

The “End of Dialogue” and Christian-Muslim Interrelations: Dialogue as Self-Perception Venue

Najib George Awad

In this essay, I pay attention to a voice that casts doubts on the value of interreligious dialogue and questions seriously its intellectual and practical validity alike. I touch upon two examples of this skeptical voice, one Christian, represented by John Milbank, and the other Muslim, represented by Ḥasan al-Bannā and Muslim Fundamentalism in Europe and UK. Both voices exist in Europe and echo one version of many other similar voices of suspicion toward interreligious dialogue one can encounter in different Western countries today. After I shed light on these two examples, I offer a re-interpretation of the value and purpose of interreligious dialogue by approaching it from the perspective of identity-formation and self-perception processes. I try to demonstrate that interreligious dialogue is not just a chance for understanding the different other and relating to its realm of reasoning. It is also a venue for pursuing a reforming and in-depth process of self-perception.

Keywords: interreligious dialogue, self-perception, identity-formation, John Milbank, Ḥasan al-Bannā

From *Monologia* to *Dialogue-mania*

Scholars of Interreligious Studies maintain today that “since 1970s, interreligious dialogue has made unprecedented advances;” so much so that one can consider the “general phenomenon [of] the dialogical ‘turn’ characteristic of the globalized world of today”, and it entails “a break with the predominantly monological era.”¹ Marianne Moyaert points to this excessive and global dialogical turn when she relates that “a number of [dialogical] initiatives have emerged, including dialogue groups, encounter centers, interreligious organizations, academic and popular journals, and academic programs, where the possibilities of interreligious dialogue are studied.”² All over the inhabited global contexts, one can witness interreligious dialogue manifesting itself in fivefold form: “1) the dialogue of life; 2) the practical dialogue of action; 3) theological dialogue; 4) spiritual dialogue; and 5) diplomatic dialogue.” This variety of forms demonstrates the numerous reasons, concerns, and themes that drive the members of different religions to approach each other’s discourses and worldviews and try to engage, address and discuss them.³ Such a dialogical euphoria permeates as well all the public venues of social interconnection, virtual networks, media, and public-expression mediums. Entering the word “dialogue” in Google’s search-engine will alone yield 374 million results. One is probably allowed to say that we all live today in a “dialogue-mania” reality. Today, interreligious dialogue is one of the most fashionable activities that religions conduct with each other around the world. Some of the important venues of Christian-Muslim dialogues one can mention are Cénacle Libanais, the *Jamā‘at al-Ikhā‘ ad-Dīnī* (The Association of Religious Brotherhood) in Cairo, and the Pakistan Association for Inter-Religious Dialogue (PAIRD), the Pontifical Institute for Arabic and Islamic Studies, the Gregorian University in Rome., and some initiatives in Indonesia.⁴

¹ Marianne Moyaert, “Interreligious Dialogue”, in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, eds. David Cheetham; Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 193–217 at 193; 201.

² *Ibid.*, 201.

³ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁴ Hugh Goddard, *A History of Christian-Muslim Relations*, second edition (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 165.

One of the most interesting activities that manifests the fashionableness of such a dialogue-mania is the Building Bridges Seminar that is today run under the patronage of Georgetown University, D.C. USA, with co-direction by Dr. Daniel Madigan (Georgetown University) and Dr. David Marshall (World Council of Churches). Originally inaugurated in 2002 by the initiation of the, then, Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey,⁵ Building Bridges was meant to “model a patience in dialogue that is fundamentally oriented towards getting to know one another’s hearts”, as well as to watch the followers of other faith “engaging at depth with their own sacred texts and with their own tradition.”⁶ The Building Bridges Seminar, thus, is not merely a venue for Christians and Muslims to meet together and manage ways that will foster their peaceful and tolerant coexistence and then conjure together strategies for moderating and containing the challenging consequences and ramifications, which their doctrinal and theological serious discrepancies and dissonances may generate in the world. Far from shying away from theological and doctrinal interaction, and replacing it with a pure interest in practical coexistence, Building Bridges is a Christian-Muslim venue where members from these two religions dialogue over points of belief and theology “that are deeply rooted in [their] hearts *as people of faith*.”⁷

This universal prevalence of dialogue notwithstanding, one finds voices today that echo a skeptical and disbelieving opinion on the validity, let alone necessity, of dialogue in general or interreligious dialogue in particular. The proponents of this voice do concede that, in today’s totally pluralistic world, the interrelation and interaction between coexisting people from different religious, ethnical, cultural and intellectual backgrounds is inevitable. However, they also believe that this interreligious coexistence and relationality need not necessarily validate or grant considerable value to any dialogue among people from different religions over religious belief and doctrines of faith. If interreligious relations are inescapable, dialogues over religious beliefs are not urgent or necessary, let alone far from fruitful.

One can spot such disapproving voices echoing within Christian and Muslim campaigns today. Sometimes, the loud volume of the more prevalent and popular pro-dialogue voice on the interreligious scene or in the academic areas of studying the relations between religions, like Interreligious Studies and Comparative Theology, overshadows the lower voice of that anti-dialogue stance and prevents us from pausing at it and conversing critically with it in scholarship. However, appreciating and promoting the pro-dialogue discourse and its universal attentive appreciation today must not detain us from paying careful attention too to those, rather relatively less popular, voices of suspicion and disbelief in interreligious dialogue. Being the voice of the minority does not automatically indicate that such a skeptical voice is intellectually trivial or worthless. It is the skeptical, critical and refuting stance, which usually stimulates our minds to

⁵ The founding seminar was entitled “Building Bridges: Overcoming Obstacles in Christian-Muslim Relations.” It was called by Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey and co-hosts Tony Blair and Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan as a response to the crisis of September 11, 2001. Carey retired soon after. His successor, Rowan Williams, made this project a priority for his ten years in that office. See Lucinda Mosher, “A Decade of Appreciative Conversation: The Building Bridges Seminar under Rowan Williams”, *Death, Resurrection and Human Destiny: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. David Marshall and Lucinda Mosher (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 259–74. See also Lucinda Mosher, “Preface: Fifteen Years of Construction: A Retrospective on the First Decade and a Half of the Building Bridges Seminar”, in *Monotheism and its Complexities: Christian and Muslim Perspectives*, eds. Lucinda Mosher and David Marshall (Washington, D. C.: Georgetown University Press, 2018), ix–xxiv.

⁶ David Marshall, “Introduction”, in *Death, Resurrection and Human Destiny*, xv–xix, xv.

⁷ Rowan Williams, “Preface”, in *Death, Resurrection and Human Destiny*, xxi–xxiv, xxiii. Italics are mine.

delve deeper into re-assessing, re-understanding and re-appraising the value, meaning and purpose of what we tend usually to take for granted and to unreservedly heed. We need to pause at the case that, in today’s context, we have voices which endeavor to escape the dialogue-mania by means of resorting to *polar contrariety*.

In this paper, I pay attention to two examples from this voice that casts doubts on the value of interreligious dialogue and questions seriously its intellectual and practical validity alike. This *polar contrariety* voice exists today in the intellectual and socio-cultural contexts of the Western world. In the paper, I touch upon two examples of this skeptical voice, one Christian and the other Muslim. Both voices exist in Europe and they echo one version of many other similar voices of suspicion toward interreligious dialogue that one can encounter in different countries today. After I shed light on these two examples, I then endeavor to dialogue with their discourse by offering my interpretation of the value and purpose of interreligious dialogue by approaching it from the perspective of identity-formation and self-perception processes. I will try to demonstrate that interreligious dialogue is not just a chance for understanding the different other’s belief system and relating to his/her faith’s realm of reasoning. It is also a venue for pursuing a reforming and in-depth process of self-perception.

Declaring the End of Dialogue: A Christian Stance

In 1990, the British Theologian, John Milbank, wrote an essay for a theological anthology titled, *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered*, which attempted to defend the particularity of Christian faith over against the theocentric or sophio-centric discourse of pluralist theology of religions. In his contribution to this project, Milbank, unsurprisingly I suppose, opts for a very thought provoking title to his writ in the volume: “The End of Dialogue.” Driven by a frank suspicion toward the pluralistic (not necessarily plural) stance on both intercultural and interreligious relations, Milbank argues that dialogue is an unreliable intellectual and practical choice to create communication and connection between religions. Religions, he argues, are basically socio-cultural phenomena that are shaped after overarching and predominating rationale or webs of perception, or conceptual metanarratives. In the West, when religious people, be it Christians, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, or others reason about dialogue or practice it, they simply do this in a monolithic, monotonous manner that reflects nothing but the Modernist Liberalist metanarrative that is prevalent in the Western world, and against which Milbank himself developed his radical orthodoxy project. Milbank ultimately proposes that if we want to withstand the Liberalist Modernist metanarrative and deconstruct its influence, we must cast serious suspicion, and even pave for the end of, all these notions and perception strategies, which the metanarrative of Liberalism underpins, namely pluralism, commonality, universalism but ultimately dialogue.

But, why dialogue is to be questioned? According to Milbank, dialogue in today’s interreligious arena is fostered and practiced upon the presumption that all religions share ultimately, and despite their discrepancies, one common almost totally similar, orientation toward a universally encompassing truth, or metanarrative of divine-human relation. Thus, all religions, after all, stand within the same circle of self- and reality-perception, even if they do not readily apprehend this. This seems to be the understanding of dialogue that underpins Milbank’s opinion that “the event of dialogue...assumes a commonly recognized subject matter and certain truths

that can be agreed about this subject matter by both (or all) participants”.⁸ Dialogue is here construed as the main venue for unmasking before religious communities the commensurability and appropriation of their religious beliefs and worldviews to such a realizable extent that makes the members of every religious group sympathetically comprehend the perspectives of the members of other religions. Dialogue is considered the meeting point that turns the voices of these different groups into one, harmonious choir-like symphony “coalescing around a single known object which is independent of our biographical or trans-biographical processes of coming-to-know.”⁹ More significantly still, Milbank notes, this perception of dialogue creates in those who believe in it the conviction that dialogue of religions drive the religious people to practically cooperate “in the causes of socialism, human rights, feminism, anti-racism and ecologism.”¹⁰

At this particular pre-conception pivot of religious dialogue, Milbank aims his intellectual rifle and unreluctantly pulls the trigger. He basically argues that what makes religious people believe in dialogue is the exact metanarrative of commensurability, commonality, and universalism that, in his opinion, tormented Western thought in the post-enlightenment era. What is needed, according to Milbank, is to knock down that metanarrative and nothing else. One of the ways to achieve this is by exposing the superficiality of the notion of dialogue on both cultural and religious levels. There are substantial and unsurpassable differences between East and West on the levels of cultures and religiosities—differences that make “Christianity” (the symbol of the West) *what* it is, not just *how* it is, and make “Islam” (the symbol of the East) *what* it is, and not just *how* it is. Dialogue must end, therefore, because it “obscures the truth-of-difference,” Milbank affirms.¹¹ It fosters an attitude of sympathy that drives the religious person to betray his own belief and this belief’s differentiation.¹² This mode of betrayal leads to the nullification of the distinctions that originated every major religion.¹³ Religions are then obliterated by dialogues, because these latter ignore the “different kind of differences;”¹⁴ the diverse understandings of “difference” itself, that are conjured after mostly starkly contrasted readings of the world. Dialogues obscure this culturally, contextually and existentially human-made nature of religions, preventing us, thereby, Milbank states, from claiming that there are out there particular cultures and religions that are “crucially in error at some point.”¹⁵

True perception of religions, Milbank maintains, lies ultimately not in comparatively constructing their commensurability.¹⁶ It rather lies in a frank tracing of these religions’

⁸ John Milbank, “The End of Dialogue”, in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), 174–91 at 177.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 185.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹² *Ibid.*, 178: “one should beware of sympathy, because too often we sympathize with what we can make to be like ourselves” (*ibid.*).

¹³ *Ibid.* 180.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 183.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 184.

¹⁶ In this sense, Milbank will not be a supporter of the area of study called “Comparative Theology,” especially its interest in detecting commonalities and reciprocal self-transformation by virtue of such commonality. On comparative theology, see for example Francis X. Clooney, ed., *The New Comparative Theology: Interreligious Insights from the Next Generation* (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2010); Francis X. Clooney, SJ, *Comparative Theology: Deep Learning Across Religious Borders* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); James L. Fredericks, *Faith among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999); Francis Clooney and Klaus von Stosch, eds., *How to Do Comparative Theology* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2019); Catherine Cornille ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell*

“genealogical deviation from a common root.”¹⁷ And when we probe this deviation and unpack, in his opinion, the more factual incommensurability of religions, we will return to the right, more credible track of reconfirming “the futility of ‘dialogue.’”¹⁸ The dialogue that seeks agreement beyond mere mutual toleration and attempts to blend together discrepancies is to be deliberately refuted,¹⁹ Milbank states, because it aspires at an impossible union between things that can never become alike or share commonality in terms of nature.²⁰ In conclusion, Milbank proposes replacing dialogue with what he calls “mutual suspicion;” he suggests securing harmony among religious groups by means of highlighting differences and never constraining interreligious interaction to conversations “around a neutral common topic.”²¹ Instead of occupation with commensurability-through-dialogue, Milbank stands with interaction for the sake of “conversion” that ought to pave the way for the constant receiving of Jesus Christ.

In the light of the above thesis, one wonders if there is still any form of dialogical connectedness between religions, which Milbank might spare the offense and sort-of vouches for. One has to point out here that Milbank is certainly not depreciative of the value of interreligious peace and tolerant coexistence. He clearly relates in his essay that “while religions may be incommensurable, this does not mean that they cannot be envisaged as lying peacefully side by side, without mutual interference.”²²

For Milbank, nevertheless, the form of dialogue that will be appreciated in such side-by-side peaceful coexistence is the one that serves the ultimate purpose of withstanding the influence of Liberal Modernist’s metanarrative on Western society. If religious or cultural dialogue serves the purpose of fighting this threat and succeeds in mobilizing different religious groups as one front against the common enemy of such metanarrative, dialogue, then, will be useful and would earn a considerable purpose. For Milbank, dialogue could strictly have a cheer Machiavellian/pragmatist use.

In an essay published recently, Angus Slater offers an excellent critical analysis of Milbank’s “end of dialogue” thesis. Slater perceptively spots Milbank’s Machiavellian/pragmatist stance on the potential use of dialogue. Slater also notices Milbank’s announcing of the end of dialogue and he disagrees with what he deems to be Milbank’s tendency to single out Christian faith as alone the reliable religion, viewing eventually “the ‘religious’ as synonymous with the ‘Christian’.”²³ My invocation of Slater’s discourse stems from his similar perception of Milbank’s availing of a Machiavellian/pragmatist possibility for dialogue in the circle of interreligious relations, which I point to in this essay. Slater notices that Milbank would not mind, for instance, a Christian-Muslim dialogue in the Western context if it was made in a “purposeful manner.” “Purposeful” in

Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); and Catherine Cornille, *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology*, (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2020).

¹⁷Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” 185.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 190.

²² *Ibid.*, 189.

²³ Angus M. Slater, “Plenitudo: Some Implications for a Reappraisal of the Religious Other in Radical Orthodoxy”, in *Interreligious Studies and Intercultural Theology*, 2:2 (2018): 243–60 at 245. Slater keeps an eye here on Milbank’s argument in John Milbank, “Christianity, the Enlightenment and Islam,” in *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (August 24, 2010) <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2010/08/24/2991778.htm>

Milbank's mind, Slater suggests, means that the conversation of Christians with Muslims "will not only respect 'the other'. It will rather compare these two religions' discourses and find out if one can detect 'coincidences of outlook' in their different discourses".²⁴

The question here is, "coincidence of outlook" in relation to what? To Milbank, the answer is straightforward: in relation to the Christians' and Muslims' stance on the destructive influence of Liberal Modernity's metanarrative on the Western world. If Christians and Muslims can concur on withstanding this metanarrative and agree to unite the fronts to defeat it, any form of dialogue between them becomes pragmatically necessary and useful instrument. But, one can ask Milbank here, would not this contrast with your claim that the "proto-metanarrative" structures of Christianity and Islam are ontologically different to such an extent that prevents any tolerance, commonality or true peace between them? Slater perceptively conceives in Milbank a Machiavellian "the end justifies the means" logic. Thus, Slater correctly proposes that, despite his forthright suspicion of dialogue, Milbank will be willing to allow a temporary abridgment or de-emphasis of the incommensurability of their differences if this would mean mobilizing Christianity and Islam against one, common, more sinister enemy: "The real metanarrative power of the secular modernity with its concomitant components of capitalist rationalist and relativist Liberalism."²⁵ Allowing a certain Machiavellian form of dialogue makes this latter to Milbank always a tactical necessity; a temporal tool for mobilizing "a shared desire to take down the playground bully of secular modernity."²⁶ Within this pragmatist framework, Milbank would encourage Christians to converse with Muslims, because "the enemy of my enemy is necessarily my friend." In this case, Christianity needs to occupy itself with accommodating or tolerating Islam. It just needs to appropriate vis-à-vis dialogue Islam's antagonism toward this common enemy and to partner with it in out-narrating a counter discourse to rival the metanarrative of secular modernity.²⁷

Reflecting Suspicion toward Dialogue: A Muslim Stance

I must admit that every time I read John Milbank's discourse, I get a genuine impression that beneath his highly sophisticated theological reasoning there is always a voice whispering: "Christianity is the answer; Christianity is the solution." As someone coming from the Arab Middle East, this whispering echoes a very similar claim people in the Arab World always heard from Muslim fundamentalists and political Islamicists like the Muslim Brothers: *al-Islām hūwa al-ḥall* (Islam is the answer), *al-Islām hūwa al-ḥall* (Islam is the solution). This appears clearly in Milbank's and Radical Orthodoxy's call for reviving Christianity in Western society by means of developing a renewed neo-Christendom proposal. His call for reviving Christendom presumes that Christianity and no other religion must become again culturally and politically preeminent in society. This means that any alliance of all religions against any form of non-religiosity or secularism in society will be allowed exceptionally under the prominent leadership of Christendom alone. In other words, Milbank seems to be calling for deeming Christendom *the* solution (*al-ḥall*) or *the* answer (*al-ḥall*) against modernist liberalism and its societal features.²⁸ In this call for

²⁴ Slater, "Plenitudo," 246. See also Milbank, "The End of Dialogue," 185.

²⁵ Slater, "Plenitudo," 246.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 249–50.

²⁸ See J. Milbank, and A. Pabst, "Christian Cosmopolis, Bastion of all Believers: Response to Joshua Ralston", 2014, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*, in <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/08/14/4067196.htm> (accessed

making Christendom *the one and only* preeminent and ruling cultural, political and religious center of gravity in any pluralist and multi-religious society, Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy sound very much as if they are chanting the same melody the Muslim Brotherhood also sang in the Arab World during the early decades of the last century.

Back in early twentieth century, the founder of the Muslim Brothers Group in Egypt, Ḥasan al-Bannā, made this two-pronged slogan “*al-Islām hūwa al-Ḥawāb* (Islam is the answer), *al-Islām hūwa al-ḥall* (Islam is the solution)” the conceptual cornerstone of his entire socio-political reformist discourse. Al-Bannā presented Islam as an absolutist holistic “theory capable of putting a cure for prevailing social condition”.²⁹ Islam, as he says, is “a comprehensive meaning that regulates all the aspects of life and [religiously] gives verdicts on every matter in it and makes for it a tight and precise system.”³⁰ What makes Islam, al-Bannā proceeds, a comprehensive solution and answer to all life aspects everywhere and at every time is the fact that Islam’s holy scripture, the Qur’ān, “contains all the fundamentals that are required for the life of [all] the nations and their renaissance and happiness”. Therefore, he then concludes: “Since the Muslim Brothers believe in this, they demand all the people to work toward making the rules of Islam the fundamentals upon which the contemporary renaissance of the modern Orient must be constructed in regard to every life aspect or affair... for, it is better for the nations that seeks renaissance to proceed towards it on the shortest roads by following the rules of Islam.”³¹

Be that as it may, al-Bannā declares Islam as *the* alternative metanarrative that is needed to liberate Egyptian society from the influence of the anti-religious metanarrative of progressive secularism on the Arab-Muslim world. This foreign influence, al-Bannā concludes, struck at the roots of the Muslim culture and infected it in a destructive manner that needs urgent and surgical treatment.³² Like Milbank, al-Bannā did not reject the reality of pluralist and multi-religious society in the Muslim World. He just argued that this plurality will become valuable only under the rulership and overseeing of the one and only preeminent and true religion (Islam) and its defining cultural and political reality: Islamdom. Islamdom alone can turn all the diverse and plural factors of societies in the Muslim world into one politically, culturally and socially homogenous and peaceful and positively co-existing public reality (*umma*). So, the non-Muslim communities in the Muslim world have no other choice but to join in the battle against secular, infidel modernization that threatens the Muslim societies under the preeminent and supreme leadership of Islamdom.

30 July, 2019); J. Milbank, “We Have Never Been Secular: Rethinking Religion and Secularity in Britain Today”, 2014, *Australian Broadcasting Corporation*. in <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/10/09/4103928.htm> (accessed 30 July, 2019). On this see also the important article of Angus M. Slater, “The ‘Comeback of Christendom’ or a ‘Christian Cosmopolis’? Dialogical Possibility in the Work of John Milbank,” in *Journal of Dialogue Studies*, 3:2 (2015): 31–51.

²⁹ Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 70.

³⁰ *Ma hā shāmil yantazim shū’wun al-ḥayāt jami’an wa yufī fī kulli sha’nin minhā wa-yada’ lahu nizāman muḥkaman wa-daḥiqan*. Ḥasan al-Bannā, “*Da’watunā*” (Our Call), in *Majmū’at Rasā’il al-Imām al-Shahīd Ḥasan al-Bannā*, Ḥ. Al-Bannā, (Beirut: al-Mū’assasah al-Islamiyya, 1981), 1–116 at 7.

³¹ *Idhā kāna al-Ikhwān al-Muslimūn ya’taqūdūn dhalik fa-hum yuṭālibūn al-nās bi-an ya’malū ‘alā an takūm qawā’id al-Islām al-uṣūl al-latī tubnā ‘alayha nahdat al-sharq al-ḥadīth fī kulli sha’nin min shu’ūn al-ḥayāt... fa-khayrun ll-umam al-latī turbid al-nuḥūd an tashuka ilayhi aqsara al-tariq bi-itibā’ihā ahkām al-Islām*. Ibid., 30. See also Abu-Rabi’, *Intellectual Origins of Islamic Resurgence in the Modern Arab World*, 82.

³² Ibid., 71.

The salvation of the Arab societies from its degradation and defeat, al-Bannā concludes, lies in conceding and succumbing to the belief that “*al-Islām hūwa al-ḥall* (Islam is the solution).”

Reading the history of the ensuing decades in the Arab World after the lifetime of Ḥasan al-Bannā tells us that the Muslim Brotherhood was born historically to bring al-Bannā’s “Islam is the solution” into factual implementation all over the Arab world. They viewed themselves as the promoters, in the declining state of Islam, of the metanarrative of Islamism and imposing it as the needed instrument for prevailing over progressive secularism.³³ Progressive secularism was deemed by al-Bannā and the Muslim Brotherhood he created as an expression of the arch-enemy of Islam: the non-Muslim West. The West was strictly rejected and attacked in one of al-Bannā’s early writings. There, he expressed brusquely his negative and inimical stance on the West, deeming it an exemplification of what stands as contrary to the particular differences of Islam and that clashes to a substantial organic level with Islam that prevents any possible interaction or dialogue between them.

It is not, I believe, far from tenable to spot intriguing similarity between Milbank’s and al-Bannā’s socio-political reading of their life-contexts. In his magnum opus, *Theology and Social Theory*, Milbank, in a manner reminiscent of al-Bannā’s, also endeavors to show that Christianity as an intellectual-theological discourse and thought form underpins as a fountainhead all the sociological and anthropological (social sciences) trends of reasoning that were developed in the European history since late medieval era. Whether scholars today concede it or not, he argues, many notions and methods of interpretation in social sciences are derived from and shaped after Christian theological premises. Be that as it may, Christianity’s theological reasoning is the alternative theory which the West needs to re-understand and re-form its own reading of its human, social and cultural development.³⁴ It is because of this referential implicit role its reasoning plays in the history of the formation of Western societies that Christianity, according to Milbank, is more than just a religious discourse among many others. In the Western context, Christianity implies a unique and distinctive structural logic for human society in its entirety.³⁵ As one of the fathers of Radical Orthodoxy, Milbank’s centralization and criterialization of Christianity permeates the discourses of the followers of the latter school of thought as well. Christianity is seen as the source and the fixer of Western secular understanding of human life. Christianity and its Christ are seen as the “watermark” or the unseen *simulacrum* beneath the societal existence of the Western world.³⁶

Reading his stance on interreligious dialogue within the above-mentioned reading of the history of social sciences and social self-perception in the West unveils the logic that drives Milbank to believe that “religious vision for the whole of society cannot be shared between religious traditions or made of a synthesis or base area of agreement between them”. To the contrary, as Angus Slater states, Milbank argues that “a genuinely ‘religious culture’ has to be religious in a *specific* way”.³⁷ There is no space in Milbank’s discourse for either “general religiosity” or “neutral

³³ Ibid., 74.

³⁴ John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory: beyond Secular Reason*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 380–389. Thus, theology, in Milbank’s logic, is *the* proper and ideal social science.

³⁵ Ibid., 406.

³⁶ See for instance, Graham Ward, *Cultural Transformation and Religious Practice*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and Ward, *Cities of God*, (New York: Routledge, 2000).

³⁷ Angus M. Slater, “The ‘Comeback of Christendom’ or a ‘Christian Cosmopolis’? Dialogical Possibility in the Work of John Milbank”, 36.

religious pluralism of the multiculturalist variety:” the solution for societal degradation is monistic, single and mono-religious, namely Christendom.³⁸ Both Milbank and al-Bannā pose one single “religio-dom” as the only referential and criterial narrative over-against all the available others in society. They both replace one metanarrative by another metanarrative, instead of truly deconstructing the idea of “metanarrative” itself. Both also represent particular religiosity (Christendom in Milbank’s case, Islamdom in al-Bannā’s) as a socio-cultural and intellectual truth that permeates the entire levels of existence of the history of their nations. And, finally, both consider the enemy to be ultimately the Modernist worldview: Milbank calls it Modernist Liberalism, while al-Bannā speaks about the same thing by calling it ‘progressive secularism’.

It is a fact that Milbank and al-Bannā belong to two historically, socially and culturally different contexts. Yet, one can still overall detect similar orientations in their discourses. It is not quite accurate to reductively read al-Bannā’s legacy as a discourse that was purely political in nature upon the fact that the latter was the founding intellectual source of the Muslim Brotherhood Movement. al-Bannā’s latter writings tended to be focusing on the political conditions of the Muslim societies in Egypt and the Arab World. These are the writings that the Muslim Brothers tended, and still, to narrowly highlight and one-sidedly pay attention to. This notwithstanding, al-Bannā’s earlier writings are more dominantly cultural, social and existential discourses that are fully and deeply imbedded in religious-theological Islamic mind and foundation. The same, I reckon, is detectable in Milbank’s own legacy. It is neither purely theological, nor does it address Christianity, or any other religion, from a politics-free perspective. For quite a few years before his retirement, Milbank injected his theological writs and lectures with conspicuous political concerns and implications. In his earlier theological *Werke*, he also engaged intellectually Christian theology from socio-historical and cultural perspectives, as his *Theology and Social Theory* demonstrates. One can fairly say that Milbank treats Christianity and al-Bannā treats Islam as *Weltanschauung* and *Kulture* in a similar manner. And, they both do so as the backbone of the alternative they offer to salvage their contexts from Liberal Modernity (Milbank) or *al-Ḥadāthah*/modernism (al-Bannā). Be that as it may, I find in Milbank almost a Christian Ḥasan al-Bannā, and maybe one can correlatively see in al-Bannā a voice of a Muslim-like Milbank.

Since the 1980s, and due to their violent persecution and bloody clashes with the political ruling regimes in the Arab world, a considerable number of the leaders, thinkers and spokesmen of the fundamental Islamists and Muslim Brothers ended up as asylum seekers in the Western countries. Many of these figures resettled in Europe and UK and established strong, wealthy and publically quite visible and active presence in these expatriation locations. Nowadays, and as they now have the third or even the fourth generation of their offspring existing in the West, such a radical Islam can be deemed as indigenously Western, and it represents a Muslim version of the voice that is highly suspicious and far from proponent of interreligious dialogue.

In his observation of Western Islam, the Muslim scholar and public figure, Tariq Ramadan points to the presence of this fundamental Islamicist tradition in Europe and UK. He relates that

³⁸ See the systematic criticism of Milbank and Radical Orthodoxy’s discourse on this matter in Joshua Ralston, “Islamophobia and the Comeback of Christendom: Riposte to Adrian Pabst,” 2014, in *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* in <http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/08/04/4060254.ht> (accessed 30 July, 2019); and J. Ralston, “How Political Theologians Should (Not) Engage with Islam: Responding to John Milbank and Adrian Pabst”, in *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* in www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2014/08/27/4075299.htm (accessed 30 July, 2019).

these Muslims pause at particular Qur'anic verses that manifest negative stances on Christianity and Judaism. They find in them a textual support of their belief in the monolithic and absolute superiority of Islam and, therefore, their depreciation and disbelief in the value of interreligious dialogue. For them, the people of other faiths are *kuffār* (infidels) and they refuse to embrace the message of Islam. Because these Muslims, Ramadan explains, believe that “religion in the sight of God is [solely and exclusively] Islam”, they then conclude that spending time in dialoguing with non-Muslims is meaningless and fruitless, for “he who desires religion other than Islam [or pay attention to it] will not find himself accepted, and in the hereafter he will be among the losers”. Be that as it may, Ramadan proceeds, “such an avalanche of [Qur'anic views] has the effect of causing perplexity and raises questions about whether any real place for dialogue remains”.³⁹

Ramadan believes that this return to “the letter of scriptural sources” not only makes these Muslims cling to their suspicion toward dialogue. More radically still, it keeps them secluded away from Western society because they deem their Western *Sitz im Lebens* totally “devoid of religion and devoid of morals”. Their world-view, or state of mind, that is, is shaped after “a binary world of good and evil, of ‘us’ versus ‘them’, of ‘knowledge’ and ‘ignorance’, of Islam and others”, as Ramadan states.⁴⁰ This binary mentality not only casts doubts on interreligious dialogue. It also emphasizes an evasive stance on such dialogue, because it does not believe that interaction with people of other religions in European or Western societies is good at all to their Islam. As Ramadan relates, they “disregard, even refuse, any involvement in European society, a domain in which, quite simply, they do not see themselves as able to participate”. Some of these Muslims goes in their rejection of interreligious dialogue into founding it on as radical stance as a “refusal of any type of involvement in any space regarded as non-Islamic.” These Muslims’ “Islam,” Ramadan opines, is “primarily defined by separation and by a practice of the religion that is literalist and protected from European cultural influences”.⁴¹ Dialogue with non-Muslims is dangerous because it pulls the Muslims, the people of good faith and of true knowledge, into a contaminative and useless connection with the people of *kufīr* and ignorance, whose fate and condemnation are already sealed. And, if for sheer pragmatic and circumstantial necessities or conditions, these Muslims found themselves obliged to engage others in interreligious discussion, the fundamentalist *‘ulamā’* (scholars) would then permit such an engagement, if and only if it was pursued to convince the other part of the truth of Islam. “Interreligious dialogue,” Ramadan concludes, “would then become a call to [Muslim] truth, a *da‘wa* (call/invitation/preaching), with no meaning beyond that.”⁴²

I am not trying here to present this branch of Islam as exhaustively representative or totally definitive of either Western Islam or Islam in the West. I do fully agree with Tariq Ramadan’s emphasis that this trend of Islamic thought represents but a minority in Western Islam, and that the media makes us think otherwise because it puts this Islamic group and no other always under the spot and gives it the center of the attention as if it is Islam itself. There is something true in Ramadan’s saying: “The optical illusion of the media must not mislead us: the Islamic groups or

³⁹ Tariq Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 204–5.

⁴⁰ Ramadan, *What I Believe*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 48–49.

⁴¹ Ramadan, *To Be A European Muslim: A Study of Islamic Sources in the European Context*, (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 2002), 240–41.

⁴² Ramadan, *Western Muslims and the Future of Islam*, 205.

grouposcules that most often makes news, those that express the most incendiary and violent views, represent the tiniest fringe of the Muslim community, which does not identify with them.”⁴³

This conceded and emphasized, in this Islamist fundamentalism, I believe, one can find a counter-Christian, Muslim exemplification of the suspicion and even devaluation of interreligious dialogue, which one can detect in a Christian, also not exhaustively representative, a voice like John Milbank’s. Like Milbank, we have here Muslims who deem theological differences between religions of substantial, ontological criterial value and grant them divisively particularizing and differentiating role. They similarly believe in the superiority of their religious metanarrative over other metanarratives. And, finally, they also opt for a Milbank-like Machiavellian/pragmatist stance on dialogue; in that they exceptionally tolerate dialogue for the sake of pursuing *da’wa*. Let us notice that Milbank similarly related that if interreligious dialogue was pragmatically needed and pursued, it should guarantee the constant receiving of Christ again and the continuation of the work of conversion.⁴⁴

Why Dialogue? For Which *Telos*?

The previously displayed devaluation and degrading of the necessity and use of interreligious dialogue is not, or at least not yet, prevalent or main-stream whether in Europe, in UK or in the world overall. Nonetheless, there is a value in pondering such a radically challenging and counter-parting voice. It invites us to avoid taking the value and use of interreligious dialogue for granted. It pricelessly confronts us with the renewed and never redundant need to always review the meaning and value of interreligious dialogue in our minds. It is such voices that make us realize the requirement of asking ourselves always: what is truly the purpose of interreligious dialogue and what is its value for our life today? Such inquiry does not have a straight forward answer as we may like usually to reckon. The value of interreligious dialogue needs to be explored, discovered, re-assessed, made sense of and verified.

Today’s vouchers for interreligious relations and dialogue do pause at what they deem the basic barrier that prevents harmony and sympathy and promotes, instead, antipathy and even fraction with the religious other—namely ignorance and the pervasive undermining of its effects.⁴⁵ Ignorance is believed to manifest in threefold manner in the context of interreligious relations. The first is “*innocent* ignorance” (or ignorance *simpliciter*), which expresses sincere lack of knowing of the religious other that is free from premeditated appraisals and value-judgment stances on this other. The second is “*blind* ignorance,” which is expressive of a stubborn refusal to know or see except what is “dictated by the already-held worldview perspectives.” Finally, the third form is “*culpable* ignorance,” which manifests “the deliberate refusal to know; the avoidance of the challenge of cognitive change; the reinforcement of a prejudicial perspective by deliberately shunning any evidence, argument, or perspective to the contrary.”⁴⁶ Against this threefold ignorance challenge, emerges today a call for more serious re-appreciation and promotion of “syncretistic synthesis” that originates from open and genuine engagement in an interreligious interaction that will

⁴³ Ramadan, *What I Believe*, 50.

⁴⁴ Milbank, “The End of Dialogue,” 190.

⁴⁵ David Cheetham; Douglas Pratt, and David Thomas, “The Future of Engagement: Emerging Contexts and Trends”, in *Understanding Interreligious Relations*, 390–401, 391ff.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 392.

accommodate the other religions' followers and produce mutual knowledge and perception of the particularities and identity of the other.⁴⁷

The above call for promoting interreligious dialoguing relationality to overcome ignorance is a valuable argument for fostering interreligious interaction and co-existence. This value conceded, I do believe that such a discourse is actually one-sided in nature and goal. It narrowly focuses on ignorance in relation to knowing the other. It does not touch upon ignorance in relation to one's own self-knowing; once own religious self-perception, which is constitutive of one's own relation to identity-formation. These dimensions of self-perception and self-identification are sometimes as challenging and obstructing a factor before interreligious dialogue and relation as ignorance toward the other. It is plausible a belief that self-definition, being religious or non-religious, is not just a simple label. Identities are sometimes too fluid in nature to such an extent that makes them "become chaotically democratic, or they may cease to be meaningful."⁴⁸ This defect does sometimes heavily casts its shadow on interaction with others and become a source of self-confusion before it causes confusion to the other. It is because of this that at some dialogical occasions the dialoguing sides fail to unfold a lucid, meaningful, and even accurate identification of the religious belief they aspire at offering as a remedy to the other's ignorance of their religiosity. They fail in remedying the other's ignorance because they themselves are entangled with a counter, and equally counter-productive, ignorance (whether innocent, blind or culpable) that is imaged in a fluid or meaningless knowledge about the very religious belief they identify themselves with. Interreligious dialogue, I believe, not only opens one's eyes to the crucial necessity of curing one's ignorance toward the other. It equally, if not more surgically, faces us directly with a serious potential of ignorance malady that infects our own self-perception. "Who we are" and what that "who" truly and accurately means is as central and foundational for existence and relatedness as "who the other is" and what that "who" connotes religiously to him or her.

In his recent study of the history of the Christians' existence in the shadow of Islam, Jack Tannous reminds us that one of the weaknesses of discussions of early Christian-Muslim interactions "is that they tend to leave unexamined the two most important words; namely 'Christian' and 'Muslim', and instead focus solely on 'interactions.'"⁴⁹ I totally concur with Tannous on this. Before we specify the meaning of the idea of "dialogue" that we bring to the interlocution table, we need to pay attention to the diverse connotations and self-understanding perspectives the two dialoguing partners hold when they speak as "Muslim" and "Christian." Because of this, interreligious dialogue is an indispensable means for building a coherent relation with one's own identity: it is a means for self-perception and not just perception of the other. This is why, in some contemporary studies,⁵⁰ some scholars validly investigated, for instance, if the interaction with Islam and the attempt at conveying Christian faith in Arabic terms forced the Christians to cut connections with their traditional theological identity, which is shaped by Greek and Syriac theological rationales. This is also why some scholars plausibly anatomized the Christians' interaction with that early form of Muslim cultural and socio-anthropological identity-formation during the seventh and eighth centuries CE. They probed how this interaction

⁴⁷ Ibid., 393.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 394.

⁴⁹ Jack Tannous, *The Making of the Medieval Middle East: Religion, Society and Simple Believers*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 225.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Najib George Awad, *Orthodoxy in Arabic Terms: A Study of Theodore Abū Qurrah's Theology in its Islamic Context*, (Boston: De Gruyter, 2015).

influenced and transformed the Christians’ self-perception: how the interaction with Islam invited the Christians of Greater Syria to re-explore, re-ponder and re-shape their own self-understanding as ‘Christians’ and no else.⁵¹ Consequentially, dialogue as interreligious interaction must not die or end because the process of one’s self-perception and identity-formation are both never-ending stories.

It is this dimension of self-perception that makes dialogue an ontological necessity for human existence and for Being, as Martin Heidegger always argued about the nature of Being, especially in his *Sein und Zeit*. Recently, the Italian philosopher, Gianni Vattimo, took this Heideggerian thought into its frank logical conclusion in relation to the idea of dialogue. Vattimo states that “Being is nothing but the Logos interpreted as dialogue, *Gespräch*, as the actual discussion among people.” In other words, Vattimo opines, we as beings are *per se* an event of *Gespräch*, events of conversation.⁵² If this is the case, then the death of dialogue is not just the burial pit of religions. It is also the annihilation of human existence, of human being-ness as such.

It is in this ontological (in the sense of relating being to beings, not in the sense of discerning objects out there) continuity between self-perception and relatedness to the state of being, which Vattimo and Heidegger speak about, that I find a fundamental reason for the never-ending need for dialogue between religions: It is the *Gespräch* that not only eventuates these religions in their core beings. It also eventuates the meaningful and encounterable being-ness of these religions’ human followers, as it invites the, to perceive this being-ness from the perspective of being a follower of *this* particular religious orientation and not any other. If dialogue ended, religions, as the religious persons themselves, are mere language games and never existing realities.

John Milbank seems in his “end of dialogue” argument following Richard Rorty’s disbelief in the meaningfulness of the dialogue between Christianity and Islam.⁵³ In an interview he held along with Gianni Vattimo, Rorty states explicitly his disbelief in the value, let alone possibility, of a dialogue between Christianity and Islam in the West in the following words:

It seems to me that the idea of a dialogue with Islam is pointless. There was no dialogue between the *philosophes* and the Vatican in the eighteenth century, and there is not going to be one between the mullahs of the Islamic world and the democratic West.... With luck, the educated middle class of the Islamic countries will bring about an Islamic Enlightenment, but this enlightenment will not have anything much to do with a “dialogue with Islam”.⁵⁴

Opposite to this view, I personally concur with Rorty’s interlocutor, Gianni Vattimo, in his belief in the essential meaning of dialogue for the humans’ existence as beings. There is a truth in Vattimo’s saying that “Being is not written somewhere in a sort of Chomskian, more historically

⁵¹ Najib G. Awad, *Umayyad Christianity: John of Damascus as a Contextual Example of Identity Formation in Early Islam*, (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2018).

⁵² Richard Rorty, Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, “Dialogue: What Is Religions’ Future after Metaphysics?” in *The Future of Religion: Richard Rorty and Gianni Vattimo*, ed. Santiago Zabala (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 55–81 at 58, 64.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 72–73.

qualified structure of language, but it is just the result of the human dialogue.”⁵⁵ Dialogue, thus, cannot end because without it the human falls into a limbo of skeptical existence and self-hood. That perception of dialogue as the manger of self-being makes it the foundation of perceiving accurately one’s own religious identity in the midst of the event of dialoguing as an expression of a human orientation that is fluxive, ever-reconstructed and never static or given from-above.

In his study of Christian-Muslim relations and interreligious dialogue, Jacques Waardenburg connects dialogue between religions to a substantial constitutive extent with the identity formation process and identity content, which the followers of religions presume and manifest in their interrelations. Waardenburg maintains that “the chances for dialogue would be enhanced if one could have a better perception or idea of what someone else who happens to identify himself or herself as a Christian or a Muslim in fact means by that.”⁵⁶ The noteworthy point in Waardenburg’s connecting of dialogue with identity is his suggestion that, in dialogues, the interlocutors not only unfold before each other their religious identity (i.e. the meaning of being “Christian” or “Muslim”). They also mutually proceed into a process of identity re-construction. “The history of Muslim-Christian relations,” as Waardenburg avers, “contains a recognition, but also a mutual construction of not only one’s own, but also the other’s identities.”⁵⁷ There is no doubt that this identity-construction factor turned some dialogical occasions in Christian-Muslim history into incidents of negative and counterproductive polemical tension and intellectual assassination. This happened, as Waardenburg plausibly opines, when Christians and Muslims constructed their own identity in a contrariety and opposition manner that makes oneself as totally and antagonistically different from the other and the other as totally opposite of oneself. These incidents of constructing otherizing identities end up exemplifying a dialogue of mutual offensive degradation and antithetical imagination of one’s self and the other’s as “stereotypes or the product of imagination.”⁵⁸

I do concede the abovementioned danger and pay attention to it. This notwithstanding, viewing interreligious dialogue as a venue of identity-formation and self-perception may actually revive the value of purposefulness of dialogue and of interreligious relations and grant both a needed, renewed *telos* and meaning in today’s world. Classically speaking, interreligious dialogue is mainly conducted to either achieve reciprocal understanding or guarantee peaceful and tolerant co-existence or to create a joint-front for tackling common particular socio-political or cultural challenging conditions. What Waardenburg profoundly invites us to reckon with is relating to dialogue and approaching it as a chance for the dialoguing religious sides to re-view their own identities, to ponder anew their self-perception processes, to pave the way by means of dialogue for a deeper, self-transformative and fluxive interpretation of who they are as “Christians” or as “Muslims.” Dialogue is a *symbiotic* process of self-perception and self-transformation, not just a venue for other-perception and other-acceptance. Interreligious dialogue is not just one’s pulpit to interpret his or her Christianity or Islam before the other and to the other. It can also be one’s opportunity to become the Christian or Muslim identity that he or she represents. In this sense,

⁵⁵ Ibid., 66.

⁵⁶ Jacques Waardenburg, *Muslims and Others: Relations in Context*, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003), 480. On the Muslims’ perception of interreligious relations from historiological perspectives, see J. Waardenburg, ed., *Muslim Perceptions of Other Religions: A Historical Survey*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

⁵⁷ Waardenburgh, *Muslims and Others*, 481.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

interreligious dialogue is not just a journey toward the other. It is also a journey towards one’s very own self-perception vis-à-vis a symbiotic relatedness to the other.

In his, *Truth and Method*, Hans-Georg Gadamer already brought philosophically and hermeneutically to our attention that dialogical conversations are venues for practicing the art of testing one’s own opinions. Gadamer then affirms that this testing nature entails that dialogue is an “art of questioning,” thus, it is not, Gadamer maintains, an art of arguing but an “art of thinking.”⁵⁹ Viewing dialogue as an identity-formation or re-perception venue makes it a chance not primarily for questioning the other and re-thinking of how we perceive this other, but a moment for questioning and re-testing our own self-perception first and foremost. On this conception of dialogue applies Marianne Moyaert’s saying “understanding begins when we are addressed and challenged by something that interrupts and suspends our own prejudices.”⁶⁰ To this I add that our own prejudices on who we are and what is our “Christianity” or “Islam”—and not just our prejudices on who the others are and what is their “Christianity” or “Islam”—are also interrupted and suspended. The main problem in Milbank’s suspicion on the validity and value of dialogue lies basically in the philosophical presumption that underpins his understanding of dialogue. He seems to depart from a sort of Husserlian presumption that the knowing subject has a priori fully fledged self-perception before even addressing reality (or life, in Husserl’s terms) in itself. Contrary to this, the core nature of dialogue is rooted in the soil of a Habermasian-like intersubjective communication perspective, wherein the grammar of meaning as well as of self-perception as such lies basically in intersubjective interaction and participation between two sides who are external to each other and who reciprocally share expectations, not just about others’s *habitus*, but also about their very own one as well. In this sense, dialogue is an intersubjective moment of communication whereby the self finds itself in the very sphere of interactive reciprocation with the other. There is no ready-made, fully fledged meaning of self before the occurrence of the interaction and the manifestation of intersubjectivity.⁶¹ Dialogue is a moment of self-perception and self-relatedness because it is that context “in which I can subject my behavior to another’s criticism and we can come to a consensus” generated from “the intersubjectivity of possible mutual understanding.”⁶²

Connecting it to identity-formation and self-perception not only influences the practicing of interreligious dialogue. It also transforms the attempt at pursuing academic programs on interreligious education. It makes such education trespasses the boundaries of the mere concentration on comparative probing and mere descriptive anatomization that aims at acquiring an in-depth knowledge of the other and its particular alterity. Far more than this alone, interreligious education becomes a venue for acquiring an inherently critical and reforming self-examination; an in-depth fathoming of one’s own religious identity. It is this interaction that paves

⁵⁹ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, tr. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 1989), 361. See also Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. Hugh Lawson-Tancred (London: Penguin Books, 1998).

⁶⁰ Mariann Moyaert, “Interreligious Dialogue,” 207.

⁶¹ See Jürgen Habermas, “From a Constitutive Theory to a Communicative Theory of Society (Sellars and Wittgenstein): Communicative and Cognitive Use of Language”, in *On the Pragmatics of Social Interaction: Preliminary Studies in the Theory of Communicative Action*, tr. Barbara Fultner (Cambridge, Mass: Polity Press, 2003), 45–65, 55–59.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 50–51. In his intersubjective communication theory, Habermas builds heavily, though critically, on the late Wittgensteinian understanding of language as game. See on this language game logic, for instance, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1958); and L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Grammar*, tr. A. Kenny (Berkeley, LA: University of California Press, 1974).

the way for re-constructing theological education in the twenty-first century on crude and frank interreligious Theology of Religions foundations.⁶³ This inter-theological study of other religions invites Christians and Muslims to perceive in depth what their religious belief calls them to become as “Christians” or “Muslims.” Such an attention to the impact of interreligious interaction on self-perception is what surgically counterparts the reduction of dialogue into mere Machiavellian/pragmatist, naively degraded, instrument.



Professor Najib George Awad (Dr. Phil.; Dr. Theol. Habil.) is the Professor of Christian Theology & Eastern Christian Thought and the Director of the PhD Program in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations at Hartford Seminary (Connecticut, USA).

The views, opinions, and positions expressed in all articles published by the *Journal of Interreligious Studies (JIRS)* are the authors' own and do not reflect or represent those of the *JIRS* staff, the *JIRS* Board of Advisors, or *JIRS* publishing partners.

⁶³ Najib George Awad, “From Pre-dialogue into Interreligious Dialogue: Interreligious Theologization as the Starting Point of a Reliable Religious Education,” in *Journal of Religious Education*, 66:1 (2018): 1–11.