THE DIGNITY OF DIFFERENCE: CHRISTIAN PARTICULARITY AND THE POSSIBILITY OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

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DECLARATION

This work has not previously been accepted in substance for any degree and is not being concurrently submitted in candidature for any degree.

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STATEMENT 1
This thesis is the result of my own investigations, except where otherwise stated. Where correction services have been used the extent and nature of the correction is clearly marked in a footnote(s). Other sources are acknowledged by footnotes giving explicit references. A bibliography is appended.

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STATEMENT 2

I hereby give consent for my thesis, if accepted, to be available for deposit in the University's digital repository**.**

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Abstract

Difference is believed to constitute one of the greatest obstacles to interreligious dialogue. Hence, a strong view of the particularity of the religions is often criticised as incompatible with a commitment to, and willingness to engage in, interreligious dialogue. This thesis argues against this apparent incompatibility by making a case for the possibility of interreligious dialogue that does not come at the expense of the particularity of the religions, specifically, of Christian particularity. The thesis identifies itself as an interdisciplinary research. It proceeds by means of a methodology of close analysis of, and constructive engagement with, literature in the fields of Christian theology, interfaith studies, and religious peacebuilding. The first chapter defines and lays out the emergence of the particularist perspective in the Christian theology of religions. It does this through a critical review and engagement with the literature, with focused attention given to the work of George Lindbeck, Mark Heim, Jacques Dupuis, and Nicholas Healy. In the second chapter, a link is opened up between the particularist framework and interreligious dialogue, in conversation with the work of George Lindbeck. A moral impulse of moving the religions toward better forms of relationality with one another is also identified, in this second chapter, as constituting a key telos of the modern global interfaith movement. The question then arises of how a Christian form of particularity might locate itself within the moral framework of interreligious dialogue. The three chapters that follow are an extended engagement with this question. In the third chapter, in conversation with the 'intratextual' vision of scripture articulated in the work of George Lindbeck, an argument is made for regarding scripture as a key site through which Christians might acquire virtues crucial for interreligious dialogue's flourishing. The fourth chapter posits friendship as an important mode of interreligious dialogue. But the account of friendship offered here moves away from those which predicate its possibility on shared metaphysical and moral orientation between the friends. Drawing insights from the work of Janet Soskice, James Fredericks, David Burrell, and Jürgen Moltmann, this fourth chapter makes a case for the possibility of, and the moral and spiritual blessings that come from, interreligious friendships. In the fifth and final chapter, the concern for interreligious peace, already noted as a motif in the modern interreligious dialogue movement, is framed as consistent with a Christian commitment to peaceableness. Through attention to two contexts of interfaith friendships, namely the contemporary practice of Scriptural Reasoning, and the friendship of Reverend Charles Freer Andrews and Mohandas K. Gandhi (in Apartheid South Africa and India), the fifth chapter argues that interreligious friendship is an important missional practice, a form of Christian witness to 'the peaceable kingdom.' Taken together, the thesis presents a Christian vision of interreligious dialogue.

INTRODUCTION: THE DIGNITY OF DIFFERENCE

Motivation for the Thesis

Growing up in Southwestern Nigeria has made awareness of religious diversity an important part of my lived life experience. In neighborhoods, schools, and workplaces in Lagos, where I lived from my teenage to young adult years, Christians, Muslims, and, to a smaller extent, adherents of African traditional religions, intermingle freely, befriend one another, and even form families together. Interreligious cooperation, friendships, and tolerance were a normal part of my upbringing in this part of Nigeria. However interreligious relations are not entirely cordial in Nigeria.[1] There are more conflictual patterns of relations among the religions, mainly between Christianity and Islam, in the country as well. Northern Nigeria continues to experience, tragically, different forms of interreligious hostility and conflict. The difference between these two regions of the same country illustrates the complexity of interreligious relations. Is religion necessarily the harbinger of violence? How might religions better coexist?

Religious pluralism is, of course, not unique to Nigeria, it forms a crucial part of our reality in our globalized world of today. Europe, which was once the bastion of Christendom,

[1] 'Interreligious relations' can be an ambiguous term. Sometimes it is employed, descriptively, to refer to the various modes of relationships which take/can take place between religions and their adherents, from the cordial to the combative. Other times, some employ it, normatively, to speak of the ideal of positive, cordial, peaceable, interreligious relationship between religions and religious persons. Examples of the first sense include 'interreligious relations' in the first sense, see Cheetham, David, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, eds., *Understanding Interreligious Relations* (Oxford, 2013); Hallvard Hagelia and Markus Philipp Zehnder, eds., *Interreligious Relations : Biblical Perspectives* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2017). Examples of the more normative sense are S. Mark Heim, 'Scriptural Paths for Interfaith Relations', *Review & Expositor* 114, no. 1 (February 2017): 63–70, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637316687357; Luke Bretherton, 'A Postsecular Politics? Inter-Faith Relations as a Civic Practice', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 79, no. 2 (1 June 2011): 346–77, https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/lfq084; Robert P. Sellers, 'Interfaith Relations and the Christian Disciple: Living with Others in the Way of Jesus', *Review & Expositor* 114, no. 1 (February 2017): 34–42, https://doi.org/10.1177/0034637317690390. In this thesis, we tend to use it the more descriptive sense, and we generally qualify it (say, 'positive interreligious relations') when employing it normatively.

is now, increasingly so, religiously plural. Migration, occasioned by violence and political and economic instability in places like Syria, Lebanon, Afghanistan, and Iraq, has been a contributory factor in this regard. An estimate suggests that by 2050, close to 15 per cent of Europe's population would identify as Muslims. [2] In the United States, non-Christian religions, even though still a minority, are growing.[3] These trends are the same in other parts of the world. Almost no one who lives in our now hyper-networked world can escape the reality of religious diversity, of engaging with religious difference.

The sociological reality of religious diversity in the world, which, we have to remember, is by no means a modern phenomenon, raises important questions for Christian theology. The questions raised are not simply of an abstract nature but are every bit practical, even existential. They include questions like how Christians might best think about the relationship between the diverse religions of the world. Does there exist an inter-religious 'core' that pervades the religions, and whose specification can be rendered intelligible to the different world faiths? Do the various religious traditions seek the same soteriological, and other theological, ends? Is Christianity, theologically speaking, reconcilable with non-Christian religious traditions, especially if one takes with full seriousness the self-narrations of the religions about what their traditions orient toward? More practically, how might Christians learn to relate better with those who are religiously different from them? How might such relationships be narrated as faithful? Can Christians participate in interreligious dialogue?[4]

[2] Pew Research Centre, 'Europe's Growing Muslim Population', *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project* (blog), 29 November 2017, https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2017/11/29/europes-growing-muslim-population/.
[3] 'The 2020 Census of American Religion - PRRI', *PRRI - At the Intersection of Religion, Values, and Public Life.* (blog), 8 July 2021, https://www.prri.org/research/2020-census-of-american-religion/.
[4] In the literature, the terms 'interfaith' and 'interreligious' are generally treated as synonymous, and we use both terms as such in this thesis. For a brief discussion of the relation of both terms, see Oddbjørn Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies : A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), 1–7, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781472594655.

How might Christians learn to live peaceably with their non-Christian neighbours? The field of the Christian theology of religions has traditionally been concerned with these questions.

A prominent position in the theology of religions, represented by figures like John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul Knitter, Alan Race, and more contemporarily, Perry Schmidt-Leukel and Paul Hedges argue that the best way to think, at least theologically, about the relationship between the religions is to view the different religions as complementary. For these scholars, the diverse religions of the world constitute compatible ways of construing the world, such that the differences that we observe between them can be narrated in a way that renders them consistent with one another. This position is often termed religious pluralism, or pluralism, for short. An important motivation for the pluralist position is ethical. Its advocates regard it as better able to provide a secure basis for positive forms of interreligious dialogue. The conviction here is, as Hans Kung famously put it, 'there will be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions and no peace among the religions without dialogue among the religions, and there will be no serious dialogue among the religions without common ethical standards.'[5] Considering how much religions factor in conflicts around the world, this pluralist concern for providing a more solid footing for interreligious dialogue can hardly be faulted.

Yet, as important as the ethical impulse which undergirds it is, this thesis makes a case against the pluralist view. We take the ethical concern seriously but argue that this concern need not come at the cost of reducing the differences between the religions. In fact, in our view, it is only by taking difference seriously that authentic, effective interreligious dialogue can take place between the religions. This thesis argues that it is better to respect the

[5] Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (London: SCM Press, 1990), 105.

differences between the religions, rather than attempting to submerge them within a larger narrative account which would be incompatible with the ultimate accounts about themselves that they hold. The position we defend has been termed particularism. The particularistic view holds that religions are best viewed as constituting distinct, often incommensurate, metanarratives about the world, the self's place in that world, and other similar considerations on what is held as constituting ultimate truth. This particularist standpoint shares, in this way, the same sensibilities that inform Rabbi Jonathan Sacks' insistence that the best way to secure our flourishing in our religiously diverse world is by engaging that world from the vantage point of the particular, the local.

In *The Dignity of Difference*, which inspires the title of this thesis, Sacks criticises the tendency toward a universalism that pretends to speak for all. As Sacks argues, this form of universalism, which, in our view, the pluralist standpoint mirrors, issues often in violence. This violence may not necessarily take a physical form, it may be intellectual, where I refuse to grant integrity to other ways of seeing the world that differ from mine. But by granting dignity to other ways of construing the world, we recognise that a key part of the human condition is diversity. But this does not mean, as Sacks argues, that one regards all viewpoints as true or ontologically accurate accounts of the world.[6] To acknowledge difference, to subscribe to a particularistic view, should not be taken as a subscription to a corrosive form of relativism, which sees all truth claims or moral values are having no firm grounding. This latter type of relativism would, clearly, not be true to the way that the religions see themselves, to their

[6] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations*, Revised edition (London New Delhi New York Sydney: Bloomsbury, 2003), 21.

claims to universality, and therefore, would not be a case of granting true dignity to their difference.

Rather, particularism grants dignity to difference by acknowledging or accepting the reality of a plurality of voices, respecting these voices, even if – and this is important – it does not agree with all the claims put forward by these voices. The particularist standpoint is an acknowledgement that one can only engage the universal from the local. It is not a giving up of the universal, but a locating of the universal within the local, an acknowledgement that diverse universalisms exist; that there are always others who will see the world differently from us. But this does not mean, as pluralists fear, that there will be no secure basis for dialogue to take place between these competing voices. In an authentic dialogue, as Sacks notes, 'we must make ourselves open to [the other's] stories, which may profoundly conflict with ours. We must even, at times, be ready to hear of their pain, humiliation and resentment and discover that their image of us is anything but our image of ourselves.'[7] It is this concern for both taking the particular seriously and also taking seriously the need for and importance of authentic interreligious dialogue that motivates this thesis.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 1 discusses what particularism means, or, better put, how we understand it. We trace the main contours of its history in the Christian theology of religions and explicate its articulation of particularism in the work of Mark Heim and the Lutheran American theologian, George Lindbeck. Lindbeck's version of particularism is the most influential, continuing to receive attention in recent literature.[8] It is also the articulation of particularism

[7] Sacks, 23. Word in bracket mine.
[8] Marianne Moyaert, *In Response to the Religious Other: Ricoeur and the Fragility of Interreligious Encounters* (London: Lexington Books, 2014); Marianne Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue', in *The*

that we most identify with, and Lindbeck is the dialogue partner, throughout the thesis, that we tarry with the most. But our engagement with Lindbeck, and Heim as well, while appreciative is not uncritical. We register, in our engagement with them, our dissatisfactions with aspects of their views.

The first chapter also discusses how particularism and pluralism connect, in their different ways, with different understandings of the relationship between religious communities. In this regard, we draw attention to the pluralist ecclesiology of Jacques Dupuis, and the alternative particularist ecclesiology of Nicholas Healy. We discuss both ecclesiologies as a way of moving our discussion of particularism from simply being about how to understand the religions, phenomenologically, to a more theologically invested commitment in taking seriously the distinctiveness of Christianity, of the church. In agreement with Healy, we consider that the church differs from other religious communities, not because it embodies any moral superiority, but because of its orientation to the lordship of Jesus Christ. This way of understanding the church undergirds our treatment, in chapter 3, of the way that Christians, as members of a distinct religious community, can learn or be morally formed in ways that facilitate better forms of relationship with religious others. We close the first chapter with a review of and response to some of the criticisms of pluralism, especially focusing on critiques of Heim and Lindbeck's position.

As already mentioned, we consider important the ethical impulse which animates the pluralist standpoint. In chapter two, we begin to move toward the constructive proposal of

Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex, 2013), 65–86; Marianne Moyaert, 'Postliberalism, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Analysis of George Lindbeck's Fiduciary Interests', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 47, no. 1 (2012): 64–86; Patrik Fridlund, 'George Lindbeck as a Potential Religious Pluralist', *Heythrop Journal - Quarterly Review of Philosophy and Theology* 60, no. 3 (1 May 2019): 368–82, https://doi.org/10.1111/heyj.12136.

the thesis. We argue that it is a mistake to think of interreligious dialogue as primarily an activity, or a set of dialogue programmes. Interreligious dialogue, we argue, is best understood as a relationship. The charge, by critics like Paul Knitter and Paul Hedges, that particularism is unable to support interreligious dialogue also requires that we consider what dialogue means in the first place. We explore dialogue's meaning by attending both to the formal ways it has been construed and second, by attending to its history. Concerning its history, we note two key moments in its modern evolution, the Parliament of the World's Religions that was held in 1883 in Chicago, USA, and the Vatican II's important document *Nostra Aetate*, published in 1965. From both moments, we see that an ethical spirit, one concerned with fostering better relations between members of the different religious traditions has been a central animating feature of the global interfaith movement. How might the particularist standpoint fit in with this concern?

Concerning formal definitions, we draw attention to the influential, and more expansive, understanding of dialogue articulated in the post-Vatican II document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*. The four forms of interreligious dialogue suggested in that document, the 'dialogue of life,' 'the dialogue of theological exchange,' 'the dialogue of actions,' and 'the dialogue of religious experience' are noted. In our view, a commitment to Christian particularity can be squared with these different modes of interreligious dialogue, with the probable exception of the dialogue of 'religious experience.' Inter-ritual forms of dialogue, as others have noted, are not as easy to actualise as may be imagined, considering the close connection between concepts and experience, and the bounded nature of religious rituals.[9]

[9] S. Mark Heim, 'On Doing What Others Do: Intentions and Intuitions in Multiple Religious Practice', in *Ritual Participation and Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Marianne Moyaert and Joris Geldhof (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 19–32.

In a bid to answer the question of how a commitment to the dignity of difference, to particularity, can undergird dialogical relations with religious others, we begin, in chapter 3, to move the thesis toward a more constructive key. In chapter three, we return to the work of Lindbeck, and consider – working within his theology – how his contention for a mode of theology that is 'intratextual' can afford us a theological resource for connecting his particularism with a commitment to dialogical engagement. Intratextuality, which, for Lindbeck, names a vision of theology in which scripture is prioritised over other non-scriptural narratives can, we argue, enable us to think about the crucial role that scripture can play in forming, in Christians, some of the virtues which are critical if interreligious dialogue would be successful. Yet, we do not, in so arguing, claim that scripture is enough. As we note, there are limitations to Lindbeck's idea of an 'intratextual' theology, but we consider that, by so foregrounding scripture, he provides a way for Christians to consider scripture's important role in enabling better forms of interreligious relations.

It is however not enough to note how the church, through scripture, plays an important role in interreligious dialogue. It is also important to consider how the church, and Christians, might be morally formed through forming dialogical relations with religious others. The last two chapters of the thesis are an extended engagement with this consideration. In chapter 4, we suggest that interreligious friendships provide an accessible mode of interreligious dialogue which can be sites of moral and spiritual formation for Christians. We note some examples of interreligious friendship. The key contribution the chapter makes is that these friendships need not be grounded on the friends' sharing agreement on 'all things human and divine.' The very nature of interreligious friendship, in which the friends differ on religious grounds, means that accounts of friendships, such as those by Cicero, Aristotle, and even Augustine, would prove restrictive for a theological attempt at grounding interreligious

friendship. Drawing from aspects of the work of Janet Soskice, David Burrell, James Fredericks, and others, we make a case for an 'open' friendship which continues to respect the otherness of the friend.

In the final chapter, we continue with the model of dialogue which we introduced in chapter 4, interreligious friendship. We argue that interreligious friendships can serve as modes of Christian witness. Gleaning from the work of Stanley Hauerwas, we argue that interreligious friendships can be forms of Christian witness to the peaceable kingdom of Christ. This is important considering how crucial a concern for peaceable relations has been in the modern interfaith movement. To illustrate the argument, the chapter attends to two sites of interreligious friendship: the contemporary practice of scriptural reasoning and the friendship between Charles Feer Andrews and Mohandas Gandhi. Scriptural reasoning, we argue, illustrates a particularist practice of interreligious dialogue that allows space for Christians to be spiritually and morally formed by interreligious dialogue, and at the same time, to witness to peace. This witness to peace is equally exemplified in the story of the friendship between the British Anglican priest, Charles Freer Andrews and Mohandas Gandhi. We tell the story of their friendship and make the point that for Andrews, it was this desire to witness Christ's love which propelled his friendship with religious others. These friendships, as we argue, in so witnessing to the peaceable kingdom of Christ also serve as crucial modes of interreligious cooperation, cooperation against the violence that religious difference often incites.

Note on Methodology

This thesis draws on a range of sources in making its argument. It locates itself, principally, within discourses in the theology of religions, Christian ethics, and religious

peacebuilding. In this way, the thesis' design is interdisciplinary, it employs a method of *bricolage*, weaving together diverse voices in pursuing its aims. This feature, we believe, connects it to the interdisciplinary nature of interreligious studies. Interreligious studies, as Oddbjørn Leirvik notes, is marked by an emphasis, in the first place, on relationality, 'on what takes place between religious traditions and their living representatives, on a scale from acute conflict to trustful dialogue.'[10] Alongside this highlighting of relationality, in interreligious studies, Leirvik suggests, there is, in a way not present in 'religious studies,' an underlining of the 'researcher's, the teacher's and the student's role as agents in the spaces between.'[11] This means that the researcher in the field of interreligious studies is never simply an 'objective' investigator, but is implicated in the discourses that they produce. Indeed, my identity as a Christian is not bracketed off in this work but is drawn upon to serve as a reflexive location from which I pursue my research agenda. The emphasis on relationality between religious agents means that, by its very nature, research in interreligious studies must have an interdisciplinary nature, gleaning insights from diverse fields that can shed light on the multi-faceted nature of interreligious relations. Some of the important texts in the field, like Leirvik's, reflect this interdisciplinarity.[12]

The first academic field that the thesis locates itself within is the Christian theology of religions. In this context, we proceed by means of a close engagement with literature in the field. We engage in critical analysis of key texts on the particularist standpoint which we defend. The second field which informs our argument is Christian ethics. Within this domain,

[10] Leirvik, *Interreligious Studies : A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion*, 11.
[11] Leirvik, 11.
[12] This feature is also present in such volumes as Eboo Patel, ed., *Interfaith-Interreligious Studies: Defining a New Field* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018); Lucinda Mosher, ed., *The Georgetown Companion to Interreligious Studies* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2022).

this thesis understands itself as an attempt at a constructive moral theology. Specifically, we seek to engage in what Charles Mathewes terms as a 'theology of public life,' an attempt to think about how the distinct theological commitments that Christians hold connect to the wider non-ecclesial spaces that they carry on their lives.[13] The question for us, in this regard, is how Christians might better relate with those who are religiously different from them. It is within this context that we engage the work of Christian ethicists/theologians like Stanley Hauerwas (chapters 3 and 4) and Janet Soskice (chapter 4). Lastly, a key field which this thesis draws from and contributes to is religious peacebuilding. Chapter 5, in particular, engages insights from the work of Peter Ochs, especially his framing of scriptural reasoning as a practice of peacebuilding. Also, the profile of the friendship of Gandhi and Andrews that we offer takes seriously Scott Appleby's thesis about religion's ambivalent character concerning questions of peace and violence.

Audience

As an academic project, this work seeks to make a scholarly contribution and should hopefully be of interest to scholars in the fields of theology, religious ethics, religious peacebuilding, and interfaith studies – fields that we have outlined above as being discursive partners for this thesis. Importantly, however, as an exercise in constructive Christian theology, the claims advanced in this thesis proceed from a particular religious tradition, namely, Christianity. A primary audience that the work has in mind, then, are fellow Christians, particularly those who, for theological reasons, are hesitant about participating in interreligious dialogues. A key aim of this project is to persuade these types of Christians that interreligious engagements are consistent with key aspects of Christian discipleship (such as

[13] Charles T. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

the call to love the neighbour and the commission to witness to Jesus Christ's love and presence in the world). As well, such dialogical engagements need not come at the expense of a robust commitment to the particularity of one's Christian faith. That is, interreligious dialogue does not by necessity entail religious compromise or infidelity.

This aim holds existential meaning for me. Coming from a Christian background in which interreligious dialogue was not given much importance, with emphasis placed instead on 'winning lost souls for Christ,' I am aware of the many misunderstandings and fears that attach to interfaith dialogue. My hope in this thesis is that some of these confusions and worries might be resolved and an openness inspired by faith in the God who calls us to risky embrace of the 'other' might issue forth in more reflective participation in the dialogue with religious others in which, in our pluralised and pluralising world, we are already inevitably engaged.

CHAPTER 1

PARTICULARISM IN THE CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY OF RELIGIONS

Introduction

We begin this chapter by positioning the particularist position in the Christian theology of religions within the literature. We offer a definition of particularism that highlights its nature as a methodological alertness to the substantive, often incommensurable differences that exist between religions. Particularism's emergence is then traced. Through a survey of the influential tripartite typology of 'exclusivism,' 'inclusivism,' and 'pluralism' that Alan Race introduced in 1983, we show how the particularist position arises out of dissatisfaction about the adequacy of these categories. In this connection, the chapter notes particularism's connection to the tradition of postliberal theology. We shall do this through an exposition of two important articulations of particularism, namely, those of Mark Heim and George Lindbeck. This exposition is complemented by an analysis of the 'inclusivist-pluralist' ecclesiology of Jacques Dupuis, which is contrasted with the particularist alternative offered by Nicholas Healy. This contrast is offered as a concrete example of how particularism, and Christian particularism more specifically, differs from a non-particularist understanding of religious communities, in this case of the church.

1.1. Particularism in Christian Theology of Religions

1.1.1. What is Particularism?

Our usage of 'particularism' throughout this thesis is within the context of discourses in the field of Christian theology of religions. Within this specific context, early uses of the

term may be found in the work of scholars like Paul Knitter and Marianne Moyaert.[14] Here, 'particularism' names a position in which stress is placed on the need to attend to the religions in their particularity – paying attention to their particulars, their self-storying, and their varied and often incompatible conceptualisations of both proximate and ultimate realities.[15] Our constructive engagement with interreligious dialogue in this thesis is shaped by this understanding of particularism. Specifically, as we explicate further later, our understanding of particularism is most shaped by George Lindbeck's influential articulation of it in *The Nature of Doctrine*. We shall return to this.

The particularist position in the theology of religions is quite recent. As we later discuss, it was only in the latter part of the second half of the twentieth century that views that have come to be described as 'particularistic' began being advocated in the context of interfaith/interreligious discourses and subsequently gained traction in the 1990s – an emergence that owes not only to theological developments but to certain sociological and philosophical trends that coalesced in the latter half of the twentieth century.

How might we best define particularism as we employ it in this thesis? To answer this question, we first offer a definition, and then turn to explicating this definition. We also reflect, subsequently, on the relationship of 'particularism' so defined and the 'particulars' of the Christian tradition, namely the church and scripture, which we engage. Also, due to the connection between the emergence of particularism to postmodernism and postliberal

[14] Marianne Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism', *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 15 (6 June 2005): 35–51, https://doi.org/10.2143/SID.15.1.583340; Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2000).
[15] Paul Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race and Paul Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 112–35.

streams of theology, we shall later attend to the nature of particularism's relationship to both trends.

In this thesis, we use the language of particularism to denote a postliberal theological position that holds that, within the context of interreligious relations, the different religions are non-trivially distinct from one another. Particularists argue that the diverse religions in the world, as far as we can tell, aim, in their respective ways, to achieve different and often incommensurable ends; employ significantly different conceptual frameworks for cohering these ends with their appropriate ritual and doctrinal means; and understand the nature of reality differently, and consequently, shape the inner life, worldview and, the moral lives of their adherents in ways that are different from each other.[16]

So defined, particularism positions itself primarily against the view, in the theology of religions, that has been termed 'religious pluralism' or 'pluralism' for short. 'Religious pluralism' in the context of this discourse is different from a merely descriptive sense of the term, where one may employ it to capture the fact of the diversity of religions in the world. In this descriptive sense, 'religious pluralism' is perhaps better named 'religious plurality,' as the later term conveys better the sense of a non-ideological and non-normative diversity of religious traditions within contemporary societies that it aims to capture. But in the theological context that we are interested in, religious pluralism is a normative, and mainly Christian (and, to a lesser extent, non-Christian) position which argues that, at some core level, the various 'great religious traditions' aim at a similar *ultimate* end or goal. Religious pluralists argue, in different ways, that the differences that appear to us to be present in the various

[16] Hedges; Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism'.

religions are of a complementary sort, and should not be understood as fundamentally opposing ways of understanding the ultimate nature of things.[17]

Particularism goes against the pluralist view by contending that, to the extent that our human epistemological limits allow, it seems impossible to specify what the nature of any such 'core level' is, that is supposed to hold together the religions.[18] While perhaps there may well be such a core level of unity between the religions there is, particularism claims, no way to specify what that is in a way that is congruent with the 'thick' descriptions of the religions themselves. Particularism argues that any attempt to narrate such a 'core level' of unity is ultimately bound by specific traditions (whether that be religious or cultural or intellectual) in a way that makes it impossible for such a narrative to be trans-traditioned. The tradition-boundedness of religion, particularism insists, renders it near-impossible to provide a meta-narrative about the relationship between the religions, at least one that is non-hegemonic and in congruence with the self-narrations of the religions.[19]

Two senses of religious pluralism, we believe, should be delineated to make clearer particularism's distance from pluralism. In the first sense, religious pluralism may refer to a *soteriological* position that maintains that non-Christian religions represent just as valid a means as Christianity with respect to the attainment of 'salvation.' Let us call this a soteriological form of pluralism. This kind of soteriological pluralism is sometimes funded by a theological universalism that sees God's providential hand in all the diverse religions of the

[17] John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religions*, Second Edi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004); John Hick, *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion* (London: Macmillan Press, 1973); Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 1962).
[18] Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism'.
[19] S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 2001); J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992); Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue and the Debate between Universalism and Particularism'; George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 25th Anniv (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

world. But in a second sense, religious pluralism is a *methodological* standpoint. Or, as John Hick terms his pluralism, 'a hypothesis.'[20] Here, pluralism is a way of understanding how the diverse religions of the world connect. In this second sense, the religious pluralist theory holds that the different religions are best explained as connected by a shared ontology, a united orientation toward the same divine Ultimate.

Particularism, in our framing of it here, takes issue, not primarily with the first sense of pluralism; that is, not principally with its soteriological deployment, but with the second: what we have termed its methodological dimension. The issue here, for particularism, is that the pluralist *hypothesis* can only be rendered valid if it ignores the actual data of the religions. Namely, the stories that the religions each narrate about their religion. Particularism argues that it is hard to describe any vision of the Ultimate which is not, in the end, traditioned and coloured by the theological visions, convictions, and ways of understanding Reality of the respective religions of the world.[21]

Yet, even as the above two senses of pluralism are noted, we should recognise that it may still be an oversimplification. Often, the methodological and the soteriological senses presuppose each other. Let us clarify what we mean. In the edited volume, *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World,*[22] four Christian theological responses to the 'problem' of religious plurality are defended. First, a 'pluralist view' by John Hick; second, 'an inclusivist view' by Clark Pinnock; third, a 'particularist view: a post-enlightenment approach' by Alister

[20] Hick, *An Interpretation of Religions*, 233.
[21] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 26; Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*.
[22] Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, eds., *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996).

McGrath; and fourth, a 'particularist view: an evidential approach' by R. Douglas Geivett and W. Gary Phillips.

As categorised in the volume, and made clear in the book's introduction by Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, the 'particularist view' is that which holds that salvation is 'available only through faith in God's special acts in history, culminating in Jesus Christ.'[23] Acknowledging that this 'particularist' view is typically referred to as 'exclusivism' or 'restrictivism,' the editors say they opt for the term 'particularism' as it seems to be 'a more appropriate term'[24] than the former two terms which, owing to 'political' considerations, often 'preclude a fair hearing.'[25]

This linguistic choice has at least two implications for our present purpose. First, as the chapters in the book which deal with the 'particularist view' reflect, 'particularism' is sometimes used as synonymous or near-synonymous with 'exclusivism' in the soteriological sense of the latter.[26] A second implication is that, as McGrath's chapter in the volume indicates, we could say, just as we said for religious pluralism, that 'particularism' has both a soteriological dimension and a methodological aspect. As a soteriological position in the context of the theology of religions, 'particularism' is sometimes employed as a proxy for an 'exclusivist' soteriology.

Our use of particularism is however not in this soteriological exclusivist sense. We understand particularism instead in what we have called a methodological sense. In this sense, particularism understands the relationship between the religions in terms of difference and a

[23] Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips, 'Introduction', in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. Dennis L. Okholm and Timothy R. Phillips (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 17.
[24] Okholm and Phillips, 17.
[25] Okholm and Phillips, 16.
[26] This much is noted by Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 112.

tendency toward incommensurability. As we note, the 'particularist turn' has tended to remain ambivalent about the soteriological status of non-Christian religions and/or non-Christians. The methodological sense of particularism, as we use it, is compatible with what Catherine Cornille has termed as 'soteriological agnosticism.'[27] Christian particularists who are soteriological agnostics may insist on the religions as really different and incommensurable *but* they remain ambivalent about how to respond to the question of whether or not non-Christians will be 'saved.' Particularism, in this 'methodological' sense, can suspend interrogating the salvific status of non-Christian religions, but yet take seriously that Christianity and non-Christian religions need not be postulated as sharing a similar understanding of ultimate reality or even what 'salvation' means.

We define particularism, therefore, as a position within the Christian theology of religions in which the differences between the religions are reckoned as *real*. The religions are distinguished by the particularity of their beliefs, commitments, and worldviews. These particularities, we consider, remain in place even when the same broad conceptual category or nomenclature is similarly employed across religious traditions. Take for instance the example of the category 'God.' While the same English letters 'G-O-D' may be employed for referring to the supreme being within Christianity and other theistic religions, the particularity of Christianity's trinitarian conception of the Divine marks its uniqueness from other non-trinitarian monotheistic traditions. Similarly, such a ritual practice like prayer which takes place in diverse forms in different religious traditions is very much conditioned by the particulars of the ways these religions understand its practice. To illustrate with Christianity

[27] Catherine Cornille, 'Soteriological Agnosticism and the Future of Catholic Theology of Interreligious Dialogue', in *The Past, Present, and Future of Theologies of Interreligious Dialogue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 201–15, https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198792345.003.0013.

again, Christian prayer is shaped by Christian beliefs about the accessibility of the Divine Godhead through the Son in whose name prayer is offered. Christian prayer at its most faithful is equally shaped by the Holy Spirit who, as scripture says, 'helps us make intercession.'[28] Thus, as the writer of Ephesians says, we are called to at all times pray 'in the Spirit.'[29] Within non-Christian religious traditions, notions of the Holy Spirit as Christians understand it – that is, in trinitarian terms – are absent. This challenge of the plurality of theological frameworks for understanding prayer is a key challenge that confronts the practice of interfaith prayer.[30]

Our constructive engagement in this thesis is shaped by a commitment to the particularity of the Christian tradition. Later in this chapter, we will review some articulations of the particularist position within which we are situated. As we shall show, there are important differences within the broad 'school of thought' of particularism, but the shared agreement on respecting the differences between the religions, on granting primacy to how the religions characterise themselves, is present in the different expressions of particularism with which we engage.

Still, for us, particularism serves primarily to set the background stage on which we seek to perform a constructive articulation of a vision of interreligious dialogue that does not come at the expense of taking seriously interreligious differences. This chapter and the next focus on presenting the nature of particularism as well as noting what we think is its credible relationship to the project of interreligious dialogue. In chapters 3, 4, and 5 – the constructive part of this thesis – we build upon some identified particulars within the Christian tradition,

[28] Romans 8:26
[29] Ephesians 6:18
[30] See Gavin D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000), 143–71.

mainly scripture, church, witness, and moral formation, to make a case for how a *Christian* particularist standpoint enables interreligious dialogue in ways that we think are potentially more meaningful to religious adherents (in our case, Christians) than pluralist-motivated approaches.

1.1.2. Particularism and Postmodernism

In the definition offered above, we noted that particularism, within the theology of religions, is postmodern.[31] To make sense of that, it is appropriate to offer a brief note on how the particularist standpoint connects to postmodernism. The literature on the meaning of postmodernism is extensive and equally extensive are discussions of postmodernism within the context of Christian theology. Without attempting to provide a succinct summary of the literature, let us note, for our present purpose, that writers on the subject sometimes distinguish between postmodernism as the *mood* of the times, the zeitgeist of current (?) Western culture and postmodernism as *ideology*, as a normative philosophical standpoint. In this vein, some refer to the former as 'postmodernity' and the other as 'post-modernism' proper.[32]

However such delineation may not always be particularly helpful considering that both senses tend to assume each other. That is, it is within the social milieu of postmodernism that postmodern ideologies emerge. As well, intellectual ideologies that are postmodern in turn shape and sustain postmodern cultures and sub-cultures. Combining both senses, some speak of postmodernism as a 'turn' – both at a cultural and an intellectual level in which certain key epistemological values that are said to have characterised the 'modern' period have come to

[31] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 113.
[32] Hedges, 113.

be transcended or rendered deeply problematic.[33] Jean-Francois Lyotard's characterisation of postmodernism as 'incredulity toward metanarratives' captures both the ideological and socio-cultural senses.[34] As culture and social current, postmodernity, it is said, is characterised by such socio-cultural features as 'multiculturalism', 'consumerism', rapid 'communication technologies', and value pluralism. As an ideology, it is distinguished by its emphasis on 'concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum, and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning.'[35] Postmodernity, unlike modernity, questions notions of universality and sameness across time and place, and highlights instead tradition, intersectional identities, and respect for difference.

Particularism within the theology of religions shares some connections with postmodernist assumptions in its shared emphasis on difference. Particularists emphasize, as Paul Hedges terms it, the 'tradition-specificity' of religions.[36] Particularists are sceptical of attempts to homogenise diverse religious narratives into single overarching metanarratives. Against religious pluralists' claims about being able to transcend the 'narrow' vantage point of any particular religious tradition or of their being able to generalise about implications that supposedly follow for other religious traditions from assumptions that derive from a different religious framework, particularism argues that every vantage point, in the end, cannot but reflect a particular tradition.

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[33] Scott H. Moore, 'Era and Epoch, Epoch and Era: Christian Intellectuals in the Postmodern Turn', *Christian Scholar's Review* XXVI, no. 2 (1996), http://www.csreview.org/XXVI2/moore/.
[34] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1979), xxiv.
[35] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 113; Gary Aylesworth, 'Postmodernism', in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2005, https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/postmodernism/#Aca.
[36] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives'; Paul Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 2010).

In his engagement with Hick's pluralism, Gavin D'Costa has, in this respect, argued that Hick's assumptions about God's love are inflected by Hick's Christian convictions. Specifically, for D'Costa, Hicks' belief about the universality of God's love is theologically grounded by his taking for granted the Christological form that the Divine's love takes and is made manifest in Christ's incarnation.[37] Aware of this criticism – that it is hard to argue for a trans-religious viewpoint in matters of faith – some pluralists have argued that pluralism does not claim to speak on behalf of the different religions, as particularists charge. They insist instead that the pluralist position is consistent with the views of the religions themselves. Knitter put it this way: 'all the religions possess the resources within their own traditions to adopt the pluralist model.'[38] Similarly, Paul Hedges grounds his religious pluralism in Christian terms, arguing that pluralism is necessitated by Jesus' example of 'radical openness' to the other.[39] This move, however, can hardly bypass the problem of how pluralists can be certain that the terms of reference ('radical openness' of Jesus Christ, for example) in one religion are strictly equivalent to those in other religions or even have any such equivalence. This is a problem that, as we shall note in our discussion of the articulation of particularism of Mark Heim, is not of small consequence.

Particularism connects as well to postmodernism in its critical alertness to the hegemonic tendencies that are latent in 'universalist' discourses. In this case, specifically, those universalist discourses that characterise pluralist theories of religion. In this regard, Tomoko Masuzawa's study of the rise of 'world religions' is helpful.[40] Masuzawa draws

[37] Gavin D'Costa, *Theology and Religious Pluralism: The Challenge of Other Religions* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 1986).
[38] Paul F. Knitter, 'Introduction', in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005), x.
[39] Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*.
[40] Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2005).

attention to ways in which even the very idea of 'religion' as a settled notion, with an unambiguous meaning, is hard to sustain, if one takes the history of the term seriously. Masuzawa's *The Invention of World Religions: Or, How European Universalism Was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* details how the emergence of 'world religions' was deeply bound up with racialised, European colonial projects that framed non-European cultures in ways that imposed Western categories (in this case 'religion') on these cultures.

Through her close reading of the work of 19th century 'comparative religions' scholars like Cornelis Tiele and Pierre Daniel Chantepie de la Saussaye, Masuzawa shows how attempts at classifying religions as 'national' or 'universal' were deeply connected with the desire to present Christianity as the ultimately truly 'universal' religion, but couching that claim, not in terms of theology, but as 'scientific.'[41] So, while today we speak, rather straightforwardly, of the 'world religions,' Masuzawa forces us to reckon with the contingency of the term, to acknowledge that its meaning should not be assumed to be without a certain political dimension. Although, as Masuzawa discusses, there were figures like the German scholar, Max Muller who resisted the hegemonic categorisations of 'religions,' insisting that the religions had their integrity, in a way that, we might say, foreshadows the particularist standpoint.

Masuzawa's work deals with questions of the provenance of the term 'world religions,' but the postcolonial and postmodernist spirit of her work cannot be missed.[42] Particularism, by taking seriously difference, shares in this postmodern/postcolonial refusal to subsume the often-competing narratives (and in this case, the narratives of the different 'world religions')

[41] Masuzawa, 107–20.

[42] A critique of the pluralist position that censors its 'colonialist' nature is offered in Kathryn Tanner, 'Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse', *Modern Theology* 9, no. 1 (1993): 1–18.

into singular neat grand narratives or assuming that any of the religions mirrors another, say Christianity. Particularism prefers, instead, to treat multi-narrativity as a given, even if sometimes troubling, feature of the human condition.

Yet, this is not to say this thesis' understanding of particularism uncritically endorses postmodernism in all its flavours. It should not be read as such. While reckoning seriously with difference as a sociocultural current in our times, we do not by this endorse a position that sees those differences as nothing more than simply phenomenological. The religions we consider are different. They are not for this reason necessarily the same in a normative, or metaphysical sense. The religions do not believe this and so a commitment to the particularity of the religions means we ought to be wary of claiming the contrary.

Therefore, we do not subscribe to what may be termed as a postmodernist relativism in which differences are taken as value-neutral, with no basis possible then for evaluating these differences. On a postmodernist view, such evaluations would be viewed as inescapably self-referential. As we have earlier mentioned, we take the difference between the religions as primarily a methodological starting point for our constructive engagement with the prospects for dialogical interfaith relations. We do not engage in evaluative claims about the differences between the religions (recall our note earlier about not wishing to engage in issues raised by 'soteriological pluralism'). Yet, this is simply a methodological decision that we have made to better focus our primary interest in how to motivate interfaith dialogue despite the reality of interreligious difference.

Before turning to a more focused review of the emergence of the particularist standpoint in the Christian theology of religions, we also need to comment on the way that particularism, as we have tried to define it above, connects to what is known as post-liberal

theology. This is appropriate in light of our claim about particularism being a post-liberal theological stance and also given particularism's relationship to postmodernism. Postliberal theology is just as similarly related. Postliberal theology's connection to postmodernism is clear from such entries as George Hunsinger's 'postliberal theology' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology.*[43] Here, postliberal theology is described as postmodern. Indeed, the particularist perspective was birthed by post-liberal theology and its articulation is most indebted to postliberal theologians. We engage, throughout the thesis, with some of these theological figures, especially George Lindbeck, a key figure of postliberal theology.

We glean insights from the way that postliberal theologians like Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas emphasise the uniqueness or, in this thesis' terms, the particularity, of Christianity. Specifically, with Lindbeck, we take seriously not simply an understanding of religions as semiotic cultural-linguistic systems, but also a vision of scripture as a key source for Christian identity formation. As well, the postliberal ecclesiology of Stanley Hauerwas and Nicholas Healy also shapes the way that we understand how the church is related to other religious communities. With postmodernism, we recognise the reality and integrity of other religious communities, but along with Hauerwas and Healy, we do not go as far as suggesting that this recognition should entail an evisceration of the uniqueness of the church or an understanding of it as such. Interreligious dialogue, as we argue in chapters 4 and 5, provides an opportunity for Christian moral development and missional witness. Our understanding of particularism is thus postmodern and postliberal in the way both movements highlight the need to take socio-identity differences seriously. Yet, both postmodernism and post-liberalism are chiefly

[43] George Hunsinger, 'Postliberal Theology', in *The Cambridge Companion to Postmodern Theology*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

alluded to in this thesis to show how the particularist perspective has been shaped by them, rather than as ideological currents within which we completely situate ourselves.

1.2. The Emergence of Particularism

1.2.1. Typologies of Christian Approaches to Other Religions

As already mentioned, particularism's emergence is within the context of the theology of religions. Particularism is, in many ways, a reaction to trends and approaches in this theological sub-field. An expansive area of discourse, contemporary Christian theology of religions has undergone a number of paradigm shifts since its flowering in the early twentieth century. Where earlier discussions and debates were mostly in response to and necessitated by on-field missiological concerns, of a world-Christianity texture, later twentieth-century theology of religions has, for the most part, been less mission-praxis oriented, reflective more of Western philosophical and theological concerns.[44] Typically concerned with 'Christian attitudes toward non-Christian religions,' contemporary emphasis has shifted to considerations of hermeneutics, giving birth, in fact, to the field of 'comparative theology,' whose central concerns have been dominated by a cluster of issues around how to read religious texts rather than questions about the possibility or otherwise of 'salvation' outside Christianity.[45]

As Thomas Owen's compilation of excerpts of various Christian theological responses to religious diversity reflects, thoughtful theological reflection on religious plurality predates the late modern era; being present in the work of several early Christian sources from the 8th

[44] As a case in point, Hendrik Kraemer's influential *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, was commissioned by the International Missionary Council 'in order to serve as the material for the World Missionary Conference of 1938' cf. Hendrik Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, Second Edi (London: Edinburgh House Press, 1946), vii.

[45] For an influential introduction to the field of comparative theology, see Francis Clooney, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010).

century forward.[46] More modern articulations are, Owen shows, present in the work of figures like Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ernst Troeltsch, W. E. Hocking and Arnold Toynbee.[47] Owen's attempts to classify these various responses have remained a persistent tendency in the field, with many writers producing their own typologies.[48]

It has however been Alan Race's 1983 typological categorisation of various 'Christian responses to religious pluralism' that has been the most influential.[49] In this now classic typology, Race divides Christian theological engagement with religious plurality into three types: 'exclusivism,' 'inclusivism,' and 'pluralism.' Race's identification with pluralism, it should be said, skews this classic survey work somewhat in that the throughgoing critical posture that he maintains in his discussion of 'exclusivism' and 'inclusivism' is replaced with a more apologetic tone in the exposition of pluralism. But even with this, the categories which Race drew out had an appealing simplicity about them, and they help provide a good entrance into the modern field of the theology of religions and, by extension, of particularism.

In Race's typology, 'exclusivism' is the position that 'ultimate truth' and 'salvation' are exclusive to Christianity. Race acknowledges that the exclusivist position has been the dominant position in Christian history, noting some biblical texts such as Acts 4:12 and John

[46] Owen groups the various forms of Christian attitudes into 'rationalism, romanticism, relativism, exclusivism, dialectic, reconception, tolerance, dialogue, catholicism and presence'. Cf. Jaco Beyers, 'A Historical Overview of the Study of Theology of Religions', *HTS Theological Studies/Teologiese Studies* suppl. 12, no. 6, a4837 (2017): 10.

[47] Thomas C. Owen, ed., *Attitudes Toward Other Religions: Some Christian Interpretations* (London: SCM Press, 1969).

[48] For more discussion on these typologies, see Paul Hedges, 'A Reflection on Typologies: Negotiating a Fast-Moving Discussion', in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race and Paul M. Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008); Perry Schmidt-Leukel, 'Exclusivism, Inclusivism, Pluralism: The Tripolar Typology - Clarified and Reaffirmed', in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, ed. Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005).

[49] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (London: SCM Press, 1983). D'Costa's *Theology and Religious Pluralism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), published three years after Race's book also adopted the same tripolar typology, helping to reinforce its stranglehold on subsequent discourse.

14:16 which have been used as proof-texts for it.[50] Other writers have used other terms to refer to the exclusivist position. Jacques Dupuis refers to it as 'ecclesiocentrism'[51] and Paul F Knitter finds it represented in 'the conservative evangelical model' of such Evangelicals (whom Knitter considers as heirs of earlier 'fundamentalism') as Harold Ockenga, Billy Graham and Carl F. Henry. [52] This 'conservative Evangelical model,' Knitter notes, is later codified in the Evangelical declarations made at Frankfurt (1970) and Lausanne (1974).

Many writers on the topic consider Harold Kraemer's *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*, first published in 1938, as the classic articulation of exclusivism. It should be remembered, however, that while Kraemer reflects the exclusivist position, his exclusivism is laced with a deep anthropological knowledge and appreciation of non-Christian religions. This recognition means it would be wrong to think that his rejection of the salvific validity of non-Christian religions is based on a non-appreciation/awareness of them.[53] References are often equally made to Karl Barth, with his radical Christocentric, neo-Reformed theology setting a sharp dichotomy between revelation and religion.[54] More recent defences of exclusivism continue, evident, for instance in aspects of the work of Lesslie Newbigin, Harold Netland, Daniel Strange, and D. A. Carson.[55] An influential philosophical defence of the exclusivist position was made by the Reformed analytic philosopher, Alvin Plantinga.[56] These recent

[50] Race, 10ff.
[51] Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1997).
[52] Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1985), 78–79.
[53] In this respect, see especially chapters V and VI of Kraemer, *The Christian Message in a Non-Christian World*.
[54] See Karl Barth*, Church Dogmatics* 1/2 Section 17. Geoff Thompson, 'Religious Diversity, Christian Doctrine and Karl Barth', *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 8, no. 1 (January 2006): 3–24, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2400.2006.00180.x.
[55] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1992); Daniel Strange, *For Their Rock Is Not as Our Rock: An Evangelical Theology of Religions* (Leicester: Apollos, 2014); D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God: Christianity Confronts Pluralism* (Leicester: Apollos, 1996).
[56] Alvin Plantinga, 'Pluralism: A Defense of Religious Exclusivism', in *The Rationality of Belief and the Plurality of Faith*, ed. Thomas D. Senor (Cornell University Press, 1995).

advocates for the position have noted nuances and diversity within the broad spectrum of exclusivism, helping thereby to complicate the overly straightforward treatment to which the position has typically been subject.[57]

Inclusivism – the view that while Christianity embodies ultimate alethic and soteriological perfection, real possibilities exist for those outside the reified Christian community to access these gains – has been said to be reflected in the theology of Luke-Acts and the *Logos* theology of Justin Martyr.[58] J N Farquhar's *The Crown of Hinduism*, published in 1913, represented its most influential exposition in the early twentieth century. Influenced by nineteenth-century evolutionary science, Farquhar's inclusivism argued for regarding all non-Christian religions, in his specific case, Hinduism, as imperfect/incomplete in comparison to Christianity. These religions were imperfect to the extent that they could not fully satisfy the legitimate 'spiritual yearnings' of their adherents. These unsatisfied longings, Farquhar argued, could only be met in Christ/Christianity, which he regarded as the 'crown' or peak of these lower forms of religious consciousness.[59]

Vatican II (1962-1965) elevated the status of inclusivism to a quasi-orthodoxy in Roman Catholicism. The Council's positive appraisal of non-Christian religions, particularly Judaism, which was reflected especially in *Nostra Aetate* and *Lumen Gentium* measured the hitherto 'ecclesiocentric' or 'exclusivist' tenor of the Church. Historically, in the Roman Catholic church, the exclusivist spirit is captured in Cyprian of Carthage's remark, '*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus.*'[60] Karl Rahner was an important influence on the Council and his

[57] See, for instance, Daniel Strange, 'Exclusivisms: "Indeed Their Rock Is Not like Our Rock"', in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race and Paul Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 36–37.
[58] Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions*.
[59] John Nicol Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), 458.
[60] Translated 'outside the church there is no salvation'. This position was given formal dogmatic status at the Council of Florence (1438-1445).

inclusivist theology of religion has received much attention in the literature. Rahner's inclusivist theology is captured in his theory of 'anonymous Christians' in which non-Christians, by the mysterious grace enabled by Christ, and made available to all persons are regarded as able to respond to Christ even without an explicit acceptance of and subscription to historic Christian faith.[61] Against the view that inclusivism represents a middle-ground between the two 'extremes' of exclusivism and pluralism, some recent treatments have sought to redeem it from this image, arguing that the inclusivist position be regarded as an integral Christian position in its own right.[62]

Religious pluralism has, by far, been the most controversial of the three positions in Race's typology. Its controversial nature owing, no doubt, to the radical nature of its departure from the historic/traditional Christian position on the matter. The British philosopher and theologian, John Hick, has been a very influential and prolific defender of the pluralist position, although other scholars also offer interesting and unique defences of pluralism. Hick alludes to the radical nature of pluralism when, in a metaphorical reference to the history of astronomy, he speaks of the pluralist position as a 'Copernican' revolution.[63]

The main thesis of pluralism has already been noted in our earlier attempt to define particularism. But to restate, pluralists consider the 'great religious traditions' of the world to be complementary, aiming fundamentally at a common core, despite their apparent differences. We have put the phrase 'great religious traditions' in a quote to highlight the

[61] Rahner's views on the topic are most clearly set forth in his *Theological Investigations*, vol. 5 ('Christianity and the World Religions); vol. 6 ('Anonymous Christians'); and vol. 14 ('Jesus Christ and the non-Christian Religions'). For a defence of Rahner within the context of a variety of criticism labelled against his theology of religions, see Gavin D'Costa, 'Karl Rahner's Anonymous Christians – A Reappraisal', *Modern Theology* 1, no. 2 (1 January 1985): 131–48, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.1985.tb00013.x.
[62] See, for instance, David Cheetham, 'Inclusivisms: Honouring Faithfulness and Openness', in *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Alan Race and Paul Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), 63.
[63] Hick introduces this analogy in his *God and the Universe of Faiths: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*.

ambiguity in the term. While wishing to grant equal valid status to all religions, pluralists have been careful to qualify this so as not to unwittingly leave the door open for all and sundry religions like satanism and cult groups.[64]

While an extensive literature critical of pluralism has emerged, [65] pluralists have been quick to respond to criticisms levelled against their position, often revising and reinventing the pluralist paradigm in the process.[66] Two publications edited by John Hick, ten years apart, *The Myth of God Incarnate* in 1977 and *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* in 1987, served as unofficial manifestos of pluralism in the 1980s and 1990s. The former laid criticism at the Christology that undergirded traditional confessions of the ultimacy of the Christ event and the latter brought together several pluralists, including such influential names as Gordon Kaufman, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, Paul F. Knitter, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Stanley Samartha, and Raimundo Panikkar. [67] They were united in challenging the notion that Christianity was somehow superior to other religions.

1.2.2. Particularism and Postliberal Theology

A key and uniting thread in the three typologies of 'exclusivism,' 'inclusivism,' and 'pluralism' has been a concern for 'salvation.' Beginning especially in the 1990s, however, several particularist scholars of the theology of religions increasingly levelled criticism both at the soteriological over-emphasis present in Race's three types, especially the assumption that

[64] See, for instance, John Hick, 'On Grading Religions', *Religious Studies* 17, no. 4 (1981): 451–67.
[65] Criticisms include those of Harold Netland, *Encountering World Religions: The Challenge to Christian Faith and Mission* (Leicester: Apollos, 2001); Harold Netland, *Dissonant Voices: Religious Pluralism and the Question of Truth* (Leicester: Apollos, 1991); Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*; D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*.
[66] A more recent defence of pluralism is offered in Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *God beyond Boundaries: A Christian and Pluralist Theology of Religions* (Münster New York: Waxmann, 2017).
[67] John Hick, ed., *The Myth of God Incarnate* (London: SCM Press, 1977); John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1987).

references to 'salvation' held the same meaning for the different religions. For these writers, the idea that 'salvation' can be reduced into a singular referent is irreconcilable with the actual self-narration of the different religions. A Christian understanding of 'salvation,' as something that comes through Jesus Christ, does not appear to be the same as a Muslim view of 'salvation' (not that Muslims would speak in such terms, of course) which, in mainstream Islam requires, amongst other things, recognising, at a ritual and confessional level, the prophethood of Muhammad. This Christian 'salvation' cannot, as well, be understood as being, more or less, the same as Buddhist 'emptiness' or *Sunyata*. But if these referents of 'salvation' are dissimilar, particularists contended, so too are the 'ends' which the different religions seek.

The different religions appear to aim at different goals. For example, union with the triune God (in Christianity), submission to Allah (in Islam), and Nirvana (in Buddhism) would all seem to be, if the self-accounts of the religions are taken seriously, to be quite different. This point was the substance of Joseph DiNoia's *The Diversity of Religions*. Contending that pluralist theology of religions does not take seriously the diversity of religious ends reflected in the different religious communities, DiNoia observes how the different religious communities embody diverse and conflicting 'particularistic claims to universality.'[68]

DiNoia employs a Thomistic framework to show how, at least within Roman Catholicism, the attainment of salvation is made possible through the sacrament of baptism and aims at enjoying *charitas* with the 'Blessed Trinity.'[69] Not only do the different religious communities have different conceptions of the ultimate end of life, but they also, differently, seek the 'cultivation of a range of 'virtues' in their adherents. That is, they train their

[68] DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective*, 1992, 120, 130, 132.
[69] DiNoia, 58–60.

adherents in different 'means' which, they consider, can enable them to realize the diverse 'ends' that they seek. As DiNoia put it, they seek different 'patterns of skills, conduct, and experience' appropriate for 'the enjoyment of the end commended by the community.'[70]

DiNoia's work reveals an indebtedness to a theological tradition that was forming and growing in influence in the 1980s and 1990s. This tradition or school of thought had come to be termed 'postliberalism' or 'postliberal theology.' Owing to its genesis in the work of some scholars associated with Yale Divinity School in the United States, this emerging theological tradition would soon come to be referred to as the 'Yale School.' George Hunsinger contends, however, that referring to this tradition as 'Yale School' is naïve as quite many disparate theological convictions were reflected amongst those like George Lindbeck, Hans Frei, Stanley Hauerwas, Brevard Childs, and William Placher who are often cited as belonging to the postliberal school.[71]Whatever the case, its emphasis on the narrative form as foundational to the constructive theological task earned it the name 'narrative theology.'

Early articulations of particularism, as DiNoia's work and those of Paul J. Griffiths provide evidence,[72] were often located, even if not always in a wholesale manner, within postliberalism. For postliberals, pluralism, in both soteriological and methodological senses, was regarded as an example of 'liberalism' in the context of the theology of religions and interreligious dialogue. In its assertion that a unifying core exists between the religions, pluralists often pointed to a common mystical experience or shared existential state which united the aims and ritual practices of the diverse religions.

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[70] DiNoia, 57.
[71] Hunsinger, 'Postliberal Theology', 42–43.
[72] See Paul J Griffiths, 'An Apology for Apologetics', *Faith and Philosophy: Journal of the Society of Christian Philosophers* 5, no. 4 (1988): 399–420; Paul J Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991).

George Lindbeck's critique of the pluralist tradition, which we would review more extensively later, was that it was incongruent with the best psychosocial theories of religion.[73] For Lindbeck, it is more appropriate to consider religions as 'cultural-linguistic' systems. As such, like languages and cultures, religion, Lindbeck considers, functions as 'idioms for construing reality,'[74] providing the conditions which allow experiences to be expressed. For Lindbeck, all experiences, it may be said, including religious experience, are by their very nature theory/language laden. Second, pluralist theories, Lindbeck contended, make the mistake of regarding varied religious experiences as being of the same quality or holding corresponding subjective importance within the different religions. Lindbeck criticises this view, regarding it as similar to claiming that 'all red things, whether apples, Indians, or the Moscow square belong to the same natural genus'– a demonstrably false claim.[75]

Outside the United States, in an important essay, John Milbank anchored his strong censure of the pluralism showcased in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* in a particularism that considers that 'every major religion is already the result of a confrontation of the fact of religious difference and an attempt to subsume such difference.'[76] As this implicit apologetic is already embedded in the self-structure of the religions, contemporary projects of interreligious dialogue that seek to find a common core between the religions, Milbank thinks, are superfluous. Milbank is critical that 'the practice of dialogue incorporates the assumption that religion is an area of universal human concern that we can consider, contemplate and

[73] Lindbeck has in mind such theories of religion as present in Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim, Clifford Geertz, Peter Winch and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 6.
[74] Lindbeck, 33.
[75] Lindbeck, 26.
[76] John Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue', in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 180.

talk about.'[77] In agreement with Lindbeck and the postliberal theological paradigm, Milbank regards as faulty the attempt to speak of religion in essentialist terms, the tendency to reduce religion to some 'genus' for which a common quality can be assigned.[78] For Milbank, even practical aspects of dialogue such as notions of religions coming together to work for 'justice' and 'liberation,' which are built on pluralist foundations are misguided.[79] Milbank grants that 'coincidences of outlook' may take place between religions, and that these coincidences can ground some 'ad-hoc' form of dialogue. On the whole, however, his lack of enthusiasm for the practice of interfaith dialogue was clear.[80]

As we argue in this thesis, however, particularism need not give up on interreligious dialogue but can forge a vision of dialogue that continues to respect religious differences. As we discuss more fully in Chapter 5, beginning in the 1990s a prominent particularistic model of interreligious dialogue, 'Scriptural Reasoning,' which, in many ways, jettisoned liberal assumptions about commonality amongst the different religions emerged. Scriptural Reasoning offers one way of showing how interreligious dialogue is compatible with taking religious differences seriously, that is, with particularism. But to explore the mechanics of particularism, let us consider more extensively the work of two representative particularists, Mark Heim and George Lindbeck. Lindbeck's articulation of particularism is especially important because of its influential nature and for the way that we continue to employ it as a dialogue partner beyond this chapter.

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[77] Milbank, 178.
[78] Milbank, 176ff.
[79] Milbank, 181ff. For more discussion (and critique) of Milbank's approach to interfaith dialogue, see Angus Slater, 'The "Comeback of Christendom" or a "Christian Cosmopolis"?: Dialogical Possibility in the Work of John Milbank', *Journal of Dialogue Studies* 3, no. 2 (2015): 32–51.
[80] A criticism, even if not always fair, of Milbank's Radical Orthodoxic take on interreligious dialogue is offered by Paul Hedges, 'The Rhetoric and Reception of John Milbank's Radical Orthodoxy: Privileging Prejudice in Theology?', *Open Dialogue* 1 (2014): 24–44, https://doi.org/Doi: 10.2478/opth-2014-0004.

1.3. Articulations of Particularisms

1.3.1. On the Variety of Religious Ends: Mark Heim's 'More Pluralistic Hypothesis'

The American Baptist theologian Mark Heim[81] in *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religions* articulates a particularistic vision of the 'soteriological' ends of the various religions that is interesting, even if controversial. His work provides a relevant illustration for our attempt at exemplifying particularism.

Heim's particularism is argued for, on the one hand, through a throughgoing criticism of the pluralist hypothesis, or what he terms 'pluralistic theologies,' and, on the other hand, through a more positive proposal grounded in a Christian 'Trinitarian' theology of religions. Heim focuses his criticism on the defences of pluralism by John Hick, Wilfred Cantwell Smith, and Paul F. Knitter. He recognises the diversity that exists within the broad spectrum of pluralism, as they are reflected in these three figures with whom he engages.[82]

The principal fault Heim finds with Hick's pluralism is that it 'rests on two sweeping assumptions', namely, mistakenly holding that the various religions orient toward a common Supernatural Being ('the Real' as Hick terms it) and second, subscribing, albeit erroneously, to the 'soteriological dogma that there can be but one religious end.'[83] By this latter charge, Heim means that Hick, incorrectly, presupposes that the different religions share a common understanding of 'salvation.' But Heim argues that this can only be a presupposition, one that can hardly be sustained by engagement with actual dogmas of the religions. The mistake, for Heim, is that pluralistic theologies, like Hick's, mistakenly assume a unified understanding of

[81] Heim at the time of this writing (March 2020) serves as 'the Samuel Abbot Professor of Christian Theology at Andover Newton Seminary at Yale Divinity School.' 'Stephen Mark Heim | Yale Divinity School', accessed 14 April 2020, https://divinity.yale.edu/faculty-and-research/yds-faculty/stephen-mark-heim.
[82] Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion*, 15.
[83] Heim, 23.

what 'salvation' means. But for Heim, there exists more than one salvific programme when one listens closely to the religions themselves.

Similarly, Heim takes issue with Wilfred Cantwell Smith's existentially grounded pluralism in which an appeal to history is employed to make a case for a common 'faith,' shared amongst the adherents of the diverse world religions. According to Heim, Smith's notion of a shared faith is hard to reconcile with the actual historical narratives of the religions themselves. For if anything, Heim argues, history – which ironically Smith often appeals to as providing evidence of the shared common faith in the world religions – reveals that 'faith does not just 'have' transient forms' but rather 'that particular faiths partake of the concrete substance they express.'[84] In other words, the form of 'faith' that adherents in diverse communities hold is directly connected to the religious doctrines to which they subscribe. 'Faith,' then, Heim argues, is never simply faith just as such. It is never just a formal category without any substantive content. Rather, faith is always 'faith *in'* such that the object of the faith shapes its subjective embodiment, understanding and expression.

Paul Knitter's 'liberation theology of religions' suffers as well, Heim argues, from its failure to take seriously the point that while a concern for justice might be an appropriate value to be commended to the various religions, notions like 'justice' and 'liberation' are themselves terms whose concrete outworking and definitions are contested, across the religions. The various religions, Heim argues, often have their particular understanding of these terms – definitions that are often at odds with each other and, at the same time, in

[84] Heim, 68.

their various ways, challenge the 'secularist' understandings of these notions as they are used in the construction of pluralistic theologies.[85]

For Heim, in the end, pluralistic theories of religion only serve an apologetic purpose. They are constructed, Heim thinks, to provide a push-back against those who claim that the religions, by being exclusionary, are bigoted. Pluralistic theories/theologies of the sort put forward by Hick, Smith, and Knitter provide an apologetic against this modernist assumption by offering themselves as alternative theologies, that are ostensibly derived from within the religious traditions, that encourage 'inclusivity' and openness, rather than the narrow-minded bigotry of 'exclusivist' theologies of religion. As Heim puts it, pluralists seek to present themselves as 'the antidote to the toxic particularity that believes only its own faith can be right.'[86]

Pluralistic theologies, Heim equally claims, are designed to improve the probabilistic value of the faith claims of the different religions. They do this by insuring religious convictions from any future 'post-mortem' falsification. So, for example, if the Christian eschaton – that is, union with the triune God in heaven – is not actualised in the future, as traditional Christian dogma teaches, it may still be that the Muslim or Buddhist or Hindu 'eschaton' may be actualised instead. In the event of the latter, Christianity would still be 'eschatologically verified' because what would prove only falsified is the particular culturally shaped Christian belief about the nature of the 'eschaton' rather than the 'real point' that an orientation to the Divine/the Real is eschatologically grounded.[87]

[85] Heim, 91–98.
[86] Heim, 110.
[87] Heim, 111–13. Heim has in mind here the pluralism of John Hick.

For Heim, however, the apologia for the religions that these pluralist writers mount cannot escape their cultural boundedness. Although they seek to help the religions be seen as 'open' and 'true,' they are ultimately culturally bound, and as such, limited in their significance. This, for Heim, is evident in their tacit acceptance of the modern Western assumption that religion's place in public life should be marginal at best.[88] But in other cultural contexts where such a private-public dynamic does not hold, these pluralist apologies, Heim thinks, can serve no real purpose. Thus, Heim reasons that if the concerns that inform these pluralistic theories are so culturally specific, then it may be that 'the various religious traditions may not be so enthusiastic about this care on their behalf [by pluralists], seeing that it entails an inexorable assimilation of the religions into certain Western categories.'[89]

Heim proceeds to critique the pluralism of Hick, Smith, and Knitter on many other points but at the heart of his varied criticisms, and most relevant for our purpose, is his contention that these theologies fail to adequately grapple with the self-descriptions of the religions themselves about what their various ends. In Heim's view, discussions in the theology of religions reflected typically in the classic typology of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism, which we reviewed, have for too long been carried on under the assumption that 'salvation is an unequivocal, single reality.'[90]

This assumption of a unified notion of salvation reflects, Heim argues, the Christian roots of the discourse, where the defining question has typically been whether those adhering to religions other than Christianity could be regarded as recipients of Christian 'salvation.' If, however, these non-Christian religions are taken seriously as *really* non-Christian (and hence

[88] Heim, 120–23.
[89] Heim, 120. Words in bracket mine.
[90] Heim, 4.

different) faith structures, soteriological judgements, by Christians, about their 'salvific' value cannot assume that adherents of these religions are pursuing the same soteriological end as Christians.

In this regard, something praiseworthy (whatever else its weakness might be, theologically) about soteriological exclusivism, if one agrees with Heim's thesis, is their taking seriously religious difference. And thus constructing their soteriology on the assumption that Christian salvation is different from other religions. But pluralistic theologies of religion, in their bid to bring all religions under one salvific programme, can only end up 'Christianizing' these other religions. It is this move that Heim chiefly criticises. For Heim, it seems clear and in fact 'almost tautological' that 'in this life, the only way to Buddhist fulfilment is the Buddhist way; the only way to Jewish fulfilment is the Jewish way; and so on.'[91] Pluralism, then, for Heim, in an ironic way, fails to be pluralist enough. As Heim reiterates, 'in order to participate in the distinctive dimension of Buddhist religious fulfilment in this life, there is no path but the Buddhist path.'[92]

Heim sees the best alternative to the pluralist position to be a particularistic (and postmodern) frame, one that is truly pluralistic, and that takes seriously the difference of the religions.[93] For him, we must privilege the self-narration of religious adherents about their religions over and above 'second-order' theories of these religions, such as pluralist theologies of religion.

[91] Heim, 4.
[92] Heim, 149.
[93] Although Heim in this work does not self-describe his theology as postmodern and he does reflect some hesitancy about post-modernity's actuality, he does regard his thesis as sitting much more comfortably within it than pluralism. Cf. Heim, 123.

There are similarities between Heim's approach and John DiNoia's work (which we referred to earlier). Like DiNoia, Heim takes religious practices, beliefs, and their moralities (the soteriological 'means') to be constitutive of, and structurally connected to, the soteriological 'ends' which they aim at and commend to their adherents. As Heim writes:

> 'A religious end or aim is defined by a set of practices, images, stories, and conceptions which collectively has three characteristics. First, the set provides material for a pervasive pattern of life. The 'ultimacy' often spoken of in definitions of religion is here given quite a concrete interpretation; it is not some single dimension of life that is addressed but all its features, sublime and mundane. Second, at least some of these elements are understood to be *constitutive* of a final human fulfilment and/or to be the sole means of achieving that fulfilment. For instance, for Christians, there is a texture of such elements making reference to Jesus Christ, and Christ is believed to be integral to the fulfilment itself. Most Buddhists may maintain that all the instruments used to follow the dharma way are ultimately themselves dispensable, even the eight-fold path itself. But it can only be discarded *after* being used, and nothing else is fit to serve the same purpose. Third, for any individual or community the pattern is in practice exclusive of some alternative options.'[94]

If this is so, we should be wary of the idea that the various religions – with the diversity of their 'practices, images, stories, and conceptions' which distinguish them from each other – intend toward the realisation of the same soteriological end. Pluralistic theologies can only sustain the claim of a unitive soteriological end by replacing the various concrete ends aimed

[94] Heim, 161. Emphasis not mine.

at by the various religions with vaguer alternatives like John Hick's contention that the various religions all strive to move people from 'self-centredness to reality centredness.' That is, they can only retain validity by not taking the teachings of the religions on these religions' terms. For Heim, however, it is better to take the religions seriously and consider the possibility that they might in fact be seeking truly different ends. To quote Heim, 'the hypothesis of multiple religious ends 'relativizes' each faith path in a rather different way [from pluralism]. It affirms that more than one way may be truthful in their account of themselves and that these truths are distinct. That is, it relativizes the religions precisely by actual relation to each other.'[95] It is because of this radical particularism that Heim describes his approach as 'more pluralistic' than those of the religious pluralists that he engages with.

But what is to be made of this 'more pluralistic' pluralism of Heim? One note to be registered is that there seems inherent within it a radical relativism that, if followed to its logical end, would make it difficult for evaluative forms of interreligious discourse to take place. That is, if it is granted, as Heim does, that if the various world religions are different and aim at diverse religious ends, then it must follow that evaluative theological judgement (rooted within particular religious traditions) and the normative value assessments of these religions would, at best, be relative, having no real applicative force beyond religious borders. We may, if Heim is correct, therefore not have any confidence or even any criteria by which to judge which of the religious claims to truth are, in fact, true. Of course, the possibility of any trans-religious evaluative criteria is ruled out by the very nature of the particularist standpoint, but Heim's radical pluralism (particularism) offers us little by way of thinking about how such evaluative criteria, even if just formally, might be produced.

[95] Heim, 147. Words in bracket mine.

This charge of relativism is, to be sure, not unique to Heim's particularism. It is a criticism often levelled against 'postmodern' attempts at deconstructing modernity's claims to universal validity. But aware of this criticism, Heim borrows the concept of 'orientational pluralism' from the philosopher Nicholas Rescher to argue that the differences in starting points (orientations) are what make it such that different ways of construing ontology exist. The concept of orientational pluralism holds that although there is a singular truth ('the truth')[96] or 'reality,'[97] disagreements over the nature of this reality are inevitable because our various starting assumptions inform the evaluative judgements that we attach to different claims to truth. The orientational pluralist 'holds that no philosophical thesis can be justified without adopting an evaluative perspective. To assert a thesis is also to commend adoption of the orientation in which its warrant rests.'[98] Within the specific context of the theology of religions, the application Heim wishes to draw is that the variety of doctrines that distinguish religious communities are rather inevitable when consideration is taken of the diverse starting points that shape these doctrinal judgements.

Heim's defence accepts the reality of its circularity. But he does not also adequately address how to think about the internal doctrines of the religious communities that talk about the final end of those who do not share in the cardinal beliefs of their religion. For example, many Christians take it that not following the Christian path would result, in those who reject this path, in final damnation, and many Buddhists consider that those who do not seek to transcend *dukkha,* through the eightfold path, would continue to reside in *ignorance*. So, while Heim wishes to preserve the particularity of the distinct soteriological ends pursued by

[96] Heim, 139.
[97] Heim, 137.
[98] Heim, 135.

the religions, it seems he is only able to do this by not considering the whole metaphysics of the religions. His tendency to focus on religious ends as incommensurable and distinct without addressing the cases where the metaphysical frameworks that shape these soteriological ends supervene on the doctrines of *other* religious communities is, in our view, a weakness of his appropriation of the concept of orientational pluralism in the context of the theology of religions. Where, we may ask, would the Christian network of stories, beliefs and practices, and the 'end' which these 'means' aim at – Aquinas' beatific vision, for instance, fit within Buddhist doctrines about the nature of ultimate reality? Without answering this question, Heim, it would seem, pluralises reality itself.

The Christian doctrine of the triune nature of God is what Heim appeals to in making this argument for a multiplicity of diverse religious ends. Heim makes his theological case for the possibility of ontological correlates to the diverse soteriological ends sought by the religions by appealing to what he regards as a Thomistic notion of 'plenitude' within the divine Godhead. For Heim, the Christian doctrine of the Trinity has import for our understanding of the dynamics of interreligious relations. As Heim sees it 'the Trinity is a distinctively Christian template for diversity.'[99] In so speaking, Heim aligns himself with the 'Trinitarian turn' in the Christian theology of religions, which had its heyday at the beginning of the 21st century. This Trinitarian trend in the theology of religions sought to go beyond what it sees as the traditional 'dismembered' Christological emphasis in the theology of religions. The theologies of religions of Raimundo Panikkar, Rowan Williams, and Gavin D'Costa are illustrations of this Trinitarian approach, although with variations in approaches, interpretative frameworks and

[99] Heim, 166.

applicative deployment between them.[100] An assessment of the merits or otherwise of Heim's, and this wider trinitarian theology of religions would take us beyond the scope of our present study.[101]

But we should note that we are sceptical of this move toward plotting the different plural narrations of the world into the Christian narrative, especially as we find it articulated in Heim's work. The best bet for particularism, with respect to relativism, is to accept it as a descriptive reality of the human epistemological condition, but without necessarily ontologizing its reality, as Heim seems to do. The diverse ways of construing ultimate reality are, descriptively speaking, relative to one another in so far as they are often in tension with one another. They proceed from different assumptions about what is known (which is the point about 'orientational pluralism'). But whereas Heim then makes a second move of ontologizing these different accounts of reality by appealing to the plenitude of the Christian Divine (the Trinity), this has the effect of blurring the real tensions which these different accounts pose to one another. But particularism need not ontologize this pluralism. It can remain ambivalent about its ontological character. Still, whether Heim's grounding of the normative validity of the diverse soteriological ends pursued by the religions is valid or not, what is of import, for our interest, is the fact that Heim's particularism seeks to ground itself

[100] Raimundo Panikkar, 'The Jordan, the Tiber and the Ganges', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1987); D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*; Rowan Williams, 'Trinity and Pluralism', in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990).

[101] An interesting collection of essays on the topic is provided in Kevin J. Vanhoozer, ed., *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997). A critical tone is sounded in the article by Lesslie Newbigin when he remarks that 'the doctrine of the Trinity was not developed in response to the human need for participatory democracy!' Cf. Lesslie Newbigin, 'The Trinity as Public Truth', in *The Trinity in a Pluralistic Age: Theological Essays on Culture and Religion*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 7.

in a specific Christian doctrinal loci, the doctrine of God, rather than in a supposedly neutral religious or philosophical category.

1.3.2. Religions as 'Cultural-Linguistic' Systems: George Lindbeck's Postliberal Particularism

Reference has already been made, in our overview of particularism's emergence, to postliberalism, and George Lindbeck. It remains for us to spell out the key outlines of Lindbeck's particularistic account of the nature of religions, especially because of the influential nature of his particularistic theology of religions.

We should begin the discussion by noting that Lindbeck's theology of religion was, despite its subsequent influence, quite incidental to his more programmatic interest in *intra*-Christian ecumenism and questions of theological method as they bordered on the nature of Christian doctrinal language.[102] Not much material exists, in fact, outside Lindbeck's seminal *The Nature of Doctrine* (*ND*), where he puts forth his 'cultural-linguistic' theory of religions, from which a more robust engagement with his theology/theory of the nature of religions may be carried out. We therefore focus here on Lindbeck's important text, first published in 1984.[103]

Paul DeHart notes at least four often-distinct strands of thought that are discernible in Lindbeck's *ND:* '(1) a sociological sectarianism combined with a catholic ecclesiology, (2) the idea of religion as a semiotic system, (3) a quasi-Thomist theory of religious truth, and (4) a notion of 'intratextuality based largely on certain interpretations of the theological exegesis

[102] Lindbeck makes this clear in the preface to the original edition when he says, 'the focus of this book is on intra-Christian theological and ecumenical issues.' Cf. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, xxxiii.

[103] We however mainly refer, in this thesis, to the 25th anniversary edition published in 2009. This edition includes an afterword and a new introduction. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*.

of Karl Barth.'[104] Interesting debates have raged on each of these aspects of *ND* but we focus, for our interest in his particularistic theory/theology of religion, on the second of these strands, namely, Lindbeck's argument that religions are to be understood 'as idioms for the construction of reality and the living of life.'[105]

For Lindbeck, a cultural-linguistic theory of religion differs from two other contending approaches to understanding the nature of religions. He terms the first of these 'propositional' and the second 'experiential-expressive.' Propositional theories of religion, as Lindbeck sees them, regard religious language as functioning, essentially, to capture an objective reality 'out there.' These theories, as Lindbeck describes them, postulate a symmetric relationship between the language employed by religious communities when speaking about their stories, doctrines, ethical systems, and beliefs as corresponding directly to some pre-experiential state of affairs, which exists before the creation of those particular speech forms. In short, a propositional theory of religion emphasizes 'the cognitive aspects of religion and stresses the ways in which church doctrines function as informative propositions or truth claims about objective realities.'[106] Lindbeck finds this 'propositional' approach to religion present in the works of Christian figures like C.S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton, and Malcolm Muggeridge.[107]

Lindbeck judges propositional theories of religion to be deficient because their capacity to properly account for the fact of change and continuity in the doctrines of religious communities is limited. Here, it is useful to recall the ecumenical context which forms the background to Lindbeck's *ND*. His concern, he says, had been to understand the 'odd

[104] Paul J DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 58.
[105] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 4.
[106] Lindbeck, 2.
[107] Lindbeck, 10.

phenomenon,' which he had observed in his engagement with ecumenical initiatives, where representatives of different Christian traditions that have traditionally disagreed over doctrinal claims, come to consider each other's still different doctrinal formulations as now rather compatible with theirs. This phenomenon of 'doctrinal reconciliation without capitulation,' Lindbeck considers, cannot be properly fitted into a propositionalist view of religious language which conceives that once doctrines are formed, they retain a steady definition for all time and places.[108] If it is the case that religious doctrines correspond, without ever changing, to a reality 'out there,' how, Lindbeck wonders, are these ecumenical dialogues able to achieve consensus without giving up on their distinct confessions? For Lindbeck, propositional theories of religion (and of doctrine) cannot adequately account for this.

If the propositionalist theory of religions and religious doctrine is associated with traditionalists, Lindbeck regards 'experiential-expressive' theories to be characteristic of liberal theology. On the experiential-expressive model, as Lindbeck considers it, religions are seen as diverse expressions of a 'common core experience.'[109] 'The experience, while conscious, may be unknown on the level of self-conscious reflection.'[110] Referring here to Bernard Lonergan's *Method in Theology*, which Lindbeck regarded illustrative of experiential-expressivism. Experiential-expressive theologies of religion postulate a shared religious experience common to all persons. This shared experience is variedly designated, as 'ultimate concern' (Paul Tillich) or 'love' (Lonergan).[111] Lonergan and Rahner, however, for Lindbeck,

[108] Lindbeck, 2–3.
[109] Lindbeck, 17.
[110] Lindbeck, 17.
[111] Lindbeck, 17.

represent a more complex and 'hybrid' version of the experiential-expressive theory in that they also make room for a propositionalist approach in their theologies.[112]

But what may be characterised as a wholesale experiential-expressivism is, according to Lindbeck, reflected in the work of figures like Friedrich Schleiermacher and, more contemporarily, in David Tracy.[113] Lindbeck's bringing together of theological figures, different in so many ways, under a common label ('experiential-expressive') has been criticised for being quite simplistic. David Tracy, in defence of himself, argues that even though much light is shed on the nature of doctrinal language by Lindbeck's 'rule theory' of doctrine, Lindbeck fails to do justice to much contemporary liberal theology when he mischaracterizes them as perpetuating the myth of a common core to the religions. And worse, for Tracy, Lindbeck fails to appreciate more sophisticated hermeneutical traditions within the liberal theological tradition that take seriously the postmodern state of knowledge claims within the contemporary world context[114] DeHart agrees with Tracy. He criticises Lindbeck's lumping together of diverse figures under experiential-expressivism. DeHart thinks that Lindbeck presents only straw-men versions of his mischaracterisation of liberalism.[115]

Tracy notes that scholarship within liberalism (at least, up to the 1980s, when he writes) had moved away from specifying any such common core. He cites some figures within this newer liberal tradition like David Burrell, Hans Kung, and Langdon Gilkey. But it is doubtful if Tracy would include a John Hick or a Wilfred Cantwell Smith to this newer liberal list. Within the context of the theology of religions, Hick's work is specifically mentioned by Lindbeck for

[112] Lindbeck, 2.
[113] Lindbeck, 2, 24.
[114] David Tracy, 'Lindbeck's New Program for Theology: A Reflection', *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review* 49, no. 3 (1985): 460–72, https://doi.org/10.1353/tho.1985.0020.
[115] DeHart, *The Trial of the Witnesses: The Rise and Decline of Postliberal Theology*, 148–84.

the way that he sees Hicks' work exemplifying the experiential-expressive tradition. In his earlier 1979 review of Hick's edited *The Myth of God Incarnate*, Lindbeck characterised Hick's 'revised' Christology as undergirded by an 'experiential' notion of religion. He cites Hick's contention that traditional incarnational language be rethought as 'not indicative but expressive, not to express a metaphysical fact but to express a valuation and evoke an attitude.'[116]

Although here, Hick (and other contributors to the volume) sought to propose a revision to traditional Christian doctrines of the divine nature of Christ. But Hick's problem with this doctrine is connected to his wider project of resisting any granting of uniqueness to Christianity. For Hick, to do so amounts to parochialism which refuses to see Christianity as a medium, amongst other equally valid mediums, for accessing the Ultimate.[117] But for Lindbeck, the problem with this, as we have already noted, is that it is hard to specify what exactly is common to the religions. And, as Lindbeck argues, 'unless this is done, the assertion of commonality becomes logically and empirically vacuous.'[118] Indeed, for Lindbeck,

> 'Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematize the same experience, rather they have different experiences. Buddhist compassion, Christian love and . . . French revolutionary *fraternité* are not diverse modifications of a single human awareness, emotion, attitude, or sentiment, but are radically (i.e., from the root) distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented toward self, neighbour, and cosmos.'[119]

[116] George Lindbeck, 'Review of The Myth of God Incarnate . John Hick', *The Journal of Religion* 59, no. 2 (1979): 248, https://doi.org/10.1086/486698.
[117] John Hick, 'The Non-Absoluteness of Christianity', in *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness* (London: SCM Press, 1988), 16–36; Hick, *An Interpretation of Religions*.
[118] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 18.
[119] Lindbeck, 26.

For Lindbeck, over and against both 'propositionalist' and 'experiential-expressive' theories of religion, a 'cultural-linguistic' approach takes the religions as, instead, thick webs of meanings, which are impenetrable by those who do not share in their specific language games. Lindbeck sees himself indebted, for this cultural-linguistic theory, to the anthropological work of Clifford Geertz (for the 'cultural' side) and the philosophical projects of Wittgenstein (for the 'linguistic' part). Informed by the work of these figures, Lindbeck argues that the experiences which are had in the various religions are shaped and given coherence through their semiotic signification within the grammar of the diverse religions. As languages, religions require something like 'conversion' or something analogous to new language acquisition for those who do not speak that language to understand what is meant. As cultures, there will always exist a strangeness about the religions to which one does not belong.

Criticism has been levelled at this construal of religions as idiomatic systems, requiring something analogous to learning a new language. About the quote above about love being differently construed in the different religious/ideological traditions, Hedges argues that it is hard to see how the analogy can apply to a notion like 'pain.' As Hedges sees it, it seems uncontroversial that 'pain,' irrespective of religious differences, is similarly experienced by adherents of different religions and cultures.[120] But in defence of Lindbeck, while Hedges is right-headed in pressing the extent to which a subscription to the particularity of the religions can go, it is hard to see how the example of pain presents a defeater for Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic thesis. It is clear that the category 'pain' – which, admittedly, seems at first wholly phenomenological – is bound up with questions of epistemology, as the American

[120] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 122.

philosopher Stanley Cavell has argued.[121] Indeed, there is no sure-proof way of knowing that the expressions of pain which the other presents to me correspond to what I know as 'pain.'

Can we ever be certain that the pain that the other expresses is in fact what we know as 'pain?' Even without attempting to resolve this radical Cartesian doubt, beliefs are important for making sense of even the pain that one feels. While the 'African' and the 'French' may experience pain similarly (to use the examples that Hedges uses), the narrative webs within which accounts of 'pain' are located are often distinct. Moreover, in the religious (rather than simply 'cultural') context within which Lindbeck applies his theory, diverse and conflicting meta-accounts of pain exist. For example, there are considerable differences between a Buddhist account of pain, explained in terms of *desire,* and a Reformed Christian explanation, construed in terms of a doctrine of sin. Lindbeck notes, in a way that underscores this point, in the afterword of the 25th-anniversary edition of *ND,* his experience of leading an interfaith discussion group at Yale. He found, he says, that despite the charitable intentions of the students, there was 'a failure to assimilate God to Nirvana or Nirvana to God in terms that made sense to the other.'[122]

1.4. Particularism and Religious Communities

In situating particularism within the literature, it is important to discuss how particularism impinges on the ways that we think about the different religious communities. Doing this enables us to move our discussion of particularism toward a more explicit Christian theological register. A particularist way of thinking about the religions not only has significance for the ways that we think about 'soteriology,' and the diverse salvific ends that

[121] Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason: Wittgenstein, Skepticism, Morality, and Tragedy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 329–95.
[122] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 137.

the religions seek to realise. It connects as well to how we think about the differences displayed in the various religious communities. It is helpful to consider the differences in the different communities of faith because, as we argue in Chapter 3, with respect to the work of Lindbeck, the church, for Christians, is an important resource for thinking about the ways that Christians engage with religious others. To do this, we next review the contrasting ways of thinking about the church offered by Jacques Dupuis (who defends the non-uniqueness of the church) and Nicholas Healy (who argues for a particularist understanding of the church). But before doing this, it should help to preface the discussion with a reflection on the connection between ecclesiology and the theology of religions.

1.4.1. Theology of Religions and Ecclesiology

As already noted, much of the discourse in the Christian theology of religions has been animated by concerns about 'salvation.' Yet, it should need no elaborate argument to make valid the suggestion that the systematic interconnection of Christian doctrines means that an inherent relationality exists between Christology (whether in these 'pluralist' versions of Knitter and Hick or the 'traditional' forms of it) and ecclesiology. Christian theological views on the exclusivity or otherwise of ultimate religious truth impinge upon the ways that we theologically characterise and appreciate the doctrines, self-understandings of, and ritual practices of non-Christian religious communities. Therefore, even when ecclesiology is not made explicitly central in the discourse, there are ecclesiological implications for any particular theological position taken for the question of the relationship of Christianity to other non-Christian religions. By ecclesiology, we here mean the theological understanding of the nature of the Christian church, the character of the church's identity, and how these understandings are connected to those social communities that go by the name 'churches.'

From a biblical theology perspective, Christology and ecclesiology are deeply connected. Theologies of religions that relativize the distinctiveness of Jesus Christ, by implication, render relative the uniqueness of the church. It is Christ who builds the church, and the church is identified by the apostle Paul as the 'Bride of Christ.'[123] The church looks back to Christ as its foundation and the Holy Spirit, sent forth by Christ, empowers the church in its witness and mission in the world.[124] The central sacraments which the church administers – the eucharist and baptism – derive their theological meaning from their Christological character. Because of this Christological foundational nature of ecclesiology, it follows that the position one subscribes to concerning Christology holds import for how one sees the church's relation to other non-Christian religious communities, and even on how one understands the church as a theological entity in and of itself. The claim we are making is that, from a Christian theological standpoint, views on the nature of the church necessarily correlate to particular views on Christology, and vice versa.

A commitment to a particularistic theology of religion therefore has ecclesiological implications. Our conviction, following Nicholas Healy, is that the fundamental orientation of the church is to the lordship of Jesus Christ and that this conviction distinguishes the church from other religious communities. One theologian of religion who has given thought to how a pluralist vision of religion connects to a pluralist understanding of religious communities is Jacques Dupuis. Before returning to explicating Healy's particularist ecclesiology, it is important to give some extended attention to Dupuis' work.

[123] Ephesians 5:25-27.
[124] Ephesians 5:23; Colossians 1:18.

1.4.2. Dupuis' Pluralism

In *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, the Catholic theologian, Jacques Dupuis shows an awareness of the implication for ecclesiology of his 'inclusivist-pluralist' position.[125] The church's claim to difference cannot, Dupuis contends, be such that this difference is imagined as implying that the church is somehow better than other religious communities in mediating God's presence and salvation. Other communities too, for Dupuis, in the different rites which they participate in, do share in mediating Christ. Dupuis is however careful to add that it is difficult to 'determine in what precise sense' these religions do this mediation.[126]

Dupuis' work is focused on the Roman Catholic theological tradition's engagement with interreligious differences. He criticises the exclusivist 'ecclessiocentrism' which considered the locus of salvation to lie only within the [Roman Catholic] Christian church.[127] His survey notes the emergence and varieties of this ecclesiological 'exclusivism,' as well as provides a discussion of the 'inclusively' inclined postures of the 'Logos-theology' of Justin, Irenaeus, and Clement, and the 'openness' ushered in by the Second Vatican.[128] While serving as a learned survey of Catholic theology of religions, the more novel aspect of the book is Dupuis' attempt to lay out his constructive position. This position is difficult to simplify as it builds upon several theological convictions that we cannot fully engage with here.[129] But we here offer a summary.

[125] We are indebted to Gerard Hall here in characterising Dupuis's position as inclusivist-pluralism. Gerard Hall, 'Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism', *Pacifica: Australasian Theological Studies* 15, no. 1 (1 February 2002): 37–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/1030570X0201500103.
[126] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 319.
[127] Dupuis, 84–109.
[128] Dupuis, 53-83;158-179.
[129] Critical engagements with Dupuis's position can be found, amongst others, in the following articles: Przemyslaw Plata, 'Jacques Dupuis and a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism', *Louvain Studies* 31, no. 1 (31 December 2006): 52–78, https://doi.org/10.2143/ls.31.1.2019379; Terrence W. Tilley, 'Christian Orthodoxy and Religious Pluralism', *Modern Theology* 22, no. 1 (2006): 51–63, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-

While Dupuis attests to being committed to upholding the uniqueness and universality of Christ, he equally regards non-Christian religions as real vehicles which mediate God's saving will and embody God's revelation in some way. Dupuis is therefore, on the one hand, critical of pluralistic theologies that are based upon relativisations of the claims of the uniqueness of both Christian and non-Christian religions such as those of Hick and Knitter. These pluralist projects are deemed as inimical to meaningful interreligious dialogue insofar as genuine dialogue requires that participants truly inhabit their religions, recognising them as non-trivially distinct from those of their dialoguing partner(s).[130] On the other hand, however, for Dupuis, this recognition of the alterity of the religions must not be 'absolutized' because 'commitment to one's own faith and openness to the 'other' must' always be held together.[131]

For Dupuis then, one can uphold that Christ is always and for all persons 'constitutive' of salvation but this commitment should not exclude one from holding a similarly strong conviction about the 'particularity' of the Christian faith. This 'particularity,' as Dupuis employs the term is different from our usage of the term so far. 'Particularity,' for Dupuis, refers to an awareness of the historical contingency of Christianity.[132] The historical contingency of the Christian faith comes with the implication that Christians must acknowledge that the uniqueness of Jesus Christ requires qualification.

For while as Scripture says, 'God was in Christ Jesus reconciling the world to himself,'[133] Dupuis contends that 'the historical particularity of Jesus imposes upon the Christ-event

0025.2006.00309.x; Gavin D'Costa, 'Christian Orthodoxy and Religious Pluralism: A Response to Terrence W. Tilley', *Modern Theology* 23, no. 3 (2007): 435–46, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0025.2007.00391.x; G D'Costa, 'Review of Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism Jacques Dupuis', *Journal of Theological Studies* 49, no. 2 (1998): 910–14; Hall, 'Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism'.

[130] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 378–79.

[131] Dupuis, 379.

[132] Dupuis, 297–98.

[133] 2 Corinthians 5:19.

irremediable limitations.'[134] That is, as Dupuis explains, one must distinguish between the *Logos Ensarkos* (the Word in the flesh) and the *Logos Asarkos* (the Word without the flesh). But is unclear how Dupuis holds together this distinction. Critical of Hick's demythologising project, he affirms the incarnation as conveying the sense that in Jesus of Nazareth, the 'Word became flesh.'[135] Yet, like Hick, he speaks of this incarnation as 'metaphorical parlance' and 'symbolic language.'[136]

So while Jesus of Nazareth – the 'historical Jesus' – is the Son of God, his self-emptying, Dupuis contends, imposes a metaphysical limit on his fully embodying the Logos *Asarkos*. Dupuis therefore writes that:

> 'Jesus's revelation of God is a human transposition of God's mystery; his salvific action is the channel, the efficacious sign or sacrament, of God's salvific will. The personal identity of Jesus as Son of God in his human existence notwithstanding, a distance continues to exist between God (the father), and he who is God's human icon. Jesus is no substitute for God.'[137]

Although nuanced, it is hard to see how this Christology differs from Hick and Knitter's. The orthodox Christian tradition's convictions about Jesus' uniqueness, for Knitter, for example, are better understood as analogous to the 'unique' emotional feelings which a spouse feels for their partner. Jesus is unique in a special, 'love language,' and subjective sense to Christians, but not in anything nearing a 'scientific' or 'philosophical' sense.[138] This seems similar to Dupuis' position.

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[134] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 298.
[135] Dupuis, 296.
[136] Dupuis, 296.
[137] Dupuis, 298.
[138] Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 185.

Dupuis' reason for qualifying the traditional Christology is, he says, that it is more appropriate in our contemporary global context of religious pluralism. As he notes, the 'particularity of the Jesus Christ-event in relation to the universality of God's plan of salvation opens to sensitive theologians new inroads for a theology of religious pluralism that would make room for diverse 'paths' to salvation.'[139] Two connected claims are here made by Dupuis. First, there is a universal saving will present in God such that all humans necessarily come under the reach of God's salvation. Second, the salvation mediated through Jesus Christ does not exhaust the saving Will of the Divine. Dupuis sees his work as an attempt to provide an 'inroad' that enables regarding the 'saving figures' and 'truth' of non-Christian religion as not superseded by Christianity. For him, a conviction about the particularity of the 'Jesus Christ- event' entails we recognise that 'the various religious traditions can serve their members as a mediation of the mystery of salvation,'[140] regarding these diverse religious configurations as somehow still 'enlightened by the Word' and 'inspired by the Spirit.'[141]

Dupuis' pluralism, grounded on a pluralist Christology, is interesting and complex, at once pluralist and inclusivist. Its radical nature resulted in a less than enthusiastic reception of his work in certain official Roman Catholic circles.[142] However, it is Dupuis's attempt to reflect on how this 'inclusivist-pluralist' position calls into question interpretations of aspects of the ecclesiology of Vatican II that makes him relevant for our attempt at exemplifying the intersection of ecclesiology and a pluralist theology of religions.

[139] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 299.
[140] Dupuis, 318.
[141] Dupuis, 298.
[142] 'Notification "Dupuis"', accessed 17 March 2021, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20010124_dupuis_en.html.

Because Dupuis considers that since non-Christian religions are channels of God's grace, truth, and salvation, he regards any attempt to identify the 'people of God' with the church. He is also critical of any strict association of the category of the 'Reign of God' to the gathered community of Christians. For this reason, Dupuis takes issues with the ecclesial language and metaphors employed in *Lumen Gentium*, the Dogmatic Constitution of the Church, one of the key conciliar documents of Vatican II, and *Redemptoris Missio*, the 1990 encyclical of Pope John Paul II.

Dupuis re-conceives the meaning of such terms as 'the new people of God' which *Lumen Gentium* employed to speak of the nature of the church in the world today. [143] In his view, the adjective 'new' perpetuates a Christological supersessionism that he rejects. The 'people of God' cannot only be those who belong to the church or have been 'saved,' in the Christian sense of the term, but extends to and must incorporate those within other religious traditions. As already noted, Dupuis argues that mediated through non-Christian religions is a salvation constituted by Christ.

An important implication that Dupuis sees as following from this Christological pluralism is that the 'reign of God' inaugurated by Christ is also embodied in non-Christian religions. These religions, in their integrity as religions, and not simply individual adherents within these religions, are part of the Kingdom of God, a kingdom whose perfect realisation in the eschaton they would also be part of. Here, Dupuis sounds like Hick who argues that God is 'being worshipped, through different but overlapping mental images of him, not only in churches and chapels but also in synagogues and mosques, temples and gurdwaras,'[144] Dupuis does

[143] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 330–57.
[144] John Hick, *God Has Many Names* (London: Macmillan Press, 1980), vii.

not regard the church to be unique in the sense of being a special locus of God's activity. His commitment to a pluralistic conception of God's revelation gives birth to an ecclesiology that is suspicious of speaking of the church as truly distinct from other religious communities.

But there are problems with this pluralist ecclesiology. *Lumen Gentium* is clear in stating that the church as the 'people of God' derives that identity from the covenant relationship which the church has been enabled to enter into by the mysterious work of grace enabled by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This conviction recalls, it would seem, the epistle of Peter in which through Christ the church is said to now be comprised of those 'who were not a people' but have now become 'the people of God.'[145] The church as the 'new people of God,' as a Christian grammar, is thus connected, in *Lumen Gentium,* to the New Testament's vision of the church as a new community. The church is a community which, in keeping with Israel's calling as an elect people amongst the nations, embodies the promise that even 'Gentiles,' by the grace secured through the Blood of Christ, can become members of God's household. That is, the new covenant established by Jesus Christ's death is the basis for the church being referred to as the 'new people of God.'

The problem with the term, as Dupuis sees it, however, is that the inclusion of 'new' authorises an othering ecclesiology, one in which those who are not members of the church are viewed as not belonging to this new household. But this need not be an othering move in the morally problematic sense of the word. The real question that Dupuis fails to consider is, considering how deeply connected the church's identity as new is connected to the covenant established by Christ, can one apply it to communities of faith who do not regard this narrative as theirs? As Avery Dulles has explained, while it is doubtless Biblically accurate to regard all

[145] 1 Peter 2:10

humans, by virtue of the Noahic covenant, as 'people of God,' 'Christians are set apart by their explicit recognition of the new and everlasting Covenant.'[146] Dupuis' pluralist ecclesiology would seem only viable if one severs this close connection which Christian theology holds subsists between the Church as the *Body* of Christ and Jesus Christ as the *Head* of the Church.[147]

As D'Costa notes, 'Dupuis's constitutive Christ is in danger of being reduced to the early historical figure of Jesus Christ without allowing for the full ecclesiological implications of the Resurrection and Pentecost.' The church, in other words, reflects her connection to Christ by its being that community which alone proclaims and celebrates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ in the power of the Spirit. It alone, for this reason, is the 'new people of God.' 'The new people of God' is not meant to suggest that the church is morally superior to other religious communities. Rather, *Lumen Gentium* captures the church's theological connection to Jesus Christ – a theological connection which is not reflected in the other religious communities. And which these religious communities, as far as we can tell, have no interest in establishing.

It is also to be noted that Dupuis' awareness of the particularist paradigm is evident in his critical engagement with the work of Mark Heim.[148] He is critical, and correctly so in some respects, of Heim's 'more pluralistic hypothesis' in which, as was noted, the different soteriological ends that exist amongst the religions are regarded as somehow mirroring a divine plenitude said to reside in the Triune relation. Heim, Dupuis charges, fails to take seriously that the ultimate and final end which the Christian tradition considers *all* humans to

[146] Avery Dulles, *Models of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1987), 54.
[147] Ephesians 5:23.
[148] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 309–12.

seek is that salvation which comes through Jesus Christ, irrespective of the divergent 'ultimate' ends which these religions may themselves subjectively aspire to.[149]

Heim, in so positing that the different religions provide complementary valid eschatological ends for their adherents, fails to grapple seriously with this orthodox Christian conviction. This instructive critique of Heim notwithstanding, Dupuis does not fully appreciate a crucial particularist point that Heim's thesis makes. This point is that the doctrines and practices of the different religious communities shape the members of these communities differently. Therefore, any talk of Christ being mediated through these religions, as Dupuis argues, must contend with how to reconcile these religions' self-understandings about the ultimate ends which they seek (and the ritual and ethical means they commend for realizing these ends) with the distinct soteriological end which Christianity seeks.

Non-Christian religions do not, as DiNoia argued, consider the Christian soteriological end of enjoying blessed fellowship with the Triune God through Christ to be their ultimate end.[150] The patterns of life which they enjoin their adherents, such as the meditative practices of Buddhists, are designed to enable them to realise the ends which they take as superior to the Christian end and as such, it seems presumptuous to suggest, as Dupuis does, that these programmes mediate, without their knowledge, a Christologically constituted salvation. To note this difference in their eschatological orientation is not to suggest that Christianity is necessarily better than these other religions. Although, from a particularist standpoint, this claim – if the religions make it – is well within the rights of the religions to make.

[149] Dupuis, 311.
[150] J. A. DiNoia, *The Diversity of Religions: A Christian Perspective* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1992).

Against Dupuis, then, from a particularist theological standpoint, it is unclear in what sense it be said that Christ is 'constitutive' of say, the Islamic scheme of 'salvation.' For example, it seems difficult to specify how the complex doctrines and practices by which Muslims seek to attain submission to Allah reflect the distinct programme which Christians pursue. At the very least, it should of course be remembered that within the influential Islamic account, Jesus may well not have died on the cross, but he was only made to appear as such, whereas the crucifixion of Jesus is crucial for giving coherence to the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist which are central to the church's worshipping life.[151] For Muslims too, the five pillars of Islam are not tangential but central to what it means to be submitted to Allah. For Christians, however, these Islamic pillars are not crucial to the programme of how one becomes reconciled to God in Christ Jesus.

As Lindbeck points out, there does seem to be something arrogant in insisting that although persons within other religious communities are, as far as we can tell, not seeking to attain what Christians mean by salvation, they are still somehow 'anonymous Christians.'[152] It is hard to imagine that adherents of these non-Christian religions would be excited to learn that their religions delivers a soteriological end which is 'constituted' by Jesus Christ. A related problem immediately presents itself as well. If it is the case that the Islamic religion, for example, mediates a Christologically constituted salvation, as Dupuis seems to be saying, in what sense does this preserve the genuine alterity between the religions which Dupuis regards as crucial for meaningful interreligious dialogue? Does not a genuine commitment to

[151] For a discussion of Islamic views on the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, see Gabriel Said Reynolds, 'The Muslim Jesus: Dead or Alive?', *Bulletin of SOAS* 72, no. 2 (2009): 237–58.
[152] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 47. This point about respecting the different religions, rather than seeking to frame them as unconsciously Christians is also criticised in Tanner, 'Respect for Other Religions: A Christian Antidote to Colonialist Discourse'.

alterity require that we prioritise an a posteriori possibility of discovering similarities with religious others over and above an a priori theological attempt to insure against the risk of this not being the case? Dupuis may argue for a Christian universalism (which is how Gerard Hall characterises Dupuis' position)[153] but this does not require that one regard the religious traditions as 'anonymously' Christian. It is enough to say all humans, in the end, will be 'saved.'

The problems which we have here highlighted concerning Dupuis's pluralism are emblematic of the pluralist position. In so far as one cannot pretend to have a 'God's eye' vantage point of view from which to accurately deduce that what takes place within the diverse religious communities is interconnected in their ultimate ontological end, pluralist ventures such as Dupuis' often tend either toward a colonialist and speculative discourse (where one imposes his theological categories on the other) or lead to a trivializing of the narratives of these religious communities. The pluralist position, as we have seen it in Dupuis, has its ecclesiological expression in an ecclesiology which narrates other religious communities as mirror images of each other.

In our view, the church as distinct follows on from a particularism which views the religious traditions as different. The interesting question, from a particularist standpoint, becomes, not whether or not non-Christian religions are somehow Christian, but whether the church – in its very distinctiveness can still serve as a means for enabling Christians to be open to dialogue with and learn from those from other religious communities. The argument that this thesis seeks to make, indeed, is that it is possible. For now, however, it would help to consider a particularist alternative to the pluralist view of understanding the church, or religious communities, more broadly.

[153] Hall, 'Jacques Dupuis' Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism'.

1.4.3. A Particularist Alternative

In *Church, World and the Christian Life* Nicholas Healy offers a vision of the church which is particularist, critical of pluralist ecclesiologies, and reflects several convictions that we share. Whereas Dupuis grounds his ecclesiology in a Christology that weakens the connection between Christ and Jesus, Nicholas Healy argues that a robust Christology is, in fact, the very basis for the difference of the church from other religious communities. The church's distinction is predicated, Healy argues, on the fact that the church alone, among all religious communities, is oriented to Jesus Christ as Lord. As Healy puts it, the distinctiveness of the church stems from its 'Spirit-empowered orientation to Jesus Christ and through him, to the triune God.'[154] For Healy, the indissoluble relation of the Body (the Church) and the Head (Christ) underwrites the claim that the church's difference from other religious communities is both theological and sociological. Theologically, the church is distinct because it is the body of Christ and is thus a community whose life is contingent on the life of her Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. Sociologically, the church's distinctiveness stems from its being 'alone manifestly oriented toward a particular person, Jesus Christ,'[155] an orientation not observable, as far as we can make out, in other religious communities.

Healy's critique of pluralist ecclesiologies is that they are out of sync with the Church's primary identity as a community called to bear witness to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. While acknowledging the worry that pluralist ecclesiologies have about emphasizing the church's difference, namely that such insistence on the difference of the church often becomes the pretext for considering Christians as better than others, Healy does not see a faithful Christian

[154] Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.
[155] Healy, 9.

response to this fear to be a watering down of the church's distinctiveness. Instead, for Healy, an ecclesiological distinctiveness is just that. It is a theological distinctiveness, rather than an expression of the church's moral superiority. He notes that those who are not Christians embody a saintliness that puts the Church's sinfulness to shame. But the church is not saved by her works and her distinctiveness is because of her orientation to Jesus Christ. It is based on grace, God's gratuity, not the moral superiority of the church. Therefore, even though the Church is a community of God's people, it does not cease being a community of sinners who frequently fail to live out their faith, and who in fact, do not possess a superior moral history than that present in other religious organisations.

Against Dupuis, and in agreement with Healy, this kind of ecclesiological particularism is better framed as a humble admission that the fundamental orientations of the different religious communities are distinct. But whereas Healy grounds his contention for the church's distinctiveness on the church's witness to Jesus Christ, we shall suggest, in chapter 3, that a key part of the church's distinctiveness is based on scripture, which the church regards as a normative source of authority over her being and functioning. Scripture, as we draw out later, in conversation with Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas, provides the central narratives which shape the church in distinct ways.

The scriptures which the church regards as authoritative for life and doctrine provides Christians with a different set of theological categories from those provided in other scriptures and other religious communities. Simply put, the church's difference is connected to it being the community oriented to the scripture as God's word. Particularly, the church lives on the story of God's love so richly displayed on the cross of Jesus Christ, and narrated in Scripture. With Hauerwas, we consider that the church is a 'story-shaped' community, with

its identity-giving narratives not merely incidental, but the very basis for her claim to being a different community.[156] Before turning to this constructive work in chapter 3, we should close this chapter by considering some criticisms of the particularist viewpoint.

1.5. Some Criticisms of Particularism

A critical appraisal of particularism is offered by Hedges who, citing and explicating Paul F. Knitter's similar criticism of particularism, considers particularism to lapse into 'the linguistic prism,' with its being 'based around notions of 'isolationism,' 'relativism,' and 'fideism.'[157] Particularism, Hedges argues, mistakes religions to be closed systems, akin to languages. But, Hedges notes, this cannot be true because contra particularism, no 'meta-language' is needed to translate languages and religions as linguistic systems. Adherents of different religions can understand one another's experiences and inhabit the same experiential dimensions themselves without difficulty. Pain, injustice, love, and similar everyday emotions seem to be universally grasped by persons who orient differently around religion. This leads Hedges to invoke Ockham's razor, suggesting that a multiplicity of diverse religious experiences need not be postulated when these varied experiences may be more easily explained 'merely as variations of one basic experience.'[158] Particularism also fails, Hedges thinks, in its postulation of religions as 'cultural-linguistic' systems that are distinct.

In a similar vein, Michael Fegert has criticised Heim's argument that the different religions aim at diverse salvific ends. For Fegert, Heim's attempt at advancing 'a more pluralistic hypothesis' needs more radical extension because even within the religions, there exists more

[156] Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 53–71.
[157] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 122. Here, citing Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 225–26.
[158] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 123.

than one conception of 'salvation.' There is not simply a 'Christian' understanding of 'salvation,' but many different Christian soteriologies. Heim's particularism, therefore, for all its intent at clearing up an analytical space for pluralizing the notion of salvation, still falls short.[159] Hedges concurs, paraphrasing Paul Badham, that 'the understanding of God expressed between a Christian who believes that all unbelievers are sent to an everlasting torment in hell, and a Christian who sees God as aiming to save all mankind constitute vast conceptual difference.'[160] There is, for these critics, simply no such thing as a homogenous 'Christianity,' and to think otherwise is simply 'nonsense.'[161]

'Isolationism' is also put forward as another fatal flaw of particularism. For one thing, so the criticism goes, particularism is 'isolationist' because it posits the religions as neat, delineable systems. But this is historically naïve when it is remembered that every religion is the product of constant borrowing from and creative appropriation of elements from other religious traditions.[162] Additionally, particularism lapses into perspectivism and relativism as it fails to allow for any tradition-neutral basis from which evaluations of the religions may be carried out.[163]

Marianne Moyaert, as well, charges Lindbeck's 'cultural-linguistic' theory of religion to be lacking in a generous portrayal of God's providence in creation. She argues that Lindbeck's unenthusiasm for regarding the different religions as interrelated is perhaps sustained by a theological anthropology that over-stresses the incapacity of humans to experience God

[159] Michael D Fegert, 'The Insufficiency of S. Mark Heim's More Pluralistic Hypothesis', *Theology Today* 69, no. 4 (2013): 497–510.
[160] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 126. Here citing Paul Badham, *Christian beliefs about Life after Death* (London: SCM Press, 1980), 10-11.
[161] Hedges, 124. These criticisms, discussed relatively more briefly in this particular article by Hedges are given more extensive treatment in his book Hedges, *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions*.
[162] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 124–25.
[163] Hedges, 122.

without the work of grace. This emphasis on discontinuity, for Moyaert, comes at the detriment of an appreciation of the God-given capacity for all humans to experience God by the divine image they embody.[164]

Jeannine Hill Fletcher offers a critique along similar lines. While largely in agreement with Lindbeck's point about the alterity of the religions, she suggests that a notion of 'God's incomprehensibility as overabundance' can offer a way of 'fixing' the initially unpromising view of interreligious dialogue that Lindbeck's theory of religion suggests.[165] Fletcher argues that although Lindbeck may be right in noting that it is hard for those not steeped in a religious tradition to faithfully appreciate its symbols, mysteries, and meaning, the Christian belief in the mystery of the Godhead can help us appreciate that the divine may yet be present even amid the mysterious otherness of the religious other. Lindbeck's particularism, for Fletcher, must be complemented with an appreciation of that divine mystery which might be discernible even in the very difference embodied in the religious other.

A comprehensive response to these criticisms would require more space than we can grant here. But some responses to them are needed. First, against Hedges' claim that particularism (and here, he has in mind, Lindbeck's articulation of it) misjudges the reality of linguistic translation amongst diverse languages and by implication, religions, it should be noted that Lindbeck thinks translation is possible. But for Lindbeck, conversion into Christianity has metaphorical similarities to learning a new language – acquiring the skills which facilitate an intelligent assimilation into the Christian life.[166] Language, in this sense,

[164] Moyaert, 'Postliberalism, Religious Diversity, and Interreligious Dialogue: A Critical Analysis of George Lindbeck's Fiduciary Interests'.
[165] Jeannine Hill Fletcher, 'As Long as We Wonder: Possibilities in the Impossibility of Interreligious Dialogue', *Theological Studies* 68, no. 3 (4 September 2007): 531–54, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390706800303.
[166] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 118.

extends beyond a mere cognitive grasp of the meaning of individual words employed by religious adherents. Language, for Lindbeck, is more about acquiring dexterity in the idiomatic expressions of a language, the inner workings of its grammar, and the allusive meanings that its phrases have. Understanding these idiomatic dimensions of language requires inhabiting the language, and spending an extended time with it, something that goes even beyond language immersion programmes. It is within this context – this inner semiotic space – that Lindbeck argues for the impossibility of postulating similarity among the religions. Lindbeck is, of course, speaking in terms of analogy, and as such, there would be inherent limits on the extent to which one can take its comparison.

Fegert's criticism of Heim's proposal for a rethinking of the essentialism latent in pluralistic conceptions of salvation as, itself, failing to preserve plurality in internal religious understandings of 'salvation' is insightful. Indeed, Heim's particularism suffers from a rather 'soft' essentialism in its speaking of such things as *a* Christian view of salvation. The variety of views (on soteriology and other doctrinal subjects) within religions make it difficult to sustain such an essentialism. Yet, in fairness to Heim, this criticism does not, in our view, dent too much the force of the overall argument that he seeks to make. His contention that the pluralist presupposition of unity amongst diverse religions remains valid. In any case, it should be noted that while diversities (about any matter) are prevalent within religious traditions, there is still a sense in which these differences do not render incoherent speaking of *a* Christian rather than, say *a* Buddhist view on a matter. That we can make sense of such references means there may be more baseline similarity *within* religious traditions than Fegert seems to grant. To take the example of soteriology within Christianity, however different views there may be within the Christian tradition, there is still agreement that, somehow, to be saved is connected to what God, in Christ, has done, is doing, and will do.

The centrality of Christ remains, even if the way that Christians understand the 'salvation' that Christ brings is diverse. Yet, however different Christian soteriological views are, they are more united than is the case with a Muslim view of 'soteriology.'

We already noted about Heim that there is indeed a risk of relativism within the particularist standpoint. But as we suggested, this relativism need not be ontologised, but can simply be regarded as in keeping with the epistemological status of religious truth claims. Still, this does not mean intelligible dialogue cannot take place between religious traditions. They can. If we take Alasdair MacIntyre's point that traditions of intellectual enquiry are always 'traditioned,' and that the modern Western tendency toward a universalism grounded in 'reason' is itself an 'Enlightenment' tradition, then we cannot escape the fact that reason and tradition need not be viewed as necessarily oppose.[167] For MacIntyre, rational argumentation is still possible across traditions. Traditions of inquiry can be challenged by other traditions for their failure to resolve the problems raised within their traditions even on their own (tradition's) terms. D'Costa illustrates the feasibility of this in his adoption of MacIntyre's approach in his engagement with what he sees as Enlightenment pretensions to being tradition-neutral, present in pluralistic theologies.[168]

Hedges also argues that particularism artificially creates too distant a gap between the religions. Considering it is a position within Christian theology of religions, particularism, Hedges thinks, may well just be a covert attempt at giving intellectual respectability to 'Western' (here used as synonymous with Christian) claims to cultural superiority. Alluding to Edward Said's *Orientalism*, Hedges argues that the postulation of radical difference between

[167] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 3rd ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).
[168] D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 1–13.

the religions can be criticised as a move at othering non-Western religions. As Hedges writes, 'particularities continue many of the fallacies and prejudices highlighted by critics of Orientalism, in particular its lack of respect for the Other.'[169] This othering, for postcolonial writers, essentially amounts to positing Western superiority over the 'other.'[170] But Hedges' deployment of postcolonial theory, in the context of his discussion of particularism, does not, to our mind, seem apposite. At the very least, particularism need not be regarded as any more Western than any theological position is, including Hedges' preferred pluralist position. Of course, there is no reason to take 'Western' and 'Christian' as synonyms as Hedges appears to do.

Citing Alistair McGrath's claim that 'it is no criticism of Buddhism to suggest that it does not offer a specifically Christian salvation,'[171] Hedges argues, against McGrath, that this contention is a criticism of Buddhism in that '[McGrath's] claim for Christianity is not simply that wearing Christian clothes (employed metaphorically to connote Christianity) today will make you look nicer, it entails the claim that all other clothes are not, transcendentally speaking, correct clothes.'[172] In other words, to claim that Christianity is different from Buddhism, or any other non-Christian religion is, for Hedges, finally to disrespect the religious other. Hedges writes, 'particularity serves to maintain Christian dominance far more decisively and ingeniously than any supposed liberal essentialist schema.'[173] This is an unfair criticism as difference need not be framed as a normative judgment of inferiority. Indeed, contrary to Hedges, love for the 'other' demands that we do not sublate the other's otherness.

[169] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 128.
[170] Hedges, 128.
[171] Alister McGrath, 'A Particularist View: A Post-Enlightenment Approach', in *Four Views on Salvation in a Pluralistic World*, ed. D.L. Okholm and T.R. Phillips (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1996), 174.
[172] Hedges, 'Particularities: Tradition-Specific Post-Modern Perspectives', 129. Word in bracket mine.
[173] Hedges, 130.

As we shall argue in Chapter 4, differences between the religions can, for Christians, be a providential site for the growth of Christian character. As we argue, it is only as difference is respected that dialogue – interreligious dialogue – truly becomes dialogical.

Moyaert, we should admit, is probably right in noting that the Christian doctrine of creation and its vision of God's image as universally present in all humans means that a theological basis exists for positing an anthropological interconnection between Christians and non-Christians in a way that Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory, taken to its extreme, allows for. Yet, in fairness to Lindbeck, Christian theology, particularly in its Reformed and neo-Reformed mode, has often cautioned against the prospects of natural theology in leading humans to an adequate knowledge of the triune God and a rightly ordered relationship with this God. But beyond that, it should be noted that Moyaert's appeal to the doctrine of creation reflects the control which the Christian doctrinal grammar (of creation) has over how Christians think and understand the anthropology of religious others. This would confirm Lindbeck's argument that we are hardly able to transcend our religious conditioning,' that we can only speak from within our religious frameworks. The Christian doctrine of creation and the notion of an *Imago Dei* are particular to the Christian tradition (and perhaps to the 'Abrahamic' religions, even if they would each understand it differently).[174] Therefore, the particularity of the religions, which Lindbeck argues for, retains its validity: it is a prior commitment to the Christian story that can legitimate the view that others, including non-Christians, bear God's image. This theological anthropological claim is not a truth apparent to those who do not share the Christian faith.

[174] For a discussion of the different ways the 'Abrahamic religions' reflect on the concept of natural law, in a way that connects to the concept of human dignity, see Anver M. Emon, Matthew Levering, and David Novak, *Natural Law: A Jewish, Christian, and Islamic Trialogue*, First published in paperback (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

In fairness, Moyaert, as she elsewhere explains, agrees with Lindbeck's emphasis on difference, his contention that religious engagement with the religious other is necessarily shaped by the theological languages and metaphors of one's religion.[175] She distinguishes between Lindbeck's particularism and his postliberalism. She takes issues with the latter, not with the former. For Moyaert, a commitment to difference need not be accompanied by the 'baggage' of Lindbeck's postliberal project. This may or may not be the case. But our argument in this thesis is concerned more with a defense of Lindbeck's particularism, rather than the postliberal position, in all its finer details. Still, as we argue in Chapter 3, Lindbeck's 'postliberal' notion of 'intratextuality' offers much by way of thinking about the connection between particularism (and the postliberal project, more broadly) and interreligious dialogue.

As well, as we note more fully in the next chapter, Lindbeck's particularism is not opposed to interreligious dialogue, as Fletcher worries. Rather, interreligious dialogues, in Lindbeck's view, need to be resourced by reasons provided by these religions themselves, rather than those which come from sources external to these religions. Lindbeck takes issue only against those forms of interfaith dialogue that aspire to ground the dialogical encounter in a shared religious experience or a legitimating belief divorced from the particularity of the religions. Jeanine-Fletcher's turn to the doctrine of God's mystery would therefore sit neatly within Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic framework as it reflects an attempt to anchor a strategy for interreligious dialogue on a Christian doctrine, rather than on a trans-religious notion like John Hick's Transcendental *Real*.

[175] Marianne Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality* (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 161–96; Jeffrey C. K. Goh, *Christian Tradition Today: A Postliberal Vision of Church and World* (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2000), 259.

Conclusion

We have reviewed the particularist standpoint in this chapter to situate the particularist orientation that drives forward our concern for motivating a form of interreligious dialogue that takes religious differences seriously. As evident in the work of both Heim and Lindbeck, whom we both reviewed, there are differences in the ways that particularists make their case. But their shared contention – and which is the insight that we take and seek to build upon in this thesis – lies in their insistence that religious differences are non-trivial and should not be treated as such. Any model of, or approach to, interreligious dialogue that proceeds by denting the particularity of the religions is likely to be ineffective in achieving what it seeks: *genuine* dialogue across difference. But even worse, it may fail to get off the ground because it would fail to appeal to 'traditional' religious adherents, who are often so conscious of how different their religious convictions are from those of others.

Yet, this is not to say that interreligious dialogue is not possible amidst difference, or that it is not to be encouraged. As we argue in this thesis, a particularist viewpoint is compatible with a commitment to fruitful interreligious dialogue between the religions. But the vision of interfaith dialogue that particularism encourages does not stipulate, a priori, that the goal of such dialogues is 'harmony.' If 'harmony' is realised in the course of dialogue, it would not be the sort that comes at the cost of a robust appreciation of the distinctness of the religions.

A particularist approach to interreligious dialogues would instead be motivated by 'theological rationales' that derive from religious traditions, rather than one grounded in an

appeal to a common religious experience shared by these faiths.[176] Lindbeck is helpful here in his note that:

> 'while a cultural-linguistic approach does not issue a blanket endorsement of the enthusiasm and warm fellow-feelings that can be so easily promoted in an experiential-expressive context, it does not exclude the development of powerful theological rationales for sober and practically efficacious commitment to interreligious discussion and cooperation.'[177]

It is this suggestion above that this thesis seeks to develop. How might Christians provide 'powerful theological rationales' for the practice of interreligious dialogue, even as they take their difference from other religious traditions seriously? This is the animating question that we seek, in this thesis, to engage.

[176] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 40.
[177] Lindbeck, 41.

CHAPTER 2

PARTICULARISM AND THE NATURE OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Introduction

In the previous chapter, we reviewed the particularist paradigm, situating its emergence within the context of Christian theology of religions. We noted that a uniting thread that ties different articulations of particularisms is the shared contention that the religions are best understood as truly different. Even when the religions share overlapping concerns, the ways that they attend to these concerns are often incommensurable. But its insistence on difference, in this way, is a chief source of pushback against the particularist model.

Critiques of particularism, some of which we briefly engaged in the chapter, take issue with particularism for what they consider to be its failure to provide solid grounds for the enterprise of interreligious dialogue. Paul Knitter makes this criticism, for instance, when he argues that a liberationist ethic, one with a global consciousness, and committed to the flourishing of 'the least of these' can only be undergirded by a pluralist theology of religion.[178] Religious pluralism, for Knitter, is an ethical posture, rather than simply a way of understanding the relationship between the religions. The pluralist option offers, Knitter thinks, the best framework for supporting cooperative interreligious social action, whereas an emphasis on difference, on particularity, is unable to provide a compelling basis for such cooperations, for dialogue.

Knitter's concern, in this regard, is not entirely wrong-headed. As Rabbi Alon Goshen-Gottstein has also remarked, in a related context, 'difference constitutes the greatest

[178] Paul F. Knitter, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue and Social Action', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 133–48.

challenge to interreligious friendship.'[179] Interreligious friendship, as we argue in Chapter 4, must be understood as a mode of interfaith dialogue. If *difference* presents such an immense obstacle to interreligious dialogue, then it is important to consider how particularism might be reconciled with the practice of interreligious dialogue. This is the concern that we take up in this chapter. Is particularity, and more specifically, a Christian version of particularism, one that takes Christianity to be truly different from other religious traditions, compatible with the project of interreligious dialogue, in view of particularism's foregrounding of religious difference? If critics like Knitter are right, then particularism may, rightly, be adjudged to have a pragmatic case against them: it is unable to serve dialogical ends. Whatever else its merits, this would be a serious weakness.

We already hinted in the previous chapter that it is not. We noted Lindbeck's point that interreligious dialogue can be resourced by 'powerful theological rationales' that stem from the religions themselves. In this chapter, we seek to further underline this point about the need for dialogue that connects to the deep resources of the religious traditions. Particularism, we begin to suggest in this chapter, contrary to what pluralists think, can make room for interreligious dialogue.

But before doing this, we should note that present in the criticism that particularism is unable to facilitate dialogue is an assumption that interreligious dialogue is a positive good, something with a transformative impact upon the world, and as such to be encouraged. This assumption is what gives the criticism of particularism (with respect to its alleged inability to undergird interreligious dialogue its moral force.) It is this assumption that shapes Knitter's

[179] Alon Goshen-Gottstein, 'Introduction', in *Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship*, ed. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Interreligious Reflections (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf&Stock, 2018), xxxvi.

contention that cooperation with religious others for the liberation of the world requires subscription to a pluralistic outlook.

So a prior question that must be considered, before attending to the prospects of a particularistic framework for interreligious dialogue, is what interreligious dialogue means. There are, as we note, different connotations of interreligious dialogue. In this chapter, and throughout this thesis, however, our contention, which is informed by an insight gleaned from David Lochhead, is that interreligious dialogue is best construed, not primarily as an *activity*, but as a *relationship*.[180] Interreligious dialogue, we consider, is essentially a form of relationality with the religious other that seeks to effect, through that relationship, a repair of the violence that often attaches to relationships across interreligious difference.

That interreligious dialogue is fundamentally oriented to the repair of relational discords is clear from its history. As we show in our review aspects of the contemporary history of interreligious dialogue – where we note two important moments in that history, the Parliament of World Religions (first held in 1893) and the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) – a moral concern for healing the world, of world repair, has been an animating impulse of the interfaith dialogue movement. This moral concern, which is also present in Knitter's contention about pluralism and liberation, is, we consider, important. A particularist vision for interreligious dialogue must be sensitive to this moral concern. It is only after attending to this question of interreligious dialogue's meaning that we would be in a position to consider how a Christian form of particularism squares with, or can support, the practice of interfaith dialogue. In the final section of the chapter, we return to this question.

[180] David Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis, 1988), 77.

2.1. Interreligious Dialogue as a Relationship

In both scholarly and popular discussions of interreligious dialogue, there is a tendency to imagine interreligious dialogue as primarily a set of activities, as a programme. Catherine Cornille writes, for example, that the 'category of inter-religious dialogue may be used to refer to any form or degree of constructive engagement between religious traditions.'[181] The emphasis on 'constructive engagement,' in this definition, gives the impression that dialogue is principally an activity, 'a constructive engagement,' that can be separated from other areas of life in which religious adherents participate. But this is mistaken. While, no doubt, interreligious dialogue may take such special forms as the World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi that Pope John Paul II organised in 1986, or the Parliament of World Religions that was first held in 1893 in Chicago, USA, the reality is that the majority of dialogical encounters in our world, engagements with religious others, often take place in non-formal, non-specialised contexts.

As Cornille herself has shown, it is only as those who participate in interreligious dialogue are first able to imbibe certain dialogical virtues, such as humility, a commitment to their religious traditions, empathy, hospitality, and a sense of interconnection, that they would be able to truly dialogue with the religious other.[182] But by so including these 'preconditions,' Cornille makes us aware that dialogue must be understood as an expansive endeavour, one that ties into the virtue-forming practices of the faith communities themselves, rather than as something that begins only in the 'act' of dialogue. In the next chapter, we shall reflect on what this need for certain 'preconditions,' to be met for dialogue to be possible, means for

[181] Catherine Cornille, 'Introduction', in *The Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), xii.
[182] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008).

Christians. Drawing on the work of Lindbeck, we shall suggest that, for Christians, in as much as virtues are required for interreligious dialogue, then scripture and the church (two important sites of Christian moral formation) impinge, in an important way, on how effective and faithful Christians would be in interreligious dialogue.

But of significance in this chapter is the point that at the heart of interreligious dialogue is relationship. Interreligious dialogue is fundamentally, as with quotidian dialogue, oriented toward relationships, and happens in the context of a relationship.[183] But by framing interreligious dialogue in terms of 'activities,' we miss the fact that a great deal of interreligious dialogue takes place outside the confines of formally organised interreligious dialogues. In ordinary contexts, whether those be in schools, in hospitals, or on public buses, religious believers are always in 'dialogue' with religious others. These dialogues may be positive or otherwise, wholesome or fraught, but, whether consciously or not, and whether shaped by market forces or by migration, interreligious dialogue has become a constant feature of our world today. Many of these dialogues are, to be sure, not strictly 'interreligious' in a self-conscious way but, as we argue more fully concerning interfaith friendships in Chapters 4 and 5, in so far as religious 'believers' tend to interpret the world through the lens of their religious faith, then even these ordinary encounters must be seen as interreligious in a non-trivial way.

Oddbjørn Leirvik, writing about the Norwegian context, distinguishes between 'necessary' and 'spiritual' forms of interreligious dialogue.[184] Leirvik sees 'necessary dialogues' as those that take place within the public sphere and are oriented toward brokering and maintaining

[183] Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, 77ff.
[184] Oddbjørn Leirvik, 'Philosophies of Interreligious Dialogue: Practice in Search of Theory', *Approaching Religion* 1, no. 1 (2 May 2011): 16, https://doi.org/10.30664/ar.67466.

civic peace. The focus of 'necessary dialogue' is on fostering interreligious tolerance.[185] 'Spiritual dialogues,' on the other hand, Leirvik explains, are based 'on personal motivation and are guided by an expectation of being enriched by other spiritual traditions.'[186] This is an important observation. There are those forms of dialogue, such as those, in the Northern Nigerian context, for example, that have become rather 'necessary' given the history of interreligious conflict in this region.[187] But there are those types, like the inter-monastic forms of dialogue that Pierre-François de Béthune discusses, that are oriented toward the spiritual nourishment of the dialoguing partners.[188] But as important as such delineations are, they can give the impression of interreligious dialogue as an occasionalist venture, a once-in-a-while activity, that can only be entered into by dialogue 'specialists.' But if dialogue is seen instead as a relationship between adherents of faiths, it is important to take seriously the embodied, enacted forms of dialogue that are constitutive of everyday life in many religiously pluralistic contexts of the world.

Perhaps it is better to understand interreligious dialogue as not just *one* thing but as many things, able to take diverse forms. A sense of plurality about what dialogue means is present in the important post-Vatican II document, *Dialogue and Proclamation*. It would help to review the four types of dialogue of which the document speaks. In its four-fold categorization of types of interreligious dialogue in *Dialogue and Proclamation,* the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue identifies four types of interreligious dialogue: 'the dialogue of theological exchange,' 'the dialogue of religious experience,' 'the dialogue of action,' and the

[185] Leirvik, 16–17.
[186] Leirvik, 16.
[187] Matthews A. Ojo and Folaranmi T. Lateju, 'Christian–Muslim Conflicts and Interfaith Bridge-Building Efforts in Nigeria', *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 8, no. 1 (January 2010): 31–38, https://doi.org/10.1080/15570271003707762.
[188] Pierre-François de Béthune, 'Monastic Inter-Religious Dialogue', in *The Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 32–50.

'dialogue of life.'[189] As explained in the document, in the 'dialogue of theological exchange,' 'specialists seek to deepen their understanding of their respective religious heritages, and to appreciate each other's spiritual values.' 'The dialogue of action,' sometimes known in the wider literature as interreligious cooperation, focuses on bringing the religions together to work on projects of shared interest and benefit, projects that are generally of a social action kind. The 'dialogue of religious experience,' involves dialogical exchanges of such kinds as interreligious prayer, interfaith meditation, or participation in any of, or all of, the worship rites of a religious community other than one's own. 'The dialogue of life' is explained, in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, as 'where people strive to live in an open and neighbourly spirit, sharing their joys and sorrows, their human problems and preoccupations.'

Eric Sharpe, in a way that mirrors these four forms of dialogue in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, distinguishes four understandings that he sees as having formed around 'interreligious dialogue.' He identifies these as 'discursive dialogue,' 'human dialogue,' 'secular dialogue,' and 'interior dialogue.' As Sharpe explains it, interreligious dialogue within 'discursive' modes aims at getting to know more about the beliefs and practices of the religious other. In the discursive mode, the goal is to explain and communicate, to the religious other, the convictions which give substance to one's religious commitment. But in interreligious dialogue understood as 'human dialogues,' the aim is not this kind of conversation around differing religious persuasions. Instead, the religious other is simply met as another human, as one who shares in one's humanity. 'Secular dialogue' seeks to bring persons of different religions together to work together on shared practical objectives – say

[189] Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 'Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ', 1991, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html.

campaigns against racial injustice or activism around environmental stewardship. 'Interior dialogues,' the last of the types of dialogue on Sharpe's delineation, are quite synonymous with what might be called contemplative dialogues. Interreligious dialogues in this latter contemplative sense aim to go beyond the merely discursive to the mystical; to transcend the intellectualist mode into the 'spiritual.'

A particularist view might harbour some suspicions about the feasibility of dialogues of religious experience if by this type of dialogue is meant that Christians can, for example, share the *same* religious experience as Muslims.[190] But as we argue in Chapters 4 and 5, interreligious friendship (which happens often as a form of the 'dialogue of life' or Sharpe's 'human dialogue'), the practice of scriptural reasoning (which is a form of the dialogue of 'theological exchange' or Sharpe's 'discursive dialogue'), and interreligious cooperation (or 'the dialogue of action' or Sharpe's 'secular dialogue'), can be undergirded by 'powerful theological rationales' derived from within the Christian tradition.

Thinking of interreligious dialogue in terms of relationality can help move it from the exoteric, 'spiritualist' frame it tends to be cast within. Also, by considering dialogue in terms of relationality, we are better able to understand its emergence as a practice-oriented toward relational repair, toward the healing of the fractures that have come into human relationships because of diverse religious orientations.

[190] For some of the problems here, with specific reference to 'interreligious prayer,' see D'Costa, *The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity*, 143–71. For more on the challenges of the dialogue of 'religious experience,' see as well, Heim, 'On Doing What Others Do: Intentions and Intuitions in Multiple Religious Practice'.

2.2. Toward Better Relationships: The Moral Spirit of the Modern Interreligious Dialogue Movement[191]

Whatever conception of interreligious dialogue one subscribes to, a key component that ties together its various expressions is the contention that the practice of interreligious/interfaith dialogue is geared toward promoting more peaceable forms of relations across religious difference. In this section, we argue that the various calls for religious traditions to engage in interfaith dialogue are, in large part, motivated by an ethical concern for bridging relational gaps which have existed and continue to exist between religions. Interreligious dialogues are geared toward repairing the felt and real discords which plague interreligious relationships at both interpersonal and group levels. It is this ethical underpinning which underlies the invocation of interfaith dialogue within the context of peacebuilding and conflict resolution. To show this, we draw attention here to two key moments in modern interfaith history: the Parliament of the World Religions and the Second Vatican Council respectively, focusing on the Second Vatican Council's key interreligious dialogue document, *Nostra Aetate*.

2.2.1. The Parliament of the World's Religions

The year 1893 is significant in discussions of interfaith/interreligious dialogue. With Leonard Swindler, many writers on the subject tend to agree that 'we can date the 'public' launching of modern inter-religious dialogue to the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago.' [192] Discussions of the 1893 Parliament are often located at the beginning of

[191] Parts of this section were presented at a doctoral seminar on 'The World Christian Movement' at Baylor University, December 2021.

[192] Leonard Swindler, 'The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue', in *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 6.

treatments chronicling the evolution of what Marcus Braybrooke terms as the global 'interfaith movement'[193]

Doubtless, what the Parliament achieved in terms of fostering harmonious global interreligious relations may not, in retrospect, be enormous. Alan Neely has contrasted the 1893 Parliament with the follow-up Parliament that was held a century later, in 1993, in Chicago. This latter Parliament and the subsequent ones after it, Neely argues, more fully embody the modern spirit of interfaith dialogues than did the pioneering 1893 Parliament. As Neely observes, and Arie Molendijk corroborates, connected as it was with the Columbus World Exhibition of 1893, the first Parliament was, in many ways, implicated in certain forms of cultural and religious superiority.[194] It was held as part of the events organised to mark the centenary of Columbus's 'discovery' of America. But it was the most historically significant of these events.

Its key organisers Charles Carrol Bonney and the Rev. John Henry Barrows were Christians. As Barrows reports, at the end of the Parliament, the appeal to many Christians who supported the organising of the Parliament rested in part on the opportunity they saw in the parliament for demonstrating 'the superiority and the sufficiency of some particular form of Christianity.'[195] Even though the Parliament was radical for its time – not least in its

[193] As for instance in Marcus Braybrooke's *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1992), 7–42.
[194] Alan Neely, 'The Parliaments of the World's Religions: 1893 and 1993', *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* 18, no. 2 (1 April 1994): 60–64, https://doi.org/10.1177/239693939401800205; Arie L. Molendijk, 'To Unite Religion Against All Irreligion. The 1893 World Parliament of Religions', *Journal for the History of Modern Theology* 18, no. 2 (1 October 2011): 228–50, https://doi.org/10.1515/ZNTH.2011.011; Justin Nordstrom, 'Utopians at the Parliament: The World's Parliament of Religions and the Columbian Exposition of 1893', *Journal of Religious History* 33, no. 3 (1 September 2009): 352, https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9809.2009.00801.x.
[195] Henry John Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893), 15.

giving opportunities to women, Jews and Roman Catholics (in what was chiefly a protestant affair) – it was nonetheless animated by what may be described as a theologically 'conservative' fervour.[196] George Washburn, a Christian missionary, for example, titled the paper he gave at the parliament 'The points of contact and contrast between Christianity and Mohammedanism.' The paper concluded that while certain areas of contact existed between the two faiths, in such areas as the doctrine of sin and Christology, they differed considerably.[197] This was not atypical. On the whole, indeed, a Christian atmosphere animated the parliament, and daily sessions began with the Lord's prayer.[198]

In contrast to this apparent theological conservatism, Neely notes a general reticence of conservative Christian theological viewpoints at the 1993 Parliament, and the more pronounced 'liberal' and non-Christian participation which the 1993 Parliament had.[199] The 1893 parliament should not, therefore, be imagined as the paradigmatic exemplar of contemporary interfaith dialogues, if by interfaith dialogue we mean a form of engagement with religious others in which participants do not regard their religious convictions to be superior to or genuinely different from those of others. At the 1893 Parliament, views of superiority, at least of Christianity, were not seen as inappropriate.

Still, with all its peculiarities, the 1893 Parliament is momentous for the history of the modern interfaith movement. For our immediate interest here, it is noteworthy that the 1893 Parliament shares with its later heirs a concern for such moral concerns as the fostering of

[196] Neely, 'The Parliaments of the World's Religions: 1893 and 1993'.
[197] Barrows, *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions, Held in Chicago in Connection with the Columbian Exposition of 1893*, 1:565–82; H. McKennie Goodpasture, 'The World's Parliament of Religions Revisited: The Missionaries and Early Steps in Public Dialogue', *Missiology: An International Review* 21, no. 4 (October 1993): 403–11, https://doi.org/10.1177/009182969302100401.
[198] Goodpasture, 'The World's Parliament of Religions Revisited: The Missionaries and Early Steps in Public Dialogue', 404.
[199] Neely, 'The Parliaments of the World's Religions: 1893 and 1993', 63.

unity between adherents of the 'great religious traditions,' world peace, listening to, and learning from religious others, and interreligious friendship. These aims come through in Barrows' report, published after the conclusion of the Parliament in 1893. There, we find his employment of such words as 'fraternity,' 'unity, and 'friendship' in his characterisation of the moral vision and hoped-for outcome of the Parliament. A concern for better forms of relationality with 'the other' was, clearly, very much an integral impulse in this inaugural Parliament. Viewed in this way, as informed by similar ethical concerns which motivate many contemporary interfaith dialogue meetings, one cannot take too much issue with Swindler's exaggerated assertion that the Parliament 'opened the dam for the dialogue among the religions of the world.'[200]

Subsequent Parliaments have kept with and expanded the ethical spirit of the 1893 Parliament. There have been six Parliaments held (at least up to the time of this writing)[201] since the 1893 Parliament.[202] The themes of these Parliaments – which indicate to a large extent what they focused on – are illustrative. The more recent Parliament that was held in Toronto in 2018 had as its theme 'The Promise of Inclusion, the Power of Love.' Melbourne 2009 focused on environmental justice and its location in a context of Aboriginal struggles for sustainable environmental practices was not coincidental.[203] It had as its theme 'Make a World of Difference: Hearing each other, healing the earth.' In Barcelona 2004, the Parliament was themed 'Pathways to Peace: The Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment.' Rabbi Goshen's article, written in preparation for the 2004 Parliament, spoke of listening as an act

[200] Swindler, 'The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue', 6.
[201] July 2020
[202] These six Parliaments, named as they are after the city in which they are held are: Chicago, USA, 1993; Cape Town, South Africa, 1999; Barcelona, Spain 2004; Melbourne, Australia, 2009; Salt Lake, USA, 2015 and Toronto, Canada, 2018.
[203] Marcus Braybrooke, 'Preparing for the Parliament of World Religions', 2009, https://parliamentofreligions.org/content/preparing-parliament-world-religions-0.

of love; one that enables the listener to come to 'appreciate and respect that which distinguishes us, but it also enables us to become so much more aware of all that unites us and the values that we share.'[204] The concern in all of these Parliaments has been to bring adherents of diverse religions together in a bid to forge peaceable and flourishing pathways together.

Reference has already been made to the centenary 1993 Parliament that was held in Chicago. One of the most important outcomes of that Parliament was the joint declaration, which was issued during it, titled *Toward a Global Ethic*. In that publication, we find the ethical concern in interreligious dialogue strongly represented. Initially drafted by the Swiss Roman Catholic theologian, Hans Kung, the document was deliberated upon in discussion groups held during the Parliament between August 28th to September 4th, 1993. The Declaration was finally adopted and signed by over '200 chosen religious representatives, most notably the 14th Dalai Lama.'[205] *Toward a Global Ethic* captures a lot of the moral sentiments and values which are expressed in many contemporary interfaith dialogue discourses. It expresses a commitment to working toward a 'just and peaceful world' and asserts the indispensability of a global ethic to the actualisation of a 'new global order.'[206] It includes a lot of interesting, no doubt sometimes platitudinous, talks about gender equality, ecojustice, economic fairness, respect for all human life, advocation of non-violence, disarmament and the interdependence

[204] David Rosen, 'Pathways to Peace: The Wisdom of Listening, the Power of Commitment', The Parliament of the World's Religions, July 2004, https://parliamentofreligions.org/content/pathways-peace-wisdom-listening-power-commitment.
[205] 'Declaration Toward a Global Ethic - Global Ethic', accessed 25 July 2020, https://www.global-ethic.org/declaration-toward-a-global-ethic/.
[206] Parliament of the World's Religions, 'Towards A Global Ethic (An Initial Declaration & The Fifth Directive) | Parliamentofreligions.Org', 1993, https://parliamentofreligions.org/documents/towards-global-ethic-initial-declaration-fifth-directive.

of all humans amongst other such moral principles.[207] The document argues that the ethic that it recommends does not seek to undervalue the differences in ethical teachings between the religions. It instead considers that the Declaration embodies those principles which the different religious traditions can, despite their differences, agree upon. To corroborate this point about shared agreement despite differences, over 200 signatories of the Declaration, which came from different religious traditions, accented to the 'global ethic' that it enjoined.

Yet, we should note – especially in connection to a particularistic framework – that while inspiring in its ambition, a key weakness of the ethic enjoined in *Toward a Global Ethic*, and indeed in the Parliament model of interreligious dialogue, is that it may mask the significant differences that are present in the ways these 'global ethics' are understood in the respective religious communities. While gender equality, for example, is an important ethical ideal to be pursued, the ways that this seemingly straightforward moral value is parsed and made sense of differs according *across* different religious and ideological traditions, and even *within* the religious traditions in a way that is often not well appreciated in the desire to establish a 'global ethic.'

A connected point here is that a 'global ethic' may not take with full seriousness the crucial link that exists between ethical judgements and their metaphysical rootedness in respective religious and non-religious traditions. That is, an attempt to 'thin down' ethics to accommodate so many diverse religious traditions can only be possible if the narrative context, existing within religious traditions, within which all ethics is always located has been severed.[208] Take the example of what the document regards as a fundamental trans-religious

[207] For a fuller exposition of the ethics of *Toward a Global Ethic*, see June O'Connor, 'Does a Global Village Warrant a Global Ethic?: (An Analysis of a Global Ethic, the Declaration of the 1993 Parliament of the World's Religions)', *Religion* 24, no. 2 (1994): 155–64, https://doi.org/10.1006/reli.1994.1012.
[208] MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*.

moral principle: 'What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others.' While perhaps something like this ethical injunction may be present in different religious traditions, the substantial question remains: what is the good that I would like done to me? In reflecting on this question, it becomes clear that the metaethical issues of how to define 'good,' and the motivations which inform the performance of moral acts remain intimately connected to prior ontological commitments. For Christians, for example, what it means to do good to the other, to the neighbour, is deeply related to what God, in Christ, has done for me. A 'global ethic,' as important and commendable as it is, insufficiently accounts for these meta-ethical differences.

Toward a Global Ethic, from a particularistic standpoint, suffers, as well, from a weakness of supposing that the best way to secure interreligious dialogues geared toward shared human flourishing is by grounding such dialogues in a pluralistic 'common ground' morality. The mere fact, however, that adherents of the different religions share the 'global village' means that they must necessarily learn to work together, even without any such prescriptions as contained in *Toward a Global Ethics*. Cornille suggests, in this respect, that the shared problems which confront the religions can often form a basis for certain forms of 'interconnection' between the religions.[209]

Yet, all this is not to say that such 'global ethic' prescriptions as made in *Toward a Global Ethic* hold no value or are, for that matter, to be discouraged. They are important and, in our view, they reflect the important moral consciousness that animates the notion of interreligious dialogue. As Jean Porter notes in her review of the 'common morality' ethic embodied in *Toward a Global Ethic*, such ethics have value 'if only to underscore the

[209] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*.

importance of the commitments in question and to give salience to the practical concerns they generate.'[210] Where they err, we consider, is in their tendency toward offering a 'thin' grounding of these ethical recommendations.

Still, a particularistic approach to interreligious dialogue must take seriously the moral spirit of *Toward a Global Ethic* and those articulated in the various Parliaments to the present. But it would insist, alongside, that, in the end, any meaningful 'global' interreligious ethic must finally be grounded in and resourced by the respective religious traditions. Even in interreligious dialogue forms that are practical, there is a need, to render them compelling, to anchor them on the distinct visions of the religious faiths.

2.2.2. *Nostra Aetate*

Leonard Swindler has highlighted such post-Enlightenment intellectual tendencies like the historicism which accompanied the study of history and *religionswissenschaft* (including Biblical studies) in Europe (and Germany in particular), the perspectivist understanding of truth articulated, for instance, in the work of an early 20th-century sociologist like Karl Mannheim, and the emphasis on the hermeneutically based nature of social reality emphasised in the work of a figure like Hans Georg Gadamer as contributory factors which enabled the increased emphasis which interreligious dialogue came to receive in the 20th century.[211]

Swindler notes two key events that he considers watershed moments in the interreligious dialogical turn which Christianity, in the 20th century, took. The first of these was the growing

[210] Jean Porter, 'The Search for a Global Ethic', *Theological Studies* 62, no. 1 (4 February 2001): 116, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056390106200106.
[211] Swindler, 'The History of Inter-Religious Dialogue'.

ecumenical consciousness within Protestant Christianity that resulted in the forming of such global-scale ecumenical events as the various International Mission Council (IMC) Conferences which took place within the first six decades of the 20th century, beginning with the inaugural edition at Edinburgh in 1910 and later conferences at Jerusalem (1928), Tambaram, India (1938), Whitby, Canada (1947), Willingen, Germany (1952), Achimota, Ghana (1958) and the last edition at New Delhi, India (1961). The IMC would go on to merge with the World Council of Churches (WCC) in 1961 with the later organisation having been formed in 1948. Swindler sees the ecumenical movement of the early 20th century as informed by the realisation that the challenges facing the churches necessitated their partnership with one another.[212] When in 1971 the Indian theologian Stanley Samartha created the Sub-Unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies within the WCC, it was nothing but the outcome of a move toward taking seriously the reality that interreligious relations were a real problem which the ecumenical church needed some guidelines and institutional framework for in navigating.

The second of these era-defining moments that Swindler notes has arguably been the more momentous. This was Vatican II (1962-1965). If the Chicago Parliament of September 1893 is considered epoch-making in its being a foreshadowing of the later forms of interfaith dialogue that would gain ascendency in the 20th century, the Second Vatican Council and one of its key conciliar documents – *Nostra Aetate* – is perhaps *the* watershed moment, within Christianity, in the contemporary movement of religious faiths toward an increased sensitivity toward better, more peaceable, and cordial relationships with one another. The measured theological tone of *Nostra Aetate*, especially with regard to the Roman Catholic Church's

[212] Swindler, 4–6.

relationship to Israel and Christianity to Judaism, has been criticised as not thoroughgoing enough.[213] But there can be no denying that the document's positive attitude toward what it saw as mystically inhering within non-Christian religions was a big step forward within Roman Catholicism.

The Vatican II Council, convened by Pope John XXIII, reflected, from a Catholic theological point of view, an attempt at 'updating' the church, an *aggiornamento* in which the general conviction, amongst its key protagonists, was that it was possible and good for the church to learn from the 'world' those things which resided in the world which were good and not contradicting of the 'great truths' of the church. It is hard to overestimate the huge impact which the Council had on the Roman Catholic church's attitude toward 'culture.' The Council reflected Richard Niebuhr's typology of 'Christ of culture,' in which the Spirit is seen as pervading human existence, even before that existence comes to fully reckon with the Christ who grounds that existence.[214] The hitherto 'negative' or 'exclusivist', as some Catholic theologians like Jacques Dupuis have described it,[215] '*extra Ecclesiam nulla salus*' dictum came to be replaced with an ecclesial policy of positive appraisal of the good, positive, and ennobling elements in non-Christian religions and cultures.

It was *Nostra Aetate* that most fully captured this nascent open disposition toward culture, and to the religions – which, of course, are intimately related to culture. *Nostra Aetate* was the shortest of the key documents published as part of over 15 documents

[213] Mary C. Boys, 'What Nostra Aetate Inaugurated: A Conversion to the "Providential Mystery of Otherness"', *Theological Studies* 74, no. 1 (1 February 2013): 73–104, https://doi.org/10.1177/004056391307400104.
[214] H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 1st ed (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2001), 83–115.
[215] Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism*, 84–109.

produced by the Council. In it, we find a clear expression of this openness in the statement, for instance, that

> 'The Catholic Church rejects nothing that is true and holy in these religions. She regards with sincere reverence those ways of conduct and of life, those precepts and teachings which, though differing in many aspects from the ones she holds and sets forth, nonetheless often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all men.'[216]

Published in 1965, *Nostra Aetate* was, amongst other things, a tacit acknowledgement of, and repentance from, those anti-Semitic attitudes which were so present within European Christianity in the earlier half of the 20th century; a repentance forced, it would seem, by a reckoning with the tragedy of the Shoah.[217] The dialogical spirit enjoined by *Nostra Aetate* has, to the present, continued to be concretised in institutional arrangements of the Roman Catholic church in the form, for instance, of the October 27, 1986, World Day of Prayer for Peace in Assisi organised by Pope John Paul II and the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue which was formed in 1964 (previously having been named the Secretariat for Non-Christians).

In noting, as it did, that 'the Church reproves, as foreign to the mind of Christ, any discrimination against men or harassment of them because of their race, colour, condition of life, or religion,' [218] *Nostra Aetate* drew attention to the moral spirit in which it was undergirded. The statement's ethical character is better appreciated when one recalls the

[216] 'Nostra Aetate', 1965, sec. 2, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html.
[217] Boys, 'What Nostra Aetate Inaugurated: A Conversion to the "Providential Mystery of Otherness"'.
[218] 'Nostra Aetate'.

historical background and pre-publication debates against which the document as a whole is set. Indeed, as already mentioned, *Nostra Aetate* cannot be divorced from the Roman Catholic's church recognition of her implication in the tragedy of the Shoah. The document and its dialogical openness, in particular to Judaism, is, seen in this light, nothing less than a political theological stance. It indicated, at the very least, a formal renunciation, on the Roman Catholic Church's part, of the neo-pagan nationalism that fed into the racism and anti-Semitism of Hitler's Germany.

This political spirit is deeply connected to the theology which underpins the document. Informing *Nostra Aetate's* inclusivist theology of religions is the desire to promote 'unity and love among men, indeed among nations.'[219] It is this concern for advancing a temper in interreligious relationships that move past what David Lochhead has described as the ideologies of 'hostility,' and 'isolation'[220] that drives *Nostra Aetate*. This moral spirit, this concern for deepening better relationality of the Roman Catholic Church with non-Christian religions, equally animates *Dialogue and Proclamation*, which was inspired by *Nostra Aetate* in 1991 by the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue. We have already drawn attention to *Dialogue and Proclamation* in our note about the four types of interreligious dialogue which it describes.

A particularist approach to interreligious dialogue has much to commend in the ethical character of *Nostra Aetate* and *Dialogue and Proclamation,* just as it must appreciate the way that this ethical concern for improving interreligious relations drives forward the various Parliaments of the World's Religions, exemplified in *Toward a Global Ethic*. But it would

[219] 'Nostra Aetate'.
[220] Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, 5,12.

especially appreciate that the dialogical openness which *Nostra Aetate* and *Dialogue and Proclamation* enjoin flows from within the theological wells of the Roman Catholic tradition, even as this tradition seeks to make sense of social, political, and cultural changes. *Nostra Aetate* and *Dialogue and Proclamation* represent, we consider, what a theological guideline for interreligious dialogue as understood within a particular religious tradition may look like. They offer to offer a 'thick' account (to borrow from Lindbeck's term, which he draws from Clifford Geertz) of dialogue that locates itself within the distinct commitments that Roman Catholicism, in the main, from Vatican II onwards, has come to hold.

2.3. Particularism and Interreligious Dialogue

Let us now return to the challenge posed by Knitter with which we began this chapter. For Knitter, to recall, however persuasive it may be as a theoretical or theological paradigm, particularism, in the end, in as much as it insists on radical difference between the religions, cannot ground the practice of interreligious dialogue. We have already noted, in our discussion of Kung's *Toward a Global Ethic*, the ways that an attempt to 'thin' down dialogue may, in the end, render such dialogues superfluous. In this section, we hope to make explicit the way that particularism can undergird interfaith dialogue, understood especially as a form of human relationship oriented toward forging more peaceable relations.

In doing this, let us return to Lindbeck's articulation of particularism which, as we noted in Chapter 1, he succinctly makes in *The Nature of Doctrine*. The first thing to note in this regard, as noted in Chapter 1, is Lindbeck's contention that interreligious dialogue requires, for its effectiveness, 'powerful theological rationales' that stem from the religions themselves.[221] As Lindbeck put it, 'There are theological grounds for dialogue, varying from

[221] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 41.

religion to religion, which do not presuppose that religions share an experiential core.'[222] This aversion for grounding dialogue in such an 'experiential core' is that this tends, in practice, to dent the diverse narrations within which religious experiences are always located. For Christians, no doubt, as Jacques Dupuis notes, summarizing the theology of dialogue of *Nostra Aetate*, a central conviction we hold is that the whole human 'community has its origin in God through creation, and its destiny in him through salvation in Jesus Christ.'[223] Yet, while one can speak of a shared humanity, any attempt to provide a theological grounding for this conviction must inevitably be bound by convictions that stem from a faith tradition.

But more worrying, often, talk of shared common core as the ground for 'true' interreligious dialogue, such as we find in Knitter and John Hick, often tends toward a prejudging of the outcome of the dialogical encounter. By deemphasising and/or relativizing the differences which give identity to the religions, pluralistic approaches to interreligious dialogue rob these dialogues of both force and real value.[224] However, the fact that interreligious dialogue has increasingly become a tool employed in contexts of religious peacebuilding means that, in actual practice, religious difference is taken as real, often resulting in conflict.[225] Particularism takes this reality of difference seriously, and indeed, we

[222] Lindbeck, 40.
[223] Jacques Dupuis, *Christianity and the Religions: From Confrontation to Dialogue* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2002), 222.
[224] For a brief but interesting reflective practitioner's view that the tendency to overemphasise consensus over conflict in interreligious dialogue impoverishes these dialogues, see Eric H Yoffie, 'Why Interfaith Dialogue Doesn't Work -- And What We Can Do About It | HuffPost', *Huffpost*, 2011, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-interfaith-dialogue-d_b_867221?guccounter=1&guce_referrer=aHR0cHM6Ly93d3cuZ29vZ2xlLmNvbS8&guce_referrer_sig=AQAAAMmHEb1zaLDNWSVWWf90Evy0mhNd_b0NnMbUtdmCOQPMsgxqtKbdYWBBKsY0ArUkwDMbTMa8CD1R9yJq9WFqAFkw1VqXn6VdLM7TBUs7nWwuNgJKfHJXlEt-WjYr7OYDBtjvE6iHNoujCiLQ0eu8fSxIE63dQ2Nq7rtr6yceJd46.
[225] An overview of interreligious dialogue within the context of peacebuilding is offered by S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, 'Inter-Religious Dialogue and Peacebuilding', in *The Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 149–67. For one more critical, see Thomas Sheffler, 'Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding', *Die Friedens-Warte* 82, no. 2/3 (2007): 173–87.

consider, offers a more 'realist' depiction of how religious identities are understood 'on the ground.' Still, particularism cannot stop at stressing 'difference,' it must take seriously the ethical impulse for relational repair, for interreligious cooperation, and human flourishing, which undergirds many pluralistic theologies, like Knitter's. But the way it does this is by asking what *particular* resources are present within the religions to enable these goals. In taking the ethical impulse present in dialogue's history seriously, it would resist the urge to thin down these ethical visions, recognising that the ways that the religions name these moral goods, and the significance they attach to them, may well vary.

A particularistic approach to interfaith dialogue takes issues with Knitter's pluralistic theological understanding of interreligious dialogue, even as it agrees with the moral posture which informs it. On Knitter's construal of interreligious dialogue, a key 'premise' of such dialogues is the presupposition that 'dialogue must be based on the recognition of the possible truth in all religions; the ability to recognise this truth must be grounded in the hypothesis of a common *ground* and *goal* of all religions.'[226] For Knitter, this premise that interreligious dialogue requires a shared ground necessitates going beyond a mere acknowledgement that the different religions have shared goals, say a doctrinal commitment to 'promote the unity of humanity.'[227] A deeper type of grounding is called for, one which, as he put it, 'allows them to be talking, in different ways, about the same reality.'[228] For without this, Knitter considers, 'the religions do not have a basis on which to speak to each other and work together.'[229] Indeed, participants in interreligious dialogue, on Knitter's reckoning, must

[226] Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 208. Italics mine.
[227] Knitter, 209.
[228] Knitter, 209.
[229] Knitter, 209.

have a theology which admits 'to the possibility and necessity of entering into the religious experience of another tradition.' [230] By Knitter's own admission, however, the 'how' of religious experiences, that is, the particular ways in which religious experiences are interiorised, interpreted, and given meaning within religious communities are 'markedly and importantly' different.[231] But Knitter adds that while this 'how' is different, the 'what' – that is, the substance which lies behind these different experiences – 'can well be the same ineffable reality.'[232]

This attempt to separate the content of religious experiences from the modes by which they are transmitted, as Knitter himself admits, is fraught with difficulties. [233] An awareness of this problem comes through clearly when Knitter suggests that, at least for Christians, a belief that the diverse religions embody, to some extent, forms of divine revelation, may help secure this common ground.[234] No doubt, as we interpret it, there is perhaps no reason why a (Christian) particularist should necessarily take issue with the suggestion of 'revelation' being available in other non-Christian religions. Who knows, God may well have revealed something of Godself to the other religions, as Amos Yong argues, by virtue of the working of the Holy Spirit.[235]

But by grounding this dialogue within a distinctly Christian doctrinal locus, that of God's mysterious gratuity, Knitter, unwittingly, underscores the impossibility of a pluralistic

[230] Knitter, 210.
[231] Knitter, 210.
[232] Knitter, 210.
[233] Quoting John Cobb approvingly, Knitter agrees that 'one can all too easily impose one's own definition of [ultimate] reality on another religion.' Cf., John Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982), 41–44. Cited in Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 209.
[234] Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 209.
[235] Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003).

theology of religions.[236] Impossible because, in the end, he appeals to a language which only makes sense within a Christian theological framework. But there is no reason to presume that non-Christian religions would employ such ways of thinking. Indeed, because 'revelation,' in the context of Knitter's usage, is a Christian theological concept, implying as it does that there is a 'revealer,' any claims of 'revelation' being available, in whatever measure, in religions other than Christianity, as Knitter makes, only be undergirded by a Christian theological logic. It would be surprising for a Buddhist, for instance, to speak in similar terms. It is hard to imagine that they would because 'revelation,' as Christians understand it, does not make sense within a Buddhist 'theological' system. In Theravada Buddhism for example, a conception of 'God' is lacking. But Knitter, aware of this problem, terms the source of this 'revelation' as 'Ultimate Reality,' in keeping with his 'theocentric' theology of religions.[237] But for Christians, 'Ultimate Reality' names nothing but the *particular* Other, 'the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,' given meaning by the Scriptural narratives in which Christians claim to know and experience this God.

On a particularist outlook, therefore, *inter*religious dialogue would, of necessity, be tied to *intra*religious dialogue. Lindbeck, for example, sees the *intra*-Christian rationale for interreligious dialogue to be connected to scriptural warrants. He considers that Christians have biblical specified reasons for engaging in dialogue with religious others. And this, especially in the case of Judaism. But more generally, for Lindbeck, the religions have a providential purpose, they 'are also peoples elected (and failing) to carry out their own distinctive tasks within God's word.'[238] For this reason, Lindbeck thinks Christians indeed have

[236] This is a point that Gavin D'Costa also makes, in his criticism of Hick's pluralism. Gavin D'Costa, 'The Impossibility of a Pluralist View of Religions', *Religious Studies* 32, no. 2 (1996): 223–32.
[237] Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 171–204.
[238] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 40.

a 'missionary' responsibility 'to help other movements and other religions make their own particular contributions, which may be quite distinct from the Christian one.'[239] Lindbeck, then, by drawing upon a Christian theology of election and providence, a theological possibility is opened up for motivating and grounding participation in interreligious dialogue. Other ways of offering a grounding for interreligious dialogue would differ, even among Christians, depending on the doctrinal presuppositions that are highlighted.

One implication of the idea that interreligious dialogue, whatever mode it assumes, is best undergirded and resourced by reasonings that stem from the religious traditions themselves is that it allows us to respect the reality that perhaps not all religions, or, for that matter, sub-traditions within religions, would find themselves interested in participating in interreligious dialogue, or, at least, in all forms of it. This poses no serious problem for a particularist understanding as it would for a pluralist theology of religions. On Knitter's pluralism, for instance, the religions must participate in interreligious dialogue (especially into 'the religious experience of another tradition'). Knitter argues that only such a form of dialogue can provide the means by which the religions may come to a more complete truth. For Knitter, then, interfaith dialogue (in the narrowly specified sense that he uses the term) becomes the precondition for the religions truly coming to understand themselves.

Against Knitter, however, a particularist theology of religions accepts that the religions tend to regard themselves as definite possessors of truth (whether rightly or wrongly) and view their core claims (say the Lordship of Jesus Christ or the Qur'an as God's Word) with a sense of finality and universality. It is not the business of this 'acceptance model' – which is how Knitter, elsewhere, describes particularism – to insist that the religions revise their claims

[239] Lindbeck, 40.

to superiority.[240] Rather – working as we do from within a particular religious tradition – a particularist theology of interreligious dialogue would seek to forge a model of 'constructively engaging with others' that does not require, from the adherents of the religions, a giving up claims of uniqueness and superiority. As Cornille reminds us, the religious traditions tend to consider themselves as complete possessors of Truth.[241] No doubt, humility, as Cornille argues, is a crucial virtue for the success of interfaith dialogue, on any construal. But it can scarcely be expected that the majority of adherents of the religions would subscribe to a form of 'dialogue' that requires them to give up on their core beliefs about the world. Humility, even in interreligious dialogue, cannot mean the giving up of one's deepest convictions.

Conclusion

This chapter has tried to argue that interreligious dialogue is an expansive practice, capturing diverse senses of what 'dialogue' can mean. We noted that interreligious dialogue, even if it often issues in dialogue *activities*, is best understood as fundamentally a *relationship* between religious adherents, one in which these adherents, especially in our religiously pluralistic world, whether consciously or not, are always engaged. As we noted, through attention to the Parliament of the World's Religions and Vatican II, interreligious dialogue has as part of its key end the repair of the often-disharmonious relations that exist between religious adherents. But if interreligious dialogue requires, for its effectiveness, that it be grounded by logics that stem from religious traditions, how might Christians *learn* to dialogue? It is this question that we attempt to answer in the next chapter.

[240] Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 171.
[241] As Cornille writes, 'most religious traditions regard themselves as the ultimate if not the sole repository of truth, as the highest path to salvation or the most efficacious means to liberation.' Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 10.

CHAPTER 3

FORMED BY SCRIPTURE: INTRATEXTUALITY AND ENGAGEMENT

Introduction

Interreligious dialogue, we suggested in the previous chapter, is animated by a concern for forging better relations with religious others. Its history reveals an enterprise that is concerned with such moral goods as hospitality, tolerance, interreligious cooperation, justice, and, social liberation. But as important as these moral goods are, and as crucial as they are to the global interfaith movement, we have been insisting that it is important to incorporate the resources which the religions have for mediating these goods into any analysis of how interreligious dialogue might be rendered more effective. This chapter is shaped by a conviction that, as we have already argued, the religions must look within, above all else, for 'the powerful theological rationales' which they might have for motiving dialogical relations with religious others. In this respect, it is one of the important contributions of Catherine Cornille's *The Im-Possibilty of Interreligious Dialogue* that she draws attention to the 'conditions' that make interfaith dialogues possible, highlighting thereby the significance of attention to moral formation in the dialogical encounter.[242] As Cornille argues, if interreligious dialogue would be effective, certain dialogical virtues need to be present, within the religious traditions which engage in dialogue, and in significant measure, *before* the moment of dialogue. This argument further highlights interfaith dialogue as a moral project, as we argued in Chapter 2. It also demands asking the question of how religious traditions might enable their members to inculcate the virtues that are necessary for positively participating in interfaith dialogue.

[242] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*.

It is this question that this chapter seeks to respond to. First, we distinguish between two framings of interreligious dialogue, those that focus on the outcomes or results of dialogue, whether those outcomes are spiritual or moral, and those, like Cornille's, that stress the preconditions which need to be in place for dialogue's flourishing. We term the first type of construals 'results-oriented' understandings of dialogue, and the second, 'virtue-oriented.' While both approaches are not necessarily opposed to each other and need not be set in tension, we consider that thinking of dialogue in terms of the antecedent virtues required for its actuality proves more illuminating. Especially so because, as we intimated in Chapter 2, interreligious dialogue must be seen as primarily a relationship, not first a programme.

If interfaith dialogue requires certain moral virtues for its success, it seems appropriate to ask how the virtue preconditions needed for its possibility connect to the theological, spiritual, and moral resources within the religions. In this chapter, the way we propose to do this is by drawing on the particularistic articulation of Christian ethics found in the work of Lindbeck and Stanley Hauerwas. We draw on insights from their work to make a case for how scripture offers a distinctive source of Christian moral formation, one with import for thinking about how Christians might inculcate the virtues required for interfaith engagement. Particularly generative for our argument here is Lindbeck's notion of 'intratextuality.'

Intratextuality, as Lindbeck articulates it, speaks to how Christians become immersed in scripture, an immersion that then shapes the way that they engage with the world. Although, as we note, certain qualifications need to be placed on how a Christian ethic appropriates the idea of intratextuality. Yet, we argue that the notion of intratextuality, as we understand it, provides a way of considering how Christians, through resources that are internal to their traditions, namely, scripture, might motivate dialogical relations with religious others.

3.1. Two Modes of Interreligious Dialogue

3.1.1. Results-Oriented Dialogue

The argument we wish to make in this chapter is that, for Christians, the scripture constitutes an important resource for interreligious dialogue because of the way that it importantly shapes Christian moral character. It is as Christians seek to live faithfully to scripture that they can learn how to be the kind of persons who can truly dialogue with others, personas who can relate virtuously with the stranger. It is already obvious that this emphasis on the moral formation of agents sits within a virtue ethic perspective. Indeed, our interest in exploring how the scriptures can form Christians, and in turn, enable a dialogical openness to religious others differs from an approach to interreligious dialogue that places the accent on the consequences which come about if the religions do not dialogue.

These 'consequentialist' approaches, if we may call them that, frame participation in interreligious dialogue as something that is to be engaged in because it *results* in positive outcomes. Or conversely stated, they consider interreligious dialogue to be something whose absence results in a range of negative outcomes in interreligious relations. An example of this approach to dialogue is present in those articulations that frame interreligious dialogue as an activity that enables a deepened appreciation of the shared unity which underlies the religions. This shared unity, it is argued, can only be revealed as the religions participate in interreligious dialogue. In Chapter 2, we drew attention to the work of Knitter who frames dialogue in these terms.

Knitter argues that a sense of shared commonality between the religions may not otherwise be discovered apart from an engagement in interreligious dialogue. Framed along these lines, interreligious dialogue comes to be viewed as providing the basis for helping

religious persons move past their parochial exclusivism into an awareness of the complementarity that the 'truths' from other religions offer. Knitter exemplifies the point when he argues that interfaith dialogue provides a 'hermeneutics of praxis' by which Christianity's traditional claims to the uniqueness of Jesus Christ might come to be seen as requiring qualification or verification.[243] In other words, it is only through participating in interreligious dialogue that Christians would come to see Jesus as one among many other modes of access to the divine. For Knitter, through engaging in interreligious dialogue Christians would become aware that 'the Christian doctrine of the trinity *needs* the Islamic insistence on divine oneness.'[244] This is an important end for dialogue, according to Knitter. The implication which Knitter implicitly draws, in this connection, is that without such participation in interreligious dialogue, Christians would not come to such a fuller understanding of the truth.

This kind of consequentialist form of framing interreligious dialogues is also evident in the talk of interreligious dialogue as a means toward the 'mutual transformation' of the religions, as John Cobb argues with respect to the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. Critical of what he sees as an essentialist understanding of religion in the pluralism of the contributors of *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness*,[245] Cobb is convinced that interreligious dialogue should allow for an appreciation of the differences which distinguish the religions but just as importantly dialogue may very well enable the 'mutual transformation' of the dialoguing religions. This mutual transformation comes about when Christians come to learn something of value in the religious other and thereby become enriched in their religious

[243] Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, 205–7.
[244] Knitter, 221. Word in italic is from the original.
[245] Hick and Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*.

understanding and spiritual life. This same goes for the non-Christian dialogue partner. Through dialogue with Christianity, Buddhists, for example, might come to 'appreciate the normative value of certain forms of historical consciousness.'[246] By historical consciousness, Cobb is referring here to the significance of history to a Christian understanding of God's revelation and the historically attuned Christian understanding of both self and the world, a view which is different from the Buddhist notions of *anatman* (no-self), *anicca* (impermanence), and *Sunyata* (Emptiness). Through participation in the Buddhist-Christian dialogue, the normative value of this sense of historicity for Christians would come to be appreciated by Buddhists. The implication, just as with Knitter's, is that without Christians and Buddhists participating in interreligious dialogue, such mutual transformation would not be attained.

Cobb and Knitter may be right in suggesting the possibility that a deepening in an understanding of the other's tradition results from interreligious dialogue. However, even if one grants the desirability and feasibility of such mutual transformation, still left unanswered is the question of what kinds of people we need to be if we would avail ourselves of the mutually transformative potentials of interreligious dialogue. In other words, what might the necessary and sufficient conditions be for such a 'mutual transformation' to take place? Cobb's note that 'whether Christians thinkers as a whole would open themselves to learning from others in this way (that is, in a way which allows for the kind of transformation and exchange of insights) remains to be seen'[247] draws attention to this point. The condition of 'opening up themselves' necessitates paying attention not only to the *event* of the

[246] John Cobb, 'Beyond "Pluralism"', in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D'Costa (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), 86. A fuller treatment of the subject is provided in his *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*.
[247] Cobb, 'Beyond "Pluralism"', 94. Words in bracket mine.

interreligious dialogue but, more importantly, in our view, to the antecedent conditions which facilitate this 'opening up.'

It is conceivable that Christians, or members of other religious traditions, may encounter religious others in the event of dialogue but come away feeling confused or/and hostile toward these religious others (and their traditions) rather than be 'transformed.' 'Interreligious dialogue,' just in itself, is therefore not enough. Questions must be asked of the moral, theological, spiritual, attitudinal, and other qualities which need to be in place if dialogue (whether seen in terms of an activity or as a relationship) will achieve its desired goals. A heightened importance must be given as well to the qualities, beliefs, and attitudes which need to be present if such 'mutual transformation' that Cobb talks about would occur or, more generally speaking if indeed interreligious dialogue between the religions would serve as a means toward reducing prejudices and hostilities. Characterising interreligious dialogue in terms of the results or consequences which accrue from partaking in it, however important, needs to be complemented by an attentiveness to the conditions that guarantee both its possibility and effectiveness.

3.1.2. Virtue-Oriented Dialogue

It is within this context that Catherine Cornille's analysis of the virtues which she notes as being preconditions for interreligious dialogue is interesting.[248] Cornille reflects an awareness of the need to move beyond merely prescribing these qualities to providing an analysis of how the religions, and in her case, Christianity, might facilitate their acquisition. For Cornille, humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy and hospitality are five key

[248] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*; Catherine Cornille, 'Conditions for Interreligious Dialogue', in *The Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Chichester, West Sussex: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2013), 20–33.

'conditions' or 'virtues' necessary for effective interreligious dialogues.[249] With respect to the first of these conditions, she appropriates the Christian tradition's understanding of humility as an awareness of the limits of the self's capacity, an awareness accompanied, for Christians, by a self-acknowledgment of one's total dependence on God.[250] Second, Cornille argues that interreligious dialogue requires 'commitment,' or something like a combination of the Thomistic virtues of faith and courage, in so far as interfaith dialogue presupposes a 'commitment to a particular worldview and belief system and a willingness to attest to its truth and validity in dialogue with other worldviews and belief systems.'[251]

'Interconnection,' the third of Cornille's conditions, is not so much a virtue in and of itself. It refers to the capacity of the religions to find a shared basis for coming together. This basis, Cornille notes, is often found in factors external to the religions like the shared problems which sometimes confront them. But if a sense of interconnection between the religions would be sustained, Cornille argues that they must be grounded in reasons internal to the religions.[252] The fourth condition that Cornille considers is 'empathy.' Interreligious dialogue, Cornille argues, can only happen when the participants in the dialogue are empathetic. For Cornille, empathy is that capacity to transpose 'oneself into the feelings, the thoughts, and the experiences of another.'[253] Such empathy is developed, Cornille considers, in part, through 'a personal sympathy toward the religious other, which is itself to be grounded in a doctrinal openness toward other religions.'[254]

[249] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 4.
[250] Cornille, 13–20.
[251] Cornille, 59.
[252] Cornille, 110.
[253] Cornille, 138.
[254] Cornille, 154.

Hospitality, the fifth, and last, of Cornille's conditions needed for interreligious, is 'a recognition of the other as other and openness to learning from the other.'[255] As Cornille describes it, this kind of hospitable recognition would only be possible when the religions come to regard the other's otherness, not as threatening, but as a source of potential enrichment. Cornille's understanding of 'hospitality' therefore differs from those conceptualizations which define it as an attitude of receptivity to individuals and groups who come from 'strange' religions. In Cornille's employment of the term, hospitality not only welcomes these religious strangers but considers the very religious elements from which their strangeness derives as being potential sources of transforming truths.

Particularly interesting is the way that Cornille analyses these conditions in conversation with the Christian tradition, particularly the Roman Catholic tradition. This reflects, on her part, a particularistic attempt to motivate interreligious dialogue with resources internal to one's religion. Indeed, she 'recognizes the epistemic priority for believers of faith and revelation over any external demands or expectations,'[256] and notes that 'if dialogue is to be possible, it must find its deepest reasons and motivations within the self-understanding of religious traditions themselves.'[257] In her analysis of the condition of humility, for instance, Cornille is aware of how humility, for Christians, is not merely something that can be attained by a self-propelled adjustment of the will but is a virtue that requires God's grace for its attainment. Her discussion of commitment also reflects a recognition as well of the centrality of an active faith, in her case, a Christian faith, to any meaningful interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue presupposes, by its very nature,

[255] Cornille, 177.
[256] Cornille, 8.
[257] Cornille, 8.

difference between the religions and a difference rendered meaningful by the active and unashamed commitment to the doctrinal claims of one's religion.

Cornille's emphasis on the virtues which facilitate interreligious dialogue and how these dialogical virtues (as we might term them) are formed is interesting. It opens up, we think, an avenue for considering how resources internal to the religions might facilitate the acquisition of these virtues and the ways by which these virtues are themselves shaped by the religious traditions' differing understandings of the aims of such dialogue. In so drawing attention to what qualities need to be present both in the individuals and the religious traditions, Cornille paints a more robust picture of dialogue, one that frames it as a process, rather than a finished product.

Cornille's attention to the virtues (and there is no need to think the five virtues she notes are exhaustive) that need to be in place before interreligious dialogue can 'get off' opens the way for considering how a crucial site of Christian moral formation, scripture, might enable the formation of Christian moral character in the context of interreligious dialogue. This question is important for a particularist standpoint, considering its vested interest in connecting interreligious dialogue to the distinct practices and belief systems of the various religious traditions. In the next section, we engage in an extended conversation with Lindbeck, reflecting on the way he argues for a mode of Christian theology that prioritizes scripture in its self-understanding. We focus on his notion of 'intratextuality.' How might such a scripturally attentive theology fund Christian social-ethical engagement, especially Christian dialogical relations with religious others? If the argument that we make is successful, we hope that it helps strengthen the point that a particularistic theology of religion (which, in the

context of Lindbeck's theology is deeply connected with 'intratextuality') can support, for Christians, faithful relationships of dialogue with religious others.

3.2. Christianity as a Cultural-Linguistic System: Returning to Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine* [258]

If religion is viewed as a culture and as a mode of language, it is not surprising that Lindbeck states that 'to become religious – no less than to become culturally or linguistically competent – is to interiorize a set of skills by practice and training.'[259] Viewed on those terms, a central goal of religion – and more specifically, the church, for Christianity – then becomes how it might train its adherents to be competent speakers of the language of the faith and how it might socialize its members into the communal practices that enable their acquisition of these modes of speaking. Christianity, on Lindbeck's view, is similar to a school, with the central (and Lindbeck, perhaps reflecting his Lutheran roots, the sole) means of instruction is scripture. Scripture serves as the prime means for Christian discipleship, for therein is contained the narratives by which God has chosen to reveal Godself to the world. As Lindbeck puts it, 'To become a Christian involves learning the story of Israel and of Jesus well enough to interpret and experience oneself and one's world in its term.'[260]

Lindbeck proposes that the key criterion for judging Christian theological faithfulness is the degree to which it has been shaped by the textual universe of the Bible. This is in keeping with his conviction about the nature of religions as distinct languages and cultures. The Christian language and culture, from a cultural-linguistic view, because it is shaped by distinct

[258] Parts of this section were presented at a doctoral seminar on 'Theological Interpretation of Scripture' at Baylor University, USA, December 2022.
[259] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 21.
[260] Lindbeck, 20.

stories, can never be neatly translated into extra-biblical categories.[261] We are now in a position to focus attention on Lindbeck's theological methodological proposal for a mode of doing theology that he describes as 'intratextuality.' As already noted, for Lindbeck, an intratextual mode of Christian theology represents the theological-methodological correlate of a 'cultural-linguistic' theory of religion. It therefore provides a way of testing how particularism connects with Christian dialogical relation with the world, and more specifically, in this context, with non-Christian religious others.

3.2.1. 'Faithfulness as Intratextuality'

Admitting the influence of his Yale colleague, Hans Frei, Lindbeck regards an 'intratextual' theology as one that grants primacy to the literary reading of scripture and attempts, in this literary (yet, not literalist) mode, to locate the existential and political concerns of the contemporary world into the world of the biblical text rather than the other way round.[262] This theological hermeneutic, for Lindbeck, is not fundamentalist or 'precritical' but is instead 'postcritical,' being critical of those historico-critical attempts to locate the meaning of the texts by appealing to 'history' and also those 'fundamentalist' attitudes that treat the biblical texts as a scientific manual.[263] This type of intratextual theology seeks, he tells us, to 'redescribe reality within the scriptural framework rather than translating Scripture into extrascriptural categories.'[264] In this vision, 'it is the text, so to speak, which absorbs the world, rather than the world the text.'[265]

[261] Lindbeck, 115.
[262] Lindbeck, 105. Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth-Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
[263] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 108.
[264] Lindbeck, 104.
[265] Lindbeck, 104.

Unlike propositionalist and experiential-expressivist theories of religions (both of which we noted in Chapter 1) which have as their scriptural hermeneutical counterparts a factualist/historicist and metaphorical/symbolic understanding of scripture, respectively, the intratextual view understands that historical (or literal) factuality and metaphorical meaningfulness are subsidiary to literary coherence. In other words, as Lindbeck puts it, an intratextual theology considers Scripture as akin to a 'realistic narrative.' As a realistic narrative, scripture, Lindbeck argues, must be read as a text with its own integral character, rather than as one whose meaning needs to be anchored through reference to the 'extra-scriptural' world outside scripture, or by a reinterpretation done to serve some extra-scriptural cause.[266]

An intratextual theology understands the Bible as a self-contained literary universe which invites the Christian reader to inhabit its world, rather than as a text which is part of an external 'real world.' For Lindbeck, it is the stories and concepts derived from the Bible which should become normative for the Christian theologian rather than the categories derived from the 'world.' As Lindbeck puts it, this kind of intratextuality:

> 'does not suggest, as is often said in our day, that believers find their stories in the Bible, but rather that they make the story of the Bible their story. The cross is not to be viewed as a figurative representation of suffering nor the messianic kingdom as a symbol for hope in the future; rather, suffering should be cruciform, and hopes for the future messianic.'[267]

[266] Lindbeck, 106, 108.
[267] Lindbeck, 104.

Lindbeck exemplifies what he means here when he writes that the Crusader who kills an enemy after proclaiming 'Jesus is Lord' is mistaken about his notion of Christ's Lordship.[268] The crusader's moral conduct is intratextually inconsistent with the Scripture's narrative sense of what submission to, and proclamation of, Christ's lordship entails. Christ's lordship is not simply 'lordship' in the sense that the term may be employed outside the narrative context of scripture. Rather, as presented in scripture, Christ's lordship is one of a 'suffering servant.'[269] Scripture reveals as well that violence is not the means by which the Lord's kingdom is established. In this respect, as John Yoder and Stanley Hauerwas have each argued, the scriptural claim that Jesus 'came preaching peace' changes the way that Christians understand moral existence in the world.[270] The church, for these Christian ethicists, is that community which has learned to live non-violently amid the world's violence. The crusader who kills in his bid to proclaim the lordship of Jesus lives unfaithfully to the nature of that lordship, as scripturally narrated.

Lindbeck's argument for an intratextual mode of theology is in keeping with his commitment to a cultural-linguistic model of religion, to particularism. Intratextuality, within the Christian theological context of Lindbeck's articulation, entails that our understanding of both the world and the 'word,' that is, of both secular and overtly theological categories like God, be given meaning by the narratives of scripture. Scripture's inherent meanings, which can disrupt the 'natural' sense of meanings associated with seemingly 'ordinary' terms like 'lordship,' must be prioritised. Rather than our coming to the Bible with a pre-understanding

[268] Lindbeck, 50.
[269] Isaiah 53:1-12; Philippians 2:7-8.
[270] Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); John Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1994).

of what these terms mean, Lindbeck puts forward a vision of theology that gives prominence to scripture's narrative over and above any other narrative. For example, from Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic and intratextual perspective, the meaning of 'God,' as understood by different religious communities, is necessarily different in so far as the scriptural narratives that sustain these meanings are different. Lindbeck as we noted with reference to 'love' in Chapter 1, disagrees that ethical concepts which ostensibly bear the same formal nomenclature are similarly understood in the different religions/ideological systems.[271]

On this point, Lindbeck, we consider, is right-headed. His contention that Christian theological faithfulness be construed as intratextuality has strong resonances with the passage in the epistle of Romans, where the Spirit, through Paul, admonishes believers to 'not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.'[272] The renewing of the mind which the apostle Paul speaks of in this context is made possible as the church listens to what the Spirit speaks to her as she sits under the ministry of the word. As Karl Barth notes in his commentary on this Romans text, repentance is the primary ethical posture of the church, of Christians.[273] It is the renewing of the mind made possible through the Word, through scripture, that enables the church to unlearn the ways of the world and to be shaped into the likeness of the 'New Human,' Jesus Christ.

In our view, Christian theology, as well, if it would retain its character as speech about God must strive to think after the thoughts of God, as God has revealed them in scripture. By arguing for a form of theology that is resourced by scripture and which reads scripture as the

[271] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 26.
[272] Romans 12:2
[273] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, 6th ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), 436.

church's book, rather than as a mere product of the accidents of history and culture, Lindbeck seeks to connect theology to the practices of the church, particularly the ministry of the word which is so central to the church's worship life. No doubt, the church must learn from the world and, as David Tracy has argued, Christian theology must stay sensitive to its varied audiences (which for Tracy are society, the academy, and the church).[274] Still, an intratextual vision for theology recognises that the church's identity derives most fundamentally from the distinctiveness of the stories provided in scripture and celebrated in her congregational worship.

Lindbeck's 'turn to scripture,' to borrow Peter Ochs' characterization of the 'post-critical' turn which he sees Lindbeck's project as participating in,[275] provides an alternative way of construing how the church engages with its varied publics, how the church carries on its missional task, its witness before the world. For Lindbeck, the missional engagement of the church, to count as faithful, cannot be secured if the church prioritizes an accommodation of its message to the prevailing cultural moods within which she finds herself.

But precisely at this point, some qualifications must be made to Lindbeck's argument for intertextuality, even as we find its vision appealing. It is important if the key insights embedded within Lindbeck's notion of intratextuality are to be preserved, to qualify aspects of it that have the potential to detract from those important insights. First, it is important to add an important complementary point, which Lindbeck, perhaps for the sake of argumentative consistency fails to make. The point to be made is that in as much as scripture

[274] David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), 3–31.
[275] Peter Ochs, 'Introduction to Postcritical Interpretation', in *The Return to Scripture in Judaism and Christianity: Essays in Postcritical Scriptural Interpretation*, ed. Peter Ochs, Studies in Contemporary Biblical and Theological Problems (New York: Paulist Press, 1993), 3–51.

is a most crucial means by which the Church and Christians learn the ways of God, and thus, can witness to God, the Church, too, meets God in the world. As we argue more extensively in chapters 4 and 5, interreligious dialogue provides, in fact, an opportunity for Christians to meet God, in the world.

Therefore, whereas Lindbeck stresses the priority of scripture for Christian theological reflection, it is a central feature of scripture that it reveals, not merely texts – ossified in time – but God's ongoing activity in the world and history. For is not the 'Living Word,' Jesus Christ, always speaking? The reality of God's ongoing work in the world, of which the Church participates in its missional work, means that, as Rowan Williams has noted, while an immersion in scripture is a sine qua non for the church's faithful witness in the world, an equal 'exposure to political and cultural issues that might help to focus doctrinal language in a new way' is also necessary for the church's meaningful engagement with the world.[276] An intratextual theology cannot become a pretext for an understanding of the church's relationship with the world as unidirectional, flowing only from the church to the world, without a reverse openness of the Church to what God might be saying to her in the world.

So, as crucial as scripture is to the forming of the Christian imagination, such an imagination must also be humbled by what Williams terms 'the judgement of the world.' The church's engagement with the world, even when such an engagement is disciplined by scripture, cannot be too hasty. As Williams contends, the Church must learn 'when to be silent, when to wait.'[277] It must learn when to listen to what the world might teach it, to discern what speech is necessary for the situation of the times. Putting the point differently, while

[276] Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology*, Challenges in Contemporary Theology (Oxford, UK ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 40.
[277] Williams, 39.

scriptural texts, as Lindbeck suggests, must be given primacy over and above any external context of the interpreter, if these texts are to speak to the church – and Christian theology, if it aspires to any relevance – they must stay connected to the contextual realities of the world in which the church is located.

Here, we may recall Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics. Gadamer contends that all interpretation, including, as we take it, those of the scriptural texts, are always already implicitly the product of a 'fusion of the horizons' of the past and the present. Interpretation, for Gadamer, is therefore always dependent on what he terms 'preunderstanding' or 'prejudice.'[278] The interpreter sits always within a tradition and his interpretation of texts is necessarily coloured by this. As Gadamer puts it: 'the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. Rather understanding is always a fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.'[279]

If this is the case, it would be idealistic to suppose that any hermeneutic of the Bible is not affected, to some extent, by the 'horizon' of the present. Lindbeck's contention for an intratextual theology, one in which the Scriptural world is made to 'absorb' the world, needs, therefore, to be complemented with (not contradicted by) an insistence that the interpretation of the Bible is always informed by the extra-scriptural world of the interpreter and that immersion in the text must remain sensitive to the world outside the text, both because this world provides the important context for an application of the 'truths' gleaned from scripture, and is also the context for wrestling with the text's meaning. Although, as

[278] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd Englis (London: Sheed and Ward, 1989), 270.
[279] Gadamer, 306.

Lindbeck would caution us, care must be taken to ensure that this attentiveness to the 'extra-scriptural' world does not lead to corrosive subjectivism. Still, the movement between the scriptural texts and the world can hardly be unidirectional. The scriptural interpreter, even when located within the church, inevitably brings with them a host of pre-interpretative lenses which shape how the texts are read and interpreted. We must stay aware of this.

Perhaps, rightly, some interlocutors of Lindbeck have argued that his notion of intratextuality fails to appreciate enough the ways that scriptural texts, while authoritative for the Christian community, have sometimes (some would say, often) been employed in ways that legitimate problematic practices.[280] That is, even an intratextual theology in which the narratives of scripture are prioritised, can potentially be used to legitimate such practices as slavery or the subjugation of women. Therefore, the *ways* that scripture is interpreted, and not merely the fact that a theology is scripturally anchored, is crucial. Yet, it may be that, in locating his proposal for an intratextual reading of scripture in the context of the church, in the context of the community of the faithful, Lindbeck may, implicitly, be calling for what Stephen Fowl terms as 'vigilant communities.' These 'vigilant communities,' which the church is for Lindbeck, are comprised of virtuous individuals, formed by scripture, who stay attuned to the witness of the Holy Spirit, and whose Spiri-empowered care for scripture can enable an 'intratextual' vision 'keep in step with the Spirit.'[281]

A second important qualification to be made to Lindbeck's proposal for an intratextual theology concerns Lindbeck's somewhat ahistorical construal of scripture. Lindbeck's 'postcritical' hermeneutics appears to be one in which the biblical texts are inoculated from

[280] Goh, *Christian Tradition Today: A Postliberal Vision of Church and World*, 393.
[281] Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 1998), 62–96.

the ontological, moral, and historical realities with which they are intractably interwoven. But from a hermeneutical standpoint, one must acknowledge that the scriptural texts were, at the time of their production, shaped by happenings outside of the literary world of the texts. As such, we cannot but locate them within this wider historical background. So while Lindbeck correctly argues for scripture to be read with a sensitivity to its nature as narrative, such a 'literary' hermeneutic need not stand in opposition to historico-critical readings of the Bible. For whatever faults it may have, the historico-critical method has rightly drawn, to the attention of the church, the historical situatedness of scripture.

True, as Lindbeck says 'the Bible is often 'history-like' even when it is not 'likely history'.'[282] Still, a great deal of the meaning of Scripture only comes through when read with a sensitivity to its historical context. This historical context, we should add, refers, not simply to the past *sitz im leben* of the texts, but includes, as well, as Williams points out, all the ways that scripture has been read in history.[283] As Williams notes 'the Church may be committed to interpreting the world in terms of its own foundational narratives; but the very act of interpreting affects the narratives as well as the world, for good and ill. Something happens to the Exodus story as it is absorbed in the black slave culture of America.'[284] Therefore, alongside – not against – Lindbeck's insistence on giving primacy to the text of scripture, it is important to add that in as much as scripture comes to us historically, the ways that the church receives scripture today and engages that scripture in her encounter with the world can scarcely fail to be affected by the messiness, complexities, and tragedies of that history.

[282] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 108.
[283] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 30.
[284] Williams, 30.

But these nuances we have felt the need to add do not undermine the wisdom that we take from Lindbeck's vision for an intratextual theology, one deeply inflected by, and immersed in, the stories of God's revelation of Godself in Israel and in Jesus Christ. Ultimately, as Fowl rightly notes:

> 'The point of Lindbeck's advocacy of an intratextual theology is to contrast a theology which accounts for things theologically, using language and concepts that derive from scripture interpreted under the Rule of faith and the creeds, with a theology whose account is determined by general, non-theological accounts of 'human experience.''[285]

What use does such a prioritization of scripture serve? How does it connect with our larger interest in the question of how Christians might come to imbibe the virtues necessary for successful (and we should add, faithful) participation in interreligious dialogue? We turn next to this question, seeking to connect an 'intratextual' approach to Christian theology with concerns about the ways that scripture serves to form Christian moral character.

3.2.2. Transformed by Scripture

Intratextuality provides a way of connecting scripture to the kind of discipleship which Christians claim happens in the church. The specific link in this regard is Lindbeck's connecting of the prospects for the realization of this intratextual vision for theology to the catechetical work of the church. For Lindbeck, it is primarily through the church socializing her members, through discipleship in the word (what he refers to as 'catechism'), that the much-needed capacity for the practice of this form of theological integrity ('intratextuality') becomes

[285] Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation*, 24.

possible.[286] In other words, it is only as Christians are trained to become the kinds of persons whose theological senses and sensibilities are shaped and nurtured by the Scripture that there would emerge that kind of theology which is faithful to the revelation embodied in Scripture. Lindbeck writes that:

> 'the viability of a unified world of the future may well depend on counteracting the acids of modernity. It may depend on communal enclaves that socialise their members into highly particular outlooks supportive of concern for others rather than for individual rights and entitlements, and of a sense of responsibility for the wider society rather than for personal fulfilment.'[287]

The church is that 'communal enclave' and, for Lindbeck, is seen as important for training the theological imaginations that can enable the practice of theology in an intratextual mode. Similarities exist, in this respect, between Lindbeck's contention that theological faithfulness depends on faithful communities and Alasdair MacIntyre rater similar argument in *After Virtue*. In *After Virtue*, MacIntyre suggests that it may well be through counter-cultural communal enclaves committed to a *telos* of the good that the kind of virtuous moral agents which are able to resist the liberal attenuation of ethics may be formed. The moral hope of society, for MacIntyre, is dependent on 'the construction of local forms of community within which civility and the intellectual and moral life can be sustained.'[288] Admittedly, we may not wish to endorse all aspects of Lindbeck's and McIntyre's 'sociological sectarianism' for how, as Williams notes, it might unwittingly reify the same patterns of the atomization which has been one of the corrosive features of late capitalist Western

[286] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 118.
[287] Lindbeck, 113.
[288] MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 263.

societies.[289] But the key takeaway here is a sense of the need for the church not to sacrifice its prophetic mission, its difference from the world and other religious communities, on the altar of cultural relevance, or even 'dialogue' construed in religiously pluralistic terms.

This emphasis on the need for the church to preserve her distinctiveness, it should not be forgotten, is related to Lindbeck's commitment to a particularistic model of religion. The Christian grammar, to use Lindbeck's linguistic metaphor, must be taught.[290] It must become the acquired 'first language' of Christians if Christian theology would be faithful, staying true to its priorities. The catechetical work of the church is crucial because it provides the means by which Christians learn to be who they claim to be, a people 'in the world but not of the world.' The particularity of Christianity depends upon the didactic role of the church. It is through the Church's 'inhabiting' the narrative world of scripture, and teaching others, that Christians can faithfully preserve their difference from other competing religious and ideological frameworks in the world.[291] The capacity of the church to live in intratextual faithfulness to the scriptures requires a faithful catechism in the word. And the context wherein this discipleship in the word takes place is the church, Lindbeck insists.

Aspects of the work of Stanley Hauerwas may prove useful in fleshing out this interconnection which Lindbeck here is drawing between theological faithfulness, construed as intratextuality, and the church.[292] Indeed, it should be noted, more broadly, that several shared theological priorities mark Lindbeck and Hauerwas. Concerning prioritizing the narratives of scripture, Hauerwas, like Lindbeck, recognises that a variety of literary forms

[289] Williams, *On Christian Theology*, 36.
[290] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 118.
[291] For an expanded explication, see his *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, 36–129.
[292] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*; Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*.

exists in the scripture.[293] Indeed, scripture often takes the form of narratives but even those parts of scripture which by their genre are not narrative (such as prophetic speeches, wisdom literature, and law), derive their coherence only as they are read in the light of the overarching narrative of scripture as a whole.[294] Scripture is a big story, made up of stories. The central stories of scripture are, for Christians, those of God's election of Israel and those about his Son, Jesus Christ. It is through these narratives that Christians learn, for instance, that they are sinners who need God's salvation. Hauerwas also considers Scripture's stories about God's election of Israel and Christ's sacrifice for sinful humanity as central to helping Christians acquire the 'skill' of living faithfully in the world.[295] Christ's sacrificial death for humanity teaches the church, for instance, that the way she makes a difference in the world is not first by attempting to change laws and other similar pragmatic moves, but is first by modelling the same kind of self-sacrifice which her Lord exemplified.[296] The life and death of Jesus is the central story of Christianity.[297] Like Nicholas Healy, whose work we reviewed in chapter 1, for Hauerwas, it is this orientation to the scriptures narratives about Jesus (and Israel) that identifies the church as a distinct community.[298]

Like Lindbeck, Hauerwas ties the faithfulness of the church to her capacity to indwell scripture. Scripture provides the stories which enable the moral transformation of Christians, and in something of a certain circular manner, this moral transformation is also what provides the church with the capacity to be true to the stories of scripture. Because the church is shaped by the distinct central stories of scripture, the ethics of the church is, for Hauerwas,

[293] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, 4.
[294] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*, 19.
[295] Hauerwas, 30–31.
[296] Hauerwas, 76.
[297] Hauerwas, 15.
[298] Hauerwas, 24–29.

always particular rather than universal.[299] But the particularity of the church is also the very basis for the church to be open to the world, to the other, including the religious other. Scripture provides the very resources for forming believers to be the kinds of persons who receive the gift that God gives through the other, the stranger.[300] Scripture, for Stanley Hauerwas, contains 'the irreplaceable source of the stories that train us to be a faithful people.' And it is 'only when my self – my character – has been formed by God's love, do I know I have no reason to fear the other.'[301]

An awareness of the intersection of scripture to the moral life is evident in Lindbeck when he writes that 'provided a religion stresses service rather than domination, it is likely to contribute more to the future of humanity if it preserves its own distinctiveness and integrity than if it yields to the homogenizing tendencies associated with liberal expressivism.'[302] What is to be noted as relevant here is not whether the category of 'liberal expressivism' is correct, but the caveat that 'provided a religion stresses service rather than domination.' By what means do the religions 'stress service rather than domination'? This question connects to Cornille's 'conditions' for dialogue. How do the religions enable their adherents to grow in humility, empathy, hospitality, a shared sense of interconnection, and a deepened commitment? If one takes Lindbeck's case for the prioritization of scripture, and the church as the context for enabling the formation of lives sanctified by that scripture, an answer to that question must include considerations of the morally formative work made possible through the scripture.

[299] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, 150; Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*, 61.
[300] Hauerwas, *A Community of Character: Toward a Constructive Christian Social Ethic*, 51.
[301] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*, 91.
[302] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 114.

3.3. Scripture and Hospitality[303]

Scripture, we have been arguing, enables the formation of Christian character, enabling Christians to be the kind of persons who are able to serve others, rather than seeking to dominate them. If this is so, then it follows that the formation of Christian agents, made possible through the proclamation, teaching, and exhortation in scripture, impinges on the ways Christians might develop the moral dispositions necessary to be better in dialoguing with religious others. Let us illustrate this point, albeit rather briefly, with respect to the virtue of interreligious hospitality that Cornille discusses.[304] We give only brief attention to it because of the extensive literature which attends to this virtue. In chapters 4 and 5, we focus on interreligious friendship and make clear how scripture can ground this virtue as well. Still, it should help to register a point about hospitality.

In chapter 5, we give more focused attention to the practice of interreligious dialogue that has been termed 'scriptural reasoning.' But here, drawing attention to scriptural reasoning might help make clear the point about the morally formative work of scripture, which Hauerwas and Lindbeck make a case for, impinges on Christian dialogical relations with religious others. In this regard, let us draw on the metaphors of 'house' and 'tent' which David

[303] Parts of this section were presented at a doctoral seminar on 'New Non-Violence' at Baylor University, USA, December 2021.

[304] Extensive treatments of interreligious hospitality can be found in Luke Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity* (London: Routledge, 2010); Anita Houck, 'Curiosity, Responsibility, Hospitality: Scenes of Interreligious Friendship', *Missiology* 47, no. 1 (1 January 2019): 45–50, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829618820027; Matthew Kaemingk, *Christian Hospitality and Muslim Immigration in an Age of Fear* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co, 2018); Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practice, and the Neighbor* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2008); SimonMary Asese A. Aihiokhai, *Fostering Interreligious Encounters in Pluralist Societies: Hospitality and Friendship*, Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-17805-5; Moyaert, *Fragile Identities: Towards a Theology of Interreligious Hospitality*.

Ford has employed to speak, respectively, of the religious communities and the 'temporary' spaces in which scriptural reasoning meetings take place.[305]

The suggestion we wish to make is that fruitful participation in the 'tents' of interreligious dialogue depends, to an important extent, on the antecedent virtues which Christians, and other participants in this form of dialogue, have formed in their respective 'houses' of worship and which they bring into these tents of dialogue. For Christians, as we have been arguing in conversation with Lindbeck, an important means by which they are so formed is through scripture. For Christians, whatever else, it is through the means of the ministry of the Word, particularly those narratives of Scripture which remind us of the moral and theological significance of the stranger that we may deeply participate in a practice like scriptural reasoning. Participating in a way that furthers its vision of fostering non-violent friendships with those outside the walls of our confessional communities. As Luke Bretherton has noted, in the final analysis, philosophical arguments 'can neither be normative nor determinative of how Christians should relate to non-Christians.'[306] Scriptures are, of course, the focus of scriptural reasoning meetings. But the claim we make here is that these scriptures, more specifically Christian scripture in this instance, serve to provide Christians with the meaning-making convictions and moral dispositions which undergird the dialogues that take place in the 'tents' of dialogue, whether that be in scriptural reasoning or any other mode of dialogue.

[305] David F. Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims', in *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, ed. David F. Ford and C. C Pecknold (Oxford ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 1–22.
[306] Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity*, 128.

Take the virtue of hospitality, for example. No careful reading of scripture can miss the central place that the stranger, the other, occupies within the Biblical textual universe. [307] If pressed, we may easily show this by drawing attention to a number of the biblical narratives that illustrate this, and perhaps no biblical figure better embodies this than Abraham. Abraham, 'the father of faith,' receives a divine call to 'Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.'[308] It is in this distant and far country that God promises to make Abraham 'a great nation.' Abraham therefore begins his journey with God as an alien, one who must venture into strange lands to meet the fullness of God's abundance. It is also as a stranger that God shows himself to Abraham in Genesis 18 in the account of the three guests who would later reveal themselves as angels of God. This attention to the stranger and the urging of a hospitable disposition toward them, as Christine Pohl has noted, is quite common in the Old Testament. [309] Even though references to hospitality in the Old Testament are, in general, in keeping with the Near Eastern cultural milieu of the time, the theological lenses through which they are framed, especially the idea that by welcoming the stranger one may very well be welcoming God, gives them a distinctive flavour. These stories, especially when they are given performative force in the homily or the preaching of the word, can prove critical for the ways that Christians construct their moral identity, and concomitantly, for how they see themselves in relation to the religious other.

To suggest, as we are, that the stories of scriptures that Christians hear in their 'houses' of worship are continuous with the aims of an interreligious dialogue practice like SR is not to

[307] For a more extended discussion of hospitality in the Old and New Testament , see: Christine D. Pohl, *Making Room: Recovering Hospitality as a Christian Tradition* (Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans, 1999), 20–35.
[308] Genesis 12:1, NRSV.
[309] Pohl, *Making Room*, 16.

claim that Christians, in fact, always so embody the moral virtues latent in these stories. Christians fail often to live out their convictions, and rather than allowing Scripture to enable our cultivation of a hospitable self, in a display of a deficiency of moral character, we often fail to welcome the stranger as enjoined by Scripture (and for in so doing, many Christians have missed the opportunity to 'entertain angels').[310] This is an important and humbling point to be registered. But it need not detract from the reality that, in scripture, Christians have an important resource for being shaped to be agents who embody such critical virtues as hospitality and humility, virtues that are important for the flourishing of interreligious dialogue.

Conclusion

Although the particularist standpoint may, at least initially, give the impression that fruitful dialogical engagements with religions other than one's own are impossible to get off the ground, there is something ironic about the fact that, by in fact taking seriously the particularity of one's faith, one may be led to forge connections with those outside that tradition. For Christians, as we have tried to suggest here, scripture, with its emphasis on hospitality, provides an important resource for grounding such openness to the stranger.

To be sure, as already noted, there is a risk of triumphalism here, one which sees the church or Christianity, more broadly speaking, as possessing, within it, all the resources needed for enabling virtuous dialogical relations with others, even without entering into those dialogical relationships. This is not what we wish to claim. Our contention is more modest. We simply contend that the internal resources that the religions have are more critical than any other factor for serving as a secure basis for dialogical relations with religious

[310] Hebrews 13:2.

others. We have already noted some critical points about Lindbeck's notion of intratextuality. Any talk of scripture and the church as sites of moral formation must, as we have tried to, be complemented by adding the equally important reminder that the capacity of the church to engage in this type of discipleship is dependent on the church's recognition of itself as a Gospel community, a community whose life is dependent on the grace which she receives in Christ.[311]

Theologically, we must be alert to the danger of idealising the church, of characterising it in a way that it comes to be viewed as having an agency apart from God. This would be wrong. But the key point that we take from Lindbeck's talk of intratextuality is the contention that the 'ministry of the word' is critical for morally and spiritually shaping Christians, the way they ought to engage in the world, and that this shaping has bearing on the question of how Christians might learn to engage faithfully with and in the world. In the next two chapters, we move 'outside' the church, to concrete contexts of interreligious dialogue, and consider how, even as the Christians (and for that matter, non-Christians) must insist on the particularity of their faith, they are still able to engage in dialogue with religious others. Interreligious dialogue, we however argue, is not simply possible despite particularity; for Christians, more than this formal point, these dialogues offer important sources of spiritual, moral, and practical enrichment.

[311] As John Webster reminds us 'the church exists by virtue of that work [electing and sanctifying work of the Spirit], having no naturally spontaneous source of life and no immanent capacity to sustain itself as spiritual company.' John Webster, 'On Evangelical Ecclesiology', *Ecclesiology* 1, no. 1 (2004): 168–69.

CHAPTER 4

BEFRIENDING THE RELIGIOUS OTHER: THE POSSIBILITY AND BLESSING OF INTERRELIGIOUS FRIENDSHIP

Introduction[312]

A positive account of the place of the religious other within the context of an articulation of Christian particularity is important. This is so if particularism would not devolve into either one of what David Lochhead calls 'the ideology of isolation,' 'the ideology of hostility,' or 'the ideology of competition.'[313] In the ideology of isolation, religious traditions other than one's own are viewed in terms which deny them the integrity, recognition, and sometimes, the political rights that one grants to one's own. In the ideology of hostility, the religious other is actively attacked given their religious difference. In the mode of competition, religions seek to outdo each other, competing with one another in what sociologists sometimes call the 'religious marketplace' for adherents. All of these ideologies that Lochhead identifies have been prevalent in the church at various points in its history, and are still present in different forms today. Admittedly, a commitment to Christian particularity such as we have been seeking to defend in this thesis can camouflage attitudes of prejudice, funding problematic othering moves, such as Islamophobia and antisemitism, modes of what Paul Hedges has termed as 'religious hatred.'[314]

[312] Part of this chapter was presented at the Lampeter Interfaith Conference, UWTSD, December 2022. It was also presented at a doctoral seminar on 'Theories and Theologies of Religions' at Baylor University, May 2022.
[313] Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, 5–22.
[314] Paul Hedges, *Religious Hatred: Prejudice, Islamophobia and Antisemitism in Global Context* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021).

In this chapter, we continue with the argument for how an emphasis on Christian particularity is compatible with the practice of interreligious dialogue. Specifically, we focus, here, on the type of interreligious dialogue that takes the form of friendship with religious others. Our focus on interreligious friendship, as a form of interreligious dialogue, is shaped by a consideration of the potentially democratic nature of this mode of dialogue. That is, unlike some other forms of interreligious dialogue which depend, for one's participation, on the acquisition of expertise in one's religious tradition, say in one's tradition's texts, doctrines, or/and history, interreligious friendship, while requiring certain other skills, is less crucially dependent on expertise in these aforementioned skills. Interreligious friendship is, for this reason, potentially more feasible a practice of interreligious dialogue for religious adherents of all kinds.

Although, of course, these friendships may not be pursued by many within the religions. There may be psychological, social, cultural, historical, and political reasons accompanying the reluctance to pursue interreligious friendships. Theologically specific reasons, which are internal to the religious traditions, might also be significant rationales that can undergird a reluctance to pursue interreligious friendships. Part of the goal of this chapter is to motivate interreligious friendships for Christians by providing a theological grounding for it. We consider such a theological grounding an important endeavour because it is one thing for Christians, in lived practice, to befriend non-Christians, but it is another thing for such friendships to be characterised as faithful to the Christian way of being in the world. Such a

grounding also becomes important in view of the opposition to interreligious friendships which have been voiced by some within the Christian tradition.[315]

We argue for interreligious friendship as interreligious dialogue in this chapter. These friendships are not simply as an aspect of dialogue but are constitutive of what dialogue, properly understood, means. Thus, crucial to the argument developed in this chapter is the claim that interreligious friendships constitute enacted modes of interreligious dialogue. We claim this in as much as interreligious friendships provide an interpersonal space for modelling peaceful interreligious coexistence amidst difference, and is also for an enabling of conversational dialogue, between interreligious friends, around questions of ultimate religious concern. Interreligious friendship, like dialogue more traditionally understood in discursive terms, attends to the same concerns for the repair of the relational discords which have too often characterized interreligious relations.

Importantly, the theological grounding of interreligious friendship we provide does not presuppose that interreligious friends share common teleological orientations on matters divine and human. If differences between the religions are real, as the particularist view considers, then an account of interreligious friendship cannot be based on a thoroughgoing concord between the friends. At least, not an agreement around ultimate doctrinal convictions that these religious adherents have about the world. For this reason, we seek to move beyond the Aristotelian or Greco-Roman vision of friendship in which friendship is seen as dependent on moral and teleological commonality or agreement between friends. It is not that shared commonalities are not important to interreligious friendship. They are. But

[315] For a discussion of some of these objections, see Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, 'A Christian Perspective on Interreligious Friendship', in *Friendship across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship*, ed. Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Interreligious Reflections (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf&Stock, 2018), 45–67.

commonality, whether of interests or shared interpersonal qualities, does not, we consider, provide sufficient theological ground for basing friendship with those distinct from us on account of their religious persuasions. It would be helpful, however, to begin by briefly clarifying what is gestured to in the notion of interreligious friendship, as we use it here.

4.1. The Idea of Interreligious Friendship

Within the classic Greco-Roman tradition, which continues to shape dominant Western conceptions of friendship, friendship is viewed as a special relationship with another, that is marked by love and preferential treatment of the friend. As philosopher James Grunebaum states, in this view, it is the special nature of friendship that distinguishes it from other forms of relationship.[316] In this way of seeing friendship, one cannot, by the very nature of the preferential nature of the relationship, be friends with everyone. Love and goodwill towards others, while constituting necessary qualities in friendships, do not suffice for counting a relationship as a friendship. As Aristotle, representing this tradition notes, one can have goodwill toward one's competitors, but this 'wishing-them-well' feeling does not, Aristotle contends, by itself amount to friendship.[317]

While this kind of friendliness may be a precondition for friendship to take place, it is seen as not a sufficient condition for its actualisation. Aristotle is clear on this point: 'But to those who thus wish good we ascribe only goodwill, if the wish is not reciprocated; goodwill when it is reciprocal being friendship.'[318] It is when friendliness, which Aristotle names here as goodwill, transforms into mutual trust between two or more persons that friendship may be

[316] James O. Grunebaum, *Friendship: Liberty, Equality, and Utility* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 21.
[317] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. W. D. Ross, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 230–31.
[318] Aristotle, 194.

said to have come about. Friendship, in this tradition, is therefore viewed as an intimate and special relationship, deriving its character from its closed-off nature, its exclusivity, and the attendant preferential treatments and affections which the friends give to and receive from each other.

Outside the Western context, as Grunebaum discusses, drawing on the work of Indian philosopher Bhikhu Parekh, conceptions of friendship accommodate for factors other than intimacy being central to friendship.[319] There are, for example, in the Indian context, those types of friendships which are cultivated during childhood. In this type of friendship, the shared context in which the children grow up together enables them to 'forge a bond that creates and maintains their ability to trust each other and to share intimacy, even after years of separation.'[320] There is also a second type of Indian understanding of friendship as based on 'mutual help and gratitude.' In this type of friendship, friends feel themselves indebted to one another on account of the support which they have hitherto received from the friend. This second type of friendship can happen between persons who occupy different social classes. In the Indian conception, according to Parekh, there is a more perfect third type of friendship. This third type 'is only possible between individuals who share common interests, temperaments, values, and so on.'[321] This threefold categorization has a very close similarity to Aristotle's tripartite categories of friendship, which we discuss later.

But the key point to be highlighted from this very brief cross-cultural excursus is simply that friendship is variously understood across cultures. In thinking of interreligious friendship, we therefore welcome a variety of forms of that type of friendship, taking it for granted that

[319] Bhikhu Parekh, 'An Indian View of Friendship', in *The Changing Face of Friendship*, ed. Leroy S. Rounner (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994). Cited in Grunebaum, *Friendship*, 26–29.
[320] Grunebaum, *Friendship*, 27.
[321] Grunebaum, 28.

some instances of interreligious friendship will be marked by deep emotional intimacy between the friends and some, in other cultural contexts, perhaps being less so. What we take as distinguishing interreligious friendship is its foregrounding of the religious identities of the friends in the relationship. As Alon Goshen-Gottstein puts it, interreligious friendship is 'the kind of friendship that consciously engages the religious identity, experience, and ideals of the participants. It is friendship that revolves around the core of their respective spiritual lives, thereby making their friendship an integral component of their spiritual lives.'[322]

Interreligious friendship is not merely friendship between persons who belong to different religious traditions. Rather, it is a type of friendship in which the religious identities of the friends are integral to the friendship. If persons belonging to different religious traditions are 'friends' on account of, say, their shared interest in a sport or some recreational activity, this may or may not count as interreligious friendship, at least not until the friendship becomes much more personal to recognise and appreciate the differing religious orientations of the friends.

Interreligious friendship, in other words, requires that the religious identities of the friends are prominent in the self-identification of the friends *and* the friendship. Interreligious friendship therefore requires what Catherine Cornille has termed 'commitment,' which, as Cornille discusses the term, as noted in chapter 3, means that religious adherents be embedded within, shaped by, and oriented toward a particular religious tradition, from which they engage with the religious other.[323] Interreligious friends have to exhibit this commitment

[322] Goshen-Gottstein, 'Introduction', xii.
[323] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 59–94.

to their respective religious traditions for their friendship to count as interreligious, in our view.

4.2. Interreligious Friendship as Dialogue

If we take interreligious friendship, just defined above, as a friendship between religious adherents who are committed to different religious paths, in what way might we describe such friendships, when and if they happen, as being forms of interreligious dialogue? This consideration is important because if, as we will argue, friendship constitutes a mode of interreligious dialogue, this opens up avenues for an understanding of dialogue that is open to non-specialist members of the religions who comprise the majority of these faiths. We can think of two broad reasons why such friendships may be deemed so. First, their dialogical nature may be seen when we consider them as sitting within the typological frame of 'the dialogue of life,' one of the forms of interreligious dialogue noted in *Dialogue and Proclamation*, which we briefly noted in Chapter 2.[324]

Although scholarly discussions of interreligious dialogue tend to focus on the three non-ordinary forms of interreligious dialogue (theological exchange, inter-ritual dialogue, and cooperation), the 'dialogue of life' seems more within the reach of the majority of religious adherents. Hence, it can be argued to be the most consequential for achieving local and global cordial and peaceful interfaith relations, which is a key aim, as we have noted (in Chapter 2), of the modern global interfaith movement. This dialogue of life occurs in such contexts as the neighbourhood, schools, marketplace, and workplace. Interreligious friendship is always a possibility in these 'everyday' contexts, where, as a form of the 'dialogue of life,' it may

[324] Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 'Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ'.

constitute an enacted or practical mode of interreligious engagement. That is, it becomes a type of dialogue between religious believers who are seeking to live out their faiths, not merely seeking to *explain* the doctrines of their religions.

Of course, friendships with religious others can also happen outside of these 'everyday contexts.' As practitioners and theorists of Scriptural Reasoning (a practice of interreligious dialogue that we discuss in the next chapter) have noted, interreligious friendship may itself come about as a result of the involvement of participants in formal interreligious dialogues.[325] That is, interreligious friendships may be struck 'accidentally' in contexts of ordinary encounters, or they may come about as after-effects of organised interreligious dialogue meetings. As John Cavadini notes, in support of this point, 'I believe there are two sorts of interreligious friendships. One is a friendship that arises from a situation of intentional interreligious dialogue. Friendship arises as a result of the dialogue, in this case. The other is when people of different religions are friends, and discussion of religious matters arises within the context of a preexisting, or at least concurrently existing, friendship.' [326] Yet, it is not hard to imagine that the sheer fact that more opportunities for interaction between religious adherents of different religions exist, especially in such deeply religiously pluralistic world contexts like India, Nigeria, and Indonesia and in intensely plural cities like London, Birmingham, and Toronto, there is an increased likelihood that interreligious friendships are struck with more frequently in everyday spaces.

[325] Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims'; Nicholas Adams, 'Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Hermeneutics', in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People*, ed. David Cheetham et al. (New York: Rodopi, 2011), 59–79.
[326] John C. Cavadini, 'Michael Singer and the Language of Friendship', in *Interreligious Friendship After Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 21.

But whatever context provides the opportunity for interreligious friendships to happen, we may only come to appreciate these friendships as dialogical (that is, as being forms of interreligious dialogue) when we recognise that interreligious dialogue cannot simply be reduced to merely talking to or discussing with religious others about religious matters. David Lochhead's claim that interreligious dialogue must be viewed, primarily, as a 'relationship,' as a way of relating with the religious other, rather than being merely an 'activity,' is, as we noted in Chapter 2, important in this respect.[327] In the 'activity' frame, as Lochhead uses the term, interreligious dialogue is viewed as a set of special activities, rather than as a form of relationality with the religious other. Jeanine Fletcher Hill has perceptively described these activity-oriented forms of interreligious dialogue as 'parliament models' of interreligious dialogue,[328] in that they have structural and bureaucratic similarities to the interreligious dialogues held under the auspices of the Parliament of the World's Religions. But seen as a relationship between religious adherents of different faiths, interreligious dialogue becomes, as David Burrell describes it, 'two seekers walking side-by-side, lured into by the mysterious companionship by a sustaining power beyond each of them.' [329] A relational view of interreligious dialogue moves beyond construing dialogue as 'persons facing each other talking *about* their faith.'[330] Moving us instead to understand interreligious dialogue as a dynamic process of *talking with* the religious other, rather than merely *talking to* them.

Interreligious friendships provide precisely such an interpersonal space wherein this sort of relational understanding of interreligious dialogue can be practised, a practice in which

[327] Lochhead, *The Dialogical Imperative: A Christian Reflection on Interfaith Encounter*, 77–81.
[328] Fletcher Jeanine Hill, 'Women in Interreligious Dialogue', in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue*, ed. Catherine Cornille (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, 2013), 170.
[329] David B. Burrell, 'Faith and Friendship', in *Interreligious Friendship After Nostra Aetate*, ed. James L. Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 57.
[330] Burrell, 57. Emphasis in original.

religious adherents not merely 'do dialogue' but learn to 'walk with' the concrete religious other in 'that ultimate inexpressible mystery which encompasses our existence,' as *Nostra Aetate* puts it.[331] Or, as James Fredericks writes, 'in interreligious friendships, religious traditions become present to us in the spontaneity of human speech and action and are no longer constrained by the limits of the text.'[332] Interreligious friendships provide a context for a holistic recognition of the humanity of the religious other, a recognition which reckons with the complex intermingling of text, theology, society, and personality within which the religious other is always located, and always presented to us, or present to us. Understood in dialogical terms, friendship is doubtless a site of interreligious dialogue, at least when dialogue is understood more broadly than being only a discursive act.

Marianne Moyaert has remarked that the dialogical encounters which take place within the context of the every day, that is, the 'dialogue of life,' do not generally involve 'deliberate and intentional addressing of the difficult theological questions and the complexity of religious traditions.'[333] Yet, while this is true, this lack of intentionality cannot be taken to mean that the dialogue of life is any less theologically important a form of interfaith dialogue. Specifically, if these ordinary dialogical encounters morph into friendship, they may become key sites of practical theological exchange in as much as the 'sharing in the joys and sorrows' with the religious neighbour, which *Dialogue and Proclamation* speaks about as characteristic of the dialogue of life, are made possible in these everyday dialogues. Religious adherents who are committed to their faiths cannot but encounter the world through the eyes of their

[331] 'Nostra Aetate', pt. 1.
[332] J L Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35, no. 2 (1998): 167.
[333] Marianne Moyaert, 'Interreligious Dialogue', in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Pratt Douglas, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 202.

religion, and thus their friendships with religious others will inevitably be mediated through the prism of their religious convictions and outlooks. To the extent, then, that interreligious friendships are responsive to, shot through with, and shaped by the religious convictions and values which the friends hold, and bring with them into the friendship, they can and ought to be considered as modes of interreligious dialogue.

A second way to substantiate the claim that interreligious friendship constitutes a form of interreligious dialogue is to recall James Fredericks' account of interreligious friendship.[334] Fredericks argues that interreligious friendship is a virtue in that, as with other established or classic virtues such as courage, justice, and temperance, it has both 'value' and requires a certain 'skill' set for it to be embodied by individuals. We will leave aside for now his discussion of interreligious friendship as value. For the moment, let us consider the 'skill' dimension of interreligious friendship, as he discusses it. Fredericks explains that interreligious friendship requires certain skills on the part of the friends, namely theological skills and skills of imagination. First, theological skills. An important theological skill which Fredericks discusses is the scriptural hermeneutical capacity which this form of friendship calls for from the friends. By textual hermeneutical capacity, he means that interreligious friendship calls for some competence, in the friends, in creatively interpreting the sacred texts of their religious traditions in the light of the questioning, probing, and challenge that the religious other might pose to them (whether directly or just by their otherness) or which the friendship itself might call for. Indeed, the very theological legitimacy of the friendship may need to be argued for by those who enter into these friendships. Interreligious friendships, on Frederick's account, are near-impossible to sustain without this kind of dexterity in

[334] Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue'.

theological and hermeneutical resourcefulness. Certain texts or doctrines within one's religious tradition, that might seem – at least at first – to stricture this type of friendship, may require being interpreted in ways that position them more positively toward the interreligious friendship.[335]

The second type of skill Fredericks argues is important for the forging of and sustenance of interreligious friendship is the skill of imagination. As Frederick explains it, this involves the capacity to put oneself in the shoes of the other, requiring 'the capacity to listen patiently and to revise one's misconceptions, even after many years of friendship.'[336] Interreligious friends would thus need to develop, alongside being committed, Cornille's virtue of 'empathy,' that capacity to 'transpose oneself into the feelings, the thoughts, and the experiences of another.'[337] Ultimately, for Fredericks, interreligious friendship has to be considered, for Christians at least, as a 'new theological virtue,' one that, like the other virtues in the Christian life, enables our shared flourishing within our pluralistic world context. Interreligious friendship, Fredericks suggests, is a dialogical virtue. An embodying of the virtue of interreligious friendship has the potential to foster peaceful interreligious relations. Interreligious friendship, seen this way, is a mode of interreligious dialogue. But how might Christians who claim that their religious beliefs and practices are different from those of their interreligious friends theologically ground their friendship with these religious others? In the two sections that follow, we argue that friendship, contra what we term the 'agreement model,' does not require serious differences – including religious ones – to be given up.

[335] An example of this kind of hermeneutical skill is in display, with respect to an Islamic view of interreligious friendship, in Timothy J. Giannotti, 'Toward a Muslim Theology of Interreligious Friendship', in *Interreligious Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 77–95.
[336] Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue', 170.
[337] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 138.

4.3. The Basis of Interreligious Friendship: The Limits of the Agreement Model

What we term the agreement model of friendship is present both in the classic Western philosophical tradition and in the Christian tradition. We discuss its manifestation in both traditions, attending, respectively, to aspects of its articulation in Aristotle and Augustine.

4.3.1. Agreement in Aristotle's Conception of Friendship

Cicero provides a good summary of the agreement model of friendship. In *De Amicitia,* which a recent translator describes as 'arguably the best book ever written on the subject of friendship,'[338] Cicero defines 'friendship is nothing other than agreement with goodwill and affection between people about all things divine and human.'[339] For Cicero, friendship is only possible between 'good men,' men who are 'regarded as models of honour, integrity, justice, and generosity.'[340] These are men (can it be women?) who have 'no vestige of avarice, lustfulness, or insolence.'[341] Friends are those who share agreement on the most important things in life, and especially who share similar values and virtues. Friendship for Cicero, it should be remembered, sits with the locus of the moral life. Friends help us attain happiness by providing us with the blessing of their virtuous company. This agreement view of friendship is perspicuous in the work of Aristotle, whom Cicero is shaped by.

Aristotle's reflections on friendship are contained in books eight and nine of the *Nicomachean Ethics*.[342] Aristotle begins his discussion on friendship by first noting its

[338] Marcus Tullius Cicero, *How to Be a Friend: An Ancient Guide to True Friendship*, trans. Philip Freeman, Ancient Wisdom for Modern Readers (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), viii–ix.
[339] Cicero, 39.
[340] Michael Pakaluk, ed., *Other Selves: Philosophers on Friendship* (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co, 1991), 86.
[341] Pakaluk, 86.
[342] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, bks 8–9.

universality. All humans desire friendship, both women and men, rich and poor. We all appreciate friendship. This, for Aristotle, gestures toward something of friendship being a deep human need. Friendship too, for Aristotle, is only possible between living individuals. Although we may speak, metaphorically, of being friends with inanimate objects, say, with a book or with a doll, Aristotle contends that friendships are only possible between individuals who can reciprocate the affections given to them. Mutuality is thus crucial to the Aristotelian conceptualisation of friendship. We can only be friends with those who feel and act positively toward us, just as we act and feel toward them.

Aristotle discerns three types of friendships. Friendships may either be of 'utility,' of 'pleasure,' or of 'virtue.' Aristotle does not think these types of friendships have equal value, although these friendships all serve purposes which can be important. Although the other types of friendships have their place, the friendship of virtue is what, for Aristotle, counts as 'perfect' friendship.[343] In friendships of utility, as Aristotle exposits it, the friends 'do not love each other for themselves but in virtue of some good which they get from each other.'[344] These friendships of utility have limitations in as much as the needs which sustain them are always changing and friends can hardly be expected to meet all the needs of their friends. These friendships, in other words, depend on circumstances which, by their nature, are always in flux. Apparently, for Aristotle, friendships of utility are commonest among the old. Whether this is true is far from clear, but Aristotle thinks that in old age 'people pursue not the pleasant but the useful.'[345]

[343] Aristotle, 196.
[344] Aristotle, 195.
[345] Aristotle, 195.

Friendships of pleasure, on the other hand, are found mostly among the young. In the friendship of pleasure, it is the pursuit of mutually beneficial pleasurable experiences which bind the friends together. These friendships are just as transient as those of utility. When the object of pleasure is found, or when the friends begin to diverge on what objects they find pleasurable, then the friendship ceases or begins to cease. The third type of friendship, perfect friendship, as Aristotle conceptualises is shared, and can only be shared, by virtuous persons. Only persons oriented to the 'good' can be friends of this kind.[346] These friends, and their friendship, do not exist for utility or out of a felt sense of need in the life of any of the friends. The friends are self-sufficient. In this perfect friendship, Aristotle says, 'the friendship is of men who are good, and alike in virtue; for these wish well alike to each other qua good, and they are good in themselves.'[347] Because the life of virtue is not one in which all persons can seek or make much progress, friendships of virtue are, Aristotle thinks, quite rare.[348] It should be noted that although differing in character, all three forms of Aristotle's friendship depend on agreement or shared commonalities between the friends, whether of interests, shared derivation of utility, or character.

Aristotle's (and Cicero's) setting up of friendships of virtues as the paradigmatic form of friendship may strike many of us today as rather idealistic. And perhaps we are right. If only 'good men' can carry on 'perfect' friendships, then it may be that perfect friendships can only, for the majority of us, remain a *possibility*, rather than something that can be actualized in our lives. Not all men (and we should add women) are perfectly virtuous, and even within an individual self, growth in the virtues is always a possibility. One can always be more virtuous.

[346] Aristotle, 197.
[347] Aristotle, 196.
[348] Aristotle, 197.

Courage may not be accompanied by liberality, and temperate persons may not be given over completely to justice. At any rate, since the virtues depend on the teleological orientation of one's life, that is, the ultimate end which one seeks to realize, it would be the case that, even amongst the perfectly virtuous (if they exist), friendship may not be possible.

Consider, for instance, that certain Christian virtues like humility may count as vices in the context of the 'pagan virtues.' Pride, as an example, which Aristotle considers as virtuous, is, for Christians, a vice.[349] Or consider that, on Aquinas' account, certain virtues (the so-called theological virtues of faith, hope, and love) can only come about in us if they are infused in us. That is, these virtues are only realizable by grace.[350] If we go with Cicero and Aristotle's account that emphasises concordance of teleological orientation between the friends, we would have to rule out, *a priori*, the possibility of 'perfect' friendship between Christians and non-Christians. Friendships, on their account, can only happen between those who are like us, whether in terms of the phase of life which we share with them or in terms of unity in moral character that exists between us. Gilbert Meilaender discerns, for this reason, a moral exclusivism in Aristotle's vision of friendship.[351] This moral exclusivism, as it plays out within Aristotle's 'perfect' friendship of virtue might well, today, be called a moral elitism.

A key weakness of Aristotle's virtue account of friendship therefore lies in the fact that acquiring perfection in the virtues is difficult, if not impossible, for most humans to achieve. But more than this, even if the virtues were successfully acquired by a person, they may not

[349] Stanley Hauerwas and Charles Pinches, *Christians Among the Virtues: Theological Conversations with Ancient and Modern Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 46. For Aristotle, pride 'is to be concerned with great things.' Pride is a virtue of honour for Aristotle: for 'it implies greatness, as beauty implies a good-sized body.' Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 89.
[350] See Aquinas' introduction of the theological virtues, see the Prima Prima Secundæ Partis of Summa Theologiae, Question 62.
[351] Gilbert Meilaender, *Friendship: A Study in Theological Ethics* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985), 16.

be immediately apparent to others, and thus there would always be an indeterminacy about how virtuous a person is.[352] And without knowing how virtuous another person is, I (the perfectly virtuous other) might not be able to begin to move toward opening myself up to being friends with them, if my theory of friendship commits me to only being friends with those who are perfectly virtuous like myself. Virtues, it should be remembered, even if they eventually take the form of acts, are fundamentally states of the heart, dispositions of the mind. Given this quality of interiority about them, we can, at best, only speculate about how virtuous people *really* are. There is always the possibility that what seems at first to us to be virtuous might, in fact, be pretences to virtue, rather than true expressions of virtue. Virtue then, as a basis for friendship, seems out of reach for most of us, and even virtuous persons might be difficult for the virtuous to befriend, to find.

This critique of the Aristotelian ideal of friendship should not be taken to mean there are no important insights to be gleaned from this view of friendship. Friends, even interreligious friends, are likely to see the wisdom in Aristotle's contention that a friendship's flourishing depends on the friends possessing such virtues as empathy, love, humility, and justice. It seems difficult to imagine that a friendship lacking these qualities will survive for a considerable amount of time. But these virtues, while important, cannot be regarded as the foundation upon which a friendship is built. In my view, it is instead friendship which itself provides the context for the acquiring of virtues.

[352] Janet Martin Soskice, *The Kindness of God: Metaphor, Gender, and Religious Language* (Oxford New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), 162.

4.3.2. Agreement Model of Friendship in the Christian Tradition: Augustine

Another articulation of the agreement model of friendship comes from the Christian tradition. Within this tradition, there have been anxieties, even reluctance, about viewing friendship as a Christian virtue. In part, this reluctance is due to the ways that Christians have sometimes set up friendship, *philia*, as sitting problematically with the Christian commitment to love all, *agape*.[353] Christians have sometimes viewed friendship as a preferential love that conflicts with the universal demands of love. Paul Wadell discusses this point with respect to Kierkegaard who contended that friendship, because it is opposed to selfless love, cannot be deemed Christian.[354] But more pressing to our interest in this chapter, Christians have often been wary of friendship with non-Christians, arguing that it constitutes a form of being 'unequally yoked with unbelievers' (2 Corinthians 6:14).[355] This kind of argument comes through for instance in Augustine.

Friendship occupies an important place in Augustine's narration of his journey toward God. He devotes much of book VI of *Confessions* to reflecting on the joys of his friendships, especially with Alypius and Nebridius. Augustine writes about his being inspired by Alypius' self-control. This virtue of continence was one which, as everyone knows, the young Augustine found difficult to imbibe. Although Augustine's conversion to Christianity had not come about at this point (at least, in the narrative context of the *Confessions*), he notes that he 'could not find happiness, even in the sense in which I then conceived of it, unless I had

[353] Meilaender, *Friendship*, 2–5.
[354] Paul J. Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989), 74–96.
[355] King James Version. For more on the rationales which inform Christian reluctance about interreligious friendships, see Volf and McAnnally-Linz, 'A Christian Perspective on Interreligious Friendship'.

these friends.'[356] Friendship, Augustine suggests, facilitates happiness. And happiness, for the older Augustine (who does the narration), is altogether bound up in one's friendship with the Triune God.

But although friendship is connected to happiness for Augustine, Augustine does not think that friendship with those who differ from one in crucial doctrinal matters leads to this kind of happiness. Stefan Rebenich discusses this point in relation to Augustine's diatribe against Jerome on account of Jerome's differing interpretation of scripture (specifically Galatians 2:11-14) and Jerome's decision to base his translation of the Hebrew bible on the Hebrew text rather than on the Septuagint, which Augustine considered more pastorally helpful to use.[357] Although Jerome was not an unbeliever, Augustine, Rebenich notes, was willing to end his friendship with Jerome for what he saw as Jerome's 'falsehood.' Rebenich notes this same posture in Augustine in his relationship with Pelagius, which 'Augustine abruptly broke off' because of 'dogmatic differences.'[358] As Rebenich notes, for Augustine and indeed many Christian theologians in the patristic period, it was 'only those who took the same way to perfection and proved themselves to be 'messengers of the truth,' in the words of Gregory of Nazianzus, [who] were considered to be true friends.'[359]

No doubt, part of the reason that undergirds Augustine's strong views against friendship with non-Christians is the cultural context of early Christianity in which orthodoxy was very much a political as it was a theological matter. As Rebenich notes, 'Christian friendships in late antiquity, like friendships of the non-Christian era, were never merely accidental

[356] Aurelius Augustinus, *Confessions*, trans. R. S. Pine-Coffin, Repr, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Engl: Penguin Books, 1982), 132.
[357] Stefan Rebenich, 'Augustine on Friendship and Orthodoxy', in *A Companion to Augustine*, ed. Mark Vessey (Chichester, West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 365–74.
[358] Rebenich, 372.
[359] Rebenich, 370. Word in bracket mine.

expressions of individual preferences, nor did they serve only to satisfy personal needs. Their types and forms closely reflected the structures of society.'[360] This is not to say theological considerations were not important. They were. Indeed, Augustine's rejection of friendship with non-Christians was in part based on his conviction that friendship must be based on 'agreement in *rebus divinis*,' in things divine.[361] But the politics of orthodoxy, the struggles over establishing correct doctrine and practice, characteristic of the early Christian period gave an added edge to these theological convictions about friendship. [362]

Yet, to return to Augustine's theological reasoning that friendship with non-Christians does not participate in our friendship with God, a case can be made for the opposite. As Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz have argued, friendship with religious others can enrich our spiritual lives and provide us with a context and opportunity for deepening our friendship with God.[363] Joining Volf and McAnnally-Linz, we shall indicate, in a subsequent section of the chapter, some of the ways that interreligious friendship can serve to deepen the Christian moral and spiritual life. To be sure, Christians have to be discerning in entering into any relationship (as 1 John 4:1 admonishes us, we are always to 'test the spirits') including interreligious friendships. Still, while such a discernment process is important, God's grace may meet us in the context of friendships with those religiously different from us. But before attempting to develop this point, it should be helpful to discuss an alternative account of friendship which does not ground its possibility on mutuality between the friends.

[360] Rebenich, 374.
[361] Rebenich, 374. Italics in the original.
[362] In fairness to Augustine, more recent appropriations of his thought suggest that his view of the self as dialogical can enable a more dialogical posture toward neighbours who are different from us. Charles T. Mathewes, 'Pluralism, Otherness, and the Augustinian Tradition', *Modern Theology* 14, no. 1 (17 January 1998): 83–112, https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-0025.00057. Mathewes, *A Theology of Public Life*, 109–21.
[363] Volf and McAnnally-Linz, 'A Christian Perspective on Interreligious Friendship'.

4.4. Beyond the Agreement Model: Grounding Friendship Amidst Difference

If, as a particularist view contends, interreligious friends do not (at least, not concerning their religious commitments) share 'agreement on all things divine and human' it seems impossible, on the agreement account, for friendship between members of differing religious faiths to take place or at least, to qualify as a 'perfect' form of friendship. Since we consider the agreement model insufficient, and as falling short with respect to providing a robust framework for theologizing (and theorizing) about interreligious friendship, how might we move past it? In this section, we want to suggest one way of doing so by gleaning from the account of friendship in the work of the Canadian and British theologian, Janet Martin Soskice.

In *The Kindness of God*, Soskice essays an account of friendship that seeks to ground friendship, not in a concordance of virtue or in a depth of mutual affective emotions which friends have for one another, but in a theological anthropology of creation, an account of friendship as a creaturely good.[364] In the agreement model, Soskice notes, the friend is held up as an 'alter ego' of the self, and the *otherness* of the other who is a friend is either denied or ignored in such a friendship.[365] This kind of view comes through for example, Soskice considers, in CS Lewis's articulation of friendship – which is one of Lewis' *Four Loves* – which posits friendship as grounded in common interests, common objects by which the friends are

[364] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 125–80. The chapter (8) where this treatment of friendship is offered has also been published in Janet Martin Soskice, 'Friendship', in *Fields of Faith: Theology and Religious Studies for the Twenty-First Century*, ed. David Ford, Ben Quash, and Janet Martin Soskice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 167–81; Janet Martin Soskice, 'Friendship', in *Intersubjectivité Et Théologie Philosophique*, ed. Marco M. Olivetti, Proceedings of the Castelli Colloquium (Rome: Cedam, 2001).
[365] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 166.

affected.[366] It is the *common* object of affection which holds friendship together in Lewis's view of friendship. But, for Soskice, this view of friendship means that the friend is not loved for who the friend is but for something external to the friend.[367] An adequate account of friendship would, however, Soskice considers, need to account for how the very *being* of the friends is central to the friendship. As Soskice puts it, quoting the Oxford philosopher, A.J.P Kenny, in friendship 'the other person enters in not just as an object who receives the good activity, but as an intrinsic part of the love itself.'[368]

That is, the *person* of the friend, and not merely a third object that the friends' love, must be integral, or at least integrated, to an account of friendship. If friendship is not the mere instrumentalization of the other, an instrumentalization which is dependent on my viewing the friend as a mirror image of myself, then an account of friendship in which the being of the other is marginalised must be inadequate. Attention to the being of the other, Soskice suggests, would immediately reveal that this other cannot neatly be reduced to being an *alter ego* of myself. No two friends, even those who belong to the same religious tradition, are the same. Rather than seeing friendship as dependent on mutual possession of virtue between the friends, Soskice underlines friendship's nature as a 'relationship.'[369] Friendship, seen this way, is a relationship marked by certain postures of the self to the other. For Soskice, a most fundamental posture is that of radical openness to the otherness of the other. Such openness, ironically, cannot be secured when, as in the agreement model, the friend's difference has been bracketed off from the dynamic of the friendship.

[366] C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves*, A Harvest/HBJ Book (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1960).
[367] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 162–66.
[368] Soskice, 167.
[369] Soskice, 167.

Soskice notes that a weakness of what we have termed the agreement model of friendship is its incapacity to account for the possibility of friendship between humans and God. Indeed, for Aristotle, friendship with the gods is not possible because they are 'removed to a great distance.'[370] However, not only the possibility but the fact of God's friendship with humans is noted in Christian scripture. And if, as Christians consider, these scriptures provide the meaning-making and existentially norming stories which shape Christian practice, imagination, and theology, then scripture's witness on the matter of God's friendship with humans must be an important consideration in any account of friendship. Soskice, in this vein, notes the fact that in Exodus 33:11, scripture records that 'the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend.' As well, Jesus tells his disciples that 'they are no longer to be called servants, but friends.'[371] These two texts seem to suggest that friendship with one radically dissimilar to us is possible, that is, friendship between humans and God is possible. Although Soskice does not cite the example of Abraham, he too is similarly called a 'friend of God.'[372]

This kind of friendship with the divine Other is ruled out in the agreement account of friendship, in as much as humans can never attain complete or perfect agreement in virtue with the divine, who is the perfection of virtue. The reality of ontological difference between creature and creator closes off any prospect of friendship based on similarity between humans and God. Thus, scripture's witness to God's friendship with humans relativises a grounding of friendship on sameness between the friends. Agreement in moral character, or theological convictions, between friends may therefore not be the most important factor for

[370] Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 204.
[371] John 15:15.
[372] 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8: James 2:23.

grounding friendship, contra Cicero, Aristotle, and Augustine. Although good moral character is important to the flourishing of friendship, it cannot, as earlier noted, be adequate a basis for a theologically specified account of friendship, in as much as we are never morally equal to God.

Of course, it may be argued that God's transcendence must be held alongside God's immanence, and the latter might be argued as being the basis for us speaking of God as a friend, sharing mutuality with us. One could point to the incarnation which for Christians is the paradigmatic act of God's immanence, as providing something of a rebuttal to Soskice's claim that God's ontological difference from humans destabilizes sameness as the basis for friendship. God incarnate, Christ, in his taking on human flesh, has become like one of us, creaturely. In response to this charge, however, we must maintain that God's immanence, God's nearness to creation, and the fact of Christ's incarnation, do not undermine God's radical difference from creation, from us. Especially important for the discussion is the theological doctrine of Christ's sinlessness. 'For he was without sin.'[373] Therefore, even if 'he was made like one of us in every way,'[374] Christ's moral and ontological distance from us remains, despite his sharing our human nature. God's immanence sits together with God's transcendence such that both aspects of the divine, as orthodoxly confessed, have to be held in unison rather than partially. As the Chalcedonian Creed says, 'one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the

[373] 2 Corinthians 5:21.
[374] Hebrews 2:17.

union.'[375] The otherness of God remains even if we recognize that God is, at the same time, near to us. God's sharing in our human flesh does not defeat Soskice's claim that friendship cannot be based on equality of moral character or the similarity of selves given Scripture's witness of God's befriending of us.

In seeking a more robust framework for accounting for friendship amidst difference, Soskice turns to the work of Martin Buber and Franz Rosenzweig, two Jewish thinkers whose account of personal identity is shaped by an awareness of relationality. Soskice sees in the work of these philosophers a way of funding a new account of friendship that can embrace the reality of difference (of various kinds) existing between friends. Soskice finds especially generative Buber's adumbration of a relational view of the self, a view in which the *I* and the *Thou* are always interconnected. Dialogue, as an existential category, as is well known, is central to Buber's account of what it means to be truly human. Buber, to recall, sees the dialogical self as standing in contrast to the monological self, where in the former, the self's conversation with another or other selves requires it to listen and to be open-hearted to the other. But in the monological mode, Buber tells us, the self 'is never aware of the other as something that is not himself.'[376] Yet for Buber, our identities are always formed in the ongoing dynamic of encounter with the other, and as such, friendship is always a possibility with the other with whom we may not initially share common interests or virtues.

Friendship, Soskice gleans from this Buberian philosophical anthropology, must therefore be understood as a relationship of 'the-at-least-two,' that is, as fundamentally a

[375] Quote found here, 'Philip Schaff: Creeds of Christendom, with a History and Critical Notes. Volume II. The History of Creeds. - Christian Classics Ethereal Library', accessed 30 May 2022, https://www.ccel.org/ccel/schaff/creeds2.iv.i.iii.html.
[376] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man*, trans. Ronald Gregor-Smith (London: Kegan Paul, 1947), 20. Cited in Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 172.

dialogue between selves.[377] This dialogical view of the self, both in Buber and Soskice, sees the self as always networked to other selves, by its very nature as a relational entity. For this reason, the other who is other at first, and *continues* to be other, exerts an influence on me, such that my self is always indebted to the other. This is a dynamic, as Soskice explains, in which 'I am becoming who I am and will become who I am through the other.'[378] If the self is thus situated dialogically in the world, Soskice argues, unexpected, shared grounds with the other are always possible and are always being formed. Friendship can thus happen with *anyone*, even if, by its special nature, not with *everyone*.[379]

Unlike what seems like a monological understanding of the self in Aristotle and Cicero's talk of 'good men,' Soskice provides us with a way of considering how the very quality of a self being identified as 'good' cannot be untangled from the encounter of that self with the other. My capacity to be virtuous is tied up with my relationship with others. There can be no self-made virtuous persons. There is a depth of sociality embedded within the human self, a gregariousness which is connected to the kinds of beings we are – creatures made for communion with the divine and with one another.

Whereas, in the agreement model of Aristotle and Cicero, the friends hold up virtue as a pre-condition for friendship, in this alternative account, friendship becomes the precondition for being virtuous. This is an account of friendship that is not exclusive but is rather universalistic. My self sits within a web of relationality with other selves, and at any time, we may be friends because, in some existential sense, we are *already* friends. This account posits friendship with the other, including the religious other, as something that

[377] Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 167.
[378] Soskice, 176.
[379] Soskice, 176.

comes often to us as a rupture, as a surprise, happening unexpectedly. Against the strict mutuality model, Soskice's account calls us to be careful not to overdetermine where, when, and with whom friendships might happen. This, of course, requires a great deal of vulnerability on our part. We must learn to be open to the other's interruption, to examining the prejudices that keep us from acknowledging the other (and especially, in this instance, the religious other) both in their otherness *and* interconnection to us. As Soskice puts it, friendship can only happen when the presence of the other comes to be welcomed by me, not as a 'wound' or as a threat to my being, but as a grace.[380] Listening then, for Soskice, becomes the most important virtue necessary for friendship's flourishing. It is only as we learn to truly listen to the other, to allow the other to be other, that we will be able to truly befriend them.

There is one aspect of Soskice's account of friendship which we should modify somewhat, even as we appreciate and welcome her move beyond the agreement model of friendship. This concerns Soskice's contention that friendship is a 'creaturely and, more specifically, a human good.'[381] It is a creaturely good akin to the goods of eating, sleeping, and playing musical instruments, explainable in terms which do not necessarily require 'the Christian doctrine of Incarnation.'[382] Without denying that friendship, which seems natural to humans just as eating and sleeping are, is a creaturely good, if friendship for Christians, as Soskice herself notes, cannot be unentangled from *agape*, but is a particular agapeic form of love,[383] then something of the Christian account of friendship must also take seriously the

[380] Soskice, 178.
[381] Soskice, 161.
[382] Soskice, 161.
[383] Soskice writes 'it seems fundamentally mistaken to suppose that we honour love only by disparaging friendship. The latter is not so much love's competitor as a particular manifestation of it.' Soskice, 160.

incarnation, in which God's friendship with creation takes on a heightened form in Christ's human life. To put the point more clearly, whereas Soskice is rightly inspired by the Old Testament's narration of Moses as one who speaks to God 'face to face, as one speaks to a friend,' complementarily, the New Testament's narration of Christ's friendship with sinners and his disciples can thicken the description of what it means for God to befriend us, the other. Christ's friendship with sinners, with us, underlines the way that friendship, for the Christian, cannot simply be a natural good of creation but is, also, a work of grace, made possible by the Spirit's empowering. We, therefore, consider that in addition to a theological anthropology of friendship, a Christology of friendship, one that looks to the fact of Jesus being friends with sinners, has much to add to how we understand friendship with those different from us. This kind of Christological friendship can allow for an even more radical openness to befriending the other, along the lines Soskice has already opened up.

Here, we are thinking, for example, of Jürgen Moltmann's account of Jesus as friend in *The Church in the Power of the Spirit*. Like Soskice, Moltmann is critical of the agreement account of friendship. He writes, 'The friendship of Jesus cannot be lived and its friendliness cannot be disseminated when friendship is limited to people who are like ourselves.'[384] But Moltmann adds, importantly, that Christian friendship, modelled on Jesus, must also take seriously the New Testament's vision of friendship as public, rather than as merely a private activity, as it has tended to be seen within the Western context. The gospel's narratives about Jesus's friendship (e.g. Matthew 9:11; 11: 16-19) suggest, in contrast, a picture of Jesus in open friendship with those outside his intimate circle of disciples. This openness, this publicness of Jesus' friendship may rightly be taken to be a model for Christians. It can serve

[384] Jurgen Moltmann, *Church in the Power of the Spirit: A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (Fortress Press, 1993), 121.

to model for us, as Soskice argues, that we must be open to being friends with *anyone*, including the interreligious other who seems at first distant from us.

To buttress the point, Jesus's friendship is not restricted to the inner circle of his disciples, rather his friendship with his disciples goes together with his public friendship, which he extends to all. A Christian account of friendship cannot, in as much as Jesus's example is taken as normative, be restricted only to those who share our faith, and who proclaim Jesus as Lord. Additionally, Moltmann correctly draws attention to the gospels' revelation of Jesus as one who befriended those who were on the margins of society, the prostitutes, the tax collectors, the sick, etc. For Moltmann, there is much to be learned, by Christians, in this scriptural portrayal of Jesus as one who is a friend of 'the unrighteous and the despised.' Jesus' radically open friendship, as the gospel narrates it, comes at a cost. Christ's death on the cross can be interpreted as a death on behalf of his friends. As John tells us, 'No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.'[385] For us, as well, friendships' flourishing, both interreligious and non-interreligious types, requires sacrifice in one form or another. There would be sacrifices necessary to make interreligious friendship happen. But these sacrifices, we believe, are worth it when we remember that, to return to the theme of interreligious friendship, these friendships are beneficial to the Christian moral and spiritual life.

4.5. Moral and Spiritual Blessings of Interreligious Friendship

Soskice's anthropology of the self sees the self as dynamic, as inherently relational, and her way of thinking about friendship proceeds from this standpoint. Although Soskice does not mention interreligious friendship explicitly, her insight that the possibility of God's friendship with us opens up avenue for thinking about friendship amidst difference has

[385] John 15:13.

immediate applicability for thinking about interreligious friendship. God's friendship with human creatures, exemplified in the scriptural narrations of God as friend of Moses and Abraham – which amounts to the endearing of God to creation – can, we believe, serve as a model for Christians in conceptualizing their friendships with religious others. Also, Moltmann's drawing attention to the radically open friendship of Jesus can provide us with a way of thinking of interreligious friendship as a form of *Imitatio Christi*, a form of imitating the God who befriends us, as we too befriend the *other*.

We would now like to extend Soskice and Moltmann's insights by suggesting that, modelled on God, interreligious friendship can be framed as being both a gift and a grace.[386] As a gift, interreligious friendship is a form of love that we give to the religious other and which we also receive from them. Interreligious friendship, amidst difference, is possible because the gift of friendship's love can always be extended to the other. Our natural inclination to give gifts to those who can return them is, from a Christian standpoint, not virtuous. This vice finds its expression, within the context of friendship, in our tendency to pursue friendship only with those who are like us, and especially those who share our deepest convictions on matters of religious faith. Pursuing friendship with those who share our religious convictions is not wrong *per se*. It has its place. There may well be certain forms of friendship that can only be shared with those who share our deepest convictions. But the radical openness of Jesus (radical in as much as it went against the grain of his day) to those outside his immediate and intimate circle of disciples which Jesus models suggests that

[386] This language of friendship as 'gift and grace' is drawn from John Bowlin, *Tolerance Among the Virtues* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 213. Friendship, understood as 'grace,' is also present in Soskice's account of friendship. For her, the friend 'may come as – as a surprise – a grace.' Soskice, *The Kindness of God*, 176. As well, the language of gift is present in the articulation of friendship in the work of David Burrell. For Burrell, friendship is a gift from the other and from God, one which we learn to receive. David B. Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth* (Notre Dame, Ind: University of Notre Dame Press, 2000), 10.

Christians ought to work toward giving and receiving friendship's love from those outside our religious community, to those outside the church. As the Gospels say, 'If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.'[387] We might translate this, in the context of interreligious friendship, as 'if you only give *philia* to those who are like you, those whom it is easiest to love, what good is that? Even unbelievers do that.'

The gift of friendship can, to be sure, always be refused. We may desire to be friends with (religious) others but that desire, by itself, is no guarantee that they would like to be our friends. As Fredericks insightfully notes, speaking about his experience in interreligious friendship, 'although I enjoy the friendship of several Buddhists, Buddhism as such may not think of interreligious friendships as virtuous.'[388] For a particularistic theology of religion, this does not constitute a problem. The onus is always on the religions themselves to provide, to recall Lindbeck, 'powerful theological rationales' [389] that can fund their practice of interreligious friendship. Ultimately, friendship, understood as a gift, for Christians, cannot be divorced from *agape*. As Paul Wadell argues, the mistake in Christian tradition on friendship has been to set up *agape* and *philia* as *necessarily* opposed. But there is no reason to think this needs to be so. It may be that the extending of *agape*, of self-giving love, to the (religious) other, may become the seed that enables the giving of friendship, of *philia*.[390] And *philia* itself can provide a context for the giving of *agape* to one's friends.

[387] Luke 6:32 NRSV.
[388] Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue', 173.
[389] Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, 41.
[390] Wadell, *Friendship and the Moral Life*, 71–74.

Next, Friendship with the religious other, we contend, constitutes a moral and spiritual blessing in as much as it comes to us as a form of grace, something which God provides for us for our spiritual flourishing. Friendship with the religious other, indeed, is often a providential context wherein we may come to experience certain divine blessings. Specifically, interreligious friendship can be a site in which, as Fredericks argued earlier, growth in the life of the interreligious dialogical virtues is made possible or deepened. In chapter 3 we suggested that the cultivation of dialogical virtues that Cornille argues is important for dialogue's success is, for Christians, enabled through the morally transformative capacity of scripture. While that is true, it must now be complemented with an account of how the 'world' also provides a context for the cultivation, display, and deepening of a dialogical character. In short, as grace, interreligious friendship provides, for Christians, a context for their growth in the moral and spiritual life.

Catherine Cornille, as noted in chapter 3, argues that humility is an important pre-condition for interreligious dialogue.[391] One cannot deny the wisdom of this claim. Humility is crucial, not only to the enterprise of interreligious dialogue but to the moral life, broadly construed. Yet, in talking about humility as a pre-condition for interreligious dialogue, we may fail to consider the important complementary point that interreligious dialogue, in the form of interreligious friendship, can itself be the context where that virtue (of humility) is formed and/or deepened. In the context of our friendship with the other, we may come to see how misguided our claims of being morally superior to religious others are. In the friendship with the religious other, we come to see ourselves better than we previously did. My friendship with the religious other provides an occasion for my coming to see myself as I am, exposing

[391] Cornille, 'Introduction'; Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 9–58.

me to my prejudices and pride. As Fredericks writes 'the stranger [that is, the interreligious friend] helps us move off our own home ground and, in so doing, provides opportunities to understand ourselves in new ways.'[392]

Interreligious friends 'stimulate our imagining.'[393] Fredericks writes: 'By drawing us out of ourselves and into a world significantly different from our presuppositions, friends help us reform our lives and understand ourselves in new ways.'[394] David Burrell argues, in a similar fashion, that friendship with those different from us can create a context for 'understanding.'[395] This understanding, as Burrell employs the term, is not the same thing as agreement or the removal of the possibility of conflict and disagreement. Even in the most intimate of relationships, conflict is, of course, always possible. Love is not diminished by the presence of disagreement between lovers. To speak of interreligious friendship providing a context for understanding Burrell means instead that, in such friendships, we can come to better appreciate the other's viewpoint, and thus our own viewpoint. In this way, interreligious friendships become sites wherein we learn, sometimes with difficulty and some awkwardness, if not embarrassment, how to disagree charitably.

One crucial providential aspect of interreligious friendship pertains to how the context of interreligious friendships can enable in us a deepening of our capacity to forbear with religious others, strengthening our growth in the virtue of bearing patiently with those with whom we share perhaps objectional differences. We can only come to learn what it means to forbear within the context of a close interpersonal relationship with another. [396] No doubt,

[392] Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue', 164. Words in bracket mine.
[393] Fredericks, 165.
[394] Fredericks, 166.
[395] Burrell, *Friendship and Ways to Truth*, 37.
[396] Bowlin, *Tolerance Among the Virtues*, 206–41.

interreligious friends may or may not share what John Bowlin terms 'objectionable difference' between each other.[397] But even if they did, friendship with those with whom we share deepest disagreements can be a providential space for our coming to experience God's sanctifying grace of forbearance, of learning to bear patiently with those with whom we disagree deeply. This is a grace which we may otherwise not know outside of the context of friendship with those radically different from us.[398] By opening ourselves to the interruption of the other we may come to receive the 'grace' of the other.

4.6. Examples of Interreligious Friendship

Although interreligious friendships marked by love for the other *and* respect for the other's difference has not typically been prominent in the Christian tradition, examples of such friendships are not lacking in the history of the Christian movement. In the early modern period, one could point to Matteo Ricci's friendship with Chinese Confucians within the context of Ricci's missionary work in China during the late Ming Dynasty. Ricci's friendship with Chinese Confucians quite fittingly takes on a literary form in his *Essay on friendship,* which he writes to a distant cousin of the Chinese emperor, named Jian'an Wang.[399] Ricci's interreligious friendship provides evidence that such friendships, within the Christian tradition, predate the modern interfaith movement.

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[397] Bowlin, 212.

[398] Bowlin speaks, in this regard, of 'those who endure with the forbearance of Christ.' That is, those for whom their being patience with the religious other, that is, forbearance, is motivated by their being 'moved by the Holy Spirit to love God and neighbour.' Bowlin, 226.

[399] Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince*, trans. Timothy James Billings (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 7. Ricci's treatise on friendship was first published in 1596. It should be noted that Ricci's account of friendship is shaped by the Western model of the friend as alter ego. As Ricci writes, 'my friend is not an other, but half of myself, and thus a second me – I must therefore regard my friend as myself.' Ricci, 91.

More contemporarily, the close friendship between Mahatma Gandhi and the Anglican missionary, Charles Freer Andrews during the early twentieth century has been noted as exemplary of interreligious friendship.[400] Gandhi and Andrews' friendship played a significant role in the peace and human rights activist work of both men, both in their work in Apartheid South Africa and in colonial India. Andrew writes about this friendship that 'to be with him (Gandhi) was an inspiration which awakened all that was best in me, and gave me high courage, enkindled and enlightened by his own.'[401] In the next chapter, we shall give more attention to this remarkable friendship, especially for the way that, as we shall argue, it reflected a form of Christian witness to the peaceable kingdom of Christ.

Friendship with non-Christians was also important in the life of Catholic mystical theologian, Thomas Merton. Merton's 'turn' to the East, and especially his dialogue with Zen and Mahayana Buddhism was, as Park Jaechan notes, connected to his close friendship with Buddhists.[402] It is hard to conceive the viability of Merton's inter-monastic dialogue without his friendship with a figure like D. T. Suzuki, the Japanese Zen Buddhist whose writing and friendship were crucial to Merton's interreligious engagement.[403] As well, as Fredericks discusses, interreligious friendships played a crucial role in the success of Vatican II's important document, *Nostra Aetate*, the 'Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions.' Indeed, Fredericks posits that 'Nostra Aetate would not have been

[400] Anantanand Rambachan, '"Love Speaking to Love": Friendship across Religious Traditions', in *Friendship across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 100–113; Volf and McAnnally-Linz, 'A Christian Perspective on Interreligious Friendship'.
[401] Mohandas K. Gandhi, C. F. Andrews, and David McI Gracie, *Gandhi and Charlie: The Story of a Friendship: As Told through the Letters and Writings of Mohandas K. Gandi and Rev'd Charles Freer Andrews* (Cambridge, Mass: Cowley Publications, 1989), 32.
[402] Jaechan Park, 'Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond: His Interreligious Dialogue, Inter-Monastic Exchanges and Their Legacy' (Graduate Centre for Theological Studies of the Toronto School of Theology, 2018), 69,71.
[403] Larry A. Fader, 'Beyond the Birds of Appetite: Thomas Merton's Encounter with Zen', *Biography* 2, no. 3 (1979): 230–54; Park, 'Thomas Merton's Encounter with Buddhism and Beyond: His Interreligious Dialogue, Inter-Monastic Exchanges and Their Legacy'.

possible were it not for interreligious friendships.'[404] Fredericks notes some examples of how the personal friendships of Jews and Catholics, under the aegis of the Secretariat for the Promotion of Christian Unity, led by Cardinal Augustin Bea, SJ, helped make possible the momentous declaration that was *Nostra Aetate*.[405]

The above-cited examples are only indicative rather than exhaustive of the fact. James Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier's edited volume, *Interreligious Friendship after Nostra Aetate,* brings together a number of more contemporary Catholic theologians who reflect on their friendships with non-Christians. Included in the volume are the accounts of interreligious friendship of contemporary theologians like Peter C. Phan, Rosemary Radford Reuther, Francis Clooney, and David Burrell. Although differing in the experiences of the interreligious friendship which they recount, these scholars, as well as other contributors to the volume, estimate their interreligious friendships as enriching their work and life as Christian theologians and as practising Catholics. Catholic religious educator Mary C. Boys reflects, for instance, in her contribution to the volume, on the way that her friendship with her Jewish religious colleague, Sara Lee, enabled a mutual transformation in both friends' understanding of their friend's religious traditions. This friendship, Boys notes, equally enabled both of them to work toward fostering such a mutual understanding amongst other interreligious groups through their work in training religious educators.[406] Their friendship thus helped energize their peace activist engagements.

[404] James L. Fredericks, 'Introduction', in *Interreligious Friendship After Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 5.
[405] Fredericks, 1–7.
[406] Mary C. Boys, 'Learning in the Presence of the Other', in *Interreligious Friendship After Nostra Aetate* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 9–20.

In reflecting on his friendship with prominent Buddhist scholar and practitioner, Masao Abe, James Fredericks, in the same volume, describes his friendship with Abe as a 'spiritual friendship.' Fredericks argues that interreligious friendships, of the deep kind which he describes himself as sharing with Masao Abe, might be recognised as 'a form of Christian spiritual practice.'[407] By this, as he elaborates, Fredericks means that 'friendships that reach across the boundaries of community, doctrine, scripture, asceticism, and liturgy that separate religious believers should rightly be regarded as new opportunities for exploring Christian spirituality.'[408] The practice of interreligious friendship can provide a context, Fredericks argues, for Christians to unlearn their tendency to view the strangeness of the other as a threat.[409] Indeed, in coming to befriend the religious other, Fredericks argues, we can become 'humanized' and enriched, as the friend opens us to new ways of seeing the world which have hitherto been closed off to us on account of the religious traditions which we occupy.[410] The difference which the religious other embodies becomes, in this way, a source of enrichment to us, even if we may never truly be able to call these traditions ours in the same sense that it is for our friends. The religious other, who is our friend, may help us, as well, to see clearly what we ourselves have always had within our religious traditions. That is, in sharing our lives with them, we come to see better what it is that is unique and distinct about our own life of faith. Fredericks considers this to have been the case in his friendship with Masao Abe.

[407] James L. Fredericks, 'Masao Abe: A Spiritual Friendship', in *Interreligious Friendship After Nostra Aetate*, ed. James L. Fredericks and Tracy Sayuki Tiemeier (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 156.
[408] Fredericks, 165.
[409] Fredericks, 156–57.
[410] Fredericks, 156.

Conclusion

Alon Goshen-Gottstein is probably right when he says, 'difference constitutes the greatest challenge to interreligious friendship.'[411] Yet, as we have argued in this chapter, precisely in this difference does the potential for interreligious dialogue – enacted in the form of interreligious friendship – for becoming a gift to the religious other (in our case, to the Christian) lie. In the mutuality of giving and receiving love and joy, interreligious friends become blessings to one another. But they also challenge us, exposing our prejudices, challenging us to learn better our own traditions, and thereby providing a context wherein moral and spiritual growth can happen. Sosckice points to listening as the key virtue required for the formation of friendship, and for Christians, listening is nothing short of *agape*, demanding the discipline of attending to the other, suspending – even if only momentarily – my preoccupation with my self.

Religious traditions are likely to have different reasons for enjoining interreligious friendship or otherwise, for circumscribing its practice. What we have tried to argue in this chapter is that at least for Christians, theological grounds exist for rejecting accounts of friendship that ground its possibility on shared teleology between the friends. Within other traditions, other ways of thinking about why their adherents should befriend religious others would have to be provided.[412] But what has been provided here by the appeal to the possibility of Divine friendship with humans, the recalling of Jesus' own example of open friendships, as well as the consideration we have given to how these friendships enrich the moral and spiritual lives of Christians, are aimed toward an attempt to ground interreligious

[411] Goshen-Gottstein, 'Introduction', xxxvi.
[412] An example of an attempt at such theological motivating for interreligious friendship from an Islamic viewpoint is provided in Giannotti, 'Toward a Muslim Theology of Interreligious Friendship'.

friendship on Christian terms. This concern ties in with this thesis's aim of arguing for the possibility of interreligious dialogue despite a commitment to affirming Christian particularity of the sort we defended in Chapter 1.

If as we claim that from a particularist viewpoint Christians ought to enter into interreligious dialogue (and friendships) as Christians, then their reasonings for so entering into these dialogical relationships must primarily be as Christians or at the very least, these reasons must hold religious existential importance to them. To speak then as we have of friendship with the religious other constituting a gift and a means of grace, one providentially made available to us, should not be taken to mean a subscription on our part to an instrumentalist view of interreligious friendship. There is no doubt such a danger here, one that calls for clarification. With Aristotle, we think that there is indeed something morally deficient, something ethically lacking in a vision of friendship organised around using the friend for my own benefit. This judgement for us stands even when the ends to which such friendships are put are ostensibly spiritual. Rather, Christian friendship with religious others, like our friendship with fellow Christians, must be seen, not necessarily as having no higher ends beyond themselves, but as partaking in the wider friendship with the divine to which Christians of all ages and of all times are called. Christians are to receive interfaith friendships as gifts in the same way that they receive other forms of gifts that the good Lord gives to them – such as the gift of family, of a career, of sharing common life with neighbours in the polis, in short, the varied gifts abounding in our creaturely life.

In scripture, Christians are urged to 'speak the truth in love.'[413] Interreligious friendship just as interfaith dialogues more broadly do not have the immediate aim of seeking to convert

[413] Ephesian 4:15 NRSV.

the religious other to one's faith. Such conversions may of course conceivably happen but as we have defined it in this chapter, interreligious friendship derive their moral and theological significance because of the way that they speak to the challenge of that difference that will not go away, the other who continues to be other. Interreligious friendship, as we will show in the next chapter, challenges us to broaden our understanding of what Christian witness to Jesus Christ means. If witness is a critical Christian category for being in the world, then it becomes important to consider the ways that interreligious friendship participates in witnessing the peaceableness of the kingdom of God to which Christians are called. We give more attention to this question in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

THE WITNESS OF DIALOGUE: INTERRELIGIOUS FRIENDSHIP AS MISSIONAL PRACTICE OF THE PEACEABLE KINGDOM

Introduction

As noted in Chapter 2, one of the four forms of interreligious dialogue delineated in the post-Vatican II Catholic document *Dialogue and Proclamation* is what it terms 'the dialogue of action.' The document explains this type of dialogue as that 'in which Christians and others collaborate for the integral development and liberation of people.'[414] This form of dialogue may be spoken of as a 'dialogue of hands,' with the metaphor of 'hands' indicating its character as a mode of dialogue-oriented toward the practical, toward shared activities, initiatives, and programmes. The literature speaks of this type of dialogue as constituting a form of 'interreligious cooperation.'[415] These interreligious cooperations have tended to be built upon what Catherine Cornille terms as 'external' forms of 'interconnection' that depend upon the shared geographical, social, and political spaces that adherents of the religions inhabit. [416] Cornille notes that similar challenges, such as the environmental crisis in the Anthropocene, perceived and real threats of anti-religious secularism especially in the West,

[414] Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, 'Dialogue and Proclamation: Reflections and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ', sec. 42.
[415] James E (James Earl) Gilman, 'Whose God? Which Religion?: Compassion as the Heart of Interreligious Cooperation', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 40, no. 3 (2003): 267–95; Paul Knitter, 'Challenges of Interreligious and Intercultural Cooperation Today', *Political Theology* 13, no. 4 (21 March 2012): 397–99, https://doi.org/10.1558/poth.v13i4.397; Mark Waters, 'Civic Engagement as an Avenue to Interreligious Cooperation in Religiously Diverse Communities', *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 53, no. 3 (2018): 407–20, https://doi.org/10.1353/ecu.2018.0027; Paul Weller, 'Interreligious Cooperation', in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, ed. David Cheetham, Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 365–89; Sjaak Korver, 'Ritual as a House with Many Mansions: Inspirations from Cultural Anthropology for Interreligious Cooperation', *Jaarboek Voor Liturgie-Onderzoek* 32 (2016): 105–23.
[416] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 95–110.

religious/ideological extremism and violence, and other material concerns experienced by the various religions often inform the dialogues of action.

Prominent interreligious-focused Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) such as Religions for Peace, KAICIID, and United Religions Initiative exemplify interfaith agencies for whom interreligious cooperation or the dialogue of action constitutes an important aspect of their strategy for promoting interreligious dialogue. But even when not organised under the aegis of an interfaith NGO, the different religions are, by themselves, leading initiatives of cooperation. As Marcus Braybrooke notes in his survey of interfaith cooperative initiatives, 'increasingly people of many religions are coming together in peace-related concerns.'[417] Braybrooke cites, in this respect, an example like the World Conference of Religious Workers for Lasting Peace, Disarmament and Just Relations Among Nations that was held in 1977, bringing 'observers from the Vatican, the World Council of Churches, and the World Muslim League.'[418]

But for Cornille, while interreligious cooperations oriented toward practical concerns are important, their effectiveness, and to some extent, even viability, might prove unsustainable over the long haul. They may, as Cornille put it, 'remain confined to collaborative response to common challenges and contingent upon the existence of such challenges.'[419] Their cooperations may, therefore, Cornille thinks, be short-termed. They may be so because they fail to be anchored on something deeper – *within* the religions themselves – that can enable, for the religious adherents who participate in these interreligious cooperative enterprises, a

[417] Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*, 169.
[418] Braybrooke, 169.
[419] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 110.

narration of them as existentially meaningful, as significant beyond simply being of ad-hoc, pragmatic import.

We however need not (and indeed, we do not) agree with Cornille that practically motivated forms of dialogue are of limited usefulness, or that they would, simply by virtue of their 'externalist' undergirding, prove ultimately unsustainable. They may not prove to be so because external conditions and pressures always remain important to the religions. And if so, reflections on interreligious dialogues must continue to attend to the pragmatic. Indeed, interfaith dialogues need to understand themselves as, whatever else, practical endeavours. As we argued in Chapter 2, in construing interreligious dialogue, we need to move away from the popular image that posits interfaith dialogue as being rather esoteric activities of relevance only to an interested marginal few within the religious traditions. Luke Bretherton is instructive in this respect when he points out that a weakness of many contemporary interreligious dialogue conversations and initiatives is their tendency toward 'spiritualizing' interreligious dialogue.[420]

This weakness comes through in their failure, too often, to attend to the political and economic contexts within which interreligious engagements/relations in our world now inevitably take place. But neglecting the practical situatedness of interreligious dialogue can only prove ironic because political and economic factors exert considerable influence on the quality and texture of interreligious relationships around the globe, whether those be positive or negative, especially in our late-capitalist, globalized world. As Bretherton makes the point, 'abstracting accounts of inter-faith relations from broader accounts of political economy masks how the state and the market are key factors in establishing the conditions and

[420] Bretherton, 'A Postsecular Politics?'

possibilities for such relations.'[421] If this is the case, then it might well follow that while Cornille importantly alerts us to the need for the religions to forge 'a sense of interconnection that is more inherently religious, or internal to religious self-understanding,'[422] it is equally crucial for them to connect these 'deeper' religious logics – which, no doubt, can more firmly undergird interreligious cooperation – to practical questions of how members of diverse interreligious communities might be able to forge more flourishing lives together, given the concrete political and economic challenges and opportunities they face.

This chapter is shaped by these two considerations. How might we, in the first place, conceive of interreligious dialogue in ways that take seriously its practical nature, its nature as an endeavour informed by and, at the same time, seeking pragmatic ends (with an important end being, as we showed in chapter two, peaceable relations between the religions)? But, second, and equally important, how might we take seriously Cornille's (and indeed also our) contention that interfaith dialogues, even those that form around practical concerns, require being anchored on the moral visions, theological commitments, and traditioned linguistic registers of the religions themselves?

In seeking to hold these two contentions, we return to the model of dialogue outlined in the last chapter, namely, Interreligious friendship. Friendship, we suggest, provides a way of holding together the considerations of the practical situatedness and usefulness of interreligious dialogue, on the one hand, and a sense of its being connected to the theological and moral visions of the different religions, on the other hand. With respect to the latter consideration, it was already argued in the last chapter that interreligious friendships are

[421] Bretherton, 346.
[422] Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*, 110.

laden with spiritual and moral blessings for Christians (and presumably, for non-Christians), and as such, must be understood as constituting sites of sanctification for Christians. But in this chapter, we attend to the former consideration. We argue that interfaith friendships are, beyond being spiritually edifying, able to serve practically transformative ends. Through the contexts of interreligious friendship that we reflect upon, we shall show how these friendships also have the capacity to witness to a Christian vision of living non-violently in the world, serving thereby as practices of Christian witness to the 'peaceable kingdom.' By framing interreligious friendship as witness, a missiological register, we hope to flag, at the same time, its identity as a practice of Christian mission, echoing Bonnie Sue Lewis who, in similarly missiological terms, speaks of interreligious friendships as an 'incarnational missional practice.'[423]

Although we should add, somewhat in parenthesis, that this is *not* to say, as David Bosch reminds us, that interreligious dialogue (even when they take the form of friendship) and mission are essentially the same thing. They are not. Rather, interreligious friendships are modes of witness, but Christian missional witness is not exhausted in interreligious dialogue.[424] Still, the category of 'witness' provides, we think, a fitting missiological frame for speaking about the dialogical encounter with religious others. The church is called to live out her faith in public, witnessing to others of the divine grace which she has received. In witnessing, the church is called to give a truthful account of herself in the midst of those who do not share her faith yet. Evangelisation is one form this may take, but it need not be the only form. The church, because she resides in the world, is always engaging in witness, even

[423] Bonnie Sue Lewis, 'Interfaith Friendship as Incarnational Mission Practice: Presidential Address, ASM 2018', *Missiology* 47, no. 1 (1 January 2019): 6–17, https://doi.org/10.1177/0091829618814835.
[424] David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in the Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 487.

if this witness does not always lead to the making of converts. The nature of this witness requires the church to equally listen, even learn from, those who at present do not belong to her community; those who, as yet, do not speak her language. Witness is, therefore, not only discursive but can be embodied in the practices that Christians live out in the world. Our claim in this chapter is that by befriending the religious other, and cooperating with these others, Christians 'witness' to Jesus Christ and peaceable kingdom.

Our argument that interreligious friendships witness to Christian peaceableness will be developed in conversation with two examples, or what we might call scenes, of interreligious friendship. In the first place, we consider the model of interreligious dialogue termed Scriptural Reasoning, a model of dialogue that has had an important influence on contemporary discussions of interreligious dialogue, especially in the United States and the United Kingdom. And – although, it is fair to say, to a lesser extent – Scriptural Reasoning has also found a reach in non-Western world contexts. We recognise Scriptural Reasoning's limitations – the fact, for instance, that, by its typically textual nature, it would be more accessible to the literate or those that are 'learned' in the religious traditions, and might therefore remain closed off to many 'ordinary' global adherents of the religions. Yet, Scriptural Reasoning, for the way that it encourages interreligious friendships and in its strong commitment to peaceable interreligious relations – offers a concrete site for thinking, from a Christian viewpoint, about how interreligious friendships share in the work of peace-making, of Christian witness. A second example we discuss is the story of the friendship between British Anglican priest, Charles Freer Andrews and Mohandas Gandhi. Gandhi and Andrews' friendship was remarkable, not simply for the quality of its peaceable interreligious witness (which, in its own right, was/is important) but, just as much, for the way that it participated in and energized the social justice projects that marked the lives of both men. The friendship

of Gandhi and Andrews provides not only an illustration of interreligious friendship's possibility despite real religious differences between friends but highlights, as well, the way that friendships of these kinds embody a form of interreligious cooperation that, prophetically, can participate in the struggle against the violence and injustice so rife in our world. In so framing interreligious dialogue as Christian witness, this chapter hopes to underline its necessity for Christians. A necessity predicated on the fact that Christians are called to live peaceably with everyone. Let us begin by first stating more clearly why we believe Christians are so called.

5.1. The Peaceable Kingdom: Interreligious Friendship as Christian Witness

We have used the language of the 'peaceable kingdom' to frame what interreligious friendships, for Christians, witness to. We take this language of 'peaceable kingdom' from Stanley Hauerwas, whose work we have had reason to engage with (in chapter 3) and whose postliberal theological vision, alongside that of George Lindbeck, influences our defence of a Christian particularism.[425] We return to Hauerwas in this chapter for the insights that are present in his articulation of the centrality of peaceableness, or non-violence, to a Christian moral vision.

A central contention in Hauerwas' moral theology is that Christian ethics must take seriously its qualifier as 'Christian.' For Hauerwas, taking this qualifier seriously means, at the very least, that scripture must be foregrounded in any Christian articulation of ethics. Scripture provides, as Hauerwas tells us, 'the irreplaceable source of the stories that train us

[425] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*.

to be a faithful people.'[426] Or, as Bretherton puts the same point – which we quoted in a previous chapter – it is scripture, not philosophical considerations, in the end, that are most persuasive for Christians in reaching ethical decisions.[427] If this is the case (and we think that it is so), then a commitment to peace, for Christians, must, in the first place, be connected to scripture. And within scripture, Christians find, in rather unambiguous terms, the instruction to 'pursue peace with everyone,' with this admonition to peace framed as integral to holiness, to what it means for Christians to be set apart from the world.[428] This injunction to peacemaking is narrated in scripture as deriving from the more fundamental reality of God's commitment to peace. The divine commitment to peace is, Christians would say, most paradigmatically exemplified in the Christological moment when Christ appears, when Christ becomes, in himself, 'our peace.'[429] The peace that Christ brings on earth assumes a present order of violence, a cosmic form of violence that, in this 'present age,' exists between the forces of darkness and the forces of Light. But 'in Christ,' God however has dismantled what Apostle Paul terms as 'the dividing walls of hostility' that the forces of darkness had been intent to foist upon God's creation.[430] Through Christ, the violent symbol that the ancient Roman cross represented becomes transformed into an insignia of the peaceable kingdom that Christ himself establishes. The 'foolishness' of the cross, as Paul tells us, has now become God's power, God's display of wisdom.[431] Through the peace that his death and resurrection bring, Christ now reigns supreme over creation, bringing creation under God's peaceable reign. In Isaiah's prophecy, there is an anticipation, indeed, of a future time when all hostilities,

[426] Hauerwas, 70.
[427] Bretherton, *Hospitality as Holiness: Christian Witness Amid Moral Diversity*, 128.
[428] Hebrews 12:14 (NRSV).
[429] Ephesians 2:14.
[430] Ephesians 2:14.
[431] I Corinthians 1:18.

even those that now exist within wider non-human creation, between humans and animals (and between animals and animals), would cease.[432]

A scripturally attentive articulation of Christian peacemaking will benefit from an apocalyptic hermeneutic of scripture, specifically of the New Testament, the type present in the work of New Testament interpreters like Beverly Gaventa, Phillip Ziegler, Douglas Campbell, and Martin J. Louis.[433] A key thrust of this apocalyptic reading of the New Testament (and specifically of Paul's epistles) is a dualism that posits a new epistemological vantage point that Christ (and conversion to the way of Christ) makes possible for those who, like Paul, are now 'in Christ.'[434] This apocalyptic dualism imagines the world in terms of 'spirit' and 'flesh.' Christians are called to increasingly 'mortify the flesh,' 'making no provision' for sin, and to 'keep in step with the Spirit.'[435] It is only 'in Christ' that Christians see the world correctly. A crucial part of what they are enabled to correctly see is that violence and an understanding of power as control over the other are inconsistent with the cruciform nature of Christ's glorification.[436] Christian pursuit of 'peace with everyone' sits within this new vision that conversion to Christ enables. Indeed, peace, as Hauerwas has noted, is not something that Christians can conjure up by their self-willed power, but must be understood as first and foremost a gift that they receive from God. Hauerwas notes that 'peace is a gift of God that comes only by our being a community formed around a crucified saviour – a saviour who

[432] Isaiah 11:6-9.
[433] Beverly Roberts Gaventa, 'Places of Power in Paul's Letter to the Romans', *Interpretation* 76, no. 4 (1 October 2022): 293–302, https://doi.org/10.1177/00209643221108179; J. Louis Martyn, 'The Apocalyptic Gospel in Galatians', *Interpretation* 54, no. 3 (1 July 2000): 246–66, https://doi.org/10.1177/002096430005400303; Philip Gordon Ziegler, *Militant Grace: The Apocalyptic Turn and the Future of Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018); Douglas A. Campbell, 'Apocalyptic Epistemology: The Sine Qua Non of Valid Pauline Interpretation', in *Paul and the Apocalyptic Imagination*, ed. Ben C. Blackwell, John K. Goodrich, and Jason Maston (Fortress Press, 2016), 65–85.
[434] 2 Corinthians 5:17.
[435] Romans 8:13; Colossians 3:5.
[436] Campbell, 'Apocalyptic Epistemology: The Sine Qua Non of Valid Pauline Interpretation', 78; Gaventa, 'Places of Power in Paul's Letter to the Romans'.

teaches us how to be peaceful in a world in rebellion against its true Lord.'[437] Christian commitment to peacemaking witnesses both to the new Christological order of peace established 'in Christ' and serves, at the same time, as an anticipation of the future epoch of peace that would, Christians believe, be fully unveiled when Christ comes again in his glory.

In a world where difference, especially religious difference, is often seized upon as a pretext for causing violence to the other, interreligious friendships, entered into by Christians, become practices of witness to this non-violent, peaceful way of living with the neighbour. The peaceable witness of these friendships, for Christians, is rooted in an eschatological horizon, a horizon wherein one sees the world correctly as now under God's reign of peace. As John Milbank has argued, Christianity, rightly narrated, 'does not allow violence any real ontological purchase,' instead, because of what God has done in Christ, peace now assumes, for Christianity what Milbank phrases as 'ontological priority.'[438] It is because it displays something of this 'ontological priority of peace' amidst religious difference that interreligious friendships model, to a violent world, what Luke Bretherton speaks of, in a related context, as 'signs of contradiction.'[439] These friendships serve as 'signs of contradiction' in the way that they exemplify hopeful instances and possibilities of relationality with the religious other that refuse to be characterized by the animosity and hatred that so often mark interreligious relations. They constitute, in this way, performances of witness to the Christian faith in that they stage to the world a refusal to read the other's difference as a threat to *my* way of being in the world. They witness to a Christian conviction that Jesus, not the Christian believer or, for that matter, any human, is Lord. Because Jesus is Lord, there is no need for me to be in

[437] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*, 12.
[438] John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: Beyond Secular Reason*, Second Edition (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 440.
[439] Bretherton, 'A Postsecular Politics?', 365.

control, and no need for me to be in control over the other, to fashion the other into my image. And 'our need to be in control,' Hauerwas tells us, 'is the basis for the violence in our lives.'[440] For Christians, interreligious friendships – seen here as constituting practices of peacemaking – may thus become enactments of a scripturally normed hospitality of the self toward the religious other.

Interreligious friendships, oriented to a Christian vision of non-violence, perform a witness to the peace that Christ enables. They provide such a performance in that they serve, in a real way, as contemporary embodiments of the always-urgent Christian mandate to 'pursue peace with everyone.' Interreligious friendships witness, at the same time, to Christian love. In the previous chapter, we already noted how friendship's love is not incompatible with *agapeic* love. The extending of one's embrace to the other, rather than recoiling in fear, witnesses to a heart that has been deeply transformed by God's love, and is thus able to live boldly (rather than fearfully) with the other. For, as Hauerwas has noted, it is only 'only when my self – my character – has been formed by God's love, do I know I have no reason to fear the other.'[441] In the introduction to her book on friendship, historian of Christianity, Dana L. Robert, says 'friendship has limitations. It does not solve all the world's problems. It does not cure cancer or HIV/AIDS. It does not eliminate structural injustice.'[442] By itself, admittedly, friendship is unable to do these. But it is instructive that Robert adds that 'faithful friendships dare to witness to Jesus Christ.'[443] Interreligious friendship, we contend, precisely provides such a kind of witness – at least for Christians – to Jesus Christ. But as an integral part of the task of

[440] Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom: A Primer of Christian Ethics*, 47.
[441] Hauerwas, 91.
[442] Dana Lee Robert, *Faithful Friendships: Embracing Diversity in Christian Community* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2019), 8.
[443] Robert, 8.

this witness to Jesus Christ, these interreligious friendships also can make a difference in the 'real world,' in such areas of practical human concerns like public life, social justice, interreligious peace and communal flourishing. Friendships, as we argued in the previous chapter, provide a much-needed interpersonal context for the formation of virtues like tolerance and hospitality. They hold a transformative capacity for providing vulnerable spaces wherein the self might experience the mystery, hospitality, and friendship of God. But in an equally integral way, they facilitate the realization of a Christian vision of living peaceably in the world. In the next section, we consider a dialogical practice, Scriptural Reasoning, in which friendship plays a crucial role, and note the way that this dialogue practice connects to a Christian vision of living peaceably with the other.

5.2. Faith Seeking Understanding Together: The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning

Scriptural Reasoning (hereafter shortened SR) is a practice that has, as mentioned in Chapter 1, gained important influence in contemporary discussions around the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue.[444] Its history is a relatively short one, having in effect begun in the 1990s with the work of a number of 'postliberal' or 'post-critical' Jewish and Christian academics in the United States and the United Kingdom. SR has attracted a significant amount of literature, with a journal, the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*, devoted to it. SR's strong

[444] For helpful surveys and descriptions of Scriptural Reasoning, see Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue'; Magdalen Lambkin, 'Towards an Interreligious Hermeneutic of Scripture: Problems and Possibilities', in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People*, ed. David Cheetham et al. (Brill, 2011), 103–28, https://doi.org/10.1163/9789401200370_008; Magdalen Lambkin, 'Can Scriptures Unite? A Theological Exploration of the Interreligious Practice of Scriptural Reasoning', *eSharp*, Uniting Nations: Risks and Opportunities, no. 15 (2010): 42–64; Adams, 'Scriptural Reasoning and Interfaith Hermeneutics'; Rachel Godfrey, 'Scriptural Reasoning', in *Mapping Faith: Theologies of Migration and Community*, ed. Lia D Shimanda (London, UK: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2020), 104–13, http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/bayloru/detail.action?docID=6214769; Jacob L. Goodson, *The Philosopher's Playground: Understanding Scriptural Reasoning through Modern Philosophy* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2021).

influence is attested by the fact that it now has a reach extending beyond the US and the UK, and has come to incorporate religions beyond the Abrahamic/monotheistic traditions which, in its formative years, it was most associated with.[445] The first SR meeting took place in 1991 during the annual conference of the American Academy of Religion, with two Jewish scholars, Peter Ochs and David Novak, the first co-chairs of this inaugural meeting.[446] The early connection to Judaism was not coincidental. SR's origins and practice are intimately tied to developments within Jewish philosophy and hermeneutics in the 20th century, specifically what Peter Ochs terms as the 'return to scripture' in Jewish philosophy of this period.[447] This 'returning' to scripture was shaped by a 'post-critical' consciousness that began to emerge amongst Jewish scholars from the 1980s forward. The post-critical turn viewed positively the generative intellectual and spiritual prospects laden in the work of such Jewish philosophers as Franz Rosenzweig, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas, Herman Cohen, and Eugene Borowitz. What developed in the aftermath of this awakening was the practice of Textual Reasoning, a hermeneutical practice that sought to put Jewish philosophy (and other Western traditions of philosophy) in close conversation with the Hebrew Scripture; in other words, an attempt at something akin (in reference to 20th-century Catholic theology) to a *ressourcement* of Jewish philosophy.[448]

[445] A discussion of its practice in China, for instance, is provided in Li Huawei, Miikka Ruokanen, and David Ford, 'Scriptural Reasoning as a Method of Interreligious Dialogue in China', *International Review of Mission* 108, no. 2 (2019): 415–29, https://doi.org/10.1111/irom.12294. And as David Ford notes, SR now has a presence in a disparate array of non-Western countries, including 'Egypt, Pakistan, Oman, Israel, South Africa, Australia, Nigeria, and Kenya.' David F. Ford, 'Foreword', in *Religion without Violence: The Practice and Philosophy of Scriptural Reasoning*, by Peter Ochs (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019), x.
[446] Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims', 4.
[447] Ochs, 'Introduction to Postcritical Interpretation'.
[448] Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims', 3.

5.2.1. Sharing Hearths: Reasoning with Friends on Scripture

It should help to provide a brief description of SR. But because a considerable body of literature has ably done this work of description, it will not be necessary to be exhaustive here.[449] Steven Kepnes provides a succinct definition of SR as 'a practice of group reading of scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam that builds sociality among its practitioners and releases sources of reason, compassion, and divine spirit for healing our separate communities and for repair of the world.'[450] Three important elements of this definition, namely, scripture, sociality, and the repair of the world should be highlighted. First, scripture. The reading of scriptures drawn from at least two religious traditions with members of the religious communities for whom these sacred books constitute scripture is the definitive feature of SR. There is, in reading scriptures together, an acknowledgement of differences in the ways that these scriptures are viewed by the different religious communities. But despite this acknowledgement of difference, SR practitioners respect the scriptures of the other as sacred, as authoritative for those within the religious communities. There is, however, neither an expectation nor encouragement for SR practitioners to regard the other's scripture as authoritative for them.

In what may be described as its attunement to the theological/spiritual character of scripture, SR clearly departs from a 'religious studies,' secular approach to the sacred texts of the religions. In post-enlightenment *religionswissenschaft*, housed in the modern university,

[449] For a good description and reflections upon the descriptions, see David Ford and C. C Pecknold, eds., *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (London: Blackwell Publishing, 2006). Ford and Pecknold's edited volume includes seminal reflective essays by some of the key 'first generation' figures in the SR movement. For a more recent treatment of SR, see Peter Ochs, *Religion without Violence: The Practice and Philosophy of Scriptural Reasoning* (Eugene, Oregon: Cascade Books, 2019).

[450] Steven Kepnes, 'A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning', in *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, ed. David Ford and C. C Pecknold (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 23.

the tendency has been to bracket off discussions about (or worse, explain away) the revelatory character of the scriptures of the religions – a tendency toward a reductionism that does injustice to these texts' histories as books of/for communities of faith. [451] Against this, in SR, there is a prioritizing of the emic perspective; of what those who 'own' these scriptures think about them. SR's approach to scripture is novel, too, in the way that it goes against the Western modernist logic that holds scripture and other modalities of religious dogma as aiding intolerance toward religious others. Over and against this modern secular attitude, SR regards the scriptures of the religious traditions as texts laden with positive, transformative capacity for reforming the often-entrenched negative dispositions toward the other that has, sadly, tended to mark the history of relations between the 'Abrahamic religions,' and indeed, even non-Abrahamic religions. It is in this respect that Kepnes speaks of SR as geared toward 'the repair of the world.' We shall return to this theme of 'world repair' soon. But for the moment, it suffices to underscore the prominent place that SR accords to scripture.

Peter Ochs, showing an awareness of non-scriptural religions, has recently broadened the focus of SR beyond scripture, employing a more inclusive term 'hearth' to describe the deep spiritually and morally authoritative sources present, in different forms, within the world's religions. The 'hearths' of the religions are, as Ochs explains, 'what is most valued in a religious group's beliefs and practices.'[452] In the Abrahamic religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the Tanakh, Bible, and Qur'an, respectively, constitute the most important 'hearths,' with these scriptures viewed as authoritative sources for norming life in the world.

[451] For historical studies of the processes and modes of this secular post-enlightenment approach to scripture, with specific reference to the Christian Bible, see, for example, Michael C. Legaspi, ed., *The Death of Scripture and the Rise of Biblical Studies*, First issued as an Oxford University Press paperback, Oxford Studies in Historical Theology (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2011); Jonathan Sheehan, *The Enlightenment Bible: Translation, Scholarship, Culture*, 3. pr., and 1. paperback pr (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 2007).
[452] Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 18.

But in other non-Abrahamic religions, what constitutes hearths might instead be myths, sacred traditions, and rituals, passed down in oral, rather than textual form. Ochs' model of 'Hearth to Hearth' dialogue, which he frames as a complement to SR, and that he locates in the context of religious peacebuilding, is therefore important for the expansiveness and inclusiveness of its vision.[453]

An important aspect of SR's treatment of scripture lies in its hermeneutics of scripture, or what, following Ochs, we might term as its hermeneutics of 'hearths.' David Ford has employed the metaphors of 'house' and 'tent' to describe the dynamic of the different dispositions toward the reading of scripture encouraged in SR.[454] The metaphor of house, as Ford explains it, speaks to the permanent religious communities and sites of worship that practitioners of SR are committed to. 'Tent' describes the temporary sites wherein SR meetings take place. SR takes place, not in the houses of worship of the different religions, but in these 'tents,' what Kepnes and Ochs term as a 'third space.' [455] In this 'third space' the sharing of scripture is, it is believed, not so inflected by the desire to adjust proceedings to suit the peculiar sensibilities of any of the participating religions. That SR meets in 'tents' rather than 'houses' of worship is thus not because SR takes an irreverent attitude to its treatment of scriptures, but rather, is due to a striving not to allow any of the participating religions to exercise dominance over the ensuing dialogue.

The language of tent, at the same time, signals the provisionality of the hermeneutical engagements with scriptures that take place in SR. Those who participate in SR, even if they possess academic expertise on the scriptural texts of their traditions, come into the SR 'tent'

[453] For a discussion of the 'Hearth-to-Hearth' dialogue, see Ochs, 150–204.
[454] Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims', 7–13.
[455] Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 22; Kepnes, 'A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning', 25.

with an understanding that the meanings they traditionally attach to or have given to these texts (in whole or in parts of it) are, in the context of SR, best viewed as provisional. Scripture is better framed as possessing an 'excess' or having a 'polyvalent' or 'vague' character (as Ochs frames it).[456] The recognition of such provisionality allows room for the exercise of the hermeneutical charity that SR thrives upon. In other words, as Ford says, SR participants understand that 'they are not experts on [scripture's] final meaning.'[457] The emphasis here is on the 'finality' of meaning, not rightness or wrongness. For Christians, this kind of hermeneutical provisionality might be grounded in the belief that, in the end, God is greater than the meanings that we attach to God's revelation. That, while it is true that God reveals Godself to us, Revelation is still, ultimately, a disclosure, not an inherent possession located within the receiving self.[458] SR thus requires participants to possess a willingness to view their 'orthodox' or 'right' meanings are potentially open to new lights, to a fuller understanding than what presently exists. These new meanings received no doubt depend on the insights on these texts shared by the religious other. But even more so, Christians might wish to say, the new meanings owe to the mysteriousness of the triune God who is able to meet humans in the most unexpected of places. Its provisional character means that SR is an exercise in both hermeneutical risk and humility. Risky because the meanings that emerge in the event of SR might challenge previously held understandings of scriptural texts, and humility then becomes an important virtue if these new meanings would be allowed to sit alongside the range of interpretive options which the SR participant holds (potentially) applicable to the

[456] Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 20.
[457] Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims', 5. Word in bracket mine.
[458] As Adams notes, Scriptural Reasoning is possible, for Christians, because Christians can acknowledge that 'God is great: greater than language, greater than traditions, greater than scripture.' Nicholas Adams, *Habermas and Theology* (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 249.

texts. As David Ford and Chad Pecknold put it, 'being generous and critically receptive, even vulnerable, to one another's judgement has been a key part of the ethos of engagement in SR.'[459]

The second aspect of SR that Kepnes's definition highlights is SR's sociality. This sociality extends beyond the fact that SR requires for its possibility more than one participant, and so, by its very nature, is a social activity. Rather, the form of sociality encouraged in SR takes a specific form, namely, friendship. Friendship has always been important in SR. Indeed, from its beginnings, SR was modelled on the Jewish *chevruta* method of study. Here, *chevruta*, as Nicholas Adams explains, is a Jewish word 'meaning a group of friends.'[460] Adams notes that 'the most striking thing about the context of scriptural reasoning is not consensus but friendship.'[461] Or, as he puts it elsewhere, 'Scriptural Reasoning values friendship above consensus.'[462] SR does not seek uniformity, but pursues, instead, a unity of hearts oriented toward the religious other in friendship. It is in its commitment to charitable disagreement, or what might be termed its encouragement of non-hostile separateness, that a major aspect of SR's transformative capacity lies. Collegiality is taken for granted in SR, but this collegial spirit often transforms, SR practitioners say, as SR runs its course over the period of its meetings, into a genuine interreligious friendship between participants. Adams sees the friendships that emerge in SR as constituting a kind of 'public friendship,'[463] in a way that recalls Jürgen Moltmann's talk of a 'public' type of friendship that Jesus models in the New Testament, which we referenced in the previous chapter. Adams notes, in a way that supports

[459] C. C Pecknold, 'Editorial Preface: The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning', in *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, ed. David F. Ford and C. C Pecknold (Oxford ; Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), x.
[460] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 240.
[461] Adams, 243.
[462] Nicholas Adams, 'Making Deep Reasonings Public', in *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*, ed. David F. Ford and C. C Pecknold (Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 53.
[463] Adams, 53.

our argument for the possibility of friendship in spite of religious orientational differences between friends, how, in SR, disagreement comes to be received as 'a gift to be treasured.'[464]

The fact that friendship with the religious other, despite disagreements, happens in SR relativizes, even contradicts, the secular liberal contention that something like an 'overlapping consensus' (in John Rawls' sense) alone provides the conditions for 'reasonable' argumentation in the political 'public sphere.'[465] As Nicholas Adams shows in his engagement with Jürgen Habermas's political philosophy, the fact that something like SR is possible at all means that religious traditions can engage in intelligible, non-hostile discourses in the 'public sphere.'[466] In some ways, as well, the collegiality and friendship – despite real differences – that SR makes possible illustrates the kind of politics of 'conversation' between diverse religious and non-religious communities that Jeffrey Stout argues is crucial for the flourishing of democracy. Stout defines this 'conversation' as the 'exchange of views in which the respective parties express their premises in as much detail as they see fit and in whatever idiom they wish, try to make sense of each other's perspectives, and expose their commitments to the possibility of criticism.' [467] One need not, of course, wedge SR so closely to a project of democratic renewal (which is the context within which Stout's work is located), but SR does offer an illustration of a practice that is civic and religious at the same time, and that offers a wholesome picture of the 'dignity of difference' that Rabbi Jonathan Sacks sought to defend.[468]

[464] Adams, 54.
[465] John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 133–71.
[466] Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 250.
[467] Jeffrey Stout, *Democracy and Tradition*, 4. print., and 1st paperback print, New Forum Books (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 11.
[468] Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference*.

But despite the high place accorded to friendship in SR, Jennifer Ruth Fields, in a recent work on Scriptural Reasoning, has argued that ambiguities, even a kind of unclarity, attaches to the construals of friendship's place in SR. Fields thinks that, while friendship no doubt functions as a prominent theme and motif in discourses on SR, there is, in actual fact, little, if any, consistency among theorists of SR about what this friendship, so highlighted in SR, names. Is this friendship best viewed as a by-product of SR or is it, rather, to be seen as the key goal that SR pursues? If it is the former, what relationship, Fields asks, does friendship have to the other 'by-products' of SR such as the surprising consensus, among the diverse religious participants, that sometimes emerges in SR? And if the latter – if friendship is SR's key goal – what kind of friendship is it that SR promotes? Is it the type of friendship that we are inclined to think is present in 'everyday' friendships or it is a distinct form of friendship?[469] Another point of ambiguity Fields notes, and one that is even more significant for our interests in this thesis, concerns what she says about how friendship has seemed more prominent within *Christian* articulations of SR, and not so much among Muslim discussions of SR. Indeed, Fields reports that 'I was not able to locate any examples of Muslim authors highlighting friendship as a goal or byproduct of Scriptural Reasoning; in fact, I could not find any who mention friendship at all in discussions about the practice.'[470]

Fields conjectures that the marked absence of Muslim framings of SR as a practice of friendship may be due to theological obstacles posed (within Islam) to the possibility (or perhaps, even desirability) of such friendships in view of Qur'anic texts that seem to prohibit

[469] Jennifer Ruth Fields, 'Questioning the Promotion of Friendship in Interfaith Dialogue: Interfaith Friendship in Light of the Emphasis on Particularity in Scriptural Reasoning' (PhD Thesis, University of Cambridge, 2020), 156–66, https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.51377.
[470] Fields, 167.

it.[471] Also, suspicions might arise that the language of friendship, in the end, is nothing but a well-designed ploy by Christians 'using friendship as a tool for evangelism.'[472] If Fields' observations are correct, they raise important concerns. In one respect, at least, if there exists such a noticeable absence of non-Christian articulations of the importance of friendship in SR, might this absence not be a serious critique of the propriety of speaking of friendship as an important and integral ethos within SR? It may be. But as Fields also helpfully notes, the absence of strong Muslim framings of SR in terms of friendship might, however, serve simply to highlight (and equally urge) the need for reflections on SR (especially those by Christians) to take seriously SR's particularistic ethos. In other words, if SR takes religious difference as a *sine qua non* to its practice, then it is also important that theorizations on SR's practice reflect framing differences. As Fields writes, 'the commitment to particularity also requires attention to the various categories that are used by each participant.'[473] In this way, one can take Fields' observations about the reluctance of Muslims to use friendship language as underlining SR's point about the need to respect the difference of the religions, a respect that also applies, it should not be forgotten, to the ways that various participants would construe the project of SR. In other words, the lack of a similar articulation of SR (in this instance, in terms of friendship) among members of SR does not necessarily mean that something like friendship is not happening within SR (say, between its Christian and Muslim participants). Instead, the lack of similarity in this regard might suggest that the way that non-Christian participants in SR understand the *thing* that Christian SR participants call friendship may differ depending on

[471] But for a defence of and articulation of a Muslim theology of interfaith friendship, although not in the specific context of Scriptural Reasoning, see Timothy J. Gianotti, 'Toward a Muslim Theology of Interreligious Friendship', in *Friendship Across Religions: Theological Perspectives on Interreligious Friendship* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2015), 77–95.
[472] Fields, 'Questioning the Promotion of Friendship in Interfaith Dialogue', 169.
[473] Fields, 169.

a matrix of factors including their respective theologies of friendship. And these theologies of 'friendship' would be deeply tied to their varied religious traditions. This point recalls our reference to James Fredericks (in the previous chapter) when he says, 'although I enjoy the friendship of several Buddhists, Buddhism as such may not think of interreligious friendships as virtuous.'[474] But such dissimilarities in articulations of interreligious dialogue (with friendship being, as we argued in the previous chapter, a mode of dialogue), as we have been trying to argue in this thesis, constitute no problem for a particularist view; indeed, these kinds of differences are to be expected (and respected).

5.2.2. Repairing the World: Scriptural Reasoning , Peacebuilding, and Christian Particularity

It remains for us to attend to the third feature of SR that Kepnes notes, its commitment to 'the repair of the world.' Kepnes explains this feature of SR as informed by SR's sense of responsibility to connect religious traditions to the challenge of human suffering present in the world today.[475] One source of brokenness in the world is violence, especially those organised around religion. SR seeks to signal new possibilities of interreligious coexistence that are animated by peace, rather than violent conflict. This does not mean that SR agrees with the 'religion causes violence' thesis that forms the text or subtext of certain portrayals of religion in the West (both in the academy and in popular culture).[476] But instead, SR sees itself, to borrow Peter Ochs' language, as an attempt at a 'reparative' engagement with the religious other.[477] The kind of reparation fostered in SR sees scripture as 'active sources of

[474] Fredericks, 'Interreligious Friendship: A New Theological Virtue', 173.
[475] Kepnes, 'A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning', 24.
[476] A thesis present, for example, in Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, 3rd ed., rev.updated, Comparative Studies in Religion and Society 13 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Charles Selengut, *Sacred Fury: Understanding Religious Violence*, Third Edition (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).
[477] Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 30–32.

repair,' and SR as a kind of 'eschatological or hopeful sign' that anticipates a future (in the present world) when the religions might coexist in peace.[478] In this commitment to peace, SR seeks to write a new story of peace, one that intervenes on the entangled histories of violence that have tended to characterise interreligious relations amongst the Abrahamic religions (even if, we must remember, as William Cavanaugh has argued, these histories of violence owe to other factors, like political and economic, than just 'religion').[479]

Peter Ochs has done much, in recent years, to connect SR to contemporary discourses on religious peacebuilding. He has sought to move SR beyond its traditional centring on conversations anchored around the sacred texts of the multiple religions to construing SR as something that serves as a transformative tool of religious peacebuilding.[480] Although a concern for interreligious peace, it should be remembered, was always present from the early days of SR.[481] In *Religion without Violence,* Ochs describes the initial reluctance that the Muslim clerics he met in South Africa had about participating in SR in a holocaust Museum in Cape Town in South Africa during his visit there.[482] Yet, when this reluctance was eventually overcome, the SR meeting that ensued – which focused on the different scriptural narratives (in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) of Sarah's laughter – evoked lively discussions and commentaries from both the Jewish, Dutch reformed, and Muslim participants in attendance.

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[478] Ochs, 30.

[479] William Cavanaugh, 'The Myth of Religious Violence', in *The Blackwell Companion to Religious Violence*, ed. Andrew Murphy (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2011), 23–33; William T. Cavanaugh, *The Myth of Religious Violence: Secular Ideology and the Roots of Modern Conflict* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

[480] See Ochs, *Religion without Violence*; Peter Ochs, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue', in *The Oxford Handbook of Religion, Conflict, and Peacebuilding*, ed. Atalia Omer, Scott Appleby, and David Little (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 488–515.

[481] Ford, for instance, writes, at the end of his contribution to his (and Chad Pecknold's) edited volume in 2006, that 'So one promise of scriptural reasoning is the formation of people through collegial study, wise interpretation and friendship who might be exemplary citizens of the twenty-first century, seeking the public good for the sake of God and God's peaceable purposes.' Ford, 'An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning Between Jews, Christians and Muslims', 20.

[482] Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 9–11.

Part of the appeal of SR in such a context where religious difference has had a history attached to hostility and even violence is perhaps its lack of a predetermined outcome, its lack of what might be regarded as a hegemonic meta-narrative that seeks to subsume religious differences under a grand theory (as is present in many pluralist theologies of religion). Because it refuses to prejudge the outcome of the dialogical encounter, that is, because it takes religious difference as real, rather than as something that is merely an appearance, SR can allow for surprising 'organic' transformations to happen in the attitudes of religious adherents to the religious other.

SR is a morally transformative practice. As Ochs writes, 'participants in SR-sponsored projects report an unexpected shift in their perceptions of both their religious behaviour and that of members of the other religions.'[483] SR participants report a deepening of 'affection' for their religion, but alongside this, there is equally a flexibility toward new hermeneutical possibilities within the 'hearths' of their religion. More charitable forms of disagreements are therefore enabled through participation in SR. SR, in this way, becomes a practice of extending charity to the other, albeit a charity that one only comes to appreciate by actually extending it in the first place. SR's twin commitment to the repair of the world (in response to the human suffering that violence brings) and to the particularity of the religions is what makes it appealing for our particularist interests in this thesis. Its commitment to religious particularity means that, in some ways, the success of SR would depend, to a large degree, on the virtues that adherents of the different religions bring, from their 'houses,' into the 'tents' of SR meetings. In this way, SR would benefit, we think, from the kind of catechesis we argued for, in chapter 2, as made possible by scripture and the church. SR offers an opportunity for

[483] Ochs, 'The Possibilities and Limits of Inter-Religious Dialogue', 494.

Christians to witness to their convictions about scripture literally: by reading and being accountable to this scripture in the presence of the non-Christian neighbour.

But at the same time, as Kyle Lambelet has argued, it will not do for us (Christians) to stop at highlighting only the ways that the church (and its ministries and its liturgies) enable moral and spiritual transformations in the life of the Christian and the world.[484] We must also acknowledge, if we wish to be honest, the surprising ways that 'the world,' just as importantly, positively impacts the church. The way that the 'holiness' of the world 'migrates' *into* the church, providing, in the process of that 'transmigration,' an occasion for Christian moral growth, an occasion for the church to be blessed by 'the world.'[485] SR – which is not, by any means, a worship practice of the church, and is not an extension of the church's liturgy – provides an example of how 'the world' can help Christians grow in the life of character. So, an openness to that world, and the surprising ways that God meets us there, are not to be seen as incompatible with taking seriously the distinctiveness of the church, of the 'cultural-linguistic' difference that Christianity embodies.

Still, it may be asked how the hermeneutical charity (and consequent peaceable interfaith relations) that SR makes possible connect to the particularistic framework of this thesis. The question is important as it forces us to make clear how SR might be narrated as consistent with a particularistic understanding of interreligious relations that we have been seeking to defend. Straightforwardly, we might just say that SR sits quite comfortably within a particularistic, postliberal vision, as evident in SR's similar beginnings as a 'post-critical' or

[484] Lambelet makes this argument in reference to the political theology of William Cavanaugh, specifically the high accent that Cavanaugh gives to the liturgy of the church, especially the celebration of the Eucharist. Cf. William T. Cavanaugh, *Migrations of the Holy: God, State, and the Political Meaning of the Church* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2011).
[485] Kyle Brent Thompson Lambelet, *¡Presente! Nonviolent Politics and the Resurrection of the Dead* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 36–37.

'post-liberal' project. SR, as we have noted, takes the differences between the religions for granted, and it does not seek a forced, *a priori* commonality or consensus, the kind that pluralist theologies of interreligious dialogue encourage. Instead, if commonalities emerge, as they sometimes do in the course of SR, they are of an organic sort, able to be narrated, by the different SR participants, in ways that reflect their respective theological visions. Such narrative differences, as we noted about Field's work, are present even in the way that 'friendship,' which has always been a key ethos in SR, is understood by SR participants. So *difference*, which is a key obstacle in interreligious dialogue (both dialogue in the form of friendship and non-friendship forms of dialogue) continues to be respected in SR.

Marianne Moyaert has, however, raised important questions about the extent to which scriptural reasoning can be said to be a postliberal project.[486] And SR's relation to particularism, in as much as particularism is indexed to a postliberal project, would also come under her suspicion. Moyaert's doubt in this regard stems from what she sees as the more open space allowed, in SR, for commonality arising between the religions; a space that postliberalism, she thinks, does not afford. She sees 'at least a tension' between the concern, in postliberalism, for preserving the distinctiveness of the religions and the commitment to interreligious learning that is present in SR.[487] To be sure, there might be an apparent tension here. But it must be remembered that what Lindbeck's particularism disavows (as we argued in Chapter 1) is not the possibility or even desirability of commonalities arising between the religions. Instead, postliberal particularism is simply critical of those attempts at building interreligious commonality on ideological, trans-religious bases (such as John Hick's Transcendental *Real* or Paul Knitter and Jacques' Dupuis's pluralist Christologies), bases that

[486] Moyaert, 'Scriptural Reasoning as Inter-Religious Dialogue', 80–81.
[487] Moyaert, 80.

are, at best, only loosely, if at all, consistent with the self-articulations of the religions.[488] So SR's practice coheres within a particularist paradigm because the reasonings, and surprising consensuses, that emerge in SR are connected to one of the most central aspects of the religions themselves, namely, their respective scriptures (or the equivalents of scripture). No doubt, SR trains participants to read these scriptures with new eyes, to allow that there might be wider ranges of meaning possible in their texts of sacred scriptures. But the expansiveness of scripture's meanings that SR encourages – if and when opened up – are not viewed as standing in tension with the traditioned meanings of these texts. Ochs, drawing from Charles Peirce's philosophy, is helpful here. Scripture allows for a 'polyvalence' of meanings, Ochs tells us, because it has the capacity for a kind of 'vagueness.' This vagueness, as Ochs explains it, is different from 'ambiguity.' Scripture is 'vague' (in Peircean terms) in that it requires that 'readers must enter into a more intimate relationship with the words to discover which meaning is active at which time, and in which place and context of reading.'[489] It is this 'vagueness' that allows Christians (and Jews, and presumably, Muslims) to be open to new meanings of the sacred text of scripture in the context of SR.

5.3. Interreligious Friendship as Prophetic Dialogue: The Witness of Andrews and Gandhi's Friendship

Interreligious friendships exemplify the form of Christian witness that the American missiologists Stephen Bevans and Roger Schroeder term 'prophetic dialogue.'[490] They constitute the prophetic in this sense, not so much with words as with the radical embodied

[488] Hick and Knitter's pluralist projects were noted in chapter 1, and we engaged with Dupuis's ecclesiology in chapter 2. The interested reader may return to these chapters for a review of our criticisms of these pluralist programs.
[489] Ochs, *Religion without Violence*, 20.
[490] Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2011).

values of hospitality, generosity, humility, respect for the other's difference, and commitment to peacebuilding that they witness to and, at the same time, help promote.[491] There is perhaps no better illustration of the prophetic character of interreligious friendship than that present in the friendship between Charles Freer Andrews (1871-1940) and Mahatma Gandhi (1869-1948). Gandhi's storied contributions to India's struggle for Independence, and his commitment to *ahimsa*, or non-violence in the process of realizing that struggle, are well-known. But central to the success of Gandhi's struggle against injustice, and his resistance against the necropolitics of the British empire, were the many friends, comrades, and associates who joined and supported his work, and whose activist and liberationist projects of resistance he was equally deeply connected to. One such figure, in this respect, was the British Anglican priest, Charles Andrews. Writing in his tribute to Andrews, after Andrews' passing away, Gandhi wrote 'He was known to every politically minded Indian. At present, I do not wish to think of English misdeeds. They will be forgotten, but not one of the heroic deeds of Andrews will be forgotten so long as England and India live.'[492] Such was the high estimation that Gandhi had of Andrews; and whose friendship Gandhi described in the most affectionate of terms, as 'an unbreakable bond between two seekers and servants.'[493] Who was Andrews and what was the context of his friendship with Gandhi? And why might we benefit, today, from a reflection on the friendship that he and Gandhi shared, particularly in the context of our larger argument for interreligious friendships witnessing to a Christian commitment to peace? It is these two questions that we will try to answer in the next section.

[491] Bevans and Schroeder, 43.
[492] Gandhi, Andrews, and Gracie, *Gandhi and Charlie*, 188.
[493] Gandhi, Andrews, and Gracie, 188.

5.3.1. Interreligious Friendship as a Sign of Contradiction: The Witness of Andrews's Life of Friendship

Drawing on Luke Bretherton's generative phrase, we earlier characterized interreligious friendships as embodying 'signs of contradiction.' We noted that they constitute contrastive symbols in the way that they run against the grain of the secular trope that presents religion as having an inherent tendency toward fuelling conflict, especially in religiously plural contexts. Religion is said to aid conflict because of the totalizing nature of the worldview that it promotes, a worldview that leaves little room, apparently, for a peaceful accommodation of difference. But as Scott Appleby and others in the now-established field of religious peacebuilding have argued, religion has an ambivalent character, possessing a capacity to be both a source of good and evil, of embrace and exclusion (to borrow metaphors from Miroslav Volf),[494] and of violence and peace.[495] Appleby's richly documented historical study draws attention to figures, movements, and groups who, as he describes them, are 'militants for peace,' radical agents, from different religious traditions, 'who place themselves in jeopardy by working in conflict zones among the poor and disposed.'[496] Whereas the secular trope accents the evils done by violent religious militants, Appleby's portrait of figures like the Cambodian Buddhist monk, Maha Ghosananda, church-based organizations like the Mennonite Central Commission, lay religious groups like the Community of Sant'Egido, highlights the positive, peace-promoting, and conflict transforming projects that religions can

[494] Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).
[495] R. Scott Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred: Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Carnegie Commission on Preventing Deadly Conflict Series (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000). As Appleby writes, in the introduction to the book, 'contrary to the misconceptions popular in some academic and political circles, religious actors play a critical and positive role in world affairs not when they moderate their religion or marginalize their deeply held, vividly symbolized, and often highly particular beliefs in a higher order of love and justice. Religious actors make a difference when they remain religious actors.' Appleby, 16.
[496] Appleby, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred*, 121.

foster.[497] Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr's non-violent activism are well-known, paradigmatic, examples of religions' capacity for promoting peace. Andrews' prophetic life of cooperation with religious and racial others must also be included in this connection, for what we describe as his life of friendship went against the grain of his day.

Reverend Charles Freer Andrews arrived in India in 1904 as a missionary under the Cambridge Mission. He had, by this time, already been ordained as a priest in the Church of England. For the next ten years after arriving in India, he would teach at St. Stephen's College in Delhi, a higher educational institution that had been established by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel and is now a constituent college of the University of Delhi.[498] But it was not in India that Andrews first met Gandhi. The first meeting between both men and the beginnings of their friendship, happened outside of India, in South Africa. Gandhi was, at the time, living in South Africa, having moved there in 1893 on a business assignment, to serve as a contract lawyer for an Indian-owned firm operating in South Africa.[499] The plan had been for Gandhi to remain in South Africa for no more than a year, but this initially planned short-term trip would last much longer. The plight of Indian labourers in South Africa, especially in the Natal region, had been too great for Gandhi to ignore, and he would take it upon himself to support, both by legal means and by the non-violent protests that he would soon lead, the cause of Indian workers in South Africa; workers who were toiling, as they were, under an unjust indenture system.

[497] Appleby, 121–65.
[498] Eric J. Sharpe, 'Andrews, Charles Freer', in *Biographical Dictionary of Christian Missions*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson, 1998, 22–23.
[499] Mohandas K. Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, trans. Mahadev Desai (Washington, D.C: Public Affairs Press, 1954), 129.

Under the system of indenture, first introduced in 1860, workers were brought over from India, and transported to different parts of the British empire to work in various plantations, mostly sugar plantations.[500] In these plantations, they worked, under slavish conditions, for a White European owner whom they had no power in choosing. Freedom from indenture was nearly impossible. It was an arrangement that, as Charles Andrews would later note in his autobiography, 'reproduced many of the old evils of slavery, sometimes in an exaggerated form.'[501] It was practised not only in South Africa but in other parts of the British Empire like Fiji and the British Guiana. The working conditions under indenture were not only deplorable, but they were also, as Andrews put it, 'immoral.'[502] It was not uncommon for workers to take recourse to suicide.[503] Although not an indentured labourer himself, it would not take too long for Gandhi to experience the racialised injustice that was deeply entrenched and institutionalised in South Africa at the time. Gandhi relays, in his autobiography, an incident, soon after he arrived in South Africa, of being forcefully removed from the train compartment his ticket had given him the right to sit in, on his way from Durban to Pretoria. He had been removed from this compartment by a policeman because his 'coloured' status meant he was not permitted to sit there.[504] In Apartheid South Africa, 'brown' and 'mixed' coloured people had been classed as 'coloureds,' deemed different from and inferior to 'whites,' and subject to similar arrangements of segregation as the native South African 'blacks.'

[500] Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative* (New York: Harper and Brothers Publishers, 1950), 90.
[501] C. F. Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ* (New York; Cincinnati; Chicago: The Abingdon Press, 1932), 212.
[502] Andrews, 212.
[503] Andrews, 212.
[504] Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth*, 140–41.

Gandhi would later be imprisoned, alongside other protesting Indians and European allies, for their march against a poll tax that the South African government had introduced and applied to Indian indentured labourers.[505] It was under these circumstances that Gandhi and Andrews first met. In the company of a friend, Dr Samuel Pearson, Andrews arrived, by sea, in Durban on January 1, 1914. He had been invited, in November of the previous year, by the respected Indian Nationalist leader, Gopal Krishna Gokhale, to support the activist work that Gandhi was leading on behalf of the Indian community in South Africa.[506] Gandhi was released from prison just before Andrews arrived and was among those who waited to receive Andrews at the port.[507] Speaking of this first meeting with Gandhi, Andrews wrote 'our hearts met from the first moment we saw one another, and they have remained united by the strongest ties of love ever since. To be with him was an inspiration which awakened all that was best in me and gave me a high courage, enkindled and enlightened by his own. His tenderness toward every slightest thing that suffered pain was only a part of his tireless search for truth, whose other name was God.'[508]

The friendship between both men was forged in the context of this liberationist struggle, in a way that makes their friendship especially apposite to our interests here. Andrews immediately became a trusted associate of Gandhi, meeting, alongside Gandhi, with high-level South African government officials, and providing other strategic and planning support on behalf of the struggle for the dignity of the indentured Indian workers in South Africa.[509] Andrews would extend his support, during his time in South Africa, to the native

[505] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 213; Chaturvedi and Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative*, 91.
[506] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative*, 89–93.
[507] Chaturvedi and Sykes, 94.
[508] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 222–23.
[509] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative*, 95–96.

black South African community as well, stating, as he did, that he was also willing to die on their behalf.[510] Gokhale had invited him to join Gandhi's work in South Africa, not only because of the way that Andrews had always been committed to issues of injustice in India (and indeed, in England, even before his move to India) but also because it was felt that his national (English), religious (Christian), and racial (white) identities could benefit the struggle, serving as some kind of capital in the negotiations with the South African government. But Andrews would soon find, to his surprise, that the racism in South Africa extended even to the church,[511] and there were many White Europeans/South Africans who were disappointed to find him so closely aligned with 'non-whites.'[512]

But for Andrews, it was his faith in the universality of the gospel's call to love and befriend all that sustained him. As Andrews' biographers, Benarsidas Chaturvedi and Marjorie Sykes, note, 'the inward peace which gave him [Andrews] his own power to be a peace-maker was drawn from the hours of quiet prayer with which he began each crowded day.'[513] It was fitting that Andrews would title his autobiography *What I Owe Christ*. He saw Christ as the cornerstone of all that he did. As he put it, 'what I have been seeking to learn all these years, through storm and stress, goes right back to the character of God himself as it is revealed to us by Christ. It means that God, our heavenly father, whose nature and character Christ came to teach us, is truly the father of all mankind and not of any single race or sect or creed. He is no tribal God. He favours no denomination. He is bound up with no race. He loves mankind. His mercy is over all his works and his goodness is made known to all the children of men. He

[510] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 222.
[511] Andrews, 215–19.
[512] Gandhi, Andrews, and Gracie, *Gandhi and Charlie*, 27–28.
[513] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative*, 101. Word in bracket mine.

is no respecter of person, and even those who outwardly appear to deny him are still his children, embraced in the arms of his love.'[514]

Andrews writes, in his autobiography *What I Owe to Christ*, that 'the true ministry for which I was fitted and prepared by God was prophetic, rather than priestly.'[515] Indeed, his friendship with Gandhi was definitely of a prophetic sort, participating, as it did, in calling out the sins of racism, exploitation, and the attendant slow and fast forms of violence that came with these ills. It was a friendship that was as inter-religiously cooperative as it was religiously enriching to the spiritual lives of both men. Indeed, it was the resources within their respective religious traditions (Hinduism and Christianity) that gave strength to both men to carry on. But both men had their disagreements. They differed over religious, ideological, and logistical matters. Gandhi was opposed to religious conversion, for instance, but while Andrews came to embrace an inclusivism that inclined him to see the Spirit of Christ at work in non-Christian religions,[516] his missional instincts insisted on the right to religious conversion as an important value to be upheld.[517] Disagreements also ensued over non-violence.

Whereas both men agreed on non-violence as the appropriate mode of activism, Gandhi's belief that non-violence could only be embodied by a self that had first learned to overcome fear in the field of battle led him to support the campaign of recruiting Indians to fight on the side of Britain in the First World War. This was perplexing to Andrews and his displeasure over Gandhi's position on the matter was made known in letters written to Gandhi. Gandhi appreciated Andrews' forthrightness, even if he disagreed, in the end, with

[514] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 20.
[515] Andrews, 244.
[516] Andrews, 233.
[517] For a discussion of this Gandhi and Andrews' divergencies on the topic of conversion, see Rambachan, ''Love Speaking to Love': Friendship across Religious Traditions', 108–10.

him.[518] On practical matters, they sometimes disagreed as well. While in South Africa and Gandhi's wife had taken ill, Andrews tried to persuade Gandhi to leave the negotiations with the government to him and others and attend instead to his sick wife. But Gandhi's principled insistence that the public good always trumps the private good of the individual would not allow him to agree to Andrews's persuasions. The impasse was only broken when, without informing Gandhi, Andrews was able to get the required signature to a document that had stalled the negotiations.[519]

Andrews' 'mission of love' in South Africa – which was how a newspaper founded by Gandhi, the *Indian Opinion*, described his time in South Africa – was very much a success.[520] The Indian Relief Act was passed sometime later in 1914, removing the poll tax, and setting the way for the end of the indenture system in South Africa.[521] After the success of his work in India, Andrews would go on to join the struggle against indenture in Fiji. This struggle, which also helped in ending indenture in Fiji, and indeed, eventually, across the British Empire, filled Andrews with a great deal of pride, and which must be noted as an important highlight of Andrews' life's work. Gandhi and Andrews' friendship continued long past this momentous time in South Africa, continuing into the Independence struggle that Gandhi would soon come to lead in India, and extending to the very end of Andrews' life. Reflecting on his life, Andrews could say: 'There has been granted me one abiding happiness for which I thank God every day. I have been blessed with wonderful friendships,' adding, 'among the dearest of all friends in far-off lands are Muslims and Hindus.'[522] Among the notable non-Christian friends that

[518] Their disagreement on this topic can be seen in the excerpts from their writings present in Gandhi, Andrews, and Gracie, *Gandhi and Charlie*, 54–61.
[519] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 235–36.
[520] Chaturvedi and Sykes, *Charles Freer Andrews: A Narrative*, 97–98..
[521] Chaturvedi and Sykes, 97.
[522] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 16.

Andrews was deeply thankful for, besides Gandhi, was Rabindranath Tagore, the celebrated Bengali Poet and winner of the 1913 Nobel Prize in Literature.[523] Andrews would even join Tagore's Ashram in Santiniketan, living and studying under the great poet's tutelage.

Reflection on Andrews' life of friendship (with Gandhi and others) offers a ready example of a figure who was deeply committed to the Christian faith, but who saw that commitment as not only consistent with but energizing of a call to love and work with those religiously different from himself, to collaborate with them as a witness to the peaceable kingdom of Christ. Andrews' life of friendship reminds us that interreligious friendship can be an 'incarnational missional practice,' embodying the peaceableness, love, and hospitality, that Christ, in his bringing down the dividing walls of hostility, has established. It was because Andrews saw himself as first and foremost a servant of Christ that he felt empowered to serve others, to cooperate with them in transforming the world. In 1971, the Indian government issued a commemorative stamp in honour of Andrews' birth centenary.[524] He was truly not forgotten in India.

Andrews remained deeply committed, to the end of his life, to Christianity, as evident in his autobiography published in 1932, eight years before his death. But we should note that, as he relays in that autobiography, he would come to be critical of, and eventually reject, the Christian doctrine of damnation of non-believers, as articulated in the Athanasian Creed. Especially after joining Tagore's Ashram (although he had long nursed doubts about the propriety of the creed), Andrews saw himself unable to fully accent to the 'damnation clause,'

[523] Rabindranath Tagore had immense influence on Andrews. Andrews writes about Tagore that 'to be with him and to learn to understand the beauty of his character has made me to continually think out afresh the meaning of my own Christian faith in its relation to other creeds' Andrews, 22.
[524] Amita Esther David, 'Charles Freer Andrews: The Renaissance Man', *International Journal of Applied Research* 4, no. 9 (2018): 301.

as he called it, present in the Athanasian Creed.[525] The creed was recited as part of the liturgy in the Anglican churches at the time. It was not the catholicity of the church or the triune nature of God and the divinity of the Son, which the creed set forth, that troubled Andrews. It was the clause, toward the end of the creed, which read 'they that have done evil into everlasting fire' that he felt was inconsistent with God's character as Love. As he writes in his autobiography, 'It came home to me with a shock, that I could not possibly recite the damnatory clause of that creed, and yet be in harmony with them in spirit.'[526] His rejection of that part of the creed led him to resign from the priesthood, although he remained a member in communion with the Anglican church to his death.

But despite this, Andrews' universalism, it should be noted, was not, strictly speaking, the sort that considered Christianity and Hinduism, or any other religion for that matter, as essentially the same. Rather, present in his rejection of 'religious exclusivism' was a soteriological universalism that grounded itself (correctly or otherwise) on a Christian understanding of God's universal fatherhood and Christ's love for all humanity.[527] As he comments on the relationship between the religions: 'It seemed to point to an organic unity, beneath the outward differences of religion, which needed to be traced if mankind was ever to become one in Spirit. This did not necessarily imply a direct historical connection, but, rather, an inward and spiritual kinship going back in its origin to the One Universal Father, who loves all his children equally and is ever seeking, in every possible way, to bring them closer to himself and to one another in love.'[528] Andrews' universalism is consistent with a particularist framework in as much as it was motivated by his understanding of the Christian

[525] Andrews, *What I Owe to Christ*, 228.
[526] Andrews, 228;242.
[527] Andrews, 228-229;242-243.
[528] Andrews, 228.

faith. Although as we showed in chapter one, through the work of Mark Heim, categories like 'salvation' cannot, in the end, be unmoored from the traditioned religious contexts which give them meaning. Still, what may be observed in Andrews' soteriological universalism was a theological wrestling informed by the perennial Christian concern to make sense of how God's love for all humans relates to the eternal fate of humanity. But whatever one makes of Andrews' position on this matter, in terms of its doctrinal persuasiveness or otherwise, it is indisputable that the exemplarity embodied in his life of friendship offers much wisdom and inspiration for the church today. At the very least, his life of friendship exemplifies how a commitment to the Christian faith can ground interreligious friendships that make a difference in the world, that can make a difference in the struggle against the various modes of the politics and economics of death that plague our world today, as they did in Andrews' time.

Conclusion

Perhaps one danger of interreligious friendship, construed as a practice of interreligious cooperation, is that such a view may risk encouraging a utilitarian understanding of friendship, where the value of these friendships lies not in something inherent about them, but instead, in something external to them. As well, the impression may be created that the main value of religious commitments lies in their capacity to serve pragmatic social and political ends. As we noted at the end of Chapter 4, we do not wish to encourage such reductionisms. We instead take the wisdom in Braybrooke's contention that it is 'important that believers from the world religions share their vision and seek to articulate what they hold in common and make clear its application to the pressing problems of peace,

justice, the needs of the hungry and the preservation of the planet.'[529] The category of witness, we have sought to argue, provides, for Christians one way of articulating the propriety of a Christian commitment to such causes as peace, in ways that do not betray the distinctiveness of a Christian vision. And interreligious friendship, far from being utilitarian, we have argued, is a practice that witnesses to a Christian commitment to the peaceable kingdom of Christ.

Interreligious friendships (and interreligious dialogue, more broadly), we have tried to contend, must, for Christians at least, be narrated in the light of God. They must be storied as a form of human relationality that participates in Christ's embrace of the world, despite the world's brokenness. In short, as we have tried to argue, these friendships must be viewed as practices of faithfulness to the triune God, rather than as something which sits at the margins of Christian existence in the world. By framing interreligious friendship in missional terms, the hope has been to commend its practice to Christians; and to contend that it is congruent with Christian commitment to witness, the call to join God in the redemption and healing of the world. These friendships provide a space for Christians to present themselves as 'ambassadors of Christ,'[530] ambassadors of the 'Prince of Peace,'[531] of Christian love and hospitality. In learning to love the other who is not like me and who *refuses* to be like me, I learn (albeit with difficulty) to extend the grace of God received in Christ, and to be enriched by the providential radiances that the Spirit might shine forth from their face. As John B. Thompson has written, 'In the peaceableness of God's reign, within which Christians live, friendship can embrace those who are different from us. This friendship is not simply about

[529] Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue*, 172.
[530] 2 Corinthians 5:20.
[531] Isaiah 9:6.

being nice to people. It is about befriending people as Christians, that is those who represent Christ, rather than simply about being friendly people. Thus, this friendship can be robust as well as peaceable in its character.' [532] We can, of course, only hope that Christians, especially those committed to the particularity of their faith, would come to embrace interreligious friendships as integral practices of what it means for us to be representatives of the peaceable kingdom of Christ.

[532] John Bromilow Thomson, *Sharing Friendship: Exploring Anglican Character, Vocation, Witness and Mission*, First issued in paperback 2017, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology (London New York: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2017), 10.

CONCLUSION: THE END OF DIALOGUE

We referenced, in chapter one, John Milbank's provocative essay 'The End of Dialogue.'[533] In that essay, Milbank offers a thoroughgoing critique of interreligious dialogue, connecting its practice closely with pluralistic ways of construing the religions. For Milbank, in fact, 'it will be better to replace 'dialogue' with 'mutual suspicion.''[534] Milbank seeks to defend a particularism which, as he puts it, is a 'postmodern position that respects otherness and locality, and yet at the same time seeks the goals of justice, peace, and reconciliation, can only, in fact, be a Christian (or possibly, Jewish) position.'[535] This kind of particularism sees Christianity as self-sufficient, having no need to dialogue with religious traditions other than itself, perhaps except for Judaism. For Milbank, interreligious dialogue ought to come to an 'end' (hence the title of his essay), giving way to conflict and mutual suspicion between Christianity and non-Christian religions.

Yet, what we have been trying to argue for in this thesis is that, against Milbank's strain of particularism, there exists an 'end' (or telos) for interreligious dialogue within the Christian tradition. Without going into the problems that come from Milbank's excessive wedging of Christianity to the West, Christianity, against Milbank's portrayal, does have within it resources that can undergird interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue, Milbank fails to see, is not simply discursive, is fundamentally about a relationship with one's religious neighbours. Dialogue can take on an enacted, relational mode, such as interreligious friendship. Even discursive forms of dialogue, such as scriptural reasoning, can be entered into by Christians without giving up their commitment to the particularity of their faith, even

[533] Milbank, 'The End of Dialogue'.
[534] Milbank, 190.
[535] Milbank, 176.

their claims to possess ultimate truth. Christians believe that God can encounter us in the stranger, as we noted in chapter 3. For this reason, there is no reason why – if the very scriptures which give identity to the Christian faith are taken with full seriousness – we may not become enriched through dialogical engagement with religious others, through religious strangers.

Interreligious dialogue, as we argued in Chapter 4, serves an important end of being a providential site wherein the Spirit might bring about moral transformation in the life of the Christian. Throughout this thesis, we have been arguing against the pluralist viewpoint, but as we conclude our argument, we must register, more explicitly, our objection to versions of particularism, such as articulated in Milbank's 'The End of Dialogue,' that make little to no space for considering possibilities of fruitful interreligious relations with non-Christian religious tradition.

It is also important to add, as we conclude the thesis, that a commitment to interreligious dialogue is not, as is sometimes feared, incompatible with proclamation, with evangelism. As we noted in Chapter 5, concerning David Bosch's work, interreligious dialogue must be seen as an important aspect of the church's missional engagement with the world. But the church's mission is not reducible, in its entirety, to interreligious dialogue, even dialogue in the form of friendship. 'Dialogue and proclamation' must go together, as the post-Vatican II document by the same name argues. Christians are called to give a truthful account of themselves to the world, to bear witness to Jesus Christ and his kingdom. But importantly, the argument we have sought to make in this thesis is that the work of Christian witness encompasses not simply the attempt to win the other into our way of seeing the world, but includes witnessing to the peaceableness of the kingdom of Christ. Christian witness must

include living out the virtues of hospitality that scripture enjoins, befriending the religious other, of continuing to love the other (both religious and otherwise) who refuses to be won over by my way of seeing the world. To offer such witness, for Christians, is the 'end' of dialogue.

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