

Methodological Presuppositions for Engaging the Other in the Post-Vatican II Context: Insights from Ignatius and Lonergan

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Abstract

This paper articulates the methodological presuppositions for inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in Catholic theology in a Post-Vatican II context. It argues that the Presupposition to St. Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and features of Bernard Lonergan's thought help to explicate an important method for engaging the other.

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to articulate the methodological presuppositions for carrying out inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in Catholic theology in a Post-Vatican II context. The paper argues that the Presupposition to St. Ignatius Loyola's Spiritual Exercises and features of Bernard Lonergan's thought help to explicate the method for engaging the other that is more appropriate for a pluralistic context than in previous ages in Church history.

It proceeds with a summary of the paradigm shift in Christian self-understanding in this ecumenical and pluralistic context. It then summarizes the work of Ignatius and Lonergan as each pertains to the methodological presuppositions for dialogue, and finally, it raises some questions about the limits of dialogue as discourse.

The Paradigm Shift

The Protestant theologian David Bosch and the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner both characterize our era of Christian self-understanding in terms of a paradigm shift (Rahner, 1979; Bosch, 1991).¹ Bosch refers to the paradigm shift as the ecumenical age. For Rahner, Vatican II represented the formal recognition that the Church was coming of age as a "world Church." He suggested that the Church had not been involved in this kind of shift in its self-understanding since the time of St. Paul.

¹ Rahner articulates two major paradigm shifts in the Church's theology of mission, while the Protestant Bosch articulates five major shifts in more detail.

In the past few years, there has been a plethora of books and articles addressing the significance of Vatican II.² Regardless of how historians will eventually weigh the historical significance of that Council, one cannot ignore its achievements. Some of these include the recognition of the *ecclesia particularis*, or local church; the movements towards reconciliation with the Eastern Church; the incorporation of the vernacular into the liturgical life; the *Declaration on Religious Freedom*, respecting the dignity of other religious beliefs; and the affirmation of other religions, including a marked about-face concerning the Church's relationship with the Jews. In addition, I have argued that the Council is unprecedented in invoking the language of mutuality in terms of the Church's outward (*ad extra*) relations (2008). Pertinent official Church documents from the Council include *The Church in the Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)*, the Decree on Ecumenism (*Unitatis Redintegratio*) and the Declaration on Non-Christian Religions (*Nostra Aetate*).³ What is paradigmatic about this shift in the Church's self-understanding is the recognition that the Church's relations with the other now

² This hermeneutic has been bolstered by the five volume history of Vatican II recently made available in English. (Alberigo, 1995-2005; See O'Malley, 2008; Barratt, 2006).

³ *Gaudium et Spes* invokes the idea of mutuality in the Introduction to Chapter IV, which is titled, "The Church and the World as Mutually Related." The chapter speaks about how the Church can enrich the individual and society and then in §44 acknowledges how the Church is enriched by the other: "Just as it is in the world's interest to acknowledge the Church as a historical reality...the Church herself knows how richly she has profited by the history and development of humanity." There is recognition that historically the Church has been involved in a mutually enriching relationship with the other. Again, what makes this document and others of Vatican II distinctive is the formal, explicit recognition of this relationship—a development, as Komonchak states, of the Church's self-constitution and reflective self-consciousness.

Moreover, the document advocates a continuing, living exchange between the Church and various cultures (GS, §44). Similarly, in a subsequent chapter, it speaks of a mutual enrichment between the Church and other cultures: "Faithful to her own tradition and at the same time conscious of her universal mission, she can enter into communion with the various civilizations, *to their enrichment and the enrichment of the Church herself*" (GS, §58, emphasis added).

The *Decree on Ecumenism (Unitatis Redintegratio I §4)* emphasizes the importance of maintaining "mutual relations" in the dialogue with other Christian traditions. The decree advocates a "change of heart" or conversion for those involved (presumably both parties) in the process. "Mutual brotherly [and sisterly] love" is viewed as the fruit of unity (UR II §7). It acknowledges the importance of mutual respect, esteem and mutual understanding. In matters of doctrinal differences, one could say, it encourages the focus on complementary rather than contradictory differences: "In such cases, these various theological expressions are to be considered often as mutually complementary rather than conflicting" (UR III, 1 § 17).

The *Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (Nostra Aetate)* repeats the call for "mutual understanding" and respect in the dialogue between religions (§3, 4). In his commentary, Walter Abbot clarifies the significance of the Council's use of *mutual*: "The word 'mutual' indicates the Council hopes for two-way communication; the Council Fathers here take an initiative (just as the *Decree on Ecumenism* urges Catholics to take the initiative in proposals for dialogue with other Christians) and hope for a response" [*Documents of Vatican II* (NY, Herder and Herder, 1966), p. 665, n. 20.] Indeed, the initiative the Council Fathers call for is something new historically in the Church's relations with other religions and Christian traditions.

must include mutual relations.⁴ In previous work I have argued that this dimension of the Church's self-understanding is best captured by an ecclesiology of friendship that complements communion ecclesiology. *Communio* would remain the primary conception of the Council documents in terms of articulating the origin, nature and mission of the Church—*Ecclesia ad intra* (Dadosky, 2008).

For Rahner, in the centuries leading up to Vatican II, ecclesial identity was not differentiated from European culture. His acknowledgment that the post-Vatican II Church is coming of age as a world-church is harmonious with the Council's recognition of the local church.

Bernard Lonergan addresses this paradigm shift in terms of the movement from a "classicist notion of culture" to an "empirical notion of culture." Such a transition is brought about, among other things, by the emergence of modern science and by the turn to the subject in philosophy. The classicist notion of culture was conceived as "normative" rather than as empirical, as universal rather than particular. Classicist assumptions emphasized fixed laws that were static and unchanging. The method of theology proceeded downwards from above by deducing from Aristotelian-like first principles to the context in question (Lonergan, 1990, 300-302). The implications for evangelization meant that Christianity was not different from high European culture and so to plant the Gospel was to supplant the indigenous cultural context with European Christianity, save for a few exceptions. In the words of Lonergan, "The classicist is no pluralist" (1990, 301).

By contrast, an empirical notion of culture begins from below. Various contexts inform any broader notion of culture in a heuristic way. The method is historical, dynamic and begins with the particular context moving upward for a more deeply informed theology. That is, one must account for the various global contexts in order to articulate a notion of culture, otherwise one risks the same mistake of the so-called "arm chair" anthropologists. It is noteworthy, however, that current postmodern tendencies tend to go in the opposite direction of the classicist notion of culture. That is, they claim that there are no universals and that cultural differences are expressions of an unbound tapestry of meanings that can never be fully understood. Differences must be affirmed in their uniqueness, hence *vive la difference!* However, the postmodern perspective has overlooked (as have some Christians) that there are different types of differences, some which are not worthy of celebration and some which mark the difference between good and evil.⁵ The failure to distinguish the different types of differences accurately or the failure to differentiate them at all is a failure of discernment. I will return to the topic of discernment in part three of this paper.

⁴ The authentic self is never a self-possessed "self" but one that is beholden to the other. Consequently, the Church's self is constituted in relation not only to God, but also as this affects its relationship to other Christian traditions, religions, cultures, including secular culture.

⁵ Lonergan helpfully distinguished between complementary, contradictory and genetic differences. But I will return to this below (1990, 236).

The recognition of a shift to an empirical notion of culture underpins much of the shift in modern theology that takes its starting point “from below.” Most clearly this involves an emphasis on the particular or local church (*ecclesia particularis*). When the notion of culture (and, incidentally, ecclesiology) was classicist, the focus of the Church was as *universal*, and so the local church was construed as a uniform ecclesial extension within the larger universal church. Following Vatican II, the emphasis on the local church was differentiated from the universal church in a new way. Principally, the local church is defined as the See or ecclesiastical region of an individual bishop. Practically speaking, however, the notion broadens to include multiple diverse contexts because a bishop can have within his See many particular cultures, each which have their own distinct ecclesial context. In short, the empirical notion of culture will give rise to an empirical notion of *ecclesia*.

This development, along with the ecumenical priority of the last 50 years, raises new questions, especially for missionaries. How does one express the Gospel message and values in terms of the meanings and values of the local context? Hence, the question of inculturation emerges. Within those local contexts the cultural meanings are often wedded to the religious values of the indigenous cultures. If one is to carry on the process of inculturation, how does one determine the line between successful inculturation and syncretism? Second, missionaries encounter various religions in their respective contexts, so with this new emphasis on inter-religious dialogue the proclamation-dialogue debate emerges. That is, how do Christians reconcile the Great Commission, the call to evangelize, with the ecumenical priority of dialogue of Vatican II? Is dialogue really just to be veiled evangelization? Is dialogue a compromise of the evangelical task? Moreover, this question takes on renewed significance because of documents issued separately by the Vatican and the World Council of Churches, documents in which dialogue is viewed as part of the mission of the Church. Both have also recognized the principle of mutuality in the process of dialogue.

In view of the Vatican Council’s positive valuation of the other, a question unique to our time emerges: What is to be an adequate method for engaging the other and for accounting for the variety of contexts in which this engagement occurs? How are we, in the words of Francis Clooney, going to insure that our dialogue does not become monologue (Clooney, 2005)?

I believe that the Presupposition of Ignatius’s *Spiritual Exercises* provides a methodological guide for engaging the other. Moreover, I believe this methodological guide, wedded to insights from Bernard Lonergan’s methodology, provides a further technical specification of the Ignatian presupposition, one that is adequate for addressing the Church’s potential identity crisis during this ecumenical paradigm shift. With the proper tools of discernment, these methodological presuppositions can serve as a priori principles for engaging the other in a pluralistic context.

The Contribution of Ignatius

In the Presupposition to the *Spiritual Exercises*, Ignatius⁶ wants to set the tone for the method of interaction between the maker of the exercises and the spiritual director who guides the exercitant. He directs them in the following way:

That both the giver and the maker of the Spiritual Exercises may be of greater help and benefit to each other, it should be presupposed that every good Christian ought to be more eager to put a good interpretation on a neighbor's statement than to condemn it. Further if one cannot interpret it favorably, one should ask how the other means it. If that meaning is wrong, one should correct the person with love; and if this is not enough, one should search out every appropriate means through which, by understanding the statement in a good way, it may be saved (Loyola, 1992, 31).

However, as the paragraph indicates, this is not just an expectation for the director and the maker of the exercises. Rather, it is the expectation, as Ignatius indicates, "of every good Christian," so presumably the Presupposition has a wider application than just within the *Spiritual Exercises*.

The late Carl Starkloff, S.J., a celebrated authority on inculturation and dialogue with aboriginal traditional religions, invoked this Ignatian Presupposition experimentally in his cross-cultural dialogue with Native peoples (Starkloff, 1996). Reinterpreting the presupposition in more contemporary terms, he emphasized the following principles:

1. Authentic discourse demands sincere openness in all parties involved—perhaps the Pauline readiness to "believe all things" (1 Cor. 13:7)—that never descends to mere credulity.
2. One must be prepared to offer considered and probing questions to one with whom one disagrees.
3. Challenges in a discussion are based on a desire to find the truth in the very position that is challenged (Starkloff, 1992, 7).

Starkloff admits, and most of us would agree, even in light of the ecumenical emphases of Vatican II, that what Ignatius is calling for is very demanding. It has

⁶ Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556) was a 16th century Spanish mystic who underwent a conversion while recovering from a war injury. He began reading the lives of the saints and sought to imitate their holiness through a life of prayer. After several pilgrimages and some profound mystical experiences, he developed the *Spiritual Exercises*. The latter is a four-week retreat based on scripture wherein retreatants dwell on the mysteries of the life of Christ with the goal of imitating Christ in their daily life in their particular vocation. After converting several of his followers through the *Exercises*, he went on to found the Society of Jesus (Jesuits). The Jesuit charism includes the regular vows of poverty, chastity and obedience but includes a fourth vow to go where the Pope sends them. Throughout their history, their reputation for education, missions, retreats and social justice is renowned. Ignatian spirituality includes a focus on 'finding God in all things' and on discernment as developed in the Exercises, so that God's will for a person can be made clear. For an introduction to his life and spirituality see (Traub, 2008).

rarely been carried out in the history of the Church. While this is not the place to go into textual commentary of the Presupposition, it is interesting, Starkloff notes, that one of the early redactors of Ignatius's proposition rendered the interpretation as "save the person, rather than the proposition" (1992, 9). This subtle change in emphasis alters the entire tone of the Presupposition to a one-way communication or what I have called "strict self-mediation" (Dadosky, 2008, 746-747).

In contrast, Starkloff points out that the Presupposition emphasizes the mutuality of the exchange between the director and exercitant, and this also presupposes the self-scrutiny of both parties in order to insure each has properly understood the other. Further, this mutuality presupposes the possibility of "mutual correction" (1992, 13).

This focus on mutual understanding and correction places the Ignatian

Presupposition in the avant-garde of inculturation methodology.

"Inculturation" refers to the post Vatican priority given to local churches to articulate their faith in their own cultural expressions, i.e. African, Asian, Latin America, Indigenous, etc., rather than European or Western categories. In the final section of his paper, Starkloff goes as far as to declare the Presupposition to be the principle of inculturation (1992, 19-20).

Every Jesuit encounters the Presupposition at the beginning and at the end of his formation process when he takes the four week Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius. Moreover, the integration of the Presupposition into the structure and everyday life of the Society of Jesus is encouraged. Hence, the formative aspect of the Presupposition helps to explain why the Jesuits have been so successful at inculturation in the past. Almost from their beginnings, the Jesuits were on the cutting edge of inculturation, practicing mutuality within various mission contexts. This was certainly the methodology of two of the earliest pioneers of inculturation, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) in China and Roberto de Nobili (1577-1656) in India. While adapting to their respective missionary contexts, they fostered mutual enrichment. The success of their methodology is summarized by Michael Foss:

The best of the Jesuit missions had conducted international relations with dignity and intelligence and so had won both the love of the simple Guaraní and the respect of the cultivated Chinese. And this was the more remarkable because it was not the habit of Europeans at this time to treat other nations with kindness or with understanding (Foss, 1969, 220).

Yet in spite of the Jesuit successes, he admits their "hints were not taken up." In fact, they were eventually thwarted:

Rome thought that the Jesuit method endangered not only orthodoxy, but also Roman rights and jurisdiction, and therefore condemned the Jesuit experiments. National rivalries, Western foreign policy and jealousies between the missionary orders then undid most of the Jesuit's laborious achievements, leaving only a nostalgia for what might have been and a

memory of uprightness in a period of greed, cruelty and bad faith (1969, 220).⁷

In hindsight, it would seem that the Jesuit “hints” and “experiments,” though short-lived, were in fact what Lonergan might call nonsystematic divergences from an otherwise strictly self-mediating recurrent pattern of relating with the other that prevailed during this ecclesial era. More recently, Rahner’s recognition that with Vatican II the Church comes of age as a world church was prefigured in the examples of Ricci and De Nobili.

Starkloff raises a question in his paper about the exigences of dialogue that may move the Church into a theological territory as yet unexplored. Inculturation presupposes listening to a culture in order to understand it more deeply with a view to better expressing the Gospel message within the given culture’s meanings and values. The Presupposition emphasizes the Jesuit approach of listening to cultures in an unprecedented and painstaking way by setting such a high standard for listening to others as rooted in the example of the *Spiritual Exercises*. Starkloff takes this further and asks whether listening (as dialogue) to another is enough, that is, he wonders whether one can truly understand another’s religious or cultural situation without some kind of “participant observation” (1992, 16). In fact, Starkloff participated in several aboriginal ceremonies throughout his career and earned the respect of many traditional elders for his efforts at inculturation (Starkloff, 2007).

Participant observation would add a new dimension to the method of dialogue. The 1990 joint pontifical statement *Dialogue and Proclamation* (§1, C) speaks of the different types of dialogue: “the dialogue of life,” “the dialogue of action,” “the dialogue of theological exchange” and “the dialogue of religious experience.” The first two deal with dialogue as the fruits of believers from various religions working together practically, and for social justice, in everyday life. The second two are carried out through verbal exchange in technical theological discussions and in the mutual sharing of religious experiences. However, although this document enriches our notion of dialogue, it does not speak to the kind of observer participation that Starkloff advocates. The dialogue of religious experience could be inhibited unless there is some kind of shared referent of mutual experience perhaps of the kind yielded by participant observation. The latter seems akin to John Dunne’s call for “passing over” and then returning to/from another’s perspective (Dunne, 1969, 5).⁸ It also suggests that inter-religious dialogue needs

⁷ The success of the Jesuit missions in China prompted the other Catholic religious orders carrying out missionary work in Asia to question their methods of acculturating to Chinese customs. Specifically, questions concerning the proper name for God in the Chinese language, the participation of Christian converts in some Confucian rites and in ancestor veneration combined to become known as the Chinese Rites Controversy. In the 18th Century Pope Clement XI forbade the Chinese Christians to participate in the rites. In response the Chinese emperor banned Christian missions in China. This ban was repealed in 1939 by Pope Pius XII. However, the Christian missionary efforts in China never fully recovered.

⁸ John Dunne was a doctoral student of Lonergan’s at the Gregorian University in Rome.

to remain exploratory, and it calls for those carrying out the dialogue to be careful on the one hand and for restraint from overly zealous ecclesiastical oversight on the other hand.

Let us assume that the Presupposition should be expanded to include the method of dialogue and to include participant observation. In order to do this in a way that respects the integrity of one's own religious beliefs, it will require discerning individuals who respect their own traditions and the traditions to which they are in dialogue.⁹

Another pioneer of observer participation deserves mention. Just before his death, Thomas Merton began looking for a Tibetan Buddhist adept at meditation to be his mentor in those practices. Sadly, Merton's untimely death robbed him and us of any fruits of his exploration as a participant in Tibetan Buddhist practices (See Thurston, 2007). But it would seem that his explorations had taken him beyond the forays of dialogue, and he was preparing to steep himself deeply into the Tibetan traditional religious worldview by way of participation.

If the Presupposition is going to become a principle for inter-religious dialogue in this ecumenical and pluralistic age, it will need more technical explication. In the next section I would like to spell out how this might look in terms of specific methodological presuppositions derived from Lonergan's method and the issue of difference. Lonergan was a Jesuit who was formed in the tradition of the Spiritual Exercises, and while he may have not explicitly invoked the language of the Presupposition in his thought, the language is implicitly there. The task is to specify it.

Transposing the Presupposition into Lonergan's Method

Transposing the language of the Ignatian Presupposition into Lonergan's method will involve three aspects: 1) an understanding of mediation, 2) distinguishing between different kinds of differences, and 3) the implementation of discernment in order to distinguish the different kinds of differences. The first two are specifically Lonergan's contribution; the third would draw on the Ignatian tradition of discernment as well as other spiritual traditions where useful.

I have argued for these three aspects in previous work (Dadosky, 2008). However, Starkloff's work has challenged me to go further by placing them in the context of the Ignatian Presupposition on the one hand, and by the suggestion that dialogue may require some kind of participant observation on the other. I cannot suppose that Ignatius would have approved of participant observation, although Mateo Ricci presumably did practice it successfully to some extent in 16th century China. The explication of participant-observation, however, would be new territory for the 21st century Church, and we do not know to what extent it is possible given

⁹ I have made this argument for the importance of discernment for the future of theology in the context of three of Lonergan's stages of meaning (Dadosky, 2010).

the dangers of syncretism and identity dissolution (See Starkloff, 1994).¹⁰ Syncretism does not respect the differences but rather seeks to blend them. Lonergan's contribution is helpful because of his emphasis on the mutuality of the dialogue and because he clarifies the distinct types of differences one can expect to encounter in the dialogue.

Mediation and Difference

Lonergan's *Method in Theology* begins with an axiomatic statement that theology mediates between religion and culture. In subsequent reflection on this statement it becomes clear that this mediation is not a one-way relationship, or "strict self-mediation" of religion to a culture or vice versa, but rather, it is one of *graced mutual self-mediation*, a two-way relationship of mutuality that is beneficial to both the religion and the culture. In addition, we can presume that religions can mutually communicate between each other, and they do so within diverse cultural contexts. This mutual self-mediation has occurred throughout the history of the Church, but the uniqueness of Vatican II is that mutuality is invoked explicitly in terms of the Church's external relations *ad extra*.

This recognition of mutual self-mediation means that we need a methodological correlate in order to articulate the multifarious relations that the Church can have with the other. Such multifariousness entails a specification of different types of differences, and Lonergan identifies three—complementary, contradictory (or dialectical) and genetic or developmental. As complementary, mutual relations can enrich all the parties involved. As dialectical, the relations can be mutually disagreeable or conflict ridden. Sometimes the differences between a religion and culture or between religions are merely developmental or genetic. An example of this would be the difference between early Jewish Christianity and post-Constantinian Christianity (after 314 CE), the differences between these two pertains to the complex of changing political and cultural contexts.

Complementary differences can be mutually enriching. The Dalai Lama states: "It is useful for the Christian to adopt some Buddhist ideas. And similarly for Buddhists to learn from the Christian tradition. To help each other. It will help to enrich both traditions" (Wilkes, 1984, 146). In general, Merton was attracted to Buddhist meditation practices because he felt the Buddhists were more adept at that aspect of the contemplative life and so he could learn from them. Meanwhile, the Buddhists have been influenced in part by Christians on the development of social teaching in Buddhism. The Dalai Lama admits that Christianity has challenged him to incorporate into his spirituality the socially responsible dimension of Christianity, including social welfare, social action and education. Likewise, the Vietnamese Buddhist Thich Nhat Hanh, who also dialogued with Merton extensively, would have resonated with Merton's social conscience in his

¹⁰ It is not surprising that Starkloff wrote extensively on syncretism and came to the opinion that we might have to allow for some of what he called "theological messiness" as we investigate these questions (1994, 93; See also Starkloff, 2002). Nevertheless, many Christians might say that the First Commandment is very clear and there is nothing to be messy about.

own lifelong endeavor to develop the social conscience of Buddhism, which he calls Engaged Buddhism (Hanh, 2003, 94-109).

In my own work, I have become interested in how the Diné (Navajo) notion of beauty might help to inform the Western notions of beauty that Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly claimed we have lost from theology (Dadosky, 2007). The Diné notion of beauty is central to their entire worldview and is at once an aesthetic, psychological, philosophical, ethical, and religious notion. Balthasar admitted in the Foreword to his *Theological Aesthetics* that his own treatment of beauty was “all too Mediterranean” and left it to others to integrate non-Western (non-Germanic) categories into a theological aesthetics. These are just some examples of the potential mutually enriching aspects when encountering complementary differences in the inter-religious dialogue.

Differences can be clearly contradictory, as when two religious traditions make differing claims about the person of Jesus Christ. For example, the claim by Jews and Muslims that Jesus was merely a prophet, albeit a respectable and great one, is untenable to the uniqueness of Jesus’ ontological status for most Christians.

Some contradictory differences can be rooted in human biases signaling that one or both parties in the dialogue are in need of a conversion from their own biases and prejudices. As *Dialogue and Proclamation* states, “Through dialogue they may be moved to give up ingrained prejudices, to revise preconceived ideas, and even sometimes to allow the understanding of their faith to be purified” (§ 49).

Throughout history, the prophetic dimension of Christianity often emerges when there is a dialectical difference. For example, John Paul II referred to certain aspects of the culture of the United States as reflecting a “culture of death.” He was trying to say something about the conflicting values between the secular culture in the United States and the Catholic position on values of life (John Paul II, 1998). In order to put the best interpretation on John Paul’s words, outraged Americans must place his concerns in context, shaped as they were in part by his own formative experiences living under two totalitarian regimes, Nazism and Marxism. John Paul II had first-hand experiences of how governmental structures can behave decadently.

With respect to genetic differences, Lonergan points out that religious development is dialectical that is, religions are shaped by the drama of changing historical circumstances including conflict (Lonergan, 1990, 110-112). Therefore, we can anticipate that within inter-religious dialogue, sometimes the differences encountered will reflect a difference in some aspect of a tradition’s development. A dialogue between an Amish farmer and an urban Evangelical, for example, will bring to light differences pertaining to the interpretation of technological development. Moreover, the beliefs regarding the roles of women and men may differ between societies that have integrated the fruits of secularity on the one hand and the so-called traditional societies on the other. These differences can be construed as genetic, although not exclusively so. Differing views on gender roles can be dialectical, depending on the presence of bias. Feminists identify a systemic bias in favor of men, namely, patriarchy. For example, at one point in the history of the United States women could not vote; by today’s standards the fact that they can

vote is simply taken for granted. The right to vote marks a development or genetic difference from previous epochs. But it simultaneously marks a moment in a society towards overcoming misogyny by a greater respect for women and in this way it is an overcoming of bias. In contrast, the assigning of different sex roles in traditional aboriginal societies does not necessarily reflect the presence of androcentric bias but rather may reflect a division of labor proper to the socio-economic context.

Discernment

If we are to invoke mutual self-mediation and the distinct types of differences as part of the basic presuppositions for inter-religious dialogue and as embodying the methodological explication of the Ignatian Presupposition, which is the course I am suggesting, then a renewed focus on discernment comes to the methodological forefront. Such discernment becomes necessary as soon as the Church acknowledges the possibility of the fruits of the Spirit residing in the other. This idea concurs with *Dialogue and Proclamation* in section 30, titled “The need for discernment.”¹¹ “While keeping their identity intact,” the document states, “Christians must be prepared to learn and to receive from and through others the positive values of their traditions” (49). The authors of the joint pontifical statement put their finger on a significant methodological issue. How are Christians to dialogue authentically and keep their identity intact, or in other words, to remain faithful to their own authentic Christian witness? Discernment will help prevent the extremes of triumphalism on the one hand and the risk of identity dissolution on the other.

The failure of discernment can affect the dialogue process in two ways. First, there can be the failure to distinguish the different types of differences at all, so that one falls back on a default stance of construing the relationship with the other in strict dialectical terms. Consider the bishops’ own admission from the Extraordinary Synod of 1985. They admit their own lack of discernment concerning the openness of the Vatican Council to the “World” effected the perception by the young people that the Church was purely institutional:

We are probably not immune from all responsibility for the fact that especially the young critically consider the Church a pure institution. Have we not perhaps favored this opinion in them by speaking too much of the renewal of the Church's external structures and too little of God and of Christ? *From time to time there has also been a lack of the discernment of*

¹¹ “The fruits of the Spirit of God in the personal life of individuals, whether Christian or otherwise, are easily discernible (cf. Ga 5:22-23). To identify in other religious traditions elements of grace capable of sustaining the positive response of their members to God's invitation is much more difficult. It requires a discernment for which criteria have to be established. Sincere individuals marked by the Spirit of God have certainly put their imprint on the elaboration and the development of their respective religious traditions. It does not follow, however, that everything in them is good.” (*Dialogue and Proclamation* ¶ 30)

spirits, with the failure to correctly distinguish between a legitimate openness of the Council to the world and the acceptance of a secularized world's mentality and order of values (Synod of Bishops, 1985, ¶ 4; emphasis added).

Of course, the bishops were speaking about the dialogue with the “world” and not with other religions, but what I am claiming for the methodological presuppositions would apply to all of the Church’s external relations. The significance of this quotation from the bishops is that it clearly recognizes the need for discernment for the Church between legitimate openness and uncritical acceptance. I applaud their honesty, and I suppose that their suspicion followed from the fact that the methodological explication of mutual relations and discernment has yet to be fully articulated and implemented within the Church’s theology.

The second way in which a lack of discernment may negatively affect the dialogue process is to mistakenly distinguish between distinct differences. Most commonly this occurs by not distinguishing between complementary and dialectical differences or by confusing the two. One of Robert Doran’s contributions for Catholic theology is his critical retrieval of Carl Jung’s work. Doran observes that Jung’s lack of clarity concerning contradictory and complementary differences in the Swiss psychiatrist’s reading of the Book of Job results in the suggestion that God has an evil, or shadow side. This suggestion, while it may be okay for Jung, would clearly be unacceptable for Christians who affirm a completely benevolent God incapable of evil (See Doran, 1990, 334-335).¹²

The failure to distinguish properly between differences can lead to a compromise of one’s religious identity especially if, through dialogue, one surrenders certain mysteries of the faith that are bound up and integral with that identity. Following the post-Vatican II emphasis on inculturation and contextualization, the question of syncretism has emerged anew. On the one hand, there are those who view syncretism as a threat to the integrity of the faith and dismiss it outright. On the other hand, there are those who see syncretism as an inevitable consequence of intercultural and inter-religious mediation. I am sympathetic to Carl Starkloff’s view that some type of syncretism or “theological messiness” will be inevitable. However, rather than despair or be threatened by this possibility, we need to prepare ourselves with the tools of discernment in order to distinguish in the specific contexts to what extent we can allow for some aspects of what Starkloff calls the “metaxy” of the syncretic process. Discernment will enable us to properly distinguish between those aspects of the tradition that can be inculturated, those aspects that can be blended without serious consequences, those that must be integrally preserved, and those aspects of the other tradition that must be resisted in the inculturation process.

Dialogue as Participation?

¹² By Jung’s own definition of the *shadow*, it would be logically impossible for an omniscient God to be unconscious of something.

If we are going to ask what another person means by their proposition, can we rely on the integrity of adequate verbal discourse in order to fully understand the proposition? Or, should there be some experiential component in order to enrich our understanding? Starkloff's suggestion of participant observation brings a new question to the Ignatian Presupposition and to the method of dialogue in general. To what extent do we need to, in the words of John Dunne, pass over to another's tradition in order to understand those religious claims more deeply? To what extent *can* we pass over? I do not have the answer for this, but I will share my own experience which led me to take Starkloff's suggestion of dialogue and participant observation more seriously.

In the summer of 1994 I was the patient in a traditional Diné (Navajo) Blessingway ceremony. The ceremony in which I participated was an abbreviated version of one that can last as long as four nights (Dadosky, 1999) The purpose of the ceremony is to restore one to the path of beauty—to promote more beauty in all aspects of one's life. It was not until 1996 as a graduate student in theology that I began to reflect upon and interpret my experience with the Diné medicine-man, or *hatathli* (singer).

In 2001 after I completed my dissertation on Lonergan and Eliade, I turned to my next project on beauty. The fruits of my experience with the Diné did not leave me compelled to “go native;” rather, I wanted to integrate what I had learned from them within my own tradition. Being convinced that Balthasar was correct in his diagnosis that the West had lost beauty, I became intrigued by the question of the Diné contribution to a theology of beauty. Moreover, I was not convinced that Balthasar's theological aesthetics rested on adequate philosophical foundations, and so I began trying to probe Lonergan's philosophy as a basis for the theological aesthetics that could better complement Balthasar's endeavor.

In 2005, assisted by a grant from the Lilly Foundation, I spent three months on the Diné reservation that is located in the southwestern United States. This was my second field research trip to the region since 1994. I studied their worldview with some of my contacts at the Diné Community College, taking courses in Navajo language and culture and conducting interviews with some of the traditional medicine people. I came up against two problematic realizations. First, there was the limitation of language. The Diné language is one of the most difficult in the world. Recall that the Japanese were never able to crack their code during WWII. It would take a lifetime to master the language adequately.

Secondly, having obtained more than a cursory understanding and appreciation of the Diné notion of beauty, my theological reflections took me in a surprisingly different direction. That is, I began to formulate insights into the Church's specific nature and mission—*Ecclesia ad intra* (See Dadosky, 2007). The category of beauty provided by the Diné traditional worldview provided an analogy for understanding how the interaction between two dimensions of the Church might be understood. Time does not permit me to go into this detail, but the analogy pertained to an integral understanding of the relationship between what Yves Congar called the “structure” and “life” of the Church, what Karl Rahner called

the “institutional” and the “charismatic,” and what Balthasar called “the official church” and “the church of love” (See Dadosky, 1999; 2007a). The point I wish to emphasize is that in my own attempt to pass over into traditional Diné religion, as partial and as incomplete as it may have been, the encounter paradoxically led to insights that helped me better understand my own tradition in a deeper and more appreciative way.

Conclusion

In the last few years, I have been attending meetings of comparative theologians at the Catholic Theological Society of America and the American Academy of Religion. I have noticed that many of their concerns are methodological. In speaking with some of the members individually I have realized also that their methodologies run up against a limit, a feeling of constraint that might indicate a need for observer participation as suggested by Starkloff.

For example, it is possible that one of the things that Buddhism has to offer Christianity is the practice of being in the present moment through various forms of meditation. Indeed, if Augustine’s achievement over Origen was to construe eternity in terms outside of temporal time as opposed to a never ending series of aeons, then perhaps the Buddhist meditation practices can steer the Christian to daily contemplation of the eternal within the temporal—a way of being in the world but not of the world. But we could not explore this unless we experiment with and develop such meditation practices.

This paper speaks to a theological frontier where the spirit of inquiry is best characterized by one of exploration, equipped with the presuppositions of mutuality, the anticipation of differences, and the principles of discernment to clarify those differences.

In terms of systematic theology, there is the recognition that because theology mediates between diverse religious and cultural contexts it may discover concepts from other contexts that help in the understanding of its deepest mysteries.

Just as the term *homoousios* was invoked at the Council of Nicaea in order to clarify an understanding of the relationship between the first and second persons of the Trinity, in this ecumenical age we will undoubtedly encounter categories from other religious and cultural contexts that may help us in a similar way.

The focus of this paper has been on methodological engagement with the other in a post-Vatican II context. I have focused on the issue of inter-religious dialogue, but the methodological presuppositions I am arguing for may be applicable to the Church’s entire external relations because it captures the multifarious range of relations with the other while relying on authentic and discerning individuals to lead the way.

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The Pope of YouTube: Metaphor and Misunderstanding in Atheist-Christian YouTube Dialogue

By Stephen Pihlaja

Abstract

Using a discourse dynamics analysis, this article investigates the use of metaphor in three YouTube videos made by two American YouTube users: one a fundamentalist Christian and one an atheist. The focus of the analysis is on how metaphor was produced dynamically in the interaction and what this interaction may tell us about how misunderstanding occurred between the two users. Analysis shows that understanding of specific metaphors seems to differ depending on who is producing and interpreting a given metaphor.

Introduction

On the popular video sharing website, YouTube, users from all over the world engage in dialogue with each other on a myriad of subjects. Often, religion is discussed, and this article is an attempt to investigate one dialogue between a fundamentalist Christian and an atheist by looking specifically at how the two users employed metaphor to talk about their role and position on the website and how the use of metaphor perhaps led to misunderstanding between the two. Although there has been much interest in YouTube and other forms of computer-mediated communication (cf. Burgess and Green 2009), to date there has been no close analysis of YouTube discourse in relation to inter-religious dialogue despite a diverse community of individuals arguing and discussing religious issues on the website. As language is one of the primary means of communication, analysis of language used in inter-religious dialogue is apt to provide some insight into the interaction between people holding differing religious viewpoints. Using an applied linguistic perspective, this article will show that metaphor is used in the dialogue, and that significant differences can be seen in how users interpret metaphor over the course of the videos.

Over the last thirty years, there has been a significant interest in metaphor studies (cf. Steen 2007 for a comprehensive introduction), stemming from the publication of Lakoff and Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By*, which argued that metaphor was fundamental to human experience, both in language and thought (Lakoff and Johnson 1980). Unlike cognitive, literary, or philosophical approaches to metaphor, a discourse dynamics approach begins by focusing on metaphor from a complex systems theory perspective, focusing on change and how change occurs. It engages metaphor as a phenomenon that emerges out of the complex system of language—something that develops naturally in the course of language being used (Larsen-Freeman and Cameron 2008). In particular, it can be used to investigate

how metaphor use emerges and how particular metaphor use or systems of metaphor use can develop and change in sections of discourse or whole discourse events. This approach is particularly appropriate for researchers interested in how language is organized in speech communities, not in conscious, prescribed ways, but as naturally occurring from the interactions of the speakers. In the context of asynchronous Internet text where videos exist in a dynamic environment with responses and comments being produced by different users, mapping the dynamic interactions may give some insight into the reasons behind the dialogue outcomes.

Although the definition of metaphor has been debated, this article understands metaphor in terms of transfer of meaning; metaphor is “seeing something in terms of something else” (Burke 1945: 503, cited in Cameron and Low, 1999). Metaphor begins with a “focus term or vehicle” in the text which is incongruous with the surrounding text and context, and in which the incongruity can be understood by some “transfer of meaning” between the vehicle and the topic (Cameron 2003). For example, in the data used in this study, the term “pope” is used to describe a user: pope is the vehicle and the user is the topic. Obviously, the word is not intended to be literally understood, but something about the role or identity of the pope is being transferred to the YouTube user. Although this transfer of meaning can be described in different ways (conceptual metaphor theorists, for example, use the terms “target domain” and “source domain” rather than “topic” and “vehicle”), it is generally considered the essential element of metaphor.

Data & Methods

The video thread analyzed in this article consists of a back-and-forth response series from two users: *fakesagan* and *jezuzfreak777*. *fakesagan* is an American male in his late-twenties from the American Northwest. His videos tend to address issues of atheism, anarchy, and libertarian politics. *fakesagan* has had several YouTube accounts and at the time of this writing is currently suspended from YouTube. *jezuzfreak777* is from the American Midwest, an outspoken Christian. His videos address faith, atheism, evolution, and, less frequently, politics. Both users had several thousand subscribers at the time of the analysis and had many fans and detractors as evidenced in the comments attached to the videos. Both had been quite active in the atheist or Christian communities of YouTube, respectively, as well as frequently commenting on and making video responses to videos made by other users.

The video thread analyzed in this text began when *fakesagan* asked two moderate Christians on YouTube their opinion of stem cell research. *jezuzfreak777* responded to the video stating his opinion, and *fakesagan* made a response, recounting a story about *jezuzfreak777* leaving a text comment on video made by a friend in which *jezuzfreak777* admonished *fakesagan*'s friend for positioning the camera to show her breasts in her video and accusing *jezuzfreak777* of being overly pious and imposing his opinion on others. *jezuzfreak777* responded saying that his goal was to “clean YouTube up” and that his piety wasn't a negative thing, but

rather something that *fakesagan* and others saw and envied. The thread ended with *jezuzfreak777*'s last video.

Figure 1: Images of *jezuzfreak777* and *fakesagan*



The videos were transcribed and analyzed in early 2009. Although *jezuzfreak777*'s videos remain accessible, *fakesagan*'s videos have been taken down, as he has been suspended from YouTube. The numbers of views, responses, and text comments were taken in late November 2008. The numbers of video responses and text comments can be altered if users take down their responses, but the view count cannot be changed. Table 1 (next page) shows relevant information related to each video.

Table 1: List of videos in thread

Title	User	Length (min:secs)	View count	Text Comments	Video Responses
Fake hips and hippy christians (part 1 of3)	<i>fakesagan</i>	9:13	3,200 (26-11-08)	67 (26-11-08)	1
[cited 26 November 2008] Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bmhCgxGz26E					
Fake hips and hippy christians (part 2 of3)	<i>fakesagan</i>	8:03	2,800 (26-11-08)	65 (26-11-08)	1
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Twm4nRphik					
Fake hips and hippy christians (part 3 of3)	<i>fakesagan</i>	10:05	6,524 (26-11-08)	118 (26-11-08)	2
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qovTzwl97cc					
Is stem cell research wrong	<i>jezuzfreek777</i>	3:07	4,291 (26-11-08)	268 (26-11-08)	2
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJHgOHmLUoQ					
moderate* christian stem cell responses- jezuzfreek777	<i>fakesagan</i>	8:38	5,109 (26-11-08)	179 (26-11-08)	1
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uI4sXm_ARIY					
Missing jezuzfreek777 video	<i>jezuzfreek777</i>	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
URL N/A					
jezuzfreek thinks he's the pope of youtube (part 1 of 2)	<i>fakesagan</i>	10:05	6,007 (20-11-08)	174 (20-11-08)	1
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qovTzwl97cc					
jezuzfreek thinks he's the pope of youtube (part 2 of 2)	<i>fakesagan</i>	9:07	6,524 (26-11-08)	118 (26-11-08)	2
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qovTzwl97cc					
Am I the Pope of YouTube?	<i>jezuzfreek777</i>	6:40	4,593 (24-11-08)	524 (24-11-08)	5
[cited 26 November 2008]. Available from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FPiEqALvvJU&watch_response					

Metaphor was identified in the video transcript using Cameron's vehicle identification procedure (Cameron 2003). After metaphors were identified following the method proposed by Cameron et al. (2009), several linguistic features including topic and metaphor vehicle groupings were identified in the transcript. Metaphors were gathered into interpretive, flexible groups or categories to aid in identifying systems of metaphor use in the discourse (Cameron et al. 2009). Metaphors relating to the same grouping (for example, government metaphors) were then compared not only within the transcription of the spoken language in an individual video, but with all elements of the video page (including text comments). Metaphors were then analyzed, particularly whether or not the same metaphors were recurrent across the whole thread, whether or not the same metaphors appeared in talk from both users, and whether or not metaphors activated by one user were also drawn upon in subsequent video responses made by other users. The process of grouping metaphors is arguably more subjective than metaphor identification as a clear procedure has not been (and likely could not be) established to group metaphors since the process relies heavily on the context in which they are being produced. Keeping in mind this perspective on the metaphor groupings, care was taken to constantly refer back to the context of the video so as to allow for the possibility that metaphors could belong to more than one group or to avoid forcing a grouping where no group is emerging.

Analysis and Findings

Given the constraints of this article, the analysis will focus on the final three videos of the thread. Of the 65 unique metaphors identified in the text, we will focus on the repeated use of the "pope" metaphor, as it seemed to play an important role in the development of the last three videos. The metaphor was repeated at every level of the dialogue: the video content, the titles of videos, textual content surrounding the video made by the user, and the comments. For the purpose of this article, we will look primarily at the use of the metaphor in the spoken words of the videos, but with care to consider the text surrounding the videos (ie., titles, description boxes, comments, tags, etc).

On the video level, the use of the metaphor "pope" did not occur until the first part of the last two videos *fakesagan* made in the exchange, titled "jezuzfreek thinks he's the pope of youtube." The metaphor, however, was not mentioned in the video text, which is devoted largely to denouncing *jezuzfreek777* as overly pious and intrusive. To understand what *fakesagan* means by "pope" requires some understanding of the text of his video. The clearest hint for the intention of the "pope" metaphor seems to be in *fakesagan*'s rejection, an analogy which *jezuzfreek777* had made in an earlier video, when he states,

Time	Intonation Unit	Text
2:52	86	and you made the analogy
	87	<well isn't that like being pulled over
	88	and telling the cop
	89	you know why are you givin me
	90	a speeding ticket when
	91	this guy's getting murdered over here>
	92	it-it's not your place
	93	to tell anyone how to make their
	94	fucking videos
	95	or question
	96	what they do with parts of their body
	97	a-alright
	98	that's-that's not your
	99	you're a pious asshole
3:16	100	it was-it was out of line

(*fakesagan* 2007)

Here, *fakesagan* criticises *jezuzfreak777*'s comment on *anangel13*'s video as being inappropriate because it is, in *fakesagan*'s opinion, not *jezuzfreak777*'s role to make such comments. For *fakesagan*, the word "pope" seems to invoke a sense of *jezuzfreak777* as an uninvolved third party, imposing himself unfairly in the conversation. *jezuzfreak777*, however, links the metaphor "pope" with the qualifier "self-appointed."

Time	Intonation Unit	Text
0:00	1	I wanna make this video response
	2	concerning me being the
0:05	3	self-appointed pope of youtube

(*jezuzfreak777* 2008)

By looking carefully at *jezuzfreak777*'s use of the metaphor in his video, it seems that he perceives the problem not being the content of his comment on *anangel13*'s page, but whether or not he has the authority to make the comment. His use of the qualifier "self-appointed" in rejecting the use of the metaphor seems to imply that perhaps the comment would have been inappropriate if he was acting in his own name, but he appeals to his identity as a Christian to counter that claim. Although it seems clear that *jezuzfreak777* rejects the labeling of "pope," that does not seem to be a rejection of *fakesagan*'s claim that he is pious. *jezuzfreak777* says,

Time	Intonation	Text

	Unit	
4:36	188	you know I can say this
	189	concerning piety
	190	it's not usually
	191	that the person is
	192	acting holier than thou
	193	that bothers people
	194	it's not really the fact
	195	that the person
	196	clings to their faith
	197	that bothers people
	198	what really bothers
	199	people the most
	200	in my opinion is
	201	that they realize
	202	that someone else
	203	has something that they don't have
	204	and
	205	they become
	206	upset
	207	that they can't
	208	enjoy that same thing
5:09	209	because they don't understand it

(*jezuzfreak777* 2008)

jezuzfreak777, it seems, holds a much more positive view of piety, and this perhaps affects his interpretation of the pope metaphor. Whether knowingly or not, it seems he has subtly shifted *fakesagan's* use of the metaphor to fit his understanding of the word and create an acceptable interpretation. This is not to say that the message of *fakesagan's* comment is lost on *jezuzfreak777*, who seems to understand it as an insult and implicitly disputes it. The reason it is insulting, however, seems to be unresolved at the end of the thread and perhaps is evidence for why the two users appear to have difficulty communicating with one another.

The “pope” metaphor also seems to evoke strong reactions in the comments, particularly the final video in which *jezuzfreak777* repeatedly refers to it, including comments like “Your the Pope of Youtube??? *kneels* Bless me Father lol” and “maybe not the pope of youtube...but SURELY the poop of youtube!” For these commenters (and the few comments on the earlier videos), the phrase the “pope of YouTube” doesn't seem to relate to the dialogue that *jezuzfreak777* and *fakesagan* are engaged in, but rather in the “drama” of the exchange and their own perceptions of what the metaphor might mean and entail. Another commenter writes, “You and Pope? We Catholics find that more offending than the ‘F’ Word which you demonize...” to which *jezuzfreak777* responds, “did you even watch this video” and receives the response, “It's actually a general comment on the title.”

This suggests that for some video watchers and commenters, the content of the dialogue doesn't necessarily play a key role in how they understand the video or react to it. In this case, the commenter does not seem to have watched the video on which they are commenting, suggesting they are unaware of the larger issues at stake in the exchange.

Both *jezuzfreak777* and the commenters on the video seem to understand the use of the metaphor "pope of YouTube" to be insulting, but, as can be seen in the examples, what they understand "pope" to be is also quite varied. What seems to have been lost, however, in the course of the video thread and especially in the comments section, is the discussion, first, of stem cell research, and second, the appropriateness of *jezuzfreak777*'s comment on *anangel13*'s video. Both users see their role and the appropriate role of the other as being fundamentally different and their disagreement is rooted in this difference. Given that the "dialogue" does not take place face-to-face and there is no real-time feedback allowing for the person with whom you are talking to ask for corrections, challenge assertions, or orient the conversation back to their own interests and opinions, the dialogue seems to be prone to users following their own understandings and interests in their response videos, rather than truly resolving the issues that arose in the videos to which they are responding.

Implications and Discussion

Considering the exchange between *fakesagan* and *jezuzfreak777*, some potentially useful conclusions can be drawn, not simply about these two users, but other YouTube dialogues between users holding different beliefs.

Although the particular dialogue examined in this article seems to be marked by serious misunderstanding and name-calling, it is important to remember that the video series began with *fakesagan* addressing a legitimate question to two other users who considered themselves Christians. This honest request for the opinions of Christians could be evidence that the possibility of an honest exchange of ideas is possible through YouTube. The dialogue that unfolds with *jezuzfreak777*, however, highlights the difficulties with making this open exchange possible, especially when other issues of YouTube social conventions (for example, whether or not it was appropriate for *jezuzfreak777* to ask *fakesagan*'s friend to change her style of making videos) cloud what might have otherwise been a beneficial discussion. Given the often impolite and crass nature of YouTube interaction as seen in both the comments on the videos as well as *fakesagan*'s treatment of *jezuzfreak777*, it seems that the potential of negative interaction remains high.

Whether or not this data is prototypical of religious dialogue on YouTube in general is difficult to say. Certainly, there seems to be the potential for constructive dialogue between atheists and Christians as well as some examples of dialogues which remain civil and jointly beneficial. In early 2009, a series of videos made between the user *coughlan666*, a British atheist, and *nightvisionphantom*, an American fundamentalist Christian, illustrated the potential of two very different individuals engaging in some meaningful dialogue. The two users issued challenges

to each other to make videos on subjects of the other's choosing (e.g., both discussed the criticisms that they had for members of their own groups). In the end, both reflected on the positive experience making the videos had been, even though both remained ardently committed to their own ideology. Similarly, in early 2010, *theamazingatheist*, an American atheist, and *YokeUp*, an American fundamentalist Christian, met together on video to support a charity committed to the rebuilding of New Orleans. On camera, they discussed the need to find common ground whenever possible. Although this seems to be the exception, rather than the norm, it does seem possible that two users of starkly different faith backgrounds could find interact constructively.

Still, the gap between the atheists and Christians on YouTube seems to be underscored by other factors, be they geographical, socio-economic, or political. Moreover, use of the word "dialogue" might also be misleading as the two users only respond to one another in recorded videos, creating the illusion of physical proximity while the two remain, both physically and metaphorically, quite far apart. This, it seems, is both the advantage and disadvantage of technologies like YouTube: people who might never engage with those strongly opposed to them in the "real world" suddenly have instant access to users from all over the world, with all the complexities these interactions entail. What is appropriate and constructive may then be quite difficult to negotiate in an abstract world where the other person is simply a face in a YouTube video. Whether or not these issues of distance and appropriateness will subside as the technology becomes less novel and the social norms of websites like YouTube continue to develop remains to be seen, and it seems difficult to predict how technologies like YouTube (and the interactions of people using them) will develop.

Conclusion

As we have seen, both *fakesagan* and *jezuzfreek777* (as well as the commenters) employed the "pope" metaphor to talk about the community roles of other individuals on the website. Based on the analysis, it seems that one element of misunderstanding between these two users occurred when the meaning of the "pope" metaphor was misunderstood. This misunderstanding seemed rooted in deeper issues of what the users valued and how they saw their own role and the role of the other on the website. For *jezuzfreek777*, it seemed acceptable to assert his religious convictions when interacting with non-religious individuals on YouTube. For *fakesagan*, this was inappropriate. Analysis of metaphor use allowed for the possibility of seeing how one aspect of dialogue may have impacted this online interaction and seems to give at least a partial explanation for why communication between *fakesagan* and *jezuzfreek777* broke down.

In many ways, this dialogue exemplifies some of the difficulties surrounding both use of language and the negotiation of social norms on new technologies like YouTube. Although the potential remains for YouTube to become a powerful tool in bringing together people of starkly different ideological positions, how these dialogues should develop and what is appropriate behavior in interaction remains a

difficult issue. Close discourse analysis of the interaction between users (particularly analysis of metaphor use) holds strong potential for describing how misunderstanding is taking place.¹³

¹³ Many thanks to Lynne Cameron, Daniel Allington, Ann Hewings, and Sarah North for their invaluable comments on the Master of Research dissertation on which this article is based. I am also deeply indebted to the Centre for Research in Education and Educational Technology at The Open University for the generous funding of my research.

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“We Walk By Faith”: Religion and Race During the Civil Rights Movement By Logan Edwards

Abstract

Proudly Protestant and Evangelical, southerners consider themselves the religious backbone of America. Yet, in historical moments when the nation’s attention was centered on the South, few recognized Christian morality in the actions of many. How could a Citizen Council member burn a cross on Saturday and serve as a deacon on Sunday? This question found resonance in particular with southern blacks, whose churches were instrumental in challenging social injustice. This paper looks at the different understandings, not of the radicals, but of the majority of black and white southerners, about the role of religion in society and how this impacted the way they reacted to the civil rights movement. By looking at these groups from an inter-religious perspective, one is able to see how different they truly are and begin to build bridges and heal old wounds.

On April 16, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote his famous “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” in which he expressed disappointment with the white church that too often “remained silent behind the anesthetizing security of stained glass windows” while injustices took place outside (Bass 2001, 251). Like many others over the course of southern history, King searched for tangible proof of the white south’s commitment to Christian ideals. From slavery to racial violence following Reconstruction and the entrenchment of segregationists during the Civil Rights era, religious white southerners both ignored and perpetuated racial injustice with clean consciences, often under the sanction of the local church. The stances of black congregations throughout the South during the Civil Rights era have been well researched and documented, but few scholars have examined the stances of white congregations. By looking at the response of the white church in the South, scholars can see how the white interpretation of the church’s social responsibilities differs from that of its black counterpart and begin to examine how practitioners of a common faith can differ significantly in their understanding of what it means to be an adherent .

According to the historian Jason Sokol, “White southerners’ racial attitudes and behavior frequently revealed a confused and conflicted people, at times divided within and against themselves” (Sokol 2006, 14). Gunnar Myrdal, author of *An American*

Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy, similarly stated in 1944, “The conservative southerner is not so certain as he sometimes sounds. He is a split personality. Part of his heart belongs to the American Creed” (Myrdal 1944, 461-2). The conflict many white Christians faced stemmed from their sense of southern identity. Southern ideology mixed American symbols of equality, freedom, and justice with a profound allegiance to the South and its particular history (Manis 1987, 15). Southerners saw themselves as the best kind of Americans; their society shone as a pinnacle of American ideals. Religion played a major part in this concept of the South. A “Lost Cause” theology emerged following the Civil War as southerners tried to reconcile their self-perceived role as God’s chosen people with their defeat at the hands of northern infidels. Southerners interpreted the Confederacy’s loss as part of their divine purpose. They were now “baptized in the blood”; made purer by having survived God’s test and waiting patiently for the day they would be redeemed and guide America back to a truer form of Christianity (Wilson 2005, 469-70). Andrew Manis, who has dedicated his career to studying Southern civil religion, states, “One should view resistance to the integrationist goals of the civil rights movement as more than merely a hypocritical rejection of Christianity’s universal acceptance of all persons or as the captivity of the churches to the traditional Southern social and racial arrangements. This resistance also constituted a virtual pledge of allegiance to a Southern civil religion...that viewed desegregation and the movement that fostered it as a threat to its understanding of America’s sacred meaning as a nation (Manis 1999, 34).” By the 1960s, the South had begun to more closely resemble the rest of the country, but many of its white citizens still clung to the belief that it was set apart in its commitment to upholding the Christian ideal, an ideal that had little trouble ignoring racial injustice.

Just as a portion of Christians wrestled with the issue of slavery in the antebellum south, some found discontinuity between the words they professed and the world in which they lived. Raised in Sandersville in the 1920s, Grace Bryant Holmes struggled to justify the social hierarchy most of her life. In her memoirs, she recounts feeling connected to the black women who worked for her family, ate lunch alongside them in the kitchen, but who were not allowed to enter the house through the front door. She reflects “Every time I accepted a privilege denied to people of color, I knew the shame of hypocrisy. I was a slave to a system I sensed was out of joint, incompatible with the ideals of America and Christianity” (Holmes 2000, 93).

The fight against the Nazis in WWII further put the hypocrisy of segregation into stark relief for many, challenging the white supremacist mindset. People questioned whether or not they could wage war against “a Jew-Baiter in Germany” and support “a Negro-baiter in Georgia” (Tuck 2001, 28). Segregation became a source of moral dilemma for those who found it out of sync with Christian and American ideals. It required them to choose between their belief in both Biblical and Constitutional values

and the “southern way of life.” Giving up segregation meant turning one’s back on home and heritage. As the possibility of integration neared, many began to side with the southern consciousness, just as their ancestors had in the years leading up to the Civil War. Samuel S. Hill notes that many white southerners continued to believe that Southern churches represented the true Christian church and the universal ideal through the first half of the twentieth century. Southerners cast the region as an innocent victim of northern aggression and arrogance. Righteous indignation is evident in much of the language used to describe desegregation. Many perceived forced integration as a “mid-Twentieth Century reconstruction period” in which northern politicians crammed integration down white southern throats (Manis 1987, 79).

Black Georgians’ sense of identity closely mirrored that of their white counterparts. Blacks, too, had a strong belief in America’s promise of equality and freedom and an understanding that they were the agents of God, commissioned to raise America to its divinely appointed place as a Christian nation (Manis 1987, 50-56). Though similar in structure, the black and white sense of divine mission differed radically on the expectation of how a Christian nation would look. Traditionally, southern blacks emphasized that the blood of Christ made all men who accepted Him equal brothers. Black Christians revered America for its potential, but believed the country would not become a Christian nation until all men were treated as equals under the law. By challenging social injustice, the black community would help the country realize the promises set down in the Constitution. Challenges to Jim Crow took on a religious tone; ending segregation meant creating a society on earth that more closely mirrored the heavenly kingdom. For Fred Shuttlesworth, a prominent black activist in Alabama, “America was *not* a Christian nation...it was founded upon Christian principles, Christian pronouncements, Christian platitudes [but] it had really never been a Christian nation...And I think God intended it to be a Christian nation” (Manis 1987, 52).

Southern blacks saw the transformation of America into a Christian nation as part of their divine purpose. As such, blacks in Georgia expected the church to take the lead in changing the political order. As early as 1933, the General Missionary Baptists adopted a resolution stating, “the church has been too much divorced from politics” at their Macon convention (Manis 2004, 111). Black churches felt a responsibility to address social issues and began to look for ways to use their influence in the community to give a voice to the disenfranchised. The first real challenges to Jim Crow in the South occurred under the leadership of various black church leaders. Local ministers served as ambassadors to white politicians and had tremendous influence within the black community. They often headed branches of the NAACP, especially in rural areas.

Ministers were not the only Christians urging blacks to get involved in social protest. During the Macon, Georgia bus boycotts of 1962, black congregations proved

they would not support pastors unwilling to take a stance for freedom by placing clothing buttons in their collection plates. Offerings in some churches dropped by as much as ninety percent as members registered their disapproval of church leaders sitting on the fence (Tuck 2001, 141). Many black Christians agreed with prominent leader Martin Luther King, Jr. that the church “must be the guide and the critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority. If the church does not participate actively in the struggle for peace and for economic and racial justice, it will forfeit the loyalty of millions” (King 1963).

While black Christians took the lead in challenging Georgia’s Jim Crow laws, their white neighbors often refused to acknowledge the changing racial landscape. Despite the decidedly Christian arguments used by black civil rights leaders and cooperation between some interracial groups, the majority of religious southerners continued to justify racial segregation, some using the argument that “God himself segregated the races” (Tuck 2001, 77). In 1955, Eugene Talmadge, whose stint as Georgia governor coincided with more lynchings than any comparable period since Reconstruction, published *You and Segregation* in which he partly defended segregation as a mark of obedience to God. Many believed that God mandated segregation and saw the Jim Crow social order as part of a divine plan (Manis 2004, 151). They also looked for other ways to divest themselves of any wrongdoing or discredit the black leaders who used the Bible against them. Some connected the Civil Rights Movement with communism (Manis 1987, 43-48). No danger was more real to America and its role as God’s chosen nation than the red threat. The atheistic component of communism made it an easy way for Christians to take a strong stance against anything that hinted at a socialist world order.

The vast majority of southern whites, however, simply overlooked racial tensions, not viewing themselves as racists, and so could nod in agreement to sermons about brotherhood on Sunday morning and continue to uphold segregation on Monday. Racists hated blacks, but most white southerners saw themselves as intimately connected to their black neighbors through a complex paternalistic rationalization. According to a South Carolinian,

You’ll see white and colored little kids playing together all the time. We live with ‘em all day...I don’t let ‘em come in and sit down at my table, sit in my living room, but they can come up to my back porch and talk to me anytime they want to. I carry them to the doctor, carry them to the hospital, loan ‘em money if they need it, do everything I can for ‘em” (Sellers 1962, 55).

Many southern whites simply did not view their social system as hypocritical.

As civil rights protests entered the local arena, most white churches did everything in their power to ignore what was happening on their city streets. While national denominations often took an official stance in support of civil rights activists, and certainly of new laws, their formal position rarely translated to the attitudes of individual congregations. As far as the Georgia Southern Baptist Convention was concerned, the opinion of the national convention didn't even extend to the state level. In 1956, the Convention's Social Service Commission recommended that Georgia Baptists accept the *Brown vs. Board* decision and cultivate an atmosphere in which public schools could comply with laws requiring integration. The state convention rejected the suggestions by a vote of three to one (Manis 1987, 70).

Part of the deafening silence from white churches stemmed from a different interpretation of the church's role in the political realm. White church leaders were the guardians of the status quo and the standing social order; while black churches felt called to shape modern history, white churches were content to observe it, choosing to place their emphasis more squarely on the world to come than on the possibilities of what the present world could be. This allowed white Christians to divorce social and political issues from their religious conscience. Following the *Brown vs. Board* decision, for instance, a Georgia Methodist declared that "Being a Christian is accepting the Lord Jesus Christ as my personal savior...just because I don't want my granddaughter going to school with a Negro boy, I don't see what that has to do with my being a Christian or not" (Sokol 2006, 52). This attitude underscores one of the primary differences between the South's black and white churches at the time. While black congregants were practically compelling their ministers to join the Civil Rights Movement, white preachers "did not, must not become involved in politics" (Holmes 2000, 124). It was not the place of the church to meddle in government policy.

White church leaders balanced precariously as they worked to negotiate between the official stances of the denomination and the sentiments of those in the pew (Sokol 2006, 50). Many ministers were more liberal than their church members, but were muzzled by strong feelings of congregational authority and independence found in southern churches. Baptist ministers served solely at the approval of their members. Those who spoke against desegregation often found themselves without a pulpit as angry deacons decided that it was better to exorcize leadership than risk splitting the church into warring factions (Holmes 2000, 126).

Denominations with more ecclesiastical structures also found ways to remove unwanted pastors, usually by creating a toxic atmosphere that forced ministers to resign. Reese Griffin resigned from his Methodist pastorate in 1956, just months after suggesting black and white children attend integrated church schools. The pastor wrote at the time, "It has come to the place where a minister will lose his pulpit if he says anything in favor of integration. It is not a matter of what he says nor how he says it. He

must dare not say anything at all” (Sokol 2006, 52-3). Deacons and church board members often called the shots in local churches, perhaps even quelling congregations willing to support a pastor’s liberal stance. This was evident to Lyndon Johnson who urged church leaders to take control of their congregations at the 1964 Southern Baptist Convention. Before a collection of some of the South’s leading ministers he entreated, “The leaders of states and cities are in *your* congregations, and they sit on *your* boards. Their attitudes are confirmed and changed by the sermons you preach and by the lessons you write and by the examples that you set” (Sokol 2006, 103). Too often, however, the example Johnson hoped for could not be found.

In the early sixties, black activists began taking their fight directly to southern white Christians by staging “kneel-ins” at central, prominent churches in order to place the problem of segregation “squarely on the hearts and the moral consciences of the white Christians in [the] community” (Tuck 2001, 114). Kneel-ins occurred on Sunday mornings at eleven o’clock, widely regarded as the most segregated hour in America. Typically, a group of black students attempted to enter a white sanctuary and join the congregation only to be turned away by deacons standing guard at the doors. While kneel-ins occurred throughout the South, some of the earliest took place in Georgia. On August 7, 1960, black college students simultaneously visited six white Atlanta churches. With the exception of First Presbyterian and St. Phillip Episcopal Church, all refused to allow the students into the sanctuary, though several churches offered to let students listen from the foyer. One church set up a loudspeaker in a downstairs Sunday school room for the students (Beantly 1960).

The first kneel-ins did not receive a wide press, but they did lead many Georgia churches to create contingency plans in case they were faced with a similar problem. The board of elders at First Presbyterian Church in Athens agreed to welcome any visitors who came to the church, regardless of race. But the receptive attitude quickly dissipated. In the fall of 1962, Harold Black entered the University of Georgia as a freshman; he was the first black male to live on campus. Many of Black’s friends attended First Presbyterian and routinely invited him to join them on Sunday morning. At his initial visit, the congregation exhibited no animosity, but within several weeks hostility mounted, forcing the minister, Reverend William Adams, to rescind his initial support of Black. Adams explained to Black that his presence offended many parishioners and, if continued, might lead to violence within the church and damage its reputation. Black “chose” not to return the following Sunday (Pratt 2002, 123-5). The experience of the students in Atlanta and Harold Black in Athens were typical of most kneel-ins. Though white deacons seldom responded with violence, blacks were firmly turned away from the church, overlooking the evangelical emphasis on fulfilling Christ’s command to preach the gospel to all the world.

On September 2, 1966 Ralph McGill ran an article in his nationally syndicated series about the controversy swirling around a small church in Macon, Georgia. At the time, Tattnall Square Baptist Church was a 75-year-old congregation located on the edge of Mercer's campus. Originally erected to serve the religious needs of students, faculty, and the surrounding neighborhood, the Church had just voted 286 to 109 to exclude black students – including those studying for the ministry at Mercer – from attending services. McGill calls the Christianity of Tattnall Square into question, underscoring the contradictions between their actions and the character of Christianity. He concludes:

The essence of Christianity was that Christ was incarnate – was made man and lived in man's world in order to fulfill the prophesy of atoning for man. Yet, Christianity today is burdened down by churches that are afraid of the world and of Christ in it – of God in it...Whatever the future of the Christian church is to be, one of its footnotes will be that of a church calling itself Christian, located on the campus of a church-related university, refusing to allow colored students to worship. If this were not so ineffably sad, it would be hysterically funny (McGill 1966).

McGill's summary of the situation brought national attention to the small church and criticism of white southern Christianity. Embarrassed, many southern Christians saw Tattnall Square's stance as a crime and were outraged by its willingness to condemn a lost world to darkness. Following the church's decision, Holmes received more than 200 responses from all over the world, many from SBC missionaries who believed that what happened at Tattnall Square was detrimental to the global Christian cause. Local Christians also criticized the message Tattnall Square sent to non-Christians by supporting segregation. Though Tattnall Square refused to admit blacks into their services, another Macon church, Vineville Baptist, after debate, decided to offer membership to Mercer's black students. In doing so it became the first church in the Georgia Baptist Convention to do so since the Civil War.

Conclusion

Because southern blacks conducted the civil rights movement as a moral and religious campaign, whites had a chance at reconciliation, and many later admitted their Christian stance supporting segregation was both unfounded and a moral burden upon their lives (Sokol 2006, 324). *The Christian Index*, a publication of the Georgia Baptist Convention, ran an article in 1966 condemning churches that turned away blacks, explaining,

We recognize that we have not been successful in dealing with some of the most difficult social problems of our time...may we pray for increased wisdom, for a fuller measure of compassion, and for the guidance of the Holy Spirit in dealing with problems which defy solution until resolved in the spirit of Lord Jesus.

Mercer University declared that Tattnall Square's decision was a "denial of the relevancy of Jesus Christ as Savior in the 20th Century life" ("Macon Church Needs Our Prayers," 6; "Mercer Comments on Church's Decision," A8). The challenge to white Christians in the South was whether their social actions conformed to their theological beliefs. In time, it seems that they came to.

Any study of southern history and culture must be approached with a willingness to negotiate the complex and often conflicting beliefs that influenced the actions of so many in the South. Religion played a vital role in shaping how southern blacks and whites viewed themselves and their divine purpose, but it was intricately tied to the South's unique history and shared memory. Southern black Christianity is distinctive from its white counterpart, just as southern Christianity is distinctive. The differences between these two groups are best seen in areas in which the two clash: the role of the church in society, America's status as a Christian nation, and the conceptualization of Christian brotherhood and equality. Though the South has come along way since the fifties and sixties, these themes continue to have relevance to its religious communities.

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Building an Islamic Feminism: Contrasting Beauvoir and the work of Amina Wadud
By Sarah Mohr

*We must remember we are women born,
By mightier than ourselves, we have to bear
These things—and worse. For my part, I will ask
Pardon of those beneath, for what perforce
I needs must do, but yield obedience
To them that walk in power; to exceed
Is madness not wisdom.*

*Antigone[:]
“Then in the future
I will not bid you help me; nor henceforth,
Though you desire, shall you, with my goodwill,
Share what I do.”*

-Sophocles, Antigone (ed. Appelbaum 1993, 3)

Abstract

People of all religions are working around the world for greater rights for women. A crucial part of this process is dialogue between traditions about the causes of gender-based oppression. To understand Islamic feminism, people in the West must understand how the meanings of biology, gender and alterity differ in Islamic feminism from their meanings in traditional Western feminist theory. A comparison of Simone de Beauvoir’s explanation in *The Second Sex* of the role of biology in women’s oppression and Amina Wadud’s hermeneutical arguments about women’s role in Islam suggests that Islamic feminism should work based on assumptions that are internal to Islam.

Introduction

This paper discusses the starting place for Islamic feminism by contrasting a central point of Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* with the work of Amina Wadud. Beauvoir’s arguments for sexual equality in *The Second Sex* are secular, and start with

the assumption that biological difference is an inadequate justification for sexual inequality. Wadud's arguments are focused on assumptions that are internal to the Islamic tradition and drawn from the Qur'an. This paper argues that in Islamic feminism as a whole, as in Wadud's work specifically, the fact that sexual difference is insufficient grounds for women's oppression is not that relevant to Muslim women's liberation. A hermeneutic approach based on the Qur'an may prove more effective advocating the importance of women's liberation in majority-Muslim societies.

While Wadud is clear that she is not a feminist, her work is cited by most women writing on Islamic feminism and forms a foundation for Muslim women writing on women in Islam. Beauvoir, specifically in *The Second Sex*, likewise forms a crucial foundation for the work of feminists in Europe and North America, as well as women writing on feminism generally (Daly 1985, 56). Wadud refers to Beauvoir in her work, and many Muslim women writing on Islamic feminism refer to Wadud. Contrasting Wadud's work with Beauvoir's work *The Second Sex* clarifies the different starting places of Western feminism and Islamic feminism. When this difference is contextualized within the history of colonialism within most majority-Muslim countries, the importance of grounding Islamic feminism within a Muslim theological framework becomes evident.

The question we are asking is what role does feminism have in Islam? Leila Ahmed's final statement in *Woman and Gender in Islam* reflects the hope that women in Islamic societies could benefit from feminism. She states,

Perhaps feminism could formulate some such set of criteria for exploring issues of women in other cultures, including Islamic societies- criteria that would undercut even inadvertent complicity in serving Western interests but that, at the same time, would neither set limits on the freedom to question and explore nor in any way compromise feminism's passionate commitment to the realization of societies that enable women to pursue without impediment the full development of their capacities and to contribute to their societies in all domains (Ahmed 1992, 248).

Ahmed's conclusion reflects a belief that a dialogue between feminism and Islam could further the development of the role of women in majority-Muslim societies.

The oppression of women is common to both the West and the East (Barlas 2002, 2). Modernity has been universally oppressive to women (Moghissi 1999, 78). But the oppression of women is not a feature solely of modernity. The oppression of women is a part of the development of Islam historically, as pre-Islamic practices that discriminated against women became incorporated into Muslim society (Ahmed 1992, 87). However misogyny, inequality, and patriarchy have often been justified by Muslims as Islamic

(Barlas 2002, 2). As a result, some ask if Islam and the Qur'an are inherently oppressive to women (Barlas 2002, 4-5).

Defining Islam allows Islamic feminists to disentangle misogyny as it is practiced by Muslims from normative Muslim theology itself (Barlas 2002, 5). Islam must be distinguished from the diversity of social customs of Muslim cultures (Wadud 2001, 166; Barlas 2002, 11). All forms of Islam rely on the Qur'an and *sunnah* (practices of the Prophet) and *hadith* (sayings of the Prophet). Amina Wadud states,

The term Islam is itself thought to apply to many different things...the criteria we use to evaluate whether something is or is not part of Islam must be on the basis of the Qur'an, (the revealed word of God) and *Sunnah* (normative behavior of the person through whom that revelation was sent, the Prophet Muhammed) (Wadud 2001, 166).

The authenticity of any one practice or belief must be judged based on fidelity to the Qur'an and *sunnah* (Wadud 2001, 166). When a practice is not faithful to the Qur'an and the *sunnah*, many do not consider it authentic or Islamic.

The particular religious laws that govern many Muslim nation states vary from country to country, implying that they are not absolute and fixed, at least in interpretation, but rather culturally derived and open to multiple influences. Misogyny and patriarchy exist in Muslim culture and society as they appear throughout human society, but they are not Islam; they are not even Islamic. They are not a fixed set of standards ordained by God and given to the Prophet.

Because the oppression of women is a problem for human society (Wadud 2001, 67), women are working around the world to improve the civil and human rights of women and to increase the opportunities available for women to fully engage human society as free and equal persons. Feminism is characterized by its commitment to resist the oppression of women (Jones 2000, 5; Wittig 1992, 14). The liberation of women would mean full human rights for women, and the end of gender-based oppression (Jones 2000, 5). Feminist theory has been defined by the struggle for social justice for women and the liberation of women as well as the philosophical process of deconstructing gender (Jones 2000, 7).¹⁴

¹⁴ For purposes of this paper, gender will be used to indicate the social construction of the meaning of sex (Jones 2000, 8). Sex refers to the simple biological difference that distinguishes women from men (Jones 2000, 8). Sex is not the determining factor in the establishment of gender: rather, gender as constructed by any given society determines how people view the significance of sex, and, consequently, how society defines women (Barlas 2002, 13). For some feminists, the meaning of gender depends heavily on sex, for others it does not (Moghissi 1999, 3).

All women writing on gender do not give the same primacy to sex in the construction of gender inequality (Wadud 2007, 79). Western Feminists tend to link arguments about women's biological inferiority with patriarchal understandings of women's ontological inferiority. But many Muslim women argue that in the Qur'an and the *sunnah* the fact of biological difference does not support the theory that women are ontologically inferior (Barlas 2002, 134). Wadud argues that gender inequality has a hermeneutical explanation in Islam, not a biological explanation, and that androcentric readings of the Qur'an contribute to the oppression of women and are in fact misreadings of Islam.

While Beauvoir disputes historical arguments about women's ontological inferiority based on sex to defend arguments for women's liberation, Wadud begins with women's ontological equality with men, and women and men's equal agency before God to explain the need for social justice for women. A comparison of Wadud and Beauvoir's writing clarifies the key differences in the meaning of sex and gender for both many Western feminists and Muslim women writing on Islam.

Biology, Ontology, Alterity: Simone de Beauvoir

“One is not born, but rather becomes a woman,” states Beauvoir in *The Second Sex*, (Beauvoir 1989, 267). Her statement reflects her argument that women have been defined and determined by the way women are the Other in contrast to men's existence as the sole transcendent subjects in society, literature, history, and psychology. Beauvoir's work has had a great impact on feminist thought. She is widely cited by feminists writing on women and gender. Beauvoir assumes that the biological inferiority of women and the oppression of women are directly linked and that they comprise the basis of justifications for the oppression of women. This understanding has profoundly influenced Western feminism. She states that biology has served as a justification for the reduction of woman to a being who exists for man and not for herself. Biology, argues Beauvoir, has been interpreted by men to justify the oppression of women.

According to Beauvoir, men have drawn from biology the assumption that woman's nature is passive and inert, in contrast to the active male principle, and therefore inferior. She argues that the passivity of the female in coitus contributes to this assumption (Beauvoir 1989, 21). The sex act and conception thereof both indicate women's passivity and inferiority. Women are assumed to be dependent, inactive, and subjected to men because the act of copulation usually involved a motionless female being acted upon by the male. According to patriarchal worldviews, women's natural propensity for inactivity, as seen in intercourse, makes women unsuitable to engage life as fully human persons.

The other false explanation for women's subjugation to men, to Beauvoir, is that simply because women bear children, their responsibilities are thought to be limited to childrearing. Women are responsible for the continuation of the species because of their ability to give birth and therefore women have been expected to take responsibility for raising children, and to sacrifice all other goals in life (Beauvoir 1989, 23). Procreation is women's place.

Women's passivity in sex and centrality in procreation lead to the subordination of women. These two biological ideas are then used to justify the subjugation of women in accord with the self-interest of men. Women's status is enshrined as a natural, moral, and necessary consequence of biology. Men's status relative to women becomes fixed and eternal. After tracing the logic of the biological explanation for the oppression of women, Beauvoir denies it has any credibility. She says,

These biological considerations are extremely important. In the history of woman they play a part of the first rank and constitute an essential element in her situation...But I deny that they establish for her a fixed and inevitable destiny. They are insufficient for setting up a hierarchy of the sexes; they fail to explain why woman is the Other; they do not condemn her to remain in this subordinate role forever (Beauvoir 1989, 33).

Despite the flawed nature of the argument that biology is destiny, historically the facts of biology have served to justify woman's oppression. Whether or not biology explains women's oppression, and Beauvoir claims it does not, historically men and women have certainly explained the division of the sexes and the subsequent division of labor with biological facts. Beauvoir assumes that the argument against privileging men over women can be refuted by establishing women's biology as insufficient cause for women's oppression.

Women's biological inferiority for Beauvoir has led to an understanding that woman is ontologically inferior to man. For Beauvoir, ontologically and morally woman is viewed as both an idol (Beauvoir 1989, 158) and a slave (Beauvoir 1989, 187), venerated and feared, but never the subject of her own experience. Her status as idol is representative of her death and life-giving capacities, her embodiment of the ongoing productive and destructive cycles of nature (Beauvoir 1989, 193). Her status as slave allows man to contain the uncontainable, uncontrollable forces of nature. Just as her divine existence as giver of life and death makes her sacred, and able to be appeased, coerced, and manipulated, her status as slave allows man to control her and subjugate her. Woman as idolized mother and giver of life and death, and woman as wife and subjugated dominated slave are both roles that serve to assuage man's fears, according to Beauvoir. Man's fear about his lack of control over nature and inability to establish

control over the awesome forces of nature is resolved through his possession of women (Beauvoir 1989, 197). Women are either glorified and protected from life (Beauvoir 1989, 235), or debased and excluded from life. Men alone become the transcendent subject capable of free will and agency, while woman is reduced to the Other, a being who exists for men, thought about and acted on by man; carnal, animal, fleshly, and recognized by man as a possession and an object (Beauvoir 1989, 165).

The ramifications of the views Beauvoir has described are various. The exclusion of women has made women so inferior to men that Virginia Woolf likens woman's role in society to that of a fun house mirror that serves to make men look better (Woolf 1989, 101). Women writing on the social oppression of women have pinpointed women's education as a crucial part of women's oppression. Any man could feel accomplished if literate because women were not able to read or write (Wollenstonecroft 1996, 100). Understanding that gender resulted from sex is an assumption that underpins concepts like the woman as a commodity and sexual commerce (Irigaray 31, 1985), or woman as a class within heterosexist society (Wittig 1992, 15). Beauvoir's arguments about the biological basis of women's inferiority and subsequent oppression greatly influence feminist thought. For many feminists, the accusation that biology is destiny has been true enough historically that it has given women's oppression a scientific basis (Irigaray 70, 1985).

Beauvoir concludes that in the modern world, changes in the social conventions associated with the sex act and childrearing based on the ability of women to be wage earners will lead to changes in the "moral, social, cultural and other consequences" of sex (Beauvoir 1989, 724-725). She states that humanity is a "historical development" and that there is no "physiological destiny" which determines the construction of gender roles in society (Beauvoir 1989, 716). Changes in the labor force and other economic considerations will resolve gender inequality in society and render obsolete the biological considerations that created women's oppression.

Hermeneutics, Ontology, Agency: Amina Wadud

Muslim women do not typically explain gender as based on sex. According to Wadud, there is a hermeneutical basis for women's oppression in Islam and she proposes a hermeneutical solution. If Islamic feminists want to unravel and discredit the theories that support sexual inequality, arguing that biological differences do not justify different treatment of men and women is insufficient.

Muslim women writing on Islamic feminism often comment on the core theme of biological difference for Western feminism (Moghissi 1999, 44). The centrality of biological difference in Western feminism poses a problem for Islamic feminism because of the lack of support in Islam for gender inequality as a result of sex. Establishing

biological equality between men and women has no significant impact on the denial of women's civil rights in an Islamic context (Mernissi 1991, 19). The argument for women's civil inferiority does not begin from women's biological inferiority in Muslim society (Barlas 2002, 130).

Many Muslim women cite misreadings of the Qur'an to explain sexual inequality and the primary cause of women's oppression (Barlas 2002, 132-133). Wadud's argument against sexual inequality approaches biological difference hermeneutically, with the hermeneutic of *tawhid*. Wadud contends that biology is not a defining factor of human worth or rank in Islam (Wadud 2007, 46). Women's biology does not limit her full agency, her divinely mandated role of *khalifah* (agent, or trustee).

Most people who defend the Islamic tradition as pro-woman state that the places in the Qur'an where women's rights are differentiated from the rights of men are intended to restrict the abuse of women, not permit it. Moreover, many Muslims argue that Islam distinguishes women from men to protect women's interests (Barlas 2002, 198).

Although the differentiation of men from women in Muslim society is connected to sex, it is not an argument based on women's inferiority. In the cases where sex forms the central grounds for sexual inequality, it is the social implications of sex that have been used to justify the oppression of women, not merely biological facts.

Wadud argues that the widespread reading of sexual inequality in the Qur'an is in part based on the misapplication of specific verses to universal or general concepts, and the decision to abandon the central ethical principles of Islam, in particular the core value of *tawhid* (God's unity). She argues that using the Qur'an to justify women's inferior civil status relies on a misreading of the Qur'an that privileges an ethic of inequity and oppression over the ethic of the justice and human equality that appears throughout the Qur'an.

Wadud explains there are two types of verses in the Qur'an, *'am* (universal) verses and *khass* (specific) verses. She gives the example of the verse prohibiting the remarriage of Prophet Muhammad's wives after his death. She states this verse is unequivocally *khass* and that it is impossible to apply the verse in a general context, let alone a universal context (Wadud 2007, 196). Even universal verses cannot be applied literally and universally at all times. Moreover, even universal verses have to be re-evaluated and interpreted based on changes in cultural norms and the natural flux of society across generations and epochs. She notes that her interpretive method recognized that the intent of the "*'am*, general utterances [in the Quran], was their historical necessity in a particular time and location while the comprehension of the transcendent reality of the divine cannot be discussed in the boundaries of any human language as a symbolic meaning-making system," (Wadud 2007, 196). Wadud's point is that when people decide on a specific interpretation of scripture, they make a choice.

While truth does have an absolute value, the multiple possibilities for each reading of scripture yields human understandings of truth dependent on interpretation. People make meaning based on their perception or preconceived conclusions about reality. No scripture can be limited to a single, clear, and specific truth.

In addition to the problems of universalizing specific verses, taking single verses as authoritative at the expense of greater themes of the Qur'an is a problem. The concept of God as the Just, or *Al-Adl*, has been used to justify the type of feminist apologetics that Wadud employs to discuss 'am verses in the Qur'an. *Zulm*, translated as both oppression and injustice, is prohibited by the Qur'an (16:90).¹⁵ Oppression goes against God's just nature and God's plan for human beings. Wadud argues that God's justice is incompatible with *zulm* and that any misogynistic interpretation of the Qur'an is *zulm*. Wadud's argument about universalizing specific verses is complemented by her argument emphasizing the ethical norms of the Qur'an. Wadud explain specific verses need to be understood as part of a greater whole. The hermeneutic of *tawhid* is partly about understanding Islam as a totality in order to support greater human rights for women (Wadud 2007, 15).¹⁶

Islamic feminism assumes that all persons are ontologically equal. This is in part because the Qur'an affirms the equality of human beings before God. Numerous verses in the Qur'an affirm members of both sexes as equal before God. They are both judged by their deeds, not their gender.

Wadud insists that despite patriarchal interpretations of primary texts of Islam, there is no distinction made between men and women in relation to their spiritual capacities (Wadud 1999, 34). She states, "There is no indication that the Qur'an intends for us to understand that there is a primordial distinction between men and women with regard to spiritual potential," (Wadud 1999, 35). The ontological equality of men and woman in the Qur'an is not only a theme of Wadud's work, it is a common theme for many Muslim women writing on women in Islam.

¹⁵ Allah commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition. (16:90)

¹⁶ Rosemary Radford Ruether is one of the most well-known women writing on Christian feminism and her approach to scripture reflects the same commitment to the ethical norms of justice and human dignity. Whether any verse is an article of faith or not relies greatly on the system within which the verse is understood. Ruether states, "The critical principle of feminist theology is the promotion of the full humanity of women. Whatever denies, diminishes, or distorts the full humanity of women is, therefore, appraised as not redemptive (Ruether 1983, 18-19)." Ruether's work is based on a particular hermeneutical approach that places the utmost emphasis on women's rights to freedom, dignity, and physical safety. Wadud, like Ruether, has developed a hermeneutical approach based on these moral imperatives.

The oneness of God is the major theme of the Qur'an. Monotheism is the central concept emphasized in Islam. All of creation is defined in contrast to the Creator. *Tawhid*, the oneness of God, is the core teaching of Islam as a religious faith. The Qur'anic story of creation supports the transcendent unicity of Allah over all creation, rather than a mere hierarchy where God rules man and man dominates woman (Wadud 1999, 26).

Wadud's hermeneutic of *tawhid*, an exegetical approach to the Qur'an that emphasizes the unity of the text and therefore prioritizes the deeper and more essential concerns of the text such as the oneness, justness, and goodness of God, allows the reader to de-emphasize verses that marginalize women by placing them both within their historical limits as well as limiting their misuse by devaluing them as primary. The hermeneutic of *tawhid* also highlights Wadud's emphasis on women and men's equal *khalifah* (agency).

Wadud's argument about the inconsistency of women's inferior status in Muslim society and woman's equal status before God is clear in her argument about woman as *khalifah* (agent and trustee) (Wadud 2007, 33). Wadud argues that throughout the Qur'an men and women are equally described as trustees who are responsible for the trusteeship of creation. "The unifying principle of Islam, according to the Qur'an, is the notion of the human being based on a relationship with the divine; more specifically, the concept of *khalifah*, moral agency, the ontological purpose for all creation (Wadud 2007, 80)." The concept that people are God's trustees on earth is framed by Wadud as a fundamental piece of God's plan for creation, central to the Qur'an and to Islam. The Qur'an states that it was the intention of God to make all human persons equally trustees (Wadud 2007, 33).

Wadud's hermeneutic of *tawhid* makes the ontological equality of men and women central to her understanding of gender equality in Muslim society. While explaining the marginalization of women based on patriarchal readings of the Qur'an, the hermeneutic of *tawhid* also makes values like God's justice primary and contextualizes specific verses that differentiate men and women based on sex. The hermeneutic of *tawhid* supports what Wadud calls gender mainstreaming, or the inclusion of women in all realms of Muslim society. She argues that the hermeneutic of *tawhid* and the values it delineates must influence public policy and reframe the way understandings of gender affect Muslim women's lives to establish social justice (Wadud 1999, 102-103, Wadud 2007, 96-97).

The importance of an Islamic Feminism

Why does the idea of using feminism, a Western concept about the basis for gender inequality, in conjunction with Islamic explanations, make sense? It seems almost

counterintuitive after looking at how the starting place of Western feminism is so different from that of Islamic feminism. It makes any conversation about Islam and feminism seem impossible. Many Muslim women writing on Islam go out of their way to state that according to Islam women and men are ontologically equal because of their equal *khilafah* and their mutual total dependence on God, unlike Western feminism which emphasizes the ontological inequality of men and women based on biological justifications of women's inferiority. Muslim women writing on women in Islam also state that traditional feminist theory is not helpful in explaining gender based oppression in Islam.

In addition to the differences in the ways of understanding and framing gender in Western feminism and Islamic feminism, describing women has additional problems in Islam. The importance of using a Qur'anic concept like the hermeneutic of *tawhid* to frame gender equality is reinforced by the way Europeans during colonialism linked women's other-ness in Islam and Islamic misogyny and Islamic inferiority. The dearth of opportunities for women and rights for women supported European understandings of Islamic inferiority. In response, Westernization was and is joined to feminism and the destruction of Muslim culture. While modernization is seen as necessary, the subordination of women to men is often linked to Islamic identity and becomes synonymous with resisting Westernization and changes in traditional culture.

Haideh Moghissi describes the unfavorable portrayal of the "Orient", and Muslim culture in the Orient, as a representation in the interests of colonialism. "The domesticated, subjugated, unenlightened Other as opposed to the liberated, independent and enlightened Western self was used as a moral prop to legitimize colonial power relations," (Moghissi 1999, 15). Woman's status as other in Islam was complicated by the Orientalist's depiction of Islam as other. Conceding that women were debased as a result of Islam was part of the justification for colonialism. To avoid being complicit in Western colonial domination any Islamic feminist epistemology must account for the other-ness of Muslim women both as women and as Muslims during colonialism.

Ahmed likewise describes the way women's other-ness in Islam was used as an argument for Islamic inferiority. She describes in particular the way that in Egypt the introduction of European feminist ideas such as educating women and unveiling, made the process of colonization synonymous with the work for women's rights. Ahmed describes the oppression of Muslim women by Muslim men, and the liberation of Muslim women as being linked by the Victorian colonial establishment. She says,

The idea that Other men, men in colonized societies or societies beyond the borders of the civilized West, oppressed women was to be used, in the rhetoric of

colonialism, to render morally justifiable its project of undermining or eradicating the cultures of colonized peoples (Ahmed 1992, 151).

The concept that the backward Oriental man needed to be restrained from oppressing the Oriental woman served to justify the destructive power of colonialism. The issue of women's rights became linked to the destruction of Muslim culture.

Conclusion: Contrasting Beauvoir and Wadud

Many of the central challenges to feminism contributing to the improvement of Muslim women's lives are framed by the differences between Beauvoir and Wadud. Beauvoir argues about biology, women's inferiority and women as Other. Her critiques of biological arguments for gender inequality are resolved with visions of economic power for women. Religious arguments are not central to her discussion. Wadud builds her arguments for gender justice on hermeneutics, women's and men's equality ontologically, and women's and men's equal agency in Islam. Her arguments are faith-based in the sense that they take seriously the central importance of religion for women's experience. Her call for gender equality draws on her arguments about God's just nature and God's purpose for men and women.

The goal of feminism is to establish equal opportunities and better lives for women. This goal, the goal of human rights for all women, is a common goal for women around the world. However, the contrast between these two thinkers shows the limits to Western theory as a defense of women's rights in Islam. The legacy of Orientalism and colonialism further detract from Western feminists' ability to provide theoretical support for women's rights in Muslim society. The major contribution of Western feminism to the theoretical grounds for Islamic feminism then is the shared goal of all feminists of better lives for all women, and ending the oppression of women.

Many Muslim women writing on Islamic feminism reject the central starting place of feminists like Beauvoir who see biological difference as the foundation for the social inequality of men and women. Western feminism can still contribute to Islamic understandings of the mothering, language, art, love, freedom, the erotic, heterosexism, and other areas of human experience in spite of the need to start from assumptions that are not part of the Western feminist tradition. The work of "jamming the theoretical machinery itself" (Irigaray 78, 1985) is still valuable and grounds for dialogue.

Gender is established for Western feminists, particularly Beauvoir, through assumptions based on sex. In contrast, Islamic feminists assume that there is a hermeneutical basis for gender roles and sexual inequality in Muslim contexts. Muslims need to continue to develop an explanation of gender-based oppression to further the process of establishing gender equality in Islam. Other concerns such as understanding

the double bind of Muslim women in relationship to their other-ness as both Muslims and as Muslim women, as well as the restrictions on Muslim women's lives due to traditional family roles will also serve to further illuminate the potential changes needed to facilitate Muslim women's full engagement in human society.

This comparison highlights that Islamic feminism needs to start from assumptions internal to Islam. While Muslim women share with all feminists the values of justice and human dignity for all women, any epistemological approach to the "ontology of being" (Wadud 4, 2007) in Islam has to start with "intra-Islamic ideas" (Wadud 16, 2007). As Wadud states, "Any comparative analysis with secular Western theories or strategies for mainstreaming women in all aspects of human development and governance is coincidental and secondary" (Wadud 16, 2007).

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Engaging the Media¹⁷ as Effective Tools for Inter-Religious Dialogue in Multi-Religious Societies: a Catholic Evaluation

By Marinus Iwuchukwu

Abstract

Modern societies are largely pluralistic; consequently, the coexistence of many religions is fast becoming the norm not only in Western or developed societies but globally. The Roman Catholic Church has a mission to reach all people and has some form of foothold even in societies that are heavily dominated by non-Christian religions. The media today have become the most effective way of communicating and, potentially, of building relationships with diverse populations. It is, therefore, important to harness the assets of the media toward sustainable and fruitful inter-religious dialogue. This paper argues that Catholics, and indeed all Christians, should seek the best ways of using the media to promote good neighborliness and peace in modern societies.

Introduction

Religion is of its essence communication. The three monotheistic religions claim to be “revelations:” God speaking to human beings. For Christians, the gospel is the good news that must be spread abroad: in other words, *broadcast*. On a theological level, the central doctrine of Christianity, the Trinity, teaches that the One God exists in three Persons, who “communicate” eternally: the Father “generates” the Son and the Holy Ghost “proceeds” from the Father and the Son (Woodrow 2003, 208). The Catholic Church’s consistent appreciation of the media as important instruments for effective dialogue is reflected in John Paul II’s apostolic letter to media workers on 24 January 2005, the occasion of the celebration of the feast of St. Francis de Sales, patron saint of journalists. Part of that letter reads,

In the communications media the Church finds a precious aid for spreading

¹⁷ This article applies the use of the term media principally to print and electronic media. Therefore, when reference is made to media workers, it is ordinarily a reference to those who work in either or both print and electronic media. However, where other forms of media are implied by the use of the term media, efforts will be made to specify the type of media intended.

the Gospel and religious values, for promoting dialogue, ecumenical and inter-religious cooperation, and also for defending those solid principles which are indispensable for building a society which respects the dignity of the human person and is attentive to the common good (John Paul 2005, #7).

The quotation above establishes the proper framework for proceeding to look into how effective the media could be in supporting the global efforts of multi-religious dialogue. The current pope, Benedict XVI, in his inaugural homily during his installation, pointedly remarked that one of the primary focuses of his pontificate would be to encourage harmony between Catholics and Christians and non-Christians of the world. While lamenting the disagreements among different peoples of the world regarding certain values, Benedict XVI concludes optimistically, with the hope that God will reunite his scattered people:

We must not be sad! Let us rejoice because of your promise, which does not disappoint, and let us do all we can to pursue the path towards the unity you have promised. Let us remember it in our prayer to the Lord, as we plead with him: yes, Lord, remember your promise. Grant that we may be one flock and one shepherd! Do not allow your net to be torn, help us to be servants of unity! (Zenit 2005).

It is with such fervent hope that the Catholic Church has approached developments in media technology since *Inter Mirifica*¹⁸ of the Second Vatican Council. Hence the need for the Church to work with the media in her mission of evangelizing the world has consistently been emphasized (Flannery 1965, 284-292).

Mainstream Media and Religion

There is ample historical evidence of profound collaborations as well as mutual interdependence of media and religion, especially in the early stages of modern mass media. The print media, historically, have been utilized successfully toward religious evangelization, activities, and education. When radio was invented in early 20th century, it was effectively and popularly used for broadcasting religious programs and services. Many religious organizations continue to utilize the services and ingenuity of television,

¹⁸ *Inter Mirifica* is a document of the Second Vatican Council, which is focused on the values of modern media and the relevance of the media to the mission of the Church in the World.

radio, and newspaper to further their missions and activities (Underwood 2002, 19ff; Ellens 1974).

However, with time, Western mainstream media began to advocate and represent voices that had hitherto been either silenced or rejected by religion and became a social watchdog over institutions, government, and organizations that previously reigned unfettered and unchallenged. These developments are some of the major reasons many mainline Christian denominations, including the Catholic Church, became very critical of, as well as distanced themselves from, many mainstream media (Lochte 2005, 98ff; Marty et al. 1963).¹⁹ As a result, the relationship of most Western mainstream media to religion became lackluster at best, acrimonious at worst. One only has to think of the many Hollywood movies that have cast religion, notably Catholicism, in a bad light²⁰ or media news reports and documentaries that have emphasized the negative dimensions of religion. The master narratives of most Western mainstream media about religion have tended to highlight news and information like the Christian religious affiliation of Timothy McVeigh (the Oklahoma federal building bomber), the Islamic orientation of suicide bombers in the Middle East and other Islamic countries, and the respectively Catholic and Protestant identities of conflicting parties in Northern Ireland. While it is true that the above-mentioned individuals and groups hold religious identities, it is not true that religion is the only driving force behind their heinous actions or socially unacceptable ideologies. Therefore, to blame Christianity for Timothy McVeigh's terrorist action in the bombing of the federal building at Oklahoma City is *non sequitur*. It is, however, sad that people with devious intentions and desires have historically found ways of wrapping religion around their socially and morally unacceptable conducts and ideas.

The media (as a social institution) have redefined themselves in ways that go beyond the traditional concept of mere channels for information, education, and

¹⁹ The 18th century's Enlightenment philosophical assumptions (like freedom of religion and a commitment to objective truth) were the precursors of the ideologies of social criticism and social watchdog mentality later assumed by the media more actively, especially from the 20th century. This is in addition to the objection religious institutions held against the media as corrupting agents of public morality. The establishment of American Family Association (AFA) is one of the end results of the objections to the media's disposition to anti-traditional family values.

²⁰ The list of such movies stretches wide, including "The Thorn Birds," "Sister Act," "The Confession," etc. There appears to exist some tension between the Catholic Church and mainstream media, especially in Western societies. Here in the United States, some Catholics are of the opinion that mainstream media are out to convict the Church of social evils in both the civic and public courts. This is owing to the intensity and aggression with which the media have published and broadcast issues that paint the church in poor taste, like the crimes of pedophilia leveled against clerics and other church workers.

entertainment. Today's media professionals truly identify themselves as the "Fourth Estate"²¹ in the social political context of a democratic society. As a result, some journalists have observed that it would be wrong for the Church to continue to think of the media as her "stooge" (Harries 1997; Heneghan 1997). Harries (1997) and Heneghan (1997) primarily argue that the media today have come to see themselves as the representatives of public opinion or as constituting the public forum. As the unofficial voice of the public, the media has often spoken and advocated for the public historically and continues to do so today. However, Western mainstream media have often been accused of lopsidedly being in favor of the liberal interests of the public. It is equally true, on the other hand, that in the United States the Fox News network has tended to represent the conservative interests of the public. Yet some media outfits, like CNN, would like the public to believe that they represent the diverse interests of the public. It is therefore fair to say that many mainstream media in the West would like to be seen as both representing the voices of the diverse public and the forum for the voices of the public to be heard. The pastoral instruction *Communio et Progressio* equally identified the media not only as constituting the forum for the public to express their opinion but also affirmed that by their role in society the media help to formulate public opinions (*Communio et Progressio* 1971, #24-32). According to the document, "The means of social communications are public forums where every man [and woman] may exchange ideas," (*Communio et Progressio* 1971, #24). This document goes on to demand freedom of the press and expression as an indispensable requisite for the formation and maintenance of public opinion: "If public opinion is to be formed in a proper manner, it is necessary that, from the start, the public be given free access both to the sources and channels of information and be allowed freely to express its own views," (*Communio et Progressio* 1971, #33).

Such positive reference to and affirmation of the media by the Catholic Church is a clear departure from the attitude of distancing from and condemnation of the media in the past. Indeed, the media today have strategically placed themselves in the position of claiming responsibility for not only assembling public opinion but also significantly influencing or evoking such opinions. As Matt Cooper observes, "The Church has a voice, like any other, which should be facilitated by the media, but it must also be analyzed and criticized," (Cooper 1997, 43). Today's media often strongly express their independence from any institution or authority. This aspect of the media sometimes

²¹ The Fourth Estate is a concept of journalists standing out in the society as the voice of the people. So although while not constitutionally recognized as such, the media have tended to unofficially represent the voice of the public. Fourth Estate is a concept that was officially introduced into usage in the 19th century Britain by Thomas Carlyle in his 1841 book, *On Heroes and Hero Worship*, in reference to the press.

leaves the Church particularly worried. Even John Paul II acknowledged this concern when he commented that “these media run the risk of manipulating and heavily conditioning, rather than serving people,” (John Paul II 2005).

The media on their part, however, insist that the one authority they serve and represent is the voice of the public (Steinfels 1994).²² This aspect is well expressed in the operation of the secular media (Woodrow 2003, 218ff). Serving and representing the public has transformed modern media significantly. They are respected and highly recognized by other social structures, including the political and religious institutions. Further on, we have a development where the media have shifted from being a voice of the people to becoming an agenda-setter within society. This development has been credited as part of the gains of a democratic and modern or postmodern society. Agenda setting is a development where the media have tended to crystallize and/or amplify either conservative, moderate, or liberal ideologies on behalf of the public and make them major talking points for political, social, religious, and economic purposes in the society.

Nonetheless, it is also true that the voice or voices the media choose to promote or defend are determined by the interests of forces like sponsors, management, and the dominant philosophy of the media organizations. Andy Pollak (1997) addresses one interest group’s influence when he writes, “It is one of our journalistic articles of faith that we write for a public which has ‘the right to know.’ In fact, I can tell you, as a journalist of twenty-five years’ experience, that we write primarily for our editors. If the ‘sun king’ is pleased with our work, we are content,” (126).

Besides the shift in paradigm of the understanding of the media in the society, media technology continues to grow rapidly. Today’s digital and internet world, which the media have fully incorporated and promoted, have further compounded the problem of keeping track of and using media developments among religious organizations. There is the enormous challenge of catching up, given that the cost associated with technological equipment and upgrading are economically astronomic for an average religious institution.

Whereas previously the information that most religions disseminated to the media was regulated by the religious authorities who determined what the media should know or not know, now that structure is strongly challenged and sometimes ignored by the invasive, independent, and investigative journalism of today’s media. John Paul II, in his 1986 address to the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Commission for Social

²² However, there are times when there is great doubt about whether what is called the voice of the people is not really the voice of the newsmakers, gatekeepers, and stereotypes that the media chooses to maintain. A renowned American journalist, Peter Steinfels, in his paper published by *The Working Paper Series*, lends weight to this observation.

Communication, contemplates the dominance and challenge of the media: “It has been said that newspaper columns, radio microphones, and television cameras constitute a pulpit from which modern society draws much of its moral and spiritual orientation,” (John Paul II 1986, #5). Interestingly the present role and dominance of the media in society was already envisaged by *Communio et Progressio* (1971). This is evident in its opening comment: “The constant improvement in the media puts them at the disposal of more and more people who in their daily lives make increasing use of them. More than ever before, the way men [and women] live and think is profoundly affected by the means of communication,” (*Communio et Progressio* 1971, #1). Further on, in 1991, John Paul II, in his address to the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, once again hinted at the towering presence and influence of the media in the society in these words:

The fact that the means of social communication have become the chief sources of information and education, of guidance and inspiration, at the level of individual, family and social behavior, invites the members of the Church clearly to recognize their importance (John Paul II 1991, par. 2).

Those words are indeed telling, not only of the importance of the media but also of the Church’s awareness of her need to appropriately use the media in her mission of witnessing in today’s society, regardless of the challenges this may entail. In his last apostolic letter to social communicators (media workers), John Paul II strongly urged them not to be afraid to use the media. He encouraged them to seek to use all the technologies of today’s media morally and responsibly as their Christian faith would suggest (John Paul II 2005, #11-14). It is in the light of a morally responsible Christian faith that the media are indispensable tools for effective inter-religious dialogue. How the media can be used as effective tools for inter-religious dialogue will be explored below.

The Demands of Dialogue

Dialogue is a social imperative for a peaceful society. By extension, dialogue is equally indispensable for peaceful co-existence among peoples of diverse faith affiliations. A document of the Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue and the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples, *Dialogue and Proclamation*, sets the tone for what to expect of an inter-religious dialogue from the perspective of the Catholic Church. Part of the document reads:

Dialogue requires, on the part of Christians as well as of the followers of other traditions, a balanced attitude. They should be neither ingenuous nor overly critical, but open and receptive. Unselfishness and impartiality, acceptance of possible contradictions ... [t]he will to engage together in commitment to the truth, and the readiness to allow oneself to be transformed by the encounter are other dispositions required (Burrows 1993, 105-106).

The key phrases to consider in the challenging efforts of dialogue include balanced attitude; open and receptive; acceptance of possible contradictions; commitment to the truth; and willingness to entertain transformation through the encounter. These dispositions for dialogue are, according to the document, to be pursued with strong religious conviction and openness to truth (Burrows 1993, 106). They are fundamental for any meaningful inter-religious dialogue.

The role of a strong religious conviction presupposes that parties in dialogue have deep reverence for and affiliation with their own religious faiths (Swidler, Duran, & Firestone 2007; Iwuchukwu 2010, 189f). Accordingly, “persons not belonging to any religious or ideological community could not, of course, engage in inter-religious ... dialogue” (Swidler, Duran, & Firestone 2007, 11). With meaningful religious conviction, people in inter-religious dialogue are able to express the beauty and strength of their faith traditions. Inter-religious dialogue is not a forum for proselytizing but rather for stating and affirming the integrity of one’s faith persuasion (Iwuchukwu 2010, 188-189). Based on such integrity and sincerity of conviction, people in inter-religious dialogue delightfully share the truths of their faiths (Swidler, Duran, & Firestone 2007, 28f). But openness to truth also implies that each person engaged in a dialogue has good listening ears to understand and appreciate the truth coming from his or her partners in the dialogue. Iwuchukwu (2010) describes openness to truth as “a prerequisite of foundational necessity for every successful inter-religious dialogue,” (187).

A close look at the above recommendations for meaningful dialogue suggests equally that the parties involved should have genuine and loving respect for each other. It is in the spirit of such respect that openness to truth will prevail in their discussions. Dialogue is not between a superior and an inferior or between a king and his subjects. It is an exercise engaged in by people who basically understand and accept the equality and dignity of each other. When dialogue is carried out in such a spirit, room is created for the transformation of those engaged in dialogue. The transformation of dialogic partners comes from the attentive, respectful, and open mindset that defines the procedure leading to the interactions.

During his first visit to the United States, Pope Benedict XVI, addressing representatives of other religions gathered with him in Washington, D.C., said,

I therefore invite all religious people to view dialogue not only as a means of enhancing mutual understanding, but also as a way of serving society at large. By bearing witness to those moral truths which they hold in common with all men and women of goodwill, religious groups will exert a positive influence on the wider culture, and inspire neighbors, co-workers and fellow citizens to join in the task of strengthening the ties of solidarity (Benedict XVI 4/17/2008).

Benedict XVI confidently affirms the good in other religions in this statement, a fact that accentuates the necessity of inter-religious dialogue and points to the need for collaboration among the religions in a given society for the common good. In the same address, the pontiff also said that:

the United Nations can count on the results of dialogue between religions, and can draw fruit from the willingness of believers to place their experiences at the service of the common good. Their task is to propose a vision of faith not in terms of intolerance, discrimination and conflict, but in terms of complete respect for truth, coexistence, rights, and reconciliation (Benedict XVI 4/18/2008).

In the light of the acclaimed value and indispensability of inter-religious dialogue for the common good in every society (which includes an end to religious motivated wars and conflicts as well as an end to religious bigotry), maximizing the benefits of the media toward the goals of inter-religious dialogue becomes imperative.

How the Church Can Use the Media to Promote Dialogue

Notwithstanding the fact that the media are fast-growing industries in society, the Catholic Church as a noble religious body has, since *Inter Mirifica* of Vatican II, continued to express her willingness to effectively and adequately use the media to further her goals. Affirming this stance, John Paul II in his 26 January 2005 apostolic letter to social communicators said, “the Church is not only called upon to use the mass media to spread the Gospel but, today more than ever, to integrate the message of salvation into the ‘new culture’ that these powerful means of communication create and amplify,” (John Paul II 2005, #2). The idea here is for the media to be infused with the values and disposition necessary for effective dialogue, which include sincere respect for all faith traditions, non-biased reporting and openness to learn the truth about the different religions in the society (Iwuchukwu 2010, 186-194). The Catholic Church has since *Inter Mirifica* consistently maintained her intention to fully, morally, and responsibly use the media to advance the mission of the Church in the world, which

includes dialogue.²³

Among the ways that the Church can use the media, especially those within her control to promote dialogue are, first, to consider better funding and support for media establishments run by the Church. The advantages of the Catholic Church having her own media establishments far outweigh the disadvantages.²⁴ Given the technology available today, the Church should encourage all its agencies, parishes, and organizations to use the internet, radio, television, print media, Wi-Fi devices, etc., to connect with the public. This will help all those extensions of the Catholic Church to truly represent the Church's interests in the media, so that the public gets the right information about the Church and religion at large. When people of other faith traditions are properly informed and enlightened about the Church and its social passions, it helps to minimize bias and tendencies of antagonisms the Church appears to face from peoples of other faith traditions who are ill-informed about the Church. Such enlightenment and better understanding enables people of other faith traditions to be open to engage in religious dialogue with the Church.

Second, reporters or religious correspondents need to be people with some faith orientation who are well educated about religion (Flynn 1997). This helps to ensure accurate, non-biased, and appropriate reporting. Religion is a discipline with very complicated terminologies, ideas, and expressions. Therefore, people reporting or commenting on religion need to have adequate knowledge as well as a faith commitment in order to provide sound reporting. A reporter without a faith commitment does not empirically understand the deeper dimensions and exigencies of a faith-filled life. There are elements of every faith tradition that are more than meets the eyes, which are better appreciated by people who are open to similar or identical experiences. Such believers

²³ Since publishing *Inter Mirifica* of Vatican II, the Catholic Church continues to maintain the value of the media for mission and evangelization. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that she will be in favor of actively involving the media in the mission of inter-religious dialogue as well as for evangelization. The document *Dialogue and Proclamation* does not see any conflict or contradiction for the Church to do so. As a matter of fact, the heart of the message of *Dialogue and Proclamation* is to firmly state that the Church has a dual mission to both promote dialogue and evangelize, with the goal of evangelization being to ensure that the good news is proclaimed, and not necessarily for proselytizing, but as her duty of sharing her message of faith. Inter-religious dialogue certainly welcomes people sharing their faith orientations with their dialogic partners (Swidler, Duran, & Firestone 2007).

²⁴ The Church needs to leave behind the old idea that the only worthwhile church projects are building new churches, hospitals, schools, and facilities to house different charity services. Today, negative media and the Church's seeming lack of positively sustained interest in the media have adversely affected her images as moral authority and spiritual leader, and her services to the society. The media today stands out as the most dominant image-maker. *Aetatis novae* was right in observing that "Reality, for many, is what the media recognize as real; what media do not acknowledge seems of little importance" (See *Aetatis novae*, #1).

must be balanced in their approach and orientation, or, for an example, a fanatical reporter may end up becoming a part of the problem of the Church in the media instead of an asset. Remembering that one of the necessary ingredients for meaningful dialogue is a balanced attitude, a reporter on interfaith dialogue needs also to have a balanced mindset. This helps promote healthy reporting; healthy reporting will enhance the spirit of the dialogue that needs to exist between dialogic partners.

Third, in the spirit of healthy reporting, it is important that the people engaged in dialogue be careful about what they send out in press releases. It is not necessary to invite the media to closed-door forums where dialogue is taking place. Among other considerations, such meetings are often too boring for the media. It suffices to report the conclusions or summaries of such meetings to the media at the end of dialogue meetings.

Fourth, Catholic media organizations need to broaden their professional partnerships to include non-Catholic and non-religious organizations. Operating a media organization with non-Catholic organizations presupposes and invites a broader and more diverse audience and viewers. With sound ethical principles and values typical of Catholic organizations, such partnerships will present a more pragmatic way of ensuring deeper and more effective impact of the teaching of the Church on the products of such partnerships. These partnerships are both evocative and indicative of the dialogue of action recommended by the Church. The recommendation of collaboration through partnership with non-Catholic organizations does not negate the earlier recommendation of supporting and promoting Catholic-owned media institutions. These two can exist simultaneously. While the strictly Catholic-owned media institutions and organizations would focus primarily on outreach to Catholics and potential Catholics, the collaborative efforts with other religious or non-religious organizations would concentrate on working with non-Catholic organizations and religions for the common good of all as well as actively reflecting the Catholic viewpoints on issues of public interest. A good example of such partnership or collaboration is instances of the Vatican press working with secular media to cover the pastoral visits of the pope. Further on, the situation in Haiti after the recent earthquake offers a golden opportunity for many Catholic media organizations to work with both non-Catholic religious media and secular media to respond to the humanitarian needs created by the utter devastation in that country.

Conclusion

This article commenced by acknowledging the increasing influence of the media, especially print and electronic, in society and their development into becoming agenda-setters in matters of public discourse. It also reviewed the growing appreciation in the

Catholic Church for valuing the importance of media in her mission to the world, including inter-religious dialogue. A significant portion of this work has argued and proposed how the media can be used as effective tool for dialogue. As part of the concluding thoughts in this article, it is desirable to focus more closely on one of the demands of dialogue mentioned earlier, namely, the yearning to be transformed by the dialogical activities. A number of theologians define this as conversion, and emphasize that it must be one of the fruits of dialogue. The closest analogy to what this transformation would mean in other disciplines of theology, like those of dogma or pastoral theology, is what Avery Dulles terms “cultural reciprocity” in his analysis of inculturation theology (Dulles 1988, 43-46)²⁵. By cultural reciprocity, Dulles (1988) implies that different cultures “can mutually criticize and enrich one another through dialogue,” (44). However, the emphasis in inter-religious dialogue differs from that of inculturation theology. For while in inculturation theology there is an attempt to bring Christ into the different cultures of the world, in inter-religious dialogue, for a Catholic, one of the goals is to see aspects of the other religion or religions that broaden a Christian understands of the Incarnate Christ. In their respective Christological theologies, Jürgen Moltmann (1981, 114-121) and Edward Schillebeeckx (1983) concluded that since Christ is God he would certainly approve of all that is good and valuable in every religion. It is this universal concept of Christ that Hans Urs von Balthasar (1989) describes as “the ‘humanization’ of God” (70ff) in his incarnation theology.

When they open up to truth and listen with sensitive understanding, partners in dialogue, are able to see other valid and valuable ways of understanding the divine and the call to live holy lives. Such openness to truth and the appreciation of it should pass through the different media channels as clearly and unambiguously as possible to the public. If this profound communication of truth is successful in multi-religious societies, the people in such societies will begin to hold and appreciate each other as partners in life’s spiritual journey. Such social conditions of harmony, peace, and understanding are some of the fundamental goals of inter-religious dialogue.

For the media to effectively communicate the gains of a transforming dialogue, the packaging of the information to be passed on to the public is pivotal. This is why media professionals, who report about religion or contribute to matters regarding religion, should be encouraged to be sensitive to issues of faith, ensuring balanced and truthful reporting and commentaries. For greater success in this regard, there will be need for effective collaboration among the different media organizations reporting

²⁵ Dulles adopts the definition of inculturation articulated by Reiser (1981), which sees inculturation as “the process of a deep, sympathetic adaptation to and appropriation of a local cultural setting in which the Church finds itself in a way that does not compromise its basic faith in Christ” (Dulles 1988, 37).

news, information, and events of inter-religious dialogue to reasonably agree on the what, when, and how of the message to be passed to the final consumers of the products of the media, the public. There should be some form of verification of information and facts rather than the manipulation of information and facts. In practical terms, this idea calls for some sort of clearinghouse on issues, news, and information affecting religion. Needless to say, some media organizations today like CNN, Fox News, CBS, NBC, PBS, etc., already have in place such outfits. Some of the media organizations mentioned have credible experts to consult and large libraries for checking and vetting facts and information. The use of credible experts as consultants and sizeable sources of recorded information and facts provide the required checking and vetting typical of a clearinghouse. However, still other organizations today are reluctant to invest in such an idea and practice.

Finally, it has become very necessary to educate the public to be selective in their use of the media for specialized information. Issues of religion certainly fall within the purview of specialized information. It is therefore vitally important today, when some gatekeepers in the media have failed and continue to fail to uphold responsible and morally satisfying reporting, that the public know that they have a responsibility to make personal efforts to ascertain the truth of news and information they receive from the media. It is then incumbent, from the standpoint of an obligation of faith, on Christians to support those media that they can count on for accurate and balanced reporting and support such media organizations that serve not only the need for reliable and balanced information but are also assets for promoting inter-religious dialogue in multi-religious societies.

The dialogue among religions must go on if we are to maintain peace and good neighborliness in our pluralist societies. The media are a great asset for achieving these social goals, and all hands must be on deck in working toward these noble goals because everyone has a stake in a peaceful, friendly, and orderly society. It is necessary that mainstream media constructively review their tendency of negativity toward certain religious institutions, and for religious institutions to proactively engage the media in the service of society toward the common good and important social ends, including achieving effective inter-religious dialogue in society.

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Globalization as a Metonymy for the Universal

By Paul Ghils

Abstract

The notions, concepts and terms implied by “humanitarian,” “human” and “humanity” are frequently posited as fundamental and predicated on universal values. However, they also imply their construction through cultural, historical and religious frameworks, as well as agreed norms taken as constituting the universal. Attempts to relativize such concepts in a pre-cosmopolitan ordering through diverse interpretations clash with the *koinê* of human sciences, the ideological consensuses and the mythical background of contemporary globalization. Proceeding beyond the cultural mores, religious traditions and historical roots of universal/universalizable concepts requires a renewed, transcultural examination of their foundation and a fresh look at humanitarian praxis.

Introduction

Being human, experiencing a feeling of belonging to humanity, conceiving of humanitarian purposes and referring to human rights undoubtedly have common semantic roots in our languages. However, the meanings of these phrases actually pertain to different cognitive spheres and different histories. They do not refer to given data, but are conceived and interpreted through the prisms of mythical, biological, psychological, political or legal assumptions, and situated into distinct cultural contexts. They can be related to the current or past trends of globalization, or integrated into a comprehensive view of current trends. In this respect, their interrelations can be considered as metonymies, i.e. as rhetorical devices using the name of a concept (such as globalization) for that of another (such as universal) to which it is related, of which it is a component or a dimension, or which it somehow represents or suggests.

In the academic field, the various settings or historical periods can be interpreted through the filter of theories of international relations (IR), and either be related to a single dimension in a reductionist enterprise with scientific claims or articulated into a complex whole to suggest a composite or cosmopolitan picture of the global scene. Examples abound of both reductionist and holistic attempts, with the variety of intermediate designs, whatever the discipline concerned—international relations, economics, international law, human genetics, religious sciences, cultural studies and

others. Finally and more importantly, this paper addresses the questions raised when the chosen set of concepts is transplanted partially or totally from their original Western context into other cultural settings: Confucian, Islamic, Hindu, African, and others.

A confusion in terms

Globalization, which has become a basic concept of IR discourse, but also a most ambiguous one, is commonly conceived as a process or set of processes which embody a transformation in the spatial organization of social relations and transactions, generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction and power. The defining criteria can thus be thought of by David Held and other internationalists as the widening, intensifying, speeding up and growing impact of world-wide interconnectedness (Held and McGrew, 1999)²⁶.

A first remark is that this definition is not limited to particular categories of actors, so that it leaves the analyst free to emphasize the role of states or non-state actors (defined as nonprofits or for-profit), mixed actors or the impact of factors and processes such as climate change or epidemics, none of which is disconnected from humanitarian issues. From this perspective, it appears to be equally scientifically legitimate to either select one variable as central to a conventional understanding of the globalization concept or, spanning the whole spectrum, to embrace a trans-disciplinary concept that encompasses all the social sciences and some natural sciences. Its institutional expression is commonly associated with international law and specifically the United Nations (UN), which, although it legally remains an association of sovereign states, “practically becomes a ‘global’ organization,” based on the understanding that the UN is or is to become a truly “universal organization” whose actions may be extended to include unofficial actors in new forms of “global governance” (Muldoon *et al.*, 2004, 8).

In the first case, globalization can be reduced to disciplinary practices and be equated with IR or global history; with processes such as the spread of technologies and scientific knowledge, international migration, epidemics or environmental change, or with specific categories of actors such as states and inter-governmental organizations (IGOs), individuals, communities, non-state actors with nonprofit or for-profit aims with a cultural, religious, techno-scientific or ideological content. Each of these reductions, or metonymical substitutes for globalization, can generate empirical patterns of world-wide links and relations across a key domain of human activity.

²⁶ The journal *Globalizations* explicitly addresses the plural interpretations of globalization, away from the paradigm that dominated the first phase of the globalization debate, as commented by James N. Rosenau (2004).

In the second case, one may think that an all-embracing and polysemous concept covering all spheres of life and all historical periods from antiquity to present may lose some of its scientific relevance and usefulness, but also acknowledge that it has the advantage of pointing to actual or potential universality. Additionally, it can be argued that its very semantic and pragmatic complexity can be seen as a positive break with conventional theories insofar as the onset of globalization has led to the blurring of disciplinary boundaries and exposes the conceptual deadlocks of strict disciplinary definitions and descriptions, suggesting the need for a comprehensive, cross-disciplinary inquiry (Ghils, 2007).

Overall, we are confronted with a dual epistemological treatment implying that the globalization concept can be either simplified with reference to positive parameters, such as the descriptive criteria of geopolitics, or complicated by extending it over to various dimensions such as historical forces, symbolic representations, cultural values or ethical constructions, whether religious or secular. A general remark applicable to all scientific or practical uses of the concept is that in all cases the global and the universal overlap, which may suggest the implicit desire that global realities pre-empt the accomplishment of the universal.

The reductionist attitude can be conspicuously observed in the economic field, where it was increasingly agreed that globalization is a corporate-led process, until it came under justifiable criticism as a consequence of the current financial and economic turmoil (Ralston Saul, 2005; Khan, 2008; Wolf, 2009). However, this process is not limited to objective phenomena and appears to be subordinated to ideological formulations and quasi-religious beliefs in market forces guided by the “invisible hand” of Adam Smith, whose disastrous results need no demonstration. A striking illustration of this stereotype is given by the World Business Academy, which is “not just another association of business people to exchange information and foster collegiality,” but understands that business is the dominant institution in society today and the one most capable of responding to rapid change and to disseminate business into the world to rekindle the human spirit in business: “Business has become, in this last half of century, the most powerful institution on the planet. The dominant institution in any society needs to take responsibility for the whole, as the church did in the days of the Holy Roman Empire. But business has not had such tradition. This is a new role, not yet well understood or accepted” (Harmann, 2005).

Other forms of what is both a reduction and an over-extension of the term are enshrined in the idea of global civil society associated with the politics of rights, the idea of common good and democratic institutions. This loose concept includes all of the often exclusive and conflicting components mentioned above, presented or imposed as universal aims despite particularistic views with political, economic or cultural content. The resulting paradoxes are particularly striking for systems whose universal aims are

derived from traditions which in one way or another amount to “imported” forms of universalism, in the way the Western state has been “imported”²⁷ to other regions of the world through colonization. In its received usages, civil society is often a reduction or even a distortion of its liberal origin insofar as it includes, among other components, conflicting orientations, exacerbated by their transnational dimensions: some communitarian theories glorify the absence of choice involved in the discovery of one’s real identity as a pre-determined reality, defining individuals—who can no longer in this case be properly and literally called “individuals”—as being constituted by their community, without any possibility of choice or free affiliation. This view of civil society is in sharp contrast with the associational tradition, in which fellow citizens are free to either become members of an association or leave it as they like, actually creating relationships they choose on a voluntary basis with the resulting fabric of plural “identities”—here again an improper term which conceals the changing and labile fabric of overlapping social spheres.

Whatever the content of civil society (CS)—companies and corporations, communities, voluntary associations, indigenous groups or religions—and its variable ethical legitimacy, which some activists have stretched to the point of considering it as the “conscience of the world” (Willetts, 1996), the very idea of CS as a political concept remains a byproduct of Western culture. Although it is often claimed that all cultures and religions are open to various interpretations and evolutions, antagonistic views regularly appear between universal human rights and cultural identities. To take a first example, the failure to adapt the concept of civil society within certain Arab countries is well illustrated by the statement Dr. Saad Eddin Ibrahim prepared but was not allowed to present on his final day in court, 29 July 2002, before he was sentenced and taken away to jail for his defense of human rights through the advocacy of civil society: “I believe that the members of this honourable Court who are over forty-five will remember that fifteen years ago they never heard the phrase ‘civil society.’ This was not an expression used in spoken Egyptian or the Arabic language before the establishment of Ibn Khaldoun Centre,” he said.²⁸

²⁷ I am taking here the term used by Bertrand Badie in *L’Etat importé. L’occidentalisation de l’ordre politique* (Paris, 1999. Eng. Transl.: *The Imported State. The Westernization of the Political Order*, Stanford: Stanford UP, 2000), in which the author traces the rise of the modern state—a mode of organizing political power within a closed territory—in post-Enlightenment Europe and its spread to the remainder of the world, especially colonial and postcolonial societies.

²⁸ English translation of the statement Saad El-Din Ibrahim prepared but was not allowed to present on the final day in court, 29 July 2002, before he was sentenced and taken away to jail. Dr. Ibrahim had been arrested on 30 June under the State Emergency Law, accused, among other allegations, to have received foreign funding without permission of the authorities and to disseminate false information that damages

Arguably, the idea of civil society is rejected in parts of the Arab and Islamic world as a concept rooted in Western culture, closely associated with secularism and the Westernization of Muslim societies. Various forms of an extreme application of Islamic law can be found in regions ruled or controlled by the Taliban, in Saudi Arabia, or even in Iran today, where the Shari'ah (Qu'ranic law) has been referred to by the government to justify the suppression of all forms of civil opposition and implied rights and support a theory of legitimate violence. The source of legitimacy was restated by Ayatollah Mohammad Mesbah Yazdi, President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's spiritual advisor and the author of *War and Jihad in Islam*, arguing that violence is intrinsic to and necessary for human beings. In violation of Iran's republican constitution, which states that the authority of the supreme leader, the president, and the parliament should emanate from the people's vote and not from God, Yazdi claimed that as the supreme leader is appointed by God, his use of violence through state authorities is legitimate.

However, counterarguments can easily be found, from breakaway currents like the Mutazilite, who held that reason alone is sufficient to understand the nature of God and existence, to contemporary Muslim philosophers or religious authorities who claim that Islam is a religion as well as a culture, and so translates into diverse, specific expressions, as opposed to the more universal concept of *akhlaq* (ethics) in addition to Shari'ah, following Khalid Duran's and other thinkers' suggestions (Masud 2007, 101-102). Some religious authorities also support confidence in scholars to rule the community in the political sphere, such as Iraq's Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, whose defense of the Iraqi constitution in his 2003 fatwa was based on democratic political principles, making no reference to the religious law, although he questioned civil liberties in other respects.²⁹ Even if scholars like Riffat Hassan and others claim that secularism and humanism are unacceptable to Islam, many Muslim "free thinkers" will claim, in line with a long philosophical tradition going back to al-Farabi and Ibn Rushd, in which secularism and humanism based on the autonomy of science and reason need not clash with the Revelation and are entitled to found the political dimension of al-

Egypt's national interest. At least eight other staff members of the Ibn Khaldun Center for Civil Society were also arrested and files confiscated. On 25 May 2009, Saad Eddin Ibrahim was proved unguilty in the case of spying filed against him by Lawyer Abul Naga Elmehrezy. He can now enter Egypt safely.

²⁹ However, the same ayatollah legitimized another kind of civil violence when he issued a fatwa in 2006 in which, to the question "What is the legal standard about men's and women's homosexuality?", he answered "It is illegitimate (haram) and the person who behaves this way is punished, the one who commits masculine homosexuality will be put to death" (question 5). Rights groups were concerned that, inspired by this ruling, the Sadr and Badr militias, both Shia, were stepping up attacks on homosexuals and calling for their eradication. Under the pressure of international protest, Ali al-Sistani finally renounced the fatwa (*The Independent*, 12 May 2006).

Farabi's "Virtuous City," remembering his ambition to naturalize Western philosophy and science of late antiquity in the Islamic world (Mahdi 2000). From its earliest period, Islamic political theory has consequently devised mechanisms and institutions for limiting the power of both political and religious authorities over what can be considered as equivalent to the forms of civil rights more recently projected from Western culture onto Islamic societies. In a similar way, Sufi currents are often seen as forms of Islamic humanism proceeding beyond the ritualistic side of religious practice into social values expressing a sense of responsibility and solidarity, a duty to sharing and sympathy with the others, as well as a freedom of expression often perceived as a threat to the established dogma (Chebel 2006).

Even if "Islam views all human beings to be ontologically members of the same family, the same umma," it posits "the moral primacy of membership in the single community of Muslim believers," even if it otherwise "acknowledges that human identities are never monolithic." The ideal universal nation so defined remains within the boundaries of a specific community, whose law is immediately positive and rational insofar as it derived from the final, closed message received from God and entirely transmitted by Mohammed. Its strength is not easily undermined by oppositional tensions "because in Islam there are no kings or popes, no kingdoms and no churches" (Hanafi 2002, 173). Rulers are consequently jurists more often than theologians, as Muslim law covers all aspects of life, from birth to death, including relations among individuals and between these and the state. Legal norms also apply to inter-state relations in times of peace and war. But the very absence of distinction between the institutional pole and the spiritual pole, between the visible and the invisible dimensions of the community raises the fundamental issue of recognizing secular government as the *sine qua non* of democracy, and theocracy as its natural opponent (Aldeeb Abu Salieh 2006).

This contrasts with Indian theories, starting with Kautilya who as soon as the 4th century B.C.E. explicitly separates political thinking from theology in his *Arthashastra*, and in the various Indian *darshanas* ("viewpoints" or "theories"), which consistently make room for a dialectical approach to arguments and counter-arguments. This explains why Sanskrit "not only has a bigger body of religious literature than exists in any other classical language," but also "a larger volume of agnostic or atheistic writings than in any other classical language" (Sen 2005).

Other examples referring to various cultural settings raise the same question about the adequacy of the concept of civil society or about its implicitly positive nature, concealing the frequent negative and destructive forces underlying forces coming under such labels as "non-state," "civil" or "transnational," (Ghils 1985, 1992, 1995, 2007) as illustrated by mafia networks, terrorist groups or anarchical movements in failed states. A second contradiction appears, as mentioned above, when it includes the

communitarian dimension in a global public sphere, which comes up against the universalist claims of a civil society based on the liberal conception of individual rights. The inclusion of the two poles of civil society—communities and individuals, inherited moralities and constructed ethics—which can in turn be subdivided into the sub-poles constituting a tension between constructive and destructive forces within them, finally undermines the assumption that civil society can be the desired locus of a possible synthesis in the public sphere.

A specific case is the intermingling of traditional and modern forms of associations in Africa. On the continent, the strengthening of civil society (in the Western sense) is still considered today as correlative to the reinforcement of pluralistic democratic institutions. NGO networks, cooperatives and “tontines”³⁰ serve both as counterweights to political power and dynamic forces affecting the whole of society: “Civil society embodies the people in its diverse and plural character, when the people has become aware of the role it is called to play” (Cotonou Meetings, 1991).

From the perspective of political anthropology, civil society can include religious (Christian, Islamic and others) and professional organizations, unions in the private manufacturing sector, as well as small and medium-size businesses, small farmers, etc. It appears that civil society is more likely to blossom within a free market society, but also if state power is effective, insofar as it creates the favorable conditions for a healthy civil society. (Bratton 1989, 407-430) As can be seen, we are confronted here again with an “imported” concept as far as the weakness of civil society is ascribed to the very weakness or “failure” of the state: “On the basis of available evidence, a prima facie case can be made that institutions of civil society exist in some African countries, if only in fledgling form.” Furthermore, this institution has been colliding, merging or overlapping with the distinctive African settings based on traditional elements of political culture in African countries, with Africans identities commonly drawn from collective social units like family, clan and ethnic group.

In his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom*, Nelson Mandela describes how influenced he was, as a young boy, by the democratic nature of the local meetings that were held in the regent’s house in Mqhekezweni: “Everyone who wanted to speak did so. It was democracy in its purest form. There may have been a hierarchy of importance

³⁰ A *tontine* is a cooperative fund whose benefits ultimately accrue to the last survivor or survivors after a specified time. First issued by the British government in 1693 to fund a war against France, tontines became associated with life-insurance in the United States in the 19th century. As a type of rotating savings and credit association (ROSCA), tontines are well established as a savings instrument in Western and central Africa.

among the speakers, but everyone was heard....” (Sen 2005, 30-31; Smyke 2005). Today, the challenge is still to reconcile the concept of solidarity, which typically translates in two distinct traditions, between the modern forms of civil society and the older associational structures constructed upon group or age solidarity.

Conflictive views in the UN system

In the field of international law, a similar contradiction exposes the failure of cultural relativism. For example, most states belonging to the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) involved in the Islamic Human Rights movement have in fact endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the covenants, together referred to as an “International Bill of Rights.” In doing so, “these states have undertaken obligations to guarantee to their citizens the rights stipulated in the International Bill of Rights. The permissible derivations from these obligations are governed by international law, which presently provides for no general limitations on the basis of religious legal systems,” despite efforts by OIC to penetrate the UN Human Rights Council (HRC).³¹ Which means, as argued by Muslim associations that question this position, that countries backing the IHR movement must either withdraw entirely from the International Bill of Rights or be prepared to acknowledge the universality of those rights.

This conflict is epitomized by the adoption of the Cairo Declaration on Human Rights in Islam at the Nineteenth Islamic Conference of Foreign Ministers in Cairo on 5 August 1990. At the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna, Iran, supported by several other Islamic States, pressed for the acceptance of the Cairo Declaration as an alternative to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This objective was partly achieved in 1997 when the Cairo Declaration was included by the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights as the last document in *Human Rights: A Compilation of International Instruments: Volume II: Regional Instruments, (New York and Geneva, 1997, OHCHR, Geneva)*. The legal contradiction is illustrated in the phrasing of the Cairo Declaration itself, which states that “(a) Everyone shall have the right to express his opinion freely in such manner as would not be contrary to the principles of the Sharī’ah; (b) Everyone shall have the right to advocate what is right, and propagate what is good, and warn against what is wrong and evil according to the norms of Islamic Sharī’ah; (c) Everyone shall have the right to participate, directly or indirectly in the administration of his country’s public affairs. He shall also have the

³¹ “Islam & human rights. Defending Universality at the United Nations”, statement by the Centre of Inquiry (which holds special consultative status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council), where it focuses on issues of freedom of expression and scientific inquiry in the international community.

right to assume public office in accordance with the provisions of Shari'ah" (Article 22). And also: "All the rights and freedoms stipulated in this Declaration are subject to the Islamic Shari'ah" (Article 24); and, in "The Islamic Shari'ah is the only source of reference for the explanation or clarification to any of the articles of this Declaration" (Article 25). In its Charter, the OIC and its 57 signatories openly violate their own principles, as it recognizes in Article 2 that "The Member States undertake that in order to realize the objectives in Article 1, they shall be guided and inspired by the noble Islamic teachings and values and act in accordance with the following principles: 1. All Member States commit themselves to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter ..."

The conflict between the two interpretations of human rights and, more generally, international law, has occupied the UN Human Rights Council (former Commission) for the past eleven years. On 28 March 2008, during the 7th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), with the support of China, Russia and Cuba among other countries, the Islamic States succeeded in forcing through an amendment to a resolution on Freedom of Expression and against the "abuse" of it.³² In agreeing to restrict the exercise of allegedly universal human rights for the first time in the 60-year history of UN Human Rights bodies, the HRC has confirmed the concern that "the tendency within some parts of the international community to roll back the principle of universality in order to make the enjoyment of fundamental rights dependent on factors such as tradition, culture, religion or the level of development," expressed in a statement to the Human Rights Council by the Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany on 10 December 2007.

True, the politicization of the HRC does not necessarily coincide with opinions voiced by 40 civil society organizations, most of them from member states of the Organization of the Islamic Conference, which call on the Human Rights Council to protect the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression and to reject the amendment to the mandate proposed by the OIC. During the 7th session of the Human Rights Council (HRC), the OIC formally successfully introduced an amendment to the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Expression which required him to "report on instances where the abuse of the right of freedom of expression constitutes an act of racial or religious discrimination, taking into account Articles 19(3) and 20 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and General Comment 15 of the Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination which stipulates that the prohibition

³² Which includes speaking out against Shari'ah laws that require women to be stoned to death for adultery or young men to be hanged for being gay, or against the marriage of girls as young as nine, as in Iran.

of the dissemination of all ideas based upon racial superiority or hatred is compatible with the freedom of opinion and expression.” This amendment requires silencing any criticism of Shar’ah Law and its association with certain abuses of human rights, such as the stoning of women, forced marriage, and the hanging of gay men. However, in what was probably a first for the United Nations, delegates to the HRC heard two Muslims describe religious literalism as “racism” and tell their listeners that the OIC does not speak for the majority of the world’s Muslims. Danish MP and leader of the Liberal Alliance Naser Khader, and Tarek Fatah, founder of the Muslim Canadian Congress were eloquent in their denunciation of the OIC, its Saudi paymasters, Iran and the Muslim Brotherhood.

The West and the rest?

Is it then relevant to ask whether it is appropriate to apply such a historically specific and essentially Western concept outside its original sphere, assuming once again that it is actually or potentially universal, or at least a space for a cross-cultural dialogue? A radical view against this claim has been articulated by the American sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein (1996),³³ who has equated universalism and imperialism in his recent works. He suggests that such ideas as civilization, progress, freedom, democracy, human rights and Western intervention to promote these ideas around the world, whether decided by states or performed by NGOs, are forms of universalism predicated on natural law and used as a smokescreen for Western dominance ever since the Enlightenment. This attitude, he says, is similar to that of the Spanish theologian Juan Ginés de Sepúlveda, who justified the conquest of America in the 16th century against Bartolomé de Las Casas’s objections. As early as 1492, Las Casas (1971) said, people were living in a closed world, a small world that constituted the whole of which the Spaniards were only a part. The victory of the *Conquistadores* could therefore be considered as reaching the universal, extending the medieval *Republica Christiana* over the whole world. Columbus’s obsession with what was to be a new and last crusade expressed not so much a “discovery” as the accomplishment of God’s will and ancient prophecies, in conformity with what a common conviction prior to the voyage itself and affirmed by Ferdinand and Isabella in a letter that follows the discovery: “That which

³³ Wallerstein challenges the divorce between philosophy and science, between the knowledge about the good and the true: “The good is the same as the true in the long run, for the true is the choice of the optimally rational, substantively rational, alternatives that present themselves to us. The idea that there are “two cultures,” a fortiori that these two cultures are in contradiction to each other, is a gigantic mystification.” <http://fbc.binghamton.edu/iwstanfo.htm>) He is in favor of a unified epistemology which he sees coming by the converging trend of the “complexity studies” and the “cultural studies.” They show a stronger concern for historicity, constructivity, contextuality.

you had announced to us has come true as if you had seen it before having spoken of it to us,” (letter of 16/8/1494).

To return to the case of civil society, Gary Wickham (1994, 509) has argued that “efforts to locate civil society... reveal more about the preoccupations of Western scholars than they do about new social configurations in the Middle East today.” However, “a categorical rejection of the idea of civil society in the Middle East is unwarranted, not least because the idea of civil society is fast becoming part of the indigenous intellectual and policy dialogues,” (Gilbraith 2009). The extent to which the idea has gained currency in the region is also described by Eva Bellin: “State officials in the Middle East use the term “civil society” to promote their projects of mobilization and “modernization”; Islamists use it to angle for a greater legal share of public space; and independent activists and intellectuals use it to expand the boundaries of individual liberty,” (Bellin 1994, 509). These authors conclude that, by focusing on its essential characteristics and role rather than its particular institutional manifestations, civil society remains a valid tool of analysis for the Arab world.

In other cultural or epistemological perspectives, the concepts of the universal, the common good, globalization and the implied concepts associated with democracy have been revisited in several noteworthy comparative studies of science, literature, religion and philosophy. Most of these studies avoid attempts at comprehensive contrasts and evaluations, aiming instead to show how bringing texts from the two traditions into conversation with one other can enrich and enliven our understanding of each, while avoiding undue confusions between science and culture, culture and religion, religion and philosophy. Such thinkers as Amartya Sen (2007) in his essays on Indian political thought, François Jullien (2004) about Greek and Chinese strategies of meaning, Muhsin Mahdi (1995) about Islamic political philosophy, Dariush Shayegan (2001) on the Persian and Western traditions, or Michael Bratton (1991, 1994) on African civil society illustrate relevant attempts at opening new avenues to potentially universal values and rights. These works resemble studies which differ in their respective approaches but try to make sense of the many phyla that may lead to new universal, or potentially universal paradigms, although they admit that situating universal concepts such as democracy or the state as a continuation of actual spaces, whether politically, ideologically or culturally defined, introduces a contextual flavor into notions which philosophical thinking has made artificially universal and abstract. However, they also question the assumption that such concepts are precisely abstract notions disconnected from actual achievements or aspirations and, for that matter, reduced to a regulatory reference.

Asian responses

As Amartya Sen (2004, 2005, 2006) has shown, political liberty and tolerance in their full contemporary form is absent from ancient traditions. Plato and Augustine were no less authoritarian in thinking than were Confucius and Kautilya.³⁴ There were, of course, champions of tolerance in classical European thought, but there are plenty of similar examples in other cultures as well. Among the earliest political defenses of tolerance anywhere, Sen often mentions the case of Emperor Ashoka's dedicated championing of religious and other kinds of tolerance in India in the third century BCE, who argued that "the sects of other people all deserve reverence for one reason or another"). In a later period, when, at the turn of the 16th century, the heretic Giordano Bruno was burned at the stake in Campo dei Fiori in Rome, the Great Mughal emperor Akbar (who was born a Muslim and died a Muslim) had just finished, in Agra, his large project of legally codifying minority rights, including religious freedom for all, along with championing regular discussions between followers of Islam, Hinduism, Jainism, Judaism, Zoroastrianism and other beliefs, including atheism.

In his broad inquiry into values directly related to democratic rights, intercultural and inter-religious toleration, Sen shows that open discussion has been present in the argumentative tradition of India for over two millennia. This traditional practice can be found not only in the public expression of values, but also in philosophical debates and hence in the formation of various forms of secularism opposed to the more religious currents of classical Indian schools (*darśanas*). The early uniqueness of Indian philosophies in making room for opposite arguments is also linked with the propensity of all Indian philosophical systems to discuss the use of reason. The claim that the use of reason must be purposeful or goal-directed is illustrated by Kautilya's *Arthashastra* (*Treatise on Gains*), a classical book on government, politics and economics which dates from around 300 BC. Kautilya's study applies a method of "critical inquiry" (*anviksiki*) distinct from theological studies. The practice of contradictory argumentation, which is present in all philosophical systems, may explain the Indian interest for what they had heard about Greece in that respect, at a time of intimate and extended contact between the two cultures following Alexander's campaign in India. As reported by Jonardon Ganieri (2001, 8), "The ancient Greek chronicler Megasthenes frequently visited the court of Candragupta and in his *Indica* he presented to the Greeks a vivid account of the Indian society of those times. Fragments of this lost work quoted by later writers reveal Megasthenes to have been greatly impressed by similarities between Greek and Indian ideas, especially about space, time and the soul. He is also said to have carried messages

³⁴ Kautilya was the chief minister in the court of Candragupta (reigned c. 321–c. 297 BC), a Mauryan ruler who came to power at about the time of Alexander the Great's death. As founder of the Maurya Dynasty, Candragupta was the first emperor to unite most of India under one administration. He lived at the same time as did Alexander and may have met him when he invaded India.

between Candragupta's son Bindusara, the father of Asoka, and Antiochus I. Bindusara indeed asked Antiochus to send him Greek wine, raisins, and a Sophist to teach him how to argue. Antiochus replied by sending the wine and raisins, but regretted that it was not considered good form among the Greeks to trade in Sophists!"

In the same vein, philosophical speculation and the practice of religious expositions associated with debates and controversies will generate a kind of pluralism that "ensures that these issues will be continually debated, as against being permanently settled," which is why "one may, in order to understand Hinduism, move on from the concept of a textual community to that of a contextual community" (Daya 1996, 201).

Indeed, the very idea of democracy, in the form of participatory public reasoning, appeared in different civilizations at different periods in world history. Sen also mentions early seventh century Japan, when the Buddhist Prince Shotoku, regent to his mother Empress Suiko, introduced a relatively liberal constitution or *kempo* (known as "the constitution of 17 articles") in 604 CE. In the spirit of the Magna Carta (signed six centuries later, in 1215 CE), the *kempo* insisted: "Decisions on important matters should not be made by one person alone. They should be discussed with many." On the subject of tolerance, it says: "Nor let us be resentful when others differ from us. For all men have hearts, and each heart has its own leanings. Their right is our wrong, and our right is their wrong." However, the preeminence of uniformity has consistently reappeared in the opposite image of a "Japanese spirit" (*yamato damashii*), somehow echoing the idea that the Chinese culture, being unique, is incommunicable (Jullien 2008, 256). Examples of championing public discussion and seeking different—and conflicting—points of view have figured in the history of many histories in the world, both in the West and outside it. They continue to be of contemporary relevance in thinking about the potential universality of pluralist democracy and fundamental rights. As Sen also recalls, when India became independent in 1947, the committee that drafted its constitution, led by B.R. Ambedkar, had to consider India's own traditions (including those of political tolerance and local democracy), in addition to learning from the gradual emergence of Western democracies over the previous two centuries.

In a distinct attempt to seize the links between the common, the universal and the uniform, philosopher François Jullien has engaged in a dialogic rediscovery of Greek philosophy and Chinese studies in the early 1970s in the hope that Chinese philosophy would throw into question all the "great universals" of European thinking. China was chosen because, for Jullien (2008), it is the only historic culture to constitute Europe's "great other": the Arabic and Hebraic worlds are "closely connected to our own history, and India is linked with European culture linguistically, with only a few divisions between Greek and Sanskrit." Revisiting Western thought with ideas from the East, Jullien points out that this approach is intellectually and politically imperative at present. Against the self-help industry, which pursues an opportunistic simulacrum of

this type of intellectual exchange, Jullien seeks to create a space of mutual inquiry that maintains the integrity of both Eastern and Western thinking. The mechanism of “enlightenment through difference” is precisely what Jullien, in his extensive and fascinating studies of Chinese culture and history, has identified as a “constitutive interdependence” or “correlation,” which he identifies as one of the main characteristics of the Chinese knowledge structure. Such an aesthetic of correlation could challenge the one of “tabula rasa,” the philosophy of the new and of progress at any price that has dominated the history of the twentieth-century avant-garde in the West. In this matter, China appears in Huang’s practice as a “symbolic form,” in the same way that Erwin Panofsky understood the role of perspective during the Renaissance. According to him, Chinese tradition distrusts the universality of logical concepts. Thus the hexagram operates not as a predetermined, abstract, and codified intellectual representation or construct, but as a pure transformational structure to be used as a perceptual diagram. The I Ching’s aim is to clarify the way events unfold. For Jullien, the hexagrammatic structure is the only one that is capable of expressing the ongoing mutations of the universe, which he calls “process,” through a concrete system of representation, or “concrete figuration.”

Another difference appearing in Jullien’s studies is an idea that appears to be crucial to understanding some aspects of a distinctively Chinese thought process, which is that in China history as a discipline concentrates not so much on events, facts, and dates, but rather on change. History is traditionally not understood and studied as a linear, continuous narrative. Facts and events are milestones within an evolving process that gives priority to relationships. In comparison, Western history is from beginning to end an epic narrative. China is, again according to Jullien (1989, 2004a, 2004b, 2008), the only great civilization that has produced neither a cosmography nor an epic. The West is dependent on Hegel’s idea that the study of universal history itself has to be perceived as a progression with a rational cause, a means and an end. In China the course of the world is an uninterrupted succession of opposed but complementary phases; history is channeled through divination practices, and civilization is less concerned with “being” than with “becoming,” which is never orderly and definitive. Jullien’s account (1989, 2004, 2008) of the worldview unifying the Chinese tradition shows that, unlike Western essentialists, the main line of Chinese reflection and discourse aims at indicating the richness of a non-dualistic heaven/nature, at hinting at the immanent structure of being, rather than at revealing the unitary truth concealed within the phenomena. The central contrast is between two sorts of universality that define two cultures, “Socratic generality” versus “Confucian globality.” The West seeks to discover the God’s-eye view directly; China hints obliquely, rejecting the idea of transcendence, at the immense variety of points of view and of the world itself.

Conclusion

The quest for universal values has been associated with concepts such as democracy, human rights and humanitarianism. However, these appear to be questionable. There linger unquestioned claims about the accomplished forms of the universal and an abstract notion disconnected from actual achievements or aspirations.

Ascribing a place to such concepts as human, humanity and humanitarian on a possible continuum between the global and the universal amounts to the possibility of a general, constructed ethic based on an ontological conception of the world which includes or excludes such concepts as truth, phenomena, situations, identities, harmony, which are either intangible or moving and evolving. It results from the emerging conversation between various cultural or philosophical conceptions that plural ethics should be considered first as a provisional horizon before considering the possibility of the universal. Still, rather than deploring this mobile, uncertain, non-institutional side of the phenomena in question, can we not see in it the expression of an authentic, full humanism, a conception of the human that is dynamic, explosive, precarious but intense? In short, from a qualitative viewpoint global, processes generate constructive but also destructive developments, whereas its temporal evolution can be more easily conceived as a fuzzy, porous concept (in the logical sense). A contextualized ethic—but globality is also a context—is more humanely, and so more modestly, a juxtaposition of daily rituals, creating a collective state of mind. It depends on a place or on various places, whether real or symbolic, and it is tormented by *concern* for belonging to those places. And so, in successive and overlapping circles, this ground, this earth, this world become important. As Michel Maffesoli suggests,³⁵ they “are of interest” because we are in them (*interesse*), quoting Merleau-Ponty, who says that it is “because I live in it” that I can take this world seriously. In that sense, in the global public sphere that could possibly be emerging, we are far from the atemporal and universal, but definitely at the very threshold of a renewed modernity and a new humanism.

We are thus confronted with a paradoxical situation. The universal can be accused of being reductionist, cancelling the stated purpose of complexification and diversity, imposing a postulated or partial complexity presented as the inheritance of one particular historical and cultural context. Conversely, it can be rejected for being overdetermined by a concept hastily inherited from an unachieved modernity or proclaimed by a religious faith. Whether implicit or explicit, the latter postulate may be

³⁵ These comments are inspired by Michel Maffesoli (From universal to particular. *Diogenes* 2007; 54, 81).

felt as ethically legitimate, following the example of feminist proponents who present their views as “clearly closer to the universal than the particular” and “inherently cosmopolitan in that they do not take the boundaries of particular tradition, whether national, cultural or religious, as having any intrinsic moral value separately from what it means to be a man or a woman within that tradition.” (Hutchings 2007, 187) In both cases, a portion of human societies is left with no other global justice than, to quote Kant’s fundamental principle of morality in an unusual sense, “to make their ends our own.”

Whereas complexity increases with the variety of geopolitical contexts, it decreases when focusing on space to the detriment of time, in the same way as the proposed “chronopolitics” tends to overemphasize time to the detriment of space. Whatever the importance ascribed to cultural memories, cultural traditions and references to history, and despite the universal claims of religions and other symbolic systems rooted in a form of permanence and continuity appealing to zenith and nadir, space divisions based on cardinal points cannot be put aside. Either way, a universal or a “world” philosophy impervious to regional or cultural specifications or to diverging historical tempi—re-territorialized or re-spatialized—is doomed to self-destruction. Needless to say, falling back to a uniform cyberspace – where space is shrinking in proportion to the speeding up of communication and the blurring of geographical and cultural boundaries, and where any “travail de mémoire” à la Ricoeur is losing sense under the pressure of “presentism,” – is doubly irrelevant, whatever significance information and communication may have in their own right.

A problem consequently arises whenever one is tempted to simplify an irreducible complexity by reducing global processes to any of their components considered as potentially universal. In the theory of IR, this view has tended to be taken for granted, from Raymond Aron (1969, 25) who, referring to the realist perspective, wrote that the division of mankind into sovereign states was a historically transitory situation and that it will come to an end when a universal polity is established,³⁶ to international lawyers who consider that international organizations and jurisdictions are by necessity an embryonic form of a universal ordering beyond national legislations. In a similar way, a common, superficial view of inter-faith dialogue will tend to refer to what is considered most positive or likely to gain general acceptance in various traditions, ignoring what is most negative, the causes of conflicts and tensions possibly

³⁶ “There will be an essential difference between domestic policy and foreign policy ... until mankind has achieved its unification in a universal state”. A similar, official view was presented about the unquestionably “universal” aim of the UN in the 1985 report of the Joint Inspectors Unit of the Organization.

originating in cultural or historical differences, more than in different core teachings. Such assumptions do not depart from Kant's view over 200 years ago in perpetual peace as the aim of man's path through history. These views have been reinforced by 9/11 and the current financial/economic crisis, in both cases as a consequence of non-state transnational actors, whether secular or religious, with strong universalist ambitions. David Held's warning (2003) about a Hobbesian return to the state, or even to a pre-Hobbesian return to the state of nature, where even the security guaranteed by Hobbes's sovereign state to its people is no longer delivered, reminds us that international affairs remain polarized and international institutions threatened with de-globalization and a retreat to cultural and religious identities. In a similar way, John A. Hall (2002) recalled Raymond Aron's monograph on Clausewitz, justifying the return of the state (Plender 2008) with the argument that peace is most likely to come about by increasing the rationality of states.

Presupposing that earlier political thinkers, from Plato, Confucius and Kautilya to Alfarabi, Guo Xiang and Avicenna inform most of current political and philosophical thinking is probably misleading. On the contrary, this is precisely where the problem arises, not only because of the scarce interaction among thinkers in the various periods and spaces considered, and more generally because an inquiry into the various non-Western traditions (and vice versa) of political and ethical thinking has not been completed, therefrom the cautious assumption of the "relative universality of human rights." (Donnelly 2007, *An intersubjective dialogue à la Habermas or Apel*, bringing together the metonymic ingredients of what is intended to be a universalistic vision, is one of the possible ways to address this issue anew. But are states and cultures "subjects"? This would presuppose, echoing "intuition" in Indian philosophy, Husserl's reference in 1917 to a "universal" ethics taken as "...a supra-individual and supranational form that can be compared to logic" in a letter to his Polish friend Ingarden, which can be "consequently opposed to any particular community and can be related only to the infinity of collective life, with mankind as such." (Dastur 1995, 120) ³⁷

³⁷ The translation is mine.

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Interreligious Dialogue as a Method of Understanding: the Case of Raimundo Panikkar

By Abraham Velez de Cea

Abstract

The dialogical method of understanding developed here is indebted to Raimundo Panikkar, a pioneer of inter-religious dialogue and comparative theology.³⁹ Specifically, the method draws on Panikkar's cross-cultural hermeneutics, which provides critical tools that only come from the practice of dialogue. The tools this method incorporates are called by Panikkar the "imparative attitude" and "dialogical dialogue."

Introduction

There are many views on the nature and purpose of inter-religious dialogue. Here, inter-religious dialogue is interpreted as a method to better understand religions, specifically, insider's perspectives and the assumptions of interpreters.

This academic form of inter-religious dialogue involves three different kinds of conversation: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and critical-comparative. That is, face to face dialogue with representatives of other religious traditions, inner dialogue with one's convictions and assumptions, and scholarly dialogue with textual sources from at least two hermeneutical or religious traditions. I call this dialogical method 'academic inter-religious dialogue.' The thesis of the article is that academic inter-religious dialogue possesses not only practical but also scholarly value. In other words, inter-religious dialogue should not be considered an activity that uses scholarship solely to advance its own practical goals, but rather, inter-religious dialogue can be seen as a valuable academic method that contributes to a much fuller understanding of religions.

The dialogical method of understanding developed here is indebted to Raimundo Panikkar, a pioneer of inter-religious dialogue and comparative

³⁹ Panikkar's works cannot be easily ascribed to a particular discipline, he is at the same time a systematic theologian, comparative theologian, philosopher of religion, and scholar-practitioner of interreligious dialogue. Panikkar was born in 1918 from a Hindu Indian father and Catholic Catalonian mother. He holds doctorates in Chemistry, Theology, and Philosophy. Before retiring to Spain, he taught at Harvard University and the University of California at Santa Barbara. A *sui generis* Catholic priest, not a functionary of the Vatican as he likes to say, Panikkar is a living embodiment of interreligious dialogue and cross-cultural understanding. His pluralist standpoint and his multiple religious belonging are the result of his profound religious experiences and his dialogical immersion into the life-world of other religions. Panikkar's contributions to Christian thought, comparative theology, and the cause of interreligious dialogue are impressive. He is the author of more than forty books originally written in German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, and Catalan.

theology.⁴⁰ Specifically, the method draws on Panikkar's cross-cultural hermeneutics, which provides critical tools that only come from the practice of dialogue. The tools this method incorporates are called by Panikkar the "imparative attitude" and "dialogical dialogue."

This article has three parts. The first part introduces the concept of academic inter-religious dialogue. The second part explains Panikkar's critical tools and how they contribute to a fuller understanding of religious traditions. More specifically, academic inter-religious dialogue possess not only hermeneutical value but also critical constructive value: it leads to new interpretative insights as well as the refinement of the categories we use to understand religions. The third part further justifies the practice of inter-religious dialogue as a best practice in the academic study of religions.

Using dialogue as a method of understanding religions is not unprecedented in the study of religions, especially among those favoring anthropological approaches to religious studies. What is less common is to claim that inter-religious dialogue is an indispensable method to study and compare living texts. By living texts I mean texts that are still relevant and authoritative in actual religious communities. By emphasizing inter-religious dialogue and living texts, I do not want to insinuate that studies based exclusively on textual sources have no place in the academia. The point is that dialogue with representatives of religious communities is an indispensable tool to understand not only the followers of religions but also their sacred texts. As the scholar of Hinduism and comparative religion Gavin Flood acknowledges "The sacred text has a 'voice' from the past that is complex in its formation—perhaps being the totality of authorial voices that have composed it—and enlivened by the present communities who set the text aside, breathe life into it through their reading or reception, and enact it (2006, 53). If it is true that living texts have many voices not only in the past but also in present religious communities, then scholars should try to understand these voices as much as possible. Ignoring the present voices of sacred texts is academically and ethically questionable. I fail to see how we can understand the present voices without some sort of inter-religious dialogue and how someone can justify today that scholars must pay attention only to the voices of the past, as if there were a transcendent Platonic world of ideas where the meaning of texts remains unchangeable. Given that meaning of texts is not absolutely independent from readers and their contexts, a dialogical turn seems unavoidable. The dialogical turn is also unavoidable because, as the scholar of Hinduism and comparative religion Diane

⁴⁰ Panikkar's works cannot be easily ascribed to a particular discipline, he is at the same time a systematic theologian, comparative theologian, philosopher of religion, and scholar-practitioner of interreligious dialogue. Panikkar was born in 1918 from a Hindu Indian father and Catholic Catalanian mother. He holds doctorates in Chemistry, Theology, and Philosophy. Before retiring to Spain, he taught at Harvard University and the University of California at Santa Barbara. A *sui generis* Catholic priest, not a functionary of the Vatican as he likes to say, Panikkar is a living embodiment of interreligious dialogue and cross-cultural understanding. His pluralist standpoint and his multiple religious belonging are the result of his profound religious experiences and his dialogical immersion into the life-world of other religions. Panikkar's contributions to Christian thought, comparative theology, and the cause of interreligious dialogue are impressive. He is the author of more than forty books originally written in German, French, Italian, English, Spanish, and Catalan.

Eck suggests, “the complexity of today’s religious and scholarly worlds involves every student of religion in multiple conversations, with many voices insistent on being heard on their own terms,” (2000, 132).

1. The practice of academic inter-religious dialogue

Academic inter-religious dialogue is a method of understanding religions that involves three distinct yet interrelated kinds of conversation: interpersonal, intrapersonal, and critical-comparative. Although these three kinds of conversation can be considered three different types of inter-religious dialogue, I understand them as three complementary aspects of a dialogical method to study religious traditions.

The first kind of conversation involved in academic inter-religious dialogue is the actual practice of dialogue with members of other religions. This social dialogue is what most people identify with inter-religious dialogue. In my account, however, interpersonal dialogue is just one aspect of academic inter-religious dialogue.

Interpersonal inter-religious dialogue can be mediated or unmediated. When the dialogue is facilitated by someone—usually experts or members from at least two religious communities, then we speak of mediated interpersonal dialogue. Mediated interpersonal dialogue can take place in many settings, usually formal ones, including monasteries, churches, community centers, colleges, and universities. Examples of mediated interpersonal dialogue are interfaith meetings, monastic exchanges, panels and roundtables with representatives of several religions. These mediated encounters can occur at different levels: local, regional, national, and international. Unmediated interpersonal dialogue can happen spontaneously anywhere, in the aforementioned formal settings as well as in less formal settings including the workplace, hotel lobbies and restaurants, private houses, and even street corners.

For Panikkar, interpersonal dialogue is a constitutive part of our nature, an act that defines us as human beings. Panikkar often speaks of humans as *homo loquens*, beings who talk, that is, who exist in and through “communication” with diverse aspects of reality, which he symbolically calls cosmic, divine, and human (*cosmotheandric*). Another way of emphasizing the dialogical nature of human beings is by saying that we are not individuals but rather persons. In other words, we are not individual monads who once gathered “decide” to establish relationships with other monads. Rather, we are persons, relational beings, knots intrinsically constituted by a network of connections with diverse aspects of reality. The dialogical nature of human beings is according to Panikkar, rooted in the dialogical nature of reality, which he calls “pluralistic” in the technical sense of being irreducible to one or many, monolithic unity or fragmented multiplicity (1993).

Panikkar’s dialogical philosophy is complex but for our purposes not strictly necessary. Whether or not someone agrees with all that Panikkar says, one can accept the truism that human beings are dialogical: they need relationships with different kinds of reality in order to survive and develop. Today, globalization and the increasing religious pluralism of many communities make the practice of inter-religious dialogue difficult to avoid and convenient to better accomplish a variety of goals, from mutual understanding and respect to global neighborliness and solidarity.

According to Panikkar, interpersonal inter-religious dialogue is not a luxury for some, even less the monopoly of any group or elite, whether religious leaders or

representatives of religious communities. Rather, interpersonal inter-religious dialogue is at the very least necessary for all living in pluralistic societies. Any gathering that involves persons from at least two religions may be an occasion for practicing inter-religious dialogue. This does not mean, however, that whenever two persons from different religious traditions meet, they always have to practice inter-religious dialogue; rather, the point is that any inter-religious encounter offers the possibility for developing our dialogical potential through the practice of interpersonal inter-religious dialogue.

The second kind of conversation that constitutes academic inter-religious dialogue takes place within a person after having “personally” encountered other religious traditions. Panikkar calls this inner conversation intra-religious dialogue, which should not be confused with intra-denominational dialogue. While intra-religious dialogue occurs within a person as a response to other religions, intra-denominational dialogue happens among members of the same religious community, denomination, or religion. In order to avoid this possible misunderstanding, perhaps it would be a good idea to call this type of dialogue intrapersonal instead of intra-religious.

Intrapersonal dialogue begins when something stirs within us, when we feel threatened, encouraged, inspired, provoked, or profoundly shaken by other religious traditions. Like interpersonal dialogue, intrapersonal dialogue is rooted in another dimension of our nature, in this case, in the unavoidable human quest for meaning and truth. For Panikkar, intrapersonal dialogue is the ultimate foundation of other forms of inter-religious dialogue. If there is no intrapersonal dialogue, inter-religious dialogue becomes a mere intellectual exercise, an exchange of information, interesting and even entertaining, but somewhat shallow and eventually dispensable (Panikkar 1999).

The third kind of conversation involved in academic inter-religious dialogue is critical-comparative in nature. All understanding is comparative to some extent, and the former two kinds of conversation presuppose the implicit practice of comparison. However, in the third kind of conversation, comparison becomes explicit and critically constructed. That is, critical-comparative inter-religious dialogue refers to the explicit, deliberate contrast of “texts” from at least two religious or hermeneutical traditions, a contrast constructed by scholars competent in those traditions. Such critical-comparative academic practice is not exclusive to comparative studies. For instance, Scriptural Reasoning presupposes the practice of critical-comparative dialogue. Likewise, many ethnographic religious studies demonstrate the practice of critical-comparative dialogue between insiders’ and outsiders’ perspectives. Unlike the previous two aspects of academic inter-religious dialogue, this critical-comparative conversation is not for everybody but specifically for scholars and theologians of religious traditions. This does not mean, however, that only scholars and theologians can benefit from academic inter-religious dialogue. In fact, the critical-comparative inter-religious dialogue practiced by scholars and theologians can be understood as a useful foundation for inter-religious dialogue in general.

The practice of interpersonal and intrapersonal inter-religious dialogue can take place without having enough knowledge about the religious other, but, then, the risk of misunderstanding, conflict and unnecessary tension increases. The practice of interpersonal and intrapersonal inter-religious dialogue becomes more fruitful when

it presupposes some familiarity not only with the basic beliefs but also with the key ethical values and spiritual practices of the other. Critical-comparative dialogue provides this useful foundation, this reliable information about these beliefs, values, and practices of the other. Thus, critical-comparative inter-religious dialogue serves as a preparation for the practice of interpersonal and intrapersonal inter-religious dialogue.

According to Panikkar, comparisons are more fruitful for inter-religious dialogue when they focus on functional equivalents, which he calls “homeomorphic” equivalents. Homeomorphism is a special type of analogy, “perhaps a kind of existential-functional analogy” (1999, 67). However, homeomorphism is irreducible to analogy. While analogy presupposes a *tertium quid*, a common aspect between two points of comparison, homeomorphism only requires a functional equivalence. In other words, two points of comparison (terms, concepts, metaphors, doctrines, practices or symbols) are homeomorphic equivalents when “each of them stands for something that performs an equivalent function within their respective systems” (1999, 17).

The comparison of homeomorphic equivalents does not assume anything common between two compared elements or even between their respective systems. Homeomorphism does not imply that the functional equivalents are interchangeable or expressions of universal patterns common to all religions.

The advantage of comparing functional equivalents is that they cannot be discovered until the interpreter has enough familiarity with the respective framework of the two “texts” under comparison. In this way, the comparison of homeomorphic equivalents prevents precipitated and superficial comparisons, comparisons that might spread misunderstandings and hinder further inter-religious dialogue.

Overall, the first factor that distinguishes academic inter-religious dialogue from other dialogical methods to study religions is that the critical-comparative conversation with or between “texts” is inseparable from the practice of both interpersonal and intrapersonal religious dialogue. In this sense, the three kinds of conversation involved in academic inter-religious dialogue are intertwined.

The second factor that distinguishes academic inter-religious dialogue from other dialogical methods is that the practice of dialogue is not simply with or between textual sources. In other words, academic inter-religious dialogue supplements imaginary conversations constructed in the interpreter’s mind with actual face to face communication with representatives of religious communities where the textual sources under investigation are still relevant and authoritative.

Consequently, hypothetical conversations with or between textual sources are not sufficient to speak of academic inter-religious dialogue. Similarly, a mere dialogical approach to study religion, for instance the one proposed by Gavin Flood in *Beyond Phenomenology: Rethinking the Study of Religion* (1999), does not qualify yet as academic inter-religious dialogue. In order to speak of academic inter-religious dialogue, the comparative conversation with or between textual sources must be supplemented by the practice of intrapersonal dialogue and actual interpersonal dialogue with representatives of living religious communities. In this sense, Scriptural Reasoning and certain works in Religious Studies and Comparative Theology can be understood as expressions of academic inter-religious dialogue.

The third factor that characterizes academic inter-religious dialogue is its interdisciplinary nature. Like other scholarly methods, academic inter-religious dialogue can be practiced within different disciplines. In this regard, academic inter-religious dialogue is interdisciplinary. However, academic inter-religious dialogue can also be considered interdisciplinary in the sense that in some cases it combines philological and ethnographic methods. In other words, scholars cannot practice academic inter-religious dialogue from behind their desks. This however, does not mean that one has to be a professional ethnographer in order to practice inter-religious dialogue as an academic method of understanding.

The fourth factor that differentiates academic inter-religious dialogue from other dialogical methods is that its goal is not only theoretical, to improve our understanding of the texts under comparison, but also practical, to facilitate sustainable dialogue among living religious traditions. By sustainable dialogue it is meant an open-ended constructive engagement with other faiths at three different levels: the intellectual, the ethical, and the spiritual. By constructive engagement it is meant mutually enriching interactions. The intellectual level of dialogue refers to the hermeneutical dimension of dialogue, in which building bridges of understanding and communication are the main goals. The ethical level of dialogue denotes the sociopolitical dimension, primarily intended to prevent conflicts, facilitate reconciliation and advance common values. By spiritual level of dialogue, it is meant the dimension of individual exploration and inner growth, which is part of the human quest for truth. This spiritual dimension enhances the other two dimensions, making them theologically and soteriologically significant, not simply useful.

Although other academic methods may also promote inter-religious dialogue, they are not intended to do so. On the contrary, academic inter-religious dialogue is done in, through, and for the sake of furthering the cause of sustainable inter-religious dialogue. This requires from the practitioner of academic inter-religious dialogue a particular attitude and approach to dialogue.

2. Panikkar's cross-cultural hermeneutics.

For Panikkar, the ultimate goals of interreligious dialogue are communication and mutual understanding, not agreement, conversion, or the creation of a new universal religion. In Panikkar's words: "The ideal is communication in order to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstandings between the different cultures of the world, letting them speak and speak out their own insights in their own languages," (1999, 10).

Communication and mutual understanding are ends in and of themselves, though they may also serve as means for variety of practical goals including social justice, peace, personal realization and the mutual enrichment of human traditions. But what exactly does Panikkar mean by understanding? What is the proper method to understand other religious traditions?

According to Panikkar, cross-cultural understanding requires a new type of hermeneutics, which he calls "diatopical." That is, a hermeneutics that involves "two (or more) cultures, which have independently developed in different spaces (*topoi*) their own methods of philosophizing and ways of reaching intelligibility along with their proper categories" (1988, 130).

The fundamental assumption of diatopical hermeneutics is that the other does not necessarily have the same self-understanding as I have (1979, 9). Each person—a term Panikkar uses to refer to individuals as well as to cultures and religions—is a source of understanding and self-understanding. This assumption has important consequences for the study of religions. Given that members of other religions are sources of self-understanding, we do not have the right to superimpose our parameters and categories of understanding on them. Another consequence is that we cannot understand others' religions unless we participate to some extent in the believer's horizon of intelligibility. This is what Panikkar calls the principle of understanding as convincement: "we cannot understand a person's ultimate convictions unless we somehow share them" (1999, 34). The principle of understanding as convincement does not entail that the interpreter must convert to the other religion in order to understand it. The principle is hermeneutical, not religious, it only assumes that in order to understand other religious person, one needs to share to some extent the source of her beliefs, what Panikkar calls *mythos*, that is, the horizon of intelligibility that give rise to that person's convictions (1975, 132-167; 1999, 38; 2003, 70-71).

The principle of understanding as convincement goes beyond phenomenological approaches to the study of religions. For Panikkar, the phenomenological method "has its own merits and justification, because there is room for a clear and valid description of religious phenomena," (1999, 76). However, the phenomenological method as it is commonly understood is insufficient to capture the belief of the believer. Since there is no naked or pure belief separate from the person who believes, the knowledge or *noêma* of a religiously skeptical phenomenologist does not correspond to the belief or *pisteuma* of the believer (1999, 83). Consequently, studies of religions are somewhat incomplete as long as they limit themselves to analyze and describe religious phenomena from the outside. The problem is not solved by interviewing members of other religions and including their opinions in our phenomenological descriptions. In order to capture the belief of the believer, the religious scholar needs to actually participate in the horizon of intelligibility of the religious other. In other words, understanding requires not a juxtaposition of outsider's and insider's voices, but rather a "religious" phenomenology that encompasses the belief of the believer.

Panikkar's hermeneutics avoids simplistic dilemmas between insiders' and outsiders' perspectives, as if all insiders' readings were purely subjective (uncritical) and all outsiders' views were purely objective ("neutral"). Similarly, Panikkar's hermeneutics overcomes the dilemma between theological versus social scientific studies of religion. Panikkar's principle of understanding as convincement is not intended to undermine the critical study of religions. Rather, the goal seems to be to expand narrow, pre-postmodern, merely rationalistic interpretations of religious studies. Panikkar's hermeneutics allows and calls for a pluralistic understanding of religious studies where both theological and social scientific approaches have a place not only in the field as a whole but also within particular scholars. Panikkar's ideal interpreter pays attention to the many voices involved in the process of understanding, which requires familiarity with the theological expression of traditions as well as social scientific studies and methods.

Extensive fieldwork, collaborative interviews, and participatory observation of the other's religious practices are indispensable steps for understanding living religions. Likewise, familiarity with the languages, texts, history, and contexts of other religious traditions is also necessary for the religious scholar. However, for Panikkar the scholar needs to supplement all these useful methods with actual participation in the horizon of intelligibility of other religions.

This participation is achieved through what Panikkar calls the "imparative attitude" and "dialogical dialogue." Unlike the comparative attitude of pre-postmodern religious studies, the imparative attitude does not claim to study religions from an alleged neutral and objective vantage point. The imparative scholar must be critically self-aware of his or her hermeneutical location.

Besides critical self-awareness of the situated nature of understanding, the imparative attitude requires from the scholar "the effort at learning from the other and the attitude of allowing our own convictions to be fecundated by the insights of the other" (1995, 172).

The neologism "imparative" derives from the Latin verb *imparare*, which according to Panikkar, means primarily "bringing together." This bringing together of two cultures or religious traditions takes place within the scholar's horizon of intelligibility. The imparative attitude as well as the understanding it brings about must be reflective, critical, provisional, aware of its own contingency, and the need to rest on "both limited and still unexamined presuppositions. We are not the only source of (self-) understanding" (1988, 128).

Panikkar compares the process of understanding that takes place with the imparative attitude to the immersion required to learn a foreign language. First, one translates by comparing with the mother tongue, but, eventually, one is able to think and speak directly in the other language. One begins by studying grammar, acquiring basic conversation skills, and taking holiday trips to a country where the language under study is spoken. Similarly, one starts the academic study of other religions and cultures by reading classical and contemporary sources, attending courses about them, and by taking field trips. However, although all these steps are useful and necessary, they do not always lead to understanding in Panikkar's sense. In order to understand the other, one needs to cross over the borders of one's own culture or religion. It is by crossing the borders of at least two cultures or religions and by bringing them together in one's own horizon of intelligibility that the interpreter reaches understanding. It is only by becoming somehow bilingual that one can best translate other language. Similarly, it is by bringing together two religions in one's own hermeneutical horizon that one can better compare them.

The other tool of Panikkar's hermeneutics is dialogical dialogue. Panikkar distinguishes between two aspects of dialogue: dialectical and dialogical. Dialectical dialogue takes place at the level of doctrines, and it treats members of other religions as objects of rational inquiry or subjects merely putting forth some objective thoughts to be discussed. On the contrary, dialogical dialogue involves the entire person, not just our rational dimension, and it treats others as "another self (alter) who is a source of self-understanding as well as a source of understanding not necessarily reducible to my own" (1999, 34). In other words, dialogical dialogue treats others as another person, a real "you." For Panikkar the I/Thou relationship is ultimate and irreducible to any relation I/It or I/Non-I. The other person is not an other (an *alius*),

even less an “it” (*aliud*), but rather another self (*alter*), a “you” who is not my ego and yet, belongs to my self. This belonging of the “you” to my self underscores the interrelatedness of our respective identities. For Panikkar, this interrelatedness of the “I” and the “you” entails pluralism in the technical sense of not being reducible to monism or dualism, monolithic unity or fragmented multiplicity.

In order to have access to the “you” dimension of another person, one needs dialogical dialogue. Dialectical dialogue does not transcend the level of ideas and objectified thoughts, that is, the level of the logos, what “he” or “she” thinks. Since persons are more than their logos and their thoughts, dialogical dialogue is necessary. Only dialogical dialogue “pierces the logos and uncovers the respective myths of the partner” (1999, 37). This does not mean that dialogical dialogue is irrational or illogical but rather that it is more than an encounter of reasons and ideas, more than an encounter with the “other,” a “you” is neither the “other” nor an “it.” Dialogical dialogue leads to the encounter of persons, and, therefore, it requires friendship and loving knowledge, which “discovers the you, not the other,” (2004, 59). It is this friendship and loving knowledge what allows us to participate in the horizon of intelligibility of other persons. Sympathetic imagination is not sufficient. It is through the practice of dialogical dialogue that we develop the loving knowledge necessary to expand our horizon of intelligibility until it actually participates in the other’s horizon.

Panikkar goes beyond Gadamer’s hermeneutics when he claims that an authentic fusion of horizons requires a loving knowledge of the other’s beliefs. Gadamer’s fusion of horizon is an intellectual, a dialectical encounter that results in understanding a third object, a shared subject matter (1989, 307). On the other hand, Panikkar’s hermeneutics seeks to understand a person, a real “you”, a subject with moral agency and self-understanding. Gadamer’s hermeneutics distinguishes between the person with whom we speak and the subject matter of our conversations. However, as the scholar of comparative religious ethics Irene Oh points out such distinction is not always so clear in conversations about our most profound beliefs: “Inquiries, discussions, and criticisms of closely and long-held beliefs are inquiries, discussions, and criticisms, not only about a subject matter, but also about an aspect of a person,” (2008, 413-4). Gadamer’s hermeneutics seems to be applicable primarily to works of art and textual sources, where the dialectical movement of play is the main metaphor (Schweiker 1987). On the contrary, Panikkar’s hermeneutics stems from his profound experience of inter-religious dialogue with persons: living traditions and real people, not just texts and subject matters. A personal encounter is the main metaphor of Panikkar’s hermeneutics.

Panikkar describes the loving knowledge necessary for having a personal encounter where understanding takes place as certain connaturality and identification with the subject. This loving knowledge by connaturality is substantially deeper than Gadamer’s fusion of horizons, which takes place primarily at the rational level, in which logical or dialectical knowledge prevails. On the other hand, loving knowledge affects the entire person, and involves more than her logos.

For Panikkar, loving knowledge is crucial to understand other persons and have access into their self-representation. The golden rule of Panikkar’s hermeneutics are precisely that unless other persons can recognize themselves in our descriptions of them, our interpretations are somehow inadequate: we are not representing them

properly. This does not mean that in order to make a good interpretation we have to accept uncritically whatever other persons say about themselves and their traditions. It just means that we cannot interpret other persons without paying careful attention to their voices and, more importantly, without participating to some extent in the mythos or horizon of intelligibility from which those voices originate.

Overall, the hermeneutical value of Panikkar's approach to inter-religious dialogue cannot be underestimated: it pays proper attention to the "multiple voices" involved in the process of understanding; it helps to interpret religious traditions in their own terms; it avoids false dilemmas and the pitfalls of old comparativism, and it challenges solipsistic academic practices characteristic of pre-postmodern scholarship.

More specifically, academic inter-religious dialogue conducted with Panikkar's critical tools improves the scholar's critical self-awareness and contributes to a fuller understanding of religious traditions. First, regarding critical self-awareness, the practice of interpersonal and intrapersonal inter-religious dialogue helps scholars to better understand their assumptions, prejudices, and hermeneutical location. The unavoidable comparisons that inter-religious dialogue produces in the scholar's mind are less likely to arise via other academic methods. The new insights and new perspectives brought about by intrapersonal dialogue and interpersonal dialogue with real people from other religious communities are less likely to originate via dialogues with or between textual sources. Likewise, comparisons done in and through dialogical dialogue and loving knowledge are likely to produce much deeper understandings of religious traditions than comparisons done in and through dialectical dialogues and "professionally conducted" surveys and interviews. Second, academic inter-religious dialogue also contributes to a fuller understanding of religious traditions because it incorporates in a deeper way the self-understanding of living religious communities into the scholar's horizon of intelligibility. By expanding the scholar's hermeneutical horizon with the self-understanding of other religious traditions, inter-religious dialogue is likely to refine our categories of understanding and, in that way, prevent their uncritical imposition onto others. That is, inter-religious dialogue refines our interpretations and leads gradually to understanding religious traditions in their own terms without necessarily losing a critical standpoint. Although I concede that one can gain some access to the self-understanding of persons (religious traditions) through dialectical dialogue, I fail to see how such access can match the one obtained via dialogical dialogue. In other words, the expansion of one's horizon of intelligibility that produces a mere intellectual knowledge does not surpass the expansion generated by a knowledge that involves the entire person in the process of understanding.

A possible objection is that loving knowledge and personal involvement cloud the interpreters' judgment rather than help them to better understand religious traditions. While this might be the case on some occasions, assuming that cognitive emotions and personal involvement have no hermeneutical relevance is, today, untenable, a questionable rationalistic bias rooted in a dualistic view of human nature.

Even though academic inter-religious dialogue is in principle open to a variety of critical tools and theoretical assumptions, I recommend Panikkar's. This, I believe, is not contradictory, as it would not be contradictory to advice a particular road to

reach a destination while being aware of the existence of other possible roads. Since I do not know of better critical tools to practice academic inter-religious dialogue, I can only but recommend Panikkar's.

3. Inter-religious dialogue as a best in the academic study of religion.

It might be objected that good scholars in comparative studies and area studies also practice some sort of inter-religious dialogue, and therefore, they already do something, at least indirectly, to advance the diverse goals of inter-religious dialogue. Thus, the objection goes, there seems to be no need for academic inter-religious dialogue, even less for a dialogical method that draws on Panikkar.

While it would be unfair to deny the possible contribution of good scholarship to inter-religious dialogue, it would be equally unfair to claim that any approach to dialogue has the same potential to advance the diverse goals of academic inter-religious dialogue. At the very least, we should differentiate between dialogical methods like Panikkar's that involve the actual face-to-face and heart-to-heart practice of dialogue and those that involve only virtual and imaginary conversations. Furthermore, we should differentiate between dialogical methods like Panikkar's that treat other religious traditions as subjects with their own self-understanding, and others that treat them as mere data, objects to be understood. In other words, we should differentiate between dialogical methods that "care" about people, and others that "care" exclusively about their "texts." That is, between methods that treat people as agents of understanding and self-understanding, and others that treat people as if they were texts whose content the interpreter can objectify through surveys and "professionally conducted" interviews.

Academic inter-religious dialogue does "care" both about people and their "texts" by paying attention to the "multiple voices" involved in the process of understanding. By "multiple voices" I mean not only the many voices of textual sources and scholarly communities, but also the multiple voices of living religious traditions and especially the voice of the interpreter.

It would be irresponsible and somehow arrogant to practice today 'solipsistic scholarship,' as if cross-cultural interpreters could become aware of their own assumptions and hermeneutical prejudices without actual dialogue with the religious other, and more importantly, without profound intrapersonal or intra-religious dialogue. Not being concerned with critical self-awareness, which requires honest intra-religious dialogue, is hermeneutically naïve. Likewise, not treating other religious communities as subjects of self-understanding, self-understanding that can only be discovered through interpersonal dialogue, is academically questionable and morally dubious. These solipsistic practices are a residue of paternalistic and ethnocentric attitudes characteristic of orientalist and colonialist scholarship. Most scholars would agree in rejecting these "past" academic attitudes, yet very few would be willing to do what is necessary to prevent them, namely, inter-religious dialogue in the aforementioned interpersonal and intrapersonal senses.

After the postmodern and postcolonialist critique of the history of religions and its old comparativism, religious studies done without paying proper attention to the "multiple voices" involved in the process of understanding are today simply unacceptable. If this normative claim is plausible, then it follows that inter-religious

dialogue as an academic method of understanding is not only desirable but also indispensable for critical scholarship. In other words, if it is true that one cannot pay proper attention to the “multiple voices” involved in the process of understanding without interpersonal and intrapersonal inter-religious dialogue, then critical scholarship cannot take place without some form of inter-religious dialogue.

Although I do not think we can ever measure the exact amount of attention to “voice” found in dialogical methods, we can intuitively assume that studies done in, through, and for the sake of inter-religious dialogue are likely to pay more attention to “voice” than studies done in conversation with textual sources and other “solipsistic” scholars. In sum, not all dialogical methods are equally valid to practice academic inter-religious dialogue.

Similarly, not all approaches to dialogue are equally suitable for academic inter-religious dialogue. Approaches to dialogue that presuppose an exclusivist theology of religions are evidently conversation stoppers. Inclusivist approaches in the sense of understanding others not in their own terms but rather in terms of one’s own religious framework are academically problematic. Religions should be allowed to define themselves in their own terms without being forced to fit into foreign categories or conceptual frameworks inconsistent with their worldview. This is a fundamental ethical requirement of cross-cultural understanding and interfaith dialogue. The golden rule applies also to interpretations of other religions that take place in the academia or the social arena. In the same way we would not like others to use concepts that misrepresent or do violence to our religion we should try to avoid concepts that misrepresent or do violence to other religions.

Pluralistic approaches are not without problems, but they are by far the most suitable for the practice of academic inter-religious dialogue (McCarthy 2000). By pluralistic it is not meant the new forms of inclusivism called pluralistic inclusivism but rather any framework that allows for genuine openness to religious pluralism without setting *a priori*, that is, dogmatically, limits to the truths and values that can and cannot be found in other religions. Among the different pluralistic frameworks, I find Panikkar’s the most conducive to understanding religious traditions in their own terms precisely because it is based on the practice of inter-religious dialogue. Here, however, is not the place to justify this claim and compare Panikkar’s pluralism to the more well known models of John Hick and Paul Knitter, which, unlike Panikkar’s, have been criticized by pluralistic inclusivists such as Mark Heim for not being pluralistic enough. Suffice to say that I prefer Panikkar’s pluralism for a variety of reasons. First, it views inter-religious dialogue as a critical method of understanding. Panikkar’s pluralism is not a great narrative, a super system, or a universal theory of religion, even less a relativist ideology to accommodate the claims of all religions. Panikkar’s pluralism is primarily an inner attitude of intellectual humility and dialogical openness. Second, it incorporates “care” or loving knowledge into the study of religions, challenging in that way the modern myths of a “purely rational” “fully objective,” and “absolutely neutral” religious scholarship. Third, Panikkar’s pluralism emphasizes the existence of incommensurable differences and the uniqueness of religious traditions without falling into postmodern isolationism and paralyzing relativism. Fourth, it does not presuppose a perennial essence common to all religions, not even an ever transcendent “thing in itself” that is never known by

historical traditions. Fifth, it combines genuine openness toward other religions with unambiguous commitment to one's own religious or secular tradition.

By appropriating critically some of Panikkar's tools, I do not want to insinuate that only multitradeational scholars like Panikkar can practice academic inter-religious dialogue. Similarly, I do not intend to suggest that the academic study of religions should be done exclusively in order to further sustainable inter-religious dialogue, even less that scholars-practitioners of inter-religious dialogue are better equipped than other scholars to study or to compare religions. I am just proposing a dialogical method that is useful to better understand living religions and living texts.

By drawing on Panikkar's critical tools, the method does not presuppose his theological and philosophical views. The practice of academic inter-religious dialogue is not necessarily dependent on Panikkar's claims about the unknown Christ (1981), the cosmotheandric nature of reality, and the pluralism of truth (not to be misrepresented as the affirmation of many truths, which Panikkar himself views as contradictory, 1987, 109). The only thing academic inter-religious dialogue presupposes is what Panikkar calls a pluralistic attitude, which should not be mistaken with an ideology, a pluralist system or a theology of religions. This pluralistic attitude is simply a dialogical and genuinely open disposition toward the religious neighbor, "the attitude of not breaking the dialogue with the other opinions" (1999, 10).

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The Other as Oneself Within Judaism: A Catholic Interpretation

By Peter Admirand

Abstract

How does a Christian try to describe the Other within Judaism to a group consisting of mostly Muslims? This was my task recently at an Abrahamic interfaith event inadvertently scheduled on Passover. In what follows, I focus in particular on how the Sages interpret the Egyptians of Exodus in the context of Passover. As a Catholic theologian who knows the great risk in such an endeavor, I also account for my hesitations and purpose. Ultimately, I see attempts like these as a means for Christians to become more Christ-like, here through analyzing Jewish interpretations of the Other while aiming to represent Jewish views justly and candidly.

Introduction

Context—especially in inter-religious dialogue—is essential. At an inter-religious event in Dublin sponsored by a Muslim organization, the planners were hoping to have Muslim, Christian, and Jewish voices to emphasize the unity of the Abrahamic faiths. Unfortunately, the event had been scheduled during *Pesakh* (Passover). Hence, there would not be a Jewish speaker nor, likely, any Jewish individuals in the audience. It was also too late to change the date once the conflict had been discovered.

As a Catholic theologian involved in Jewish-Christian dialogue and teaching various courses on Judaism in Dublin, I was asked to give a talk—not, of course, pretending I was Jewish, but as much as possible, incorporating a Jewish element. So, a Catholic theologian attempted to present Jewish views towards the non-Jew to a predominantly Muslim audience.

My attempt was a mutual exercise of what Perry Schmidt-Leukel (borrowing from Piet Schoonenberg) calls *auto-interpretation* and *hetero-interpretation*. The former refers to our self-understanding of our own faith while the latter refers to our understanding of another's faith. Ideally, inter-religious dialogue is a face-to-face encounter where one's address to the Other and being addressed by that Other come together in a mutual space of truth-seeking, tolerance, and fellowship. As David Tracy writes: "For there is no genuine dialogue without the willingness to risk all one's present self understanding in the presence of the other," (Tracy 1990, 72). Its aims are transformation, purification, and clarity—even if such clarity involves murkier notions

of truths, paths, and salvations—and reaps more questions than answers (Admirand 2009). As part of the dialogical process, I come to know better my own faith, the faith of the Other, my interpretation of that faith, and the Other's interpretation of my faith. Vulnerability, courage, and patience are some of the key attributes needed in ample supply. As Schmidt-Leukel writes: "...if interfaith dialogue should serve a better mutual understanding, every partner in dialogue must not only strive for a good understanding of the other's auto-interpretation but of the other's hetero-interpretation as well. In other words, the point is to understand *how* the other perceives *oneself* and *why*," (2001, 8-9).

Aware of the problems of speaking for an Other, I still accepted this opportunity as a challenge to present my interpretations of Judaism towards the non-Jew to an audience who may be skeptical or negative towards Judaism. As a Catholic highly aware of the Christian failure to embrace, protect, and learn from the face of the Jewish Other, I also saw this as a small act of *teshuvah* though adamant that mine is a Christian voice not speaking for any Jewish person—only attempting to present my understanding of the multiform voices of Jewish tradition(s). Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, it was an opportunity then to assess Christianity's calling to embrace the Other, and recent challenges to Christianity that have arisen through Jewish-Christian dialogue. It was, indeed, a means to become more Christ-like. Hopefully, for my part, I can present the Jewish view—or views—clearly and justly.

Pesakh

The Jewish festival of *Pesakh* (Passover), often called the Feast of the Unleavened Bread, was, according to the biblical scholar James Kugel:

celebrated in an unusual way: every family in Israel was commanded to make an all-night feast of a roasted sacrificial lamb or goat, called the *pesah* and every last bit of its meat had to be finished before dawn. No bone in the animal's body could be broken during the eating. That night, and for the next seven days, no regular bread could be eaten—in fact, all such bread and leavening needed to be removed earlier from every house...The *pesah* sacrifice was so called, in other words, because it sounded like the verb meaning: 'pass over': G-d had *passed over* the Israelite houses at the time of the last plague (2007, 318-9).

While the focus of this feast is usually on G-d's liberating action (The Qur'an adds: "We afflicted Pharaoh's people with dearth and famine so that they might take heed" ("The Heights" 7:130), it is also fitting to use the story to reflect upon the Other—the not me or

the not us. Sometimes this Other is a neighbor or simply a stranger; sometimes it is an enemy; sometimes it is a strange combination of all three, as *The Keys to my Neighbor's House*, the haunting volume of justice and genocide in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, depicts.

Rooted in the Book of Exodus, though, *Pasakh* celebrates the angel of the Lord (or G-d) passing over the houses of the Israelites, whose inhabitants had splashed the blood of a lamb on their lintels. But the Egyptians were not so lucky. There was much wailing that night as the first-born Egyptian sons were smitten, even “the first-born of the captive who was in the dungeon, and all the first-born of the cattle” (Ex. 12:29). It was a plague so severe that the Pharaoh was finally eager to send the Israelites away for “there was no house where there was not someone dead” (Ex. 12:30).

The Israelites had initially sought and found shelter in Egypt through Joseph and his connection with one pharaoh. But friendships and connections fade with time; and the Other turned stranger turned helper turned friend became oppressor.

While not mentioned in the Qur'an, there is a fascinating hadith in the compilation of Sahih Bukhari (born in 810 CE):

Narrated Ibn'Abbas:

The Prophet came to Medina and saw the Jews fasting on the day of Ashura. He asked them about that. They replied, “This is a good day, the day on which Allah rescued Bani Israel from their enemy. So, Moses fasted this day.” The Prophet said, “We have more claim over Moses than you.” So, the Prophet fasted on that day and ordered (the Muslims) to fast (on that day).⁴⁰

Of significance here is the reverence for the actions of G-d in liberating the Israelites and the honor ceded to Moses by the Abrahamic faiths.

In reflecting on Passover, it is fitting, perhaps, to think of ‘the enemy’ in the hadith—the Egyptian, more specifically, in the biblical account—especially focusing on the first-born sons (let alone the cattle) who played no role in oppressing the Israelites. According to the Egyptologist Jan Assmann, “Biblical image of Egypt means ‘idolatry,’” (1997, 208). And yet, “the Egyptian” – the Other – is also beloved of G-d in the Bible and in some remarks of the Sages.⁴¹ In Isaiah 19:19-21, we read: “. . . when the Egyptians cry out to the Lord against their oppressors, he will send them a savior and champion to

⁴⁰ “Introduction to Translation of Sahih Bukhari”. Trans. M Muhsin Khan. USC, Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement.

<http://www.usc.edu/schools/college/crcc/engagement/resources/texts/muslim/hadith/bukhari/031.sbt.html#003.031.222>. Accessed 28 January 2010.

⁴¹ For a concise account of the Other in Rabbinic literature, see Hayes, 2007: 243-269.

deliver them. For the Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, and the Egyptians shall acknowledge the Lord in that day and they shall serve Him.” There is also a well-known passage from the Bavli: “When the Egyptian hosts were drowning in the Red Sea,’ say the Rabbis, ‘the angels in heaven were about to break forth into songs of jubilation. But the Holy One, blessed be He, silenced them with the words, “My creatures are perishing, and ye are ready to sing!”’ (Tractate *Sanhedrin* 39b).

Here we get a glimpse into a G-d of justice and mercy, a union rarely without conflict and a sense of loss. In the Bible (and the Qur’an) these attributes are delicately and precariously linked. In Leviticus 19:15, we hear: “You shall not render an unjust judgment; you shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great; with justice you shall judge your neighbor”. And yet, the Jewish theologian Eliezer Berkovits notes some of the tensions of a G-d who is impartial and yet seeks to protect the poor and oppressed, as in the biblical passage of Deuteronomy 10:18, which speaks of a G-d “who regards no person” while the verse immediately adds: “He does execute justice for the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment”. Thus, “to seek justice is to relieve the oppressed” (2003, 133). At the same time because judging is so closely linked with ethics, impartiality under the law remained the key rule.

As creator of all, G-d loves all. We hear in the Tractate *Haggia*: “What does the Divine Presence say when anyone suffers? My head is heavy; My arm is heavy. If that is how the Holy One, Blessed be He, is distressed for the blood of the wicked, how much more so [is he distressed] when the blood of the righteous is shed,” (Solomon, 2009, 298). G-d does not celebrate when the Red Sea engulfs the Egyptians and their chariots. G-d reminds the Israelites that the Egyptians are also G-d’s people. And yet, the Sages’ interpretation did not end here. In the section from Tractate *Sanhedrin*, it is noted that G-d will not rejoice; but others may.⁴² More problematically, another rabbinic tradition argues that G-d told the angels to cease singing because the Israelites were still in trouble—not because Egyptians were perishing. One could say that both the universalistic and insular tendencies are present in Judaism, as will be discussed below.

A Hidden or Pervasive Light? Religious Pluralism and Judaism

It is fitting to acknowledge that two polar threads have been present in Judaism: a notion of Israel as a “light unto the nations” called to reveal G-d to everyone, and what

⁴² In Tractate *Sanhedrin* 39b, we read: “Said R. Jose b. Hanina: He Himself does not rejoice, yet He causes others to rejoice.” See *The Babylonian Talmud*, ed. Rabbi Dr. Isidore Epstein. http://www.come-and-hear.com/sanhedrin/sanhedrin_39.html#PARTb. Accessed 28 January 2010. See Shemot (Exodus) Rabbah 23:7 for the interpretation citing G-d’s concern for the Israelites at the Red Sea and not the Egyptians as well.

has been self-described by some Jewish scholars as an insular, tribal outlook. Michael Kogan, for example, calls this tendency “Judeomonism” (2007, xiii). Against this inward tendency, Jewish tradition also espouses the Noahide law or covenant, which lists G-d’s teaching of seven prohibitions to all peoples. This covenant is different from G-d’s specific (and more demanding) covenant through the Torah, which is said to contain 613 laws. As Norman Solomon writes:

The concept of Noahide law carries significant consequences for Jewish theology: it means that the essential Jewish ‘mission’ is not to convert Gentiles to Judaism in its fullest form, but to lead them to implement the Noahide commandments. . . and it allows for a positive evaluation of other religions, provided they endorse the Noahide commandments (505-6).

Thus, while dissenting voices can always be found, there is a resilient Jewish tradition that seeks to reach out and respect the Other as a child of G-d and acknowledge that G-d also calls and loves that Other. Such a tradition is especially relevant when discussing the issue of religious pluralism.

While many of us believe the truth claims of our own religion, how do we interpret and evaluate the truth claims of the Other? For some (whether Jews, Christians, or Muslims), truth claims are only full or final in the context of one’s own faith; outside—“beyond the pale” as it were—is falsity, idolatry, or perhaps charitably, “partial truth”. In Roman Catholicism, such an exclusivist view was contained in the outdated notion that “outside the Church there is no salvation”. Vatican II—and particularly (the flawed but still fruitful) Declaration *Nostra Aetate*—helped to make great strides toward a more inclusive position. However, work still needs to be done, particularly after recent disturbing setbacks in Jewish-Catholic relations.⁴³

⁴³ From the initial attempt to reinstitute an excommunicated Bishop who had denied the Shoah; to the confusing move by the US Catholic Bishops in revising one sentence in the U.S. Catholic Catechism for Adults (opening a range of questions including whether Christians should overtly and systematically seek to convert Jews), to the persistent and seemingly unnecessary rush to propel sainthood upon a very controversial (and uninspiring) wartime pope; such actions have understandably caused sadness and alarm to our Jewish brothers and sisters, and many Christians as well.

The original sentence in the catechism referred to above had been: “Thus the covenant that G-d made with the Jewish people through Moses remains eternally valid for them.” It was replaced with a Pauline passage: “To the Jewish people, whom G-d first chose to hear his word, ‘belong the sonship, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the worship and the promises; to them belong the patriarchs, and of their race, according to the flesh, is the Christ’” (Rom 9: 4-5). The problem is not with the Pauline quote but in the statement that was removed, which interestingly opposes John Paul II’s teaching that the

Tragically, a militant interpretation reigns in some Christian circles, narrowly marshalling Jesus' (apparent) call for universal baptism (Mt 28:19) without embodying the essence of discipleship and love towards all. Christian mission should predominantly concern itself with being Christ-like and seeking the meaning of true discipleship. While semantically similar, being Christ-like is far more important than the label of "Christian." It is the key to any sense of mission and dialogue as witness. It is to balance the call to evangelize in Matthew with the more penetrating (but difficult) statement in Mark: "Those who are not against us are for us," (9:40). Interestingly, the Catholic liberation theologian Jon Sobrino has written of "no salvation outside the poor" insisting upon all faiths to adopt a preferential option for the poor; an endeavor that reaches across a wide swath of various believers and non-believers (2008, 150). As the Qur'an warns: "No! But you show no kindness to the orphans, nor do you vie with each other in feeding the destitute. Greedily you lay your hands on the inheritance of the weak, and you love riches with all your hearts," ("The Dawn" 89:15). For Christians, responding to social injustice in partnership with the poor and oppressed is to approach what it means to be Christ-like.

Against an exclusivist view, an inclusivist one will want to claim that G-d—or in "kabbalistic terminology the *Ayn Sof*—the Infinite beyond human comprehension" (Cohn-Sherbok 2004, 125; see Unterman 2008, 8-10) — is present in other faiths, but in the guise or mechanism of one's own tradition, even if the other does not know it as such. Thus a Buddhist may be an "Anonymous Christian" while rabbinic sources describe select foreign peoples as "anonymous monotheists". Christine Hayes, in her article, "The 'Other' in Rabbinic Literature" refers to the term "venerators of heaven (*yir'ei shamayim*) in reference to gentile sympathizers of one sort or another" as depicted in Palestinian rabbinic sources (2007; 255-6). Others go further. Cohn-Sherbok notes:

In the medieval period such writers as Rabbenu Tam applied this rabbinic conception of symbolic intermediacy to Christian believers. In his opinion Christianity is not idolatry since Christians are monotheists despite their belief in the Trinity. Other writers, such as Judah Halevi, formulated an even more tolerant form of Jewish inclusivism: for these thinkers Christians as well as Muslims play an important role in G-d's plan for humanity spreading the message of monotheism (2004, 121).

Jewish covenant had never been revoked. See: <http://www.georgiabulletin.org/world/2009/08/27/US-4/>. Accessed 28 January 2010. For a pithy analysis of this Pauline passage, see Fredriksen, 2008: 8-9.

A pluralist view may argue for there being multiple truths or one truth contained in various ways among multiple sources. In this context and in the ongoing debate on the merits or problems of religious pluralism, one also can read a wide-range of views from various Jewish groups and thinkers. Even where there is disagreement, there have been some hopeful signs of candid dialogue.

Such honesty is particularly evident in the volume *Jewish-Christian Dialogue: Drawing Honey from the Rock*, where Jewish scholars Alan Berger and David Patterson examine a range of issues and problems within Jewish-Christian dialogue and then invite three Christian scholars to respond. As David Gushee, one of the Christian participants notes, “[This book] is the most direct and no-holds barred critique of Christians and Christianity that I have read from a Jewish perspective,” (Berger and Patterson 2008, 188). Berger and Patterson’s interpretations, accusations, challenges and truth-claims towards Christianity will leave few Christian readers without demanding clarification or wanting to respond. To be clear, Berger and Patterson highlight Judaism’s openness to other paths (Ibid., 60), and ask: “...where in any Christian eschatology is there room for salvation that remains outside of Christianity?” (Ibid., 60). Such openness, however, remains questionable with comments like: “Therefore, it seems, traditional Christian theology is, in part, defined by an anti-Judaic stance: It *has* to be anti-Judaic in order to be Christian,” (Ibid., 113). Anti-Judaic tendencies are the cancer of Christianity; not its essence.

Berger and Patterson also highlight the radical difference between the role(s) of the Messiah among Christians and Jews, and contra *Dabru Emet*,⁴⁴ raise doubts that the same God is invoked among both groups:

Here one truly begins to wonder whether Christians and Jews worship the same thing when they speak of God. Jews, for example, do not worship a Triune God who can impregnate a virgin and become incarnate in a human being. And they do not conceive of a Messiah who must be tortured and slaughtered, according to the will of God, as a redemption or a price for the sins of humanity (Ibid., 111).

⁴⁴ While not necessarily representative of the millions of Jews around the world, *Dabru Emet: A Jewish Statement on Christians and Christianity*, published by a number of prominent rabbis and Jewish intellectuals from a range of Jewish groups, remains a key contemporary expression of a Jewish response to the post-Shoah Christian and churches who are striving to eradicate anti-Judaic expressions, actions, and beliefs. For the document, see: <http://www.jcrelations.net/en/?item=1014>. See also: Tikva Frymer-Kensky, 2000).

Although Christian respondents like John Pawlikowski and John Roth rightfully challenge Berger and Patterson's questionable interpretations of Christianity (Ibid., 191-6), the quotations above provide ample material for clarification and mutual learning. However, some comments do border on the Judeo-centric. As Roth remarks: "There's a tone in this book that seems to suggest, 'Jews win, Christians lose,'" (Ibid., 193).

Dan-Cohn Sherbok, advocating John Hick's Copernican revolution in the area of religious pluralism, writes: "With a shift from inclusivism to pluralism, there is no longer any need to interpret other religions from a Judeo-centric standpoint; rather, with the Divine at the center of the universe of faiths, Jewry can acknowledge the inevitable subjectivity of all religious faiths, including those contained in the Jewish heritage," (132). Cohn-Sherbok's statement, while far from satisfactory in relation to one's unique religious identity, still has much merit. Traces of human, fallible subjectivity lay at the margins (or even centers) of much religious doctrine and dogma and to pretend otherwise has often had dire consequences (Admirand 2008, 302-17). Nevertheless, I prefer the pluralist model as advocated by other Jewish theologians like Michael Kogan and Rabbi Irving Greenberg, whose arguments seems to embody more of what I deem to be core biblical and rabbinic Judaism while remaining open to the non-Jewish Other like me.

Greenberg and Kogan's Contributions to Interfaith Dialogue

Rabbi Irving Greenberg and Michael Kogan both maintain a belief in the particular Jewish experience of G-d and the Jewish biblical covenant, but also are articulate and passionate voices for Jews to face and acknowledge the truth claims of non-Jews. In Michael Kogan's *Opening the Covenant: A Jewish Theology of Christianity*, he writes: "Judaism is a faith that already contains elements of pluralism, for while Judaism views itself as the true faith of the Jewish people, it does not insist on a world in which everyone is Jewish," (2008, 232). Note that Kogan is not going to renounce core beliefs that contribute to his Jewish identity, but nor will he claim that his tradition has a monopoly on truth claims and theological beliefs and arguments. In the context of Jewish-Christian dialogue and the possibility of a viable Christian covenant with G-d through Christ, Rabbi Irving Greenberg also concisely contends: "My argument is quite simple. Christianity had to start within Judaism, but it had to grow into its own independent existence if justice was to be done to the particularity of the covenant". Addressing the fact that a majority of Gentiles—and not Jews—followed Christ and that nascent religion, Greenberg adds:

I can only suggest that the resurrection signal had to be so marginal, so subject to alternate interpretations, and the incarnation sign so subtle, as

to be able to be heard in dramatically opposing fashions – one way by the band elected to start the new faith and another way by the majority of Jews called to continue the classical covenantal mission (2004, 194).

Such an argument, similar to Kogan's (and looking back, to Franz Rosenzweig) accentuates the belief that Christ came for the Gentiles—to bring the Word of G-d and to open the Covenant to the non-Jew. Christians did not replace Jews; nor have Muslims replaced Christians and Jews (Kogan, 13).

Kogan highlights Judaism's distinguished line of figures who have validated the presence of G-d in many of the beliefs and practices of the Other. He quotes Rabbi Menachim Ha Me'iri (1249-1315) who radically included Christians and Muslims as part of "Israel" through his interpretation of the "Talmud, specifically *Shabbat* 156a, 'Israel is not subject to the stars.'" Because Muslims and Christians also do not look to the stars and astrology for prophecy or spiritual guidance, then they are linked with Israel (*ibid.*, 75).

For Kogan, moreover, Judaism "believes in a universal ethic but not a universal theology. While holding there is one G-d, Jews expect that different peoples will conceive of divinity in widely different ways," (233). Thus, calling Jews to acknowledge the validity of the Christian covenant is to "lead us beyond the Jewish-Christian dialogue to a consideration of other religions: to Islam, the third of the Abrahamic faiths, and beyond, to religions outside this tripartite division," (*Ibid.*, 233).

Such an agenda is, of course, risky and threatening. It is so much easier to rest one's restless heart in one's own religious doctrine and revelation. It is so much more comforting to convince oneself of the superiority of one's faith without leaving oneself open and vulnerable to the possibility that the Other may have much to teach, or even correct us, and that G-d is also present and living in that tradition. As Greenberg writes: "In principled pluralism, practitioners of absolute faiths do not give up their obligations to criticize that which is wrong (or what they believe to be wrong) or that which leads to less than full realization of truth, found in other faiths," (207-208). Nor does one renounce or minimize the distinctive elements of each tradition to appease the Other. Participants in interfaith relations respect each other by kindly and humbly expressing (when appropriate) the core of their faith. The aim, as noted, is mutual transformation, hoping to grow in grace, mercy, and the knowledge of our interconnectedness.

Conclusion: What Cannot be Passed Over

In the Exodus tale from which Passover derives, G-d frees the Israelites from their bondage. The cost, however, is high. But in the Bavli, G-d also tells the angels not to sing

when the Egyptians “are perishing.” A space to be open, and perhaps, to love the Other, is maintained.

In any conflict of thoughts between two believing and religiously-different others, one is challenged to respect one’s beliefs, the religious views of that Other, and most importantly, the G-d who seeks to liberate us from oppression. By overcoming the hubris of claimed certainty, moreover, we can pass over any violent clash to forge a path that can truly reflect G-d’s image in all of us.

Not surprisingly, in examining the Jewish view of the Other, I uncovered ample material to help Christians like me become Christ-like in a more meaningful way. As I was naturally drawn to Jewish accounts that validated my religious perspective, it is not surprising that non-Christians react with sadness and distress when Christian views deny the validity of their faiths.

Hopefully, this awareness testifies to a just reading of some aspects of Jewish tradition. If not, then I pray that one has the patience to instruct me further and that I have the courage to embrace theological vulnerability, without which, most of our inter-religious attempts would be in vain.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ I wish to thank the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences for their funding support. I also want to express gratitude to the anonymous Readers of the *JIRD*.

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