The Journal of Interreligious Studies, Issue 13, Winter 2014

"Scholarship should point our hearts towards the world." --Diana Eck

Photo by Alex Ford, via Flickr Creative Commons.

Table of Contents:

Dear Readers,

Founded in 2008 by a pioneering group of young scholars, the first issue of the *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* went online in February of 2009. Since that time the *Journal*, a peer-reviewed publication, has emerged as a significant forum for the exploration of interreligious engagement in theory and practice. Finding its first institutional home at Auburn Theological Seminary (2010-2012), the *Journal* is now a program of CIRCLE, the *Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education* at Andover Newton Theological School and Hebrew College. With this shift in 2013, Rabbi Or Rose and Dr. Jennifer Peace, co-directors of CIRCLE, became the publishing editors of the *Journal*. We are most grateful to be able to continue to bring you the *Journal* free of charge, thanks to the generous support and dedication of many individuals, institutions and foundations. In particular, we wish to thank the Henry Luce Foundation for its ongoing support of our programs.

Ably led by founding editor, Stephanie Varnon-Hughes, with ongoing input from co-founder Rabbi Joshua Stanton, the *Journal* continues to pursue its original mission, seeking to "build an interreligious community of scholars, in which people of different traditions learn from one another and work together for the common good." As the *Journal* evolves, we are also making some changes. Most notably, the *Journal* has changed its name from the *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* to the **Journal of Interreligious Studies**. This new name acknowledges both the breadth of past contributions to the *Journal* and the language employed in this emerging, interdisciplinary field. This name change dovetails with the recent creation of the "Interreligious and Interfaith Studies" group at the American Academy of Religion (AAR), co-chaired by Dr. Homayra Ziad and Dr. Jennifer Peace.[1] Particularly in this issue, we are inspired by remarks made by Dr. Diana Eck at AAR 2013, in which she reminded us, "Scholarship should point our hearts towards the world."

In addition to the new name, we have shifted to a publishing schedule of three issues annually. Our winter issue (as reflected here) will focus on publishing outstanding papers from the AAR, particularly papers presented under the auspices of the new group. Our spring issue will be curated by a guest editor each year and organized around a specific topic. This year's guest editor is Dr. Victoria Barnett, Director of Programs on Ethics, Religion, and the Holocaust at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in DC. Finally, our summer/fall issue will be an open call to a wide range of contributions, as has been the model for all of our past issues.

In closing, we want to thank our dedicated readers as well as all those involved in publishing the Journal We feel blessed to be working with a talented team of staff, board members, and advisors as we participate in the dynamic and divergent conversations taking place about the nature of this emerging area of study and practice.

Sincerely,
Jennifer Peace and Or Rose

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[1] The full list of the leadership team for the *Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group* includes: Co-Chairs: Jennifer Peace, Assistant Professor of Interfaith Studies, Andover Newton Theological School; Homayra Ziad, Assistant Professor of Islam, Trinity College Steering Committee Members: Diana Eck, Professor of Comparative Religion and Indian Studies and Fredric Wertham Professor of Law and Psychiatry in Society in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, Member of the Faculty of Divinity, Harvard University; Paul Knitter, Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions and Culture, Union Theological Seminary; John Makransky, Associate Professor of Buddhism and Comparative Theology, Boston College; Ravi M. Gupta, Charles Redd Chair of Religious Studies, Department of History, Utah State University; and Rabbi Or Rose, Director, Center for Global Judaism, Hebrew College.

3Dialogue in Action: Toward a Critical Pedagogy for Interfaith Education

By Nazia Islam, Tiffany Steinwert, and Diane Swords

 "The future of the world depends on people of differing faiths developing the capacity to cooperate and work with each other and American higher education can have a significant part in building that capacity." (Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2012, p. 91)

Now more than ever interfaith education is a pressing imperative for higher education. As religious tensions rise in the United States and around the world, the need for critical and constructive pedagogies of interfaith education grows. Not only must students increase their own religious literacy to function in an increasingly religiously plural world, but they must also learn effective ways to communicate and collaborate across differences of faith and non-faith (Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2012; Patel, 2012; Patel and Meyer, 2011). In a recent study of religion in higher education, Jacobsen and Jacobsen, assert, "paying attention to religion has the potential to enhance student learning and to improve higher education as a whole" (Jacobsen and Jacobsen, 2012, p. vii).

While colleges and universities have long instituted academic courses on world religions and have offered co-curricular experiences for interfaith dialogue, few institutions have developed academic opportunities that fuse religious literacy, interfaith dialogue and multi-faith action. This paper intends to explore the possibilities for such a course through a critical analysis of the Intergroup Dialogue model as a pedagogical tool for interfaith education among undergraduate students.

Interfaith education is called to several tasks at once. Not only must it foster religious literacy, but it must also nurture what scholar Suresh Canagarajah calls, "transactional conversations." This type of mutual encounter leads to a dialogical theological engagement between students that transform attitudes and create space for authentic relationships across religious differences (Canagarajah, 2010, p.28). The Intergroup Dialogue pedagogical model offers the potential for just such experiences.

Intergroup dialogue (IGD) was developed at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor in the 1980s as a tool for engaging students in critical conversations about race and equality in America. This dialogue model combined sound pedagogical principles, academic knowledge, and empirical research to "bring together students of different social identities over a sustained period of time to understand their commonalities and differences, examine the nature and impact of societal inequalities, and explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice" (Zuniga, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker 2007, p.2). Dialogue classes are led by a pair of trained facilitators who share identities with members of the class. They follow a standardized curriculum that involves trust-building, understanding social identities, understanding social inequalities, dialoguing on "hot topics" and completing a collaborative project in small diverse groups.

IGD is distinguished by several important features. First, it addresses power relations and social structures. Second, personal experience is put into context of social institutions such that affective learning supports academic understandings of inequalities and vice versa. Also,

substantial focus is on the collaborative action projects which provide experience working for social change, and a sense of efficacy that students otherwise lack. "Intergroup dialogue provides an important opportunity to develop and practice the understanding and collaboration needed to address social group divisions and inequalities in educational contexts and communities" (Lopez and Zuniga 2010, p.41).

Cross-listed as a sociology, women and gender studies, and cultural foundations of education course offering, the pilot course employed the Intergroup Dialogue model to examine religious pluralism in the United States, the role of Christian privilege in religious oppression, and the potential of dialogue to bridge these and other intersecting identities. The course addressed religion as a personal and social identity, paying close attention to the intersections of racial, ethnic, gender, sexual orientation and national origin identities. To foster transactional conversations and relationships students engaged in two intensive group projects: a 10 day travel experience to London where they encountered lived religious pluralism in a global city and a semester long intergroup collaboration project in which they worked together across difference on a common project to foster social justice on campus.

While religious identity functions in many similar ways as racial and ethnic identities on which the IGD model was constructed, there remain salient differences. These differences provide points of reflection for our analysis. The paper explores the ways in which the IGD model facilitated interfaith education and the ways in which it may have hindered it. Specifically, this paper explores the differences in religious and racial/ethnic identity, the role of religious literacy in creating appropriate foundations for interfaith dialogue, the significance of theological knowledge in interfaith dialogue, the role of intra-faith conflict, and the impact of student faith development on the ability to engage in transactional interfaith dialogue. Through this analysis, the paper seeks to move toward a critical pedagogy of interfaith education that expands the IGD model as a vehicle for interfaith engagement in institutions of higher learning.

The three following essays are reflections on this pilot interfaith dialogue. The reflections explore the opportunities and challenges presented by employing the Intergroup Dialogue model (IGD) to explore religious pluralism. Jointly authored by a theologian, sociologist, and student representing three world religious traditions (Christianity, Judaism, and Islam), this paper explores interfaith pedagogy from multiple perspectives across discipline, role and religion. Offering insights from professors, religious leaders and student participants in the course, the paper aims toward the critical construction of a new pedagogy for engaging interfaith education that increases appreciable knowledge of diverse faith and non-faith traditions, builds relationships and partners students across difference in joint projects for the common good.

Diane Swords, Adjunct Faculty, Intergroup Dialogue, Sociology, and Women and Gender Studies at Syracuse University

Last spring, the Reverend Steinwert and I piloted a course called "Dialogue in Action: Faith Conflict and Community." We followed the Intergroup Dialogue (IGD) model, designed to "examine the nature and impact of societal inequalities, and explore ways of working together toward greater equality and justice" **(Zunig**a, Nagda, Chesler, & Cytron-Walker 2007, p.2). **In this presentation we present three perspectives, those of the two co-facilitators and that of a student.**

I am a long-time facilitator of IGD courses, but I have no academic background in religion. I am a sociologist and a Jew. **I believe that sociologically the IGD model** is a compelling way to look at interfaith relations, in spite of some challenges.

I address four aspects of intergroup dialogue here: 1) communication skills; 2) identity and emotion in the classroom; 3) using a frame of privilege and oppression to examine power and inequality and 4) turning relationships into commitment to act for justice.

First, IGD teaches communication skills to have conversations about controversial and emotional issues in the classroom. Key skills are active listening, purposeful sending, empathy, and perspective taking.

One challenge we experience in all the dialogues is conflict avoidance. This is intensified in the interfaith dialogue, which, I suggest, may be due to a belief that religion requires "being nice". We need to work on surfacing the conflict underneath our politeness and face it head-on.

We always bring all our identities into any classroom whether we intend to or not, but a second feature of IGD is that our identities are a resource for learning, and for developing relationships that lead to appreciation, commitment and action for justice.

IGD requires a teaching team (two co-facilitators who represent targeted and dominant identities related to the topic of the class). In race dialogues, as the facilitator of the dominant identity, I must reinforce understanding of white privilege. In interfaith dialogue, as a Jew, my marginalized identity complicates teaching about Christian privilege. I need my Christian co-facilitator to legitimate its existence.

Two challenges last semester focused on my identity: I believe the Jewish students internalized the societal images of them as wealthy and in some ways superior; and that they had not learned the history in which this semi-privilege has repeatedly led to persecution. I reacted to this both protectively and angrily, feeling that their attitude of entitlement endangers all Jews by creating animosity. First I must deal with my own feelings; and then we need to find resources to deepen awareness of history and intersectionality to help them disentangle their privileged and targeted identities.

A second challenge was that, though most students experienced the class as a safe space, it appears not to have been the case for one student who hesitated to share personal stories. We need to work to create a space where it is clear that all of us seek to use our privilege to be safe allies.

As mentioned, the IGD model frames issues of social conflict in terms of privileged and targeted identities. Understanding social structures explains conflicts that cannot be understood with an individualistic model, and suggests real solutions to social inequalities.

However, as with whites who have other targeted identities, it was difficult to help Christian students, especially those who do not fully identify as Christian, see ways they receive structural privilege. One student noted that she came to understand privilege only after converting from a privileged identity as a Christian to an "unprivileged" one as a pagan.

In most classes, students finish a whole semester without knowing their fellow students. **The IGD model supports students in developing personal relationships.** We build toward sharing personal stories in "testimonials" and by the 3rd or 4th week develop deep

bonds. One student observed that her classmates were her inspiration to work on the action project for social justice.

Tiffany Steinwert, Dean of Hendricks Chapel at Syracuse University

As Dean of Hendricks Chapel, I am charged with the holistic religious, spiritual, moral, and ethical education of students. A daunting task on its own, it becomes even more difficult situated within the Division of Student Affairs as a co-curricular option. In the past, we have engaged interreligious education mainly outside of the classroom. Last year to bridge the curricular/co-curricular divide, we piloted a course on faith in the IGD model. We hoped to integrate the academic frame of social justice education with the co-curricular aim of exploring faith as a salient identity among students from diverse faith and non-faith traditions.

Researching existing interfaith dialogue courses, we realized that while interreligious academic engagement was on the rise, there was no clear-cut model. We longed to find a curriculum that employed a social justice frame to bridge curricular and co-curricular conversations.

Our pilot is still a work in progress. Yet, what struck me most about our experience were the opportunities and challenges involved in addressing spiritual formation, Christian privilege, and the intersectionality of identity.

As a Christian pastor and theologian, I was particularly interested in how the course might engage students' spiritual formation. From my perspective, this type of existential questioning is a central task of higher education. It moves us from producing products (professionals for a capitalist job market) to engaged citizens for a more robust democracy.

In their application essays, students voiced a general interest in religious pluralism, though most claimed no faith identity for themselves. Their answers came as no surprise. Many of us are familiar with the statistics: 72% of young adults identify as "spiritual but not religious" and the largest growing religious affiliation in America today is "none." Left behind by religious institutions of the past, this generation finds itself bereft of opportunities to explore their own spiritual identities. James Fowler's Stages of Faith can be helpful here. Many students find themselves in the *"Individuative-Reflective"* stage struggling to understand and take personal responsibility for their beliefs.

The IGD model presupposes a foundational understanding of one's identity. Whether race and ethnicity, gender, sexuality, or class, these identities are often perceived as static (though, of course, in reality, we know they are not and students soon discover that). However, in traditional IGD classes, students come in having at least a foundational sense of who they believe they are. In the faith dialogue, it became clear that students did not.

The IGD model also presupposes the ability to listen and learn from one another. However, students felt as though they did not know enough about themselves and their traditions to be a resource for others. Dialogue suffered because there was not sufficient substantive religious understanding to provoke conversation. I do not think it was a simple problem of religious literacy. Although, that was part of the problem. Rather, I think students were so acutely aware of their own doubts that they felt disempowered to act as an authoritative voice. In addition, their fear of being perceived as ignorant, voiced by several of the students over the course of the class, inhibited their ability to ask questions of the other.

While I confess as a pastor and theologian, I yearned for more direct theo-babble, many students found the class a perfect crucible to examine themselves and engage others.

Using the lens of privilege to explore intergroup differences, IGD adds the critical dimension of power to the interfaith conversation. Moving beyond the acknowledgment of religious difference, IGD helps students explore concrete power differentials associated with religious diversity in America. Using the frame of Christian privilege, the course investigates how power functions and why religious identities matter. It moves students beyond the idea of religion as a personal matter, to understand it as a public identity that structures social, economic, and political access. Unmasking Christian dominance helps students see the saliency of religious diversity and the call to religious pluralism. It adds urgency to the conversation and offers students a structure for systemic change. The social justice frame engages students in working together across difference to dismantle instances of Christian privilege by moving from dialogue to action.

Since IGD draws on a wider discourse of identity, the class provided fertile soil for students to grapple with the intersectionality of multiple identities. All too often we treat religion and spirituality as separate from other identities, as if it is an extra-curricular aspect of our lives. Perhaps worse, is the conflation of religion and ethnicity reducing it to a cultural characteristic. The balance in higher education is difficult. However, IGD offers the opportunity to wrestle with the complex relationships of faith, gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class. Students discovered their faith was inextricably interwoven into the fabric of their other identities and that was good.

Nazia Islam, Syracuse University, Class of 2014

My faith is always on my mind. I've written about it before, and I will write about it again because it never quite stays the same. I continue to adhere and practice the same faith, Islam, but my understanding of it has evolved and gone through delicate transformations. Faith used to mean ritual to me – merely ritual. I recognize ritual is as a very important component in faith and religion but it's not the end of it. As I've grown and time proceeded and continues to proceed, my faith and conviction, like puff pastry, bakes from a single layer of raw dough and expands into elaborate and fine layers. For me currently, it's the meaning within the rituals and scripture about how I can maintain in remembering God inside and outside these acts of worship. How I can infuse spirituality with the mundane. Not so much as how I can make the mundane spiritual for me, but how the mundane is also spiritual and sacred.

Before taking the intergroup dialogue class on faith, I was very confident about my faith identity or so I thought. I was also very confident that I had to embody it as much as I could to the way I thought it was supposed to be represented and practiced. My notion of identity was very one-dimensional. If I was Muslim, I had to be as Muslim as possible. But that came into conflict with my cultural heritage identity and nationality. Which one did I have to choose and embrace the most? I felt that I had to embody only one of them.

After the IGD, I realized I am an individual intrinsically distinct on the inside, but I embodied multiple identities on the outside and no one told me that was ok. I could still be myself and still be Muslim, Bengali, American, a woman to my own accord. The identity I thought I had the most confidence in – my faith identity – was the most complex of the lot.

The intergroup dialogue class has put a lot of things into perspective. One aspect I liked the most was getting to hear other people's stories and being able to relate to them to some degree. I thought it was a nice way to bring faith into the classroom. Growing up in a public school, faith and religion were topics confined to textbooks. Discussions about religion and personal stories were always left out unless it was about Christmas. This ties into the Christian privilege topic addressed in class. I wasn't aware of the concept of privilege until it was pinpointed, since I always thought and was taught it was the norm in the US. Then we discussed how each aspect of our own identities are privileged and oppressed.

Another component of the IGD model was connecting these aspects of identities to how society is structured around them. Many problems arise from identity politics, and religion was just an aspect of identity conflicts not the root (even though it is made out to be the root of all problems sometimes). The problems arise when identity is shrunken down merely to color, creed, or class. This course taught me about intersectionality in identity, how to dialogue to understand others, how to approach discourse about conflict, organize for social action, and think critically about how to attain and maintain a peaceful pluralistic society.

Although I learned much, I still struggled with creating critical dialogue. I got the listening part down, but putting various perspectives into the dialogue was difficult. Sometimes it's difficult to bring another perspective to the table when you want to see a certain situation from many points of view. In addition, having three other Muslims in the room all being male and one of them being a chaplain made it kind of intimidating. I felt like I was going to be judged, so I did not contribute as much. Dialogue is about agreeing to disagree, but I thought that this was sometimes missing from the discussions.

My most special memory from the class was the cultural chest activity. A cultural chest is where you take a box or container and decorate the outside representing things about you that people can see and on the inside you put things in there that represent you, but are not quite bluntly visible just by looking at you. I really enjoyed staying up late to make mine. I used an old cracker box that I covered in white paper and painted and drew on each side of it representing my visible identities. Inside the box however were aspects of my identity that could not be easily seen or distinguished. Like the fact that I had three books inside signified I liked to read books on poetry, spirituality, and holistic medicine. The most important thing inside my box was a piece of abstract art I drew, because it represents me accurately. I think this is what the inside of my brain looks like - not easily defined.

Tiffany Steinwert is an ordained Elder in the United Methodist Church who has spent her career working at the intersections of faith and social justice. In her many roles as pastor, scholar, and organizer, she has empowered people of all faiths and no faith to build relationships amidst difference, craft meaningful communities and create change through collective action. While serving as a pastor in New England congregations, she also worked as a teaching fellow at Boston University and Harvard Kennedy School teaching courses in theology, community organizing and leadership. Trained as a practical theologian, she is interested in how communities of faith respond to and interact with the pressing issues of the contemporary world. Steinwert holds a B.A. degree in Psychology and Women's Studies from Williams College in Williamstown, MA, a Master of Divinity degree from Boston University School of Theology in Boston, MA, and a Ph.D. in Practical Theology from Boston University. Among her civic interests, Steinwert serves the Syracuse community as a member of the Religious Roundtable of InterFaith Works of CNY and an advocate for Vera House.

Diane Swords has a Ph.D. in Social Science from Syracuse University's Maxwell School. Her research interrogates race, class, and gender in social movement strategy and democratic leadership. She is working on a book tentatively titled "We are the Second Superpower: Democracy in Nuclear Abolition Movements". As a part-time Instructor in Intergroup Dialogue, Sociology, Women's and Gender Studies, and Cultural Foundations of Education, she has co-facilitated Intergroup Dialogue courses on Race and Ethnicity, and on Gender. She helped to develop and pilot a new course entitled Dialogue in Action: Faith, Conflict and Community, which is running for the second time this spring of 2014. Diane also participates in dialogue and anti-oppression efforts outside the university, and chairs the board of Peace Action of Central New York, a local chapter of a national peace and social justice organization (peaceactioncny.org).

Nazia Islam is currently a student at Syracuse University majoring in Anthropology. She is interested in intercultural communication, comparative religion, and the study of human behavior and cognition; she supports community development and outreach paired with the arts to create change and awareness of social problems and issues.

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Inter-religious or Trans-religious: Exploring the Term "Inter-religious" in a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective
By Anne Hege Grung

This paper will contribute to the discourse on terminology connected to interfaith and interreligious studies, dialogues, and relations. At a closer look, the prefix "inter" in "inter-religious" may be problematic if one critically views the activities or situations it intends to describe. Let me elaborate a bit further on this.

The prefix "inter-" usually indicates a relation between stable, equal entities, where the boundaries between them are more or less fixed. In organized inter-religious relations, however, it is significant to acknowledge that relations established in the encounter itself are always situated in a broader context. This context is not only the immediate social, political, and religious current circumstances and geographical location, but also includes specific historical aspects, and in may include transnational spatial contexts if some of the participants have roots and relations to other geopolitical locations. The space of the dialogue is always connected to other spaces because the people involved are in motion. The discourse, the conversation and the group process in the dialogue have marks of other discourses, conversations and relations. In a critical perspective, this observation entails that   inter-religious dialogues are marked in different ways by internal and external hierarchies of power and authority connected to gender, culture, ethnicity and class. [1]

In an inter-religious dialogue, the question of representation and the questions of who is to decide the topics, the aims and the premises are crucial. A premise of an inter-religious or inter-faith dialogue is that people from different *religious* backgrounds and affiliations are present. The question is: What about other human differences? From a feminist postcolonial perspective the questions of who is constructing the boundaries, and who is controlling inclusion and exclusion in the dialogues are connected to issues of representation and to the authority to interpret a religious tradition.

To replace "inter" with the term "trans" requires the acknowledgement of a larger fluidity in the encounter between people of different religious affiliation, and opens it up for addressing thematizing *intra-religious* differences. It may also make the relevant contextual power relations influencing the dialogue more visible. On the other hand, the term "trans" instead of "inter" may be understood as a challenge or a threat to religious boundaries the participants in the dialogue wish to keep stable in order to feel secured in their own religious identity. I will illustrate the difference between an inter-religious and a trans-religious dialogue through two models of dialogue I suggested when I framed the empirical material in my PhD-thesis "Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Reading" theoretically. The first model, "religious difference as constitutive," suggests a dialogue where religious difference is evaluated as the constitutive and most significant aspect of the encounter. The second model: "religious differences as challenge," is an attempt to figurate a dialogue where religious differences are seen as challenge, where both the religious differences as such may be challenged, and other human differences explored. It should be stressed that the two models do not entirely correspond to the distinction between inter- and trans-religious dialogues, but the may be useful to illustrate the exploration of the terms "inter" and "trans" connected to dialogue. It should also be noted that the two models are porous rather than watertight, and that the same dialogue processes could include both ways of organizing inter-/trans-religious encounters.

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[1] Nehring, A. " On the Communication of Sacred Texts," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe. Between Texts and People*. D. Cheetham *et al* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 383.

In the first model, religious boundaries are seen to be fixed and the people involved are first and foremost representing an official interpretation of their religious belief, reflecting the fact that religious difference in itself is the premise for the dialogue. The aim of the dialogue is to increase mutual knowledge and decrease tensions between religious groups, and to create a shared platform to present the represented beliefs in a positive or constructive way towards society at large. Intra-religious differences are not in focus, and mutual criticism of each other's traditions is not encouraged. In some examples of this kind of dialogue, such as the practice of Scriptural Reasoning, there is an explicit aim to reduce the influence of secularism and increase the influence of religious traditions in broader society.[2] Other examples of dialogue after this model are broad, official or semi-official institutionally-anchored dialogues on national or international level. From a feminist postcolonial view, these types of dialogue may be criticized for confirming existing hierarchies regarding gender and sometimes cultural/ethnic background. Because intra-religious discussions are not addressed and the a priori view on religion is that it represents a constructive force in society, the embedded patriarchal and colonial structures in religious traditions may not be signified and challenged. Jeannine Hill Fletcher in her contribution to *Inter-religious dialogue*: "Women in Inter-Religious Dialogue" states that what she names the "Parliamentary Model of Dialogue"– referring to the function of the World's Parliament of Religions in a historical perspective– excludes women and women's issues because it is based on representatives from the religions who are authorities and leaders in their respective traditions, which means that they are mostly men. She states that from the beginning of the World's Parliament of Religions in 1893 the initiative takers only had eyes for the "brotherhood" of religious traditions, unaccompanied by any focus on "sisterhood." Hill Fletcher also believes that the men who had the power of definition over the arrangement, the Western men, only had enough attention for one significant other, which would mean that this significant other shifted from being women in their own tradition to non-Western men from other traditions, and that Western women thus slipped out of their focus. Brotherhood was formed to include all in an androcentric construction of mainstream religion. Hill Fletcher's investigation of the Parliament's further development shows that women who attended the meetings started to form their own ways of dialoging, in what she calls the "Activist Model of Dialogue." She also suggests a "Storytelling model of dialogue" for everyday life.[3] They are both based outside of any formal hierarchical representation in the religious communities, and thus more open for women. They give a different perspective on the notion of religion as more complex, entangled with social, cultural and political contexts.[4]

Both of Hill Fletcher's model suggestions can be related to what I suggested as the second model of inter-/trans-religious dialogue which views religious differences in a different manner than the former. Religious boundaries and religious traditions as such are not to be regarded as fixed, but rather flexible or fluid. Other human differences such as gender, ethnicity and social differences may then be recognized and thematized. To openly challenge religious differences creates space for more criticism of the traditions in the dialogue, including criticism of gendered power hierarchies and colonial discourses embedded in religious interpretations. The second model aims at a balance between mutual respect and agency for transformation. It could be criticized for focusing too much on the individual participant, at the risk of losing the connection to the mainstream discourses in the religious traditions. However, this model provides tools for accepting diversity within the traditions and for self-reflection that provides space for both respect and transformation, when functioning at its best. Paolo Freire's slogan for dialogue as "transforming and re-humanizing the world" fits this model well.[5] The perspective of fluidity regarding culture and

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2 Kepnes, S. "A Handbook for Scriptural Reasoning" in D.F. Ford and C.C. Pecknold ed. *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning*) (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), 34.

3 Fletcher, J.H "Women in Inter-Religious Dialogue". In Cornille, C. (Ed.). *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-religious dialogue*. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 175, 177.

4 Ibid.

5 Freire, Paulo *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th anniversary ed. (New York: Continuum, 2000), 89.

religion is also applied to the relation between the secular and the religious, which is not static but intertwined and fluid.

Agreement is not an aim for either of these two models of dialogue. But an unstable, plural place must emerge from the encounter to create a "third space" in dialogue, which may be a shared space from which one has a possibility to work for transformation. One may, for instance, imagine an encounter of this kind to establish a common criticism directed not only at society but also at the religious traditions themselves, including their canonical scriptures and their practices of representation.

This way of conceptualizing interreligious dialogue opens up the possibility for the dialogue not only to change the broader society but also to create new interpretations of the religious traditions themselves and possibly transform them. It would not promote religious values over secular, but rather discuss the relationship between the two. This model creates instability – or rather takes into consideration the instability existing in the field, and although the model it could be criticized to deconstruct religious boundaries and challenge religious traditions, it opens up such things as canonical scriptures and religious norms and practice for feminist and postcolonial criticism.[6]

One may say that there can never be too many spaces available for religious encounter or too many models for how these encounters should happen. I believe this is true. At the same time, critical investigation is necessary to provide tools of self-reflection. The two models can be seen as complementary: one could say that both are needed, and that together they provide spaces for religious people having various positions and aims. Representatives of the two models may challenge and criticize each other and thus develop discourses of criticism that are useful for all involved. But the models may also be seen as contradictory. If the hegemonic discourses within the religious traditions prefer the first model to the second, there may gradually be less space for

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[6] Grung, A. H. "Gender Justice in Muslim-Christian Readings. Christian and Muslim Women in Norway Making Meaning of Texts from the Bible, the Koran and the *Hadith*." Ph.D. diss., the University of Oslo 2011, 63

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encounters aiming at transformation and self-criticism, which is bad news for feminists and other marginalized groups within the traditions.

Another possibility is that the encounters shaped by model two could gradually change the hegemonic discourses in the religious traditions, together with intra-religious discourses of change. This would be a long-term process and should probably not be relied on as the only way forward for those aiming at transformation of the religious traditions.

Inter-religious and trans-religious dialogue or relations may not be mutually exclusive descriptive terms, but rather addressing different forms of dialogue. It may also be a describe processes in an ongoing dialogue, that can move from inter- to trans- or the opposite. If used more normatively, the trans-religious perspective may describe dialogues that are more aware of intra-religious differences and questions of power in the dialogue. Introducing the term trans-religious is therefore useful for establishing a critical perspective in the current discourse.

Interreligious Studies: a Relational Approach to the Study of Religion

By Oddbjørn Leirvik[1]

The term "interreligious studies" is still a relatively new one in academia but during the last decade, some universities (like my own in Oslo) have established new chairs and study programs with exactly this title. Since 2005, there has also been a European Society for Intercultural Theology and Interreligious Studies (ESITIS), which holds biannual conferences and publishes the journal *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*. In 2013, AAR welcomed an Interreligious and Interfaith Studies Group under the double headings of "interreligious" and "interfaith".

In my following reflections, I will mainly stick to the expression "interreligious" – in tune with the title of my book, *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion*.[2]

In my book, I try to define interreligious studies as an academic discipline. Many associate interreligious studies primarily with theology and in the European context this particular term has mainly been used within faculties of theology. But interreligious studies also link up with important developments in the established field of religious studies.

Paul Hedges, in a recent entry in the *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religion,* locates interreligious studies at the "interface between a more traditionally secular Religious Studies discipline, and a more traditionally confessional theological discipline." In comparison with religious studies, Hedges suggests, interreligious studies are … "more expressly focused on the dynamic encounter and engagement between religious traditions and persons."[3]

As implied by the prefix *inter*, there is something essentially *relational* about interreligious studies, making it different both from confessional theology and from religious studies in the conventional sense. It nevertheless links up with interesting developments in religious studies, as exemplified by Gavin Flood in a chapter on "Dialogue and the situated observer" in his book *Beyond Phenomenology* (1999). Referring to the shift to language in religious and cultural studies, Flood criticizes the idea of "the detached, epistemic subject penetrating the alien world of the other through the phenomenological process." Instead, Flood writes, "the subject must be defined in relation to other subjects." Flood goes as far as to say that religious studies thus become "a dialogical enterprise in which the inquirer is situated within a particular context or narrative tradition, and whose research into narrative traditions, that become the objects of investigation, must be apprehended in a much richer and multi-faceted way. "[4]

Trying to further define interreligious studies, I find Flood's Bakhtin-inspired idea of the researcher being thrown into a dialogical relationship with people or texts of the object tradition highly relevant. Linking up with Flood, I would suggest that interreligious studies are *dialogical* and *relational* in three different senses:

(1) The *object* of study is interreligious relations in the broadest sense, including, I
suggest, the relation between religion and non-religion. Rather than researching

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[2] Leirvik, Oddbjørn. *Interreligious Studies: A Relational Approach to Religious Activism and the Study of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).
[3] Hedges, Paul. "Interreligious Studies," in A. Runehov and L. Oviedo ed. *Encyclopedia of Sciences and Religion* (New York: Springer, 2013), 1077.
[4] Flood, Gavin. *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell, 1999), 143.

one particular tradition, interreligious studies investigate the dynamic encounter between religious (and non-religious) traditions and the space that opens or closes between them. I would like to emphasize here that the object of interreligious studies is not interfaith dialogue alone. The object of study may equally be confrontational and othering discourses between the religions, and within them.

(2) With regard to the *subject* (the researcher) I would contend that interreligious studies are by nature *interdisciplinary*. Religion being a multidimensional phenomenon, the complexity of interreligious relations can only be grasped by a combination of cultural analytical, social science-, legal, religious studies- and theological approaches. I suggest that in all these disciplines, and particularly in theology, the exploration of interreligious relations should also be *interactive* in Flood's dialogical sense.

(3) As for *the research process* and its institutional frameworks, I would suggest that interreligious studies in the theological sense can only be meaningfully done by subjects engaged *in conversation between* different faith traditions, in an effort at interfaith (i.e. relational) theology. In the context of theological faculties in Europe, the introduction of interreligious studies parallels an effort to become multireligious faculties in which, for instance, Islamic theology is taught alongside Christian theology – and in dialogue between the two.

Elaborating a bit on the researcher's self-understanding, interreligious studies should carried out with the openness to reflect critically on *one's own position* in the spaces between different traditions. When studying a separate religion, it has been commonplace in religious studies to claim that you need not – or should not – be implicated yourself in the object of study. As we have seen, this idea has been fundamentally challenged by Gavin Flood's more interactive approach to religious studies. But in the case of interreligious studies, it is hard to see how anyone could say that he or she is not a part of the studied field – especially if we include those complex spaces between religion and secularity that in my understanding are a constitutive part of interreligious studies. Who is not part of the spaces between religions, cultures and secularities? Who is not already a positioned agent in those spaces, when undertaking a particular study?

With a view to the many tensions between the religions, and not least between religion and non-religion, interreligious studies thus become studies of conflicts that you are already part of.

With regard to agency, there is also the question of interfaith education versus critical outsider perspectives on what dialogue activists are doing. In an article from 1998 by Scott Daniel Dunbar, titled "The place of interreligious dialogue in the academic study of religion" he argues that "interfaith studies" in academia should be both experiential and prescriptive, not just descriptive. Emphasizing the agency perspective, and on a normative note, Dunbar's overarching aim seems to be the education of interfaith activists:

> Descriptive study is useful because it records and documents the dialogue process for the present and future generations. Prescriptive study introduces students to more thought-provoking questions, such as: Can interreligious dialogue play a role in resolving religious conflicts and healing past injustices? … Finally, experiential study helps students study to understand the dynamics of interreligious dialogue in a more existential way that has practical implications for their own lives. [5]

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[5] Dunbar, Scott Daniel "The place of interreligious dialogue in the academic study of religion," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 35:3-4 (1998), 462.

However, as David Cheetham has emphasized in an article about "The University and Interfaith Education", interfaith education needs the critical outsider perspective of religious studies in order not to be controlled by dialogue insiders who are well aware of their role as agents but perhaps not always able to see themselves from a critical distance. [6]

Moving now from the agency aspect to the *interdisciplinary* nature of interreligious studies, in the latter part of my presentation I will briefly indicate three different theoretical perspectives on the "space between", a metaphor borrowed from Martin Buber and used rather extensively in my own writings. Although the notion "space between" refers mostly to how interfaith dialogue can be conceptualized, it may also contain power-critical perspectives.

(1) Martin Buber's *philosophical* notion of "the realm of between" links up with his basic understanding of an I/Thou relation in which both parties resist the temptation of reducing the other to an object, an "It:" "Spirit is not in the I, but between I and Thou … Man lives in the spirit, if he is able to respond to his Thou …"[7] In a later book from 1947 titled *Between Man and Man*, he writes: "On the far side of the subjective, on this side of the objective, on the narrow ridge, where I and Thou meet, there is the realm of 'between.'"[8] Buber's rather idealistic understanding of the dialogical space has been challenged by Emmanuel Levinas in his critical insistence of the asymmetrical nature of any human relation: "There would be an inequality, a dissymmetry, in the Relation, contrary to the 'reciprocity' upon which Buber insists, no doubt in error."[9]

(2) Levinas' more power-sensitive perception of interpersonal relations may be further elucidated from a *social science* or *cultural analysis* perspective, for example as developed by Edvard Soja and Homi Bhabha in their use of the notion "Third Space'. In Bhabha, the notion of Third Space offers a communicative perspective on how the production of cultural meaning always transcends the utterances of the I and the You: "The meaning of the utterance is quite literally neither the one nor the other." And he goes on: "It is the 'inter' – the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the *inbetween* space – that carries the burden of the meaning of culture … by exploring this Third Space, we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of our selves" (Bhabha 2004: 56). Notwithstanding this optimistic note, Bhabha is persistent in his reminder that Third Space – as an in-between space – is always contested space, which can be blocked by rival claims to cultural hegemony.

(3) *Theologically*, many examples could of course be cited of recent efforts at doing "interreligious theology" in the spaces between religious traditions. Let me on this occasion draw your attention to the Shi'ite Muslim scholar Hasan Askari who in an article from 1972 titled "The dialogical relationship between Christianity and Islam" went as far as to suggest that the two religions, by their rival understandings of the Word of God "constitute one complex of faith", one starting with the Person, and another with Scripture. According to Askari, "[t]heir separateness does not denote two areas of conflicting truths, but a dialogical necessity."[10] Seeing Christianity and Islam as "a dialogical whole," Askari envisages Christians and Muslims trying to interpret the signs of God together, not with the ambition of reaching harmony but rather in an attempt to come to terms with irreducible

6 Cheetham, David. "The University and Interfaith Education," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 15:1 (2005), 16–35.
7 Buber, Martin. *I and Thou* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1987), 57f.
8 Buber, Martin. *Between Man and Man*. R. G. Smith trans. (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 242f.
9 Levinas, Emmanuel. *Of God who Comes to Mind*. B. Bergo trans. (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1998), 150.
10 Askari, Hasan. "The dialogical relationship between Christianity and Islam" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (1972), 485.

differences: "A common religious sign must be differently apprehended. It is the very ambiguity, richness, of the religious sign that gives rise to different and even opposed interpretations and understandings" [in this case, of the Word of God]. Sensitive to the pain of difference, he adds: "To drop monologue is to immediately discover the other ... the discovery of the other, of our own being, is both soothing and painful, more the latter … It is right in the middle of this pain and anxiety that a Divine Sign is known."[11]

These are just brief indications of what an interdisciplinary investigation of the space between might look like – if social scientific, philosophical and theological perspectives were allowed to enrich each other, in a conversation in which scholars not only from different disciplines but also from different faith traditions are exploring the realm of between together.

Let me end with a multidimensional understanding of in-between space developed by David Ford in his explication of Scriptural Reasoning as a modality of Jewish-Christian-Muslim dialogue. Relating to Scriptural Reasoning's triple metaphor of houses, tents and campuses as places for tradition-specific, dialogical and scholarly readings respectively, Ford states that "inbetweenness" is a significant metaphor for Scriptural Reasoning as a spiritual as well as public effort:

> It is concerned with what happens in the *interpretative* space between the three scriptures; in the *social* space between mosque, church and synagogue; in the *intellectual* space between 'houses' and 'campuses', and between the disciplines on the campuses; in the *religious and secular* space between the houses and the various spheres and institutions of society; and in the *spiritual* space between interpreters of scripture and God[12]

As for the fundamental question of whether the idea of "interreligious studies" presupposes a notion of religions as separate entities between which spaces open or close, I leave it to my colleague Anne Hege Grung to discuss whether – in an age of cultural complexity – it is more fitting to speak of "trans-religious" relations and studies.[13]

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11 Askari, Hasan. "The dialogical relationship between Christianity and Islam" *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 9 (1972), 485f.
12 Ford, David. "An Interfaith Wisdom: Scriptural Reasoning between Jews, Christians and Muslims," in D. Ford and C. C. Pecknold ed. *The Promise of Scriptural Reasoning* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 12.
13 Cf. her contribution in this issue of JIRS titled "Inter-religious or Trans-religious. Exploring the Term 'Inter-religious' in a Feminist Postcolonial Perspective."

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How could we get over the monotheistic paradigm for the interreligious dialogue?
By Seung Chul Kim

1. Deconstruction of the typology of interreligious dialogue

In this paper I will argue that the Christian theology of religions in an Asian context requires a deconstruction of the theology of interreligious dialogue that has been conducted so far under the conventional typology of "exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism." I think such a typology comes from the monotheistic Christian paradigm. Once that is done, we can begin to explore new theological possibilities emerging from the actual reality of the Asian Christians who have lived in and with the various religious traditions of Asia. I want to find out such a theological possibility in the Hua-yen Buddhist thought.

Looking back the history of effect of the interreligious dialogue so far which was initiated by the Christian awareness of religious plurality in modern society, we should admit that we have rarely tried to understand how and what other religions understand about the phenomenon of interreligious dialogue, and how they evaluate the Christian contribution to the interreligious dialogue. If we consider these matters seriously, the absence of the voices of other religions in contemporary discussions of the interreligious dialogue is enough to raise skeptical questions about their legitimacy and propriety. Reviewing the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism, James W. Heisig, who has been personally involved in this dialogue for decades, offers harsh criticism of the dialogue itself: "Christian theology came to be so overwhelmed by derivative debates over the nature of doctrinal truth claims in a religiously plural world that the immediacy of *contact* had been displaced by *talk about contact*. In time, it became clear to Buddhist participants that the Christians preferred to talk to themselves." [1] As Heisig aptly points out, there is a "misplaced immediacy" in the theology of interreligious dialogue. In other words, the Christian dialogue with other religions was suspected to be a dialogue with something that was already constructed by the Christian understanding of that religion. It could not be a genuine dialogue, but at most a monologue in the form of ventriloquism.

Viewed from an Asian perspective, the conventional modes of thought prevalent in the western theological tradition do not seem the right place to begin constructing an Asian theology of religions. We can point out at least two reasons for that.

First, almost without exception, Christian theologians have tended to the simplistic view of other faiths "existing *alongside* the Christian faith" that Christians need to "encounter."[2] Other religious traditions are assumed to be distinct traditions running *parallel* to the Christianity and then they were made objects of theological reflection without further ado. It is this assumption that lies behind the distinction between three modes of approach: exclusivism,

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[1] James W. Heisig, "The Misplaced Immediacy of Christian-Buddhist Dialogue" in: Catherin Cornille and Stephanie Corigliano (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue and Cultural Change* Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publisher, 2012, p.97.
[2] Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian theology of religions* London: SCM Press LTD, 1983, p.x-xi. (Italics not in original)

inclusivism, and pluralism. But there is one more assumption rarely attended to which I think is more important and more crucial than the first one: The idea that there is "one and only one" truth, and that truth is revealed, full or partially as the case may be, through the Christian faith. Accordingly, the question of interreligious dialogue is thought to concern the ways in which other religions deal with that "one and only one" truth.

This way of dealing with other religions reflects the Christian understanding of the ultimate truth and constitutes what I want to call a "theological semantics of other religions." I have adapted the notion from Jan Assmann, a German Egyptologist, who addresses the forms of thought and behavior in a given worldview in terms of a "cultural semantics" described as "a semantic paradigm expressed in grand stories and differentiating motifs." [3] In the case of monotheistic religions, Assmann identifies its paradigm with the belief that "there is no God but one" and that "idols are nothing." If there can be one and only one God, it is logical to conclude that anything else called "God" should be either replaced by or absorbed into the one true God. In this way, monotheistic religions transform existential questions about God into a logical choice: true or false, friend or foe. This in turn is intrinsically "political" in the sense that it differentiates allies from enemies. [4] We remember here that Carl Schmitt defined his concept of "the political" (*das Politische*) as a way to discern friend from enemy, or enemy from friend. And it is interesting enough that his concept came from his traumatic experience in his youth when he lived with his family as a member of the Catholic minority in the Protestant state of Preussen.[5] The fundamental character of monotheistic semantics is thus deductive and, as a result, exclusive. It demands with "violence" that its followers divide the world into for and against, into a way of life and a way of death.[6]

The same thing could be said about interreligious dialogue. That is to say, the theologies of religions, or the theologies of interreligious dialogue, or the theologies of religious pluralism, whatever they may be, have focused on the question of the monotheistic oneness of truth. Turned upside down, such theological endeavors arose from an awareness of the need to resolve the problem of oneness in Christian faith. Sometimes oneness means the exclusive absoluteness of Christian faith that should be defended against the truths claims of other religions. At other times, oneness means something very boundlessly open that could include a variety of religious truths. In this point, the core problem of religious pluralism is to be found in the question about the oneness and manyness of the truth, which was typically manifested in the theological statement of Ernst Troeltsch who took the initiative in the theological reflection on the history of religion. He said: "In our earthly experience the Divine Life is not one, but many. But to apprehend *the one in the many* constitutes the special character of love." [7] Troeltsch's theological thinking established the resources of the stereotypical paradigm of the Christian theological concern for other religions, as Paul Knitter observes: "[M]uch of what we feel concerning

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3 Jan Assmann, "Monotheismus und die Sprache der Gewalt" In: *Das Gewaltpotential des Monotheismus und der dreieinige Gott* hrsg. Peter Walter, Freiburg/Basel/Wien: Herder, 2005, S.19.
4 Cf. Carl Schmitt, *Der Begriff des Politischen. Texte von 1932 mit einem Vorwort und drei Corollarien* Berlin: Duncker & Humbolt, 1963.
5 Horst Althaus, *„Heiden" „Juden" „Christen" Positionen und Kontroversen von Hobbes bis Carl Schmitt*, Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007, S.481
6 Jan Assmann, *Die Mosaische Unterscheidung: Oder der Preis des Monothiesmus* München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003.
7 Ernst Troeltsch, "The Place of Christianity Among the World Religions," in: John Hick and Brian Hebblethwaite ed., *Christianity and Other Religions: Selected Readings* Glasgow: Fortress Press, 1985, p. 31. (Italics added.)

religious pluralism is mirrored in Ernst Troeltsch." [8] The theologies today that try to have relationships with other religions, whatever they may be, have derived their fundamental forms and contents from the theological thinking of Ernst Troeltsch and from the monotheistic paradigm.

Second, the current theological controversies over interreligious dialogue recall the conditions in which the science of religion was born as an academic discipline in earlier centuries. As recent critical reexaminations of the science of religion indicate, the study of phenomena called "religion" was undertaken exclusively through theological perspectives. Such concepts as "religion," "history of religions," (*Religionsgeschichte*) and "world religions" (*Weltreligionen*) have been coined or applied exclusively by Christianity-centered and Europe-centered awareness. [9] From the beginning, the science of religion (*Religionswissenschaft*) was subordinate to Christian theology. Friedrich Heiler identifies the inseparable relation of the science of religion to theology as follows: "... we can't understand the religion if we regard it as superstition, illusion, and bugbear. Religion has something to do with the ultimate reality that is revealed to the human being and bless him. God, revelation, eternal life are the realities for the religious human being. All the science of religion is in the end theology, as long as the science of religion deals not only with the psychological and historical phenomena, but also the experience of the otherworldly realities." [10] To support his argument, Heiler refers to a phrase of Nathan Söderblom, one of the founders of the science of religion as a modern discipline: "God is living, I can prove it through the history of religion."[11]

In other words, the concept of "the science of religion" and "the history of religions" are suspected to be Christian inventions to prove the existence of God and thereby assert the universal validity of Christian theology. Since the Enlightenment, Christian theology has had to face fatal criticism from humanism and modern science that such Christian concepts as revelation, salvation, creation, etc. are merely relics of an ancient worldview that is no longer viable. Christian theologians staged a counterattack. By inventing the concept of "the history of religions" to form a joint front with the Christian faith, and by bestowing a special character on "religion," such theologians as Friedrich Schleiermacher, Ernst Troeltsch, and Rudolf Otto believed that they had found academic ways to withstand criticism of the Christian faith. That is, the concept of "the history of religions" carries with it an assumption that faith itself is a universal human phenomenon and that faith is something totally different ("*das Andere*") from rational ways of thinking and being human. In this sense the science of religion was, from beginning to end, *ancilla theologiae*.

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8 Paul Knitter, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985, p. 23.

9 Jonathan Z. Smith, "Religion, Religions, Religious" Mark C. Taylor ed., *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998, p. 269ff.; Tomoko Masuzawa, *The Invention of World Religions. Or, How the European Universalism was Preserved in the Language of Pluralism* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005, p.309ff.

10 Friedrich Heiler, *Erscheinungsforschung und Wesen der Religionen* Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer Verlag, 1961, S.17. (Italics added) For critical reexaminations of the origins and history of the science of religions, see Axel Michaels, „Einleitung" *idem* hrsg., *Klassiker der Religionswissenschaft: Vom Friedrich Schleiermacher bis Mircea Eliade* 2.Aufl., München: C.H.Beck, 2994, S.7ff ; Sigurd Hjelde, „Religionswissenschaft und Theologie: Die Frage nach ihrer gegenseitigen Abgrenzung in historischer Perspektive" *Studia Theologica* 52(1998) S. 85ff.

11 "Gott lebt, ich kann es beweisen aus der Religionsgeschichte." Nathan Söderblom, *Der lebendige Gott im Zeugnis der Religionsgeschichte.* German ed. by Friedrich Heiler, München: C. Kaiser, 1932, I, S.356.

2. Religious understanding as "intimacy knowledge"

But the Asian way of theologizing takes a different approach. Asian Christians experience the relationship between the Christian faith and other religions not as the objective juxtaposition of variant traditions lying *outside* their own faith, but as part of a historical and cultural accumulation and configuration *within* their own faith. From the outset, the Christian faith in Asia is a composite phenomenon that includes other religious traditions. In other words, the religious traditions with which the Asian Christian seeks dialogue are already "somatically associated" [12] in their Christian faith. Let me enter into a detailed discussion of this topic.

The objective religious history in Asia shows that multiple religious traditions have existed simultaneously. We may call such a condition "explicate" religious reality, expressed in the religious history of, for example, Korea [Figure O]. But the genuine "religious" meaning of the co-existence of multiple religions is to be found for the first time when we turn this figure vertically, as in Figure I. That is, the genuine awareness of interreligious dialogue for Asian Christian does not emerge until the "explicate" objective religious reality is internalized and incarnated into the "implicate" subjective religious reality of one's Christian faith. [13] For the Asian Christian, the plurality of religions as an outer fact [Figure O] is encoded and incarnated in her/his faith as an inner religious reality [Figure I]. The objective religious history of Asia is accumulated in the subjective faith of Asian Christians. At this moment the objective knowledge of the history of religion gets its corporeality. In this sense we can cite what Thomas Kasulis explains as an "intimate" type of knowledge in his book *Intimacy or Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference*: "Perhaps we need to coin a new term capturing the theory of truth involved in an intimacy orientation. In this work we will call it the "assimilation theory of truth." […] The term "assimilation" is used in physiology to indicate the process by which the body takes in nutrients from the food that has been ingested and digested. From the standpoint of intimacy, knowledge is absorbed into the body somatically through praxis. Knowledge is literally incorporated rather than received from outside or generated from inside. […] In an important sense, intimate knowledge is not something the person has. Instead it is what that person, at least in part, is. (In Sanskrit, *satya* means both "being" and "truth.") Knowledge is assimilated, not acquired. It resides in the overlap between the knower and the known." [14]

Kasulis distinguishes the "intimacy knowledge" from "integrity's knowledge." The latter assumes, in contrast to the former, quoted above, "a publicly verifiable objectivity," and in order to get that, the knower as an observer should take a distance from the known. In principle, the knower could be separated from the known at any time when the integrity relation between the two is of no use. But in the case of "intimacy knowledge," the known could not be separated from the knower because the former became "somatically" an indispensable part of the knower. When the knower is by force removed from the known, it leaves for both of them an incurable injury. The separation of the knower from the known means in this case a loss of a part of the

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12 Thomas Kasulis, *Intimacy and Integrity: Philosophy and Cultural Difference* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002, p.79.

13 I borrow the terms "explicate" and "implicate" from Stephen Kaplan's Book *Different Paths, Different Summits: A Model for Religious Pluralism*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2002.

14 Thomas P. Kasulis, *ibid.*, p.79.

knower. In this sense, the religious understanding as "intimacy knowledge" is intrinsically sacramental and Eucharistic.

Through Kasulis's term of "intimacy knowledge" which, as he maintains properly, is "somatically assimilated" into the body of the knower, the relation between the history of religions in Korea and the Christians who live in it can be understood in this way: The historical knowledge about the other religions "out there" is "somatically assimilated" into their Christian faith; this "somatic" knowledge in turn recalls the position of other religions "in" their own Christian faith; other religions "out there" and their Christian faith exist, if expressed by the Hua-yen terminologies, in the relation of simultaneity, interdependence, and interpenetration.

In this sense Asian Christians belong, consciously or unconsciously, to multiple religions that affect the living traditions of their Christian faith. Their Christian faith was and is constructed through encounters with "other" religions that are already found in their faith itself. Here *faith is dialogue, and dialogue is faith*. To understand this intimate relationship we thus need to develop "the hermeneutics of the depth" for unearthing the religious traditions layered in the unconsciousness depths of the Christian faith, modeled after C. G. Jung's ideal of achieving "individuation" by incorporating the voice of the unconsciousness. [15] In this sense, Christian dialogue with other religions would begin from a self-reflective dialogue of faith with its own "inner" reality rather than from an encounter with "other" and "outer" religious ways. Dialogue would then not be an elective activity for those who wish to engage in it but an integral dimension of faith itself.

3. The Hua-yen Buddhist *dhatu* of Asian Christian faith

As mentioned above, the reason to investigate the possibility of the theology of interreligious dialogue which is grounded on the Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of the ultimate reality comes, first of all, from a critical reevaluation of the theological concentration on the oneness of religious truth. Here I want to refer to the Hua-yen Buddhist contribution to the formation of Asian theology of interreligious dialogue, or Asian theologies of religious pluralism.

In a short paper entitled "Buddhism and pluralism," Kiyotaka Kimura, a well-known Japanese Buddhist scholar, inquires into "the relationship between Buddhism and monism or pluralism." [16] He divides the transition of Buddhist teaching about the nature of reality into three phases: From a naïve pluralistic standpoint over nihilistic monism to a standpoint that transcends both naïve pluralistic and monistic ways of thought.

The fundamental Buddhist awakening is expressed through two sorts of teachings on *pratiitya-samutpada* (=dependent origination). The first, the teaching of the Twelve-fold Chain (*nidānas*) (*nidvādaśāṅga-pratītyasamutpāda*), holds that all suffering (*dukkha*) in the world is

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15 Cf. Seung Chul Kim, "Der Glaube als interkulturelles und interreligiöses Ereigns in Bezug auf die Kulturalität des Selbstverständnisses des ostasiatischen christlichen Glaubens." In: Michael Fischer hrsg., *Die Kulturabhängigkeit von Begriffen* Frankfurt am Main/ Berlin/ Bern/ Bruxelles/ New York/ Oxford/ Wien: Peter Lang, 2010, S.123ff.

16 Kiyotaka Kimura, „Bukkyo to Tagenshugi" (Buddhism and Pluralism) *Bukkyō to Ningen Shakai no Genkyu: Asaeda Zenshō Hakase Kanreki Kinen Ronbunshū* (*A Study of Buddhism and Human Society. Essays in Honor of Dr. Zenshō Asaeda on his Sixtieth Birthday*) Kyōtō: Nagata Bunshōdō, 2004, p.525. (Author's translation)

caused by "ignorance" (*avidya*). The second, the teaching of "five aggregates" (five *skandha*), says that a human being is constituted with five functions of "form," "sensation," "perception," "mental formations," and "consciousness." And in this case, the five aggregates were thought to be substances (*asti*) that exist eternally. This standpoint, Kimura asserts, "is evidently a sort of pluralism." That is, according to the essential teaching of Buddhism, everything in the world exists out of more than two causes. There is no One thing out of which everything comes from. The teaching of Twelve-fold Chain shows us how the former cause yields organically the later cause. There is a Twelve-fold 'Chain of being' from ignorance to birth. "Buddhism does not give importance to the idea of the Root-Principle or the First Cause as other systems of philosophy often do. […] According to Buddhism, human beings and all living things are self-created or self-creating. The universe is not homocentric; it is a co-creation of all beings. Buddhism does not believe that all things came from one cause, but holds that everything is inevitably created out of more than two causes." [17]

But "the theory of all that exists" (*sarvāstivāda*) was severely criticized by Mahayana Buddhism. According to the teaching of emptiness (*śūnyatā*) of the *Mādhyamaka* School founded by Nāgārjuna, neither self nor *dharma* has in itself any eternal substance. The naïve pluralism of Buddhism is totally denied here. But the standpoint of emptiness is not to be called even as a monism, because *śūnyatā* as a concept has in itself no substance, either. *Śūnyatā* itself is nothing more than a transient name which is dedicated to something that exists only in mutual relationships, which are as Nāgārjuna puts it:"Whatever is dependently co-arisen / That is explained to be emptiness./ That, being a dependent designation / Is itself the middle way. (*Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* 24:18)

But the *Mādhyamaka* School, Kimura maintains, represents a position that somehow has an intrinsic possibility to fall into a sort of nihilism. As a critical alternative to such a tendency the *Yogācāra* School appears as a monism of consciousness. According to this school, all phenomena come from and converge to consciousness only. The *Yogācāra* School was succeeded by the *Tathāgatagarbha* School that maintains the inherent identity between the Buddha and sentient beings. They subsume each other in the way that sentient beings have in themselves the Buddha-*dhatu* or *tathāgatagarbha*. Kimura maintains that these ways of thinking take on monism.

Furthermore, Buddhist philosophy reached its ultimate state of development in the view that there could be, besides and behind all things, no special ground for anything. That is, all things that exist, whether as an individual or a whole, are affirmed immediately as the very appearance of ultimate truth. As examples of this position, Kimura lists the theories of the Tien-tai School, the Zen School, and the Hua-yen School. According to Tien-tai, all things and phenomena reflect the truth [諸法実相]. The Zen School maintains that the heart of sentient beings is not different from the Buddha himself [即心是仏] .

The extreme form of the affirmation of all things as the very appearance of ultimate truth is realized by the Hua-yen School. The Hua-yen School sees the world as a place where we find ourselves as *loka-dhatu* existing in an interdependent relation with *dharma-dhatu*, the

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[17] Junjiro Takakusu, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy* ed., by Wing-Tsit Chan and Charles A. Moore, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973, p. 29.

world of *dharma* [18] The world is, as it is, the Lotus Treasury World (*Padma-garbha-loka-dhatu*) (華蔵世界). This phenomenal world is at once the world of faith, the realm in which "simultaneous interpenetrative harmonization" [19] between the phenomenal world and the transcendental world, if we still are allowed to use such dichotomous concepts. It is precisely in this Hua-yen worldview, as Heinrich Dumoulin wrote, that the "the cosmotheistic (*kosmotheistisch*) world view of the East Asian people" is intensively realized and enthusiastically practiced.[20] In this sense Hua-yen Buddhist thought, which is, according to Kimura, to be evaluated as the most sophisticated system of thought in Mahayana Buddhism, can be expected to give Asian Christians the most comprehensive possibility to understand and express their Christian faith.

As is well known, the Ha-yen School teaches about the Four *dharma-dhatu*: the *dharma-dhatu* of "Shih"; the *dharma-dhatu* of "Li"; the *dharma-dhatu* of Non-obstruction of "Li" against "Shih"; The *dharma-dhatu* of the Non-obstruction of "Shih" and "Shih." And the ultimate meaning of all this is to be found in "the *dharma-dhatu* of the Non-obstruction of 'Shih' and 'Shih,'" which could be translated as "the realm of non-obstruction between phenomena." All things and phenomena are intrinsically interdependent. As *Avatamsaka* Sutra asserts, the basic idea of the Hua-yen School is the interdependence and unity between the absolute and the relative, and also between all the relatives: "All in One, One in All. The All melts into a single whole. There are no divisions in the totality of reality. It views the cosmos as holy, as 'one bright pearl,' the universal reality of the Buddha. The universal Buddhahood of all reality is the religious message of the Avataṃsaka Sūtra." Or,

> In each dust-mote of these worlds
> Are countless worlds and Buddhas.
> From the tip of each hair of Buddha's body
> Are revealed the indescribable Pure Lands.
> The indescribable infinite Lands
> All ensemble in a hair's tip [of Buddha]. [21]

In keeping with his understanding of the historical transition of the Buddhist teachings, as summarized above, Kimura suggests that "we have to recognize the complexity and diversity not only of the Buddhism but also of the religions, and that we should abandon some principle which we tend to set up as a ground for the religious complexity and diversity. Because, as Nāgārjuna and Zhuangzi maintained, as long as such a principle is established, another principle should be set up, and there would be a rivalry and prejudice. [...] We should find the way that we could transcend monism, dualism, and even pluralism at the same time." [22] Although Kimura maintains that pluralism is also something to be transcended, it is evident

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18 Eikaku Yosihara, "The world *loka-dhatu* and the *dharma-dhatu*" *Review of Kobe University of Mercantile Marine Part I Studies in Humanities and Social Science* 21(1973) p. 5ff.
19 Steve Odin, *Process Metaphysics and Hua-yen Buddhism: A Critical Study of Cumulative Penetration vs. Interpenetration* Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982, p. 3.
20 Heinrich Dumoulin, "Dozai no Taiwa wo unagasu Kegonkyō"(*Avatamsaka sutra* that stimulate the East-West Dialogue) *Sophia* 34(2) (1985), p. 95.
21 Cited from Heinrich Dumoulin, *Zen Buddhism: A History. Volume 1: India and China* World Wisdom Books, 2005, pp. 46-47.
22 Kiyotaka Kimura, *ibid.*, p. 526.

from his argument that he advocates the pluralistic understanding of Hua-yen Buddhism, which goes far beyond both the naïve pluralism of early Buddhism and the somewhat nihilistic monism of the *Mādhyamaka* School. The pluralistic view of the Hua-yen School went through a negation of the substantial understanding of pluralism that juxtaposes all things and phenomena. It is a pluralism after naïve pluralism (eternalism 常住論) and after the monism of emptiness (annihilationism 断滅論). [23]

What, then, could a Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of ultimate reality tell about the self-understanding of Asian Christians with reference to the various religious traditions? The complicated metaphysical system of Hua-yen thought could be aggregated into the teaching of "the *dharma-dhatu* of the Non-obstruction of 'Shih' and 'Shih.'" *Dharma-dhatu* could be translated as *topos*, where "each individual is at once the cause for the whole and is caused by the whole, and what is called existence is a vast body made up of an infinity of individuals all sustaining each other and defining each other." [24] "The Hua-yen universe is essentially a universe of identity and total intercausality" in "which there is no center, or perhaps if there is one, it is everywhere." [25] Hua-yen destroys "the fiction of a sole causal agent." [26] Rather, with the insight of Hua-yen Buddhism, we can maintain, "the religious truths are spread out in the organic co-relational network." [27] The point to the doctrine of interdependence is that things exist *only* in interdependence, for things do not exist in their own right. In Buddhism, this manner of existence is called 'emptiness' (Sanskrit *śūnyatā*). Buddhism says that things are empty in the sense that they are absolutely lacking in a self-essence (*svabhāva*) by virtue of which things would have an independent existence. In reality, their existence derives strictly from interdependence. [28]

Things exist interdependently because they have no self-nature, and vice versa. In this sense Hua-yen synthesizes, as Kimura maintains, both the naïve pluralism and the nihilistic monism of Buddhism. Cook describes the same insight by citing the phrase of Japanese Buddhist Gyōnen (1240-1321) that "both Fa-tsang and Nāgārjuna accomplished the same end: both demonstrate that things do not exist independently of each other." [29]

If all things exist in interdependence, then there could be no substantial distinction between sentient beings and the Buddha, between the relative and the absolute. As Cook

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23 In this connection we still have to remember, however, that there have been in Buddhism itself many efforts to classify the sutras and their teachings [教相判釈]. It was an endeavor to propose the superiority of one's own school on the grounds of specific sutras and their teachings, and the Hua-yen School was not an exception. It is therefore impossible and even anachronistic to try to find an impulse for religious pluralism in the ancient religious traditions as such, because the awareness of religious pluralism is a modern one. Cf. Richard P. Hayes, "Gotama Buddha and Religious Pluralism," *Journal of Religious Pluralism* 1(1991), p.94-95.

24 Francis Cook, *Hua-yen Buddhism: The Jewel Net of Indra* University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977, p. 3.

25 *ibid.*,p.4. Cf. Kamata Shigeo, "Hokkai Engi to Sonzairon" (The *pratiitya-samutpaada* of *dharmadhatu* and Ontology) in: *Kōza Bukkyō Shiōo: Sonzanton/Jikanron* vol.1 ed by Mitsuyoshi Saigusa, Tōkyō: Risōsha, 1974, p. 102.

26 Francis Cook, *ibid.*, p. 12.

27 Ryūsei Takeda, „Shinrann Jōdōkyō Saikaishaku no ichi Shiza: Shūkyō Tagenjidai ni okeru Jōdōkyō no Tatzukōuchiku" (One perspective for the Reinterprtation of the Jodo teaching of Shinran: The Deconstruction of Jōdō Buddhism in the age of religious pluralism) *Shūkyō Genkyu* (Study of Religions) 82(2)(2008) p. 297.

28 Francis Cook, *ibid.*,p. 15.

29 *ibid.*, p. 48.

admits, the perfect nature of the Buddha "is treated in the most unusual manner" by Fa-tsang: "Fa-tsang's position is that this [*nirvāṇa*, emptiness, Buddha nature] comes to exist in both a pure and impure form as conditional phenomena." [30]

The interdependence of the Absolute and the Relative could be developed by the theory that one thing is the whole and at the same time nothing. Francis Cook explains this fact with the analogue of Fa-tsang's ten coins, which is an analogy for the totality of existence. "According to the reasoning of the Hua-yen masters, coin two is not a self-existent entity in its context of the ten (whole). It is coin two as a result of coin one, and looked at from the standpoint of coin one, coin one is the cause and coin two is the result, i.e., it is a conditioned coin two. […] Consequently, coin one exists- i.e., is a phenomenal object – and coin two is empty – i.e., exists only in a conditioned manner. […] The coins are identical in their simultaneous possession of the natures of emptiness and existence.[…] The emptiness and existence which serve as the source for the identity of thins function primarily as a means of indicating the flow of causal efficacy between a dharma considered to be cause and the totality of remaining dharma which are in this context considered to be result." [31]

Cook interprets this metaphysical analogue of Fa-tsang in an existential and ethical way for the Bodhisattva: "Not only is the reality of identity and interdependence the basis for Bodhisattva activity, but it also acts as a moral imperative, leaving the truly moral being with no option but to act in accordance with this reality." [32]

If this Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of the reality is "somatically" assimilated into self-understanding of Asian Christian faith, as I believe it is, then the identity of Asian Christians is born within the awareness that their faith is intrinsically formed through the encounter with other religions. At the same time this awareness tells them that their identity as Christians is always "in the making," so that it could not be fixed to one form. Rather, their faith frees them from every attachment to any object of the faith, because the self as the subject of their faith is already constituted by the encounters with other religious worlds of faith.

Thomas Kasulis seems to draw near to this Hua-yen understanding of the interdependent self when he sees the Buddhist understanding of the self as "intimacy's view of the self." According to Kasulis, in Buddhism intimacy's understanding of the self reaches the furthest logical point, because the naïve attachment to the 'I' or ego (*ātman*) as an independent entity is totally denied in Buddhism. Kasulis says further of the Buddhist self:

> In the Buddhist self's diagrammatic representation, there is no unshaded or independent part of *a* left. This lack of the independent ego –the lack of an unshaded part of *a* – is what Buddhism calls *anātman*, 'non ego' or 'non-I.' This does not mean that I am without identity; there is still the unique overlap of interdependent process defining who I am (as represented by the full circle of *a*). The major point for Buddhism, however, is that the overlaps defining *a* are
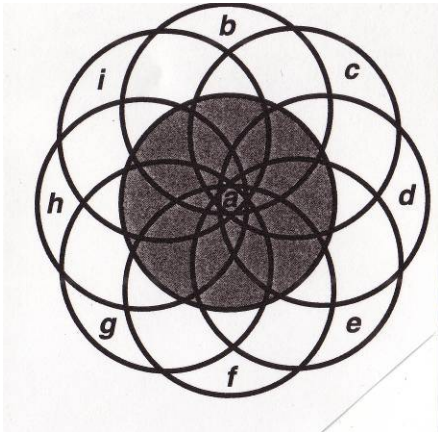
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30 *ibid.*, p.60.
31 *ibid.*, p.64-65.
32 *ibid.*, p.118.

completely interdependent (completely shaded) and without any trace of independent substantiality – without any untouched nucleus. [33]

The Buddhist Self [34]

In the Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of reality, "the lack of the independent ego" of a person is both a starting point for and as the ultimate stage of living in the realm of dharma. At the same time, the "lack" is experienced as a freedom from the attachment to a self-closing exclusive self of the faith that denies, as cited above from Steve Odin, any "simultaneous interpenetrative harmonization" in front of the different religious tradition than one's own.

4. Three steps toward "the theology of pluralistic pluralism"

The essential problem of theological understanding of religion could be not stated as a question of whether there is only one ultimate religious truth or not. [35] From the point of view of Asian Christians, this is merely an abstract question that neither is to be answered ultimately, nor has any ultimate meaning for their faith. Although the concept of pluralism is to be defined as "the metaphysical doctrine that all existence is ultimately reducible to a multiplicity of distinct and independent beings or elements," [36] the "multiplicity of distinct and independent beings or elements" is assimilated in one and the same faith of Asian Christians. In this sense, the question of whether there is one ultimate truth must transcend its epistemological character, which could not be asked and answered without objectifying Asian

[33] Thomas P. Kasulis, *ibid.*, p.63.

[34] *ibid.*

[35] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Gott ohne Grenzen. Eine christliche und pluralistische Theologie der Religionen* Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005, S.177.

[36] Frederick J.E. Woodbridge, "Pluralism," James Hastings ed., *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics* vol. X Edinburgh: T.&T.Clark, 1981, p.66.

Christian faith. The dichotomy between the One and the Many, no matter how it is assumed, is no longer valid for the reality of Asian Christian faith. Or, to state the same thing better, the one faith consists of many religions, and many religions are assimilated in one faith.

In order to be honest toward the experience of Asian Christian faith, I think we must pass through three steps of theological thought.

First of all, we must overcome the exclusive attitude toward other religious traditions. Hick's "Pluralistic Hypothesis" could contribute to a deconstruction of the egocentric self into the Reality-centered view of the religions. Hick says: "The great world faiths embody different perceptions and conceptions of, and correspondingly different responses to, the Real from within the major variant ways of being human. ... One then sees the great world religions as different human responses to the one divine Reality, embodying different perceptions that have been formed in different historical and cultural circumstances. […] Within each of them the transformation of human existence from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness is taking place. These traditions are accordingly to be regarded as alternative soteriological "spaces" within which, or "ways" along which, men and women can find salvation/liberation/ultimate fulfillment." [37] Hick's idea of a "Pluralist Hypothesis" that concentrates the transcendent One over all historical and cultural religious phenomena could provide us, although temporarily, a method (*upāya*) to overcome the exclusivist attitude toward other religions.

Second, we should further cut the thread of the oneness that is assumed to tie all the various religious traditions of the world together to the transcendent One. That would mean getting over even the "Pluralistic Hypothesis" of John Hick. The following Zen *mondo* could be cited as an indicator to cut the One; "A monk asked Jōshū, 'All the dharmas are reduced to oneness, but what is oneness reduced to?' Jōshū said, 'When I was in Seishū I made a hempen shirt. It weighed seven pounds.'" [38] By concentrating on this *mondo*, we could delete the shadow of the One that remained in the "Pluralistic Hypothesis" of John Hick.

In order to understand the religious experience of Asian Christians, the contemporary discussion of the phenomenon called "multiple religious belonging" [39] could provide us with a possibility to be free from the coercive One. Let's hear what Monica Coleman, an African American Christian, notes about the intrinsic problem of the theological endeavors for the religious pluralism by some Western theologians:

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37 John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* Yale University Press, 1989, p. 240.

38 *Two Zen Classics. Mumonkan & Hekiganroku* Translated with commentaries by Katsuki Sekida; edited and introduced by A.V. Grimstone, New York: Weatherhill, 1977, p.271. (case 45) *Mondo* means literally "question and answer" and is used in Zen Buddhism to provoke a great question and to test the awakening status of the practicing monk.

39 The theme of "multiple religious belonging" becomes actively discussed rather among the European and American scholars. Cf. Christoph Bochinger, "Multiple religiöse Identitäten im Westen zwischen Traditionsbezug und Individualisierung" Reinhold Bernhardt/Perry Schmidt-Leukel hrsg., *Multiple religiöse Identität. Aus verschiedenen religiösen Traditionen schöpfen* Theologischer Verlag Zürich, 2008, S.137ff.; Jan Van Bragt, "Multiple Religious Belonging of the Japanese People" in: Catherin Cornille ed., *Many Mansions? Multiple Religious Belonging and Christian Identity* Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002, pp.7-19; Cf. Xavier Gravend-Tirole, "Double Commitment: or The Case for Religious *Mestizaje* (Creolization)" in: David Cheetham et.al. ed., *Interreligious Hermeneutics in Pluralistic Europe: Between Texts and People* Editions Amsterdam/ New York: Rodopi B.V., 2011, p. 415ff.

The assumption is that each of us identifies him or her self in one discrete religious tradition and then interacts with those other people who also identify themselves as members or adherents of a different and yet also single and discrete religious tradition. The Womb Circle exists as part of a larger African American religious tradition that illustrates that this assumption is, in many contexts, fallacious. That is, there are individuals—indeed entire communities—that do not function as members of a single unitary religious tradition. There are individuals—indeed entire communities—that live and function as members of multiple religious traditions *simultaneously*. In these contexts, conversations about religious plurality are not just between discrete faith traditions and communities—about being interreligious—but rather about being multi-religious. And while examples may be found outside of African American religions, I believe that African American religions are distinctively qualified to discuss this multi-religious existence because this it is not a new phenomenon or realization for African American religions. Rather, multi-religious living is woven into the history and reality of African American religions.[40]

Third, by cutting the thread of the transcendent One, we enter into the realm (*dhatu*) of faith, which I have described with the help of Hua-yen Buddhist understanding of the reality. In this realm, the religious pluralism "out" is "somatically" assimilated into the religious pluralism "in'" as a reference to the existence of Asian Christians. In this realm of faith, the "individuals" or "entire communities," as Colman mentioned above, "live and function as members of multiple religious traditions simultaneously."

What would be the proper name for the theological paradigm that effectively expresses the Asian Christian faith? I want to call it "a theology of pluralistic pluralism." Needless to say, this phrase was coined from the "the theology of unitive pluralism" by Paul Knitter, in which Troeltsch's insight into the relation between the One and the Many are seems to be repeated: "The many are called to be one. But it is a one that does not devour the many. The many become one precisely by remaining the many, and the one is brought about by each of the many making its distinct contribution to the others and thus to the whole. ... So there is a movement not toward absolute or monistic oneness but toward what may be called 'unitive pluralism': plurality constituting unity."[41] Seen from the Asian perspective, Knitter's recent autobiographical book *Without Buddha I could not be a Christian* (2009) suggests a possible realization of what was potentially entailed in his concept of "the theology of unitive pluralism." In other words, the intrinsic meaning of "the theology of unitive pluralism" is realized in the theology of "double-religious belonging": To be faithful both to the Christian faith and Buddhist

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40 Monica A. Coleman, "The Womb Circle: A Womanist Practice of Multi-Religious Belonging" *Practical Matters* 4(2011) pp. 6-7. (Italics not in original.)
41 Paul Knitter, *ibid.*, p.7.

tradition simultaneously. With Knitter we could maintain that the Asian way of being Christian is realized as a "multi-religious belonging" to the various religious traditions at the same time. [42]

"The theology of pluralistic pluralism" is a theological way of thinking to express the reality in which we experience the free-floating and mutual penetration of the religious traditions not only in the world "out there," but also in the inner world of one's faith. This reality, as experienced by Asian Christian, is not to be totally and adequately expressed by the "Pluralistic Hypothesis," although it helps us to overcome the unnecessary conditions of being a Christian in Asia: The exclusivist self-righteous attitude of the faith. In the theology of pluralistic pluralism, the Many appears as much the Many as it is liberated from the coercive One. One's own faith occurs here, to put it better, by the mutual penetration of the many faiths, unconsciously and even consciously.
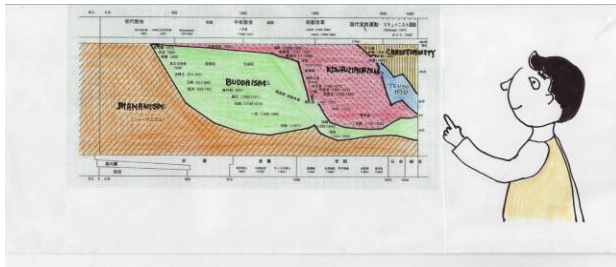

[Figure O] [43]

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42 In Korea and also in Asia, where multiple religious traditions have long co-existed, however, comprehensive reports or studies of the phenomenon of "multi-religious belonging" remain to be done. This is probably partly due to the historical fact that the Christianity from the West has taken the initiative in Korean society since the modernization of the country, and it is partly due to the fact that the traditional religions of Korea have rarely played a leading social role. Moreover, the Christian faith which was introduced into Korea by Western missionaries was usually conservative and fundamentalist, with extremely exclusive attitudes toward non-Christian religions. But along with the diversification of Korean society and the influx of laborers from Southeast Asia, came the phenomenon of "multiple religious belonging." Therefore, what Colman says about African American religious tradition corresponds to the Asian Christian faith, so the object fact of religious plurality is reflected in and coincides with the awareness of interreligious dialogue "in" one's own faith.

43 The figure (a religious history of Korea) itself comes from Dong Sik Ryu, *Hanguk Jongyo wa Kidokkyo* (*Religions of Korea and the Christianity*) Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1965. I modified it by adding an illustrating figure for my own use in this paper.
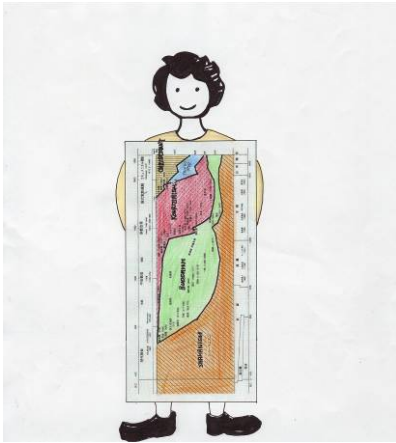
[Figure I]

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Thinking Differently about Difference:
Muslima Theology and Religious Pluralism
By Jerusha Tanner Lamptey

How does the Qurʾānic discourse depict the phenomenon of religious diversity, specific other religions and, more generally, the religious 'other'? While seemingly simple, this question, in fact, is rife with significant theological and practical implications. Theologically, it is intimately connected to the understanding of God and God's action in the world. It is also intertwined with the understanding of humankind and the purpose of human creation. In fact, this rich question in many ways defines the theological relationship between God and humankind; the Qur'an's depiction of religious otherness and the religious 'other' is also—and always—a depiction of God and the religious 'self.'

Practically, the depiction of the religious 'other' assumes great importance in light of the uniqueness and ubiquity of the modern reality of religious diversity. Today, we encounter diversity in a more intimate and intricate manner. Such encounters frequently prompt inquiry into convergences and divergences in belief and practice and discussions of appropriate forms of interreligious interaction. Moreover, ongoing waves of religious violence and oppression force us to ask difficult questions about the relationship between depictions of religious diversity, other specific religions, and religious 'others,' intolerance, and oppression. Although there is not an automatic and direct connection between negative depictions of the religious 'other' and intolerant actions, negative depictions can easily be co-opted to further incite intolerance and even violence among individuals and groups.

In addition to its enduring theological and practical import, the question of how the Qur'an depicts the religious 'other' is also inherently complex. The Qur'an explicitly and extensively discusses the topic of religious difference, sometimes referencing specific groups, such as the *al-naṣārā, yahūd*, and *ahl ul-kitāb* (commonly translated as the Nazarenes/Christians, the Jews and the People of Scripture) but also using more general terminology, such as believers, hypocrites, disbelievers, and submitters. However, throughout this discourse, the Qur'an does not consistently depict religious otherness as acceptable or unacceptable. At times, otherness is positively evaluated, and at others, it is blatantly scorned:

> *Those who believe, the Jews, the Nazarenes, and the Sabians—all those who believe in God and the Last Day and do good—will have their reward with their Lord. No fear for them, nor will they grieve.[1]*

> *… We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, God would have made you one community, but God wanted to test you through that which God has given you, so race to do good: you will all return to God and God will make clear to you the matters you differed about.[2]*

> *The hypocrites will be in the lowest depths of Hell, and you will find no one to help them.[3]*

Moreover, the extensive—and seemingly ambivalent—discussion of religious otherness is tangled together with repeated Qur'anic affirmations of continuity and commonality (or sameness) between religious communities, revelations, and prophets:

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[1] Qur'an 2:62.
[2] Qur'an 5:48 (excerpt).
[3] Qur'an 4:145.

We have sent other messengers before you—some We have mentioned to you and some We have not—and no messenger could bring about a sign except with God's permission…[4]

We sent to you [Muhammad] the Scripture with the truth, confirming the Scriptures that came before it, and with final authority over them …[5]

These various elements of the Qur'anic discourse on religious otherness have prompted the articulation of a variety of hermeneutical approaches, all of which aim to address—or make sense of—this complexity and apparent ambiguity. While one possible approach would be to deem the text inconsistent and thereby account for the apparent mixed messages, this strategy has not been employed by most historical or contemporary Islamic scholars, scholars who largely approach the Qur'an as the inerrant Word of God. Rather, Islamic scholars have largely preferred hermeneutical strategies that rely upon notions such as chronology, progressive revelation, abrogation, distinctions between particular and universal verses, and prioritization of Qur'anic principle or values. These strategies, with varying degrees of authority, have resulted in and continue to result in diverse depictions of the overarching Qur'anic view of the religious 'other.'

The contemporary Islamic discourse in the United States bears witness to this hermeneutical diversity, with scholars voicing interpretations of the Qur'anic discourse that can be grouped into two dominant trends: first, there are those that prioritize the message of religious sameness, downplaying—even ignoring—Qur'anic discussions of religious difference. This trend is evident, for example, in the writings of Asghar Ali Engineer and Abdulaziz Sachedina. Concerned with providing a theological justification for human rights and civil pluralism, Engineer downplays the particularities of the Islamic tradition and advances a view that the Qur'an is primarily concerned with general ethical action not specific tenets of belief or practice.[6] Sachedina argues that the shared human nature bestowed on all at the time of creation takes precedence over and reduces the importance of the particular—and conflict-producing—religious differences introduced through revelation.[7]

Comprising the second major trend are those scholars that aim to simultaneously account for both religious sameness and difference but are able to do so only through models that depict religious communities as isolated or hierarchically ranked. Two prominent examples of this trend are found in the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Muhammad Legenhausen. Nasr draws an analogy to solar systems, arguing for the integrity of different religious universes and their particularities. This approach manages to uphold both sameness and difference but does so only by treating religious universes as if they are homogenous wholes that exist in isolation from one another.[8] Critiquing most pluralistic views of religious diversity for devaluing religious practice and religious imperative, Legenhausen distinguishes between questions of truth, salvation, and correct religion and argues that, while other religions may be true and salvific, only Islam is the correct religion—the divinely commanded religion—in contemporary times.[9]

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4 Qur'an 40:78 (excerpt).

5 Qur'an 5:48 (excerpt).

6 Asghar Ali Engineer, "Islam and Pluralism," in *The Myth of Religious Superiority: A Multifaith Exploration*, Edited by Paul Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2005), 211-219.

7 Abdulaziz Sachedina, "The Qur'an and Other Religions," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Qur'an*, ed. Jane Dammen McAuliffe (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2006), 291-309.

8 Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Religion and Religions," in *The Religious Other: Towards a Muslim Theology of Other Religions in a Post-Prophetic Age*, edited by Muhammad Suheyl Umar (Lahore: Iqbal Academy Pakistan, 2008), 59-81.

9 Muhammad Legenhausen, "A Muslim's Non-reductive Religious Pluralism," in *Islam and Global Dialogue: Religious Pluralism and the Pursuit of Peace*, Edited by Roger Boase (Surrey: Ashgate, 2005), 51-73. (Legenhausen previously wrote on this topic in *Islam and Religious Pluralism* (London: Al Hoda Publishing, 1999).

Without delving further into the specifics and valuable insights of these interpretations, what is central to note is that—irrespective of their ultimate evaluation of the religious 'other' or of religious diversity—both trends are premised upon a common conception of difference. In the majority of these interpretations, difference is conceived of as that which unambiguously divides humanity through the erection of clear and static boundaries. In the first trend—the prioritization of sameness—such boundaries are seen as impediments to the ultimate goal of tolerant interaction; boundaries and difference create conflict. Thus difference is downplayed, while sameness is emphasized. In the second trend—the attempt to simultaneously affirm religious sameness and difference—divisions and boundaries are upheld in an effort to address Qur'anic messages on the value and divine intentionality of religious diversity. Religions are therefore depicted as bounded wholes that either do not—or ideally would not—interact at all, *or* are related only through some sort of evaluative hierarchy, such as supersession or completeness. Separation and hierarchical evaluation uphold boundaries and difference, and, although sameness is acknowledged, it is not permitted to eradicate or blur such boundaries.

This conception of religious difference as being intimately tied to boundaries, however, is problematic for two primary reasons. First, it leads to an excessive focus on the boundaries themselves and on the process of identifying that which demarcates a boundary. The boundary assumes great prominence as the symbol and marker of the division between insiders and outsiders, a symbol or marker that is depicted as clear, static, and unambiguously defined. This sort of definition is only achieved through the identification of a *simple* and *singular* threshold criterion. In the contemporary discourse, some such criteria are recognition of Muhammad as a prophet or adherence to the specific rituals of Islam. While these are certainly important components in the Qur'anic discourse on religious otherness, they are not the *only* components. Therefore, an excessive focus on boundaries necessary leads to a reduction or simplification of the complexity of the Qur'anic discourse, as well as of the nature of religious identity and interaction.

The second reason that the shared conception is problematic is that it presupposes a certain genre of religious 'other.' If religious difference creates clear and static boundaries, then the religious 'other' in this scenario is one who is wholly discrete, clearly identified, clearly bounded. It is an 'other' who is unmistakably distinct from the religious 'self.' However, this genre of religious 'other'—not to mention religious 'self'—again reduces the complexity of the Qur'anic discourse. The religious 'other' of the Qur'an is unique and perplexing in that it is an 'other' that is simultaneously the same as and different from the 'self.'

Some insights drawn from the writings of Jonathan Z. Smith help to clarify this distinction. Smith acknowledges this boundary-focused view of the 'other' when he discusses the binary opposition of WE/THEY, or IN/OUT.[10] This stark dualism is characterized by a preoccupation with clearly defined, impenetrable boundaries, limits, thresholds, and pollution. As such, the primary mode of interaction depicted by this binary is a double process of containment, that is, keeping in and keeping out. However, Smith contends that 'othering'—the process whereby we make sense of the 'other'—is much more complex than the basic opposition of us and them. Othering actually involves multiple possible relations with the 'other.' Intriguingly, the deepest intellectual issues arise when the other is "too much like us," when the other is the *proximate* other in distinction from the *distant* other. Distant others are so clearly distinguished that they are insignificant and voiceless; since they are easily defined and contained, they require minimal exegetical effort. The proximate other, though, is much more complex and amorphous; it is the 'other' who claims to be 'you.' As such, the proximate other presents a direct and perpetual challenge to the worldview and identity of the 'self,' forcing ongoing

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10 Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2004), 27, 230.

modification, reconsideration, and re-drawing of boundaries. Therefore, proximate difference does not erect discrete and static boundaries, but on the contrary provokes questions about dynamic and multiple relations between the self and the other.

It is my contention that the Qur'anic religious 'other' is *this* genre of other; it is the proximate religious other, or, what I have termed, the Other-that-can-never-be-wholly-other. As such, neither of the two prominent trends in contemporary Islamic discourse is capable of effectively accounting for both the proximity *and* the otherness of this religious other. The trend of prioritizing sameness partially addresses proximity but neglects otherness by devaluing difference. The attempt to affirm both sameness and difference, conversely, neglects the full complexity of proximity by establishing clearly defined and bounded religious wholes.

This inability to effectively account for both proximity and otherness arises from the common conception of difference evident in both trends in contemporary Islamic interpretation. Therefore, in order to intricately engage the Qur'anic discourse on the Other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other, it is essential to articulate an alternative conception of religious difference. It is essential to *think differently about difference itself*.

In my work, I draw resources for this "rethinking" of difference from Muslim women's interpretation of the Qur'an—primarily the hermeneutical and theoretical approaches of Amina Wadud, Riffat Hassan, and Asma Barlas[11]—and feminist theology. While neither field is primarily concerned with religious difference, both fields offer pointed critiques of dominant paradigms of difference (specifically, sexual difference). In doing so, they provide insights into and conceptual fodder for the articulation of alternative models of difference. These insights and raw conceptual materials can be critically extended to the topic of religious difference.

In the remainder of this essay, I will outline one such extension drawn from Muslim women's reinterpretation—the distinction between lateral and hierarchical religious difference—and highlight its rich implications for reinterpreting the Qur'anic discourse on the religious 'other.'

In her work on the Qur'an, sex, and gender, Asma Barlas draws a distinction between difference that differentiates laterally and difference that differentiates hierarchically. Her main contention is that sexual difference (that is, biological difference) is divinely-intended and purposeful and as such should be acknowledged rather than ignored or downplayed. However, she argues that divinely-intended sexual difference only differentiates "laterally"—meaning it distinguishes individuals without ascribing value.[12] Individuals, therefore, cannot—or should not—be assessed on the basis of their sexual biology.[13]

In addition to this non-evaluative form of difference—lateral difference—Barlas identifies another genre, hierarchical difference, which *is* associated with evaluation and assessment. Citing Surah 49, āya 13,[14] Barlas argues that hierarchical difference is evaluated only with respect to the concept of *taqwā* (God consciousness, or piety). *Taqwā* is tied to and assessed on the individual level,

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11 Amina Wadud, *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Texts from a Woman's Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Riffat Hassan, "Feminism in Islam," in *Feminism and World Religions*, edited by Arvind Sharma and Katherine K. Young (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999), 248-78; and Asma Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur'an* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2002).
12 Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 145.
13 Barlas, *"Believing Women" in Islam*, 11.
14 Qur'an 49:13: "People, We created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should know one another. In God's eyes, the most honored of you are the ones most mindful of Him [has the most *taqwā*]: God is all knowing, all aware."

rather than based on affiliation with a particular group, that is, men or women. But this does not mean that an individual can strive for or achieve *taqwā* in isolation. *Taqwā* is always defined in the context of multiple relationships. Every individual is capable and responsible for herself, but capacity and responsibility can only be actualized relationally and socially. In arguing for the distinction between lateral and hierarchical difference, Barlas aims to illuminate the fact that there *are* multiple genres of difference and to challenge the pervasive conflation and static linking of the two.

Building upon Barlas' distinction, it is possible to identify defining characteristics for both genres of difference, beginning with hierarchical difference. First, hierarchical difference is evaluative and thus connected with accountability, judgment, rewards, and punishments. Second, evaluation of this genre is carried out only on the basis of conformity or non-conformity with the concept of *taqwā*. Third, the evaluation of *taqwā*—or hierarchical difference—is performed on an individual basis. It is, however, always connected to social and relational manifestations. In other words, every person is assessed individually, but that assessment is integrally related to the individual's interactions with others, both divine and human.

There are also three defining characteristics of lateral difference. First, lateral difference is a group phenomenon. It does not primarily refer to individual particularities, but rather to patterns and trends of difference at the group level. The fact that lateral difference is a group phenomenon, however, does not mean that lateral groups are completely discrete; groupings that denote lateral difference can overlap, intersect, and even be inclusive of other lateral groups. Second, lateral difference is divinely-intended. Lateral difference, therefore, is not the result of degeneration, human error, or corruption. It is willed by God for a teleological purpose and, as such, should not be targeted for eradication or homogenization. Third, lateral difference never serves as the basis of evaluation. Evaluation is not tied to difference that is divinely-intended. Moreover, evaluation is not conducted at the group level. It is important to clarify that this does not mean that there will be *no evaluation* whatsoever within groups of lateral difference; rather, it implies that a singular evaluation will not be uniformly ascribed to an entire group solely on the basis of membership in that group. As a result, in seeking to identify groups of lateral difference within the Qur'anic discourse, the goal is not to find groups that are *never evaluated*, but rather groups that are *partially* and *diversely* evaluated.

The distinction between lateral and hierarchical difference and the outline of the defining characteristics of both provide a novel roadmap for navigating the Qur'anic discourse on religious difference. By re-reading the Qur'anic discourse with an eye to identifying the two genres and understanding the relationship between them, certain pivotal nuances are illuminated. Perhaps the most striking and thought-provoking is that the delineation between hierarchical and lateral religious difference corresponds with a distinction in terminology.

Hierarchical difference (that is, evaluative, *taqwā*-related, individual difference) is connected to terms and concepts, such as *īmān* (belief), *kufr* (disbelief), *nifāq* (hypocrisy) and *islām* (submission), in all of their various grammatical forms. As the result of comprehensively tracing the semantic structures of these concepts throughout the Qur'an, it becomes apparent that they denote various—and *particular*—manifestations of *taqwā* or the lack thereof. In the Qur'an, the central evaluative role of *taqwā* expressed in Qur'an 49:13 is coupled with explanations of the multifaceted nature of *taqwā*, for example:

> *True goodness does not consist in turning your face towards East or West. The truly good are those who believe in God and the Last Day, in the angels, the Scripture, and the prophets; who give away some of their wealth, however much they cherish it, to their relatives, to orphans, the needy, travelers and beggars, and to liberate those in bondage; those who keep up the prayer and pay the prescribed alms; who keep pledges whenever they make them; who are steadfast in*

misfortune, adversity, and times of danger. These are the ones who are true, and it is they who are the muttaqūn, *it is they who manifest* taqwā.[15]

Hierarchical religious concepts, including *īmān* (belief), *kufr* (disbelief), *nifāq* (hypocrisy) and *islām* (submission), are then continuously juxtaposed to these central features of *taqwā*:

> *True* **believers** (muʾminūn) *are those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when God's revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord.*[16]

> *But* **those who believed** (alladhīna āmanū), *did good deeds, and humbled themselves before their Lord will be companions in Paradise and there they will stay.*[17]

> *The* **disbelievers** (alladhīna kafarū) *will remain in doubt about it until the Hour suddenly overpowers them or until torment descends on them on a Day devoid of all hope.*[18]

> *When humans suffer some affliction, they pray to their Lord and turn to God, but once they have been granted a favor from God, they forget the One they had been praying to and set up rivals to God, to make others stray from God's path. Say, 'Enjoy your* **ingratitude** (kufr) *for a little while. You will be one of the inhabitants of the Fire.'*[19]

Moreover, manifestations of the *taqwā*-related concepts of belief, submission, disbelief and hypocrisy are assessed individually:

> *You who believe, you are responsible for your own souls; if anyone else goes astray it will not harm you so long as you follow the guidance; you will all return to God, and God will make you realize what you have done.*[20]

They are also tied closely to praise and disdain, as well as promises of reward or punishment:

> *Who could be better in religion than those who submit (*ʾaslama*) themselves wholly to God, do good, and follow the religion of Abraham, who was true in faith (*ḥanīf*)? ...*[21]

> *The worst creatures in the sight of God are those who reject (*kafarū*) Him and will not believe.*[22]

> *In fact, any who submit (*ʾaslama*) themselves wholly to God and do good will have their reward with their Lord: no fear for them, nor will they grieve.*[23]

> *We shall send those who reject Our revelations (*kafarū*) to the Fire. When their skins have been burned away, We shall replace them with new ones so that they may continue to feel the pain. God is mighty and wise.*[24]

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15 Qur'an 2:177.
16 Qur'an 8:2.
17 Qur'an 11:23.
18 Qur'an 22:55.
19 Qur'an 39:8.
20 Qur'an 5:105.
21 Qur'an 4:125 (excerpt).
22 Qur'an 8:55.
23 Qur'an 2:112.

In distinction from the hierarchical concepts of religious difference, lateral religious difference (that is, group difference that is divinely-intended, and not the basis of evaluation) is associated with terminology that refers to specific *groups*, such as *al-naṣārā* (Nazarenes, Christians), *yahūd* (Jews), and *ahl al-kitāb* (People of Scripture). Tracing these terms throughout the Qur'an, it is evident that they refer to diverse communities that exist as a result of God's will:

> *… We have assigned a law and a path to each of you. If God had so willed, God would have made you one community, but God wanted to test you through that which God has given you. So race to do good. You will all return to God and God will make clear to you the matters you differed about.*[25]

> *We have appointed acts of devotion* (mansak) *for every community* (umma) *to observe, so do not let them argue with you about this matter. Call them to your Lord—you are on the right path—and if they argue with you, say, 'God is well aware of what you are doing.*[26]

More notably—and the cause of many interpretive debates—these groups are *partially* and *variously* evaluated. This is highlighted through common refrains that, for example, describe "*some* among the people of the Book" as praiseworthy and others as blameworthy:

> *Some of the People of the Scripture believe in God, in what has been sent down to you and in what was sent down to them: humbling themselves before God, they would never sell God's revelation for a small price. These people will have their reward with their Lord. God is swift in reckoning.*[27]

> *Some of the People of the Scripture would dearly love to lead you astray, but they only lead themselves astray, though they do not realize it.*[28]

Since such evaluations are partial and diverse, they cannot be prompted by lateral religious difference, by the communitarian religious identity. If they were, then they would be holistically and homogeneously applied to the entire group. These evaluations, rather, are prompted by the manifestations of particular forms of hierarchical religious difference among *individual members* of the lateral religious group. This is made explicit in Qur'an 3:199 when reference is made to original Arabic; the "some among the People of the Scripture" that are praise are those that believe (*yuʾminu*), those that manifest *īmān*. It is equally explicit in other Qur'anic verses that reprimand those who *disbelieve* (manifest *kufr*) among the People of the Scripture, such as Qur'an 98:1:

> *Those who disbelieve (*kafarū*) among the People of the Scripture and the associators were not about to change their ways until they were sent clear evidence.*[29]

Although this is a very brief and limited introduction to the delineation between hierarchical and lateral religious difference within the Qur'anic discourse, it points to certain weighty implications. To begin, the coexistence of divergent Qur'anic assessments of religious 'others' has been typically explained through abrogation, chronology, or specification of Qur'anic praise to a very small contingent of the People of the Book or other communities. However, the reconceptualization of religious difference as consisting of two genres presents an alternative and unique hermeneutical

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24 Qur'an 4:56.
25 Qur'an 5:48 (excerpt).
26 Qur'an 22:67.
27 Qur'an 3:199.
28 Qur'an 3:69.
29 Qur'an 98:1.

option. The divergent assessments are no longer contradictions, but rather *multiple possible intersections* or *pairings* of lateral and hierarchical religious difference.

Additionally, if hierarchical and lateral religious difference are separate genres, they should not be conflated or treated as if they are synonymous. No one hierarchical category (including believers or disbelievers) can be treated as an automatic synonym for a lateral community. People of the Scripture, for example, are not automatically disbelievers based upon their communal affiliation as People of the Scripture. If they are described in this fashion, as disbelievers, it is due to the fact that they manifest disbelief. Conversely, if they are described as believers, it is not necessarily because they are rare exemplars or covert converts to the path of Prophet Muhammad; rather, they may be described as believers because they simply manifest belief. Similarly, and provocatively, members of Prophet Muhammad's community are not believers because they are members of his community, but rather because—and only if—they manifest belief.

Hierarchical evaluation is never fixed or holistically applied to an entire lateral religious group, because it is not ascribed on the basis of communal affiliation; hierarchical religious evaluation is individually assessed. Therefore, while there is hierarchical assessment of *taqwā*, this assessment is not confined to *or* defined by the boundaries between divinely intended lateral religious communities. In fact, hierarchical religious difference is uniquely characterized by its lack of denotative stability. It does not denote or correspond exactly and statically with specific groups. It can cut across and through *all* categories of lateral religious difference, creating various intersections and challenging the notion of discrete and fixed boundaries.

Nevertheless, this lack of denotative stability in reference to lateral communities should not be misconstrued as indicating that *taqwā* and its related concepts lack definite content. In the Qur'an, hierarchical concepts are specific, evaluative, and social; certain actions, behaviors, and beliefs in relation to God and other humans are positively evaluated and others are negatively evaluated. In fact, it is by delineating between the two distinct, yet dynamically interrelated genres of religious difference that it is possible to navigate between two objectionable extremes, between exclusivism and relativism. By distinguishing between hierarchical and lateral religious difference, it is possible to avoid the presentation of *taqwā* as confined to one reified, lateral community, and also to avoid the depiction of *taqwā* as a relativistic and nebulous form of belief.

It is also by distinguishing between hierarchical and lateral religious difference that it becomes possible to more holistically comprehend the complexity of the proximate religious other, the Other-who-can-never-be-wholly-other. Difference is no longer conceived of as that which divides humanity through impermeable boundaries. Difference is rather the dynamic intersections that produce various (perhaps even infinite) combinations of proximity and otherness. As such, the options are no longer to prioritize sameness and proximity to the detriment of otherness, or to neglect the intricacies of proximity through isolation and linear hierarchies. With this rethinking of difference, the new and primary option is to focus on the dynamic intersections themselves without collapsing the two genres, without depicting them in a static or exclusive relationship, and without returning to a reliance upon oversimplified or singular threshold criteria.

Such an acknowledgement of and focus on the dynamic intersections, though, will also necessitate that we deeply probe the intricacies of hierarchical religious difference itself. In order to avoid reverting to reliance on the notion of static, distinct boundaries between groups, we will need to obtain a more robust view of what the evaluative concepts and overarching Qur'anic discourse actually entail. If belief and disbelief are no longer ascribed on the basis of communal affiliation, then what exactly are belief and disbelief? How exactly do they conform to or diverge from the central

evaluative standard of *taqwā* in all of its dynamic, social, and relational complexity? Answering these questions becomes the heart of the interpretative task.

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Shabkar and Interreligious Encounter on the Tibetan Plateau, 1781-1851

By Rachel Pang

Introduction

In this paper, I will examine a Buddhist response to religious and sectarian diversity on the Tibetan plateau in the nineteenth century. I am interested in: (1) how the inclusion of responses to religious diversity from different cultures and time periods affects the conversation in interfaith and interreligious studies; and (2) whether or not it is accurate, acceptable, or productive to use interfaith and interreligious vocabulary in our discussion of responses to religious diversity in different cultures and historical contexts. Following a discussion of Shabkar's non-sectarian activities and their historical context, I will explore the ways in which such a case study in the history of religion can broaden and enrich discussions in the emerging academic field of interreligious and interfaith studies.

The great Tibetologist Gene Smith once noted, "The roots of eclecticism and tolerance are sunk as deep into the soil of Tibetan tradition as those of sectarianism and bigotry."[1] Indeed, the countless examples of religious harmony and rivalry indelibly shaped the course of Tibet's history. Instances of inter-sectarian harmony resulted in the flourishing of ecumenical learning and exchange.[2] Instances of sectarian rivalry, on the other hand, caused irrevocable damage, sometimes escalating into civil war. These eruptions of violence were usually due to the involvement of powerful political and financial stakeholders in religious affairs—such as the Tibetan nobility and in some cases, foreign military powers like the Mongols.

Into this millennium-long history of co-existent religious tolerance and rivalry was born the celebrated Tibetan Buddhist spiritual master Shabkar Tsokdruk Rangdrol (1781-1851). Shabkar was born in Amdo province at the northeasternmost corner of the Tibetan plateau (modern day Qinghai province, PRC) but traveled extensively throughout his life to teach and to go on pilgrimages. Viewed by both himself and others as the reincarnation of the eleventh-century poet-saint Milarepa, Shabkar is primarily remembered by posterity for his spiritual autobiography, his ability to spontaneously compose and perform songs of spiritual realization (*mgur*), and his fervent promotion of non-sectarianism.[3]

As many scholars have pointed out, the idea of non-sectarianism was not unique to Shabkar or nineteenth-century Tibet. It dates back to the historical Buddha.[4] I suggest that Shabkar felt compelled to promote non-sectarianism so fervently due to three reasons.

Firstly, it would not be in accord with Buddhist ideals—and especially the Mahāyāna Buddhist ideals of loving-kindness, compassion, generosity, moral discipline, patience, diligence,

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1 Smith, *Among*, 237.

2 Important examples include the non-sectarian approaches of the 3rd Karmapa Rangchung Dorjé (1284-1339); the iron bridge builder and father of Tibetan opera, Tangtong Gyelpo (1361/1365-1486); the 14th century religious luminary Tsongkhapa; and the great composer of encyclopedias, Jamgön Kongtrül (1813-1899), and so forth.

3 The Tibetan word that I am translating as "non-sectarian" or "ecumenical" is the Tibetan word "ris med." Literally, "ris med," means "impartial," "unbiased," or "not taking sides." Shabkar uses "ris med" to refer to his attitude towards religious diversity. However, it is important not to equate the "ecumenical" of this instance with the Ecumenical Movement of Protestant denominations in the early twentieth century.

4 Ringu Tulku, 4-5. It was fine to debate with the views of other religions and sects in order to clarify one's understanding, but that was not seen as a form of criticism of others' views; sectarianism and criticism for criticism's sake were forbidden.

meditation, and wisdom—to engage in perpetual conflict with others over doctrinal difference. This reminds us of the specific religious and cultural background from which Shabkar emerged and that his approach to religious diversity was deeply rooted in the beliefs and values that he cultivated throughout his life.

Secondly, I suggest that Shabkar's non-sectarianism was a direct reaction to the religious environment in which he lived. His autobiography contains constant admonishments reminding people not to be sectarian. In Kyirong, Shabkar tells the lamas there not to engage in sectarianism by dividing the Buddha's teachings into categories of "good" and "bad."[5] To the general populace, he advises refraining from hostility (*ma sdang*) towards the tenet systems of others since the teachings of all tenet systems are the teachings of the Buddha.[6] In Lhasa, Shabkar advises, "There is no holy Dharma that is not profound / People of Lhasa, do not be sectarian, there is no point."[7] In his final testament, he advises, "Disciples who after listening, reflecting, and meditating upon the teachings / Engage in sectarianism after several years / And belittle the Dharma of others. / Do not abandon the Dharma and accumulate negative karma."[8] The presence of these admonishments suggests that Shabkar was likely reacting to instances of sectarianism that he encountered throughout his journeys on the Tibetan plateau; it would be highly unlikely for him to admonish others for being sectarian if there were an absence of such a phenomenon.

It is also clear from recent secondary scholarship that Shabkar grew up in an environment where there were tensions between different sects—especially between the Nyingma and Geluk sects. Sometimes, it involved verbal sparring.[9] Other times, it involved criticizing another sect in the book that one was writing, [10] and still other times, it involved silent grudges.[11] Clearly, sectarianism was widespread in nineteenth-century Tibet.

Finally, as Shabkar points out in the colophon of the *Emanated Scripture of Orgyen*, it has been prophesized that the future demise of the Buddhist teachings will not be due to an outside enemy, but due to Buddhists "quarrelling over which are good and bad teachings, and fighting due to attachment and aversion."[12] Therefore, the very survival of Buddhism lies in inter-sectarian harmony.

Shabkar's Communicative Strategies

Regarding his own attitude to other religions and sects, Shabkar says to his disciples,

> I went about training with faith, devotion, and pure perception in whatever Buddhist and non-Buddhist tenet systems. Because of this, wherever I went, many beings made offerings, praised, and served me, and I brought benefit to both myself and others.

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[5] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 1, 675.1-.2. Ricard, trans., 386.
[6] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 1, 675.4. Ricard, trans., 386.
[7] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 1, 840.2-.3. Ricard, trans., 478.
[8] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 1, 952.3-.4. Ricard, trans., 534.
9 Yangdon Dondhup, 50.
10 Ibid. Drakgönpa Könchok Tenpa Rabgyé was a throne holder of the famous Gelukpa monastery Labrang in Amdo, while Rigdzin Palden Tashi was an important Nyingma *ngakpa* leader in Rebgong. For more information see Dhodup, 47.
11 We find passages where Shabkar feels compelled to defend the veracity and purity of the Nyingma teachings from sectarian slander directed against it (Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 2, 115.4.), as well as incidents of prejudice between members of different sects (Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol 1, 896.4-897.1. Ricard, trans., 507).
12 Zhabs dkar, *Orgyan*, 576.

Thus, you should do as I did, and it will be good.[13]

While the basis for Shabkar's non-sectarian attitude involved the cultivation of respect for other religious traditions, Shabkar's approach to religious diversity was by no means simple or passive. In particular, his strategy for communicating this non-sectarian paradigm was multi-valenced, involving his life example and varied literary and religious means. The primary way by which Shabkar promoted non-sectarianism was through his own life example, preserved after his death in his autobiography. Throughout his life, Shabkar made it a point to study Buddhism from masters of all sectarian lineages. Generally speaking, his childhood and youth were spent immersed in the tantric Buddhist practices of the Nyingma; he received his monastic vows from the great Gelukpa abbot Arig Geshé and studied their scriptural tradition assiduously. He spent years of his adult life engaged in the Kagyu meditative practices of Mahāmudrā in the Himalayas. By the eighteenth century, sectarian identity had solidified in Tibet to the degree where it was usually the case that individuals from a particular sect would practice the teachings within their own sect more or less exclusively. Shabkar is a rare example of a Tibetan Buddhist saint who managed to master the teachings of three distinct sects: the Nyingma, the Geluk, and the Kagyu. In this way, Shabkar was an interesting anomaly in the history of Tibetan Buddhism, and the paradigm of the non-sectarian attitude.

Shabkar's approach to non-sectarianism was active and full of energy: in addition to cultivating a profound respect for the religions of others, he actively sought out opportunities to learn more about them. In this way, Shabkar's approach to religious diversity resembles aspects of certain contemporary examples of interfaith or interreligoius dialogue, such as Diana Eck's Pluralism Project, that envisions "pluralism" as "*the **energetic** engagement with diversity*," and "*the **active** seeking of understanding across lines of difference*," and so forth.[14] Historical examples of interreligious encounter such as Shabkar's represent interesting models for which to compare to present day instances of "interreligious dialogue" or "interfaith dialogue." In any case, the merits and shortcomings of all approaches should be actively explored and debated.

In addition to his life example, Shabkar used a variety of literary genres that would connect to a wide audience—sermons, songs, life narrative, "emanated scriptures," and "elegant sayings." With his eloquent and easy-to-understand prose and verse, Shabkar was able to convey his message to a wide audience ranging from the educated monastic elite to illiterate nomads and farmers. Shabkar's methods for expressing his ideas resonates with the fundamental place of song, verse, oral literature, and storytelling in Tibetan culture, making his chosen media highly efficacious.

Shabkar also linked non-sectarianism to a series of powerful religious ideas. For example, Shabkar grounds non-sectarianism in Buddhist cosmogony associated with the Nyingma tantric tradition. By emphasizing the common origins of all phenomena in the primordial *dharmadhātu*, or "Dharma expanse," Shabkar emphasizes that the ultimate nature of all buddhas, bodhisattvas, and spiritual masters is fundamentally the same. This can be read as an indirect argument for the common origin of all spiritual guides and the ultimately trivial nature of sectarian divisions. Shabkar also grounds non-sectarianism in Buddhist soteriology. He argues that a significant part of reaching full enlightenment, or nirvāna, involves "training in faith and pure perception towards all spiritual teachings (*chos*) and peoples, making offerings, giving praise, and being of service." He continues, "If one does that and simultaneously requests the blessings of the Victor and Sons, one's mental continuum will naturally ripen and be liberated."[15] Finally, Shabkar grounds his promotion of non-sectarianism in a series of revelatory visions. Near the end of his life, Shabkar sees the enlightened

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[13] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 2, 108.6-109.4.
[14] Eck, Diana. "What is Pluralism?" Bold added by this essay's author for emphasis.
[15] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 2, 28.3-.6.

figure Padmasambhava in a vision. Padmasambhava reveals to him that he is, in essence, the same as the greats spiritual masters Tsongkhapa and Atiśa, who had appeared to Shabkar in a couple of earlier visions. In terms of non-sectarianism, the significance of this vision has to do with the different sectarian affiliations of Padamasambhava (Nyingma), Atiśa (Kadampa), and Tsongkhapa (Geluk). Thus, this revelatory vision indirectly argues that the teachings presented in the great variety of Buddhist texts lead back to Padmasambhava and by extension to the Buddha. This claim is echoed in one of Shabkar's songs, where he suggests that different tenet systems – Madhyamaka, Dzokchen, and Mahāmudrā – lead to the same truth.[16]

Shabkar's Non-Sectarianism and Interreligious/Interfaith Studies

Returning to one of the questions that I posed at the beginning of the paper: is it accurate, acceptable, or productive to adopt the interfaith and interreligious studies vocabulary in the study of interfaith engagement in diverse cultural and historical contexts? At present, it is difficult to answer the question. From my perusal of the websites of organizations devoted to interreligious and interfaith dialogue, and to scholarly literature on this subject, the terms interfaith, interreligious, multifaith, pluralism, and so forth often refer to different things in different contexts. For example, take the term "pluralism": in Christian theology,[17] in Diana Eck's highly influential Pluralism Project, and in common parlance, the term takes on drastically different meanings. While the terms "interfaith" and "interreligious" are most often used interchangeably, there are significant instances where they mean different things to different communities. For example, on the website of the Archdiocese of Chicago's Office for Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs, the term "interfaith" is defined as "relations with members of the "Abrahamic faiths" (Jewish and Muslim traditions)," while "interreligious" refers to "relations with other religions, such as Hinduism and Buddhism." This is in stark contrast to the use of "interreligious" to mean the interactions between different religions, as in the case of J. Abraham Vélez de Cea's work, which engages intimately with the Christian theological vocabulary, and in the case of a recent symposium in Chinese religions at Hamburg University entitled, "Modes of Interreligious Engagement: Buddhism And Other Religious Traditions In Medieval China." Without some sort of consensus on the meaning of these terms, or at least some systematic attention paid to what they mean in different contexts, it is difficult and confusing to use them in discussion at this point. Moreover, it would be beneficial to interfaith and interreligious studies if there were to be some sort of systematic study of the ways in which the key terms within this field were used.

I suggest that an answer to the first question can come from considering the second question, namely, how the inclusion of religious traditions from different geographic and cultural domains affects the conversation in interfaith and interreligious studies. Most of the literature that I have come across in interfaith and interreligious studies deals with modern America and, to a lesser extent, Europe. I suggest that in the process of coming to a consensus regarding the meaning of "interfaith," "interreligious," "pluralism," and so forth, we should also consider examples of interreligious encounters in different cultural and temporal contexts—like pre-modern India, medieval China, and nineteenth-century Tibet.

In this paper, we have seen that many aspects of Shabkar's promotion of non-sectarianism in nineteenth-century Tibet are remarkably similar to many examples of contemporary interfaith dialogue. Like in Diana Eck's Pluralism Project, Shabkar is actively engaged in learning about the traditions of other sects and religions; like the cases documented by Gustav Niebuhr and Susan Thistlethwaite'e volume, Shabkar's fervent promotion of non-sectarianism was in part a response to

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[16] Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 2, 236.3-237.3. Zhabs dkar, snyigs dus (2003), vol. 1, 231.5-232.2; Ricard, trans., 138.

[17] See for example Kiblinger, 2, and Schmidt-Leukal, 14.

inter-sectarian hostility on the ground; like Paul Knitter and many theologians, Shabkar's promotion of non-sectarianism was motivated by his own faith. At the same time, however, Shabkar's promotion of non-sectarianism teaches us something new about interfaith dialogue. For example, how many individuals engaged in interfaith dialogue—be they theologians, students on a university campus, or religious studies scholars—use a varied repertoire of literary and religious media to convey their message?[18] Or, to what degree are modern forms of interreligious and interfaith dialogue grounded in specific religious, cultural, and historical backgrounds, as Shabkar's clearly was?

In the end, this comparative enterprise reminds us that religious diversity is not unique to our culture or the contemporary world, and in turn, this encourages us to be more self-reflexive of our own interfaith and interreligious endeavors in a deeper way. We'll find that, while some cases from other times and cultures fit into our existent molds and models, others do not. Shabkar's approach to religious and sectarian diversity on the Tibetan plateau in the nineteenth century is a case in point: while he was clearly engaged in activities that promoted intersectarian and interreligious harmony, we could not equate his activities to "interfaith dialogue" or "interreligious dialogue" as it occurs in twenty-first century America, for example. These two phenomena simply come from two starkly different historical and cultural contexts. And yet, by looking at examples of interreligious encounter from varying temporal and cultural contexts, we will be able to expand the limits of knowledge in this emerging field of interfaith and interreligious studies by looking at how individuals from different cultures responded to religious diversity in the past.

To conclude, I suggest that in order to enrich and broaden the scope of the emerging field of interfaith and interreligious studies, it would be productive to analyze how groups and individuals from different cultural and temporal periods responded to religious diversity. Adopting the interfaith and interreligious vocabulary in these varied case studies would be a powerful way of including them in the conversation. However, as to whether or not it is accurate or acceptable to adopt the interfaith and interreligious studies vocabulary in the study of varied historical and cultural examples of interreligious engagement, we must first systematically establish what these words mean and in which contexts.

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[18] The closest example that I can think of is the Pluralism Project, with its use of multiple forms of media, and varied modes of engagement with different sectors of society.

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Mapping the Discourse: A Case Study in Creating "Interfaith Community" on a "Multi-Faith" Campus

By Denise Yarbrough

Introduction

During the academic year 2012-2013, the University of Rochester ("U of R") went through a collaborative process of creating a Statement of Policies of Affiliation for religious communities that serves students on the U of R campus under the auspices of the Interfaith Chapel. An older document, "The Covenant," had been in effect since the early 1990s. However, because the scope of the religious diversity on campus had changed significantly since that time, it became necessary to re-visit the procedure by which religious communities affiliate with the university through the Interfaith Chapel. The goal was to create a policy that would recognize all of the affiliated religious communities equally, not privileging any historical group and offering all groups equal opportunity to access university resources and support.

In the process of drafting the new Statement of Policies of Affiliation, a host of issues arose, many of which exemplify the challenges that come with a religiously diverse community. Many of the tensions and issues that we confronted as we thought through how religious communities would co-exist in our university environment parallel the issues that arise in local communities in our contemporary society as the United States adjusts to the increased religious diversity of our cities, towns, and villages. In addition, the issues that arose as we struggled to define how we would create and live in an "interfaith" university community offer insight into what makes "interreligious" or "interfaith" studies as an academic discipline unique and distinct from the study of comparative religion.

The critical marker of "interreligious" or "interfaith" is the "inter" prefix, which denotes relationship and encounter between the different religious or spiritual groups. Whereas comparative religion encourages learning about different religions and how they are alike and different in their own unique ways, interfaith or interreligious studies involves understanding how those similarities and differences are manifested in the lived experiences of the adherents of those traditions as they come in close contact with people of different religious traditions. That there are religious similarities and differences is a given for interfaith and interreligious studies. What those similarities and differences mean for real world interaction is the focus of this emerging discipline. In a real sense, interreligious and interfaith studies is a disciplined study of relationships between people of different religious traditions and of the impact of those relationships on community life.

Our struggle to articulate a policies statement that everyone could embrace was an incarnational experience of interfaith and interreligious dialogue that illustrates the core vision of the academic discipline of interfaith and interreligious studies. When religious communities live in close quarters and must share resources and space, a "comparative religion" approach does not work. Comparative religion may teach about what the various communities believe and how they practice, but it offers little or no insight into how those communities will impact one another when they must live and work together in one community. Interreligious and Interfaith Studies is the discipline through which these kinds of real world interactions can be analyzed and comprehended.

The process of fashioning our new Statement of Policies of Affiliation offers a case study in what happens when people of different religious traditions navigate the shoals of their similarities and differences as they try to live together in one community. That relational process is of the essence of interfaith or interreligious engagement. In drafting this new policies statement, we had to grapple with a number of issues that are universal when people of different religious traditions share living space, whether it be a common building like our Interfaith Chapel or a common community like a town or village. Some of the issues are quite predictable, such as how to share worship space and financial resources, how to schedule the groups in ways that are fair to all, and finding ways to juggle conflicts when holidays and special events for one community impact the others. Some more complicated issues included how to define a religious leader or chaplain, indeed what term or language to use for persons in that leadership role and what that role entails. A more subtle issue arose in terms of privilege, as the religious communities that had been on campus the longest found it difficult to let go of their privileged status and welcome other religious groups to the chapel, fearing loss of their privileged status. Just as conflicts in the larger culture erupt when the group that has been historically privileged (in the contemporary American context, Christianity) feel that privilege slipping away, so did those communities react when their status at the university seemed to be changing.

The issue which took the most time to resolve was that of proselytizing. The university's policy is that groups that affiliate with the chapel agree not to proselytize and to respect the integrity of all the other religious groups on campus. For those religious groups for whom proselytization is integral to the way they practice their religion (Evangelical Christians, Chabad Jews, Latter Day Saints), this topic was of crucial importance. Our collaborative process of working through that thorny issue offers another lived example of what it is to do "interfaith" or "interreligious" studies, since the interfaith/interreligious enterprise, both in the community and in the academy, requires that those involved refrain from proselytizing in order to enter into the interfaith/interreligious experience.

Setting the Stage

The University of Rochester is a secular research university with an undergraduate student body of 5030 students. The undergraduate colleges include the college of Arts, Science & Engineering, the Hajim School of Engineering and Applied Sciences, and the Eastman School of Music. Graduate schools include the Simon School of Business, the Warner School of Education, and the College of Medicine and Dentistry. A large percentage of the undergraduates major in STEM disciplines, including engineering, biology, chemistry, and business. The arts and humanities are less popular as majors for undergraduates. Students who are religious perceive the campus to be very secular and somewhat dismissive of religion.

The university has an Interfaith Chapel, a standalone building on the west end of the academic quad, directly facing the library on the east end with academic buildings and the student commons buildings in between. The chapel is situated on the banks of the Genesee River facing a walking trail and the water. The River Level of the chapel is large open space with bay floor to ceiling windows overlooking the river. The Interfaith Chapel was dedicated in 1970, having been built with funds donated by Virginia and Gilbert McCurdy, who were Baptists. The chapel was built intentionally as an interfaith building, with a large sanctuary that seats 500. The sanctuary contains no religious images or art. It has rainbow colored stained glass windows in the upper portion of the building, an organ, a grand piano, and a dais

upon which a table is placed for Christian worship. An ark, housing some of the Torah scrolls belonging to the Hillel organization, is at the back of the sanctuary and is moved to the front during the Jewish High Holy days.

The second level of the chapel houses the offices of the various chaplains who serve the religious communities that are affiliated with the chapel. It also has a large parlor/meeting room (Brennan Room), a conference room, a small meditation room, and a full kitchen. The River Level is a large open space that seats about 300 (in rows) with large windows overlooking the river and the walking trails. The river level is the most versatile room in the building and is used regularly by the Roman Catholic Community for their Sunday masses and by the Hillel community for Friday Shabbat services and dinner. On one side of the river level is an alcove containing a *bima*, an ark with Torah scrolls and a religious storage area for the Hillel Jewish community in which are kept prayer shawls, prayer books, and other paraphernalia for religious worship. On the other side of the river level is the Roman Catholic sacristy, containing all the accoutrements needed for the mass, vestments, and also the reserved sacrament. The river level also includes a "bride's room," as the chapel is a popular venue for weddings. The river level sports a kosher kitchen and a catering kitchen, both of which are heavily used by religious groups for regular weekly meals.

The Roman Catholic Newman Community and the Protestant Chapel Community are both celebrating fifty years of ministry on the University of Rochester campus in 2013-14. The Jewish community has been on the campus for nearly forty years previously as part of a consortium of Rochester area colleges that comprised one Hillel organization. As of 2013 the University of Rochester Hillel community has become its own not for profit organization and hired a new rabbi to run the U of R group. The University also has a Chabad group, served by a full time rabbi, with a Chabad House off campus, but a short walk from campus. The Chabad rabbi participates in the meetings of the Interfaith Chapel chaplains, although his students tend not to participate in interfaith programming. Chabad has been on campus for close to twenty years.

When the Interfaith Chapel was dedicated in 1970, the communities that comprised the chapel included the Roman Catholic Newman Community, the Jewish Community through Hillel, and the Protestant Chapel Community, which is a group of mainline protestant denominations that pool resources to employ one chaplain to serve the needs of Presbyterian, Episcopal, United Methodist, United Church of Christ, and Baptist students. The university offered space in the chapel to the religious communities, in return for which they supplied chaplains and programming to serve the religious needs of their various constituencies. In the early 1990s, the relationship between the University and the three religious communities was memorialized in a document called the Covenant between the Religious Communities and the University. That Covenant document was signed by the President of the University, the then-Director of University Religious Affairs, and the highest executives of the local Jewish Federation, the Roman Catholic Diocese, and the Genesee Area Campus Ministries board.

The Covenant established the parameters of the relationship between the University and the covenanting religious communities. The chaplains were paid by their various religious organizations, although their ministries received a financial subsidy from the university in addition to space in the Interfaith Chapel. The chaplains were also entitled to have university ID cards, use the library and the gymnasium, and receive free tuition for courses at the university. The university employed a director of University Religious Affairs, who was not

responsible for any one religious community, but worked to support the work of all of the covenanted communities and to foster interfaith engagement. The Director also taught in the Department of Religion and Classics.

Even when the covenant was signed in 1994, some criticized it as not recognizing the full extent of religious diversity on the campus. Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish traditions were not the only ones on campus at that time, and some acknowledged that the covenant did not fully embrace the true religious diversity on campus, as it did not include Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, or even minority Christian groups.

A few years after the covenant was signed, an additional signature was obtained from the local Islamic Center representing the Muslim community, although at that time no Muslim chaplain was assigned to the university. As time went by, religious diversity on the campus continued to expand with the creation of a Christian group representing the African American Church tradition served by a part-time volunteer chaplain, the addition of a part-time chaplain serving the Orthodox Christian Fellowship, the creation of a Chabad Jewish group on campus, an increase in the Muslim population that did then require the appointment of a volunteer chaplain to serve that community, and the creation of a student group serving the Hindu population. In addition, the Christian diversity increased as evangelical parachurch organizations like InterVarsity, CRU, Agape, and Basic all formed groups on campus and had some connection with the chapel as they did so.

By 2012, significant tension had built up in the Interfaith Chapel as religious groups that were not part of the Covenant felt marginalized and ignored, while those original covenanting communities and their chaplains enjoyed a significant degree of privilege with respect to financial resources, space in the Interfaith Chapel building, and visibility on campus at various events like Freshman Expo, Student Activities fairs, and public events where a chaplain is invited to offer prayer. To ease that tension and to create a process that would be fair to all the religious communities currently operating on campus, we took on the task of drafting a new document to structure the relationship between the university and recognized religious communities.

As we continue to live with the policies statement and the principles articulated in it, we struggle to map the boundaries of what is permissible interference with a religious group's practice and what is not. This is the stuff of "interfaith" or "interreligious" dialogue and the academic discipline of interreligious and interfaith studies. How the various religious communities impact one another and what influence the presence of the religious other has on how one lives one's own religion is the very core of interreligious/interfaith encounter.

In our particular context, the Hillel Jewish community was counted among the "privileged" groups that felt threatened by the impending changes to the process of affiliation. The Chabad Jewish group was one among several of the newer religious communities that we were seeking to include in the life of the chapel, and the Chabad rabbi was active in his participation in crafting this new agreement that we hoped would be more fair to all of the diverse religious communities now using the Interfaith Chapel.

Terminology

In the emerging discipline of interreligious and interfaith studies, terminology is confusing! At the University of Rochester, we use the term "Interfaith Chapel," although not because anyone intentionally thought through which term to use when the chapel was

originally built and dedicated in 1970. At that time, "interfaith" was the term most often used outside of academic circles when referring to activities between different Christian denominations and between Christians and those of other religious traditions. It reflects the then-prevailing Christian code word for someone's religion as being his or her "faith." I would argue, however, that *interfaith* is possibly a more all-encompassing term than is *interreligious,* in that it can be understood to encompass practices, rituals, beliefs, values, ethics, and behaviors that are not part of any particular historic religious tradition and thereby incorporates the increasingly large number of people in the American population who consider themselves "not affiliated" with respect to religion, those the Pew Forum has recently dubbed the "nones." Indeed, the Secular Student Association at the University has chosen to affiliate with the Interfaith Chapel as a "spiritual or religious" group. They might have been less inclined to do so had the chapel been called the "Interreligious" Chapel, since they do not consider themselves "religious."

The term "multi-faith" appears in the policies document as a descriptive term. It recognizes the fact that there are multiple religious and spiritual groups present on the campus. But the term multi-faith does not suggest that those groups actually have any relationship to one another or interact in any way. The term interfaith, however, does signal relationality and interaction.[1] We ultimately determined that "multi-faith" described the fact of religious diversity on campus, and "interfaith" expressed the commitment to building and maintaining intentional community between and among the different groups. Our distinction between these terms parallels Diana Eck's discussion of "diversity" and "pluralism":

> The language of pluralism is the language not just of difference but of engagement, involvement, and participation. It is the language of traffic, exchange, dialogue, and debate. It is the language of the symphony orchestra and the jazz ensemble. ... [P]luralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our very deepest differences.
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> First, *pluralism* is not just another word for diversity. It goes beyond mere plurality or diversity to active engagement with that plurality....Pluralism requires participation, and attunement to the life and energies of one another.[2]

So for our purposes "interfaith" worked out to be the best term as it felt more expansive than "interreligious," which seemed to presuppose a recognized religious tradition, and it suggests interaction and involvement, relationship and engagement between the various groups. [3]

Catherine Cornille's prolific works on interreligious dialogue and interreligious hermeneutics provides support for our argument that the word "interreligious" connotes interaction between recognized historic religious traditions. In Cornille's corpus, the articles and books all deal with recognized historic religions interacting, dialoguing, and engaging one

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[1] Stephen Graham, "Christian Hospitality and Pastoral Practices in a Multi-Faith Society: An ATS Project 2010-2102," *Theological Education*, Volume 47, Number 1 (2010), 5.

[2] Diana Eck, *A New Religious America,* (San Francisco: Harper San Francisco, 2001), 69-70.

[3] Another very minor, but practical reality, is that *interfaith* is simply easier to say and spell! "The Interreligious Chapel" would be more of a mouthful than university administrators want to handle in day to day discourse! And, when the chapel was built and dedicated, that was the term used, and it is quite literally engraved in stone on the building.

another. The underlying assumption in Cornille's works is that the dialogue partners are members of recognized historic religions, including indigenous religions. [4]

Conversely, the term "interfaith" often appears to describe groups or organizations that may not be rooted in any particular existing religious tradition, but that may borrow from or use rituals, practices, texts, music, art, or other artifacts of different world religions, or such as are uniquely created for that group to express its own worldview, belief system, spirituality, or practices. An example would be a description on the website of the iNtuitiveTimes Institute, which trains "interfaith ministers" for ordination. On their website, they describe an Ordained Interfaith Institute Minister:

> OIIM Interfaith Minister has studied at least three, and usually six, different major religious traditions and is trained to help the individual to develop a sense of personal spirituality, drawing on the spiritual practices of many different religions. [5]

This group is just one of many that train specifically "interfaith ministers," people who are not rooted in one historic religious tradition, but rather learn about many different religions and pick and choose practices and beliefs from among those religions as they carry out their ministry. Whatever one may think of the training and ordination of such ministers, the fact that numerous organizations exist to train and deploy them suggests something about the market in our contemporary population for that kind of "interfaith" ministry.

The use of the term "interfaith" as described above feeds into a concern that many people within the historic religious traditions have about the whole enterprise of interfaith engagement. Some resist interfaith or interreligious dialogue, because they believe that such efforts are an attempt to create a "one size fits all" religion to which everyone must belong. There is a common misconception that "interfaith" or "interreligious" means that the separate identities of the various religious groups are sacrificed in the name of creating some uber-religion that will satisfy everyone, thereby either eliminating or watering down existing faith traditions. As described above, some people who call themselves "interfaith" are people who have chosen to affiliate with or create a community that intentionally borrows or incorporates rituals, beliefs and practices of a variety of world religious traditions, while not strongly identifying with any one of them. However, many of those who are committed to the "interfaith movement" are those who are deeply rooted in their own historic religious tradition and who wish to engage those of other historic religious traditions for social, political, personal, and spiritual reasons. The term "interfaith" may cause confusion if one does not probe to discover which version of the word "interfaith" is meant in a particular context.

The "interfaith movement," which is now a global movement incorporating thousands of different organizations and coalitions, committees, commissions, and dialogue groups both formal and informal all over the world, refers commonly to those who engage in dialogue between and amongst representatives of existing, historic world religions. This movement's origin is usually pegged to the first Parliament of the World's Religions that was held in Chicago in 1893. For people who consider themselves heirs of that movement, or who identify

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[4] See, Catherine Cornille, ed., *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to Inter-Religious Dialogue,* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013); Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibilty of Interreligious Dialogue,* (New York: Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008); Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway, eds., *Interreligious Hermeneutics,* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2010).

[5] See, http://interfaithministry.com/institute/minister.htm, Retrieved 10/17/2013.

with it, interfaith encounter means learning about the similarities and differences between and amongst the historic religious traditions and growing into the ability to celebrate and appreciate both the similarities and the differences. With respect to differences in particular, the goal of the interfaith/interreligious enterprise is to reduce the fear of difference so that the potential and the opportunity that it presents for innovation, wisdom, and deepened understanding of self and other and even of the divine, becomes possible. In our policies document, we made it clear that the mission of the Interfaith Chapel includes both supporting the individual religious communities to grow and thrive in their own right and to bring those communities into dialogue and engagement with one another in a variety of ways. However, our use of the term "interfaith" also has the side benefit of encompassing those who might consider themselves "interfaith," because they have chosen to follow a path that incorporates the beliefs, practices, or rituals of a variety of religious traditions. While this particular constituency was not represented in our policies document discussions, that group is not excluded by our use of the term "Interfaith Chapel."

Notwithstanding the ambiguity inherent in the choice of the term "interfaith," its use in our context is appropriate. In the University setting, we want our chapel to be welcoming to students who do not affiliate with any particular religious tradition as well as to those who do. The term "interfaith" captures what Douglas and Rhonda Jacobsen describe as the "pluriformity" of religion on university campuses today:

> This pluriformity has two sides. One side represents traditional, 'organized' religion, and the main change here is that the range of organized religions in America has increased exponentially…The other side of today's religious pluriformity, however, makes things even more complex and confusing: The boundary line between what is and what is not religion has become thoroughly blurred. If secularity is like freshwater and religion is like saltwater, life in America is now thoroughly brackish.[6]

So for our purposes, on a multi-faith secular university campus, the term "interfaith" is a good choice to describe the work and mission of the chapel. It encompasses both the historic religious traditions in dialogue and encounter with one another, and the more free form, do-it-yourself pluriform spiritual and religious practices and beliefs of many university students today. In addition, it signals that the important aspect of our life together is engagement with one another across our differences.

As the academic discipline of Interfaith and Interreligious Studies takes shape in the coming years, the inclusiveness of both terms will be important for scholars working in this emerging discipline. The academic enterprise will include study of the interaction and relationships between and among existing historic religions as well as the emergence of avowedly "interfaith" spiritualities and/or religious groups and their interaction with the pre-existing historic religions. Both terms are needed so as to embrace the pluriformity of American religious and spiritual life in the 21st century.

Participatory Spiritual and Religious Dialogue

One of the requirements of the policies of affiliation with the Interfaith Chapel is that all religious and spiritual groups that choose to affiliate must agree to participate in explicitly

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[6] Douglas Jacobsen and Rhonda Hustedt Jacobsen, *No Longer Invisible: Religion in University Education,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 7.

interfaith programming on campus, and those groups that are served by chaplains or adult religious leaders must send that leader to our weekly chaplains meeting so as to foster interfaith engagement, understanding, and cooperation. This is an integral piece of what it means to be part of an interfaith community. If we were merely creating a multi-faith chapel, each community could simply do its own thing and never interact with the other communities in the building other than to reserve space or work out conflicts in sharing the physical resources of the chapel. We were firmly committed to the proposition that being part of the Interfaith Chapel requires interfaith engagement on multiple levels. This requirement of engagement is integral to what it means to do interfaith or interreligious study. Just as our affiliated communities must be willing to engage in various types of activities with the other religious groups in the chapel, the discipline of interfaith and interreligious studies requires of the scholar more than merely the linguistic knowing that has been so much a part of the scholarly study of religions. The discipline moves the scholar out into the world of interfaith and interreligious encounter as a student of that encounter in whatever diverse ways may be required to apprehend the material being studied. As Ursula King has argued, "the challenge of interfaith encounter is both experiential *and* academic…both methodological and substantive."[7] Interreligious and Interfaith Studies can rise to the challenges King posed in her article on the future of religious studies:

> Yet, besides the challenging task of critical analysis, there also exists a great need for creative synthesis and forward-looking vision. Interfaith encounter and dialogue can be experienced as a liberating praxis freeing partners in dialogue from the oppressive, narrow boundaries of their own standpoints, revealing the limited positions of their respective religious and cultural traditions, through which the world has been mediated to them. Within a global context the active engagement with religious pluralism and encounter can lead to both mutual understanding and mutual transformation…[8]

Interfaith engagement is by its very nature, participatory. This affords different ways of knowing than merely studying texts or philosophical writings. As Ferrer and Sherman write:

> Contrary to the hegemonic claims of the linguistic paradigm, then, it is becoming increasingly plausible that epistemological frameworks that take into account a wider-and perhaps *deeper* engagement with human faculties (not only discursive reason, but also intuition, imagination, somatic knowing, empathic discernment, moral awareness, aesthetic sensibility, meditation, and contemplation) may be critical in the assessment of many religious knowledge claims.[9]

In crafting our policies of affiliation, we required participating religious and spiritual communities to commit to various kinds of engagement, including educational dialogues, shared worship experiences, shared community service projects, and shared social activities such as meals. In all these forms of engagement, the different religious communities have the opportunity to learn from and about one another in ways other than a purely linguistic epistemological approach to studying another religion.

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[7] Ursula King, "Is There a Future for Religious Studies as We Know It? Some Postmodern, Feminist, and Spiritual Challenges," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion,* Vol. 70, No. 2, June 2002, 377.
[8] Ibid.
[9] Jorge Ferrer and Jacob Sherman, *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies,* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2008), 11.

This participatory engagement is of the essence of being an interfaith community. The kind of learning and knowing that happens in such an environment is of a different quality than a comparative study of another religious tradition. In comparative religion, the student learns about the other religion and compares it to his or her own or to another religion about which the student has learned. In comparative theology, the student delves deeply into the texts and traditions of the other religious tradition before coming back to the home tradition with new insights to bring to the theological enterprise in the home tradition. In both of these disciplines, the knowing is primarily linguistic and rational, using intellect and mind. In the participatory approach, other faculties of human knowing are employed to plumb the depths of human religious experience and wisdom.

In the participatory paradigm, the student uses different faculties to learn about the other religious tradition, including prayer, meditation, chanting, activities in the community, and social activities with those of other religious traditions. All of those lived encounters are ways of coming to know the religious other. As Ferrer explains, the participatory approach is "more sensitive to the spiritual evidence and honors the diversity of ways in which spiritual awareness can be expressed,"[10] as opposed to the purely academic or scholarly study of different religious paths. I submit that this participatory approach distinguishes interfaith and interreligious studies from its cousins, comparative religion or comparative theology. The actual participation in religious observances, in dialogues on religious, spiritual, or other issues of existential importance, sharing meals, sharing in service to the community, are all ways of coming to know the religious other and the religious ultimate (however that ultimate is named or apprehended in one's own tradition,) that are unique to the discipline of interfaith and interreligious studies.

In the process of creating the policies statement, some of the chaplains in the historic covenanting religious groups balked at the emphasis on interfaith engagement. There was some hesitation about the idea of having to engage with the other religious groups in the intentional way called for in the policies statement. When pushed to explain the concern, it became evident that they feared that the requirement that they participate in interfaith activities would detract from their mission to build up and foster commitment of students to their own particular religious community. I had to repeatedly emphasize that interfaith engagement could, in fact, become a vehicle for deepening the students' understanding of and commitment to their own tradition while simultaneously opening them up to the religious others in the university community in ways that would build up the larger community and allow for a genuine celebration of the diversity that exists on campus.[11]

Ferrer writes about the participatory turn and religious pluralism, explaining that the participatory approach can help to defuse the conflicts that often arise out of conflicting truth claims between religious groups. Ferrer ascribes to the belief that there are different religious ends to which each religious tradition is moving, and that, in fact, the different traditions are co-creators of spiritual reality.[12] Ferrer says, "Once traditions stop thinking of themselves as aprioristically superior or closer to *the* Truth, peoples from diverse belief systems can encounter each other in the spirit of critical dialogue, collaborative inquiry, and mutual

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[10] Ibid., 136.
[11] Denise Yarbrough, "Interfaith Encounter in the Pews: Bringing Interfaith Dialogue Home", *The World's Religions After September 11,* Vol. 3, *The Interfaith Dimension,* Arvind Sharma, ed., (Westport: Praeger Press, 2009), 220-221.
[12] Ferrer, 149

transformation."[13] Indeed, he adds, the religious differences then become cause for "wonder and celebration." He suggests the image of a tree to capture what it means to say that different religious traditions are co-creators enacting spiritual truth. The different religions, he suggests, have a common root,

> [T]he deep bond constituted by the undetermined dimension of the mystery in which all traditions participate in the co-creation of their spiritual insights and cosmologies…Like members of a healthy family, religious people may then stop attempting to impose their particular perception on others and might instead become a supportive and enriching force for the creative 'spiritual individuation' of other practitioners, both within and outside their traditions…This account would be consistent with a view of the mystery, the cosmos, and/or spirit as moving from a primordial state of undifferentiated unity toward one of infinite differentiation-in-communion.[14]

Ferrer's explanation of the different religions and spiritualities of the world as evidence that the spirit or cosmos is moving from undifferentiated unity toward a state of infinite differentiation is echoed by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks. Sacks understands the differentiation between religions as evidence of humankind's progress towards spiritual maturity:

> The challenge to the religious imagination is to see God's image in the one who is not in our image. That is the converse of tribalism. But it is also something other than universalism. It takes difference seriously…The faith of Israel declares the oneness of God and the plurality of man. It moves beyond both tribalism and its antithesis universalism…Tribalism denies rights to the outsider. Universalism grants rights if and only if the outsider converts, conforms, assimilates, and thus ceases to be an outsider. …The critical test of any order is: does it make space for otherness? Does it acknowledge the dignity of difference?…If we are to live in close proximity to difference, as in a global age we do, we will need more than a code of rights, even more than mere tolerance. We will need to understand that just as the natural environment depends on biodiversity, so the human environment depends on cultural diversity, because no one civilization encompasses all the spiritual, ethical and artistic expressions of mankind.[15]

In insisting that religious communities on our campus agree to interfaith engagement, we affirm our commitment to continuing that journey from undifferentiated unity to a state of infinite differentiation-in-communion. We state our commitment to becoming a place where the dignity of difference is a core value. Our context in the Interfaith Chapel is somewhat analogous to those who live in interfaith families and marriages. Proximity, shared physical space, shared financial resources, and daily contact in the university community throw the various religious communities together in ways that require that they go beyond mere "tolerance" of the religious other. At a bare minimum, it forces them to "deep tolerance," where they cannot walk away when the differences between them cause conflict, but rather must find ways to work through the differences, hopefully coming to a place of deeper appreciation and understanding of those differences. In her study of interfaith families, Kate McCarthy writes:

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[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid., 150,151
[15] Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference,* (London: Continuum, 2002), 60-61.

> The discipline of committed relationship has pressed many of the interfaith couples I observed into deeper levels of respect for and engagement with one another's differences. … This sense of interfaith relationship as a process rather than a prenegotiated settlement is a hallmark of the deep tolerance I came to see in many mixed-faith couples…[T]he deep tolerance of living intimately with that difference can be difficult and hurtful.[16]

In many respects, life in the university Interfaith Chapel is its own form of "interfaith marriage." The communities live cheek by jowl with one another, share kitchens, living spaces, worship space, financial resources, and, in many cases, student participants. The Christian groups agree every year during Passover, which is almost always also Holy Week, to turn over the lowest level of the chapel building to the Jewish community so that it can be *kashered* and used exclusively by that community for the entire holiday. This means the Christian groups must move their worship venues, clean out one of their kitchens, and radically re-organize how they do their work during the busiest week of their liturgical year. That kind of intimate engagement of these various living religions is the stuff of interfaith and interreligious studies and dialogue.

For the academic discipline of interfaith and interreligious studies, the attitude of wonder and celebration at the differences between religious and spiritual traditions and the acceptance of those differences as inevitable, welcomed, and necessary is another facet of what it means to do interfaith or interreligious studies. There is no need to make the traditions or their conflicting truth claims cohere. It is not the ends to which these traditions are moving that matters, rather it is the process of their interaction with each other, which itself co-creates spiritual truths that is important. Again, this distinguishes interfaith and interreligious studies from comparative religion or theology.[17]

Our university struggled to articulate a process by which diverse religious communities could live together in an intentional interfaith community in order to better serve our students and the university's mission to prepare them for adult leadership in the 21st century. The veritable explosion of religious diversity both in American society at large and on our college campuses in the past two decades could lead to one of two responses: (1) celebrate the diversity and understand it as a gift to be mined for yet unimaginable creative riches, or (2) retreat in fear to corners of isolation and parochialism which would not promote understanding, compassion and peace among the different religions and cultures of our world, nor would it prepare the students in our university for leadership in the religiously and culturally diverse workforce into which we will send them upon graduation. We chose to grasp a vision of interfaith and interreligious enrichment even as it presented challenges to old ways of doing and being religious communities on campus.

Proselytizing in Interfaith Community

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[16] Kate McCarthy, "Pluralist Family Values: Domestic Strategies for Living With Religious Difference, *Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science,* Vol. 612, (Jul. 2007), 196.
[17] The image of the tree with the trunk representing the common root out of which springs all the different religious traditions and spiritualities became the new logo for the Interfaith Chapel after we had completed this process of creating our policies of affiliation.

In the course of preparing the policies document, we engaged in considerable discussion about the University's non-proselytizing requirement. For a number of years, the religious groups affiliating with the chapel had abided by a statement entitled "Communal Expectations for Religious Life" in which religious communities at the chapel agree to cultivate interreligious understanding by facilitating interreligious exploration and learning among students. The Communal Expectations document states clearly, "Active efforts to convert or proselytize have no place in such a setting."

As we worked on the new policies document, members of actively proselytizing religious communities were part of the discussion and they pushed us to be more specific about what constitutes prohibited proselytizing on the university campus. The groups involved were Cru, an Evangelical Christian parachurch organization, Chabad, the Hasidic Jewish organization that actively proselytizes among Jews, and, to a lesser extent, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. All of these groups agreed that they were willing to curb their typical proselytizing practices in order to be affiliated with the Interfaith Chapel. They were willing to sacrifice certain proselytizing activities for the access to students, the recognition and status they would have as affiliated religious organizations, and the financial support they would receive from the chapel as affiliated religious groups.

Basically, the discussion on proselytizing led to an agreement that religious or spiritual group leaders and chaplains are not free to approach students on the campus to discuss religion or spirituality. They must wait for students to seek them out. They are permitted to have tables at student expos and activities fairs but must wait for students to approach them rather than their taking the initiative to approach students. The university regulates soliciting and flyering in dormitories and stipulates where flyers and notices of events and meetings can be posted on campus. Only recognized student groups can post flyers, and in the chapel, only affiliated religious groups may post notices. We require that all religious groups be clear about who they are in all their notices and flyers so that students do not inadvertently come to an event sponsored by a religious group not realizing that it is a religious group hosting the event. We wanted to prevent situations of spiritual "bait and switch" activities. We agreed that students may recruit fellow students and may approach their peers to talk about spirituality and/or religion, but cautioned the evangelical groups about not "training" students to become proselytizing agents in the student body. Genuine and spontaneous student conversations are encouraged. Premeditated and intentional attempts to coerce a fellow student into engaging in a religious or spiritual conversation that may not be that student's interest is actively discouraged.

The lengthiest discussion during this phase of our conversations was how to determine where the line is between talking about or sharing with someone about one's religious faith and "proselytizing." Our statement on this subject cautions religious and spiritual group leaders to "avoid any statements that would suggest to a student that they are in some way 'damned' or 'going to hell' or are misguided, or wrong if they do not belong to the leader's religious community." The document encourages students to use "I" statements when sharing about their faith and to avoid judgmental comments about other religious traditions, beliefs, or practices. The document also requires chaplains and religious/spiritual group leaders to exercise caution when working with students who express an interest in conversion to that leader's religious tradition, particularly if the student has been a member of a different religious tradition prior to entering college. Our policy encourages chaplains and religious leaders to encourage the student to speak with a religious leader in their home faith tradition

prior to making the decision to convert and to be sensitive to family dynamics and other social pressures that may be part of a student's decision to convert.

While we are clear that college students are absolutely free to make their own decisions about religious or spiritual affiliation during their college careers, we also tried to build in safeguards to ensure that students make an informed and appropriate decision, particularly when the conversion might be something that would cause significant familial consternation. In suggesting caution and collaborative consultation among the religious/spiritual leaders and chaplains, we instantiated in our chapel policies a principle declared by a consortium of Christian churches worldwide in a statement issued in January 2011, prepared by the World Council of Churches, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, and the World Evangelical Alliance, which cautioned Christians who engage with people of other world religious traditions:

> **Ensuring Personal Discernment:** Christians are to acknowledge that changing one's religion is a decisive step that must be accompanied by sufficient time for adequate reflection and preparation, through a process ensuring full personal freedom.[18]

In a college setting, where we intend to foster intentional interfaith community, this policy of caution and collaboration when students express interest in converting from one tradition to another is a way to be sure that the student is acting out of full personal freedom. And while the principle enunciated above was issued by an Ecumenical Christian organization, we applied it broadly to all the religious groups that affiliate with the Interfaith Chapel.

In the interfaith movement, the agreement not to proselytize is fundamental to any dialogue process. In the guidelines for interfaith dialogue promulgated by the World Council of Churches in 1979, an underlying assumption in all the suggestions for how to engage in dialogue is that the different parties to the dialogue will listen to one another with respect and that all parties to the dialogue are free to "define themselves." The WCC guidelines state unequivocally, "One of the functions of dialogue is to allow participants to describe and witness to their faith in their own terms."[19] As we wrote the document by which we would live out the intentional interfaith community that is the Interfaith Chapel, it was important to clarify the parameters of the agreement not to proselytize, trying to leave all groups with the freedom to exercise their religion as they see fit, and to share their religion with others while protecting students who might be vulnerable from subtle, manipulative tactics that might compromise their ability to exercise their own full religious freedom.

Interfaith and Interreligious Studies is particularly well suited to explore the dynamics of the tensions that arise around proselytization when groups and individuals of different religious traditions encounter one another. While a comparative religion approach would note that Christianity and Islam, for example, are both religions that proselytize, the Interfaith and

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[18] World Council of Churches, Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Evangelical Council, *Christian Witness is a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct,* http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/christian-witness-in-a-multi-religious-world, Accessed 10/25/2013.
[19] World Council of Churches, *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies, 02/10/2010,* http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-dialogue-and-cooperation/interreligious-trust-and-respect/guidelines-on-dialogue-with-people-of-living-faiths-and-ideologies, accessed 10/25/2013.

Interreligious Studies scholar will probe deeply into what the encounter between those religious traditions and others looks like in the real world, and how those traditions manage to engage in interfaith/interreligious dialogue with integrity without completely abrogating that religious heritage of proselytization and evangelization. What texts do members of these traditions turn to when determining how to engage people of other religious traditions? What kinds of "dialogue" do these proselytizing traditions find most beneficial, and what poses the most difficulty? Indeed, the discipline of Interreligious and Interfaith Studies is uniquely poised to tackle the issue of proselytizing as such activity has historically been the primary reason for many religious groups to eschew interfaith or interreligious encounter. There has long been an assumption within evangelical religious circles that interfaith or interreligious dialogue is anathema because of its restriction on proselytizing.

In our discussion of the non-proselytizing requirement, we had a lively conversation about an encounter between members of the Cru organization and a Jewish student who had accompanied a friend to a Cru event. That Jewish student asked the leader of the Cru event some questions after the discussion was concluded and found herself being in "dialogue" for 90 minutes during which time the Cru leader encouraged the student to accept Jesus and to visualize Jesus accompanying her around campus. The Jewish student was traumatized by that encounter, including the promise by the Cru leader to pray for the student. The Jewish student did not want to be prayed for and felt threatened by leader's offer of prayer. After much conversation among the chaplains and religious leaders, it became clear that the Cru leader was not sensitive to the history of Christian anti-Judaism and its residual effects on Jewish students. She simply did not understand how viscerally a Jewish student might recoil at being pressured to visualize Jesus. In the course of our dialogue about this incident, a dialogue that included representatives from Hillel and Chabad and a variety of Christian leaders, we explored the issue of Christian privilege.

The Dynamics of Privilege

Notwithstanding the recent Pew Forum statistics, showing the steep decline in participation and affiliation with traditional, historic Protestant denominations and a significant increase in non-Christian religions in the American population as well as the significant rise in the percentage of the population who declare no religious affiliation, it is still the case that the United States continues to be a predominantly "Christian" nation. Those of religions other than Christianity continue to feel as though they are the minority, and their religious rituals, festivals, practices, and mores may or may not be reflected in popular culture. American Jews have certainly become more integrated into American culture in the past fifty years, and "interfaith" engagement has included dialogue and engagement between Catholics, Protestants, and Jews since the post-World War II period.

In our Interfaith Chapel conversations regarding the new policies document, the Protestant, Catholic, and Hillel Jewish communities were the three original "Covenant" communities on the campus, and they initially resisted the process of creating a new model for affiliation with the chapel out of fear of loss of that privileged status. This resistance to making room for the diversity of religions now a part of our campus community was an echo of the same kind of resistance and fear of the religious "other" that fueled anti-Semitism in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the anti-Catholic hostilities that were part and parcel of our American religious life in the early 20th century, and the Islamophobia that infects our culture today. Even as interfaith and interreligious dialogue has exploded in our post 9/11 context,

"Christian privilege" has continued to be a factor impacting the dialogue process, particularly in cases where the Christians involved are not conscious of the extent of their privilege in our society. That Christians come to any interfaith or interreligious encounter in this country from a position of strength and greater power is a reality that some Christians are reluctant to acknowledge.

In a recent study conducted by the Association of Theological Schools (ATS) between 2010 and 2012, the dynamics of Christian privilege were obliquely addressed as the ATS schools began to wrestle with what additions needed to be made to theological education of Christian clergy to better equip them for ministry in a religiously diverse society. The fact of religious diversity is undeniable. ATS recognized that clergy serving congregations in this religiously diverse society needed to achieve a minimal degree of world religions literacy and some training in interfaith and interreligious dialogue. For the purposes of that study, the theological framework for considering the issue of doing Christian ministry in a multi-religious world was the concept of hospitality, a Christian theological virtue that all denominations within the tradition could share, even as they differed theologically in significant ways with respect to how they think theologically about religious pluralism.[20] The ATS researchers noted, however, that even the concept of hospitality might imply Christian privilege and a hierarchy with Christianity on top. Ultimately the ATS study adopted that virtue of hospitality as its lens for examining what was needed in theological education of Christian clergy because, "offering hospitality without concern for gaining advantage is a hallmark of the biblical practice."[21] It is also a virtue that is shared by all the Abrahamic traditions and so can serve as a foundational concept out of which all three traditions can manage their interactions. It can be tricky to determine in any given situation who is guest and who is host, but at least the concept of hospitality, an open and embracing and welcoming attitude to the "stranger," provides an affirming and positive start to interfaith/interreligious engagement. If applied with some degree of humility, it can go a long way towards diminishing the power imbalance between the majority-privileged religion and its dialogue partners.

In our context the issue of Christian privilege came up in a variety of subtle ways. Something as simple as what is the appropriate title for campus religious leaders became a study in the effect of Christian privilege on the campus religious climate. Typically, campus religious leaders are called "chaplains," which is a peculiarly Christian term. It is also a term that connotes someone with a particular set of credentials, usually including graduate theological education and formal endorsement and "ordination" by a recognized religious body. The Christian chaplains were loath to extend the label "chaplain" to religious leaders from other traditions, and even to Christian religious leaders from the parachurch organizations like Cru and InterVarsity, because they had not had the same level of theological and pastoral training. Of course, not all traditions train their religious leaders in the way that Christians train their clergy or Jews train their rabbis. By and large, rabbis in the United States have become comfortable with the term "chaplain" when they are serving in prisons, hospitals, and universities, even though it is not a term that is indigenous to their tradition. Jewish rabbinical training in the Reform and Conservative movements is very similar to Christian Protestant and Roman Catholic clergy training, so the term chaplain seemed to work fine for those groups, all of whom at the University of Rochester made up the original Covenant partners. As we prepared to extend the "privileges" of chaplaincy to religious or spiritual leaders who did not have the same kind of training, those privileged chaplains balked. It took

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[20] Graham, 2-3.
[21] Ibid., 3.

some time for them to become comfortable with the concept that other religious traditions must be free to determine who their religious leaders are and how they are prepared for that leadership. The conversations about what training is required before one can be considered a "chaplain" on campus illustrated the assumptions that Christians bring to an interfaith encounter and the extent to which these Christians, as the privileged religious group in this society, simply assume that the way they do things is the way all other religious groups should function.

The minority religious groups did not care much about whether they could hold the title "chaplain," but they did care about being eligible for the privileges the university would extend to a person with that title. As they have had to function in the university system, the minority religious group leaders have learned that the title chaplain does have meaning outside the chapel, so they embrace the term even though it is not a term that has meaning within their own religious traditions. Christian privilege continues to be present even as we implement these new policies. Ultimately, all religious leaders on campus who abide by the new policies document are eligible for the "chaplain" title. Most have chosen to use it when securing a university ID, because it confers status and privileges to them that they want in order to serve their constituency on campus.

Other indicia of privilege during our discussions included who gets space in the Interfaith Chapel building, how conflicts are handled when several religious groups are competing for the same space for worship and other activities, and how money is allocated to the religious groups serving the chapel. Ultimately, the original, "privileged" Covenanting partners did not lose their privilege, as we drafted the statement to distinguish between those communities that had part-time chaplaincies and those that had full time chaplains serving their communities. Unfortunately, the outcome of that compromise leaves the smaller, minority communities with fewer financial resources, less space in the building, and lower priority when conflicts arise with respect to reserving space. In the Interfaith Chapel, Christianity and Reform/Conservative Judaism are the privileged groups. Their worship needs take precedence over others, and they receive more financial resources from the University towards their activities. They also serve more students that the minority religious groups. Over time, as the minority religious groups grow, it is our hope that the resources we have available to support their programs will also grow.

For the academic discipline of interreligious and interfaith studies, the issue of privilege is woven into the enterprise. Wherever an interfaith or interreligious encounter takes place, there will be one religious tradition that is privileged in that encounter. In the United States, Canada, and Europe, Christianity would carry the privilege. In Saudi Arabia, Islam would be the privileged group. In Israel, Judaism carries the privilege. The dynamics of how the privileged group interacts with and offers hospitality to the minority religious groups is fodder for academic scrutiny. Privilege is culturally contextual, and the study of how that privilege is managed in any given context is integral to the interfaith/interreligious study of the phenomenon of the interaction.

In our context, the privileged groups did not actually give up any of the privileges they already enjoyed in terms of resources like finances and space. They merely opened the door for the minority groups to join them in enjoying those privileges. They did, however, have to compromise and let go of some of their preconceived assumptions about issues like religious leadership and how and where it is appropriate to share their religious faith with people who do not share that faith. The compromises they did manage to work out are slowly transforming

how the various religious groups see themselves in relation to the other religious groups, and that impacts how they perceive their own faith traditions as they confront other faith traditions. This is the very essence of interfaith and interreligious studies.

Conclusion

Interfaith and Interreligious Studies is an emerging discipline that bridges the existing academic disciplines of comparative religion and comparative theology through its unique focus on how different religious groups actually engage and interact with one another in the real world. The ways of knowing that inform this discipline include cultural/linguistic, intellectual knowledge and study, and also participatory forms of engagement and learning, such as prayer, meditation, chanting, dance, religious rituals, feasts and fasts and food, and engagement in the larger world around common concerns and social issues. The process of drafting the University of Rochester's Policies of Affiliation with the Interfaith Chapel was a microcosm of the way in which the faith traditions of the world are engaging one another in the larger American context and even globally. The issues of proselytization, privilege, limited resources that must be shared, religious leadership and its role in the culture, and the encounter of the sacred and the secular are all the stuff of interfaith and interreligious study and dialogue.

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Abraham the Missionary? The Call of Abraham in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
By Joel N. Lohr

> *Now the LORD said to Abram,*
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> *"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall [be blessed/bless themselves/find a blessing]."* (Genesis 12:1-3)

Probably more than any other in the Hebrew Bible (or what Christians call the Old Testament), this passage—the so-called "Call of Abraham"—is regularly used to explain not only why God chose Israel but also what God's larger plan is for the world. I should clarify, however, that this is almost exclusively with respect to Christian interpreters, or those with an interest in Christian theology. This is a crucial point, and in some ways is the crux of my reflections in this paper: *It seems to be taken for granted by many Christian interpreters that Genesis 12:1–3 is not only an important passage but a key passage, one that explains God's election of Israel and unlocks the meaning of the rest of the Bible.[1] Further, it needs to be underlined that this is in distinction to Jewish readers, those who usually understand the passage to be important, but for other reasons.* In this short paper I will examine why this might be so and I will suggest that readings of this type can in fact be harmful for Jewish-Christian relations, inaccurate with respect to election theology, and can reveal a subtle form of supersessionism that is best avoided.

The passage itself is relatively well-known as are its translational difficulties. The main difficulty comes in how we are to read its final phrase, which is often translated as "in you all the families of the earth shall *be blessed*" (NRSV). The problem is that the verb *nivrekhu*—be blessed—is in the niphal form and could equally be translated reflexively as "bless themselves" (or, in the middle, "find blessing"). The question, then, is whether the nations are passive or active in finding their blessing in Abram (whom I will call by his later name, Abraham, in this paper[2]) and whether, by implication, Abraham (and thus his descendants) is to be active in helping the nations obtain that blessing. In other words, is Israel called to *actively* bring a blessing to all the families of the earth? Is Abraham's call missional in any sense? And, given that 12:2b contains the "to be" verb (*hayah*) in the imperative ("be a blessing"), is Abraham the first of the Bible's apostles, a "sent ones" to all the families of the world?[3]

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[1] For more, see R. W. L. Moberly, "Genesis 12:1-3: A Key to Reading the Old Testament?" in *The Theology of the Book of Genesis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 141-61. In this paper I draw from this piece and build upon it, much indebted to Moberly's thinking and overall work.

[2] I do this for the sake of convenience, and to avoid possible confusion for readers. It may also help to facilitate interreligious dialogue among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, all of whom know this patriarch through this more common name ("Ibrahim" in Islam).

[3] For a discussion suggesting that the imperative in 12:2b is significant, see David J. A. Clines, "What Happens in Genesis," in *What Does Eve Do to Help? and Other Readerly Questions to the Old Testament* (Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series 94; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 49-66 (here 56). Contrast Keith N. Grüneberg, *Abraham, Blessing and the Nations: A Philological and Exegetical Study of Genesis 12:3 in its Narrative Context* (Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft 332; Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2003), 142-52, who examines

It seems the most influential readings of this passage in modern biblical scholarship have come from Hans Walter Wolff,[4] Gerhard Von Rad,[5] H. H. Rowley,[6] Claus Westermann,[7] and, in evangelical Christian readership—whose size and influence ought not be underestimated—from Gordon Wenham,[8] Gordon McConville and Christopher Wright.[9] All of these interpreters read the passage from a distinctly Christian theological perspective, and all of their readings share a commonality: all understand the passage to be of utmost significance for the Old Testament and the Christian Bible. Despite some variation,[10] the passive reading of *nivrekhu*—which is present in the Septuagint and NT— is influential if not instrumental. In fact, for Wright in particular but also for von Rad, the passage comes to control the interpreter's overall theology: "Mission" for Wright, and "Heilsgeschichte" (or Salvation History) for von Rad.

I raise this issue because although Jewish interpreters read the same passages[11] this passage has not, to my knowledge, captured the Jewish imagination in the same way, nor has it influenced Islam to the same degree. To be sure, the passage is important to Judaism, of utmost importance, but usually the focus is on Abraham's obedience in responding to the call as manifested in his going (Gen 12:4). Or, some Jewish interpreters acknowledge that divine election is clearly at work here but that the passage does not necessarily explain or give

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the issue but ultimately concludes that "the force of the imperative [here] is not to issue a command, but to state further the divine purpose" (146). See also Moberly, "Genesis 12:1-3: A Key to Reading the Old Testament?" 151-55.

[4] Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist," in *The Vitality of Old Testament Tradition* (ed. Walter Brueggemann and Hans W. Wolff; Atlanta: John Knox, 1975), 41-66.

[5] Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Old Testament Library; 2nd ed.; trans John H. Marks; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961), esp. 152-57.

[6] H. H. Rowley, *The Biblical Doctrine of Election* (London: Lutterworth, 1950). For a fuller examination of Rowley's work, see my *Chosen and Unchosen: Conceptions of Election in the Pentateuch and Jewish-Christian Interpretation* (Siphrut: Literature and Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures 2; Winona Lake, Indiana: Eisenbrauns, 2009), 12-15.

[7] Claus Westermann, *Genesis 12-36: A Continental Commentary* (trans. John J. Scullion: Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1985), 142-58.

[8] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1; Waco: Word, 1987), 264-83.

[9] Neither Wright nor McConville have written commentaries or books directly on Genesis but it is clear from their monographs and other biblical commentaries that Genesis 12:1-13 is something of a controlling passage for their overall work. See J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5; Leicester: Apollos, 2002); McConville, *Grace in the End: A Study in Deuteronomic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993); McConville, "The Shadow of the Curse: A Key to Old Testament Theology," *Evangel* 3.1 (1985): 2-5; Christopher J. H. Wright, *Deuteronomy* (NIBCOT 4; Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1996); and (especially) Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2006). I discuss both author's work in my *Chosen and Unchosen*, and critique their work on Deuteronomy and mission more fully in my "Taming the Untamable: Christian Attempts to Make Israel's Election Universal," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 33 (2011): 24-33. And again, see Moberly, "Genesis 12:1-3: A Key to Reading the Old Testament?"

[10] Wenham opts for the middle—"find blessing"—as does Wolff. However, both (Wolff in particular) find the blessing of the nations to be key to the passage, to which everything builds. Wolff puts it this way: "The syntactical gradient observed [in 12:1-3a] corresponds precisely to the movement of the whole toward verse 3b as the *conclusio*: in the people of Abraham all humanity can gain blessing" [139-40]). Although Wenham translates the passage in the middle ("find blessing"), and demonstrates his reasons for why in his commentary notes, in his concluding, final words reflecting on the passage (Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, 283) he seems to return to the New Testament's passive reading drawn from the Septuagint (Acts 3:25 and Gal 3:8).

[11] With important differences in how this is done, of course. See Jon D. Levenson, *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993). Especially pertinent is his: "Why Jews Are Not Interested in Biblical Theology," 33-61.

reasons for it.[12] However, if Judaism, and to some extent Islam, were to pick a foundational story from within Genesis that came to define the people, it would likely not be the "Call of Abraham" so much as the *Akedah*, or "the Binding"—which Muslims recall during Eid al-Adha and Jews read during Rosh Hashanah and other times throughout the year in their liturgy.[13] And there again, the emphasis usually on Abraham's obedience and God's gracious providence. For most Jewish readers the "Call of Abraham" is important primarily for Abraham's obedience (12:4) and how powerfully it speaks of God's special love for and blessing of this patriarch.

So why so much ado about this passage within Christianity? Why is it understood not only as important but even *the* controlling passage of the Old Testament, perhaps even the whole Christian Bible? To give you a taste of how the passage is read, and how interpreters relate it to Israel's election, let me provide a sample statement from Christopher Wright, who says the following:

> "God's call was explicitly for the ultimate purpose of blessing the nations (Gen 12:1-3). This fundamentally missionary intention of the election of Israel echoes through the OT at almost every level."[14]

He then states:

> "There was a universal goal to the very existence of Israel. What God did in, for, and through Israel was understood to be ultimately for the benefit of the nations."[15]

My purpose in highlighting these statements is to provide a picture of how some Christians read a particular passage of the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible, and in distinction to Jewish readers in particular. (Though I will not outline Jewish interpretations for the sake of time, in my examination of rabbinic literature and modern Jewish interpretation, this line of interpretation, with its heavy emphasis on the blessing of nations and mission to them, is not emphasized in the same way.[16]) But Christians hearing this may be saying to themselves: well of course, this is how the New Testament reads this passage; this is a Christian reading of the passage. There is truth to this. This way of reading Genesis 12:1-3 comes not by way of a breakthrough of the historical-critical method of reading the Bible, getting back to its "original meaning," but ultimately stems from Paul in the New Testament. In fact, for Paul this

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[12] That God simply loved Abraham, electing him in Genesis 12, is a central tenet of the all-important work of Jewish scholar Michael Wyschogrod, *The Body of Faith: God in the People Israel* (Northvale, N.J.: Jason Aronson, 1996).

[13] For a helpful overview of how Jews and Christians have interacted with the Akedah over the centuries, at times building upon the interpretations of each other, see Edward Kessler, *Bound by the Bible: Jews, Christians and the Sacrifice of Isaac* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). On the Akedah in Jewish liturgy, see Meyer I. Gruber, "Love Conquers Anger: The Aqedah in Rabbinic Liturgy" in *Unbinding the Binding of Isaac* (ed. Mishael Caspi and John T. Greene; Lanham: University Press of America, 2007), 1-6. For more on Abraham within Islam, see Tim Winter, "Abraham from a Muslim Perspective," in *Abraham's Children: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Conversation* (ed. Norman Solomon, Richard Harries and Tim Winter; London: T&T Clark, 2006), 28-35. Compare also the recent work of Jon D. Levenson, *Inheriting Abraham: The Legacy of the Patriarch in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

[14] Wright, *Deuteronomy*, 11.

[15] Wright, Deuteronomy, 11.

[16] Nahum Sarna, interestingly, does believe that the passive reading of *nivrekhu* is a "more likely translation," and does suggest that this blessing will eventually be of great ("universal") importance; however, he does not arrive at a Wright-like missionary reading. See Nahum M. Sarna, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Genesis* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 89.

passage, and Genesis 12:3 in particular, is the very gospel itself. Paul states in Galatians 3:6-9, working from the Septuagint:

> Just as Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness," so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you." For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

Paul may see things this way, and interpreters like Wright, McConville, and von Rad may agree. But my raising the issue today relates *not* to the fact that these interpreters agree but that they often operate as though their readings of Genesis 12 are the result of careful exegesis of the Old Testament, through use of the historical-critical (or a purportedly "neutral") method *rather than Paul*. Here we encounter the problems outlined by Jon Levenson in his debates with Jorge Pixley over whether (in that example) the exodus story can be read as a universal story promoting liberation and a "preferential option for the poor," or whether, as Levenson argued, it is an ethnically-dependent story focused on Israel as a special people loved by God, *that* being the reason for Israel's being brought out of Egypt.[17] The issue for me arises when Christian interpreters assume, or purport, that they are reading *exegetically* when in fact their readings are heavily influenced by the lens they undoubtedly and unwittingly look through. I am also uncomfortable when Christian interpreters seem concerned to correct other non-Christian interpreters who do not emphasize the nations, or don't see the nations as the reason for God's election of Abraham.[18]

I would like to end with an anecdote that shows a little something of this. When I first finished my PhD, I was invited to review Joel Kaminsky's book *Yet I Loved Jacob*[19] as part of a panel for the 2007 Society of Biblical Literature Annual Meeting in San Diego.[20] One of the participants was a senior Christian Old Testament interpreter from whom I have learned a great deal and whom I respect immensely. What struck me was this Christian interpreter's concern that Kaminsky, a Jewish interpreter, did not agree with Wolff's reading of the passage whereby the nations are the focus. The reviewer also seemed puzzled that Kaminsky did not see the passage as explaining Israel's election, something said to be "an almost inescapable reading." Now, to be fair, the professor in question addressed his questions respectfully and honestly—we might say in an exemplary dialogical fashion, one from which we can all learn. And in response Kaminsky agreed that election is indeed at work here, but that the passage is primarily focused on Abraham and his descendants, with the nations finding a blessing as a

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[17] See the following: Jon D. Levenson, "Exodus and Liberation," in *The Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, and Historical Criticism: Jews and Christians in Biblical Studies* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 127-59; Levenson, "Liberation Theology and the Exodus," in *Jews, Christians, and the Theology of the Hebrew Scriptures* (ed. Alice Ogden Bellis and Joel S. Kaminsky; Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series 8; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 215-30; "The Perils of Engaged Scholarship: A Rejoinder to Jorge Pixley," in ibid., 239-46; and "The Exodus and Biblical Theology: A Rejoinder to John J. Collins," in ibid., 263-75. Corresponding articles in the discussion are, Jorge V. Pixley, "History and Particularity in Reading the Hebrew Bible: A Response to Jon D. Levenson," in ibid., 231-37; and John J. Collins, "The Exodus and Biblical Theology," in ibid., 247-61. See my discussion on Levenson in *Chosen and Unchosen*, 71-90.

[18] I here work with the assumption that divine election is at work in the book of Genesis, even if it comes to fuller expression in Deuteronomy. See further my *Chosen and Unchosen* as well as Nathan MacDonald, "Did God Choose the Patriarchs? Reading for Election in Genesis," in *Genesis and Christian Theology* (ed. Nathan MacDonald, Mark W. Elliott and Grant Macaskill; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 245-66.

[19] Joel S. Kaminsky, *Yet I Loved Jacob: Reclaiming the Biblical Concept of Election* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2007).

[20] The papers presented were eventually published in the *Review of Biblical Literature*.

"consequence"—he strongly resisted the notion that this passage explains the purpose of Israel's election. But I was still struck by a Christian interpreter who just could not help but attempt to correct, or minimally influence, a Jewish interpreter to see the blessing of the nations as the reason for Israel's election, something understood to be clear in Genesis 12.

My hope for this paper is that Christian interpreters might come to acknowledge why they read Genesis 12:1-3 as they often do, and will come to understand why Jews do not always read it in the same way. My guess as to why Christians focus on the nations, and see them as the reason for God's election, is that Christian interpreters, whether they choose to engage the issue or not, read the text *as* Gentiles. For them, Genesis 12:1-3 speaks deeply to their fate as nations, as Gentiles, those said to be blessed through Abraham. In short, they can't help but see this as the focus. It also equates well with Christian notions of mission and evangelizing the nations. We might say that we can't help but read with our own interests in mind. But I would like to suggest that doing so can risk making Israel's election a mere stepping stone to something better, and can potentially become a type of anti-Judaism, at least when it is implied that Jews "just can't see it" or that they are reacting to Christian readings. Christian interpretations that focus on the nations have their place, but we need to exercise intellectual honesty and critical awareness by acknowledging how and why such readings are achieved. It is often through an act of "engaged scholarship," not strictly on the basis of some kind of neutral, plain-sense historical-critical exegesis of the passage.

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Engaging Interfaith Studies Across the Curriculum: From Niche to Norm
By Cassie Meyer

Religious diversity, along with debate around religious belonging, pluralism, and inclusion, has become an increasingly fraught topic in American public discourse and public life. While many scholars – particularly those at seminaries or those within fields such as comparative theology – have been concerned with such matters for many years, academic interest in the applied realities of religious diversity has remained a relatively niche topic. In light of this, I am interested in the intersection between the emerging academic field of "interfaith" or "interreligious" studies and its application to experiences of religious diversity beyond the classroom. In exploring these topics, I will argue that interfaith/interreligious studies can foster learning with wide civic relevance, and thus has implications for higher education beyond seminaries or religious studies departments. From there, I will offer a constructive framework for thinking about the learning outcomes of this emerging field, namely what I call "interfaith literacy." I will conclude with a discussion of concrete resources for teaching interfaith studies to undergraduates at four-year institutions with these applied civic goals in mind.

Given the fraught nature of religious diversity in American public discourse and life, there is arguably a need to teach about religious diversity with the normative goal of educating students for engagement, civility, and leadership in a diverse society. How then, is the content of this emerging field applicable not just for students and scholars within religious studies or focusing on religious leadership, but for those within applied vocational fields such as education, business, health care, non-profit, or international work as well as the general student population? Let us consider three distinct "levels of engagement" with interfaith studies that a given college or university that might consider.

The first level of engagement, what I will call the "civic" or "literacy" level, is concerned with the student population broadly and asks how interfaith studies is relevant to educating students to be engaged citizens in a religiously diverse world. Because of the broad application, a university might consider incorporating interfaith studies into campus-wide learning initiatives, such as first-year seminars and all-school common book reads. Faculty could ask how these topics might be engaged in general education requirements or popular courses taken by a wide swath of the student body, considering a basic level of literacy necessary for engaging with a religiously diverse world. The second level of engagement, which we call the "professional" or "leadership" level, is concerned with students entering into professions in which engaging religious diversity constructively is a necessary competency. With this in mind, a campus might offer a multi-disciplinary concentration or course-sequence in interfaith studies, with courses taught by religious studies faculty as well as faculty in the given fields geared toward helping students to navigate religious diversity in their professional careers. Fieldwork, study abroad, and other experiential learning opportunities would be essential to the professional application of interfaith studies, giving student a chance to encounter interfaith cooperation and religious diversity first hand. Finally, recognizing the need for increased research, writing, and advanced coursework within interfaith studies, there is a level of "specialization" or "expertise" cultivated by faculty, undergraduate, and graduate students interested in this topic as specialists. One might look to fields of study like urban studies, social work, and peace studies--fields that have applied and

practical dimensions, rich bodies of research and literature, and dedicated centers of study and faculty to imagine what it might look like for interfaith studies to become an established field within a given university as well as across institutions.

As scholars seek to define and give shape to this developing field, one of the key questions for consideration is what a student should know and be able to do upon completion of a given class or course of study. In the case of interfaith/interreligious studies, I am interested in what learning outcomes can be expected given this goal of civic application. Put differently, what outcomes can we identify that are necessary for students hoping to enter a variety of professions to be able to positively navigate religious diversity, and how should these outcomes shape the development of curriculum, content, and pedagogy? Looking at recent social science research into how diverse groups form ties and build social capital, one approach to interfaith/interreligious studies might focus on developing concrete skills in students to build relationships between diverse groups, and on fostering appreciative knowledge of diverse religious traditions.[1] Such skills should be both broadly applicable to relationship-building across lines of religious and non-religious difference, as well as the specific skills that might be relevant to a given profession (e.g. the skills particular to a public official versus those particular a nurse seeking to engage religious diversity productively). In terms of knowledge, interfaith studies might be concerned with knowledge that contributes to relationship-building and navigating difficult situations. Beyond a basic "religious literacy," such knowledge – what we call "interfaith literacy" – should include topics such as a knowledge of know diverse religious and non-religious traditions articulate working with those of other backgrounds and knowledge of the shared values that different groups share and can work together on, thus forming the basis of common action and relationship-building.[2]

These outcomes – relationship-building skills and knowledge that fosters interfaith literacy – raise important questions for the implementation of interfaith studies within a college or university curriculum. Thus, I want to spend the remainder of my comments exploring a few of the concrete ways that universities my organization, Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), has partnered with have thought about these ideas within their curriculum. In the examples, I'll focus primarily on the "citizenship/literacy" level and the "professional/leadership" level, and less on the "specialist/expert" level. This is because while I recognize the significance of that level of engagement with interfaith studies, I am not myself a scholar with such expertise. Our work at Interfaith Youth Core is focused primarily on undergraduate institutions holistically engaging interfaith within the curriculum and across the institution; we are heartened to see the ways that many seminaries, divinity schools, and other schools of advanced study are engaging with these questions, and will leave those matters to the experts.

Before getting to specific examples of how campuses are engaging the citizenship and leadership levels of their student populations, the first tool I want to consider helps to contextualize what interfaith learning might look like for different kinds of students taking on different levels of expertise. The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric, modeled on AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics, was developed in partnership between faculty at Wofford

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[1] For an extended consideration of how social science research can inform interfaith efforts, see Eboo Patel, *Sacred Ground* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2012), pp. 65-87.

[2] Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer, "Interfaith Cooperation on Campus: Teaching Interfaith Literacy," *Journal of College and Character*, 12, no. 4 (2011), pp. 1-7.

College, Elon University, and IFYC.[3] The rubric can help faculty assess student interfaith learning by looking at an individual project, paper, or program as well as considering student growth along the rubric across multiple assignments within a course. The rubric is meant to be a starting point, its terms and movements are meant to be contested, but the creators of the rubric hope it helps faculty think about how to measure the interfaith learning that often happens in their classrooms and think about how such learning contributes to students' development as global citizens. It is useful in this conversation because it points to the different ways a student might be engaged with the topics surrounding interfaith studies. You might expect a student learning about this at the broadest level to be at a 1 or a 2 on some of these measures, whereas a student who graduates from college focusing much of her efforts on these topics and planning to continue to study them in graduate school might score mostly 4s.

With this additional framing in mind, let's consider what I've called the "citizenship" or "literacy" level of engaging interfaith studies within the curriculum. Dominican University, in River Forest, Illinois, publicly articulated "interfaith learning" as central to their values as a Catholic liberal arts college educating students for diverse vocations and professions. As part of this, they identified 14 "Interfaith Learning Outcomes" that focus on the Attitudes, Knowledge, Skills, and Actions all Dominican students should have upon graduating. Examples of these outcomes include the expectation that a graduating student:

- Critically evaluates the role that one's own religious, spiritual, or ethical worldview has played socially, culturally, and historically.
- Explains why knowledge about one's own religious, spiritual, or ethical worldview is important for one's future profession.
- Communicates in ways that can build relationships and foster dialogue with various others.
- Seeks to establish common ground while acknowledging conflict as it arises.[4]

To contribute to students' growth around these learning outcomes, Dominican has taken on the task of incorporating interfaith themes throughout curricular and co-curricular activities. Within their core curriculum, they have added required texts to the seminars that all sophomores and juniors take that touch on interfaith themes, including Thich Nhat Hahn's *Living Buddha, Living Christ* and Diana Eck's *Encountering God*. They provided resources for faculty interested in creating explicit interfaith learning opportunities for students and modules for facilitating an interfaith dialogue or a site visit to a local diverse religious community. They also created opportunities for faculty to discuss different tactics for teaching these texts and to raise critical questions around the proper role for interfaith engagement within the classroom.[5]

Next, Dominican engaged faculty across disciplines in conversations around how their teaching supported the development of these learning outcomes, worked with different

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[3] View the *Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric* here www.ifyc.org/rubric. For an overview of the development process, see Katie Bringman Baxter, "Measuring Student Learning for Interfaith Cooperation: The Pluralism and Worldview Engagement Rubric," *Journal of College and Character*, 14, no. 3 (2013): 259-266. For more on AAC&U's VALUE Rubrics see www.aacu.org/VALUE/rubrics/.

[4] To see the full list of learning outcomes, and read about the process of developing them, see Jeffrey Carlson, "Building and Assessing a Culture of Interfaith Learning, *Diversity & Democracy*, 16, no. 3 (Summer 2013). Available online at: http://www.aacu.org/diversitydemocracy/vol16no3/carlson.cfm.

[5] Many of these resources are available on IFYC's website at www.ifyc.org/teaching-interfaith.

departments and schools within the university to connect more deeply to these learning outcomes, and helped faculty to create rubrics to measure students' learning. In doing so, Dominican developed ways not only to engage the broad student body in interfaith learning, but also to support those students whose professional trajectory would have particular resonance with the questions raised by interfaith studies. Dominican's efforts to contextualize interfaith learning within particular disciplines and professional schools speaks to the "professional" or "leadership" level of engagement – that is, what it might look like to support students for whom engaging religious diversity will be professionally relevant. For example, students in fields such as health care, education, public service, business, social work may all find interfaith studies relevant to their careers and education. There are additional ways that campuses are thinking about engaging students at this professional level. One is by creating interdisciplinary minors or course sequences in topics like "interfaith studies" or "multifaith leadership"; several campuses are pioneering what these minors might look like. Through funding from the Teagle foundation, IFYC is bringing together a group of those campuses this January to explore best practices, challenges, and opportunities in interfaith studies course sequences, with the opportunity to offer campuses funding to support the development of such course sequences.[6]

While many campuses are not ready for such a large-scale institutional commitment, at IFYC we have seen a number of faculty work to raise these applied questions in their courses in ways that explicitly connect to the development of students civic and literacy skills in relationship to religious diversity as well as deeper professional or leadership development. In our work, we have found case studies to be a particularly useful classroom tool to help students make the connection between the work that they may do beyond college and religious diversity, a method that Dr. Diana Eck has been pioneering for many years. In the courses I teach with IFYC's founder and president, Dr. Eboo Patel, we often use articles from the week's news that focus on tensions or conflict around religious diversity, asking students to reflect on how they might respond if the given incident took place in their local community. These give students a chance to identify the complex ways that religious diversity plays out in a given situation, analyze the responses of various actors, and demonstrate application of theory to concrete situation.[7] One of our faculty partners, Karla Suomala of Luther College, was interested in creating a series of case studies that located students or young people as the central actors in situations of religious tension or engagement. These cases look at real-life incidents of interreligious tension where students or young people are the primary actors and decision-makers. Such case studies can be useful in a course specifically touching on interfaith studies, such as a look at religious pluralism in America, or a comparative religions course, but also can help bring interfaith themes – and thus broaden the application of interfaith studies – to courses within other disciplines, such as history, political science, sociology, and others.

With these concrete resources as examples of what interfaith studies might look like at the "literacy" or "citizenship" levels, and at the "leadership or professional" level, as well some tools to begin to think about measuring interfaith learning, I want to conclude my remarks with a few concrete questions for reflection, to prompt this group to think collectively about how interfaith studies might be engaged both within their own courses and across disciplines within their institutions:

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[6] See www.bit.ly/InterfaithStudies for more information on the interfaith course sequences project.

[7] Eboo Patel and Cassie Meyer, "Current Events as Interfaith Engagement Case Studies," *Teaching Theology and Religion* 16, no. 4, p. 300.

1. What are the existing resources you might access in your institution to think about interfaith in the curriculum at the "literacy" or "citizenship" level?
2. What are ways that you are already teaching that might support students' growth at the "professional" or "leadership" level?
3. Do the learning outcomes or rubric help you think about how your work might contribute to interfaith learning?

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