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15 August 2011

We were recently asked, “How is online dialogue *really* supporting in-person work for understanding and peace?”

In this, our seventh issue, we are proud to share with you voices from around the globe. Once again, we hear perspectives that aren’t always highlighted or included in academic discussions here in the US, and provide a place and starting point for rigorous and sustaining conversations.

In “Madhvacharya as Prophetic Witness,” Deepak Sarma invites us to consider the founder of the school of Vedantic school of dualism, *Madhvācārya*, as a prophetic witness. Christhu Doss provides a unique and needed perspective on Christian inculturation in “Uncapping the Springs of Localization: Christian Inculturation in South India in 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries.” Eric Hall argues against Masao Abe’s interpretation of the Christian notion of Kenosis in his “Kenosis, Sunyata, and Comportment: Inter-Religious Discourse Beyond Concepts.” Finally, Robert Hunt raises an important consideration of how modernity affects dialogue in “Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue.”

In this issue, for the first time, we have invited young religious thinkers from State of Formation to query and dialogue with Hunt’s paper. Their responses both model the best kind of dialogue, and continue the conversation—Karen Leslie Hernandez, Kari Aanestad, Ben DeVan, and Bryan Parys connect Hunt’s scholarship with their own places of experience and formation, bring even new and considered perspectives to Hunt’s ideas and thesis.

As always, we welcome your sustaining discourse—your submissions, criticisms, and comments continue to build a movement of peaceful—but never complacent—dialogue. At the end of this issue, please find our Call for Submissions for Issue 9: Women, Feminism, and Inter-Religious Dialogue. We thank the writers and editors of this issue for bringing their scholarship and ideas to our forum.

In the continued spirit of discovery and discourse,

**Joshua M. Z. Stanton and Stephanie Varnon-Hughes**  
Founding Editors in Chief



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## ***Madhvācārya as Prophetic Witness, by Deepak Sarma***

### **Abstract**

*Madhvācārya, the 13<sup>th</sup> century propounder of dualism, exemplifies a prophet whose prophetic witness was enacted in a kairos, which demanded his dualist response. The school of Vedānta that he founded was a radical corrective that urged the return to a theistic conception of the universe that was in accordance with the prescriptions of the śruti (the revealed canonical texts). I offer stipulative definitions of three terms and one phrase used in Catholicism, namely kairos, prophet, witness, and the combined, prophetic witness. I use these to show that he is a prophet, and a prophetic witness who acted during a kairos.*

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### **1. Introduction**

In this paper I will argue that Madhvācārya, the 13<sup>th</sup> century propounder of dualism, exemplifies a prophet whose prophetic witness was enacted in a *kairos*, which demanded his dualist response.<sup>1</sup> The school of Vedānta that he founded was a radical corrective that urged the return to a theistic conception of the universe that was in accordance with the prescriptions of the *śruti* (the revealed canonical texts).

To do this I will first offer stipulative definitions of three terms and one phrase used in Catholicism, namely *kairos*, prophet, witness, and the combined, prophetic witness. I will use these as a heuristic template in which to place Hindu, specifically Mādhva, materials and to show that he is a prophet, and a prophetic witness who acted during a *kairos*.

### **2. Stipulative Definitions**

I will stipulate that *kairos* is a term that points “to a decisive moment, a moment of truth, a compelling moment in history which demands a radical response.”<sup>2</sup> I will further stipulate that a prophet is someone who is “authorized by God, sent by God, and/or given words by God.”<sup>3</sup> A witness is one whose practices exemplifies and follows what seems to the practitioner to be the prescriptions of God. A prophetic witness is either a prophet who is witnessing or one who aspires to be like a prophet in her/ his witness and speaks against the prevailing beliefs and practices, imploring listeners to act in ways

more in accordance with God's prescriptions.

### 3. The *kairos*

The context within which Madhvācārya lived was certainly “a decisive moment, a moment of truth, a compelling moment in history which demand[ed] a radical response.”<sup>4</sup> Madhvācārya (1238-1317 CE) was born of Sivalli Brahmin parents in the village of Pājakakṣetra near modern day Udupi in the Tulunadu area of southern Karnataka. Southern Karnataka was filled with a diversity of theologies and people. This pluralistic environment had a significant effect on Madhvācārya. His innovations included reminding potential adherents to stay true to the theism presented in the *śruti* (the revealed canonical texts) and also to maintain the *varṇa* (class) system which was the existing social system that he felt was being threatened by the prevailing heretical beliefs found in Advaita Vedānta. Advaita Vedānta appeared to Madhvācārya to be merely Buddhism in disguise. This time was a *kairos*, a decisive moment, a moment of truth, a compelling moment in history, which demanded a radical response. And this response was *bhakti-yoga* (the path via devotion), a radical devotionally oriented dualism that Madhvācārya argued was in accordance with *śruti*, upheld the *varṇa* system and therefore, that would eventually benefit the greatest number of people.

But first, what was at stake? What were the basic theological beliefs? And what were the ones that Madhvācārya felt needed to be corrected?

#### 3.1 The Basic Theological Beliefs

The philosophical and religious traditions extant in medieval South Asia other than Abrahamic ones, all shared a belief in circular time. The universe was governed by this circularity as it is perpetually born and destroyed. This exhibited itself on the microcosmic level as the cycle of rebirth and the mechanism of *karma*, that one's actions in earlier lives affected both the rebirth and events that are to occur in one's future lives. The entity that was reborn is the *jīva* (enduring self) also known as the *ātman*. One accumulates some combination of *puṇya* (meritorious) *karma*, or *pāpa* (demeritorious) *karma*, popularly rendered in the West as ‘good’ and ‘bad’ *karma*, and is born again and again in *saṃsāra* (worldly existence).

One manifests one's *prārabdha* (latent) *karma*. That is, the accumulated *karma* manifests itself until it is depleted or until more is accrued. Though the traditions differed widely on the origins and precise function of these mechanisms of *karma* and *saṃsāra*, they all agreed that this system existed. They also all shared an interest in ending this seemingly endless cycle and this desire was their *raison d'être*. The state that sentient beings enter after being liberated from the cycle is called *nirvāṇa* in Buddhism and Jainism, and *mokṣa* among the Hindu traditions. The ontological status and characteristics of *nirvāṇa* and *mokṣa* differ vastly and each tradition of thought offered methods by which adherents could break the cycle and attain the desired end.

It is believed that if one had the right cognitive habits and implemented them then one will eventually achieve *mokṣa*, if not in this lifetime then in future ones. If, on the other hand, if one's beliefs and practices were incorrect then one would jeopardize one's future births and compromise one's chances of breaking out of the cycle of birth

and rebirth. The stakes were very high indeed.

### 3.2 Advaita Vedānta

Madhvācārya's chief rival was the Advaita school of Vedānta. The schools of Vedānta are commentarial traditions and each makes differing claims about the truth found in *śruti* and, therefore, the method by which one can obtain *mokṣa*. Each links the entirety of its doctrinal system to these interpretations. Each has prescriptions that must be followed by adherents and that conform to their doctrines.

The Advaita School of Vedānta had many followers in the area, making medieval southern Karnataka a ferment of theological dispute. Temples, which were officiated by priests who followed ritual and other worship texts found in the Advaita canons, were built in the area, as were affiliated *maṭhas* (monasteries). According to the *Śaṅkaradigvijaya*, a hagiography of Śaṅkarācārya, the most important expounder of Advaita, Śaṅkarācārya (788-820 CE) visited southern Karnataka in the 9th century and disputed with scholars of local traditions.<sup>5</sup> One of the four *maṭhas* established by Śaṅkarācārya himself was located in Sringeri, only about 50 km, from Udipi, the heart of Mādhva Vedānta.

But what made Advaita Vedānta so heretical? What inspired Madhvācārya to bear prophetic witness against them?

The Advaita School posits that the relationship between *Brahman* (considered the impersonal absolute in Advaita theology) and the *ātman* (self) is *advaita* (non-dual). Furthermore, the universe is not comprised of difference and different entities, as it seems. Knowing this, adherents can eventually obtain *mokṣa* (liberation) from *saṃsāra* (the cycle of birth and rebirth).

According to the Advaita school, the only entity in the universe is thus *Brahman* (the impersonal absolute). *Brahman* is outside of language and it is beyond duality. *Brahman* is *sat* (being), *cit* (consciousness), and *ānanda* (bliss). Difference that one normally perceives is only apparent. *Brahman* is incorrectly superimposed upon. Thus, it appears as if there is a multiplicity of *ātman* (selves). This too is only apparent, as the *ātman* are mistakenly understood to be different from *Brahman*. The error, Śaṅkarācārya explains, is a result of *māyā* (illusion) and *avidyā* (ignorance), terms that he uses interchangeably. *Mokṣa* (liberation), the goal of the Advaita School, is therefore, the realization that the *ātman* has a non-dual relationship with *Brahman*.

The similarity between Śaṅkarācārya's Advaita and Mahāyāna Buddhism has led many to speculate that it is merely a Buddhist position in disguise.<sup>6</sup> Madhvācārya's student Nārāyaṇa Paṇḍitācārya, characterized Madhvācārya and Śaṅkara as born enemies in his *Madhvavijaya*, a hagiography of Madhvācārya. In it he further describes Śaṅkara's *Brahma-sūtra-bhāṣya* as "composed by (demon) Maniman (born as Śaṅkara) on earth."<sup>7</sup> Dasgupta summarizes much of the Mādhva mythology that grew around Śaṅkara:

[Śaṅkara]...really taught Buddhism under the cloak of Vedānta....The

followers of Śankara were tyrannical people who burned down monasteries, destroyed cattle and killed women and children...<sup>8</sup>

Śankara, represented as an evil being that was on earth to preach heterodoxical doctrine, was frowned upon by the orthodox Indian philosophical community. His heterodoxy resulted from the implications of this position that members of all classes could achieve *moksa*. After all, Śankara proposed *jñāna-yoga* (the path to *mokṣa* via knowledge) and this was not restricted and, at first glance, did not demand adherence to the *varṇa* system. His philosophy is thus very similar to the anti-class sentiment propounded in Buddhism. The Buddhists, of course rejected the authority of the *Vedas*, which made them heretical. Thus Śankara is often cursed as heretical by the Mādhvās for his quasi-Buddhist doctrines. The following passage from Paṇḍitācārya's *Madhvavijaya* exemplifies these accusations:

In the place of the non-existent world (according to the Buddhists) this wicked Śankara said that it is different from what exists and what does not exist. He called the (Buddhist) Relative Truths (*samvṛti*) *Māyā* (Illusion) and the *Brahman* attributeless for the substantiation of voidness. Alas! So this Śankara became famous as a Buddha in disguise.<sup>9</sup>

It is against this position and during this *kairos* that Madhvācārya acted as a prophetic witness. After all, the hierarchical world put forth in the *Vedas* was under threat. Ironically, those who were swayed by the anti-class flavor of Advaita Vedānta would, Madhvācārya believed, be accumulating *pāpam* (demeritorious *karma*) and would likely be born in situations even less efficacious and helpful for attaining *mokṣa*. Here an anti-hierarchical position was heretical, rather than the reverse.

#### 4 Madhvācārya as prophet

I have stipulated that a prophet is someone who is “authorized by God, sent by God, and/ or given words by God.” In this connection, Madhvācārya's travels took him to Mahābadarikāśrama, the home of Vyāsa, and author of the *Brahma Sūtras*, to meet the founder of the Vedānta tradition himself. Vyāsa is believed to be an *avatāra* (incarnation) of Lord Viṣṇu, the deity around which Mādhva Vedānta is centered.<sup>10</sup> Under the guidance of Vyāsa, Madhvācārya is said to have composed his *Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya*, a commentary on Vyāsa's *Brahma Sūtras*.<sup>11</sup> An informative autobiographical statement made by Madhvācārya occurs at the end of his commentary on the *Brahma Sūtras*:

Vāyu, whose three forms are described in the Vedas, who has the great radiance of a god, who is bestowed upon [us] and, in this way, visible [to us], whose first manifestation was as a messenger to Rāma, whose second was as [Bhīma,] the destroyer [of the Kaurava army] and whose third incarnation is Madhva by whom this *bhāṣya* (commentary) is made for the sake of [establishing the supremacy of] Hari [that is, Viṣṇu].<sup>12</sup>

As per my stipulative definition, Madhvācārya is certainly a prophet. Madhvācārya

himself has an unusual background as he proclaims himself to be the third *avatāra* of Vāyu, the wind God, who is also the son of Viṣṇu.<sup>13</sup> In fact, Vāyu incarnated himself two times before he appeared as Madhvācārya. Hanuman, the monkey deity of the *Rāmāyaṇa* epic and Bhīma, one of the Paṇḍavas in the *Mahābhārata* epic, are the first and second incarnations. According to the stories found in these two texts, both assist Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, two *avatāras* of Viṣṇu, in defeating *rākṣasas* (demons), and others who threaten the stability of *dharma*.<sup>14</sup> In his incarnation as Madhvācārya, Vāyu again assists Viṣṇu, though this time against a more insidious threat, namely Advaita Vedānta/quasi-Buddhism.

Vāyu, namely Madhvācārya, is thus a guide for *bhaktas* (devotees) on their journey towards Viṣṇu and has a dynamic position as a mediator between devotees and Viṣṇu. This self-identification further confirms his status as a prophet.

What did Madhvācārya proclaim? How does it differ from his Advaita predecessors?

#### 4.1 Basic Mādhva Ontology

As stated in the *Parama Śruti*: ‘...the wise [recognize] that [the universe] is known and protected by Viṣṇu. Therefore it, [the universe,] is proclaimed to be real. But Hari [that is, Viṣṇu] alone is supreme.’<sup>15</sup>

This passage, taken from Madhvācārya’s *Viṣṇutattva(vi)nirṇaya*, summarizes the chief elements in Mādhva Vedānta. For Madhvācārya, the universe is unquestionably real, as are its components. Viṣṇu, who is *Brahman* and is the pinnacle of the Mādhva system, governs all things. Furthermore, correct knowledge of Viṣṇu and one’s place in relation to Him is the prerequisite for *mokṣa* (liberation).

Viṣṇu is the facilitator of all entities and all possible events. The entire universe is manifested due to His activity and is utterly dependent upon Him. To reflect this dualism in ontology, Madhvācārya separates all of reality into *svatantra* (independent) and *asvatantra* (dependent) entities. The only *svatantra* entity is Viṣṇu while all other entities are *asvatantra*.<sup>16</sup> All things, moreover, are in a hierarchical relationship with one another and with Viṣṇu, where Viṣṇu is at the zenith. This chain of command is known as Madhvācārya’s doctrine of *tāratamya* (gradation). The hierarchy pervades every aspect of the Mādhva system and can be found even in *mokṣa*. There is *tāratamya* in *mokṣa* because of the gradation in the devotion towards Viṣṇu.<sup>17</sup> This is known as Madhvācārya’s *ānanda-tāratamya-vāda* (theory of a gradation in bliss).<sup>18</sup>

Knowledge of Viṣṇu alone is insufficient for attaining *mokṣa*. Madhvācārya writes:

Bhakti (devotion) comes from knowledge of the greatness [of God] and is the strongest [in all circumstances when compared] to others. Mokṣa [is achieved] by this [bhakti] and in no other manner.<sup>19</sup>

Madhvācārya’s emphasis on *bhakti* as the only method for obtaining *mokṣa* distinguishes his position from ones in which knowledge alone is sufficient.<sup>20</sup> *Bhakti* is

the central component in Madhvācārya's soteriology. Not only is *bhakti-yoga* (the path to *mokṣa* via devotion) the sole method for obtaining *mokṣa*, but it also most accurately characterizes the experience of *mokṣa*. Fostering *bhakti* and becoming a *bhakta* is both the means and the ends of Mādhva Vedānta.

Devotees must also obtain the grace of Viṣṇu in order to obtain *mokṣa*. Madhvācārya writes:

Direct realization of the highest Lord [comes] only from grace and not [from] the efforts of the *jīva*.<sup>21</sup>

The *jīva* is utterly dependent upon Lord Viṣṇu as is exemplified in the need for Viṣṇu-*prasāda* (grace). The reward of Viṣṇu-*prasāda* is a natural outcome of *bhakti-yoga* (the path to *mokṣa* via devotion). When *bhaktas* show their awareness of the hierarchy of the universe, namely the supremacy of Lord Viṣṇu, and act accordingly, then they are awarded for their submission. Madhvācārya explains:

Hari [that is, Viṣṇu] is the master of all for [all] eternity. [All] are under the control [of the] Highest [One]. This *tāratamya* and the supremacy of Hari are to be known.<sup>22</sup>

It is thus essential to act according to one's *varṇa* (class) lest one act against *tāratamya*. In his commentary on the *Bhagavad Gītā*, Madhvācārya reminds adherents that *varṇāśrama-dharma* (obligatory duty according to class and stage) must be performed.<sup>23</sup>

Madhvācārya, of course, held that these beliefs and practices were in accordance with those found in *śruti* and, indirectly, were dictated by God. He saw people being misled by Advaita Vedānta and sought to correct this and to return to a theistic conception of the universe.

## 5. Concluding Remarks

In this short paper I have used Catholic categories to analyze the status and activities of Madhvācārya, a medieval Indian theologian. As per my stipulative definitions Madhvācārya seems to be a paradigmatic example of a prophet whose prophetic witness was enacted in a *kairos*. Madhvācārya derived his authority from God, namely Viṣṇu, and sought to remind people of the importance of *tāratamya* (gradation). This meant that people ought to know both their place in relation to Viṣṇu as well as to one another. In the latter case this meant that people ought to fact in ways according to their *varṇa* (class) and ought not to follow what appeared to be an anti-hierarchical and any-social-inequality stance put forth by Buddhism, via Advaita Vedānta.

**Deepak Sarma**, an Associate Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Case Western Reserve University, has published in Indian philosophy, Hindu studies, method and theory in the study of religion, and bioethics. His chief focus has been the Madhva School of Vedānta. He has delved into comparative philosophy of religions, comparative theology, and served as the president of the Society for Hindu- Christian Studies.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Alice Bach, Frank Clooney, Paul Griffiths, and Peter Haas for assisting me as I thought about this topic.

<sup>2</sup> Bonganjalo Goba, “The Kairos Document and Its Implications for Liberation in South Africa,” in *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1987), 314.

<sup>3</sup> I am grateful to Frank Clooney for this language.

<sup>4</sup> Bonganjalo Goba, “The Kairos Document and Its Implications for Liberation in South Africa,” in *Journal of Law and Religion*, Vol. 5, No. 2 (1987), 314.

<sup>5</sup> See the Padmapādatīrthayatrāvarnam and related chapters of Mādhava’s *Śamkaradigvijaya*. These chapters are descriptions of religious pilgrimages and travels undertaken by Śamkarācārya.

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, King, Richard. *Early Advaita Vedānta and Buddhism: The Māhāyana Context of the Gaudapādīya-Kārikā*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995.

<sup>7</sup> Rau, D.R. Vasudeva, (ed. & tr.), Nārāyana Panditācārya’s *Madhvavijaya*, Śrīmadānanda Tīrtha Pub., A.P., India, 1983, 5.17.

<sup>8</sup> Dasgupta Surendranath. *A History of Indian Philosophy*, vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922.I, p. 52.

<sup>9</sup> Nārāyana Panditācārya’s *Madhvavijaya*, Śrīmadānanda Tīrtha Pub., A.P., India, 1983, 1.51.

<sup>10</sup> *evamvidhāni sūtrani krtvā vyāso mahāyaśāh | brahmarūdrādidevesu manusyapitrpkaksisu | jnānam samsthāpya bhagavānkridante purusottamah | BSB o.*

<sup>11</sup> For further reading about the link between Madhvācārya and Vyāsa, see Sheridan’s ‘Vyāsa as Madhva’s Guru: Biographical Context for a Vedāntic Commentator.’ In *Texts in Context: Traditional Hermeneutics in South Asia*. ed. J. Timm. 109-126. NY: SUNY PRESS, 1992.

<sup>12</sup> *yasya trīnyuditāni vedavacane rūpani divyānyalam bat taddrsatamittham eva nihitam devasya bhargo mahat | vāyo rāmavaconayam prathamakam prkso dvitīyam vapurmadvho yattu trīyakam krtamidam bhāsyam harau tena hi | BSB 4.4.23.*

<sup>13</sup> *vāyum hareh sutam... | Chāndogyopanisadbhāsyam 3.15.1.*

<sup>14</sup> *tasmād balapravrttasya rāmakrnsnātmano hareh | antarangam hanumāś ca bhīmastatkāryasādhakau | Mahābhāratatātṭparyanirnaya 2.34-35.*

<sup>15</sup> *matam hi jñānināmetasmitam trātam ca visnunā | tasmāt satyam iti proktam paramo harir eva tu iti paramaśrutih | Visnutattva(vi)nirnaya.*

<sup>16</sup> *svatantram asvatantram ca dvividham tattvam isyate | svatanthro bhagavān visnur | Tattvasamkhyāna 1.*

<sup>17</sup> *tāratamyam vimuktigam | Anubhāsyā 3.3.*

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<sup>18</sup> *yathā yathā ‘dhikāro viśisyate evam muktāvānando viśisyate | Brahma Sūtra Bhāṣya 3.3.33.*

<sup>19</sup> *māhātmyajñānapūrvastu suddrhassavato ‘hidkah | sneho bhaktir iti proktastayā muktir na cānyathā | MBhTN 1.85.*

<sup>20</sup> Madhvācārya believed that the Advaita school holds that knowledge alone is sufficient.

<sup>21</sup> *paramātmāparoksyam ca tatprasādād eva na jīvaśaktyeti ... | Brahma Śūtra Bhāṣya 3.2.22.*

<sup>22</sup> *sarvesām ca harirnityam niyantā tadvaśāh pare | tāratmyam tato jñeyam sarvocatvam harestatthā | Mahābhāratatātparyanirnaya, 1.79.*

<sup>23</sup> *ato niyatam varnaśramocitam karma kuru | BGB 3.8.*

## ***Uncapping the Springs of Localization: Christian Acculturation in South India in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries***, by M. Christhu Doss

### **Introduction**

Identified for its diversified culture and traditions, India witnessed a process of assimilation and synthesis of cultures during the Indian subcontinent's medieval period. Undoubtedly, however, the advent of British colonialism during the seventeenth century profoundly altered Indian life, culture, and polity. Conquering forces undermined Ancient Indian customs and values, and "Hindu" practices<sup>1</sup> were decried as being superstitious. Consequently, the scathing attack on Indian culture and religion generated vehement criticism from English-educated Indian intelligentsia including Ram Mohan Roy, who even claimed that "the British did not want the light of knowledge to dawn on India."<sup>2</sup>

The expansion of Christianity in India constitutes one of the most remarkable cultural transformations in its social history. Western missionaries in general and Protestant Christians in particular, who operated within and through the colonial enterprise, criticized Hindu religion in a narrow and dogmatic manner in an attempt to prove it "inferior," discrediting it in the minds of the Indian intelligentsia.<sup>3</sup> Consequently, scholars view the role of Western missionaries in shaping the nature and course of Christianity in India in more abrogative and adverse terms<sup>4</sup> as their strategies, which were complex in nature, created tensions and conflicts within indigenous cultures. Christian converts in India very often felt that they were the victims of their cultural background, since missionaries had so much power and control.<sup>5</sup> As a result, both Hindu and Christian nationalists and liberal-minded intelligentsia attempted to develop counteractive strategies to "Indianize" Christianity. They largely viewed the religion as a "foreign import," although for some, this involved efforts to make the Church more "Hindu" or Sanskritic in its liturgy, hymnody, and architecture.<sup>6</sup>

This paper attempts to look critically into different stages of localization and Christian inculturation in South India.<sup>7</sup> At the outset, it examines how missionary attitudes towards indigenous masses compelled the newly converted Indian Christians to come out of the missionary fold to establish their own fission model.<sup>8</sup> It further traces the roots of localization through the ideological discourse promoted by the Indian intelligentsia at the time, namely Indianization.<sup>9</sup> In this context, terms such as Indigenization or Hinduization, and Westernization etc., are used to explore how counter movements substantially resisted missionary attempts to present the Christian message in an Indian way. Despite the fact that missionary scholars like Robert Eric Frykenberg, Norman Etherington, Geoffrey Oddie, Susan Billington Harper, David Maxwell, Dick Kooiman, and others have argued extensively about Indian Christians' active involvement in the indigenization of Christianity, this study deals largely with the strategies adopted by educated Indian Christians to uncap the springs of acculturation.

### **Hindu-Christian Model**

The socially and economically challenged sections of the South Indian society included: Shanars (later known as Nadars),<sup>10</sup> Paravas,<sup>11</sup> and Pariahs,<sup>12</sup> who were treated as "outcastes" and denied ordinary citizens' rights such as the use of public streets, wells,

etc. These groups constituted a notable Christian population when Robert de Nobili<sup>13</sup> was actively involved in propagating the Christian faith. Despite the fact that the converted Christians were allowed to retain their former social customs and usages, the upper strata of the society identified conversion to the Christian faith with the process of Westernization.<sup>14</sup> As a result, de Nobili adapted a system externally by dressing like a Sannyasin and even openly calling himself a Roman Brahmin<sup>15</sup> with a view to “Indianize” Christianity—e.g. imitating Brahmins by wearing ochre robes and wooden sandals, taking vegetarian food, constructing chapels in Indian or Hindu style, and replacing Anglican usages with Sanskrit including “Kovil” for the place of worship, “Arul” and “Prasadam” for grace, “Guru” for priest, “Vedam” for Bible and “Poosai” for mass to communicate his message to Tamil audience. He thus set a precedent for the process of “Indigenization” in India during later periods.<sup>16</sup>

It was the Western missionaries who initiated studies on culture, society, and religions of the indigenous masses<sup>17</sup> to assess the situation in many parts of South India. They observed that the people were “neglected for ages,” which in turn made them pathetic in terms of socio-economic conditions.<sup>18</sup> Missionaries were of the opinion that Nadars, with some exceptions, were slaves of the dominant castes.<sup>19</sup> Robert Caldwell,<sup>20</sup> a missionary-cum-Bishop in Tirunelveli<sup>21</sup> of South India, described the Nadars as: “Belonging to the highest division of the lowest classes or the lowest of the middle classes.”<sup>22</sup> Similarly, H. R. Pate described the Nadars as a caste group, “inferior” to other “privileged” sections of the society. Subsequently, Kearns, a missionary scholar, opined: “Nadars are among the worst types of the human family.”<sup>23</sup>

Studies made by Western missionaries on Nadars over a period of time attracted open criticism from the lettered masses,<sup>24</sup> who in turn made attempts to translate their studies into vernacular and also undertook initiatives to distribute translated copies to their fellow community members both in South India and abroad to make them understand what they believed to be the misrepresentation of their community by missionaries’ works. They further alleged that in most of the missionary periodicals,<sup>25</sup> emphasis was placed on European culture, civilization, morality, and so on.

Furthermore, the master-servant relationship between missionaries and the Indian Christians widened the gulf between these two races further than ever before, while the relationship between missionaries and the empire became increasingly cordial.<sup>26</sup> The effects of Western dominance were therefore felt not only in the political sphere but also in the wider religious sphere. Converts, who closely observed the activities of missionaries, were targeted for allegedly having anti-white sentiments.<sup>27</sup> Over a period of time, a group of Christians in Tirunelveli made an attempt to disassociate themselves from missionary organizations, as they felt that the white men used the Bible only to rule them.<sup>28</sup> The Nadars, who were identified as inferior, began to question the paternalistic domination and guiding control<sup>29</sup> of the missionaries and even claimed that the sincere milk of the work of the Lord was adulterated by the poison of impure European traditions.<sup>30</sup>

When the Western missionaries felt that their superficial knowledge of the vernaculars and artificial sympathy<sup>31</sup> for the converts partially disconnected themselves socially, they began to utilize the colonial connection and wrote letters to the sub-collector of Tirunelveli. As a result, warrants were issued for the arrest of local Christians including Sattampillai, also known as Arumainayagam, who in reaction to Western missionaries’ domination established his own church called *Hindu Church of Lord Jesus*

in 1857 on the model of Jewish temples. He even started calling himself a rabbi and emphasized mainly Old Testament principles and doctrines.<sup>32</sup> Despite the argument that “zeal for caste” and “Hindu sentiments” were the prime forces for the establishment of his church,<sup>33</sup> the way in which Sattampillai and his associates drew parallels between the Jewish customs and ancient Hindu traditions, incorporating a number of local Hindu customs into the church, totally rejected Western Christianity as “inauthentic.”<sup>34</sup> In fact, the Hindu Church of Lord Jesus had crucial implications on the nature and course of the foreign missions in South India largely due to Sattampillai’s equal faith in both Hindu and Christian religions. He even rejected everything that appeared to him to savor of a European origin, with a view to make a fusion model of Hindu-Christian religion without any assistance from “white” European missionaries.<sup>35</sup> Subsequently, the socio-religious reform movements, writings on issues like church autonomy and ‘Churchianity’ by educated Indian Christians, and the growing Indian nationalism, centered largely around Bengal, began to undermine the attempts to Westernize Christianity<sup>36</sup> through multifarious strategies.

### **Discourse of De-Westernization**

When the missionaries felt that there was a growing anti-European syndrome among the Indian Christians, emphasis on training local converts became inevitable.<sup>37</sup> Missionaries even admitted that no English or European missionary would individually take the task of propagating Christianity without the help of local converts. During this period, a range of debates took place in India on the so-called Indianization of Churches in an attempt to free the Indian churches from the growing influence of Western theology. In most of the churches established by Indian Christians, the use of vernacular languages for liturgy, the employment of local musical traditions, and adaptations of Indian architectural patterns in the building of churches became the order of the day.<sup>38</sup> As a result, missionaries slowly and steadily started withdrawing themselves voluntarily from many of the mission stations in South India—partly due to the compulsion of Indian Christians to develop their own material resources to promote the indigenous church, and partly because of the growing anti-Western theological sentiments that Indian theology was superior to the Western counterpart.<sup>39</sup>

The last decade of the nineteenth and first quarter of the twentieth centuries marked a distinct change in theological discourse in India. The growing Indian national movement in Bengal, which later came to be called the “Bengal storm”<sup>40</sup> by Stephen Neill, made an indelible mark on the intelligentsia of Indian Christianity. For many of the leaders of socio-religious movements, Christianity was closely linked with imperialism, which later resulted in the revival and reassertion of Hinduism in conscious opposition to Christianity.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, a number of educated Christians, both Indian and foreign theologians including Kali Charan Banerjee, Sathianadhan, K. T. Paul, Vedanayagam Samuel Azariah, Whitehead, C.F. Andrews, Appasamy, Chenchiah, and Vengal Chakkarai, became critical not only of the British raj but of the Western captivity of the Indian church at large.<sup>42</sup>

Notions that “the spread of more effective Western techniques and the extension of a more dynamic Western culture are often accepted as inevitable and self-evident” and “supervision and control of the local pastors by Englishmen was a necessity” were vehemently criticized by the educated Indian Christians, for they felt that the statements reflected deeply embedded Euro-centric perspectives, providing no scope for indigenous Christianity in India.<sup>43</sup> Many times, Western missionaries faced objections not only from

people belonging to non-Christian faiths but also from Christians at large.<sup>44</sup> According to the local Christians, this opposition was partly due to Western missions' suspected attitude and behavior towards native missionaries, "lack of openness, absence of devolution of responsibility, and above all their 'spiritual or cultural hegemony.'"<sup>45</sup> While a large chunk of Christians were prepared to continue in a predominantly Western tradition of church organization, a small but vibrant educated Christian population was constantly insisting on the significance of Indian national and cultural traditions and their relevance to Indian Christianity. Discourses about 'Indian-ness' and 'nationalism' became a visible sign in the day-to-day activities of nationalist sentiments amongst Indian Christians, which later resulted in the formation of organizations like Indian Missionary Society and National Missionary Society in 1903 and 1905 respectively.<sup>46</sup>

During this time, a few liberal Western Bishops "imagined" themselves as true champions of the Indianization of Christianity.<sup>47</sup> V.S. Azariah, a close associate of the then-Madras Bishop,<sup>48</sup> had been asked by John Mott, the chairman of World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh to give an address on *The problem of Co-operation Between Foreign and Native Workers in the Younger Churches*.<sup>49</sup> In his address, he underlined the "true relationship" of foreign missionaries in the following lines:

I do not plead for returning calls, handshakes, chairs, dinners and teas as such. I do plead you [foreign missionaries] to show that you are in the midst of the people to be to them not a Lord and master but a brother and friend. Through all the ages to come the Indian Church will rise up in gratitude to attest the heroism and self-denying labors of the missionary body. You have given your goods to feed the poor; you have given your bodies to be burnt. We ask also for love. Give us friends.<sup>50</sup>

This speech had crucial historic implications on the course of the foreign missionaries in India and abroad. Subsequently, Western missionaries undertook initiatives to solve the ongoing 'cold war' between these two races. Indian Christians, as a result, had proved themselves to be partially successful when they acquired V.S. Azariah as their first Indian Bishop in 1912 at Dornakal in the then Madras Presidency.<sup>51</sup> Yet bishops who were in favor of British leadership were extremely "doubtful" of his leadership, and the English missionaries were "horrified" and even wrote letters to the Madras Bishop that they were not willing to work under an Indian bishop.<sup>52</sup>

After his consecration, the focus of attention revolved largely around the Indianization of Christianity in one way or the other. One of Azariah's objectives was that the faith must be presented in terms and worship conducted in a manner most natural and intelligible to the people of India. He iterated that worship in Western forms was foreign and strange to the Indians. In fact, he encouraged the use of Indian customs and tunes in the church. Emphasis on local methods of offering to God, harvest festivals, notion of first fruits, a remarkable example of the adaptation of Indian art to Christian worship in Dornakal Cathedral, and so on helped to ground worship in local values.<sup>53</sup> Although missionary scholar Susan Billington Harper argues that the church indigenization was the product of the Western Orientalist rather than indigenous impulses, the way in which Azariah rejected Western missionaries' suggestion to replace his bishop's miter with a turban disproved the popular Oriental imagination, showing his continued confrontations with Western missionaries with regard to the Indigenization process.<sup>54</sup> Despite the fact that the continued demand for a "truly Indian Church" can be traced back to the last decades of the nineteenth century, which the Christian Press

carried with huge coverage,<sup>55</sup> Azariah could raise his voice wholeheartedly in favor of indigenization only after acquiring the “power chair” of bishop.<sup>56</sup>

Nonetheless, the concept of inculturation remained too theoretical for the newly converted, inexperienced Indian evangelists. In fact, it did not attract a great deal of attention from the grassroots level Christians, as they had been accustomed predominantly to the Anglican model of worship for a considerable period of time. The way in which Azariah used strategies to indigenize Christianity so as to undermine the growing influence of Western practices in Indian Christianity influenced a sizable Christian population, but the notion of Christian inculturation through theological discourse remained untouched in South India.<sup>57</sup>

### **“Cleansing stagnant Western waters” and indigenization in the making**

Protestant Christian attempts to indigenize Christianity over course of time deeply impacted on their Catholic counterparts. When a group of nationalist leaders who associated themselves with the Indian National Congress felt that “Christianity in India was full of stagnant Western waters and could be cleansed only through Indian Christian literature,”<sup>58</sup> the tensions and conflicts between these two races came to “most explicit expression.”<sup>59</sup> Establishment of non-denominational missionary organizations by both Indian and liberal Western Christians challenged the Western theology through Indocentric perspectives. Kali Charan Banerjee, who joined the Indian National Congress in 1885, set up a non-denominational Christian organization called Christo Samaj in 1887. He wore the clothes of a Sannyasin, a conscious hearkening back to Robert de Nobili and his policy of inculturation. His association with Scottish missionaries in Bengal made a tremendous impression on the Scottish missionaries in Madras, especially Madras Christian College, the then-epicenter of the Re-thinking Christianity in India Group.<sup>60</sup> Consequently, de Nobili model of inculturation began to influence Indian theological discourse, leaving space for the Madras School of Theologians to initiate their own inculturation model called “Re-thinking Christianity in India Group.”<sup>61</sup>

The Re-thinking Group, based at Madras Christian College, felt that the missionary emphasis on institutions like “church” in India was not at all wise and reiterated that Christianity must understand the spiritual genius of India, methods of work, forms of worship, and categories of thought so as to take root in the Indian soil.<sup>62</sup> As a result, development of spirituality through the Bhakti tradition—i.e. loving surrender to God,<sup>63</sup> “raw fact of Christ,”<sup>64</sup> (experience of Christ that Hindus could share with Christians), and inculturation of the Christian faith through the notion of *avatar*<sup>65</sup> (incarnation of a deity on the earth)—became the order of the day. However, the Re-thinking Group’s attempt to develop distinctive Indian theologies, with a view to make use of the rich diversity of forms and modes of thought of “Hindu” philosophies, could attract only a particular section of the Christian community. Similarly, nationalists including Gandhi gave an open call to the Christian intelligentsia to reform the institutionalized church for allegedly having impurities and its denial of salvation to all who were not considered Christians.<sup>66</sup>

It was during this period that initiatives were made to localize Christianity using a fusion model called the ashram strategy. The very idea of establishing an ashram—a small community of faithful people living a life of the greatest simplicity as disciples of a guru—for Christians, became a reality only after Gandhi made a speech on the concept of ashram in a conference in Madras Christian College in 1915.<sup>67</sup> The proponents, who were

attracted largely by the ancient Hindu idea of ashram, criticized the institution of church in the public domain for allegedly having quarrels, hierarchy, ritual, and fixed dogmas and concluded that the church was interested more in administration than Christian life.<sup>68</sup> As a result, the first Christian ashram, called Cristukula Ashram<sup>69</sup> and founded by both a foreign missionary<sup>70</sup> and an Indian named S. Jesudasan<sup>71</sup> in 1921 in Tamil Nadu, continued the task of making distinctively Indian forms of Christianity. Interestingly, Gandhi was invited to this ashram and appreciated its remarkable endorsement of another religious ethos. The Cristukula Ashram aimed largely at establishing new and vital forms of Christian community to align with the ancient Hindu idea of the ashram. The founders of the ashram in their book *Ashram Past and Present*<sup>72</sup> argue that the Christianity should keep itself free from hierarchical institutions like church, with a view to attract more Hindus to the Christian ashram. They even identified themselves Hindu-Christians, emphasizing only “spiritual” matters.<sup>73</sup>

The Cristukula Ashram applied remarkable strategies towards Christian inculturation in South India, which included re-thinking everything in the light of theology through mysticism to suit the Indian context.<sup>74</sup> Attempting to understand how Christianity was related to Indian thought and became a “living force” in the country, Indian theologians were inclined to think that it would place great emphasis on mystical experience.<sup>75</sup> As a pursuit of achieving communion, mysticism was identified with “conscious awareness of ultimate reality, the divinity, the spiritual truth, or God through direct experience, intuition, or insight.”<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, Western missionaries who came to India to “give” the Hindus Christ acknowledged that they “discovered” Christ more deeply through Hindu mysticism and admitted that India plunged them more vigorously into Christ’s mystery than anything from their Christian backgrounds.<sup>77</sup> It was in this context that Indian Christian theologians viewed Bhakti mysticism as a bridge of understanding between Hinduism and Christianity,<sup>78</sup> for they felt that of all Hindu religious experience, Bhakti mysticism was the nearest to Christian mystical experience.<sup>79</sup>

The so-called Hindu-Christian theologians in India attempted to situate the writings of the New Testament within the discourse of Hinduism. Similarly, some of the missionaries from both Protestant and Catholic denominations, who preached Christianity in the South India, mastered Sanskrit in order to convert the local masses and to be in tune with the prevailing conditions. They handled a volume of Sanskrit words in preference to vernacular languages to widen the scope of inter-religious dialogue.<sup>80</sup> They proclaimed that: “If St. John had been writing his Gospel in India, he would have used the term ‘Om’ in place of Logos...In our ashram every morning we reverently say together ‘Om, shanty, shanty, shanty. We lose something very precious in our spiritual Indian heritage by a needless foolish fear of syncretism.”<sup>81</sup> As a result, the belief that the knowledge of God and of truth can be attained through spiritual insight and independently of reason was propagated more widely by Indian theologians than ever before, whereby monasticism flourished in India, reaching the highest mark of mysticism in the last decades of the twentieth century.<sup>82</sup> Attempting to localize Christianity, Indian Christian intelligentsia functioned as a bridge between Indian monastic traditions and Christian spirituality with a view to “Hinduize” Christianity by incarnating it into India’s culture, way of life, prayer, contemplation, and liturgy.<sup>83</sup>

## Concluding Remarks

Although emerging largely through obscurantist operations, the Indian Christian intelligentsia made persistent and prolific endeavors against the complex motives of Western missionaries and the notions of Westernization through a range of localization initiatives<sup>84</sup> that challenged the Western missionaries' Euro-centric approach. The Christian inculturation, an ecclesiological revolution intended to develop inter-religious dialogues in South India, remains an unfinished and partial success. The Hindu-Christian fusion model of indigenization further opened up public spaces, whereby new forms of Christianity began to emerge to the tune of cultural heritages that were deeply embedded in the Indian subcontinent.

The way in which European missionaries looked at Indian Christians—"weak" and "ignorant" for clinging to "old habits...heathen rules...and superstitions"—was judged unacceptable to Indian Christian intellectuals. As a result, the contest against the foreign missionary dominance compelled the Indian Christians to make efforts to contain Christianity in an indigenous framework so as to identify Western Christianity as a mixture of gospel, politics, power, and European customs. Although it is argued that it was not Indian Christians who formulated indigenous interpretations of Christianity, but the Brahmo Samaj, founded by Ram Mohan Roy, it should be noted here that the pioneers of localization included individuals like Sattampillai, who constructed for the first time the notion of "Indian" forms of Christianity, advocating a "Hindu" way of prostrating before the deity, the use of frankincense, sitting on the floor, and worshipping God with folded hands.<sup>85</sup>

With the tremendous increase of Western missionaries in South India in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Christianity was too easily identified as a foreign religion. It was in this scenario that V.S. Azariah, members of Madras Rethinking Group, and others who favored inculturation got their inspiration largely from the simultaneously growing Indian nationalism. In fact, they had taken up the task of initiating an "Indian" Christian theology for the development of indigenous understandings of Christ and Christianity in India.<sup>86</sup> Furthermore, initiatives made by Indian Christian theologians eventually opened up new avenues whereby the Christian message was conveyed to a "Hindu" middle class through indigenous philosophies. K. P. Aleaz, an Indian scholar on theology, argues: "The life and work of Jesus manifest Brahman, the Supreme Self, as the pure consciousness, reveals the all-pervasive power, and proclaims the liberative, illuminative, and unifying power."<sup>87</sup>

Expounding the meanings of Western Christian theology with special reference to its Sanskrit roots, the ashram model made further attempts to accelerate the process of indigenization. Breaking new grounds for Hindu-Christian dialogue, the establishment of Christian ashrams as adaptations of an Indian institution played a crucial role for inter-religious centers. Considered largely as products of pro-Indian culture and spiritual traditions, these ashrams increased membership in "Hinduized" Christianity, because for a large number of Hindus the hierarchy-oriented church was seen as a barrier to interest in Christianity.<sup>88</sup> It is in this context that the idea of uncapping the springs of localization can be understood not in terms of keeping Christian theological interpretations national or international but expressing the "universal character" of Christianity in terms understandable to every family, caste, region, and nation.<sup>89</sup> The conscious process of Christian acculturation in South India therefore sowed the seeds for Hindu-Christian inclusivism by accommodating Hindu philosophies, leaving the scope for new forms of

Christianity and inter-religious dialogue alive.

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- <sup>1</sup> The word "Hindu" is derived from the word "Sindhu," the name for the Indus River. The name Sindhu further became "Hind" or "Hindu" in Persian languages and later re-entered Indian languages as "Hindu," originally with the sense of the inhabitants of the lands near the east of the Indus River. Although it is argued that the term "Hindu" identified anything native to India, whether people, custom, and religious traditions, it was not common before the British Raj came into being. Similarly, colonialism, Orientalists, and Christian missionaries had located the core of Indian religiosity in Sanskrit texts with a dual objective: textualization and interpretation of religious beliefs and practices. Consequently, conceptualized by Western Orientalists, according to their own pre-suppositions about the nature of religion, the construction of Hinduism as a single religion is conceived of in terms of Western conceptions of religion. See David N Lorenzen, *Who Invented Hinduism* (Yoda Press, 2006), 7-8; Robert Eric Frykenberg, *Christianity in India: from beginnings to the present* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2008), 268; Richard King, *Orientalism and Religion: Post-Colonial Theory, India and "The Mystic East"* (Routledge, 2002), 101-111.
- <sup>2</sup> Sarkar Ghose, *Indian National Congress: Its History and Heritage* (New Delhi: All India Congress Committee, 1975), 18-44. Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1998), 153. Hira Singh, *Colonial Hegemony and Popular Resistance: Princes, Peasants, and Paramount Power*, Sage Publications (New Delhi, 1998), 35; Ram Gopal, *Hindu culture during and after Muslim rule: Survival and subsequent challenges* (M. D. Publications Pvt. Ltd., 1994), 69.
- <sup>3</sup> Norman Etherington, "Introduction," in Norman Etherington (ed.), *Missions and Empire* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2005), 3-4; Robert Eric Frykenberg, "Christian Missions and the Raj," in Norman Etherington (ed.), *op. cit.*, pp. 107-131; D. Dennis Hudson, *Protestant Origins in India: Tamil Evangelical Christians 1706-1835* (U.K.: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), 186-187; Brijraj Singh, *The First Protestant Missionary to India Bartholomaeus Ziegenbalg, 1683-1719* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 120-121; S. A. Abbasi, *Thinkers of Indian Renaissance* (New Age International, 1998), 170.
- <sup>4</sup> Susan Billington Harper, "The Dornakal Church on the cultural Frontier" in *Christians, Cultural Interaction and India's Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg, (London: Routledge, 2002).
- <sup>5</sup> Geoffrey A. Oddie, "India: Missionaries, Conversion and Change," in *The Church Missionary Society and World Christianity 1799-1999*, ed. Kevin Ward and Brian Stanley, (U. K.: Curzon Press Ltd., 2000), pp. 252-254; Kavita Philip, *Civilizing Natures: race, resources and modernity in colonial south India* (Orient Blackswan, 2004), 212.
- <sup>6</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *Christian Missions: Their Place in India* (Ahmedabad: Navajivan Press, 1941), 123-126, 160, 259; Hugh Mcleod, *World Christians, 1914-2000* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 427.
- <sup>7</sup> Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India* (Bushington, USA: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2007), 80-81.

- <sup>8</sup> M. S. S. Pandian, “Nation as Nostalgia: Ambiguous Spiritual Journeys of Vengal Chakkarai,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 38, No. 51/52, Dec. 27, 2003-Jan 2, 2004, pp. 5357-5365; Vincent Kumaradass, “Creation of Alternative Public Spheres and Church Indigenization in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Colonial Tamil Nadu: The Hindu Church of Lord Jesus and the National Christians of India,” in Roger E. Hedlund, *Christianity is Indian: The Emergence of Indigenous Community* (New Delhi: Mylapore for I.S.P.C.K., 2000), 3-21.
- <sup>9</sup> Antony Copley, *Religions in Conflict: Ideology, Cultural Contact and Conversion in Late Colonial India*, (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1997); Helen Ralston, *Christian Ashrams: A New Religious Movement in India* (Edwin Miller Press, 1987); A.J. Appasamy, *Sundersingh: A Biography* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1956), 102-103; Jan Peter Schouten, *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India* (Rodopi, 2008); T. E. Slater, *The Attitude of Educated Hindus*, August 1858, Stephen Neill Study and Research Archives; Duncan B. Forrester, *Forrester on Christian Ethics and Practical Theology: Collected Writings on Christianity, India and the Social Order*, (England: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2010); Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India 1707-1858* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), 364-368; S. M. Pathak, *American Missions and Hinduism*, (New Delhi: Munshiram and Mahoharlal, 1967), 131-132.
- <sup>10</sup> *Madras Church Missionary Record*, vol. XXVII, no. 5, May, 1860, p. 122.
- <sup>11</sup> Also called Parathavar, Bharathar, and Bharatakula Khastriyar are a Tamil fishing community. Portuguese expressed their willingness to help to those who embrace Christian faith. St. Francis Xavier was one of the Portuguese missionaries who closely associated with the community.
- <sup>12</sup> Eddy Asirvatham, “Changing India and the Missionary,” *The Harvest Field*, 1920, 409; Robert Hardgrave, *The Nadars of Tamilnad* (University of California Press, 1969).
- <sup>13</sup> Robert de Nobili (1577-1656), an Italian Jesuit missionary who came to South India in 1542.
- <sup>14</sup> Rowena Robinson, *Christians of India* (Sage Publications, 2003), 29.
- <sup>15</sup> Jayaseela Stephen, *Caste, Catholic Christianity and the Language of Conversion* (Gyan Publishing House, 2008), 100.
- <sup>16</sup> John F. Butler, *Iconography of Religions: Christianity in Asia and America* (Brill, 1979), 7; M. G. Chitkara, *Hindutva*, (APH Publishing, 1997), 140.
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Caldwell's works like *A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, (Madras, 1856), *A Political and General History of Tinnevely in the Presidency of Madras from the Earliest period to its cession to the English Government in A.D. 1801* (Madras Government Press, 1881), *The Tinnevely Shanars: A Sketch of their Religion, and their Moral Condition and Characteristics, as a Caste* (Madras: Christian Knowledge Society Press, 1849) and Benjamin Schultze's *Notices of Madras and Cuddalore* (Longman and co., 1858) played a crucial role.
- <sup>18</sup> *Madras Church Missionary Record*, vol. 1, no. 9, December, 1830, 268.
- <sup>19</sup> *Madras Church Missionary Record*, vol. V, no. 5, May, 1838, 91.
- <sup>20</sup> Robert Caldwell was the first to use the word ‘Dravidian’ instead of the term ‘Tamilian’ in his first and longest work entitled “A Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages,” originally published in 1856. He was the standard authority on the subject without rival or successor. See J. L. Wyatt, *Reminiscences of Caldwell* (Madras: Addison and Co., 1894), 150-151, 192. Also see Robert Caldwell, *The Tinnevely Shanars: A Sketch of their Religion, and their Moral Condition and Characteristics, as a Caste* (Madras: Christian Knowledge Society

Press, 1849); Hardgrave, L. *The Nadars of Tamil Nadu: The Political Culture of a Community in Change* (University of California, 1969), 57.

- <sup>21</sup> He was a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of Gospel and became Bishop of Tirunelveli Diocese later in the year 1878.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert Caldwell, *The Tinnevelly Shanars*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Madras, 1849, 4-5.
- <sup>23</sup> J. F. Kearns, *Mudalur Mission Report*, 1824, Society for the Propagation of Gospel, 1824.
- <sup>24</sup> Caldwell's remarks on Nadars over a period of time invited criticism through the following works: H. Martin Winfred, *Shandrar Marapu* (Madras: Shandrar Customs, 1871); Sargunar, *Bishop Caldwell and Tinnevelly Shanars* (Palamcottah, 1883); A. N. Aiya Sattampillai, Aiya, *The Chantror Memorial* (Madras Golden Stream Press, 1911); S. Winfred, *Shandrar Kula Marapu Kattala* (Safeguarding the customs of the Shandrar Community) (Madras, 1874) and so on.
- <sup>25</sup> It was through the missionary societies that the Tamil journals were first published. A monthly journal *Tamil News Paper* (1831) was published by the Madras Religious Tracts' Society. *Evangelical Explanation* (1840) and *Good Teachings* (1840) came out every month from Nagercoil and Palayamkottai respectively. *People's Friend* (1841) was published bi-monthly from Madras. In 1847 *Dravida Deepigai* came out. *Morning Star* (1841) was a monthly published by American Mission at Jaffna. Neyoor Mission Society published the *Country's Helper* (1861) with illustrations. *Children's Friend* (1849) and *Young One's Friend* (1859) were the children's magazines published from Palayamkottai and Jaffna respectively. *Bala Deepigai* (1852) was a quarterly from Nagercoil. In 1863, a Tamil monthly named *Arunodhayam* was started by the Tamil Evangelical Lutheran Missions. Quoted in M. Christhu Doss, *Protestant Missionaries and Depressed Classes in Southern Tamil Nadu 1813-1947* (Un-published Ph. D., Thesis), Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 2010, 166-167. Also see D. I. Jesu Doss, *Tamil through the Tranquebar Mission*, Christian Sishya Sanga Publication, Coimbatore, 1939, 2-8.
- <sup>26</sup> S. Sathianadhan, "Missionary Work in India," *The Harvest Field* (Madras: Addison and Co., September, 1877), 190-191.
- <sup>27</sup> Stephen Neill, *op. cit.*, 232-233. Arumainayagam alias Sattampillai (1823-1918), known for his intellectual caliber, worked in a missionary school and closely associated himself with missionaries. He was dismissed for allegedly having remarked on foreign missionaries.
- <sup>28</sup> Joseph Mullen, *A Brief Review of Ten Years' Missionary Labor in India Between 1852 and 1861* (London, 1863), 50-51. Also see Robert Hardgrave, *op. cit.*, 76.
- <sup>29</sup> *Madras Church Missionary Record*, July and August, Madras, 1876, 240-242; *Madras Church Missionary Record*, November, 1877, Madras, 361-363. Also see Vincent Kumaradass, *op. cit.*, 3-21.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted in M. S. S. Pandian, *op. cit.*, 5357-5365. Also see Vincent Kumaradass, *op. cit.*
- <sup>31</sup> S. Sathianadhan, *op. cit.*, 190-191.
- <sup>32</sup> It is called by three different names: *Nattu Sabai* (country church) or Sattampillai *Sabai* (Sattampillai church) or *Eka Ratchakar Sabai* (Savior's church) by local people. It has its branches at seven places in Tamil Nadu. The worship usually held in every Saturday (Sabbath day). People belong to this church don't work on this day. Even food for Saturday is made before 6 p.m. on Friday. When other Anglican churches use bell, this section of the people blow up the trumpet. They use Jewish calendar to celebrate feast days as followed in Old Testament days. Presently Hindu Christian Church of Lord Jesus has seven places. They are: 1. Mukuperi (near Nazareth), also known as *Thai* (mother) *sabai*. 2. Oyyankudiyiruppu. 3. Kulathukudiyiruppu 4. Salaiputhur. 5.

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- Coimbatore 6. Chrompet, Chennai. 7. Chinnalapatti. See Vincent Kumaradass, *op. cit.*, 2-7; Stephen Neill, *op. cit.*, 233.
- 33 Joseph Mullens, *A Brief Labor of Ten Years' Missionary Labor in India between 1852 and 1861* (London, 1863), 51-52.
- 34 Roger E. Hedlund, *Christianity is Indian: the Emergence of an Indigenous Community*, Mylapore Institute for Indigenous Studies, Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 2000, 8-9.
- 35 Robert Caldwell, *The Nadars of Tamilnad*, *op. cit.*, 76-77.
- 36 David Stuart, "As Others See," *The Harvest Field* (Madras: Addison and Co., August 1887), 44. Also see T. Walker, "The Tinnevely Mission: Church Missionary Society," *The Harvest Field*, October 1892, 128 and William Simpson, "Mandalay and the Pagodas," *The Harvest Field*, April 1886, Madras, 320.
- 37 W. Goudie, "Training and Supervision of Native Agents," *The Harvest Field*, September 1887, Madras, 194.
- 38 Sebastian C. H. Kim, *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 174.
- 39 *Madras Church Missionary Record*, July and August 1876, 240-242.
- 40 Stephen Neill in his work argues that Bengal was the area in which the cultural shock was most acutely felt and in which the tensions and conflicts between East and West came to most explicit expression. Bengal as the epicenter of the Indian nationalism was rapidly becoming one of the capitals of the world where every aspect of life was discusses and debated. Stephen Neill, *Christianity in India 1707-1858*, *op. cit.*, 364-368.
- 41 Stephen Neill, *op. cit.*, 364-368.
- 42 Robin Boyd, *op. cit.*, 86-87. The theologians had been intensively involved in a new Indian approach to the Christian faith and wanted to experience their faith in Christ in terms of their Hindu background.
- 43 Carol Graham, *op. cit.*, 7
- 44 Missionaries, sometimes making friendship with influential converts, used to preach the Christian faith in front of Hindu temples and other public places with unhealthy intentions and motives, hurting the feelings and sentiments of the people of other faiths. This attitude of missionaries towards other faiths directly and indirectly induced and instigated communal tension between faiths. A missionary from Church Missionary Society shares his experience in the following lines: "The opening words give the whole tone to the preaching, and as my companion read on 'you must not worship Brahma-you must not worship Vishnu-you must not worship Vishnu-all this is sin.'" See *Madras Church Missionary Record*, October-December 1875, 310-311. Also see Clifford Manshardt, *Christianity in a Changing India*, (Bombay, 1932), 20-21. The administration of the church was alleged by the Indian Christians as autocratic. They even claimed: "Bishops are acting not only as paternal government but they held all the rein of power in their own hand. The executive councils are consulted but they preserve the right of veto. Thus the one power, the Bishop has all the authority and all the power." T, Walker, *op. cit.*, 128.
- 45 V.S. Azariah, *India and Christian Movement*, 1934, 63-64.
- 46 *Ibid.* Also see Robin Boyd, *op. cit.*, 87-89.

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- 47 Susan Billington Harper, *op. cit.*, 95.
- 48 Henry Whitehead (1853-1947).
- 49 Carol Graham, *op. cit.*, 38-41.
- 50 *Ibid.*
- 51 Susan Billington Harper, “The Dornakal Church on the Cultural Frontier,” *Christians, Cultural Interactions and India’s Religious Traditions*, ed. Judith M. Brown and Robert Eric Frykenberg, (London: Routledge, 2002), 183-210.
- 52 J.A. Sharrock, *op. cit.*, 279-281.
- 53 Carol Graham, *op. cit.*, 7.
- 54 Susan Billington Harper, “The Significance of Episcopal Extension for Church-State Relations in British India” in *Religion and Public Culture: Encounters and Identities in Modern South India*, ed. John Jeya Paul and Keith E. Yandell (Routledge, 2000), 79.
- 55 *Christian Patriot*, Madras, 16 June 1898.
- 56 M. Christhu Doss, “Contextualizing Missionary Engagement: Transition from Christianization of Indianization of Christianity in Colonial South India—Edinburgh Conference and After,” in *Edinburgh 1910 Revisited: Give Us Friends- An India Perspective of One Hundreds of Mission*, ed. Frampton F. Fox (Bangalore: Asian Trading Corporation, 2010), 8-9.
- 57 Duncan B. Forrester, *op. cit.*, 86-87.
- 58 Suresh K. Sharma, *Cultural and Religious Heritage of India: Christianity*, 205-206.
- 59 Stephen Neill, *op. cit.*, 364-368.
- 60 Antony Copley, *op. cit.*, 214-216.
- 61 Thoughtful Christians including Appasamy (1891-1975), Chenchiah (1886-1959) and Vengal Chakkarai (1880-1958) in Madras started an organization called Christo Samaj in 1918 based on the mode which was set up in Bengal in 1887 by K.C. Banerjee. The founders were ‘deeply dissatisfied’ with the work which the missionaries were doing. *The Bengal Christian Herald* (later changed to *The Indian Christian Herald*) a newspaper, started by K.C. Banerjee, became the focal point, whereby a weekly journal named *The Christian Patriot* started publishing articles which were considered ‘nationalistic’ in content. The ‘Rethinking Group’ also formed the Indian Christian Book Club which later published its magnum opus *Rethinking Christianity in India*, with special reference to indigenous Christianity. Duncan B. Forrester, *op. cit.*, 86-87.
- 62 A.J. Appasamy, *op. cit.*, 102-103.
- 63 Appasamy focused largely on the development of spirituality through Bhakti tradition—‘Loving surrender to God.’ Jan Peter Schounten, *Jesus as Guru: The Image of Christ among Hindus and Christians in India* (Rodopi, 2008), 117-118.
- 64 Chenchiah, the most radical of the three, concerned mostly as the experience of Christ that Hindus could share with Christians otherwise known as ‘raw fact of Christ.’ *Ibid.*

- <sup>65</sup> Vengal Chakkarai Chetti represented Indian Christian community of Madras at the time when Gandhi delivered a talk in Madras on 26 April 1915. His contribution to Indian theology could be considered entirely Indian, and thus Hindu concepts influenced both Christians and people with Hindu backgrounds. He was in favor of inculturation of the Christian faith, which he called the 'Indianization of Christianity' in his thought provoking work *Jesus the Avatar*, published in 1926. *Ibid. The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961, Vol. 14, 421.
- <sup>66</sup> M. K. Gandhi, *op. cit.*, 123-126, 160.
- <sup>67</sup> *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, Vol. 14, 405. Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1961. Also see Paul M. Collins, *op. cit.*, 80-81.
- <sup>68</sup> Robin Boyd, *op. cit.*, 160-161.
- <sup>69</sup> Also known as the family ashram of Christians. Savarirayan Jesudasan and Ernest Forrester Paton, ed., *The Christukula Ashram: Family of Christian Ashram at Tirupattur* (N.M.S. Press, 1940).
- <sup>70</sup> Ernest Forrester Paton. K.R. Sundararajan and Bithika Mukherjee, ed., *Hindu Spirituality, Post Classical and Modern* (Motilal Banarsidass Publication, 2003), 523-524.
- <sup>71</sup> Harry Oldmeadow, *Journey's East: Twentieth Century Western Encounters with Eastern Religious Traditions* (World Wisdom Inc., 2004), 234-236.
- <sup>72</sup> Published in 1941 and focused entirely on the notion of a religion less Christian.
- <sup>73</sup> Zoe C. Sherinian, "Dalit Theology in Tamil Christian Folk Music: A Transformative Liturgy by James Theophilus Appavoo," in *Popular Christianity in India: Rifting Between the Lines*, Selva J. Raj and Corinne G. Dempsey, ed. (State University of New York Press, 2002), 233-235.
- <sup>74</sup> Robin Boyd, *op. cit.*, 160-161. Paul M. Collins, *op. cit.*, 80-81. Michael Von Bruck and J. Paul Rajashekar, "Hinduism and Christianity," in Erwin Fahlbusch and Geoffrey William, *The Encyclopedia of Christianity*, Vol. II, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999.
- <sup>75</sup> A. J. Appasamy, *Christianity as Bhakti Marga: A Study in the Mysticism of the Johannine* (Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 1.
- <sup>76</sup> Surendranath Dasgupta, *Hindu Mysticism: Six Lectures* (Forgotten Books, 1927), vii.
- <sup>77</sup> Harvey D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Liturgical Press, 1991), 606.
- <sup>78</sup> Horst Georg Pohlmann, *Encounters with Hinduism: a contribution to inter-religious dialogue* (SCM Press, 1996), 75.
- <sup>79</sup> Mariasusai Dhavamony, *Hindu-Christian Dialogue: Theological Soundings and Perspectives* (Rodopi, 2002), 47.
- <sup>80</sup> Venkatarama Raghavan, ed., *Proceedings of the First International Sanskrit Conference*, Vol. II, Issue I, Ministry of Education and Social Welfare, 1975.
- <sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>82</sup> Alexander P. Varghese, *India: History, Religion, Vision and Contribution to the World* (Atlantic

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Publishers and Distributers, 2008), 769.

<sup>83</sup> Harvey D. Egan, *An Anthology of Christian Mysticism* (Liturgical Press, 1991), 603.

<sup>84</sup> Norman Hetherington, *op. cit.*, 1-2.

<sup>85</sup> Rasiah S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and Empire: post-colonial explorations* (Cambridge University Press, 2005), 176-182.

<sup>86</sup> Paul M. Collins, *Christian Inculturation in India, op. cit.*, 41-47.

<sup>87</sup> K.P. Aleaz, *Christian Thought Through Advaita Vedanta*, Indian Society for Promoting Christianity (Delhi, 1996), 90-112; quoted in Sebastian C.H. Kim, *Christian Theology in Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 50-51.

<sup>88</sup> Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: an analysis and theological critique of the Hindu-Christian encounter in India* (Oxford Center for Mission Studies, 2004), 54-55.

<sup>89</sup> John B. Carman, "Christian Interpretation of 'Hinduism': Between Understanding and Theological Judgment," in *India and the Indianness of Christianity: Essays on Understanding Historical, Theological and Bibliographical—in Honor of Robert Eric Frykenberg*, ed. Robert Eric Frykenberg and Richard Fox Young, (Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2009), 237.

## ***Spiritual Directions, Religious Ways and Education,*** **by Joseph McCann**

### **Introduction**

Robert Wuthnow, Professor of Sociology at Princeton and the Director of the Center for the Study of Religion, has been observing and analyzing American approaches to religion for some decades now. His distinction of “dwelling” and “seeking” is probably the most helpful way of thinking about attitudes to religion and spirituality today.

Wuthnow explains by saying that there are two mentalities, one interested in stability and security and the other which moves towards exploration and transition. Many individuals now are looking for the sacred and the meaningful elsewhere than in traditional churches or religious institutions, and finding it in places not usually regarded as sacred. As Wuthnow comments: “Rather than being in a place that is by definition spiritual, the sacred is found momentarily in experiences as different as mowing the lawn or viewing a full moon.” (1998, 3-5) The purpose of this article is to build on Wuthnow’s idea and map the movement of spiritual seekers as they travel from their familiar locale in different directions by unknown paths to spiritual “fresh woods and pastures new.”

This article employs an extended metaphor of journey or passage, that is, someone goes from one place to another, chooses a route, makes discoveries on the way and arrives at a destination. The journey is the inner journey of a person seeking, looking and finding a new spiritual home. The paper provides a framework or map, to enable one to observe where the journey may be headed. After all, when travellers have a general sense of the countryside, then they are less likely to feel lost.

### **The Framework**

The framework comprises four phases: Spiritual Seeking, Spiritual Directions, Religious Ways and Religious Dwelling. The impulse for the journey starts from an urge to begin a quest: this can be described as Spiritual Seeking. Seekers follow a pointer or indicator which arises from their spiritual experience: these are Spiritual Directions. “Spiritual Direction” means an orientation rather than a particular action or process. That leads to a choice of paths or common practices usually shared with others: Religious Ways. A “Religious Way” suggests a more specific route or path, maybe with twists and turns, for which one might need a guide or map, and where one might encounter fellow travelers on a particularly well-trodden road. Finally, the journey on a path in a particular direction leads a seeker to a destination, a spiritual place of peace and stability: this is a Religious Dwelling.

As well as these four phases, this article suggests a fifth: Educational Curricula. If ways are paths shared with others, and dwellings are places of personal peace and stability, then curricula are organized exercises, drills or practices that serve as educational courses. The root of “curriculum” is “path or track” (as in running track), that is to say, a lane, running oval or circle around which teachers hurry their students to reach their learning goals. This enables the formation of students who have neither experienced the urge to spiritually seek, nor the attraction of religious stability, to give them some sense of spiritual discovery and religious appreciation.

Therefore, we have broad directions, then firm and safe and crowded ways, leading to particular destinations, and, lastly, curricula, confined training runs for novices. The title conveniently summarizes the argument of this paper: that we can conceive of spiritualities as identifiable directions originating with the human person. Each Spiritual Direction can be related to a different Religious Way. These, in turn, may be useful for educators mapping out manageable Educational Curricula for students. The Spiritual Directions and Religious Ways and useful Educational Curricula are captured in the Framework to organize thinking and fill the conceptual space between Spiritual Seekers and Religious Dwellers.

The argument is that the Religious Traditions embody the Spiritual Seeking of the generations and they should be valued for that by educators. The opposite line of thinking is to circumscribe the Spiritual within the preoccupations of the individual human being, and that is unfortunate. Neither Religion nor Spirituality should be “confined to the privacy of one’s own ecstasy.” (Ammerman, 2003, 216)

This article will take the reader through that Framework. The outline of the Framework is provided in the Appendix and it may help one to navigate the way, visually, from the left hand column headed Spiritual Seeking through the second column or Spiritual Directions, followed by Religious Ways, Religious Dwelling and Educational Curricula in the right hand column.

### **Spirituality and Religion**

First of all, we need to comment briefly on the key terms in our quest: “Spirituality” and “Religion”. Nowadays, people commonly say: “I am not religious -- but I am spiritual.” These are not new ideas. The distinction between “Spirituality” and “Religion” has been around for a long time, though the meanings have changed.

“Spirituality” begins as a distinction between the spiritual moral realm and the moral realm of fleshly desires, for example, when Paul the Apostle advises the early Christians to go into training, to subdue their lower desires in favor of heavenly things. But Paul was a Jew and that was a Jewish distinction. Confusion soon arose with the Greek distinction between soul and body, which was not the same thing at all. Then a political perspective arose in the Middle Ages between the responsibility of the Lords Spiritual and Lords Temporal. Some of the Reformers pointed to a contrast between the experience of religious oppression in the established churches and the spiritual and personal faith of the children of God. (Carrette and King, 2005, 33) Our contemporary notions of the spiritual reflect undertones from this conceptual history

“Religion” too is a western European idea, rooted in the notion of “binding people together” with their family, their country and their gods. It came to refer especially to the opening of the human to the transcendent, that is, to that which goes beyond the individual, including whatever is “the other,” “the certain,” “the sacred,” and “the holy,” (Otto, 1968).

These are rough and ready descriptions of complicated concepts. They are also confined to the western history of ideas. There is no guarantee that these ideas are shared to any extent with other cultures. This is an exercise in labeling, a tactic that risks doing injustice to the spiritual experiences and the religious understandings of non-western traditions. Of all the concepts to which this applies, of course, none are more

problematic than “Spirituality” and “Religion.”

These considerations set up another contrast, of course, disturbing to many, between the claim of the transcendent (as reflected in “Religion”) and the concerns of the autonomous self, as reflected in personal needs, interests, desires, perceptions and ambitions (expressed in the term “Spiritual”). Today this approach is popular for a variety of reasons: sometimes because the existence of the transcendent is denied or because it is absorbed into the natural world and combined with human experience, or because it is completely ignored as irrelevant to what one wants anyway. These may represent many who say they are spiritual but not religious.

As we move through the Framework that describes categories of spiritual perspectives and religious activities and educational curricula, further hazards arise. Ascribing particular spiritual directions, for instance, to religions is over-simplification. A simplification is intended to reduce confusion, and focus attention on key elements, but that risks dropping out details that may also be highly relevant. At best, we are dealing with under-tuned categories.

This approach, though, has the merit of being easily understood by religious educators. Different kinds of religious teaching have been identified as involving the study of sacred scriptures, or theological issues, or progressing from “lower” to “higher” sciences, or experience, or myth and ritual, (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2001, 640). These are readily paralleled with the Spiritual Directions and Religious Ways described in this paper.

### **Spiritual Seeking**

The starting point for this article is the idea of Spiritual Seeking and so we begin in the left hand column of the Framework. Scholars from various disciplines have attempted to identify aspects common to all personal spiritual activity. A common example is the threefold categorization of belief, experience and community. (McGuire 2002, 15-17) However, as we are starting from a position theoretically prior to joining or adhering to any organized religion, my preference is to derive the Spiritual Seeking column for the Framework from the concepts of the Holy, the Sacred and the People, and by extension, the residual category of the Profane.

The **Holy** is that which is awesomely complete, perfect, whole and entire, more than anything else we can imagine. It designates the Wholly Other, the Quite Beyond, the Supreme Supernatural, the Ultimate Goal, the Absolute End of the human quest for meaning. Whether or not a Supreme Being exists, there is no denying that faith, hope and reliance upon such a reality lies, where it exists, somewhere near the heart of spirituality.

The **Sacred**, however, is nearer at hand, being found in the special, set apart, cut off, the ecstatically heightened, existentially deepened, mystically comprehended person, place, time or object that contrasts sharply with the mundane, routine, quotidian, boring “same-old-same-old” everyday round of event, life and toil, known generally as the Profane. The Sacred therefore can be an experience of, a celebration for, and a dwelling in, the realm of special experience amid the fleeting moments and spaces of everyday humdrum existence. Whether or not it is associated directly with the Holy, the Sacred is cherished, valued, esteemed and maybe even revered in a different way than the rest of

reality.

The third area central to religion is the **People**. Spirituality can “bind us together with bonds that cannot be broken.” At this point, it is verging on becoming a religion. Loyalty to other people renders both spirituality and religion highly attractive or profoundly threatening to “the earthly powers that be” as they strive to co-opt spiritual or religious motivations, or else radically reduce such influences on the body politic. This is because people can be quite aroused and highly motivated as they recognize who they really are, remember whence they have come, and try to discern where they are going. This is a very powerful situation, and governments often feel impelled either to enlist this motivational power for their own purposes, or alternatively, to reduce its influence completely.

Finally, the **Profane** is the remainder, the left-over, anything that is not spiritual or religious in any shape or form. It is defined, or rather, recognized by what it is not. The Profane is not worthy of special attention, in no way wonderful or awesome, barely deserving a second glance. It is around all the time, available everywhere, the common-or-garden stuff of everything that happens. Sometimes, a fleeting light may illuminate a piece of it but the spark soon fades back to the dull everyday.

### Spiritual Directions

Writers locate the origin of spiritual sensibility in the experience of the Holy or the transcendent, described as “the quest for the Absolute, as a finality for which religious authority is exercised, in the face of the relativity of everyday existence” (Piette, A. quoted in Hervieu-Leger, 2000, 46). Whether this occurs through revelation (assuming the actual existence of an Absolute Other) or through enlightenment (relying on an insight of seer or prophet), some such recognition seems to be essential for spiritual activity. It is also possible that the recognition is directed only at the Sacred, which may, or may not, be a clue of the transcendent or an embodiment of the absolute.

The next step is the emotion and feeling which the insight or disclosure brings about, both for the visionary and the community that gathers in the wake of the experience. We can speculate then that a spiritual sense begins with the **Perception** of the Holy (or the Sacred) and progresses to emotional sharing of that Perception with Society. This leads to the formation of a group of adherents or the **People**. This scenario so closely parallels the stories of Abraham, Moses, Jesus, the Buddha, and Mohammed as to make it plausible. It may be said, therefore, that a spiritual insight begins to become a religion when it is shared with others successfully.

Then Society gathers in a communal activity. The activity may involve preaching, teaching and spreading the unique insight or world view, or worshipping the Holy, celebrating the presence of the Sacred, or collaborating with shared norms and goals in pursuit of a new communal vision in the light of the ethical awareness that the sense of spirituality has bestowed on them (**Profession, Prayer and Practice**).

The People begin to identify (that is, recognize) or signify (that is, choose to express) the Holy and Eternal and Absolute and Sacred in the realities of their everyday lives. These clues and signs are named, distinguished from everything else, acknowledged to be special and requiring to be treated as special. Any or all of the core elements of belief, rule or ritual (Profession, Practice and Prayer) can be in play, though

normally, one or other is in the foreground.

Finally, the Profane or the non-sacred world too is affected by the new perspective. **Participation** in commerce, politics, art and music, architecture and language, are all shaped by the spiritual experience and religious emotion of the original insight. The landscape of city and country, daily conversation, habits of civic exchange, the gait and appearance of walking in the street, clothes and styles, music and song, literature and learning, everything that makes up civilization, can all be transformed by the new religious impulse. And of course, subsequent interaction between the profane and the sacred is two-way: the religious vision is reflected even in the secular world, while the secular or profane world looks to the religious inspiration for foundation and support.

### Religious Ways

Spiritual Directions are pointers for the seeker. They spring from the individual and collective spirits of the People. We may now align these six Spiritual Directions with the principal Ways in which Religions manifest themselves.

Scholars of Religion have variously listed the principal religious activities as follows: How people experience life; How people express their identity; What people believe; How people live; How people worship; How people associate with each other. (Yinger, 1970) As a short-hand, we can sum these up in three “C” words: Code (meaning norms, commandments, rules, and ethics), Creed (meaning beliefs, convictions, stories and teaching) and Cult (meaning worship, liturgy, prayer and celebration). These three terms are commonly used as categories for religious analysis. Often, a fourth C-word is added: Community (meaning the group of fellow religious adherents, with whom one worships, believes and practices a way of life). I should like to add two more terms, Consciousness (to cover the individual disposition and psychological experience of the person) and Culture (or Civilization -- to refer to the consequences of a religion on the secular life of society.). Three of these terms are more closely associated with the Religious (that is, Code, Creed and Cult); the other three terms, Consciousness, Community and Culture, are more diffuse and, we may say, Spiritual. There should be no surprise that the two categories, Spiritual Directions and Religious Ways, are so easily melded. The major world religions became so because their customs and practices were responding on the one hand to the deep spiritual craving of many of the world’s population, and on the other, to the particular historical and cultural circumstances of individual religions.

It is the case, after all, that Seekers are looking for something. So the question may be asked: How does a Seeker know when an appropriate destination has been reached? One plausible explanation is that the Seeker is looking for a better or ideal version of the Spiritual home they have left, perhaps like the groom who turns out to be marrying a younger version of his own mother. It remains to be seen what today’s Religious Seekers are in fact doing: Are they settling for a version of their old familiar homestead? Or are they ending up in a completely different kind of religious dwelling? There seem to be mixed signals in the research.

Ireland has undergone a distinct decline in traditional Catholic practice during the last decade or so. The shift in adherence of young Irish Catholics was investigated by Anderson in a survey reported recently in *Social Compass*. Anderson’s account suggests

that Irish youth are not generally embracing new spiritual expressions: they are instead moving to a very new kind of Irish Catholic home (2010, 35). This pattern, however, may not be true of other European young people (Barker, 2010, 194).

Recent research by Flory and Miller in the USA suggests a somewhat different route and outcome. Flory and Miller say that the post- [Baby] Boomer generations are looking for “spiritual experience and fulfillment in embodied form through community and through various expressive forms of their spirituality, both private and public.” They are finding a home with “expressive communalism,” at times “reclaiming” the liturgical tradition of one of the mainline Christian churches. (Flory and Miller, 2009, 201-203) In a word, these Religious Seekers are moving down the street from home, to a form of worship or cult that both answers their spiritual longing, and is sufficiently familiar to their traditional beliefs.

### Religious Dwellings

Each of the major world faiths (the Religious Dwellings) features a different Religious Way, almost to distinguish it from other Religions. It is true, of course, that any one world religion incorporates several of the Religious Ways. Christianity and Hinduism and Buddhism, for example, each has a profession of belief (Creed) and distinctive prayers (Cult) and explicit commandments (Code). But there is evidence that each Religion has an affinity with a particular Religious Way, whether by accident of history, or cultural disposition, or religious evolution. This becomes especially evident if the education of the young is examined in detail. Often, the religion will reveal its “bottom line,” so to speak, in the classroom. (McCann, 2007)

The Buddhist religion, for example, in its schools, concentrates on individual teaching, with great attention to individual differences, but involving withdrawal from ordinary life, even if only for a period of months, to a Buddhist monastery. The purpose is to devote ones full attention to meditation with the hope of reaching enlightenment. The individual must stand on his or her own feet. Detachment, mindfulness, focused attention, and grounded realism is all that matters. Anything else is mere opinion. Buddhist education is about **consciousness**.

The Jewish faith is very aware of being the people who received the promise of God, believed it, and tried to live by it ever since. The promise was made to the people of Israel. Accordingly, Jews are concerned about being a member of the Jewish race. One is a Jew if one’s grandmother is Jewish. The question of “Who is a Jew?” is a contested issue today, and the answer is in terms of blood connection. Hence Judaism emphasizes the religious value of the people, or the **community**.

Christianity, by contrast, does not have any condition of birth or blood relationship to be a member of the religious congregation. The only criterion is the personal response of faith to the saving grace of God, and this is signified in the sacrament of Baptism. No other criterion – such as family – is required. Hence, Christianity stresses the importance of individual conviction and conversion, and Christian education and formation and “bottom line” is professed belief or the **creed**.

Islam follows Christianity in looking for conversions from other religions, and none, as its typical process for admitting new members, but it does not highlight the complexity of the Muslim profession of faith: the Islamic creed is simply that there is

only one God and Mohammed is his prophet. More important for Muslim adherence and practice is the keeping of the Quranic law, the Sharia. The faithful Muslim follows out the rules and regulations laid down since Mohammed's time. Thus Islam is a religion of the commandment, the God-given rule, or a **code**.

The Hindu religion values personal ritual, family prayer and community ceremony as a springboard for personal formation. Rite and ceremony reveal the divine in every person, place and moment. Close study of hymns, reflection on the texts and questioning by the teacher, rational thought and meditation, obedience to simple chores and tasks, self-discipline and silence prepare the youth for life. Hinduism is about devotion and worship, the **cult**.

Chinese religion and culture differs completely from Buddhism, in that little or no attention is paid to interiority or spiritual insight or personal devotion. Chinese religion values the public virtues of stability, toleration, prudent government, humane arts and letters, and personal restraint. The will of heaven and the memory of the ancestors are the certainties that underpin Confucian civic values for thousands of years. So Chinese religion is centered on civilization or **culture**.

### **Educational Curricula**

Deriving from the Religious Ways and Religious Dwelling on our framework, are the Educational Curricula, and we now look at this part of our map to explore if there are any leads for the educator to be found. This paper proposes that an attention to the Religious Ways of the different World Religions provides pointers to the development of Educational Curricula that may validly relate to the Spiritual Directions of Spiritual Seekers.

Let us begin with the Religious Way of **Culture**. It is so far from the usual religious concerns that it sometimes is not perceived as religious at all. Chinese religious values have permeated an entire civilization for centuries. Confucian ideals and principles spread throughout Asia. The resulting culture privileges age and seniority instead of the young, values stability rather than innovation, and sets great store by duty and obligation in place of ambition and individualism. The five Confucian principles of *JEN* or humanity, *CHUN TZU* or integrity of the person, *LI* or traditional propriety, *TE* or moral example and *WE* or the cultivation of the arts, give a flavor of the "habits of the heart" that did not just characterize an elite, but were the foundation for a civilization.

Elie Weisel, the Jewish writer, once said that if he were to envy Christianity one thing, it would be its music. Indeed, Christianity has produced great composers, whose melodies can touch the deepest parts of the human soul and artists, painters and sculptors who depicted humanity at its most divine moments. By contrast, Islam forbids pictorial representations of the human body, and music that stirs the softer emotions, but yet glories in a civilization that pre-dated medieval Europe with its Renaissance, invented mathematics, preserved Greek classics for the west and produced architecture that still astonishes the visitor. Each of the religions has in its culture and civilization the throb of its religious heart embodied in word or diagram or stone, or pigment, or cloth, or movement, or in the rhythm of musical notes. These can each provide, in the hands of a skilled educator, a "way in" to a distinct kind of spiritual striving.

Some religious educators in Europe are considering concentrating more on the

heritage of Christianity, in its buildings, sculptures, pictures and musical pieces, for curricular material. This is partly motivated by secular concerns that appreciation for the art left by Western Europe's Christian centuries will be lost from the consciousness of the young. This is a worthy concern indeed; but consideration of the place of the Icon in Christian practice in Eastern Europe will demonstrate that works of art, like painting, music, sculpture and dance, can in their own right be "windows on the sacred."

**Cult**, that is, Ritual, Liturgy, Ceremonial and Worship is specifically directed at evoking sacred space and sacred time among the concerns of everyday life. To be present at the Japanese Tea Ceremony is to experience the importance of every moment and the significance of every gesture of hand and body. The ceremony picks out even the folding of a cloth or the stirring of a cup or the whisking of tea leaves as special and sacred in the context of the tea house and hospitality.

Leon Kass, who was the Chairman of the US President's Commission on Bioethics, published a book of readings on the human body *Being Human*. The cover had a picture of a ballerina soaring in a graceful leap, light and airy, looking upward, straining to escape the bonds of gravity and the limitations of humanity. This was, for Kass, a symbol of the human being seeking self-transcendence. But another picture that also means a great deal to him is the image of Moses before his Creator on Sinai, slumped face down, flat on the earth, afraid to look on the face of God. Few of us can achieve the beauty of the ballerina in her dance. All of us can fall prostrate in humble insignificance. Both are postures or movements of body that say more than words about the state of our soul. (Cohen, 2010)

Movement and posture are important for education and formation of the young, clearly embodied in ceremony and ritual. One of the attractions of *hatha yoga* is the discipline of standing and sitting in a way that helps contemplation. Kneeling, walking, gestures of the hands, demeanor of body, all of these can be taught, and are able to instill inner lessons as well. The military, after all, drills recruits in marching, to teach obedience, teamwork and precision. A nineteenth century Native American chief said that the tribe told its young people "to sit still and like it, to listen when there was not obviously anything to hear, and to look where it seemed there was not anything to see. They wanted young people to be silent, so that perhaps with age, they could speak a word of value to their people." Our Western educational systems have moved somewhat away from that. With new attention to spiritual directions and religious ways, we may find a route back.

Teaching obedience and deference to elders is not popular in educational theory, to be sure, so it may be instructive to consider the Spiritual Direction of Practice, and the Religious Way of **Code** or Commandment. Islam faced a crisis in the twelfth century, concerning whether it should incline to theology and philosophy, or to take the side of ethics and law. Law won out and that determined the spirit of Islam from then until now. Muslims teach children the *Quran* in Arabic whether or not they understand it. They learn it off by heart, not unlike Catholic children who, in the not-too-distant past, learned the *Catechism* answers by heart or altar servers who could rhyme off the Latin of the Mass responses. Muslim children today learn things before they know what they mean. Islam stands by the dictum that human beings should obey God's law, not try to understand God's word. Certainly, one should not presume to judge God's thoughts by using our puny reason.

There is a human insight here that curriculum educators might recognize. Islam presents both an attractive simplicity combined with a high standard of personal conduct. Scholars struggle to explain why Islam is the fastest growing global religion. They parallel Islam's success with the phenomenal growth of the stricter Protestant and fundamentalist churches around the world while liberal churches and easygoing religious groups are losing membership.

There is something in the human psyche that needs a challenge. Rules have an attraction, and standards present a goal. People like the sense of achievement of accomplishing something difficult. Consider for example the contemporary interest in the pilgrimage to Compostella by many who would not be Catholic, or even conventionally religious. Sacrifice and effort, even beyond the call of duty, are an earnest of sincerity, a sign of support, and a pledge of loyalty. It may be the case that true spirituality requires a practical symbol of commitment, and some assurance that it is not a mere passing fancy or momentary fascination. This is for the sake of the community as well as for oneself. The British writer of the 1950s, Douglas Hyde, recalls that the first thing the Communist Party demanded of its young adult recruits was that they go out and sell the Communist newspaper *The Daily Worker* on freezing winter London street corners all day. Often they would return to the office in the evening having sold no papers at all, but the point was not about selling the paper. It was about the commitment of the seller. (Hyde, 1951)

Christians take it for granted that the first obligation of a church member is to believe and that the “bottom line” for a religion is its doctrine, teaching or **Creed**. The Gospel is the Good News, and a convert or member realizes that it is “Good” and that it is “New.” As Michael Caine said, “Not many people know that.” Hence the Gospel must be preached so that others may hear and be convinced that it is both true and good. The world will be saved one person at a time, because each must be personally convinced of this truth and relevance to him or her as an individual.

Christians believe that, despite appearances, the universe is filled with God's love and grace. To know that and to act upon that knowledge is to find happiness, and to achieve human fulfillment. The word “Creed” comes from the Latin *cor dare* meaning “to give one's heart,” just as “Belief” is linguistically related to the Germanic word for “Beloved.” We give our heart to a person – not to a proposition. Teaching in spirituality should introduce us to people, whose stories inspire us, comfort us, challenge us and instruct us. We ought to teach, in the words of Sydney Carter “The good news in the present tense.”

The Religious Way of Creed, of course, does not just apply to Christians. Christianity has its Twelve Articles of the Creed; Islam has its Five Pillars; Buddhism its Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Way. These are different doctrinal “bottom lines,” but spirituality demands that the doctrine touches the heart. Stories, parables, myths, legends, anything that comes alive between the tale, the teller and the listener, just like so much of the sacred literature and stories of the saints from each of the world religions, can move us to set out from home or continue on the path or change direction on our journey, because we see that there is someone ahead of us showing the way, or beside us urging us on.

Every Jew is deeply aware of being part of the Jewish **Community**. They are the People of the Promise, the *Qahal*. God made an eternal promise to Abraham and his

descendants and Jews claims direct descent from Abraham. Orthodox Jews hold that membership of the Jewish people is recognized if a person is born to a Jewish mother or is converted according to Rabbinic law. A recent English case about school admission turned on this question. Did that criterion of Jewish membership involve religious or racial discrimination? A majority of Law Lords decided that the orthodox Jewish criterion used as a school admission policy was direct or indirect racial discrimination. (Goldman, 2010, 15-16)

“All politics is local,” Tip O’Neill famously remarked. We could equally claim that all religion is family. An ancient and deep current in the human being is blood, physically and spiritually. Blood is thicker than water. Blood brothers, shoulder to shoulder, sisters under the skin, the family of man, “the near in blood, the nearer bloody,” all testify to the deep emotions and murky depths stirred by the mention of blood and breeding. Religion may about the answer to the question “Who is my neighbor?” -- but even more basically, it is about “Am I my brother’s keeper?” The close ties of kith and kin, the claims of seed, breed and generation, the Biblical interest in who “begat” whom, are evidence of this primitive and fundamental call on our loyalty that lies deep in our human makeup. No matter how sophisticated our social arrangements, we cannot for long ignore the claims of family.

This is shown, of course, most of all, in relation to the dead. Chinese civilization celebrates different generations in their respect for ancestors. Africans will include the ancestors in deliberations and have no difficulty with the notion that the dead can contact the living. Rene Tabard tells the story of a Congolese catechist in 1973 who was told by a young African girl that her mother had just spoken at length to her deceased older brother (the girl’s uncle). Given that Jesus’ resurrection was a proof of his divinity, she enquired, why was her uncle not divine too? (Tabard, 2010) There are other examples of honoring the dead from Christian settings, for instance, the family altars in Latino Catholic homes in Texas and the attention to the dead and funerals in traditional Irish Catholicism.

The last Religious Way is **Consciousness** and this is the typical theme of Buddhism. Buddhism is recognized as posing the sharpest contrast in spirituality and religion to the Religions of the Book, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. This is because the western religions suppose a difference between creation and the creator, and thereby, take for granted the revelation of a Transcendent Being. Buddhism, however, is based on the personal insight and awareness -- bought by contemplation and mindful attention -- that each of us is on his or her own in a sorrowful existence , but that liberation from suffering is possible for us by calm acceptance and compassion, and a regulated life in the eight paths of the Buddha’s teaching.

I recall hearing a Tibetan guru responding to a question about western young people trying out Buddhism in a monastery as the Beatles had done in the 1980s. He answered with a story, the burden of which was that one cannot understand anything of the way of the Buddha by a short stay or retreat; one must commit to the life properly because only then can the teaching and consciousness be appreciated. Awareness and consciousness are not cheap grace. It does not come easily. We must live so that we may see properly. He who seeks, finds.

Michael Barnes suggests that the dialogue between spirituality and world religions has recently moved from the purely theological level to the experiential plane.

He notes that this spirituality-religion exchange, over the last number of decades, has revealed four layers.

The first is the current interest in meditation in eastern religious traditions that led to the recovery of forgotten Christian practices. The second is the witness of missionaries – notably to India and to Japan – who have espoused a contemplative monastic way of life compatible with eastern spirituality. The third is the contemporary organization of inter-religious prayer events, big and small, such as the one in Assisi hosted by Pope John Paul II in 1986. The fourth and last is the inter-religious commitment to communal social action in the battle against poverty and injustice.

These four – “personal discovery,” “missionary inculturation,” “public celebration,” and “the common good” – point to the places where we should be searching for paths from seeking to dwelling. Certainly, personal prayer, common life, public ritual and social action strikes one as the kinds of engagement a true seeker should espouse to make progress as a human being on the spiritual quest. (Barnes, 2005, 32-33)

### **Spirituality and the Life Cycle**

Many years ago I came across the Hindu approach to religious education in its teaching about the four Yogas. Hindus say that there are four paths or Yogas that one may set out on. The first is *Karma Yoga*, the yoga of duty and action and practice. The second is *Jnana Yoga*, the yoga of knowledge and cognition and learning. The third is *Bhakti Yoga* or the yoga of love and affection and relationship. The fourth is *Raja Yoga* or the yoga of mysticism, meditation and contemplation.

It occurred to me that this analysis of the different perspectives explained a lot about the popular religious change in the 1960s, when people moved from a religion of duty to one of love and affection. (If you want to get a popular presentation of that transition, study the song “Do you love me?” in the musical *Fiddler on the Roof!*)

Our grandparents’ generation followed the discipline of duty: they discharged the obligations that religion and human life laid upon them, making nothing of their difficulties, disregarding the sacrifice and hardship, but attaching eternal significance to the effort. More recent generations wish to experience an emotional and personal connection with what they are doing. They seek fulfillment, are impatient if not deriving meaning and achievement, and require almost that their lives yield for them a sense of being significant. Were we collectively not living through a movement from the Yoga of Duty to the Yoga of Love?

This alerted me to the idea that there is no universal way, that each human being has his or her own spirituality, and path of discovery to the truth. Some of us are reflective, some emotional, some active and some experimental, and our way of the spirit will parallel our disposition. (Smith, 1991, 26-50)

Furthermore, Hindus have another understanding to offer the educator. It is that human beings move through different stages in life, not just in growing up, in child development, but also in adulthood. First comes the Student from ages 8 to 20 years old, where attention should be given to learning. Second is the stage of the Householder, in young adult life, where the task is that of having a family and earning a living. Thirdly there is the stage of Retirement, when one withdraws from the fray, having achieved

sufficiently. Finally, the retired person “enters the forest” as a Hermit, needing nothing and wanting less, except wisdom. It is an obvious corollary that each stage in life brings its own specific spirituality or yoga. (Smith, 1991, 50-55)

## Conclusion

Researching this paper allowed me to discover a convergence between what I am attempting to say, and themes found in a number of scholars. This convergence can be summed up by saying that some writers are suggesting the importance of “practices” in the lives of people seeking spiritual sustenance.

Robert Wuthnow’s 1998 book *After Heaven* is an example. Wuthnow describes practice as “intentional engagement in activities that deepen [one’s] relationship to the sacred” and he considers it as a serious third option to dwelling and seeking spiritualities. Where Seeking is too transitory and, sometimes, too dilettante and superficial for serious searching, and Dwelling seems too rooted and sterile, too embedded and unchanging for today’s volatile spiritual climate, a spirituality of practice may provide both “roots and wings,” communal support and individual performance, personal energy and ancient wisdom for us.

For a spirituality of practice, the conceptual Framework of the ancient wisdom of world religions may help.

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Appendix

**Spiritual Directions, Religious Ways and Education: The Framework**

<b>SPIRITUAL SEEKING</b>	<b>SPIRITUAL DIRECTIONS</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS WAYS</b>	<b>EDUCATIONAL CURRICULA</b>	<b>RELIGIOUS DWELLING</b>
The Profane	Participation supports.	Culture civilization, tradition, politics, art	Confucian principles, European heritage	Chinese Religion
	Prayer addresses....	Cult, celebration, ceremony, rites, liturgy	Actions and movement, Japanese tea ceremony	Hinduism
The Sacred	Practice does.....	Code, commandments, rules, ethics, laws	Challenging demands, Social concern	Islam
	Profession states...	Creed, teaching, myths, story, scripture	Teaching and story, Persons, parables, saints,	Christianity
The Society	People share...	Community, institution, persons, groups	Jewish mother, Ancestors, family altar, Funerals, graveyards	Judaism
The Holy	Perception sees....	Consciousness, insight, loyalty, feelings	Insight with effort, Contrast with the west	Buddhism

## ***Kenosis, Sunyata, and Comportment: Interreligious Discourse Beyond Concepts, by Eric Hall***

### **Abstract**

*Here, I argue against Masao Abe's interpretation of the Christian notion of Kenosis. Kenosis supposedly coincides with the Buddhist notion of Sunyata, through which Abe attempts to build an interreligious bridge. Abe, however, presents Kenosis in such a manner that is too out of sync with most historical western understandings of it, meaning his interpretation cannot actually function as the bridge that he wants. Giving what I believe is a more "orthodox" interpretation of Kenosis, I argue that the idea still finds a parallel in Sunyata, only in terms of the notion of praxis rather than conceptuality.*

### **Introduction**

Interreligious discourse remains a potent tenant of much of U.S. religious life, both academic and lived. The possibility of such discourse, in fact, seems legally built into the denominational infrastructure supported by the U.S. Constitution, which acts as a grounding framework for cooperative Federal identification among competing, localized identities. However, religious traditions themselves have assumed the imperatives behind such discourse as meaningful beyond their political-social impact; the discourses are seen as a part of these traditions' emerging self-identities (Knitter 2009). At the same time, it has become more explicit in other recent books on the matter that certain forms of dialogue can be quite *unhelpful* (Cornille 2009; Cornille 2008; Fredericks 2004). These dialogues tend not only to force conceptual relationships that simply do not exist between respective "faiths," but, in such comparisons, attempt to gain the "truth" of the dialogue partner by showing how the one position's propositions are actually better accounted for in one's own. Such comparisons, then, force the religious "Other" not into a solidarity-creating dialogue, but a defensive posturing.

I believe that this very phenomenon takes place in the attempt of Masao Abe, a Zen practitioner and philosopher of the Kyoto School, to create a dialogue with Christians in the essay "Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata (Abe 1995)." In it, he unfolds what he believes to be a direct conceptual relationship between the Christian idea of kenosis and Buddhist understanding Sunyata. However, Abe's interpretation is unconvincing, at least if a historical Christian self-understanding is taken more seriously. After expositing Abe's comparative interpretation of these two concepts and expressing why the comparison might not work from the Christian side of the dialogue, I offer a comparison of kenosis and Sunyata more sympathetic to both respective religious identity-traditions. My comparison is based on the religious praxis each concept signifies. By respecting the true conceptual differences in these religious traditions, such a method—based on James L. Fredericks understanding of the idea (Fredericks 2004)—I hope is far more conducive to the establishing a more substantive comparison.

### **"Kenotic God and Dynamic Sunyata"**

Abe's interpretation of Incarnation begins with the kenosis passage found in Philippians 2:9-11. The passage says,

Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, who, existing in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of man; and being found in the fashion of man, he humbled himself, becoming *obedient* even unto death, yea, the death of a cross.

Aside from a number of other interesting remarks on the passage, Abe is quick to point out that, at least as he perceives Paul to be describing Incarnation through kenosis, there can be no distinction between reality and appearance in the God-man; the simple and unified person acts as a *whole* person, not the appearance of a whole person. Accordingly, when Paul says that Christ empties himself, he does not merely say that the human nature of Christ empties itself, but that Christ *as a whole*—divinity included—empties himself. Incarnation through kenosis signifies “a radical and total self-negation of the Son of God (Abe 1995, 36).”

Of course, this interpretation of Incarnation through kenosis has immediate implications for Abe’s understanding of the meaning of the Son of God. If the Son empties himself completely into the person, and if this person is understood as a unified whole, the kenosis must be ascribed to the unified being of the Son, both in terms of divinity and humanity. The Son, in other words, is indistinct from its active self-emptying; the Son by nature is kenotic. To push this logic even further, if the Son is divine and if this divinity is also predicable of the entire person of Christ, then the divinity of the Son is found precisely in the Son’s self-emptying, which is an emptying of the Son’s Divinity. As such, Abe moves toward a new and paradoxical Christology. According to Abe, this Christology means that “The Son of God is not the Son of God (for he is essentially and fundamentally self-emptying): precisely because he *is not* the Son of God he *is truly* the Son of God.(Abe 1995, 37)” Because divinity and self-emptying are one and the same movement in the Son, the Son’s renunciation of his divinity is precisely what makes the Son divine. This logic has great effects on the Christian historical self-understanding of God, two of which I will point out.

An interpretation of Incarnation through kenosis allows for no Johannine pre-existing Son, at least not in the sense of a theoretically deduced divine substance existing above and beyond this immanent self-emptying Son. Pre-existence, rather, must be understood in terms of this self-emptying, self-emptying as revealed to humanity in the act of emptying. When one, then, engages in a substantializing form of thought, one can certainly abstract from the process of self-emptying itself and reify the Son as pre-existent; this is the mode of thinking historically rooted in the Church. But in itself, the truly, actively, and non-substantive reality of the kenotic Son contravenes this Johannine doctrine. The Son himself is not a divinity who self-empties its nature into finitude; the Son *is* the ever-present moment of self-emptying opened to us in the very God-man himself. This point, however, has further implications.

If the Son empties himself totally, and if this self-emptying is seen in the life and death of the Son, and *moreover* if the mission of the Son is consistent with the divine essence, the divine essence itself must be a total self-emptying. In other words, the Father—as ground of the divine essence, who by means of a perichoretic relationship empties himself absolutely into the Son—is one with the Son’s total kenosis. Just as Abe above could say by means of kenosis that, paradoxically, the Son’s divinity is found in the Son’s non-Divinity, so too is the Godhead’s Divinity found in its non-Divinity. Divinity in its entire Trinity becomes kenotic, leading to a loss of the Godhead

Fittingly, Abe interprets Sunyata as representing the Buddhist interpretation of “ultimate reality,” that location wherein a Christian would cement the notion of God

(Abe 1995, 50). But what this ultimate reality means is an entirely different question, a question that can only be intuitively grasped through an enlightenment experience that Zen Buddhists call Satori.

According to Abe, this Zen Buddhist moment of enlightenment is constituted by a double negation (Abe 1985, 110). The first negation negates the possibility of absolute identity and, accordingly, onto-theology (Abe 1985, 108). All beings, it ends up, are nothing in and of themselves; all beings, by means of their constant movements, are masks to the truth of their nothingness. Yet, simply to adhere to this perspective is to fall into western nihilism, a position that Abe reject (Abe 1995, 35-36). While it is true that no ultimate being grounds reality and hence nothing has absolute identity, it is just as true that one must negate this absolutely (and thus substantialized) nihilistic position (Abe 1985, 110). It is therefore true for Abe that no ontic being is anything more than it is, that no being is directed toward some absolute end found in pure being; but it is also true no one thing is anything less than it is—a pure nothingness is as false as a pure beingness. For Abe, then, the ontic and the ontological collapse into one, and the truth of a being is that it is just such a being at this point in time with this dynamic appearance (Abe 1985, 66).

This notion precisely signifies the meaning of Sunyata. Accordingly, Abe says that, “All that I have said about Sunyata can be summarized by saying that true Sunyata is not static but dynamic—it is a pure and unceasing function of self-emptying, making self and others manifest their suchness (Abe 1995, 87).” Buddhism, *qua* Sunyata, represents an absolute flowingness and dynamism—the eradication of identity as an absolute; and Sunyata, as a signifier of the meaning of ultimate reality, represents the absolute nothingness—the total transferability of identity—grasped in that moment of Satori.

With this explanation of Sunyata, it is not difficult to understand how it relates to Abe’s interpretation of kenosis. Kenosis, from Abe’s interpretation of it, becomes a definitive expression of the Buddhist’s interpretation of ultimate reality, namely, of Sunyata. Kenosis and Sunyata are one. And because these two concepts mean essentially the same thing, Buddhists and Christians have a conceptual way by means of which to relate to one another.

### **Kenosis as a Way of Being**

From a conceptual level, *this* particular Christian will have to reject overall approach to kenosis by Abe, not least of which is due to Abe’s equivalent of a theology of religions approach (Fredericks 1999, 13-15). Such a rejection, of course, does not mean that the interpretation itself is without value, nor does it mean that Abe cannot interpret Incarnation through kenosis as such; Abe’s interpretation retains veracity within his own tradition and can and should be fully explored by the Christian tradition. The simple fact remains, however, that as a theology of religion this understanding is very unhelpful for interreligious dialogue precisely because it does not take historical doctrines in the Christian faith seriously enough.

On the other hand, I think that Abe is correct in noting that the Christian idea of kenosis grounds a way in which these two religious traditions can attempt to relate to one another. However, the relation will have to take place at a deeper, more fundamental level than the *content* revealed in the concept of kenosis as either Abe or more classical Christian traditions express the notion. Rather, kenosis will have to be used in such a way that it can express some more basic categories, categories potentially consistent with both Abe’s interpretation of Sunyata and the more classically approach to kenosis. Such a

project becomes possible if it attempt both to remain true to its Christian self-understanding while nonetheless reveal some common denominators that both Christianity and Buddhism might find acceptable for opening further dialogue. The common denominators will be isolated in terms of the ways that both Christianity and Buddhism *relate* to their respective interpretations of the category of ultimate reality.

Many Christian traditions might reject the notion of a total ontological kenosis; however, many Christian traditions can and do already accept what might be awkwardly called a *psychological* interpretation of kenosis. A psychological view of kenosis first signifies a psycho-intellectual emptying on the Son's part of the knowledge of his divinity. As Philippians presents the idea, Christ does not consider himself equal to the Father even though he is in the form of the Father. Indeed, according to Paul, Christ "finds" himself in the form of a human, hinting to the fact that Christ has given up his knowledge of the Father. Of course, from a historical Christian perspective, this ignorance can only have taken place in the Incarnation; thus, ignorance cannot be ascribed to the Son in his non-Incarnational form. Nonetheless, a psychological understanding of kenosis holds within it the possibility that Christ, as Incarnate Son, denies himself of the knowledge of his own equality with the Father in his Incarnation.

In denying knowledge of his own equality with the Father, Christ also denies his knowledge of the Father in any sort of direct, conceptual manner. If the Son in Christ actually knew the Father, he would be able to grasp, by means of the Father, his own equality with the Father. That is, because God (from more classicist understandings) is the absolutely simple insight within which all creation itself is known and conceived, Christ would know himself (in Trinitarian terms) as the second subsisting relation in the divine Godhead. As God, Christ would know himself as God. But, by means of his kenosis, he does not.

Christ, then, does not know the Father in the Father's self, nor does he know that he and the Father are one; Christ is only asked to listen for and to the Father when the Father actually speaks, of which there is no guarantee on the part of Christ, due his self-emptying, that the Father will actually speak and that Christ will follow. But who the Father is, why the Father says what the Father says, and what the Father eventually will ask of Christ is not known by Christ. Christ must simply allow the Father to be the Father, and act on the Father's words when the Father speaks.

In this regard, it also seems pertinent to point out that Christ's kenosis is tied directly to the possibility of Christ's free obedience, as explicitly stated in Philippians. But Christ's obedience signifies nothing other than his freely listening to, and freely acting upon, the Father's word—even to the point of death on a cross—without any divine knowledge of either the ultimate meaning or outcomes of his actions. The condition for the possibility of Christ's obedience is Christ's kenosis, but the meaning of Christ's kenosis is his obedience. Both are intrinsically linked to one another in Christ.

Thus far, I have presented little that would seem to offend more historical Christian ears, at least at a conceptual level. At the same time, I believe that by means of this brief and psychological explanation of kenosis, I am able to point out a certain way that Christ comports himself toward the Father; I am able to point out, in general, Christ's *way of being*, and how it is representative of a proper interpretation of a Christian way of being in general. Christ's way of being, then, suggests two insights, both of which I will try to show are functionally found in the Buddhist notion of Sunyata.

As I have already suggested, in his kenosis, Christ completely empties himself of his *divine knowledge* of the Father; Christ, then, must learn of the Father by means of

the tools and methods provided to human reason. Christ must learn of the Father by means of experience. Yet, at the level of human reason, there seems to exist no direct experience of the Father. Thus, knowledge of the Father depends, at worst, on transcendental inferences based on the material world; at best, on mystical revelations granted from the Father; and somewhere in between, on the oral and recorded history of these revelations found in his scriptures.

It is the first of these sources of knowledge that is probably most important for the current purposes. That is, for reasons I will not argue here, both the mystical and special-revelatory understandings of God eventually presuppose a hermeneutical transference back into humanity's more "natural" ways of thinking, and thus end up looking like transcendental inferences and explanations from an immanent perspective. But, regardless of this debate, at the level of natural human knowledge (so long as one takes Rahner's appropriation of Aquinas seriously), the Father exists as *something* like an unobjectifiable horizon; and though one can grasp the nature of the surrounding world through this horizon, the horizon itself remains beyond grasp (Waldenfels 1995, 155-160). The horizon constantly overturns itself, even in terms of being defined as a horizon.

All of this to say that, like us, Christ, in his kenosis, knows the Father only as unobjectifiable, as a horizon. Christ, accordingly, cannot grasp the Father in himself, and so cannot know the Father directly; likewise, Christ has no direct insight into the Father, meaning that he cannot reduce the Father to a conceptual object. At the same time that Christ remains ignorant of the Father's essence, he is also faithful and obedient to his experience of the Father—or, in Christian terms, the Father's revelations of himself. But, if Christ, while unable to objectify the Father, remains obedient to the Father, this obedience can be expressed more generally as a representational comportment toward the Father. Christ's comportment toward the Father can be expressed precisely as what Buber calls the "I-Thou" relationship, according to which the Thou in this relationship is heard rather than pre-categorized according to the I (Buber 1958, 39-40).

The treatment of the Father as a Thou can be understood most precisely as Christ's obedience. He constantly declines any attempt to instrumentalize the Father, to project a conception of what the Father is and thus what the Father ought to be asking of the Incarnate Son. Such truth is evidenced not only on the Mount of Olives—wherein Christ pleads with the Father to take this cup from him—but in the constant attitude of Christ which constantly says, "Not my will, but yours." Christ's obedience, then, is a reflection of his comportment toward and treatment of the Father as an absolute Thou—the Father always remains unschematized from the perspective of the kenotic Son. As with Christ, moreover, so with his followers—Christians must follow Christ's example in terms of how they relate to the Father, even through Christ. But, these two concepts reveal a similar way in which the Buddhist relates to the notion of Sunyata.

In the same way, then, that the Father remains unknown and, accordingly, addressed as a Thou by the kenotic Son, so too does Sunyata remain as such for the Buddhist. For one, and as already pointed out, Sunyata as an expression of ultimate reality is an expression of ultimate reality's unobjectifiability. Sunyata is and remains dynamic, one with the appearance of finite objects; accordingly, Sunyata cannot be captured in either human thought or language, to such a degree that Abe takes to describing Sunyata as Sunyata (Abe 1995, 57). Thus, in this same regard, Sunyata presents itself as something that must simply be attended to in its own terms, at least in the category of ultimate reality. While certainly such an I-Thou relationship cannot be interpreted as "obedience" as it is with Christ and the Christian, obedience was

interpreted in such a way that ultimate reality—the Father in Christian terms—is allowed to reveal itself as it is. How this ultimate reality *actually* reveals itself is and may remain a point of contention between the two traditions, but in terms of the content of these more basic categories, the Buddhist may interpret this comportment as “suchness.”

Without giving too much more detail, suchness precisely represents the non-instrumental way of relating not to Sunyata itself (which does not exist in itself) but to the beings that express Sunyata. Without trying to instrumentalize some being, get to the bottom of some being, or even understand the meaning of some being, suchness simply takes the being for what it appears as at any given point in time. Accordingly, through the insight that nirvana is samsara, it is possible to affirm the spontaneous dynamism that is Sunyata—the free flow of unconceptualized appearances. But to allow such appearances to come in and out of one’s consciousness without hindering these with conceptual and instrumentalizing baggage is to treat them as the Thou, even if the Buddhist cannot affirm the I!

### Room for Dialogue?

From such an interpretation of kenosis, Buddhists and Christians can find a mutually beneficial understanding of the way in which each comports itself toward that category of ultimate reality. Neither can instrumentalize that ultimate reality, and hence both find themselves in a position wherein they must address the category as a Thou. But the true benefit of this mutually conceived relationship is that the concept itself presents a way of life rather than a doctrinal reinterpretation of either tradition. In other words, the mutual concept that allows both Buddhists and Christians to relate to one another is not a concept that does violence to either tradition’s historical self-understanding; each are allowed to let that ultimate reality present itself to each tradition precisely as it presents itself to the tradition in its own self-understanding—nothing more and nothing less. Based on this fact, each tradition may find solidarity with the other in the fact that neither is able ultimately to know its ultimate reality in any substantial manner, and that both traditions must learn to relate to it accordingly.

What such an interpretation accomplishes, and what it can concretely do for this particular religious dialogue at a practical level, I do not know. At the very least, it presents mutually informing concepts that negate the ultimate importance of finding mutually informing concepts; that is, and paradoxically speaking, these concepts allow Buddhists and Christians to relate at *perhaps* a more fundamental level than the level of concept, namely, at the level of religious praxis.

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## ***Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue, by Robert Hunt***

### Abstract

*This paper seeks to understand contemporary Islam in such a way as to suggest new approaches to Christian-Muslim dialogue. However, the general approach it offers is equally useful in the pursuit of other forms of engagement with Muslims and the Muslim community. It is the thesis of this paper that understanding Muslim (and Christian) identity in terms of narrative will provide a more illuminating and fruitful basis for engaging in interfaith dialogue, or at least a better understanding of those with whom we as Christians are in dialogue. A focus on Muslim narratives will also provide an alternative taxonomy of Islamic movements in the hope that this will provide indications of how future dialogue most usefully can be pursued.*

### **Taxonomies of Islamic Movements**

From the beginning of the Muslim community there occurred divisions that were recognized and enumerated by Muslims themselves. Most of the groups emerging from these divisions were referred to in older Muslim histories and theologies as heretical sectarians, and the distinction between the faithful and the heretics is the oldest taxonomy in Islam. With the related distinction among those outside of Islam between people of the book (monotheists) and polytheists, it usefully described, for the purposes of regulating Muslim behavior, the entire human world. Eventually there emerged other distinctions within the Muslim community, most notably the recognition of four "schools" of law, as well as of numerous philosophical and theological movements that, if questionable were not strictly heretical (depending upon who was making the evaluation). Muslims also recognized the movement known as Sufism with its multiple lineages originating in different leaders as a kind of parallel spirituality to one based primarily in the observance of God's moral and ritual law. And as Ibn Kaldun observed in his pioneering work, these taxonomies of the Muslim world continued to overlay more primal groups such as tribes and clans, as well as complex emerging urban and rural classes. In short Muslims were conscious, as were the Christians and Jews sharing their social and religious landscape, of a complex world of overlapping social and religious distinctions that singly or in combination would guide interaction with both other Muslims and non-Muslims.

Consciousness of these complex taxonomies by no means disappeared with the advent of colonialism and the intrusion of modernity on the Muslim world.<sup>1</sup> While obscure to most non-Muslims, the complex patterns of pre-colonial social divisions continue to color Muslim thought and behavior. In Malaysia, for example, Muslims of Arab descent remain identifiable by inherited titles, as do those whose ancestors were supposedly Indian demigods descended to intermarry with the people of Sumatra. (One of these, *Iskandar* (Alexander) has roots even further West) Yet distinctions between the schools of law are almost moot in the Malaysian and Indonesian contexts. On the other hand, those between Sufi tariqahs, and between Sufis and non-Sufis, can be quite significant in forming political partnerships. And of course more uniquely Malaysian distinctions (between the court-based Islamic leaderships, that of the villages, that originating in new Islamic universities, and those empowered by official positions in government) play a role as well.<sup>2</sup> Yet while pre-colonial distinctions remain important,

with the advent of modernity in Muslim lands Muslims themselves began to identify new taxonomies based in the Muslim community's response to European ideas, European political power, and European forms of social organization, in short to modernity in all its fullness. Through these new distinctions Muslim leaders could identify themselves to one another and their followers, and around these there grew struggles for social status and political power.

Bennabi in his *Islam in History and Society* (Bennabi 1988) makes one of the earliest modern Muslim examinations of these emerging taxonomies, identifying *reformers* and *modernists* as two specific movements flowing out of the encounter of Islam with modernity. Dismissing the long-term consequentiality of both groups he then suggests the emergence of a new consciousness flowing directly from an encounter with the source of the Qur'an that will restore the civilizing power of Islam. It is a movement he associates with Hassan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood more generally. The distinctions he makes, like those made in Southeast Asia between the *kaum tua* (old group) and *kaum muda* (new group) leaders emerging in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, were based on one hand in whether or how to appropriate the full Islamic tradition or only its earliest elements, and on the other how far to adapt distinctly modern ways of understanding reality. Bennabi's "reformers" wished to return to the roots of Islam and rethink it in the tradition of Islamic renewal movements down through the ages. They rejected the intellectual and spiritual assumptions of modernity. The "modernists" generally accepted the intellectual and spiritual assumptions of modernity and by re-evaluating the sources of the Islamic tradition sought to re-conceptualize Islam as a modern religion. Of course the relation of each of these movements to the others was complex, and none simply accepted out of hand Western worldviews and social structures. Indeed Muslims, like Christians, continue to struggle to understand and articulate for themselves all the underlying assumptions of modernity even as the world of post-modernity emerges. Bennabi's own view has been given new life as Muslim leaders have sponsored the re-publication of his work in new contexts.<sup>3</sup>

More recent attempts at taxonomies of Muslim movements include those of John Esposito (*Islam and Politics*, 1998) and Clinton Bennett (*Muslims and Modernity*, 2005). The latter argues for a taxonomy that in his words, runs left to right from modernists to neo-traditionalists to traditionalist to radical revisionists, although he notes that almost every author he surveys would place him or herself in a different schema (Bennett 2005). Muslim authors such as Samira Haj are similarly engaged in creating and critiquing such taxonomies. (Haj 2009) Indeed one of the noteworthy characteristics of contemporary Muslim reflections on everything from politics to child-care is the effort place those reflections in some sort of genealogy, and thus identify the author.

Both Muslim and non-Muslim authors recognize is that the Muslim reaction to modernity took place at several levels, not least political and social, so that very quickly the three responses that Bennabi identified morphed into a wide variety of political and social movements, some of which adopt similar ideas of social change out of very different basic assumptions. One example of this is the understanding of the role of women in society. Modernists (in Bennabi's schema) generally argued that women should be educated and play a full and equal role in society. But they accepted that distinct gender roles (which might mitigate against such equality) were affirmed by revelation *and* the natural order as well. Like modernists some reformers argued for women's education and more active social engagement, but on the basis of cutting past cultural accretions upon original Islam to recover its supposed liberation of women from pre-Islamic misogyny. Their argument from the teaching of "original" Islam then goes

deeper into the tradition to justify, for example, unequal shares in inheritance. Both groups might offer similar *language* about implementing policies allowing women to participate more fully in the economic and social life of Muslim communities, but their reasoning would distinguish them in relation to other issues. Modernists, for example, might disagree with reformers about issues of inheritance and child custody: opting for theoretically “modern” patterns that put an equal obligation for self-support and support of family on women and men, and avoiding any idea of “ownership” of children belonging to men as such.

It is in part this confusing presentation of similar assertions about everything from women's rights to political structures to accepting the results of scientific research that has hindered Muslim-Christian dialogue. What appear to be agreements among Muslims, or Muslims and Christians, mask deeper conceptual differences. This paper, in suggesting a different form of taxonomy of Muslim identities, hopes to at least bring to light some of these underlying differences in a useful way. Older taxonomies have been based on describing contemporary Islamic movements in terms of the intersection of two sets of ideas; those found in the Islamic tradition, and those found in the modern world. The variety of those movements came from their different understanding and appropriation of the tradition on one hand and their understanding and appropriation of modernity on the other. The taxonomy offered here is based on the way Muslims articulate and embody a narrative description of their identity, without suggesting that Muslims consciously embrace the taxonomy of I offer, any more than they self identify with other taxonomies offered by either Muslim or non-Muslim scholars. As importantly, this taxonomy shows the continuity of Muslim narratives that pre-date Islam’s encounter with modernity, even if their contemporary forms arise out of a modern Muslim identity crisis.<sup>4</sup>

In the paper *narrative* means simply a way of describing the origins of Islam as a religious movement, the “plot” which characterizes its engagement with the non-Muslim world, and the end toward which it is understood to move. The narratives that I will describe can be inhabited, or embodied, and I believe (but will not fully demonstrate in this essay) that differences in Muslim movements within a particular narrative can be understood by the difference in which the same narrative is embodied. Like all taxonomies this is not to be taken as a normative description of reality, but rather a useful way of making distinctions that will highlight opportunities for more fruitful interreligious dialogue.<sup>5</sup>

## **Muslim Narratives**

### ***Transnational Islam***

One of the taxonomies presently being used to describe Muslim movements distinguishes between a *transnational* understanding of Islam and an understanding of Islam by those for whom local cultures and loyalties remained paramount.<sup>6</sup> (Hefner 2009) For Hefner and others the distinction between transnational and local Islam is the distinction between: 1. an understanding of Islam that is scripturalist, a-historical, a-cultural, and possessing primary loyalty to a transnational Muslim community and 2. understandings that situate themselves in a particular historical/cultural situation with appropriately local primary loyalties.<sup>7</sup> An alternative description of transnational Islam would focus on how Muslims understand themselves to be engaged in a distinctive history, and that the identifiable features of transnational Islam derive from the way in which they narrate their engagement with the non-Muslim world.

What Hefner and others refer to as transnational Islam I believe identifies with a narrative that is repeated in many of the accounts of Islam generated by this movement, one of the most famous being that of Sayyid Qutb in the introductory paragraphs of his book *Milestones*. Here he speaks of the first generation of Muslims and its relationship to the current generation.

When a person embraced Islām during the time of the Prophet, peace be on him, he would straightway cut himself off from *jahiliyyah*. . . .

Today too we are surrounded by *jahiliyyah*. Its nature is the same as during the first period of Islām, and it is perhaps a little more deeply entrenched. Our whole environment, people's beliefs and ideas, habits and art, rules and laws is *jahiliyyah*, even to the extent that what we consider to be Islamic culture, Islamic sources, Islamic philosophy, and Islamic thought are also constructs of *jahiliyyah*! This is why the true Islamic values never enter our hearts, why our minds are never illuminated by Islamic concepts, and why no group of people arises among us equal to the caliber of the first generation of Islām.

2. We must return to that pure source from which the first generation derived its guidance, free from any mixing or pollution. . .

Our primary purpose is to know what way of life is demanded of us by the Qur'an, the total view of the universe that the Qur'an wants us to have, the nature of Allāh, taught to us by the Qur'an, the kind of morals and manners enjoined by it, and the kind of legal and constitutional system it asks us to establish in the world. We know that in this we will have difficulties and trials, and we will have to make great sacrifices. But if we are to walk in the footsteps of the first generation of Muslims, through whom Allāh established His system and gave victory over *jāhiliyya*, the Allāh must be the master of our wills (Qut b 1990, 15 -16).

This account begins with the world of pervasive *jahiliyya* or polytheistic ignorance. Into that world there comes, through Muhammad, God's revelation. That revelation initiates a movement to recognize God, to offer God fit praise, and fully implement in human lives and society God's immutable law. It is a narrative of order being created by the first Muslims in the midst of a chaotic world, and gradually spreading until the entire earth is a realization of God's law. This order recognizes no enduring significance to different languages, ethnic and tribal distinctions, or local forms of social organization. All that is normally attributed to culture is understood to be best dictated by God's law, which is comprehensive and universal.

According to Qutb this primal narrative needs to be, and is, being re-lived by the *avant garde* of the Muslim world, in particular the Muslim Brotherhood of which he was a part. His inspiration, however, has older roots, in the work of Ibn Taymiyya and later Ibn Wahab, both of whom saw their Muslim World overwhelmed by barbaric superstition and ignorance, and struggled to overcome it. He and they looked forward to the restoration of the divine order almost entirely lost in the modern age. Because a divinely dictated social order includes an understanding of appropriate relations between all religions, dialogue is less a means of mutual understanding and accommodation than a means of persuasion through which non-Muslims are invited to take their appropriate places in an emerging divinely approved social order.

If there are differing narratives within this transnational narrative they relate to the means for accomplishing the end of implementing the divine order in society. Thus we might distinguish two sub-narratives in a single narrative of establishing God's order in a chaotic world. A minority find their roots in Muhammad at Mecca, toiling for Islam in the face of ignorant intransigence and oppression. The majority narrative refers to Muhammad in Medina as a normative account of the Islamic plot, and would not, as Qutb does, so lightly dismiss the importance of the Hadith (traditions of the prophet). According to this narrative Muhammad slowly, through persuasion and reason (albeit not without violent conflict), brought new Muslims, Christians, and Jews into conformity with God's will. Either of these narratives can allow for an abrupt end to human effort in the eschatological arrival of God's judgment.

Some of the difficulties related to dialogue with Muslims that identify themselves through the transnational narrative may be exemplified by the 2008 Madrid initiative of the Muslim World League and its sponsor, the Saudi Arabian King Abdullah. In the opening statement at the Madrid conference the head of the Muslim World League asserted that the world was in a major crisis due to the failure of humans to follow God's guidance. He then suggested that what the world needs is a *Shari'a* (divine command) oriented vision arising out of dialogue. And although (he noted) Islam itself gathers all the wisdom of all revelations of God, Muslims are nonetheless *commanded* in the Qur'an to engage in dialogue and respect other monotheistic creeds. The objective of dialogue, as he stated it, would then be to coordinate internationally a response against those who insult religion, defend the rights of religions, and implement laws that counterbalance immorality, permissiveness, and family disintegration (Madrid, July 17, 2008, *personal notes*). If this seems like an approach to dialogue that diminishes the independence of the second voice in dialogue it is the author's observation that indeed, at this conference other voices were indeed wittingly or unwittingly marginalized.

Nowhere was the marginalizing of a second voice more obvious than with regard to women. No women were invited in a formal capacity to the Madrid dialogue from *any* religious tradition, the publically stated reason (by the head of the Muslim World League) being that "women do not hold significant positions of world religious leadership." Finally, in the end the document by the multi-faith working group was reworked by Muslim World League officials before it was released; the result being a document that many delegates found problematic. This may be seen as simply lack of experience in dialogue, but the changes made between the draft of the working group and the final document appeared to remove all affirmations of any religious commonality not in accordance with the rather strict orthodoxy of transnational Islam, and returns to the themes of the opening statement at the conference. Whatever their intentions the MWL apparently could not publically articulate a religious agenda other than the transformation of a *jahiliyya* world through implementation of *shari'a*. And indeed to do so would be to step outside the narrative that defines their understanding of a Muslim identity.<sup>8</sup>

Ultimately the *transnational* Muslim narrative is a simple story in which the recipients of God's unique revelation in the Qur'an, the revelation of a divinely mandated order, engaged in the task of implementing that order universally until such time as they succeed or God intervenes. It is a narrative that is also observable among Christians and followers of other religions.

### ***International Islam***

What Hefner and others refer to as Islam centered on local loyalties I believe can be better understood as the story of *international* Islam, or Islam as the story of Islamizing different ethno-cultural groups, and more recently nation-states, unifying them without necessarily diminishing their distinctiveness.

The narrative in which international Muslims understand themselves to be participating begins not only with God's revelation to Muhammad in the midst of a world of *jahiliyyah*, but with God's creation of the world and Adam and Eve, its first people and its first Muslims. In this narrative (with which transnational Muslims would not disagree, but for whom it plays no identifying role) Adam as the first prophet receives his role as vice-regent of the earth and takes responsibility for keeping it in order according to God's law. A divinely mandated diversity of peoples arise and God continues to send prophets to remind them of their role as orderers of creation according to God's will.<sup>9</sup> Muhammad is the last of these prophets; his revelation is both pure and sufficient; and the community he founds will fulfill its ordering vocation worldwide. Yet the story is not one of dominating and destroying all past revelations, but of complimenting and fulfilling them. According to this narrative Muslims encounter a world full of God's order and truth, and are obliged to learn from that world and its peoples even as they restore order where it has been lost. The result will be an Islamic world unified by certain fundamental practices and structures, but religiously diverse and highly variegated in the ways in which fundamental practices and structures are clothed by culture. Because it recognizes the presence of God's ordering revelation prior to Muhammad and independent of the Qur'an it seeks to purify local custom and the exercise of civil authority rather than displace them. *Adat* (local custom) *Kanun* (state initiated law) and *Shari'a* (revealed law) are considered compliments in the ordering of society. As a result the Islamic story can be conceived in terms of striving for religious and spiritual unity and not necessarily cultural and political unity.

Yet it must be noted that this recognition of a plurality of nations, and even polities, does not admit to a plurality of basic orders for human society. That order is determined by *Shari'a*, whether conceived rather broadly as in the case of the early work of Tariq Ramadan, (Ramadan 1999) or narrowly as in the case of Muhammad abd. Rauf (Muhammad 1991)<sup>10</sup> What distinguishes this from transnational Islam is not a lessened commitment to a *Shari'a* based order, but an allowance that this order can be realized in a world of nations. Thus Ramadan, abd Rauf and others reject the older Islamic ordering of the world into the *Dar al-islam* (realm of Islam) and *Dar al-harb* (realm of war/conflict) and interpret the classical but now purely theoretical recognition of a *Dar al-sur* (realm of treaty obligations) as the basis for an Islamic order that recognizes the validity of non-Islamic states.

This narrative has a long history with the Muslim world and is reflected in a work that is enormously widespread in the Muslim world, *The 1001 Nights*. The vast and complex narrative is itself a reflection of the way in which Muslims saw their world for much of Muslim history - a world of many rulers and nations and many cultures and classes. One story in particular, set somewhere on the Silk Road, is particularly representative. In this portion (from a rather free popular translation) we find a characterization of a generic (but of course magical) Muslim kingdom that is recounted by its king.

After this cruel sorceress unworthy of the name of Queen had metamorphosed me thus,' and brought me into this hall, by another enchantment she destroyed my capital, which was very flourishing and

populous. She annihilated the houses, the public places and markets, and reduced the site of the whole to the lake and desert plain you have seen. *The fishes of four colors in the lake are the four kinds of inhabitants of different religions, which the city contained. The white are the Muslims; the red, the Persians, who worship fire; the blue, the Christians; and the yellow, the Jews.* The four little hills were the four islands that gave name to this kingdom. But her revenge not being satisfied with the destruction of my dominions, and the metamorphosis of my person, she comes every day, and gives me over my naked shoulders a hundred lashes with a whip until I am covered with blood. When she has finished this part of my punishment, she throws over me a coarse stuff of goat's hair, and over that this robe of brocade, not to honor, but to mock me. ("The Story of the Young King of the Black Isles", Anon. 1946)

This fantasy well describes the international Islamic ideal of cosmopolitan urban culture. In the end it is a narrative of God's best order steadily realized by humanity worldwide. It recognizes true religion, which is to say religion that *must* be accommodated within an Islamic order, as monotheistic and ethical if not distinctly legalist. Interreligious dialogue is thus pursued to discover the assumed shared understandings of God, God's relation to humanity, and ways in which human relations should be ordered. Like transnational Muslims, most international Muslims understand the end of the earth in terms that suggest a continuation of history as a return to the primal paradise that God bequeathed Adam and Eve. In that paradise the ordering that is the responsibility of all believers continues, purged of all elements of ignorance or hardheartedness.

The recent *Common Word* initiative is the example of dialogue as understood within international Islam. Many of the scholars who signed the document come from religiously plural contexts, or from Muslim minority contexts, and are engaged in articulating political theories that allow for religious diversity to flourish even as religious voices play a role in making public policy. Yet as it emerges in dialogue the international narrative, while it will allow for cultural and political difference, does not seem to allow for substantial disagreement over the ordering of either divine or human relations in a pluralistic society.

I would suggest that an attentive reading of the initial *Common Word* document shows that while it appears to appeal to common principles (love of God and love of neighbor) it does so within a narrative that interprets these principles according to divinely mandated structures for both human society and authentic spirituality. The issue of love of neighbor, which the document assumes is commonly affirmed by Christians and Muslims, is one example. While respect for one's neighbor is clearly a value found in the Islamic tradition, it is expressed by the document in terms of obligations in behavior toward others and circumscribed by the obligation to purify the Muslim community of heresy and polytheism. Thus the assertion in the document that Christians, Muslims, and Jews should live together in peace does not necessarily extend that invitation to all humanity. Excluded are polytheists and all those whose personal and social relations do not conform to supposedly universal religious norms. Similarly the *Common Word* document consistently asserts that true worship of God is "God without partners" and references verses in the Qur'an that traditionally are interpreted as a direct contradiction of Trinitarian doctrine. So while it encourages the recognizing of a common obligation to worship God it does so by directly denying the validity of Christian worship of God in Christ. In short it invites a dialogue based on presumed Christian and Jewish agreement with an Islamic conception of the divine and human order. The initial response initiated out of the Yale Divinity School carefully avoided

these problems, opting to focus on the need for shared works in achieving justice for all. And the emergence of this shared narrative may be the most positive fruit of dialogue.

***Principled Islam and its Emerging Narrative.***

The narratives of transnational and international Muslims begin and end in different places, but remain narratives of divine order revealed, chosen, and possibly imposed. The third narrative I believe can be identified within the Muslim community is that which I call a *principled* narrative. This designation is not intended to suggest that Muslims who identify themselves within the other narratives lack principles. Most writing on Islamic law identifies basic values and purposes identified and codified relatively early in the history of Islamic theology. The basic values of *Shari`a* are *Adl* and *qist*—Justice and equity, *Huquq*—Rights and obligations, *Shura*—Consultation, *Masalih*—Public interest, *Falah*—Success (in this world and in the hereafter). The purpose of *Shari'a* are identified as the protection of *Din*—Religion (way of life with God), *Nafs*—Life (Soul and Body, Living Being), *Nasl*—Progeny or family, *`Aql*—Intellect, *Mal*—Property or wealth.<sup>11</sup> Similar lists are found in most standard works on Islamic law. What distinguishes the principled Muslim narrative is its assumption that these principles and others either clearly articulated in the Qur'an or discovered upon later reflection *precede* and take precedence over the implementation of specific structures in human society and religious worship.

An example of this difference may be found in different interpretations of the meaning of gender equality. The Qur'an consistently states both that all humans are equal, and that men and women in particular are equal. At the same time the Qur'an and its compliment in the traditions of the Prophet appear to mandate both distinct gender roles for men and women in the family and human society, distinctive realms of influence, differences in inheritance and child custody, and a male dominated social hierarchy both in the home and in public. Thus the great corpus of traditional Islamic law interprets Qur'anic calls for equality to mean *spiritual* equality, while the mundane world is governed by differences in roles and a strict hierarchy.

Modern transnational and international narrative Muslims frequently appeal to nature and supposedly universal social norms as confirming but not revealing a divine order of gender relations. However, Muslims for whom principle *precedes* specific structures have argued that Qur'anic calls for equality, taken as a face value statement of principle, demand equality in mundane as well as spiritual matters. Amina Wadud-Muhsin in her *Qur'an and Woman* provides an example:

However, in order for the Qur'an to achieve its objective to act as a catalyst affecting behavior in society, *each social context must understand the fundamental and unchangeable principles of that text, and then implement them in their own unique reflection. . .*(italics added)

Therefore, to force it to have a single cultural perspective - even the cultural perspective of the original community of the Prophet - severely limits its application and contradicts the stated universal purpose of the Book itself.

3. Although there are distinctions between men and women, I argue that they are not of their essential natures. More importantly, I argue against the values that have been attributed to these distinctions. Such attributed values describe women as weak, inferior inherently evil, intellectually incapable, and spiritually lacking. These evaluations have been used to claim that women are unsuitable for performing certain tasks, or for

functioning in some ways in society. The Qur'an does not attempt to annihilate the differences between men and women . . . In fact, compatible mutually supportive functional relationships between men and women can be seen as part of the goal of the Qur'an with regard to society." However, the Qur'an does not propose or support a singular role or single definition of a set of roles, exclusively for each gender across every culture (Wadud-Mushin 1996, 5-9).

The difference between narratives based on realizing principles and those based on implementing mandated social structures may also be found in the rise and eventual fall of the *mu'tazilah*, a rationalist school of Islamic theology that dominated in the early Abbasid period but was eventually rejected as heretical. Among the many theological disagreements that led to the banning of the *mu'tazilah* was their assertion that certain verses in the Qur'an must be interpreted metaphorically or allegorically, since to do otherwise resulted in logical contradictions. Similarly they insisted that the principle of divine justice demanded human free will, and that the concept of God's oneness made it necessary that the Qur'an be created rather than co-eternal with God. Influenced by Greek philosophy, they saw the world, both natural and spiritual as the outworking of principles fundamental to the Divine life.

At least part of the Sufi tradition might also be identified with a *principled* narrative, in so far as some Sufis rejected the necessity of practices (such as the prayer ritual) when they didn't advance the Sufi goal of self-extinction into the oneness of Being.

The narrative of principled Islam, suppressed politically, has never died out among Muslims. In the 20th century it has gained renewed interest among some Muslims, including scholars like Fazlur Rahman (Rahman 1982). It is a narrative that begins with the calling of the prophets (including Adam) to carefully use their rational minds to read God's revelations and submit to the fundamental principles of the universe and the human social world. The Qur'an in this view is the most clearly principled revelation, and thus one that, like all others must be interpreted in light of its principles. In this principled narrative it is the *surahs* revealed at Mecca, before there was an organized Muslim polity seeking to form a Muslim society, that outline the basic principles later articulated in specific practices found in later revelations and the traditions of the Prophet. Thus the later Medina *surahs* are understood to be specific to a context and timeless only as examples of the way in which principles must be applied in context. (See an-Na'im, *Toward an Islamic Reformation* (Na'im 1990) and the more recent work of Tariq Ramadan, *Radical Reform* (Ramadan 2009). Sometimes this narrative, as in the work of Rahman, postulates a continual movement in which with each new generation and situation the specific ordering of the Qur'an is used to understand the underlying principles, which are then applied in new ways to the contemporary situation. Others (such as an-Na'im) who articulate the principled Muslim narrative speak of "reverse abrogation." Instead of the older principle of abrogation which stated that earlier revelations are abrogated by later revelations, this hermeneutic approach says that later verses whose specific command in a specific situation runs contrary to the principle of God's justice and mercy found in the earlier *surahs* are "abrogated" by those principles, and thus are no longer applicable.<sup>12</sup> In this narrative the story of being Muslim is, or should be one of continual attentiveness to the specific ways that God's principles of justice, equality, grace, mutual concern, and honesty need to be applied in ever new and changing circumstances.

If Haj is correct in her interpretation of Asad's work it may be that in the scholarly rehearsals of the narrative of reform that one finds the narrative expression of principled Islam. Thus Bennabi's work, as well as that of Rahman, Ramadan, Wadud and others offer a narrative account of Islamic reform prefaced on the ultimacy of a principled narrative. There are also popular indicators of a principled narrative. In Malaysia it is rehearsed by popular bloggers and authors such as Raja Petra Kamaruddin and Syed Akbar Ali, and more concretely in the vocal defense of the principles of human rights and democracy by the Sisters of Islam and the Malaysian Bar Association. Syed Akbar Ali's interpretation of the *surahs* of the Qur'an generally taken to support the structures of an Islamic banking system is a popular and accessible example. He contests all interpretations of the word *riba* as "payment of interest" in the modern sense, and interprets the words of the prophet Shuaib in Qur'an 11:85 to mean that "the definitive principle of what an Islamic economic system should strive for . . . . Is that prices charged for goods and services be fair. . . . Competition in an Islamic economic system would therefore continuously seek to lower the cost of living or raise the standard of living" (Akbar Ali 2006, 253-254). Ali's interpretive strategy is representative in taking the many narratives in the Qur'an and reinterpreting them as statements of principle rather than legal prohibitions or requirements.<sup>13</sup> More generally Kamaruddin, Ali, the Sisters of Islam, and their political allies are distinguished by their insistence that the story of Malaysia as a nation has been and should be the implementation of principles of human rights through a democratic system to which all citizens have equal access. They reject explicitly the alternative narratives of transnational and international Islam that insist that Islamic laws have a privileged place in shaping such a society.

Dialogue with Muslims whose self-understanding is based on a narrative of working out fundamental principles reflective of the Divine Will has no ongoing international focus at this time that I know of. However, Muslims who might be regarded as articulating such a principled narrative are regularly engaged in different interfaith dialogue efforts. One example is a Buddhist-Muslim Dialogue around the topic of human rights, held at the United Nations from September 3 - 5, 2008. At this conference it appeared to this author that there emerged a clear distinction between women representing Islam, including Awan Nammar and Mona Siddique, who understood human rights as principles to be implemented in law, and Shayk Muhammed Hisham Kabbani, of the Islamic Supreme Council of America. The latter maintained that the framework for understanding and interpreting human rights was the obligations enjoined on humans by the God through *Shari'a*. It appears that for Shayk Kabbani God alone has rights, humans have obligations, some of which are to God, and some of which are to other humans. Apart from such explicit inter-religious initiatives it appears to this author that the principled Muslim narrative is primarily represented in dialogue that centers around specific political and social agendas rather than inter-religious engagement per se. Tariq Ramadan's most recent work, which suggests that civil society should evolve on the basis of agreed principles accessible through study of universally available information is suggestive of how principled narratives can enter into dialogue with one another to form a shared narrative of social reform (Ramadan 2009).

### ***The Mystic Narrative***

A fourth narrative identity in Islam, in so far as it can be distinguished from the three already discussed, is that of Sufism, or mystical Islam. It is a narrative which has a beginning, a plot, and an end but which is nonetheless a-historical: concerned about the ascent of the soul toward *fana* in which its being rejoins God its source. In this narrative Muhammad the prophet is the first (in stature if not history) mystic. His flight on a

winged horse into the seven heavens, until he arrives at the realm of God in God's self, is the primary story of humanity in relation to God. It is the archetype of all subsequent *jihad*, or the struggle of the soul to loose itself from being captured by the illusion of distinctions among beings. It is a narrative in which the primary meaning of the Qur'an, and every other revelation, is esoteric in addition to being ethical and legal. The path of submission to God's law is merely a small part, one possibly to be eventually discarded, of the journey toward submission of one's claim to exist to the presence of Divine Being itself.

For many Christians this mystic narrative seems to offer particular promise for a shared narrative. Yet it must be noted that the great majority of Muslims identify themselves with *two* narratives: the one of engaging the world with the demands of God's revelation on society, the other of the personal ascent of the soul to God. The second of these narratives finds amiable companions in many mystical traditions, and weaves in and out of such traditions worldwide. It travels a road that followers of many different religions may travel with some ease, and it does offer respite from the rigors of paths where every intersection presents a choice of heaven or perdition, and thus must be contested. Yet daily life must be lived on those narrow, contested paths, and in the end that is where the will to engage in dialogue is most severely tested, and its results most consequent.

## Conclusion

In seeking to understand contemporary Muslim movements through the narratives with which they identify I do not want to suggest that inter-religious dialogue should be restricted to one group or another, or even that it will be fruitful only with one group rather than another. Christians likewise identify themselves within their own version of these narratives. There are Christians for whom all of human history has only two parts; that which takes place before God's saving act in Jesus Christ and that which takes place after. And thus the history of world is made simply of two possible narratives with their respective endings: heaven and hell. There are Christians who see in the Biblical narrative a more complex unfolding of God's relationship with both creation and humanity. It is a narrative that recognizes many and diverse ways that God has engaged, and continues to engage humans in God's saving act, even if it is a narrative in which (according to some but not all) of these diverse engagements converge on a single point. Christians also have a narrative based more on the outworking of divinely ordained principles in human history rather than simply implementing divine law. And of course there are Christian mystics. Thus Christian Muslim dialogue will often be more complex than simply the interaction of two different narratives. Instead the identification of these different narratives suggests two conclusions.

First that dialogue will be most fruitful when it recognizes that which is possible within the narratives that serve to give the participants their religious identity. Transnational Muslims are unlikely to give up efforts to implement *Shari'a* law within human societies. To do so for them would be to cease to be Muslim. It may be possible, however, to mitigate the impact of realization of their narrative on religious minorities, for example, by engaging in a dialogue over the status of contemporary religious groups in relation to the status of traditionally accorded "the people of the book." There is, after all, a traditional stream of Islamic thought that does just this; essentially "finding" a monotheistic essence in each religious tradition and then regarding apparent polytheism as a problem internal to those traditions.<sup>14</sup> Dialogue with international narrative Muslims might need to be content to make progress on matters of forming a multi-religious civil society with an understanding that democratic structures and a secular

government are a pragmatic rather than principle means of living harmoniously. This is what Ng Kam Weng suggests in his book *The Quest for Covenant Community and Pluralist Democracy* (Ng 2008). Even dialogue over issues of human rights need not be impossible, so long as it is understood that transnational and international Muslims will interpret the basis of these rights differently than those Christians who identify with a more "principled" narrative. While these accommodations may seem like thin gruel in the face of the urgent demands created by the exploitation of women, children, and the poor the only alternative to dialogue appears to be the application of overwhelming force; a neo-colonial alternative that has thus far proved less than effective.

Secondly it seems that understanding identity in terms of narrative, rather than the interaction between two sets of beliefs, values, laws, or worldviews called Islam and Modernity respectively (and regardless of whether such sets are regarded as bounded or centered), offers a way of approaching dialogue that is emerging but hasn't been adequately articulated. *This form of dialogue is the exploration of two or more religious narratives in the hope of finding a shared story that allows not merely religious tolerance, but real cooperation in the project of creating a shared society and world.* What makes such dialogue powerful, and distinctly religious, is that each party learns that these shared concerns arise from the deepest level of commitment to live within an order that, whether it is structured by principle or law transcends the concerns of any one religious community or even humanity as a whole. Presently the author is experimenting (with Muslim partners) with reformulating plans for dialogue between Christians and Muslims, and persons of other faiths, that focus on bringing narrative to the fore and seeking out shared stories in the dialogue process.

Christian Muslim dialogue can be seen, I believe, as the engagement of two or more different religious narratives. In some cases a particular Christian narrative may resonate quite well with a particular Muslim narrative. In other cases they may find themselves at odds over basic understandings of how the human story in relation to the divine can or should unfold. In either case productive dialogue will depend on the participants representing themselves as accurately as is possible and knowing, quite literally, where the others believe they are coming from and where they understand themselves to be going.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> There are those who believe that the European Enlightenment actually had its roots in Islamic thought. So for example *The Vital Roots of European Enlightenment: Ibn Tufayls Influence on Modern Western Thought*, by Samar Attar (Attar 2007). Without judging these scholarly forays into re-writing intellectual history, what is important for this paper is that rewriting the story of Islam and the West so as to put Islam as a source of modernity is the distinctive mark of narrative identities discussed below which seek to find in Islam all that is, or can be, positive in the eyes of the narrator).

<sup>2</sup> It was recently drawn to my attention by members of the North Texas Islamic Association that in North Dallas the dominant school of legal interpretation is Hanafi – unsurprising since this school predominates in the South Asian Subcontinent from which a majority of Dallas Muslims come. This, rather than Shafi' (Egypt), Hanbali (Arabia), or Maleki (Turkey). This makes a real difference in some practices, for example the celebration of the prophet Muhammad's birthday. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century Shafi'ite commentators have encouraged it, and it is celebrated widely in Southeast Asia and North Africa. Hanafi commentators have discouraged it, and thus it is not celebrated in Dallas area mosques. For those interested in how distinctions between classical Islamic schools of law retain their relevance through contemporary rulings the Wikipedia article on Mawlid is well written, and relevant to the actual working of interfaith dialogue (<http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mawlid?wasRedirected=true>).

<sup>3</sup> My own copy of *Islam in History and Society* was published in Malaysia in the 1980's and has a forward written by a prominent Muslim politician named Anwar Ibrahim who has since become a globally recognized Muslim leader, and leader of Malaysia's political opposition.

<sup>4</sup> Zaiuddin Sardar, for example, in his trilogy, *The Touch of Midas, Islamic Futures*, and *The Future of Muslim Civilization* (1985-7) seeks to identify the patterns characteristic of previous Muslim history and literally chart a future unencumbered by that past.

<sup>5</sup> Only after substantially completing this article did I come across the work of Samira Haj on the Wahabbi tradition (Haj 2009) in which she makes use of Talal Asad's elaboration of Alasdair MacIntyre's conceptualization of tradition. Asad suggests that Muslims themselves approach Islam as a "discursive tradition", or a set of "discourses that seek to instruct practitioners regarding the correct form and purpose of a given practice that, precisely because it is established, has a history. These discourses relate conceptually to a *past* (when the practice was instituted, and from which the knowledge of its point and proper performance has been transmitted) and a *future* (how the point of that practice can best be secured in the short or long term, or why it should be modified or abandoned), through a *present* (how it is linked to other practices, institutions, and social conditions)." (Asad 1986) Clearly this represents both an alternative approach to identifying Islamic movements (one which to my knowledge was not taken up after Asad's paper was presented until the work of Haj) and is suggestive of ways of deepening the conceptual roots of the taxonomy I explore below. Samira Haj, in a detailed analysis explicitly rejects the taxonomies of Esposito, 1999, Eickelman and Piscattori, 1996, Voll, 1994, and Bas, 2004. (Haj 2009) p.21 However, her focus is on discursive reiterations of a tradition constantly in the process of re-interpretation concentrates on a single narrative of *tajdid*, *ihya*, and *islah* (renewal, revival, and reform) in the context of *aswa*, (progressive retreat from the golden age of Muhammad). (Haj 2009) p.8 This narrative is explicit in all sorts of Muslim literature, but is somewhat different than the narratives on which this essay focuses.

<sup>6</sup> Hefner's work is a good example of the confusion in current taxonomies. Hefner uses the term "modernist" for what Bennabi called reformist Muslims because they appear in SE Asia in the

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modern era. Others such as Bennett refer to Hefner's "modernists" as "traditionalists" or even "radical revisionists." (Hefner 2009, 22).

<sup>7</sup> Such local loyalties are in part related to traditional social structures that mediate Islam to the point that they become inseparable from it, and the understanding of Islam as a religion of ineffable wonder into which one must be initiated by face-to-face interaction with a local teacher.

<sup>8</sup> The Muslim World League is not the only bearer of transnational Islam into the realm of interreligious dialogue. Another example is the discussion of Malaysian government sanctioned inter-religious dialogue that emerged between the years 2000 and 2008. (Hunt 2009) In the Malaysian case elements within the government's Islamic authority themselves rejected participation in the proposed dialogue as an insult to the sovereignty of Islam in the state.

<sup>9</sup> In Dallas our local dialogue partners at the IANT and IID constantly cite the Qur'an's assertion that God intentionally made a variety of peoples so that they might know each other (Qur'an 30:20-23, 49:13). Thus the Qur'an as revelation is used not as the starting point of the Muslim narrative, but *refers* to that starting point in God's creation of humanity. This is a move not alien to other religious traditions.

<sup>10</sup> Francis Tiso, in his critique of Leonard Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue" points out that Ismail al-Faruqi's thought, and in particular his forceful assertion of the superiority of an Islamic worldview, has provided the "intellectual gymnasium in which many progressive and moderate Muslims have had their basic training," including Tariq Ramadan and Ziuddin Sadar. It is an observation the author would at least in part affirm. Tiso points out that al-Faruqi's *Islam and Other Faiths* describes an understanding of the role of non-Muslims under *Shari'a* law "that on the surface seems quite rational, but that would in practice lead to the most gross violations of human rights imaginable, short of outright slavery." If this seems an overstatement one need only observe the way in which al-Faruqi's thought is used by Muslim groups to circumscribe the human and civil rights of non-Muslims in countries like Malaysia. In brief, as I understand him, al-Faruqi asserts that Islam is not merely a religion, but an ideology, the most complete and perfect ideology, and that an Islamic state (like all states according to al-Faruqi) would legitimately demand that their citizens learn, master and conform to the state ideology even while allowing religious freedom (meaning freedom of private spiritual convictions and practice)(Heckman and Picker Neiss 2010, 236).

<sup>11</sup> Mattson, Ingrid (Mattson 2008, 205). Mattson goes on to cite the work of Muhammad Kamali, a contemporary scholar of Islamic jurisprudence on the role of principles and values in interpretation.

<sup>12</sup> In identifying a principled narrative I am not speaking of merely the use of *ijtihad* or independent reasoning in Islamic exegesis and legal discourse. The term *ijtihad* can mean merely questioning the results of earlier scholarship within a framework that nonetheless accepts the enduring validity of specific social structures and relations.

<sup>13</sup> It must be noted that at some level this strategy serves the purpose of transnational and international narratives as well, for example in interpreting "jihad" to mean a general principle of struggle rather than an explicit command to war. The difference is that principled Islam sees *jihad* as a struggle for principles, while transnational and international Islam see jihad as a struggle to implement structures.

<sup>14</sup> The Vatican dialogues with Muslim leaders over the status of Christian and other religious minorities in Muslim lands appears to be one example of such dialogue.

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## ***Dialogue in Practice: a Special Section of the Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue***

Current American discourse on religion and ethics is primarily defined by established leaders – ministers, rabbis, academics and journalists. There is an entire population of important stakeholders without a platform: the up-and-comers. To remedy this, the Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue, Hebrew College, Andover Newton Theological School, and The Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions have joined forces to create *State of Formation*, a forum for up-and-coming religious thinkers to draw upon the learning that is occurring in their academic and community work, reflect on the pressing questions of a religiously pluralistic society, and challenge existing religious definitions.

*State of Formation* is a community conversation between leaders in formation. Together, a cohort of seminarians, rabbinical students, graduate students, activists and the like – the future religious and moral leaders of tomorrow – are working to redefine the ethical discourse today.

In this section, writers from *State of Formation* engage with Robert Hunt's article, "Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue." In this exchange, we find modeled a frank exchange of ideas, new perspectives, careful querying, and a sharing of background and interest—the very best of dialogue.

## ***Wanted: More Than Dialogue—a Response to Robert Hunt’s Essay, “Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” by Karen Leslie Hernandez***

Robert Hunt’s essay, “Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” is intriguing and interesting. I especially found his ideas surrounding the narrative taxonomies of Islam and the Muslim world important. While I agree that not all, but many Muslims struggle within the modern world and Islamic tradition, I think the Western world puts more of a focus on this issue than is necessary. What I mean by this is that all of us scholars of Islam, theologians, and Professors of religion are constantly aspiring to figure out why parts of the Muslim world are in uproar; why we are witnessing this violence in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century; why this insurgency of religious extremists have surfaced. We have many answers for this—the lasting effects of colonization; the poverty in the Muslim world compared to that of much of the Western world; Western meddling in international affairs; and of course, the oil and other precious resources that are plundered to benefit much of the non-Muslim world.

I am not sure Hunt’s mention of the patriarchal issues that surround Islam is necessary in this particular paper. I agree that there are major issues when it comes to a woman’s place in religious hierarchy. Such statements, as Hunt noted, from the head of the Muslim World League that, “... women do not hold significant positions of world leadership,” and therefore are not welcome to participate in dialogue sessions, only exacerbates an already hot-button topic that needs to be addressed. This, however, is coming from King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia—a leader from a country where Islam and culture are so enmeshed that women cannot drive, nor go anywhere alone, which is not necessarily Islamic in nature, but more cultural. In other Muslim countries, women have these rights. I would like to read more on this topic and in fact I feel that a whole paper could be devoted to empowering Muslim and Christian women to challenge such patriarchal ideologies such as the stance that the Muslim World League takes. Women in multi-faith dialogue are imperative to the success of such dialogue.

While I find it interesting and relevant that Hunt divides Muslims into two narrative categories, that being transnational Muslims and international Muslims, I wonder if Muslims themselves would agree with this idea. From the Muslims I encountered and conversed with from all over the world, I have received the same basic message—they are all proud to be Muslim, faithful to God, faithful to humanity, and faithful to and in creating a peaceful world, not only in the larger world, but within their own personal world as well. Their *jihad*, if you will, is to maintain their humanity, to revere God, and to never harm a single person as long as they live. I often hear Surah 5:32 recited in my conversations: “... whoever kills a soul ... is like one who has killed the whole of mankind; and whoever saves a life is like one who saves the lives of all mankind ...” This is the basic message I received and still receive from my dialogue with Muslims around the world as well as in my own backyard.

I find Hunt’s use of Sayyid Qutb’s writing on *Jahiliyyah* interesting. I also was intrigued but perplexed when he writes that Adam and Eve were the first Muslims. Qutb’s writing stems from not only his experience with the Muslim Brotherhood, but also from the racism he encountered while living here in the United States in the 1950’s. He witnessed the bigotry of white people toward people of color and was horrified by it. He also witnessed the degradation of women while living in the USA by watching the

objectification of American women in their everyday lives, as well as in the American media. From my conversations around the world, I do not think many even know about the concept of *Jahiliyyah*, let alone acknowledge it as part of their narrative or as something they need to recognize in today's modern world. As for Adam and Eve being the first Muslims, I have to respectfully disagree with this statement. As a Christian, I do not consider Adam and Eve the first Christians and I highly doubt that Jews consider Adam and Eve, the first Jews. I would like to posit that all of the Abrahamic faiths acknowledge that Adam and Eve were pivotal in the beginning of our humanity, but the reality is that at that time, God was Father. Adam and Eve, in all their ignorance, were learning and growing as humans in their time here on earth—religion had not been created by humans during their lifetime. With this, they may serve as role models for all of us ethically, yet, pegging them with any religion, I feel, is a bit presumptuous.

I would like to offer a counterpoint to the importance of interreligious, or what I would rather refer to as, multi-faith dialogue. I think any attempt at calling for more dialogue is to be respected and at this time in history, especially with recent events in Norway, dialogue is needed, especially among Christians and Muslims. What I find frustrating with dialogue is that it is just that. Dialogue seeks to understand and to go beyond our own theological discourses and dogmas, yet, most that engage in dialogue are clergy, academics and theologians. People who really need to engage in dialogue, such as people who fall prey to apathy for lack of feeling that they need to be involved, are those that I feel need and must be reached at this time in our very conflicted world. I guess you could say that I am calling for a grassroots movement of religious understanding. The extremists, such as Norway terrorist, Anders Behring Breivik, or even members of Al Qaeda, are beyond the reach of such dialogue, obviously, however, your neighbor and mine—they are not beyond the reach of such important work. In fact, they are in need of dialogue, but more, they are in need of interaction with “the other.” How then can we step out of our comfort zone and interact with those that are different from us? Those that we may even fear? How can we reach and go beyond dialogue?

Having taken part of several multi-faith dialogue groups, I can say with the utmost certainty that at this time in history, we as humans must go beyond just talking about why our religions are different. Speaking as a Christian, simply put, I feel that Christians need to embrace our Muslim brothers and sisters much more and on a regular basis. How? Simply by interacting with them more. Do congregations across the nation have sister mosques? Are there congregations that hold get-togethers with the mosque down the street or monthly dinner meetings with Muslims in the neighborhood? Do Christian communities hold service projects that bring Muslim and Christian teens together to serve the community? These are the next steps to going beyond dialogue as Christians. I believe it is this type of interaction that will make more of a difference than only dialogue, and it is my hope that this kind of interaction and action will eradicate fear and create a sense of coexistence that would stem to all people of all religions.

I continue my counterpoint by acknowledging the importance of Hunt relating Ibn Taymiyyah's work as well as Ibn Wahab's work and that they helped create some of the narrative that is Islam today. In all honestly however, these ancient scholars and theologians of Islam and their theologies rarely come up in conversation with every day Muslims and Christians, but mostly with theologians and scholars of Islam. I am not saying that the work of Taymiyyah and Wahab should be ignored and their work discredited. Yet, if one hasn't studied Taymiyyah's work, or cannot relate that Bin Laden based much of his ideology on Taymiyyah's work (as did Qutb), understanding this framework won't do much in the attempt at opening up new avenues for dialogue. This is not to say that we ignore the obvious differences in our religions and the significance

of the narratives that led to the development of our religions, but more, that we simply acknowledge our humanity within our religious selves. Hunt's piece is for those who are seeking dialogue and a deeper understanding of the religions of the one they are dialoguing with, as is the case with most who partake in dialogue; so, as I stated above, I am not discrediting the value of such dialogue. This kind of intense dialogue that requests the understanding of these concepts such as *Shari'a*, *Jahiliyyah*, as well as the ideologies of scholars such as *Taymiyyah* and *Wahab*, are concepts that many may not want to work on, or make an effort to relate to each other on this kind of level. What I suggest is merely taking that dialogue down to a level that will allow interaction, understanding, and reconciliation among all those who have questions.

Last, I would like to offer that if we are going to cross more boundaries of understanding and grow within our own faith and traditions, then we should focus more on the narratives of today, because it is a fact that stories are an important aspect of our culture. Back in 2006, I found myself in an all men's *Wahhabist* Madrasa in Varanasi, India, called *Jamiah Salafiah*. As a Western woman, it was a privilege to have this opportunity to sit and talk with these young men from all over South Asia. What I found is that their narratives, their stories of why they are Muslim, what they believe as Muslims, what they want to do with their lives as young Muslim men who are in a sect of Islam that many define as a terrorist sect, led me to understand that these young men were anything but terrorists. In fact, every single young man I spoke to condemned terrorism, spoke highly of what they understood of Christianity, and most importantly, these young men were willing to listen to my story as well. They had questions for me; why are you a Christian? What do you believe? How do you carry your faith in your everyday life? What do you want to do with your faith in the world? For three days I interacted with these young men. I watched them go to prayer. I sat surrounded by them on the steps of the school and answered their many inquiries. I laughed with them; sat in silence with them. I learned about their everyday lives. I listened to them recite *Qur'an*. I watched them read the Bible. I grew with these men in their faith for those three days, and they grew in mine. That is a narrative that is today's narrative. Indeed, they may have carried the ideology of Ibn Wahab since they were attending a Wahhabist Madrasa, yet, that isn't what we discussed. This was simply a narrative that gave this interaction meaning and depth for us as human beings trying to understand and relate to each other. This is what I mean when I say we must go beyond dialogue. It is that simple interaction that I still carry with me today. Their words, their lives and their love of life and their hope of being given the opportunity to change the world. It was that one common denominator between us that I found giving, grounded and real.

Hunt's article is incredibly important to the success of deeper dialogue and a greater theological understanding of the religion of Islam for Christians. I agree that Christians need more avenues to seek relational ties with their Muslim brothers and sisters. It is my hope that we can all move beyond dialogue and simply acknowledge each other as humanly as possible, seeking common ground with compassion and humility. It is this place that I believe we can arrive at, as does Hunt when he writes, "...productive dialogue will depend on the participants representing themselves as accurately as is possible and knowing, quite literally, where the others believe they are coming from and where they understand themselves to be going (Hunt 17, 2011)."

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## ***I am so much more than Lutheran: A Response to Robert Hunt, by Kari Aanestad***

In his piece “Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” Robert Hunt argues that more fruitful interreligious conversations will be aided by classifying Muslims in one of four taxonomies that are named according to the narrative of religious self-understanding. Hunt argues that old taxonomies, which define Muslims according to where they land in respect to the intersection of Islamic tradition and modern thought, are limited in their ability to facilitate interreligious dialogue. The categories are restricted in that they define different strands of Islam in such a way that offers little insight into how different practices of Islam may interact with other religions.

The four taxonomies that Hunt offers (transnational Islam, international Islam, principled Islam, and Sufism), however, seek to define different practices of Islam according to how “Muslims articulate and embody a narrative description of their identity” (Hunt, *supra*). Hunt defines “narrative” as ways to describe the different origins of Islam as a religious movement, which is then closely followed by “plot,” the story of how Islam interacted and continues to interact with the non-Muslim world. Hunt argues that defining categories of Islam in this way helps reveal some of the more critical differences between Christians and Muslims and in doing so hopefully facilitates a more fruitful interreligious dialogue.

Hunt’s four taxonomies of Islam are as follows: transnational Islam understands itself as the recipient of God’s full revelation in the Qur’an, a divinely mandated order that provides guiding laws for the universe that all people are to obey and carry out. International Islam is a unification of different ethno-cultural groups and nation-states whereby local custom, state initiated law, and revealed law provide order for society. Principled Islam finds its primary identity in its commitment to principles such as justice, equity, rights and obligations, and mutual concern and applies those principles in new and changing situations. Finally, Sufism is an Islamic mysticism wherein submission to God’s law is only a small part of the larger journey of the human to eventually be fully in the presence of the Divine Being.

While Hunt argues that his four taxonomies are rooted in practicing Muslims’ own narrative description of their religious identities, Hunt’s use of narrative in these taxonomies seems to be focused on the story of a religion and less concerned with the individual lives that embody and comprise that religion. The taxonomies according to narrative that he offers bring interreligious dialogue participants to a macro level of interaction by inviting them to see both themselves and each other according to broad categories that define the multiple ways in which individuals understand their religious identities. In other words, Hunt’s four taxonomies define not what it means to be a Muslim (different practices of a religion), but how a Muslim might define that for himself (ways in which people understand themselves as participants of a religion).

Hunt argues that since these categories focus on the broader story of a religion and how it interacts with other religions, the categories are then generally applicable to other religions beyond Islam. Said another way, there is a Christian equivalent to Hunt’s transnational Islam, and if participants of interreligious dialogue are able to understand what categories they and their conversation partners fall under, they will be able to have a more fruitful dialogue. They will be able to better see the places where their stories

(the ways in which they understand themselves as participants of a religion) either overlap or limit their interactions with others.

My primary critique of Hunt's piece is that while he replaces old categories of religious self-understanding with new categories that supposedly facilitate more fruitful interreligious conversations, I am cautious about the degree to which categories are helpful. My critique is threefold critique: first, religious identity is only part of the full narrative of the individual. For example, I suspect that though I self-identify as a Lutheran (a principled Lutheran according to Hunt's taxonomies), my narrative of my religious identity is only part of a larger story - the complex, beautiful, entire story of Kari.

Second, to reduce a person's full narrative into a category of religious self-understanding is ultimately to limit a person's ability to fully express herself, hear others, and feel heard, which consequently restricts interreligious dialogue. The specifics of my individual narrative (the ways in which I understand myself as a self) deeply inform my religious identity, and if I am expected to speak as a category and not a full self, it is likely that I will not be a fully present conversation partner engaged on a level of shared meaning-making.

Finally, Hunt's categorization presupposes that the quality of interreligious dialogue can be measured and that an academic model can affect that quality. Though I would love to think that an academic model could help bring forth fruit in arguably one of the most strained interreligious relationships, I know from my own participation in interreligious work that storytelling and story receiving is a somewhat ambiguous process with often immeasurable outcomes.

In conclusion, Hunt's four taxonomies provide a helpful framework for thinking academically about interreligious dialogue and stand as a helpful starting point for that dialogue in real practice. I suspect, however, that the complex realities of interreligious dialogue and the messiness of storytelling serve to remind us that we must always be careful not to be too confident in painting with a broad brush. That is to say that though it may be helpful to be able to identify people in different categories of religious identity, I suspect it may be equally (if not more) helpful to see people beyond those taxonomies or at least hear the stories of how they got there. We all inhabit spaces that are fuzzy, and I suspect we do our conversation partners and ourselves a disservice when we see the world too categorically.

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***Dialogue Hard? A Response to Robert A. Hunt on “Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” by Benjamin B. DeVan***

I am grateful to Robert A. Hunt for his thoughtful paper and to the *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* for inviting me to respond. Hunt raises many issues which resonate with me regarding freedom of religious conviction and expression, interreligious dialogue, cooperation, and egalitarianism.

First, I applaud Hunt for engaging those he designates as “mystical” and “principled” Muslims, who in other taxonomies hold some affinity with Progressives, Reformers, Reformists, Liberal Muslims, Modernist Muslims, and others. I especially admire Emory University’s A.A. An-Na’im, who Hunt cites. An-Na’im, following his mentor Mahmoud Muhammad Taha, emphasizes Qur’anic principles gleaned from Meccan era Surahs supporting interreligious cooperation, caring for the poor and vulnerable, and mystical or theological meditations on God and God’s attributes. Some time ago An-Na’im proposed:

Unless the basis of modern Islamic law is shifted away from those texts of the Qur’an and Sunna of the Medina stage, which constituted the foundations of...Shari’a, there is no way of avoiding drastic and serious violation of universal standards of human rights...As stated and explained in relation to constitutionalism, criminal justice, and international law, the traditional techniques of reform within the framework of Shar’ia are inadequate for achieving the necessary degree of reform. To achieve that degree...we must be able to set aside clear and definite texts of the Qur’an and Sunna of the Medina stage as having served their transitional purpose and implement those texts of the Meccan stage which...are now the only way to proceed (An-Na’im 1998, 234).

In my Master of Theology thesis, “Is Religious Diversity Embraceable by Evangelical Christians and Orthodox Muslims?” (DeVan, 2010), the writings of “principled” Muslims like An-Na’im were immeasurably valuable for developing a shared Evangelical-Muslim narrative incorporating empathy, recognition of common humanity, mutual theological sharpening, tolerance, cooperation, a dynamic and open marketplace of ideas, integrity in wrestling with seemingly irreconcilable differences, and love.

Nevertheless, Christian interaction and dialogue with Hunt’s “transnational” Muslims may sometimes be worthwhile even when “transnationals” wish to convince Christians to convert to Islam. Some Christians will expect equal or equivalent opportunities to persuade and proselytize Muslims, and any variation of second class or “dhimmi” status for non-Muslims (via some “transnational” Muslim versions of an “emerging divinely approved order”) must be repudiated both now and for the future.

However, Christian dialogue with “transnational” Muslims can be specifically beneficial for humanizing each other, minimizing miscommunication based dissension, clarifying positions, managing and enriching relationships, and uncovering constructive commonalities. Difficult or challenging dialogue also induces theological and exegetical refining. Dekker and Medearis (2008, 2010), Rosenberg (2009), and Siljander (2008), for instance, demonstrate rewarding interactions with some “transnational” Muslims by building on Jesus and Jesus’ teachings as a prophet and Messiah for both Christians and Muslims.

Non-Muslims and “principled” Muslims who dialogue hard with “transnational” Muslims may also influence some of their interlocutors to adopt alternate understandings of the Qur’an, concurrently encouraging more meaningful modes of interreligious and intercultural coexistence and cooperation. Dialogue with “transnational” Muslims offers occasions to elaborate on “principled” Muslim, Christian, or other perspectives nudging “transnationals” to re-conceive or revise their approaches for an “emerging divine order” by considering, for example, the “Kingdom of God” proclaimed by Jesus in the Gospels (Injil/Injeel in Islam). Tawfik Hamid (Rosenberg 2009), Ed Husain (2007), and Daveed Gartenstein-Ross (2007) are just three potential case studies from varied backgrounds who were once “transnational” Muslims that later articulated more “principled” perceptions of faith within Islam or Christianity.

Second, dialogue with “transnational” Muslims fosters gender equity. Enablers or purveyors of misogyny will appeal to the Qur’an by asserting that contact with women can defile men (Surah 4:43), that the Qur’an names no female angels (cf. 4:117, 43:15-19, 53:27), that legal convictions of rape require four male witnesses (24:13), that women’s testimony is worth half a man’s (2:282, 24:6-9), that men receive double inheritance, and merit multiple other privileges or priority within the family simply because they are male (cf. 2:221-2:228, 4:3, 4:7-12, 4:24, 4:34, 4:129, 4:176, 24:31, 60:10, 66:4-6).

But knowledgeable egalitarians can convey the full force of Qur’anic and other foundations for women’s rights and dignity by way of dialogue. This is not limited only to “spiritual” equality inferred from the Qur’an’s presenting men and women as created from a single soul and bearing religious duties and responsibilities (4:1, 4:124, 7:189, 39:6, 57:12, cf. 3:195, 4:124, 7:19-27, 16:97, 33:35, 43:70, 57:12, 58:11, 96:1). It also includes the seeds for economic and political gender parity via select gender-equal legal and criminal penalties (cf. 5:38, 24:2-4, even though the explicit punishments are questionable in other contexts), and the right of both women and men to own property (4:7, 4:32, but cf. 3:195, 33:32-33).

Moreover, “principled” Muslims and others may prick the consciences of Muslim misogynists by showing how the Qur’an speaks favorably of wives and mothers (16:72, 25:74, 30:20-21, 33:6, 42:11, 51:59), that men are enjoined to treat women kindly (4:3, 4:19, cf. 2:233), that husbands and wives should seek to live in tranquility, intimacy, and as protectors of each other (2:187, 9:171, 30:21); that a woman should not be held in marriage against her will (cf. 4:19, 4:35, 4:128), that men must provide for their divorced wives, children, and (if possible) widows (2:233, 2:240, 2:241); that reconciliation is preferable to divorce (4:35), that women and men may both remarry and enjoy conjugal rights (cf. 2:232, 2:235), that male and female infanticide is condemned (81:7-14 cf. 16:57-59, 17:31), and that honor is due to both parents (4:1, 6:151, 17:23, 31:14, 46:15). “Principled” Muslims will undoubtedly discern additional materials from the Qur’an and other sources to extend and inform healthy, egalitarian gender relations. Fatima Mernissi (1987), Asma Barlas (2002), and Kecia Ali (2006) are particularly prescient.

Finally, Hunt recounts that many Muslims believe, “Islam itself gathers all the wisdom of all revelations of God.” Hunt concurrently calls for subsequent exploration of, *“religious narratives in the hope of finding a shared story that allows not merely religious tolerance, but real cooperation in the project of creating a shared society and world.”*

The Bible, which Hunt mentions briefly, is one indispensable resource for such a story. Medearis (2008, 141-142) for example, reports how Muslims, Christians and other Lebanese Members of Parliament together studied the life, example, and teachings of Jesus through the Gospel of Luke. Muslims can arguably recognize the New Testament with Christians, and the Tanakh or Old Testament with Jews and Christians as Holy Scripture. Instead of banning or aspersing the Bible, Muslims can affirm with Christian

theologian Miroslav Volf in *Allah: A Christian Response*, “(If) the Bible contains the authentic *content* of God’s self-revelation to Abraham, Moses, the prophets and Jesus...then (we) have a significantly overlapping and therefore common Scripture” (2011 , 88, cf. 87-89). I also sensed similar sympathetic sentiments from Muslim students at the historically black university where I taught, including at least one Muslim student who confidently defended the Bible as “the word of God.”

Beyond contemporary anecdotes, historic Muslim luminaries like Al-Ghazali, Al-Razi, Al-Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Ibn Khaldun, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, and Muhammad Abduh all acclaim Jewish and Christian Scriptures as divinely revealed and divinely preserved texts along with the Qur’an (see documentation by Accad 2003; Moucarray 2001, 25-79; Saeed 2002; and Zahniser 2008; cf. Zebiri 1997, 14).

Muslim disparaging of the Bible—as opposed to rejecting false representations or interpretations of the Bible—might not even have emerged until 1,000 AD/CE. The Qur’an repeatedly affirms and confirms preceding Jewish and Christian scriptures (2:62, 2:83-87, 2:89, 2:91, 2:97, 2:136, 2:140, 3:2-3:3, 3:50, 3:81, 3:84, 3:119, 4:47, 4:136, 4:163, 5:46-47, 5:66, 5:68-69, 6:91-92, 6:154, 10:37, 10:94, 16:43, 17:55, 19:30, 21:7, 21:105, 35:51, 42:3, 57:27, and 61:6). Obscuring or neglecting the Bible violates the spirit of Surah 2:140, “Who does greater evil than he who conceals a testimony received from God” (Arberry 1955)? Surah 10:94 likewise directs, “If thou (Muhammad) art in doubt concerning that which We reveal unto thee, then question those who read the Scripture (that was) before thee” (Pickthall 1930).

I appreciate Hunt’s article and the *Journal of Interreligious Dialogue* for inviting me to ponder and contribute to these salient topics. I look forward to further fruitful conversation.

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## ***Narrative as New Reality: A Memoirist Responds to Robert Hunt, by Bryan Parys***

*What is remembered is what becomes reality.* – Patricia Hampl

First off, I'm a memoirist. I've been invited to respond to Robert Hunt's "Muslims, Modernity, and the Prospects of Christian-Muslim Dialogue," distinctly because I am not a theologian, but a crafter and student of narrative. Or, better yet, the art of narrative—meaning there is an act of creation necessary when humans engage in the parsing and ultimate sharing of narratives.

In his essay, Hunt purports that a deeper understanding of narratives will allow for more substantial, bridge-building dialogue between Muslims and Christians (he specifies that "Christian" is just one lens here, and that the narrative approach to dialogue could and should work for any non-Muslim group). As he explicitly says, "It is the thesis of this paper that understanding Muslim (and Christian) identity in terms of narrative will provide a more illuminating and fruitful basis for engaging in interfaith dialogue..." (Hunt *supra*).

Narrative, however, is a world of a word. It is not only a chronicling of where we come from, but also who we are because of our claimed origins, and what drives our passion. One's own narrative starts with the self and, from there continuously enters a labyrinthine layering of subsequent narratives—of our parents, our ethnicity, our friend group, our gastronomic sensibility, our faith, our heroes. In other words, humans are a jumbled tome of inexorable narratives, emphasis on that plural. Therefore, it is of the utmost importance to understand how Hunt is using this loaded term, which he does by stating, "In the paper *narrative* means simply a way of describing the origins of Islam as a religious movement, the 'plot' which characterizes its engagement with the non-Muslim world, and the end toward which it is understood to move" (Hunt).

In essence, Hunt is looking at the Muslim world in terms of its *historical* narrative. His use of "simply," becomes anything but simple, in that he is seeking (in 18 pages no less) to find a narrative that is at once specific as well as covers the current Muslim mindset. To this end, Hunt is extremely illuminating (especially for this non-seminarian). But, some further grounding could help offer a more concrete how-to blueprint.

I want to offer some further thoughts on narrative, and in so doing, hope to bring elements of Hunt's abstract instructions to a level of personal engagement. That is, I speak of sharing not just our communal narrative, but our personal narratives, for the self is the only place that dialogue may start, and it is the sharing of self that is the only place dialogue can survive.

In, *I Could Tell You Stories*, her classic essay collection on the craft of writing, the memoirist Patricia Hampl writes in the chapter "Memory and Imagination," that neglecting our personal histories is to become vulnerable to control: "If we refuse to do the work of creating this personal version of the past, someone will do it for us. That is the scary political fact" (Hampl 1999).

Here, she suggests that politics and the art of memoir are connected. I want to further this assertion into the realm of interfaith dialogue. While it remains true, like it

or not, that we are ambassadors of the tradition we ascribe to, we are first and foremost beings with memories—this is the great equalizer. You cannot boil our essence down any further than this. At this level, there is no agenda to impose *Shari'a*, there is no angling for a “Christian” nation, nor any other large-scale religious endgame. There is just biology—synapses firing, neural pathways, and feet trying to move forward.

From this juncture, Hampl suggests that the next level of humanity is the desire to talk to each other about “the big issues.” And while the transmission of this desire to speak of big things often results in the stalemates that Hunt speaks of, the genesis of this desire is to connect. Violently forcing one’s views on another, in this light, is a misguided take on that desire to connect, in that it sees assimilation as the only means of relational community.

The only possibilities regarding interfaith dialogue are whether to move up the narrative ladder in a connective or disjunctive manner.

The best way to be connective then, is to own the fact that we are saturated in Story, and never cease looking for others with whom to exchange these stories. And while Hampl is speaking specifically of the craft of writing within the memoir genre, it is easy to extend this into our purposes at hand here. As she says:

“Memoir must be written because each of us must possess a created version of the past. Created: that is, real in the sense of tangible, made of the stuff of a life lived in place and in history. And the downside of any created thing as well: We must live with a version that attaches us to our limitations, to the inevitable subjectivity of our points of view. We must acquiesce to our experience.... You tell me your story, I’ll tell you mine” (Hampl 1999, 32.)

So, all this talk about “art” and “memoir” is actually not as cloistered as it seems. Art is just a means of turning the interior life into the exterior, and memoir<sup>1</sup> uses memory as its medium. In this way, we must all seek to be memoirists—owners of our stories—if we ever hope to speak of those “big issues” and still progress as a global culture. There is much at stake here. If we give up our right to owning and crafting our pasts—on the micro and macro level—than our pasts become the plaything of authorities, for good and for ill. Hampl writes,

“[Memory]...is an efficient way of controlling masses of people. It doesn’t even require much bloodshed, as long as people are entirely willing to give over their personal memories. Whole histories can be rewritten. The books which now seek to deny the existence of the Nazi death camps now fill a room” (Hampl 1999, 32).

To conclude, I will give you a part of my narrative. I grew up in a nondenominational, Evangelical Christian context in the lake-swaddled city of Laconia, New Hampshire. My Christian school’s mascot was, and is still “The Crusader.” It wasn’t until college that I learned how detestable the moniker was. I wondered what the Jewish people in our city thought of when they saw write-ups in the sport section on how “Crusaders slaughter Eagles in Basketball Playoffs.”

In choosing this mascot, our school was surely not trying to proudly display one of our history’s most solipsistic and bloodied takes on sharing our beliefs.

But, we still did, and I am culpable to a degree.

I share this because I am seeking to use my experience as something that is both real and symbolic. This is my memory, but in parsing it with you, its original truth does not become my identity. This memory now belongs to you in part, and from here, we have the capacity to choose to reach an understanding—a new reality—and move forward.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> In fact, the Indo-European root of the word “memoir” is *mer-mer* and means “to vividly wonder” and is anything but its cliché criticism, navel-gazing.

*The Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* presents its  
**Call for Submissions for Issue 9:  
*Women, Feminism, and Inter-Religious Dialogue***



Women have played pivotal roles in transforming communities and conflicts, upending theories and traditions, and building bridges of understanding where others have thought it impossible. Given the dynamic landscape of female involvement in numerous aspects of inter-religious activities and dialogue, we at *The Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* will be devoting an entire issue to the exploration of inter-religious work as informed by women's perspectives and feminist theory more broadly. We invite articles that engage in rigorous reflection on the intricate and often behind-the-scenes partnerships between women and inter-religious endeavors at large.

It is our hope that this special issue will contribute to and stimulate the inclusion of this increasingly utilized approach to the study of inter-religious dialogue and theory. We especially welcome and encourage investigation of the following topics:

- *How do women already operating within particular traditions or communities incorporate their own perspectives into inter-religious activities?*
- *How might current trends in feminist theory shape discourse on religious pluralism or plurality? Do these theories have the potential to transform inter-religious thinking or activities?*
- *To date, has inter-religious work failed to include women's voices? If so, how might this have influenced outcomes, and how can things be different henceforth? Critiques of particular trends or authors are especially welcome.*

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- *How have some women within particular religious groups or communities engaged in interfaith work in a way that differs from or even breaks with broader traditions (either their own or the mainstream)?*
  - *How have local female authority figures and social justice leaders engaged or partnered with religious organizations to promote dialogue and transformation?*
  - *How have women operated outside of established norms for dialogue promotion and conflict resolution?*
  - *What roles have female religious leaders played in various traditions? What movements are underway to expand these roles in a manner that allows for (or is even inspired by) increased interfaith engagement?*
  - *How has feminist work collaborated with or rallied against concrete religious activities as well as theological discourses?*

### **About the Journal**

The *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* is a peer-reviewed publication dedicated to innovative research and study of the interactions that take place within and between religious communities. Published online, it is designed to increase both the quality and frequency of interchanges between religious groups and their leaders and scholars. By fostering communication and study, the Journal hopes to contribute to a more tolerant, pluralistic society. Rather than shying away from discourse on problematic exchanges that take place between religious groups, the Journal seeks articles that approach these "trouble spots" from an informed, academic perspective in order to provide new insight into how difficulties may be overcome, or at least better understood. Given the interdisciplinary nature of inter-religious studies, we invite articles from a wide array of content areas and fields of study.

### **Submission Guidelines**

All submissions must be the original, previously unpublished work of the author(s). Authors are also advised to read about the Journal and the previous issue prior to submitting an article. Submissions should be around 3,500 words, including references and a 100-word abstract. They should adhere to the *Fifteenth Edition of the Chicago Manual of Style*, with endnotes. Co-authored articles are welcomed and encouraged. Articles may be submitted online at [www.irdialogue.org/submissions](http://www.irdialogue.org/submissions) or via e-mail to [submissions@irdialogue.org](mailto:submissions@irdialogue.org).

### **Deadlines**

The deadline for submissions for the ninth issue of the Journal is December 15<sup>th</sup> 2011. Articles submitted after this date will not be considered for publication in this issue. You will hear back about the status of your submission by January 15<sup>th</sup> 2012.

### **Peer-Review Process**

After an initial vetting process by the editorial board, each submission will undergo a rigorous peer-review by members of the Board of Scholars and Practitioners. If accepted for publication, the Journal's staff may edit the submission for mechanics and adherence to writing standards.