ARTICLE

The Logic of Religion? A Critique of Hans Küng's Philosophy of the Dialogue of Religions

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Abstract

This essay offers a critique of the theoretical framework used by Hans Küng for extrapolating the essence of the Abrahamic faiths. It then presents an alternative approach which allows for an inductive examination of what might be described as the inner logic of a religious tradition. Grounded in an Aristotelean philosophical principle, "epistemic fit," it presupposes that religious traditions possess an intrinsic logic which can be brought to the surface in order to exhibit parallels between them. Thus, following a critique of Küng, the paper probes how this Aristotelean principle might be applied to the dialogue of religions, illustrating the value of this approach by contrasting it with the conceptual apparatus utilized by Küng in his search for a global ethic.

Keywords

Hans Küng, philosophy of religion, interreligious dialogue, epistemic fit, William Abraham

The Logic of Religion?

The very idea that religions possess an inner logic is highly contested. Indeed, in what might be described as a postmodern trend in religious

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studies, the very category of religion has been called into question.[1] This renders Hans Küng's attempt to isolate a common "essence" within the various religions hugely problematic. Moreover, his conflation of divergent philosophical apparatus, a curious mixture of Georg Hegel and Thomas Kuhn (renowned for his postmodern challenge to the master narrative of modern science), makes his project unworkable.[2] Nevertheless, the question of interreligious dialogue was a major concern for Küng during his lifetime. In fact, his pivotal role in the formation of the Global Ethic foundation was grounded in his desire to foster world peace by uniting the globe around principles on which all people can agree, work that continues up to this day in *Projekt Weltethos*.[3] However, while Küng struggled to locate an essence within Christianity and various other religions, contemporary religious studies is averse to essentialism.[4]

A paradigmatic example of this trend in religious studies is Timothy Fitzgerald, for whom the very category of religion, let alone the attempt to locate the essence of a religious tradition, is misguided:

> The discipline of religious studies has been historically constructed around a highly unstable and contested category "religion"…

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1   Timothy Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity: A Critical History of Religion and Related Categories* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 3–4; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions* (Chicago, IL: University Press, 2005); Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003); Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Disciplines and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1993); Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982). For further discussion see: Johannes Wolfart, "Postmodernism," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. R. McCutcheon and W. Braun (London: Continuum, 2009), 380–96.

2   See Thomas Nickles, *Thomas Kuhn* (Cambridge: University Press, 2003), 4–5.

3   Identifying themes, such as the "Golden Rule of Reciprocity," the objective of *Projekt Weltethos* is captured in the following extract from their website: "For a better world we need a common ground. Common values on which we agree. Only then can we enter into constructive dialogue and shape the world together. The good news is that this already exists. Across all religions, cultures and philosophies, there are principles that recur time and again…In 1990, the internationally renowned theologian Hans Küng derived basic values from the discovery of this greatest common denominator and collectively referred to them as a *Weltethos* or Global Ethic. They are a common basis for dialogue and sustainable development, both in smaller groups and in relation to the global community." For further discussion see: "About Weltethos" https://projektweltethos.de/en/about-weltethos/.

4   For further discussion see Timothy Fitzgerald, *The Ideology of Religious Studies* (Oxford: University Press, 2000).

researched and described as though it is a transparent notion, based on commonsense observable reality, universally applicable, a word and an idea which unproblematically translates into any language of any culture at any time in human history.[5]

A similar criticism of this category is made by Tomoko Masuzawa, whose work, *The Invention of World Religions,* discusses the manufactured nature of world religious traditions by European intellectuals so as to preserve Christian hegemony.[6] The approach taken by these writers resonates considerably with what has been termed postmodernism.[7] For example, Fitzgerald's attack on "all-encompassing" terminology such as "religion" resembles Jean-Francois Lyotard aversion to metanarratives.[8] Essentially Lyotard argued that, rather than fantasizing about universal forms, if we have rejected metanarratives then what we have fallen back upon are smaller narratives.[9] These little narratives (micronarratives) are limited contexts where "language games" form clear, if not clearly defined, rules for understanding and behavior.[10]

At first glance, Küng's attempt to locate a common foundation for religious belief might be interpreted as being more in line with the spirit of nineteenth-century writers like Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach (1804–1872) than with postmodern approaches to the study of religion.[11] While Küng's conceptual framework will be dissected below, it is important to stress at the outset that a postmodern epistemological orientation does not prohibit an

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5   Fitzgerald, *Discourse on Civility and Barbarity,* 3–4.

6   Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions*, 18.

7   Wolfart, "Postmodernism," 391.

8   Shaped considerably by Ludwig Wittgenstein's critique of the idea that there is a correspondence between human language and notions of objective truth these writers argue that different groups in a society regulate their behaviour through rules (grammar) of linguistic conduct. For further discussion see: Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge,* tr. G. Bennington and B. Massumi (Manchester: University Press, 1984), 8, 37; Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* tr. G. E. M. Anscombe, et al. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953); Paul Hedges, "Discourse on the Invention of Discourses: Why We Still Need the Terminology of 'Religion' and 'Religions'," *Journal of Religious History* 38, no. 1 (2014): 132–48 at 135.

9   Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 41.

10   Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 10.

11   Ludwig Andreas von Feuerbach, *Essence of Christianity*, tr. M. Evans (New York: Calvin Blanchard, 1855). For further discussion see: Donald Wiebe, "Modernism," in *Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. R. McCutcheon and W. Braun (London: Continuum, 2009), 351–65.

analysis of the coherence of traditions (religious or otherwise).[12] As Hedges illustrates,[13] while religious traditions may be cultural linguistic constructs, terms like religion may still be used to refer to particular religious traditions or groups who identify as religious:

> We are therefore not faced with the stark dichotomy of either employing an essentialist and *sui generis* concept of "religion" as a Platonic ideal that exists in some generic form across all cultures, or rejecting the very term as an "illusion" of ideological power structures and "a philosophical cul-de-sac." Indeed, if Fitzgerald is right that scholarship has come to a point that shows us that our older usage of "religion" is problematic, one response is that we need to simply improve our definition or definitions of "religion" rather than abandon it altogether.[14]

Hence, it is perfectly possible to accept the critique made by these writers while at the same time allowing for a study of what might be described as the various "grammars" of the plethora of groups identifying as religious.[15] This resonates with what Lyotard refers to as micro narratives—groups within a society who regulate their behavior through different rules of linguistic conduct.[16] These groups might be as small as a Christian house fellowship and as large as a denomination (such as the Methodist church of Great Britain).[17] Nevertheless, charting the contours of a group identifying as religious (large or small) does not require us to adopt a naïve (exclusively

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12   For further discussion see: Willard Van Orman Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1964), 20–47; Daniel Pratt Morris-Chapman, *Nonfoundationalism Considered as a Handmaid to Theology* (Burbage: William Wathes and Sons, 2007).

13   Fitzgerald, *The Ideology*, 24; Hedges, "Discourse on the Invention of Discourses," 134.

14   Hedges, "Discourse on the Invention of Discourses," 139.

15   Even Masuzawa acknowledges that the contemporary "reality of world religions" is not solely "of the European academy's making" (Masuzawa, *The Invention of Religion*, xiv). For further discussion, see Hedges, "Discourse on the Invention of Discourses, 132–48; Anna King and Paul Hedges, "Is the Study of Religion Religious? How to Study Religion, and Who Studies Religion?" in Paul Hedges, ed. *Controversies in Contemporary Religion* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2014), 31–56.

16   Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 8, 37.

17   However, while accepting the postmodern point that all traditions are shaped by language and culture, the present essay is shaped by a different epistemological orientation.

textual) conception of religion as a "corpus of symbols and meanings."[18] Neither does it require us to ignore the power relations that exist within these groups.[19]

In short, one can accept all these points and explore the particular practices, behaviors, opinions, and rules that constitute a group identifying as religious. One can give assent (should one so choose) to the dogmas of Postmodernism and tranquilly probe the contours of a group identifying as religious even if that group (1) is shaped/constructed by people (western and non-western), (2) has explicit and implicit power relations, (3) is behavioral, oral, or textual in nature, (4) has contested boundaries, and so on.[20] That being said, it must be acknowledged that a postmodern epistemological orientation entails the view that the diverse "grammars" (written and unwritten) upheld by the different groups identifying as religious are necessarily incommensurate.[21] Therefore, rather than assuming the postmodern paradigm as an objective fact, the present paper explores an alternative conceptual framework through which it is possible to compare these groups, denominations, traditions (and so on) and to bring them into dialogue. In this vein, Küng's attempt to compare different religions (using a curious mixture of postmodern and modern epistemologies) offers a useful foil for exploring whether an alternative conceptual approach (epistemic fit) allows for an inductive examination of what might be described as the inner logic of groups identifying as religious.

Therefore, in what follows, this essay critiques the conceptual apparatus used by Küng to excavate what he deems to be the essence of religion before offering an alternative conceptual framework for comparing different groups identifying as religious. Beginning with a general overview of his writings, the essay proceeds to an analysis of the nonfoundational (postmodern) theoretical framework employed by Küng to uncover the "foundation" of the Abrahamic religions. Following a critique of Küng's use of this conceptual apparatus, it concludes with an alternative model by exploring how analytic

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18   James Clifford, "Introduction" in J. Clifford and G. Marcus, eds. *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (London: University of California Press, 1986), 18–19

19   Malory Nye, "Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning: Religious Studies and Contemporary Cultural Debates." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 12, no. 1–4 (2000): 447–76.

20   For further discussion see: Nye, "Religion, Post-Religionism, and Religioning," 447–76.

21   For further discussion see: Willard Van Orman Quine, Word and Object (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1960).

philosophy, particularly recent work in the epistemology of theology, might be brought to bear on Küng's proposals for interreligious dialogue.

An Introduction to Hans Küng

Küng and the Foundation of Christian Unity

During his lifetime, Hans Küng was driven by a passion to unite different traditions together by excavating what he believed to be their essential components. In his various writings he always attempted to isolate a common understanding which might unite Christians and even those of other religious traditions. The central objective being that of resolving tensions between them. Thus, in his first major work on Christian teachings regarding justification, Küng attempted to show that, essentially, Catholics and Protestants have the same understanding of this doctrine.[22] During Vatican II, Küng continued in this vein, writing a series of publications on the possibility and challenges to Christian unity. In *The Council and Reunion* (1960), he argued that for unity to be achieved the Catholic Church must model itself on Christ.[23] Two years later, in his work *That the World May Believe* (1962), his desire for unity was manifest in his contention that inessential aspects of the Church's teaching should be reformed wherever these act as a barrier to full organic unity.[24] In that same year his *Structures of the Church* (1962) outlined the principle on which these reforms should proceed contending that Christ, who called the Church into being, must be the standard for Christian unity.[25] A similar argument is made in the *Living Church* (1962), wherein he argued that the Ecumenical Council could only make progress if it fulfilled the justified demands of Lutherans, Calvinists, Anglicans, and Free Churchmen in the light of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1963).[26] Throughout the Council, Küng also wrote a number of shorter

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22   Karl Barth, "A Letter to the Author," in Hans Küng, *Justification: The Doctrine of Karl Barth and a Catholic Reflection*, fourth edition, tr. T. Collins, E. Tolk, D. Granskou (London: Burns & Oates, [1957] 1981), xxxix.

23   Hans Küng, *The Council and Reunion*, tr. Cecily Hastings (London: Sheed & Ward, [1960] 1962).

24   Hans Küng, *That the World May Believe* (London: Sheed & Ward, [1962] 1963), 25.

25   Hans Küng, *Structures of the Church*, tr. S. Attanasio (London: Burns & Oates, [1962] 1965), 148.

26   Hans Küng, *The Living Church: Reflections on the Second Vatican Council*, tr. C. Hastings (London: Sheed & Ward, 1963).

works challenging aspects of Catholicism (authoritarianism, clericalism, censorship, and so on) that he felt acted as barriers to unity. [27]

These earlier works got the attention of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith (CDF, now the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith), however, it was his publication on *The Church* (1967) that led him into explicit conflict with the Church's hierarchy.[28] Here Küng identified ways in which unity could be achieved following the Council. This work, dedicated to the Archbishop of Canterbury, argued that the Church of England could be in communion with Rome if it recognized a version of the pastoral primacy of Peter.[29] At its heart this work offered an ecumenical doctrine of the Church and placed the Gospel of Jesus Christ "taken as a whole as the 'standard for unity.'" Following this publication, he received a letter from the CDF questioning whether he believed "the Church of Christ…consists of all the churches and ecclesial communities."[30] While under investigation Küng challenged the Church's "institutionalism in his *Truthfulness the Future of the Church* (1968).[31] Küng also began a wide-ranging examination of Papal infallibility, under the title *Infallible? An Inquiry* (1970), following Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Human Vitae* (1968) which prohibited all forms of artificial contraception.[32] This, a most radical work, led to a withdrawal by the Church of his permission to teach. Furthermore, it meant that Küng was no longer viewed as a Catholic writer by many within his Church. This is true even of figures like Karl Rahner (1904–1984), who described Küng as a "protestant."[33]

27　These include reflections on Thomas Moore, entitled *Freedom in the World* (1964); on intellectual freedom, in *The Theologian and the Church* (1964) and *The Church and Freedom* (1964); and on the importance of religious freedom, in *Christian Revelation and World Religions* (1965).

28　United States Catholic Conference, *The Küng Dialogue: A documentation of the efforts of The Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith and of The Conference of German Bishops to achieve an appropriate clarification of the controversial views of Dr. Hans Küng* (Washington, DC: United States Catholic Conference, 1980), 45.

29　Hans Küng, *The Church*, tr. R. Ockenden (New York: Image Books, [1967] 1976).

30　Hans Küng, *The Church*, 377.

31　In this work, Küng argues that the Church must shed its "institutionalism" and evolve according to the Gospel. Hans Küng, *Truthfulness the Future of the Church*, tr. R. Ockenden (London: Sheed & Ward, 1968), 138.

32　Hans Küng, *Infallible? An Enquiry*, tr. E. Mosbacher (London: Collins, 1971). Pope Paul VI (1897–1978) reigned 1963–1978.

33　Karl Rahner, "A Critique of Hans Küng: Concerning the Infallibility of Theological Propositions," in *Homiletic and Pastoral Review* (1971), 10–26 at 13, 20.

Küng and the Foundation of Interreligious Unity

The publication of *Infallible* marks the end of a period of intense focus on reform within the Catholic Church. In these earlier writings, Küng argued that all Catholic reform must occur in accordance with "the same norm, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ."[34] For example, in the *Church,* Küng argued that the Church should be governed by, and have as its criterion, "the Gospel of Jesus Christ."[35] The same principle is operative in Küng's later works. However, while his earlier publications argued for Christian unity around the person of Christ, his later work focused upon interreligious unity, a program which he later styled "The Religious Situation of Our Time" and "No Peace without Religious Peace."[36] This project, sponsored by the Bosch Jubilee foundation, has led to a variety of publications and to the creation of the Global Ethic Foundation (1995).[37] Essentially, in these later works, Küng is writing to help the different religious traditions "engage in dialogue" and attempting to offer a "synthesis of [the] historical and systematic dimensions" of these religions to facilitate greater understanding between the them.[38] His *Paradigm Change in Theology* (1989), *Global Responsibility* (1990), *Judaism: Essence, History and Future* (1991), *Christianity: Essence, History and Future* (1994), and *Islam: Essence, History and Future* (2004) illustrate this overarching desire for the so-called major world religions to find common ground. Hence his trilogy on the three Abrahamic religions has the explicit goal of "reshaping international relations," a "contribution that [he] as a theologian and philosopher engaged in religious dialogue hope[d] to make."[39] This project is grounded in the presupposition that if peace can be achieved between the different religions it will lead to peace among the nations. This is evident in his description of the program in Küng's preface to all the volumes in this trilogy: "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundations of the religions."[40]

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34 Hans Küng, *The Council and Reunion*, 84.

35 Hans Küng, *The Church*, 13.

36 Hans Küng, *Judaism: Essence, History and Future*, tr. J. Bowden (London: Continuum, [1991] 1992), vii.

37 For information on Projekt Weltethos, see: https://projektweltethos.de.

38 Hans Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, tr. J Bowden (London: Continuum, [2004] 2007), xxvi–xxviii.

39 Küng, *Islam: Past, Present and Future*, xxvi

40 Küng, *Judaism: Essence, History and Future*, vii

In all these works, Küng analyses the history of the Abrahamic religions in the hope that it will enable him to distinguish between the essential and inessential elements of these very different religious traditions.[41] Hence, the analysis of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam divides the history of these religions into "paradigms" and attempts "to give a systematic historical diagnosis" of these great traditions and "offer perspectives on the different options for the future and with them practical and ecumenical approaches towards a resolution of problems."[42] For example, he divides three thousand years of Judaism into the following: (I) Tribal, (II) Kingdom, (III) Theocracy, (IV) Medieval, (V) Modern, and (VI) Postmodern Paradigms.[43] However, what is interesting for our present purposes is not so much the conclusions reached by Küng but the theoretical framework utilized to "investigate the foundations" of these religions.

Küng's Reception of Kuhn's Paradigm Analysis

Küng's use of Thomas Kuhn is intriguing given that the latter became famous for what might be described as a postmodern critique of the grand narrative of modern science.[44] In his *Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (1962), Kuhn analyzed the way in which one scientific theory (paradigm) succeeded another and argued that there can be no objective standards for adjudicating between different paradigms.[45] Kuhn's work resonates considerably with the work of Willard Van Orman Quine's (1908–2000), who argued that there is no foundation for knowledge—that alternative conceptual frameworks may equally well account for the data of experience.[46] The following extract from his "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" (1951) is helpful for illustrating the underlying principle operative in these writers:

> The conceptual scheme of science [is] a tool…Physical objects
> are conceptually imported into the situation as convenient

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41   Hans Küng, *Global Responsibility: In Search of a New World Ethic* (New York: Crossroad) 1991), 2, 123.

42   Küng, *Islam*, xxix

43   Küng, *Judaism*, iv.

44   Nickles, *Thomas Kuhn*, 4–5.

45   Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [1962] 1975).

46   Quine lectured at Harvard while Kuhn studied there. For further discussion, see: J. Conant and J. Haugeland, eds., *The Road Since Structure* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 253–324, at 279.

intermediaries…as irreducible posits comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer…[I] believe in physical objects and not in Homer's gods…But in point of epistemological footing the physical objects and the gods differ only in degree and not in kind. Both sorts of entities enter our conception only as cultural posits. The myth of physical objects is epistemologically superior…as a device for working a manageable structure into the flux of experience.[47]

The point that Quine is making in the extract above is that, because scientific theories have no objective foundation, no description of reality is more objectively legitimate than any another. Kuhn maintains that a historical study of paradigm change in science reveals very similar characteristics to the choice between "incompatible modes of community life."[48] Like Quine, Kuhn argues that when two conflicting scientific theories are on offer it is not possible to decide between the theories using a neutral objective standard or foundation. He argues that a debate between competing scientific theories cannot appeal to the "facts" because facts themselves are defined differently by different theories. Furthermore, the prevailing science cannot be used because its procedures "depend in part on a particular paradigm and that paradigm is at issue."[49] How then does one decide between two conflicting scientific theories? Kuhn believes that the decision to replace the prevailing scientific paradigm with a newer one (a paradigm shift) is not based upon an objective neutral standard but upon "persuasion," and even "faith." [50]

Incommensurability

Central to Kuhn's thesis is the idea that different paradigms lack an objective common measure. To be precise, he identifies three types of incommensurability.[51] First, he highlights the "incommensurability of standards," given that different scientific theories contain different methods and principles.[52] Thus, he argues that there is no universal abiding standard

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47   Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," 44.

48   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 94.

49   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 96.

50   Kuhn argues that the person who embraces a new scientific paradigm must do so in "faith that the new paradigm will succeed." Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 158.

51   For further discussion on this point see Alexander Bird, *Thomas Kuhn* (Chesham: Acumen, 2000).

52   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 149.

for evaluating the validity of a theory.[53] Second, there is what he describes as an "observational incommensurability," resulting from differences in perception.[54] Finally, he emphasizes that it is impossible to semantically commensurate alternative theories because "languages cut up the world in different ways" and "we have no access to a neutral sublinguistic means of reporting."[55] Here Kuhn acknowledges Quine's thesis regarding the difficulties of translation from one language to another.[56] Kuhn thus argues that when the problem of translation is applied to the commensuration of competing theories it results in conceptual incommensurability.[57] Thus, while the words used in different scientific theories might be identical, their physical references are not.[58] In summary, it is clear that for Kuhn a scientific paradigm shift is a change in the language used to describe data. Furthermore, it involves a "reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations…methods and applications."[59] Different paradigms clearly entail different views of the world.[60]

Küng's employment of Kuhn's theoretical framework

At this juncture, it is helpful to illustrate precisely how Küng (mis) applies paradigm theory to religious history. Philosophically, Kuhn is a nonfoundationalist: he does not believe different paradigms are commensurate and rejects the idea that there is a common foundation or essence at the heart of each one. This makes Küng's use of Kuhn problematic, given that, in each of the different volumes in his trilogy on the

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53   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 148–49.

54   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 150.

55   Thomas Kuhn, "Reflections on my Critics," in *The Road Since Structure*, 123–75, at p.164.

56   Quine discusses an "indeterminacy" when translation occurs and argues that "rival systems of analytical hypotheses can conform to all speech dispositions within each of the languages concerned and yet dictate, in countless cases, utterly disparate translations; not mere mutual paraphrases, but translations each of which would be excluded by the other system of translation. Two such translations might even be patently contrary in truth value" (Willard Van Orman Quine, *Word and Object* [Cambridge, MA.: Technology Press of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1960], 72–73)

57   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 149.

58   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 102

59   Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 85.

60   Bruce Kuklick, *The History of Philosophy in America* 1720–2000 (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 271.

Abrahamic faiths, he attempts to discern the "essence" or "foundations" of these religions. Thus, in *Christianity: Essence, History, and Future*, Küng states that the paradigm model will enable a rediscovery of the "essence" of Christianity. To this end, he divides Christian history into five paradigms: the early Christian apocalyptic, the Hellenistic Byzantine, the Roman Catholic, the Reformation Protestant, and the Enlightenment Modern. Küng argues that while these paradigms are different, they all have a common "essence."[61] Küng argues that the essence of Christianity is Jesus Christ. He writes:

> Despite all the failure and reluctance of Christian people right from the beginning, and all the developments and confusions of the history of Christianity, [Jesus] will nevertheless remain the basic conception of Christian religion, which is never abandoned…here alone is the foundation of Christianity's originality from earliest times, continuity in its long history down the centuries, identity despite all the difference of languages, culture and nations.[62]

Küng maintains that Christ is "the abidingly valid, constantly obligatory, and simply indispensable element of Christianity."[63] Thus Küng attempts to use Jesus as a "foundation," a standard by which to adjudicate the essential and inessential elements of the different Christian paradigms: "For how else are we to be able to define the abiding element in what takes shape?…How else could we have a criterion, a norm, for defining the legitimate element in any particular empirical manifestation of Christianity?"[64] Küng believes that Jesus Christ acts as a "criterion" and common measure across the successive paradigms of Christianity, enabling him to determine what is authentic and what is not. This is fascinating, given that Kuhn believes successive paradigms to be incommensurable with one other.[65]

Küng's Conception of Jesus

Küng's conception of Christ further complicates his use of this theoretical framework. In *Christianity*, Küng contends that he developed his conception

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61   Küng, *Christianity*, xxii, 7–8.

62   Küng, *Christianity*, 59

63   Küng, *Christianity*, 26

64   Küng, *Christianity*, 8

65   Incommensurability is a term taken from mathematics which means "lack of common measure." James Ladyman, *Understanding Philosophy of Science* (London: Routledge, 2002), 115.

of Jesus "in the context of my book *On Being a Christian*."[66] Here Christ is extrapolated from the New Testament's proclamation of Him by using the historical-critical method. Küng believes that it is the historical Jesus who "holds the rifts and breaks, the contrasts and inconsistencies in tradition and in the history of Christendom" together.[67] However, if Küng accepts Kuhn's theory of paradigm change, he has to explain how the Jesus of the gospels acts as a common standard for Christians if there is an incommensurability between the theological methods used in different Christian paradigms. Even in the same paradigm, different groups of Christians will use different theological methods.

Küng's method of reading the gospel is influenced considerably by the principles and presuppositions governing historical criticism.[68] He believes some aspects of the New Testament are more accurate than others; however, he also believes that the "historical proximity" that New Testament writings have to Jesus affects their accuracy. While this view leads to difficulties regarding which aspects of the New Testament proclaim Jesus correctly, Küng states, in *On Being a Christian*, that "because of the work of so many generations of exegetes and the results of the historical-critical method, we are able today to know better than perhaps any former generations of Christians—except the first—the true original Jesus of history."[69]

The above makes clear that Küng believes the historical-critical method enables one to determine which Christ is the true Christ—which aspects of Scripture proclaim the historical Jesus.[70] The problem for Küng is that

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66   Küng, *Christianity*, 51.

67   Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, tr. E. Quinn (London: Collins, [1974] 1977), 121.

68   In his *Structures of the Church*, he argues that he does not believe that the New Testament's conception of Christ is completely accurate: "The New Testament is, after all, not a kind of symposium of essays of equal rank…The New Testament carries the message of Jesus Christ, of which all later testimonies can be, and aim to be, nothing more than interpretations. Hence, much as the derived testimonies of the New Testament are to be taken seriously, they are to be taken seriously as derivative and not as original attestations. Here not only the temporal proximity to the message of Jesus but also the inner objective proximity are important considerations" (Hans Küng, *Structures of the Church*, 148).

69   Hans Küng, *On Being a Christian*, tr. E. Quinn (London: Collins, [1974] 1977), 160–161.

70   In his work on Hegel's Christology (1970) Küng further illustrates the considerations governing his theological method: "The only way for an historically based Christology … is by drawing inferences from the highly diverse proclamation of the New Testament witnesses…the text of the New Testament as we have it abounds in contradictions of nuance and directions…the varying and in part contradictory character of the Jesus tradition frankly forbids the cozy assumption

his conception of Christ is the result of a theological method peculiar to what he describes as the "Paradigm of Modernity, Orientated on Reason and Progress."[71] Earlier paradigms utilized different theological and hermeneutical standards for establishing their conception of Christ from Scripture. While Küng, like Luther, contends that the epistles which preach Christ's message clearly are the most accurate, Küng's reception of the New Testament Jesus is influenced considerably by modern historical criticism whereas Luther's is not.[72] The Christ extrapolated using Küng's methods is not the same as the one extrapolated by Luther, whose methods were characterized by what Küng describes as "The Protestant Evangelical Paradigm of the Reformation." Thus, while the gospel of Jesus Christ might continue to act as a primary source of information, methods for investigating the Jesus of the gospels change in different paradigms. Scripture is open to a plethora of interpretations. Historical criticism only serves to expand the interpretations available; it does not lessen them. This incommensurability of standards makes clear that to apply one theological method as a criterion for judging all the other paradigms is quite inconsistent with Kuhn's theory of paradigm change.

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that Jesus himself took pains to ensure an exact transmission of his words…The state of the sources makes it impossible to advocate the historical reliability of the Jesus tradition as a whole…Despite all the difficulties, however, it remains true that inference from the kerygma is possible, justified and necessary" (Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology,* trans. J. R. Stephenson [Edinburgh: T & T Clark, (1970) 1987], 490–91).

71　Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 650–791.

72　"The epistle to the Romans may also be regarded as corresponding more closely to Jesus' message than, for instance, the epistle of St James. The further a testimony is removed from the original message the more will exegetes as well as dogmatists have to pay attention to the manner with which the testimony treats of the event of salvation in Jesus Christ. One will have to ascertain what kind of considerations play a part in the particular situation in which the Gospel was proclaimed; how the interpretation of the message was influenced by the personality of the preacher; how these secondary factors promoted, restricted, strengthened, weakened, exaggerated, or minimized the essential quality of the message. Thus every testimony in the whole of the New Testament must be understood in the terms of the message of Jesus its original dominant issues" (Hans Küng, *Structures of the Church*, 148–49). For Luther's thought, see Martin Luther, *Luther's Works,* eds. J. Pelikan and H. Lehmann, 55 Vols. (St Louis, MO: Concordia Press, 1955).

Küng's Hegelian Reading of Kuhn

While Küng's use of paradigm theory is curious, given that his real desire is to locate a conceptual apparatus that that will enable him to identify some kind of intrinsic logic within the histories of the various religious traditions, it is all too easy to underestimate the influence of Georg Hegel on his reception of Kuhn's proposals.[73] The announcement of Vatican II delayed the publication of Küng's *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology* (1970) by more than a decade; an English translation was not available until the late 1980s—by which time Küng had become enamored by Kuhn's *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[74] However, while Küng's later work uses the language of "paradigm change," it seems his reading of Kuhn is shaped considerably by Hegel's "primordial confidence" in reason. His admiration for this aspect of Hegel's thought is reflected in the following extract:

> Should we examine the various warring systems and successive systems in purely historical terms, there would be no alternative to ascertaining a chaos of opinions and succumbing to skepticism. Hegel's primordial confidence in reason voices itself when he opposes such a view, insisting that there is but *one* truth…We should not conclude from this that the other philosophies are false; rather we should see the wood in the trees, the one body in the many members! In the speculative vision it can be made clear that all of these philosophies are philosophy: various forms of appearance of the *single* truth. This truth may be multi-coloured, it may be prone in its necessary stages and moments to contradict itself or to get entangled in itself, but in its increasingly wonderful blossoming it is nevertheless *one* truth.[75]

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73   This postponement may account for why Hegel's influence on Küng's thought is frequently overlooked: C. and S. Simut, *A Critical Study of Hans Kung's Ecclesiology: From Traditionalism to Modernism* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Mark E Powell, *Papal Infallibility* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans, 2009). An exception to this rule is Manuel Rebeiro, *The Church as the Community of the Believers: Hans Küng's Concept of the Church as a Proposal for an Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (New Delhi: Intercultural Publications, 2001).

74   Hans Küng, *The Incarnation of God: An Introduction to Hegel's Theological Thought as Prolegomena to a Future Christology*, trans. J R Stephenson (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, [1970] 1987), xv.

75   Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 376.

Given the above, it might be argued that Küng's attempt to commensurate the historical paradigms of Christianity in Christ is far more Hegelian than Kuhnian. Indeed, Küng repeatedly applauds Hegel's attempt to "reconcile systems which succeed one another," so as to identify the logic governing the history of philosophy as the development of a single "essence of absolute Spirit."[76] He writes:

> Notwithstanding all the contradictions which constantly emerge and the resolve themselves, the history of philosophy is consequently unqualifiedly logical. We may go further to say that the history of philosophy is nothing other than the concrete development of supra-temporal, eternal logic in time. The whole development is dominated by the strict coherence of the subject matter in movement: the necessity of the Concept, the divine Logos, the absolute Spirit. No element in this history is purely and simply false…But every element is onesidedness, though to a diminishing degree and therefore, increasingly, intelligible. If we do not come to a standstill at the stage of onesidedness—and history does not come to a standstill—then everything will be rectified *en passant*, in contradiction and change, so that the history of philosophy is certainly not a disavowal of philosophy, but rather portrays its lofty ratification and verification.[77]

While this is an extract from his work on Hegel, and while Hegel's approach is fundamentally different from that of Kuhn, it seems Küng wants to use paradigm analysis to achieve a similar objective:

> The rifts, jumps and breaks, contrasts and contradictions in Church tradition and in the history of Christianity generally cannot be disputed…What really holds together the twenty centuries of Christian history and tradition, which are so tremendously contradictory? The answer, here too an elementary one, can only be: it is the name of that Jesus.[78]

Thus, Küng employs paradigm theory in the hope that it will enable him to locate a common *essence* within the various contradictions of "twenty

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76   Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 377.
77   Küng, *The Incarnation of God*, 376–77.
78   Küng, *Christianity*, 24–25.

centuries of Christian history."[79] Nevertheless, while continuity with Christ is important for Küng, his application of the theory of paradigm change to the history of Christianity, in order to establish its essence, leads him to underplay Kuhn's emphasis on the incommensurability of different paradigms. From this it seems that what Küng's proposal requires is an alternative theoretical framework which will allow him to explore the intrinsic logic of the different religious traditions. What it seems is necessary at this juncture is an alternative conceptual apparatus that can enable Küng to achieve this goal.

Epistemic Fit

In his Nicomachean ethics, Aristotle famously illustrates how different areas of knowledge have different levels of precision. This principle has had a variety of applications. For example, the epistemology of theology, ecclesiology, and even missiology have been explored in relation to this principle.[80] The recent publication of the *Oxford Handbook on the Epistemology of Theology* illustrates this principle well:

> It has been commonplace in epistemology…to explore in detail the epistemology of particular academic disciplines. The epistemology of science, for example, has received the lion's share of interest; but attention has also been given to mathematics, history, aesthetics, and ethics. The crucial warrant for these later developments goes back to Aristotle's insistence…[that] we should fit our epistemic evaluations in an appropriate way to the subject matter under investigation.[81]

Applying this principle to a wide variety of subjects, these writers examine what might constitute appropriate epistemological evaluation in a variety of areas, including: "Knowledge of God,"[82] "Revelation,"[83] "Scepticism,"[84] and

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79   Küng, *Christianity*, 24–25.

80   For further discussion see my essays on: "Newman Wesley and the Logic of Unity" (2023) and the "Logic of Mission" (2024)

81   "Introduction," in William J. Abraham and Frederick D. Aquino, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology* (Oxford: University Press, 2017) 1.

82   John Greco, "Knowledge of God," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, 9–29

83   Sandra Menssen and Thomas Sullivan, "Revelation and Scripture," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, 30–45.

84   William Dunaway and John Hawthorne, "Scepticism," in *The Oxford Handbook of the*

so on. The guiding principle operative here is clearly articulated by William J. Abraham in his work, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation*: "With Aristotle I have insisted that we should accept the principle of appropriate epistemic fit. We should let the subject matter in hand shape what kinds of considerations should be brought to bear on the rationality of the issue under review."[85]

While Abraham does not apply the principle of epistemic fit to the question of interreligious dialogue, his application of this principle to ecclesiology is relevant at this juncture:

> What constitutes the essence of the church. This is exactly what we find in ecclesiology and in ecumenical work…Outsiders often dismiss the whole debate as empty of cognitive content; after all, there is no universal or stable agreement on the criteria of appraisal in play. This disposition betrays a narrowness of conceptual sensibility. What is, in fact, at issue is how best to capture the complexity and beauty of the life of the church.[86]

Here—and in his magnum opus, *Canon and Criterion*—Abraham indicates that the key to unlocking the differences between alternative versions of theism is to explore the kind of intellectual entity before us by examining its essential features.[87] This leads, in turn, to an exploration of the relevant considerations pertinent to the assessment of its rationality.[88] The above dovetails with Küng's attempt to locate an "essence" within the Abrahamic religions which will help foster dialogue and peace. While we have critiqued Küng's use of Kuhn's conceptual apparatus, it would appear that if his work were reconfigured around the principle of epistemic fit, it would coherently enable him to explore the essence of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. This is apparent given that in each of these works Küng moves inductively, immersing himself in the extensive histories of these great traditions so as to

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Epistemology of Theology, 290–308

85 William J. Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold of Divine Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2006) 29.

86 William J. Abraham, "Church," in Charles Taliaferro & Chad Meister, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Christian Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: University Press, 2010), 174.

87 William J. Abraham, *Canon and Criterion in Christian Theology: From the Fathers to Feminism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).

88 Abraham stresses that all "forms of serious and living theism" are "constituted by a network of interrelated propositions that need to be taken as a whole" (Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold*, 43–45).

unmask what he deems to be their intrinsic logic. This leads him to affirm that, despite their enormous differences, each of these world religions share a number of parallels which can be brought into dialogue.

Applying Epistemic Fit to Interreligious Dialogue?

There are of course numerous studies exploring the similarities between religious traditions.[89] Nevertheless, to my knowledge, the principle of epistemic fit has yet to be utilized as a theoretical framework for these comparisons. However, Johan Buitendag, citing the application of this principle to ecumenical dialogue, suggests that this Aristotelian principle could be fruitfully applied "to diverse religions."[90] The question is, what precisely would the principle of epistemic fit add to the field of interreligious dialogue? Over the centuries, scholars have positively noted themes common to the different religions without this principle. What particularly does epistemic fit add to the field? While my objective here is more modest, in that I want to resolve the conceptual difficulties in Küng's proposals, I consider that his particular case is illustrative of the epistemological contribution that this principle adds to the discussion.

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89   In relation to Islam, these range widely from general historical discussions, explorations of Jewish-Christian influence on the Qur'an, investigations as to whether this early Christian movement shaped the latter's system of beliefs and so on. For further discussions, see Guy Stroumsa, "Jewish Christianity and Islamic Origins," in *Islamic Cultures, Islamic Contexts*, (Leiden: Brill, 2014) 72–96; José Costa, "Early Islam as a Messianic Movement: a non-issue," in Carlos A. Segovia, ed., *Remapping Emergent Islam: Texts, Social Settings, and Ideological Trajectories* (Amsterdam University Press, 2020): 45–83; Murtiza Sazjini, Rahman Ushriyyih, and Muhammad Ali Rizaei Isfihani, "A Comparative Study of Ebionism and Koran: A Response to The Question of Adaptation," *Religious Research* 7, no. 14 (2020): 8–33; Patricia Crone, "Jewish Christianity and the Qur'ān (Part One)." *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 74, no. 2 (2015): 225–53; Sidney H. Griffith, "Late Antiquity and the Religious Milieu of the Qur'an's Origins," in *The Routledge Companion to the Qur'an* (New York Routledge, 2021), 3–12; Timurlenk Chekovikj and Elena Trencevska Chekovikj, "Jesus and Monotheism, The Similarity and Relations Between Early Judeo-Christian Credence and Islam," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2 (2020): 45–53; Sidney H. Griffiths, "Late Antique Christology in Qur'ānic Perspective," *Die Koranhermeneutik von Günter Lüling*, ed. Georges Tamer (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 33–68.

90   Johan Buitendag, "Integral ecology: Response of an emeritus professor to the contributions of his septuagenarian Festschrift," *Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 9, no. 1 (2023), 1–20, 15. http://dx.doi.org/10.17570/stj.2023.v9n1.a8a

Essentially, the principle of epistemic fit not only enables us to resolve Küng's epistemological eclecticism, but it also illustrates how we might transcend the dialectic between modern and postmodernisms. Unlike modernism, the principle of epistemic fit resists the one-size-fits-all approach, which seeks to commensurate all knowledge under a uniform system. Nevertheless, upholding this principle does not entail the skepticism intrinsic to postmodernism. In this regard, both modern and postmodern thinkers represent two sides of the same coin. The former considers an objective theory of knowledge to be possible and tries to bluntly commensurate all knowledge claims under its auspices. The latter denies this possibility and, as a result, renders claims to knowledge suspicious and incommensurate. The principle of epistemic fit allows us to depart from this merry-go-round.[91]

The principle of epistemic fit offers an alternative epistemological orientation. In contrast to the first principle operative in modernism and postmodernism, which holds that real knowledge may only be attained (or not attained) by adhering to a kind of universally applicable epistemic process, let us assume instead that the different religious traditions already contain knowledge. Rather than beginning with a theory of knowledge, let us begin by attending to the claims to knowledge already present within the respective tradition. This reverses the standard epistemological procedure operative above by recognizing (from the beginning) the knowledge claims advanced by the different traditions at the outset.[92] This differs sharply from modernism, which assumes that objective knowledge is the result of a solid epistemological process. It also differs considerably from postmodernism, which assumes objective knowledge to be impossible because no solid epistemological process exists.[93] On the contrary, this principle is grounded in the idea that knowledge is already present. Its evaluation is retrospective and is undertaken in a manner appropriate (fitting) to the knowledge claims already in our possession.

All this allows us to look for common themes and ideas without breaching the sensibilities of postmodernism. In sum, it allows us to transcend the incommensurability implicit within postmodern renditions of reality and constructively bring the claims of diverse traditions into dialogue. To illustrate how this might work, in the remainder of this essay I illustrate

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91   Kevin Hector, "Friedrich Schleiermacher," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Epistemology of Theology*, 484.

92   For further discussion see: William Abraham, *Crossing the Threshold*, 13.

93   For further discussion see: Roderick Chisholm, *The Problem of the Criterion* (Milwaukee, WI.: Marquette University Press, 1973).

how the principle of epistemic fit offers a coherent theoretical framework for Küng's work.

Epistemic Fit, Monotheism, and Interreligious Dialogue

A helpful example of how Küng's research can be reconfigured theoretically using the principle of epistemic fit is his discussion of their belief in one God. Given the scope of our enquiry and the vast array of possibilities, framing the discussion carefully is key here, as Küng himself acknowledges:

> Driven by the conviction that an original truth manifests itself in many forms of language. For the Christian faith this original truth has its basis in the historical Jesus of Nazareth; to understand him as the Christ of the one God with all its practical consequences, theologians must have the right to take up christological options which were pushed to the side and covered up but are nevertheless completely legitimate, indeed original. These are the options from which the disciples of Jesus and the oldest Jewish–Christian community also began. And theologians should do this in the hope that here, possibly, are categories that will make this Jesus more understandable as the revelation of God to Jews and Muslims.[94]

Here Küng's epistemological eclecticism is clearly manifest in his conflation of epistemological foundationalism (in the search for the historical Jesus) and his use of Kuhn's nonfoundational theoretical framework to locate the essence within a pluriverse of diverse religious paradigms. Nevertheless, applying the principle of epistemic fit, it would indeed be possible to explore the contours of early Jewish-Christian thought in order to ascertain whether these early conceptions of the trinity might be more intelligible to Muslims and Jews.

At the outset, Küng rightly highlights the monotheism in each of these traditions. While acknowledging that the "Ecumenical Hellenistic Paradigm of Christian antiquity" led to the use of Hellenistic formulations in theological discourse, his extensive historical analysis bears fruit at this juncture in that it enables him to explore whether earlier Jewish-Christian understandings of the trinity might be more intelligible to Muslims. Küng emphasizes that, while Islam has no roots in Hellenistic Christianity, he finds resonances between what he describes as the "Ebionite," the "Jewish

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94   Küng, *Islam*, 516–17.

Apocalyptic Paradigm of Earliest Christianity," and Islam.[95] Following an extensive discussion, Küng asserts that the Qur'an has "Jewish-Christian influences" and contends that the marginalization of Jewish Christians in Palestine led some communities to migrate to the Arabian peninsula.[96] Küng maintains that these Jewish-Christians remained in the region until the late seventeenth century and argues that the analogies between "the Qur'anic picture of Jesus and Christology with a Jewish Christian stamp" present a useful point of departure for inter-religious dialogue.[97] He writes:

> My proposal is that if the dialogue—or, with the inclusion of Jews, the "trialogue"—about Jesus is to be fruitful, it must begin with the Jesus of the Jewish Christians…Which historical references in the Qur'an point with what intensity to what specific Christian group must possibly be left open but there can be no disputing the decisive point that the analogies in content between the Qur'anic picture of Jesus and a christology with a Jewish-Christian stamp are indisputable. The parallels remain perplexing and open up surprising possibilities for conversation between Christians, Jews and Muslims. [98]

Küng's proposal to mine the intellectual resources of the early Jewish-Christian tradition in order to gather concepts for inter-religious dialogue is promising. It has the potential to offer a connection point between these three traditions. This is particularly insightful in relation to the monotheism shared by the Abrahamic faiths.

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95   Küng, *Christianity*, 61–110. The term Ebionite was used by the Church fathers. For example, Irenaeus was highly critical of this group: "But those who are called Ebionites agree indeed that the world was made by God but … the only Gospel they use is that according to Matthew and they reject the Apostle Paul calling him an Apostate from the Law." For further discussion see: Irenaeus Bishop of Lyons, *Five Books of S. Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons: Against Heresies*: trans. J Keble (London: John Henry Parker, 1872), p.77 [26.2]; 4 Hans Schoeps, *Jewish Christianity: Factional Disputes in the Early Church*, tr. D Hare (Philadelphia, PA.: Fortress Press, 1969), 134.

96   He writes: "The Jewish–Christian communities with their theology—despite all the vilification, syncretism and extermination—must have developed an influence which was to be of historic importance in Arabia in particular, through the Prophet Muhammad. Underground links between Jewish Christianity and the message of the Qur'an have long been discussed by Christian scholars" (Küng, *Islam*, 37–42).

97   Küng, *Islam*, 44.

98   Küng, *Islam*, 501–502.

Reflecting on the scriptures, Küng highlights that, in Christianity, monotheism has always been present. However, he proposes that Christians recover a Jewish-Christian conception of the trinity in which the unity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is understood as a "revelation event" rather than what God ontologically is in Himself.[99] He stresses that this original New Testament perspective coheres with Catholic liturgy which traditionally addressed prayers not to the Trinity but to the "One God and Father, through the Son, in the unity of the Holy Spirit."[100] He believes this to be how God has revealed Himself in the economy of salvation and considers this conception to be more intelligible for the Abrahamic faiths. He writes:

> The Father is the one and only God of Abraham, beside whom there are no other Gods and who to us (as we must say in present-day metaphorical language) is both "Father" and "Mother." Belief in one God must not be put in question indirectly either: there is no third way between monotheism and polytheism. The Son is none other than the historical person Jesus of Nazareth, who personally reveals the word and will of this one God: in him the one true God is really manifest, present and effective The Spirit is the holy emanation, might and power of God and Jesus Christ who is exalted to him, which is effective in the believer and in the community of faith and which makes all human beings the sons and daughters of God. Thus, the Spirit is not a third party between God and human beings but is none other than God himself, God's powerful spiritual presence and reality.[101]

Küng believes this conception of the Trinity, the essence of the New Testament, offers a real dialogue point for Christians, Muslims, and Jews. He believes this shift of accent away from Greek and Latin, authentically, represents the heart of the New Testament. Here "God the Father" remains above Jesus, His "Son," and our "brother" remains alongside us. Finally, "God's power," the Holy Spirit, is within us. This, he believes, is a formulation which can form the basis of dialogue between the Abrahamic faiths.[102]

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99   Küng, *Islam*, 79–80.

100   Küng, *Islam*, 510–512.

101   Küng, *Islam*, 512, 515.

102   Küng makes clear that he does not believe Christians must "begin again unhistorically at zero." He does not for a moment believe contemporary Christians should become "Ebionites." Nevertheless, while he acknowledges that "the great councils and their doctrinal statements will always be important" he rejects the

This approach coheres with the principle of epistemic fit because it represents an attempt to extrapolate an underlying idea of God which can be commensurate throughout the many centuries of Christian history, and moreover, intelligible to Jewish and Islamic conceptions of God. This is neither to suggest that Küng rejects the truth of the great ecumenical councils, nor to imply that the various Christian traditions should jettison their theological or doctrinal heritage. It simply represents an attempt to extrapolate what he believes to be the essence of Christian thought in order for this to be brought into dialogue with other religious traditions as an intelligible point of reference.

Conclusion

In the above, I have illustrated how Küng's valuable proposals for understanding both Christian unity and interreligious dialogue might be made more coherent using the principle of Aristotelean epistemic fit. Having raised doubts concerning the suitability of Kuhn's theoretical framework for the realization of Küng's objectives, I have explored whether or not his proposals might be reconfigured using this Aristotelian principle, offering an example of how this principle coheres with his discussion of monotheism in relation to the Abrahamic faiths. The above suggests that this model has much to offer to the dialogue of religions and may fruitfully be applied to a whole host of different examples.

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idea that "the Greek and Latin" paradigm should be the "sole criterion" for interreligious dialogue, given that Islam emerged at a time when "Hellenistic culture" was in decline (Küng, *Islam*, 516–517).