichment.[119] Bryant agrees and states that the crucial question is "how can we experience these differences in ways that contribute to mutual enrichment rather than to antipathy? This is perhaps the greatest challenge facing the interreligious movement."[120]

Much of the resistance to the common ground approach arises from misconceptions. It is feared that too much emphasis on common ground will give the mistaken impression that all religions are the same. Bryant, however, explains that the common ground approach "is not motivated by a desire that all be the same but by a desire to move beyond a history of mutual antagonism."[121] By focusing on common ground "mutual trust between the partners can be established and developed."[122]

It is the position of this thesis that the best solution to the common ground debate is to find a balance between the two views. Both common ground and differences in interreligious dialogue have their respective merits and dangers.

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[118] John Cobb, "Dialogue", in Leonard Swidler et al. (eds.), *Death or Dialogue? From the Age of Monologue to the Age of Dialogue* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 15.

[119] Mojzes, "The What and How of Dialogue", 204.

[120] Bryant and Flinn, xviii-xix.

[121] Bryant, "Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue in a Trinitarian Perspective", 16-17.

[122] Swidler, "What is Dialogue?", 37.

An exaggerated stress on what is common to all religions can easily mean that dialogue is simply an exercise in the mutual confirmation of beliefs, whereas an over-emphasis on differences can lead to antagonism and discord. I agree with Mojzes' statement which masterfully blends the two positions together:

> Dialogue is the methodology of reconciliation between differing positions which fundamentally grants the other the right to be different. It aims at reaching a degree of commonality which would increase the chances that the relationship would evolve in the direction of a durable peace, co-existence (living with each other) and even pro-existence (living for each other). Dialogue does not shy away from differences, though it seeks to underscore shared views and convictions. The reason partners in dialogue do not shy away from differences is that they value variety. The presupposition of dialogue is that the other partner *is* valuable and *has* valuable insights which may be of benefit to both partners and perhaps even to the world at large.[123]

Mojzes' statement raises the issue that different standpoints are needed to enrich epistemological dialogue. Therefore, differences are healthy and valued. The catch 22 of epistemological dialogue is that without differences there would be nothing to talk about. Hellwig writes "It may seem paradoxical, yet ... it is the very universality and apparent mutual exclusivity of our claims that provides the necessary basis for a fruitful and substantive dialogue."[124] Therefore, religious differences should not be undervalued or ignored. However, overall I feel that the common ground approach is more urgent than the differences approach because when we look at the long history of religious conflict, a focus on common ground is a refreshing change from the past.

In conclusion, it is unnecessary to dive into the ocean of controversy by emphasizing differences in dialogue to begin with. An emphasis on common ground is a refreshing change from the past centuries of bickering. Focusing on

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[123] Mojzes, "Types of Encounters Between Religions", 8.

[124] Hellwig, "Bases and Boundaries of Interfaith Dialogue", 74. (Epistemological dialogue only I add.)

common ground does not negate differences but allows the process of dialogue an opportunity to mature. In due course differences will arise, and when they do they can be addressed with civility. Civility is particularly required when it comes to a discussion of truth claims. The subject of truth claims in dialogue is so important that we will consider it in a chapter of its own.

Chapter 4:

THE PROBLEM OF ABSOLUTE TRUTH CLAIMS

> [N]o question in the history of the churches and religions has been the cause of the shedding of so much blood and tears as the question of truth. Blind fanaticism for the truth has at all times and in all churches and religions brought unbridled violation and murder. Conversely, forgetfulness of the truth, lack of orientation and loss of norms have meant that many people no longer believe in anything.
> In view of this situation the basic question in inter-religious understanding and the peace movement is: is there a theologically responsible way which allows Christians and those of other faiths to accept the truth of other religions without giving up the truth of their own religion and thus their own identity?[125]

One of the most famous, or infamous, Christian truth claims is to assert that Christ is the only way to salvation. It follows from this claim that members of other religions are doomed unless they recognize Jesus as their saviour. It was never seriously considered, until this century, that other religions could themselves be channels of salvation for this would undermine traditional christology.[126] There appear to be solid grounds for admitting that , "[t]raditional christology ... makes it difficult, if not impossible, for Christians to recognize the

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125 Küng, 77-78.

126 I.e., how traditional church councils have interpreted the question "who is Jesus?" .

integrity and spiritual validity of other faith traditions".[127]

Today, many scholars insist that traditional christology needs to be revised and updated in the modern pluralistic context. They argue that Christians must be prepared to modify their absolute truth claims and accept that there are many paths to salvation. Knitter carefully explains that:

> In questioning absolute or final truth claims, I am not at all questioning the necessity of entering the dialogue with firm convictions, with personal commitments to what one holds to be true and sacred, and with a universal message. Such clear, strong positions are the stuff of dialogue. But I *am* suggesting that in order for our commitment to be full and our claims to be clear and universal, they need not be final, superior, unsurpassable.[128]

How should christological revision be carried out? One of the most famous proposals was John Hick's "Copernican revolution" in theology. Hick advocated a paradigm shift from a christocentric model of the universe to a theocentric model. Just as Copernicus taught that it was the Sun rather than the Earth which resides at the center of the solar system, so too Hick asserts that Christians must place God, rather than Christ, at the center of their beliefs. According to Hick, if God is placed at the center of the universe then all religions revolve around the same source which can become a basis for dialogue.[129]

However, some scholars reject Hick's theocentric model of dialogue. Lochhead states that at "a purely practical level, ...[Hick's] strategy does not appear to be a promising one. The great majority of Christian churches have regarded themselves as rooted in Nicene orthodoxy. ... The case for interfaith dialogue will be better made [he proposes] if it proceeds from, rather than in opposition to, what the churches have traditionally understood faithfulness in

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[127] Lochhead, 89.

[128] Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?", 32.

[129] Of course, it was pointed out earlier that Theravadin Buddhists deny that there is a God so the theocentric model of dialogue, once espoused by Hick, is flawed.

Christology to involve."[130]

Furthermore, Harvey Cox insists that traditional christology, instead of undermining interreligious dialogue, will actually enliven it:

> [S]ome might say, but is it not better to delay so potentially divisive a topic [as Christology] until some more inclusive ground work has been laid? *This may be the case in some instances,* but I have never been persuaded that an interfaith dialogue is enhanced by designing it like one of those elementary collections for teaching the piano that begins with "Frère Jacques" and works up to Chopin preludes at the end. *Everyone always knows that* the question of who Jesus was and is, and what he means today, will inevitably appear. Until it does, it sometimes feels as though one is -at least to some degree- engaging in the necessary pleasantries that often precede a genuine conversation but are really not integral to it. [Italics mine.][131]

I disagree with Cox's position. I cannot play the piano, but if I was learning how to play the piano I would not be ambitious or presumptuous enough to learn Chopin first. Rather I would want to build my confidence, skills and self-esteem by practicing simple selections to begin with. Correspondingly, if I was learning to swim, I would not want to be thrown into the deep end of a pool and told "sink or swim." It makes sense to practice swimming in a shallow pool before trying to swim in deep water. Why take the risk of drowning? In the same way, it is premature to tackle the most controversial issues in a dialogue without the requisite trust and goodwill between the groups involved. In fact, an ill devised dialogue could undermine future relations with another religious community and jeopardize any subsequent dialogues. Although I agree with Cox's point that the subject of christology should not be off the agenda, I feel that one does not have to be hasty to skip over important preludes. The controversial issues will eventually emerge.

My second criticism is that the phrases which I have italicized in Cox's

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130 Lochhead, 90.

131 Cox, 8.

passage are highly dubious. In the first place, it would have been helpful if Cox had identified the particular instances he alluded to. Second, it is not self-evident that "everyone knows" that the question of who Jesus was and is will inevitably appear in dialogue. As already illustrated, there are many types of dialogue. By claiming that the question of christology will inevitably appear in dialogue, Cox imposes an assumption which is untenable because some models of dialogue do not require any discussion of christology. Therefore, Cox could be criticized as insensitive to the diversity of approaches that can be taken in dialogue. For example, Paul Knitter writes that "[w]hether the question of Jesus' uniqueness is answered, ... is not, really, the central issue or the primary purpose of dialogue. The task at hand, demanded of Christianity and all religions ..., is that the religions speak and listen to each other, that they grow with and from each other, that they combine efforts for the welfare, the salvation, of all humanity."[132]

I agree with Cox, however, that a revision of traditional Christology *does not have to be* a precondition of dialogue because the ethical model based on love of one's neighbour suffices on its own merits to require dialogue for Christians. Consequently, a Christian could still assert that Christ is the only way to salvation but be required to engage in dialogue with members of others religions out of love.

There are many Christians who are against the revision of absolute truth claims for dialogue. John Cobb, for example, writes that to "sacrifice belief in the incarnation for the sake of dialogue would not only impoverish us but would also take from us our most precious potential gift to the dialogue partner."[133] On the same note, Bryant feels that giving up traditional christology is unacceptable for Christians. He writes:

The absurdity of such a view becomes obvious if, for the moment,

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[132] Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 231.

[133] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue,* 45.

we look beyond Christianity and consider persons of other faiths. Would we, for example, expect the Taoist to deny the Tao as a precondition for dialogue, or expect the Caitanya Vaishnavite to deny the conviction that Krishna is the Lord, or the Muslim to forsake faith in Allah? Of course not.[134]

Harold Coward concludes that absolute truth claims are necessary in dialogue. He writes:

> The prerequisite for dialogue is not the harmonizing of all beliefs but the recognition that each spiritual person has a committed and absolute conviction, and that these convictions are different. ... In the dialogical approach, each religion is seen as having an absolute that cannot be surrendered without destroying the essential identity of that faith. Such dialogue necessitates sufficient maturity of the ego 'to let the opposites co-exist without pretending that they can be made compatible.' ...[Therefore,] [d]ialogue starts from the assumption that each religion has its absolute claims which cannot be relativized.[135]

Coward's comments summarize the case against bracketing or modifying truth claims in interreligious dialogue. However, he is wrong when he says that "dialogue starts from the assumption that each religion has its absolute claims which cannot be relativized" because some approaches, such as the sociological rationale of dialogue, are not founded on the relevance of truth claims at all. For example, Knitter argues that debates about truth claims are like quicksand because they occupy too much valuable time, while more important sociological problems await resolution. The strong convictions Coward refers to can quickly deteriorate into a dogmatic attitude. A dogmatic attitude is inherently closed to other points of view which undermines dialogue. Coward does not distinguish carefully enough the dangers of dogmatism from his own position.

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134 Bryant, "Interfaith Encounter and Dialogue in a Trinitarian Perspective", 15.

135 Harold Coward, *Pluralism: Challenge to World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985), 39.

Küng proposes the following solution to the truth claims dilemma. He writes, that the responsible theological solution is to combine the best possible loyalty to one's own religion, and maximum openness to others. "[A] maximum theological openness to the other religions in no way calls for the suspension of one's own convictions in faith", nor "excludes a sensitivity towards those of other faiths."[136] Küng's proposal is a middle path which requires neither the surrender of Christian convictions nor the disparagement of the convictions of others.

Bernard Lonergan proposes that Christians should be attentive, intelligent, reasonable, and responsible towards all possible viewpoints confronting them.[137] Lonergan's model of openness has the following implications on truth claims according to Knitter. He infers that:

> [R]eligious believers cannot approach the table of dialogue with claims ... of having "the final word," or the "definitive revelation," or the "absolute truth," or "the absolute saviour." Such claims stymie [Lonergan's] ... principles: (a) How can we be genuinely *attentive* to what is different when our final norm has judged what is different to be inferior? (b) How can we freely ... *understand* new possibilities when our final and. unsurpassable revelation has excluded any worthwhile possibilities better than our own?[138]

Knitter proposes that to be truly attentive to other viewpoints, as Lonergan wishes, it is requisite that one modify absolute truth claims in dialogue so that other claims will not *a priori* be rejected.

Despite the fact that John 14:6 and Acts 4:12[139] are very intolerant

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[136] Küng, 100; 109.

[137] Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder & Herder, 1972), 3-25.

[138] Knitter, "Interreligious Dialogue: What? Why? How?", 31.

[139] Acts 4:12 reads: "And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved (RSV)." I have always found this scripture to be ironic because the modern name Jesus is not the same as his original Jewish name which was Yeshua. If it is *literally* true that "there is no other name under heaven by which we

towards other religions, many Christians are unwilling to modify their understanding of these scriptures because they assume there is a divine reason why these scriptures exist. Many Christians assume that the entire bible is literally true without any human alterations or mistakes. However, the New Testament was not handed down by God (if indeed a God exists) but was composed and redacted by human beings with all their weaknesses, interests, and ulterior motives. It took hundreds of years for the New Testament to be formed (canonized) and it is likely that this process involved human fallibility. It is plausible that the exclusive scriptures of John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 could have been inserted by the early Christians in their polemics against Jews and Gnostics. Exclusive scriptures could have been used as an instrument to bring unity and to forge an identity in the Christian community in times of persecution. Today, however, in retrospect we must ask ourselves whether these exclusive scriptures really resonate with the spirit of love personified by Jesus? Are exclusive scriptures consistent with the *universal love* found in Jesus' teachings?

It often seems that proponents of dialogue, appealing for a more tolerant understanding of absolute truth claims, are like David in his battle against Goliath. They face great odds so I save the last words for them.

In contrast to fundamentalists and conservatives, Hick and Knitter feel that Christian truth claims should be viewed metaphorically rather than literally. Let us consider an example by Cobb. He writes:

> [N]ot all claims to exclusive supremacy are meant as objectively
> literal statements. A woman who says that she has the best mother
> in the world is saying more about her feelings for her mother than

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must be saved", then it would seem that we can only be saved under the name of Yeshua, for Jesus is a later English translation. My point is considerably deeper than it may appear at first glance. Obviously, many Christians feel that the word Jesus is equivalent to Yeshua but they are stretching the original *literal* claim of the scripture. If the name Jesus is considered legitimate for salvation then how about the Logos, or the light which enlightens all men, which are other names that Jesus is called in the Gospels. If one accepts these other names as legitimate (which would follow from using Jesus instead of Yeshua) then Acts 4:12 would not be as exclusive as it first appears.

about the exact comparative merits of her mother and all others. If a patriotic Englishman announces that his is the best of all nations, and a patriotic Frenchman makes the same claim about his, the initial reaction would be to be impressed with their fervour and devotion, not to ask for objective evidence....

Suppose, somewhat to our surprise, the response of each was to insist that he did mean quite objectively exactly what he said and that he was prepared to debate the matter with any who disputed his claim. What would happen? We would expect from each a recital of the great achievements of his nation and its outstanding qualities. We would expect the lists to be different. ... The Frenchman might argue strongly that cuisine is more important as a measure of national greatness; the Englishman would argue for bureaucracy. But would this not cease to be a worthwhile discussion?[140]

In the same way, Cobb suggests that debates about the superiority of each religions' truth claims are like comparing apples with oranges. How can one objectively demonstrate that *karma marga* in Hinduism is superior to *justification by faith* in Lutheranism? We will never know which is superior unless perhaps we experience both; but even if we experience both and conclude that justification by faith is superior to *karma marga,* we cannot presuppose that it will be so for other persons. What you may find helpful may not work for me. That is why comparing truth claims may be incommensurable. Knitter and Cobb suggest that some doctrines "can no more cancel one another than the day cancels the night or vice versa."[141] This is a very interesting idea which gives a whole new twist on the subject of absolute truth claims.

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[140] Cobb, "Dialogue", 11.

[141] Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 221.

Chapter 5:

THE IMPORTANCE OF GUIDELINES

Let us turn now to other issues in the methodology of dialogue. The way a dialogue is prescribed[142] is very important, for Christians may be convinced that dialogue is necessary, but refuse to get involved if they dislike the methods advanced.

Knitter writes "Before we can go about the practice of dialogue, we must have some agreement as to what it means and what are its presuppositions."[143] Dialogue has to produce its own rules and categories. Before engaging in dialogue, it is useful to have a road map of where the participants are going and what routes to take. Scholars have published guidelines from their personal experience to facilitate the practice of interreligious dialogue. Although every dialogue is exploratory, guidelines have been advanced to help participants avoid areas of controversy and to build trust. This chapter will examine the most well known set of guidelines in the academic literature written by Leonard Swidler and called the *Dialogue Decalogue* (or Ten Commandments of Dialogue). Swidler's *Dialogue Decalogue* is published in journals around the world.

Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue"

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: *Interreligious dialogue must be a two-sided project-within each religious community and between religious communities.*

Third Commandment: *Each participant must come to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. False fronts have*

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[142] Many scholars prescribe a set of guidelines, or methods, for how Christians should engage in dialogue; however, not all Christians will accept their guidelines.

[143] Knitter, *No Other Name?*, 207.

no place in dialogue.

Fourth Commandment: *In interreligious 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 participant must define her or himself.*

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

Seventh Commandment: *Dialogue can take place only between equals, or "par cum pari" as Vatican II put it. ... This means, for instance, that between a learned scholar and an uninformed person there can be no authentic, full dialogue but at most a gathering of information.*

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

Ninth Commandment: *As we enter into interreligious dialogue we must learn to be at least minimally self-critical of both ourself and our own religious tradition. A lack of such self-criticism implies that our own tradition already has all the correct answers.*

Tenth Commandment: *Each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion from within.*[144]

My first remark about Swidler's conditions is that they are very useful for the epistemological approach to dialogue but are not necessary for other approaches. As we have seen, there are several rationales of dialogue and the epistemological path is only one among many. Because Swidler's goal is learning (commandment one), he attempts to outline conditions that will facilitate this goal. However, a problem of Swidler's remarks is that he makes his "commandments" sound obligatory and universal for all types of dialogue. This mistake is common in the literature. Swidler proposes his guidelines *as if they are the only correct way to conduct a dialogue.* Rather than presenting his conditions as "commandments", Swidler could have called them "guidelines" which would have been more congenial to other methodological approaches.

Now concerning the substance of Swidler's "commandments" some

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[144] Swidler, *After the Absolute,* 42-45.

points of clarification are helpful, as well as a few points of criticism. I will only elaborate on some of Swidler's conditions which I feel deserve further clarification.

For example, Swidler's fifth commandment states that *Each participant must define her or himself.* The purpose of this commandment may seem unclear at first. However, Swidler goes on to explain that when the participants define themselves in dialogue, this allows a way to undercut false stereotypes of religions other than one's own.

Swidler's seventh commandment is that *Dialogue can take place only between equals.* I completely disagree with this statement. If interreligious dialogue is limited to our equals only (and Swidler means intellectual equals) then dialogue becomes analogous to an activity for "club members only" which is exclusive. Second, Swidler's commandment requires one to make judgements about the "learnedness" of another person which can be an arrogant exercise. Cannot young children teach their parents insightful lessons despite their obvious imbalance in knowledge? Is it not true that teachers can learn from students as well as vice-versa? Swidler implies that dialogue between two intellectually unbalanced groups is not fruitful simply because they are not equal. In contrast, I propose that we can learn from everyone regardless of their knowledge level. We can even learn from people we do not like (for example, we can learn that we do not want to be like them!). Why then does Swidler presuppose that no dialogue can be conducted between two intellectually unequal persons?[145] He does not elaborate here. Swidler's condition of intellectual equality limits dialogue primarily to a very small group of academic scholars. In contrast, others such as David Lochhead, Durwood Foster and myself argue that Christian dialogue should not have limits and should apply to everyone because love of one's neighbour does not depend on intellectual equality.

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[145] Indeed, is this question even an ethical one? Should we go about making *a priori* judgments about how intelligent someone is before engaging in dialogue with him or her?

Swidler's eighth commandment also deserves some extra commentary. He states: *Dialogue can take place only on the basis of mutual trust..* According to Swidler, the best way to build mutual trust is to focus on areas of common ground in initial dialogues. By focusing on areas of common ground the religions can build bridges of trust, respect and understanding. Once mutual trust is established, the more thorny issues like doctrinal differences can be tackled in dialogue. Indeed, if there is no trust then one's philosophical astuteness becomes a weapon with which to fight the other. Therefore, Swidler makes a good point.

Swidler's ninth commandment, that self-criticism is needed in dialogue, is also insightful. In particular, many Christians feel that a critical look at their own history of guilt is needed in dialogue with Jews. One scholar writes that "genuine Christian-Jewish dialogue can begin only after a profound act of contrition for what Christian Scriptures and theology contributed to the persecution of the Jews ...."[146] However, John Taylor disagrees with focusing on the past. He writes that "if we are to go forward history must be forgotten, or at least forgiven, for dialogue is between the living, the people here and now. Dialogue seeks a new beginning."[147] However, I wonder if Taylor would be willing to suggest to Jews that the holocaust should be forgotten. Therefore, Swidler's "commandment" that self-criticism is needed is particularly pertinent in Christian dialogue with Jews, but, one must remember that Swidler's condition of self-criticism is mutual and both sides must acknowledge past wrongs committed.

Finally, Swidler's tenth commandment reads *each participant eventually must attempt to experience the partner's religion from within.* Many Christians with a mystical orientation have attended joint worship sessions with members

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146 Emerson S. Colaw, "Why Dialogue?" in Jakob J Petuchowski (ed.), *When Jews and Christians Meet* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1988), 178.

147 Taylor, 216.

of other religions. In particular, the Christian churches in India are rather innovative in this area. At the recent 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions, held in Chicago, Christians partook in joint meditatation and prayer sessions with followers of other religions including a Native American drumming ceremony.

Swidler's guidelines offer a helpful map for travellers in interreligious dialogue. However, his guidelines pertain to epistemological dialogue only. To my knowledge, no other set of guidelines has been advanced for non-epistemological dialogue. The vast majority of the literature on dialogue concerns the epistemological approach and methodology although specific sets of guidelines have been published for Christian dialogue with Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, and the African Religions. Campus writes "these guidelines present a theoretical exposition of these religions and enumerate a series of points which can serve as the basis for dialogue."[148]

An interesting philosophical question underlies the role of guidelines in dialogue. This question is, "should interreligious dialogue be a conditional, or an unconditional, act for Christians?" Some scholars, such as Swidler, feel that certain conditions are required for Christians to engage in dialogue and then the question becomes, what are the conditions? However, other scholars, such as John Cobb and David Lochhead, insist that dialogue is either an unconditional act for Christians, or that conditions should be kept to a minimum. They feel that conditions for dialogue are exclusionary and should be avoided.

Let us consider this debate for a moment. According to Cobb conditions for dialogue should be "very minimal. Both parties must be prepared to listen respectfully to one another and to share honestly. ... [and he adds] the occurrence of dialogue is not dependent on any further conditions."[149] Cobb is wary about imposing too many conditions on dialogue because it would make

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[148] Camps, 11.

[149] Cobb, "Response 1", 84.

dialogue an event for those who accept the conditions only. He explains that there are two different attitudes to whom should be included:

> One [attitude] is to "fence" the table, that is, to specify the condition on which people may come. The purpose is to insure that only those who are worthy to commune will do so. The other attitude is to encourage all who will to come. This is called "open" communion. ...In varying ways and degrees I see all three[150] of my colleagues as "fencing" the table. They are all concerned with worthiness for dialogue. I, on the other hand, belong to a Protestant tradition that emphasizes "open" communion. Let whosoever will join the conversation.[151]

Another scholar, Lochhead, goes beyond Cobb's "open communion" position and argues that Christians should engage in dialogue with everyone unconditionally. If dialogue is envisioned as an attitude rather than an activity, then dialogue does not depend on the condition of reciprocity. However, if dialogue is envisioned as an activity manifested in interpersonal relationships then the condition of reciprocity is required.

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[150] Here, Cobb is referring to Knitter, Swidler, and Hellwig who are preoccupied with outlining conditions for dialogue.

[151] Ibid., 84.

Chapter 6:

CONFLICTING GOALS IN DIALOGUE

In the past, interreligious dialogue was considered an end in itself because it was a breakthrough from previous centuries of intolerance and monologue. However, Wilfred Cantwell Smith writes that today the word dialogue "designates a transition through which one moves to something new."[152] Christians disagree what this "something new" should be. This chapter will compare different Christian positions on this subject. It will be argued that many goals are possible and each has its own merits and strengths. Two different questions act as a framework for our comparative analysis: (1) what goals should be valid for Christians in dialogue? and (2) what goal is the most important for Christians in dialogue?

There is a direct correlation between the rationale one uses for dialogue and the goals one seeks in dialogue. We saw earlier that there are four rationales which correspond to the following goals:

(1) The sociological rationale seeks cooperation, peace or social justice ;

(2) The epistemological rationale seeks greater knowledge of truth;

(3) The ethical rationale seeks to express love of one's neighbour ;

(4) The theological rationale seeks to recognize God's presence, love and saving grace outside the boundaries of Christianity.

Since scholars disagree about which rationale is the most appropriate for Christians they also disagree about which goal is the best. Knitter, for example, feels that epistemological goals, which remain on a cognitive level, are less important than the need of the world religions to work together to help alleviate the suffering of humanity. Küng agrees with Knitter that sociological priorities should have precedence in dialogue. For him, the ultimate goal of interreligious

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[152] Smith, *Towards A World Theology*, 193.

dialogue is "an authentic peacemaking between religions."[153] Wilfred Cantwell Smith echoes the sociological approach because his primary goal is to build a world community on the basis of faith.[154]

Roger Garaudy suggests that the underlying goal of dialogue is, quite simply, to encourage others to be better people. He writes "we do not ask anyone to stop being what he is. What we ask is, on the contrary, that he be it more and that he be it better. ... We hope that those who engage in dialogue with us will demand the same of us."[155] Thus, the underlying goal of a dialogue with Buddhists is to help them to be better Buddhists. The process is reciprocal and the Buddhists can also help the Christians to become better Christians.[156] Consequently, one goal of dialogue is mutual edification and purification. The groups involved reciprocate by encouraging each other to live by the highest ideals of their faith. In this way, religions can compete together in good works. A friendly contest between the world religions in acts of kindness could potentially· be very beneficial to humanity at large.

It is probable that the above scholars would accept their colleagues' goals as valid, but retain their own preferences about which goal should be superior. Their goals are complementary rather than contradictory. It is wrong to suggest that one particular goal should have paramount or overriding importance because different goals are appropriate for different types of dialogue. If two religious groups meet to dialogue about preventing human

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[153] Küng, 134.

[154] Smith, *Towards A World Theology,*129.

[155] Roger Garaudy, *From Anathema to Dialogue* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1966), 122.

[156] This friendly competition has occurred between monastic representatives of Tibetan Buddhism and Roman Catholic Christianity. The 14th Dalai Lama and several Buddhist monks made an "exchange trip" with Christian monks in Europe. Both monastic communities were impressed with the diligence of the other. Dalai Lama, *Parliament of the World Religions* (Chicago: Palmer House Hilton, September 4, 1993).

rights abuses, for example, it would be foolish to suggest that they should seek greater knowledge about the ontological status of God. Rather, a more appropriate goal for these two groups (given their priorities) would be to seek areas of common ground to protest against human rights abuses. Therefore, the goal, or goals, sought in a specific dialogue will be contingent on the circumstances.

John Cobb argues that the primary goal of dialogue should be the "mutual transformation" of the participants. By "mutual transformation" he means mutual enrichment where the views of the dialogue partner significantly influence and revise the other person's thought. However, David Lochhead argues that dialogue is an end in itself and any other goals in dialogue are selfish. Let us consider their debate in more detail.

In 1982, Cobb published a book, entitled *Beyond Dialogue,* which argued that dialogue that does not intend to go beyond and seek the mutual transformation of the participants stagnates.[157] The word "transformation" implies "what is sometimes spoken of as the 'risk' of dialogue. That risk is that in the process of listening one will be forced to change in a more than superficial way."[158] Cobb argues that unless dialogue brings a transformation in the minds and hearts of the participants, it has been unsuccessful.

David Lochhead's book, *The Dialogical Imperative (1988),* directly challenged Cobb's position. According to Lochhead, "there is no need to move 'beyond dialogue' ... dialogue is an end in itself."[159] Lochhead explained the reasoning for his position as follows:

> [O]ne compromises the dialogical relationship if one attempts to justify it by its results. A relationship that is justified by what one can get out of it is not a dialogical relationship. That is not to say

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[157] John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue,* viii.

[158] Ibid., 48.

[159] Lochhead, 46.

that there are not benefits that result from dialogue. There certainly are benefits. The claim that dialogue leads to growth, to deeper self-understanding, is certainly true. To enter a dialogical conversation for these reasons, however, is to compromise the dialogical relationship from the start.[160]

These are strong words and they challenge the conventional dialogue approaches that seek either social amelioration, religious cooperation, or growth in knowledge of truth or as their primary goals. But for Lochhead, these goals are selfish ends. He writes:

It is common to justify dialogue as something that helps us to understand ourselves better, or as something that contributes to our own growth and maturity. Whereas change in the form of growth is something that one might well hope and expect from a dialogical relationship, it cannot be its prime purpose. To attempt dialogue for what we can get out of it is too egocentric an attitude. If the dialogue partner is viewed primarily as the instrument for my growth, then he or she is a means for my own fulfilment rather than one who is loved for his or her own sake. ... A relationship that is entered into for the results it will bring, whether it be the conversion of the other or our own growth, is still in the realm of monologue.[161]

Upon closer inspection of his book, however, it appears that Lochhead is unable to consistently sustain his position that dialogue is an end in itself. On one occasion he writes that "understanding rather than agreement is the primary goal of dialogue."[162] However, if understanding is the primary goal of dialogue, then people would enter a dialogue for what they could get out of it which Lochhead rejects as ego-centric.

If we assume that understanding is indeed Lochhead's primary goal in dialogue then his views are not as different from Cobb's as they first appeared. According to Lochhead, true understanding requires "integration" of insights into

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[160] Ibid., 80.

[161] Ibid., 79.

[162] Ibid., 64.

daily practice. He writes, "if we think of understanding as something that happens in our heads and something that is confined to our heads, then understanding is not adequate to express the goal of dialogue. The word 'integration' is intended to point to the fact that genuine understanding has implications for our life and practice."[163] This view sounds very compatible with Cobb's concept of "mutual transformation". Therefore, it is questionable whether or not these two scholars are really opposed in their views about the goal of dialogue. The difficulty is due to the contradictory statements in Lochhead's writings.

THE DEBATE ABOUT SYNCRETISM

It is sometimes mistakenly assumed, by some Christians, that the goal of interreligious dialogue is the fusion of the world religions into a single unified religion. However, Raimundo Panikkar writes that:

> The aim of intrareligious dialogue is ...not ... to come to a total agreement or a universal religion. ... Some may wish even to reach communion, but this does not imply at all that the aim is a uniform unity or a reduction of all the pluralistic variety of Man into one single religion, system, ideology or tradition.[164]

Therefore, the goal of dialogue is not a unitary world religion. The process of dialogue involves deep respect and appreciation of religious diversity. Paul Mojzes explains that convergence "is not the final goal...of dialogues, though partial and gradual movement closer to one another will occur if both partners desire it. It is a positive result of the dialogue if at the end of the dialogue the gap between the two has been narrowed -not so much the gap of identity but the

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163 Ibid., 67.

164 Panikkar, xxvii.

gap of misunderstanding and distrust.[165] The goal of interreligious dialogue then *is not* the amalgamation of the world religions into a unitary religion. Perhaps this misconception was imported from the ecumenical movement which seeks unity among Christians. However, this misconception does not apply to dialogue with other religions.

The fear of syncretism has been exploited by some Christian groups who oppose dialogue. They warn that dialogue leads to a mixture of ideas which would corrupt and change the faith and produce a loss of Christian identity. Consequently, many Christians have been reluctant to engage in dialogue with members of other faiths. Wesley Ariarajah writes, "the greatest obstacle to genuine theological thinking is the inordinate fear of syncretism. This arises only when one tends to absolutize a religion, a doctrine or a theological system as the ultimate truth."[166] This section intends to illustrate that the process of adaptation (pejoratively called "syncretism" by critics) is not the "evil force" that many writers portray it to be. It is argued that the process of syncretism has been unfairly criticized in much of the literature on dialogue.

The following question underlies the controversy about syncretism: "Is it appropriate for Christians to absorb elements from other religions?" Some Christians think absolutely not, while others feel that the adoption of outside ideas is acceptable and perhaps even healthy. In the history of Christianity, there are two important precedents that seem to support the latter view as having the upper hand. Let us consider these two examples.

The first example in favour of syncretism is found in the attitude of the early Church Fathers to the philosophy of the ancient Greeks. The early Church enthusiastically (with the exception of Tertullian) appropriated and absorbed the wisdom and insights of Greek philosophy to enrich their theology. It is

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[165] Mojzes, "Types of Encounters Between Religions", 16.

[166] S. Wesley Ariarajah, "Toward a Theology of Dialogue" in Richard W. Rousseau (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing the New Frontier* (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1981), 36.

important to note that the Church Fathers *did not* accept the pantheon of Greek God's and Goddesses (the polytheism of Greek thought), but they did accept elements of Greek thinking that were particularly conducive and insightful to elucidate Christian theology. In the same way, Christians in dialogue with Hindus, for example, do not have to absorb the polytheism of certain types of Hinduism in order to assimilate other insights they may find enriching for renewing Christian theology today.

A second example, that supports adaptation to outside influences involves the work of St. Thomas Aquinas who was the beneficiary of the rediscovery of the philosophy of Aristotle during the Middle Ages. The writings of Aristotle were lost to Western Europe after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. However, invading Muslim rulers in Spain took a keen interest in ancient philosophy, and the Islamic world translated the works of Aristotle into Arabic. Eventually, the Arabic versions were translated into Latin and began to circulate in the rest of Christian Europe. St. Thomas Aquinas utilized the "rediscovered" ideas of Aristotle to help develop his philosophy and theology in the thirteenth century. Therefore, it is notable that St. Thomas Aquinas was open to absorbing and adapting Aristotle's philosophy which strengthened Christian theology significantly.

The point of these examples is to illustrate that Christians who.denounce "syncretism" are likely unaware of the degree of syncretism already in their own religion, and are rather naive about the historical development of Christianity. Indeed, Hans Küng writes:

> [I]n the West there is not a single nonsyncretistic religion, in the strict sense of the word. How many different elements have merged in the Old Testament, in the New Testament, too, and still more in the Qu'ran! And to that extent there is, in fact, as Wilfred Cantwell Smith never tires of stressing, one "religious history of mankind."[167]

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[167] Hans Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1986), 180.

Here, Küng is alluding to Wilfred Cantwell Smith's book, *Towards A World Theology* (1981). Smith's work abundantly illustrates the historical interconnection between religious traditions. He shows "that every religious tradition on earth has in fact developed in interaction with the others; not in isolation, in some watertight compartment."[168]

One is often reminded in the debate on syncretism about another debate in Christianity that has significant parallels. It is argued by some Christian groups that one should approach Christianity "by scripture alone" for tradition is not important. However, this argument ignores the fact that the Christian scriptures are themselves a product of tradition. Correspondingly, Christians who argue that syncretism must be avoided to keep Christianity "uncontaminated," fail to realize that the Christianity over time has already "syncretized" many outside influences that have actually strengthened the tradition.

Despite the historical cross-fertilization of religious traditions, it is surprising how often one comes across derogatory remarks about syncretism in the literature on dialogue. For example, Durwood Foster writes, "It is imperative that the depth of traditions be preserved against a shallow syncretism that lacks all specific commitment."[169] However, Küng writes:

> It is generally a sign of weakness and anxiety when a religion goes into a shell and becomes isolated; and conversely a sign of strength when it can learn from another while maintaining a critical perspective. Anyone who wishes to may take the late-Greek term *syn-kretismós* in the more positive, original sense. Whether one agrees with Plutarch in relating it to the alliance of the cities of Crete, most of which had been at odds with the rest; or with Erasmus of Rotterdam in tracing it back to *syn-kerranynai* (= mix together, but meaning the efforts at peaceful behaviour on the part of religious adversaries), in either case the word points to the

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168 Smith, *Towards A World Theology*, 15.

169 Foster, 22.

crucial thing: understanding, reconciliation, peace.[170]

Nevertheless, Küng prefers the word "synthesis" rather than "syncretism" to describe the mixing of religious ideas.[171] He approves of a "synthesis" of new ideas into Christianity but he rejects syncretism because of its negative connotations.

On a similar note, Arnulf Camps raises an insightful point about terminology. He writes that "all religions have incorporated elements from other religions over the course of history. [However,] The process is usually called 'adaptation.'"[172] Here, Camps raises an important detail about semantics. Whereas scholars who are against the absorption of ideas into Christianity label the process "syncretism," those in favour use words such as "adaptation" or "synthesis" to explain the process.

Raimundo Panikkar draws an analogy between the process of syncretism in a religion and the process of syncretism in a language. According to Panikkar, both religions and languages can adopt outside elements in similar ways. He writes:

> Although any language is a world in itself, it is not without relations with neighbouring languages, borrowing from them and open to mutual influences. And yet each language only takes as much as it can assimilate from a foreign language. Similarly with religions: they influence each other and borrow from one another without losing their identity. ... From the internal point of view of each language and religion, it makes little sense to say that one language is more perfect than another, for you can in your language (as well as in your religion) say all that you feel you need to say.[173]

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[170] Küng, *Christianity and the World Religions*, 180.

[171] Küng, *Global Responsibility*, 96.

[172] Camps, 75.

[173] Panikkar, xxiv.

Therefore, both religions and languages can absorb outside influences without losing their identity. However, there are situations where minority languages attempt to retain their identity amidst a dominant language. For example, the French-speaking Province of Quebec in Canada argues that it deserves special protection from the threat of linguistic assimilation in an English-speaking North America. Quebecers fear linguistic syncretism because of their relationship with a dominant English culture. They argue that without legal protection it will be impossible to stop linguistic assimilation. Could not some minority religions also lose their identity in a dominant religious culture? On the other hand, when we look at Europe, we see remarkable momentum towards greater integration which shows a confidence that the European languages will retain their distinct identities despite the massive economic and political integration underway.

The W.C.C. insists that the fear of syncretism should not prevent Christians from embracing dialogue. It writes, "The particular risks of syncretism in the modern world should not lead Christians to refrain from dialogue, but are an additional reason for engaging in dialogue so that the issues may be clarified."[174]

John Cobb and Stanley Samartha are two Christian theologians who explicitly and boldly support syncretism in their writings. Cobb writes, "Christianity can and should assimilate the elements of truth in all other traditions."[175] Samartha adds, "Ideally we reach towards a new outlook subsuming the positive qualities of our own prior view and positive qualities from the significant alternatives."[176] Many Christians today support this attitude of openness towards other religions. However, Cobb's following statement

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[174] *Guidelines on Dialogue on Dialogue With People of Living Faiths and Ideologies* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1979), 15.

[175] Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue,* 41.

[176] Stanley J. Samartha, "Dialogue as a Continuing Christian Concern" in John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite (eds.), *Christianity and Other Religions* (Glasgow: William Collins Sons & Co. Ltd., 1980), 36.

illustrates why some Christians are worried that too much assimilation may lead to a loss of Christian identity. He states, "A Christianity which has been transformed by the incorporation of the Buddhist insight into the nature of reality will be a very different Christianity from any we now know. ... That will not obliterate the difference between the two traditions, but it will provide a new basis for fresh dialogue and fresh transformation. The lines that now sharply divide us will increasingly blur."[177] These words raise an important question about syncretism which is where Christians should draw the line between. openness and loyalty? Clearly, some syncretism is unavoidable in dialogue because all two-way communication brings new information (verbal or non-verbal) which is assimilated by our minds; however, the question of how far conscious syncretism should go is an important issue for Christians in dialogue on which more research needs to be done. The main point of.this section was to illustrate that Christians who dismiss syncretism outright as a negative process, ignore the important role that syncretism (or adaptation) has played in the history of Christianity. Consequently, it is misleading to claim that all syncretism is bad.

In conclusion, this chapter has illustrated that there are many goals sought by Christians in interreligious dialogue. The following table summarizes these goals:

End in itself	Transformation	Learning	Liberation	Peace	Fellowship
D. Lochhead	J. Cobb	L. Swidler	P. Knitter	H. Küng	W.C. Smith

There is a consensus that the underlying aims of dialogue are to cultivate greater understanding, appreciation and respect between religions; however, beyond that there is disagreement. A group's goals will be influenced by its

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177 Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, 52.

interests, priorities, and by practical contingencies. Because there are many different reasons to enter into dialogue, it is unwise to impose one goal as the best. One overriding goal would suppress methodological plurality. Multiple goals in dialogue are healthy.

Chapter 7:

THE MISSION-DIALOGUE TENSION

One of the most important areas of disagreement among Christians concerns the relationship between mission and dialogue. Is it legitimate for Christians to missionize (proselytize) in dialogue or not? Some Christians feel that mission is the antithesis of dialogue, whereas others contend that mission is a valid part of the dialogue process.

Two opposing currants can be distinguished in Christianity during the twentieth century. The first current, known as the evangelical movement, stresses a missionary approach towards non-Christians which seeks the pursuit of converts. The second current, called the ecumenical movement, seeks greater cooperation among Christians and recently with members of other religions. The evangelical and ecumenical forces are deeply divided in their respective attitudes towards mission and dialogue. We will consider their arguments for and against proselytizing in this chapter.

Let us consider the evangelical position first. Support for proselytizing is derived from Jesus' saying, "Go therefore and make disciples" (Matt. 28:19). Evangelical Christians interpret this scripture as requiring them to seek converts to the church. Further support for the missionary approach can be found in the life of Saul of Tarsus (Paul), who travelled across the Roman Empire converting gentiles to the early church.

There are different types of evangelical Christians. Right-wing evangelicals reject dialogue because they feel that it challenges and undermines the missionary task of the church. However, moderate evangelicals

believe that mission and dialogue can be harmonized. For example, in his article, "In Defense of Proselytizing: A Contribution Towards Interfaith Dialogue" (1986), Rodney Sawatsky writes:

> Dialogue among and between religions is good and necessary yet dialogue should not silence the pursuit of converts. Rather dialogue needs to be defined to include such recruitment. Dialogue assumes that both sides are open to learn from each other, indeed to be vulnerable to each other. True vulnerability must allow for change, for conversion.[178]

Cobb concurs with Sawatsky and argues that dialogue is not incompatible with the missionary goal to persuade others that Christianity is true. Cobb writes that:

> When dialogue is truly free, Christians will affirm their own convictions passionately. And those convictions normally include the view that their partners in dialogue should share these convictions. Christians will be as persuasive as they can. Christians also listen to what their partners say, and they want their partners to be as persuasive as possible in the way they present their beliefs. It is only thus that Christians can gain the most from the inter-change. Real dialogue consists in the effort to persuade the other.[179]

However, the majority of scholars on dialogue, from the ecumenical tradition, feel that missionizing undermines the dialogue process. They argue that proselytizing can very quickly be seen as coercive. Attempts to convert, or (to put it euphemistically) persuade, someone to become Christian are seen by many as manipulative. If conversion is the goal then one enters a dialogue primarily to teach the other rather than to learn. "Dialogue is seen as a means,

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[178] Rodney Sawatsky, "In Defense of Proselytizing: A Contribution Towards Interfaith Dialogue" in John W. Miller (ed.), *Interfaith Dialogue: Four Approaches* (Waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1986), 96.

[179] Cobb, "Dialogue", 9.

not of meeting people but of 'reaching' people."[180] Therefore, Lochhead argues that dialogue and mission are incompatible since proselytizing is monological in nature. The dialogue partner is not taken seriously because s/he is viewed as inferior and in need of conversion. His or her religion is seen as lacking the fullness of truth included in Christianity. Hence, proselytizing is really a form of inclusivism rather than dialogue.

In defense of proselytizing, Sawatsky presents an interesting argument that merits consideration. He writes:

> It is assumed in our society that everyone is free to persuade anyone else on political, economic, ethical and many other similar issues. This is the essence of our advertising industry. Surely, it is equally legitimate to seek to persuade on religious matters. A liberal society such as ours assumes that it is proper to persuade someone to become a member of the NDP or even of the Communist party, or that it is proper to persuade someone to join the anti-nuke crusade or to be in favour of abortion, or birth control or pornography. Even so it is proper to persuade someone to join a particular religious group.[181]

Not all Christians agree with Sawatsky's point of view. Religion is a touchy matter. For example, it could be responded that some religious cults use brain-washing techniques to "persuade" others to join them. Would Sawatsky concur that in a liberal society like ours brain-washing is a legitimate form of persuasion? If not, then clearly one must draw the line between persuasion and coercion. Christian missionaries have a tarnished history of coercion against non-Christians. Twenty centuries of Christian missionizing lie before us like an open book. It can be said that many missionaries have not measured up to the example set by Jesus. Logically, a Christian missionary should closely follow the teachings of Jesus, but history is full of examples to the contrary. The inquisition in Mexico is perhaps the most notorious example of where the cross

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[180] Lochhead, 84.

[181] Sawatsky, 93.

and the sword went together.

Consequently, most scholars of dialogue feel that a new relationship with other faiths must be free from missionizing. Proponents of dialogue insist that proselytizing has no place in dialogue. Many people of other faiths are suspicious of dialogue because they suspect that Christians intend to convert them. Indeed, "by seeing themselves as others see them, Christian proselytizers may realize that in the eyes of other world religions the Christian mission has been associated with Western power, European culture" as well as colonialism and imperialism.[182] To avoid being perceived by non-Christians as an attempt at proselytization, the association between missionizing and dialogue must be abandoned. Christians must come to dialogue with complete respect for the integrity of the other religion.

It is my conclusion that Christians do have a mission towards other religions but the mission is to be representatives of the love found in Jesus' teachings. Therefore, I propose a twist in the mission debate by suggesting that the mission of the Church is to spread love, good-will, and peace throughout the world. Since Christians claim to be followers of the Prince of Peace, then their mission is to convert others to peace and love. As Stephen Neill puts it, "Conversion to Christ is not necessarily identical with acceptance of the church; but in the vast majority of cases this follows, though the second acceptance may prove to be more difficult than the first."[183] The mere presence of loving Christians as neighbours can prove effective as witness to the faith. John Taylor retells two Franciscan stories that show starkly different missionary approaches towards other religions:

> The first [story] concerns Saint Francis's strange meeting with Sala'din. They had no common language ... Yet near the end of

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[182] Walter Bildstein, "A Response to Rodney Sawatsky" in John W. Miller (ed.), *Interfaith Dialogue: Four Approaches* (waterloo: University of Waterloo Press, 1986), 98.

[183] Stephen C. Neill, "Christian Missions," in Mircea Eliade (ed. in chief) *The Encyclopedia of Religion Vol. 9,* (New York: MacMillian Pub. Co., 1987), 576.

the encounter Sala'din is reported to have said, 'If ever I met a second Christian like you I would be willing to be baptized. But that will not happen.' And less than 300 years later a King in Peru said something very similar, yet horribly different, to a Franciscan friar. This friar, accompanying an expedition of the Conquistadors, was offering the vanquished Incas the choice of conversion or death. When their King demurred, his hands were cut off and the appeal was then repeated: 'Be baptized and you will go to heaven.' 'No,' said the King, 'for if I went to heaven I might meet a second Christian like you.'[184]

The stories illustrate how a humble attitude of *agape* is more effective, and leaves a deeper impression, than coercive proselytizing.

Finally, the *Encyclopedia of Religion* concludes its article on Christian Missions by stating: " a reconsideration of the meaning of the word mission is long overdue. ... In the past, the gospel travelled across continents and oceans almost exclusively in one direction. Has not the time come to establish two-way. traffic, to have the gospel travel across continents and oceans in many directions?"[185] While the Gospel can be shared with those of other faiths, Christians can also partake of the "good news" found in other traditions. Interreligious dialogue is the name for this two-way traffic.

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[184] Taylor, 216.

[185] Ibid., 578.

Chapter 8:
DIMENSIONS OF REPRESENTION IN DIALOGUE

Who should represent Christians in dialogue with another religion? Should representation be restricted to clergy and acedemic scholars or can the layperson engage in dialogue? On a broader level, can specific Christian churches speak for other Christians in dialogue or only speak for themselves?

There are thousands of Christian groups in the world with their own teachings and identities. An interreligious dialogue involving Christians more precisely consists of Catholics, Presbyterians, Lutherans etc. who represent their specific communities. Consequently, Christians in dialogue tend to speak for their own church and not for others. The exception to this norm is the World Council of Churches which represents many Protestant and Orthodox denominations in dialogue with other religions.

Most often Christians in dialogue are represented by clergy or academic scholars. However, a consensus is emerging that dialogue should not be restricted to formal academic initiatives, but should occur at all levels of society. Swidler argues that interreligious dialogue "should involve every level of the religious communities, all the way down to the 'persons in the pews.'"[186] Although "there is reluctance to accept that lay persons might speak for Catholicism or Judaism," Hellwig adds that in the modern context, where contact between religious neighbours is unavoidable, the "concern to encounter the orthodox Catholic, or the authentic Hindu, or the Jew with the proper Talmudic outlook, may become less and less appropriate to the reality of people's lives..."[187] What is increasingly important is to be able to respectfully communicate with people who hold different religious views who live next door

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[186] Swidler, "What is Dialogue?", 31.

[187] Monika K. Hellwig, "Response 1" in Leonard Swidler et al. (eds.), *Death or Dialogue?* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 101.

in the same communities. Formal dialogues, involving official delegates, are important but these meetings should not replace dialogues at the basic level of society, between neighbours and families on the same street, or in the same office.

However, it is often pointed out that only Christians of a "liberal" persuasion enter interreligious dialogue since "fundamentalist" denominations oppose dialogue.[188] Indeed, it is true that most Christians involved in formal dialogues are liberals. Mojzes writes that these Christians can often "find more. in common with a similarly oriented faction from another religion than with conservatives within their own tradition. For example, liberal Christians may find it relatively easier to get along with Reform Jews or moderate Muslims than either of these groups is able to get along with their more conservative or orthodox branches."[189]

It is only fitting that liberals play an active role in interreligious dialogue. A common characteristic of liberals is their openness to different viewpoints which is consonant with dialogue. Furthermore, liberal Christians are more willing than conservatives to engage in self-criticism about the history of Christianity. Nevertheless, the term "liberal" is often used in a derogatory manner to downplay Christian scholars or denominations who champion dialogue. Ironically, opponents of dialogue do not seem to recognize that their attack is somewhat ironic, for Jesus himself was a "liberal" compared to the Jewish authorities of his day.

Cox points out, however, that there is a danger in limiting the scope of interreligious dialogue to liberals. He writes "I have often wondered at such times whether the 'dialogue' has not become a tedious exercise in preaching to

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[188] By "liberal" here I mean Christians with a more open disposition to change and innovation; *not* Christians belonging to the Liberal political party.

[189] Mojzes, "Types of Encounters Between Religions", 17.

the converted..."[190] He reminds liberal Christians not to lose touch with their conservative and fundamentalist brethren. According to Cox, "[w]e may not admit it, but we do need each other. They remind us that without the radical particularity of the original revelation, we would have no faith to share. We remind them that without the universal dream they falsify the message and diminish the scope of the original vision."[191]

Most of the discussion about representation in the literature focuses on the polarity between official representatives and lay people. However, two other major areas should not be overlooked. The first is the difference between Western and Eastern representatives of Christianity; the second is the representation of male and female participants in dialogue. Let us consider both areas of representation respectively.

In recent years there has been an increasing awareness that Christianity is no longer the primary possession of Western countries. Christians in Asia, Africa and Latin America have their own flourishing communities with unique perspectives that could be immensely fruitful in interreligious dialogue. Indeed, there are greater numbers of Christians emerging in Africa, Latin America, India, the Philippines and other Asian countries than in the industrialized nations.[192] These other continents are as important as the older strongholds in developments in Christian theology today. Western Christians must be sensitive to Christians from other parts of the world with different cultural backgrounds and approaches to dialogue. The representation of cross-cultural viewpoints in interreligious dialogue should therefore be encouraged. Third World perspectives on Christianity, such as liberation theology, could prompt Western Christians to reconsider their Eurocentric assumptions about rationality and

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[190] Cox, 4.

[191] Ibid., 18.

[192] Geoffrey Parrinder, *Encountering World Religions* (New York: Crossroads Publishing Co., 1987), 222.

reality. Consequently, Western Christians should be increasingly attentive to the role of non-Western viewpoints in dialogue.

In addition to the lack of non-Western representation in dialogue, women also have been excluded from dialogues until recently.[193] In her article, *En-Gendering the Dialogue: Feminist Contributions to Interfaith Encounters*, Judith Martin argues that female representatives are needed in interreligious dialogue. She writes that male Christians have established "more mechanisms for building bridges to their male counterparts in other religions than to women in their own."[194] Consequently, she argues that all further participation in interreligious dialogue by Christians must include representation by women.

The representation of women has not figured highly in the literature on dialogue. Martin writes:

> [W]hile dialogians have been universally sensitive to the issue of terminology when it comes to acknowledging different faith communities, many have been less responsive when it comes to women. Strangely, these individuals, who wouldn't think of referring to Buddhists or Hindus as ..."anonymous Christians," find it difficult to see why women insist on being referred to as women in their own right instead of, anonymously, as men. Similarly, many who are involved in dialogue seem more at ease referring to the Transcendent as Father, Allah and Brahman, than as Mother and Goddess."[195]

Hence, the question arises, "How could women make their own unique contribution to interreligious dialogue?" Let us consider the epistemological

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[193] This is mainly due to the fact that there are few female clergy members in Christian denominations. In the 1980s and 1990s, however, women have begun to participate in interreligious dialogue at both the academic and institutional levels. See Margaret O'Gara, "Ecumenism and Feminism in Dialogue on Authority" in Melanie A. May (ed.), *Women and Church -The Challenge of Ecumenical Solidarity in an Age of Alienation* (New York: Friendship Press, 1991), pp. 119-129.

[194] Judith G. Martin, *En-Gendering the Dialogue: Feminist Contributions to Interfaith Encounters* (Unpublished paper presented at the Inter-Religious Federation for World Peace, no date given), 1.

[195] Ibid., 4.

model of dialogue as an example. We saw earlier that epistemological dialogue is based on the premise that different religious believers have their own distinct viewpoints on reality. By sharing these viewpoints they can learn from each other and grow. In exactly the same way, it is argued (by feminists) that the female's viewpoint is different from the male's in the following way:

<u>Three Dimensions of Epistemology</u>

Females' experiences are different from males.
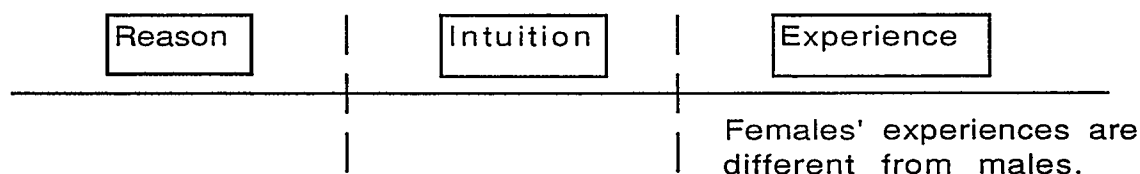
It is claimed that female epistemologies of religion will be unique because the experiences of women are different from those of men. Thus, female perspectives on interreligious dialogue would offer unique insights that could influence the language, terminology, goals and conceptual frameworks used in interreligious dialogue. Martin concludes that "the time has come for interfaith dialogue to make [gender representation]... an explicit priority as well."[196]

On a similar note, Harvey Cox points out that Christians in dialogue should consciously ensure to include the poor. He writes that the "favoured format for most dialogues today is one in which representatives of the various religious traditions of the world -usually scholars or ecclesiastical leaders whose positions make them more attuned to confessional than class differences- meet to converse about what unites them or separates them."[197] Cox insists that Christians from middle class backgrounds must not lose touch with the issues and perspectives of Christians who are poor.

Therefore, minority, gender, cross-cultural and class representation are all important features of the representation debate in dialogue.

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[196] Ibid., 4-5.

[197] Cox, 179.

CONCLUSION

In today's age of global interdependence, no religion is an island. Dialogue with other religions is necessary in order for religions to co-exist peacefully. Today Christians must learn from their past. The last nineteen centuries of Christian history are a testament to the sufferings of intolerance. After all the inquisitions, the crusades, the ghettos, the pogroms, the forced conversions, and finally the holocaust, it is clearly time for Christians to cultivate an attitude of respect towards other religions. The principles of interreligious dialogue are an excellent step in this direction. However, interreligious dialogue is not merely a theoretical pastime but involves real life people. Real dialogue builds bridges of understanding between religious communities. Real dialogue heals past injustices and builds friendship. Real dialogue moves religious traditions from co-existence to pro-existence.

This thesis has advanced the following conclusions for further reflection and discussion:

- It has been illustrated that there is no one right way to engage in interreligious dialogue. Instead, there are a multitude of ways, rationales and approaches. Methodological pluralism is healthy.

- It was shown that both the Vatican and the World Council of Churches are committed to interreligious dialogue for their respective communities.

- It was shown that Christians can still believe that Christ is the only way to salvation and engage in interreligious dialogue because the ethical and sociological approaches to dialogue do not involve the abandonment of truth claims.

- It was shown that interreligious dialogue actualizes Jesus' commandment to love one's neighbour as oneself.

- It was contended that Christians need to focus more on orthopraxis than orthodoxy. In other words, Christians need to live in accordance with Jesus' ethical teachings which should take precedence over any

exclusionary christology.

- It was shown that the "main obstacles to dialogue are, on the one hand, a feeling of superiority and, on the other hand the fear of losing one's identity."[198] It was argued that the fear of losing one's identity in syncretism is exaggerated. Adopting new ideas has actually helped to rejuvenate Christianity.

- Finally, it was argued that truth always exceeds our grasp of it and because the Holy Spirit has no boundaries elements of truth can be found in other religions. Indeed, the sensitive Christian "cannot fail to recognize and to rejoice in the abundant spiritual fruits to be seen in the lives of men and women of other faiths."[199]

In order for the attitude of dialogue to be widely accepted among Christians, it is important that two practical steps be taken. First, pejorative stereotypes of other religions must be systematically removed from Christian theology, vocabulary and consciousness. Concepts like "infidel", "perfidious Jew", and "idolater" need to be discarded because they conjure up hostility and disrespect towards other religions.

Second, training in dialogue needs to be introduced into Christian seminaries and classrooms. Howe writes that it "is not enough to talk about dialogue in the abstract. The principle must be embodied in men [or women]. Dialogue calls for dialogists. In fact one of the crying needs in the Church today is for dialogical teachers."[200] He recommends that:

> Both the clergy and laity need training that will prepare them to become persons with dialogical understanding and abilities. For a

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[198] Samartha, 162.

[199] Lesslie Newbigin, "The Basis, Purpose and Manner of Inter-faith Dialogue" in Richard Rousseau (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue: Facing the New Frontier* (Scranton: Ridge Row Press, 1981), 16.

[200] Howe, 136.

majority of them this would mean a revolution in their present understandings and approaches because of the prevalence among them of the monological attitude and method, which has been ingrained in them both by their life in the Church and the training given them for their ministry.[201]

Steps in this direction have been taken in the last twenty years. For example, the Vatican Secretariat for Christian Unity issued a "Directory Concerning Ecumenical Matters: Ecumenism in Higher Education" which endorsed the need for revising seminary education. Swidler summarizes the key points of the directory as follows. (1) Joint retreats with non-Catholics were recommended; (2) Experts from other religious traditions were to be invited to teach about their own traditions; and (3) "[T]hose in authority in seminaries, universities, and similar institutions should take pains to promote the ecumenical movement and spare no effort to see that teachers keep in touch with advances in ecumenical thought and action."[202] Today, more and more Christians are becoming aware of the issues involved in interreligious dialogue. According to Swidler, Christians have moved from being the most opposed to dialogue, to now being at the forefront of dialogue among the world's religions. Indeed, Swidler feels that "all Christian theology today should be carried out within the context of dialogue."[203]

The last hundred years have seen a profound transformation in the attitude of Christianity from intolerance to dialogue. Although some Christians see this metamorphosis negatively, what they call the end of the world others call a butterfly.[204] Today many Christians rejoice that Christianity has broken out

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[201] Ibid., 146-147.

[202] As cited in Swidler, "Religious Pluralism and Ecumenism from a Christian Perspective", 334-335.

[203] Swidler, *After the Absolute*, 68.

[204] Paraphrased from Richard Bach, *Illusions: The Adventures of a Reluctant Messiah* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1977), 177.

of its cocoon of intolerance and is spreading its wings in dialogue.

The lessons of interreligious dialogue go beyond the scope of religion. The philosophy and principles of interreligious dialogue are valuable for both religious and non-religious persons alike. One scholar writes:

> [I]n our modern world dialogue as a desirable way of being human has become a powerful vision for the human future. Not only should dialogue be promoted as a fundamental social virtue ... to enjoy differences and diversities, but, more significantly, dialogue itself is a way of life, a dynamic state of social peace in which differences are not eliminated but communicated without violence. Dialogue, in this sense, should become the social practice of all members of our society.[205]

The study of dialogue provides useful guidelines on how to be open-minded towards other viewpoints which all persons can learn from. After all, closed-mindedness is a wonderful thing to lose.

I began this thesis with a quotation by Arnold Toynbee and, to wrap things up, I will finish with another of Toynbee's remarks. Concerning the future of religious cooperation and dialogue, Toynbee makes the following prediction:

> I would not say that I expect to see a coalescence of the historic religions, but I think it may be expected, and also may be hoped, that all religions, while retaining their historic identities, will become more and more open-minded, and (what is more important) open-hearted, towards one another as the World's different cultural and spiritual heritages become, in increasing measure, the common possession of all Mankind. I should say that, in learning more and more to respect, reverence, admire, and love other faiths, we should be making progress in the true practice of Christianity. And the practice of the Christian virtue of charity need not prevent us from holding fast to what we believe to be the essential truths and ideals in our own Christian faith.[206]

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[205] As cited in Swidler, *After the Absolute*, 177.

[206] Arnold Toynbee, *Christianity Among the Religions of the World* (New York: Scribner's, 1957), 104-105.

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APPENDIX:

Text of the Declaration of A Global Ethic

We take individual responsibility for all we do. All our decisions, actions, and failures to act have consequences.

We must treat others as we wish others to treat us. We make a commitment to respect life and dignity, individuality and diversity, so that every person is treated humanely, without exception. We must have patience and acceptance. We must be able to forgive, learning from the past but never allowing ourselves to be enslaved by memories of hate. Opening our hearts to one another, *we must sink our narrow differences for the cause of the world community, practicing a culture of solidarity and relatedness.*

We consider humankind our family. We must strive to be kind and generous. *We must not live for ourselves alone, but should also serve others,* never forgetting the children, the aged, the poor, the suffering, the disabled, the refugees, and the lonely. No person should ever be considered or treated as a second-class citizen, or be exploited in any way whatsoever. There should be equal partnership between men and women. We must not commit any kind of sexual immorality. We must put behind us all forms of domination or abuse.

We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.

We must strive for a just social and economic order, in which everyone has an equal chance to reach full potential as a human being. We must speak and act truthfully and with compassion, dealing fairly with all, and avoiding prejudice and hatred. We must not steal. We must move beyond the dominance of greed for power, prestige, money, and consumption to make a just and peaceful world.

Earth cannot be changed for the better unless the consciousness of individuals is changed first. We pledge to increase our awareness by disciplining our minds, by meditation, by prayer, or by positive thinking. Without risk and a readiness to sacrifice there can be no fundamental change in our situation. Therefore we commit ourselves to this global ethic, to understanding one another, and to socially-beneficial, peace-fostering, and nature-friendly ways of life.

We invite all people, whether religious or not, to do the same.
(Chicago: Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions, 1993.)