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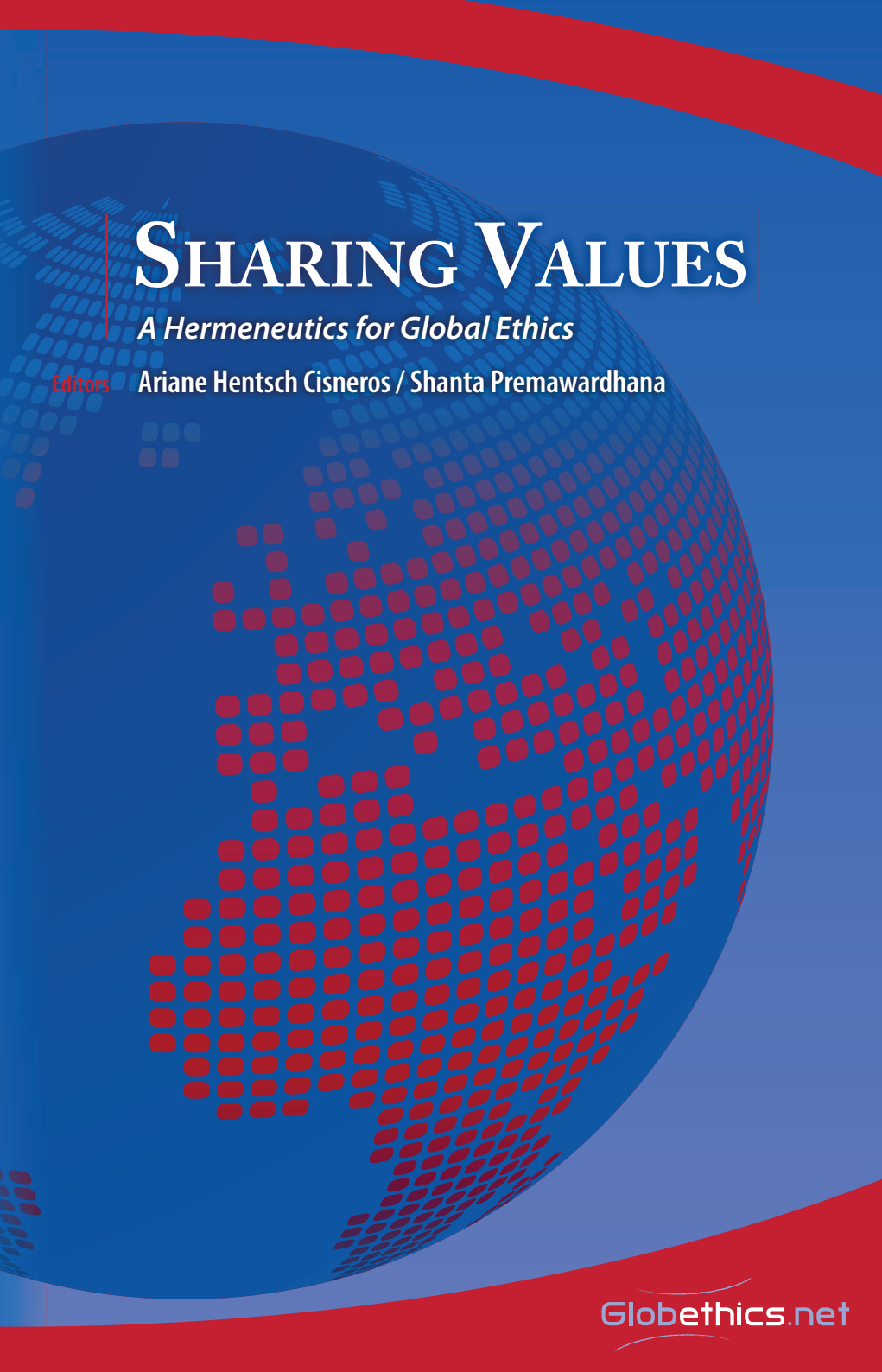
Sharing Values

A Hermeneutics for Global Ethics

Editors: Ariane Hentsch Cisneros / Shanta Premawardhana



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4 Sharing Values

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PREFACE

Abdul Malik Mujahid, USA

I am honoured to be one of the signatories of the Declaration toward a Global Ethic at the 1993 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago. I have tried to live by the ideals presented in the Declaration, not just because I signed this document, but also because these ideals are enshrined in my faith.

The Parliament has always been ahead of its time in terms of ideas. The 1893 parliament was so revolutionary that it took 100 years for a slow-moving century to hold another Parliament of the World's Religions. The Declaration signed at the 1993 Parliament continues to inspire dialogue and engagement and led to the birth of another document, 'A Call to Our Guiding Institutions,' adopted at the 1999 Parliament of World Religions in Cape Town, South Africa.

Although it is not easy to quantify the direct impact of the Parliament or of such declarations, the growth and acknowledgment of the interfaith movement points to a broader acceptance today of the ideas that they support and nurture.

The modern interfaith movement is no longer confined to the Western hemisphere. People, communities, and leaders around the world are finding in interfaith dialogue a crucial communication tool as they develop their human connections. Many, for the first time, are seeing commonalities with those they once looked at through the prism of stereotypes or mutual exclusivity.

It seems that the interfaith movement now even has its own martyrs, such as individuals and organisations in civil society who stand up for their fellow human beings of other faith communities. As I was writing the present Preface, news came that Salman Taseer, governor of the largest Pakistani state, a Muslim, sacrificed his life knowingly, as he tweeted about it, in support of an imprisoned Christian woman accused of blasphemy. The Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams willingly accepted extraordinary criticism from within his church and society when he suggested that Britain allow implementation of Muslim personal law for social cohesion purposes.

Initiatives that have made headlines also indicate that the power of the global interfaith movement today is real: the Swiss cantons that opposed the Minaret ban in a 2009 popular vote harbour a thriving interfaith movement; the fastest-growing group working for Palestinian rights in the USA is actually a Jewish organisation that has seen its membership grow ten times in twelve months; when Muslim scholars issued the document 'A Common Word' addressed to Christian leaders, it sparked the longest conversation Muslims and Christian theologians have had in centuries.

Faith groups, too, are working together for the common good of all on issues as diverse as human development, malaria eradication, poverty, the elimination of torture, war, and nuclear armament, drone attacks, or terrorism. These are just some of the ways individuals and communities of different religions have come together based on a shared understanding of right and wrong.

Unfortunately, the world still does not quite know how interfaith engagement is delivering results. Most of the time, extraordinary results are seen locally. Illinois in the United States used to be in a lowly 48th position among the states when it came to the healthcare system. Despite all of the talk of its dirty politics, today it is the second best state when it comes to healthcare. This was just one of the achievements of over 80

churches, mosques, and synagogues who responded to the call of Cardinal Joseph Bernardin in the form of the United Power for Action and Justice community organizing group. Massachusetts, which leads the nation in healthcare, had a similar interfaith engagement story behind it. It would be worth making a documentary about such successes; yet the interfaith community is still not media savvy and needs to work on publicising its extraordinary accomplishments.

The world today is very different from when the Declaration toward a Global Ethic was adopted. We now have seven billion people on the planet, almost 1.5 billion more than in1993. Over the last ten years, human interconnectedness has been transformed dramatically by technology. While half of India still goes to sleep hungry, 50 percent of Indians are now connected by cell phones. About 420 million Chinese spend two billion hours weekly on the internet today.

The internet has existed since the 1960s. The web, however, was just an unknown baby in 1993 when we signed the Declaration. With Google indexing about a trillion web pages today, the world of information has been transformed.

The interfaith movement has so far relied on the direct human touch in dialogue and engagement, which is the core of human civilisation. But can the impact of the interfaith movement be greater if it adopts social media, adding virtual dialogues to physical dialogues and virtual engagements to on-the-ground engagements?

Technology affords us a tremendous opportunity to develop a global ethic, cutting across limits of space and even time to connect with others, those we know and those we do not. It allows us to speed up the process of sharing our values, agreeing to disagree, and building the mutual trust and appreciation that are so critical to dialogue.

Can the interfaith movement improve social cohesion? Societies in the USA and Europe are under tremendous pressure when it comes to dealing with rising diversity and the fear of demographic shifts. They

are desperately seeking effective ways to turn individuals within their borders who hail from almost every part of the globe into successful and productive citizens.

Can the interfaith movement have a higher impact on guiding institutions, especially governments? Violence by nation states has killed and maimed more people in human history than all of the crusades and jihads put together. Religions are a force for good by and large. It is nationalism and nation states that have been the real killers, not religions.

Hans Küng's maxim, 'There will be no peace on earth unless there is peace among the religions', serves the great purpose of encouraging interreligious peace and harmony. However, peace on earth will require the interfaith movement and the religious leaders who are convinced of the futility of violence to devote more resources to influencing nation states to prevent wars. With due apologies to Dr Küng, I would rephrase his statement to state this concern: 'There will be peace on earth when the world's religions are able to prevent nation states from going to war.'

Although the words 'violence' and 'non-violence' are part of the Declaration, it does not even utter the word 'war'. Perhaps this is because the assumed target audience is individuals. However, governments cannot be excluded from this declaration: 'We commit ourselves to a culture of non-violence, respect, justice, and peace. We shall not oppress, injure, torture, or kill other human beings, forsaking violence as a means of settling differences.'

We simply cannot afford to wait until 'the consciousness of individuals is changed first', as the Declaration affirms. A continued discussion of universal ethics enshrined in specific faiths and traditions, as well as the engagement of faith communities with each other to exert influence on guiding institutions, is our best option to create a better world, as we acknowledge, with the Declaration, that '[w]e are interde-

pendent' and that '[e]ach of us depends on the well-being of the whole...'

.

INTRODUCTION

Ariane Hentsch Cisneros/ Shanta Premawardhana

At least in part because of the presumption that ethics and religion are interconnected, initiatives towards a global ethic have often been associated with the interfaith movement. The first Parliament of the World's Religions in 1893, which signalled the beginning of the modern interfaith movement, and subsequent parliaments have been closely linked with attempts to formulate a global ethic. The most visible of these initiatives took place at the 1993 parliament, when the Swiss theologian Hans Küng was commissioned to write a 'Declaration toward a Global Ethic', which, despite objections, was adopted by the Parliament's participants.

Critiques addressed to Küng's Declaration point to its abstract and hortatory aspect, its minimalist approach, and its bias towards Western, liberal, empirico-rationalistic presuppositions.[1] To the Western eye, the four commitments outlined in the Declaration, namely, the commitments to non-violence and reverence for life (art. 5-6), to fairness and a just economic order (art. 7-9), to truthfulness and tolerance (art. 10-11), and to a culture of partnership and equal rights of men and women (art. 12-

[1] See for instance Shingleton, Bradley, "In Search of Common Ground. The Role of a Global Ethic in Inter-Religious Dialogue", on www.carnegiecouncil.org/resources/ethics_online/0023.html, accessed November 2010.

13), seem indeed basic and non-controversial. Yet each of these commitments has faced and still faces major challenges.

For example, advocating non-violence can be interpreted, in particular by those suffering post-colonialist or neo-imperialistic aggression, as a ploy by the oppressive powers to perpetuate the oppression. Historically, the violence of state-generated aggression and the oppression of unjust structures have remained largely unaddressed, whereas a call to non-violence has been repeatedly addressed to those who agitate for change. While the truism that power does not voluntarily concede is widely acknowledged, when non-violent agitations prove unproductive and agitators conclude that the only way to institute meaningful change is to engage in violent actions, they are called to be non-violent. Articulated mostly in non-Western contexts, such arguments give justice precedence over non-violence.

Similarly, the fourth commitment, which from a liberal standpoint seems the easiest to accept, is among the most contentious, since the interpretation of equal rights and partnership between men and women vary widely in different cultures and religions. Even in Western contexts there are widely divergent opinions. For example, in Christian contexts, scholars insist that the biblical injunction ‘Wives, be subject to your husbands’ (Ephesians 5:22) is not to be taken literally or in isolation. The wider context, they remind us, is one in which Christians are called to ‘be subject to each other out of reverence for Christ’ (Ephesians 5:21). Yet, many Christians, including women, as well as many traditional religious communities, will take this injunction literally and in isolation and strongly disagree with the sentiment expressed in the fourth commitment of the Declaration.

Similar charges are pressed against the most famous of the ethical codes with a global horizon: the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Whose ethics will win the day, ask the critics, and to whose values will we be held accountable? How will the concerns of our own lo-

cal or contextual ethics be satisfied in such global formulations? Is the project of global ethics nothing but an imperial project designed to impose the values of those in power?

Yet, in these days of rampant globalisation, most of us realise that we cannot do without global ethics and that we must find ways to both respect and listen deeply to the varied voices representing individual contexts and their inherent values. Today, the best answers to the serious ethical questions, particularly those sought by our globalised, technology-driven, war-weary and increasingly up-rooted and anxious contemporary societies, can be found only in the interaction and dialogue between the varied contextual expressions of values. This book is about creating the space for such a conversation.

It has also been argued that religions can sometimes be a hindrance to the development of ethics. Such critiques point out that religious communities themselves have not adequately lived up to their own ethical commitments and that the ethical impetus comes out of a human impulse rather than a religious one. Yet many, perhaps most initiatives towards global ethics, have come from religious sources and particularly from those who engage in interreligious dialogue.

The contributors to this book agree on two assertions: first, that while contextual ethics are important, a global ethic is also necessary; and second, that religions have a vital role to play in determining a global ethic. The most critical question about the acceptability of a global ethic, though, is the methodology used to arrive at such a mutual expression. This very question was in the forefront of the conversation when Geneva-based Globethics.net brought together some sixty ethicists from around the world in Nairobi in January 2009 for a conference entitled ‘Care and Compassion: Methodologies in Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions’. The conference yielded significant conversations on the methodologies of interreligious dialogue and global ethics, resulting in the present volume. Apart from the essays, the volume in-

cludes reports of the multi-disciplinary and 'multi-methodological' exchanges that took place within the five workgroups online both before and at the conference, as well as the resulting Globethics.net Principles on Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions.

The methodological options required that no papers be presented at the conference, but that a variety of means of expression be used to suit every culture present at the conference. With the exception of a few reprints that illuminate the theme, the present essays were written following the conference, reflecting the learnings from that experience and as inductive exercises. We editors were therefore pleased to discover some interesting similarities in approach, revealing the trends we identify below.

A first group of texts suggest a variety of *interreligious hermeneutics rooted in religious traditions*, which, if we take for granted that the interfaith, intercultural encounter must be grounded in one's identity and worldview, is self-explanatory. Syafa'atun Almirzanah highlights how Sufi hermeneutics – here, Ibn al-`Arabi's – calls for respect for an infinity of meanings, all of them of divine origin, in the interpretation of scriptures or dogma. The realisation that a 'conviction – however deep it may be – does not restrict or exhaust in any way the potential meaning of [sacred] texts', is of 'particular relevance to dialogue', writes Almirzanah. According to her, there are two ways the reader can imitate the Sufi master when interpreting scriptures: by 'delving as deeply as possible into all the contextual resources' (textual and historical), and by valuing religious experience.

From a Christian standpoint, Reinhold Bernhardt argues that compassion serves both as a hermeneutics of dialogue and as a response to the needs of others. He also argues that compassion must be informed by an ethic of dialogue. 'Compassion and dialogue are two foci of an ellipse,' he claims, 'and though tension may arise between them, they actually belong together'.

Padmasiri de Silva, in his essay on contemplation in the classroom, refers to Buddhism as an ethical path adaptable to various contexts. Buddhist contemplation (understood in Western languages as meditation) is an eminently subjective language that, because it frees us from contingent thought patterns, appears as a universal language that empowers us 'to handle effectively the apparent contradictions and paradoxes in life' across ethnic, religious, and cultural boundaries.

The last author in this trend, Parichart Suwanbubbha, argues that the Buddhist criteria of ethics of values, namely the triad of skilful intention, skilful means, and skilful end, are a challenge to the expectedly uniform results of interreligious dialogue on ethics, in that they welcome a 'diversity of conviction' coupled with possible and different normative values in different religious ethics. In that sense, Suwanbubbha's paper examines how Buddhist values may suitably support ground rules for interreligious dialogue on ethics.

As the reader will discover, nearly half the essays take a *clear option on the transcendental or on the holistic* as foundation of ethics or of a dialogue on ethics, thus evoking the potential for a spiritual posture in the field of ethics and interfaith ethics in particular. Gerhold Becker, for instance, contends that to avoid the pitfalls of both moral relativism and cultural incompatibility in the search for global ethics, we need to 'acknowledge the normative roles of culturally and religiously based moralities but extend the search […] to their foundations in order to discover there the postulated common core of humanity's moral experience that would still be preserved – albeit to different degrees – in the culturally based moralities'. In other words, to make sense both in the global and local contexts, ethics shared by East and West need to remain in close connection with the deep human experience that is reflected in religions and cultures.

Taking Albert Schweitzer's *docta ignorancia* as starting point, Pier Cesare Bori formulates a mystical ethics that grounds ethical behaviour

in the experience of communion. 'In the discovery of the shared belonging of all beings', he writes, 'is born respect for life, or rather, the "Ehrfurcht", veneration towards life.... From the meeting and from communion derives the drive to action: the being in communion and "pity", the "Mitleiden", become commitment to protect and promote life.'

De Silva, in the article we already mentioned, observes that both normative ethics and metaethics have failed to address questions raised by complex ethnic and religious contexts and thus advocates for a dialogical ethics as a necessary alternative. Taking leave of the logical-rational stance of the Western-born normative and metaethics, de Silva explores the avenues of a 'contemplative ethics' as a versatile language to guide us on the 'rough road' across ethnic, religious and cultural boundaries.

Yehezkel Landau, in his brief description of the advanced Building Abrahamic Partnerships training he crafted and of the skills needed for professional interfaith leadership, advocates for a holistic approach to dialogue, 'engaging head and heart and gut' in order to confront 'the hurt and the fear which we all carry'. Enabled by mutual trust, this engagement includes aesthetic and ritualistic dimensions, and 'distinct pedagogical styles or modes', including 'elicitive facilitation' that allows drawing forth from the group its collective wisdom on a specific subject.

John d'Arcy May, in trying to explain the rampant suspicion in official religious bodies, theology faculties and religious study department towards interfaith dialogue, stresses the need to reflect on the 'hermeneutics of dialogue', that is, what we do in general when we engage in dialogue. In particular, he refers to the question of how we manage our contradictory drives – on the one hand, to affirm our own religious identity and, on the other hand, to merge with the other's in our search for true religious understanding. May's solution to the dilemma is unequivocal: ultimately, 'reliable knowledge of religions, one's own and

others', is intersubjective', and the only possible locus of this intersubjectivity is transcendent: dialogue, or 'interreligious communication' as May coins it, is indeed an 'ethical reality' that 'offers us a unique opportunity to "practise transcendence" by moving beyond the symbolisms and institutions which mediate transcendence to us in our own tradition […], thereby relativising them while adhering to the judgement of religious truth rooted in transcendence itself'.

In the last essay in this trend, Maricel Mena López, offers a plea for an ecofeminist approach to an ethic of globalisation, insisting that 'being human' in one's interrelatedness with the earth and with the cosmos calls for care and compassion for those sidelined and subdued by patriarchal and empirico-rational empires. How a system treats women's bodies, emotions, and daily lives, but also the ancestors and nature – in short, human societies' most vulnerable components – is a clear indicator of its worth. Only by taking their well-being into account will globalisation show a human face, turned towards 'progress' in the best sense.

Another group of essays provide African and Latin American reflections rooted in *a hermeneutic that emerged in reaction to neo-imperial power struggles*. This is a theme in Mena Lopez's analysis of the impact of the neo-liberal globalisation on native Latin American populations, especially on women, ethnic and sexual-orientation minorities, and immigrants in general. She also proposes how to reconcile progress and compassion from an intercultural, feminist and ecological perspective.

In his essay on an effective dialogue involving religion and culture, Jesse Mugambi denounces the essentially imperialistic (when not blatantly missionary) motive behind the interreligious endeavour in its current form, an endeavour deemed as necessary only by its Western initiators and that hardly escapes political stakes as it rises up on the international agenda. Interreligious dialogue, if it should become an efficient tool of peace-building, should present all signs of symmetry between the parties, writes Mugambi: dialogue should include the vernacular in the

languages of exchange, and be based on participants' mutual respect and mutual appreciation.

Sending another liberationist call, Francisco Ortega offers a detailed exploration of how the perception of alterity has impacted our understanding of history, especially as the global history written from an Eurocentric perspective has produced regional identities as either agents or products of history (the 'subalterns'). Understanding of the 'other' then appears as a product of the historical locus of interpretation and escapes any attempt to a 'grand unified' global ethics. For Ortega, thus, it is crucial to 'reground the work of interpretation in a poetics of place', especially in the view of the 'failure of metanarratives', in order to bring about 'a culture of interpretation capable and conscious of its local and global responsibilities'. This work, that Ortega grounds at the confluence of contemporary continental hermeneutics, postcolonial theory, and a Latin American contestatory critique, opens on the development of a hermeneutics of subalternity that takes into account 'the historical conditions that produce subalternity while attempting to give an account of the historical agency exerted by subalterns'.

Lastly, we find in this volume various stances on the *mutual challenge of modernism and traditionalism*, starting with the already-mentioned essay by Becker, who, in his search to clear the path to a sound method for global ethics, grounds his reflection on two well-known test cases for global ethics, the Asian-values debate and bioethics. These show the prevalent suspicion in East Asia of 'the aggressive promotion of a global human rights legislation based on a set of allegedly Western values' and the resistance of moral philosophers from East Asia against the universal validity and meaningful application within the socio-cultural context of Asian societies of the heavily Western dominant version of bioethics. What Becker seeks to show in the last analysis is that a universal sense of morality and criticism must prevail

over traditions and mores, allowing for universality and progress in a society's set of values.

In his attempt to root modern business ethics in African traditional values, Obiora Ike claims that there is an African business ethics, the challenge of which is to rediscover traditional African values, diffuse but still operative in various communities throughout the continent, and apply them to modern Africa. His article shows how such issues fit into, or relate to many modern categories of Western philosophical paradigms.

Mugambi, in his reflection on 'how theology and religion should constructively relate with science and technology', highlights how the question relates specifically to the project of the social reconstruction of Africa. Imported from the Western positivist approach to organised knowledge, the divorce of science and technology from religion, ethics and aesthetics in Africa has led to what Mugambi calls the breakdown of sanctions that religion used to impose on anti-human adventures in knowledge and experimentation. Referring to Ali Mazrui's 'twin strategies of looking inward to Africa's own ancestry and culture, and looking outward to the wider world at large', Mugambi shows how this synthesis can be applied to a wide a range of domains, from production design to biblical hermeneutics, where its cultivation will show great potential for shaping the process of Africa's social reconstruction.

Finally, John Raymaker, in his essay on the challenge of global ethics in a secular world, contends that a faith-belief distinction is helpful in dialoguing ethically with atheists and secularists to the extent they are committed to a tolerant openness of other views. Bernard Lonergan with his methodology and Gibson Winter with his social ethics have laid foundations for a dialogue among ethicists on global ethics. The essay illustrates the challenges of a religious global ethics in an increasingly secularised world with some examples taken from Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Islamic sources.

The book ends with Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann's call for global ethics. This contribution by the President of the 63rd United Nations General Assembly (2008-2009) differs from the other essays in operating simultaneously at various levels of discussion and thus. It is at the same time theoretical ('ethics are either global or they are not ethics'), hermeneutical ('a minimum ethos on the basis of multicultural exchange and the philosophical and religious traditions of peoples'), strategic ('we must take collective short- and medium-term action... to set a foundation for new forms of sustainable living'), and normative (respect, care, responsibility, and cooperation must keep 'the common good of humanity and the Earth' as 'a dynamic reality'). Its challenge, we believe, provides a fitting conclusion to the book.

In a way, this volume is paradoxical as it does the very thing it set out to criticise, namely, inviting partners in dialogue to share their views and values using a single methodology, following here the quite strict rules of academic expression and cognition. Still, this volume offers a platform to various philosophical, religious, cultural and spiritual perspectives on the subject, which in essence was the objective. In the final analysis, a particularly exciting feature of this book is that the trends identified provide programmatic guidelines for the global ethics project.

We have indeed given here indications of the current reflection on the hermeneutics of dialogue on ethics, with an attempt to formulate in a decentralised manner priorities for future implementation of this dialogue. These include using our own religious resources to foster dialogue on ethics, searching for a solution to moral diversity taking into account the transcendental and/or the holistic, dealing with the deep suffering in the wake of colonisation and in the midst of neo-imperialism, and addressing the mutual challenges of traditionalism and modernism.

These priorities may not come as a surprise, and truly, it will be reassuring if they do not; they nonetheless appear as necessary steps on the path to true interfaith understanding and to the building of genuine trust

among the peoples of the world. We hope that the present contribution will help raise awareness of this necessity.

We must thank here Jayendra Soni from the University of Marburg, and John A. Raymaker from the Global Ministries University, both in Germany, for their invaluable editorial work on the articles by Obiora Ike, Maricel Mena López, Jesse Mugambi (on religion and science), John A. Raymaker, and Parichart Suwanbubbha, as well as on those by Ariane Hentsch Cisneros, Shanta Premawardhana and Sumner B. Twiss to be published in the June 2011 issue of the *Journal of Religious Ethics*.

Geneva, March 2011
Ariane Hentsch Cisneros / Shanta Premawardhana, editors

1

GLOBETHICS.NET PRINCIPLES ON SHARING VALUES ACROSS CULTURES AND RELIGIONS[1]

1. Introduction

'Care and Compassion. Sharing Values across Cultures and Religions' was the theme of the Third International Conference of Globethics.net, which took place on 25-29 January 2009 in Nairobi. About sixty ethicists, religious scholars and economists from eighteen countries on five continents gathered for one week. Participants invested significant time and energy on determining a methodology for sharing values across cultures and religions. While most agreed that religion can substantially contribute to global ethics, some felt that religion is itself a problem. However, since many conflicts are in some way related to religious differences, the organisers felt that special attention needed to be given to religions.

Held in Kenya, the conference acknowledged the need to view the issues from the African perspective. The report presented by the group working on the African perspective stated that one cannot talk about Af-

[1] A draft of this text was adopted at the Globethics.net International Conference 25-29 January 2009 in Nairobi. It was drafted and revised by Dr Shanta Premawardhana, Director, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation at the World Council of Churches, and by Prof. Dr Christoph Stückelberger, Founder and Executive Director, Globethics.net, on the basis of the conference group work reports.

rican values without talking about religion. The group also feared that there is a tendency to view the questions of global ethics through the eyes of Western intellectual traditions and that this should not be the norm.

There are different types of interreligious and intercultural dialogues in ethics. Among them are grassroots dialogues, institutional dialogues and academic dialogues – which all have specific objectives and methodologies.

A large part of the work in preparation of and during the conference was done in five work groups: 'Defining Global Ethics', 'Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics', 'Integrating Means and Methods of Sharing Values, in a Human-to-Human Approach', 'Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation' and 'Sharing Values in the Kenyan and East African Contexts'. All but the first used care and compassion as a support theme and as core values. Participants expressed the hope that the guidelines drawn from the discussions would be helpful to both religious and non-religious people who engage in dialogue on values.

This report contains areas of general consensus between the conference participants, even if in some areas that consensus was somewhat unstable.

2. Global and contextual ethics

Global ethics is an inclusive approach to common binding values, guiding principles, personal attitudes and common action across cultures, religions, political and economic systems and ideologies. Global ethics is grounded in the ethical recognition of inalienable human dignity, freedom of decision, personal and social responsibility and justice. Global ethics acknowledges the interdependence of all human and non-human beings and extends the basic moral attitudes of care and compas-

sion to our world. Global ethics identifies transboundary problems and contributes to their solution.

Global ethics promotes public awareness of those fundamental values and principles. They are the foundation on which the universal consensus on human rights is built. Human rights are the most tangible and legally binding expression of this ethical vision. Global ethics fosters trust among human beings and strengthens caring and action for global environmental protection.

Contextual ethics takes seriously the identity of people and institutions in their local, cultural, religious, economic and political contexts. Global ethics needs to be local and contextual in order to have an impact on individual action and social structures. On the other hand, contextual ethics becomes isolationist if it remains local and is not linked to global ethics. Contextual ethics appreciates and respects diversity in its different forms as social, political, cultural, religious, and bio-diversity. There is an enormous richness in diversity. It may decrease vulnerability and be a source of sustainability. Contextual ethics contributes to global ethics. Together they can lead to unity in diversity. All cultures and religions can contribute to global values. For example, the contribution of African values to global values includes the viewpoint that all of reality is a continuum, from the spiritual to the human to fauna, flora, and the inanimate world. Therefore, injuring nature is unethical. This implies responsibilities towards non-human living beings and the inanimate universe as well as the continuum between generations that have gone before and that come after us.

Global and contextual ethics are two poles that challenge each other and inseparably belong together. Global and contextual ethics have to consider power structures. Global ethics can be abused for domination over other cultures, religions and values. Contextual ethics can be abused to defend traditional privileges or power. On a global as well as on a local level, ‘power over others’ tends to be oppressive, ‘power with

and for others' tends to be empowering and nurturing. Power as 'power from' (e.g. power from God, from the people through election) can be abused to justify oppressive power. It can also be used responsibly as an empowering power, serving the needs of the needy and thus responding to the origin of power.

3. Values and norms

Global and contextual ethics are based on values and norms. Values are fundamental, long-term benchmarks of orientation, rooted in and justified by specific worldviews. Norms are mid-term applications of values to specific contexts.

Some values such as the golden rule and virtues such as honesty are commonly accepted across cultures and religions. Values in general have religious and non-religious justifications and origins. Agreeing on values that are common for humankind and values and norms that may be different in specific contexts requires dialogue across cultures and religions. When common values can be affirmed through dialogue, they provide a foundation from which communities can engage in common action towards conflict resolution, reconciliation and peace.

This work is particularly urgent at times of conflict and violence, but more difficult to accomplish once a conflict has already started. Therefore, it is best if dialogues are set up and functioning before a conflict occurs; firstly for sharing values that provide a foundation, and secondly for engaging in common action.

Below are examples of values that are shared across religions and cultures:

Care and compassion is the ability for empathy, respect and support of the other. It leads to solidarity.

All religions emphasise the centrality of care and compassion.

Sharing leads to, enables, and sustains relationships between human beings and strengthens communities. Sharing power leads to a responsible, community-oriented use of power.

Participation, for example in decision-making, is an expression of respecting human dignity and strengthening communities in an inclusive way. Sharing values in dialogue is a participatory process.

Justice or equity is based on the inalienable human dignity of every human being and their equality. Justice grows when people cultivate a deep respect towards each other. This is expressed in the golden rule of mutuality and reciprocity as the basic norm of equity: 'Do to others as you would have them do to you.' It grounds solidarity and fairness. All known religious traditions commend some version of the golden rule to their followers, the operation of which is based on reciprocity, empathy, enlightened self-interest, and some notion of moral autonomy, and which is used to facilitate cooperation not only within the in-group but also between members of that group, strangers and all human beings.

Peace is the condition of justice and, at the same time, its fruit. Aiming at peace that leads also to security is a motivation for and a goal of sharing values.

Reconciliation is the healing power that enables the overcoming of past and present offences, violations and conflict, and the rebuilding of relations and communities.

Responsibility is accountability for one's own actions. The level of responsibility has to correspond to the level of power, capacity and capability. Those with more resources bear greater responsibility for resolving problems.

The participants affirmed that there are significant differences in the interpretation of values and value systems. Sometimes these differences are expressions of distortion and instrumentalisation, but at other times they are expressions of real differences. Accordingly, differences have to be treated in different ways.

4. Principles for sharing values in transformative dialogues

4.1 Goals and forms of sharing values in dialogues

Sharing values can be done in various forms, such as in formal inter-religious and intercultural dialogues, research partnership projects and common action. Sharing of values also happens informally in daily life as people relate with each other in neighbourhoods, schools, work places, and sporting and cultural events. In such venues, neighbours, friends and colleagues may explore the deeper meanings in the fortunes and misfortunes of their day-to-day life or engage with each other in common action. Sometimes, the opening of houses of worship to other religious communities for exposure visits or for their use (as appropriate) also facilitates the sharing of values.

One specific form of such sharing is through formal dialogue. There are many forms of interaction called dialogue – and not all are seen as true dialogue – for example: In a learning dialogue, participants want to learn from each other. A testimonial dialogue aims at presenting one's own position and persuading the other to accept it. The negotiating dialogue aims at reaching an agreement. The public relations dialogue is just window dressing. The action-oriented dialogue looks towards sharing through common action. Such sharing can be most fruitful when the dialogue is intended to be transformative.

Transformative dialogue nudges or even prods and pushes participants beyond where they are to a new, richer and more inclusive understanding of who they are and what they should do. In order to have a fruitful transformative dialogue on sharing global and contextual values, the following principles are recommended:

4.2 Personal attitudes in transformative dialogues

Honesty: People come to the dialogue table with varied motivations. Some also bring their fears and prejudices. The transformative nature of the dialogue will depend to a significant extent on the ability of partici-

pants to be honest with each other. Religious disciplines and personal reflections are often helpful means for each participant to prepare themselves for honest engagement.

Deep listening: Listening is a discipline that most people need to cultivate. The desire to have one's voice heard in coherent and clever expressions makes many to start thinking about what to say next while the other is still speaking, rather than carefully listening. Deep listening also requires one to listen not just to the words that are spoken but to emotions that are communicated non-verbally and to implicit values that are not expressed. Deep listening also requires one to be aware of the emotional triggers in one's own mind and have strong handles to keep from being swayed by them.

Walking in the other's shoes: The golden rule of reciprocity means to put oneself in someone else's place and to listen at some depth to the motivations and values of the other by walking in the other's shoes for a while.

Suspending judgment: Evaluating what the others communicate against our own values, we make judgments all the time. Transformative dialogue requires the conviction that unless one has walked in the other's shoes or at least listened at some depth, one cannot judge. Proper judgments are necessary for transformative dialogue. However, until the dialogue matures to the stage where participants are able to understand those values, it is necessary to suspend judgment.

Appreciating others' beliefs and values: It is necessary to come to a dialogue with a curiosity to appreciate and learn the beliefs and values of the dialogue partners and not with a motivation to debunk the beliefs and values of others. An important hallmark of transformative dialogue is that one participates hoping to learn and be enriched by the beliefs and values of the other.

Being self-critical of one's own beliefs: One does not come to dialogue expecting to prove that one's beliefs, values or tradition are right

and true. Instead one comes to dialogue ready to be critical of one's own beliefs, values and tradition. It is easy to be self-critical among one's co-religionists. The real strength of the dialogue and its transformative nature is largely based on the ability and willingness of participants to be self-critical of their own beliefs, values and tradition in the presence of those from other traditions.

Acting in openness and transparency: Dialogue is transformative when trust is established between participants and the values of openness and transparency are shared. The personal attitudes mentioned above and the principles of organising are helpful in achieving this.

4.3 Organising a transformative dialogue

Cultivating strong personal relationships is a necessary first step to break through stereotypes and prejudices that colour our casual relationships. Strong personal relationships help the conversations not only to be cordial, but also allow participants to take greater risks towards honest interactions.

Establishing an innovative methodology of preparation: Acknowledging that the person, organisation or religious institution that initiates and organises the dialogue often has the power to determine its outcome, an extra methodological step of creating an ad-hoc bilateral or multilateral organising committee is recommended. The ad-hoc organising committee will agree on goals, expectations and methodologies, raise funds, set the agenda, agree on the list of invitees, locate a common space and create a safe environment for dialogue to take place. The way a dialogue is organised is itself an expression of ethical values such as equity and participation.

Creating a safe zone: Despite the best attempts to create a safe zone, participants may find addressing controversial issues such as religious beliefs and values, race relations or political and economic prerogatives too threatening. Facilitators trained in group processes and

skilled in the discipline of dialogue can steer the dialogue in ways that allows participants to take risks in the group.

Interrogating self-understanding: It is important that participants interrogate their own self-understanding prior to engaging in dialogue. Participants in dialogues must be rooted in their traditions in order to be authentic. Such rootedness requires thorough reflections on one's own self-understanding.

Exploring the self-understanding of the other: It is not unusual for participants to bring certain stereotypes and prejudices to the dialogue table. In order to get beyond this, it is important that participants explore the self-understanding of the other and seek to build trust.

Providing adequate time and space: Having multiple stakeholders also requires participatory interaction and decision-making. This means providing adequate time and space for participation by all parties, although it is important to reach prior agreement about how much time each person gets. It also means instituting decision-making methods that do not create an environment that excludes those who lost in a vote. Methods that help participants reach a consensus are preferable for transformative dialogue.

Organise gender-diverse dialogues: Unless it is specifically determined that the dialogue be organised as a women's group or a men's group, it is important that dialogues are intentionally gender-diverse. The problem is particularly acute when formal dialogues of religious leaders are convened, since most religious leaders, even in today's world, are men. This invariably means that the voices of women, who have significant experience and expertise in dialogue, are lost. Today, a formal dialogue event that is not gender-diverse does not have credibility.

Engaging between religious and non-religious ethics: Sharing values is not an end in itself but an opportunity to engage with each other in ethical behaviour and action. Insight from the discipline of ethics there-

fore is useful. However, on this question a dialogue between secular ethicists and religious ethicists must be encouraged. Religious ethicists find their ethical reflection rooted in religion. Some secular ethicists are of the opinion that religion is a problem for ethics, rather than a help. The profundity of today's ethical dilemmas requires that both groups engage with each other, especially when global challenges such as climate justice have to be solved engaging all different worldviews.

4.4 Assuring that the dialogue is transformative

Looking at different identities: Such exploration will reveal the several identities that each participant brings to the table. Some identities are held forcefully or are solid while other identities are held lightly or are porous. In interreligious dialogue, for example, there is a tendency to look at participants only as religious. While that identity may be an obstacle to building trust, relating to the others through their other identities, whether ethnic, national, political, economic, or role in the family, can help create an opportunity for building trust.

Clarifying levels of power: In any group, multiple levels of power are present. They are often sensed by the participants but are rarely acknowledged. Acknowledging and clarifying the various levels of power involved will help the dialogue to move to its transformative level.

Keeping each other accountable: Accountability for the commitments that participants make to each other is very important to the success of transformative dialogue. Since accountability often causes tension to arise in the group, participants don't often keep each other accountable. It is necessary that the participants understand tension as useful to the group process since it can help the dialogue reach its transformative goal.

Including contexts: No dialogue should be divorced from its context. Therefore a transformative dialogue must include reflections on the political, economic and other questions that arise from the contexts in which the dialogue partners live. For example, the dialogue must take in

to account, as a part of its content, histories, especially of oppression, while not being entrapped or circumscribed by them.

Interpreting from the others' centre: While participants must be rooted in their own interpretive centre, they must be careful not to interpret the others' values from the perspective of that centre, but rather from the perspective of the others' interpretive centre. This requires each participant to stand lightly and to move back and forth between centres.

Starting cooperative action: Transformative dialogue does not only mean conversation but conversation that leads to cooperative action: diapraxis. Such diapraxis often provides another set of opportunities for sharing values for transformation.

Gaining new insights: A sign of a successful transformative dialogue is that new insights emerge from the group. These insights, different from the values or beliefs participants have already shared, appear as new insights that enrich each participant. Attentiveness to this emerging reality is necessary for transformative dialogue.

Open-ended and hopeful, such dialogues are contextually sensitive and have the greatest potential for undergirding and sustaining the development and education of a global ethics of responsibility. They also provide opportunities for problems to be addressed cooperatively, equitably and urgently.

4.5 Other means of sharing values

There are means of sharing values other than formal dialogues, involving a range of activities far beyond the verbal (spoken or written language). Music, the visual arts, touch, common meals, etc. can also be understood as meaning-bearing 'languages'.

Art (music, visual arts, and dance) can be used to understand values attached to a context as well as the values behind the intention of the artist; these values give expression to pieces of music, literature, film, theatre, dance, comedy, humour and irony, stories and folklore. In time, these expressions themselves become the carriers of these values. Insti-

tutions can engage artists-in-residence to create such expressions based on shared values, as well as to unveil the values that are embedded in older pieces. This creates new and improved opportunities to teach the community to share values.

Marriages across cultures and religions provide another opportunity to share values. An intercultural or interreligious couple will need to negotiate a new set of values as they set up their family and raise children. It is important that educational and religious institutions become more intentional about teaching those about to enter into such marriages the tools for sharing values.

Engaging in neighbourhood dialogues: Many formal dialogues bring religious, political or economic leaders to the table. While such dialogues are useful, some of the best dialogues and many transforming experiences take place in local neighbourhoods where neighbours gather to talk about their common concerns in order to find meaning or agree on common actions. It is important to privilege the participation from below by engaging the participants at the grassroots so that their voices are lifted up and heard both by the leaders and by the general public.

2

IBN AL-`ARABI'S SUFI HERMENEUTICS. APPLICATIONS TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Syafa'atun Almirzanah, Indonesia

1. Ibn al-`Arabi's life

Ibn al-`Arabi, whose full name is Muhammad b. Ali b. Muhammad b. al-`Arabi al-Ta`i al-Hatimi, is acclaimed as one of the greatest Sufi masters of all time. By all informed accounts, he was 'a towering figure in human spirituality'[1] and thus came to bear the *laqab* or honorific epithet of *al-shaykh al-akbar* or 'the Greatest Master'. He was born on 27 July 1165/17 Ramadan 560, or, according to other sources, 6 August/27 Ramadan,[2] in the beautiful township of Murcia, inland from the Medi-

[1] Hirtenstein, Stephen, *The Unlimited Merciful. The Spiritual Life and Thought of Ibn `Arabi*, Oxford: Anqa Publishing, 1999, ix.

[2] Khalil ibn Aybak Safadi, *al-Wafi bi al-Wafayat*, Wiesbaden, 1966, Vol. 4, 178. See also Al-Muhadarat, I: 34, Cairo, 1906, where Ibn al-`Arabi said: 'I was born in Murcia when it was under sultan Abi `Abd Allah Muhammad ibn Mardanish's reign, in Andalus', cited in Asín Palacios, Miguel, *Ibn al-`Arabi, hayatuhu wa-madhhabuh*, transl. al-Isbaniyah `Abd al-Rahsan Badawi, Cairo: Maktabat al-Anjlu al-Misriyah, 1965 (transl. of *El Islam cristianizado. Estudio del sufismo a través de las obras de Abenárabi de Murcia*, Madrid: Editorial Plutarco, 1931).

terranean Costa Blanca between Valencia and Almeria, in the *qiblah* of Andalus, at the beginning of the Almohad reign. His father exercised military duties in the service of Ibn Mardanish,[3] ex-Christian warlord.

Ibn al-`Arabi's family was related to one of the oldest, noblest and most pious[4] Arab lineages in Spain of the time – the lineage of the Banu Ta`i. Ibn al-`Arabi himself states, 'I am al-`Arabi al-Hatimi, the brother of magnanimity; in nobility we possess glory, ancient and renowned.'[5] As asserted by Addas, Ibn al-`Arabi's family belonged to the *khassa* of his society, meaning the cultural 'elite' that consisted of the ruling class and the highest officials in the Andalusian administration and army.[6]

What is interesting about Ibn al-`Arabi's foray into Sufism is the nature of the narrative material we have about his experiences. Not only are they decidedly hagiographical, as one might suspect, but they are auto-hagiographical. In other words, the large percentage of the material at the centre of Ibn al-`Arabi's hagiographical portrait comes from the pen of the master himself. The significance of this is not entirely clear. One might imagine, for example, that such attestations about oneself might bring more scorn and derision than admiration and adulation. If so, it would not be the first time that a Sufi has sought to engender the scorn of potential admirers. Indeed, the entire tradition of the Malamatiyya is based on the performance of antinomian acts as an effective

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[3] Muh. B. Sa'd b. Muh. B. Ahmad Ibn Mardanish.

[4] Ibn al-`Arabi has at least two uncles who were on the Path (Zahid). Ibn al-`Arabi said in Futuhat, 'One of my family members who was *zahid*, or who withdrew from the world was from Tunis. He used to stay in the mosque praying for God and his tomb was a place for *ziarah* (visit).' See Ibn al-`Arabi, *al-Futuhat al-Makkiya II*, Vol. 12 (1989), Cairo: `Uthman Ismail Yahya, al-Hay'at al-Misriyat al-`Amma li al-Kitab, 1972- (hereafter Fut.)

[5] Ibn al-`Arabi, *al-Diwan al-akbar*, Cairo: Bulaq, 1271H, 47, cited in: Addas, Claude, *Ibn `Arabi ou la quête du soufre rouge* (*Quest for the Red Sulphur. The Life of Ibn `Arabi*), transl. Peter Kingsley, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 1993 (hereafter abbreviated as QRS), 17.

[6] See Fut. I, 506, 588-9 cited in: Claude Addas, *Ibn `Arabi. The Voyage of No Return*, Cambridge: Islamic Texts Society, 2000, 11-12 (hereafter abbreviated as VNR); see also QRS, 48-49.

means of acquiring the public derision necessary to keep the ego (i.e., *nafs*) under tight control. At the same time, these accounts are celebrated and carefully preserved for posterity. Perhaps Ibn al-`Arabi's auto-hagiography is a way of grounding the admiration for the master among those who recognise his gifts and are open to his teachings, while simultaneously working to dismiss those who are closed to what he has to offer. In any case it is also clear that the genre of auto-hagiography that we find in the writings of Ibn al-`Arabi seems closely linked with the fact that Ibn al-`Arabi understands all of his writings, not to be the product of his own isolated consciousness, but rather as revelations that he receives in visions and for which he cannot take any ultimate credit. Henry Corbin argues that this is all part of Ibn al-`Arabi's imaginal[7] epistemology according to which abstract intellectual distillations of mystically perceived truths are even farther from the Real than the visions of the imagination.[8]

If, according to Islamic tradition, the Qur'an was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel, so, Hirtenstein says, the *Futuhat* that 'explains the esoteric meaning of the Qur'an was revealed to Ibn al-`Arabi by the Youth with no name. And like the Qur'an, which is said to have descended in its totality upon the heart of Muhammad and then been revealed to him piece by piece, so the *Futuhat*, although pre-

[7] I borrow the term 'imaginal' from William Chittick who uses it as an alternative for 'imaginary' primarily because the latter connotes a sense of the false or unreal in colloquial English. By 'imaginal', Chittick is coining an adjective used to describe a phenomenon closely connected to the imagination, but which is understood to be uniquely real. See Chittick, William C., *Imaginal Worlds. Ibn al-`Arabi and the Problem of Religious Diversity*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994 (hereafter abbreviated as IW).

[8] Corbin, Henry, *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn `Arabi*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969, 377. See also the new translation: Corbin, Henry, *Alone with the Alone. Creative Imagination in the Ṣufism of Ibn `Arabi*, transl. Ralph Manheim, pref. Harold Bloom, Princeton University Press, 1998.

sent in its entirety within the Youth, would also take many years to write down.'[9]

Some of the themes in the *Fusus,* Ibn al-'Arabi's other book, have become the focus of attacks from the eighth century down to the present day, such as the unity of being, the notion of the pre-existence of the human soul, the final salvation of Pharaoh, the perfect man, and the non-eternity of infernal punishments – though they are not absent from the *Futuhat*. It was for this reason, Addas argues, that – 'due allowance being made for the intellectual laziness of the jurists, who were generally happy simply to cite the 'condemnable propositions' already catalogued by Ibn Taymiyya – the *Fusus* lent themselves to criticism far more readily than the *Futuhat.*'[10]

During the last years of his life, Ibn al-`Arabi was still active composing a number of works, revising the *Futuhat,* and teaching his disciples. One day God commanded him: 'Tell your disciples: "Make the most of my existence before I go!"'[11] It seems that it was what his disciples did; they never tired of gathering around the shaykh to study his works. In 22 Rabi` II 638/November 1240, at the age of seventy-five, Ibn al-`Arabi passed away. 'The pilgrim,' Addas writes, 'arrived at the end of his long terrestrial journey… the Shaykh al-Akbar left his disciples to perform a *mi`raj* from which there would be no return: one that would lead him to the Rafiq al-A`la, the Supreme Friend.'[12]

2. Controversy and the example of Ibn Taymiyya

Much of Ibn al-`Arabi's work has triggered attacks from certain jurists. The question that must be addressed in any assessment of his legacy is *why* his teachings aroused so much hostility among certain Mus-

[9] Hirtenstein, Stephen, op. cit., 152.
[10] QRS, 278.
[11] Fut. I, 723.14, QRS, 287.
[12] QRS, 287.

lims? In his monograph on the subject, Alexander D. Knysh presents a study of the disagreement within the Islamic world over the legacy of Ibn al-`Arabi. He analyzes the intense theological and intellectual debates about Ibn al-`Arabi, including the doctrinal disagreement and factional differences among the ulama, whose interests were by no means identical with those of other strata of medieval Islamic society. According to Knysh, to understand the fierce disputes over Ibn al-`Arabi, it is crucial to understand the place and role of the ulama in medieval Islamic society.[13]

No discussion of the controversial legacy of Ibn al-`Arabi would be complete without the mention of the systematic attacks against Ibn al-`Arabi and his school that culminated in the writings of the famous Hanbali jurist Ibn Taymiyya (d. 1328), who articulates one of the most scathing and subsequently influential critiques of Ibn al-`Arabi and his teachings. That Ibn Taymiyya was a Sufi, there can be no doubt.[14] But as a conscientious Sufi, Ibn Taymiyya felt obliged to defend orthodox and orthoprax Sufism against corrupting innovations in Sufi belief and practice.

Contemporary scholarly assessments of Ibn Taymiyya's perspectives on the teachings of Ibn al-`Arabi vary to a certain degree. Some, such as the work of Muhammad Umar Memon, are themselves polemical, echoing and even magnifying the negative sentiments of Ibn Taymiyya himself.[15] Others, such as the work of Alexander Knysh on this topic, are more balanced and insightful. Knysh is well aware that Ibn Taymiyya is the author of numerous tractates and legal opinions (*fatawa*) that rely on

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[13] See Knysh, Alexander D., *Ibn `Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition. The Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1999.

[14] See Makdisi, George, "Ibn Taymiyya. A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order", in: *The American Journal of Arabic Studies 1*, 1973, 118-129, quoted in Memon, Muhammad Umar, *Ibn Taymiyya's Struggle Against Popular Religion*, The Hague: Mouton, 1976, x.

[15] See Muhammad Umar Memon, op. cit.

quotations from scripture, condemning the theses that he finds in Ibn al-`Arabi's writing. He also notes that, while Ibn Taymiyya appears to have an excellent knowledge of the works he was refuting, curiously enough, his critiques are not aimed against Ibn al-`Arabi's entire corpus, but rather against certain of the master's works, especially *Fusus al-hikam.* In this regard, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

> At first, I was among those who held a good opinion of Ibn `Arabi and praised him highly for the useful advice he provides in his books. This useful advice is found in pages of 'Revelations' [al-Futuhat al-makiyya], the 'Essence' [al-Kunh ma la budda minhu li al-murid], the 'Tightly Knit and Tied' [Kitab al-amr al-muhkam al-marbut], the 'Precious Pearl' [al-Durrat al-fakhira fi dhikr man intafa`tu bi-hi fi tariq al-akhira], and the 'Position of the Stars' [Mawaqi` al-nujum], and similar writings. At that time we were unaware of his real goal, because we had not yet studied the Fusus and suchlike books.[16]

Apparently, at one time or another, Ibn Taymiyya had an appreciation of Ibn al-`Arabi's thought. He obviously read the *Futuhat* and admired it. Sometime, however, between his reading of this and other of the master's works, Ibn Taymiyya's opinion changed. According to Ibn Dawadari, the change occurred in the year 703/1303 when Ibn Taymiyya received a copy of *Fusus* and found it to be highly problematic.[17] It appears that the issue here is not that Ibn al-`Arabi makes a perceived departure from orthodoxy in *Fusus* that one could not impute to the *Futuhat* as well. Instead, it seems that Ibn Taymiyya is reading *Fusus* through a distinctly different interpretative lens from that through which he read the *Futuhat.* All indications point to the fact that this second lens through which Ibn Taymiyya read *Fusus* is that of what he perceived to be the dangerous combination of the popularisation and concomitant distortion of the teachings of Ibn al-`Arabi, the proliferation of sectarian

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[16] Ibn Taymiyya, *Majmu`at al-rasa'il wa l-masa'il*, 4 Vol., edited by Rida, Muhammad Rashid, Cairo: Matba`at al-Manar, 1922-1930, Vol. 4, 179, quoted in: Knysh, Alexander D., op. cit., 96.

[17] Ibn al-Dawadari, *Kanz al-durar wa l-jami` al-ghurar*, Wiesbaden: Qism al-Dirasat al-Islamiyya, al-Ma`had al-Almani li al-Athar bi al-Qahira, 1960-1982, 143, quoted in Knysh, Alexander D., loc.cit.

phenomena such as that of the Nusayriyya, and the bastardisation of classical Sufism to include all manner of popular beliefs and practices having little to do with what Ibn Taymiyya understood to be orthodox Islam. Knysh writes:

> Using his notion of 'correct Sufism' as his measuring stick, Ibn Taymiyya singled out what he viewed as Ibn `Arabi's tendency to obfuscate the critical God-man demarcation as his main target and as the starting point of his antimonistic critique. In his view, this tendency put the Greatest Master amid the cohort of 'heretics' and 'grave sinners,' responsible for such 'vices' as the excessive influence on the Muslim state of its Christian and Jewish subjects, suggestive female dress, popular superstitions, the game of backgammon, the spread of the Mongol customs among the Mamluks, the miracle-working of the dervishes, minor pilgrimages to saints' shrines, Shi`i heresies, the exotic garments of wandering Sufis, hashish-smoking, the chivalric cult of *futuwwa*, state control of food prices, rationalist philosophy, and *kalam*.[18]

In simple terms, then, Ibn Taymiyya does not give us an 'objective' and comprehensive review of Ibn al-`Arabi's thinking because he does not see this as his task. Rather, he understands his role to be that of a defender of orthodox and orthoprax Islam and Sufism at a time when he understands both to be under a tremendous pluralist cultural assault.

The premier aspect of Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching that is most troublesome for Ibn Taymiyya is his teaching on the 'oneness of being' (often referred to in Arabic as *wahdat al-wujud*,[19] although Ibn al-`Arabi never uses this expression). Within this teaching, Ibn Taymiyya locates the particular difficulty to lie in Ibn al-`Arabi's doctrine of *al-a`yan al-thabita*, or the 'immutable entities'.[20] For Ibn al-`Arabi, the Arabic word

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[18] Knysh, Alexander D., op. cit., 89.

[19] On *wahdat al-wujud*, see Chittick, C. Alexander, "Wahdat al-Wujud in Islamic Thought", in: *Bulletin of the Henry Martyn Institute of Islamic Studies 10*, 1991, 7-27; "Rumi and Wahdat al-wujud", in: Banani, Amin *et al.*, *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam. The Heritage of Rumi*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994; "Sadr al-Din al-Qunawi on the Oneness of Being", in: *International Philosophical Quarterly 21*, 1981, 171-184.

[20] This is Chittick's translation of *al-a`yan al-thabita* from his *The Sufi Path of Knowledge. Ibn al-`Arabi's Metaphysics of Imagination*, Albany, NY: State

`ayn refers to an 'entity' whether existent in the created order, or in a state of non-existent potentiality in the mind of God. The creative activity of God occurs as God brings into existence any combination of the entities that are established in the divine consciousness. According to this schema, everything that is brought into existence has its full and complete origin in the Godhead. To say otherwise would, for Ibn al-`Arabi, be tantamount to *shirk*. For Ibn al-`Arabi, God does indeed create *ex nihilo*, but not in the sense that any reality is beyond God's imagination and the scope of God's knowledge. Therefore the 'nothingness' of everything that God brings into existence is not, for Ibn al-`Arabi, a literal no-thing-ness – as it is for Ibn Taymiyya – a void that has nothing to do with, and thus is the opposite of Being. Rather, for Ibn al-`Arabi the 'nothingness' out of which God creates is the nonexistence or 'pre-existence'[21] of all those myriad and unlimited 'things' that are established in the mind of God.

Ibn al-`Arabi insists, for example, that the fact that God 'sees all things' before they exist, does not in any way contradict the fact that He creates what exists out of nonexistence. In fact, the distinction between any type of 'existence' on the one hand, and 'thing-ness,' on the other hand, is a crucial component of Ibn al-`Arabi's metaphysics. Another

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University of New York Press, 1989 (hereafter abbreviated as SPK), 7. Knysh also adopts this translation.

[21] All terms such as 'pre-existent' – which are not direct English translations of an expression used by Ibn al-`Arabi and thus depart significantly from his primary discourse – can be problematic. This is because, as Knysh points out, Ibn al-`Arabi's discourse is 'deliberately crafted so as to obfuscate its essence' (9). This does not mean that Ibn al-`Arabi is being deliberately obscurantist, but rather reminds us that he recognises the limitations of language in any attempt to describe the Real. In this particular instance, Ibn al-`Arabi is trying to distinguish between absolute no-thing-ness and the absolute non-existence out of which God creates the phenomenal world. Insofar as 'pre-existence' suggests any type of 'existence' – however potential and not actual it may be – this is not what Ibn al-`Arabi is trying to evoke when he describes something as a truly nonexistent 'thing'. From Ibn al-`Arabi's perspective, the danger of a term like 'pre-existent' is that it makes his cosmology more susceptible to the charge that he is denying *creatio ex nihilo*.

way of saying this is that, for Ibn al-`Arabi, the quranic equivalent of the Christian doctrine of 'creation out of nothingness' can more precisely be glossed as 'creation out of nonexistence'. Of all things that ever have been brought into existence or ever will be, it is absolutely vital that Ibn al-`Arabi declare: 'He [i.e., God] never ceases seeing it. He who holds that the cosmos is eternal,' the master goes on to warn, 'does so from this perspective [*but does so erroneously!*]. But he who considers the existence of the cosmos in relation to its own entity [or 'thing-ness'] and the fact that it did not possess this state when the Real saw it maintains [*correctly*] that the cosmos is temporally originated.'[22]

In sum, Ibn al-`Arabi intends his teaching with respect to *al-a`yan al-thabita* ('immutable entities') as an attempt to maintain fidelity to the quranic doctrine of the temporality of the cosmos alongside an unqualified assertion that nothing – especially God's creation – can possibly be 'new' or 'alien' to God. Because of his historical context, however, and the vocation he embraces as a defender of orthodoxy and orthopraxy, Ibn Taymiyya does not receive this teaching in the mode in which it was intended. Instead he receives it as part of a larger threat to mainstream Islamic teaching in which Ibn al-`Arabi himself had no appreciable role during his lifetime. Speaking of Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching with respect to *al-a`yan al-thabita*, Ibn Taymiyya writes:

> … [H]e brought together two [heretical] theories, namely the negation of God's existence, on the one hand, and the negation of His [status as the] originator of the creaturely world, on the other. Thereby he denies that the Lord is the maker [of the world] and affirms that there is neither the existence of God, nor the act of creation. In so doing, he invalidates [the Qur'anic notion of] 'the Lord of the worlds.' [For him,] there exists neither the Lord, nor the world over which He holds sway. In other words, there is nothing but the immutable entities and the existence that sustains them.[23]

[22] Fut. II, 666.34 in SPK, 85.
[23] Ibn Taymiyya, op. cit., Vol. IV, 21-22 quoted in Knysh, op. cit., 102.

Despite such a strong condemnation of Ibn al-`Arabi's thought, it is interesting to note that Ibn Taymiyya refrains from the *ad hominem* attacks that could be found on the lips or flowing from the pens of so many of Ibn Taymiyya's disciples in subsequent generations. Of all those who profess what Ibn Taymiyya interpreted as being heretical doctrines of the oneness of being, Ibn Taymiyya says of Ibn al-`Arabi that the latter is

> … the closest to Islam among them … He at least distinguished between the manifest One and the concrete forms of His manifestation. Moreover, he affirmed the validity of Divine Command and Prohibition and the Divine Laws as they stand. He also instructed the travellers on the [mystical] path how to acquire high morals and the acts of devotion, as is common with other Sufis and their disciples. Therefore, many pious worshippers (*`ubbad*) have learned [the rules of] their path through his instruction and thus have greatly benefited from him, even though they sometimes failed to understand his [mystical] subtleties.[24]

By recognising the moral and ritual rectitude of his fellow Sufi, Ibn Taymiyya is locating himself squarely within a mainstream Sufism that has always placed a premium on right behaviour as an absolute *sine qua non* of the spiritual quest. Indeed, what impresses the great Abu Hamid al-Ghazali and draws him to Sufism during his years of searching for the truth is that the Sufi are those who teach about truth, first and foremost, by the example of their lives:

> Their life is the best life, their method the soundest method, their character the purest character; indeed, were the intellect of the intellectuals and the learning of the learned and the scholarship of the scholars, who are versed in the profundities of revealed truth, brought together in the attempt to improve the life and character of the mystics, they would find no way of doing so.[25]

Through his praise for Ibn al-`Arabi's lived example, it is obvious that Ibn Taymiyya holds the master in high esteem and realises that –

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[24] Ibn Taymiyya, op. cit., Vol. I, 183 quoted in Knysh, op. cit., 98.

[25] Montgomery, Watt, *Muslim Intellectual. A Study of al-Ghazali,* Edinburgh University Press, 1963, 60. See also *Al-Ghazali. Al Munqid min al-dalal,* Lahore: Hay'ah al-Awqaf bi-Ḥukumat al-Bunjab, 1971.

while the master's teachings may be (mis)interpreted as challenging the practical distinction between God and the world, paradise and hellfire, and threatening the rigorous observance of the Shari`a – in his own life the master was a scrupulously pious Sunni Muslim. By the same token, Ibn Taymiyya's comment on the tendency for people to 'fail to understand [Ibn al-`Arabi's mystical] subtleties' should not be overlooked. In fact, I would argue that it is precisely these misunderstandings to which Ibn Taymiyya feels compelled to respond, and that Ibn Taymiyya by no means would countenance the *takfir* (i.e., declaring to be an unbeliever) of Ibn al-`Arabi that one finds among so many of Ibn Taymiyya's followers in today's world.

3. Ibn al-`Arabi's lasting influence

Although there are still ongoing polemics against Ibn al-`Arabi and his teachings he is nonetheless very influential on the development of contemporary Sufism, in both its intellectual and popular forms. It should be noted, however, that differences of circumstance and context will determine not only the mode and scope of the dissemination of Ibn al-`Arabi's teachings, but also the ways of understanding it. On certain occasions – as we saw in the case of the causal factors behind Ibn Taymiyya's polemic – the doctrine of 'the unity of being' (*wahdat al-wujud*), for example, has been interpreted in ways approaching monism or pantheism. Accordingly, some saw the mystic path as a personal striving to become one with the only Being – a striving that has no use for 'organised religion'. Such relativistic and anti-religious[26] interpretations depart radically from the teachings of Ibn al-`Arabi in the way that they blur all distinctions between Islam and other religions (something

[26] Especially in the contemporary sense in which spirituality is set up in opposition to religion.

Ibn al-`Arabi never did) and generally undetermine all legitimate notions of 'heresy'.

For many centuries now, the teachings and legacy of Ibn al-`Arabi have held a special attraction for those who strongly feel the mysterious dimensions of God's presence in all human experience. Many find Ibn al-`Arabi's spirituality – one of deep piety and moral conviction, on the one hand, and an expansive notion of what is True and Real, on the other hand – uniquely compelling, especially in a context where the importance of embracing cultural, ethnic, political, and religious plurality is only matched by the importance of rooting oneself in what it is one believes.

4. Exegesis and religious diversity in Ibn al-`Arabi's teachings

Ibn al-`Arabi has been at the centre of some controversy within his tradition. In light of this fact, it would not be surprising if some were to use the thinking of a controversial figure within the tradition as a source of understanding for religious diversity and dialogue. To those who would have serious reservations, I respond in two related ways. The first is to point out that the greatest and most creative minds in the history of religions have always been at the centre of some controversy. From Maimonides to Augustine to Shankara to al-Shafi`i and Ibn Rushd, the historical record is replete with stories about the 'trouble' caused by particularly gifted religious geniuses.[27] The second is to say that if, in the process of mining the riches of our tradition, we wish to assess fairly and accurately the orthodoxy of a religious thinker, we need to do so on the basis of a fair and open analysis of his teachings themselves and not on whatever propaganda may exist for or against the figure in question.

[27] For orthodoxy and heresy in Medieval Islam, see Knysh, C. Alexander, "'Orthodoxy' and 'Heresy' in Medieval Islam. An Essay in Reassessment", in: *The Muslim World LXXXIII (1)*, January 1993.

When it comes to the figure of Ibn al-`Arabi and the way in which his teachings can be seen as expressions of Islamic orthodoxy on the issues of religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue, this process of fair analysis may be simpler and more straightforward than many would suspect.

In one of his well-known essays on biblical hermeneutics, Michael Fishbane notes that the tradition of rabbinic mystical exegesis known as *Sod*[28] turned around the principle that the words of sacred scripture speak to the reader 'without ceasing'. Thus, Fishbane asserts, 'There is a continual expression of texts; and this reveals itself in their ongoing reinterpretation. But *Sod*,' Fishbane emphasises, 'is more than the eternity of interpretation from the human side. It also points to the divine mystery of speech and meaning.'[29] Fishbane goes on to speak about the 'prophetic task' of 'breaking the idols of simple sense' and restoring 'the mystery of speech to its transcendent role in the creation of human reality'. He asserts that one of the primary functions of the mystical exegete – individual like Ibn al-`Arabi – is 'to continue this prophetic mission'. It is 'in the service of *Sod* [i.e., mystical exegesis],' that a mystical exegete such as our master mediates 'a multitude of interpretations' as 'he resists the dogmatisation of meaning and the eclipse of the divine lights of speech.' Taking our lead from Fishbane, we can assert that, as a mystical exegete, our master seeks to 'transcend the idolatries of language' and to condemn 'hermeneutical arrogance in all its forms….'[30]

In his approach to canonical scripture, Ibn al-`Arabi fulfils the role of mystical exegete as Fishbane interprets it for us. He believes unequivo-

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[28] In his essay entitled "The Teacher and the Hermeneutical Task. A Reinterpretation of Medieval Exegesis", Michael Fishbane makes reference to the four-fold typology of medieval scriptural interpretation common to both the Jewish and Christian traditions. For Jewish exegetes, this typology took the form of the acronym PaRDeS, where P=*Peshat* (the literal meaning), R=*Remez* (the allegorical meaning), D=*Derash* (the tropological and moral meaning), and S=*Sod* (the mystical meaning). See Fishbane, Michael, *The Garments of Torah. Essays in Biblical Hermeneutics*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989, 113.

[29] Ibid., 120.

[30] Ibid.

cally in an infinitely readable Text, and he champions this infinite readability in the hopes of combating the 'idolatries of language' and 'hermeneutical arrogance'. According to Ibn al-`Arabi, each word of the Qur'an – not to mention its verses and chapters – has unlimited meanings, all of which are intended by God. Correct recitation of the Qur'an allows the reader to access new meanings at every reading.[31] 'When meaning repeats itself for someone reciting the Qur'an, he has not recited it as it should be recited. This is proof of his ignorance.'[32] In fact, Ibn al-`Arabi regards the words of language as symbolic expressions, subject to the interpretative effort, which he calls *ta'bir* (literally the act of 'crossing over'). Thus, for him the truth of the interpretative effort presents itself in the act of crossing over from one state to another, and under this interpretation, difference becomes the root of all things since for the thing to be in a constant state of crossing is for it to be constantly differentiated, not only from other things, but also from itself. [33]

Thus, with respect to scriptural hermeneutics, our master appears to be convinced of the infinite potential for meaning inherent in the nature of divine revelation, especially in the form of sacred scripture. Such an understanding of the nature of scripture can be invaluable in dialogue

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[31] We may also mention here Muhammad Shahrour, a professor of Civil Engineering born in Damascus in 1938, and his 800-page *Al-kitab wa'lqur'an. Qira'a mu'asira* (*The Book and the Qur'an. A Contemporary Interpretation)* where he asserts the timelessness of the Qur'an and says that there is a direct conversation between the reader and the text: 'If Islam is sound for all times and places, Muslims must not neglect historical developments and the interaction of different generations. Just as the Prophet, his contemporaries and his immediate successors understood the text of the Qur'an in the light of their intellectual capacities and of their perception of the world, so we should read and understand it in the light of ours. We should reinterpret sacred texts and apply them to contemporary social and moral issues. The Qur'an should be read as if the Prophet Muhammad had only recently died, informed us of this Book'. See Shahrour, Muhammad, *Al-kitab wa'lqur'an. Qira'a mu'asira*, Damascus: Ahali, 1990, 41.

[32] Fut. IV, 367.3.

[33] Fut. II, 518.12. Indeed, Ibn al-`Arabi was what Bruce Lawrence calls 'a deep-sea diver in the Ocean of the Qur'an'. See Bruce Lawrence, *The Qur'an. A Biography*, New York: Broadway, 2006, 109.

because it demands that people of faith not only take a stance of conviction within the teachings of their sacred texts, but also that they realise that this conviction – however deep it may be – does not restrict or exhaust in any way the potential meaning of these texts. There is also an additional sense in which the insights of the masters with respect to the infinite readability of scripture have particular relevance to dialogue. If dialogue is authentic and brings about authentic transformation, then the encounter with the religious other should have some effect on our religious self-understanding and therefore on our own readings of our own texts.

For some, religious diversity may be viewed as a problem, but it certainly is not for Ibn al-`Arabi and for the school of thought that he established. In fact, Ibn al-`Arabi has an *explicit* theology of religions. In Ibn al-`Arabi's own words, 'There are as many paths to God as there are human souls.' The reality, however, of how religious diversity has been dealt with in Islamic history varies from context to context. To generalise, it is not inaccurate to say that – much the same as the case of Christianity (which tended, at least in the medieval period, to be significantly less tolerant of intra- and interreligious diversity than Islam) – some Muslim scholars have emphasised an exclusivist approach, while others have emphasised a more open and inclusivist one. Ibn al-`Arabi seems to be the most sophisticated and profound thinker of this second category.

Ibn al-`Arabi's discussion of religious pluralism begins with the assertion that God Himself is the source of all diversity in the cosmos. Thus, divergence of beliefs among human beings ultimately stems from God:

> God Himself is the first problem of diversity that has become manifest in the cosmos. The first thing that each existent thing looks upon is the cause of its own existence. In itself each thing knows that it was not, and that it then came to be through temporal origination. However, in this coming to be, the dispositions of the existent things are diverse. Hence they have diverse opinions about the

identity of the cause that brought them into existence. Therefore the Real is the first problem of diversity in the cosmos.[34]

According to Ibn al-`Arabi, this diversity of opinion is one of the many signs that, to paraphrase the famous hadith *qudsi*, 'God's mercy takes precedence over His wrath.' Thus, 'since God is the root of all diversity of beliefs within the cosmos, and since it is He who has brought about the existence of everything in the cosmos in a constitution not possessed by anything else, everyone will end up with mercy.'[35]

In addition, for Ibn al-`Arabi, religious diversity is a natural consequence of the unlimitedness of God's Self-disclosure[36] and the concomitant degree of 'preparedness' of any element of the phenomenal world to be a *mahall* or 'locus' of the Self-disclosure. Another way of articulating this point would be to say that diversity in the phenomenal world is a direct function of the varying 'preparedness' or capacity of creatures to receive the divine Self-disclosure. For Ibn al-`Arabi, God's Self-disclosure or his *tajalli* is very much connected with the 'receptivity' (*qabul*) and 'preparedness' *(isti`dad*) of the creatures or the vessels (*mahall*). Thus, when God discloses Godself, the degree to which a thing receives God's Self-disclosure is determined by its 'preparedness' to bear it. In Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching, receptivity 'must be taken into account not only on

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[34] Fut. III, 465.23 in IW, 4.
[35] Fut. III, 465.25 in IW, 4-5.
[36] Divine Self-disclosure or Self-manifestation is one of the most central teachings of Ibn al-`Arabi's ontology. It is rooted in Ibn al-`Arabi's reflection on a well-known hadith qudsi: 'I was a Hidden Treasure [lit., 'a treasure that was not recognised'] and desired [out of love] to be recognized, so I created the creatures and introduced Myself to them, and thus they recognized me.' (Fut. II, 322.29; II, 310.20; II, 232.11; II, 399.29; SPK, 66, 126, 131, 204, 250). According to this concept, creation is God's Self-disclosure to Godself through the veils and signs of the creatures. For Ibn al-`Arabi, everything that exists in the world is, after all, nothing but the self-manifestation of the Absolute. In this case, Ibn al-`Arabi uses the term 'hidden treasure' to refer to God's Being before it manifests itself and comes to be known by means of creation. Ibn al-`Arabi insists that 'through the universe [which means by the creation of universe] God comes to be known'. See Murata, Sachico, *The Tao of Islam*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1992, 11.

the cognitive level, but also on the existential level'.[37] About preparedness, Ibn al-`Arabi writes:

> God says, 'the giving of thy Lord can never be walled up (Q 17:20). In other words, it can never be withheld. God is saying that He gives constantly, while the loci receive in the measure of the realities of their preparedness. In the same way we say that the sun spreads rays over the existence of things. It is not miserly with its light toward anything. The loci receive the light in the measure of their preparedness.[38]

According to the quotation above, the essence of God never manifests in the universe; rather, it is God's specific attributes and Names that manifest themselves. Ibn al-`Arabi refers to God in God's manifestation as the divine presence (*al-hadra al-ilahiyya*), and he distinguishes this from God as non-manifest, which Ibn al-`Arabi refers to as the primordial presence (*al-hadra al-qadima*).[39] This distinction plays an important role in Ibn al-`Arabi's understanding of spiritual attainment. The master claims that no human being can go beyond the realm of God's Self-disclosure because the Absolute in its essence is absolutely unknowable. The only and the highest possibility for the human being comes in seeking the Absolute within the parameters of a particular instance of divine Self-disclosure within the human self. Now the viability of any particular instance of divine Self-disclosure is ultimately determined by the receptivity or preparedness of the existent entity. It is for this reason that there is a distinction between God's prophets and 'friends' (*awliya'* or *akhilla'*) on one hand, and ordinary people on the other. The prophets and friends of God are loci of the manifestation for all the divine Names, but other people are more limited in their receptivity and can only make certain Names manifest. It is important to note that, although God's Self-disclosure depends on the receptivity and pre-

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[37] SPK, 91.
[38] Fut. I, 287.10; SPK, 91-2.
[39] Akkach, Samer, *Cosmology and Architecture in Premodern Islam. An Architectural Reading of Mystical Ideas*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2005, 67.

paredness of the locus or vessel (*mahall*), this does not mean that God's Self-disclosure, which is God's mercy, is suspended.

For Ibn al-`Arabi, the concepts of receptivity and preparedness are closely connected to the question of the divine 'measuring out' of human 'destiny' (*qadar*). Before it comes into existence, God knows the qualities and characteristics of each entity, because its 'treasuries are with Him'. Then, in the process of creation, God measures out these qualities and characteristics – including one's destiny (which ultimately is identical to one's capacity to receive divine manifestation) – according to the creature's preparedness to receive. To illustrate this point, Ibn al-`Arabi has recourse to one of his favourite ontological metaphors, the metaphor of the mirror: 'Try, when you look at yourself in a mirror, to see the mirror itself, and you will find that you cannot do so. So much is this the case that some have concluded that the image perceived is situated between the mirror and the eye of the beholder.'[40] Thus, the recipient sees nothing other than his own form in the mirror of Reality. It also means that the existent entity, fixed forever in God's knowledge, can never receive anything beyond what it demands in itself and according to its own capacity. This is one of the foundational principles behind Ibn al`Arabi's approach to the diversity of destiny among human beings, but also his approach to the diversity of religions.

When God brings the cosmos into existence, God, the One, discloses itself in the diversity of modes, which means that the One, the unlimited, delimits itself in its delimited *wujud*. With regard to human beings, their diversity is an expression of the infinite potentiality of Being, which is underscored by the unrepeatability of the human soul. For Ibn al-`Arabi, diversity of religions is essentially due to the nature of the non-redundant diversity of human souls as they are brought into exis-

[40] Ibn al-`Arabi, *Muhyi al-Din. The Bezels of Wisdom*, transl. and intro. by R.W.J. Austin, pref. by Titus Burckhardt, New York: Paulist Press, 1980 (hereafter abbreviated as BW), 65.

tence by the One. As constituent elements of the phenomenal world, each human being is by nature, as mentioned above, a *mahall* (lit. a 'place') or *mazhar* (locus of manifestation) in which the One discloses Itself in and to the phenomenal realm. Because religious traditions realise themselves in the lives of the human individuals who constitute any religious community, the diversity of people as distinct and particular manifestations of the One Being is reflected in the particular traditions as a whole. Speaking fairly directly to the issue of religious diversity, the master writes:

> You worship only what you set up in yourself. This is why doctrines and states differed concerning Allah. Thus one group says that He is like this and another group says that He is not like this, but like that. Another group says concerning knowledge (of Him) that the colour of water is determined by the colour of the cup. . . . So consider the bewilderment that permeates (*sariyya*) every belief.[41]

Ibn al-`Arabi is very fond of quoting the great ninth-century mystic master of Baghdad, Abu l-Qasim Muhammad al-Junayd (d. 910) who once used the metaphor of water coloured by its container as a metaphor for unity in diversity: 'The colour of the water is the colour of its container.'[42] Ibn al-`Arabi's fondness for this metaphor, however, by no means indicates that he considered all religions to be equally valuable, but simply that, like every other constituent element of the existing order, all religions have their origin in God. One might paraphrase Ibn al-`Arabi's interpretation of Junayd's water metaphor by asserting that if the water represents the divine Being, the differences between religions is represented by the colour or colours of the container. The colour or colours, therefore, are directly related to the 'preparedness' of a given religion to receive its particular manifestation of the Real. There are some religions that may be monochromatic or whose colours are strictly

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[41] Fut. II, 212.1-7, also quoted by Bashier, Salman H., *Ibn al-`Arabi's Barzakh. The Concept of the Limit and the Relationship between God and the World*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004, 123.
[42] Fut. II, 316.10; SPK, 149, 229, 341-344.

limited or faded. Other religions may have more distinct colours, but all of the same basic hue. Still others may have distinct colours of different hues, etc. 'He who discloses Himself,' Ibn al-`Arabi writes, 'in respect to what He is in himself, is One in entity, but the self-disclosures – I mean their forms [e.g. the various religions] – are diverse because of the preparedness of the loci of self-disclosure.'[43] As always, Ibn al-`Arabi roots this idea in the Qur'an. In this respect he makes specific reference to Q 11:118-119: 'If your Lord had willed [it], He would have fashioned humanity into one community, *but they will not cease to differ*, except those upon whom your Lord has been merciful.'[44]

Just as God never ceases to love or desire to be 'recognised,' or to be manifest, God's Self-manifestation also takes an infinite multiplicity of loci or receptacles (*mahallat*). Thus, phenomenal multiplicity, which is rooted in divine infinity, in fact has only one ontological entity, but because God's self-manifestation never ends, the loci of manifestation (*mazahir*) are infinitely diverse. This logic quite straightforwardly carries over to the phenomenon of the diversity of religions. In more direct terms, Ibn al-`Arabi writes, 'every observer of God is under the controlling property of one of God's Names. That Name discloses itself to him or her and gives to him or her specific belief through its Self-disclosure.'[45]

One might also note that, from a slightly different angle, Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching on the diversity of religions can be inferred from what he has to say about perpetual creation. As part of his teaching on this subject, the master emphasises that 'the Real does not manifest Itself twice in one form, nor in a single form to two individuals.'[46] Ibn al-`Arabi strongly asserts, not only that creation is a never ending process,

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[43] Fut. I, 287.19, also quoted in IW, 141.
[44] *Wa law sha'a rabbuka la-ja`ala al-nasa ummatan wahidatan wa la yazaluna mukhtalifin illa man rahhima rabbuka*.
[45] Fut. II, 85.14, also quoted in IW, 141.
[46] Fut. II, 657.13.

but also that God never manifests in a single form twice. Thus, for the master, the belief of believers is the cognitive manner in which the Self-disclosure of the Real is understood or misunderstood, cognitively conceived or misconceived.[47] In a similar vein, Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), who appears to have been highly influenced by the master, asks: 'If you pour the ocean into a jug, how much will it hold?'[48] Thus, every believer worships God the Real according to the particular 'Lord' (*rabb*) whom she or he recognises in her or himself.[49] 'Since there are as many cups as drinkers at the Pool which will be found in the abode of the hereafter,' Ibn al-`Arabi himself writes, 'and since the water in the cup takes the form of the cup in both shape and colour, we know for certain that knowledge of God takes on the measure of your view, your preparedness, and what you are in yourself.'[50] In many ways this statement is similar to the words of Thomas Aquinas: 'Things known are in the knower according to the mode of the knower.'[51] 'Although the Real is One,' Ibn al-`Arabi affirms,

> beliefs present Him in various guises. They take Him apart and put Him together, they give Him form and they fabricate Him. But in Himself, He does not change, and in Himself, He does not undergo transmutation. However, the organ of sight sees Him so. Hence location constricts Him, and fluctuation from entity to entity limits Him. Hence, none becomes bewildered by Him except him who combines the assertion of similarity with the declaration of incomparability.[52]

Ibn al-`Arabi's explanation above is based on the opinion that the 'God of belief' is Being (*wujud*), which manifests itself to every believer. Because every one of God's Self-manifestations is single and never repeats, every belief is single and exclusive. And the object of

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[47] SPK, 340. See also Fut. II, 509.31.
[48] IW, 163.
[49] From the hadith: 'He who knows himself knows his Lord.'
[50] Fut. IV, 443.33, II, 597.35. See also SPK, 342.
[51] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologia* 2.2ae.1.2, cited in Hick, John, "Ineffability", in: *Religious Studies 36*, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 2000, 40.
[52] Fut. IV, 393.6, also quoted in IW, 163.

every belief is single – i.e., the 'God of belief' or the 'God worshipped by each believer' differs from the God of every other believer. In fact, Ibn al-`Arabi attempts to emphasise this point by talking about a multiplicity of 'Lords' manifesting the one God:

> Every believer has a Lord in his heart that he has brought into existence, so he believes in Him. Such are the People of the Mark on the day of resurrection. They worship nothing but what they themselves have carved.[53] That is why, when God discloses Himself in other than that mark, they are confounded. They know what they believe, but what they believe does not know them, for they have brought it into existence. The general rule here is that the artefact does not know the artisan, and the building does not know the builder.[54]

Ultimately, for Ibn al-`Arabi, it is crucial for the believer to transcend the 'God created in belief'.[55] For the master, the path ultimately leads one to transcend the 'colour' conveyed by religious affiliation. This is not, however, a prescription for a relativistic approach to religion. We should remember that in Ibn al-`Arabi's mind God's Law (i.e., the Shari`a) is crucial for the realisation of the Real (*la haqiqa bi la shari`a*). Thus, the path to God must be facilitated by the purest and most correct beliefs and practices possible. For Ibn al-`Arabi, these are found in the proper interpretations and practices of the Sunna of Muhammad, the Seal of the Prophets – i.e., the religion commonly referred to as 'Islam'.

Unlike many Muslims who believe that certain exclusive verses in the Qur'an abrogate (*naskh*) certain inclusive verses– thereby concluding asserting that Islam abrogates previous religions – Ibn al-`Arabi does not draw such a conclusion. For Ibn al-`Arabi,

> All the revealed religions (*shara`i*) are lights. Among these religions, the revealed religion of Muhammad is like the light of the sun among the lights of the

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[53] According to Chittick, here Ibn al-`Arabi is alluding to the words of Abraham quoted in the Qur'an, 'Do you worship what you yourselves carve, while God created you and what you do?' See Q 37:95-96 and IW, 185.7).
[54] Fut. IV, 391.12, quoted in IW, 151.
[55] BW, 282.

stars. When the sun appears, the lights of the stars are hidden, and their lights are included in the light of the sun. Their being hidden is like the abrogation of the other revealed religions that takes place through Muhammad's revealed religion. Nevertheless, they do in fact exist, just as the existence of the lights of the stars is actualized. This explains why we have been required in our all-inclusive religion to have faith in the truth of all the messengers and all the revealed religions. They are not rendered null (*batil*) by abrogation – that is the opinion of the ignorant.[56]

What Ibn al-`Arabi is basically saying is that it is incumbent on Muslims to follow the path of their Prophet Muhammad and stick to the guidance of the Qur'an. At the same time, he also emphasises that the nature of the Qur'an is inclusive; that it includes within itself the paths of all the prophets preceding Muhammad. He writes:

Among the path is the path of blessing. It is referred to in God's words. 'To every one of you We have appointed a right way and a revealed law' [57](5:48). The Muhammadan leader chooses the path of Muhammad and leaves aside the other paths, even though he acknowledges them and has faith in them. However, he does not make himself a servant except through the path of Muhammad, nor does he have his followers make themselves servants except through it. He traces the attributes of all paths back to it, because Muhammad's revealed religion is all-inclusive. Hence the property of all revealed religions has been transferred to his revealed religion. His revealed religion embraces them, but they do not embrace it.[58]

In the *Futuhat* Ibn al-`Arabi further explores the phenomenon of the diversity of religions. To summarise what we have already stated, for Ibn al-`Arabi, God Self-discloses in numerous ways, infinitely diverse and thus unique and different from one another. Although God in Godself is immeasurably greater than all God's manifestations, God also is somehow manifest in the form of every belief. But God does not constrain Godself within one particular belief. One belief may well be more accurate than another (e.g., 'I believe there is only one God' versus 'I

[56] Fut. III, 153.12, quoted in IW, 125.
[57] This translation should read 'a revealed law and a way' (*shir`atan wa minhajan*).'
[58] Fut. III, 410.21, quoted in IW, 145.

believe there is no God'), but God is too glorious to delimit Godself to one form of belief rather than another.

In fact, Ibn al-`Arabi plays with the root *`QL* in order to convey the inherent potential of discursive language and rationalist thought to delimit that which cannot be limited. The trouble with speculative thinking – especially when taken to the extreme – is that the *`aql* or 'intellect', which is the human faculty enabling us to engage in such thought, acts like a 'fetter' (*`iqal* – from the same root), which at times is very useful (i.e., helping us to develop categories with which to better understand ourselves and our world) but at other times can be very misleading. The danger lies in the capacity of the intellect to attempt to 'fetter' and pin down that which is beyond fettering. Ibn al-`Arabi, then, criticises speculative thinking and formulation when it acts to confine the infinite Essence of God. Ibn al-`Arabi goes on to strengthen this argument by reflecting on the root of the words for 'creed' (*`aqida*) and 'belief' (*i`tiqad*). The root is *`QD*, which has to do with 'binding' and 'tying' a knot. He is not attacking 'creeds' and 'beliefs', because he thinks they have their place in the life of faith. What he is criticising is the attempt to absolutise 'creeds' and 'statements' to the point at which one is involved in the futile (and perhaps even blasphemous) attempt to 'tie a knot' around God. He writes:

> God is known through every knotting. Although the beliefs are totally diverse, their aim is one. He is a receptacle for everything that you tie Him to and every knotting you make concerning Him. And within that He will disclose Himself on the day of resurrection, for it is the mark which is between you and Him.'[59]

For Ibn al-`Arabi, only the *`arif* (literally 'gnostic'), who has attained the station and state of the Perfect Human, can see God as manifested in every belief, and as unconstrained by any belief. The true *`arif* identifies the Truth in any belief and understands that any belief involves a Self-disclosure of the Real. He or she understands that, while some beliefs

[59] Fut. IV, 416. 29; IW, 164.

may be true and others false, all beliefs are delimitations of the non-delimited *wujud*, which, according to Chittick, 'embrace[s] all reality on whatever level it is envisaged.'[60] As the 'locus of manifestation' of the all-comprehensive Name of God (i.e., Allah), and thus as one who stands in the 'station of no station', the Perfect Human acknowledges any station and any belief insofar as it corresponds to one of the infinite multiplicities of the Self-disclosure of God.

Perhaps the quranic text that Ibn al-`Arabi quotes most frequently in support of his argument that all religions are manifestations of the Real is: 'Wheresoever you turn, there is the face of God' (2:115).[61] Commenting on this verses and a few others like it, Ibn al-`Arabi writes, 'God has made it clear that He is in every direction turned to, each of which represents a particular doctrinal perspective regarding Him.'[62] Indeed, for Ibn al-`Arabi, because God is the *wujud* or essential reality of all phenomenal multiplicity, no path is essentially distorted or warped; every path according to him essentially brings believers to God. Quoting the quranic verse 'To Him all affairs shall be returned' (Q 11:123), Ibn al-`Arabi writes, 'certainly, all roads lead to Allah, since He is the end of every road.'[63] Thus, every believer serves God on the basis of God's Self-disclosures and their preparedness, so all beliefs in fact are rooted in God the infinite. By saying this, it does not mean that all beliefs are similar and have the same effect on the transformation of human consciousness toward God.[64] It means that each belief manifests truth and,

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[60] IW, 139.
[61] Wa li-llah al-mashriq wa al-maghrib fa aynama tuwallu fa thamma waju Allah. See for example Ibn al-`Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, ed. A. Afifi, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Arabi, 1946, 113, and IW, 137.
[62] IW, 138.
[63] Fut. II, 148.11; SPK, 303.
[64] On the transformation process in Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching, see Chittick, William C., "Belief and Transformation. Sufi Teaching of Ibn al-`Arabi", in: *The American Theosophist 74*, 1986.

insofar as it does this, it is part of the path to human perfection in service to God.

One of the most touching and profound aspects of Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching on the diversity of religions can be found in the *Futuhat* where the master refers to God as 'taking care of the needs of misbelievers' and 'giving them to drink'.[65] According to Ibn al-`Arabi, all those who are worshipping God, even though they may be doing so falsely by attaching the name 'God' to their idols, are nonetheless the loci of God's Self-disclosure, and as such are de facto recipients of God's mercy. 'God takes care of their need and gives them to drink', Ibn al-`Arabi writes, 'He punishes them if they do not honour the Divine Side in this inanimate form'.[66] Here Ibn al-`Arabi's phrase 'giving them to drink' echoes his discussion of 'the drinking places', a discussion in which he refers to many quranic verses:

> The drinking places have become variegated and the religions diverse. The levels have been distinguished, the divine names and the engendered effects have become manifest and the names the gods have become many in the cosmos. People worship angels, stars, Nature, the elements, animals, plants, minerals, human beings and jinn. So much is this the case that when the One presented them with His Oneness, they said, 'Has He made the gods One God? This is indeed a marvellous thing.' (23:117)…. [T]here is no effect in the cosmos which is not supported by a divine reality. So from whence do the gods become many? From the divine realities. Hence you should know that this derives from the names. God was expansive with the names: He said, 'Worship Allah (4:36), Fear Allah, your Lord (65:1), Prostate yourself to the All-merciful' (25:6). And He said, 'Call upon Allah or call upon the All-merciful; whichever, that is Allah or the All-Merciful, you call upon, to Him belong the most beautiful names' (17:110). This made the situation more ambiguous for the people, since He did not say, 'Call upon Allah or call upon the All-merciful; whichever you call upon, the Entity is One, and these two names belong to it.' That would be the text which would remove the difficulty. God only left this difficulty as a mercy

[65] Fut. II, 661.27; SPK, 381, also cited in Houedard, Dom Sylvester, "Ibn `Arabi's Contribution to the Wider Ecumenism", in: Hirtenstein, Stephen/ Tiernan, Michael (eds.), *Muhyiddin Ibn `Arabi. A Commemorative Volume*, Shaftesbury: Element, 1993, 295.
[66] Fut. II, 661.27 and SPK, 381. Also cited in Houedard, Dom Sylvester, loc. cit.

for those who associate others with Him, the people of rational consideration – those who associate others with Him on the basis of obfuscation.[67]

In fact, one of the most important and striking features of Ibn al-`Arabi's teachings on the nature of the Real (*al-Haqq*) and its connection to religious pluralism is that they are thoroughly grounded in quranic exegesis. One of the most important verses upon which he bases these teachings is: 'Then high exalted be God, the King, the Real! There is no God but He, the Lord of the noble Throne' (Q 23:116). Commenting on this verse Ibn al-`Arabi says:

> This is the *tawhid* of the Real, which is the *tawhid* of the He-ness. God says, 'We created not the heavens and the earth and all that between them, in play' (21:116, 44:38). This is the same meaning as His words, 'What do you think that We created you only for sport?' (23:115). Hence, 'there is no God but He' [in the above quranic passage] is a description of the Real.[68]

Here Ibn al-`Arabi is describing the way in which the verse in question (Q 23:116) speaks about a particular expression of the divine oneness. In doing so he makes two points that are critical in understanding his teaching on religious diversity. The first point is that the Qur'an reveals multiple dimensions of the divine oneness. Another way of putting this is to say that the Qur'an discusses more than one type of *tawhid*. In fact, according to Ibn al-`Arabi, there are thirty-six different types of *tawhid* found in the Qur'an. The dimension of divine oneness expressed in Q 23:116 is that of the 'He-ness' of God or the degree to which the Real is God and God alone. The second point Ibn al-`Arabi is making in this brief commentary on Q 23:116 is that every element of phenomenal existence is a purposeful expression of the divine oneness (i.e., no aspect of creation exists as 'play' or 'sport'.) For Ibn al-`Arabi, this includes the diversity of religions. Indeed, Ibn al-`Arabi affirms that the abundant quranic references to the plurality of religions is by no means a refer-

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[67] Fut. III, 94.19 and SPK, 363-364. Also cited in Houedard, Dom Sylvester, loc. cit., with a slightly different translation in 'Ibn `Arabi's Contribution'.
[68] Fut. II, 415.18; SPK, 134.

ence to an accident of fate, but is rather the nineteenth type of *tawhid*, which the Qur'an addresses most directly in the following verse: 'We never sent a messenger before thee [i.e., Muhammad] except that We revealed to him, saying, 'There is no god but I, so worship Me!' (Q 21:25). Commenting this verse Ibn al-`Arabi says:

> This is a *tawhid* of the I-ness … It is like God's words, 'Naught is said to thee but what was already said to the messengers before thee' (41:43). In his verse God mentions 'worship' (*`ibada*), but not specific practices (*a`mal*), for He also said, 'To every one [of the prophets] We have appointed a Law and a way' (5:48), that is, We have set down designated practices. The period of applicability of the practices can come to an end, and this is called 'abrogation' (*naskh*) in the words of the learned masters of the *Shari`a*. There is no single practice found in each and every prophecy, only the performance of the religion, coming together in it, and the statement of *tawhid*. This is indicated in God's words, 'He has laid down for you as Law what He charged Noah with, and what We have revealed to thee [O Muhammad], and what We charged Abraham with, and Moses, and Jesus: "Perform the religion, and scatter nor regarding it"' (42:13). Bukhari has written in a chapter entitled, 'The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one', and this one religion is nothing but *tawhid*, performing the religion, and worship. On this the prophets have all come together.[69]

What, then, is the distinction that Ibn al-`Arabi is making between Qur'an 23:116 and Qur'an 21:25? As he himself tells us, it is a distinction made between two expressions of *tawhid*. The first is an expression of *tawhid* in which God refers to Godself in the third person (i.e., as 'He') and in which He makes mention of Himself as 'King' (*al-malik*) and 'The Real' (*al-haqq*), and also makes reference to His 'Noble Throne' (*al-`arsh al-karim*). In a sense, this can be interpreted as the Qur'an's own use of the language of discursive or speculative theology, which can only speak of God in the third person, and thus takes as its appropriate object the divine 'He-ness' (*huwiyya*). In 21:25, however, God expresses His oneness in the first person (i.e., as 'I'). In this context, God makes reference to the Prophet Muhammad himself (the recipient of this specific revelation) in the second person singular, to all

[69] Fut. II, 414.13; SPK, 171.

the messengers sent before Muhammad, and to acts of worship. For Ibn al-`Arabi, this verse is making a direct connection between the succession of messengers (and by extension the different forms that authentic religion takes) and acts of worship that ideally mediate a direct experience of the 'I-ness' of God, in which God acts as the subject beyond objectification. Thus, when one juxtaposes the two verses, one sees the divine oneness being expressed in two very different verbal modalities that reflect two very different human activities: the cognitive activity of speculative thought and the more affective experience of ritual worship. It is not that one modality is a more authentic expression of *tawhid* than the other, but rather that both represent two very important dimensions of *tawhid*.

As Ibn al-`Arabi more explicitly develops his teaching on religious diversity he builds upon a key insight conveyed by the second of the two verses analysed above. For Ibn al-`Arabi, the succession of prophets and messengers, culminating in the messengership of Muhammad, that characterises all orthodox Islamic perspectives on the history of revelation is one in which an underlying unity of encounter with the one and only God (i.e., the one immutable religion for which all of humanity for all time has been created) is historically expressed in a multiplicity of forms. In the master's own words: 'The "path of Allah" is the all-inclusive path upon which all things walk, and it takes them to Allah.'[70] Thus, commenting on Bukhari's title mentioned in the quotation above, 'The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one,' in which Bukhari uses an article in the word 'religion' ('the religion', instead of 'a religion'), Ibn al-`Arabi says,

> He brought the article which makes the word 'religion' definite, because all religion comes from God, even if some of the rulings are diverse. Everyone is commanded to perform the religion and to come together in it … As for the rulings which are diverse, that is because of the Law which God assigned to each of one of the messengers. He said, 'To every one (of the Prophets) We have ap-

[70] Fut. III, 410.25, 411.22; SPK 302-3.

pointed a Law and a Way [*shir`a wa minhaj*]; and if God willed, he would have made you one nation' (5:48). If He had done that, your revealed Laws would not be diverse, just as they are not diverse in the fact that you have been commanded to come together and to perform them.[71]

Thus, Ibn al-`Arabi is differentiating between *din*, which means primordial ideal religion, and 'path' or *shir`a wa minhaj* ('law' and 'way'), which means contextualised and historicised religion. Although the '*din*' is always singular and unitive, the various 'paths' or 'laws' are numerous. 'The paths to God are numerous as the breaths of the creatures', writes Ibn al-`Arabi, 'since the breath emerges from the heart in accordance with the belief of the heart concerning Allah.'[72] Such an approach endorsed by Ibn al-`Arabi is essential in enhancing interfaith dialogue and acceptance of different religious perspectives.

There is no way that the careful reader of Ibn al-`Arabi can miss the fact that his teachings on the underlying unity of all human systems of belief and practice are part of an elaborate esoteric commentary on the first article of Islamic faith '*La ilaha illa Allah*' (there is no God except God). We can see a very direct example of this by returning briefly to his exegesis of Qur'an 23:115.

That within which the existence of the cosmos has become manifest is the Real; it becomes manifest only within the Breath of the All-Merciful, which is the Cloud. So it is the Real, the Lord of the Throne, who gave the Throne its all-encompassing shape, since it encompasses all things. Hence the root within which the forms of the cosmos became manifest encompasses everything in the world of corporeal bodies. This is nothing other than the Real Through Whom Creation Takes Place. Through this receptivity, it is like a container within which comes out into the open (*buruz*) the existence of everything it includes, layer upon layer, entity after entity, in a wise hierarchy (*al-tartib al-hikami*). So It brings out into the open that which had been unseen within It in order to witness it.[73]

Another quranic verse important to an understanding of Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching on religious diversity is: 'Everything is perishing

[71] Fut. III, 413.15; SPK, 303.
[72] Fut. III, 411.22; SPK, loc.cit.
[73] Fut. II, 415.20; SPK, 134.

except His Face [or Essence]' (Q 28:88). This verse refers to the sense of the relativity of all things in the face of God, which is helpful in cultivating the humility necessary for openness to other perspectives and other stories of encounters with the divine. Equally important are quranic references such as:

> And unto God belong the East and the West; and wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God (Q 2:115) He is with you, wherever you are (Q 57:4).
> We are nearer to him [man] than the neck artery (Q 50:16).
> God cometh in between a man and his own heart (Q 8:24).
> Is He not encompassing all things? (Q 41:54).
>
> He is the First and the Last, and the Outward and the Inward (Q 57:3)

These verses, which express a profound sense of the immanence of the divine, are set in balance, Ibn al-`Arabi rightly argues, with those preeminent verses such as those we find in *Surat al-Ikhlas* (Q 112) and the famous 'Throne Verse' of *Surat al-Baqara* (Q 2:255). The balance between the *tanzih* (transcendence) and *tashbih* (immanence) of God plays a major role in Ibn al-`Arabi's thinking about religious diversity. *Tanzih* involves the fundamental assertion of God's essential and absolute incomparability 'with each thing and all things'.[74] It involves the assertion that His being transcends all creaturely attributes and qualities. At the same time, however, 'each thing displays one or more of God's attributes, and in this respect the thing must be said to be "similar" (*tashbih)* in some way to God.'[75] Thus, a certain similarity can be found between God and creation. Unlike traditionalist theologians, who opine that these two concepts are diametrically opposed and cannot exist together in harmony, for Ibn al-`Arabi, both *tanzih* and *tashbih* are in this sense compatible with each other and complementary. *Tanzih* and *tashbih* 'derive necessarily from the Essence on the one hand and the

[74] SPK, 9.
[75] Ibid.

level of Divinity on the other'.[76] Out of this distinction, Ibn al-`Arabi challenges that anybody who exercises and upholds *tanzih* or *tashbih* in its extreme form is either an ignorant man, or one who does not know how to behave properly toward God, because such extremes are attempts to delimit God's Absoluteness. To deny completely the authenticity of other religious 'ways' is to insist that there is no divine self-disclosure to be found there. In doing so, one sets limits on God much in the same way as those who only know God through cognitive activity (which tends to place emphasis on transcendence) and not through affective experience (which can convey a profound sense of divine immanence). Only when one combines *tanzih* and *tashbih* in one's attitude can one be regarded as a 'true knower' (*`arif*) of the Absolute.[77] Ibn al-`Arabi says:

> When the Gnostics know Him through Him, they become distinguished from those who know Him through their own rational consideration (*nazar*), for they possess nondelimitation, while others have delimitation. The Gnostics through Him witness Him in each thing or in the entity of each thing, but those who know Him through rational consideration are removed far from Him by a distance which is required by their declaration of His comparability. Hence they place themselves on one side and the Real on the other. Then they call Him 'from a far place' (Qur'an 41: 44).[78]

5. The hermeneutics of Ibn al-`Arabi and of modernist thinkers

It is important to note that Ibn al-`Arabi's interpretation of *tanzih* and *tashbih* and how this relates to his teaching regarding the underlying unity of all religions is by no means restricted to medieval esoteric hermeneutics. The highly influential Salafi modernist thinker Rashid Rida

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[76] SPK, 69.
[77] Izutsu, Toshihiko, *Sufism and Taoism, A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley/ Los Angeles, CA/ London: University of California Press, 1983, 54.
[78] Fut. III, 410.17; SPK, 110.

offers an interpretation of the meaning of the word *islam* in the Qur'an that complements and supports Ibn al-`Arabi's approach to the question of religious diversity. The Qur'an declares: 'Do they seek other than the religion of God, when unto Him submits whoever is in the heavens and the earth, willingly or unwillingly?' (Q 3:83). Here the Qur'an uses the word *aslama* based on the fourth form of the root *SLM*, which has to do with the act of 'submitting' to God. The word *islam* is the *masdar* or verbal noun from this same form and thus literally means 'submission'. As is the case in Q 3:19[79], in this verse *islam* is identified as 'the religion of God'. According to Rashid Rida, understanding the word *islam* in the proper sense (i.e., writ large as 'Islam'), to refer to the doctrines, traditions and practices observed by Muslims, is a post-quranic phenomenon according to which *al-din* is understood in its social and customary form.[80] For Rida, these forms of Islam, writ large, 'which [vary] according to the differences which have occurred to its adherents in the way of uncritical acceptance, has no relationship with true *islam*. On the contrary,' Rida writes, 'it is subversive of true faith.'[81]

Rida's interpretation of the quranic usage of the word *islam* is helpful in understanding the distinction Ibn al-`Arabi makes between the form and essence of revealed religion. Ibn al-`Arabi's interpretation of the scriptural story of Noah is clearly rooted in this distinction. In the *Fusus*, Ibn al-`Arabi says that the people of Noah are not entirely mistaken. For Ibn al-`Arabi, the idols that were worshiped by the people of

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[79] Ibn al-`Arabi offers his own interpretation of 3:19 as follows: 'Verily the true din with God is this tawhid which He has prescribed for Himself. His din is, therefore, the din of the submission of one's entire being… [to be a Muslim means that I have] severed myself from my ego and achieved annihilation in Him.' See Pseudo-Ibn al-`Arabi (`Abd al-Razzaq al-Qashani), *Tafsir Ibn `Arabi*, Vol. 1, Beirut: dar al-Sadr, d, 105, cited in Esack, Farid, *Qur'an, Liberation, and Pluralism. An Islamic Perspective of Interreligious Solidarity against Oppression*, Oxford: Oneworld, 1997, 127.

[80] Rida, Muhammad Rashid, *Tafsir al-Manar*, Vol. 3, Beirut: Dar al-Ma'rifah, n.d., 361, cited in Esack, Farid, op. cit., 130.

[81] Loc. cit.

Noah were in fact 'the diversity of the names' understood by Ibn al-`Arabi as the Divine Names through which human beings become aware of the self-disclosure of God. The people of Noah committed 'the sin of idolatry' not because they recognised the divine in a plurality of forms, but because of their ignorance that these forms are not deities in themselves, but rather concrete forms of the one God's self-manifestation. Their sin, therefore, was in their worship of these forms as independent entities apart from God. According to Ibn al-`Arabi, the idols are nothing other than God's self manifestations.[82] For Ibn al-`Arabi, the Qur'anic verse: 'And Thy Lord hath decreed that you should worship none other than Him' (Q 17: 23) does not mean, as it is usually understood, 'that you should not worship anything other than God', but rather 'that whatever you worship, you are thereby not (actually) worshiping anything other than God'.[83]

In this sense, 'idolatry' – as serious a sin as it is – can be nothing more than a matter of the worshipper's awareness and intention. Since there is no God but God, it is actually impossible to worship anything other than Him. Some may well ask what impact such a distinction might have on the approach to the whole question of religious diversity. Does it matter, in other words, whether one asserts that idolaters are sinning because they are actually worshipping something other than God, or because, though they are worshipping God and cannot do otherwise, they sin in their lack of awareness of the true nature of their worship? The answer seems to be 'yes'. By locating the sin in the human being's intent, rather than in objective reality, one retains the necessity of discernment in intent and the meaningfulness of true worship versus idola-

[82] Affifi, Fusus, Com, 39, see BW, 76, "The Wisdom of Exaltation in the Word of Noah".
[83] Affifi, Fusus Com, 39, See also Ibn al-`Arabi, Fusus al-Hikam, ed. A. Afifi, Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-`Arabi, 1946, 55/72. Also cited in Isutzu, Toshihiko, *Sufism and Taoism. A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1984, 59-60.

try, without the arrogance of believing that some human beings have an authentic relationship to God and others do not. In this way, not only is it possible to perceive degrees of authenticity in different forms of worship, but it also no longer guarantees that just because an individual or group adopts a particular form of worship, they are immune to idolatry.[84]

There are many other aspects of Ibn al-`Arabi's thought that have direct relevance to what he has to say about religious diversity but, unfortunately, are too numerous to mention here.[85] The key thing to remember about Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching on religious diversity is that, although it is not in the least bit relativist (i.e., it never denies the superiority of Islam over the other religions of humanity), it abhors the arrogance and

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[84] We may also mention here Nurcholis Madjid (1939-2005), one of Indonesia's most respected Islamic scholars, a graduate from the University of Chicago who was dubbed as the icon of reform of the Islamic movement in the country, and who had expressed concern that Islamic parties have become a new 'Allah' for Indonesian Muslims who regard them as sacred and who regard Muslims who do not vote for them as sinful.

[85] For instance, in the Futuhat, Ibn al-`Arabi gives a clearer explanation for the esoteric unity of all revelation, which for him is innate in all diversity. He quotes verse 42:13, which affirms that the law with which Muhammad is charged is the same as that which Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus were charged. Further on, Ibn al-`Arabi quotes from other verse, which mentions further prophets, and concludes with verse 6:90 saying: 'Those are they whom God has guided, so follow their guidance.' He then says that 'This is the Path that brings together every prophet and messenger. It is the performance of religion, scattering not concerning it and coming together in it. It is that concerning which Bukhari wrote a chapter entitled "The chapter on what has come concerning the fact that the religion of the prophets is one"' (Fut. III, 413.12 in SPK, 303). Ibn al-`Arabi also recommends to the seeker of God not to get fascinated with any one form of belief, but rather to try seeking the 'knowledge that is inherent in God' (*ilm laduni*), and not to be imprisoned within ideologically closed ways of viewing the phenomenal world. This is why Ibn al-`Arabi can convey the following in a poem in his *Tarjuman al-Aswaq* (*The Interpreter of Ardent Desires*): 'My heart has become capable of every form.' According to Peter Coates, this aspect of Ibn al-`Arabi's world view reflects 'the perfect immensity of his metaphysics which makes it intrinsically antithetical to all forms of fundamentalism, cognitive or metaphysical'. See Coates, Peter, *Ibn `Arabi and Modern Thought. The History of Taking Metaphysics Seriously*, Oxford: Anqa, 2002, 15.

idolatry of suggesting that other religious ways are not somehow themselves manifestations of authentic human connections to the one source of all Being.

In the final analysis, Ibn al-`Arabi warns his fellow Muslims against restricting God to the form of one's own belief, a warning that is entirely in accordance with the thrust of so much quranic discourse:

> Beware of being bound up by a particular creed and rejecting others as unbelief! Try to make yourself a prime matter for all forms of religious belief. God is greater and wider than to be confined to one particular creed to the exclusion of others. For He says, 'Wherever ye turn, there is the Face of God'.[86] He who counsels his own soul should investigate, during his life in this world, all doctrines concerning God. He should learn from whence each possessor of a doctrine affirms the validity of his doctrine. Once its validity has been affirmed for him in the specific mode in which it is correct for him who holds it, then he should support it in the case of him who believes in it.[87]

In light of certain key quranic verses, Ibn al-`Arabi maintains that Muslims are commanded to believe in all revelations and not just in that conveyed by the Prophet of Islam, as he mentioned in his Futuhat quoted before.

Thus, Ibn al-`Arabi insists that one should not delimit God within just one of the many possible modes of divine self-disclosure. Instead, the true Muslim is a person who recognises God in all revelations:

> So turn your attention to what we have mentioned and put it into practice! Then you will give the Divinity its due and you will be one of those who are fair toward their Lord in knowledge of Him. For God is exalted high above entering under delimitation. He cannot be tied down by one form rather than another. From here you will come to know the all-inclusiveness of felicity for God's creatures and the all-embracingness of the mercy which cover everything.[88]

Ibn al-`Arabi alerts the believers not to fall into particularism – an admonition that resonates with the qur'anic dictum: 'And they say: "None enters paradise unless he be a Jew or a Christian." These are their

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[86] Ibn al-`Arabi, *Fusus al-Hikam*, op. cit., 113, cited in IW, 176.
[87] Fut. II, 85.11 quoted in IW, 176.
[88] Fut. II, 85.20; SPK, 355-356.

own desires. Say: "Bring your proof if you are truthful." Nay, but whosoever surrenders his purpose to God while doing good, his reward is with his Lord; and there shall be no fear upon them, neither shall they grieve.'[89]

6. Applying Ibn al-`Arabi's hermeneutics to interfaith dialogue

One of the larger problems facing participants in Christian-Muslim dialogue is the interpretation of certain biblical and quranic verses that are generally interpreted in highly exclusivist ways and often cited by the opponents of dialogue. The purpose here is to imagine the ways in which Ibn al-'Arabi's hermeneutics can provide a framework for this dialogue that is more fruitful and more grounded in orthodox, mainstream tradition than those currently available. Let us begin with a review of these verses and then move on to envision an application of the hermeneutics.[90]

The Qur'an does not only contain verses that clearly declare the divine ordainment of religious diversity, exhortations to engage in dialogue, and the presence of piety and righteousness in religions other than Islam. It also contains polemical verses. For example the Qur'an says:

> O ye who believe, take not the Jews and the Christians for friends [or 'guardians'.] They are friends [or 'guardians'] one to another. He among you who taketh them for friends [or 'guardians'] is (one) of them. Truly, God guideth not wrongdoing folk (5:51). And the Jews say: Ezra is the son of God, and the Christians say: The Messiah is the son of God. That is their saying with their

[89] Qur'an 2:112.

[90] At this juncture, it is important to emphasise once again that my aim is not to create such a matrix. This can only be done in the context of actual praxis and, therefore, will obviously be influenced by many more interpretations of Ibn al-`Arabi, Eckhart, and both traditions (Islam and Christianity) than I, as an individual scholar/ practitioner, could possibly bring to bear. My aim here, rather, is to try to envision provisionally what such a matrix might look like, that is, for instance, how it might function to enhance dialogue.

mouths. They imitate the saying of those who disbelieved of old. God fighteth them. How perverse are they! (9:30).

A common radically exclusivist interpretation of these verses is that Jews and Christians are corrupted peoples practicing corrupted traditions of worship and belief. As such, they can never be trusted to be 'friends' to the believers. Moreover, these peoples are understood to be the enemies of the faithful since God himself 'fights them' (*qatalahumu llahu*).

The New Testament has its own fair share of verses that have conventionally been interpreted in highly exclusivist ways. Such verses include are those that: present Jesus as the 'one [and only] mediator' between God and humanity (1Tim 2:5); that there is 'no other name under heaven' by which people can be saved (Acts 4:12); that 'no one comes to the Father except through me [i.e., Jesus]' (John 14:6); that Jesus is the only begotten Son of God (John 1:14); and that whoever sees him sees the Father (John 14:7).[91] Hence Jesus is viewed as the only one who truly and fully reveals God. It is, in part, on the basis of verses such as these that Jesus is claimed to be the particular and unique saviour of the world.

What the traditions of exclusivist interpretation of both these verses have in common is that they tend to be uninformed from within as well as from without. By 'uninformed from within', I mean they are usually deaf to alternative interpretative possibilities from within their own tradition. By 'uninformed from without', I mean they are usually articulated with little to no experience of genuine encounter with the other, or if there is experience of the other, it is short-lived and highly negative.

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[91] See this discussion in Knitter, Paul, *No Other Name? A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions*, New York: Maryknoll Orbis Books, 1985, and in his "The World Religion and the Finality of Christ. A Critique of Hans Küng's On Being A Christian", in: Rousseau, Richard W. (ed.), *Interreligious Dialogue*, Ridge Row Press, 1981. See also Küng, Hans *et al.*, *Christianity and the World Religions. Paths to Dialogue with Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism*, New York: Doubleday, 1982, and Young, Frances, "A Cloud of Witness", in: Hick, John (ed.), *The Myth of God Incarnate*, London: SCM Press, 1977.

By applying some of the key points of our mystic master as a framework for exploring the significance of these verses, we can more clearly see the ways in which this orthodox teacher can help us develop a more fruitful dialogue focused on this subject. At this juncture, however, it is important to mention that the Ibn al-`Arabi hermeneutics proposed here is by no means the only way that holds some promise of fruitfulness when it comes to Christian-Muslim dialogue. Rather, this way is proposed as one among many possibilities.

The point we will now refer to that immediately comes to mind when faced with the problem of the quranic and biblical verses cited above is the *infinite potential for meaning* inherent in the nature of divine revelation. Within the context of the Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching for dialogue this important hermeneutical principle would by no means require an *a priori* dismissal of the more exclusivist interpretations of these verses. In fact, it would be a misuse of the matrix to load it with a particular political or philosophical agenda other than the foundational conviction that interfaith (and intra-faith) dialogue is inherently good and necessary for the welfare of the participating traditions as well as for the welfare of the human family in general. Rather, what this principle would do is remind the participants in dialogue, who are aware of these verses and their exclusivist interpretations, that other possibilities for interpretation exist that may well be equally defensible within the context of the larger tradition and thus, depending on the authoritative consensus of the community of believers, may be equally or even more orthodox in nature.

As I see it, Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching, especially its infinite potential of scriptural meaning, would encourage two complementary activities when faced with any scriptural text that posed a challenge (either positive or negative) for dialogue, cooperation, and mutual understanding and trust. The first of these activities would be to imitate the master himself by delving as deeply as possible into all the contextual resources available for interpreting these texts. This not only means reading

quranic or biblical passages in light of other proximate and otherwise related quranic or biblical passages. It also means using all the available tools of historical research to uncover key elements of the original context of a given passage's revelation (in the case of the Qur'an) and a given passage's composition (in the case of the Bible). The second of these activities would also involve a certain imitation of the master when it comes to his valorisation of experience and its importance in interpreting sacred scripture. In this case, the experience that would be most significant would be that of the encounter with the religious other. The concept of the infinite potential for meaning of scripture would encourage interpretations of all scripture – especially passages that purport to speak about the religious other – to be rooted in actual experience of that other. Simple reason dictates that any interpretation of what the Qur'an, for example, says about Jews and/or Christians is de facto faulty if it cannot stand in the face of a given Muslim's authentic relationships with Jews and/or Christians.

Another way that is also pertinent in the case of scriptural interpretation is the teaching of the *oneness of being*. This concept dictates that God's presence and influence can be found in all traditions, thus, any interpretation of sacred scripture that suggests otherwise would be suspect. From the perspective of Ibn al-`Arabi and the orthodoxy he represents, no passage of the Qur'an should be interpreted to suggest that any group of people, by virtue of their beliefs and practices, live outside of a relationship with God. This does not mean that, according to this concept, no distinction can be made between 'believers', for example, and 'unbelievers'. It also does not mean that one tradition cannot be perceived of as superior, in certain ways, to another. What it does mean is that the hubris of decreeing God to be 'here' and not 'there', or 'with us' and not at all 'with you' cannot be accepted.

Of course, there are many other challenges encountered in the dialogue besides those of interpreting apparently exclusivist scriptural pas-

sages. Another example might be problems of interpreting either our own or others' doctrinal formulations. A primary illustration of this in Christian-Muslim dialogue is the Christian doctrine of the Trinity and/or the doctrine of the Incarnation and the Muslim doctrine of *tawhid*. Although some expect the dialogue to resolve such fundamental doctrinal differences as this one, this is by no means the purpose of the matrix. Here is where the master's idea of the 'naming of God' can be helpful. Given the importance of our doctrinal formulations to the integrity of our respective traditions, we must never fall into the arrogance of believing either that these formulations are equivalent with the reality (i.e., God) of which they speak, or the arrogance of believing that they amount to little more than disposable conjecture in our quest for the truth. Through his teaching that has to do with the 'naming of God' we hear our master asking us never to lose sight of our creaturely limitations – especially the inherent inadequacy of our modes of discourse to convey an understanding of God. Another way of putting this is to say that we do not preserve the integrity and sacredness of our doctrinal formulations by absolutising them in such a way as to exclude all others. Rather we preserve this integrity and sacredness precisely by humbly recognising that the deepest understanding of these inherently limited linguistic formulations must leave room for validating and dignifying the religious experiences and formulations of others, no matter how different they may be from our own.

Also, to the extent that we lose a sense of humility with respect to our doctrinal formulations, we also lose a sense of humility as we stand before our traditions and thus run the risk of lapsing into idolatry by mistaking our traditions for God. Through Ibn al-`Arabi's teaching that has to do with the distinction between 'God created by the believer', on the one hand, and the 'Godhead', on the other, the master reminds us that however passionately we may believe in the articles of our faiths or however passionately and devoutly we may perform our rituals, the

moment we begin to use these beliefs and practices as weapons to establish the dominance of the self over others is the moment we mark ourselves as servants of our own egos rather than of God.

By interpreting scripture with a hermeneutic of the infinite potential of meaning, by never forgetting the oneness and ubiquity of the divine Being, by recognising the limitation of our theological language and our success distinguishing between the 'God' we create and the ultimately ineffable Godhead, we truly plumb the depths of our relationship to God by opening ourselves to the goal at the heart of both Islam and Christianity: to transform the believers into better and better beings, more deeply committed to the service of God and one another.

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3

COMPASSION AS A CORE ELEMENT OF CHRISTIAN ETHICS[1]

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The gospel of Luke relates the famous parable of the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37). Jesus had been asked by an expert in the Jewish law: 'Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' Jesus replied by asking: 'How do you read the law?' The man answered: 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;' and 'Love your neighbour as yourself.' 'You have answered correctly,' Jesus replied. 'Do this and you will live.' But the man wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' In reply Jesus told the following parable: 'A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him, and departed, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was; and when he saw him, he had compassion, and went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and

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wine; then he set him on his own beast and brought him to an inn, and took care of him. And the next day he took out two *denarii* and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.' Which of these three, do you think, proved neighbour to the man who fell among the robbers?' He said, 'The one who showed mercy on him.'In the first section of my paper I would like to employ this parable of the good Samaritan in order to point up the importance of compassion for the Christian tradition but also to discuss compassion's limitations as a foundation for Christian ethics. The aim will be to work out a viable and adequate understanding of compassion. In the second part I shall inquire into the role that compassion can play in interreligious encounters.

1. Compassion as emotion, consciousness, and ethical norm

According to the English translation of the parable, the Samaritan felt 'compassion' when he saw the victim of the assault. In the original Greek text a much stronger expression is used: *splagchnizomai*, meaning that 'the bowels' – as the most interior, most intimate part of the human being – 'turn over', as it were. Nowadays we would prefer to speak of the heart as the centre of human emotions, but according to the New Testament understanding, the entrails are the location of the emotions. Compassion is experienced as an interior *revolt* within the emotional condition of one who is affected by the suffering (*passio*) of another human being or of an animal – the suffering, that is to say, of a sentient being, a being with a soul (*anima*), and thus able to feel pain. Compassion means to *share* that suffering, to participate in it, to make it one's own feeling, to suffer with the sufferer (*com-passio*). The suffering of the Other evokes a resonance in me: a co-suffering.

The same expression, 'the turning over of the bowels', is used in other important biblical testimonies. Jesus felt that kind of interior revolt

when he saw a crowd of hungry people (Mark 8:2; 6:34, see also Matt. 9:36), when he met two blind men (Matt. 20:34) and a leper (Mark 1:41) and when he encountered a mother grieving over her dead son (Luke 7:13). Moreover there are two parables in the New Testament where the expression is applied even to God himself. One of them is the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:27); the other is the well-known story of the prodigal son: when he returned to his father – poor, hungry, and dirty – the father felt a rumbling in his entrails (Luke 15:20). This is to say that God himself feels compassion for the needy, the poor and oppressed. It is that which constitutes the most profound basis for a Christian ethics of solidarity.

But is it sufficient to base ethics on emotions? Is that not a shaky ground – highly individualistic and capricious? Compassion would then tend to be evoked primarily by suffering that occurs close to me or which strikes people to whom I feel related in one way or the other. The citizens of the USA were obviously affected more deeply by the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans than by the victims of the tsunami in South East Asia. Suffering that I experience directly and immediately calls forth a stronger feeling of compassion than suffering that is reported to me by the mass media. Compassion as an emotion can thus be 'prejudiced', giving preference to those who suffer at close range to me or belong to my family, my tribe, my community, my nation or my religion.

In the parable of the good Samaritan Jesus avoids that preference for the proximal Other and universalises the commitment to care for the needy whoever and wherever they are. Interpreted from the standpoint of the Samaritan it teaches that *everybody* who is in need has to be regarded as one's neighbour, because he or she is a creature of God and is thus to be respected as *God's* neighbour. Interpreted from the standpoint of the sufferer it teaches that *everybody* who comes to the aid of someone in need has to be regarded as neighbour because he or she acts in the

name of God – as *God's* neighbour. 'Love of neighbour' can thus be understood as a *genitivus objectivus* (the person in need of loving care is the neighbour) or a *genitivus subjectivus* (the person offering love is the neighbour). In both cases 'neighbourhood', according to the Christian understanding, is constituted in the relationship with God and not by an affection or a relationship between the person in need and the person who cares for him or her. Thus the parable elaborates 'neighbourhood' neither in the spatial terms of living together in a social community, nor in the ethnic, cultural or religious terms of belonging to the same people, culture or religion, nor in terms of common interests, such as a shared preference for the same soccer team or employment in the same company or membership in the same political party. 'Neighbourhood' is constituted in and through God's salvific will for all his creatures, which is at work as a promise and an obligation to care for the needs of people I come to meet, be it personally or as mediated by information. Because I am a creature loved by God, I am empowered to love my neighbour.

According to the Stoic understanding, the attitude of compassion ought not to be affected by emotional concernment. It is supposed to be a purely rational disposition.

As a mere spontaneous and immediate emotion, compassion is indeed insufficient as a basis for Christian ethics. In the context of an ethos of neighbourly love compassion is an awareness, an attentiveness that is part of a permanent (habitual) ethical attitude – in traditional terms: the virtue of charity. 'Compassion is not a simple feeling-state but a complex emotional attitude toward another, characteristically involving imaginative dwelling on the condition of the other person, an active regard for his good, a view of him as a fellow human being, and emotional responses of a certain degree of intensity.'[2]

[2] Blum, Lawrence, "Compassion", in: Oksenberg Rorty, Amélie (ed.), *Explaining Emotions*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980, 509.

To approach compassion as an ethical attitude of neighbourly love – as is characteristic for Christian ethics – does not mean to neglect the importance of the affectional dimension. The *attitude* of compassion becomes both activated and energised by the *affection* of compassion. On the other hand, spontaneous emotional energy needs to be channelled into and integrated within the framework of an ethical attitude, where it can become an integral part of a specific pattern of life-orientation. Compassion thus has both an emotional and a rational component. While the ethical attitude is always anchored in a specific religious and cultural tradition, compassion as affection can be regarded as a universal anthropological capacity able to transgress the boundaries between ethnic groups, religions, and cultures. But compassion can also be suppressed under the influence of 'enemy' stereotypes.

In addition to the affectional and the rational-ethical aspects of compassion there is also a third dimension: the volitional. As the parable of the good Samaritan shows, compassion as co-suffering or vicarious suffering does not lead to passive moaning, wailing and whining, but to a spontaneous *activity* aiming to resolve the suffering and its causes. Compassion (*Mitleid*) is more vigorous than sympathy and empathy (*Mitgefühl*). It goes beyond understanding and literally moves those affected by it – moves them both internally, as it shapes their perception of the situation, and externally, as it impels them to take action. It impels a person thus affected to come to the aid of the suffering Other so as to alleviate his or her distress. Thus compassion leads to the practice of neighbourly love: hospitality, social work, engagement for the accused, the enslaved, the oppressed and the poor. These forms of active neighbourly love can be summed up in the term 'mercy', derived from the Latin *misericordia.* The feeling of compassion – prompted by the misery (the suffering, the *passio*) of others – becomes the impulse for a saving, caring or helping activity. With a nearly irresistible power it pulls one towards an active engagement.

The ethos of neighbourly love, as illustrated by the parable of the good Samaritan, encompasses all three dimensions: the affection of compassion, its ethical attitude and its concrete practice. 'Compassion' in the narrower sense refers only to the affectional dimension. In the broader and more important sense it extends throughout all three dimensions. It is that broader understanding of compassion as emotional concern, ethical attitude and practical engagement that makes it possible to avoid the problems that would arise if Christian ethics were grounded in compassion as a feeling – problems such as preferring to care for those who are close to me, since I *see* their suffering. Compassion as an attitude is not dependent on the 'stirring of the bowels'. That can of course serve as an important impulse for an act of neighbourly love but there can also be other, less stirring impulses. Attention to the needs of others refers not only to states of emergency or to violations of basic human rights, but concerns all needs, visible and invisible, of human beings – the needs of their bodies and souls, of their social relationships, of their communities.

The practice of neighbourly love must not be restricted to the treatment of the painful appearance of distress but has to be extended to the elimination of its causes. It is not only to be realised in the personal sphere as solidarity but also in the social arena as justice. From the perspective of Christian social ethics, the structures and functions of social institutions, political organisations and economical systems must be questioned as to whether or not they promote justice, fairness and a balance of interests. That is known as 'structural *agape*'.

In focusing on the relationship to the needy other we should not forget to note that according to the Great Commandment of the Jewish and Christian traditions, which demands that we love God and the neighbour, 'love' refers not only to the alleviation of distress and the compensation of deficiencies, but also to a fundamental acknowledgement of and a loving attention to that Other who is *not* in a miserable

situation. There is then not only a 'negative' ('relieving from') but also a 'positive' ('doing good') dimension. Especially the second of those dimensions is directed not only towards others but also towards one's *own* person and community. That commandment calls upon me to love God and the neighbour 'as myself'. *Compassion as awareness* thus includes sensitivity to the needs of my *own* self in all the various dimensions of my life. And both – the love of my neighbour and the love of myself – are rooted in God's love.

According to the First Letter of John, God's very essence is love (4:8,16). We are called to respond to as well as to correspond to that love – in the relationship with God, with ourself, with other creatures, and indeed with created reality as a whole. *Being-in-agape* is the utterly foundational characteristic of Christian existence, and as such it must then impact upon our most fundamental ways of seeing and find expression in our behaviour. The one side of *agape* is empathy and compassion, the other side, practical caring. The mandate for self-giving service is set forth in Mark 10:42-45.

In the next part of my paper I explore the importance of compassion as a core element of Christian ethics in the encounter of people from different religious backgrounds.

2. Compassion as a motive for interreligious dialogue

Let me again return to the parable of the good Samaritan. Although the Samaritans claimed descent from a group of the people of Israel at the time of the Babylonian exile, their religious tradition differed from that of later mainline Judaism, which looked upon them as ethnically, culturally and religiously inferior and impure. Pious Jews despised them and shunned all contact with them. For their part, the Samaritans accused the Jews of aberration from the Torah. Thus the parable of the good Samaritan narrates the story of an encounter of people belonging to

different religious communities – each of which claimed superiority over the other. It is addressed to the Jews, represented by members of two distinguished groups – a priest and a Levite – whose members are expected to follow the commandment of neighbourly love in a particularly notable way. The parable tells them that it is precisely the heretical Samaritan who is moved by compassion and behaves in accordance with the will of God. Thus the message of the parable, as we have seen above, is that the adequate expression of being in communion with God is not belonging to a certain people, culture or religion, but practising solidarity with the needy Other. Compassion relativises and overrides all boundaries of ethnic, cultural or religious identities. The decisive response to God's love and to the 'new being' (expressed in the symbol of eternal life), evoked by the salvific will of God, is neighbourly love.

That makes compassion such an important issue for the encounter of adherents of different religious traditions. Understood in the narrower sense delineated above compassion plays a central role only in those encounters that refer in one way or another to a situation of distress. But understood in the broader sense, compassion becomes the attitude of acknowledgement that constitutes dialogical relationships.

I shall try to systematise the instances of interreligious encounters in which compassion – in both the narrower and the wider sense – comes into play:

- when the encounter is driven by the *needs* of the adherents of other religions whom I meet, or on my needs, or on the needs of others, i.e. third parties;
- when the encounter takes up the question of how to *understand* those needs and how to *act* in order to alleviate the sufferings caused by them;
- when the encounter is rooted in the *ethics* of the respective religious traditions and in the *spiritual motivations* for following that ethical orientation.

Compassion can lead to interreligious encounter and can become a central issue for dialogue and conjoint action. It can create a tradition-transcending basis for interreligious understanding and can radiate from there, planting and developing the seeds of neighbourly love in the hearts of the participants of the encounter and of those who then come to be included in the resulting solidarity.

There are at least six different forms of encounter between the adherents of religions:[3]

- *intellectual* theological exchange at conferences, where experts seek to deepen their understanding of the various religious traditions;
- interreligious encounter in *everyday life*, where people strive to live in a neighbourly spirit, sharing their problems and preoccupations;
- *spiritual* communion, where people come together in prayer, contemplation, meditation and worship;
- the *ethical* dialogue of *action*, in which people collaborate for the improvement of living-conditions, for liberation and justice;
- the *interior* dialogue of a person with other religious traditions;
- dialogue *about* dialogue, in which the possibilities, forms and difficulties of interreligious encounters are discussed.

The experience of compassion can and ought to become the emotional impetus for the dialogue of action. In the case of the good Samaritan the experience initiated a unilateral action, but action might also be a bi- or multilateral activity among members of different religious traditions working together to assist people in distress. In addition to single spontaneous interventions in acute states of emergency, constant activity

[3] See Bernhardt, Reinhold, *Ende des Dialogs? Die Begegnung der Religionen und ihre theologische Reflexion*, Zurich: Theol. Verlag, 2005, 27-31 and Lienemann, Christine, *Mission und interreligiöser Dialog*, Göttingen: Ökumenische Studienhefte 11, 1999, 96.

in fighting against poverty, illiteracy, and insufficient medical care is essential.

Hans Küng's Project World Ethos calls for interreligious cooperation for the sake of humanity in the face of global challenges and responsibilities. This approach brackets off the different *theological* foundations upon which the basic ethical commandments of the world-religions are based. It restricts its focus to a common denominator in the moral instructions of the religious traditions. The project strives for a fourfold commitment capable of sustaining interreligious cooperation:

- commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life;
- commitment to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order;
- commitment to a culture of tolerance and a life of truthfulness; and
- commitment to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women.

These commitments follow from the ethos of neighbourly love. The question is: What might be the motivation for nurturing them and living out what they envision? The *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic*, where the four commitments above are laid out, appeals to a 'conversion of the heart' in terms of a new consciousness created and fostered by the religions. In my understanding this is the consciousness of compassion – compassion in the broader understanding that goes beyond its emotional dimension. It encompasses perception and understanding of the Other, and it leads to action. The conversion of the heart reaches further than the conversion of the bowels.

But in all religious traditions there are counter-forces working against the power of compassion – forces that drive back the empathy with the needy ethnic or religious Other and restrict it to the members of one's own clan, community, nation, or religion; forces that demand a distinction between the neighbour and the stranger; forces that cause mischief, sowing the spirit of separation and hostility.

Within the religious traditions those forces opposed to an attitude of universal compassion are nurtured by and expressed in the claim of the superiority of one's own tradition over against the others. For example, this claim leads to distinctions between those who are saved and those who still have to be saved; and if they then refuse to become saved they are condemned by God. Even in the New Testament there are harsh verdicts against Gentiles and Jews. In his Letter to the Romans Paul dooms those Gentiles who addict themselves to ungodliness and unrighteousness (1:29-32). And in his First Letter to the Thessalonians he fulminates in a similar way against the Jews (2:15f).

On the other hand we ought not to forget that Paul himself was a Jew and his struggle to incorporate the Gentiles and the Jews into the body of Christ was a consequence of his attempt to save them. Perhaps he would have understood this attempt as a fruit of compassion. What Robert C. Roberts says of Christianity in general, may be said of Paul: 'Christians regard sin and being out of fellowship with God as the primary harm to which human beings are subject.'[4] That conviction can however lead to forms of compassion that need critical scrutiny. If for instance Christians feel compassion (or properly speaking: pity) for Hindus because they are alienated from God, then one must indeed ask if this is an appropriate application of compassion. Such an example indicates the importance of ethical reflection on the *nature* of the distress that evokes compassion. And it shows that the sentiment of compassion can be linked with paternalistic attitudes, with attempts to convert people from other faith traditions, with claims for the superiority of one's own religious path or ethical preference. The ethical mindset of a person or community is closely associated with religious beliefs – in the case of my example: with the question as to how God's salvific will and action is related to other relig-

[4] Roberts, Robert C., 'Compassion as an Emotion and Virtue', in: Dalferth, Ingolf U./ Hunziker, Andreas (eds.), *Mitleid. Konkretionen eines strittigen Konzepts*, Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007, 123.

ions. This issue is discussed in the 'theology of religions'. The ethical reflection on compassion must itself become an issue of interreligious dialogue. Dialogue rests upon the principle of mutuality. As opposed to that, compassion is uni-directional; as an emotion, it is tied to a subject-object relation: a person feels compassion for another sentient being. The dialogical principle on the other hand calls for making the other person a subject. It transfers the I-They relation into an I-You relation.

The implicit ethos of dialogue requires each participant to inquire into the self-understanding of the others and gives the other participants the opportunity to articulate a personal view of their situation. It may be the case that another person feels comfortable with what for me seems to be a very uncomfortable, distressful situation that has evoked my compassion. Now it may be that this person is deluded about his or her real needs, but it may also be that I have simply taken my own understanding of 'well-being' and absolutised it for all. Only in a dialogical encounter can one find out how the other is experiencing a situation that to me appears distressing. Only in a dialogical encounter can one find out whether compassion is the appropriate response, and if so, what practical activity should be undertaken to change the situation. Compassion is a strong motive for spontaneous charity but it needs to be framed by ethical reflection and by dialogue, by the inner voice of my ethical orientation *and* by the voice of the other. The normative orientation cannot and ought not rely only on affections. It needs ethical discourse and it needs to listen to the *self*-articulation of those for whose sake I feel compassion. The 'others' bear their own normativity, and a dialogue with them brings that into play. Compassion and dialogue are the two foci of an ellipse, and though tension may arise between them, they actually belong together.

4

ETHICS FOR THE 'ROUGH ROAD'. EXPLORING NEW DIMENSIONS FOR INTERFAITH ETHICS[1]

Padmasiri de Silva, Australia

Prelude

Ethics is generally divided into metaethics and normative ethics. 'The term "metaethics" implies that we are not taking part in the practice of ethics itself, but rather reflecting on the practice of ethics, as if from a different level from which we can view it as a whole, and see what is going on, when people are, say, arguing about rights and wrongs of eating meat'.[2] Normative ethics on the other hand seeks to directly influence actions. When we criticise a friend for not keeping to a promise or condemn a person for killing animals, we make judgments about right and wrong, and this kind of activity is described as making normative judgments, but when we consider the basis of actions, whether they are based on facts or emotions, or merely prescribing, whether they are subjective or normative ethics, we are engaging in metaethical reflections.

[1] Lecture at the conference on *Negotiating the Sacred IV: Tolerance, Education and the Curriculum*, Centre for Cross Cultural Research, Australian National University. September 1-2, 2007.
[2] Singer, Peter, *Ethics*, Oxford University Press, 1994.

A third dimension for engaging in ethics is to broaden and diversify the methods and tools of teaching ethics, methods of engaging in dialogues on ethics across different groups, ethnic, cultural and religious. One of the reasons for the emergence of this third dimension for engaging in ethics is the limited methods that dominate ethical discourse such as the emphasis on the rigours of logical consistency, the use of data and statistics, where the onus is on proof and disproof, rather than communicating a complex moral situation. There has been an effort to widen the techniques of pedagogy in ethics to more imaginative encounters through narrative, stories, fiction, drama, constructed dialogue and films.

Working very much in the field of Buddhist ethics, I have to a great extent been dominated in the past by the Western models of normative ethics and metaethics.[3] But while being guided by these models, I was always struck by the fact that the Buddha's sermons relating to the good life were 'context-bound', by his compassion directed to people in dire distress, by his ability to 'vary the medicine' according to the nature of the person, and find a balance between the content and the form of the message, and by his superior skill in selecting one specific approach rather than another (*upāya kaushalya*: the skill in means). Often he communicated through metaphors, paradoxes and stories. He preached to the criminal Angulimala, the intellectually dull Culapanthaka, and the grief stricken Patacara. In talking to Angulimala, who was eventually liberated, the Buddha almost bracketed the time-worn ideas of right and wrong, made Angulimala move out of a guilt-ridden psyche, and in the most refined non-judgmental perspective transformed the one-time criminal.

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[3] See my "Buddhist Ethics", in: Singer, Peter, *A Companion to Ethics*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1991, 58-68; *Buddhism, Ethics and Society. The Conflicts and Dilemmas of our Times*, Clayton: Monash Asia Institute, 2002; and the paper on "Tolerance and Empathy. Exploring Contemplative Methods in the Class Room", presented at the conference on *Negotiating the Sacred. Tolerance & the Curriculum*, Canberra: Australian National University, 1-2 September 2007.

'Ethics for the rough road' implies that more than ever, we need a kind of language, a method of communication for speaking to people across different kinds of boundaries, such as religion, ethnicity and culture. We need pathways for understanding as the instability, the chaos around is great – the tsunami, earthquakes, tornados, bushfires – and hits rock-bottom levels of suffering regardless of identity.

1. Exploring contemplative ethics: ethics for the rough road

> The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement. (For the crystalline purity of logic was, of course not a result of investigation: it was a requirement). The conflict becomes intolerable; the requirement is now in danger of becoming empty. – We have got into slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need friction. Back to the rough ground! [4]

The meaning of 'friction' in the above statement may be interpreted as a reference to the uncertainties and chaos around our lives. But the philosophical world that pervaded the times of Wittgenstein, dominated by the rational-empirical model, attempting to find neat answers to well-formulated questions, had no opening to diversify the approaches to ethics. The epistemology dominant at the time does help us to formulate questions clearly, emphasising consistency and coherence in thinking, examining the validity and assumptions in an argument, and finding useful methods and models in science for testing the veracity of our beliefs. But with the emergence of the rough road in our lives, we also need a supplement (not a substitute), an education focused on experiential, self-reflexive, contemplative learning skills, a more subjective, and one would say a 'phenomenological' approach. If we want to handle effectively the apparent contradictions and paradoxes in life, we need to

[4] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, *Philosophical Investigations*, ed. G.H. von Wright *et al*., transl. G.E.M. Anscombe, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953, 46e, §107.

move to contemplative education, fostering the human capacity for knowing through silence, bracketing and suspending the auto-pilot of the constant rush of thought patterns – looking inward, pondering, beholding, replacing the habitual chatter of the mind and staying still. In fact, William James offers a positive pathway to move to the rough road:

> The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character and will. An education which should improve this faculty would be an education par excellence. But it is easier to define this ideal than give practical instructions for bringing this about.[5]

In contexts of adversity, we need mindfulness and a reflective turn of mind rather than logical formulations for making choices, and it is such a perspective that is the 'root of judgment, character and will'. This is not to deny the importance of rules, precepts, and theoretical approaches in ethics, but to use and apply them, we need to find a mind immersed in the reflective concerns of morality, the moment-to-moment flow of thought, commitment and authenticity in facing existential challenges – in short, developing authentic moral character.

> The replacement of genuine moral reflection by procedures and protocols finally paralyses people's capacity for moral thought. Moral life requires the personal facing of genuine moral difficulty, disorder and uncertainty. The more important goals of moral reflection are not so much (ready-made) answers to moral problems as the development of moral character.[6]

Of the three dominating moral traditions in the West, exemplified in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Kant's *Fundamental Principles of Morals* and John Stuart Mill's *Utilitarianism*, Kant focuses on moral law – the deontological tradition – Mill brings out a consequentialist focus on ethics, and Aristotle is immersed in the art of moral education. The perspective I am developing has more affinity with the Aristotelian ap-

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[5] James, William, *The Principles of Psychology*, Vol.1, New York: Dover Publication, 1950, 424.

[6] Tichtchenco, P., "The Goals of Moral Reflection", in: Evans, Martyn (ed.), *Critical Reflections on Medical Ethics*, Advances in Bioethics Series, Vol. 4, London: Jay Press, 1998, 51-52.

proach, though in a strict sense, 'mindfulness' hardly entered the arena of Western ethics, since 'rationality' was the basic measuring stick for them. Plato's metaphor of reason as the charioteer and passions as the unruly horses has been a dominating metaphor in the ethics and the moral psychology of the West. Contemplative traditions in Buddhism, the Hindu tradition that Siddhartha Gautama inherited, medieval Christian mysticism, and Sufi Islam share to some extent the Buddhist tranquillity meditation (*samatha)* approach while insight meditation (*vipassana)* is basically a Buddhist contribution. Contemplatives may be located across a wide spectrum, from those who have interiorised their outlook, such as the Christian desert fathers, Himalayan yogis, Thomas Merton and the Buddhist forest monks, to those who emphasised a ceaseless interconnection with the world, such as the Dalai Lama, Hildegard of Bingen, Thich Naht Hanh, Gandhi and Martin Luther King. A book entitled *Hermits: The Insights of Solitude* runs through the lives of Henry David Thoreau, the desert fathers, Ramakrishna, hermits of the Sahara and Thomas Merton.[7] All of them generated invaluable insights by committing themselves to certain contemplative lifestyles.

2. Contemplative ethics in interfaith dialogue

Thus the contemplative approach to epistemology and ethics I am developing in this article, and more broadly contemplative education and life, may offer an interesting approach to interfaith dialogue, and this is exemplified in mystics and personalities across the world's major religious traditions. Developments in contemplative education, today, emphasise both 'accumulation of knowledge' and 'embodiment of knowledge', as well as the uniqueness of each person's journey. I am

[7] France, Peter, *Hermits. The Insights of Solitude*, London: Pimlico, 1996.

reminded of Iris Murdoch's image of the moral endeavour as a person going on a pilgrimage.[8]

The ethical reflections of Iris Murdoch, more recently developed by Lawrence A. Blum,[9] offer many cross-cutting points of convergence to the perspective developed in this paper. Murdoch says that, apart from the ethics that emerges when we make a choice, the more important point is that ethics is something that 'goes on continually, not something that is switched off in between the occurrence of explicit moral choices'.[10] In developing a contemplative ethics, we have to confer a sense of majesty and clinical sacredness on our routine lives – the moment-to-moment flow of life that comes within the range of mindfulness practice. It is because our routine lives get infected with habitual forms of deception and automatic and thoughtless behaviour that we expect the spark of a dramatic choice situation to make a great difference, but the more crucial thing is to reflect on the whole tenor of our routine lives. The real details and particulars are important. In making a case for what she calls the 'nostalgia for the particular', Murdoch says that the moral life unfolds in the moment to moment flow of attention: 'I would regard the (daily, hourly, minutely) attempted purification of consciousness as the central and fundamental arena of morality.' It is in this routine, prosaic, silent life, that like ants we can build our moral integrity, dexterity and industriousness. This is not to deny the value of moral theories and principles but they need to find their wellsprings in the deeper reflective path of morality and then it can be assured that we may not collapse in a moment of crisis.

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[8] Murdoch, Iris, "Vision and Choice in Morality", in: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society 30*, 1956, 32-58.
[9] Blum, Lawrence A., *Moral Perception and Particularity*, Cambridge University Press, 1994.
[10] Murdoch, Iris, *The Sovereignty of Good*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970, 37.

The next point I wish to take up is 'transformative dialogue', which is nourished by deep listening. Some of the dominant ethical issues today like matters of public and social policy are often pursued in an adversarial frame of mind, which Deborah Tannen calls 'ritualised opposition'.[11] In her book she spells out the nature of this 'argument culture' in the United States of America. There is a need for good dialogue and good listening and understanding other points of view. Often what is called the truth has many sides, and often as in the story of the elephant and the seven blind men, a person catches only a limited aspect of a problem and does not see the larger issue. There can be contrasting perspectives, dilemmas and even paradoxes. In transformative dialogue the virtues of good listening and tolerance are important. We need to move from the excessive manoeuvres of ratiocentric ethics (that some view is either right or wrong) to a more transformational perspective, acknowledging our fallibility and vulnerability, as well as develop skills of flexibility, and contextualise our moral insights. In his recent research on social intelligence, Daniel Goleman says that cognitive science has well served linguistic and artificial intelligence but 'neglects noncognitive capacities like primal empathy and synchrony that connect us to other people'.[12] Development of social intelligence in schools and the wider society would be a welcome complement to contemplative education. Contemplative techniques have entered the mainstream of counselling and therapeutic systems in the West. I do not attempt to explore this dimension in this article, as I have written a complete text on the subject.[13] Contemplative psychotherapy as a discipline was first developed at the Naropa Institute (now Naropa University) in Colorado, mostly inspired by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

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[11] Tannen, Deborah, *The Argument Culture*, London: Virago Press, 1998.
[12] Goleman, Daniel, *Social Intelligence*, London: Hutchinson, 2006, 334.
[13] de Silva, Padmasiri, *Explorers of Inner Space*, Ratmalana: Sarvodaya Vishvalekha, 2008.

Jonathan Watts records an interesting experiment of the use of contemplative techniques in social work in Thailand, conducted with Buddhist monks.[14] The project emphasises, according to him, a 'method' rather than an 'ideology' in bringing people together. He says that the multiple methodologies of deep listening and communicative skills would help contemplative social theorists and grassroots activists among the monks to get together. The building of trust, friendship and community and group dynamics highlight an important type of relationship: the group goes beyond logical agreement and disagreement, and there is a transformative process, engaging in this judgment-free awareness.

3. Levels of understanding across religions

In the Buddhist tradition with which I am closely acquainted, there is a certain layer of knowledge that you first get to by reading the scriptures (sermons of the Buddha) or listening to the preaching by a monk, and for which we may first use the normal model of conceptual understanding. But as you go beyond this understanding, you engage in a deeper process, as religion connects people to something beyond themselves. It has been observed that 'the meta-narrative of religion reduces anxiety about the travails of existence and consoles the individual with a larger context for his or her thoughts and feelings'.[15]

The Buddha's advice that to detach oneself from suffering (*dukkha*) is to detach from a powerfully driven system of desires has to be understood within an existential and experiential commitment – as Murdoch says: through a pilgrimage in life. As you get somewhere, even half-way

[14] Watts, Jonathan, "Exploring the Method of Socially Engaged Buddhism", in: *INEB, The Buddhist Channel*, 13 December 2005, **www.buddhistchannel.tv**, accessed July 2009.
[15] Nettle, Daniel, *Happiness. The Science Behind Your Smile*, Oxford University Press, 2005, 156.

to this goal, there is a shift of experiential understanding and insight. William James has best described this shift of understanding:

> To give up pretensions is as blessed a relief as to get them gratified…. There is a strange lightness in the heart when one's nothingness in a particular area is accepted in good faith. […] How pleasant is the day when we give up striving to be young, – or slender! Thank God, we say, *those* illusions are gone.[16]

It may be said that some of the basic questions addressed in religions do not seek quick and specific answers but the ability to get absorbed and immersed in living questions. There is a tradition of voluntary simplicity and managing desires skilfully among the monks that shows, in the words of Rainer Maria Rilke, that the questions have to be lived: 'Have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, as if they were locked rooms or books written in a foreign language... Live the questions now'.[17] Guy Claxton in his book *Hare Brain and Tortoise Mind* offers a graphic metaphor to distinguish contemplative knowledge from the kind of knowledge people develop to live in accelerated times, where the mind seeks decisive and business like ways of thinking – working like the hare brain.[18]

In 1954, Aldous Huxley wrote that in the field of education we do everything possible to keep us away from 'exploring inner space' and that 'non-verbal humanities, the arts of being directly aware of the given facts of our existence, are almost completely ignored'.[19] Howard Gardner is well known for his work on *multiple intelligences*,[20] and Daniel Goleman built on this work introducing the celebrated concept of *emo-*

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[16] James, William, *The Principles of Psychology*, op. cit., 311.
[17] Rilke, Rainer Maria, *Letters to a Young Poet*, transl. Stephen Mitchell, New York: Random House Modern Library, 2001, 34.
[18] Claxton, Guy, *Hare Brain, Tortoise Mind*, New York: Eco Press, 1977.
[19] Huxley, Aldous, *The Doors of Perception and Heaven and Hell*, New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 1990, 76.
[20] Gardner, Howard, *Frames of Mind*, New York: Basic Books, 1993.

tional intelligence.[21] Goleman has followed this move by a work on *social intelligence* and, more recently, a book on *ecological intelligence*.

4. How developments in contemplative education may be relevant to interreligious dialogue

Communication across religious traditions at an academic level have been based on the accepted criteria of rationality and logic, the clarification and analysis of arguments for accepted beliefs. This perspective has a role to play, but we also need methods of 'deep listening', sitting side by side attempting to capture the contemplative strands of different religions – the ungrudging reception of the other person with empathy. In a presentation at the Parliament of Religions in Melbourne, in a panel on 'Buddhist-Christian Dialogue', I introduced this concept as 'transformative dialogue', where the final outcome is not cementing any intellectual conviction but a transformation of one's perception and understanding of the perceptions of others. This also has implications for developing a new 'pedagogy' for teaching religions.

But it is time that we introduced a new work on 'contemplative intelligence'.

5. Paradoxes of identity in a contemplative life

In my attempt to figure out the contemplative perspective in relation to the moral life, I have developed elsewhere its epistemology, a framework for contemplative education, methods for group interaction in social work and for transformative dialogue in discussing ethics and public policy.[22] In the very deeper areas of the contemplative life, we have used

[21] Goleman, Daniel, *Emotional Intelligence*, New York: Bloomsbury, 1996.
[22] De Silva, Padmasiri, "Tolerance and Empathy. Exploring Contemplative Methods in the Class Room", op. cit.

the metaphor of life as a pilgrimage. But Owen Flanagan says that there are certain paradoxes of identity that emerge in relation to the contemplative life in the context of a particular religion that would paradoxically enrich the ethics of the rough road. I shall briefly raise these concerns in relation to Buddhism, as the tradition closest to my life: '...choosing a life without deep personal relations – think of a Christian or a Buddhist ascetic – is not the same as, nor is it remotely incompatible with, living a life rich in human sympathy, respect and fellow feeling. A life that lacked these latter feelings could conceivably feel satisfying from the inside; but such a life, even more obviously than a life which lacked personal life and intimacy, would hardly be recognised as a good one'.[23] Flanagan emphatically points out that at one extreme asceticism or Buddhist renunciation draws one away from human relations but yet in another way (almost paradoxically) draws one more deeply than one would normally be drawn into a life of expansive love and attention to those in need. In relation to the perfected ones in particular, though they have abandoned all the negative emotions of attachment, hatred and delusion, they are capable of a rich range of positive emotions of loving kindness and compassion, along with altruistic joy and equanimity. Those on the path to liberation, while they are restructuring their motivational economies so that they overcome personal cravings, maintain a 'minimalist personal point of view' to muster certain agent capacities and develop a disciplined, refined and rich character. The Buddhist point of view also accommodates diversity among people: one person is different from another, and even on the path to liberation personality differences may colour the selection of certain skills. For the householder, there is a range of family values and healthy social relations enumerated in detail in the sermons of the Buddha. The paradoxes of identity emerge with an extremely rich exposure within the realms of

[23] Flanagan, Owen, *Varieties of Moral Personality. Ethics and Psychological Realism*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991, 117.

insight meditation. My meditation guru Venerable Dhammajiva from the Nissarana forest hermitage in Sri Lanka says that looking at these paradoxes of identity in relation to mind and body (*nama-rupa*) is a process of alertness, attention and awareness, calling for speed, vigilance and dexterity, as if one were aiming an arrow at a moving deer rather than a stationary one.

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5

APPLYING BUDDHIST VALUES TO INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE ON ETHICS[1]

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When one investigates how Buddhist values may contribute to a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics, one comes to realise that Buddhist teachings are no more perfect than others. In fact, it is helpful to know that every religion shares ethical and moral teachings aimed to reduce human problems. According to John Hick, all religions propose salvation or liberation as 'the actual transformation of human life from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness'.[2] Each religion differs as to propositional truths, or as Hick phrases it: 'there are many belief-proposals that are accepted by the adherents of one religion but rejected by those of another'.[3]

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[1] This article was first edited by Jayendra Soni and John A. Raymaker, to whom we address heartfelt thanks.

[2] Whaling, Frank (ed.), *The World's Religious Traditions*, New York: Crossroad, 1986, 151.

[3] Hick, John, "The Conflicting Truth Claims of Different Religions", in: *Philosophy of Religion*, New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India, 1981, 122.

It is often said that each religion is full of 'pragmatic truth'; each intrinsically contains values, moral and ritual conduct. If this be true, then it suggests that one accepts both the differences and the unique identity of each religion. This article presents an alternative effort to apply Buddhist values to interreligious dialogue on ethics. It is based on a view that one should follow through on one's convictions when one has come to grasp the necessity or worthiness of a concept or idea.

1. The nature of Buddhist ethics

Buddhist ethics studies right and wrong actions in the light of Buddhist teachings for both the ordained and for lay people as contained in such terms as *vinaya* (the monastic rules) for monks, and *sila* (precepts) for the laity. Buddhist ethics identifies moral values and behaviour classified under the rubric of 'performance' and 'avoidance'. Buddhist ethics is derived from natural law; it considers cases when there are no rewards – nor punishments in case of violation. It goes hand in hand with the law of the 'fruit of action,' *kamma* (*karma* in Sanskrit) as reflected in a well-known Buddhist text:

By oneself indeed evil is done;
By oneself is one defiled.
By oneself is evil avoided;
By oneself is indeed one purified.
Purity and impurity depend on oneself.
No one can purify another.[4]

[4] *Dhammapada*, 165. All quotations from Buddhist texts are taken from Dhammananda, K. Sri. *Treasure of the Dhamma*, Kuala Lumpur: Buddhist Missionary Society, 1994.

The quotation implies that human beings are centres of responsibility. Humanity itself is the source of both good and bad actions. No one controls human beings; this is a crucial belief to support a worldview and practice necessary for every kind of proper interaction among human beings.

Buddhist ethics is not only related to the understanding of *kamma*, but is also connected to another important Buddhist teaching called *paticcasamuppada* that accounts for the existence of living beings. Phenomena that occur are an unending process of rising and ceasing, being the result of many causes and conditions. 'When there is not this, there is not that. Ceasing this ceases that.'[5] This Buddhist teaching points to the reality that everything is interconnected, and that the fruition of all actions depends on their related causes:

> Knowing *kamma* is knowing *Paticcasamuppada*.
> Thus the wise, seeing dependence-upon origination-*paticcasamuppada*,
> proficient in the fruit of action (*kamma*), see this action as it really is.[6]

Everything is interdependent. Whenever there are things, the concepts of plurality and the diversity of all things are more or less implied. Within the diversity of things, similarities and differences are included. Buddhist ethics suggests that one should see things as they actually are, that is, in holistic fashion.

In Buddhism, precepts are known as *sila* and are understood as envisaging a harmonious living on the globe. 'If the purpose of observing *sila* is to gain more worldly material wealth and pleasure, it is inferior *sila – hina.* If the purpose is to gain salvation (liberation)

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[5] *Majjhima Nikaya* II: 32.
[6] *Sutta-nipata*, 653.

and to serve others, it is excellent *sila – panit*'.[7] This implies that practising the precepts can also lead a person to his or her own spiritual development. In other words, it is necessary for a Buddhist who would like to reach the highest goal not only to avoid evil and do good but also to 'purify' the mind. In purifying one's mind, one will gain the insight and wisdom to understand the reality of this world.

> Wisdom is purified by virtue, and Virtue is purified by wisdom.
> Where one is, so is the other.
> The virtuous person has wisdom, and the wise person has virtue.
> The combination of virtue and wisdom is called the highest thing in the world.[8]

2. The criteria of Buddhist ethics

One of the simple criteria of Buddhist ethics for whether an action is ethical or not is to ask whether an action causes harm to either oneself or others. In other words, any 'skilful' action in Buddhist ethics should cover both loving oneself and empathising with others, including not causing trouble to others.

As mentioned earlier, any action (*kamma*) one performs will bring results in accordance with the law of cause and effect of actions. *Kamma* is the cause and *vipaka* is the fruit, the effect. The cause produces the fruit, the fruit explains the cause. Intentional action either wholesome (*kusala*) or unwholesome (*akusala*) creates kammic effects. A Buddhist text explicates the word: 'The word "*ku-*

[7] *Visuddhi-magga*, 12.
[8] *Digha Nikaya* I: 84.

sala" means "good health", "faultless", "skilful", "productive of happy sentient results", etc.'[9]

According to Buddhist ethics, 'skilful' or wholesome actions are derived from the absence of the three root causes of evil: greed (*lobha*), hate *(dosa)* and delusion *(moha)*. Whether an action is good or bad, be it in terms of physical, verbal and/or mental behaviour depends on the criterion of whether or not it is caused by one of these three evils.

Consequently, the criteria of Buddhist ethics cover the entire cycle of skilful intention, skilful means (*upaya*) and skilful ends. If any of these is absent, one will not be able to justify the action as being ethically sound. Intention is also an indicator of *kamma*. Without intention, such behaviour is not kammic action. In the teaching passed on by tradition, the Buddha taught: 'Monks, I say that intention is *kamma*. When one intends, one acts by deed, word or thought. Sense-contact is the source of *kamma*'.[10] That is to say, whatever is considered to be a wholesome action includes skilful intention, skilful means and a skilful result.

This skilful trio cannot be based on greed, hate or delusion. If one has, say, the good intention of supporting the revival of female ordination in Buddhism, one needs to select the proper way of skilful means such as not using harsh words to attack the whole community of monks. Otherwise, one is using the old stereotype of judging all monks, including the liberal ones. Another kind of violence (one of a 'liberation type') will sooner or later occur possibly in the form of verbal or even physical reaction. It implies an angry quality of mind that may be mixed with hate. Moreover, if one calls for the effort to

[9] *Atthasalini*: 38.
[10] *Anguttara Nikaya* II: 82.

tear up some parts of scripture, instead of reinterpreting them, one may not be ethically accepted by the community due to the unskilful means of delusion. Although one may have a good intention to help and to broaden the religious space of women and to further the range of women's opportunities, the verbal action is mixed with delusion, 'not having enough information on the importance of religious scriptures'. Therefore the ethical quality of action in Buddhism depends on 'awareness and mindfulness' of one's mental factors, on fulfilling the ethical cycle of skilful intention and skilful means and so receiving skilful ends.

Put in another way, such ethical behaviour should consider different methods in conducting a constructive dialogue on such topics as 'human rights' or a feminist perspective with experts in Buddhist scriptures. All should have 'a chance and a safe zone' to hear participants' different points of view on the basis of the nature and criteria of Buddhist values mentioned above. One may attempt to do so to ascertain how such views may be applied to a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics.

3. Buddhist ethics and interreligious dialogue on ethics

Generally speaking, dialogue is a 'deep listening'.[11] Interreligious dialogue on ethics requires that one listen deeply to different truth claims and other related ethical religious beliefs and practices. However, this does not mean that one should set side by side the scriptures of each religion to ascertain the ethical issues in each religion. Instead, one strives to put humanity's present global problems at the

[11] Bohm, David, *On Dialogue*, London: Routledge, 1996, 1-2.

centre and to listen to each problem with 'loving-kindness and compassion' so as to understand what is inherent in all religions. The crucial point in interreligious dialogue on ethics is listening to, empathising with the problems of people and treating one another humanely in order to join together in solving peoples' ethical problems in accordance with each religious tradition. Above all, dialogue should not be an isolated, separate action, or a 'finished product'. It needs a properly prepared process of listening repeatedly until the values of deep listening are naturally embodied in each given action with each partner in the dialogue. Such an attempt might lay claim to being a contribution to a successful interreligious dialogue.

4. Humanity encounters humanity

When humanity seeks to encounter humanity, Buddhist values may be helpful; they can contribute to an 'interreligious dialogue of life', [12] by emphasising the concept of 'human beings and their conditions as being at the centre of all considerations'. This is reflected in the Buddha's declaration that

In this one-fathom long body along with
its perceptions and thoughts, do I proclaim
the world, the origin of the world, the
cessation of the world and the path leading

[12] The Federation of Asian Bishops Conferences recommended three different forms of dialogue, namely, 1) the dialogue of prayer or religious experience, 2) the dialogue of studying each other's doctrines, and 3) the dialogue of life. See more details in Hill, Brennan R. *et al.*, *Faith, Religion & Theology*, Connecticut: Twenty-Third Publications, 1990, 203-4.

to the cessation of the world.[13]

This quote focuses on the size and length of a human body. We are supposed to manage any problems by ourselves. In most cases, human beings involved in difficult situations must take decisions on their own. It is suggested that realising these problems and interrelating them (as being a concern of joint interest and responsibility and solving them together) is much better than choosing one specific ethical doctrine alone. In this way, a problem involving different cultural values can become a topic of dialogue among members of different religions. Giving priority to ethical problems will go well with the understanding that interreligious dialogue needs to be conducted continuously and humanely in daily life. Not listening to one another humanely, or merely 'comparing' ethical teachings from various religions is not enough; nor is this suitable to the social conditions of an interreligious dialogue on ethics at the present time. Put in another way, placing real ethical situations of life at the centre of an interreligious dialogue on ethics is as important as solving the problems themselves. One must treat any person having different ethical convictions humanely.

The ultimate reality of *Buddhism* is *nibbana* (liberation); it seems to be a sophisticated, far-off goal and an ideal for many Buddhists; still, a notion of '*nibbana here and now*' is an encouraging one for us today. According to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, a late Thai Theravada monk, anyone who is in on the threshold of getting rid of the sense of 'me and mine', even in the near future, is considered to be person who touches and tests temporary *nibbana.* This interpretation would help assure that Buddhist ethical teachings emphasise a 'community-

[13] *Samyutta Nikaya* I: 62.

focused role'. This means that Buddhist values pay special attention to being personally free and taking care of the real life problems of people in the community. If such be the case, Buddhist ethics could play a role in both 'top-down' and 'bottom-up' moral practices. Making efforts in interreligious dialogue for mediating conflicts is an example of 'bottom-up' moral practice, a 'community-focused ethics' in action.

To repeat, it is necessary to focus on present ethical situations from the perspective of a given religious tradition when conducting a 'global responsibility dialogue'. Problems such as those of medical ethics and those due to gaps between rich and poor, to making inadequate claims for a 'just war', to discussing the rights of homosexuals or to abortion, to evaluating impending ecological disasters, etc. all fall within the ambit of Buddhist ethics and values. Accordingly, an interreligious ethical dialogue on life issues is a challenging task for all religious communities – especially for socially engaged ones.

5. Interconnectedness, diversity and tolerance

I have already said that Buddhist ethics realises that everything is interconnected. Human beings are willy-nilly involved in the web of complicated relationships; for Buddhists this is due to its concept of rebirth. Anyone can be born as a father, mother or relative in a family in any birth. Buddhism teaches people to be aware of such interconnected relationships in accordance with the concept of *paticcasamuppada*. Being aware of interconnected relationships implies that one should be mindful of 'seeing things as they are'. At the basis of this worldview is the idea that everything is ultimately imperma-

nent, that there is no absolute, intrinsic self. In addition, in the final analysis, neither is there any suffering.[14] This understanding underscores the two ideas of 'diversity and tolerance'. Indeed, since there is interconnectedness, many things, many ideas, many points of view and many convictions are possible. When variety exists, differences are bound to occur. Different identities, different worldviews and different religious ethical explanations should be welcome. Therefore one needs to respect and be tolerant of all kinds of diversity.

In conducting interreligious dialogue on ethics one should welcome different forms (types) of ethical reasoning and not judge other ethical beliefs according to one's own ethical system. For example, eating meat is acceptable in the teaching and practices of many religious and ethical systems. The concept of vegetarianism should not be used to find fault with the different ethical situations of others. This acceptance should be derived from the sincere tolerance, not 'lazy tolerance'[15] in order to avoid any 'confrontation of conflict' at that moment. The danger of accepting something on account of a 'lazy tolerance' is that it will lead to a concept of 'relativism' that will preclude the need or the possibility of compromising when people are in interreligious dialogue. Sincerity to oneself and to our partners in dialogue is highly recommended in order to reach sustainable understanding and cooperation. In fact, the religious values of 'sincerity and tolerance' can be found in any religious tradition.

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[14] There is in the final analysis an end to suffering in the sense that, for Buddhism, everything is ultimately impermanent and there is no absolute, intrinsic self.

[15] Hill, Brennan R. *et al.*, op. cit., 195.

6. What are the purposes of dialogue?

People misunderstand the purposes of interreligious dialogue if they think that it is meant only for the exchange of religious or ethical information and views. In fact, such dialogue challenges our ability to translate 'good ethical teaching into action'. That is, when people engage in interreligious dialogue, they need to exercise such 'inner values' as open-mindedness, loving-kindness and patience to have a self-critical view. This is in addition to being able to accept constructive criticism coming from our partners. Therefore, the purpose of dialogue is not only 'to learn, to change and grow in the perception and understanding of reality, and then to act accordingly',[16] but also to have an inward striving for spiritual development.

As to the question of observing the precepts *(sila)* in Buddhist ethics, Buddhist lay people are advised to practise them step by step, until they attain the highest goal. The teaching is as follows:

Cula Sila: simply observing the basic principles of good behaviour.
Majjhima Sila: developing higher moral values for his/her own happiness
Maha Sila: actively making an effort to uphold a noble livelihood.[17]

As Gunasekara phrases it, 'in Buddhism the goal of ethical conduct is self-control, self-understanding, and self-development. It is an essential prerequisite for the training of the mind, the elimination of ignorance and the attainment of enlightenment'. [18] This means that to practice Buddhist values, we need to face the challenges of mental

[16] Swidler, Leonard, *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, New York: Orbis Books, 1987, 14.
[17] *Visuddhi-magga*, 12.
[18] Gunasekara,V.A., "The Ethics of Buddhism. A Short Statement", 2009, **http://uqconnect.net/slsoc/manussa/bethics.htm**, accessed October 2010.

development such as self-control and many other kinds of positive mental attitudes. In interreligious dialogue, we need the same type of courage and mental dispositions we have when we listen to various religious ethical explanations or when we engage in religious practices.

To repeat, observing precepts should be basically applied to our daily life step by step, by understanding and practising them continuously until one becomes aware of the reality of being on the path of spiritual development. This is also the basic requirement needed for gradual spiritual transformation when engaging in interreligious dialogue on ethics. 'Patiently pursued dialogue can become an instrument of new "revelation", a further "unveiling" of reality on which we must then act.'[19]

7. Interreligious dialogue on ethics: heart-to-heart dialogue

In an authentic dialogue, people listen to each other with their heart not only with their ears. That is, people listen with loving-kindness, without prejudgments and with empathy for the different religions and ethics. Buddhism suggests that people exercise unconditional loving-kindness and compassion as well as empathy when living in a pluralistic world.

A state that is not pleasant or delightful to me
must be so for him also; and a state which is not
pleasant or delightful for me, how could I
inflict that on another?[20]

[19] Swidler, op.cit., 16.
20 *Samyutta Nikaya* V: 353.35-354.2.

Although each religious tradition has its own ethical explanation, people can still listen and learn from one another. The more we listen to how we differ from others, the better we will understand our own tradition. In his *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, Paul Tillich proposes a dynamic typology to show that in conversation with other religions, believers would rediscover latent or recessive dimensions in their own tradition.[21] Migliore adds that in such a dialogue 'all would be enriched'.[22] This is quite true; it may happen with many partners in a dialogue circle.

As an example of such open-mindedness, let me cite the case of an interreligious dialogue between Buddhist monks and Muslim leaders in Thailand's Deep South. One Buddhist monk shared his experience as a fundraiser in favour of a poor senior Muslim neighbour who wanted to make a pilgrimage to Mecca. The fundraising took place at a time when insurgents wanted to use Buddhism and Islam as tools to create distrust through injustice, and it profoundly moved the people directly involved in that circle. One Muslim leader responded by deeply thanking his Buddhist friend because it was very helpful for him to better understand the word '*zakat*' (giving money or things to help the poor and needy) as taught in his own religion.

One Buddhist teaching suggests that we listen to and learn from others. According to the teaching, 'to be attached to one thing (to a certain view) and to look down upon other things (other views)' is inferior; the wise man calls it 'a mental hindrance'.[23] This attitude

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[21] Tillich, Paul, *Christianity and the Encounter of World Religions*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1963.
[22] Migliore, Daniel L., *Faith Seeking Understanding*, Grand Rapids, MI: Williams B. Eerdman Publishers, 1991, 162.
[23] *Sutta-nipata*, 889, 891.

shows that although people have faith and maintain different standpoints in accordance with the truth claims of their own religion, it is necessary to open ones' eyes, ears, attitude and mind to listen to others.

Above all, listening through a 'heart-to-heart' dialogue includes patience to contemplate and reflect upon what one learns from others. That is, in interreligious dialogue, one can listen to (1) oneself and one's own religious values, (2) others and their religious values, (3) silence and (4) the result of listening to oneself and others.

Listening to 'silence' happens when all partners are mindful about what they have heard and talked about. It implies that all partners are aware of what they are going to say responsively. In interreligious dialogue, silence is supposed to be 'a ground of openness'. Such silence is deep, rich, positive, replete with meaning, far from empty. It is the opposite of a silence between strangers. In other words, practising listening to others through the heart is mindfulness. It may also be regarded as an inner activity in dialogue. Certainly, Buddhist values support this by paying particular attention to the 'noble silence for mindfulness'. As the Buddha is said to have taught:

> Mindfulness, O monks, I declare,
> is essential in all things everywhere.
> It is as salt to curry, Mindfulness, verily, brings great profit.[24]

Listening contemplatively to the result of interreligious dialogue on ethics is very important insofar as it implies the factor of mindful reflection, the appreciation and gratitude to be open-minded to learn different ethical worldviews, to instil better understanding and to

[24] *Anguttara Nikaya* I: 3.

change any bias and prejudgments. Buddhist values recommend a moment of regular reflection while engaging in dialogue. The following quotation is a conversation between the Buddha and his son Rahula whom he ordained:

'What think you, Rahula? What is a mirror for?'
'To reflect, Sir.'

'In just the same way you must reflect again and again before doing every act, in speaking every word and in thinking every thought. When you want to do anything you must reflect whether it would conduce to your or other's harm or both, and if so it is a wrong act, productive of woe and ripening unto woe. If reflection tells you this is the nature of that contemplated act, assuredly you should not do it. But if reflection assures you there is no harm but good in it, then you may do it.'[25]

8. Interreligious dialogue on ethics: beyond the boundaries of identity

Although this paper begins with the traditional explanation of the nature of and criteria for justifying what people should do in the light of Buddhist ethics, the important task of the paper is to encourage a transformation of society so that it would correspond more closely to desirable models of sustainable communities; it therefore stresses that morality should be applied in everyone's daily life.

There are some noteworthy cases of interreligious dialogue on ethics in the Youth Detention Centre in Narathiwas, a province known for its chronic situation of unrest in Thailand's Deep South. In this centre children undergo correction after committing crimes. A working group from Mahidol University Research Centre for Peace

[25] *Majjhima Nikaya* I: 415.

Building conducted dialogues in order to propose non-violent action among Muslim and Buddhist children – all of whom are under 18.

The children were being taught to practise a type of dialogue within a group of three. The exercise involved one boy sharing a dilemma story that depicted a real ethical situation from his life. Then the other two boys challenged him to give reasons to support or reject his decision. For example, one boy shared the story that he hesitated and was unable to choose between his mother and friends. His mother wanted him to buy a bag of rice. His close friend whom he had not met for a long time wanted him to use 'drugs' with a group of other friends. One of the listeners was a Buddhist boy, the other, a Muslim. In the beginning, we the dialogue facilitators did not know who belonged to which religion. Nor did we learn much about the religious ethical reasons or lack thereof that contributed to their decision. What the three of them felt after 'deep listening' was loving-kindness, listening without prejudgments, with sympathy and empathy. The boy who shared his story reflected his feeling that it was a great relief for him and that he felt comfortable sharing his nagging problems and to learn that both friends tried to give reasons to support his decision as much as possible. He said, further, that he got a lot of encouraging advice from his friends. Although this was a very simple and humble ethical situation from the minority group of children, it depicted for us the human quality of trust displayed in the dialogue circle.

This example might be said to have been a charged space within which an interreligious dialogue of experience and feeling was occurring. It involved an authentic human quality struggling to account for suffering with the hope of arriving at human happiness as soon as possible. This interreligious dialogue on 'what one should do' and

'should not do' transcended the boundaries of the participants' different religious backgrounds. We the dialogue facilitators did not know who were Buddhists and Muslims but what we learnt from the experience included these children's common concerns and human condition.

Applying Buddhist values should take place in real social situations and communities so that Buddhist ethics do not merely appear as 'individual' or doctrinal ethics.

The next example took place in a dialogue-training session at a Youth Detention Centre in Songkhla, another Thai province.

On the last day of the training, children were asked to write down two possible life plans they might have after leaving the centre. They were also to list on a flip chart two important things that they would like to do most if they were going to die. After each child had finished writing, he read out his message; others listened to his story with open hearts. We had a chance to hear their plans, which reflected the moral teaching of both religions. For example, one Muslim boy wanted to kiss his mother's feet before he died because he said his mother used to do so when he was small boy. Interestingly, what he said reminded me of the saying from Muslim communities that 'paradise is under a mother's feet'. He added that he would like to pray to Allah until he died and to have his mother's prayer clothes cover his corpse! Buddhist children in that circle were asked to listen to all these wishes with empathy.

At the same time, other Muslim children needed to practise listening kindly to a Buddhist boy who wanted to be ordained as a monk so that his mother might be able to touch 'his yellow robe' in paradise. All these stories indicate a different 'coherent truth' of the-

istic ethics and atheistic ethics stemming from one's own religion and influencing one's moral behaviour.

Although people would like to claim perfect exclusive moral values and practices, they still need interreligious dialogue on ethics to be able to hear other alternative ways of learning from others. People can even use ethical rules learned from others as a 'critical catalyst'. As Hans Küng suggests, 'Christian faith in dialogue may serve as "critical catalyst" for the other religions, helping to bring out in them what is deepest and best; and conversely, Christian faith will be challenged and clarified in the dialogue'.[26] In the case of Muslim and Buddhist children at the centre, they had a practical chance to listen to one another's stories with empathy. Their openness to their friends' moral behaviour was a learning process in their own life.

However, there was one Buddhist boy who wanted to rob a bank to get money so as to give it to his mother before he died. It was, therefore, time for us to help him so that on his own he could analyse what is good or bad. We found that he had 'a good intention' to express his love and concern for his mother for the last time. But his means involved 'delusion', not knowing that his crime would bring sadness and illegal involvement and suffering to his mother, for which his mother might even go to jail after receiving the stolen money. His good intention coupled with unskilful means would bring unskilful results and suffering to himself and his family. Sharing and discussing this moral lesson from a Buddhist values viewpoint is a way toward interreligious dialogue because the meaning of others may be heard by other religious followers. Every one, Buddhist and Muslim, became an active participant; this led to an en-

[26] Migliore, op. cit., 163.

hancement of mutual sympathy and understanding. The positive qualities of mindfulness can hopefully become an expected outcome when conducting interreligious dialogue.

Conclusion

I have attempted to show that Buddhist values apply to both ordained and lay people. Engaging in interreligious dialogue on ethics can benefit everyone, whether professional, ethicists, or young and lay. Both Buddhist ethics and interreligious dialogue on ethics are generally performed so as to appreciate the outer and inner strivings of each participant. Skilful values in Buddhist ethics always support the effective ground rules of interreligious dialogue on ethics such as sincerity, equality of the participants, patience, self-criticism, trust, sympathy, empathy, loving-kindness, awareness and open-mindedness. All these are mental factors important in Buddhist morality and necessary for a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics. Above all, one may realise that all three kinds of interreligious dialogue on ethics, namely study, experience or prayer, and dialogue of life, are interconnected. However, what should get more attention is the interreligious dialogue of life. Community-focused Buddhist values, based on 'here-and-now ethics' are in the last analysis most desirable for supporting a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics.

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6

'THE GOOD, NOT THE TRADITIONAL'. CLEARING THE PATH TOWARDS GLOBAL ETHICS

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1. The challenge of global ethics

The search for global ethics is motivated by the experience of increased exchange and cooperation at numerous levels between continents, states, communities, and individuals on the one hand, and of divergent social, cultural, and legal standards fostering tensions, conflict, and mutual suspicions on the other. While the world has shrunk to what Marshall McLuhan some fifty years ago dubbed the 'global village', climate change and the environmental crisis threatening the very survival of humankind have given rise to an unprecedented moral awareness of global concerns (environment, economy, poverty, technology, medicine, etc.) and with it an urgent sense of global responsibility for our planet. The political inability to translate this new moral sensitivity for global concerns into a united response to meeting the challenge is clear proof of deep divisions still prevailing. They are not merely indications of the usual self-interests of state policies but suggest also fundamental differences at the cultural and religious bases of contemporary

societies. In particular, the emergence of religious fundamentalism has threatened the peaceful coexistence among religions and in secular society. It is against this background that a global ethics is widely regarded as the only alternative to a full-scale 'clash of civilisations' (Samuel P. Huntington) and that the spiritual resources of the world's religions must play a prominent role in the search for such ethics. Yet the obstacles on this road are formidable and may jeopardise the whole enterprise. Only if they can be removed, the search for global ethics has a chance to succeed.

2. Two test cases

Two of the best-known test cases for the possibility of a global ethics are the *Asian-values debate* in the mid-eighties of the last century and the controversies about the foundation and scope of *bioethics*. While the former clearly has political overtones, it also reflects deep-running suspicions of particular East-Asian societies about the underlying intentions for the aggressive promotion of a global human rights legislation based on a set of allegedly Western values.

The latter concerns moral dilemmas in modern biology and medicine. Though they probe the resources of traditional ethics in East and West alike, the core principles of the dominant version of bioethics are associated with the moral tradition of the West. Moral philosophers from East Asia have seized on this and argued against their universal validity and meaningful application within the socio-cultural context of Asian societies. Their call for cultural alternatives (e.g. Confucian bioethics) to Western bioethics further complicates the search for a global ethics.

2.1 The Asian values debate

The debate was based on the assumption that cultural traditions express specific sets of values that give societies their unique identities.[1] The problem of this claim is first of all factual, as it implies that countries from Japan to India and from Israel to Siberia all subscribe to the same set of values. Amartya Sen has called this 'generalisations of heroic simplicity' without empirical foundation or heuristic significance.[2]

A more sympathetic reading, however, would place the debate within the broader context of a search for a sense of cultural authenticity and of buttressing fledgling state sovereignty. This concern for moral and political identity is shared by many (citizens and politicians) across Asia and largely defines government policies. From this perspective, the focus of the debate about Asian values is not on an identical set of values uniting all countries in Asia but rather on unique cultural traditions and lifestyles that people wish to defend against the allegedly destructive forces of globalisation. This struggle for the preservation of cultural authenticity not only is part and parcel of the fight against (perceived or

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[1] Originating in the East in the second half of the 1990s, the Asian values debate unfolded both at the political and the intellectual level. While political leaders (particularly Kuan Yew Lee of Singapore and Mahathir bin Mohamad of Malaysia) sought to buttress authoritarian rule with reference to specific sets of Asian values, East Asian intellectuals (including Noordin Sopiee in Malaysia and Tommy Koh, George Yeo, Kishore Mahbubani in Singapore) argued for cultural diversity and challenged the universality of human rights. For useful orientation in this diverse and prolific debate, see: De Bary, Wm Theodore, *Asian Values and Human Rights. A Confucian Communitarian Perspective*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard, University Press, 1998; Bauer, Joanne R./ Bell, Daniel A. (eds.), *The East Asian Challenge for Human Rights*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Bell, Daniel A., *East Meets West. Human Rights and Democracy in East Asia*, Princeton University Press, 2000; Plantilla, Jefferson R./ Raj, Sebasti L. (eds.), *Human Rights in Asian Cultures. Continuity and Change*, Osaka: Hurights Osaka, 1997; Quah, Jon (ed.), *In Search of Singapore's National Values*, Singapore: Institute for Policy Studies, 1990.

[2] Sen, Amartya, "Economics, Business Principles, and Moral Sentiments", in: Enderle, Georges (ed.), *International Business Ethics. Challenges and Approaches*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1999, 15-29.

real) attempts at political and economic domination by Western nations but also has implications for the possibility of global ethics.

Those concerns are widely shared across societies not only in Asia but also in Africa. States with multiple ethnicities see their political and cultural integrity threatened by what they suspect is the resurgence of colonialism under the disguise of supposedly universal moral values and their global implementation through legal instruments. The decision in 2005 by the General Assembly of the United Nations to put the *Declaration on Human Cloning* to a vote instead of seeking consensus is a case in point. Countries from East Asia including China, Korea, Japan, and Singapore were unanimous in their disapproval of both process and content.[3]

The new cultural sensibility was already noted in 1993 when the *Bangkok Declaration* stated that 'incompatible values' separate Asian nations from the West and that standards of human rights neither override Asian values and state sovereignty nor justify restrictions on economic development and the conduct of business.[4] Typically, lists of such specifically Asian values include 'the primacy of order over freedom, family and community interests over individual choice and economic progress over political expression'.[5] Though the *Declaration* was apparently equally directed against internal dissent[6] and Western critique of authoritarian rule, it utilised and rekindled the strong anti-colonial sensitivity that extends well beyond the most outspoken promoters of those Asian values. Brushing aside such critique as mere political posturing or immature moral thinking seems simplistic and even counter-productive.

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[3] Fifty-ninth General Assembly of the United Nations' Sixth Committee, *Declaration on Human Cloning* (consulted February 2005).
[4] Davis, Michael C. (ed.), *Human Rights and Chinese Values*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1995, 205-209.
[5] Lim, Linda Y.C., "Whose 'Model' Failed? Implications of the Asian Economic Crisis", in: *The Washington Quarterly 21*, 1998, 27.
[6] Chua, Beng-Huat, *Communitarian Ideology and Democracy in Singapore*, London: Routledge, 1995, 31, 187.

Instead, it should be taken seriously as another confirmation that significant value differences at the ethical level exist.

While value differences between East and West are real and, as empirical comparative research confirms, cannot be denied, the values in question may nevertheless not be incompatible. As the former deputy prime minister of Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, has pointed out, 'there is less difference between East and West than is often made out to be. There is no basis for doubting that the West is any less dedicated to ethical and moral ideals or to the virtues of family life than the East'.[7] There are good reasons to believe that the value differences express, above all, different value priorities (rankings) at specific stages of economic development and social context rather than incompatible moral visions about the good and the right. This interpretation seems to be endorsed across Asia. In a survey on social values, Asian respondents put social harmony first and relegated freedom of expression to the bottom. In contrast, American respondents ranked the latter first, closely followed by personal freedom and the rights of the individual.[8] Even China does not outright reject the value of human autonomy, social and political rights, and individual liberty as long as those values are not instrumentalised to undermine or threaten economic development and the social and political stability of the nation. The challenge of global ethics is therefore above all 'to conceive a common vision of the future which goes beyond our current concerns and preoccupations, advancing towards the creation of a global community, dominated neither by the East nor the West, but dedicated to the ideals of both'.[9]

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[7] Ibrahim, Anwar, *The Asian Renaissance*, Singapore, Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1996, 41.
[8] Hitchcock, David, *Asian Values and the United States. How Much Conflict?* Washington, D.C.: The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1994, 26.
[9] Ibrahim, Anwar, loc. cit.

2.2 Bioethics

Bioethical proposals in response to the global ethical problems associated with breath-taking scientific advances in modern biology and medicine are not free of political implications either, and they too show value differences along the East-West divide. As the differences in legislation among states on embryonic stem cell research, human cloning, abortion, or assisted suicide amply demonstrate, cultural traditions and religious world views continue to exert great influence on the public discourse on bioethical norms in East and West, and even in secular or liberal societies. The debate is, however, less dominated by politicians than by ethicists and medical practitioners who want to utilise the specific moral resources of their own respective traditions in developing culturally sensitive alternatives to allegedly Western bioethics. As the dominant ethical tradition for several countries in East Asia (particularly China, Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) is Confucianism, a specific Confucian version of bioethics has been explored. Its rests on the assumption that the metaphysical and cosmological foundations of Confucianism contain moral principles that not only challenge the claim for universal validity of their Western counterparts but also form the nucleus of an alternative conception of bioethics.[10]

Yet it is doubtful whether the development of regional bioethics is the right approach to resolve moral dilemmas posed by modern biology and medicine that are fundamentally the same in East and West, North and South. The emotional debates about the ethical issues at the beginning and end of human life as well as the prospect of redesigning our genetic heritage continue unabatedly all over the world. This suggests that people in both hemispheres (West and East) draw on conflicting

[10] Fan, Ruiping (ed.), *Confucian Bioethics*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1999; Becker, Gerhold K., "Bioethics with Chinese Characteristics. The Development of Bioethics in Hong Kong", in: Peppin, John F./ Cherry, Mark J. (eds.), *The Annals of Bioethics. Regional Perspectives in Bioethics*, Lisse: Swets & Zeitlinger, 2003, 261-284.

moral intuitions in their search for moral answers to the same type of problems. Furthermore, modern societies in East and West are no longer homogeneous in terms of their value preferences but characterised by value pluralism and opposing value hierarchies. This applies even to such a strong proponent of Asian values as China. 'The assumption of a monolithic and unified Chinese culture in general, and a single medical ethics in particular, is a myth'.[11]

At the same time, people all over the globe regard it as necessary to base decisions in the biomedical sciences and in health care on shared ethical standards, since neither research nor its application can be constrained by national legislation but have consequences for people everywhere. Instead of playing down value differences or assuming regional homogeneity of values, we have to accept that value pluralism is inescapable and a permanent feature of modern society. The question then is, should we take as definitive and acquiesce to the fact that humankind is ultimately divided on its most fundamental intuitions about the good and the right? Or should we regard it as a chance to truly identify, maybe for the first time in history, the common core of humanity and to build on it a new moral vision that neither stifles cultural diversity nor threatens to destroy the 'family of man'?

3. Global ethics as a global project

One of the approaches to global ethics that gained wider publicity is the *Declaration Toward a Global Ethic* adopted by the Parliament of the World's Religions in Chicago on 4 September 1993.[12] The idea was first

[11] Nie, Jing-bao, "The Plurality of Chinese and American Medical Moralities. Toward an Interpretive Cross-Cultural Bioethics", in: *Kennedy Institute of Ethics Journal 10*, 2000, 250.

[12] The Declaration deliberately refers to ethic in the singular thus emphasising above all the fundamental attitude toward good and evil.

proposed by Hans Küng in his 1990 book *Projekt Weltethos.*[13] It was based on the assumption that the world's major religions can make a meaningful contribution towards the harmonious co-existence of peoples of different cultural traditions and value systems by identifying a core set of common moral values in their own teachings, rituals, and practices. Küng was convinced that in spite of all their doctrinal differences, religions share some fundamental moral norms that can be uncovered through the dialogical investigation of their religious foundations. The vision of a global ethic holds the promise to truly unite otherwise diverse ethnic and religious groups in the common goal of building a world of peace and justice. Grounded in 'a fundamental consensus on binding values, irrevocable standards, and personal attitudes', the envisioned global ethic neither implies 'a single unified religion beyond all existing religions' nor 'the domination of one religion over all others'. Instead of imposing from the outside a new morality on existing religions, the *Declaratio*n regards global ethic as 'the minimal ethic which is absolutely necessary for human survival' and 'already exists within the religious teachings of the world'. Acknowledging religions' 'special responsibility for the welfare of all humanity and care for the planet Earth', the Parliament of the World's Religions has expressed the hope that its vision of a global ethic will lead to 'a transformation in the consciousness of individuals and in public life' so that the world can 'be changed for the better'.

The *Declaration* was accorded much praise for its hands-on approach towards a common moral basis in the midst of cultural and religious diversity. Uniting representatives of different faiths in a search for commonalities and avenues for cooperation is of great symbolic value as it underscores that humanity shares more spiritual resources and fundamental moral intuitions than the many divisions and conflicts suggest. It

[13] Küng, Hans, *Global Responsibility. In Search of a New World*, London: SCM Press, 1991.

also seems important that religious people and their representatives accept their responsibility for a world of peace and social justice.

While the noble goal of the *Declaration* is generally acknowledged, critics have pointed to two major flaws that have implications for the idea of global ethics and the religious dialogue to achieve it. It has been argued that the *Declaration* is based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the relationship between religion and ethics, and that its identified common denominator for a global ethic is much too general to be of any practical use.

While it seems obvious that the spiritual resources of religions cannot be ignored in the search for global ethics, it is doubtful that they can be translated into the language of secular ethics without some substantial loss of their specific religious meaning. Religions differ so widely in their belief systems, ways of life, and social roles that it is hard if not impossible to unite them all under one concept as we in fact continue to do. The very term 'religion' is alien to them and is the result of reflections on their specific beliefs and ways of life from the perspective of a detached observer. If we, for operational reasons, continue to use the term religion, it is more for some intuitive understanding of its meaning than for the term's conceptual clarity. As Clifford Geertz once remarked, 'Our problem, and it grows worse by the day, is not to define religion but to find it'. That is to say, the 'problem is not one of constructing definitions of religion. We have had quite enough of those; their very number is a symptom of our malaise. It is a matter of discovering just what sorts of beliefs and practices support what sorts of faith under what sorts of conditions'.[14] Instead of looking for something like the 'essence' of religion, which would anyway be largely arbitrary, we

[14] Geertz, Clifford, *Islam Observed. Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia*, Chicago University Press, 1971, 1.

may search for resemblances along a complex continuum of similarities and differences analogous to those found within a family.[15]

A famous example illustrating this conceptual problem is Adolf von Harnack's remark: 'Who knows one religion, knows them all.' Since Harnack was the leading Protestant theologian of his time, his one religion that represents all of them was, of course, the Christian religion. His full statement is therefore: 'Who does not know the Christian religion, does not know any religion, and who knows it in its history, knows them all'.[16] Yet something similar could be claimed for other religions, which hold comprehensive world views that affect all forms of life. Hinduism, for example, has been understood as essentially containing all faiths and all forms of religious experience.[17]

More importantly, the claim that any one religion could exhaust the full range of religious experience underestimates the complexity of the kind of world views and ways of life religions stand for. It equally underestimates the wealth and depth of human experience, its anxieties and hopes that offer the fertile ground from which religions grow. Genuine understanding of the idea of religion can only be expected from the respectful, dialogical encounter with and between religious people, from immersion into their practices, participation in their rituals, adoption of their perspectives, and from in-depth comparative studies in the wide and open field of religious experience. As the 'father of religious studies,' Friedrich Max Müller, noted: 'Who knows one (religion), doesn't know any religion'.[18]

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[15] Hick, John, *An Interpretation of Religion. Human Responses to the Transcendent*, London: MacMillan Press, 1989, 4.
[16] Harnack, Adolf von, *Die Aufgabe der theologischen Facultäten und die allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*, Gießen: Riecker, 1901, 16: "Wer die christliche Religion nicht kennt, kennt keine, und wer sie samt ihrer Geschichte kennt, kennt alle".
[17] Smart, Ninian, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Glasgow: Collins, 1977, 677.
[18] Stone, Jon R. (ed.), *The Essential Max Müller. On Language, Mythology, and Religion*, New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002, 81.

The second problem is evident even in the signatories to the *Declaration*, who represent religions as diverse as Zoroastrism and Buddhism, Hinduism and Islam, Christianity and Neo-paganism. While the integrity and sincerity of the members of the Chicago assembly in their search for moral commonalities in their respective faiths is not in question, it is less clear to what extent the faithful they represent would recognise the minimal ethic of the *Declaration* as the genuine expression of their faith. This is not simply a rhetorical question, if each and every religion must be understood as a multi-dimensional organism comprising a holistic system of meaning and practice that affects individual and social behaviour. The moral dimension is embedded in this organic structure, and its specific meaning is a function of all other dimensions. By isolating a minimal ethic against this multi-dimensional context and detaching it from its specifically religious meaning, the remaining moral content may no longer be representative of the religion from which it has been extracted. 'A religion reduced to ethics would be the equivalent of humanism'.[19] It is precisely for this reason that the resulting minimal ethic is indistinguishable from prevailing norms of common morality and unable to reduce or even eradicate the potential for conflict.

Obviously, the four 'irrevocable directives' of the *Declaration* with their commitment to 'a culture of non-violence and respect of life', 'of solidarity and a just economic order', 'of tolerance and a life of truthfulness', and 'of equal rights and partnership between men and women' are highly abstract and speak the language of secular ethics rather than that of religious experience. While religions clearly have a moral dimension, it is doubtful whether it can be extracted from its religious foundation without loss. As comprehensive systems of meaning, religions imply claims for universal truth to which also their ethics is subjected – not vice versa. Isolating moral directives from their conceptual frame of reference and enlisting them in the service to achieve non-religious goals

[19] Smart, op. cit., 674.

such as 'the survival of mankind' seems to put the cart before the horse. While it may give them the tincture of universality the project for a global ethic aspires to, it disconnects them from their roots and instrumentalises religion for external, non-religious purposes.

As the pervasive debate in applied ethics shows, in the hard cases of ethical decision-making the religious representatives rarely see in those directives the 'neutral' norms of universal ethics. Instead they tend to reinterpret them in the light of their religious doctrines and thus recharge them with religious meaning. The intractable controversies in bioethics referred to earlier (particularly abortion, embryonic stem cell research, euthanasia, to name just a few) show e.g. that the *Declaration*'s 'commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for life' – while noncontroversial in itself – is either trivial or too vague for application as long as it is detached from its religious and spiritual context. If it were otherwise, one would have to wonder what the heated debates were all about. Obviously, conflicts in the whole range of applied ethics arise from different interpretations of the meaning, justification, and practical implications of the norms invoked in a specific case. Even within one and the same religion, e. g. Christianity, there is no unanimity in the assessment of the ethical implications of the prohibition to kill or to respect life as the differing positions of individual Christians or the Christian churches on capital punishment, abortion, or euthanasia demonstrate.

These considerations should be construed neither as an argument against involving religions in the search for global ethics nor as a plea for moral relativism. While we have reason to believe that value pluralism is not a temporary phenomenon but one that will stay with us as a characteristic of life in modern societies across the world, we need nevertheless to be sure that humanity is united in its fundamental moral intuitions. These foundations have to be uncovered and – if necessary – secured if we are to meet the challenges that lie ahead. One of the most

urgent challenges comes from modern genetics. 'No branch of science has created more acute or more subtle and interesting ethical dilemmas than genetics … [I]t is genetics that makes us recall, not simply our responsibilities to the world and to one another, but our responsibilities for how people will be in the future. For the first time we can begin to determine not simply *who will live and who will die, but what all those in the future will be like*'.[20] This scenario should re-enforce our search for global ethics and locate it at the level where we touch upon the core of humanity. This, however, reaches deeper than the four 'irrevocable directives' make us believe. While morality is clearly concerned with the universalisable norms of the just and right, the focus of ethics is on common values and conceptions of the good life that are embedded in and sustained by an anthropologically grounded ethical self-understanding of what it is to be human.

4. Navigating between moral relativism and cultural incompatibility

One of the most serious problems with which the search for global ethics is confronted is intrinsically related to the very role of ethics in human life, its meaning and justification. At least some of the difficulties encountered with regard to the Asian values debate and inter-religious dialogue are aspects of this problem. If it is true that moral values and norms are always embedded in comprehensive systems of meaning that are largely coextensive with particular cultures and religions but have evolved independently of each other, the status of global ethics within the ensemble of those culturally or religiously based moralities requires clarification. Has global ethics to be conceived as some sort of super-structure that would allocate ethical systems their specific

[20] Burley, J./ Harris, John (eds.), *A Companion to Genethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2002, 2 (my emphasis).

position and assess their validity along a shared standard of moral reasoning? Or is it simply one more system of ethics, whose scope is defined by contemporary secular society rather than by the parameters of any specific cultural tradition or religion? While the first option would undermine the moral status of culture and religion for human self-understanding, the second would merely expand the range of ethical systems from which to choose and thus add a new facet to the old problem of moral relativism. There may, however, be a third option. It would acknowledge the normative roles of culturally and religiously based moralities but extend the search for global ethics to their foundations in order to discover there the postulated common core of humanity's moral experience that would still be preserved – albeit to different degrees – in the culturally based moralities.

Although moral relativism raises issues far exceeding our current objectives, it needs to be at least briefly addressed as it would defeat all efforts in the search for global ethics. Moral relativism as the claim that moral right and wrong (good and bad, justice and injustice, virtue and vice, etc.) are always relative to a moral framework and that no moral framework 'is objectively privileged as the one true morality',[21] would effectively divide humanity into competing moral cultures without standard for arbitration. What is morally right in relation to one moral framework can be morally wrong within a different moral framework. Coupled as it frequently is with the thesis of cultural incompatibility, moral relativism would leave little hope that humanity could ever be united in its response to the global crisis. If cultures and social practices are indeed incompatible, it would be impossible to understand the meaning of the key concepts outside their respective cultural framework or to translate them into another. The only alternative to continuous moral conflict would be to suspend moral judgment altogether and to look for

[21] Harmann, Gilbert/ Thomas, Judith Jarvis, *Moral Relativism and Moral Objectivity*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996, 3.

some sort of pragmatic compromise at the social, political, and legal levels. It is highly unlikely that such compromise could prevent the feared 'clash of civilisations' or secure the foundations for peaceful co-operation in the face of the global crisis.

Obviously, the long shadow of moral relativism does not only fall on the cross-cultural dialogue in the search for global ethics. It also affects life in modern, liberal societies whose inherent pluralism of values seems to undermine the very possibility of norms valid for all citizens. People within the same society may adhere to different value systems or comprehensive systems of meaning without a shared moral frame of reference. They meet each other as 'moral strangers' whose moral convictions and norms are defined by particular moralities.[22] Restricting all substantive value to particular moral communities leaves only some minimal conditions even moral strangers will have to accept if they want to live in peace with each other. As liberal societies are centred in the idea of individual liberty, the only principle available to them would be autonomy. On this account, modern, secular society is split, on the one hand, into various particular communities that alone can provide content-full moralities and, on the other, into an abstract state whose legal provisions for social and political cooperation derive from the principle of autonomy. This would make 'substantive disagreement about most issues that matter' inevitable and relegate the task to keep each other in check to state legislation and the police.[23]

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[22] Engelhardt, H. Tristram, *Bioethics and Secular Humanism. The Search for a Common Morality*, London: SCM Press, 1991, 3.

[23] Engelhard, H. Tristram, "Morality, Universality, and Particularity", in: Tao Lai Po-wah, Julia (ed.), *Cross-Cultural Perspectives on the (Im)Possibility of Global Bioethics*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2002, 23.

5. Requirements of (inter)religious dialogue, searching for global ethics

The search for global ethics must extend beyond the search for mid-level principles as the smallest common denominator of religious and cultural traditions. It would neither exclude religions from this search nor reduce them to their moral dimension. A truly global ethics can only be envisaged if it is inclusive of the religious and cultural experience of mankind. This calls for a comprehensive, in-depth, and open-ended dialogue whose participants are committed to truth and factual accuracy. Clearly, the search for global ethics will be a long one, full of expectations and full of disappointments, but worthwhile nevertheless and without alternative.

It makes much sense to initiate it as a respectful dialogue among religions as they preserve in their spiritual resources substantial intuitions of who we are as human beings and to what we may aspire. They reach deep into the collective memory of humankind and keep alive insights that even the non-religious may not want to ignore. Yet religions are no fossils from the human past but organisms full of life that continue to provide meaning and orientation for billions around the world.

The dialogical search for global ethics needs to be conducted with genuine and honest interest in the other as other. Participants must overcome prejudice and disinformation and learn from each other with open minds. It may be only after a long exploratory journey through the religious universe that they touch upon its core and catch a glimpse of religious insights upon which a global ethics can be built.

Any true dialogue is not only explorative and analytical but also constructive. It will have to search for the strongest points in the religious (or cultural) tradition under investigation, not for the weakest. This requires the dialogical scrutiny of divergent positions within the same religion, and this calls for theology. Interreligious dialogue will therefore

have to move from the outside towards the inside, from talking *about* religious experience, its doctrinal expression, and its ritualistic practice to talking *with* and learning *from* competent interpreters of religious faith. This will open new possibilities for consensus but may also instil new conflicts.

From a Christian perspective, the search for global ethics would have to consider, firstly, that genuine theology is sensitive to the intellectual tremors of its time and dialogical in nature, not confrontational. It addresses issues within their proper context and extends its inquiry from the early times of Christianity to the present. It is neither a self-confident speech from the lectern nor a sermon from the pulpit. Instead, it is the patient yet passionate involvement in mutual *maieutics*, the assistance in the delivery of truth.

Secondly, the search for global ethics from the perspective of dialogical theology recognises that truth is only with God and that humans must be content with being on the road towards truth, eagerly probing any of its signs. Evidently, this is a risky business, but it should not put off anyone. As Ernst Troeltsch, whose scholarship extended from Christian theology to the sociology of religion and religious studies, once put it: 'Without taking risks, without making mistakes, without martyrdom, there is no grasping of truths and values'.[24] Thirdly, the dialogical search for global ethics will have to translate religious insights into the language of public reason without substantial loss of their religious meaning. Such a translation cannot be achieved by simply repeating the doctrines of classical theology, but by bravely engaging in an open-ended dialogue with contemporary culture and thought. This will require drawing a fine line between preserving and reconstructing religious substance. If this substance were to be preserved as Egyptian embalmers

[24] Becker, Gerhold K., "The Absolute in the Relative. Ernst Troeltsch's Search for Ultimate Meaning", in: *Ultimate Reality and Meaning. Interdisciplinary Studies in the Philosophy of Understanding 19 (2)*, 1996, 111.

prepared the corpses of the Pharaohs for eternity, it would be incomprehensible and of little consequence in the search for global ethics. If, however, it were absorbed completely into the secular horizon of modernity, it would lose its religious meaning.

6. The vision of a global ethics

Against the backdrop of the discussion so far, it should be apparent that the pursuit of global ethics must be culturally sensitive and inclusive. It calls for sympathetic and detailed understanding of regional ethics and of the values embedded in religious systems of meaning. Moral disagreements must be carefully noted and respected.

The search for global ethics must avoid any type of asymmetrical positioning (through status or language competence) between the partners in dialogue and requires an amicable atmosphere of openness and truthfulness. As it cannot be excluded that moral disagreement on fundamental issues of life may be based on inadequate communication, factual inaccuracies, or conceptual ambiguity, resources will have to be allocated in the search to address these problems. Only then could it proceed to explore the reasons of moral disagreement on specific issues and look for common ground. It is highly unlikely that moral communities could exist for long in complete isolation from one another or live in separate worlds without communication between them. Even indigenous societies in remote places were usually in some contact with their neighbours and knew about their ways of life. Today, all moral communities are affected by the same global problems regardless of whether they face up to them or try hard to ignore them.

Even on the assumption that some people may regard others outside their communities as ‘moral strangers’, they at least share with them the same human nature and will be familiar with the same kind of emotional responses to suffering, pain, and death; their expectations of a life of

meaning, fulfilment, and flourishing are grounded in similar experiences of life's fragility. In this sense, they are not absolute strangers but 'sufficiently morally acquainted to enable fruitful dialogue across even starkly different cultural groups'.[25]

Recognising the inescapability as well as the experiential wealth of ethico-religious traditions, the dialogical search for global ethics will have to turn to inquiry into their core ideals and their function in society and its institutions. This would imply discerning not merely what these ideals are but also how they are embedded in the practices of ordinary life. In this way, 'the dialogue would search for a society's moral centre – the institutions where the tradition's moral ideal are most powerfully alive and where visions of a humane moral order have the most leverage on other institutions'.[26]

As ethics provides practical guidance for individual and communal life from a vision of human flourishing, it unfolds in relation to basic spheres of human experience (especially mortality, socialisation, individuality) that mark the space within which any human life develops and to which ethics responds. The fundamental ethical question then is: 'what is it to choose and respond well within that sphere?'[27] Although the answers to this question may vary relative to cultural contexts and historical constellations, they cannot be constructed arbitrarily as they need to 'respond well' to the foundational conditions of human experience or the 'existential aprioris'.[28] This gives them an inherent cognitive

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[25] Loewy, Erich H., *Moral Strangers, Moral Acquaintance, and Moral Friends. Connectedness and its Conditions*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997, 3.

[26] Madsen, Richard, "Ethics and the Family. China/West", in: Pohl, Karl-Heinz/ Müller, Anselm W. (eds.), *Chinese Ethics in a Global Context*, Leiden: Brill, 2002, 298.

[27] Nussbaum, Martha C., "Non-Relative Virtues. An Aristotelian Approach", in: Nussbaum, Martha C./ Sen, Amartya (eds.), *The Quality of Life*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993, 245.

[28] Erich H. Loewy's list of 'six existential aprioris' include the human '(1) drive for being or existence; (2) biological needs; (3) social needs; (4) a desire to

pull to universal moral truth. While the moral responses may yield a plurality of standards, as seems indeed to be the case, this should not be taken to suggest that we simply have to accept anything and abandon judgement altogether. Even if, for various reasons, a plurality of standards were desirable, this would not rule out judgments of superiority.[29] To put it differently: Although we always speak the language of a specific time and a particular place, 'the rightness and wrongness of what we say is not just for a time and a place'. Should we indeed try to eliminate the normative in ethics by advocating moral relativism, we would – as Hilary Putnam reminds us – attempt 'mental suicide'.[30]

It can be assumed that the fear of death is a universal, not merely a culture-dependent, phenomenon and that humans are social beings *by nature*. Ethics everywhere has developed norms and basic values that are indispensable to peaceful human coexistence and cooperation. They include the positive duties of mutual care and reciprocity, the negative injunctions concerning violence, deceit, and betrayal, and the norms for certain rudimentary procedures and standards of justice. This set of values and norms has been called the 'minimal interpretation of morality' (Peter Strawson), since it entails the 'condition(s) of the existence of a society'. Affecting every level of personal and working life, the family and the community as well as national and international relations, it is sufficiently broad to allow for cultural diversity without preventing the critique of abuses 'perpetrated in the name either of more general values or of ethnic, religious, political, or other diversity'.[31] In spite of our diverging interests and conceptions of the good,

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avoid suffering; (5) a basic sense of logic; (6) a desire to live freely and to pursue our own interests'. See Loewy, op. cit., 141.

[29] Taylor, Charles, "Rationality", in: *Philosophy and the Human Sciences. Philosophical Papers. Vol. 2*. Cambridge University Press, 1985, 151.

[30] Putnam, Hilary, "Why Reason Can't Be Naturalized," in: Baynes, Kenneth *et al.* (eds.), *After Philosophy. End or Transformation?* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1987, 241.

[31] Bok, Sissela, *Common Values*, Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1995, 23.

broad consensus exists on such core duties that range from promise keeping to respecting bodily integrity.[32]

As long as we understand each other's moral language, we are not locked into our moral communities as if they were rooms without windows and doors. Yet even within those borders, we are able to critically assess the appropriateness of traditional answers in light of new experiences and with regard to the basic spheres of life to which they are supposed to respond and to 'respond well'. This idea of ethics is neither new nor specifically Western. It inspired the ethics of Aristotle in ancient Greece as well as the ethics of Mozi in ancient China.[33] For Aristotle, who is usually regarded as a strong advocate of a culturally based 'communitarian ethics', the criterion for the assessment of moral answers within a particular community or tradition is their orientation to the good: 'Generally, of course, it is the good, and not simply the traditional, that is aimed at' (Politics, 1268a). This is to say, practices 'once doubtless customary' can be critically assessed as much as 'the notions of primitive men' or 'laws which have been written down'. Culturally embedded moral traditions can be changed in light of better ethical reasons, those that can be shared not only by the members of the same moral community but also by others and are thus in principle available to all people.

This conception of ethics allows for both moral progress and moral universality. The ethical justification of slavery may have been possible in the past; it is possible no longer. Unless moral discourse is little more than a meaningless pastime, objective standards must be available to all participants, including 'moral strangers', to assess their arguments.

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[32] Larmore, Charles, *The Morals of Modernity*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 58.

[33] Becker, Gerhold K., "Asian and Western Ethics. Some Remarks on a Productive Tension", in: *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics 5 (2)*, 1995, 31-33.

At the opposite end of the world, Mozi makes the same crucial distinction between customary mores and morality proper by asking for good reasons why we should follow the traditional value system. Referring to ancient practices and rituals that were once accepted without any question but are now regarded as abhorrent and inhumane (like eating the first-born son), Mozi states: 'They practiced these rituals and did not give them up. And yet how can these be the way of humanity *(ren*) and morality (*li*)?'[34]

In spite of attempts to ethically privilege cultural traditions and their sets of moral values, the tendency to subject them to critical scrutiny has gained momentum even in traditional societies. A prominent voice in this growing chorus is Indian feminist Uma Narayan:

> We publicly hold up to our fellow citizens the shame of what 'our' traditions and cultural practices, and the changing economic and social contexts in which they function, have so often done to its women: the deaths, the brutalities and the more mundane and quotidian sufferings of women within 'our' culture, with which 'our' culture has been complicitous … We need to move away from a picture of cultural contexts as sealed rooms, impervious to change, with a homogeneous space 'inside' them, inhabited by 'authentic' insiders who all share a uniform and consistent account of their institutions and values. Third-World national and cultural contexts are as pervaded by plurality, dissension and change, as are their 'Western' counterparts … We need to be wary about all ideals of 'cultural authenticity that portray "authenticity" by lack of criticism and lack of change.[35]

7. The core of global ethics: human dignity

The debate about global ethics calls for sustained reflection not only on the traditional resources of ethics but also on the forces that have pitted secular societies and religious world views against each other. As the

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[34] Quoted in Hansen, Chad, *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought. A Philosophical Interpretation*, New York/ Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992, 107.
[35] Narayan, Uma, *Dislocating Cultures. Identities, Traditions, and Third-World Feminism*, New York: Routledge, 1997, 29, 33.

challenge is, for the first time in human history, truly global, our response must be global, too. The task is not the founding of a new ethos but the cross-cultural search for commonalities in the moral intuitions of humankind that can provide the resources for a global ethics that can meet the global crisis. How we respond to this task will have far-reaching consequences for our planet and for our self-understanding as human beings.

The single most important candidate for the core ideal of global ethics is human dignity. Human dignity draws its moral force not from a particular and well-defined philosophical conception but from the intuitive appeal of the ordinary language of respect for the human person and her inherent worth. It encapsulates a particular vision of humanity: that of the priority of ethics over force and violence. Only humans can adopt the moral point of view in the daily struggles of life by recognising each other as fundamentally equal, regardless of the circumstantial particulars of individual endowment, social standing, or personal fortunes. Human dignity is above all the basic moral attitude of conscientiousness and respect for human beings as human beings. It stands for a specific form of moral sensitivity that permeates the moral fabrics of conscientious people and intuitively alerts them to morally precarious situations long before reflective morality is able to discern the relevant details and provide the principles for a considered judgment one can live with. It thus signals intuitively plausible moral repugnance at the wrongness of certain acts. A conscientious person does not first have to become familiar with moral theory to see that acts such as murder, torture, rape, enslavement, and the like are intrinsically evil.[36]

[36] See also Twiss, Sumner B., "Torture, Justification, and Human Rights. Toward an Absolute Proscription", in: *Human Rights Quarterly 29*, 2007, 346-367: "all of the moral and religious systems of which I am aware advance some notion of human dignity that condemns the torturous violation of that dignity in the manner just described."

Human dignity simultaneously predicates something about each and every human person and about the way we ought to interact. What we owe to each other is grounded in what we fundamentally are: fragile and vulnerable beings with a human face. As Emanuel Levinas has reminded us, by looking at the naked face of the other (*autrui*) we enter into moral space. In such encounters, the others are exposed to us in the irreducible existence of their defenceless eyes. Although the other as corporeal reality is an object among objects, the open face looking at us signals a fundamental difference to all objects that puts up a moral barrier against intrusion. It opens a relation 'with something absolutely other: the resistance of what has no resistance – the ethical resistance.'[37] It is this moral barrier that is central in the idea of human dignity by marking out a person's moral standing that (negatively) prohibits transgression and (positively) demands moral respect. It is obvious that this idea stands in the background of Levinas' moral ontology of the human face, although he does not draw on it explicitly. Instead, he finds human dignity revealed in the concrete encounter with the other human person, which establishes an inescapable relationship of non-indifference that demands a moral response. In the personal encounter with the other, I am immediately and inevitably immersed in a primordial moral discourse. Its 'first word is obligation',[38] since 'the first word of the face is the "Thou shalt not kill." It is an order. There is a commandment in the appearance of the face, as if a master spoke to me. However, at the same time, the face of the other is destitute; it is the poor for whom I can do all and to whom I owe all. And me, whoever I may be, I am he who finds the resources to respond to the call'.[39]

Human dignity thus stands for the moral point of view and sets up the basic frame of reference in ethics. It then serves also as the platform

[37] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985.
[38] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totality and Infinity*, Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991, 201.
[39] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity*, loc. cit., 89.

upon which arguments can be constructed that help preserve a rich idea of human goodness and probity.[40] For its justification, nothing more is required than to realise that it is categorically opposed to humiliation as 'the rejection of a person or a group of people from the human commonwealth', 'from the "family of Man".' Human dignity prohibits on moral grounds to treat humans as nonhuman or to relate to humans as if they were not human, in treating them as if they were merely things, tools, animals, subhumans, or inferior humans.[41] Positively, it demands of us moral respect, as the other is of incomparable worth not in the particulars of his or her individual existence but as a human person.

In this sense, human dignity is not a consequence or possible result of dialogue or moral discourse but its precondition. As the alternative to the moral point of view is violence, dialogue implies the renunciation of violence and the recognition of moral worth and equality among human beings. In dialogue, the violent struggle for superiority that otherwise characterises human history is replaced by verbal confrontation constrained by human dignity. As all genuine dialogue is grounded in mutual moral respect, 'violence and discourse are the two opposite poles of human existence' … 'Violence is always the interruption of discourse: discourse is always the interruption of violence'.[42] Before we enter into a dialogue we must have adopted the moral point of view requiring us to recognise the other as our moral equal. Drawing on a famous metaphor of Rawls, we must be willing to cover behind a "veil of ignorance" all particulars of our partners except for one: that of being humans of equal moral worth.

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[40] Becker, Gerhold K., "In Search of Humanity. Human Dignity as a Basic Moral Attitude", in: Häyry, Matti/ Takala, Tuija (eds.), *The Future of Value Inquiry*, Atlanta/ Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2001, 53-65.

[41] Margalit, Avishai, *The Decent Society*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, 108-121.

[42] Ricoeur, Paul, "Philosophy", in: Jacques Havet (ed.), *Main Trends of Research in the Social and Human Sciences*, Part 2, De Bary, Wm. Theodore Vol. 2, The Hague/ Paris/ New York: Mouton Publishers, Unesco, 1978, 1316.

In the social and political spheres, human dignity provides the moral basis for human-rights legislation as well as for any content-full vision of human flourishing. This 'vague but powerful idea' thus stands for a form of the good life that can and needs to be secured in the specific culture of human rights and reciprocal obligations. It has normative bite as it 'supposes that there are ways of treating a man that are inconsistent with recognising him as a full member of the human community, and holds that such treatment is profoundly unjust'.[43]

While it may be difficult to arrive at a definitive set of universally agreed moral values and principles, this does not necessarily imply that we do not share a core ideal of human flourishing. The international human-rights discourse and the increasing implementation of human rights in national and international legislation presuppose and endorse human dignity as the core ideal of morality. This ideal leaves sufficient space for the substantive moralities of particular communities but unites them all into one 'family of man' and a shared vision of the good life. 'A people is no less a member of the human race, which is society as a whole, than a family is a member of a particular nation. Each individual owes incomparably more to the human race, which is the great fatherland, than to the particular country in which he was born. As a family is to the nation, so is the nation to the universal commonweal; wherefore it is infinitely more harmful for nation to wrong nation, than for family to wrong family'.[44]

What Fénelon envisaged at the beginning of the 18th century has been solemnly endorsed in 1948 in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, whose first article declares: 'All human beings are born free and equal in

[43] Dworkin, Ronald, *Taking Rights Seriously*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977, 198-199.
[44] Fénelon, François de Salignac de La Mothe, *Dialogues des morts anciens et modernes avec quelques fables composés pour l'éducation d'un prince. Socrate et Alcibiade*, Paris: Estienne, 1718, 17.

dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood'.

7

'LEARNED IGNORANCE' AND COMPASSION IN ALBERT SCHWEITZER[1]

Pier Cesare Bori, Italy

Two perceptions cast their shadows over my existence. One consists in my realization that the world is inexplicably mysterious and full of suffering; the other in the fact that I have been born into a period of spiritual decadence in humankind.
Albert Schweitzer[2]

1. Philosophy and religion

Albert Schweitzer, with his intellectual research and in his activity in the world, emerges from the great history of German Protestant theology and its theological faculties and occupies an important and definitive place there. It suffices to recall the proud, self-aware beginning of his great book, the *Quest for the Historical Jesus* (1906):

When, at some future day, our period of civilisation shall lie, closed and completed, before the eyes of later generations, German theology will stand out as a great, a unique phenomenon in the mental and spiritual life of our time. For no-

[1] This article was first published as "'*Dotta ignoranza*' e compassione in Albert *Schweitzer*", in: Cristianesimo *nella storia 29*, 2008, 173-187.
[2] See the epilogue of Schweitzer, Albert, *My Life and Thought*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1955.

where save in the German temperament can there be found in the same perfection the living complex of conditions and factors – of philosophic thought, critical acumen, historical insight, and religious feeling – without which no deep theology is possible.[3]

And yet Schweitzer did not belong only to this great history. He did not allow himself to be touched by any aspects of German nationalism, remaining quite immune to it. Claus Günzler, the editor of his texts, and the author of the best introduction to his thought, affirms:

Guided by the *ethos* of the eighteenth century concept of 'human', he was never capable of simply describing culture, but needed to measure every culture against the Enlightenment idea of the 'human'. Undoubtedly we find here a weakness in his relationship with cultures foreign to him, as for example in Africa, yet this enabled his ethical perspective to remain immune to the dangerous temptations of the German spiritual vision after the First World War.[4]

The rejection of every kind of nationalism was also reflected in his choices, which first led him to work in a French colony (and consequently to imprisonment in France during the First World War) and then to live until the end of his days in Lambarené (except when he was in Europe for lectures, concerts and the collection of funds).

Schweitzer did not belong completely to the academic world either. He was in the first place an extraordinary witness and argument for the unity of theory and practice (Ernst Cassirer, contrasting Schweitzer with the German political climate in the Thirties, made some very vigorous observations on this point).[5]

His thinking was in addition entirely without separate compartments: he wished to live beyond the opposition between theology and philosophy. He was a *grenzüberschreitenden Denker*, a thinker who crossed frontiers.[6] His position as historian, his creative and hermeneutic open-

[3] Schweitzer, Albert, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (3rd edition), London: Adam & Charles Black, 1954, 1.
[4] Günzler, Claus, *Albert Schweizer. Einführung in sein Denken*, München: Beck, 1996, 32.
[5] Ibid., 39f.
[6] Ibid., 45-46.

ness confidently embraced rational thought, whatever form it might take, religious or otherwise: 'Instead of philosophy we should be speaking of rational thinking' ('Statt Philosophie sollte man Denken sagen').[7] And in his research his enquiry into thought was free ranging, whether dealing with Paul, the 'first to champion in Christianity the rights of thinking',[8] with the Chinese, the Indians, with Zarathustra, the Jews, ancient Greek philosophy, or the Roman-Hellenistic world.

> The visions of the world of world religions and western philosophy do not belong to different worlds, but are linked to each other by inner connections. The distinction between religious vision and philosophical vision is especially slippery or ambiguous. The religious vision of the world that tries to understand itself through thought becomes philosophical. This occurs with the Chinese and the Indians. But a philosophical vision of the world that goes deeply into things becomes religious.[9]

Elsewhere he expressed himself like Marsilio Ficino, who spoke of *pia filosofia* and *docta religio*: 'Wie das wahre Denken religiös, so ist die wahre Religion denkend.'[10] Few others have sought such simplicity and immediacy in their writing. Terms like 'elementary', 'direct', and 'vital' recur an infinite number of times in his work. He uses insistently terms like 'true', and 'truth' (*Wahrhaft, Wahrhaftigkeit*), as much in his theoretical philosophical-ethical writings as in his historical ones.

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[7] Ibid., 17, quoting from Schweitzer, Albert, *Die Weltanschauung der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben. Kulturphilosphie III*, ed. C. Günzler/ J. Zürcher, München: Beck, 1999 and 2000 (hereafter *Kulturphilosophie III*), Part 1, 252. (I give the reference in these terms: the author quotes from the first edition of the work).

[8] 'Nicht nur, dass Paulus als erster das Recht des Denkens im Christentum vertritt: er weist ihm auch für alle Zeiten den Weg, den es zu gehen hat', in Schweitzer, Albert, *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, Tübingen: Mohr, 1954 (1st ed. 1930) (hereafter *Die Mystik*), 366. 'But it is not merely that Paul was the first to champion the rights of thought in Christianity; he has also shown it, for all time, the way it was to go." Schweitzer, Albert, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1931, 377.

[9] Schweitzer, Albert, *Kultur und Ethik*, München: Beck, 1960 (hereafter *Kultur und Ethik*), 124.

[10] Günzler, Claus, "Einleitung", in: *Kulturphilosophie III*, 24, quoting the same, Part 2, 60.

The research into the life of Jesus, according to him, is a work of truth of Protestant Christianity. So it is important that even those who do not belong to that culture should measure themselves with it. Even those who are not entirely fluent in his language, and who unlike him have not grown up with Luther's translation of the Bible, and Nietzsche as a literary model, should do this.[11] Especially now, with the publication of his impressive legacy[12], I believe that this is an important task.

2. Two decisive moments: the Lake of Gennesaret

The publication of this legacy does, however, makes the task of reconstructing Albert Schweitzer's thought all the more complex. We can try to do this by recalling the two decisive moments of his intellectual career, expressed in two famous passages.

First of all, the *Quest of the Historical Jesus.* Our relationship with Jesus, in the last analysis, is not an intellectual relationship: his vision of the world cannot be ours. It is a mystical relationship. Our relationship with Jesus is of a mystical character, he repeats.

Why already in the early twentieth century Albert Schweitzer had chosen the term 'mystical', a term with negative connotations in the Protestantism of the Lutheran ascendancy, presents problems. The work of Ernst Troeltsch, among them, may be recalled. But in the end, I think that more important than researching into the ascendancies, it is precisely the page just quoted that makes everything clear. Beyond the constructions of orthodox Christology, beyond the moralistic portrait of Je-

[11] 'Als das Vollendetste in Deutsch sehe ich Luthers Bibelübersetzung und Nietzsches "Jenseits vom Gut und Böse"', in: Schweitzer, Albert, *Aus meinem Leben und Denken*, Frankfurt a.M.: Fischer Verlag, n.d. (hereafter *Leben und Denken*), 61. "What is nearest perfection in German I see in Luther's translation of the Bible and Nietzsche's *Jenseits von Gut und Böse* (*Beyond Good and Evil*)." See Schweitzer, Albert, *My Life and Thought*, op. cit., 62.

[12] Especially important are the two volumes of materials dedicated to the *Kulturphilosphie III* quoted above.

sus in liberal theology, beyond the knowledge 'according to the flesh', after critical-historical research eating into any kind of certainty over dogma, all of a sudden the possibility of a pure 'being with', or 'being in' Jesus opened up, the possibility of an elementary and vital communion, indeed a *mysterious* one. It is Paul's model of mystical knowledge that is being put forward here; in fact his *History of the Research into Paul* (1911) will be published shortly afterwards, and the mystical theme will be clearly set out there in the epilogue.[13] It will emerge right from the title of his *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle* (1930), whose fundamental thesis goes back to the time of the *Quest of the Historical Jesus*.[14]

This is a mysterious communion ('ein unaussprechliches Geheimnis') that cannot be expressed in words but is transformed into a powerful ethical impulse, for the following of Jesus. Here is the famous conclusion to the *Quest of the Historical Jesus*:

> We can find no designation which expresses what He is for us. He comes to us as One unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, He came to those men who knew him not. He speaks the same word: "Follow thou me!" and sets us to the tasks which He has to fulfil for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether he be wise or simple, He will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the sufferings which they shall pass through in His fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience Who He is.

3. The River Ogoué

The discovery of the idea of 'respect for life' was the second turning point. After months of torment in which Schweitzer had been feeling his way to a foundation for his ethics, after much frustration and denial, finally, during a lengthy trip along the river Ogoué in September 1915, something happened.

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[13] See 'escatologische Mystik', in Schweitzer, Albert, *Geschichte der paulinische Forschung*, München: Beck, 1933 (reprint), 188.
[14] '…deren ersten Entwurf auf das Jahr 1906 zurückgeht', in *Die Mystik*, vii.

Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, were were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase, "reverence for life". The iron door had yielded: the path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the idea in which world- and life-affirmation and ethics are contained side by side. Now I knew that the world-view of ethical world- and life-affirmation, together with its ideals of civilization, were founded in thought.

And a little further on, in opposition to Descartes' famous 'Cogito ergo sum', he wrote:

The most immediate fact of man's consciousness is the assertion: "I am life which wills to live, in the midst of life which wills to live," and it is as will-to-live in the midst of will-to-live that man conceives himself during every moment that he spends in meditating on himself and the world around him.[15]

4. Eschatological mysticism …

In Schweitzer's intellectual personality these two moments, religious and philosophical – I say moments, but perhaps it would be more accurate to call them features: it does not appear that the second took the place of the first – these two features coexisted and to a certain extent conflicted with each other.

On the one hand he developed his thinking on Christology, up until his book on *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, a defence of Pauline mysticism. Here he opposed a generic theistic mysticism, of a Hellenistic kind, to a Messianic and eschatological mysticism, which showed an immediate ethical correlative.

All attempts to rob Christianity of the character of Christ-Mysticism are nothing more or less than a useless resistance to that spirit of knowledge and truth, which finds expression in the teaching of the first and greatest of all Christian thinkers. Just as Philosophy, after all its aberrations, has always to return to the primary truth that every genuinely profound and living world-view is of a mystical character, in the sense that it consists of some kind of conscious and willing surrender to the mysterious and infinite will-to-live, from which we are; so thought of, an essentially Christian character cannot do other than conceive this surrender to

[15] *Leben und Denken*, 138f. *My Life and Thought*, 141f.

God, as Paul conceived it long ago, as coming to pass in union with the being of Jesus Christ.

God-mysticism, in the sense of a direct becoming-one with the infinite creative will of God, is impossible of realisation. All attempts to extract living religion from pure Monistic God-mysticism are foredoomed to failure, whether they are undertaken by the Stoics, by Spinoza, by Indian or by Chinese thought. They know the direction, but they do not find the way. From the becoming-one with the infinite essence of the being of the Universal Will-to-be there can result nothing but a passive determination of man's being, an absorption into God, a sinking into the ocean of the Infinite. Pure God-mysticism remains a dead thing. The becoming-one of the finite will with the Infinite acquires a content only when it is experienced both as quiescence in it and at the same time as a 'being-taken-possession-of' by the will of love, which in us comes to consciousness of itself, and strives in us to become act. Mysticism only takes the road to life when it passes through the antithesis of God's will of love with His infinite enigmatic creative will, and transcends it. Since human thinking cannot comprehend the eternal in its true nature, it is bound to arrive at Dualism and be forced to overcome it, in order to adjust itself to the eternal. It must, no doubt, face all the enigmas of existence which present themselves to thought and harass it, but in the last resort it must leave the incomprehensible uncomprehended, and take the path of seeking to be certified of God as the Will of Love, and finding in it both inner peace and springs of action.

The Messianic eschatological world-view is an overcoming of Dualism, arrived at by bold and vigorous thinking, through the victorious arising, within the belief in the infinitely enigmatic Creator God, of a belief in the God of Love. All religious mysticism must, indeed, take up into itself some king of Messianic belief, it it is to receive the breath of life. Thus the Messianic-eschatological mysticism of Paul is an expression of essential religious mysticism which has forced its way to living trough. In Jesus Christ, God is manifested as Will of Love. In union with Christ, union with God is realised in the only form available to us.[16]

On the whole, this was the same position as the one in the lecture at Selly Oaks to English Quakers in 1922, on *Christianity and the religions of the world* ('The religions of the East are a "logical" mysticism, only Christianity is an ethical mysticism')[17] and, a little while after his *Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, in the *Great Thinkers of India* in 1934; here an evolutionary paradigm prevailed, in the direction of a mysticism of ethics of an evidently Christian stamp. It would seem that only messianic

[16] *Die Mystik*, 367f. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 378f.
[17] Schweitzer, Albert, *Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, München: Beck, 1984 (hereafter *Das Christentum*), 61.

mysticism had the concrete quality to make it able to excite a yes to the world and to life, and the ethical impulse. What point, then, was there to the philosophical search for a 'world vision of respect for life'?

5. … but also philosophy of culture

On the other hand, Schweitzer devoted an extraordinary amount of work (which is emerging now, with the publication of the previously unpublished work) to historical research into world visions, to the philosophy of culture and to an attempt to construct a 'world vision of respect for life' (the title he would have wanted for a great work of which he published only the first two parts, with the title *Kultur und Ethik* in 1923, and whose third and fourth parts have now been published). Here in the background there was a positive evaluation of Stoicism and Chinese thought,[18] there was his enthusiasm for the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, there was the continuous philosophical debate with Hume, Kant, Goethe, Fichte, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, and Spengler. Here philosophical categories like monism and dualism were gradually put to use, the affirmation or denial of life and the world, and philosophy, mysticism and ethics, the ethics of dedication and the ethics of self perfection. Hermeneutic typologies and models were used that served a little mechanically to direct the history of thought towards the coming of a mysticism of respect for life, in whose formation Christianity had only been a step in the right direction.

It is clear that the idea came to Albert Schweitzer from his formulation in a universalistic sense (in contact with Africa) of the messianic experience of early Christianity. But Schweitzer proceeded with Christianity as Paul had with the figure of Jesus: if Paul, 'exploring in depth

[18] See now Schweitzer, Albert, *Geschichte des chinesischen Denkens*, ed. B. Kämpf/ J. Zürcher, München, Beck, 2002, with interesting positive evaluations by H. Roetz from a Sinological perspective, in his postface 331-348.

into what is conditioned by time, [had] penetra[ted] to a spiritual reality of perennial value', today it would mean formulating that same experience by freeing it from the terms of traditional Christology.[19] For Albert Schweitzer, that past experience, historically determined and limited, was today respect for life, the utterance linguistically and culturally adequate and relevant today. Ulrich Neuenschwander, the scholar who had the merit of laying the foundations of the work on Albert Schweitzer's legacy, stated: 'Christianity is for him the earliest form of respect for life'.[20] Christianity here was only his personal point of departure.

6. Abandoning the search for 'a vision of the world'

Around the principle of respect for life Schweitzer wished to construct the edifice of a coherent vision of the world. He worked at it with passion, writing and rewriting, almost obsessively, always dissatisfied. He failed to complete his work, abandoning it perhaps at the end of the 1940s. Günzler, in his preface to the first of the two volumes of *Kultur-*

[19] 'But it is not merely that Paul was the first to champion the rights of thought in Christianity; he has also shown it, for all time, the way it was to go. His great achievement was to grasp, as the thing essential to being a Christian, the experience of union with Christ. Out of the depths of the expectation of the Messiah and of the Messianic world this thought wells up to him, a thought to which expression had already been given by Jesus when He spoke of the mystery of the consecration of believers through fellowship with the unrecognised future Messiah who was dwelling among them. By penetrating to the depths of the temporarily conditioned, Paul wins his way to a spiritual result of permanent value. Strange as his thoughts are to us in the way they arise out of, and have their form moulded by, the eschatological world-view which for us is so completely obsolete, they nevertheless carry a directly convincing power in virtue of their spiritual truth which transcends all time and has value for all times. So we too should claim the right to conceive the idea of union with Jesus on the lines of our own world-view, making it our sole concern to reach the depth of the truly living and spiritual truth'. See *Die Mystik des Apostels Paulus*, 366f. *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, 377f.

[20] 'Christentum ist ihm die angestammte Form der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben', in the essay included in the quoted edition of *Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, 111.

philosopie III, remarked that his attempt to expand ethics towards a vision of the world was bound to fail, because the ethics of respect for life had been vehemently developed against the idea of world vision itself.[21]

Albert Schweitzer's diffidence towards any kind of theoretical framework was thus an element of contradiction that in the end destroyed his efforts. In a fine concise text of 1952, delivered in French at the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, he recognises that

> [ethics] today cannot count on the support of a conception of the world that may serve as a justification…
>
> A complete and satisfying knowledge of the world is lacking. We are reduced to the simple realization that everything in it is life, like ourselves, and that every life is a mystery. Our true knowledge of the world consists in being penetrated by the mystery of existence and of life. This mystery becomes all the more mysterious with every progress in scientific research. To be penetrated by the mystery of life corresponds to what in the language of mysticism is called 'learned ignorance', which nevertheless knows what is essential.

And a little further on, he ended thus:

> All the efforts undertaken by philosophy, all the great systems it has constructed to place itself in relation with the absolute, have been in vain. The 'absolute' is such an abstract term that it escapes meaning. We cannot place ourselves at the service of the infinite and unfathomable will of the creator, on which every being rests, understanding its nature and intentions. But we enter into a spiritual relationship with it if we feel ourselves under the effect of the mystery of life, and we devote ourselves to every living being we have the chance to help.
>
> The ethics that obliges us to deal only with people and society cannot have this meaning. Only the ethics that is universal, obliging us to concern ourselves with every being places us truly in a relationship with the universe and with the will that is made manifest in it
>
> In the world the will to life finds itself in conflict with itself. In us – through a mystery that we don't understand – it wants to exist at peace with itself. It is manifest in the world: in us it reveals itself. To be beings that are different from the world is our spiritual destiny. To the extent that we conform to this, we live

[21] Günzler, Claus, "Einleitung", in: *Kulturphilosphie III*, Part 1 & 2, 22.

our existence, instead of merely experiencing or enduring it. Through respect for life, we become devout, in an elementary form, vital and profound. [22]

This was his final position, which is preserved in the translation and rewriting of this text by Schweitzer himself, at the end of the 1950s: 'Ethics today has to admit that it can no longer count on appealing to a corresponding *Weltanschauung*'.[23] Here what he wrote almost fifty years before in the *Quest for the Historical Jesus* takes on its full meaning; that this places in the history of dogmas the *negative* foundation of religious thought;[24] and twenty years before in his autobiography's epilogue, already quoted in part in the epigraph:

Two perceptions cast their shadow over my existence. One consists in my realization that the world is inexplicably mysterious and full of suffering; the other in the fact that I have been born into a period of spiritual decadence in mankind. I have become familiar with and ready to deal with each through the thinking that has led me to the ethical world- and lif-affirmation of reverence for life. In that principle my life has found a firm footing and a clear path to follow.[25]

7. Docta ignorantia and Mitleiden

You will have realised that Albert Schweitzer's theses are weaker and in need of correction there where he tries to arrange the history of cultures and of the religions of humanity into an evolving series, pointing in the direction of an ethical mysticism. His theses should really have been aiming at recognition of a plurality of ways or paths, in which may be found the same structural features, and, principally, precisely the constant link between mysticism and ethics. While for this I have to re-

[22] *Le problème de l'éthique dans l'évolution de la pensée humaine*, in: *Revue des travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales & politiques 105* (1952), 44-46. There is a translation by Schweitzer himself from the end of the fifties, *Das Christentum und die Weltreligionen*, 69-88.
[23] Ibid., 84.
[24] 'In the history of doctrine its work has been negative: it has, so to speak, cleared the site for a new edifice of religious thought.' *Quest*, 1.
[25] *Leben und Denken*, 189. *My Life and Thought*, 194.

fer to my previous research,[26] I do wish here to note how in Schweitzer's own long journey, exemplary and, in a way, universal aspects may be seen.

We recall two original moments or features, one before the 'mystery' of Jesus, the other, we could say, before the mystery of life (the lake of Gennesaret, the river Ogoué). We may notice how the two different experiences do actually repeat a fundamental and exemplary itinerary, not just in Schweitzer's life, even if we are referring primarily to him.

There is first of all the intellectual work, the research, in which truth and logical coherence, *Denknotwendigkeit*, are essential requirements. And there is deep down a crisis emerging in the admission of a 'learned ignorance' (see for example the conclusion to *The Great Thinkers of India*).

Thus the experience of an 'inexpressible' contact opens up for us, from will to will, from life to life. Beyond, but not in irreconcilable conflict with the intellectual journey that had led to pass via philosophies, religions, and world visions, beyond all this and in greater depth, almost on a sudden it happens that the conscious not knowing is transformed into communion or contact, into the 'link'[27] with reality as the life and interconnection of individual existences. In the discovery of the shared belonging of all beings is born respect for life, or rather, the *Ehrfurcht*, veneration towards life (*veneratio vitae*, *vénération de la vie*, as he translated himself on occasion).

From the meeting and from communion derives the drive to action: the being in communion and pity, the *Mitleiden*, become commitment to

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[26] See my "Universalismo come pluralità delle vie", in: *Filosofia politica 3* (Dec. 1998), 455-470. Giangiorgio Pasqualotto has dedicated to this approach of mine a sensitive attention for which I am grateful in *Dalla prospettiva della filosofia comparata all'orizzonte della filosofia interculturale*, in *Simplegadi 10 (26)*, 2005, 3-27. For my perspective I am especially indebted to T. Isutzu, particularly his *Sufism and Taoism. A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

[27] See *Verbundenheit* in the indices of *Kultuphilosphie III*.

protect and promote life. In his own thought and experience, theory does not necessarily possess in itself the strength to transform itself into practice: only a 'mysticism' – not a neutral and abstract mysticism of Being, but a mysticism that starting from learned ignorance achieves a concrete connection of the living to the living, of the existing with the existing – only an authentic mysticism in this sense can be the foundation to the ethical impulse.

Schweitzer's judgment on Indian culture came under criticism from S. Radhakrishnan, and rightly so.[28] Why should we think that the ethical and mystical link belongs only to a specific development of Western culture? A sense of mystery, communion with beings, compassion and respect for life are found under different names elsewhere, too. Yet certainly, from Schweitzer's experience (like that of the Tolstoy of *Confession*, which he loved[29]) an essential feature comes to light: a mysticism can found a universal ethics all the more, the more it takes away determinations from the absolute and the less claims it makes to be its representative.

8. Religious compassion

> In a period that regards as absurd and little worth, as antiquated and long ago left far behind, whatever it feels to be in any way akin to rationalism or free thought, and which even mocks at the vindication of inalienable human rights that was secured in the eighteenth century, I acknowledge myself to be one who places all his confidence in rational thinking.[30]

Schweitzer's position on human rights, and we remember he was winner of the Nobel Peace prize in 1954, is shown here in all its strength, and with all its relevance for us today. In him, respect for life is

[28] See the fine essay by S. Marchignoli, "'Mistica' indiana ed 'Etica' europea? A partire da Schweitzer", in: *Paradigmi 21 (61)*, 2003, 55-72, especially 67f.
[29] *Kultur und Ethik*, 251.
[30] *Leben und Denken*, 191. *My Life and Thought*, 196.

linked to the idea of human dignity and rights that emerged specifically in the modern West, thanks to the flowing together of various sources: from the Renaissance (a renovated Stoicism) and radical Christianity to the Enlightenment. Important positions had already been taken in *Kultur und Ethik* in 1923,[31] and then in the epilogue *of Aus mein Leben und Deken* in 1931, from which the quotation is taken.

It is no coincidence that I find a correspondence between this attitude of his and a perspective I described when speaking of the universal nature of human rights. It is my belief that the perspective of human rights does not presuppose a definite, constant conception of human nature, but rather an idea of nature as a readiness tending towards the universal to participate in the needs and the suffering of others: 'Mitleiden', compassion, 'humanity', 'mercy', 'pity', and also 'reason and conscience' in the 1948 Declaration of Human Rights.[32]

A clarification is needed here. Schweitzer writes: 'Par le respect de la vie nous devenons pieux d'une façon élémentaire, profonde et vraie' ('Through respect for life, we become pious or devout, in an elementary form, vital and profound'.) It would be interesting to see in this finale an echo of the pity with which, according to Claude Lévi-Strauss, Rousseau proclaims the end of *cogito* and lays the foundations of the social sciences: to know what we do not know, not through an act of communication, but through a surge of compassion.[33] But it is still more interesting that Schweitzer himself translates 'pieux' as 'fromm'.[34] We are thus

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[31] *Kultur und Ethik*, 92-94.

[32] According to a reading I put forward in *Per un consenso etico tra culture*, (Genova: Marietti, 1995, 89-100), translated from my *From Hermeneutics to Ethical Consensus among Cultures* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1994) on the basis of preliminary works, behind 'conscience' there is the Confucian *ren*. See S. Twiss, *Human Rights and Religion*, Brighton/ Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2002, 170f.

[33] Lévi-Strauss, Claude, "Jean-Jacques Rousseau. Founder of the Sciences of Man", in: Lévi-Strauss, Claude, *Structural Anthropology*, Vol. 2, transl. Monique Layton, New York: Basic Books, 1976, 37f.

[34] *Das Christentum*, 88.

dealing with *religious* compassion, which becomes 'elementary, profound and alive' via respect for life. And it is interesting that he should so often say he does not speak of God '*aus Frömmigkeit*', precisely because of his religious piety.

> People ask, surprised, why I always speak in impersonal terms: the infinite, the universal will to live, instead of saying simply 'God'. I do it 'aus Frömmigkeit', I leave out speaking of God… 'aus Frömmigkeit'.[35]

As regards this piety, there are some wonderful pages in his book on Bach of 1904, devoted precisely to the 'Piété de Bach': 'Au fond, Bach n'était ni piétiste ni orthodoxe, c'était un penseur mystique. Le mysticisme, voilà la source vive d'où jaillissait sa piété.'[36] I have brought up the problem of Schweitzer's mystical terminology, and indicated the name of Troeltsch, but there is here perhaps a more precise indication. The language of mysticism becomes spontaneous – to him, a man from Alsace who thinks of himself as belonging to both German and French cultures[37] – speaking of Bach and his music to a French audience, in pages that perhaps also throw light on the personality of their author, the great creator of a mysticism that is a 'yes to life and the world':

> There are certain chorales and certain cantatas where one can feel, even more than elsewhere, that the master has put his entire soul into them. To be precise, these are the mystical chorales and cantatas. Like all mystics, Bach was, one might say, obsessed by religious pessimism. This strong, healthy man, who lived surrounded by the love of his large family, this man who was energy and activity *in personam*, who had such a great sense of fun, experienced, in his innermost soul, the intense desire, the 'Sehnsucht' of eternal rest. He knew the nostalgia for death, if any man has known it. And this nostalgia for death has never been translated into a more fascinating music.

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[35] *Kultuphilosphie III*, Part 1 and 2, 462, also 432, 441.
[36] Schweitzer, Albert, *J.S. Bach. Le musicien-poète*, Wiesbaden: Breitkopf and Härtel, 1904, 113.
[37] See ibid., v, where he excuses himself for his imperfect style: 'C'est l'héritage de ceux qui vivent et pensent dans deux langues. Mais ne sont-ils pas nécessaires à la science et à l'art surtout, ces esprits qui appartiennent à deux cultures?'

8

BUILDING ABRAHAMIC PARTNERSHIPS. A MODEL INTERFAITH PROGRAMME AT HARTFORD SEMINARY[1]

Yehezkel Landau, Israel/USA

1. Professional background and institutional context

Since June of 2004, Hartford Seminary has sponsored an interfaith training programme for Jews, Christians, and Muslims called Building Abrahamic Partnerships (BAP). In my quality of Faculty Associate in Interfaith Relations at the Seminary, I have served as BAP programme director since its inception and have designed, coordinated, and taught in the beginners and advanced BAP courses. My responsibility also includes financial and logistical administration, enlisting other members of the teaching staff, and recruiting participants.[2]

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[1] This article was first published in Roozen, David A./ Hadsell, Heidi (eds.), *Changing The Way Seminaries Teach. Pedagogies for Interfaith Dialogue*, Hartford, CT: Hartford Seminary Series on Innovation in Theological Education, Vol. II, 2009.

[2] Tuition income alone could not cover the costs of the programme. I am profoundly grateful to the three foundations whose funding has made BAP possible: The Henry Luce Foundation, the William and Mary Greve Foundation, and the Alan B. Slifka Foundation.

In this paper, I briefly describe the elements of the advanced BAP training and the skills needed for professional interfaith leadership, although my primary focus is the basic BAP course, which by July 2009 had been offered eleven times. This reflection is a preliminary assessment of its effectiveness as a model for adult-level interfaith education. The course is still evolving, partly in response to participants' evaluations and accounts of their experiences.[3]

Hartford Seminary is known nationally and internationally as a Christian institution for theological education with a highly regarded Macdonald Center for Islamic studies and Christian-Muslim relations. My appointment to the faculty in the fall of 2002 added a Jewish dimension to the communal life and academic programme of the Seminary, thus deepening the school's commitment to, and capacity for, interfaith study and conversation. That conversation was broadened from a bilateral dialogue to an Abrahamic trialogue, while retaining the special focus on Christian-Muslim relations.

My role as BAP Director also reflects my own professional interests and commitments. From 1978 until 2002, I lived in Jerusalem and was active, as a dual American-Israeli citizen, in various interreligious peacemaking efforts involving Jews and Palestinians. In the 1980s, I directed the Oz VeShalom-Netivot Shalom religious peace movement, and from 1991 until 2003 I co-founded and co-directed the Open House Center for Jewish-Arab Coexistence and Reconciliation in Ramle, Israel.[4] For over twenty years I also taught Jewish tradition and spirituality at several Christian institutes and ecumenical centres in Israel.

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[3] A systematic evaluation of the BAP program was undertaken in the summer of 2009, using e-mail questionnaires and selective phone interviews with past participants.

[4] See www.netivot-shalom.org.il and www.friendsofopenhouse.org. See also my research report "Healing the Holy Land. Interreligious Peacebuilding in Israel/ Palestine", in: *Peaceworks 51*, Sept. 2003, accessible through www.usip.org.

Today, educational initiatives like BAP, while so urgently needed, are tragically stymied in the Middle East by political, cultural, and psychological obstacles. The success of BAP is partly due to its setting – the United States in general and Hartford Seminary in particular. The Seminary's history of sponsoring interreligious encounters, studies, and events is conducive to this success. Also, Hartford is situated in the heart of New England – a generally liberal and tolerant region – making it accessible to students along the East coast, from Washington, DC, to Maine. Of the almost 300 participants in the eleven basic BAP courses conducted so far, some have come from more distant places, including Alabama, Colorado, Wyoming, California, western Canada, the Netherlands, Israel, Syria, Turkey, Iran, Egypt, Nigeria, Indonesia, Singapore, Pakistan, and St Thomas, Virgin Islands. Since there are sizable Jewish and Muslim communities in New England, we can draw students (degree candidates and auditors) from all three traditions relatively easily. In addition, there are scores of American and international Muslim students in the Seminary's degree programmes and its unique Islamic Chaplaincy programme.

Equally important is the presence of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in the greater Hartford area. This allows for visits to synagogues, mosques, and churches for the worship experiences built into BAP. The local congregations that have welcomed BAP students to their prayer services have been gracious and accommodating. The ongoing relationships with local congregations are beneficial for the BAP participants who interact with them, for the congregations that are enriched by the curiosity and insights of the visiting students, and for Hartford Seminary in sustaining relationships with local communities of faith.

It should also be noted at this point that the term 'Abrahamic' in the name of the programme evokes the figure of Abraham/ Ibrahim, a shared spiritual ancestor and role model for Jews, Christians, and Muslims alike. Such terminology is not unique to BAP. Many interfaith tria-

logues use 'Abrahamic' as an alternative to 'monotheistic'. Aside from the symbolic and sentimental value of using Abraham in this way, the wisdom in this choice is debatable. In the compendium of supplemental readings for the basic BAP course, I included two articles written by rabbis that question whether Abraham is a unifying figure at all. Their reservations are motivated by different factors, but their conclusion is the same: each of the three traditions has 'its own Abraham', and evoking the patriarch risks fostering division as readily as harmony.[5] Prof. Ingrid Mattson, my Hartford Seminary and BAP colleague, who is currently serving as president of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA), raised another problematic issue: she rightly cautioned that holding up Abraham/ Ibrahim for veneration and emulation risks excluding Sarah and Hagar (and potentially all women) from the picture.

In spite of these reservations, we still believe that Abraham is a federating enough figure for us to refer to in the context of the Programme.

2. Programme rationale and goals

Almost eight years after September 11, it should be abundantly clear that all our faith communities need help to overcome mutual ignorance and estrangement. Because this is a painful process, we need trained clergy, educators, and facilitators to help us confront the exclusivism and triumphalism that have, at times, turned each of our sacred traditions into a weapon of unholy war.[6] In a United States Institute of Peace *Spe-*

[5] See Goshen-Gottstein, Alon, "Contemporary Interreligious Discourse", in: *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 12 (2)*, 2002, 165-183 (on 'Abraham and 'Abrahamic Religions''), and Safran, Rabbi Avi, "Avraham Avinu. The 'interfaith superstar'", in: *Connecticut Jewish Ledger*, 11 October 2002, 11.

[6] For examinations of how our understandings of the sacred can be used to justify violence, see the following: Appleby, R. Scott, *The Ambivalence of the Sacred. Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000; Kimball, Charles, *When Religion Becomes Evil*, New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2002; McTernan, Oliver, *Violence in God's Name. Religion in an Age of Conflict*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2003; Juer-

cial Report issued in 2003, Rev. Dr David Smock, who directs the USIP's Religion and Peacemaking Initiative, wrote:

> The overarching question is how to develop interfaith trust in the prevailing atmosphere of fear and mutual suspicion. In situations of trauma, as experienced continuously in the Middle East and as experienced in the West since 9/11, people are likely to turn inward. Accordingly, they have great difficulty in reaching out to the religious 'Other.' The prevailing attitude is often that no one's suffering can compare to our own suffering. In this climate of victimhood, the Other – whether nation, ethnic group, or religious community – is often labelled simplistically and unhelpfully as either good or evil.[7]

Overcoming ignorance is one challenge; imparting information to enhance knowledge and understanding is standard fare for institutions of higher learning. In the basic BAP course, three full days are devoted to presenting the basics of each tradition, namely, historical development, beliefs and practices, denominational variety, and attitudes to other faiths. Yet there is another challenge that such a programme has to address to be effective: helping participants overcome their fears and suspicions of one another.[8] Conditioned reflexes, including competing victim scripts, are very difficult to transform. Building trust takes time. It also takes a willingness to acknowledge and question one's own ego-based and emotional investments: the need to be right, the assurance of being special if not superior, resistance to change, and loyalty to a faith

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gensmeyer, Mark, *Terror in the Mind of God. The Global Rise of Religious Violence*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001; and Markham, Ian/ Abu-Rabi, Ibrahim M. (eds.), *September 11. Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences*, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2002. For an analysis of how Abrahamic religions (Judaism and Islam especially) can be forces for both conflict and reconciliation, see Gopin, Marc, *Holy War, Holy Peace. How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.

[7] David Smock, "Building Interreligious Trust in a Climate of Fear. An Abrahamic Trialogue", *Special Report 99*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, Feb. 2003, 3.

[8] For a Jewish approach to these challenges, see Magonet, Jonathan, *Talking to the Other. Jewish Interfaith Dialogue with Christians and Muslims*, London: I.B. Taurus & Co., 2003, especially Chapter 2 "The Challenge to Judaism of Interfaith Dialogue" and Chapter 8 "Risk-taking in Religious Dialogue".

community with its history and behavioural norms. For most Jews and Christians, BAP is their first opportunity to engage Muslims and experience prayer in a mosque. For most of the Muslim participants, it is their first encounter with Jews and the inside of a synagogue. Such face-to-face encounters, and the crossing of experiential thresholds, demand a level of openness and vulnerability that few people have the courage to risk.[9] Those who rise to the challenge may have to confront suspicions from co-religionists, even accusations of disloyalty. This is not an easy burden to carry. An interfaith activist soon learns that *inter*religious co-operation needs to be complemented by *intra*religious work in our respective communities. The latter keeps us grounded in our own traditions and communal loyalties. At the same time, it enables us to sensitise our co-religionists to the challenges and benefits of interfaith encounter.

How much can be accomplished in a one-week course? Surprisingly, a great deal – though everyone involved in BAP acknowledges that the basic course is only the first step on a lifelong journey toward deeper understanding and, ultimately, spiritual fraternity and solidarity. The four stated goals of that course reflect serious intellectual and emotional challenges: (1) educating participants about the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic traditions; (2) creating a supportive learning community in which clergy, lay ministers, religious educators, and chaplains can forge mutually beneficial relationships across communal boundaries; (3) helping participants acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith work; and (4) developing leadership strategies for promoting interfaith relations in increasingly heterogeneous societies.

To achieve these goals, I have assembled for each round of the basic course a teaching staff comprised of five or six Hartford Seminary fac-

[9] One of the reasons the course includes several shared *kosher/ halal* meals, starting with an opening dinner, is to create a gastronomic and cultural 'comfort zone' for mutual engagement.

ulty members[10] and three 'pastoral adjuncts' who are clergy from each of the traditions with experience in leading local congregations. The Seminary professors are present for designated segments of the programme, while the rabbi, minister, imam, and I accompany the course from beginning to end. The three clergy adjuncts are expected to share their theoretical and practical expertise and to intervene when pastoral difficulties arise. Personal discomfort can provide a potentially rich learning opportunity for individuals as well as for the whole group. Each BAP round has ample opportunities for turning irritation into insight, and to address them we have evolved a two-pronged strategy:

(1) At the outset of the course, participants are told that their comfort zones will be challenged during the week and that we need a consensual agreement to maintain fidelity to our overall goals. The following list of ten ground rules for respectful dialogue, as opposed to debate, is read aloud and adopted, sometimes with an addition or amendment:

In order to engage in dialogue rather than in debate, we will:
Listen with a view of wanting to understand, rather than listening with a view of countering what we hear.
Listen for strengths so as to affirm and learn, rather than listening for weaknesses so as to discount and devalue.
Speak for ourselves from our understanding and experiences, rather than speaking based on our assumptions about others' positions and motives.
Ask questions to increase understanding, rather than asking questions to trip up or to confuse.
Allow others to complete their communications, rather than interrupting or changing the topic.
Keep our remarks as brief as possible and invite the quieter, less vocal participants in the conversation, rather than letting the stronger voices dominate.
Concentrate on others' words and feelings, rather than focusing on the next point we want to make.

[10]To ensure that the Seminary as a whole has a stake in the BAP program and that its varied resources are tapped for the benefit of the participants, the faculty members who teach in the basic course represent all three of the school's centres: the Centre for Faith in Practice; the Macdonald Centre for the Study of Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations; and the Hartford Institute for Religion Research.

Accept others' experiences as real and valid for them, rather than critiquing others' experiences as distorted or invalid.
Allow the expression of real feelings (in ourselves and in others) for understanding and catharsis, rather than expressing our feelings to manipulate others and deny that their feelings are legitimate.
Honour silence, rather than using silence to gain advantage.

When necessary, these ground rules are reiterated during the course to bring the group back to its agreed-upon norms for communicating;

(2) When someone hears a statement that disturbs or offends, s/he is encouraged to say 'ouch!' so that the group can address that person's feelings in real time. Often the 'ouches' are sparked by one person speaking on behalf of an entire faith community, with co-religionists feeling misrepresented. Conversely, if someone feels surprise and delight in learning something new, s/he is encouraged to say 'wow!' The late Krister Stendahl, my Christian mentor and friend, called this 'holy envy' and considered such an experience to be the ideal outcome of interreligious encounter. In BAP, there are usually more 'ouches' than 'wows', requiring sensitive and effective leadership to facilitate the group process productively.

3. Content of BAP I

The content of the basic BAP course is about half academic and half experiential, in keeping with its intellectual and affective goals. The academic element of the programme consists of:

- three days devoted to each of the three traditions, mixing frontal presentations and facilitated discussions including controversial topics subject to widespread misconceptions and prejudices – for example, what Israel and Zionism mean to Jews, what the Trinity means to Christians, or what *jihad* means to Muslims;
- two evening sessions devoted to the following subjects: 'What Do We Mean by Spirituality?' with interfaith triads sharing ac-

counts of personal religious experiences before three clergy adjuncts offer their reflections; and 'Religion and the Media', with professional journalists from the newspaper and television industries sharing examples of their work;

- three half days of comparative text study, in four small groups and then plenary discussions. The texts we choose for examination are of two kinds: passages that evoke inclusive justice, peace, and loving behaviour; and others that are problematic, at least to outsiders, for they seem to summon the faithful to exclusivist or belligerent behaviour toward those who are different.[11]

The experiential dimension of the basic course includes:

- worship in a mosque on Friday, in a synagogue on Saturday, and in a church on Sunday, followed by group discussions of the respective prayers and practices;
- two to three artistic or symbolic exercises providing non-analytic ('right-brain') modes of self-expression;[12]

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[11] In the first rounds of the course, the text study took place before the day-long introductions to the three faiths, but we found it more effective to have the overviews first and then the text study, to make the passages more meaningful to those who are not familiar with their neighbours' scriptures.

[12] At the opening dinner one of two exercises is used for self-introductions and initial group bonding. In the first one, three condiment containers (clear salt and pepper shakers plus an opaque bottle of soy sauce) are presented as representing Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Participants are asked to group them so that two traditions (represented by the salt and pepper shakers) are deemed closer in nature than either is to the third (the soy bottle), and to explain this choice in their self-introduction. Three alternatives are possible, and each is valid according to its own criteria for relating the faith traditions. Many Jews and Christians use the soy bottle to represent Islam, which is 'opaque' to them. Often Muslims and Jews see Christianity as the 'opaque' and distant Other, finding more affinities between Islam and Judaism as ways of life centred on normative behaviours like dietary rules. A few students resist the premise of the exercise, and they either refuse to do it or they change the rules, e.g., by suggesting that the ingredients of all three containers be poured into one vessel. In the second exercise, an 8" x 11" piece of paper with a serrated border, representing a postage stamp, is given to each student. Everyone is asked to draw his or her own religious stamp,

- in addition to seven *kosher/ halal* meals eaten together, long lunch and dinner breaks to encourage fellowship and networking;[13]
- in recent rounds of BAP I, a four-part 'fishbowl' exercise[14] focusing on Israel/ Palestine and extending over three days, as a way to practise compassionate listening around one of the most controversial and polarizing topics in Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations; at the end of three afternoon sessions, members of one faith group sit in an inner circle and speak in turn (for 3 minutes each) on what the events in the Holy Land mean to them, while members of the other two faith groups form an outer circle, listening without commenting; on the next day, most of the evening session is devoted to processing these 'fishbowl' experiences; also, those who are journaling during

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serving as an 'ambassador' image to adherents of other religions. Coloured markers are provided, and each person gets a chance to share her/ his stamp and explain its symbolism.
On the last day of the course, before the closing dinner, one of two creative and fun exercises is used to achieve closure to the week-long experience. In one exercise, large A3 sheets of paper are disseminated, each with a blank circle surrounded by the words *shalom* (in Hebrew), *a-salaam* (in Arabic), and *peace*. (These were created by Artists for Middle East Peace in Lexington, MA). Most participants use coloured markers to draw their visions of interreligious peace. Others make collages out of coloured paper. Then the group members share their creations in turn, while sitting in a circle, after which they all walk around the circle in silence, looking closely at each of the artistic visions placed on the chairs. The alternative exercise has the group divide into three Jewish-Christian-Muslim construction teams. Each team is given a box of Lego and is asked to design together a sacred space/ environment in which all feel welcome and included. 'Negotiation' and mutual accommodation, over symbols and spatial configurations, yields rich learning opportunities. After all three groups have finished, each shares its design and something of the group dynamics that went into constructing it.

[13] Many participants have reported that these unprogrammed mealtimes are a rich and essential part of the course, allowing them to cross boundaries, overcome fears and prejudices, and forge new friendships

[14] See Kraybill, Ron/ Wright, Evelyn, *The Little Book of Cool Tools for Hot Topics. Group Tools to Facilitate Meetings When Things Are Hot*, Intercourse, PA: Good Books, 2006, 54-55.

the week have an opportunity to record their reactions along the way.[15]

Students taking the course for credit are required to submit two assignments: a research paper or an approved artistic project with rationale and bibliography; and a personal journal recording the student's insights and feelings during the week.[16]

Over eleven rounds of the basic BAP course, some common denominators stand out in regard to content. On the day devoted to Jewish tradition, the brief introduction to the meaning of *Shabbat* and how it is observed by Jews invariably elicits 'wows' from Christians and Muslims. Participants are generally intrigued by unfamiliar spiritual disciplines in each other's lives, and Sabbath observance is one such practice.

For Islam, it is the *hajj* pilgrimage and the five daily prayers that evoke 'wows' of 'holy envy' among Jews and Christians. Prof. Ingrid Mattson, in her presentation, counters misconceptions about Muslim women and helps participants understand the difference between the teachings of Islam and the different cultural manifestations (including distortions of that normative tradition) in nominally Muslim societies. Christians react in different ways upon learning that Muslims revere Jesus and Mary but do not accord them divine or superhuman status. Some Christians are pleased by this positive outlook toward their Lord and his mother. Others are disturbed, feeling threatened by another tradition that has its own view of Jesus, as prophet rather than saviour. The Jewish

[15] Among insights drawn from the June, 2009 rounds of BAP I and BAP II, students formulated statements such as: 'In the fishbowl exercises I learned: that there is a lot of pain everywhere, on all sides, in personal stories; that Jews recognise the suffering of Palestinians, too; about the need for closure; I was reminded that I have a way to defend against pain by sectioning it off; how to express anger constructively that a physical embrace after a cathartic experience is very important; etc.'

[16] The journals, in particular, have taught me a great deal about how the course, including interactions outside the classroom, impacts the students.

participants, on the whole, are fascinated by this conversation but are outside it, since Judaism has essentially ignored Jesus.

On the day allotted to Christianity, Prof. Ian Markham[17] usually begins with a very effective exercise, evoking surprise and irony. On the blackboard he writes the word 'God', followed by 'Trinity', 'Incarnation', 'Bodily Resurrection of Jesus', 'Virgin Birth of Jesus', 'Hell, Demons, and Satan', 'Substitutionary Atonement', 'Historical Inerrancy of Scripture', and 'The Incompatibility of Christianity with Evolution'. He then asks the Christians to raise their hands if they believe in God. All the Christians raise their hands. Then he goes down the list, and hands drop as the different Christian doctrines are considered, with the more liberal Protestants experiencing increasing discomfort, doubt, or outright disbelief. Ian then asks the Muslims in the group to do the same exercise. The Christians (and Jews) are amazed to discover that the Muslims affirm more of the classical Christian doctrines than do many of the Christians, since they are also taught in the Qur'an. This is a wonderful teaching moment, as Muslims and Christians, with Jews joining in, discuss the authority of sacred texts, the nature and meaning of revelation, and the place of subjectivity and rational criticism in the interpretation of scriptures. These concerns surface again when we study texts in all three traditions.

Understandably, the 'fishbowl' exercises on Israel/ Palestine are emotionally charged, but this technique allows participants to address the issue, and the feelings evoked by it, in safe, instructive, and constructive ways. Ideological polarisation, even long-held grievances and recrimination can be supplanted by empathy, alternative angles of perception on a painful subject, and envisioning strategies for healing the

[17] The Very Rev. Ian Markham is the former dean of Hartford Seminary. He is currently president and dean of Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria, VA.

personal and collective wounds engendered by the tragedy in the Holy Land.[18]

[18]In the early rounds of BAP I, before we incorporated the 'fishbowls', Imam Yahya Hendi (Muslim chaplain at Georgetown University and an M.A. graduate of Hartford Seminary) was the Muslim pastoral adjunct. The example of a Palestinian-American imam and an Israeli-American professor overcoming enmity and embracing one another in mutual affection served, in its own way, to model a path toward reconciliation. See Landau, Yehezkel/ Hendi, Yahya, "Jews, Muslims, and Peace", in: *Current Dialogue 41*, June-July 2003, Geneva: World Council of Churches, 12-13. In case the reader thinks that the BAP 'laboratory' has produced some wonder drug to cure the pathological fallout from the Middle East, it is worth citing some sobering reminders of what the 'real world' is like. In the June 2007 round of BAP I, a painful but educationally powerful incident occurred in my modern Orthodox synagogue in West Hartford, following *Shabbat* morning prayers. The rabbi conducted a question-and-answer session for the BAP students and some members of the congregation, as he had done several times before. This time the Middle East situation became the focus for intense, and increasingly bitter, exchanges. A few Jewish congregants got defensive and made some bellicose statements that hurt the Muslim students (including four women from Damascus, Syria, studying at Hartford Seminary) and that shattered the 'safe' learning environment we had been creating all week. Later that afternoon the whole group re-convened at the Seminary to process what had happened. Many tissues were consumed as students and teachers shared their pain over the verbal assault, along with mutual affection and care. Despite the shock and pain caused by this experience, it proved beneficial in taking the group to a deeper level of empathy and solidarity with one another. It did challenge me, however, to engage more deliberately in intrafaith work, especially with my rabbi, before subsequent BAP groups were brought to that synagogue. A similar incident, in reverse, happened in June 2009 in the local mosque, where the hosts invited a Palestinian-American speaker to present a partisan viewpoint on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the lunch that followed mid-day prayers there. Once again the group felt that its 'safe' space and the consensual ground rules governing our conversations were violated. What both incidents demonstrate is the necessity to sensitise host communities before BAP groups are brought to their places of worship for discussion. Until this is done (and so long as the Middle East remains a source of bitter feelings), it is probably better for the group to attend the respective weekly prayers and then move to a neutral venue (like the Seminary) for the shared meals and the discussions about the experiences of communal prayer.

4. Holistic interfaith engagement

A few additional aspects of BAP I are worth highlighting. The formal worship in the mosque, synagogues, and churches toward the end of the course, as well as the devotions offered by participants at the start of each morning and afternoon session, are two complementary experiences that are spiritually and symbolically enriching. In the discussions over lunch that follow the public prayers on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, participants ask clarifying questions and share 'ouches' and 'wows' that emerged for them during the worship. By the end of the week, Jews and Christians have generally overcome any initial apprehensions about entering a mosque, a new experience for almost all of them. The Christian and Jewish women feel solidarity with their Muslim sisters at the mosque, as they don headscarves (helped by the Muslim women in the group) and share the same-gender piety in the women's section. Here is a poem written by a United Church of Christ pastor Rev. Laura Westby, following her experience at the mosque:

Hair covered
Forehead to the floor
There I found You, at last
Nose to the carpet
Smelling fibres and feet
There I inhaled the Blessedness
Eyes closed
I was at last blind to all
But Your Presence
Bowing and bending I danced the holy round
Foreign words in my ears
You spoke silence
In this alien place
Where I was guest
I knew You, the One I have been seeking
The One who found me
On the floor of a mosque
And called me beloved.

Through their first-ever experience at a synagogue, whether modern Orthodox or liberal, Muslims develop a deeper appreciation of how Jewish tradition and the Hebrew language are very close to Islam and Arabic. Heba Youssef, a Muslim woman in the January, 2009 round of BAP I and a student at Hartford Seminary, attended *Shabbat* morning prayers at my modern Orthodox synagogue and wrote about the experience in her journal:

> I enjoyed just observing the people and how the young ones were playing around with each other, how the older ones were more focused, how everyone was dressed and also all the rituals that took place. The ceremony of removing the Torah from its safeguarded spot; the bowing, the chanting and the designation of specific duties were all pretty fascinating to me.
>
> We mingled a little afterwards with some of the people there and I met this nice young Jewish couple who had just recently gotten married. It was nice because they were about my age and we were discussing kosher spots in the area (because for Muslims kosher = halal) and we had a great conversation about how hard it is to find decent places for us to eat! It's nice to see how much people of faith actually have in common.

And a Catholic participant in another round of the course had what she called a 'theophany' when the Torah scroll emerged from the Ark and was carried around the synagogue, with congregants singing and kissing it as it passed.

On Sunday, the discussion over lunch following the Episcopal and United Church of Christ church services helps to clarify denominational differences among Christians, and allows Jews and Muslims to honestly share any discomfort they may feel in Christian worship. This emotional estrangement is particularly acute for Jews when a New Testament reading, a hymn, or a sermon refers negatively to 'scribes and Pharisees', or 'the Jews' in the Gospel of John are castigated, or some other subject that has engendered Jewish-Christian animosity over the centuries arises.[19] These are the moments, holistically engaging head and heart

[19] See my "Foreword" to J. Harrington, Daniel sj, *The Synoptic Gospels Set Free. Preaching without Anti-Judaism*, New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press,

and gut, where I believe BAP is most interpersonally genuine, spiritually and ethically concrete, and ultimately transformative in positive ways. For it is, above all, the hurt and the fear we all carry that we are challenged to confront honestly and work through together. Theological discussions take us only part of the way toward reconciliation. Without the honest exchange of negative feelings and conditioned resistances, we are not being true to ourselves or to one another, and we are not living up to what this moment in history demands of us. Instead, we are playing it safe by remaining superficial and abstract. It is necessary, but insufficient, for example, for Christians to examine, together with Muslims and Jews, the theological underpinnings of Christological prayers and hymns, or the meaning of a sacrament like the Eucharist. What Christians also need to know and understand is that most Jews and Muslims will react to these central aspects of Christianity with profound spiritual and emotional dissonance, sometimes even revulsion, engendering self-protective distance. This response is far deeper than cognitive disagreement. It is a kind of 'spiritual allergy', a discomfort that touches the soul. And it is precisely this kind of reaction – by anyone in an Abrahamic trialogue – that needs careful and caring examination, once sufficient trust has been established within the group.

A Jewish psychologist, Marcia Black, shared her experience in the programme with members of her Amherst, MA, synagogue during a *Shavuot* sermon in June, 2005:

> Through my encounter with Muslim and Christian prayer, I understood more clearly our rabbis' entreaty that prayer be the vessel for the eternal fire of Divine love that burns away the separate self. …with a heart of humility, we need to listen to these and those voices, Muslim, Christian, Jewish so that the agony of splintered time will cease, so that we may find our way to *shleimut*, wholeness.

2009, ix-xii; and my essay "Pope John Paul II's Holy Land Pilgrimage. A Jewish Appraisal", in: Boadt, Lawrence CSP/ di Camillo, Kevin (eds.), *John Paul II in the Holy Land. In His Own Words*, New York/ Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005, 129-156.

It is worth adding that there is a deliberate attempt in both the basic and advanced BAP courses to include musical selections and artistic exercises, in order to add an aesthetic dimension that engages the heart and soul as well as the intellect. There is also a conscious attempt to make the *kosher/ halal* meals that are eaten together experiences of consecrated fellowship. Blessings from all three traditions are offered before the food is taken. All these exercises and experiences are ritualistic expressions of community across theological boundaries, and they create soulful bridges that allow for less inhibited exchanges in the classroom.

When people of different faiths share a prayer experience, the question that arises is: are they praying together as one fellowship, affirming a common set of religious truths, or are they spectators in each other's worship settings? Both mode of worshipping together is possible, and each has its own legitimacy and value depending on the desired outcome.[20] Any of us may choose to opt out of a prayer experience because of conditioned resistances or sincere theological reservations. For example, in the very first BAP I course, some conservative participants (primarily Muslims) felt uncomfortable when the United Church of Christ service we attended gave its blessing to same-sex relationships through some hymns included in the worship. Over lunch afterwards, some of the participants shared their discomfort and said they would have preferred to watch the service from the balcony, establishing a clear distance from the congregation. In subsequent rounds of the course, this op-

[20] On the last day of BAP II, the advanced training, participants experience both kinds of worship: single-faith liturgies and inclusive devotions, both designed by participants in the course. For an example of a Christian participant observer analysing Jewish prayers and customs, see Cox, Harvey, *Common Prayers. Faith, Family, and a Christian's Journey Through the Jewish Year*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001; and for a chronicle of a Jew's journey through Christian and Muslim devotional rites, see Klein Halevi, Yossi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden. A Jew's Search for God with Christians and Muslims in the Holy Land*, New York: William Morrow, 2001.

tion was offered to the students in order to prevent such spiritual discomfort.

5. Other factors in the success of BAP

I want now to reflect on the intersection of the qualitative and the quantitative dimensions of BAP. In order for the programme to succeed, there has to be in each round a critical mass of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Ideally there should be a minimum of eight from each tradition, to ensure sufficient diversity in the small groups. This recruitment goal requires a lot of effort, and it sometimes necessitates allocating scholarship assistance to achieve parity among the three subgroups. A minimum number from each faith yields two interrelated outcomes. The first is 'safety in numbers' for the participants, not feeling so 'alone' or underrepresented in any subgroup. The second is a more enriching experience for everyone in the course, with a strong and diverse group representing each of the Abrahamic faiths. Once assembled, the participants need to feel that their needs are honoured, that everyone is treated equally with no favouritism shown, and that the ground rules for respectful communication are adhered to. In the classroom and outside, the pastoral support of the teaching staff is sometimes required to meet these needs. At other times the participants themselves demonstrate mutual solidarity by supporting one another emotionally and practically (e.g., carpooling from the hotel to the Seminary or sharing a picnic in a nearby park).

One experience in the second round of BAP I is worth noting (especially since it is, until now, unique). Among the participants were six African-American Christians, a sufficient number to make race as relevant an issue as religion. This necessitated greater sensitivity and responsiveness, from the other participants as well as the teaching staff. It also brought additional 'ouches' and 'wows'. One Jewish participant, for

example, objected to the use of the term 'Zion' by African-American Christians, sparking a difficult but educationally valuable discussion. One adaptive outcome was to add an optional visit to an African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church service on Saturday evening.

The teaching staff for a programme like BAP clearly needs to have the pedagogical skills needed for both interfaith exploration and community building. The pastoral skills of the three clergy adjuncts and the programme director are crucial. The professors who are present for shorter periods also need pastoral sensitivity, along with their academic expertise, in order to teach effectively within this framework. Frontal lectures, which may be sufficient in other courses, need to be enhanced and deepened by facilitated discussions on the relevant material. The formal text study oscillates between small group examination of assigned passages and plenary discussions in the main classroom, with the professors and pastoral adjuncts co-leading these sessions. The students, for their part, come to appreciate the unique gifts of each faculty member. Some students may see the teachers as 'official' representatives of their respective faiths. When this role is projected onto a teacher, a student may be disappointed if his or her tradition is presented in a way that does not conform to preconceived notions. This frustration can be minimised if the issue is addressed directly by the teachers themselves. The course staff includes both academics and clergy adjuncts so that the intellectual, spiritual, and emotional dimensions of interreligious encounter are honoured and addressed. As I say at the opening dinner, the course is not called 'Interfaith Relations 101', but rather 'Building Abrahamic Partnerships', because we are engaged in actively forging and nurturing relationships. This takes effort; it requires compassionate acceptance of each person's uniqueness and tests our commitment to work together for a common goal.

The characteristics of the sponsoring institution – both its advantages and limitations – also need to be considered. At Hartford Seminary,

white American Protestants have been in the majority since the school was founded in 1834. They still are the predominant group, welcoming into their midst Muslims and Jews, along with Catholics, evangelical Protestants, and racial or ethnic minorities, as part of the school's mission to foster conversation across communal barriers. No one is *ex*plicitly privileged or favoured as a result of the Seminary's history, but some *im*plicit cultural norms and nuances are inevitably at work. My Muslim colleagues and I are sensitive to the conditioned apprehensions, the cultural cues, the gestures of hospitality, the dietary requirements, the prescribed prayer times, and the nonverbal communication styles of Muslims and Jews. This sensitivity serves to make the ambiance at Hartford Seminary more inclusive for BAP participants, especially non-Christians. And this inclusiveness helps to overcome feelings of marginality or alienation that representatives of minority groups might otherwise feel.

Another feature of the sponsoring institution is its academic 'neutrality', which tends to relativise the truth claims of any religious tradition. On academic turf, even with the Christian roots of Hartford Seminary, Jews, Christians, and Muslims can meet as intellectual and spiritual equals. This adds to the safety factor: no one need fear that the institution is promoting a particular theology. In fact, Hartford Seminary now sees the promotion of interreligious dialogue and understanding as one of its central goals. This makes the Seminary a suitable place for conducting Abrahamic conversations. If BAP were sponsored by a synagogue, church, or mosque – or an agency like the Synagogue Council of America, the National Council of Churches, or the Islamic Society of North America – the underlying assumptions and resulting dynamics would be quite different. Once none of the faith traditions is privileged, the power dynamic shifts to favour all of them rather than any one. By this logic, it might be argued that a religious studies department in a secular university would be an even better setting for BAP. But a

counter-consideration, no less compelling, is that Hartford Seminary's ethos encourages spiritual expression, not only intellectual exploration. Devotional experiences within the classroom or chapel, over shared meals, and at the various houses of worship are celebrated rather than just tolerated or analysed intellectually, as might happen at a university.

Another political consideration is that of gender equality and inclusiveness, given that each of the three Abrahamic faiths has a history of male dominance or patriarchy. Within BAP we try to ensure equal representation of women and men on the teaching staff and, if possible, among the participants. Despite our best efforts early on, it was only from the fourth round of BAP I that we succeeded in pairing an academic from the Seminary faculty with a pastoral adjunct of the opposite sex. I believe this contributed to making the subsequent courses more successful. The gender balance also pre-empts a collective feminist 'ouch', as occurred in the second round of BAP I, when some Christian women demanded time in the programme to present their own perspective on Christianity. Having women clergy and professors on the teaching staff provides female role models for both women and men, demonstrating that women have their own distinctive contributions to make toward interreligious partnerships.

One final observation regarding the composition of the BAP teaching staff and the participants: by restricting these courses to Jews, Christians, and Muslims, the wisdom of other faith traditions (including those of the Far East) is not being tapped, even though passing references may be made to them. This is an obvious limitation and, I would add, a loss. (My own conviction is that adherents of the Abrahamic religions, which originated in the Middle East, need to develop greater humility and compassion, qualities associated more with the traditions of the Farther East). At the same time, the Semitic roots and a prophetic heritage shared by Jews, Christian and Muslims alike influence their worldview

and self-understanding, making this trialogue a special undertaking in the wider interfaith context.

6. The advanced BAP training

After examining the challenges and achievements of BAP I, I want to offer some brief reflections on the advanced BAP II training, which Hartford Seminary has so far offered for times starting in 2007. Like the basic course, BAP II begins with a dinner on Sunday evening, allowing the participants – most of whom took part in BAP I – to introduce themselves and enjoy an initial experience of fellowship. The rest of the course runs from Monday morning until Friday evening. The primary goal, which shapes the content of the course, is to help participants develop conceptual frameworks and practical skills or tools for interfaith leadership. The second major goal, a process objective as in BAP I, is to create an educationally enriching interfaith community based on trust and respect. The combination of competent resource people as instructors and facilitators, the variety of educational experiences during the week, and above all the chemistry of the group all contributes to the success of this course.

Rev. Karen Nell Smith and Imam Abdullah Antepli (both participants in BAP I) have served as my co-facilitators for all three rounds of BAP II.

The theoretical and skill areas we focus on are:

1. facilitating interfaith activities (events, dialogue groups, and workshops);

2. compassionate listening and nonbelligerent communication;[21]

[21] Gail Syring and Jan Bennett, who are trained in the 'nonviolent communication' methodology of Marshall Rosenberg, lead this session on Tuesday morning.

3. understanding group dynamics and multiple identities in interfaith settings;[22]

4. healing personal and collective trauma;[23]

5. comparative study of sacred texts from the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur'an;[24]

6. spiritual resources for conflict transformation; and

7. designing interfaith worship experiences.

We have chosen five symbolic themes with universal resonance for the devotional offerings that begin each day: light/ fire; water; earth/ soil; tree; and bread-and-table. The opening dinner features an exercise in which everyone shares an object that has some personal symbolic meaning, as a means of self-introduction. Each participant places his or her object on a table in the centre of the room, where a candle stands along with copies of the three sacred scriptures. This table is the central point of reference and reverence for the whole week. The candle is lit at the start of every morning, afternoon, and of the single evening session. These and other ritual elements lend the course a sacramental dimension, making it more than a strictly academic programme. They also provide some spiritual coherence to the disparate experiences throughout the week.

Guest trainers share their theoretical and practical expertise on two of the five days (see footnotes 23-26). On the other three days, the various sessions are led by one or another of the three co-facilitators, while the other two serve as supportive allies, ready to intervene when called

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[22] Tamar Miller, trained in social work and public administration, conducts this session.

[23] Tamar Miller also leads this session, which we included for the first time in the 2009 round of BAP II.

[24] In 2007 and 2008, Prof. Raquel Ukeles facilitated this session; in 2009 Prof. Mahmoud Ayoub from Hartford Seminary and Rabbi Or N. Rose from Hebrew College teamed up to lead this day-long examination of Biblical and Qur'anic texts, focusing on the experience and role of prophecy in our respective traditions.

for, and scribing for one another on large post-it sheets, which are then affixed to the classroom walls. Karen Nell, Abdullah, and I model distinct pedagogical styles or modes, letting the group know when we are shifting from one to the other. In the mode of training or instruction, one of us presents the rationale and concrete 'hows' of a particular methodology. The second mode, which we use more often, is elicitive facilitation, framing a subject and then drawing forth from the group its collective wisdom.

Friday is devoted to the practicalities of designing interfaith worship. This challenge is deliberately scheduled on the last day of the course, to allow trust and familiarity to develop beforehand. There is also a very practical concern reflected in this choice: early in the week, the group is divided into two Jewish-Christian-Muslim teams of 'liturgists', so that they have ample time (during breaks and evenings) to design the two interfaith worship experiences. The day's programme moves back and forth between single-faith prayers (in each of the three traditions) and the two inclusive worship opportunities. Group discussions are conducted following each of these devotions, which can include prayer, readings from texts, song or chant, sounds from sacred instruments – drums, bells, chimes, or a *shofar* (ram's horn) – silence, and body movement.

Prayer is a very personal act of faith, even when done in a communal setting; so talking about it, let alone planning it, with others from a different tradition (or another branch of your own), can raise sensitive issues that are often not addressed in interfaith encounters. In the 2007 round, a Christian participant asked the Jews how they feel when Christians adopt Jewish prayers like the '*Sh'ma Yisrael*' affirmation of God's Oneness. A rich discussion about the asymmetrical relationship between Judaism and Christianity, along with the dangers of 'spiritual plagiarism', ensued. In these honest conversations, Jews have an opportunity to share their fears and negative reactions when encountering a cross or

other symbols in a church. We also address the sense of self-negation or inauthenticity that Christians often feel when asked to give up Christological language in order to accommodate Jews and Muslims in common worship. Should they ever comply, and, if so, on what occasions?

In all three rounds of BAP II, the interfaith worship services have been truly inspirational and a memorable highlight of each course. They demonstrate how closely connected the participants are by the end of their week together. Accommodating different theologies and liturgical styles and presenting the fruits of creative collaboration to the rest of the group yields spiritual gifts that are genuine blessings for everyone.

Evaluation forms indicate that the students in BAP II take from the course a set of concepts, skills, and sensitivities that can empower them both personally and professionally. Their interfaith leadership 'tool kits' are enhanced and the practical lessons can be applied in their particular work settings.

7. A theological underpinning for BAP

As I work for mutual understanding and solidarity among Jews, Christians, and Muslims, my own theological assumptions are constantly challenged. A key question is whether one can develop a theology, or multiple theologies, of religious pluralism to undergird the building of Abrahamic partnerships. One theology, acceptable to all, that accounts for religious diversity within God's plan appears inconceivable. The three traditions have disparate understandings of why the One God has allowed different, mutually irreconcilable theologies to coexist.

One can, of course, bracket the theological dimension entirely and promote interreligious encounter on the basis of practical necessity: humanity as an endangered species requires collective effort in order to survive. No talk of redemption or reconciliation is necessary, according to this utilitarian perspective. But BAP has a deeper goal. It seeks to heal

the historic wounds that have traumatised us and left us, as Abrahamic siblings, estranged from one another. It has a vision of interreligious reconciliation and cooperation that is hopeful – one might even say messianic – for it is rooted in our shared summons to emulate God by living lives of justice, peace, and love. To overcome our deep-seated fears and to bring us closer to the hoped-for Kingdom of God, we need new religious paradigms. One of the obstacles to such new, visionary thinking is the narrow way in which our traditions have formed our identities.

Redefining our particular identities in other than dualistic ways (us vs. them, theologically valid vs. heretical, saved vs. damned, righteous vs. sinful) requires humility and an appreciation for human diversity as a blessing rather than a threat. The intellectual challenge of dialectically affirming the Oneness of God and the multiplicity of theologies is compounded by the emotional challenge of transcending our victim scripts and demythologizing the adversarial relationship with our traditional 'enemies'. Long-standing conflicts over land, power, or economic resources have been, all too often, 'theologised' into cosmic struggles between God and Satan, Virtue and Evil, or the forces of Light and Darkness. In this way our religious identities have been skewed by simplistic and essentialistic thinking, along with emotional investments in self-referencing understandings of love and loyalty. BAP encourages participants, in a relatively 'safe' setting, to undertake transformations in both spheres, the intellectual and the emotional. The theological link between the two is the symbolic transfiguration of God (favouring more than one faith community), of ourselves (seeing ourselves as distinct but not superior or victorious over others), and of our relationship with others (as allies or partners rather than adversaries).

Sadly, none of our traditions has adequately prepared us for this theological transfiguration, and that is why programmes like BAP are needed. At this point in history, humanity is in dire need of more inclusive religious concepts and norms – what may be termed 'paradigm

shifts'. We need new understandings of what it means to be faithful, to God and to one another. One direction for my own theological thinking is exploring the implications of seeing the One God as a 'multiple covenanter', inviting all of humanity (through Noah) and then different faith communities into complementary relationships of sacrificial service for the sake of God's Creation. This may be one helpful paradigm of inclusiveness and mutuality; there are many others worth exploring. We need to experiment with new ways of doing theology together, new ways of living together, and new ways of integrating the two. Familiar spiritual practices like prayer and text study can be transformed through interreligious engagement and creativity. In this spirit, BAP participants are pioneers venturing onto unfamiliar terrain, where we are all equal in God's sight and where we all have unique insights to contribute toward a future of shared promise and blessing. Let us recall that in the Biblical account (Gen. 12:3), Abraham is promised: 'in you all of the families of the earth shall be blessed'. It does not say that all of humanity will merge into one family. The verse implies, instead, that distinct family and faith identities will remain, but that we will all share a common blessing. BAP is one step on a journey toward that shared blessing. Its theological underpinning, which I would call 'pluralistic, multi-covenantal monotheism', together with a holistic pedagogy that integrates the cognitive, the affective, the aesthetic, and the spiritual dimensions of religion, together create an educational model that, I believe, could be replicated or adapted in other seminary settings.

Conclusion

As Jews, Christians, and Muslims sharing a fragile planet in a time of collective peril, we are called to face one another in repentance and humility. We all proclaim a messianic future unfolding and anticipated, but we have all failed to translate those proclamations into effective ac-

tion. Instead, we have undermined our own beliefs and aspirations. We desecrate what we call holy, and we become our own worst enemies. Entrenched fears rooted in past or present traumas cripple our imaginations. Instead of envisioning a future in which we are all redeemed and blessed, we compensate ourselves for our insecurities by fantasies of unilateral victory and vindication.

We need new theologies of inclusiveness that affirm, at the same time, the oneness of God and a plurality of ways to worship and serve God. We also need new models of religious and interreligious education. And we need pedagogies that help us grow in faithfulness to the tradition of our forebears while we learn from the traditions of our neighbours, affirming them as valid and mutually enriching. Above all, we need new understandings of those neighbours. We must come to know them not only intellectually through increased factual knowledge – *yeda'* in Hebrew, a cognitive knowing based on new *in*formation. More important, and urgently needed, are new heart-understandings of each other, grounded in mutual affection and appreciation. In Hebrew this is *da'at*, the kind of intimate knowledge and spiritual *trans*formation that Adam and Eve shared after leaving the Garden and its childlike innocence.[25] None of us is innocent of wrongdoing. At one time or another, each of our religious traditions has been complicit in domination and mass slaughter.

If we are to write a new historical chapter that redeems our tragic past and present, we need collaborative initiatives in mutual re-education. We should be corrective mirrors for each other, so that we do not repeat our past mistakes. Many of those mistakes originate in the act of projecting evil onto others rather than acknowledging it in ourselves. If we can be helped to see our own limitations and moral lapses through

[25] For examples of such transformation of the heart, see Klein Halevi, Yossi, *At the Entrance to the Garden of Eden*, op. cit. (fn. 19), and Nicholl, Donald, *The Testing of Hearts. A Pilgrim's Journey*, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1998.

the eyes of our Abrahamic siblings, we have a chance to truly experience the kingdom of God on earth. The beginning of redemption is the humble recognition that we need one another to be redeemed. BAP is one modest effort to foster that recognition among Jews, Christians, and Muslims and to develop a praxis of partnership in that spirit.

In summary, the pedagogical praxis modelled in the BAP programme aims for a redemptive transformation of Abrahamic relationships by expanding knowledge about each other's faith traditions, evoking and healing legacies of pain within a safe and supportive learning environment, and building a spiritual community in which everyone is nourished and blessed.

Bringing forth a helpful way of conceiving interreligious transformation in the service of inclusive justice and reconciliation, John Paul Lederach in *The Moral Imagination*[26] argues that peacebuilding is both a skill and an art requiring 'moral imagination' in four distinct 'disciplines': relational mutuality; paradoxical curiosity; unconventional creativeness; and disinterested risk-taking.[27]

Lederach deepens the last point by connecting 'the deeper implications of risk and the longer-term sustenance of vocation'. The vocation of interreligious peacemaking requires these different 'disciplines', or leaps of faith-imagination, in the areas of theology, spirituality, ethics, and for that matter, of global ethics.

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[26] Lederach, John Paul, *The Moral Imagination. The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2005, 31-40.

[27] Formulated in more details, these 'disciplines' are as follows: (1) adversaries need to 'imagine themselves in [a positive] relationship' by 'taking personal responsibility and acknowledging relational mutuality'; (2) parties in conflict need to 'embrace complexity' and adopt a stance of 'paradoxical curiosity' in order to rise above dualistic antagonism and, instead, 'hold together seemingly contradictory social energies in a greater whole'; (3) space needs to be provided 'for the creative act to emerge' and allow the estranged adversaries to 'move beyond the narrow parameters of what is commonly accepted and perceived'; and (4) to move beyond enmity and violence (what is known) to the prospect of peaceful relations (the unknown and mysterious) requires a capacity to take risks 'without any guarantee of success or even safety'.

I am grateful to all of my colleagues – teachers and students – who have joined in this pioneering effort to explore an interior terrain linking mind, heart, and spirit. We engage in this undertaking with the hope of becoming better interfaith leaders and peacemakers in the wider society.

9

THE DIALOGUE OF RELIGIONS. SOURCE OF KNOWLEDGE? MEANS OF PEACE?[1]

John D'Arcy May, Ireland

The dialogue of religions might be said to be in the situation in which the Christian ecumenical movement found itself half a century ago: thanks to a relatively small number of committed people, institutions are in place and there is the prospect of a more comprehensive movement taking shape (United Religions Initiative; Parliament of the World's Religions);[2] but there is still an air of irrelevance surrounding the whole phenomenon, hardening into hostility in the remaining bastions of the 'scientific' study of religion. At the 'official' or representative levels of the world's religions the dialogue is often enough met with indifference or suspicion. To speak for my own Christian tradition, since

[1] Lecture at the University of Leuven, 25 February 2004, first published in *Current Dialogue 43*, July 2004, 11-18, and revised in the context of a research project on 'Envisioning 21st Century Ecumenism. Diversity, Dialogue and Reconciliation' funded by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences at the Irish School of Ecumenics, Trinity College Dublin. I would like to thank Dr Paul O'Grady, Department of Philosophy, Trinity College Dublin, and my PhD student John O'Grady for helpful criticisms of an earlier draft.

[2] For detailed accounts of the origins of the International Association for Religious Freedom (1900), the World Congress of Faiths (1936), the Temple of Understanding (1960), the World Conference on Religion and Peace (1970) and many more interfaith organisations, see Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope. One Hundred Years of Global Inter-faith Dialogue* (London: SCM, 1992).

the Second Vatican Council's Declaration *Nostra Aetate* (1965), participation in interreligious dialogue is the official policy of the Roman Catholic Church, and Pope John Paul II made dramatic gestures with his convocations of world religious leaders in Assisi and especially his rapprochement with the Jews. Yet in all these developments there is a strong undertow of reluctance to make any theological concessions that became quite explicit in the Declaration of the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dominus Iesus* (2000), and the concurrent investigation of the writings of the Jesuit theologian of dialogue Jacques Dupuis.[3] The pontificate of Benedict XVI has seen no improvement in this situation; on the contrary, there has been repeated friction with Jews and Muslims. In the World Council of Churches the whole topic of religious dialogue and pluralism was effectively sidelined in recent times. The Sub-Unit for Interfaith Dialogue has been downgraded to an Office of Inter-Religious Relations, the landmark Baar Declaration on *Religious Plurality: Theological Perspectives and Affirmations* (1990) was largely ignored,[4] and a more recent document on pluralism as hospitality was sidelined at the last general assembly of the WCC in Porto Alegre, Brazil (2006).[5] One could also say that in the majority of theology faculties

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[3] May, John D'Arcy, "Catholic Fundamentalism? Some Implications of *Dominus Iesus* for Dialogue and Peacemaking", in: *Horizons 28 (2)*, 2001, 271-293, and Rainer, Michael J. (ed.), *Dominus Iesus. Anstössige Wahrheit oder anstössige Kirche?* Münster/ Hamburg/ London: LIT Verlag, 2001, 112-133. See also my review article "A Catholic Theology of Religious Pluralism. The Recent Work of Jacques Dupuis SJ", in: *Priests and People 18 (1)*, 2004, 28-30.

[4] For a detailed exposition and critique of these and other machinations, see Cracknell, Kenneth, "Ambivalent Theology and Ambivalent Policy. The World Council of Churches and Interfaith Dialogue 1938-1999", in: *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 6 (1)*, 1999, 87-111; and for a fuller account, Ariarajah, S. Wesley, *Hindus and Christians. A Century of Protestant Ecumenical Thought*, Amsterdam: Editions Rodopi/ Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991. The *Baar Declaration* may now be found in Kinnamon, Michael/ Cope, Brian (eds.), *The Ecumenical Movement. An Anthology of Key Texts and Voices*, Geneva: WCC/ Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997, 417-420.

[5] "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding", in: *Current Dialogue 45*, July 2005; for some, however – including the present writer, who was in-

and religious studies departments, though the *study* of religions may have gained ground, the *dialogue* of religions is still kept at arm's length. Religion scholars regard it as a private commitment rather than an instrument of research, though there are cases where religious studies scholars have 'come out' and declared their commitment to the traditions they study.[6] For many Christian theologians the practice and results of interreligious dialogue still have no direct bearing on biblical, moral or dogmatic theology. There must be reasons for this discouraging lack of development, and it is the purpose of this paper to seek some of them out.

To begin with the much-misunderstood term 'dialogue' itself, it connotes the polite but non-committal exchange of doctrinal statements between representatives nominated by various traditions. For this reason I have always preferred to speak about 'interreligious communication' in order to capture the many levels at which interreligious encounters actually take place in various contexts, from the classroom and the hospital ward to the workplace and the street.[7] This suggests the need for collaborative 'meta-reflection' about what interreligious communication involves even as we engage in dialogue, for this form of communication, like any other, can be extensively theorised. In practice, because contexts of understanding can vary so widely, 'the means of communication has to be created in the course of communication itself'.[8] It is becoming

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volved in its formulation – the document did not go far enough, see Race, Alan, "Hospitality is Good but How Far Can It Go?", *Current Dialogue 46*, December 2005.

[6] Makransky, John, *Buddhahood Embodied. Sources of Controversy in India and Tibet*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997; Jackson, Roger/ Makransky, John (eds.), *Buddhist Theology. Critical Reflections by Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, London: Curzon Press, 2000.

[7] 'Conversation' also has useful implications; see Barnes, Michael, *Religions in Conversation. Christian Identity and Religious Pluralism*, London: SPCK, 1989. I usually avoid the term 'interfaith' because of its strong Christian overtones.

[8] Sangharakshita/ Geffré, Claude/Dhavamony, Mariasusai (eds.), *Buddhism and Christianity*, *Concilium* (1979), 55-63; or, as Paul Knitter is fond of saying, 'doing comes before knowing'.

more and more apparent, for reasons we shall investigate shortly, that a real encounter of religious worlds has profound implications for the religious commitments of those involved, as is evident particularly in two recent approaches to dialogue: the 'liberationist' (Aloysius Pieris, Paul Knitter), stressing collaboration in the struggle for justice as the medium, not just a topic, of interreligious encounter; and the 'comparativist' (James Fredericks, Francis Clooney), which tries to enter deeply into the religious world of one tradition radically different from one's own.[9]

Each religious tradition has its own inbuilt bias towards affirming the indispensability of what counts for it as 'salvation' or 'liberation'; each regards its own 'way' as in one sense or another 'absolute' and thus, at least by implication, as unique and superior to all others. Precisely this need to assert identity-in-relationship *is* the problem of dialogue; it is the tension between 'the need to integrate and merge versus the need to be unique'.[10] The claims seem incompatible, yet their separate existence does not mutually invalidate them. Religious identities, like those of individual people, do not simply arise in a vacuum as the result of some kind of spiritual 'big bang', as Wilfred Cantwell Smith liked to put it: though each is autonomous in its unique inspiration, they are themselves the products of relationships with religious 'others':

We each bring distinct identities to dialogue, but these identities are themselves both the products and the presuppositions of interactions, whether individual or collective. It is the paradox of identity that you only acquire one by entering into a relationship with the Other, but in

[9] By far the most comprehensive and original attempt to systematise the various models of interreligious relations is by Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2002), in which he identifies 'replacement', 'fulfilment', 'mutuality' and 'acceptance' models.

[10] Gopin, Marc, *Between Eden and Armageddon. The Future of World Religions, Violence and Peacemaking*, Oxford University Press, 2000, 203; see 204-206.

order to take up this relationship you already need to know who you are.[11]

Must each tradition, then, simply be allowed its own autonomy, right through to the reality each conceives of as 'salvation' (S. Mark Heim)? Or do they all relativise one another (John Hick, Alan Race)? A more promising approach might be the attempt to deconstruct absolutism itself (Michael Barnes, Joseph O'Leary).[12] Whatever strategy we favour, it is obvious that much work needs to be done on what might be called the 'hermeneutics of dialogue', that is, the theory of communication between autonomous social 'universes of meaning' such as those of the religions. I propose to tackle this task in three steps: (1) the role of communication in *understanding* religious 'others'; (2) the role of such interreligious understanding in bringing about *reconciliation and peace*; and (3) the light shed by these reflections on what it means to '*be* religious'.

1. Understanding through dialogue?

Despite the enduring legacy of Wilfred Cantwell Smith[13] and isolated essays by scholar-practitioners such as Donald Swearer,[14] there is stubborn resistance in the field of history of religions (understood as *Re-*

[11] May, John D'Arcy, *After Pluralism. Towards an Interreligious Ethic*, Münster/ Hamburg/ London: LIT Verlag, 2000, 71.

[12] On the latter two approaches, which seem to have been formulated entirely independently of one another, see May, John D'Arcy, "The Elusive Other. Recent Theological Writing on Religious Pluralism", in: *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue 13 (1)*, 2003, 114-124.

[13] Now helpfully drawn together by Kenneth Cracknell in *Wilfred Cantwell Smith. A Reader* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2001), synthesised most powerfully in W.C. Smith's *The Meaning and End of Religion* (London: SPCK, 1978, orig. 1962), and perhaps best illustrated by the lively exchange with John Hick and other scholars in John Hick, (ed.), *Truth and Dialogue. The Relationship Between World Religions* (London: Sheldon Press, 1974).

[14] Swearer, Donald, *Dialogue. The Key to Understanding Other Religions*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1977.

ligionswissenschaft and eschewing the more speculative phenomenology practised by scholars such as Mircea Eliade or Gerardus van der Leeuw) to any other than strictly rational and scientific methods of gaining reliable knowledge of those collective social phenomena known as 'religions'.[15] Anything resembling 'theology', 'confession' or 'commitment' must be kept completely separate from the study of religion. 'Whatever else it is, Religious Studies must be "not-theology" and must never admit to any kind of normative presuppositions'.[16] This leaves us with the problem of how to reconcile 'insider' and 'outsider' perspectives in the study of religions and cultures, and the even more basic problem of who 'we' are who undertake this task: de-contextualised Western rationalists for whom all religious phenomena are merely 'data'?[17]

'Dialogue', understandably in such a context, seems to complicate the already fraught 'politics of religious studies' by introducing exclusive claims and special pleading. It is perfectly legitimate for religious people, but has no place in the academy, though the knowledge gained by 'objective' study of religions may be useful to those who wish to pursue it. Thanks to the level of reflection on participant observation and

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[15] Robert A. Segal, in "In Defense of Reductionism" (published in his *Religion and the Social Sciences. Essays on the Confrontation*, Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989, 5-36), criticises Eliade for 'endorsing the believer's point of view' and advocating a 'religious' study of religion, while Donald Wiebe, in his *The Politics of Religious Studies. The Continuing Conflict with Theology in the Academy* (London: Macmillan, 1999, chapter 10), accuses van der Leeuw of 'subverting' the scientific study of religion.

[16] May, John D'Arcy, "Political Religion. Secularity and the Study of Religion in Global Civil Society", in: Spalek, Basia/ Imtoual, Alia (eds.), *Religion, Spirituality and the Social Sciences. Challenging Marginalisation*, Bristol: Policy Press, 2008, 9-22, referring to Griffiths, Paul J., "On the Future Study of Religion in the Academy", in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion 74*, 2006, 66-74.

[17] McCutcheon, Russel T. (ed.), *The Insider/ Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion. A Reader*, London: Cassell, 1998; *Critics Not Caretakers. Redescribing the Public Study of Religion*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001; and Segal, Robert A., *Explaining and Interpreting Religion. Essays on the Issue*, New York: Peter Lang, 1992.

the subjectivity of standpoints reached by the social sciences, especially anthropology, in recent years, however, it is no longer so easy to maintain the imperious reductionism defended by Segal, Wiebe, McCutcheon and others, despite the pertinence of their warnings that the study of religions is in danger of being reduced to the perpetuation of theology by other means.[18] The crux of their argument is that scholarly integrity entails keeping one's distance from anything that could be construed as religious commitment *as a means of acquiring knowledge* of one's own or other religious worlds. But then the question must be asked: Does what is presented as the fruit of such study capture anything worth knowing about 'religion' at all, if religion is taken to be an intensely personal and intrinsically communal matter, knowledge of which depends on subjective reporting and group self-representation? It is the methodological dilemma of all the social sciences: can the socially constructed yet ultimately autonomous 'meanings' brought forth by religious traditions be 'explained' in the manner of the physical sciences (*Erklären*), or can they only be 'interpreted' and 'understood' (*Verstehen*)?[19]

My own view is that, although the study of religion offers ample scope for the rational sifting of evidence and generalisation from it, in the end reliable knowledge of religions, one's own and others', is intersubjective. I have therefore never subscribed to the 'neutralist' or 're-

[18] For example, Alles, Gregory D., "Toward a Genealogy of the Holy. Rudolf Otto and the Apologetics of Religion", in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 69, 2001, 323-341.

[19] Though not perhaps to everyone's satisfaction, Ninian Smart dealt with this dilemma in *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge. Some Methodological Questions* (Princeton University Press, 1973). For an equally fresh and witty approach, see Clifford Geertz, *Available Light. Anthropological Reflections on Philosophical Topics* (Princeton/ Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000), especially chapter VIII on "The Pinch of Destiny. Religion as Experience, Meaning, Identity, Power". Earlier discussions between philosophers and anthropologists may be found in Bryan Wilson (ed.), *Rationality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970); M. Hollis/ S. Lukes (eds.), *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); and Michael Krausz (ed.), *Relativism. Interpretation and Confrontation* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

ductionist' view of *Religionswissenschaft.* To me it is illusory to think that in any field of intellectual endeavour, even the 'hard' sciences, individual standpoint, emotional response, creative imagination and personal commitment play no part in the acquisition of knowledge. It is not felt to be objectionable if a professor of literature also happens to be a poet or a novelist, as long as he or she has the ability to conceptualise literary theory and analyse the history of literature. In the case of religion, where both objective comparison and subjective evaluation of data are always in play, mature scholarship involves becoming aware of these at a meta-level of reflective analysis. It is not ultimately possible either to understand the others as they understand themselves or to make explicit the conceptual framework in which we do so without *entering into actual communication* with the other tradition, for this entails the step from observation and abstraction to the practical testing of one's conclusions in the give and take of interpersonal and intercommunal exchange. Whether this takes the form of personal conversation, participation in ritual, the appreciation of art or – as a last resort! – the study of literature is a secondary matter. For Hegel, the dual movement of 'passing over' into the unfamiliar world of another culture and 'coming back', transformed by the experience, to re-inhabit one's own was the essence of education, an insight that has been re-appropriated for interreligious dialogue by John Dunne and Raimon Panikkar.[20] Disciplined dialogue is thus not merely a legitimate but an indispensable means of acquiring reliable knowledge of both one's own and other traditions.

[20] Dunne, John S., *The Way of All the Earth*, New York: Macmillan, 1972; Panikkar, Raimon, *The Intra-Religious Dialogue*, New York: Paulist Press, 1999 (3rd rev. ed.).

2. Peace through dialogue?

Alongside the traditional objections to the validity of religion, such as the advance of science or the problem of evil, the supposed intrinsic link between religion and violence has become a major concern in the course of the 20th century. This objection can no longer be refuted simply by saying that it is only 'debased' or 'distorted' religion that leads to violence, not religion in itself. Religion is said to have arisen in order to rationalise the murder of a mythical patriarch (Sigmund Freud), the killing of animals in the hunt (Walter Burkert) or the scapegoating of individuals to purge the community of guilt (René Girard);[21] indeed, if we follow Nietzsche we could say that violence is itself religious, a theme that can readily be detected in the noble sacrifices of classical literature and the redemptive vengeance that figures so prominently in contemporary film and television drama (Walter Wink).[22] Considerably less effort has been put into researching the connection between the religions and peace, what Marc Gopin calls their 'prosocial' potential.[23] Religion, it seems, is capable of inspiring both the depths of violence in Crusade and Jihad, Holocaust and Intifada, and the heights of reconciliation, from Saints Francis of Assisi and Raymond Lull to Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King and Thich Nhat Hanh, thus demonstrating the 'ambivalence of the sacred' (R. Scott Appleby).[24]

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[21] Hamerton-Kelly, Robert G. (ed.), *Violent Origins. Walter Burkert, René Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*, Stanford University Press, 1987.
[22] May, John D'Arcy, *After Pluralism*, op. cit., 21-29.
[23] Gopin, Marc, *Between Eden and Armageddon*, op. cit., 207-208; and more recently, *Holy War, Holy Peace. How Religion Can Bring Peace to the Middle East*, Oxford University Press, 2002.
[24] R. Scott Appleby, in his *The Ambivalence of the Sacred. Religion, Violence, and Reconciliation* (Lanham/ Boulder/ New York/ Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), makes the worldwide scope of interreligious cooperation in peacebuilding abundantly clear.

There is no doubt that the long, sad history of religions-in-conflict corroborates this modern objection to religion: just as there seems to be scarcely a tradition that has not succumbed to the 'revolt against complexity' by falling into fundamentalism, so there is hardly any that is not in one way or another compromised by association with violence. Yet we know that all religious traditions properly so called have embedded within them precious ethical values – repentance, forgiveness, compassion, justice – that they have inspired and nurtured through the ages. This is not to say that such values cannot exist independently of religious traditions, but simply that the religions have been the matrix in which they have been able to flourish. The religions as such have seldom been the sole underlying cause of conflict; not even in the internecine conflicts of the first Islamic centuries, the Crusades, or the post-Reformation wars of religion was this the case. Rather, it is what Buddhists succinctly call the 'three poisons' of greed, hatred and delusion, manifested in economic inequality and injustice, communal rivalry and ethnic resentment, the lust for power and the flaunting of wealth, that have motivated violence. Ethnic superiority and religious intolerance are pressed into service as ideologies to legitimate the brutal enforcement of these attitudes or violent resistance to them, but they are seldom 'causes' in their own right.

It is at this point that the realisation becomes relevant that dialogue is itself an ethical reality that in an important sense – most convincingly articulated by Emmanuel Levinas – is prior to knowledge itself.[25] This ethical reality of the encounter with what Levinas calls the 'infinite' in the *face* – especially the eyes – of the other makes thinking a moral enterprise and dialogue a religious act, in Christian terms the 'sacrament of the stranger'. We may reformulate Levinas's 'infinite' as the (admittedly

[25] See May, John D'Arcy, *After Pluralism*, op. cit., 19; and *Transcendence and Violence. The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, New York/ London: Continuum, 2003, 125-130.

polysemic) cipher 'transcendence', meaning by this the intentionality of the human mind by virtue of which it is 'always already' *beyond, further than* what is explicitly conceivable (as formulated, for example, by Karl Rahner and Bernard Lonergan). We might then say that interreligious communication offers us a unique opportunity to '*practise* transcendence' by *moving beyond* the symbolisms and institutions that mediate transcendence to us in our own tradition (as some kind of religious 'objects'), thereby relativising *them* while adhering to the judgement of religious truth rooted in transcendence itself (as the 'intentional dynamic' of the religious attitude). This frees us to enter into the stories and symbols of religious others *as if they were our own*, thereby discovering new possibilities of transcendence that may have remained latent in our own religious identity.[26] This presupposes, of course, that all the complexities surrounding the concept of 'transcendence' itself have been sorted out – whether it is admissible at all, purely intentional or in some sense really existent – a task we cannot undertake here.[27] The greater the degree of difference, the more severely the quality of our own response in the presence of the other is tested; and when otherness degenerates into hostility, the religious dimension of the ethical challenge becomes manifest ('Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you…', Luke 6:27; 'Hatred can never put an end to hatred; love alone can…', *Dhammapada* 5). We might even speak of a 'spirituality of dialogue'.

It is thus not only in the genesis of conflicts but also in their resolution that the religious dimension of dialogue becomes apparent. The religious name for this is reconciliation.[28] Cultural and religious perspectives greatly influence how one thinks of reconciliation,[29] and in West-

[26] May, John D'Arcy, *After Pluralism*, op. cit., 80.
[27] A sketch of the problem is given in John D'Arcy May, *Transcendence and Violence*, op. cit., 11-14.
[28] For a fuller discussion of what follows see May, John D'Arcy, "A Rationale for Reconciliation", in: *Uniting Church Studies 7 (1)*, 2001, 1-13.
[29] Hurley, Michael (ed.), *Reconciliation in Religion and Society*, Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, 1994.

ern Christian settings we normally associate it with the reciprocal relationship between repentance and forgiveness, priority usually being given to forgiveness. Each of these goes beyond merely forgetting past wrongs to engage actively in 'deep remembering'; neither is a substitute for seeing that not only retributive but restorative justice is done; and both together go deeper than professional conflict resolution based on mediation techniques. The more deeply ingrained the conflict is in the social fabric, the more 'political' the acts of forgiveness and repentance, whether private or public, become. The potential of the dialogue of religions in conflict situations is that it goes deeper into the particularities of the protagonists' religious worlds than the more abstract – and therefore alien – strategy of universalising the terms of the conflict. It invites the parties to follow an alternative route to a genuine transcendence of the conflict by re-appropriating each tradition's own cherished religious values as a first step towards appreciating those of the others. Though forgiveness in such circumstances can seem impossibly difficult and repentance extremely unlikely, if the parties to the conflict can be empowered to bring about change themselves rather than have it imposed on them by outsiders, to initiate the dialectic of forgiveness and repentance in their own ways and by mutual agreement, then former enemies can be liberated from backward-looking hatred to build a new future together.

Such processes are intrinsically political, though the time comes when what was begun in the religious commitments of the parties can be carried forward in the public arena of institutional change. Politics constructs a forum in which ideas and interests can clash non-violently. It is premised on consensus about the limits of toleration, but in situations where the boundaries of humane behaviour have been consistently overstepped, 'apology' and 'compromise' come to seem like acts of betrayal and forgiveness must dig very deep. 'Practically, politically and morally, the institutionalisation of forgiveness is one of the things that make soci-

ety possible'.[30] Reconciliation, as the coincidence of forgiveness and repentance, is both transcendent and particular, 'religious' and political, conditioned by the beliefs and sensitivities of individuals and groups.[31] When religion is involved in conflict, the motives for enmity and animosity carry the 'ultimate' sanction of world views and beliefs that may not be compromised under any circumstances. By the same token, these world views, in all their particularity, contain *for each of their respective adherents* the key to transcending the conflict through the 're-membering' demanded by reconciliation, if only they can be brought into communication and interaction through dialogue.[32]

3. Being religious through dialogue?

Underlying all that we have said so far is a residual ambiguity about what it means to 'be religious' in the post-modern context of limitless diversity, the post-colonial situation of resurgent ethnic, cultural and religious autonomy, and what Manuel Castells calls the 'real virtuality' of the 'network society' brought about by global electronic communica-

[30] May, John D'Arcy, "A Rationale for Reconciliation", op. cit., 9.
[31] See May, John D'Arcy, "Political Religion. Secularity and the Study of Religion in Global Civil Society", in: op. cit.; "Alternative a Dio? Le religioni nella sfera pubblica globale", in: Autiero, Antonio (ed.), *Teologia nella città, teologia per la città. La dimensione secolare delle scienze teologiche*, Bologna: Edizione Dehoniane, 2005, 95-109; "God in Public. The Religions in Pluralist Societies", in: *Bijdragen. International Journal in Philosophy and Theology 64*, 2003, 249-264.
[32] This theme is developed by Geiko Müller-Fahrenholz in *The Art of Forgiveness. Theological Reflections on Healing and Reconciliation* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1997) (a complete reworking of the German original is available in *Vergebung macht frei. Vorschläge für eine Theologie der Vergebung* (Frankfurt: Lembeck, 1996); and by Terence P. McCaughey, *Memory and Redemption. Church, Politics and Prophetic Theology in Ireland* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1993).

tion.[33] What counts as 'religion' in these new contexts? As Westerners, even those who have repudiated Christianity, still think of religion in terms of theism, religion in this sense is widely rejected in the West, though some theologians seem unaware that it is precisely a vivid and lively theism that is being enthusiastically embraced by ever larger numbers of both Christians and Muslims in the 'South'.[34] These are extremely complex phenomena that require rigorous analysis. Why are Muslim women in Iran burning the *chador* in protest while their sisters in neighbouring Turkey are demonstrating for the right to wear it? Why are young girls in the more relaxed Muslim circles of Indonesia or Britain suddenly seized with a religious dread that compels them to wear the *jilbab* or the *hijab* and be dominated by men? Why are Christians in Latin America turning to an apolitical Pentecostalism in their millions? How could so much of the vast Pacific have become so enthusiastically Christian in such a short time? Why is a seemingly reactionary Roman Catholicism flourishing in Asia and Africa? The examples are as manifold as they are baffling to those with a European concept of religion, whether classical or modern, and to European Christians of a 'liberal' cast of mind.

The value of the 'objective' and comparative study of religion becomes apparent when we learn that for much of humankind, whether in the Pacific Islands, East Asia, or the American and African continents, religion traditionally had little to do with theism but sprang from the immanence of the sacred within the phenomena of nature, which does

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[33] Castells, Manuel, *The Rise of the Network Society. The Information Age. Economy, Society and Culture*, Vol. I, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, chapter 6, esp. 410-418.

[34] Walbert Bühlmann pointed thirty years ago to *The Coming of the Third Church*; more recently, Philip Jenkins has caused a stir with his *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

not necessarily mean that it was not transcendent.[35] The religions, as the 'narrators of transcendence', have found many different ways to dramatise and institutionalise the human relationship to the transcendent, understood in both its 'subjective' and 'objective' senses. In the new global public sphere, in consequence, we are all *ipso facto* pluralists, because in virtually every social and cultural context, even formerly closed or monochrome ones like China or much of the Muslim world, we are constantly being confronted with new and unfamiliar ways of 'being religious'. It now becomes apparent why I prefer to work with the concept of 'interreligious communication' in various media and at different levels, rather than the more formal and doctrinal 'dialogue'. Whichever term we use, we see that the new situation holds multiple implications for it, which I would group under the following headings:

Epistemological: Resistance to the idea that religion entails knowledge, and that religious propositions, though they do not refer in the same way as empirical ones, are nevertheless cognitive, has been persistent in the post-Enlightenment orthodoxy of much Western philosophy, though this is changing as French phenomenology (Marion, Derrida) rediscovers God and linguistic analysis tackles the conceptual problems of religious doctrines.[36] The great intellectual systems of India, whether Hindu or Buddhist, all came to grips in one way or another with the conditions under which transcendent knowledge is possible, as did those of the Christian and Islamic Middle Ages.[37] In dialogue the concession needs to be made by both sides that the possibility of the other's being

[35] See, for example my *Christus Initiator. Theologie im Pazifik*, Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1990, and Part I of my *Transcendence and Violence. The Encounter of Buddhist, Christian and Primal Traditions*, op. cit.

[36] To mention just two examples: Smart, Ninian, *Doctrine and Argument in Indian Philosophy*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1964; Griffiths, Paul J., *On Being Buddha. The Classical Doctrine of Buddhahood*, Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1994.

[37] See, for example, Burrell, David, *Faith and Freedom. An Interfaith Perspective*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2004; Ipgrave, Michael, *Trinity and Inter Faith Dialogue. Plenitude and Plurality*, Oxford *et al.*: Peter Lang, 2000.

able to offer new and valuable knowledge relevant to one's own understanding of religion may not be ruled out *a priori*; nor may the possibility that such knowledge could be viable in the public forum of discourse about 'religion-in-general'. In particular, the role of personal commitment as well as intellectual judgement in acquiring knowledge of any kind makes it evident that knowing, like communicating, is an ethical enterprise. This becomes especially relevant in the context of religious knowledge.

Ethical: Dialogue, as we have seen, like politics, is always particular. Every act of communication rests on ethical presuppositions, and the encounter with the face of the other, in the sense defined by Levinas and refined by Ricoeur, though it necessarily has ontological presuppositions, is in a fundamental sense pre-cognitive and pre-ontological. In this acknowledgement of the rightness of the other's existence as something 'better than being'[38] there is a primordial orientation, a trans-subjective intentionality, that is prior to all attempts to speak about it, symbolise it and enact it as 'transcendence'. The summons to commitment disclosed in the fact of the other is unconditional; it is the prototype, as it were, of the dimension of transcendence proper to ethical obligation. It is only in meeting the gaze of the other, in the 'saying' that constitutes actual communication, *le dire* as opposed to the always retrospective *dit*, that we are carried beyond the 'totality' of conceivable knowledge of the world to the 'infinity' that transcends the world. This is primordial; revelations, norms and doctrines are derivative. They utilise whatever symbolic media particular cultures and histories provide in order to articulate the primary symbolisation, the ruling metaphor of a religious tradition, that by definition articulates transcendence itself. Languages and cultures make it possible for us to have interpersonal and interreligious encounters in the first place, but always *modo concreto*, 'in particu-

[38] Zygmunt Bauman's gloss on Levinas's 'otherwise than being', in: *Postmodern Ethics*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1993, 71-74.

lar'. Religious knowing is thus a continual mediation between ethical acts, symbolisations of meaning and propositional truth. In the words of a recent definition of religion, it is 'an explanation of the ultimate meaning of life, and how to live accordingly'.[39]

Aesthetic: In our verbal and rationalistic intellectual environment it is perhaps worth emphasising the further point that none of the above can happen unless emotional reactions and imaginative visions are allowed to play a part. Far from being distractions and delusions that endanger the reliability of knowledge, as our use of language conditions us to believe, emotion is crucial to any kind of empathy with religious realities, our own or others'. It is precisely the rational component of our minds' capacity for transcendence that allows us to be aware of this and to exercise critical control over it, but without emotional involvement and a sense of beauty we will remain trapped in the dilemma of the social sciences, vainly seeking 'objective' knowledge of what is in fact the most subjective of all human experiences, the realisation of ultimate meaning and our response to it. The rise of 'world philosophy', which engages Western philosophy with its Indian, Japanese, African and other non-Western counterparts, promises radical new perspectives on the aesthetics of rationality.

In the light of all this it is somewhat disingenuous to speak, as I and many others have done, of the religions as 'spiritual resources' that must now be brought to bear on the problems of human survival in a co-ordinated and rational way. The much-vaunted 'global ethic' (Hans Küng), if it is to bring about 'ethical globalisation' (Mary Robinson) in the form of humane and constructive solutions to humankind's self-inflicted problems, must be an *inter*-religious ethic, one that gives testimony to the religions' ability to surmount their own age-old antago-

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[39] Swidler, Leonard/ Mojzes, Paul (eds.), *Attitudes of Religions and Ideologies Toward the Outsider. The Other*, Lewiston/ Queenstown/ Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990, iv.

nisms, just as religious education must become *inter*-religious learning if it is to be credible and effective.[40] That is the theory, but as long as it remains within the parameters of 'tolerance', 'liberalism' and 'pluralism' inherited from the European Enlightenment – indispensable and inalienable as these are – it does not even begin to come to terms with the depths of rage and the crises of identity that must be coped with if we are to bring about a global non-violent way of life for all, not just the privileged and powerful. This would be in itself not only an ethical but a religious reality, even though constructing it would be an eminently rational enterprise and the religions as we know them may be transformed in the process. Much self-transcendence in the name of transcendence itself needs to take place, both individually and collectively, in both cultural and institutional settings, before a fundamental 'solution' to our problems can be envisaged. Perhaps, though, it will turn out to be a solution precisely because it is a non-solution, not something we planned for as the anticipated outcome of dialogue but the new relationship to the religious – or 'spirituality', if you will – discovered in the course of inter-religious communication itself. Perhaps this dynamic implicit in dialogue, if only it is carried through consistently to its 'end' – in both senses of the term! – will be our biggest surprise.

Conclusion[41]

Materialist, positivist and otherwise reductionist rationales for the study of religions are not the antidote to ideology but are themselves ideological; this much is becoming clear. It is equally clear that religious

[40] See the pioneering study by Martin Rötting, *Interreligiöses Lernen im buddhistisch-christlichen Dialog. Lerntheoretischer Zugang und qualitativ-empirische Untersuchung in Deutschland und Südkorea*, St. Ottilien: EOS Verlag, 2007.

[41] The following recapitulates the Conclusion of my "Political Religion. Secularity and the Study of Religion in Global Civil Society", op. cit.

faith itself, and not just its rationalisations in various 'theologies', can perform ideological functions. Ethics, though logically autonomous, is pragmatically in need of motivation and ideationally in need of 'plausibility structures', which the religions have historically provided – albeit sometimes by dubious means (threats of eternal damnation, denigration of earthly pleasures) – and continue to provide. This is not to recommend a 'religious' study of religions, simply to note that students of religion are deceiving themselves if they think they can ignore 'theology', understood as the religions' own critical reflection on their practice and experience. In today's multireligious context, this involves entering into *inter*religious relationships as the religions experience them, thereby gaining access to their crises of self-understanding and their attempts to accommodate otherness within the constraints of their own ongoing efforts at self-definition.

The alternatives are sobering. For the religions, if they fail to rise to the challenge of global pluralism and constructive interrelatedness, there is the bleak prospect of a plethora of rigid fundamentalisms, incapable of accommodating otherness and unable to enter the public sphere except to reinforce their obsessions and do battle with all who differ from them. For the study of religions, the ultimate outcome of a sterile 'science envy' would be a steady loss of plausibility and legitimacy, ending in irrelevance and confirming Paul Griffiths' pessimistic forecast: 'This [assumption] makes the future of the nontheological academic study of religion just what it should be: bleak'.[42] A negative outcome is not inevitable if religious studies, short of becoming somebody's particular 'theology' but also without succumbing to a disinterested and uninterested scientism, can renew itself by coming to grips with the ethical and po-

[42] Griffiths, Paul J., "On the Future Study of Religion in the Academy", in: *Journal of the American Academy of Religion 74 (1)*, March 2006, Special Issue: Articles and Essays on the Future of the Study of Religion in the Academy, 74.

litical challenges the religions must now meet in the emerging global civil society.

The religions can confront politicians and the powerful, nationally but now also internationally in the inchoate global order, with serious questions about the normative presuppositions of their policies. Declarations of war, ecological destruction, economic imbalance, the wanton elimination of languages and cultures – all these and many other evils of globalisation may no longer be rationalised with spurious 'liberal' justifications (freedom of choice, economic growth, competition). When asserting the dignity of the human, the inviolability of nature and the common good, the religions – at their best – are bringing to bear on these problems historically rooted and communally tested value orientations. What might be termed their 'future nostalgia' – what Christian theology calls their eschatological vision – makes the religions factors to be reckoned with as the new global order of civil society takes shape. Preparing the ground for this is not a soft option for idealists, but a hard intellectual and political task.

10

COMPASSIONATE CARE FOR ALL OF CREATION: A LATIN AMERICAN ECOFEMINIST PERSPECTIVE[1]

Maricel Mena López, Colombia

Introduction

In order to develop my argument, I shall first address how globalisation affects Afro-American communities – emphasising capital's inability to show compassion to these communities. It may then be seen that ecofeminism is the key to making possible a proper understanding of how care and compassion can function as ethical imperatives so important for the present age. There shall then follow a hermeneutical exercise stemming from a time-tested, empirico-rational Afro-American wisdom that asks questions wisely. Finally, we shall see how categories newly derived from ecofeminism can serve as an important alternative for integrating women's experiences and the way they live.

[1] Our heartfelt thanks go to John A. Raymaker for his translation from Spanish and to the latter and Jayendra Soni for their editorial work.

1. Globalisation as an excuse for ending diversity

As I address the theme of an ethic of care and compassion in the modern age, the first question that strikes me as an Afro-American woman is the impact of globalisation on Afro-American and native populations. Importantly, such a sentiment is conscious of the fact that we participate in a global economic model, not very aptly named 'globalisation'. I say this because globalisation connotes or is understood as a process through which all humans on this globe become interdependent. It means that through this process the world becomes accessible, that localities are linked nationally and regions, internationally – and vice versa. But in reality, globalisation means none of this. The globalisation that developed at the end of the twentieth century and now faces us at the beginning of this millennium is neoliberal.[2] It aims to transform the territories occupied by native populations and those deriving from Africans into commercial regions dominated by the speculative capitalism of the large corporations.

We thus perceive that what is globalised[3] is the market. The only thing that circulates freely is the capital in the hands of the few, while the globalisation of merchandise, products and services is partial; for people, it is quasi-nonexistent. In this way, one notes that industry can lead to the death of the subject[4] in the sense that one cannot choose freely (in an 'self-determining manner'), given that one's life depends

[2] Estefanía, Joaquín, "La globalización, una 'maravillosa excusa para muchas cosas'", in: Tamayo, Juan José (ed.), *Globalización*, Estella Navarra: Verbo Divino (10 Palabras Clave Series), 2002, 27.

[3] Globalisation means the homogenisation of the modes of capitalist production whereby through communication networks, financial markets promote competence and gain control of images and of information. In other words, one exists by conquering and by destroying; otherwise one cannot exist.

[4] Here I am paraphrasing Adorno's reference to death where he argues that one dies when one regards the self as mere material value. One subjected to the shock of said processes tends to forget what it means to be a real self. Adorno, Theodor, *Crítica cultural y sociedad*, Third edition, Barcelona: Ariel, 1973, 11.

on one's ability to dispose of a certain capital. It follows that talk of an overall integration leads to an ideology whereby any non-integration of the individual within society is each individual's own responsibility.

Amartya Sen, who analyses poverty's various faces, emphasising the effects of 'progress' in a globalised world[5], warns us that the modern economy has been substantially impoverished by the growing split between economics and ethics. This is obvious in the shortcomings in nutrition, health, education, and natural resources that affect many groups of human beings. Here we can include the activities surrounding the extraction of such metals as gold and silver as well as other economic activities where the human person and the earth take second or third place after the profits. In the case of Columbia, thousands of the descendants of Africans and indigenous people have been uprooted from their territories.[6] Many of them have been subjected to processes of ethnic eradication that occur, for example, when land suitable for globalisation is disputed. Of the displaced people,

> 33% represents black communities, that is to say, 957,000 people. The rate of expulsion of these communities is 20% greater than that of the rest of the country. The indigenous population accounts for 5% of displaced people – a critical figure, seeing that these people represent only 2% of the overall population. 48% of the displaced are women many of whom had become heads of families upon the death of their spouse or the drafting of their partner or spouse. 44% were minors among which 26% were of school age (5 to 14 years old).[7]

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[5] Sen, Amartya, *Sobre ética y economía*, Madrid: Alianza, 1990, 25.

[6] The phenomenon of displacement in Columbia has global effects affecting mostly indigenous and Afro-American communities as statistical studies conducted in the Pacific side of the country have shown, See Mingorance, Fidel *et al*., "El cultivo de Palma Africana en el Chocó. Legalidad ambiental, territorial y derechos humanos", Colombia: Human rights everywhere/Diócesis de Quibdó, 2004, 122-154. See http://colombia.indymedia.org/uploads/2004/12/informe completo_es.pdf, accessed October 2010.

[7] The dynamics of war and exclusion are some consequences of forced evictions of communities. See Bello, Marta Nubia, *Desplazamiento forzado. Dinámica de guerra, exclusión y desarraigo*, Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2004, 22–23.

These data show the magnitude of the problem and point to the profound political, social, cultural, economic, territorial and environmental consequences visited upon the groups in question, especially their women and children. But there are also other reasons for the displacements. The territories, blessed with biodiversity, can serve as routes for the traffic of arms and drugs, and are propitious for housing illegal products. They are suitable for the cultivation of African palms[8] for the purposes of combustion, extensive cattle-raising, and the production of fine timber. The territories also contain such important mineral deposits as gold, silver, and platinum among others. The region is thus one that can be globalised at the cost of ethnic extermination.

Given this reality I believe we can speak of a segregative, territorially ethnic globalisation.[9] It is a concept that helps us to understand why, due to a lack of the minimum conditions required for a good quality of life – conditions that are supposed to be an aspect of globalisation – the ethnic minorities[10] of the continent are forced into the global market without enjoying any of its benefits.

The prevailing 'ethics' in economics pays homage to the market, to private property, to money, to the net internal product, to increasing exports, to fiscal restraint, without being the least concerned about people's health, about the landless, the uneducated or the untrained, about those who lack water or even an identity. This prevailing ethic puts into

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[8] The African palm is a plant used in foods as well as for the manufacture of vegetal acids and other industrial products such as cosmetics, soaps, biocombustibles, etc. See Mingorance *et al.*, op. cit., 4.

[9] The legal ethnic territories of Columbia are of two types: secured areas for indigenous tribes; and the collective territories of black communities. As of now, 36,000,000 hectares are officially reserved for the first type and 4,950,000 hectares for the second type. By territorial ethnic segregation is meant all political activity prosecuting the removal of these communities from their ancestral lands.

[10] Poverty, exclusion and ethnically racial discrimination add up to an overall theme particularly relevant in these times of omnipresent globalisation. From this viewpoint, the ethnic-racial component is basic when analysing poverty; race and ethnicity are components of the complex areas of exclusion in the Americas.

question the values proclaimed by religions in these times of global reach. This is due to a mindset that gives rise to a culture that sees scientific truth, empirically and mathematically proved, as superior to religious truths.[11]

What is most frightening in this situation is that faith all too often takes its stand on money, power and consumption.[12] One believes in God and in the market but not in one's neighbour. Such a 'faith' is indifferent to the fact that two-thirds of the population does not have adequate access to the goods that a globalised world could provide. One uncaringly practises a religion devoid of love, unconcerned for creation or the environment since the gauge is that of personal pleasure and satisfaction, leaving one unconcerned about the sufferings of one's neighbour – and much less about the pangs of creation. As St Paul puts it, 'we know that up to the present time all of creation groans with pain' (Romans 8:22).

Compassion and care – as well a concern for justice – must be key words for the world of religion in a time of globalisation. This is because ethical imperatives are at the forefront of what can free us of political, social and cultural conflicts in the present world. To take note of and make known the sufferings of people on the planet is a necessary condition for any future political peace, for any form of social solidarity in face of the ever greater divides between rich and poor.

2. Compassion and care: two ethical principles for an ecofeminism

One must appropriate the concept 'ecofeminism' in order to grasp why compassion and care are two key ethical principles in the age of

[11] Betto, Frei, "Qué diablo de fe es la nuestra?" www.rebelion.org/noticia.php?id=50828, accessed October 2010.
[12] Ibid.

globalisation. From a philosophical viewpoint, ecofeminism[13] can be considered as the form of wisdom that strives to reinstate ecosystems and women into ethical discourse.[14] Inasmuch as nature became an object to be dominated for increasing wealth, women have been relegated by the patriarchal system and even more by modernity to being sources of handwork and of production and blessed wombs. According to Michel Foucault,[15] this body-controlling system is a constitutive part both of the exercise of power and of sharing knowledge. The body serves as a locus of discourse and for the exercise of power. In this way, the question of the ways power was disseminated is a basic one: how and within which social networks are the people in question dominated? In that social system, nature only plays an implicit role. Ecofeminism argues that the oppression of women and the destruction of nature both stem from the same patriarchal system,[16] which wants to dominate while denying the primordial unity of the whole cosmos.

Taking a radically different stand, ecofeminists affirm the integral principle that all is interrelated, or that there is a dynamic interdependence between human beings and the cosmos from which life evolved. Ecofeminists put an emphasis on people, especially on poor women who suffer from monetary inflation;[17] this is why they struggle against inequalities and for balanced relations. In their search for all the basic elements of life, they propose a radical reconstruction.

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[13] Ecofeminism is part of the diversity of co-existing feminist epistemologies, which do not constitute a universal feminism.

[14] Ress, Mary Judith, "He encontrado algunas respuestas en el Ecofeminismo", in: *Conspirando 23*, 1993, 98.

[15] Faucault, Michel, *Microfísica del poder*, Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1993, 98.

[16] Mary Condren, in *The Serpent and the Goddess. Women, Religion, and Power in Celtic Ireland* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 1998), deconstructs the basic myth of patriarchy: she sees in Eve and the serpent important elements for the liberation of women's bodies.

[17] On globalisation and poverty among women workers, see Nunes, Christiane/ Ferreira, Girard, *Globalzação, pobreza e o mundo do trabalho*, Brasília: Centro de Documentação e Informação, 2004.

The central point of ecofeminist epistemology is the idea of interdependence in which all elements touch human life. In this view, the experiences of human beings are deemed indispensable for an epistemology that unquestionably insists on the recognition of bodies. Knowing includes what is usually called knowledge, but not all forms of knowing may be reduced to what is known 'by reason'. What are known as absolute truths are experiences of various types attributable to one or another person and expressed according to their life experiences. In the majority of cases these experiences come to have the aura of authority as if they were one's own.

Religious holism opens the door to people's multifaceted experience of being related to the sacred values that give meaning to human existence. The 'sacred' is the name of things (*cosas*) and their relationships. As Gebara puts it, 'The sacred is the beauty pervading all things, our questions without answers flowing through the most diverse times and cultural spaces; these continue to be unceasing interpreters for us.'[18]

The sacralisation of life sets a norm for fundamental ethical discussions. This is because the sacred is marked or characterised by various ambiguities, physical and moral, human and cosmic, positive and negative. The various identities vivified by ambiguities, simultaneity, and various intersections, permit us to visualise distinct ethical and political horizons. The experience involved therein enables us to live the sacred in a different manner.

Valorising one way of knowing over another has to do with a properly suitable hierarchisation of people within precise contexts. I am here speaking of circumstantial, cultural, political and social types of valorisation in addition to the types able to respond to personal and group concerns.

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[18] Gebara, Ivone, *Teología ecofeminista*, Sao Paulo: Editora Olho d'Água, 1997, 72-73.

Dualist patriarchal societies place as attributes of men reason, determination, authority, force, power and intelligence – all of which are deemed superior to intuition, tenderness, affection, sensitiveness, service etc., which are seen as 'feminine' attributes. The same dualism locates science and technology on the masculine side and religion on the feminine side, with the exception of religious power, which is, of course, a male monopoly. One can hardly reform such a dualism by bringing in the categories of compassion and care, nor can one suppose that they will be validated inasmuch as these categories are constitutive of women. What is proposed with this approach is an ecofeminist stance that distances itself from empirico-scientific knowledge. One must come up with new analytical categories that do justice to the body and its subjective aspects, as is the case with compassion and care –these two ethical imperatives must be approached from an intercultural perspective.

But what does one mean by compassion and an ethic of care?[19] I understand compassion to be a basic ethical principle in interpersonal relations; such a principle is to be extended toward all living beings and to ecosystems. Within Christian theology such a perspective means loving one's neighbour. It is the first criterion upon which creation depends. In such a sense, we as people of faith find it possible to accept the principle of love/ compassion as an ethical concept. As such, we experience it in integral relationships that would include, as it were, all living beings. Under this aspect, one has an ability to feel close to all beings; one is responsive to their sufferings. It is a healing perspective in both a political and a liberative sense. The Dalai Lama's perception here is telling:

> After developing empathy and a sense of proximity, the next important step for cultivating compassion consists in penetrating the true nature of suffering. Our compassion for all other beings must emanate from the recognition of suffering. One of the specific characteristics of the contemplation of such suffering is that it will be more powerful and more effective if one first concentrates on one's

[19] On an ethic of care, see García, Alejandra, "La Ética del Cuidado", in: *Revista Aquichan 4*, 2004.

own sufferings and then expands that reality until one reaches to the sufferings of others. Our compassion for these will grow because it is mediated through the recognition of one's own suffering.[20]

The healing dimension of suffering goes hand in hand with an ethic of care imbued with emotive feelings, with relations and relationships that touch on the moral life.[21] From this point of view, the ethic of care cannot be an ethic affecting 'only women';[22] rather, it is one that responds to the more profound exigencies of what it is to be human; to be human means existing because of others and for others. Ethical actions that do not take into consideration the others and their value and dignity as human beings does not correspond to the true good; this true good is that we can come to know all men and women through a heart that loves others as they are in themselves as well as for what they mean for us.

In the face of various types of ethics caught up in the purely formal, such as the Kantian ethic, a merely legalistic ethic focusing on interpreting human rights, or a utilitarian ethic that decides on the function of individual and social benefits, an ethic of care seeks to base itself on the subject as *related*, including the affective side.[23]

In this ethic, the subject is dealt with as immersed in situations or in problematic ethics and as seeking ways to favour the wellbeing of the

[20] Dalai Lama, "La Compasión y el Individuo", in: *Mundo Nuevo*, May-June 2006, www.mundonuevo.cl/areas/Revista/mayo_2006/articulos/dalai_lama.php, accessed October 2010.

[21] Cortina, Adela, "La educación del hombre y del ciudadano", *Revista de Educación Iberoamercana*, January-April 1995, 16. For Cortina a moral expression means first of all the "ability to confront the face of demoralisation, that is, to acquire a higher degree of morality" (see ibid., 14). See www.rieoei.org/oeivirt/rie07a01.htm, accessed October 2010.

[22] As to the theory about the ethic of care, Carol Gilligan in *La Moral y la Teoría, Psicología del Desarrollo Femenino* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1994) calls for a study of women's language; it is capable of generating ethical interpretations that differ from men's, but are just as valid.

[23] Pascual, Fernando, "La ética del cuidado ¿una ética para mujeres?" www.forumlibertas.com/frontend/forumlibertas/noticia.php?id_noticia=10551&id_seccion=23, 2008, accessed October 2010.

other[24] while not neglecting the abstract rules that do not seek to understand the emotive dimensions of each unique situation.

3. Compassion and care from Afro-American cultural standpoints

How is one to understand compassion and care from the point of view of Afro-American and Caribbean ancestral cultures? How can we integrate the sacral element in cultural and religious 'constructs'? These questions serve as a basic entry point in the present attempt to develop an ethic of compassion and care from the standpoint of the communitarian praxis of communities that have been relegated to the margins of empirico-rational knowledge while retaining a component of myth supposedly opposed to the history that began with rationalist systems having a Western imprint. On this point, let me cite the oral report of a Haitian woman:

Wherever there is a tree called Mapu, there is a water fountain.
But now water fountains are no more because they cut Mapu down
Still, we breathe that same fragrance…
In Haiti, whenever we see a large and pretty tree
We get the idea that there spirits live; for this reason
The tree deserves respect and so we make offerings under its branches.
There are other trees such as the Palm that are loaded with meanings.
Its roots are good in that it can give life to the rest of nature.
Many religions have come here; they have snuffed out the myth of the spirits.
In doing this, one loses one's respect for nature.
Myths are our ancestors' wisdom.
Our elders and our women taught them to succeeding generations:
Have respect for nature.
Today, hand in hand with the spread of technology,
Nature is being destroyed; human rights are trampled upon.
Would that Mapu would come to help us
Straighten this out and would that he will come before long.[25]

[24] For an adequate distinction between a feminine ethic and a feminist one, see Sherwin, Susan, "Ética, ética femenina y ética feminista", in: *Ética y salud reproductiva*, México: Miguel Ángel Porrúa, 1996.

This poetic story evokes ancient sapiential myths in which the earth's bounty and the maintenance of life are directly linked to the bonds between humans and nature. The fertility evidenced in Mapu is one that generates fountains of water; the quality of life for all creatures depends upon it. But because of the values proclaimed by moderns, these vital elements are threatened, as Ivelin recounts it above.

In order to deepen our analysis of what 'being related' means, we shall understand culture as a nexus of meaning and feelings. It is within such a nexus that Afro-Americans and Caribbeans recreate and vindicate their rights of surviving within the various contexts of oppression, marginalisation, racism and poverty. These people have different ways of life and of manifesting their faith-experiences or their relations with the sacred. An example of this is the experience of faith of Haitian women, their strength, their will to resist amidst dire situations of hunger and poverty. They have profound wisdom as they withstand the hierarchical, androcentric and patriarchal structures within which they are willy-nilly constrained to live.

Ivelin reminds us that in the above poem the question of ancestry is basic to an understanding of the cosmic visions of the world held by various ethnic groups in the Americas. Such visions speak to us of a group's primordial origins; they let us know what elements maintain its identity. They speak of an identity now suffering from deforestation, but one that also resorts to universal, elemental principles: the earth, justice, fertility, love, peace, compassion, care, etc. Ancestry is related to the basic principles of survival, but it is also felt in each person, in each boy or girl, in each woman, in each elder, or in a rule that is just.

Orixas deities (male and female) of the Afro-Brazilian cults provide useful examples. In these cults, Orixas are intimately associated with, or related to the basic principles addressed here; they are to be felt within

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[25] Recounted by Ivelin Constant during a "Bible and Culture" seminar in Haiti, 2000.

the bodies of women and of men.[26] This sacred element perpetuated in nature is the vital force permitting them to feel that all that exists has life, being the force also known as Axe. Hence, many creation myths are or have been composed with the help of other created beings – including women and men. Female creators are ranged along the side of male creators; together with these, they have the power of initiating and ending life. In this way, one notes that in such a cosmovision ecology is clearly integrated with the feminine. It is nonetheless important to recover the importance of ancestral spirits. In the poem quoted before, Ivelin informs us that the spirits live in Mapu; it deals with ancestors present in the forces of nature. These ancestors are those who reached old age and died a worthy death. Only these can be called ancestors. To these one makes offerings so as to guarantee life's continuity. That is why death and the slaughter perpetrated against the community are collective offenses. To contain chaos so that life might arrive at its plenitude, one must make offerings that secure life's continuity. An unjust death threatens life in its plenitude, risking that the completion of the circle of life will be short circuited. Offerings are thus essential to re-establishing equilibrium. An offering would avoid the premature death of people or of nature, allowing individuals to reach a ripe age with a guarantee of immortality. It is important to stress that the task of re-establishing equilibrium is not done only toward the ancestor but also toward the community charged with the task of preserving life. It is only possible to guarantee life if there is communal solidarity. Such solidarity extends to nature, which is a realm of relatedness; spirits live in trees. This is the way to guarantee immortality and communion with nature. Seen from this point of view, death is not an end but a new beginning.

There is thus a close, intimate relationship between life and death in the Afro-American cosmovision. It is a theological conception leaving

[26] Sousa, Vilson Caetano, *Orixás, santos e festas. Encontros e desencontros do sincretismo afro-católico na ciudade de Salvador*, Salvador: UNEB, 2003, 125.

no space for dualisms. In it, life and death interact. Protective ancestors are on guard and comfort mistreated humans. In the Bantu culture, the notion of family (*muntu*)[27] is not limited to the nucleus comprising fathers and sons; rather it extends to the deceased considered as living, active beings. Life and death are integrated in an indissoluble alliance. The brotherhood includes trees, plants, sets of tools and other things that serve humans. Particularly important in this constellation is the earth where one is born, one sows and one is buried. Life and death are of divine origin; it is for this reason that all types of violence against human life are condemned. Paradoxically, because of violence committed against a village or nation, death becomes a powerful mechanism for resisting and struggling against the conquest of the earth.

In this analysis, one cannot leave aside the important role of women and their care for preserving and resisting on behalf of the Afro-American cultural heritage. One of the mechanisms involved here is the transmission of the word, orality – as we have seen in Ivelin's account above. The word is power; it yields strength. It has a didactic role in preserving life and maintaining a harmonious community. This power of the word must be used to transmit life, but it is not the only means used to do so, since the word is not exhausted in what is said. It extends to silence, to the body, to movement, to the beating of drums, to a 'non-knowing'. These latter traditions have survived thanks to the power of the word and here women have played fundamental roles.

But is there something important to be retrieved in a description of the panorama of African and indigenous village life in this age of globalisation? How did one previously consider the socio-economic system that led to justifying the economic and legal domination of women, of the earth and of animals? In the patriarchal cosmovision, this system

[27] *Muntu* is the singular of *Bantu*; the concept implicit in this word transcends connotations of being human. It includes the living and the deceased as well as animals, vegetables, minerals and all things which serve them.

is ideologically justified so as to appear as something natural, inevitable. It is for this reason that the ecofeminist analysis is applied to cultural situations, studies, and social models in which women and nature are deemed as inferior.

Ecofeminism interrogates relations of power among men, women and nature and denounces hierarchies of male domination over women and nature. Reintegrating the vital elements of nature, life and death of the feminine and the masculine, of the good and evil, are all integral to human life.

4. Ecofeminist epistemological categories stemming from interculturality[28]

Here, I take as my point of departure the evidence that not all forms of knowing are valid for all women since not all of us are on an equal plane. The experiences of women are hierarchised and mediated in asymmetrical relations: those pertaining to black, white and indigenous women, to our sexual options, our social conditions, etc. With this in mind, I now propose some analytical categories that are far from claims of being normative for all women.

4.1. The body

The body is to be deemed as the special territory by means of which daily life is lived.[29] It is there that we experience our turning-points, our tensions, our joys. The quotidian (*lo cotidiano*) does not occur within a private space, in an intimacy removed from the public sphere; rather, it pervades all areas of human reality with its existential and social de-

[28] On an intercultural feminist theology see Mena López, Maricel/ Aquino, Maria Pilar, "Teología feminista intercultural. Religión, cultura, feminismo y poder", México D.F.: Dabar, 2008, 13-31.

[29] On the body from the anthropological perspective see López, María José, *Cuerpo, sexo y mujer en la perspectiva de las antropologías*, San Cristobal: Librería de Mujeres, 1999.

mands. For Lefebvre, whose work is an important contribution for understanding daily life in modern times, 'The quotidian is not a mere concept. We can take that concept as a driving or guiding thread for coming to know society by situating it in the global: in the State, in the technical side of life, in culture...'.[30] In the quotidian, social reality expresses itself in the experiences of subjects, in social relations, in the coming-to-be of existence, in the conflicts afflicting us in personal and collective ways.

It is our feminine body that helps us experience the sacred within us;[31] it is through it that we are invited to read the sacred text that is life itself. The liberation of our bodies by means of its movements enables us to encounter the roots of that discipline we need when working on the level of deep convictions and the archaic myths marking our own unique personality. In this way, our body challenges us to grow and mature as people until we reach a fuller consciousness. The epistemology developed from the experience of the quotidian or daily life permits us to detect diversity, plurality and inequality. I propose here a systemic analysis of racism, class-conflicts, religion, and sexual orientation. Turning to a body as feminine implies a recovery of the plenitude of life, of the transcendent, of the spiritual and sacred aspects of the female body. In this way, the body invites us to love from the heart so that we may be disabused of false dichotomies camouflaged between the rational and the feelings of a patriarchal logic for which the divine, spiritual and superior aspects of life are attributed to the masculine.

4.2. A rhetoric of transformation

For an epistemological discernment, one must think of the relations that hold between thinking and concepts. Not all thinking is a concept. Prevailing forms of discourse justify nationality, theory, concepts. It is precisely such mono-cultural and nationalist discourses that have dele-

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[30] Lefebvre, Henri, *A vida cotidiana da vida moderna*, São Paulo: Ática, 1991, 35.
[31] Mena, Maricel, "Unser Körper ist der Ort der Erlösung", *Ila 256*, 2002, 17-18.

gitimized other non-occidental forms of knowing. For this reason, the epistemology here presented breaks from the usual courtesies of Western academia. As opposed to a dialogue of 'discourses', I am proposing a dialogue of bodies, of emotions, tastes, odours and colours. By thus reclaiming our right to think, to think badly or in subversive, deconstructive ways, one is also reconstructing concepts having the imprint of feminist theories; it is a reinventing without a fear of erring or of beginning anew.

4.3. The emotions

In the Western philosophical tradition, the emotions are viewed as prejudicial to knowing. Since the days of Plato up to our own, reason and not the emotions has been deemed as the indispensable aptitude for any knowing. Reason is not opposed to emotions as such but it is associated with the cultural, the universal, the public sphere and the masculine, while the emotions are associated with irrationality, the physical, nature, the particular, the private sphere, the feminine. Keller[32] argues that in alleging problems with the objective sciences inasmuch as these are opposed to the less strictly scientific (meaning here the subjective) one is implicitly seen as invoking a sexual metaphor. To reclaim the emotions as an analytical category means therefore that we are unmasking expressions of misogyny[33] or of a misanthropy manifested in discourses tilted toward repudiating women or men, in sum, the other.

The epistemology of the West prescribes that true scientific knowing be capable of verification.[34] Since the emotions are variable, positivism

[32] Keller, Evelyn Fox, *Reflexiones sobre género y ciencia*, Valencia: Magnanim, 1991, 50.
[33] Bosch Fiol, Esperança/ Ferrer Pérez, Victòria A./ Gili Planas, Margarita, *Historia de la misoginia*, Barcelona: Anthropos, 1991, in their first chapter analyse how misogynist beliefs and practices appeared and were transmitted first in so-called explanations of strange or inexplicable deeds, and later as scientifically 'proved' deeds, based on a principle of authority.
[34] Amorós, Celia, *Hacia una crítica de la razón patriarcal*, Madrid: Anthropos, 1985, 21.

stipulates that a credible knowing be one established by neutralising the emotions. Despite this, I seek to establish a context that would enable us to grasp how the emotions can be useful, even necessary in reaching knowledge.[35]

5. Ancestry and resistance

Let us emphasise the ethical, political and sacred horizons of our traditional ancestral cultures. The voices as well as the historical silences of women in the Afro-American and indigenous traditions challenge us to construct liberative cognitive proposals. This partly involves the retrieval of the feminine and its presuppositions of an intercultural ethics. History is to be codified in myths, rites, ceremonies and the oral tradition. A wisdom that is in harmony with an integral and integrative body is to be reclaimed. But as to a body that is also sexual, it is important to reclaim it self-critically from the standpoint of an intercultural feminism in the face of present religious modes hierarchised along gender perspectives.[36]

6. A pilgrim geography

What I am arguing here is that the daily lives of women can serve as an important epistemological feature. Up to the present women have been absent but they cannot after all be deemed to be nonexistent; nor can their bodies be negated, silenced or muzzled. Their struggles, forms of resistance and means of survival lead us to speak of a macro-context, which is that of imperialism. The lives of women, forced into the webs

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[35] Jaggar, Alison/ Bordo, Susana (eds.), *Gênero, corpo, conhecimento*, Rio de Janeiro: Rosa dos Tempos, 1998, 160.

[36] Joan, Scott, "El género. Una categoría útil para un análisis histórico", in: Amelang, James/ Nash, Mary (eds.), *Historia y género. Las mujeres en la Europa moderna y contemporánea*, Edicions Alfons el Magnanim, 1990, 23-58.

of a capitalist globalisation, prompt us to examine the latter's space, its locations and its geography marked by forms of exclusion. In so doing, we note an increasing trend in the feminisation of poverty,[37] within which the faces of black and indigenous women predominate. One cannot but note the ambivalent and conflicting aspects of globalisation, caught as it is in the tentacles of 'development' and poverty.

Let us denounce the use and distribution of resources of privileged groups as we take into account the geographical areas now being shut out. Faced with such a scenario we must seek alternatives to imperialism. Globalisation not only imperils the lives and the cultures of the excluded but also tenders no space for them to live their culture. Hypertechnology is accessible only to a small minority in the world. The majority cannot enter here. The earth's geographical contexts link us to other geographical contexts, which have social and political values. The creative appropriation of these points of reference by Liberation theologians enabled us to link what appeared to be dissociated realities within new hermeneutical perspectives. Thus, categories such as ethics, corporality, ecology, the quotidian, interculturality, the interdisciplinary, and interreligious dialogue continue to be important for the Latin American feminist agenda.

7. An ecological conscience

The intercultural ecofeminist epistemology denounces the massacre of the earth, the destruction of nature; it upholds the rights of women throughout the continent. In this fashion, the ideological patriarchal system is to be unmasked in that it fosters an institutionalised economic domination over women, over the earth, over animals.

[37] The majority of the 1.5 billion people living on a dollar or less per day are women. The gap separating men from women living in poverty has substantially increased during the past decade. Nunes and Ferreira call this 'the feminisation of poverty' (op. cit., 17).

By vindicating the rights of the earth and by defending a territory, women intend to build a world in which it would be possible to live in harmony with all created beings. For this to become possible, it is necessary to denounce the entire model of social relations and cultural constructs that promote inequality between men and women and their interrelations with nature. Only through a committed conscience engaged with one's companions can the dream of a 'territory for all' be realised.

Conclusion

By integrating ecofeminism and an intercultural paradigm in realms of knowledge, I have attempted to search for an ethical praxis that can free women and preserve nature. This implies a search for a life with dignity. This is imperative and necessary in the face of the present social model. In this model, the multiple social relations of power foment a society based on divisive antagonisms. The past and present holocaust undergone by black and indigenous peoples on account of the colonialist mentality reinforces divisions while propping up a power that continues to generate racist, sexist and class ideologies. It is because of this that the ethic of care and compassion, here explored, invites us to 'evangelise' the political world and the worlds of entrepreneurs and of capitalists so that these may be infused with a necessary ethical feeling of solidarity with others. This is an important challenge in our brutal and violent era of neoliberal globalisation, which affects people perhaps even more strongly than did colonialism. It may at times allow self-governance to some populations, but on the other hand, the neoliberal penetration with all its aspects affects people in much more extensive ways, dispensing with, or overlooking certain forms of experience, people and social groups. Such rejections increase when in societies stigmas are added to other prejudicial stereotypes. Such is the situation facing women and

ethnic minorities.[38] Paradoxically, in the neoliberal model, ethnic, cultural and geographical frontiers keep on shrinking as the market expands.

As awareness strikes that we live in societies in which the feminisation of poverty is increasing and that black and indigenous women are the most affected, we must reflect on the ways women resist these trends, we must reclaim a better quality of life on the planet, we must contemplate other ways of knowing.

My option prioritises not only women caught up within a globalised patriarchy but also women whom globalisation has impoverished and subjected to violence while fragmenting them. Although my basic focus is on black women, I contemplate a larger movement of women and of men disposed to exploring and beginning to construct an alternative world. One must also ask how discussions and initiatives geared toward relations of equality may become a challenge taken on by the world of religions, not only from standpoints of universal discourse and a masculine normativity, nor that of discourses of certainties and unique truths, but rather from a discovering of other truths, of other sacred texts, of other ways that will lead us toward multiple horizons and possibilities.

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PREREQUISITES FOR AN EFFECTIVE DIALOGUE INVOLVING RELIGION AND CULTURE

Jesse N.K. Mugambi, Kenya

Introduction

According to Alan Geyer, there are six ways in which religion can be appropriated for the mobilisation of factions within a society: i) as a source of loyalty; ii) as a sanction for loyalty; iii) as a sanction for conflict; iv) as a source of conflict; v) as a sanctuary from conflict; vi) as a reconciler of conflict.[1] This article explores the intricacy of religion both as a catalyst and a reconciler of conflict, taking into account that at both individual and social levels religious identity is inextricably bound to other aspects of self-definition. Conflicts that seem overtly political often have religious undertones; conversely, those that seem overtly religious often have political undertones. We thus cannot restrict interrelig-

[1] Geyer, Alan F., *Piety and Politics*, Richmond, VA: John Knox Press, 1963. See also Mugambi, Jesse N.K., "African Church Leadership. Between Christ, Culture and Conflicts", in: Stückelberger, Christoph/ Mugambi, Jesse N.K., *Responsible Leadership. Global and Contextual Ethical Perspectives*, Geneva/ Nairobi: WCC/Acton, 2008, 195-203.

ious dialogue[2] to the religious domain, just as we cannot restrict political dialogue to the domain of politics. Human societies are complex phenomena, in which various cultural variables continually interact unpredictably.

1. Religion as a catalyst of conflict

Besides various pillars of culture, such as ethics, kinship, politics, economics, and aesthetics, religion stands as the pillar through which a community expresses its worldview.[3] It is concerned with the community's self-understanding in ultimate relation to all aspects of reality, a self-understanding inculcated in all members of the community through nurturing, socialisation, instruction, ritual and social norms.

In *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Ninian Smart provides a useful template for understanding the various dimensions of religion as a social phenomenon.[4] In this template, religion has six aspects: basic teachings; basic rituals; basic myths; basic norms; basic social expectations; basic monuments. Each of these six aspects is accorded a different level of emphasis in different religions, communities, and by different individuals – some religions will be more ritualistic than others, some more individualistic, and others more moralistic. For instance, some religions will attach great importance to their monuments (including their treasured sacred scriptures), while others will consider only few cultural monuments despite being deeply ritualistic. This great diversity of emphases accounts for many cross-cultural and cross-religious dialogue misunderstandings.

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[2] In the context of this article, we will refer to 'dialogue' as a conversation between two or more parties exchanging opinions, viewpoints, experiences and suggestions about a theme of mutual interest.

[3] For further discussion on this section see Mugambi, Jesse N.K., *Religion and Social Construction of Reality*, Inaugural Lecture, Nairobi University Press, 1996.

[4] Smart, Ninian, *The Religious Experience of Mankind*, Glasgow: Collins, 1969.

If we take a closer look at every war in human history, there is a great probability indeed that we find a religious dimension to it, either as a trigger, or as catalyst when religious sentiments are used to mobilise public support for one or the other side of the conflict. Today, media reports all over the world are replete with flares of social unrest arising from religious misunderstandings within and between religions. Religious undertones and overtones, it seems, influence all social conflicts at varying degrees of intensity: a conflict may escalate or diminish depending on how religious sentiments are handled. In many instances, religion as a pillar of culture has been, and still is, used to sanctify conflict, in spite of the fact that the core teachings of every religion emphasise the ideal of peaceful coexistence. Each side in the conflict will invoke its religion to sanctify its perspective and to demonise the perspective of the opponent, encouraged that they are to believe that God endorses their argument and blesses their interests. It is as tempting for a privileged party to believe that God justifies repression as it is for an aggrieved party to believe that God justifies resistance.

2. Interreligious dialogue as a tool of conflict resolution

If religion assumes an obvious role in fuelling conflicts, it can also serve as a support in conflict resolution. It is our view that the interest in dialogue within national and international circles arises precisely from its ability to abate conflict and help establish and promote peaceful coexistence.

Religious aspects have already been present in, or in the background of, different peace tools in modern history, even if the creators of such tools have not often acknowledged this fact. For example, religion underlies the norms acclaimed as the basis for peaceful coexistence among nations and cultures, yet the United Nations Organisation does not explicitly acknowledge itself as a religious entity. In turn, the Universal

Declaration on Human Rights is drawn from the core teachings of various religions including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism and Confucianism, yet it does not explicitly acknowledge indebtedness to religious insights.

Most conflicts in modern history have been culturally multi-faceted, with political, economic and religious dimensions. From the perspective of political science, imperialism is understood as the expansion of political domination by powerful nations over weaker ones. In reality, however, the influence of imperial powers over their colonies has extended far beyond the establishment of colonial rule to include economic exploitation, cultural brainwashing and religious indoctrination. Correspondingly, all struggles against imperialism have also been multi-faceted, with religion at their core. It is interesting to follow the apologetic rhetoric between the protagonists of imperialism, on the one hand, and the antagonists, on the other, that has developed across continents and regions. In Africa, for example, imperial powers have waged war against their colonial subjects as law breakers, while the latter have considered their struggles as divine mandates to free themselves from alien forces of dehumanisation. Even when the antagonists were Christians, they would challenge the theological justifications of imperialism and approach the Christian scriptures from hermeneutic perspectives at variance with those of the missionary defenders of the imperial metropolis. The pan-African struggle against apartheid is perhaps the most dramatic illustration of this point. The apologists of both the defenders and the opponents of apartheid derived their arguments from the Christian scriptures, with diametrically divergent conclusions. Civil conflicts also have both political and religious dimensions, irrespective of any nation and any period in history.

With these general observations, any arbitrary list of conflicts would suffice: 1) Africa: anti-colonial struggles; anti-racism struggles; civil wars; and so on. The resolution of all these conflicts had of necessity to

involve religious leaders as mediators without whom durable settlement would have been impossible. 2) Asia: in *The Clash of Civilizations* Samuel Huntington has shown that the conflicts that often appear as clashes over political influence and economic resources are at the same time cultural, with deep roots in the religious traditions of the conflicting parties. 3) Europe: the disintegration of the Soviet Union has brought to the surface the deep religious identities that had been suppressed during the era of socialist secularism. The religious legacies of Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Western Protestantism and European Islam have proved indispensable in the negotiations for peaceful coexistence in various European countries. 4) North America: despite the strong emphasis on secular governance, religion remains a significant frame of reference for the pluralistic societies of Canada and the USA. 5) Central and South America: this region is often called Latin America, because of the dominance of the legacy of Roman Catholicism. Yet the struggle continues with varying intensity among the 'first nations' and Africans for inclusion in governance and economic life in the Latin American nations. 6) Pacific: in this vast area religion is intertwined with the other aspects of culture, to the extent that every conflict has religious overtones and undertones.

These observations indicate that peaceful coexistence is impossible to achieve without taking serious account of the religious concerns of citizens, even when secular principles of governance are taken as normative.

3. The mutual influence of politics and religion

We would provide an incomplete view of reality here if we did not explore to some extent the mutual influences of politics and religion and how this influences impact interreligious dialogue.

At the level of politics, religion has probably the greatest potential in citizen mobilisation, even in those societies where religion has only historical or nominal significance.[5] Religious news channels in print and electronic media directly and indirectly influence their audiences towards particular political orientations, while secular media organs seize any opportunity at their disposal to drag religious leaders into political lobbying. Since the core social functions of religion include inculcation and entrenchment of convictions, aggressive politicians often use it indeed to promote their own partisan interest. To boost their chances, many debutant and incumbent politicians will, for instance, link up with religious leaders for access to the believers they serve.[6] It requires experience and expertise for a religious leader to guide the believers without falling into the muddy waters of politics and to avoid being co-opted by politicians who offer their patronage (financial or otherwise) in return for the use of religious pedagogy to promote partisan viewpoints and ideologies.

Here are some illustrations of the intertwining of politics and religion in modern and contemporary times:

a) Slavery and the slave trade in England: Until William Wilberforce and his fellow English lobbyists succeeded in discrediting the

[5] Some of the early proponents of the secularisation theory, such as Harvey Cox, have revised their view. Contrast *The Secular City* (London: SCM Press, 1965) with his extended interview by Bob Abernethy on 15 September 2009 in Cambridge, MA: www.pbs.org/wnet/religionandethics/episodes/september-25-2009/harvey-cox-extended-interview/4342, accessed 28 October 2010. Opponents of the secularisation theory have always maintained that religion is part of human culture, manifested differently from culture to culture and from time to time. See for example, Greeley, Andrew, *Unsecular Man*, New York: Doubleday, 1967. The North Atlantic was at one time called 'Christendom'. Today the adjective 'post-Christian' is often used, referring to the retreat of 'institutional Christianity' from the public domain to 'private spirituality' in most European and North Atlantic nations. See Jenkins, Philip, *The Next Christendom. The Coming of Global Christianity*, Oxford University Press, 2002.

[6] It is an important ethical question as to what extent religious leaders should oblige and provide religious audience and exposure for campaigning politicians.

slave trade in and out of Parliament, the official church leadership had endorsed slavery and the slave trade as divinely ordained.[7] One of the most popular hymns in the Church of England was written in 1848 by Cecil Frances Alexander, discouraging believers from any attempts to change their social status because it was divinely ordained.[8] The hymn was written in the same year that Karl Marx published the *Communist Manifesto*, urging the working classes of the world to unite and campaign against exploitation.[9] A revised edition of the hymn has since then omitted the following verse:

The rich man in his castle,
The poor man at his gate,
God made them high and lowly,
And ordered their estate.
All things bright and beautiful,
All creatures great and small,
All things wise and wonderful,
The Lord God made them all.

b) Apartheid in South Africa: In South Africa apartheid was hailed as a 'Christian' ideology until the General Council of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) declared it a heresy in August 1982. After this declaration the Dutch Reformed Church withdrew its membership from WARC and the WCC,[10] but these measures eventually contributed towards the establishment of the new Republic of South Africa in 1994.

c) Civil Rights movement in North America: Racial discrimination and segregation has remained one of the most divisive social issue in

[7] Lean, Garth, *God's Politician. Wilberforce and his Struggl*e, London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1981; Williams, Eric, *Capitalism and Slavery*, London: Andre Deutsch, 1964.
[8] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cecil_Frances_Alexander
[9] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Communist_Manifesto
[10] See Richardson, Neville, "Apartheid, Heresy and the Church in South Africa", *Journal of Religious Ethics 14 (1)*, Spring 1986, 1-21.

North America, even as both sides of the divide use the Bible to defend their ideology.[11]

d) Religion and architecture in Switzerland: In recent years, Muslim immigration has altered the demography of Switzerland significantly, especially in urban settings, where the need arose for new minarets. Nevertheless, in November 2009 a majority of Swiss voters rejected the construction of new minarets. Some observers interpreted the referendum's outcome as a manifestation of religious intolerance, although other considerations certainly accounted for it, such as urban planning, aesthetics, ecology, demographics and traffic flow.[12] Here politics and religion were clearly intertwined:[13] whatever religious leaders preached affected politics, and whatever politicians proclaimed affected religion.

e) Religion and literature in Britain: After publication in 1988 of the *Satanic Verses*, the Salman Rushdie crisis in the United Kingdom had been headline news for many months.[14] Salman Rushdie's creative writing was so controversial that it caused great annoyance in some sectors of Islam, as was crystallised in the various death threats and the *fatwa* issued against him.[15] Without limits democracy deteriorates into anarchy. But without freedom of expression any society will deteriorate into dictatorship. Every set of 'rights' has a corresponding set of duties, and every set of freedoms has a corresponding set of responsibilities. The challenge is how to set the limits for these rights, duties, freedoms and responsibilities. Who has the power and authority to set these limits?

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[11] Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism*, New York, Doubleday, 1964; James Cone, Martin, *Malcolm and America. A Dream or a Nightmare*?, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1993.
[12] See for example, www.getreligion.org/?p=22286
[13] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minaret_controversy_in_Switzerland
[14] www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/nov/03/afghanistan.terrorism
[15] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Salman_Rushdie

f) Religion and art in Denmark: Since the 2005 cartoon crisis in Denmark, sacrilege in art has become a controversial theme.[16] Freedom of expression in aesthetics may be an integral part of the dispensation promised by 'democracy'; the challenge is how to express one's aesthetic freedom without encroaching on the religious freedom of others within the same political space.

4. Interreligious dialogue as political dialogue

With politics and religion closely linked together, it comes as no surprise that the former strongly impacts interreligious dialogue. If we begin from the premise that interreligious dialogue has implications far beyond personal interaction towards peaceful coexistence in pluralistic societies, it follows that interreligious dialogue's horizon is more ideological than theological, even when theological arguments and justifications are used. The practical outcome of interreligious dialogue is in the political rather than in the religious domain. The main outcome of interreligious dialogue, if successful, is to reduce conflict and enhance harmony between communities with particular reference to religious identities. For example, the World Conference of Religions for Peace (now *Religions for Peace*) was established to promote interreligious dialogue, but with a focus on peaceful coexistence between peoples, nations, religions and cultures.[17] Doctrinal, scriptural and pedagogical approaches are used as means of conflict reduction at the social level, rather than doctrinal agreement at the institutional consensus. It is for this reason that leaders involved in interreligious dialogue are often not the ritual heads

[16] The Sunni Path issued a Declaration on the Cartoon Crisis, condemning the sacrilegious treatment of Islam in Danish art. See http://qa.sunnipath.com/issue_view.asp?id=9528, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jyllands-Posten_Muhammad_cartoons_controversy

[17] www.wcrp.org

of religions but the professional experts identified by the sponsors of the dialogues.

As a clear reflection of this, and in view of the apparent upsurge of cross-cultural tensions concomitant with the pressures of globalisation, the third millennium has begun with increased efforts to promote inter-religious dialogue. Symptomatic of this *Zeitgeist*, Samuel Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations* contends that the twenty-first century will be a period in which civilisations compete for hegemony in the world, with the Euro-American 'Christian' civilisation competing with the Islamic, Vedic and Confucian civilisations.[18]

We feel that this hypothesis is too simplistic to be applicable in reality. For example, while Asian and African societies are deeply religious, institutional religiosity can no longer be regarded as an attribute of Western societies. The time when European and North American societies used the adjective 'Christian' to describe themselves is long past; thus a presumed conflict of civilisation cannot be understood in terms of religious difference. Identification with religious institutions such as 'denominations' and 'churches' has indeed become 'old-fashioned' in the West, although some individuals might consider themselves indifferent but not antagonistic to religious institutions.[19] Today the adjective 'post-Christian' is more common and more readily acknowledged. This 'post-Christian' outlook has been of such great concern to the Vatican that in 2003 the Pope reminded European leaders not to forget Europe's indebtedness to the legacy of Christianity.[20]

Among Christian institutions initiating interreligious dialogues, we count the World Council of Churches (based in Geneva), which, for

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[18] Huntington, Samuel, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 1998.

[19] This individualistic 'spirituality' grew with existentialism, which can be traced to the French Enlightenment and also to such thinkers as Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. See Brown, Colin, *Philosophy and the Christian Faith*, Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1978.

[20] www.new-diaspora.com/Religion/Pope%20JPII/vat&eu03.htm

many years, has sustained a bureau for interfaith dialogue, with dozens of consultations and a handful of publications.[21] The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (based in the Vatican) was established after the Second Vatican Council with three objectives: i) to promote mutual understanding, respect and collaboration between Catholics and the followers of others religious traditions; ii) to encourage the study of religions; iii) to promote the formation of people dedicated to dialogue.[22] These two global institutions have facilitated regional and national initiatives for interreligious dialogue. Dialogue may not be the most appropriate term to describe these programmes, since they are the creation of the World Council of Churches and the Vatican. Various Christian churches have similar bureaus through which they invite leaders of other religions to participate in their functions, always as guests more than as partners.[23] The World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP) is institutionally 'neutral', and for that same reason its resolutions are not binding on any of the religions from which the delegates come. As a forum for discussion it is certainly useful, but as a source of binding institutional agreements it is peripheral.

There are also some interreligious initiatives by other religious movements, such as the Nichiren Buddhist movement Soka Gakkai International (based in Tokyo), which, 'based on the Buddhist spirit of tolerance, respect for other religions, engage[s] in dialogue and work[s] together with them toward the resolution of fundamental issues concerning humanity.'[24] There also are many individual contacts and interactions between people of different religions, but hardly ever do such contacts

[21] www.oikoumene.org
[22] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pontifical_Council_for_Interreligious_Dialogue
[23] www.usccb.org/seia; http://nifcon.anglicancommunion.org/about/index.cfm;**www.antiochian.org/interfaith**; www.urc.org.uk/what_we_do/interfaith_relations/interfaith_relations
[24] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sōka_Gakkai

become institutionalised, and thus it is difficult to measure their impact.[25]

When we refer here to interreligious dialogue as political dialogue, we also think of how interreligious dialogue is instrumentalised to serve in various instances of national or international policies of domination, as in the cases of missionaries engaging in dialogue, of externally imposed dialogue, and dialogue between the global North and South.

4.1. The special case of 'missionary dialogue'

Probably as a reaction to the apparent decline of Christianity in the West, a minority of missionary-oriented Christians remain very aggressive to 'evangelise' the rest of the world. By 'evangelise', missionaries mean converting the rest of the world to their own ways of life, thought and morals using the latest communication and information technology with the Bible as a catchword. Africa is not spared – the content of serial programmes in Kenyan Christian television and radio channels, magazines, and websites is self-explanatory.[26]

There is an obvious conflict between the objectives of missionary outreach and interreligious dialogue. Missionary outreach is promoted on the basis of the assumption that one's religion is superior to that of the targeted potential converts, while the promotion of interreligious dialogue presupposes that the parties to dialogue have reciprocal perspectives to be shared. If, say, conversion is part of the agenda of dialogue, then there should be an understanding that either party is allowed to

[25] In tropical Africa many families are multi-religious. It is not unusual to have within the same family a Muslim, a Roman Catholic, a Methodist, an Anglican, a Pentecostal, a secularist. At the social level within the family they will interact and participate in the rites of passage, but at the institutional level they will worship in their respective religions.

[26] The following TV channels are available on TV in Kenyan living rooms, with most programmes originating from Europe and North America. No programmes originate from Kenya for broadcast abroad as reciprocation: www.tbn.org; www.christiantv.org.uk; www.cbn.com; www.skyangel.com/home/default.aspx#/aid; http://shalomtv.org/index.htm; **www.ctnon**line.com; www.gbntv.org; www.christiantvguide.co.uk/html/christian_tv_listings.html.

convert the other – yet this understanding is obviously seldom. As a result, any initiative for interreligious dialogue that is surreptitiously aimed at conversion will fail, because the other party will either reciprocate or turn down the invitation.

Departments for interfaith relations at the World Council of Churches and at the Vatican have remained 'one-way' initiatives. The oldest such initiative in Africa is the Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa (PROCMURA), which also remains one-sided. Although there must be an initiator of a dialogue, those invited to participate must own the agenda and the process from the beginning, including participation in leadership and sponsorship. In practice, however, the politics of ownership and patronage prevent such mutuality and reciprocity.

4.2. Dialogue as externally imposed interaction

This leads us to a crucial question in any instance of interreligious dialogue, that is, 'Who initiates the dialogue?' We contend here that an externally initiated dialogue serves more the interests of the peripheral parties (especially the initiators of that dialogue) than those of the antagonists.[27]

[27] For example, when violence unexpectedly erupted in some parts of Kenya in January 2008, some politicians demanded international mediation to resolve the political differences between themselves and their opponents. Ambassador Kofi Annan became the chief mediator. A programme of action was formulated, to be monitored and guaranteed by external authorities. Through this procedure the politicians compromised national sovereignty, owing to their inability to negotiate their vested interests among themselves. The 2010 referendum became an integral part of the agenda, and Kenyans had of necessity to abide by that process. The guarantors seem to be more interested in concluding the agenda than the local politicians involved. They were the first to issue statements concerning the referendum. The Kenyan electorate seems to be of secondary importance in the mediation game. See www.kbc.co.ke/story.asp?ID=65587; www.newstimeafrica.com/archives/13450; http://nairobi.usem**b**assy.gov/press-releases/2010-press-releases/pr_20100712.html. Similarly, in Iraq and Afghanistan the external parties became the main actors, setting the agenda for the local elite. www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/04/13/iran-demands-un-probe-

Externally imposed dialogue yields pretentious outcomes unless and until the antagonists, on their own accord, are ready and willing to openly declare their prerequisite demands as a basis for permanent settlement. Some of such demands, if declared, may not be practicable, but the antagonists concerned must voluntarily waive them in return for durable peace. The external mediators and arbitrators will have to demonstrate their patience in securing the concessions from both sides of the conflict as part of the negotiation. Some negotiations drag on for decades owing to the insistence by both antagonists on the minimum demands that either side finds it impossible to concede. Effective dialogue presupposes an honourable conclusion of all outstanding disputes. At the end of the negotiations the mediators and arbitrators become witnesses, accompanied by observers mutually respected by the antagonists. It is a great achievement whenever former antagonists become respectable partners.

4.3. Power relations between North and South

The twentieth century has seen an important increase in the interaction among and between peoples, nations, cultures and religions. This interaction was promoted by imperialism, missionary outreach, commercial enterprise and international institutions. Technological inventions launched new ways and means of transportation and communication. The most glaring consequence of this interaction was the encroachment by powerful nations and cultures on the territorial, cultural and religious integrity of less powerful peoples, nations, religions and cultures. Movements of resistance erupted in every continent against the world's empires, leading to decolonisation particularly in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP). European and North American Christian missionary agencies adjusted to this decolonisation, conveniently handing over their establishments to local leadership. At the cultural

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29.html.

level, however, North Atlantic tutelage persisted through control of media channels and the training of local academics and professionals. The third millennium has begun with this tutelage intact, as demonstrated in the asymmetric bilateral and multilateral relations between the former imperial powers and their former colonies.

During the 1970s African nations campaigned for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) based on equity and fair trade, but historical inequity has remained entrenched. Concurrently, some African churches within the ecumenical movement campaigned for a moratorium on missionary funds and personnel from Europe and North America as a strategy to promote selfhood and self-esteem. This campaign became one of the most contentious issues in the World Council of Churches. This contextual setting has made problematic the discourse on intercultural and interreligious dialogue. Without a common agenda it is difficult to determine the content of dialogue, its rules of engagement and its projected outcomes.

Ideally, dialogue should be jointly sponsored. In practice, however, most dialogue engagements are initiated and funded by agencies in Europe and North America, which can hardly be considered neutral. Patronage compromises the entire process from beginning to end: 'Whoever pays the piper calls the tune!' The parties invited from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) normally agree to participate more out of courtesy than principle. The invitations themselves lack integrity, in the sense that those invited are the ones expected to produce the anticipated outcomes.

5. Ingredients for an optimal dialogue

Taking stock of all of the above, we can now draw principles for an effective interreligious dialogue

To start with, interreligious dialogue is only possible if the parties in conflict are willing to engage in discussion about issues where a difference of perception or interpretation exists. Then, effective dialogue cannot be achieved until the various levels of the conflict become explicit; dialogue should first clarify the issues and interests at stake.

Whenever conflict explodes into open confrontation the impact extends far beyond the immediate members involved. The outsiders affected by the conflict will put pressure on the antagonists to resolve their differences in the interest of the whole society. External mediators and arbitrators are then identified with a clear mandate to reduce tension and facilitate negotiation. To be acceptable by both sides neutrality must be guaranteed. Mediated dialogue is not ideal, because it is organised under tension. When parties enjoying cordial relationship engage in dialogue, they mediate among themselves and set the timetable for their sessions. In contrast, dialogue that is externally mediated will have externally defined terms of reference and may not yield mutually reinforcing outcomes.

Parties in conflict will not commit themselves to dialogue until they are mutually assured of reciprocal respect and confidence, which can only be won through mutual trust. As long as there is suspicion between the parties there will be no mutual trust, and without mutual trust there will be no mutual confidence. Building confidence is a difficult undertaking, not the least when relationships between conflicting parties are based on past experience rather than on expectations. Mediation can again facilitate the building of confidence, provided the parties in conflict mutually accept the mediator as a neutral arbitrator. In reality, neutral mediators are difficult to find, their fees are costly, and conflicting parties may not be capable or willing to pay if their impartiality is not guaranteed. Too often, one or both parties disqualify mediators when confidence is eroded or compromised on the basis of real or imaginary

evidence that other parties have trivialised the concerns of its members.[28]

Finally, dialogue will make sense to an individual only when the core elements of his or her identity are clear and certain; participation will be hesitant if a participant's identity is tainted by ambiguity and vagueness. When the goal of dialogue is to clarify questions pertaining to identity, participants tend to focus on matters of individual interest even though individual identity is always bound to group identity.[29] The table below presents types of triggers of social conflict, depending on the way they are answered by various parties in a society.

Triggers of social conflict	
Individual level	*State/ Other communities*
Who do I believe am?	Who do others say I am?
What am I?	What do others say I should be?
What do I have (What am I worth?)	What do others say I deserve?

[28] This provides an explanation for the humiliation of captives in war. Recent discourse on the conduct of war has tended to obscure the fact that war is the result of the breakdown of diplomacy. War is not merely a parade of weaponry and combatants; it is also a psychological duel between two parties committed to mutual humiliation and mutual destruction. See Lederach, Paul, *Preparing for Peace. Conflict Transformation across Cultures*, Syracuse University Press, 1995; *Building Peace. Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, US Institute of Peace, 1997; *The Moral Imagination. The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Oxford University Press, 2005.

[29] The debate on the draft of a new constitution in Kenya in 2010 was polarised over one main issue: inclusion or exclusion of Islamic courts and abortion in the Bill of Rights. Proponents of inclusion defended their interests, while the opponents likewise defended their own. The common denominator was the desire for a new constitution for all the citizens of Kenya, but factional interests became dramatically divisive. Although this was a political undertaking, religion became deeply involved on both sides of this debate. The referendum was conducted in August 2010. See www.kbc.co.ke/story.asp?ID=65155**;** www.pambazuka.org/en/category/features/65246/print**;** www.nation.co.ke/Referendum/-/926046/962648/-/8hmge5z/-/index.html. Likewise, defenders and opponents of Apartheid in South Africa used divergent interpretations of Christian teachings until international mediation facilitated a compromise. See Allen, John, *The Authorized Biography of Desmond Tutu*, London: Random House, 2006.

What do I believe	What do others say I should believe?
What do I value most?	What do others think I should value most?
What are my expectations?	What do others define as my expectations?
What are my aspirations?	What do others define as my aspirations?
What are my capabilities?	How are my capabilities valued by others?
What do I know?	How is my knowledge valued by others
Who are my 'associates'?	Who do others recognise as my 'associates'?
Who are the members of my 'community'?	Who do others regard my 'community'?
Which is my 'nation'?	Which do others regard as 'my nation'?

To conclude, it is worthwhile to consider two basic ingredients necessary to optimal dialogue, namely, common language and reciprocity. Without these ingredients, an exchange of words, documents and gestures can hardly be called 'dialogue', no matter how much time, effort and money have been invested in the preparations.

There must be indeed meaningful linguistic interaction between the parties, either directly or through interpretation. When conversation is conducted through interpretation, the parties involved must have confidence in the competence of their interpreters. Inaccurate interpretation will inevitably lead to miscommunication between the discussants. It makes a great deal of difference whether dialogue is conducted directly or through interpreters. As a result of imperial history, the dominant languages in international dialogue are English, French, Spanish, German and Portuguese. None of these languages is the medium of nurture for the majority of people in any African community. These languages are used in school and in administration, but they are peripheral in the development of cultural and religious consciousness among most Africans.

It is interesting to note that even at the religious level the training of priests and lay leaders is conducted in foreign languages, while African languages continue to be used for liturgy and ritual in worship, rites of passage, politics and commerce. The small African elite may use these foreign languages among its peers, but outside the elite the African languages remain the dominant medium of communication. This awkward situation makes intercultural and interreligious dialogue asymmetrical in international circles. A conversation may be conducted for a wide variety of objectives, usually between relatives and friends. The relationship between friends is sometimes strong and sometimes under strain. Friendship may be deep or superficial, depending on the circumstances of its establishment. This variation in the depth of relationship affects the depth of conversation. Casual friendship can yield only casual conversation and correspondingly, casual dialogue.

As far as reciprocity is concerned, mutual respect and mutual appreciation are preconditions for effective dialogue. Reciprocity is indispensable in conversation. A verbal exchange between a slave and his master can hardly be described as a conversation. The master issues orders, and the slave is expected to obey. A conversation between two parties of different status can hardly yield effective dialogue, owing to the differentiated attitudes and anticipated outcomes. Normally, the party of higher social status expects no challenge from his counterpart of lower status. At the same time, the party of lower status is cautious not to offend his counterpart of higher status, for fear of consequences if differences should result from such a conversation.

In view of these qualifications, it is clear that not all conversations can be described as ‘dialogue’. Casual greetings and chats about the weather do not fit the definition of dialogue. A conversation will qualify as a dialogue only if there is a theme under discussion, with expectation of a possible conclusion over the issues about which opinions are exchanged. The parties in a dialogue-conversation may agree to disagree

or to postpone the discussion to some other time and place. Sometimes a conversation can end abruptly, when one party becomes disrespectful or refuses to build on the views put forward by the counterpart.

Conclusion

The objective in this paper was to explore the ingredients of effective interreligious dialogue as a prerequisite for peaceful coexistence. The discussion has been neither exhaustive nor conclusive; the arguments and illustrations have led to the conclusion that religion, however defined, underlies the self-definition of communities in every nation, and tends to resurface whenever conflicts arise between communities even when the triggering factors have no direct bearing on religious institutions and teachings. This prevalence of religion can be explained from a phenomenological perspective, since religion underlies cultural identity, even when and where the majority of citizens do not overtly assert their religious identity through ritual participation. Ninian Smart's *Dimensions of the Sacred* provides a useful template for this phenomenological explanation. My own work *Religion and Social Construction of Reality* provides another helpful overview.

In the last analysis, interreligious dialogue appears as an indispensable device in the quest for peaceful coexistence, provided that such dialogue covers the concerns of society as a whole in the quest for long-term modes and models in the promotion of the common good.

12

HISTORICAL INTERPRETATION AND ETHICS. NOTES ON THE ROLE OF ALTERITY[1]

Francisco Ortega, Colombia

I have to make do with what is resurrected only today – isolated pieces of interior that have broken away and yet contain the whole within them, while the whole, standing there before me, has lost its details without trace.
Walter Benjamin[2]

Introduction: the ethical impulse of critique

As indicated by the title, this essay is a preliminary exercise, or rather, an admittedly partial and incomplete set of notes. It is, however, the product of my ongoing concern for the role of alterity in its various manifestations – difference, diversity, the distinct, heterogeneity, or, as in this case, the subaltern – in the constitution of our present. Despite the obvious limitations of an unfinished work, I believe that the considera-

[1] The present article is a revised version of the original published as "Historia y éticas. Apuntes para una hermenéutica de la alteridad", in: *Historia Crítica 27*, 2005.
[2] Benjamin, Walter, "A Berlin Chronicle", in: Demetz, Peter (ed.), *Reflections. Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, trans. E. Jephcott, New York: Harcourt Brace, 1986, 50.

tions set forth here may be relevant for debates pertinent to the reconstitution of the discipline of history and other social sciences.[3] Hence, I offer my notes with the aim of opening up room for dialogue and with the intention that what they propose (and do not propose) may find resonance in diverse readers.

The starting point of the essay is the assumption that historiography (like all other interpretative sciences, from literary criticism to anthropology and sociology) derives from a social operation and therefore responds to determinations of place and procedure. Hence, it is impossible to separate the results of this intellectual operation – what we commonly call historical knowledge – from the social dimension that inevitably makes it possible. The old adage that all knowledge is political is as true in terms of its form – that is, the way it is produced and shared – as of its content.[4] Through this preliminary consideration I wish to draw attention to the often forgotten connections existing between knowledge and

[3] The problem of alterity has become one of the most important thrusts in reflection on history in recent years. Some of the most influential works include: De Certeau, Michel, *L'Absent de l'histoire*, Paris: Mame, 1973; Levinas, Emmanuel, *Le temps et l'autre*, Montpellier: Fata Morgana, 1979; Todorov, Tzvetan, *La conquête de l'Amérique*, Paris: Seuil, 1982; Taylor, Mark C., *Alterity*, University of Chicago Press, 1987; Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton University Press, 2000. A large selection of topics and approaches can be found in Marchitello, Howard (ed.), *What Happens to History. The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought*, New York: Routledge, 2001.

[4] De Certeau, Michel, *Culture in the Plural*, ed. Luce Giard, transl. Tom Conley, Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1998. De Certeau says that as an operation interpretation must be understood 'as the relation between a *place* (a recruitment, a medium, a profession, etc.), various procedures of an analysis (a discipline), and the construction of a *text* (a literature).' The determinants of the operation do not exhaust the integrity of the knowledge, but they mark it decisively and make the objectivity of history a term agreed upon among those who practice the discipline. See De Certeau, Michel, *L'écriture de l'histoire*, Paris: Gallimard, 1975. For discussion see Ortega Martinez, Francisco A., "Aventuras de una heterología fantasmal", in: Ortega Martinez, Francisco A. (ed.), *La irrupción de lo impensado. Cátedra de estudios culturales Michel de Certeau 2003, Cuadernos Pensar en Público 0*, Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2004.

power. In the following pages I shall explore – albeit schematically – the ethical dimension underlying such connections, and I shall insist on the urgent need to continue efforts aimed at thinking through a situational, critical, and consciously participatory history.

The insistence on linking knowledge and power and the consequent attempt to reground the work of interpretation in a poetics of place constitute responses to the disciplinary crisis and the failure of metanarratives. Furthermore, these responses have informed some of the most innovative and controversial debates in the human and social sciences during the past thirty years.[5] In this regard, it should be noted that these responses are not new or alien to the Latin American critical tradition. In fact, we could say that intellectual pursuits in the region have persistently called attention to the epistemological foundations that govern them and the specificity of the location from which they spring. Indeed, a vast – we could even say dominant – sector of criticism in our continent structures its discourse in a way that seeks to have the interpretative task confront the need to respond to the problem of Latin American specificity. This problem is posed as the question of whether historic experience is immediately accessible to European theoretical elaborations, or whether, on the contrary, there is a risk that such practices conceal, displace, or subordinate the specificity of this experience.[6]

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[5] For a report on the crisis of knowledge, see Lyotard, Jean-François, *The Postmodern Condition. A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. More recently, see Wallerstein, Immanuel, *The End of the World as We Know It. Social Science for the Twenty-First Century*, Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1999, and *The Uncertainties of Knowledge*, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2004.

[6] Since the colonial period, intellectual activity – and particularly historiography – has had a significant meta-theoretical character necessarily connected to its condition as reflection *from* the periphery of the centres of knowledge. Even in the 16th century there was debate on the type of language best suited to describing the reality of the Americas, while in the 18th century the native-born intellectual elite took up scientific languages to re-write local histories. For two interesting studies of these debates, see Cañizares-Esguerra, Jorge, *How to Write the*

Although they are often confused, a distinction must be made between two proposals emerging from this way of structuring critical discourse: one related to identity, and the other to ethics.[7] The former confronts the universalising pretensions of Western knowledge with American singularity. According to this tradition, the singularity of the Americas has been deformed throughout history, and it is the duty of *genuine* intellectual practice to unmask the distortions produced by Eurocentric knowledge. Hence, the aspect relating to identity finds one of its most spectacular responses in the attempt to establish properly Latin American practices of knowledge, whether artistic (for example, a Latin American aesthetic such as 'magic realism'), or in philosophy and the social sciences (for example, the Latin American philosophy of Leopoldo Zea, the anthropology of the deep Americas, *América profunda*, or even Alejandro Moreno's sociology of the people).[8]

History of the New World. Histories, Epistemologies, and Identities in the Eighteenth-Century Atlantic World, Stanford University Press, 2001, and Castro Gómez, Santiago, *La hybris del punto cero*, Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2005. Roberto Salazar Ramos, in his *Posmodernidad y Verdad. Algunos metarelatos en la constitución del saber* (Bogotá: USTA, 1994), and Santiago Castro Gomez, in *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana* (Barcelona: Puvill Libros SA, 1996), have developed a shrewd genealogy of cultural reflection within more recent theoretical debates.

[7] Augusto Salazar Bondy clearly stated the differentiation with the publication of *¿Esiste una filosofía de nuestra América?* Mexico: Siglo XXI, 1968, in the course of an argument with the Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea. In 1973, Salazar Bondy proposed as an alternative an emancipatory programme for the critical task in the Americas. See "Filosofía de la dominación y filosofía de la liberación", in: *Stromata 29*, 1973, 390ff.

[8] Alejandro Moreno writes that the new sociology must be erected as a 'non-speculative knowledge, without thereby lacking concepts; non-reflective, but not exempt of reflection; practical-experiential, lived – but life-based – emanating from the everyday reality of a community or people; in which life and thought shape and become part of each other; endowed with some contents and a shape that structure them into an *identity of its own.*' See *El aro y la trama. Episteme, modernidad y pueblo*, Colección Convivium, Caracas: Centro de Investigaciones Populares, 1995 (2nd ed.), 468 (emphasis mine). See also Zea, Leopoldo, *La filosofía Americana como filosofía sin más*, Mexico, D.F.: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, 1985 (10th ed.), and Kusch, Roberto, *América profunda*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Bonum, 1975 (2nd ed.). Roberto Salazar Ramos presents a critique of

On the other hand, the properly ethical tradition replaces the vocabulary of identity (*Latin American* philosophy) with one of political action (philosophy of *liberation*; pedagogy of the *oppressed*). The intellectual practice comes out of the feeling of indignation that springs from becoming aware of social, institutional, and cultural violence that is generated with the structural perversion proper to colonialism, underdevelopment and the consequential and concomitant state of cultural dependence.[9] Argentine philosopher Arturo Roig sets forth this double pressure on thinking when he says that 'social structures considered in themselves are unjust insofar as they are organised on the dominator-dominated relationship, a reality that is only aggravated by our dependent cultural state'.[10] Faced with this double pressure, Orlando Fals Borda proposes a social science of liberation that allows

> …the use of the scientific method to describe, analyse, and apply knowledge to transform society, overturn the power and class structure that impedes this transformation, and set in motion the measures likely to assure a broader and real satisfaction of the people.[11]

Despite the epistemological character of the formulation, its fundamental bent is ethical inasmuch as the normative concern is social violence and the way in which conventional scientific practice does not apprehend its raison d'etre. Based on this connection, and to the extent that the critical endeavour is found to be complicit in violence and depend-

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the aspects of this tradition related to identity and populism. For a summary version of the argument, see Tovar Gonzalez, Leonardo, "El Ejercicio de la filosofía como arqueología. Entrevista con Roberto Salazar Ramos", in: *Dissens I*, 1995, 43-50.

[9] To the crisis of metanarratives and the crisis that emerges vis-à-vis the disassociation of culture and politics, Gonzalo Sánchez Gómez adds the crisis that is proper to an endemic war tearing Colombia apart. See "Los intelectuales y la política", in: *Revista Colombia-Thema 6*, 1999.

[10] See his essay collection, *Filosofía, universidad y filósofos en América latina*, Mexico: UNAM, 1981. The article "Función actual de la filosofía en América latina" was originally published in 1971.

[11] Fals Borda, Orlando, *Ciencia Propia y Colonialismo Intelectual. Los Nuevos Rumbos*, Bogotá: Carlos Valencia, 1987 (3rd ed.), 15-16.

ency, thinking becomes active involvement and contestation, alongside theoretical work.

For my present purposes, I propose to set aside the search for or affirmation of a supposed identity – which sometimes dominates Latin American critique – from the essentially ethical concern for performing responsible labour out of, and with, knowledge. Adopting the ethical bent as explicit starting point, I aim in the following pages precisely to examine – in the light of some contemporary theoretical debates – the present possibilities for bringing about a culture of interpretation capable and conscious of its local and global responsibilities. That is why I find it natural to explore the intersection of three traditions that, openly or covertly, comment and take ethical positions on the activity of interpretation. The three approaches are contemporary hermeneutics (particularly Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, and to some extent, Gianni Vattimo and Hans-Georg Gadamer);[12] postcolonial theory, especially that

[12] I understand hermeneutics broadly as the theory of interpretation and understanding of verbal and non-verbal social experience. Even though one finds such an understanding in early Greek philosophy and again during the early modern period, it was only during the late 18th century that hermeneutics became a proper philosophical enterprise as a reflection on the conditions and possibilities of understanding and communicating. In that context, Philip August Boecke identified interpretation as the 'consciousness of that through which the meaning and significance of the thing communicated are conditioned and defined' (see his *Theory of Hermeneutics* quoted in: Mueller-Vollmer, Karl (ed.), *The Hermeneutics Reader*, New York: Continuum, 1985, 135, as well as the introduction to the volume by Mueller-Vollmer himself, 'Language, Mind, and Artifact: An Outline of Hermeneutic Theory Since the Enlightenment'. As Ramberg and Gjesdal have put it recently, 'Without such a shift… it is impossible to envisage the ontological turn in hermeneutics that, in the mid-1920s, was triggered by Martin Heidegger's *Sein und Zeit* and carried on by his student Hans-Georg Gadamer. Now hermeneutics is not only about symbolic communication. Its area is even more fundamental: that of human life and existence as such. It is in this form, as an interrogation into the deepest conditions for symbolic interaction and culture in general, that hermeneutics has provided the critical horizon for many of the most intriguing discussions of contemporary philosophy, both within an Anglo-American context (Rorty, McDowell, Davidson) and within a more Continental discourse (Habermas, Apel, Ricoeur, and Derrida).' For a more in-depth philosophical overview, see Ramberg, Bjørn/ Gjesdal, Kristin, 'Hermeneutics',

which critiques the totalising forms of European historicism insofar as they find their expression in colonial and postcolonial relations (Gayatri, Subaltern Studies Group, Achille Mbembé);[13] and finally the already noted contestatory theoretical tradition on the possibilities and responsibilities of criticism in the neocolonial context of Latin America.[14]

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in: Zalta, Edward N. (ed.), *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, @Metaphysics Research Lab, Centre for the Study of Language and Information, Stanford University, *2005*. Available at: **http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/hermeneutics**, accessed 5 June 2010.

[13] Slemon, Stephen, "The Scramble for Postcolonialism", in: Ashcroft, Bill *et al.* (eds.), *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1995, 45-522. The idea of the postcolonial was first used in 1959 in an article on post-independence India. In cultural studies, the idea of post-colonialism is strongly associated with the literature of the Commonwealth and the penetration of non-canonical literature into English literature departments (see, for example Ashcroft, Bill *et al.*, *The Empire Writes Back*, New York: Routledge, 1990). In the United States its acceptance is broader and more ambiguous. It includes works in the field of historiography – the Subaltern Studies Group collective, discourse analysis exemplified by Edward Said, and the philosophy project of V.U. Mudimbe and Achille Mbembé. I decided to opt for the name 'postcolonial' because it designates in a general way a number of critical interventions that vigorously examine the ideological character of European modernity; 'it foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery'. See Mishra, Vijan/ Hodge, Bob, "What is Post(-)Colonialism?", in: Frow, John/ Morris, Meghan (eds.), *Australian Cultural Studies. A Reader*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1993, 30.

[14] For the purposes of this essay I shall limit my references to the philosophy of liberation, a tradition whose major figures include Enrique Dussel, Arturo Roig, Augusto Salazar Bondy, Juan Carlos Scannone, Germán Maquínez Argote and Mauricio Beucho Puentes. This group of thinkers arose in the late 1960s and are tributaries of phenomenology, the Frankfurt School, and European Marxism. Their philosophical programme is threefold: 1) carry out rigorous critical work in accordance with the modes of reflection proper to theory; 2) make reflection a political endeavour around the dialectic of theory-praxis; 3) modulate as theme and articulate as context of methodological reflection the social conditions of marginality of most of the continent's inhabitants. See Dussel, Enrique, 'Philosophy in Latin America in the Twentieth Century: Problems and Currents', in: Mendieta, Eduardo (ed.), *Latin American Philosophy. Currents, Issues, Debates*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2003, 12-13 and 30-33. Although what I intend to salvage is the tendency to recognise the social responsibility of knowing, it will not be out of place to state that my proposal starts from the assumption that this theoretical programme is still valid for contemporary critical

The initial excuse for establishing dialogue between apparently dissimilar traditions has to do with what I consider a provocative and productive supplementarity of the three narratives.[15] This supplementarity is of two kinds. The first can be formulated as the strategically valid succession of the critique of the ontological project that permanently inscribes Being on the (idealist and universalist) horizon of modern European rationalism. All three approaches emphasise that our only contact with the ontological dimension of being is through the existential manifestation of being, that is, 'that the ontological dimension of being is for human beings primordially a pure availability that breaks down into the infinite world of manifested beings and their relations.'[16] This criticism entails – as defined by Enrique Dussel, one of the best known exponents of the philosophy of liberation – a revision of the 'original split, since

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reflection. Hence, despite all possible disagreements that I might have with various formulations, in what follows I shall be concerned solely with what still has something to say to our present. For those interested in a critique, see: Cerutti Gulberg, Horacio, *Filosofía de la liberación lationoamericana*, Mexico: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982; Schutte, Ofelia, *Cultural Identity and Social Liberation in Latin American Thought*, State University of New York, 1993; Salazar Ramos, Roberto, "Los grandes metarelatos en la interpretación de la historia latinoamericana", in: *Filosofía de la historia, junio-julio 1992. Ponencias VII Congreso Internacional de la Filosofía Latinoamericana*, Bogotá: Universidad Santo Tomás, 1993, 63-109; and Castro Gómez, Santiago, *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana*, op. cit.

[15] I speak of a supplementarity, and not of a complementarity, in order to emphasise the unstable, antagonistic and open convergence of these three critical traditions. I do not claim that they relate to each other as harmonious parts that reach an organic plenitude in the realisation of a new totalising interpretative proposal. Instead, they often engage each other polemically and see only discontinuities among themselves. It is not just a matter of self-perception, as they are historically and intellectually sufficiently distinct as to render any attempt to make them converge hugely problematic. However, by bringing them together in such supplementary fashion I do wish to claim that a productive dialogue among these three traditions is possible and desirable.

[16] Roig, Arturo, *Filosofia, universidad, y filósofos en América Latina*, Mexico: Universidad Nacional Autonoma de México, Coordinacion de Humanidades, Centro Coordinador y Difusor de Estudios Latinoamericanos, 1981, 17.

Kant, of formal morality from the ethics of human life, which is generally judged to be inconsequential'.[17]

The second type of supplementarity has to do with the marked centrality played by alterity in the three narratives, inasmuch as it constitutes the starting point for the critique of totality (since alterity is what always remains outside totality) and for a new exercise of interpretation (since alterity is what demands to be interpreted without being reduced to the same). Once more, Dussel formulates the ethical consequence of this supplementarity from the perspective of the philosophy of liberation. Critical reflection must start

> …from Alterity, from the 'compelled' or the 'excluded'… from the concrete and historic, the aim is to show the conditions of possibility of dialoguing from the affirmation of Alterity, and at the same time from negativity, from its concrete empirical impossibility, at least as starting point, that 'the Other/excluded' and 'dominated' can really take part…[18]

My intention in this essay is to take advantage of the supplementarity of these narratives (both in the critique of the ontological horizon and in the role of alterity) to *begin* to explore the possibilities of a hermeneutics of subalternity that will help us to reground a critical practice of historical interpretation. This hermeneutics must be sensitive to the power relations that configure social subordination, and, most important, it must be capable of responding respectfully to the alterity that characterises the subaltern.[19]

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[17] Dussel, Enrique, *La ética de la liberación ante el desafío de Apel, Taylor y Vattimo con respuesta crítica inédita de K.-O. Apel*, Tolulca: Universidad Autónoma del Estado de México, 1998, 5. Further on, Dussel defines his project as a search for a '*tertium quid* not considered in the Euro-North American debate, and all the more so if this *tertium* is situated in the perspective of the impoverished, exploited, and excluded world periphery', 132.

[18] Dussel, Enrique, *1492. El encubrimiento del otro. El origen del mito de la modernidad*, Bogotá: Ediciones Antropos, 1992, 13.

[19] The term subaltern was proposed long ago by Antonio Gramsci in his *Prison Notebooks* (1926-1937) to designate the proletariat under capitalism (see for example, 'Notes on the history of the subaltern classes'). Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies Collective picked up the concept in the early 1970s to broadly

Because the task entailed in such a project is enormous, in this case I shall deal with only three fundamental aspects. First, I shall examine the succession of critiques of the ontological horizon of European idealism. Then I shall explore the role played by alterity in each of these discourses. Third, I shall explore how alterity can foster or interrupt a post-imperial hermeneutics of subalternity. In closing, I shall attempt to make an overall appraisal and advance ideas for the development of a hermeneutics of subalternity.

1. Hermeneutical critique of the ontological horizon

The relationship with the other is not an idyllic and harmonious relationship of communion or a sympathy through which we can put ourselves in the other's place.
Emmanuel Levinas[20]

More than any other contemporary European philosophical developments, the hermeneutic tradition entails a will to break with the ontological character of modern Western rationalism, by replacing the metaphysical horizon of Being with the historic horizon of hermeneutics. The

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designate 'the general attribute of subordination… whether this is expressed in terms of class, caste, age, gender and office or in any other way' (Guha, Ranajit, ("Preface", in: *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Oxford University Press, 1988, 35). More concretely, Guha's argument was that within the realm of colonial history, the category of the subaltern, understood as 'the demographic difference between the total… population [of the colony] and… the [foreign and native] elite' ("On Some Aspects of the Historiography of Colonial India", in: *Selected Subaltern Studies 44*), construed a sufficiently differentiated political and cultural realm to challenge the teleological claims of imperialist and nationalist (including Marxist) historiographies. Thus, although the subaltern is taken as the logically and politically other of domination, a history of the subaltern nonetheless seeks to 'understand the contribution of the people *on their own*, that is, *independently of the elite* to the making and development of history ("On Some Aspects", 39). For an initial bibliography, see Guha, Ranajit (ed.), *A Subaltern Studies Reader 1986-1995*, Minneapolis, MI: University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

[20] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Time and the Other*, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1987, 75.

shift displaces the requirements for truth production, from the deductive attributes of Being to historical criteria that are internal, partial, and contingent. The historic origins of European hermeneutics are eminently political, going back to the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, when German theologians invoked the principle of perspicuity by which they claimed the self-sufficiency of the sacred texts vis-à-vis the doctrinal authority of the church. A new kind of emancipated reader emerged, as hermeneutics became the interpretative strategy by which the Bible yielded its meaning and truth.[21] In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century hermeneutic interpretation was strongly revitalised and became a disciplinary activity (theological, historical, and philological) to criticise what Levinas and Derrida call the metaphysics of presence.[22] The transformation takes place, among other reasons, because of the need to ground a theory of truth for the human sciences that would distinguish them from the model of the positive sciences.

Here I intend to draw attention to five postulates of contemporary hermeneutics. First, hermeneutics takes as its starting point an explicit recognition that the 'interpreter-self' is inscribed in the event of interpre-

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[21] Broadly understood as the 'art of interpreting texts and especially sacred texts', Schleiermacher first and then Dilthey adopted it as a method of knowledge appropriate to the type of experience examined by the human sciences. Hermeneutics has been enriched subsequently by the contributions of Husserl, Heidegger, Barthes, Ricoeur, Gadamer, Habermas, Hans Jauss, Geertz, etc., and has become one of the main strands informing interpretative strategies within the social sciences. An excellent introductory study to the history of hermeneutics can be found in Mueller-Vollmer, Karl, 'Language, Mind, and Artifact. An Outline of Hermeneutic Theory since the Enlightenment', in: *op.cit.*, 1-53. See also Gadamer, Hans-Georg, *Reason in the Age of Science*, transl. F.G. Lawrence, Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1981, especially the essays 'Hermeneutics as Practical Philosophy', 88-112, and 'Hermeneutics as a Theoretical and Practical Task', 113-138.

[22] In 'Dialogue with Emmanuel Levinas', in Cohen, Richard (ed.), *Face to Face with Levinas*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986, 18-20. See also Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, transl. Alphonso Lingis, The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981, 5-8 and 165-171. Also, see Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976, Chapter 2.

tation; second, it postulates the existence of a tradition outside of which and prior to which the interpretative act cannot be carried out, a tradition that comprehends the interpreting and interpreted situation; third, it recognises the mediation of language (and of theory) in the production of the object investigated through what Gadamer calls 'prejudices'; fourth, hermeneutics proposes interpretation – as opposed to explanation, which better fits the exact sciences – as a way of re-presenting the reality investigated.[23] Fifth and last, hermeneutics knows that it is partial and recognises in its discernment an inevitable political intention. Not surprisingly, therefore, the social sciences – history and anthropology, for example – have perceived in hermeneutics an opening to social alterity and a critique of idealism that comes from its intention to be recognised as a contingent way of producing knowledge (or, in Certeauian terms, conceiving of itself as a social operation).

Contemporary hermeneutics emerges in the debate against two dominant currents of its time, positivism, which embraces the model of scientific truth, and relativism and its derivatives (pragmatism, historicism, utilitarianism), which surrender transcendent truth. In this debate hermeneutics takes it upon itself to carry out the critique of the metaphysical language of modern rationalism without giving up the claims of a foundational truth authorising it.[24] Nevertheless, the central problem before which hermeneutics seeks to constitute itself as a methodological response is not so much epistemological as profoundly ethical, and, as we saw in the context of its emergence, political. That is why Hans-Georg Gadamer points out that the crisis of knowledge affects not only

[23] Wilhelm Dilthey proposes the distinction between the exact (explanatory) and the human (interpretative) sciences in 'The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences', 1910. See *Selected Works*, eds. Rudolf A. Makkreel /Frithjof Rodi, transl. H.P. Rickman, vol. III, Princeton University Press, 2002, 101-209.

[24] Edmund Husserl makes this observation in 'The Origins of Geometry', one of the appendices of *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970, 369-378.

the field of metaphysics, but also, or perhaps especially, the realm of the political:

> The insight into the conditions of all knowledge by the historical and social powers that move the present signifies not only a theoretical weakening of our belief in knowledge but also a factual defenselessness of our knowledge against the arbitrary powers of the age.[25]

In theology, jurisprudence, and classical philology – all privileged domains of hermeneutics – the effort to erect defences against the potential arbitrariness of the contemporary world finds its driving expression in the relationship of the act of interpretation with a canonical tradition validated by sacred texts.

Although there is a wide variety of models, hermeneutics, as a rule, recovers the distance between querying subject and object queried through a cultural continuity, also known as the hermeneutical circle.[26] Two conditions make this continuity possible: the presence of 'prejudices' and the existence of foundational texts or tradition. In the first place, the commonality between object and investigator is punctuated, according to Gadamer, with a set of shared expectations and assumptions – the historicity of the interpreter – that he calls prejudices.[27] Thus, prejudice is not a defect of interpretation, but its enabling condition, the

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[25] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "Truth in the Human Sciences", in: *Hermeneutics and Truth*, ed. Brice R. Wachterhauser, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994, 27.

[26] The hermeneutical circle is the dialectical way that hermeneutic knowledge proceeds: "Complete knowledge always involves an apparent circle, that each part can be understood only out of the whole to which it belongs, and vice versa. All knowledge that is scientific must be constructed in this way.' See the 'Introduction' (IX.20.1) in Schleiermacher, Friedrich, 'Compendium of 1819', in: Mueller-Vollmer, Karl (ed.), *The Hermeneutics Reader. Texts of the German Tradition From the Enlightenment to the Present*', New York: Continuum, 1985,

[27] See Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "What is Truth?" in: *The Hermeneutics Reader*, op. cit., and "Truth in the Human Sciences", op. cit. See also "Text and Interpretation", in: Michelfelder, Diane/ Palmer, Richard (eds.), *Dialogue and Deconstruction. The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1989, 21-51, and his collection of essays *Reason in the Age of Science.*

requirement for meaning to exist. The difference between the prejudice of *doxa* and the hermeneutical circle is that the latter is subjected to a critique through self-reflection:

> Hermeneutics has to do with a theoretical attitude toward the practice of interpretation, the interpretation of texts, but also in relation to the experiences interpreted in them and in our communicatively unfolded orientations in the world. This theoretic stance only makes us aware reflectively of what's performatively at play in the practical experience of understanding.[28]

In the second place, hermeneutics establishes continuity through the identification of reference points or foundational texts (whether in the form of sacred texts – the Talmud or the Bible, for example – in which the distance between significance and signifier is zero, or in the form of some main reference points – the Talmud and the Bible, among many others, although now not as sacred texts – to which history continually refers in order to be able to constitute a past) that provide the initial authority for beginning a reading. The hermeneutical model thus lives in continual tension: on the one hand, it affirms in the face of any dogma and institution the interpretative capacity of the reader, but on the other hand it subjects this capacity to epochal prejudices (dogmas) and to the implicit demands of a historic tradition.

In the attempt to fit into a secular and pluri-religious world while always avoiding falling into relativism or pragmatism, contemporary hermeneutics presents two alternatives: on one side is the mystical turn of Levinas (shared by de Certeau and Ricoeur), which attempts to ground a first philosophy (a transcendental ethics) on the infra-religious substrate of the sacred texts.[29] On the other side, there is the secularising move of

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[28] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, ibid., 112.

[29] For Emmanuel Levinas, see *Otherwise than Being* (op. cit.), and *Totality and Infinity*, Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishing, 1991; for Paul Ricoeur, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980, and *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*, transl. Kathleen Blamey/ John B. Thompson, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1961; for De Certeau,

Gadamer, Vattimo and Habermas, in which the ethical authority of the sacred is replaced, whether by the common substrate of tradition, or by the social structures that mark the epochal horizon, or again by a model of communicative action governed by Kantian-like moral categories.[30] In the first case, ethics is grounded in a previously established transcendence accessible only by faith. In the second, it is grounded either in a critique of tradition, in a historicist effort, or in a quasi-religious faith in the capacity of humanistic reason to carry out a critique of *doxa* and ideology. In both cases, however, the tension between tradition (whether tied to some sacred texts or not) and plurality of interpretation is inevitable.

Hence it is not surprising that one of the dominant themes of hermeneutics is its universal validity, which is also a key aspect for grounding an ethics.[31] Nevertheless, this aspiration to universal validity causes serious problems, especially for the secular wing of hermeneutics. Thus, in Gadamer, for example, concepts such as authority, superior reason, and genuine tradition circulate with the intention of resolving the tension inherent in the hermeneutic model by reconstituting a horizon of objectivity.[32] Yet, from a non-masculinist and non-Eurocentric perspective, reconstituting this totalising horizon makes the tension inherent in herme-

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L'Absent de l'histoire (op. cit.) and *L'Etranger ou l'union dans la difference*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1991.

[30] For Gadamer, see *Reason in the Age of Science* and *Truth and Method*, transl. Garret Barden/ John Cumming, New York: Crossroads, 1982; for Vattimo, *Etica dell'interpretazione*, Turin: Resenberg & Sellier, 1989; for Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Practice*, vol. 1 *Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, transl. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, and *The Theory of Communicative Practice*, vol. 2 *Lifeworld and System. A Critique of Function and* System, transl. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1987.

[31] See for example, Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "Text and Interpretation" and Habermas, Jürgen, "The Hermeneutic Claim to Universality", in: *The Hermeneutic Tradition. From Ast to Ricoeur*, Ormiston, Gayle/Schrift, Alan (eds.), Albany: State University of New York Press, 1990), 245-272.

[32] This reconstitution is not exclusive to Gadamer. For example, in Vattimo reconstitution takes place with a Heideggerian accent (see *Etica dell'interpretazione*).

neutics unbearable, and the critical emancipatory impulse that gives rise to it is cut short. This is precisely the critique that feminism makes of hermeneutics when Georgia Warnke objects that 'history is almost invariably a sexist history and the shared understandings of a society are, again, a sexist set of shared understandings.'[33] From another perspective, the global (which does not displace but complements the feminist), Gayatri Spivak points out that even at those times when 'the history of Europe as Subject is narrativised by the law, political economy, and ideology of the West, this concealed Subject pretends it has "no geopolitical determinations."'[34]

The ethical impulse of contemporary hermeneutics coincides with that of feminism, postcolonialism, and the philosophy of liberation, inasmuch as they all try to conceive being [*el ser*] outside the universalist language of European Modernity; they seek, in other words, 'an ontology that assures the pre-eminence of the object vis-à-vis consciousness'.[35] Nevertheless, postcolonial criticism and the philosophy of liberation take up the critique of European rationalism precisely where European hermeneutics is least willing to question its privileges, that is, where the connections between geopolitical (economic, cultural) power and a type of knowing (inasmuch as this knowledge is productive due to its neocolonial character) are interwoven most rigidly and violently, that is, in this continuity between tradition (canonical texts and prejudices)

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[33] Warnke, Georgia, "Hermeneutic, Tradition and the Standpoint of Women", in: Wachterhauser, Brice R. (ed.), *Hermeneutics and Truth*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1994. Warnke points out that the bonds that subject interpretation to tradition harm women insofar as, being patriarchal, this tradition displays two constants: 'the exclusion of women from most historical traditions and the patriarchal prejudices that have stereotyped women in demeaning and disenfranchising ways', 206.

[34] Chakravorty Spivak, Gayatri, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in: *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Nelson, Cary/ Grossberg, Larry (eds.), Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 271-313, 272.

[35] Roig, Arturo, *Filosofía, universidad, y filósofos en América Latina*, op.cit., 16.

and interpretation that constitutes the hermeneutical circle.[36] For post-colonialism and the philosophy of liberation the problem no longer consists of a more or less liberal relationship between tradition and interpretation, but in the recognition that certain concepts and categories that inscribe the ontological dimension of being (Scripture, History, Man, Nation) and govern the relationship between tradition and interpretation inevitably recover idealist contents and reconstitute teleologies that over-textualise social existence and justify systems of exclusion. In other words, the hermeneutical circle tends to structure a historicist account in which its foundational prejudices and reference points function as justifiers of a world ordering characterised by inequality and the displacement of other cultural and political possibilities: a neo-imperial ordering.[37]

The geopolitical over-textualisation of being and its modes presents a serious obstacle when attempting to postulate a globally meaningful hermeneutic model, outside the language of humanistic rationalism, that responds to the demands of the subaltern. This is because, first, this language is the only one that has managed to prevail generally with some success, and it is not likely to be replaced by globally competent (I do

[36] The paradigmatic example would be the rejection of the church hierarchy of the reinterpretations of the Bible that have arisen in liberation theology. In all cases the Vatican has imposed severe sanctions. At a more secular level the adjusting of economic policies to the needs of the international market redefines the function of social institutions and makes them vulnerable to the tremendous collision of the narratives of History, the Nation, and Modernity. This clash of narratives overdetermines the epochal horizon of the peripheral subject, in proposing a modular idea of the historic, the modern and citizenship.

[37] On this historicist recovery see: Derrida, Jacques, "White Mythologies", in: *Margins of Philosophy*, University of Chicago Press, 1982, 207-271; Chakrabarty, Dipesh, *Provincializing Europe*, Princeton University Press, 2000, Chapter 1 "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History"; Young, Robert, *White Mythologies. Writing History and the West*, New York: Routledge, 1990; Chatterjee, Partha, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World. A Derivative Discourse?* Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1993; and Moreiras, Alberto, *The Exhaustion of Difference. The Politics of Latin American Cultural Studies*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001, 13-16, 249-263.

not mean universal) post-historicist hermeneutic models.[38] A second difficulty is that contemporary hermeneutics has insufficiently historicised the Subject of humanism, inasmuch as in replacing its ontological horizon with its epochal horizon, the ontological inscription *in and of the* body of the subaltern went unnoticed. The rise of the philosophy of liberation and postcolonialism is a response to the historicism that emerges from this neglect and it indicates that the problem of a transcultural hermeneutics occurs at the two nodal moments of the operation of interpretation: in the historical narrative (or structural domain of prejudices) and in the subject of this historic narrative (or referential domain of the foundational texts).

The postcolonial critique observes that the concept of history already postulates a model narrative – History – structured in such a way that it overdetermines all other possible narratives, assigning them subordinate positions within its universal account. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes that 'with regard to the academic discourse of history – that is, "history" as a discourse produced in the institutional realm of the university – "Europe" still remains the sovereign theoretical subject of all histories'.[39] This model History has been formulated 'innocently' countless

[38] To the argument that there is *no* need to conceive of a globally meaningful hermeneutic model, I would make the observation that given how advanced is the modular historical narrative (embodied in the capitalist market and in the enshrining of the national state as the model of political community), attempts to imagine interpretative models that do not take the globalisation of the world into consideration are condemned to ontologise the subaltern either as the starting point of developmentalism or as the horizon of the arrival of nativism. In both cases these dense traditions displace and silence the site of the hermeneutical subaltern. As Anthony Appah points out, 'we are all already contaminated by each other': 'Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?' *Critical Inquiry* 17, 1991, 354. The task is not to formulate an autonomous subject but to imagine interpretative models that transcend the I/other binarism without denying radical heterogeneity.

[39] Chakrabarty, Dipesh, op. cit. For a more sustained development of this thesis, see the other essays in the first part of *Provincializing Europe*. Also see *Habitations of Modernity*, University of Chicago Press, 2002 and Guha, Ranajit, *His-*

times. As an example I propose that of Max Weber, scarcely different from most in its self-awareness:

> A product of modern European civilization, studying any problem of universal history, is bound to ask himself to what combination of circumstances this fact should be attributed that in Western civilization, and in Western civilization only, cultural phenomena have appeared which … lie in a line of development having *universal* significance and value.[40]

With eagerly coveted modernity as final reward, this model narrative postulates a history to be repeated and consumed in every corner of the planet. Subaltern narratives – if they wish to reach the goal of History, to become modern – must repeat the model, mechanically performing the only role reserved for them, 'the project of positive unoriginality'.[41]

Concomitantly with this narrative, there is a normative modular subject (or foundational reference point) of every interpretation, which upon being narrativised assigns derived identities to the other participants of History. Adapting Jean Baudrillard's category, Chakrabarty refers to this modular subject as the hyperreal 'Europe', whose effect is to activate other hyperreal identities such as the 'Orient', 'India', 'Africa', and, we could add, 'the Americas' and 'Latin America'.[42] The role of hyperrealty is to create the overwhelming impression that every identity is fixed and exists anchored in primordial realities. When proper nouns are assumed as ontological truths they infuse social subjects with programmatic contents that render them participants in what Spivak calls the phantasma-

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tory at the Limit of World-History, New York: Columbia University Press, 2002, 24-47.

[40] Weber, Max, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, transl. Talcott Parsons, New York: Macmillan, 1976, 13. Emphasis in the original.

[41] Morris, Meaghan, "Metamorphoses at Sydney Tower", *New Formations 11*, 1990, 10.

[42] They are hyperreal terms 'insofar as they refer to certain figures of the imagination whose geographical referents remain more or less indeterminate.' Chakrabarty, Dipesh, op.cit. The idea of the hyperreal is developed by Jean Braudillard in his *Simulations*, transl. P. Foss *et al.*, New York: Semiotext, 1983, 23-26.

goric modes of existence: *ipseité* and *mêmeté*.[43] The *ipseité* mode of existence is that which allows the being [*ente*] to be defined in relation to itself, whereas *mêmeté* designates that which must be defined in relation to a given model, what Homi Bhabha calls the mimetic mode of existence.[44] Thus, the modular subject claims the fullness of Being for itself (and hence it has been possible to speak of Being in referring to this existential dimension of being) and postulates the identity of others in relation to its own identity, so that any other must define itself in relation to this module. Consequently, the other's identity is defined by a distance that is derivative (insofar as whatever existence he may claim come from his belated participation in Being), that is difference (insofar as such participation in Being is deficient), and that is subaltern (insofar as the derivative and differential distance signifies an inferior and degraded mode of existence). In its most radical manifestation, the other can acquire monstrous, abject proportions, as Kristeva points out, that renders the other neither subject nor object.[45]

2. The fist of the Other and the analectical method. The philosophy of liberation

...we have not yet succeeded in finding the correct logical analysis of what we mean by our ethical and religious expressions
Ludwig Wittgenstein[46]

[43] Chakravorty Spivak, Gayatri, *Outside in the Teaching Machine*, New York: Routledge, 1993, 212.
[44] Bhabha, Homi, "Of Mimicry and Man. The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse", in: *The Location of Culture*, New York: Routledge, 1994, 121-131.
[45] Kristeva, Julia, *Powers of Horror. An Essay on Abjection*, transl. Leon S. Roudiez, New York: Columbia University Press, 1982, 2-11.
[46] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, "A Lecture on Ethics", in: *The Philosophical Review 74*, 1965, 3-12 (or www.galilean-library.org/manuscript.php?postid=43866, accessed 31 May 2010).

Taking as its starting point the supplementarity of critiques of the ontological horizon, a hermeneutics must ground its exercise in the transcendence that assures its integrity vis-à-vis pragmatism, relativism or positivism. This foundational act must transcend the positivity of the empirical to assure the inviolability of the subject, that is, it must open a space of transcendence that allows us to ground the significance of the ethical. Lyotard soberly sums up this need when he writes that, 'A human being has rights only if he is other than a human being'.[47] On the other hand, the emphasis on communicability renders secular hermeneutics – as in the work of Habermas, Gadamer, and Vattimo – vulnerable to this specific type of reductionism. The philosophy of liberation and postcolonialism, for their part, are part of the tradition that Paul Ricoeur calls the hermeneutics of suspicion, that is, the critique of ideology exemplified by Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, which is effective for criticising totality but which Ricoeur and Levinas consider insufficient for grounding a new ethic of critique.[48]

Hence, the hermeneutics of Ricoeur and Levinas emphasises the radical alterity that characterises Being, the core of incommunicability that Being contains, which is manifested as surplus of experience, an excess that prevents Being from being reduced to mere meaning. Whereas for Gadamer, Habermas and Vattimo, concepts like tradition, authority, prejudice and epochal horizon are enabling, for Paul Ricoeur, Michel de Certeau and Emmanuel Levinas they are highly suspect. As paradoxical as it may be, I am convinced that a hermeneutics of subalternity needs this type of alterity to ground its critique of ontological priority, because it seeks to think 'otherwise than Being' (*autrement qu'être*). However, it must be admitted immediately, it is insufficient when attempting to for-

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[47] Lyotard, Jean-François, "The Other's Rights", in: *On Human Rights. The Oxford Amnesty Lectures*, ed. Barbara Johnson, New York: Harper Collins, 1993, 136.

[48] Ricoeur, Paul, "The Critique of Religion", in: Reagan, Charles/ Steward, David (eds.), *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, 214.

mulate an 'ethic of liberation' (as proposed by the philosophy of liberation), that is, when attempting to ground a mode of relating and knowing that is based on the subaltern alterity of the marginalised.[49]

Out of a phenomenology of immanence, Emmanuel Levinas proposes that transcendental alterity unfolds initially, upon experiencing the fundamental solitude of our existence:

> In reality, the fact of being is what is most private; existence is the sole thing I cannot communicate; I can tell about it, but I cannot share my existence. Solitude thus appears here as the isolation which marks the very event of being. The social is beyond ontology. [50]

What is truly present is not the obvious discovery of what is, but a being with more Being than that of its temporal manifestation. Hence the experience of existence as a radically isolated fact places us before another existence, contemplating in the face of the other what is totally mysterious and radically Other. For its part, the Other carries a meaning of its own, because significance is not exhausted by the play of differences with other existents, but it lays in the mysterious inapprehensibility of its own radical and singular existence: the completely Other (*le tout-autre*) cannot be thematised nor is it susceptible to *ipseité* or *mêmeté*.[51]

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[49] See, for example, Dussel, Enrique, *La ética de la liberación ante el desafío de Apel, Taylor y Vattimo con respuesta crítica inédita de K.-O. Apel*, op. cit.; Beuchot, Mauricio, *La hermenéutica analógica en la filosofía de la cultura y en las ciencias sociales*, Morelia: Red Utopia A.C. Jitanjáfora, 2002; the essay "Problemas hermenéuticos para una fundamentación de la ética", in: Roig, Arturo, *Etica del poder y moralidad de la protesta. La moral latinoamericana de la emergencia*, Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 2002. See also the official summary furnished by Hans Schelkshorn, "Discurso y liberación", in: Dussel, Enrique (ed.), *Debate en torno a la ética del discurso de Apel*, México: Siglo XXI, 1994, 11-34.

[50] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Ethics and Infinity. Conversations with Philippe Nemo*, transl. Richard A. Cohen, Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press, 1985.

[51] I am following the distinction proposed by De Certeau (following Jacques Lacan) with the use of *Other* (*Autre, A*) and *other* (*autre, a*) to identify a now classic difference in psychoanalysis. Freud introduces this differentiation when he uses the concepts *der andere* (other person) and *das Andere* (the other, alterity).

The face of the Other is thus the boundary from which Being unfolds in radical alterity, the interstice from which an ethics of transcendence can be properly established. Consequently, Emmanuel Levinas paradoxically founds an ethics (or, as he calls it, a first philosophy) on the basis of the immobilisation of the act of interpretation. This immobilisation occurs with the pre-eminence that saying (*dire*) acquires over the said (*dit*), whose signification goes beyond the said.[52] Thus, saying (*dire*) is what is irreducible to interpretation, its value can never be es-

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Lacan makes it one of the main thrusts of his theory. The distinction seems to acquire a systematic character stating with Seminar II, when he compares the radical *Other* as an axis of the subjective relationship to the *other* that is not really other, 'since it is essentially coupled with the ego, in a relation that is always reflexive, interchangeable'. Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar. Book II. The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis 1954-1955*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, transl. Sylvana Tomaselli, New York: Norton, 1988, 321. The *other* may be succinctly defined as a projection of the self, simultaneously counterpart and mirror image, which means that it pertains to the registry of the imaginary. According to De Certeau, the operation of interpretation inevitably produces others. For Lacan, the *Other* is the place of radical alterity which cannot be assimilated by identification. As he will say in the 1955-56 seminar, the *Other* is a place, the place where language is constituted, the scene of the unconscious, which means that it belongs to the register of the symbolic. *The Seminar. Book III. The Psychoses. 1955-56*, ed. Jacques-Alain, Miller, transl. Russell Grigg. In De Certeau's analysis, the *Other* designates an existence that escapes the secular modes of apprehension of modernity, but is at the same time constitutive of the self, the point of exclusion and the symbolic bonds by which this exclusion is never definitive. In this text I shall use the notation *other* to designate a strictly relational condition with a subject whose difference is in question. I reserve the notation *Other* for those instances in which I need to refer to the condition of radical alterity, whether it is announced by the presence of a subject or an object. De Certeau, Michel, "The Historiographical Operation", in: *The Writing of History*, New York, Columbia University Press, 56-114. Is the subaltern subject who inhabits postcolonial theory and the philosophy of liberation an *Other* or *other*? On this point it must be emphasised that these designations are not in opposition. In fact, we have to think the intersection of these domains (*other*/*Other*) inasmuch as subalternity participates in both: that is, the subaltern is always an ideological construction – by means of which his/her subordination is naturalised – that nevertheless always carries traces of the radical *Other*. I have pursued some of these questions in "Aventuras de una heterología fantasmal", *La irrupción de lo impensado*, Bogotá: Universidad Javeriana, 2005), 14-59.

[52] Levinas, Emmanuel, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, op. cit., 37-38.

tablished in terms of the said (*dit*). Consequently an ethics that seeks to ground itself in this sole and certain alterity bears with it the intolerable responsibility of responding to it – not to Being, but to what lies beyond, despite Being.

Such grounding, it will be clear, presents a serious challenge to historiography. First, the Levinasian formula questions the positivist approach, whose premises have grounded disciplinary practice for a long time. According to that practice, the positivist historian continues and perpetuates a labour of appropriation that results in the reduction of the Other to the same, which is the foundation of the metaphysics of violence that governs the epistemological apparatus of Western modernity. Second, Levinas' formula invites us to consider the saying in excess of the said. The document, therefore, is worthwhile not only for what it reports (the said) but for the speaking that marks it as a locutionary act (the saying). Consequently, it is not enough to simply gather testimonies given by others; what is required above all is *knowing how* to listen to the act of saying that harbours both the said and that which cannot be said: 'An ethics of history requires vigilance in witnessing to that which cannot be seen, in witnessing to the process of witnessing itself.[53]

If for Levinas such radical alterity marks a distance, for the philosopher of liberation Enrique Dussel it grounds sociability. Indeed, Dussel claims this radical alterity to inscribe the variegated manifestations of being [*ente*] as dis-*tinct*, singular in their cultural and social genealogies, not just different, that is, depending on the norm: 'The dis-tinct is the Other as person, the one who as a free person does not originate in the

[53] Oliver, Kelly, "Witnessing Otherness in History", in: *What Happens to History. The Renewal of Ethics in Contemporary Thought*, ed. Howard Marchitello, New York: Routledge, 2001, 41-66, 65. While on this point I wish to recognise the contribution of a work by Alejandro Castillejo that I find very suggestive, *La poética de lo Otro. Para una antropología de la guerra, la soledad y el exilio interno en Colombia* (Bogota: Universidad Nacional, 2000).

identical'.[54] The restoration of the Other as generative principle of existence and of historic sociability leads to a reflexively heterological science: 'By taking othered subjectivity as point of departure, Dussel argues, we can re-establish the conditions of addressability and responseability that make subjectivity possible and ethical'.[55]

Such a shift must be understood in the context of Dussel´s critique of Levinas. For Dussel, no matter how profoundly fertile the Levinasian ethics is, a hermeneutics that takes as its starting point the conditions of subalternity needs to point out certain tensions inherent in his philosophy. First the crucial face-to-face moment, the glimpse of the Other in the other's face, is accessible only from a position of power: 'The Other is, for example, the weak, the poor, "the widow and the orphan", whereas I am the rich or the powerful.'[56] In order to recognise the Other in the other's face, the self must want to recognise others' fragility, recognise this same vulnerability in one's own face, and open toward the Other. This gesture can be thought only from a position of relative power in which the self knows that it will not expire in the act. There are two consequences. First, the sacred distance before the other, even when it arises out of respect, ends up mystifying the other and producing a confused and patronising politics of mystic reverence. Second, in situations of extreme subordination, the face-to-face with power-holders is simply not possible and the subaltern cannot allow themselves the luxury of showing their face. Before the powerful, subalterns may submit or challenge; if they submit, they stage acquiescence; if they challenge,

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[54] Dussel, Enrique/ Guillot, Daniel E., *Liberación latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas*, Buenos Aires: Editorial Bonum, 1975, 25. Notice that Dussel puns on '*tinto*', tint or hue, to drive home the point that what he means by *dis-tinto* is not the same as mere difference, which presupposes a relationship with identity.
[55] Oliver, Kelly, op.cit., 64.
[56] Levinas, Emmanuel, "Time and the Other", in: Hand, Seán (ed.), *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989, 48.

they produce the fist, never an unguarded face. This is the great lesson Frantz Fanon left us.[57]

An analysis of the *identity* of alterity displays the degree to which Levinas's ethics is implicated in, from, and by a position of power. Levinas seeks an essential alterity and hence his first intuition occurs on the basis of the experience of one's own existence. Nevertheless, the only moment in which this alterity is defined positively – *in which it acquires identity* – is on the basis of the encounter with sexual difference. The contrary, absolutely contrary, says Levinas, that defines the Other is the feminine, which is defined in turn by mystery and modesty, 'a mode of being which consists in shunning the light'.[58] Thus, the feminine is postulated, from the beginning, as the contrary of some aspirations attributed exclusively to men. Furthermore, the specific way in which relations to the Other – to the female – takes place is through erotics, so that relations of power and knowledge are excluded. Luce Irigaray argues that in Levinas's philosophy woman is defined exclusively from the standpoint of man.[59]

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[57] Fanon, Frantz, *The Wretched of the Earth*, Paris: Maspero, 1961. The critique of a formalistic ethics is taken up uniformly by the group of thinkers associated with the philosophy of liberation. I mention only some of the best-known texts: Scannone, Juan Carlos, "La liberación latinoamericana. Ontología del proceso auténticamente liberador", in: *Stromata 28 (1-2)*, 1972; Salazar Bondy, Augusto, "Filosofía de la dominación y filosofía de liberación", in: *Stromata 29 (4)*, 1973; Dussel, Enrique/ Guillot, Daniel, *Liberación latinoamericana y Emmanuel Levinas*, Buenos Aires: Bonum, c1975; Roig, Arturo, *Etica del poder y moralidad de la protesta. La moral latinoamericana de la emergencia*, op.cit.; Beuchot, Mauricio, "Hermenéutica analógica y crisis de la modernidad", in: *Revista de la Universidad de México 13*, April-May 1998, 567-568, ed. Nora Maria Matamoros Franco Antología del Ensayo Hispánico, 1998, www.ensayistas.org/antologia/XXA/beuchot/beuchot2.htm, accessed 2 November 2010.

[58] Levinas, Emmanuel, "Time and the Other", op.cit., 50.

[59] These are some of the criticisms of Luce Irigaray ("Questions to Emmanuel Levinas. On the Divinity of Love") and Catherine Chalier ("Ethics and the Feminine") in Bernasconi, Robert/ Critchley, Simon (eds.), *Re-Reading Levinas*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991). See also Irigaray, Luce, "The Fe-

Levinas does not have much to say about the community that arises from pleasure, from *shared life* with the feminine. His erotics, continues Irigaray, sacrifices 'the vital dimension of the Other's body to the elaboration of a future for himself'.[60] The community that counts is that which is born with the child who eventually replaces the woman as the model of alterity. Levinas reduces the relation to the Other to reproduction, and he reduces the woman to terms of maternity. Irigaray objects that:

> From my point of view, this gesture fails to achieve the relation to the other, and doubly so: it does not recognize the feminine other and the self as other in relation to her; it does not leave the child to his [her] own generation. It seems to me pertinent to add that it does not recognize God in love.[61]

Consequently, the inauguration of alterity is confused, inasmuch as it is derived from the fact that the self experiences the feminine not only as an alien existence, but also as the generically (in the sexual and discursive sense) opposite. But what is in this condition of Woman that can so easily be postulated as the basis of all difference? The qualifiers 'mysterious' and 'modest' in this context turn out to be extremely suspect, and encounter violent resonances both in the saying (prejudice) and in the said (tradition). To anticipate the postcolonial language that I shall discuss in the next section, these adjectives reconstitute an ontology of Being, through the historicist narrative that claims to be normative.

Furthermore, as a result of the position of power from which it is formulated, Levinas's ethics prescribes an infinite responsibility that can only be manifested in veneration before the Other. However, not only is veneration insufficient to contest this discourse of metaphysical alterity with which the subaltern has been inscribed in relations of social power,

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cundity of the Caress", in: Bernasconi, Robert/ Critchley, Simon (eds.), *Face to Face with Levinas*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991, 111-112.

[60] Irigaray, Luce, "Questions to Emmanuel Levinas. On the divinity of Love", op. cit., 110.

[61] Ibid., 111-112.

but it also continues a time-honoured process of fetishising the non-Western subaltern (think only of the attributes associated with the native American or black woman in some hegemonic discourses) that relegates it to the field of ideology. Clearly a hermeneutics of subalternity cannot think the Other as positive presence or as recoverable veneration: 'The other as analogous', we are told by Mauricio Beuchot, is 'not the … equivocal and mysterious other of Levinas or the other that yearns to be univocal, as in Habermas and Apel'.[62]

In Levinas Being still remains ontologised, insofar as the horizon that comprehends it is not conscious of its privileges and is claimed as universal. Philosophy of liberation teaches us that alterity is not only radically constitutive of the very experience of existence, but that it is also constitutive of the *culturally particular* experience of existence, an experience that takes place in, although it is not reduced to, power relations.[63] Here is why for philosophy of liberation an ethical position simultaneously demands an understanding of the modes and procedures by which particularity has been turned into otherness – that is of the ways in which subalternity has been produced – and a political intervention to contribute to its liberation. Only then, we can undertake the further task of conceiving a more democratic globality.

A situational hermeneutics that is not only respectful of the Other but is actively committed to the liberation of the Other means that is not simply occupied in shedding light on a given situation, but that it must be done *from* and *with* the subaltern. Methodologically, this means that thought must be opened to interaction with alterity. As Roig says, 'only on the basis of a strong pre-eminence of existing beings, grasped in their

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[62] Beuchot, Mauricio, "Hermenéutica analógica y crisis de la modernidad", op.cit.

[63] Dussel, Enrique, *El encubrimiento del otro. El origen del mito de la modernidad*, op.cit, 155-210; Dussel, Enrique, *La ética de la liberación ante el desafío de Apel, Taylor y Vattimo con respuesta crítica inédita de K.-O. Apel*, op. cit., 7-41.

alterity and newness, will we be able to organise an open dialectical thinking'.[64] Some call this opening – or idea of opening – analogical thought (Beuchot, Moreno Olmedo), others analectical thought (Dussel, Mignolo), while some prefer the term *mestizo* thought (Beuchot, Bolívar Echeverría). What is clear is that these proposals coincide in a willingness to think reflection *experientially*.

The distance between the language of European hermeneutics and the philosophy of liberation can be perceived better in the disparity with which ethical concerns are formulated. While hermeneutics speaks especially of a care for the other, Dussel and his colleagues speak of solidarity, commitment, and struggle. Inasmuch as the ethics of Levinas prefers a mode of sociability proper to intimacy (erotic and filial), some communal concepts – conviviality, friendship, solidarity – are not properly theorised. The concept of community, for example, is never thought of in terms of solidarity, and therefore it becomes abstraction and norm. By decidedly standing alongside the excluded, the philosophy of liberation is obliged to think *methodologically* the category of solidarity, and work with the other as philosophical possibility and as the condition of possibility for philosophy. For Beuchot analogical thought 'and participation go together, and analogy becomes the condition of possibility of participation'[65]; for Alejandro Moreno Olmedo,

> With analectical thought… unity in difference can be thought at the same time; it respects distinction in unity and unity in distinction, without separating or confusing transcendence and immanence; it comprehends negation out of affirmation (not the other way around), and affirmation and negation from the transcendence that is proper to the *via eminentiae*.[66]

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[64] Roig, Arturo, *Filosofía, universidad y filósofos en América latina*, 19.
[65] Beuchot, Mauricio, *La hermenéutica analógica en la filosofía de la cultura y en las ciencias socials*, op. cit., 27.
[66] Moreno Olmedo, Alejandro, *El aro y la trama. Episteme, modernidad y pueblo*, op. cit., 457. See also Dussel, Enrique, "El método analéctico y la filosofía latinoamericana", in: *América Latina. Dependencia y liberación*, Buenos Aires: Fernando García Cambeiro, 1973.

Solidarity as a formal category of thought inaugurates a respect for the distinct, and makes it difficult to speak or act for others.

Just as Levinas rehabilitated the concept of 'face', the philosophy of liberation seeks a more adequate vocabulary to narrate the historically concrete yet elusive experience of subalternity. Historiographically speaking, this proposal requires revaluing other sources of knowledge and other ways of knowing. Indeed, this perspective maintains (in a very anti-Foucauldian manner) that 'The subject of cognition is the battling, oppressed class itself'.[67] Accordingly, the philosophy of liberation impels us to take into account the local practices and languages that express social relations, for there we find subjugated knowledges and memories. Broadly speaking, we can say with Michel de Certeau that the philosophy of liberation invites us to discover the creative astuteness of subalterns, where any possible sense of community – and, hence, of the future – is elaborated.

3. From the plenitude of the face to vanishing trace. Postcolonial reason

> *The concept of life is given its due only if everything that has a history of its own, and is not merely a setting for history, is credited with life.*
> Walter Benjamin[68]

So far I have argued that, whatever their important differences, hermeneutics, postcolonial criticism and the philosophy of liberation con-

[67] Benjamin, Walter, 'Theses on the philosophy of history (1940)' available at www.efn.org/~dredmond/ThesesonHistory.html**.** Moreno Olmedo writes that 'we need a hermeneutics of our popular language. I believe it is absolutely necessary… as… heuristic possibility.' Moreno Olmedo, Alejandro, *El aro y la trama. Episteme, modernidad y pueblo*, op. cit., 479.

[68] Benjamin, Walter, "Task of the Translator", in: *Illuminations*, transl. Harry Zohn, ed. and intro. Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1973 (1st ed. 1968), 71.

verge in the view that alterity constitutes both the enabling moment of interpretation and the starting point for any critique of totality. We already saw how hermeneutics arises historically at the time when difference becomes constitutive of, and enabling the reading of sacred texts. Henceforth, a relation with alterity becomes the foundational moment in the act of interpretation. As Paul Ricoeur writes, it guides the interpreter: 'there is no direct way from myself to myself except through the roundabout way of the appropriation.'[69] Postcolonialism and the philosophy of liberation, in a much more explicit manner, also posit difference as both calling for and enabling interpretation and critique. Nevertheless, the alterity alluded to in each of these narratives is not always the same. Lest we incur oversimplification, it must be established that these three approaches – contemporary hermeneutics, postcolonialism, and the philosophy of liberation – identify registries of alterity that are neither contiguous nor continuous, even though they – as I am suggesting in this essay – might be thought in supplementary relation to each other.

Contemporary hermeneutics maintains a complex and contradictory relation with alterity. It is, as mentioned, the founding moment for interpretation. Gadamer, for example, states that 'the fascination of the other, the strange, the distant is effective in opening us to ourselves.'[70] It is worthwhile to note that concepts such as the 'strange' and the 'distant' (like that of 'deviation' and 'appropriation' invoked by Ricoeur) to define the other are, at best, ambiguous. In such phrasings one senses the degree to which the other is still defined in terms of the Subject, its value appraised instrumentally, its identity thematised as derivative. Conversely, alterity also constitutes, at least when formulated in ethical terms, the absolute limits of interpretative powers, a position that Levi-

[69] Ricoeur, Paul, *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, op. cit., 43. Of course the distance (and also the supplemental complementarity) between the three traditions lies, as I am arguing, in the way that this appropriation differs in each case.
[70] Gadamer, Hans-Georg, "What is Truth?", op. cit., 44.

nas elaborated at length.[71] As argued in the previous section, such position confines the Other to absolute unknowability and pre-empts the language of sociability and politics. Jean Baudrillard and Marc Guillaume have attempted to theorise these two registers:

> …in every other, there is an otherness – which is not me, which is different from me, but which I can understand, indeed assimilate – and there is also a radical alterity, which is inassimilable, incomprehensible, and even unthinkable. And Western thought still confuses this alterity with otherness, *reduces* this alterity to otherness.[72]

And yet, their co-existence remains tense, uncomfortable (indeed, irritating) and, I would argue, largely untheorised.

At this point it might be fitting to contrast this re-appropriation of alterity with the more deliberate approach of deconstruction. Broadly understood, deconstruction – like most post-structuralism – seeks to undermine fundamental binary oppositions (writing-speech, nature-culture, male-female, etc.) that are at the core of Western philosophical traditions. Though these binaries are thoroughly naturalised and credited with organising thought into stable hierarchies, they are historically constituted and remain socially unstable. It is precisely through them that full immanence is attributed to Being, and lack – the lack proper to all social existence – defines the Other. The critical undermining of such metaphysics of presence – as Derrida calls it – takes place when the primacy of Being, its transcendence, is shown to be arbitrary and wholly depending on a supplement.[73] In order to achieve such deconstruction,

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[71] See Emmanuel Levinas, *Alterity and Transcendence*, transl. Michael Smith, New York: Columbia University Press, 1999, 3-76. Beyond phenomenology, Zygmunt Bauman has developed this point extensively and brilliantly in *Postmodern Ethics*, Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1993. See especially "The Elusive Universality", 37-61, and "The Elusive Foundations", 62-81.

[72] Braudillard, Jean/ Guillaume, Marc, *Figures de l'altérité*, Paris: Descartes & Cie, 1994, 10.

[73] See Derrida, Jacques, *Of Grammatology*, transl. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1976, 313; and *Margins of Philosophy*, transl. Alan Bass, University of Chicago Press, 1984, 3-27.

critique must expose the lack constitutive of Being by demonstrating its derivative or dependant character, its *aporia*, its own *différance*. Thus, the destabilisation of Being (or culture, reason, male) means the denaturalisation of the binaries and the calling into question of the difference between the inner and outer, the self and the other, the masculine and the feminine. Understandably, alterity is also revealed to be an idealised construct.

Feminism, postcolonialism, and the philosophy of liberation base their critique of the patriarchal and neoimperial subject on this intervention. However, they also find the reluctance to address the diversity of social experience, particularly that which has been marked by persistent subordination, theoretically insufficient. This theoretical insufficiency repostulates the unitary subject of humanism through idealist categories, and reverts to very conventional interpretative strategies: one can only speak from sameness; the subject is defined in terms of the other-who-opens-the-doors to our selves; the other is defined as either the infinite distant or the deviant and strange.

The three currents seek to show that behind the absence of Being lie concealed the traces of actual subalterns. Feminism arises, for example, out of the recognition that the condition of the subject 'woman' displays a real subordination that needs to be articulated *positively*, that is, beyond the critique of the male subject. For these critical practices, the interpretative process cannot simply be the incessant deconstruction of the humanist Subject whereby it is shown that it is not homogenous, autonomous, superior, and universal. These traditions seek to extend the interpretative moment so that the deconstruction of Being opens up a space to acknowledge the diversity of historical agents.

Furthermore, although poststructuralism and postcolonialism often share the critique of modern humanism, the aspects emphasised by their critiques reflect the diversity of their political programmes. While the critical objective of deconstruction and much of hermeneutics is the

transcendental manifestation of the rationalist modern subject, for postcolonialism and the philosophy of liberation (which think the Other with and from the colonial order) it is its neoimperialist nature. The aim of poststructuralism is not to revindicate the specificity of a subordinated subject, but to radically deny the possibility of the Subject (here the work of Gianni Vattimo is exemplary); its critique recovers the other – the context, the supplement, the margin, etc. – as the demonstrable, necessary, and violent absence established by *différance*.[74] If poststructuralist critique emphasises that *the Other only exists as idealised exclusion*,[75] postcolonialism insists that the *Other is never entirely absent and constitutes the Subject even when it seems most remote*.[76]

Postcolonialism cannot completely prescind from the subject that invoked it. Hence it sets itself two tasks: on the one hand, it investigates the rarefaction that has occurred in order to designate a presence (which is absence: the Native, the Savage) and that enables the Imperial subject and legitimates its colonial designs. Postcolonialism interrogates the desiring and omnivorous gaze of the metropolitan Subject that regards the world as available for consumption; it questions this desire that borders on the scientific (in its desire to know everything about the other), the judicial (in its confidence to constitute itself judge of all activities of the

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[74] See, for example, 'Verso un'ontologia del declino', in: Vattimo, Gianni, *Al di là del soggetto. Nietzsche, Heidegger e l'ermeneutica*, Milan: Feltrinelli, 1981, 11-42. In the text Vattimo reads, through Heidegger, the ontology of preeminence that is traditionally attributed the West, to show its absence and propose as task the ontology of sundown, of evanescence.

[75] It is Jacques Lacan who has captured most decisively this non-existent existence: 'Woman can only be written with a bar through it. There is no such thing as Woman, Woman with a capital W indicating the universal. There's no such thing as Woman because, in her essence... she is not-whole'. See Lacan, Lacan, Jacques, *The Seminar. Book XX. Encore, 1972-73. On Feminine Sexuality. The Limits of Love and Knowledge*, New York : Norton, 1998, 72-73.

[76] Spivak, Gayatri Charavorty, "Displacement and the Discourse of Woman", in: *Displacement. Derrida and After*, ed. Mark Krupnick, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1983, 174. See also "History", in: Spivak, Gayatri Charavorty, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason. Toward a History of the Vanishing Present*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999, 423-431.

other), and the policing (in its desire to control everything of the other). The postcolonial critique points out that the absenting of the Other is nourished by colonial and neo-colonial relations and is manifested variously in the discursive totality that Edward Said calls 'orientalism', in the field of colonial anxiety and ambivalence that Homi Bhabha, updating Frantz Fanon, indicates as the operative mode of the other in the cultural circuit of the metropolis.[77]

Thus, the postcolonial project examines disciplinary practices and circuits of knowledge to trace the modes of inscription, subjection, and alteration of colonial subalterns. The work of Edward Said, especially *Orientalism*, exemplifies this first task. Said adapts discourse analysis as it is developed by Foucault; he shifts the focus of intellectual history, and where only a venerable body of knowledge had been seen, points to an alterity-producing machine. By tracking this intellectual production called orientalism, Said traces the moral economy that has enabled the West to exercise and *justify* a geopolitical domination since the eighteenth century. Orientalism is thus 'a way of coming to terms with the Orient that is based on the Orient's special place in European Western experience.'[78] Said's aim is to make evident the discursive practices by which the West constructed the Orient as variously exotic, passive, despotic, etc. (in all cases requiring the attention and intervention of the West) while reserving for itself a self-affirming image. Through this historic genealogy, Said seeks to destabilise the certainty of the West by revealing the ways by which the imperial subject claims the plenitude of Being for itself and shows the epistemic origin of colonial violence.

The second task that postcolonialism claims for itself is the problem of how to think subaltern alterity without ontologising it or making it

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[77] Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, New York: Vintage, 1979; Bhabha, Homi, "Of Mimicy and Man", in: *The Location of Culture*, op. cit.

[78] Said, op. cit., 1. V.Y. Mudimbe carried out a similar description for the case of Equatorial Africa in *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy and the Order of Knowledge*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988.

vanish.[79] In recognising the critique of the humanist Subject, postcolonialism is also forced to recognise that the space of the Other, of the subalterns, exists only in an overdetermined manner; their voice is inaudible, their presence violently expelled from Being, simultaneously buried under the narratives of autochthony (the native) and modernity (citizen).[80] Indeed, in order for colonialism to function, writes Achille Mbembé, the native has to be created, a being from whom 'no rational act with any degree of lawfulness proceeds', and who is considered incapable of acting within a 'unity of meaning'. The native 'does not aspire to transcendence… [he is a] thing that is, but only insofar as it is nothing'.[81] The native is always native, hiding the being of the subaltern. It is an overdetermination that continues in the narratives of modern politics and democracy, as well as economic and social development.[82]

Postcolonialism starts from the astute observation that the very efforts of colonial authorities to reduce, control, and annihilate the resistant subalterns inscribed them in the folds of historic discourse. Their silence is never inarticulateness; their reticence is never passiveness; their

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[79] Precisely those who criticise the philosophy of liberation correctly note the propensity of its practitioners toward a romantic and populist ontologising of the marginalised. See Castro Gómez, Santigao, *Crítica de la razón latinoamericana*, op. cit., 145-170.

[80] See Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", in: Nelson, Cary/ Grossberg, Lawrence, *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1988, 271-313: 'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the "third world woman" caught between tradition and modernisation... There is no space from which the sexed subaltern subject can speak."

[81] Mbembé, Achille, *On the Postcolony*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001, 187.

[82] In the same book, Mbembé advances a critique of the concept of political modernity in Africa. See the chapter "On Private Indirect Government", ibid., 66-101. For his part, Arturo Escobar develops a brilliant critique of the concept of developmentalism in Escobar, Arturo, *Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, Princeton University Press, 1994, see especially 3-20, 102-153.

invisibility is never absence. Furthermore, their disquieting trace is subversive because, as Ranajit Guha notes, insurgency is 'the necessary antithesis of colonialism'.[83] Thus, the traces of the subaltern and the traces of violence exercised against the subaltern constitute the foundation for a new historical practice. In that sense postcolonialism might be understood as a self-reflexive approach to interpretation that aims at critiquing modern and colonial teleologies while seeking to engage the history of subordinated non-Western subjects and languages. Because these subjects and languages acquire their historical specificity outside Western teleologies they are coloured by alterity.

Writing itself becomes a problem. A vindicating history constitutes – at times – effective modes of resistance. Nevertheless, it is well to keep in mind that the re-writing of history centred on a new social subject generally points toward an economy of inclusion and does not change epistemic violence. Obviously subaltern history cannot be understood as the attempt to recover the subaltern subject, as if history could be undone and as if the subaltern would be waiting there, beyond Being, from time immemorial. Subaltern history, when most interesting, constitutes the search for the memory of other presences, other possibilities, histories, experiences that were and are dis-tinct (*not* different), whose ontologies are dis-tinct, whose meanings are not yet clear, and whose once possible futures still constitute our present, if only as what could have been but cannot longer be.

4. 'A flashing image'. Notes by way of conclusion

Thus far I have tried to demonstrate the critical supplementarity existing between contemporary hermeneutics, the philosophy of liberation and the postcolonial critique. The task is barely sketched out, because,

[83] Guha, Ranajit, *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India*, Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983, 2.

as I mentioned at the outset, it can only be the beginning of a critical dialogue that requires many other voices and experiences. Nevertheless, I think that it is absolutely necessary that these and other intellectual traditions be opened to a sustained cross-disciplinary interrogation to imagine a hermeneutics that takes into account the historical conditions that produce subalternity while attempting to give an account of the historical agency exerted by subalterns.

Linda Hutcheon has written that:

> The current post-structuralist/post-modern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical post-modern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses'.[84]

A significant sector of the philosophy of liberation coincides with this critique, albeit for different reasons. From a perspective that reclaims the emancipatory impulse of modernity, it considers the post-structuralist critique of the autonomous subject a luxury possible only in the self-complacency of wealthy European and North American ivory towers.[85]

I do not agree with this assessment. Although the relationship between the two positions is tense they are not mutually exclusive: post-structuralism emphasises the lack of the Subject, and postcolonialism, the traces of the displaced subaltern. They refer to alterities and subjects of a different order. Of course, I have argued, an approach to the humanist subject that fails to examine its patriarchal and imperial dimensions

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[84] Hutcheon, Linda, "Circling the Downspout of Empire. Post-Colonialism and Post-Modernism", *Ariel 20*,1989, 151.

[85] See for example the texts of Arturo Andrés Roig, "¿Qué hacer con los relatos, la maña, la sospecha y la historia? Respuesta a los post-modernos", in: *Rostro y Filosofía de América Latina*, Mendoza: Editorial de la Universidad de Cuyo, 1993, 118-122; and "Posmodernismo. Paradoja e hipérbole. Identidad, subjetividad e historia de las ideas desde una filosofía latinoamericana", in: *Casa de las Américas 213*, 1998, 6-16.

ends up repostulating Europe-Man as the universal Subject. Hence, to the extent that their contemporary interpretations remain indifferent to neoimperialism and patriarchy, their theoretical yield will revert into the pre-eminence of universalistic aspirations.

Conversely, the critique of the (neo)imperial subject can only be carried out as part of an overall project to critique the subject of modern humanistic rationalism. It cannot lead into nativism, identity, or self-sufficiency.[86] In brief, it should be a type of hermeneutics that is capable – when faced with the silent traces of the subaltern – of feeling that piercing pain of the Walter Benjamin who discovers that nothing is sure, that everything is always threatened with being lost, inasmuch as 'The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognised and is never seen again." [87] Only there, in this fragile memory-image, lies the foundation of a new history.

Finally, I also believe that hermeneutics can hope to fulfil its ethical programme only if it is explicitly postulated from and with subalternity, carries out the emancipatory impulse that gave rise to it, and is not ashamed to say with José María Mariátegui, 'I do not pretend to be an impartial or agnostic critic, which in any event I do not believe is possible'.[88] Hence the problem posed is that of developing interpretative strategies that will allow us to conceive a hermeneutics on, from and with subalternity, with all the *heteroglossia* [multilanguagedness] and

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[86] Salazar Ramos and Castro Gómez have argued convincingly against a methodological reflection based on projects of identity. See Salazar Ramos, Roberto, "Los grandes metarelatos en la interpretación de la historia latinoamericana", op. cit.; Castro Gómez, Santiago, *Crítica de la razón latenoamericana*, op. cit., 99-120. Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson make the same critique of feminism in "Social Criticism without Philosophy. An Encounter between Feminism and Postmodernism", *Communications 10*, 1988).

[87] See thesis number 5 in Benjamin, Walter, "Theses on the Philosophy of History", 1940, available at www.sfu.ca/~andrewf/CONCEPT2.html.

[88] Mariátegui, José María, *Seven Intepretative Essays on Peruvian Reality*, Chapter Seven "Literature on Trial", available at www.marxistsfr.org/archive/mariateg/works/1928/essay07.htm.

conflictual politics that such an enterprise entails. It is a delicate if perilous adventure of thinking of and with the other, maintaining a distance that neither reduces him to sheer unintelligibility nor coming so close that it converts him into a repository of sheer knowability.

But this is a programme to which we will have to return in the future. Furthermore, this is a collective labour, or as Dussel would say, an analectical labour.

13

THE INTEGRAL NATURE OF AFRICAN CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS VALUES AS ETHICAL VALUES[1]

Obiora Ike, Nigeria

When God created the world, he gave the Europeans the clock and gave Africans time.

Amazing or perhaps as simple as this assertion may sound, there is something that attracts a deeper inquiry from the researchers and scientists, drivers of business and captains of industry, academics, tourists and historians and many others who travel through the continent as they observe, in contradistinction to experiences in other continents, Africa's quite distinctive attitudinal belief in and practice of a 'take-it-easy' lifestyle. Such a belief and practice are often expressed in such statements as 'God is in control' and 'tomorrow is another day'. This paper is about identifying specificities of the African worldview. It raises questions about the inherent rationality in the cosmology and interpretation of the universe of African traditions and religions, often expressed in holistic and interconnected terms. This is different from the cosmovision generally found in Western philosophies, which identifies reality in clearly spelt out, separated and isolated beings.

[1] This article was first edited by Jayendra Soni and John A. Raymaker, to whom we address heartfelt thanks.

The point being made here is that culture matters precisely because it provides the key to a proper understanding of reality, as well as solutions to problems that emerge from this reality. The oral interview I once conducted with Ozor Neife Ozoike, a wise old centenarian from Umana Ndiagu in the Ezeagu land of Eastern Nigeria comes to my mind. During the interview Ozoike said in part: 'People who do not look back to their past cannot look forward to prosperity'.

Without taking into account this reality of African culture, how would one explain a certain 'ease' in the African mind and its elastic attitude to time, vis-à-vis the mentality of a clear mechanical dependence on the electronic clock or watch found particularly amongst peoples of the Western hemisphere? Thus, the term 'African time' has emerged and has become both entrenched and readily accepted as a *modus operandi* in African lingual expressions. One encounters it wherever one may travel within the continent. Lateness is excused on the grounds of African time! If one may be allowed to generalise on this topic, it seems that there is more to this phenomenon that makes an African live life 'leisurely'. In comparison with people from other continents, Africans relax more; they laugh a lot and tell many stories. This mentality certainly affects business and ethics in the African context as in Africa, it has a universal application.

How and why is it so? This question also offers a valid reason for the exercise, attempted in these pages, to understand and study the integral nature of African cultural values considered as ethical values. All over the African continent, there is an amazing identity as to how people regard both business and ethics and as to how they understand the concept of time, not just as an exact moment but as something around or 'surrounding' an event. To repeat: 'Why is this so?'

To avoid biases or prejudices, it is critically necessary to be allowed to present an African perspective without the use of interpreters in a search for knowledge and its transfer across cultures. As has become

clear in intercultural exchanges, cultural divergence amongst the peoples of the world has led to much misunderstanding, prejudice, injustice, exploitation, xenophobia and even war. These consequent, negative tendencies are unhealthy for the peace of nations and for the sustainable balance needed for individuals and communities worldwide – that is, if they are to be happy and fulfilled in their essence. The challenge is to launch a new intercultural and intercommunicative dialogue that presents itself as a fundamental human right as we emerge in the new millennium.

1. Background and justification

The background for this reflection and its attempt to justify a notion of understanding Africa from an African perspective is a reminder that much of what is 'known' or written about Africa stems from non-African 'experts': intellectuals, traders, anthropologists, travellers, missionaries. In their writings, most of these observers tend to look down on Africa and its peoples, who are considered as primitive, barbaric, uncivilised. Africans are deemed as lacking in any ability for rigorous philosophical, ethical or even scientific development comparable to the external paradigms offered by Westerners, by Islam or by writers from various Eastern traditions.

The postulation made here about Africa and Africans (not in mere general terms) derives from available facts and from 'on-the-ground' realities. It is based on credible works of research by many African writers, especially in the past hundred years. It contends that the African worldview, its cosmology and philosophical foundations, and its religions and ethical foundations have an inherent rationality that interprets the universe in holistic and interconnected terms and not in isolated, linear and particularistic terms, separated from each other.

Numerous questions can be asked when dealing with this topic: What are the ideas and the underlying philosophy in African societies that have given rise to such concepts and practices as the understanding of the Earth, the attitude and use of land, property and ownership, family values, respect for the elders, reverence of the ancestors, the role of gender – men, women and youth? What is the African attitude to life, to the divine milieu, to God, religion, the spirits and the spiritual realm? How is consensus built in communities? What does community mean to the African and how is the spirit and practice of community life conducted? Is there governance and needed structures in village social affairs?[2] What is the concept and the purpose of law? What of the adjudication of cases where legal cases arise? What of the concepts of morality, democracy, management, profit and price allocation, transparency, environment and ecology?

The rediscovery of cultural and religious values translated into ethical values would also focus on other areas of production and work such as industry and enterprise, manufacture and commerce, trade and agriculture, hunting and game, taxation issues, contracts and labour relations, money and capital, including the factors of production, markets and competition, and supply and demand factors in the economy. One overriding question remains to be reflected upon, namely, how community harmony takes precedence over individual rights. Is there an ethics in business in the African worldview? Can there be an African business ethics?

The fundamental thrust of this paper is to give a background for the ambitious claim that there is in fact an African business ethics; the challenge is to rediscover the traditional African values and to apply them in modern Africa. In this way, an attempt can be made to build up a sound foundation for doing business in an ethical manner and to make African

[2] One would wish to include here reflections on aspects of medicine and health, work and its relations to the past, present and the future.

business values and ethics known to the rest of the business community. Such values and such an ethics are pre-eminent virtues; many of these are still known and operative in various communities all over the continent. The point is to reiterate them to bring out their impact for our study.

Some of these values include respect for the divine and the sacred, respect for elders, keeping one's promises and standing by one's word, being honest at all times, acting with justice and fairness in dealing with others, exercising legal conscientiousness and observing the rules, giving priority to the interest of the community over private and individual interests, avoiding conflicts of interests, practising transparency, disclosure and accountability in every situation, preserving the common good, respecting and protecting life and the environment (humanity and nature), being prudent in speech and not harming others, being content and eschewing greed.

Such espoused traditional values should be regulated and applied to modern issues of sustainability, corporate governance and the service of the common good. Our search, therefore, is not to invent new codes of conduct, but rather to rediscover these inherent traditional values and principles of sustainability, subsidiarity and solidarity. The next step would be to apply them to the modern models of a global culture that speak of corporate governance, corporate social responsibility, and business ethics so as to maintain the best practices contextually within an African milieu. In doing so, we should be able to establish the integral nature of African cultural and religious values considered as ethical values**.**

2. African identity as a unity of past, present and future

African cultures and philosophies as found from the Horn of Africa to the southern Cape, from the Western Atlantic shores of Senegal

through the massive forests of Central Africa to the Indian Ocean washing the shores of Kenya, express three levels of existence that incorporate the past (ancestors from whom traditions, ethics and cultures derive their origins), the present (the community to whom the individual belongs); and the future (as yet unborn generations: one has to ensure continuity and sustainable management for those who will come after us). These three levels are cardinal points in understanding the African view of the relationship between culture and religion, tradition and ethics, private and public interests, the human community and the world of nature in general, including animals and trees, and animate and inanimate beings. Although customs vary from community to community in matters such as marriage, burial rites, title taking, there still prevails a central link for various African communities on the 'ultimate questions of life concerning the origin of human existence, the purpose of life, death, the why and how of things, moral laws, land and markets, to mention but a few'.[3]

3. African philosophy

African philosophy is a philosophy of community that is well expressed in the phrase 'I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am'.[4] In the original African society, culture, religion, law, economics, politics, history, morality and trade are not easily separated; this tradition identifies the peoples at their deepest levels of consciousness and accompanies their every activity. Any external evaluation needs to take into consideration the interplay between the sacred and the secular: 'the connection of the seen and the unseen, the union of the dead with the

[3] Ike, O.F./ Edozien, N.N., *Understanding Africa. Traditional Legal Reasoning as a Basis for Culturally Rooted Development*, Enugu: CIDJAP Publishers, 2001, 8.
[4] Mbiti, John S., *African Religions and Philosophy*, Oxford: Heinemann, 1989, 108.

living, the spirit with the ordinary human and the dependence of the earthly human who is seen on the spiritual which is unseen'.[5]

The following ten categories offer deeper insights into the wide spectrum of African culture:

Culture (*omenala*) as the traditional law in African societies is understood as the people's whole way of life (past, present and future), a central thread that guarantees protection of life and property, harmony between the members of society and with nature, as well as linkage to the divine through ancestors and deities. It is said that every people has a culture, a way of life that links their past to the present and points to the future. Even though culture is not static but steadily dynamic, some of the elements that provided the rationale for cultural practices in the past may have disappeared in the face of modern realities such as migration, new technologies, scientific discoveries, war – among other factors. There is an urgent need in the face of the modern age to strengthen the linkage and sustainability of cultural development and its interpretation at least on the levels of principles that identify these societies. In the African milieu, whether amongst agricultural peoples or nomadic tribes, culture (*omenala*) provides a proper foundation to a sustainable economy where the preservation of the environment, the enhancement of principles of equity and fair play, as well as the promotion of an economy integrating individual interests and communal protection exist side by side without any contradictions.

Oral transmission: Aspects of African culture (*omenala*) are transferred from one generation to the next by oral tradition through symbols and rituals, in fables and dances, and in the moral formation and religious traditions of the African peoples: 'as soon as a child is born into the community of "umunna" (brethren), life is affected by the intricate network of restrictions and all that they represent. Immediately a child is able to speak and understand issues,… it is exposed daily to the do's and

[5] Uzukwu, E.E., *A Listening Church*, Enugu: SIST Attakwu Publishers, 2001, 9.

don'ts of the society and parents drum it into its ears, through fables told in the night around the fireside and exposure to the various forms of rituals and other observances, the gravity of committing abominable acts'.[6]

***Ubuntu* in property rights**: Private property, understood as a 'social mortgage', emphasises the right of access of all people who belong to the community to the gifts of nature, including the various factors of production such as land and labour. Even though the community respects the right of individual ownership of property, this does not imply the amassing of wealth by a few to the detriment of the majority. In other words, ownership of property is subjected to its universal destination and use by all members of that community. A philosophy founded on the principle of 'it belongs to me but I belong to the community' (*umunna*; *ubuntu*) ensures that property rights are guaranteed, but not in an absolute system as found in capitalist societies. A property right is limited by overall social (stakeholder) interests.

Religion as a natural phenomenon is understood in African cosmology as relating human beings to the unseen universe of the deities and the gods in a sense conveying humanity's dependence on the world and spirits beyond. This interconnectedness between the spiritual and the secular signifies an interrelatedness of past, present and future generations. These factors are to be considered in decision-making. Thus, the taboos of many African societies, even in unwritten and pre-literary symbols and traditions, protected the overall environment, including land, animals, water, forests and nature via religious codes. Respect for nature is noticeable in the many traditional societies on the continent, since humanity attained both continuity and history through the elements – a truly organic understanding of ecological sustainability and a philosophy still practicable and noticeable in many business practices in contemporary times. In short, there is no African without a sense of re-

[6] Olisa, A., *Human Rights Law Service*, Lagos: HURILAWS, 2003.

ligion, a practice of religion and a link to some form of religious adherence. Many therefore say that atheism is un-African, a point corroborated by the various experiences of daily life in the reality of traditional religions present on the continent and 'in the many African cultures and societies all of which show that to be African is to be religious'. About the Africans John Mbiti once said that 'they eat, drink and live religiously. There is no unreligious African'. African religion is thus not an isolated abstract, but is embedded in culture, in people's very way of life. The Igbo cosmology of Nigeria, for instance, does not distinguish between religion and the secular society, but creates room for an interdependent world where 'the secular is so interwoven with the sacred that one does not exclude the other, nor could one be conceived without the other, thereby giving religion an anthropocentric outlook'.[7]

Culture, society, economy and religion are interwoven: From the above emerges 'interwovenness' between religious beliefs and cultural practices. Attempts to loosen this 'interwovenness' during the Islamic and Christian religious missions proved impossible; these mistakes are currently being corrected under the agenda of 'inculturation'. Win-win scenarios emerged from this worldview and practice, thus making it possible to evolve from the *omenala*'s unique principles that provide an integral understanding of the economy, society, culture and the environment. It is in this way that traditional African religious values, philosophies and cultural practices are now being unearthed and re-branded in the new and emerging religious space on the continent.

Values-guided life: We have seen that African traditional religion is essentially a philosophy and a spiritual way of life that permeates, pervades and animates the traditional social institutions, norms and celebrations. Every Igbo ritual act in south-eastern Nigeria, including sacrifice,

[7] Odoemene, Anacletus N., "Moral Values in Traditional Igbo Society", unpublished presentation at the Conference on "Theologie Interkulturell" in Frankfurt/M., 1996, 16.

dance and festival, has a philosophy or idea behind it. In other words, action is motivated by and grounded on values that involve a basic belief, a philosophy, an underlying principle or an idea. These values thus generate action and behaviour that in turn influence individuals and groups.

Business ethics as social responsibility: Even though the study of ethics is classically distinguished from morality and emerges on the philosophical and scientific scene, especially in modern times, as the rational basis for the rightness or wrongness of actions by humans, ethics here does not refer simply to cultural beliefs, traditions or religions, but to the rational idea that it is fair or unfair to treat people outside the ambience of justice. This Western model of ethics, which continues to gain ground in the many humanistic and speculative sciences and other areas of human endeavour, elicits its scope and array in such disciplines as business ethics, media ethics, bioethics, social ethics, political ethics, economic ethics, environmental ethics, legal ethics, gender equity, and more. In an African setting, doing business is always an ethical matter. In this context therefore, business ethics must entail social responsibility, where community is an extension of business and business an extension of community.

Ethics as culture: A discussion of ethics within an African ambience must necessarily involve a discussion of both African philosophies and cultures and their moral and overall ethical practices. The point of linkage between religion, morality, law, and social as well as economic realities is the domain where Africans locate tradition, the *omenala*, which is the foundation for ethics, and therefore the rational background for living together. In summary, this African contribution promotes stakeholder participation, enhancing communal living and values based on principles of *onye anwuna ma ibe ya efula* (live and let live), and implying the age-old social ethical principles of justice, fairness, solidarity and subsidiarity.

Life as the highest moral and ethical value: The integral nature of African cultural and religious values as ethical values begins with an understanding of life as sacred and as something to be preserved, protected, promoted and generated. Homicide, murder, suicide and other unnatural forms of death inflicted on another are thus considered crimes against the earth and a breach of the bond between human beings, the deities and the earth itself. Such breaches damage the communal foundations upon which society is based, and have to be repaired by all means by the entire community even where the culprit and his family have to undergo expulsion from that environment. In serving life, the *omenala* in its ethical dimension seeks to serve communal harmony, to respect the past heritage of ancestors and the laws of the land founded also on religious beliefs, and to help in the progress of the economy by protecting the earth and by making laws to discipline those who thwart the laws of the land.

Modernity still contains tradition: It may amaze some, but reality 'on the ground' shows that the traditional *omenala* still serves as a link between the ethical, religious and secular realities as well as the basis for the legal system and morality in general. It still exists as strongly today as it did yesterday. Africa's beliefs in traditional religious practices and cultural practices are still found even in present-day lifestyles in the many big cities on the continent. Many modern cities carry the cultures of their peoples, as we find them in Lagos, Abuja, Accra, Cape Town, Johannesburg, Enugu, Cairo, Tunis, Nairobi, Lusaka and Harare, to mention but a few.

Conclusion and practical applications

The main issues from an African perspective on the integral linkage between religion, culture and ethics – which unfortunately do not fit into

the modern categories of many Western philosophical paradigms, actions or thought patterns – are as follows:

A broad understanding of culture, which encompasses a people's entire way of life. African culture (*omenala*), as it is founded on cultural rationality (that is, derived from the past) and is able to project into the future, has the potential to assist and guide modernisation in a sustainable manner. In the face of radical and rapid changes worldwide, globalisation, migration, technological advances, and the danger of losing original sources (including cultural integrity) also remain threats in Africa. There is an urgent need to look again into the primary sources of traditional cultural rationality in order to enable a significant yet sustainable development. One may do this by promoting intercultural dialogues that look into Africa's past history so as to retain or reclaim elements that are relevant and applicable to modern economies.

Religion as an integral reality, that is, a non-dualistic relationship between the sacred and the secular in promoting an integral understanding of creation. Those presently living, the yet unborn and the living dead all share in a cyclical bond that determines the being and consciousness of all Africans. This kind of religion determines the relationship between humanity and divinity; it has formed the basis for the reverence of creation governed by God and a respect for the earth (*ala*) that has its own ethical implications. One of these ethical implications is a deeply rooted respect for nature as an organic understanding of ecological sustainability.

Law as a service to harmony, regulating issues of justice and community by prescribing the rules that govern society. It is indispensable in building consensus, social harmony, reconciliation and equitable relationships. The essence of the law and of justice in traditional society is not to blame this or that person, but to settle the matter for the social harmony of the entire community and its continued existence.

An economy where business is not separated from ethics and where nature is preserved. Land is understood not as a good for absolute ownership, but one for being used and respected as such. In many cases, land in traditional society is not sold but allowed only for use, since the earth is recognised as what provides sustenance to the agrarian economy of traditional society upon which everything depended, to cover the needs of the past, the present and the future. Besides, an absolute sale of land was conditioned and practised only as leased on a temporary basis, to enable the transmission of this scarce good for future generations. This traditional cultural value translated today as a business ethical model may serve as a deterrent to the greed of those wealthy enough to buy all that is available. Wealth has significance when it is used responsibly to further community interests and not hoarded just for individual aggrandisement. In Africa one acquires reputation by adding value through one's wealth that is to be shared with the village community.

Win-win scenarios in business. The principles that find relevant application in this context include: recognition and promotion of win-win scenarios in the economy; social responsibility of business; a "we-and-I" consciousness in social relations; property as a social mortgage and a natural right; interconnectedness between spiritual realities and the material world.

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14

RELIGION AND SCIENCE IN SOCIAL RECONSTRUCTION[1]

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Prelude

Before I delve into this subject, I would like to quote two paragraphs from Ali Mazrui's introduction to his famous book, *The Africans*:

The ancestors of Africa are angry. For those who believe in the power of the ancestors, the proof of their anger is all around us. For those who do not believe in ancestors, the proof of their anger is given another name. In the words of Edmund Burke, 'People will not look forward to posterity who never look backward to their ancestors.' But what is the proof of the curse of the ancestors? Things are not working in Africa. From Dakar to Dar es Salaam, from Marrakech to Maputo, institutions are decaying, structures are rusting away. It is as if the ancestors had pronounced the curse of cultural sabotage.

If this is the curse of the ancestors, what is the sin? It is the compact between Africa and the twentieth century... its terms are all wrong. They involve turning Africa's back on previous centuries – an attempt to 'modernise' without consulting cultural continuities, an attempt to start the process of 'dis-Africanising' Africa. One consequence takes on the process of social turbulence, of rapid social change let loose upon a continent. Franklin D. Roosevelt once said to Americans, when faced with the economic crisis of the 1930s, 'The only thing we have to fear is fear itself.' For my turn I am tempted to say to fellow Africans,

[1] This article was first edited by Jayendra Soni and John A. Raymaker, to whom we address heartfelt thanks.

facing a series of severe political, economic, social and cultural crises in the 1980s, 'The main thing we need to change is our own changeability.'[2]

1. Religion as social technology

Theology is to religion what science is to technology. Theology serves as the intellectual rationalisation of the structure and utility of religion, while science is the intellectual reflection on the structure and utility of the physical environment, both extensively and intensively. Applied science yields technology, while theology provides a rationalisation of the various forms of religious expression. The ingenuity with which religions are structured and practised indicates that social engineering draws considerable inspiration from religious sentiment.

In this paper I intend to explore the relationship between religion and technology on the one hand and science and theology on the other. This intention arises from my conviction that religion, however defined, is an essential factor in the social transformation of nations and communities. This conviction has been strengthened by the events that culminated in the ending of the Cold War and in the civil strife that engulfed many countries during the following years. Religion and technology were then utilised in amazingly creative ways, at a time when both ideological blocs claimed that religion was irrelevant to both politics and technology.[3]

Historically, it was the people of Poland who pioneered the revolt against the Soviet Union, supported by the Catholic Church and the Solidarity trade union as the focal points of the revolt. The Catholic

[2] Mazrui, Ali, *The Africans*, London: BBC Publications, 1986, 11.

[3] During the Cold War, the USA was overtly interested in the collapse of the Soviet Union for ideological reasons, one of the arguments being that communism was antireligious. The USA has also publicly campaigned for the liberalisation of politics and religion in China. Such campaigns openly contradicted the First Amendment to the Constitution of the USA, according to which the state takes a neutral attitude towards religion, neither supporting nor hindering it.

Church mobilised the people for the moral revolt against Communism, while Solidarity (*Solidarność*) mobilised the workers to paralyse Polish industry. Although the official national ideology of Poland was communism, more than ninety per cent of the country's population was Catholic – a fact not widely publicised in the news media.

The role of religion in the political transformation of Poland became public through media coverage of the Pope's visits to his native country, where he was encouraging the people to apply pressure on the regime to liberalise both religion and economy. The massive demonstrations had the strategic support of the USA, as high-ranking leaders frequently visited Poland and the media gave glowing coverage to both the Catholic Church and Solidarity (*Solidarność*). Lech Walesa became a renowned leader through the coverage, and the fact that he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize indicates that the leaders of world opinion supported the revolt.

East Germany followed Poland, with the demolition of the Berlin Wall symbolically marking the collapse of the Soviet Union. As churches in both West and East Germany had been working since many years for the re-unification of the country, they became the focal point for the resistance against communism. In Russia, the public resurgence of religion was marked by the restoration of Leningrad's old name, St Petersburg. In 1998, the remains of Tsar Nicolas II were ceremonially reburied in a controversial ritual that indicated the importance of religion in the legitimation of politics and other pillars of Russian culture.

When Yugoslavia plunged into civil strife after the death of its federal leader Josip Broz Tito, old religious and ethnic rivalries came to the fore. The news media portrayed the conflict as one between Serbs and Muslims, yet the real conflict was between various tribes (Serbs, Croats and others) affiliated to Islam, Roman Catholicism, or Orthodox Christianity. There, religion was the *occasion* for, rather than the *cause* of, social conflict.

In Northern Ireland, while the real conflict opposed Irish republicans, Ulster loyalists, and British imperialists, the media emphasis on the religious factor created the impression of two brands of Christianity at war with each other. The majority of Catholics in Northern Ireland being of Irish ancestry, and the majority of Protestants being of British descent, religion continues to be used as a focal point of political manoeuvres.

Turning to tropical Africa, it is clear that in the twentieth century religion has been the most influential social factor throughout the continent, the missionary enterprise bringing with it both positive and negative consequences. While Christianity acquired the public profile of the spiritual prop of imperialism, the African elite gained from mission schools and colleges knowledge and skills that they used as assets in their struggle against colonial domination. In the post-colonial period, churches also provided the palliative sermons that helped pauperised citizens bear the disillusionment that followed the euphoria of independence.

After the Cold War, many churches embraced the fad of 'democratisation', but their involvement hardly depicted them as advocates of total change. Rather, they were wooed by the elites of opposing camps in multi-party politics, with church leaders finding it difficult to maintain the public profile of peacemaking and reconciliation. In every country, however, there was no doubt that religious leaders were indispensable agents of social legitimation, entangled as they were in the political wrestling brought by political liberalisation. The most dramatic illustration of this point took place in South Africa, where Archbishop Desmond Tutu became the 'conscience of society' in the last phase of the struggle against *apartheid.* With courage and clarity, he became the 'voice of the voiceless' and championed the cause of justice in a country where oppression was national policy. The contribution of religion to the abolition of *apartheid* is considerable; it echoes the role of the Clapham

Sect in the campaign for abolition of the slave trade in Britain, under the leadership of William Wilberforce. The Nobel Peace Prizes awarded to Desmond Tutu, Mother Teresa of Calcutta and others were a worldwide public acknowledgment of the role of responsible religious leadership in the reconstruction of society.

In the Great Lakes region, the role of religion in social transformation has also been instructive. Rwanda has the largest percentage of Christians in this region – more than 90 per cent of the population. In the tragic war of 1994, Christians were caught up on both sides of the conflict, which some analysts would blame on ethnicity and others would explain in terms of an externally imposed liberalisation of politics. Christianity became a scandal, as the ecumenical movement, like the UN, appeared impotent to abate the conflict despite established contacts, networks and relationships within the country. Likewise, the widely publicised clashes in Kenya in 1992 seem to have occurred despite the high rate of adherence to Christian churches among the population. Was Christianity irrelevant in these situations? Certainly, individual Christians could not be 'neutral' while they were caught up in the conflict on one side or another. Yet the question of religious doctrine in such situations could not be avoided.

Liberia provides another interesting example. The process of reconciliation that ended the civil war in the 1990s was facilitated jointly by Christian and Muslim leaders. In appreciation of this contribution to peace, the All Africa Conference of Churches awarded the Desmond Tutu Peace Prize jointly to the National Council of Churches of Liberia and the National Islamic Council of Liberia. The ecumenical movement was thus extended in Liberia beyond cooperation between Christian churches to include Muslim leaders, for the purpose of facilitating peace

in a nation that was rent asunder by religious, political and ethnic tensions.[4]

In northern Africa, the religious factor is just as important. Islam as the cement of society is taken for granted; even though there may be conflicts with regard to the brand of Islam that should set the norm of conduct, there is no dispute as to the religion that provides the locus of social cohesion. In recent years the news media have expressed a particular concern over the rise of Islamic 'fundamentalism', but it should be noted that phenomenologically, Islamic 'fundamentalism' is no different from Christian or any other religious 'fundamentalism'. This point has been aptly explained by Mohammed Tozy in his essay 'Movements of Religious Renewal'.[5] Paul Gifford has, in turn, documented the role of Christian 'fundamentalism' in promoting Western social values in tropical Africa and contrasted the relatively new fundamentalist groups, mainly from North America and Europe, with the more mainstream denominations, whose presence dates from the colonial period when they were introduced in the modern missionary enterprise.[6] The analyses of Gifford and Tozy are complementary; it is possible to analyse along similar lines the role of Islam in Pakistan, Sikhism in Punjab, Buddhism in Tibet, and Roman Catholicism in East Timor.

The relationships between politics, economics, ethics, aesthetics, religion and ethnicity are complex. Any attempt to explain conflicts in terms of one or another of these pillars of culture always proves simplistic. The role of religion in social engineering has long been appreciated

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[4] The AACC Desmond Tutu Prize for Peace is awarded every five years to the person, group or organization that contributes most significantly towards peace in Africa. In 1992 the Prize was awarded to Bishop Dinis Sengulane of Mozambique. In 1997 it was jointly received at Addis Ababa by the Chairman of the National Council of Churches of Liberia and the Chairman of the National Islamic Commission.

[5] Tozy, Mohammed, "Movements of Religious Renewal", in: Ellis, Stephen (ed.), *Africa Now*, London: James Currey, 1995, 58-74.

[6] Gifford, Paul, *The Religious Right in Southern Africa*, Harare: Baobab, 1991.

by political leaders, so much so that every regime throughout history has taken keen interest in the social influence wielded by religious leadership. Although the appeal of religion penetrates individual consciousness much more deeply than any political ideology or epistemological conviction, it is at the social level that religion becomes pivotal in influencing the direction of institutional change. From this social perspective, religion is technology – a tool and a method of social organisation.[7]

2. Science as organised knowledge

The original meaning of science was 'organised knowledge' and only after the nineteenth century was 'science' associated exclusively with empirical enquiry. In all cultures, religious leaders have been the custodians of science until positivism divorced empirical science from religion, ethics and aesthetics in nineteenth-century Europe. Largely responsible for this divorce, Auguste Comte declared that the age of religion had ended and that the age of science had arrived; he expressed his wish to replace churches with laboratories and Christian saints with renowned scientists. Oriental cultures, on the contrary, still maintain the close relationship between religion and science. Transcendental meditation, acupuncture, herbal medicine, various forms of yoga – all these are considered 'scientific' in the oriental tradition.

In tropical Africa, colonial domination destroyed the scientific base of African cultures, while imposing imperial knowledge structures on African peoples as a strategy of subjugation and control. As Paulo Freire put it:

> All domination involves invasion – at times physical and overt, at other times camouflaged, with the invader assuming the role of a helping friend. In the last analysis, invasion is a form of economic and cultural domination. Invasion may

[7] Smart, Ninian, *Dimensions of the Sacred*, London: Fontana, 1997, 10-14.

be practiced by a metropolitan society, or it may be implicit in the domination of one class over another within the same society.

Cultural conquest leads to the cultural inauthenticity of those who are invaded; they begin to respond to the values, the standards, and the goals of the invaders. In their passion to dominate, to mold others to their patterns and their way of life, the invaders desire to know how those they have invaded apprehend reality – but only so that they can dominate the latter more effectively. In cultural invasion it is essential that those who are invaded come to see their reality with the outlook of the invaders rather than their own; for the more they mimic the invaders, the more stable the position of the latter becomes.

For cultural invasion to succeed, it is essential that those invaded become convinced of their intrinsic inferiority. Since everything has its opposite, if those who are invaded consider themselves inferior, they must necessarily recognize the superiority of the invaders. The values of the latter thereby become the pattern for the former. The more invasion is accentuated and those invaded are alienated from the spirit of their own culture and from themselves, the more the latter want to be like the invaders: to walk like them, dress like them, talk like them.[8]

Africa's contribution to the universal pool of knowledge has yet to be publicly appreciated in the international arena. UNESCO provides a forum for discussion of issues of this kind, but the participation of some of the powerful nations has been lukewarm. In his book *The African Genius*, Basil Davidson shows how science – organised knowledge – facilitated the development of African civilisations, some of them long before the emergence of modern European imperialism.[9] More recently, Martin Bernal has documented the African foundations of Mediterranean civilisations, including Hebrew, Greek and Roman.[10] In June 1979, Dr Amadou-Mahtar M'bow, former Director-General of UNESCO, raised the following challenge:

What were the factors that enabled the modern West to subject the rest of the world to its laws? What specific historical process brought this about and how can one explain the survival of a system of cultural and economic domination

[8] Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, London: Penguin, 1996, 134-36.
[9] Davidson, Basil, *The African Genius*, Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969, 1-25.
[10] Bernal, Martin, *Black Athena*, Vols. I & II, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987/1991.

which has outlived the colonial era and continues as a form of indirect dependence? I would answer in this way. The industrial world has profoundly influenced the advance of Africa primarily because the Africans themselves have not succeeded in countering this pattern of development with an alternative model of progress rooted in their own traditions.[11]

To illustrate how this challenge can be met, T.R. Odhiambo describes a community living on a small island in Lake Victoria, which sustains itself using the resources on the island with a high population density and a self-regenerating ecology:

In large parts of Africa, shifting cultivation has been practised as a viable method of assuring yields of crops while sustaining the fertility of the rather fragile tropical soils. The Wakara, living on the small island of Ukara in Lake Victoria, had no chance to do this... [since] an acre of arable land supports about two people. In the face of this acute problem, the Wakara have adopted an indigenous farming system which is unique, technically highly productive, and agronomically difficult to improve upon. The system involves almost continuous cropping, which at the same time ensures the maintenance of soil fertility.

The Wakara apply heavily farmyard manure or green manure to the land every year. Cattle husbandry is therefore an essential part of their farming system... The Wakara have also devised a three-shift rotation system. [...] The whole farming system is characterized by a most economical use of scarce resources and closely planned management of the land. The Wakara provides an extremely apposite instance of an indigenous technology that we should retain and further develop to meet Africa's specific needs. And there are others – in psychiatry, in traditional medicine, in pottery and other forms of artisanship – that we should equally strive to maintain and modernize.[12]

In conclusion, Odhiambo suggests that 'part of the strategy for a new technological revolution in Africa is for the scientific and technological communities to "rationalise, modernise, and put on stream the continent's indigenous technologies for wider and more sustained production. This is a crucially important step, since the African has been told so many times that he has no indigenous science or technology that he has almost come to believe it. This near-belief in itself has been a major

[11] Cited in Shinn, Roger L. (ed.), *Faith and Science in an Unjust World*, Geneva: WCC, 1980, 159.
[12] Ibid., 161.

stumbling block in nurturing a scientific and technological culture in Africa."'[13]

Ali Mazrui, from the perspective of political science, offers a similar prescription for Africa's social reconstruction:

> We have sought to demonstrate that in the last three centuries Africa has helped substantially in building the West's industrial civilisation, while the West may have hampered the evolution of Africa's own industrial culture. Africa's contribution to the West's industrialisation has ranged from the era of the slave trade for Western plantations to the new era of cobalt and chrome for Western factories. The foundations of Western industrial prosperity include African labour, territory and minerals. Africa's contribution to Western industrial development inadvertently helped to create the white technological Brahmins of the world. The West's disruptive impact on Africa helped to create the Black technological untouchables of the twentieth century. How can the balance be restored? At the beginning of this book we prescribed for Africa the twin strategies of looking inward to Africa's own ancestry and culture, and looking outward to the wider world at large....The Third World as a whole needs to exploit its own areas of leverage and influence – such areas as producer power, consumer power, debtor power and the newly emerging skill power.[14]

3. Theology as the science of religion

In every culture, the majority of people follow religious traditions as a matter of daily routine. Only a few engage the intellect for rigorous analysis and elucidation of religion. Religious leaders, however, have to establish within their ranks a group of specialists whose duty is to explain the internal coherence of their tradition. Without such explanation, religion loses its convincing tenets and becomes extinct. Missionary religions have evolved elaborate guilds of scribes and scholars. In Christianity, for example, the Bible has been translated into hundreds of languages, according to need and availability of human and financial resources. Cross-cultural encounters encourage intellectuals to find the divergence and convergence between cultures and religions that have

[13] Ibid.
[14] Mazrui, Ali, op. cit., 177.

come into contact. This interaction produces a new body of knowledge that in later generations helps to modify the cultural and religious heritage of both societies.

In the first century of the Christian era, for example, three cultural traditions interacted in the Mediterranean region – Aramaic, Greek and Roman. Most of the gospels were written in popular Greek, even though the Roman rulers used Latin as the language of administration. The local people used their own languages for nurture and social interaction. The linguistic situation in contemporary East Africa is comparable to that in the Mediterranean region during the formative years of Christianity: English, analogous to Latin – the language of administration; Kiswahili, analogous to Greek – the language of commerce and international communication; and the various African languages, analogous to Aramaic, Syrian, Phoenician, and so on. Each of these languages is a carrier of a particular worldview – a cosmology and an ontology. Theology presupposes a worldview and cannot be articulated in an ontological vacuum.

The 'Christian' theology that the missionary enterprise has presupposed was formulated in the context of the European cosmology and ontology. When Africans integrate Christianity, they do not automatically switch over from their traditional cosmology to the European. Rather, they appropriate doctrinal concepts according to their own ontological presuppositions. For Christianity to become entrenched in the African cultural milieu, it will be necessary for African Christian theologians to articulate the relevance of the gospel and the church in the African cultural and ontological context. This task cannot and ought not to be done by missionaries. The theology of St Augustine of Canterbury was certainly very important for the establishment of Christianity in England; however, as a missionary from Rome he could only introduce the Christian faith to the Angles. The appropriation of the gospel to English culture was the responsibility of the English divines. Such is the challenge that African Christian theologians must face.

This point has been aptly elaborated by Gerald West in his book *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation*, where he emphasises how much a theologian's ideological orientation and social commitment determine the hermeneutical outcome in a project of biblical interpretation. This insight is illustrated in South Africa:

> First, my analysis demonstrates an important paradigm shift in black theology which is common to all black interpreters, and those white interpreters who stand in solidarity with them. Interpreting the Bible is done from within a clear commitment to the community of struggle, a commitment which entails accountability to and solidarity with the struggle of the poor and oppressed for liberation and life in South Africa. And, as we have seen, this commitment to 'black theology's political starting point in the struggles of the oppressed and exploited black people in South Africa dictates a new way of reading the Bible.' Second, the analysis... clarifies the strategic differences among those committed to the struggle for liberation and life in South Africa. These differences are by no means minimal or insignificant, as this and subsequent discussion demonstrates.[15]

West further observes that the hermeneutical perspectives of biblical scholars differ from those of ordinary readers of the Bible, owing to the starting points of the two categories of Bible readers. He urges biblical scholars to link themselves with ordinary Bible readers in order to learn from them and facilitate the widening of the frames of reference for both. Elitist aloofness on the part of scholars alienates them from ordinary readers and this alienation deprives the community of faith of the mutual nurturing that the scholars are expected to encourage. As West puts it:

> What is particularly exciting and challenging about reading the Bible with ordinary readers is that it is quite legitimate for ordinary readers and trained readers to emerge from the reading process with different elements of interest. The readings produced in this interface affect ordinary and trained readers differently, and this is not surprising because we come to the text from different places, and after the reading encounter return to our different places. Our subjectivities as trained and ordinary readers are differently constituted, and so the effect that the

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[15] West, Gerald O., *Biblical Hermeneutics of Liberation. Modes of Reading the Bible in the South African Context*, Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995 (2nd rev. ed.), 101.

corporate reading has on our subjectivities will be different. However, and this is extremely important, we will have been partially constituted by each other's subjectivities.[16]

Laurenti Magesa, in his book *African Religion, The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, has succinctly articulated the hermeneutical starting point of ordinary African Christians who presuppose the African cultural heritage as they express their commitment to the Christian faith:

African Religion emphasizes the communal nature of property within a given community, and at least to that extent, follows the principle of inclusion. Yet, it does not completely dismiss private or personal ownership. For African Religion, the ethical task is to establish a balance between exclusion and inclusion with regard to the acquisition and use of material resources; in other words, to establish a balance between the rights to private ownership of property and the human meaning of the resources of the universe. Thus, tradition usually indicates the parameters within which personal ownership may be exercised without harming the common good, which, in the end, is always primary. In African religious thought, the right of personal ownership is situated within the context of joint or public right of access to the basic resources necessary for life. Generally, the interplay between an individual's right to own property and his or her expectations with regard to access to communal property assures the least economic inequality in the community. This is not by accident. It is intended to prevent attitudes destructive of relationships, such as arrogance and envy. In the moral perspective of African Religion, disharmony must be constantly guarded against, whether it comes from social or economic inequalities.[17]

The African perspective on social reality described by Magesa is on many points at variance with the individualistic disposition that the missionary enterprise has introduced from the Euro-Hellenic heritage. African Christian theologians have to face the challenge of synthesising the dialectical, Euro-American academic training they have accumulated with the synthetic wisdom of the African heritage. The cultivation of this synthesis has great potential for shaping the process of Africa's social reconstruction.

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[16] Ibid., 237.

[17] Magesa, Laurenti, *African Religion: The Moral Traditions of Abundant Life*, Nairobi: Paulines, 1997, 242.

4. Technology as utilised science

Technology means organised knowledge about tools of various kinds and uses. In order to make tools, one must know how to identify a problem, understand the various ways of solving it, and finally select the option that offers the best solution. The next stage in the technological cycle involves designing and testing prototypes in the context of actual use. When a prototype has been developed and tested, it has then to be produced in sufficient numbers to be distributed to users according to demand. Industrialisation is the process through which tools are mass-produced, ensuring predetermined quality and quantity. In the entire technological cycle, science – organised knowledge – is utilised to make work easier, faster, or more efficient and effective.

In his study of the role of science and technology in the social history of the USA, David Noble has observed that

> technology is not simply a driving force in human history, it is something in itself human; it is not merely man-made, but made of men. Although it may aptly be described as a composite of the accumulated scientific knowledge, technical skills, implements, logical habits, and material products of people, technology is always more than this, more than information, logic, things. It is people themselves, undertaking their various activities in particular social and historical contexts, with particular interests and aims.[18]

In the same place Noble insists that the essentially human phenomenon of technologyis therefore also a social process:

> it does not simply stimulate social development from inside but, rather, constitutes fundamental social development in itself: the preparation, mobilisation, and habituation of people for new types of productive activity, the reorientation of the pattern of social investment, the restructuring of social institutions, and, potentially, the redefinition of social relationships.[19]

Similarly, Herbert Marcuse writes:

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[18] Noble, David F., *America by Design*, New York: Alfred Knopf, 1977, xxii.
[19] Ibid.

> We do not ask for the influence or effect of technology on the human individuals. For they are themselves an integral part and factor of technology, not only as the men who invent or attend to machinery, but also as the social groups which direct its application and utilisation. Technology, as a mode of production, as the totality of instruments, devices, and contrivances which characterize the machine age, is thus at the same time a mode of organizing and perpetuating (or changing) social relationships, a manifestation of prevalent thought and behaviour patterns, an instrument for control and domination.[20]

While it is true that scientific knowledge transcends cultural limitations, the contexts within which it is developed are always culturally circumscribed. In this sense it is possible to refer to specific cultural frames of reference in connection with particular forms of science and technology. The technology for central heating systems was first developed in cold climates, where the necessity to keep warm in winter set scientists and inventors in search of ways and means to make life more comfortable. Likewise, refrigeration was developed in the endeavour to preserve food during the long summer months. Before refrigeration, food was treated with salt and spices – another form of technology to solve the problem.

In Africa, pre-colonial methods of food storage were radically different from those that imperial industries introduced and imposed. Most communities were either agrarian or nomadic, and there was a symbiotic relationship between the two modes of life. Trade flourished between the two, and there was mutual respect between them. Among the agrarian communities, much emphasis was put on organic storage through the cultivation of perennial root, fruit and grain and legume crops. The nomadic communities used the culling of livestock as a means of organic food storage. The disruption and destruction of these social systems led to chronic famines in tropical Africa, and imported technology has failed ever since to solve Africa's problems of food security.

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[20] Marcuse, Herbert, "Some Social Implications of Modern Technology", in: *Studies in Philosophy and Social Science*, Vol. IX, 1941, 414-439.

The foregoing remarks point towards the observation that science and technology are an integral part of the description of every human culture. The degree of technological sophistication is difficult to measure, comparatively, because each community must find ways and means to solve its own problems. However, a community under the yoke of colonial or other forms of domination lacks the freedom to develop its own capacity to meet its own needs with its own technological resources.[21] Domination is often justified through myths that portray the ruled as weak, ignorant, incapable, lazy, and so on. Such negative stereotypes, when they are inculcated through the education system or through the news media, result in a generation of dependent people who look to their rulers for patronage and relief. As early as 1933, Albert North Whitehead wrote:

> It is a great mistake to divide people into sharp classes, namely, people with such-and-such a knack and people without it. These trenchant divisions are simply foolish. Most humans are born with certain aptitudes. But these aptitudes can easily remain latent unless they are elicited into activity by fortunate circumstances. If anyone has no aptitude of a certain type, no training can elicit it. But, granted the aptitude, we can discuss the ways of training it. Foresight depends upon understanding. In practical affairs it is a habit. But the habit of foreseeing is elicited by the habit of understanding. To a large extent, understanding can be acquired by a conscious effort and it can be taught. Thus the training of Foresight is by the medium of Understanding. Foresight is the product of Insight.[22]

In the twentieth century, technology has acquired a special status because of the immense power it wields over humankind. The masters of technology can hold a whole society to ransom. For this reason, rulers have great interest in maintaining a close relationship with industrialists. Where in the past there was close link between religious leaders and the guilds, today there is a wide gap between industry and religious institutions. The divorce of science and technology from religion, ethics and

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[21] Mazrui, Ali, op. cit., 159-177.
[22] Whitehead, Alfred N., *Adventures of Ideas*, New York: Free Press, 1967, 89 (1933 for the 1st ed.).

aesthetics has led to the breakdown of sanctions that religion used to impose on anti-human adventures in knowledge and experimentation. This has led to exploitation of individuals and communities for power and profit. Technology without moral sanctions is selfish and brutal. Science without ethical and aesthetic foundations is ultimately purposeless and frustrating; it is culturally suicidal.

5. Religion as the conscience of science

There were times when religion functioned as science and as technology. Such was the case in Europe until the Renaissance in the sixteenth-century and in Africa until the European colonisation at the end of the nineteenth. In those times, religious leaders were at the same time the custodians of scientific knowledge and technological expertise. Sacred scriptures were then used as manuals to distinguish truth from falsehood, knowledge from ignorance, right from wrong, certainty from doubt. Such sacred books as the Bible, the Talmud, the Qur'an, and the Vedas were regarded in their respective religious contexts as the ultimate criterion of judgment and the supreme source of all knowledge.

The separation of theology from science and technology from religion was a slow, painful process. The 'free-thinkers' who dared to challenge the authority of religious leaders and the knowledge contained in the sacred scriptures were persecuted and sometimes executed. Copernicus and Galileo remind us that the personal cost of innovative thinking can be as high as public ridicule, even for knowledge that later becomes the foundation of public education. Without the astronomical discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo, space science and technology would be impossible, yet Martin Luther, despite his apparently 'progressive' theological insights, regarded Copernicus as an 'upstart astrologer' and a fool. When Luther heard that Copernicus was spreading his ideas in Prussia, he is reported to have responded thus:

People give ear to an upstart astrologer who strove to show that the earth revolves, not the heavens or the firmament, the sun and the moon. Whoever wishes to appear clever must devise some new system, which of all systems is of course the best. This fool [Copernicus] wishes to reverse the entire science of astronomy; but sacred Scripture tells us that Joshua commanded the sun to stand still, and not the earth.[23]

When, in 1628, Englishman William Harvey published his discovery about blood circulation, Italian thinkers denounced him by suggesting that perhaps in England, blood passed through the human heart as water through a pump, and that in Rome, blood flowed smoothly through the body as a quiet stream down a meadow![24] Charles Darwin's theory of evolution was also greeted with much criticism by some members of the Royal Society. Bishop Samuel Wilberforce of Oxford scathingly attacked Darwin at the meeting of the British Association in 1860, on the ground that his theory was contradicting the biblical doctrine of creation. Today, the theory of evolution has become one of the most influential ideas in biology.[25]

The examples outlined above show that the challenge posed by scientists to the monopoly of knowledge wielded by religious leaders resulted in a struggle for social influence. By the middle of the twentieth century, the balance of influence had tilted in favour of science and technology. Scientism reached its zenith with the deployment of the atom bomb in 1945 and the successful mission to the moon in the 1960s and, in biology, with organ transplants and genetic engineering. Yet the limits of science and technology remain within the bounds of empirical

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[23] Cited in Russell, Bertrand, *History of Western Philosophy*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1961 (2nd ed.), 515.

[24] See Donders, J.G., "Don't Fence Us In. The Liberating Power of Philosophy", Inaugural Lecture, University of Nairobi, 1977, 1-10, and Russell, Bertrand, op. cit., 521.

[25] Donders, J.G., op.cit. The response of Bishop Samuel Wilberforce to Darwin's theory is cited in James, E.O., *Christianity and Other Religions*, London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968, 17-18. See also Irvine, William, *Apes, Angels and Victorians. A Joint Biography of Darwin and Huxley*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1956, 88.

experimentation. Moral, aesthetic and spiritual considerations are beyond those limits. Scientific and technological knowledge is thus complemented by religious insight in the moral, aesthetic and spiritual domains.

Today, it would be ridiculous to deny the supremacy of science and technology as sources of reliable knowledge and utility from a materialistic standpoint. However, science and technology do not have the final word about the ultimate nature of reality; they provide important and indispensable perspectives about some aspects of reality but cannot cover the whole spectrum of everything there is. For instance, science and technology will provide weapons as destructive as generals may commission. However, no weapon can help the generals to make the moral decision to declare war or command an army to attack. Such decisions remain within the moral plane, for which the responsibility remains with the leaders, not with their weapons. Likewise, science and technology may be available to clone human beings, but the moral decision to do such cloning remains with the scientists themselves. They cannot appeal to the knowledge they have accumulated to help them make the moral decision.

Religion, as the conscience of science and technology, can cultivate the values that would help scientists and engineers to make responsible moral decisions. For this role to be effectively carried out, religious leaders and theologians will need to take a keen interest in the achievements of science and technology, appreciating the frontiers of knowledge that scientists and engineers are opening up. At the same time, scientists and engineers will need to appreciate the limitations of science and technology and the complementarity of the various branches of knowledge. This mutual acknowledgement and appreciation of epistemological complementarity will come as a necessary and sound foundation of social reconstruction.

6. Practical implications

The foregoing argument leads us to ask how, with regard to the project of social reconstruction of Africa, theology and religion should constructively relate with science and technology. Between 1994 and 1997, I researched on this question and had the opportunity to visit many countries in tropical Africa, in Europe and the Americas. During these visits, I discussed the question with a wide spectrum of people, clerical and lay, professional and non-professional, men and women, literate and non-literate. The results of this enquiry are summarised here in six points as hypotheses for further exploration:

1. Africa has become a *mitumba* (second-hand goods) continent. Throughout tropical Africa, both in rural and urban areas, sprawling open-air markets are flooded with second-hand goods that have been dumped from Europe and North America, from lingerie to machinery. In the meantime, local factories are going into receivership, owing to liberalisation without anti-dumping legislation and enforcement. While Africa opens its markets to goods and services from abroad, tariffs and other trade restrictions are raised against African products, leading to an extreme pauperisation of Africa and its peoples. African communities, particularly through religious education and encouragement, will have to boost their moral and social integrity to a point where *mitumba* are not morally and aesthetically acceptable. Such an ethos would have to enter the core of national policy and legislation, as indeed happens in the countries from which the *mitumba* originate.

2. Africa is a *sukuma wiki* (kale vegetable) continent, despite its ample and fertile land, large lakes, long and wide rivers, perimeter coastline, tropical sunshine and equatorial rain. It is a continent whose people produce what they do not consume and consume what they do not produce. Agricultural land is used to produce crops whose yields are exported at prices set by the buyers. The money earned is then used to im-

port basic food and other goods at prices set by the sellers. This kind of economy leads to perpetual dependence, resulting in the erosion of human dignity. The example of the Wakara on Lake Victoria, and others like it, are worth promoting. Communities should set their goals according to the means at their disposal to achieve them. This is a simple but profound message that can be inculcated through religious education.

3. Africa is a *matatu* (improvised passenger transport) continent where planned public transportation systems have collapsed and where people have to improvise in order to move about for business and leisure. It is possible for local communities to organise decent and affordable public transportation, but such initiatives would have to be based on an ethic of efficient service, rather than on the ethic of profit. In northern Tanzania, the church at diocesan level has started such an initiative.

4. Africa is a *misaada* (donations) continent, where aid seems to have become more important than trade. From a moral perspective, free things that are offered as gifts are invaluable, provided that mutual respect is sustained between the giver and the recipient. When this mutual respect is lost, invaluable things become valueless. Aid in Africa has become valueless, because the esteem that should go with it has been compromised by condescension on the part of donors and inferiority on the part of recipients. Valueless things can be wasted or squandered, since they are of no value to the giver or the recipient. Religion can help to restore esteem in economic relations, by promoting the principle of trade rather than aid; *earning* rather than *yearning*.

5. Africa is a *pothole* continent, in which maintenance is often considered a burden rather than a necessity. We need to recall the proverbs that emphasise the culture of maintenance and inculcate this ethic in religious education. A stitch in time saves nine. *Usipojenga ufa, utajenga ukuta* (‘if you do not repair the crack, you will eventually rebuild the whole wall’). In his book *Grand Corruption*, George Moody-Stuart has explained how bribery condoned by lending governments influences the

award of bilateral and multilateral contracts in Africa. Transparency International, Oxfam, Christian Aid and other NGOs have occasionally exposed the hypocrisy of those OECD governments that claim to be committed to the 'alleviation of poverty' in Africa while their policies achieve the opposite consequences. It is more lucrative to sign a contract for a new road than to repair an old one. For those individuals, corporations and governments interested in the pauperisation of Africa, it makes sense to wait until a road they have financed on loan is completely dilapidated and then provide another loan to build the same road anew. The borrowing country will then pay twice for the same infrastructure. This observation, which has evidence throughout Africa, partly explains why the infrastructure continually shrinks instead of expanding. *Potholes* have become the main feature of African road networks.

6. Africa is becoming a continent of *despair*. Owing to increasing pauperisation, especially under economic 'liberalisation', many people, especially the youth, are losing hope. They cannot see the possibility of enjoying a better life, and they have no hope for their offspring either. In such a situation, society becomes chaotic, for lack of a future to hope for and shared values to hold together its members. The church is a community of hope; it is religion, more than any other social institution that can restore the hope that has been eroded. It can become a place where people can dream together, and wake up to work together for realisation of their dreams. Jesus says he has come that we might have life in abundance, here on earth. Religion can restore hope by facilitating the realisation of the small dreams that believers dream, day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year. Poetically, I wish to express this insight as follows:

Success may be measured
Not by the position one has achieved,
but by the obstacles one has encountered,
and the aptitude one has exerted
in overcoming them.

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SOME CHALLENGES TO A RELIGIOUS GLOBAL ETHICS IN AN INCREASINGLY SECULARISED WORLD[1]

John Raymaker, Germany

Introduction

Hans Küng closes his book on Islam[2] with his oft-used refrain that 1) humanity cannot survive without a consensus on ethics; 2) there will be no global peace until there is peace among religions; 3) there can be no religious peace without interfaith dialogue. Though not affiliated with Hans Küng, it is in such a spirit that the Geneva-based Globethics.net Foundation sponsored an international conference near Nairobi, Kenya, in January 2009. The Conference was a timely event attended by some 60 specialists in religious ethics hailing from Africa, parts of Asia, Europe and the Americas.[3]

This article researches an ethical method that may help lay bases for a global social ethics responsive to the various religious traditions of the

[1] This article was first edited by Jayendra Soni and John A. Raymaker, to whom we address heartfelt thanks.

[2] Küng, Hans, *Islam Past, Present and Future*, trans. John Bowen, Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2007, 661 (original edition: *Der Islam. Geschichte, Gegenwart, Zukunft*, Munich: Piper Verlag, 2004).

[3] A detailed account of the meeting can be found on www.globethics.net.

world. It seeks to keep in mind both Küng's admonition and Globethics.net's practical approach. It first touches on the important distinction between faith and beliefs, which can help us understand and evaluate conflicting religious claims. It then turns to the works of Bernard Lonergan and Gibson Winter in the light of the faith-belief distinction as providing a method for pursuing social ethics on a global scale. Finally, it uses this approach to sketch some ethical views of Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, Islam, and secularism so as to help foster a global ethics appropriate to our increasingly multicultural 'global village'.

1. The role of faith and beliefs in ethics

William Johnston has called for a global mediation of mysticism on the model of Hans Küng's global ethics.[4] A helpful start for such a project is to invoke William Cantwell Smith's distinction between faith and beliefs as used by Bernard Lonergan.[5] To live religiously is not merely to live in the presence of certain symbols; it means to be involved with them and through them in a special way that may lead beyond the symbols themselves, demanding the totality of a person's response. Smith calls such a total involvement faith. On this view, an act of faith is an expression of some form of ultimate connection with all that we are or can become in the face of our own mortality. The monotheistic faiths call this ultimate connection God or Allah; Buddhism refers to it in other ways such as Buddha consciousness or enlightenment. Faith, in the sense here proposed, roots us in the fundamental nature of the cosmos; it reminds us that we are children of the universe, of the earth, and that we should not reject whatever is good, true and beautiful in life. It goes be-

[4] Johnston, William, "Has Mysticism a Future?" in: *Japan Mission Journal*, Summer 2006, 82.
[5] Lonergan, Bernard, *Method in Theology*, New York: Herder, 1972, 110-123, and *Collected Works of Bernard Lonergan*, Vol. 17, *Philosophical and Theological Papers 1965-1980*, University of Toronto Press, 2004, 31.

yond affirming a set of contingent beliefs, as any language is contingent upon the historical context in which it is evoked. Too often, language is universalised beyond its proper realms of application; it becomes a tool of conflicting dogmatic positions or ideology stemming from ethnocentrism, bias or self-interest.

A proper use of the faith-belief distinction requires that believers of any religion be able to discern the value of believing the word of religion. It also requires that one accept the valid judgments of fact and of value that a particular religion proposes. Such a view will invite believers of various communities to recognise in one another the common faith orientations within specific communities as well as within the world religions exemplified in their teachings. Faith transcends particular dogmatic expressions. It can be considered as the archetypal dimension of all human consciousness when it enters the realm of 'mystery' – as Gabriel Marcel understood the distinction between 'problem' and 'mystery'.[6] While dogmas deal with theological problems raised in particular historical eras, 'mystery' is the fundamental nature of human consciousness in the face of the temporal and contingent nature of human existence. Religious people may express their faith in terms of an ultimate connection, but secularists with a moral sense tend to speak solely in ethical terms.

Obviously, there are differences to be overcome if a consensus is to be reached on what a global ethics is and how it can help humanity solve its many problems. One must balance faith and beliefs with the daunting realities humans face in an unfaithful world. What types of theological and cultural ethics may help us defuse historical misunderstandings now exacerbated by fundamentalists and terrorists? Bernard Lonergan and Gibson Winter both reflected on such problems within Western con-

[6] Marcel, Gabriel, *Being and Having*, trans. Katherine Farrar, Westminster, London: Dacre Press, 1949.

texts. Can their works be of help in a quest to reach a viable consensus as to what a global ethics means in our global village?

2. Lonergan's and Winter's methods towards a global ethics

Garry Dorrien describes the tradition of social ethics that began with the distinctly modern idea that Christianity has a socio-ethical mission to transform the structures of society in the direction of social justice.[7] Dorrien notes that in the early 1880s the proponents of a 'social gospel' founded what later became social ethics. Not surprisingly, this form of ethics arose at the same time that Social Darwinism and sociology came into vogue.[8] Gibson Winter figures prominently in Dorrien's book as one of the ethicists who can help us address modernity and postmodernity, on the ground of Winter's examination of the four divergent styles used in sociology, namely the behaviourist, functionalist, intentionalist and voluntarist styles.[9] Each style can be relevant and effective but one has to discover the inherent limitations in each approach. The functionalist style, for example, influenced by Talcott Parsons differs sharply from C. Wright Mills' voluntarist style.

Whereas Max Weber distinguished between social science and social policy, Winter asks whether or not each of the four styles is philosophically grounded. Social policies can only be sound if they are based on

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[7] Dorrien, Gary, *Social Ethics in the Making. Interpreting an American Tradition*, Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2008.

[8] Francis Greenwood Peabody, one of the founders of social ethics, argued that the emerging discipline of sociology needed to be informed by the ethical conscience of progressive religion. A question is whether such a conscience exists in most believers or in postmodernists that would give us a basis to extend the notion of social ethics to a global ethics. I argue that it does, provided that the foundation is in faith or mystical experience for religious people or in other forms of self-transcendence (as espoused, for instance, by Albert Camus) and that such a self-transcendent foundation can be discussed without ideological biases.

[9] Winter, Gibson, *Elements for a Social Ethics*, New York: Macmillan, 1966.

ethical value judgments. Winter, influenced by Max Scheler and Alfred Schutz, opts for the intentionalist style as the one that can help the other styles ground the tensions between a creative self and a social self.[10] His encompassing approach defines social ethics as the 'expression of ultimate commitments in the sharing of man's future, embodying a view of man and his fulfilment in concrete recommendations for social policy.'[11] Such an approach to social ethics recalls the encompassing roles of faith and symbol or of mystery in Marcel as we saw above. For Lonergan, one must use dialectic to assess why this is so.

Lonergan's cognitional theory[12] and theological method[13] complement what Winter did in social ethics. One problem in Winter's *opus* is that, while in his *Elements* he had relied on the intentionalist style in his effort to relate authentic praxis to society and its dominant instrumentalist reason,[14] he later tried to ground his ethics in Heidegger's *Denken* (thinking). This was, arguably, a step backwards,[15] in that Heidegger's

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[10] Western philosophy and ethics passed through such stages as the merely empirical approach of a Hume that led to Kant's attempt to rescue us from Humean relativism. In the twentieth century, Scheler and the Frankfurt School devised further strategies to preserve a sense of value in ethics. Scheler, for example, showed that Kant's ethics cannot provide guidance for actual conduct. For Scheler, apriorism need not be merely formal, but can also be based on the non-formal values that had formerly been the exclusive domain of empirical ethics (see Scheler, Max, *Vom Umsturz der Werte*, Vol. 3 of *Gesammelte Werke*, Berne: Francke Verlag, 1965).

[11] Winter, Gibson, *Social Ethics. Issues in Ethics and Society*, New York: Harper Forum Books, 1968, 17.

[12] Lonergan, Bernard, *Insight. A Study of Human Understanding*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1957.

[13] Lonergan, Bernard, *Method in Theology*, New York: Herder, 1972.

[14] Winter, Gibson, *Elements for a Social Ethics*, op. cit.

[15] While Winter correctly understood that each of the four styles in the social sciences addresses itself to the situational level of relevant policies, he argued 'that the temporal order projected by the scientific style creates a screen for the selection of relevant questions and development of particular themes' ("Toward a Comprehensive Science of Policy", in: *Journal of Religion 50*, 1970, 359). While he saw each style as being implicitly an ontology, which unifies meaning and an ethical perspective, he problematically relied on 'the primordial unity of ecstatic temporality'. Lonergan first grounds epistemology and metaphysics in

Denken does not sufficiently distinguish between the languages of description and common sense, in both of which things are related to us, and the language of science in which things are related to one another. Critics differ as to whether Heidegger's turn to temporality in Part II of *Sein und Zeit* purified the ontology of Part I or whether or not it laid the groundwork for a more original appropriation of it. Lonergan laid groundwork for a new approach to metaphysics based on his own original cognitional theory. On this view, Lonergan's cognitional-intentionality analysis grounds the voluntarist style of a C. Wright Mills or the later Winter's attempt to articulate the transformative power of symbols. It gives us foundations for grounding the four social scientific styles as well as the role of symbols in all cultural settings.

According to Lonergan's generalised empirical method (GEM), all humans have the same basic cognitional structure consisting of recurrent cognitional operations operating on four levels: experiencing, understanding, judging and doing (acting). One experiences data, understands the data, judges whether the data and one's understanding are correct and decides to act in accordance with the resulting knowledge. Ideally, the four levels lead[16] to self-transcendence – that is, our basic cogni-

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the foundational priority of cognitional analysis *vis-à-vis* ontology and metaphysics. Elsewhere, I argue that 'Lonergan's insistence on the reflexive mediation of immediacy' is a surer guide than Heidegger's life-long efforts to retrieve and disclose the immediacy of *Dasein*'s openness to Being through the ontological difference that is rooted in Kant's 'phenomena' (Raymaker, John, *Theory-Praxis of Social Ethics. The Complementarity between Lonergan's and Winter's Foundations*, Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1977, 169).

[16] 'Where knowing is a structure, knowing knowing must be a reduplication of the structure... Self-knowledge is the reduplicated structure: it is experience, understanding, and judging' with respect to these three levels. 'Consciousness is not knowing knowing; it is merely experience of knowing' (see *Papers by Bernard Lonergan*, Montreal: Palm Publishers, 1967, 224). Lonergan is here speaking of the first three levels of our cognitional structure, but his method (GEM) is to be extended to the fourth level – that of deciding and acting. This fourth level plays a pivotal role when one dialectically assesses the past so as to move toward the future, as occurs in foundations (*Method in Theology*, op. cit., 235-294). GEM is so named because it attributes equal validity to the data of sense

tional operations help a person transcend self. Within our basic cognitional structure, as elucidated in GEM, there emerge new horizons that faith makes possible for one committed to the ultimate, however it is expressed. Ecumenism and interfaith dialogue are means for dealing with the complexities of such a task. Lonergan offers us the 'theological' method (one that can be used in other fields) of an eightfold specialisation[17] that can help us in this regard.

GEM is not to be restricted to theology. All of GEM's eight functional specialties are related to one another. Since GEM is based on the reduplicative[18] aspects of our four basic conscious intentional operations, GEM offers ways for us to evaluate and compare the competing claims and methodologies of scientists, ethicists and historians; its eightfold functional specialisation makes use of and applies the reduplicative nature of our basic cognitional operations in all fields. Instead of a deductive approach to moral process, GEM expects moral reflection to spiral forward inductively. It assesses new situations[19] from the standpoint of transformed selves at every turn.

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and to the data of consciousness. "It does not treat of objects without taking into account the corresponding operations of the subject; it does not treat of the subject's operations without taking into account the corresponding objects" (*A Third Collection. Papers by Lonergan*, ed. Fred Crowe, New York: Paulist Press, 1985, 145). Lonergan's use of the 'data of consciousness' (originally proposed by William James and Henri Bergson) is to be compared to Husserl's intentionality analysis in which *noesis* and *noema*, act and object, are correlative. GEM allows for an inductive approach to moral process.

[17] In *Method in Theology*, Lonergan adapts GEM so as to function in eight functional specialties (research, interpretation, history, dialectic, foundations, doctrines, systematics, and communication). This occurs in two phases. The first phase mediates an encounter with the past; the second phase, pivoting on a decision (conversion), helps us encounter the future by moving through foundational commitments, a systematic rethinking of doctrines and how doctrines are to be communicated to believers while addressing present realities.

[18] See note 5. The reduplicative aspect is key to functional specialisation and to my whole approach here.

[19] While authors such as Werner Jaeger (in his *Paideia. The Ideals of Greek Culture*, trans. Gilbert Highet, Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1939) and the Algerian of Berber descent Mohammed Arkoun (in his *Rethinking Islam*, trans. and ed.

By locating Winter and Lonergan against the background of the present problems now confronting humanity, we can glimpse how their views are helpful for a global ethics. Faith (as approached by W. C. Smith and Lonergan) and social ethics (as Winter defines it) can help ethicists from all continents study and interrelate some seemingly conflicting claims of the world's religions. GEM can integrate other methods; it 'exploits' the complementarities just alluded to so as to foster an intercultural-interdisciplinary ethic.

I have applied GEM to Winter's project because the complementarities[20] between our four basic levels of conscious intentional knowing-

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Robert Lee, Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994) argue for the unchangeable principles of a Greek or an Islamic tradition, still situational realities within these traditions must not be overlooked. What is important today is how ethicists might collaborate in finding a way into the future that honours world traditions while doing justice to situational aspects. Relying in part on Tillich, Joseph Fletcher (in *Situation Ethics. The New Morality*, Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1966, 95) claimed that if 'love = justice' one can override moral principles in given situations. GEM avoids situational ethics; it helps us discover the personal implications of innate norms while challenging each of us to appropriate these norms through the transcendental precepts 'be attentive, be intelligent, be reasonable, be responsible.' From a GEM standpoint, Tad Dunne notes that while not every tradition is a morally progressing sequence, those that do 'progress' alternate between consolidating past gains and moving toward future improvements. 'GEM names the routines that consolidate gains a higher system as integrator. It names the routines within the emerged systems that precipitate the further emergence of a better system a higher system as operator. Within a developing moral tradition, value judgments perform the integrator functions, while value questions perform the operator functions… Value judgments that are provisional will function as limited integrators – limited… to the extent that… value questions function as operators, scrutinizing value judgments for factual errors, misconceived theories, or bias in the investigator… Feelings may function as operators or integrators. As operators, they represent our initial response to possible values, moving us to pose value questions. As integrators, they settle us in our value judgments...' (see Dunne, Tad, "Bernard Lonergan. Generalized Empirical Method", in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, **www.iep.utm.edu/lonergan**, accessed July 2010). GEM finds complementarities between the data of sense and of consciousness, between operators and integrators, between our basic knowing-doing operations. It argues for emergent probability in a world process based on various 'schemes of recurrence'.

[20] E. Scheid argues that there are two complementary motivations for obeying God's authority, namely God's creative will and the drive towards self-

and-doing, on the one hand, and the four styles within the social science, on the other, all 'conspire' to offer a recipe for inter-disciplinary cooperation. Such possible cooperation based on said complementarities offers a seamless transition from a secular ethics to an interfaith religious ethics. Faith helps us identify 'ultimate concern' and formulate policies conducive to honouring such a concern in mutually respectful ways. Part three seeks to apply some of the above principles, making use of complementarities inbuilt[21] in the structure of our human knowing-and-doing operations; it asks how ethicists from the various religions and from secular spheres may cooperate in formulating and implementing policies for a global ethics.

3. Applying GEM to foster a cooperative interfaith global ethics

As noted earlier, Hans Küng insists on the need for interreligious dialogue to bring about world peace. I shall now try to enlarge the notion of a social ethics to broader contexts by examining some of the many efforts now being made toward interfaith dialogue understanding and cooperation. Limited space suggests that I restrict my remarks to some of the common aspects in a foundational religious global ethics – ones broad enough to complement the views of secularists.

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fulfilment. Thus the two categories of biblical morality, awe and love, are complementary, love being the hidden source of awe, and awe the hidden source of love (see Scheid, E., "The Authority Principle in Biblical Morality", in: *Journal of Religious Ethics 8*, 1980, 180-203).

[21] In GEM's reduplicative method, the four basic levels of conscious intentionality get reduplicated in the eight specialties through the data of consciousness and of sense. GEM is an 'inbuilt bridge' to the extent that is in fact 'appropriated' by thinking, self-reflective people.

3.1.1. Law and ethical methods in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Secularism

Is a global ethics to be founded on law (as happens in Judaism and Islam) or on natural or positive law[22] as many Westerners maintain? Or can it be based on the basic recurrent operations and functional specialisation the recurrent operations make possible in reduplicative fashion? I argue for the latter. GEM's foundations include faith (see above). Faith may be grounded in good will, in the mystic, apophatic traditions of Buddhism (*Nikayas*, *Zen*), of Judaism, (*Kabbalah*), Christianity (St Basil, the Rhine and Spanish mystics) or of Islam (the use of *ta'til*, 'negation' in negative theology or the Sufi allegorical method, *ta'wil*, that looks for the hidden meaning of a text). Let us briefly explore some of these traditions with a view to detecting some of the roles law play in such traditions.

While most Western legal systems have a formal written organisation, oral traditions have been given pride of place both in Judaism and in Islam. In Judaism, the *Torah* is supplemented by a strong oral tradition (although that oral law has now been codified in the *Mishnah* and *Talmud*). In the case of Islam, the *hadith* (a body of laws, legends and stories about Muhammad's way of life) are an oral tradition with a telling influence even today. They are thought by Muslims to contain an authoritative exposition of the meaning of the *Qur'an*.[23]

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[22] Abortion has been legalised in many nations despite the moral dilemmas this presents to many. GEM can help individuals and ethicists reflect on the implications of conscience in the light of conflicting laws and divergent cultural traditions. We are called to do so from contemporary and historical viewpoints.

[23] The *Qur'an* and *hadith* are expressions of ethics in operation; yet different branches of Islam (Sunni, Shia, Sufi) and various schools within these branches accept different *hadith* collections. In *Rethinking Islam* (op. cit.), Mohammed Arkoun has thought through the problems of *Qur'an* exegesis against the background of the French hermeneutics pioneered by Emmanuel Lévinas, Paul Ricoeur and others. Similarly, Küng (op. cit., 533) notes that the 'Ankara School', composed of young teachers, has concluded that the *Qur'an* is a concretisation of timelessly valid ethical principles bound to a historical context. In different historical situations, the valid principles must be 'reworked' by the standard of

Küng notes the swift changes that marked the first century of Islamic empire-building.[24] It is in that century, beginning with the Umayyad caliphs (661-750) that *Shari'ah*, the Islamic Law, emerged. This occurred through the appointment of state judges (*qudat* – plural of *qadi*) and through the formation of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).[25] Küng adds that it may surprise some that jurisprudence – not knowledge generally – is honoured in the Muslim world with the great word 'knowledge'. In the years after 750 CE, 'it became more evident that "law" (albeit often practised by theologians) and not theology stands at the centre of Islam'. One can thus say that after the Umayyads, what was once the 'religion of an ethic became a religion of the law'.[26] Küng is quick to add, however, that this development was not one that is 'of the essence of Islam' or of its original unfolding. Still, Islam did tend to follow the Jewish orthodox tendency to prioritise law. In both cases, this involves a situational element, for there is a gap between what actually moves a person and what one imagines moves a person. Tort law, for example, is meant to recognise and bridge such a situational gap.

From a GEM point of view, which distinguishes between faith and beliefs and stresses the role of conversion and of transformative symbols in general, the tendency to give law a predominant place as occurs in

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their own insights. ... Any knowledge of the ethical principles of the *Qur'an*, including that of the present-day interpreter, remains bound up with its place and limited to its context.' Küng argues that to effect a realistic dialogue with Islam, one needs a 'time-sensitive understanding of the *Qur'an*'; besides Arkoun's hermeneutics, he cites those of Fazlur Rahman and Fradif Esack.

[24] Küng, Hans, op. cit., 208.

[25] *Shari'ah* means the path (to water). It is seen by many as God's eternal and immutable will for humanity as expressed in the *Qur'an* and Muhammad's example; *fiqh* is fallible, changeable. Still, some sources refer to *fiqh* as synonymous with *Shari'ah*. There arises the problem of *Sunna* as an interpretation of the *Qur'an*. The ex-Muslim Babu Suseelan (2008) writes that 'Islam has a unique ethical system with one set of ethics for Muslims and another set' for the *kafirs*' ('infidels'). See Suseelan, Babu, "Can Muslim Fundamentalists Be Moral?" www.politicalislam.com/blog/can-muslim-fundamentalists-be-moral, 2008, accessed July 2010.

[26] Küng, Hans, op. cit., 209.

Judaism and Islam should be allocated to the domain of belief. In contrast, the Sufi tradition does not restrain itself to laws and beliefs but opens up horizons to communicate with other religions on the level of faith.[27] In this respect, Sufis would open ways of communication with Christian, Buddhist and even New Age mystical movements.

Lonergan's foundations – an eye of love that responds to God's love – and Christian spirituality are in tune with a Christian *Zen*. For monotheistic religions, truth originates from God. One might distinguish a trans-self belief in karmic reincarnation from a faith in a self-transcendent union of love with God. But the two views can meet. On another level, as the bonds between *Zen* and the art of calligraphy are rooted in a deep, natural relationship, so Muslims accord calligraphy an inner spiritual[28] substance – even though Muslims give Muhammad a central role. Analogously, Christian views on grace are rooted in a deep *kairos* – relationship with God.

The creative power of enlightenment or of conversions[29] can tap a spontaneous willingness in sincere people, moving them to engage themselves in our age's complex problems. As one instance of a mystical, apophatic approach that can help ground a global ethics, I would like to refer to the famous *Zen* ox-herding pictures. In the pictures, the

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[27] Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), a great Islamic jurist and theologian, fell into a serious crisis at the height of his success in 1095; turning to Sufism, he renounced his career, left Baghdad and made a pilgrimage to Mecca. He criticised philosophy in order to Islamise it, striving to reconstruct the sciences on the basis of Sufism. Al-Ghazali thus helped the heretofore maligned Sufism gain recognition in the Islamic community.

[28] Dumoulin, Heinrich, *Zen Buddhism. A History*, Vol. 2, New York: Macmillan, 1990, 223. Seyyed Hossein Nasr notes how Sufis interpret Arabic calligraphy. 'Letters and words descend from the spiritual world into the physical and possess an inner spiritual substance', that is, they put on the dress of the world of corruption, as it were, to reach into the hearts of believers (Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *Islamic Art and Spirituality*, Albany, NY: SUNY, 1983, 32).

[29] Conversion must be understood here as a pivotal moment in one's life where a deep insight is gained into spirituality. This is not to be understood as a change of religious affiliation.

ox signifies one's deep self; the oxherd is an ordinary human person who, enlightened through practice, becomes one with the ox. The first picture shows the oxherd who, having lost the ox, stands alone in a vast pasture. How, we ask, can human beings lose their deeper self? The pictures suggest that although the spirit-mind (grace) helps us lest one's deeper self go astray in the wilderness, yet ignorance and delusion do lead one to stray from the ox. The oxherd then begins a search for the ox. At first, he relies only on vague intellectual knowledge. Painful *Zen* practice enables him to straddle the ox; he becomes one with it but in the paradoxical way that having become free by being identified with it, he no longer needs it. The eighth picture shows the two disappear in the embracing nothingness of a circle. The final two pictures show the oxherd return to everyday life as an enlightened one. He bestows goodness to all he meets and seeks to make the world a better place. A verse describes enlightenment in terms applicable to Christians:

A thought of faith once awakened is the basis of the way forever.
A spot of white is therefore observed on the ox head.
Faith, already awakened, is refined at every moment.
Suddenly come to an insight, joy springs up in the mind.[30]

The oxherd seeks God as an open question as do some postmodernists. One can reject faith, as many do today; but at a deeper level, it is struggled for within our inner depths. As the oxherd returns to the world, so religious people are urged to counter evil by conquering pride and sin. If secularists are perplexed by the reality of evil, GEM invites them to be converted in intellectual, moral and psychic ways that will leave them open to further inquiry as to how one can 'universalise' in the non-systematic ways of faith.

[30] Dumoulin, Heinrich, op. cit., 280.

3.1.2. GEM and a faith-belief distinction: rescuing us from 'systematic universalising'

Some Christians worry that interfaith dialogue lead to a systematic universalising of basic beliefs that winds up watering these down. The faith-belief distinction is helpful in providing an alternative here. Faith, as the foundational ground of a converted ox-herd, helps us understand and respect the beliefs of others while challenging all to move toward apophatic foundations as does the oxherd and other mystics. This is quite relevant to the demands and the practice of a global ethics. Modern ethicists, influenced in part by Martin Buber, tend to argue that morality is only possible within person-to-person community contexts. Alasdair MacIntyre[31] argues for instance that the moral structures that emerged from the Enlightenment were philosophically doomed from the start because they used an incoherent language of morality. He contends that such philosophers as Hume, Kant, Kierkegaard failed 'because of certain shared characteristics deriving from their highly specific historical background', which could not understand or relate to such disparate culture as that of the Polynesians.[32] The Renaissance had abandoned Aristotelian teleology; shorn of the teleological idea that human life has a proper end, ethics was expurgated from its central content and only remained as a vocabulary list.

Placing ethics within world cultural contexts of the type illustrated by MacIntyre helps us move from beliefs-based fundamentalisms or from a dogmatic secularism[33] to foundations lived by the oxherd or by

[31] MacIntyre, Alasdair, *After Virtue. A Study in Moral Theory*, University of Notre Dame Press, 1984, 51.

[32] MacIntyre (ibid., 113) opines that Nietzsche is to be compared to King Kamehana II of Hawaii in that in a single stroke the king effectively abolished the taboo system among his people.

[33] An emphasis on lived experience and interiority may help us find a common base to mediate a global ethics that goes beyond while interrelating the conflicting presuppositions of secularists and believers. If religious conversion is now being contested, we must be ready to reinforce the reality of moral conversion grounding ethics. What postmodernists relativise (such as the possibility of a

people of faith. Transcending but respecting beliefs is one way to avoid relativist ethics. The foundations GEM offers are viable in transcultural, interfaith, interdisciplinary contexts inasmuch as they respect an implicit or explicit faith of a person. Such a faith has a conscious intentional dimension based in personal and communal situations. As Ezekiel and Muhammad had powerful visions with strong ethical implications, so GEM foundations invite all converted people to live within open horizons that respect beliefs and the systematisations of belief in each tradition but leave people free to be ethically transformed. Secularists too, may fit within such a broad description. Studies of the way given traditions respect spiritual symbols are called for – studies that can help rescue both secularists and believers from 'systematic universalizing'. This article seeks to turn apparently mutually exclusive horizons into avenues that avoid unwarranted universalising. Globethics.net complements such an approach because it seeks to help us respect one another's spiritual symbols and ethical commitments.

3.2. Reconciling religious and secular global ethics

Our pluralist world demands that a religious focus on social ethics not overlook how such a focus can intermesh with that of non-religious approaches to ethics. Stanley Hauerwas recalls the remarkable change in advanced theological education that occurred in the USA in the late 1960s and early 1970s.[34] This involved a migration of Christian ethics studies from seminaries to graduate programs at religiously unaffiliated universities. Some feared that such a development would impoverish

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common base for ethics) finds hermeneutical-dialectical helps in functional specialisation for applying ethics as an integral aspect of such specialisation. GEM mediates between methods and their culturo-knowledge matrices as it engages people ethically. By having people 'sublate' concepts through personal insights which lead to rational reflection, GEM helps both theologians and existentialist philosophers (who stress the immediacy of experience) authentically work out an ethic applicable to the sciences, to given religions or to interreligious dialogue.

[34] Hauerwas, Stanley, "Christian Ethics in America (and the JRE). A Report on a Book I will not Write", in: *Journal of Religious Ethics 25.3*, 1997.

Christian moral reflection, making it difficult for the churches to reflect ethically in ways intelligible to Christians.

Lonergan's studies on self-transcendence and on intellectual and moral conversions and Winter's approach to the different styles in sociology offer us complementary ways to reconcile religious and secular approaches to ethics. Their views need to be extended, using the research of anthropologists and other specialists from various cultural traditions, as well as the facilities of ethics research centres. In this sense, Küng's insistence on the necessity of interfaith dialogue is to be extended to viable methods for religious and secular ethicists to strive for peace and justice. Reaching consensus on ethics to attain global peace requires interfaith dialogue. A question that can be raised is how well do centres for ethics, inspired and organised by religious groups, relate to centres and university faculties that limit themselves to a secular ethics. Because it addresses people within concrete situations, GEM appears as a relevant instrument for both religious and secular centres studying ethics.

Conclusion

Solidarity with victims of ideologies and of circumstances is an imperative of global ethics.[35] GEM's emphasis on conscious intentionality can help a global ethics assess the various stands of the world religions and of secularists. It can help our world develop viable policies seeking to lessen the differences between the rich and poor in our ever-more-interdependent globalised world. With GEM, religious people can cooperate with secularists through a functional specialisation that has re-

[35] Matthew Lamb examines Critical Theory and the end of intellectual innocence in our world. He notes how GEM's focus on the dialectics of the human good is one remedy for a 'criticism innocent of its own presuppositions' (see Lamb, Matthew, *Solidarity with Victims. Toward a Theology of Social Transformation*, New York: Crossroad, 1982, 128).

course to an 'inbuilt' bridge within each human person – a bridge that has to be appropriated through intellectual, moral, (religious) and psychic conversions. 'Religious' must remain in parentheses until Marcel's distinction between 'problem' and 'mystery' can be rethought in terms of a belief-faith distinction that speaks to secularists.

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OPENING SESSION ADDRESS TO THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE ON THE WORLD FINANCIAL AND ECONOMIC CRISIS AND ITS IMPACT ON DEVELOPMENT, NEW YORK 24-26 JUNE 2009[1]

Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, Nicaragua

My dear Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers for Foreign Affairs, Excellencies, Mr. Secretary-General, Brothers and Sisters all, We, the representatives of States and Governments of the world, are meeting at the United Nations because we are going through a singular moment in human history when our common future is at stake. We are citizens of different nations, and the same time, we are citizens of the planet; we all have multiple and interdependent relationships with each other.

1. Noah's ark that saves us all

At this critical moment, we must all join our efforts to prevent the global crisis, with its myriad faces, from turning into a social, environ-

[1] From the Conference website www.un.org/ga/econcrisissummit/statements/pga_opening_en.pdf, by H.E. Miguel d'Escoto Brockmann, President of the 63rd United Nations General Assembly © 2009 United Nations. Reprinted with the permission of the United Nations.

mental and humanitarian tragedy. The challenges of the various crises are all interconnected and oblige us all, as representatives of the peoples of the Earth, to declare our responsibility one to another, and that together, with great hope, we will seek inclusive solutions. What better place than this United Nations General Assembly Hall to do so. This is the hall of world democratic inclusiveness par excellence, the Headquarters of the G-192. Obviously, each State has the option of determining its level of participation, in accordance with the importance it attaches to the topic of each meeting.

It is neither humane nor responsible to build a Noah's ark only to save the existing economic system, leaving the vast majority of humanity to its fate and to suffer the negative effects of a system imposed by an irresponsible but powerful minority. Decisions that affect us all we must take collectively to the greatest extent possible, including the broad community of life and our common home, Mother Earth.

2. Overcoming the past and building the future

First of all, we must overcome an oppressive past and forge a hopeful future. It must be acknowledged that the current economic and financial crisis is the end result of an egoistical and irresponsible way of living, producing, consuming and establishing relationships among ourselves and with nature that involved systematic aggression against the Earth and its ecosystems and a profound social imbalance, an analytical expression that masked a perverse global social injustice. In my opinion, we have reached the final frontier. We seem to have reached the end of the road travelled thus far, and if we continue along this way, we could arrive at the same destiny that has already befallen the dinosaurs.

Therefore, controls and corrections of the existing model, while undoubtedly necessary, are insufficient in the medium and long term. Their inherent ability to address the global crisis has proven to be weak. Stop-

ping at controls and corrections of the model would demonstrate a cruel lack of social sensitivity, imagination and commitment to the establishment of a just and lasting peace. Egotism and greed cannot be corrected. They must be replaced by solidarity, which obviously implies radical change. If what we really want is a stable and lasting peace, it must be absolutely clear that we must go beyond controls and corrections of the existing model to create something that strives towards a new paradigm of social coexistence.

From this perspective, it is essential to seek what the Earth Charter calls 'a sustainable way of life'. This implies a shared vision of the values and principles promoting a particular way of inhabiting this world that guarantees the well-being of present and future generations. As great as the danger we all face from the convergence of these various problems is, the opportunity for salvation that the global crisis is helping us or forcing us to discover is even greater.

We have built a globalised economy. Now is the time to create globalised policy and ethics based on the many cultural experiences and traditions of our peoples.

3. Mother earth and global ethics

A new ethic assumes a new way of seeing. In other words, a different vision of the world also creates a different ethic, a new way for us to relate.

The viewpoint that comes to us from the earth sciences, that the Earth is contained within a vast, complex and evolving cosmos, must be incorporated. This Mother Earth, the term approved by the General Assembly this past 22 April, is alive. Mother Earth regulates herself, maintaining the subtle equilibrium among the physical, chemical and biological in such a way that life is always favoured. She produces a unique community of life from which the community of human life – humanity

– emerged, as the aware and intelligent part of the Earth herself. This contemporary concept agrees with the ancestral vision of humanity and of the native peoples for whom the Earth always was and is venerated as Mother, *Magna Mater*, *Inana*, *Tonantzín*, as the Náhuatl of my country, Nicaragua, call it, or *Pacha Mama*, as the Aymaras in Bolivia name it.

There is a growing awareness that we are all sons and daughters of Earth and that we belong to her. As President Evo Morales has reminded us many times, she can live without us, but we cannot live without her. Our mission as human beings is to be the guardians and caretakers of the vitality and integrity of Mother Earth. Unfortunately, because of our excessive consumption and wastefulness, Earth has exceeded by 40 per cent her capacity to replace the goods and services she generously offers us.

This vision of the living Earth is attested to by the astronauts who, from their spacecraft, acknowledged in wonder that Earth and humanity constituted a single reality. They were experiencing what is known as the 'overview effect', the perception that we are so united with the Earth that we ourselves are the Earth: the Earth that feels, thinks, loves and worships.

This perspective gives rise to respect, veneration and a sense of responsibility and care for our common home, attitudes that are extremely urgent in the face of the current general degradation of nature. From this new perspective a new ethic is born. A new way for us to relate with all those who live in our human abode and with the nature that surrounds us. Today, ethics are either global or they are not ethics.

4. Axioms of an ethics of the common good

The first affirmation of this global ethic consists in declaring and safeguarding the common good of the Earth and humanity. We will start with the assumption that the community of peoples is simultaneously a

community of common goods. These cannot be appropriated privately by anyone and must serve the life of all in present and future generations and the community of other living beings.

The common good of humanity and the Earth is characterised by universality and freedom. That is to say, everyone, all peoples and the community of life must be involved. No one and nothing can be excluded from this global common good. Furthermore, by its nature, it is freely offered to all and therefore, cannot be bought or sold nor be an object of competition. Moreover, it must be continuously available to all, otherwise the common good would no longer be common.

What are the fundamental goods that constitute the common good of humanity and the Earth? The first is undoubtedly the Earth itself. Who does the Earth belong to? The Earth belongs, not to the powerful who appropriate its goods and services, but to all the ecosystems that make up the whole. It is a gift of the universe that arose out of our Milky Way from an ancestral sun that disappeared long ago but was at the origin of our sun around which the Earth revolves as one of its planets. By virtue of the fact that it is alive and generated all living beings, it has dignity (*dignitas Terra*). This dignity demands respect and veneration and endows it with rights: the right to be cared for, protected and maintained in a condition where it is able to continue producing and reproducing lives.

We still need to recognise that the globalised means of production, in their industrial voracity, have in large measure devastated the Earth and thus have also damaged the common good of Earth and humanity. We must urgently seek other paths that are more humane and more favourable towards life: the paths of justice and solidarity that lead to peace and happiness.

Next we have the Earth's biosphere as the common heritage of all life, with humanity as its guardian. It belongs to the common good of humanity and the Earth, as stated at the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment: 'the natural resources of the earth, includ-

ing the air, water, land flora and fauna and especially representative samples of natural ecosystems'.

Water, oceans and forests in particular belong to the common good of humanity and the Earth. Water is a natural resource that is common, essential and for which there is no substitute, and all have the right of access to it independent of the costs involved in its collection, storage, purification and distribution, which will be borne by governments and society. Therefore, the eagerness to privatise it and turn it into merchandise that can bring in plenty of money is of great concern to us. Water is life, and life is sacred and should not be traded. This Assembly wishes to support efforts to conclude an International Water Covenant for collective management that will guarantee this vital resource to all.

The same can be said of forests, especially tropical and sub-tropical forests, where the greatest biodiversity and humidity necessary to Earth's vitality are concentrated. The forests prevent climate change from making life on the planet impossible by capturing major amounts of carbon dioxide. Without forests there would be no life and no biodiversity. The oceans serve as the great repository of life, regulate the climate and balance the physical and chemical base of the Earth. Forests and oceans pose questions of life, not just the environment.

The Earth's climates belong to the common good of humanity and the Earth. General Assembly resolution 43/53 of 6 December 1988 on 'Protection of global climate for present and future generations of mankind' recognises that climates are a common concern of mankind since 'climate is an essential condition which sustains life on earth'. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, best known by its English acronym IPCC, believes that 'climate change affects humanity as a whole and should be confronted within a global framework of shared responsibility'.

But the greatest common good of humanity and the Earth is humanity as a whole. It has supreme intrinsic value and represents an end in it-

self. It is part of the kingdom of life, highly complex, capable of consciousness, sensitivity, intelligence, creative imagination, love and openness to All. In all cultures the clear perception exists that humanity bears an inviolable dignity. Those who wage war and build instruments of death that can eliminate human life from the face of the Earth and severely damage the biosphere are committing crimes against humanity.

Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, we must wait no longer. We must proceed without delay to the complete abolition of nuclear weapons, not simply their reduction or non-proliferation. A standard of zero tolerance for nuclear weapons must be established urgently and decisions in this area can no longer be deferred. We are living at a propitious time for this and we must not fail to take advantage of it. Neither can the world continue to tolerate the obscenity of ever more astronomical arms spending while offering absurdly low amounts to lift half of humanity from inexcusable levels of poverty that, furthermore, are a time bomb against all societies. Violence creates violence, and keeping people hungry and at sub-human levels of existence is the worst form of violence.

5. Strategies for overcoming the crisis

At this time in history, with the global crisis and for the sake of the common good of the Earth and humanity, we must take collective short- and medium-term action to keep society functioning on the one hand, and to set a foundation for new forms of sustainable living on the other. Five essential elements could give coherence to new initiatives that seek to construct alternatives and to guide the many practices that will be discussed over the next few days in the General Assembly.

First: the responsible and *sustainable use* of limited natural resources. This means moving beyond exploitation and strengthening a relationship of respect and synergy with nature.

Second: putting the *economy* back in its proper place in society as a whole by abandoning the reductionist vision that has made it the main focus of human coexistence. The economy should respect values but not be a source of values; it should be seen as the activity that lays the foundation for the physical, cultural and spiritual life of all human beings on the planet, while respecting social and environmental norms.

Third: to spread *democracy* to all social relations and institutions. It should not only be applied and strengthened in the political arena, with a new definition of the state and of international organisations, but also extended to the spheres of economics, culture and the relationship between men and women so that it becomes a universal value and democracy is permanent.

Fourth: to build a *minimum ethos* on the basis of multicultural exchange and the philosophical and religious traditions of peoples, so that they can participate in defining the common good of humanity and the Earth and in developing new values.

Fifth: to strengthen a *spiritual vision* of the world that does justice to man's search for a transcendent meaning of life, of the creative work of human beings and of our brief appearance on this small planet.

Personal, social and planetary well-being can only be achieved if these five essential elements are made real. This is made possible by an economy that makes sufficient and decent provision for the whole community, where human beings live in harmony with each other, with nature and with the Whole of which we are a part. These are the foundations for a *biocivilisation* that gives a central role to life, the Earth and humanity, whose citizens are sons and daughters of joy rather than of need.

6. Four fundamental ethical principles

All these challenges cannot be adequately addressed unless we change our minds and our hearts and create space for the emergence and development of other essential aspects of the human being. The exclusive and excessive use of instrumental analytical reasoning in modern times has made us deaf to the call of the Earth and insensitive to the cries of the oppressed, who constitute the vast majority of humanity. In the innermost part of our human nature we are beings of love, solidarity, compassion and sharing. This is why we must enhance our analytical reasoning with sensitive, emotional and heartfelt reasoning, which is the source of the values mentioned.

The common good of humanity and the Earth is a dynamic reality that is constantly evolving. Four ethical principles are important for keeping it alive and open to further development.

The first ethical principle is *respect.* Every being has intrinsic value and can serve the good of humanity if guided not by purely utilitarian ethics, such as those that predominate in the current socioeconomic system, but rather by a feeling of mutual belonging, responsibility and conservation of existence.

The second is *care*. Care implies a non-aggressive attitude to reality, a loving attitude that repairs past harm and avoids future harm and, at the same time, extends into all areas of individual and social human activity. If there had been sufficient care, the current financial and economic crisis would not have occurred. Care is intrinsically linked to maintaining life, because when there is no care, life weakens and disappears. Care is expressed in *compassion*, which is so needed these days when much of humanity and the Earth itself are being battered and crucified in a sea of sufferings. In a market society that is driven more by competition than cooperation, there is a cruel lack of compassion towards all suffering beings in society and in nature.

The third principle is collective *responsibility*. We are all dependent on the environment and interdependent. Our actions can be beneficial or harmful for life and for the common good of the Earth and humanity. The many crises now occurring are largely the result of a lack of responsibility in our collective projects and practices that has led to a global imbalance in markets and in the Earth system.

The fourth principle is *cooperation*. If we do not all cooperate, we are not going to emerge stronger from the current crises. Cooperation is so essential that in the past it enabled our anthropoid ancestors to make the jump from animality to humanity. When they had food, they did not eat individually but brought everything to share with everyone in the group in cooperation and solidarity. What was essential in the past is still essential in the present.

Lastly, there is a belief that pertains to the common good of humanity, a belief that comes from spiritual traditions and is affirmed by contemporary cosmologists and astrophysicists, that behind the whole universe, every being, every person, every event and even our current crisis, there is a fundamental energy at work, mysterious and ineffable, that is also known as the nurturing source of all being. We are sure that this nameless energy will also act in this time of chaos to help us and empower us to overcome selfishness and take the action needed so there is no catastrophe, but an opportunity for creating and generating new forms of coexistence, innovative economic models and a higher sense of living and living together.

Conclusion: this is not a tragedy but a crisis

In conclusion, I would like to place on record my deep conviction that the current scenario is not a tragedy but a crisis. Tragedy has a bad outcome, with an Earth that is damaged, but can continue without us. Crisis purifies us and forces us to grow and find ways to survive that are

acceptable for the whole community of life, human beings and the Earth. The pain we now feel is not the death rattle of a dying man but the pain of a new birth. So far we have fully exploited material capital, which is finite, and now we have to work with spiritual capital, which is infinite, because we have an infinite capacity to love, to live together as brothers and to penetrate the mysteries of the universe and the human heart.

As we all have our origin in the heart of the great red stars where the elements that form us were forged, it is clear that we were born to shine our light and not to suffer. And we will shine our light again – that is my strong expectation – in a planetary civilisation that is more respectful of Mother Earth, more inclusive of all people and more in solidarity with the poorest, more spiritual and full of reverence for the splendour of the universe, and much happier.

With these words, our discussions at this very important Conference on the world financial and economic crisis have begun. In providing a context for these issues, I wish to emphasise that we will have to set aside all selfish attitudes if we are to take advantage of the opportunities that the current crisis offers. Such attitudes only seek to preserve a system that seems to benefit a minority and clearly has disastrous consequences for the vast majority of the inhabitants of the planet. We must arm ourselves with solidarity and cooperation in order to make a qualitative leap forward to a future of peace and well-being.

Allow me, dear brothers and sisters, to conclude this reflection with the words of the Holy Father, Pope Benedict XVI, for this Conference:

> I invoke upon all of the Conference participants, as well as those responsible for public life and the fate of the planet, the spirit of wisdom and human solidarity, so that the current crisis may become an opportunity, capable of favouring greater attention to the dignity of every human being and the promotion of an equal distribution of decisional power and resources, with particular attention to the unfortunately ever-growing number of poor.

Thank you very much.

17

GROUP REPORTS FROM THE 2009 NAIROBI CONFERENCE

Group 1: Defining Global Ethics

Participants: Prof. Dr Gerhold K. Becker, Germany (moderator), Prof. Sumner B. Twiss, USA (moderator), Dr Kiarash Aramesh, Iran, Dr Jonathan K.L. Chan, China (*not travelling*), Prof. Dr Abhik Gupta, India, Prof. John Hooker, USA (*not travelling*), Prof. John M. Itty, India, Prof. Eunice Karanja Kamaara, Kenya, Prof. Dr Thomas Kesselring, Switzerland (*not travelling*), Prof. Kim Yersu, South Korea (*not travelling*), Rev. Dr Richard Ondji'i Toung, Cameroon (*not travelling*), Prof. Deon Rossouw, South Africa

Group process

After the initial call from the group conveners to all participants, outlining the charge to the group and emphasising process and results, participants emailed statements on the meaning of global ethics, most of which were responsive, either directly or indirectly, to the views of other participants. Participants also circulated papers, most being authored by themselves, on definitions of global ethics and on the substantive moral practical issues needing to be addressed by the group. An outline (precursor to the present document) of group perceptions collated by the conveners was circulated prior to the conference and sent to all partici-

pants, which received a few responses (silence may or may not have signified assent). At the conference, the outline was discussed within the group.

Use of the expression 'global ethics'

One significant point that emerged in our discussion was the relevance and appropriate use of the expression 'global ethics'. Participants in disfavour of the expression argued that:

As with the term 'universal' (as in universal ethics), the use of the term 'global' leads to suspicions of attempted hegemony or domination by the powerful.

The phrase 'global ethics' embeds the appearance of a presumption against moral diversity or pluralism.

Moreover, using the term 'global' conjures up, at least for some, globalisation in the economic sense and is associated with capitalism, neo-liberal economics, and Western economic hegemony.

As a contextual observation, participants from Europe and the U.S. tended to embrace a universalistic and global language, while those from Africa, Asia, and South America tended to be wary of such language. While all participants were critical of neo-liberal economic policies, those from Asia, African, and South America extended this critical view to Western cultural, political, and moral values more generally.

Participants in favour of the expression argued that:

Using the term 'global' helps us to identify a unique set of problems that cut across national boundaries and that need to be addressed holistically and cooperatively.

With respect to conjuring up 'globalisation,' we need to note that globalisation is not a recent phenomenon (though its intensification is) and further that it can be understood to apply to all sectors of human ac-

tivity (economic, cultural, political, moral, religious, legal), thus indicating the permeability of cultures to one another.

We can draw an important distinction between global (or globalisation) perspectives: 'globalisation from above,' indicating (e.g.) international agents and transnational corporations, on the one hand, and 'globalisation from below,' indicating the majority of the peoples of the world at a grassroots or local level, on the other.

Those holding an intermediate position thought that:

We use 'global' (as in global ethics) as a way to identify transboundary problems affecting human and non-human welfare and needing holistic, ecological, and cooperative redress.

We privilege the globalisation-from-below perspective (the people's perspective) over elite agents not representative of people's interests.

We accept moral diversity and pluralism as a fact and then ask what is common or shared in terms of not only problems and challenges but also possible normative standards of human behaviour in addressing these problems (e.g., a common morality).

Practical orientation

Members of the workgroup thought it was important to start with, and typologise practical problems or challenges, while also recognising that they are not mutually exclusive and overlap at points.

Human-oriented issues:

Poverty, starvation, low and unfair wages, malnutrition

Disparity of rich and poor populations within and across countries

Disproportionate population growth rates

Growth and spread of threatening technologies (e.g., nuclear)

International criminal activity (e.g., human trafficking, weapons trade)

Discrimination of the basis of status, including nationality, ethnicity, gender, and other markers

Threats to (world) peace and human flourishing due to military conflict, war, oppression, and acts of terrorism

Health concerns (disease prevention and disease treatment, healthcare provision) and the implications of biotechnology and genetics for humanity

Environment-oriented issues:

Pollution in various forms

Environmental degradation

Climate imbalance

Decreasing biodiversity

Ecosystem destruction

These problems are interdependent, bear on human and non-human survival, and extend from the present into the future.

They need to be addressed cooperatively, equitably, and aggressively.

The perspective of globalisation from below strongly suggests that the 'haves' (i.e. those with greater resources and power) bear greater causal responsibility for the problems' production and consequently have a greater moral responsibility for their redress or alleviation.

Implicit in these problems are the systemic themes of sustainable human development, poverty eradication, technology control, redress of inequalities among nations, and a holistic understanding of the human relationship to nature.

Towards normative solutions

One of the main points of morality is to enable human cooperation in the solution of practical problems, and one initial step toward a normative ethical strategy is to ask what we, the peoples of the world, already

share in order to help us do this? We do in fact share a number of things pointing to important moral norms, even if they might be contested in some of their specifics:

All societies share analogous rules regulating (e.g.) indiscriminate violence within the in-group, sexual activity, deception and truth-telling, theft (or arbitrary deprivation of property), and dispute settlement.

All known moral traditions embed some version of the Golden Rule, the operation of which is based on reciprocity, empathy, enlightened self-interest, and some notion of moral autonomy, and which is used to facilitate cooperation not only within the in-group but also between members of that group and strangers.

We regularly encounter, both within and across societies, rather fundamental moral responses (emotions) of indignation or resentment at perceived unjust treatment and of empathy (sympathy, compassion) for others when they are treated badly.

We already have a cross-cultural consensus on basic human rights norms bearing on physical and civil security, socio-economic necessities for human survival and flourishing, and the importance of special protections for vulnerable populations and people (e.g., minority and ethnic groups, women, children, the sick and elderly).

Practically speaking, therefore, we have much to work with in developing a global ethic.

Since some might regard the preceding as constituting an unstable consensus based on empirical normative observations, we might press further and ask whether there is any deeper justification for this consensus, for example:

A notion of intrinsic or inherent human dignity and inviolability that more deeply grounds the consensus.

A capacity to universalisation or generalisation inherent in the concept of morality that serves as a test for what is properly ethical or unethical.

The presupposition of equal respect for people that may undergird any sincere human communication about cooperative problem solving.

An exegesis of the Golden Rule that demonstrates it as a foundational norm that further grounds solidarity, fairness, equality, and human rights.

And intermingled, or even independent of these appeals, the metaphysical or ontological commitments of various religious and philosophical world views.

Our workgroup reached no agreement on how to argue this 'meta-case', but it is significant that all were aware of the first-level consensus above and were committed to working on the second-level with the expectation that whatever emerges – even simple recognition of final divergences in justification – will not undermine the first-level consensus but in fact deepen and extend it to help solve the practical problems identified. Some of the reasons for this meta-disagreement were:

In appealing to an overlapping consensus on moral norms, there was concern about the contingency and therefore instability of an empirically based consensus claim.

Even in appealing to and using a normative consensus, there was concern to emphasise local cultural interpretations and embodiments of norms (e.g., a 'local-in-global-in-local' framework accommodating commonalities and variations among different cultures).

Scepticism that all attempted universalistic justifications are question begging at some deep level, smuggling in (e.g.) essentialist claims about human nature or distinctive Western moral norms.

Notion that a global synthesis of moral values and practices dealing with survival and flourishing is better understood as an aspirational, regulative ideal rather than an accomplished reality, with that reality always being evolving and never static.

Resistance to the justificatory endeavour itself as being a diversion, along with the view that it is better to focus on and emphasise real-world

practical cooperation in solving shared, common social and environmental problems.

A global ethics

Given that the problems identified earlier clearly thwart a good, flourishing life for all, humanly and environmentally, and for present and future generations, any global ethic (or common morality) worth its salt must work to rectify these problems.

Drawing from the normative consensus attained so far, and deepened by the exigent need for practical rectification, we propose a global ethic with the following features:

The normative goal of a good life for all that meets minimal material requirements regarding nutrition, shelter, education, physical security, employment with decent and fair wages, and the like.

The development of national civil environments that secure respect for life, liberty, justice, equality, equal access to opportunities for self-development, and political participation in all decision-making that bears on the commonweal.

The development of an international civil environment (or global civic ethic) that aims at economic equity among nations, their equal access to the global commons, and their active cooperation in combating shared problems that threaten not only the peace of the world but also environmental well-being in the present and future.

Implicit in these features are the ideas that:

As a species, we ought to live in solidarity and strive for constructing and sustaining authentic communities at various levels – communities that coordinate and balance individuality and sociality, self-realisation and the common good, and that resist all attempts at political domination by a few at the expense of all others.

Some peoples and communities have a greater responsibility than others to contribute to redressing past injustices and inequities, due not only to their causal role in facilitating and continuing these injustices but also to their greater power to redress them effectively.

While the notions of care and compassion are significant orienting moral values, it is important that they be interpreted and employed with reference to participatory decision-making in authentic community built on relational understandings of the person and social and natural environments, rather than being interpreted as benevolent charity (which appears to instantiate an asymmetrical power relationship between benefactor and recipient).

It is important to view all the problems and norms ecologically or holistically since what happens at one end of the world affects others through our interdependent relations, which, in turn, means that all of us bear responsibility for all and must participate in continuing to develop, refine, adjust, and extend (to the degree required) our common moral norms and their application to our shared practical problems.

Towards a global ethics

Pragmatically speaking, a global ethics is needed in order to address and redress transboundary practical problems – e.g., regarding social justice, the environment, and war – that threaten the survival of humanity and the planet itself.

In order to be as inclusive as possible, the working group wished to avoid imposing contestable metaphysical assumptions in its reflections. We did, however, collectively share in a conception of the person as having dignity that ought to be respected by others, and we affirm the importance of having a sense of responsibility for the common good.

There are important angles of orientation and commitment in the contemporary world that guide our thinking regarding exigent practical

problems. These are provided by, on the one hand, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and subsequent human rights declarations, legal conventions, and regulation, and, on the other, the Stockholm Declaration and subsequent environmental declarations, conventions, and regulation. Both developments enjoy significant international consensus.

Both of these regimes, however, need to be supplemented considerably by an ethics of respect and responsibility with regard to human beings, societies, and natural systems, for all three of these are too easily violated or otherwise deleteriously affected by short-sighted (or even perverse) social, economic, and cultural practices.

The question is how to create or prompt the effective development of both individual conscience and a social-cultural ethos that express and sustain a sense of active moral responsibility in both the short- and the long- term, bearing on survival, well-being, and flourishing in both the present and the future.

We propose that such respect and responsibility can be most effectively developed and maintained through dialogues that:

focus on urgent transboundary social and environmental problems;

are undertaken by affected communities at the local, national, and/or regional levels;

involve representatives of all the multiple stakeholders in the resolution of these problems;

make sincere, respectful, and reasonable efforts to deliberate and make decisions about the solutions to the problems.

We believe (or such is our intent) that these practical dialogues would have the following features and/or effects: be contextually sensitive, involve participatory interaction and decision-making, and have the greatest potential for undergirding and sustaining the development and education of a global ethic of responsibility.

Conclusion

Global ethics provides the conceptual basis for an inclusive approach towards common moral values and principles grounded in the moral vision of human dignity, personal and social responsibility, and justice. These values and principles are the foundation on which the universal consensus on human rights has been built, and human rights are the most tangible and legally binding expression of this moral vision.

Global ethics acknowledges the interdependence of all beings and extends to the basic moral attitudes of care and compassion for our world. It promotes public awareness of and sensibility for those fundamental moral values and principles as a prerequisite for the effective implementation of human rights and environmental protections.

Group 2: Ensuring a Successful Interreligious Dialogue on Ethics

Participants: Dr Asghar Ali Engineer, India (moderator), Prof. John Raymaker, Germany/USA (co-moderator), Dr Nikolaos Dimitriadis, Greece, Rabbi Dr Alon Goshen-Gottstein, Israel (not travelling), Dr Simon Kouvon, Togo, Mr Souaibou Marafa, Cameroon (not travelling), Dr Kamrad Mofid, United Kingdom, Dr Pragati Sahni, India, Mrs Lilian Siwila, South Africa (not travelling), Ass. Prof. Dr Parichart Suwanbubbha, Thailand, Dr Yahya Wijaya, Indonesia.

Initial assumptions

Participants argued that there are common values in approaches to defining global ethics but there are differences in how these are understood and applied. In order to deal with such complexity, they examined the problem on three levels, namely the grassroots level, the institutional level and the academic level.

Grassroots level

Participants distinguished between two approaches on this level. In some traditional societies interfaith dialogue has often been part of life in practice and theory. However in many societies that have been subject to an increase of new migrants, many challenges have arisen to harmonious living in the short term. Well-informed and/or economically secure individuals tend to agree more readily that there are common ethical values than do less-informed or less economically stable people, who are observed to be more sensitive to fear, ignorance, bias, insecurity, racial stereotyping, etc. Such negative realities can be manifest or remain latent, but will always hinder the process of dialogue and engagement.

Dialogue within oneself (which can lead to inner conversion) may be helpful – even needed – in removing hindrances to dialogue. Is there such a thing as multiple religious identities that can be helped through a process of inner conversion? Dialogue means to learn about different values, and to grow in compassion. We reckon there are common values, but they can be distorted by the discourse of institutions, including the media.

Institutional level

Religious doctrines and traditions rooted in the past were based on less pluralistic societies than are most modern societies. Some problems that arise today on the institutional level are that religious texts and teachings are used selectively and not holistically. For instance, the Christian story of the good Samaritan or Mohammed's inclusive Medina Charter are either ignored or misunderstood.

Political and/or religious leaders can and often do abuse, manipulate, and control teachings and/or concepts to promote their own ends. For instance, there was a case where a government from Southeast Asia dis-

couraged the Buddhist teaching of being content with a simple life on the account it impeded the emergence of a materialistic lifestyle.

Academic level

Theological approaches notably differ among themselves and from religious studies approaches. The lack of interdisciplinary cooperation – even of adequate intra-disciplinary consultation – leads to a lack of accountability. Theologians and religious studies departments should be partners as much as competitors if we are to do justice to both value-laden teachings and allegedly value-free research. Similarly, dialogue and interaction between economic and theology departments are missing. As a result, both religious and secular ethics remain unaddressed or without due application. An ethics of human rights, for example, can be based on both religious and/or secular values, implying that religious as well as secular values and traditions can be resources of ethics today.

Proposals and possibilities

As global ethics embraces different disciplines, subjects, cultures, religions, civilisations, it needs dialogue. In turn, dialogue needs a safe zone that does not threaten participants even when addressing such controversial issues as religious beliefs, race relations or political prerogatives. Dialogue is more fruitful when people feel their values from the heart, and can respond while respecting the feelings of others. South Africa is one example where relative security was provided within a historically and culturally complex state. On the other hand, there exists in some nations a process of (re-)writing laws to the detriment of minorities. The role of a global ethics is to foster trust among humans based on values. There can be legitimate forms of cooperation based on enlightened understandings and on accepting differences. The following examples mean to clarify this.

Religious teachings and ideas have been sources of inspiration for ethical reforms (e.g., abolition of slavery, justice and peace). Reforms best occurs when religious traditions are able to adapt to present circumstances. Religious traditions and their power of continuity can indeed be fortified by revisiting (i.e. 'updating') the original formulation of their teachings, as well as the modalities of their application in our modern, pluralistic societies.

Hopefully, it can be shown that humanistic, secular ethics do not conflict in principle with the various religious ethics of the world. Doing so would foster human understanding. Granted that one cannot compromise with destructive tendencies, there is always need for a deeper appreciation of other people. On such a view, one's religious convictions underlie and reinforce values. This means that dialogue is that of life in action.

Dialogue between secular ethics and religious ethics should be encouraged. We leave open the hermeneutical processes that can deepen our understanding of, and respect for human rights and ulterior motives. It is sometimes said that in Africa everything a person does is religious. People should know where the other person is coming from. Instead of pointing to the differences, one must respect context.

NGOs and civil societies are increasingly drawing attention to issues that are all too often ignored by the powers that be. Such NGOs might have to be provocative to start a dialogue.

Group 3: Integrating Means and Methods to Share Values in a Human-to-Human Approach

Participants: Prof. Ingrid H. Shafer, USA (moderator), Rev. Dr Evangeline Anderson-Rajkumar, India, Prof. Ram-Prasad Chakravarthi, United Kingdom, Dr Padmasiri de Silva, Australia (not travelling), Prof. Darrell J. Fasching, USA (not travelling), Mrs Ariane Hentsch Cisneros,

Switzerland, Mr Elias Metri Kasrine El-Halabi, Lebanon (not travelling), Mr Kurt Lussi, Switzerland, Dr Micheal Mawa, Uganda, Dr Jayandra Soni, Germany, Prof. Dr Gerhard Wegner, Germany.

Emergence process

Members of this group declared that, as they were concerned that something in human relationships is unsatisfying, in particular that care and compassion are often missing in dialogues between cultures and religions, they felt a pressing need to bring in these dimensions by suggesting relevant approaches and means to share values in a satisfying and fulfilling way. They have reflected collectively on such possible means and methods to share values as well as on the hermeneutical and epistemological guidelines needed to build such dialogues. Given the wide diversity in the backgrounds of potential dialogue partners with regard to the many dynamic ways – geographic, cultural, ideological, linguistic, economic, social, and educational – in which human beings interact, learn, and communicate, they decided to use a very wide spectrum of approaches to take maximum advantage of all these ways. In other words, they thought of 'dialogue' as involving a range of activities far beyond the discursive (spoken or written language): music, visual arts, touch, etc., can also be understood as meaning-bearing 'languages'. They presupposed that these should be directed to a non-negotiable commitment to human equality (in terms of, e.g., gender, voice, economic power), humans being holistic and defined by a fundamental desire to understand the other and to be understood.

Hermeneutical and epistemological approaches

A number of hermeneutical and epistemological guidelines emerged in the course of our collective reflection that we feel as relevant instru-

ments to build an efficient, satisfying and fulfilling interreligious dialogue on ethics.

In any such dialogue, partners should generally

consider human beings as being multi-dimensional and, therefore, that we need to distinguish elements of stability and flux in the human experience,

consider the other and ourselves as a nexus at the intersection of various webs of relationships and identities, implying that there will be times when we will need to see that person as standing for these collectivities and times when we will not,

shun destructive extremism, fundamentalism, fanaticism as well as dogmatism and bigotry and consider our understanding of ultimate reality as being beyond the many facets that we can grasp,

make a shift of paradigm: the other comes first. We need to be in a listening attitude to the dialogical need of the other before inviting the other to participate in a dialogue. Consider the other (and understanding her value) as necessary to understanding our own values,

and in particular,

share both similarities and differences; see both what we have in common and the differences that might motivate us to engage in dialogue.

consider both beliefs and practices when trying to understand the values of the other.

shift perspectives: as far as possible, to start the engagement with the other's perspective, being aware of our own expectations vis-à-vis dialogue

think as a minority, being aware that we each are a minority, and vulnerable in this respect (who is a majority, who a minority, and where? There are various hegemonies, of which each of us is a nexus. We are ‘others’ all the time),

challenge dominant presuppositions,

distinguish situations where conflict resolution is a prelude to dialogue and where it is the purpose,

consider ways in which mutually incompatible positions may coexist in a common reality, be it through resolution, dissolution, transcendence or setting them aside.

Means of sharing

When we share values we should consider sharing them at various levels and be interdisciplinary, taking into consideration the people and institutions in interaction. A wide range of individual or collective media, discursive and non-discursive, can help conduct a meaningful dialogue on values. The following list includes examples but has no pretence to being exhaustive.

Education. A primary and universal venue for the transmission of values, education requires great care and continuous appraisal on the adequacy to its task.

Education should be more than schooling – it should include moral values, through school and parents, and not only the learning of facts and figures, and the appropriation of certain epistemological postures.

Through education patterns of domination should be deconstructed and reconstructed in a more egalitarian way. There is a value in subverting mortiferous, domesticating education. A colonially-imposed schooling imparts alienating but also liberating values.

Teachers and students should learn from each other in a mutual learning process.

Publications. Academic publications are a traditional means of expressing ideas and opinions, as well as of sharing values. Either collective or individual, their increasing number contributes to forming a body of primarily intellectual knowledge, a tradition that is sometimes carried on untouched, sometimes re-interpreted and challenged through the ages. Co-authoring is a specific way of exchanging and sharing values about one specific topic

Speeches. Live speeches are a livelier means of communicating a message, or values, as they leave space for interaction between the speaker and the auditors. Oral communication allows for a more comprehensive style than written communication, involving body language, humour, etc. In this sense, communication technologies such as the written media or telecommunications may undermine the fullness of an expression.

Stories and narratives. We need a complete shift in the way we conceive mainstream organised dialogue about values. From cold, dogmatic or philosophical exchanges, we should move on to include other 'warmer' ways of expression, such as telling stories and narratives, which has been the norm in the oral traditions around the world.

Narrative forms are equally relevant when reports are being written about events involving an exchange about values. When recounted in the form of a story, an event can yield information that may not seem directly relevant to its overall purpose or objective, but informs the readers or listeners in a way that calls to their own personal experience and ability to picture an event far richer than if they only read the conclusion of the gathering.

Art. Classical and popular artistic expressions including fine and performing arts such as music, film, theatre, song, stories and narratives, dancing, folklore, comedy, humour and irony, the visual arts, etc. all are valid ways to express, share, and understand values attached to a context.

We should consider the symbolic dimensions of art as well as its efficacy to elevate us to a dimension closer to the divine or to the truth.

Art should be suggested, proposed – not imposed. Artistic means of sharing values have indeed been used positively but also negatively; imperialistic powers are known to use art as a means of cultural domination, for instance. We need to distinguish the conditions of creation (the intentions) from the efficiency of art pieces in conveying values (recep-

tion), and distinguish cases where freedom has been undermined in promoting selected values (such as solidarity in the former USSR). Also, art is often spontaneous, it bursts out of the artist as a response to a pressing need, but then the piece of art starts a life of its own. Art is versatile, one should be aware of it; the artist wants to communicate, but the audience might get another message. Values behind the intention of the artist or of the producer or patron, values behind the specific meaning carried by the expression, and the efficacy of the artefact itself in carrying or unveiling these or other values need to be appraised case by case.

When approaching artistic dialogue, one should be cautious that modern Western art tends to be exclusive, highly individualistic, and elitist. Can there be a more inclusive 'counter-art' to transmit values? We can also learn values through 'foreign' art, so we should be allowed to appropriate foreign art. Some art forms have already become our common heritage.

From a proactive perspective, artists in residence can be suggested as a way to improved opportunities to share values.

Film, drama, and video. One could use 'Second Life' (a web-based virtual world) to teach. Most online games are violent war-games, but games to demonstrate values of mutual support and respect could be developed.

In drama, also, how to be authentic to ourselves and to our characters? Role-playing is effective in conflict resolution.

Multidisciplinary exhibitions are a rich way of informing about issues in a way that calls on various human communication skills. The senses as well as the intellect are put to work, and when such exhibitions are interactive, their pedagogical strength is yet reinforced.

Trade of consumer goods, foreign foods and clothing. The history, modalities and rules of trade (exchange of products) can be explored in order to understand the values of another community. Much can also be

learned through the way consumer goods are produced and exchanged, and by the consumption of the goods themselves.

Work. Physical work done in common has proved in certain instances to be a successful way of sharing values, as long as there is equality in the relationships of co-workers. To be fruitful, intercultural team work in any professional context requires awareness and respect of the other's values.

Games, humour. Humour is a powerful tool of communication and understanding that permits us not only to ease tense situations but also to give clear indication of the frontier between the acceptable and the non-acceptable in the non-conventional. Shared humour often shows the degree of tightness ('high-context') in cultural understanding and relationships. Games are another way of expressing deep values associated to different cultures.

Bodily movement. The brain is not the only place where memory is stored. The human body as a whole is a great receptor of information, where it is stored yet very often neglected. Since this memory can have serious effects on our physical and mental health, it is crucial that we treat it with the same care as the more 'mental' types of memory. Imprinting positive impressions of other, different cultures and values through bodily reception can be a way to increased respect, understanding, and even appropriation of foreign cultures.

Somatic mimesis and learning: playing sports can help understand values behind the culture attached to a particular sport. Examples: football, cricket, etc.

Dancing: certain beliefs are common all over the world, for instance, carnivals in Switzerland, with their masks and strange dances, resemble shamanic ceremonies.

Rituals (religious or secular), etiquette, existing or emerging, can be shared in order to understand other cultures or religions.

Interpersonal contacts. Human-to-human love is a firm ground on which individuals can learn from each other in trust.

Group 4: Balancing Power Relations, Inducing a Real Transformation

Participants: Prof. Maricel Mena López, Colombia (moderator), Dr Jack A. Hill, USA (co-moderator), Prof. Dr Bernard Adeney-Risakotta, Indonesia, Mr Peter Alexander Egom, Nigeria, Prof. Muteho Kasongo, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rev. Prof. Christoph Stueckelberger, Switzerland.

Prologue

Members of this group have deliberated on the theme of 'balancing power relations: inducing a real transformation' by formulating three critical questions: (1) 'How are power relations experienced from our perspectives?'; (2) 'How are power and authority to be understood, particularly with respect to interreligious dialogue?'; and (3) 'What ethical and sustainable ways of dealing with power imbalances can induce transformative dialogue?' It is helpful to begin by defining key terms that are central to discussing these questions at least in a provisional way. 'Power' is understood as the capacity to decide and implement a goal. It entails a capability to persuade others. 'Authority' refers to a position or a function that is related to power. On an institutional level, there may be a 'formal authority' – such as the authority that resides in the office of a religious or secular leader – but the individual who occupies such a position may not have the competence to exercise power effectively. On an individual or non-institutional level, there may be an 'informal authority' – such as the moral authority that is expressed by a protestor in a street demonstration against an unjust political leader –and

the possessor of such authority may act in powerful ways, exhibiting a great deal of competence. In other words, it is important to note at the outset that one might have power, but not formal authority; and one might have a position of formal authority but not have competence where exercising power is concerned.

Power dynamics in our specific contexts

Power relations are pervasive in all our experiences of life. There are many different kinds of power and powerlessness that we experience differently in different contexts. Some of us are powerful in some contexts, but feel powerless in other contexts. Within our group we discussed many kinds of power and powerlessness that are specific to particular contexts or to particular groups of people within our contexts. We focused especially on how the dynamics of power relations affect interreligious dialogue especially in relation to values and ethical concerns. We agreed to start by looking at our experiences of power and then move to generalisations and theory intended to find commonalities and explanations, rather than beginning with theories about power and then move to specific examples. Either approach is valid, but we appreciate the advantages of moving from the specific to the general, rather than vice versa.

We agreed that we all experience power both negatively and positively in our different contexts. There appeared to be a 'hermeneutics of suspicion' at work in which all of us were suspicious of imbalances of power. Interreligious dialogue is distorted by huge differentials in the power wielded by different parties to the dialogue. However, since power is diverse, we also saw that one party may be powerful in one area, while another party is powerful in a different way. For example, a corporate executive from an oil company may control almost unlimited financial resources and can hire 1,000 Public Relations Officers ('Repu-

tation Management Experts'), but s/he may tremble before a rag-tag Greenpeace activist. The oil company needs to be legitimised and have community support in order to do business.

Nevertheless, the group was very conscious of how often wealth and poverty distort or even prevent interreligious dialogue. Interreligious dialogue may be a very low priority for people who are struggling just to survive. The group was especially concerned about the oppression of women in conditions of conflict and/or poverty. For example, many poor women in Columbia (and many other countries), have to walk many kilometres just to bring precious water for their most basic needs. Their water sources may be contaminated by industrial pollution, and they often lack access to basic health care, for example when giving birth. As a result, their whole family's life expectancy may be very low. For people struggling to survive, interreligious dialogue may seem irrelevant unless it is focused on how to discern and meet their basic needs. In conditions of poverty and suffering, those who are interested in dialogue need to consider first the most fundamental needs of the participants so that the dialogue addresses their needs. In Nigeria, for example, the lack of a social safety net and basic services makes life 'poor, nasty, brutal and short' (Hobbes) for both men and women. Interreligious dialogue may be an essential means for addressing basic needs and finding ways for different religious communities to address such needs cooperatively.

The need for interreligious dialogue may be even more urgent in situations of conflict and violence, particularly where religious sentiments are manipulated to sharpen the conflict and polarise communities from one another. Once again, patriarchal social, economic, cultural and political structures often lead to extreme suffering on the part of women and children. Rape and sexual assault are common in contexts of war and mass violence. One of our members cited examples of how rape in the Congo is almost routinely ignored by the press, even though it is an

ongoing phenomenon that devastates the lives of thousands of women. However when one or two men were castrated, it caused a huge uproar of indignation at the brutality. Interreligious dialogue needs to keep in mind the social structures that subordinate some parties to the interests of those in power.

On the one hand, interreligious dialogue might be thought ideal if the parties to the dialogue are all on an equal level. However in circumstances of oppression, it is often the most oppressed who need to dialogue the most. They may need to force or goad the powerful to listen to their voice. In Java, Indonesia, there is an old traditional practice whereby poor and powerless people who experience extreme injustice and oppression stand before the house or office of the powerful and 'dry themselves in the sun'. This is a kind of dialogue by suffering. By standing in the full glare of the tropical sun for hours or even days, they risk serious injury or even death by sunstroke and dehydration. Their suffering is a way of forcing the powerful to listen to their plight. Our group discussed ways in which the 'mouse' can force the 'elephant' to listen to her. The elephant might normally not care even if he tramples the mouse to death. But a human 'mouse' may force a human 'elephant' to take notice by creative and dramatic means. Surprising coalitions between powerful and weak groups may also be a means of attracting the attention of powerful groups that need to listen to the weak.

Our group was very conscious that imbalances of power occur and may thwart true dialogue, not just on the level of economic or political power, but also in terms of religious power. In many countries, religious leaders refuse to allow their exercise of power to be scrutinised or criticised. Religious leaders in all faiths sometimes defend their power in undemocratic ways. They claim divine authority and/or religious or educational privilege because of their holy office. One example cited was of micro-finance schemes where poor people are forced to repay their loans on time, but bishops refuse to repay and the organisers are afraid to chal-

lenge them because of their religious authority. Leaders who abuse their power and refuse accountability or transparency in the use of funds, are poor candidates for interreligious dialogue.

We were aware that sometimes interreligious dialogue is a cover for oppression and may be manipulated in accordance with the interests of the powerful. For example, the authoritarian government of President Suharto in Indonesia frequently sponsored interreligious dialogue to promote harmony and ensure coordinated religious support and legitimation for government development projects. In this case dialogue was intended to support the status quo. It was a ritual practice intended to strengthen a habitus (Bourdieu) of social inequality.

In some contexts, dialogue is very difficult because the social and cultural practices of the people do not permit any criticism of religious authority. Religious authorities do not accept public criticism. For example, in Indonesian pesantren (Islamic boarding schools), the Kiyai (guru or religious leader), has almost absolute power over his (there are no women Kiyai) disciples. The Kiyai is an absolute monarch within the context of his pesantren. But even here there is a kind of dialogue at work. The Kiyai are meant to lead and teach without self-interest. Many are in fact very progressive and serve their disciples with great virtue. However if they do not, if they are seen to abuse their power or oppress their followers, the disciples and community will 'vote with their feet'. They will simply go to another pesantren to find a more virtuous Kiyai to teach them. Many pesantren in Indonesia are good places for dialogue because they accept visitors from other faiths to come and learn and share their ideas. Nevertheless dialogue of this sort must be very polite and never criticise the Kiyai in front of others.

One power dynamic that many of us experience is the difference of position between leaders of the majority or dominant religious group and leaders or member of minority groups. For example, Muslims in the United States are a minority who experience various types of discrimi-

nation or even threats to their physical safety. If they dialogue with Jews and Christians in New York, they are like the mouse dialoguing with the elephant. Similarly some Muslims in India may experience serious threats against their very existence that makes dialogue with some Hindu groups both necessary and dangerous. On the other hand, Muslims in Pakistan, Indonesia or Bangladesh are in the powerful position of the elephant, while minority groups are more like the mouse.

Powerful groups, not only religious but also economic, often control the public space of contexts where they form a large majority. French secularists may forbid the wearing of Muslim dress in publicly supported institutions, because they are a majority. Conversely, Muslims may require the wearing of Muslim dress, even by non-Muslims, in areas that institute Islamic law (syari'ah). It is important for all religious groups to remember the principle of reciprocity (see Abdullahi an-Naim), or more simply put, the golden rule, when determining the ground rules for dialogue in public.

Interreligious dialogue includes many different types of communication, both verbal and symbolic. But in all types of communication, power realities play a part. Who speaks to whom, and in what tone of voice or language is an inescapable part of dialogue. In further parts of this paper, we will elaborate on our understanding of power and propose ways of inducing transformative dialogue in the light of our experiences and understandings of power.

Different understandings of power relations

Power is a complex concept with both positive and negative aspects. When many of us first talk about power, we think in terms of 'power over others'. This power is hierarchical in nature and is associated with dominating, anthropocentric, patriarchal and other oppressive systems of advantage where language, gender, race and/or religion are used by one

group to manipulate or otherwise exert unjust control over others. When conceiving of power in this way, we are thinking in terms of an imbalance of power relations that is 'excluding' in nature.

But power can also be viewed positively as 'power with and for others'. This power may also be hierarchical in nature, but it is associated with empowering rather than dominating others. It is a power that is associated with sharing, serving and even sacrificing on behalf of others. It may involve delegating responsibilities or delicately balancing differentials in power. For example, while the 'good chief' in Polynesian societies has a great deal of authority and exercises control over others, she or he does so by discerning and acting to promote the common good, rather than private self-interest. The good chief takes care to hear all points of view, such that 'no one is left out'. When speaking of power in this way, we are talking about an imbalance of power that is 'inclusive' in nature.

Power can also be viewed in terms of its source or origins, as 'power from' outside of or beyond ourselves, as in power from God, or power from the spirit world, or power from the community, or even power in terms of capabilities or capacities that reside within each of us as individuals. Because power in this sense is a 'gift' or something 'received' it implies an element of responsibility. However, while religious adherents often refer to power received from a transcendent being in positive, redemptive ways; this 'power from' can also have decidedly negative connotations. Religious leaders of all stripes may use power to hurt others, defend their own interests at the expense of the interests of others, or inhibit harmony and a spirit of trust and well-being in the community. And we are mindful that these different senses of 'power from' may not be reconcilable with one another.

It is important, further, to be mindful of cultural context when reflecting on these three understandings of power. For example, in the African world view, power is not only associated with human beings and human institutions, but inhabits everything in the universe as a real sub-

stance, while at the same time it is also manifest in specific familial, social and cultural structures. And it is also important to avoid simple generalisations about various types of power, such as economic power. Many of us are concerned about the global reach of the power of transnational corporations and the widespread use of advertising to create consumer demand for more and more products. Consequently, the whole concept of the power of the market can be viewed in a negative light. And yet, among the Ibo in Nigeria, each child born on one of the four market days of the week is given a name of the respective market day on which she or he was born. The 'market' is in this way part of one's sense of identity.

Finally, when thinking of power in relation to interreligious dialogue, it is necessary to acknowledge various power imbalances that may be a factor in decisions and strategies about how we engage in such dialogue, including the language utilised, the degree of formal education of participants, and differentials in economic class. For example, imagine that participants are seated in a circle on chairs, but that the height of each chair reflects the economic assets or wealth of the person seated in that chair (depending on who is in the circle, some chairs may be very high indeed!). Imagine further that a poor person with no prior experience in formal debating is asked to participate in a debate with a professor who holds a Ph.D. and has participated in many debates. Other factors that may contribute to imbalances of power include political, racial, ethnic, gender and sexual orientation. People's health status – for example, if they are infected with HIV – may predispose them to be stigmatised or discounted. Some people may also be perceived by others to have an intimidating degree of moral power. For example, theologians, teachers of ethics and religious leaders are sometimes not aware of how their own positions are perceived as having an inordinate amount of moral authority.

Towards inducing transformative dialogue that takes power relations and care and compassion seriously

Given the reality of power imbalances, what is an ethical, sustainable way of inducing transformative dialogue? Ethics implies that we must do something with the power we have. Transformative ethics entails a genuine encounter with the other who has different moral values and principles from ours. In fact, we could say that we only begin to engage in transformative ethics when our moral world collides with the moral world of the person who stands in a different moral tradition.

Transformative dialogue is dialogue that nudges and even pushes us beyond where we are to a new, richer understanding of who we are and what we should do. Such dialogue has the following aspects:

It takes care to define the goals of the dialogue at the outset. For instance, the aim of the dialogue may be exploratory in nature. Perhaps there is an attempt to learn about religious practices. It may be geared toward giving and listening to testimonies. It might be structured as a revealing dialogue in which participants bring uncomfortable truths to light. It could be a dialectical exercise focused on confronting injustices or social problems, where there is an intent to challenge certain positions. Or perhaps there is a concern to negotiate a settlement of some kind.

It acknowledges and clarifies the different levels of power that are present at the onset of a dialogue. It is mindful of where the difficulties may come from and how different imbalances of power can influence the dialogue. It may require the building of a ‘counter power’ that lessens the impact of power differentials and allows for a fairer dialogue. For example, people of similar educational backgrounds or individuals who occupy similar places in social and economic hierarchies might be enlisted as participants for a particular dialogue. We may have to go

more slowly than we would like – to take 'baby steps' toward achieving transformative dialogue.

It presupposes a prior interrogation of our own self-understandings. It necessitates a capacity to be self-critical or what the Latin American sociologist of religion, Otto Maduro, refers to as 'autocriticality'. For example, the good teacher knows her or his limitations. According to an ancient Chinese story, Confucius had an excellent student that knew Confucianism perfectly. But one day Confucius said to the student, 'You are not my follower.' In response the student asked, 'Why?' to which Confucius replied, 'Because you never criticise me.' Participants in transformative dialogue know that they need criticism. Thus, transformative dialogue assumes a level of humility about our own moral power – an awareness of our own predispositions toward selfishness or lack of concern for the well-being of the other.

It proceeds on the assumption that we do not exist for ourselves alone, but that we exist in relation to one another. It presupposes, in the words of the Asian American theologian, Rita Nakashima Brock, that we are 'relationship-seeking beings'. We are ready to engage in transformative dialogue when we can truly respond to the question, 'Who am I?' to quote John Mbiti, with words such as, 'I am because we are.' It is mindful that the 'we' is not limited to fellow human beings, but includes flora and fauna, indeed all of nature. And for religious adherents, it includes a covenantal relationship with transcendent power – with the creative source of all that is. It does not question the other's definition of her or his faith or culture.

It builds trust by stressing a need for openness and transparency. It assumes that participants approach and engage one another in a non-defensive way. It is a dialogue in which everyone senses that she or he will get a fair hearing.

It includes as many diverse voices as is practically feasible and appropriate to the nature of the particular dialogue. For example, it creates

ways to include women in settings where women have been excluded from such participation. It recognises that the greater the diversity, the greater the possibility for arriving at truth.

It assumes that participants are accountable to one another, but is aware that different cultures have different mechanisms for holding one another accountable, especially their leaders. Participants may be held accountable to one another in both direct and indirect ways. Leaders with a high degree of moral authority should encourage the contributions of people who are normally voiceless.

It takes histories seriously, especially histories of oppression, while not being entrapped or circumscribed by those histories. It acknowledges that healing is important, but it seeks to move beyond healing processes toward new levels of caring and compassion in the future. Thus, while transformative dialogue assumes an acute awareness of legacies of colonialism or neocolonialism – for the need to remember the injustices of the past – it also constitutes an empowering exercise in which participants strive toward a new heaven and a new earth. It seeks to transcend differing viewpoints about controversial issues in the past and present in order to encourage contributions toward dialogue in the future. It honours the other's definition of her or his faith or culture. It represents an invitation to an ongoing process that constitutes the building up of enduring relationships.

As interreligious dialogue, it may or may not focus on expressly religious themes, doctrines or philosophies. Indeed, transformative dialogue may focus on specific social problems or practical needs for survival in everyday life that are not specifically religious in nature. It may issue in surprising coalitions, creating an opportunity for new openings.

It is an open-ended, hopeful process – a flow of dialogue in response to 'the gift' of our very being. It unfolds in the hope and expectation of introducing change, and even inducing the breaking forth of a kairos.

Transformative dialogue is not confined to analytic or propositional discussion. It also includes sharing of stories, myths, and non-verbal artistic expressions. Such dialogue requires attention to forms of expression and symbolic dialogue that may be more common to marginalised groups. Sharing of food and other forms of sustenance is an almost universal form of dialogue.

Group 5: Sharing Values in the African Context

Participants: Dr David Lutz, Kenya/USA (moderator), Prof. Jesse Mugambi, Kenya (moderator), Rev. Monsignor Prof. Dr Obiora Ike, Nigeria, Mr Mohammed M. Jeizan, Kenya, Prof. Eunice Karanja Kamaara, Kenya, Mr Richard Kibirige, Uganda, Mr Joseph King'ori, Kenya, Dr. David Maillu, Kenya, Dr Laureen Maseno, Kenya (not travelling), Prof. Dr Dr em. John Mbiti, Switzerland/Kenya, Mr. Harold Miller, Kenya/USA, Rev. Prof. Dr Aidan G. Msafiri, Tanzania, Dr Paul Mwangi, Kenya, Dr David Ndegwah, Kenya, Dr Max Ngabirano, Uganda, Mr Hassan Kinyua Omari, Kenya.

Preliminary remarks

The concepts of care and compassion not only are common to all human cultures and religions but also are constant desires of the human person. All great religious leaders have emphasised the centrality of care and compassion. Jesus Christ, for example, did so in the Beatitudes and the Parable of the Prodigal Son. We should avoid addressing the themes of care and compassion too superficially or narrowly. There is a need to explore their inner dynamics and problematics, both positive and negative.

We can distinguish two types of care and compassion:

Formative-transformative care and compassion is the authentic and absolutely needful empathy and action that holistically and humbly helps both the giver and the receiver. It neither undermines the dignity of the receivers nor paralyses their potentiality and responsibility to develop as rational and creative beings. Moreover, it respects both the emotions and the socio-cultural and human identity of the sufferer. In short, it does not homogenise itself. True compassion is essentially and necessarily respectful and dignifying. It does not overlook the fundamental human values cherished by others.

Destructive-paralyzing care and compassion is indifferent and overlooks the dignity of the human person. It paralyses the potentialities of human beings and renders them dependent. Certain acts of compassion may become obstacles to the integral development and transformation of the receiver, who becomes simply a passive and inactive partner and develops 'dependency syndrome'. Worse still, some acts of compassion may result from the giver's 'helping syndrome', which helps neither the sufferer nor the giver. It hinders the holistic development and actualisation of the receiver.

Viewed holistically, the suffering person carries not only material needs or wants, but also personal desires and the responsibility of integral growth and transformation. Consequently, care and compassion should avoid the potential dangers of the maldevelopment of the human person. Any act of care and compassion should not only facilitate the empowerment of the sufferer but also promote human creativity and personal fulfilment.

Defining global ethics

Although cultures and religions are diverse, ethics is universal. Therefore, it is possible to work toward a global ethic. But being human

is expressed in many ways. Universal ethics must be particular in order to be relevant.

We could attempt to validate global ethics either from the top down (deductively) or from the bottom up (inductively). If we start from the universal, what will actually happen is that the particularity of those in power will be universalised. They will tailor the rules to suit themselves. Universal values that are imposed from above will not be accepted from below. When the powerful universalise their particularity, the ethic of the powerless goes underground, to await an opportunity to resurface. It may erupt either constructively or destructively.

A global ethics will be imposed from above or from outside, if ordinary people cannot identify themselves with the values and virtues associated with it. On the other hand, it will be an affirmation of self-identity, if its values and virtues resonate with a people's self-perception and self-evaluation within their own cultural and national context. Yet if it is local and remains local, it will be isolationist.

We should avoid imperialism by beginning with the particular and working toward the universal. The universal must not supersede the particular. People must see that they are part of a bigger whole, without losing what is their own. Our approach to defining global ethics should be like drops forming a body of water, not like a lake from which we permit streams to flow. But we should also examine the sources of the water and distinguish between pure and polluted water.

We must not let science or technology, or the market, or the media be the custodian of global ethics; for behind them always stand certain people with certain agendas.

Africa has much to offer to global ethics. Although African cultures differ from one another, these differences are in detail, not in essence. Certain elements are common to all:

African ethics is communal, not individualist. This does not mean that the individual is unimportant, but rather that the individual is important as a member of the community.

All of reality is a continuum, from the spiritual to the human to fauna, flora, and the inanimate world. Therefore, injuring nature is unethical. This implies that we have responsibilities towards non-human living beings and the universe.

The spiritual dimension is particularly important in the African world view. Accordingly, God is the creator of all things. This has significant implications for our lives.

There is a relationship of continuity between generations. We occupy a specific generational space. Others come before us and others will come after us. There is a series of rites of passage (not only the one from adolescence to adulthood) that complete the continuity of generations. After people pass through a rite of passage, certain behaviour is expected of them. There are intergenerational handovers; when these break down, community breaks down.

We should take care of the weak and the poor, not as objects of pity, but with empathy.

Global ethics is human ethics. If African values were merely African values, Africa would have little to offer to global ethics. If, on the contrary, some African values are in fact human values, then Africa does indeed have something significant to offer to the rest of the world: values that are genuinely human. At the same time, Africa can also learn from the rest of the world.

A global ethic should be based on covenantal rather than contractual relationships. Care and compassion are voluntary, covenantal acts, extended by one person or group to another. A contract cannot compel someone to be caring or compassionate. Contracts are for protection of self-interests. Covenants are commitments towards other people. Covenants increase social goodwill. Contracts are based on the fear that one

party may not keep the promise over a particular consideration. Covenants are based on the trust that each party will keep the promise.

Sir Jonathan Sacks makes the following distinction between contracts and covenants:

'A contract is made for a limited period, for a specific purpose, between two or more parties, each seeking their own benefit. A covenant is made open-endedly by two or more parties who come together in a bond of loyalty and trust to achieve together what none can achieve alone. A contract is like a deal; a covenant is like a marriage. Contracts belong to the market and to the state, to economics and politics, both of which are arenas of competition. Covenants belong to families, communities, charities, which are arenas of cooperation. A contract is between me and you – separate selves – but a covenant is about us – collective belonging. A contract is about interests: a covenant is about identity. And hence the vital distinction not made clearly enough in European politics between a social contract and a social covenant. A social contract creates a state; a social covenant creates a society.' (Address to the European Parliament, Strasbourg, 19 November 2008).

The distinction between contracts and covenants is not one of mutual exclusivity; some relationships properly possess both contractual and covenantal properties. Nevertheless, it is a distinction that can be applied fruitfully in many contexts. For example, the slow pace of progress in interreligious dialogue can be explained partially by the fact that it is often conducted with the characteristics of a contract, rather than with those of a covenant. Additionally, a partial explanation of the disintegration of the institution of the family in some modern societies is that marriage has come to be regarded as merely a contract.

Ensuring a successful interreligious dialogue on ethics

Religions do not dialogue; people dialogue – but only if they respect one another. In order for interreligious dialogue to take place, people from different religions must respect each other.

Religion at its best is a corrective to abuse of power; religion at its worst involves abuse of power. Religions have sometimes been abused by the powerful. Therefore, religions cannot automatically become instruments of promoting peace. The power of religion may be seized by those who want to misuse it, e.g., as an instrument of war.

The approach of some (but not all) missionaries in Africa was top-down. Those who knew told those who did not know. In contrast, in interreligious dialogue, instead of thinking we know more than others, we should listen to others. Religion cannot be an instrument of peace if it is my religion to the exclusion of others.

We should keep in mind that the religions are themselves divided internally, and ask who within each of them should participate in interreligious dialogue. We should also keep in mind that participants in interfaith discourse represent not only their religions, but also their societies. Religions are the custodians of the ethics of the societies in which they are dominant.

Integrating means and methods of sharing values, in a human-to-human approach

There are many means and methods of sharing values other than academic discourse. Going beyond academic discourse means that we move from idealism to realism, from theory to practice. In the practical sharing of values, we need to take into consideration the various existential components of human life. Some obvious examples are theatre, music, dancing, poetry, art, etc. A less obvious example is intermarriage.

The political climate must permit these different means and methods of sharing values.

In some cultures, opening places of worship to members of other religious communities may facilitate the sharing of values. Being there for the global other is another key to sharing. In whatever means and method one uses, a premium should be placed on the independent investigation of truth, since it eliminates prejudices that hinder the sharing of human values. Ethics does not exist in isolation from concrete human situations; therefore, in all human interactions – political, economic, religious, etc. – means and methods should be crafted in order to promote human values.

Balancing power relations, inducing a real transformation

It is important to understand that there are many different kinds of power. In thinking about balancing power relations, it may be helpful to consider the work of African female theologians who are investigating 'power over' vs. 'enabling power', oppressive power vs. nurturing power.

There are two dominant models of power, both of which are unsatisfactory: the leader-follower or ruler-ruled model and the centre-periphery model. Are rulers more important than those who are ruled? The shepherd leads the sheep by walking behind them, not in front of them, in order not to lose the last sheep. And what is so good about being at the centre? It would be better to think of everyone at the periphery, in a circle. Then everyone could see everyone and no one would be more powerful than anyone else. Although these metaphors are imperfect, they suggest alternatives to the dominant models of power.

We should understand power as influence. Influence should be shared, not dispensed. There are different focal points of social influ-

ence: political, religious, business, artistic, intellectual, and moral, kinship-group leadership, etc.

In order to induce a real transformation, we need to bring global ethics down from the theoretical to the practical level. Global ethics should not exist only in the mind. We need institutions consistent with global ethics. The institutions that govern human activities need to be in harmony at the global level for global ethics to be in place. Global ethics needs to be local in order to be relevant.

The current global economic crisis, which is affecting the major economies and melting down on the poor within both 'developed' and 'developing' countries, as well as on the natural environment, shows that the present model of unbridled liberal markets, with a capitalist and materialist financial system, is not sustainable. Existing paradigms have failed. People around the world have lost jobs, families are uncertain of their futures, and governments have introduced panic measures to bail out failing banks and corporations, whose management promoted the domination of short-term profits and personal interests above those of humanity in the first place. It is time for new thinking and action in the economy field, founded on moral and spiritual values and universal ethical principles. We need inclusive, just international partnerships to promote people above profits and to empower local communities by a revision of the current unethical world economic system. We need coordination of efforts by all countries, founded on the principles of efficiency and equity. We need to understand the business firm as a covenantal community, rather than merely a collection of individuals related to one another by a network of contracts.

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