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CURRENT DIALOGUE

December 2014

Editorial

2014 has been a year of transition in the interreligious department of the WCC. We are bringing to its fulfilment a major project that the department has been engaged with over the past decade, and we are also opening up some quite significant new areas of work.

First, the fulfilment. My own initial direct involvement with the work of the interreligious department of the WCC came in 2002 when, as a then member of staff of the Anglican Communion Office, I was invited to participate in a meeting organized jointly by Interreligious Dialogue, Faith and Order and Mission and Evangelism, to produce a statement on Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding. The meeting was a memorable one for me – not least because it was the occasion when I first met Father Jacques Dupuis. The 2002 meeting and a follow-up gathering a year later produced the document "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding"[1] which eventually went to the Porto Alegre Assembly in 2006 – with a number of caveats. It was made clear that it "did not represent the view of the WCC", and also that further reflection was needed. Part of that reflection was work in relation to specific "other faiths": Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and indigenous religions. The papers presented at the consultation relating to Buddhism were published in *Current Dialogue 51*; those relating to Islam in *Current Dialogue 52*; those relating to Judaism in *Current Dialogue 53*. When I joined the staff of the WCC in September 2011 I was specifically asked by senior colleagues to draw this process to a conclusion, and present an overall report and reflection on the theme of "religious plurality" or, as we have now chosen to call it, "Christian Self-Identity in a Multi-Religious World" for adoption by the WCC. A couple of years, and meetings in Bossey, Geneva and Nairobi later, a report entitled "Who Do We Say That We Are?: Christian Self-Identity in a Multi-Religious World" was duly presented to and accepted by Central Committee in July 2014. So a process that began 12 years ago is now finally coming to its conclusion. It is being published as a discrete booklet in the first half of 2015, and it appears in the newest issue *The Ecumenical Review,* 66:4 (December 2014). I say "coming" to an end rather than "has come" because we have been asked by the Central Committee to prepare a study guide for the report, which certainly, I am looking forward to doing. We hope to have the study guide available during the latter half of 2015. We will certainly ensure that when the report is published it is announced on the WCC website.

Next, the new. One of the issues that I have become increasingly aware of in the 15 years or so when I have been professionally engaged in interreligious dialogue is the relationship which can be either creative, or difficult, or a mixture of both, between interreligious and inter-church dialogue. What are the goals of each? Are they the same or different? Does one somehow "threaten" the other? How can they creatively engage? The World Council of Churches occupies perhaps a unique platform in relation to this topic, given its place as "the" Christian international ecumenical body which also has a long and honourable history of commitment to interreligious engagement. So collaborating with colleagues in Faith and Order, and building on work already done by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (the papers from a conference organised by CTBI on this topic are incorporated in this issue of *Current Dialogue*), we are seeking to produce a short handbook particularly designed for Christian church committees or professionals who find themselves needing to deal with both threads – the interreligious and the inter-church. Work on this will be taking place during the first half of 2015.

Also still "new" is the development by my colleague Rev. Dr Peniel Rajkumar of an Asia-based course for Christian young people working in an interreligious environment. YATRA – the acronym by which it is known – had its first, very successful outing in June 2014. It is intended to make it an annual event, and is likely that the second YATRA will take place in June 2015 in Cambodia. Do encourage appropriate younger colleagues and students to apply for it. The Bossey Interreligious Course, which includes young Jews and Muslims as

well as Christians, also continues. We would really appreciate help in making it better known – particularly among the Jewish and Muslim constituencies.

The difficult events of the summer in the Middle East and their aftermath have had several consequences for us working in interreligious dialogue – rightly, our work and our plans must not be fixed in concrete so solid that they cannot be responsive to current events. We are seeking to engage in a formal process of reflection on Christian attitudes to anti-Semitism and to Islamophobia. We are also working to hold a significant international conference towards the end of 2015 that will explore the topic of fundamentalism in religions.

As well as the Middle East, two particular geographical areas of current concern from an interreligious perspective are Nigeria and Malaysia. In Nigeria, following on a high-level Christian-Muslim international visit to the country in 2012, we are working with partners in the country to establish a centre for the monitoring of religious-based violence. And – as the first article in this issue of *Current Dialogue*, for which we are very grateful to Professor Miroslav Volf, suggests (discussed also in the article by Peter Riddell) – the so-called "Allah" controversy in Malaysia feels rather like a litmus paper for Christian-Muslim relations, particularly in countries beyond the Middle East.

I am sorry about the delay in the publication of this issue of *Current Dialogue*, caused by a mixture of practical and financial reasons. It will be therefore the only issue to be published in 2014 – although complications in the distribution of the previous issue (No. 55) meant that, in many cases, it did not reach you until March-April of this year. We will revert to the publication of two issues in 2015.

Clare Amos, *Programme Executive, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation*

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[1]   www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/assembly/2006-porto-alegre/3-preparatory-and-background-documents/religious-plurality-and-christian-self-understanding.

God and Allah: What's in a Name?

Ryan McAnnally-Linz
Miroslav Volf

In October 2013, a Malaysian appeals court ruled that the Catholic newspaper *Herald* could not legally use the word "Allah" in print. The court argued that the use of "Allah" in non-Muslim writings could confuse Muslims about the differences between Islam and other religions and even entice them to convert, which would violate Malay law. As news of the decision spread, many individuals and organizations voiced their opposition. Meanwhile, some Malaysian Muslims demonstrated in favour of the court, and Sultan Abdul Halim Mu'adzam, the current Malaysian head of state, proclaimed his support for the ruling. The controversy even spilled over into violence, as a church in the province of Penang was firebombed in January 2014. At the time of writing the case awaited a hearing in the Malaysian Federal Court, the country's highest judiciary body.[1]

Our (limited) understanding of Islam leads us to believe that there are good Muslim reasons to reject the lower court's reasoning. But Muslims who agree with us are much better placed to elaborate them, and indeed some have. Our pluralist political commitments lead to the same conclusion. But arguments based on those commitments can do only so much when disconnected from the theological and philosophical convictions that motivate them and when delivered to the Malaysian political context from the far different American one. It might appear, then, that there is not much for Christian theologians to do in response to the Malaysian court's ruling. That appearance would be deceiving.

The ruling in fact raises pressing theological questions for Christians. Does the Christian faith permit one to pray to Allah? And when Muslims worship Allah, might they be worshiping God? To understand the import of these and related questions, it's helpful to consider a surprising Christian response to the Malaysian court decision. Instead of considering it a violation of the rights of Malaysian Christians, some have *welcomed* the ban on Christians using the word "Allah" in their texts. Representative of this response is President R. Albert Mohler Jr of The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, who has argued that Christians should not call upon the true God of the Bible using the word "Allah", because "Allah" refers only to the radically different god of the Qur'an.

It matters greatly whether Dr Mohler and those who agree with him are right. If they are, the prospects for respectful, trusting cooperation between Christians and Muslims diminish. The reason, however, is perhaps not what one would expect. It's not that people have to believe in the same god in order to live together in peace and even to cooperate politically. Contemporary South Korea and the United States, for instance, both see relatively peaceful and cooperative political relations between Christian, Buddhist, and non-religious populations. And, clearly, it's not that people who believe in the same god necessarily get along. Citing counter-examples here is disconcertingly easy: countless European wars both before and after the Reformation, recent conflicts among Muslims in Iraq and Syria, the American Civil War … the list of tragedies could go on.

It's not a question of an automatic, necessary relationship. The question of the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur'an affects the prospects for cooperation for three different reasons.

First, if Dr Mohler is *wrong*, then *certain otherwise unavailable forms of cooperative reasoning between Christians and Muslims become possible*. Among many other things, people engaging in

political cooperation make arguments, offer reasons, and try to convince one another. If Christians and Muslims hold that the God of the Bible and the God of the Qur'an are one, then when reasoning with and convincing one another, they will be able to appeal to arguments about the character of God. They will be able to engage, that is, in common theological deliberation. Since theological reasons are highly important to many Christians and Muslims, being able to deliberate theologically together is a significant help to efforts and cooperation.

Second, if Dr Mohler is *right*, then *the mutual sense of respect necessary for public cooperation becomes much harder to maintain between Christians and Muslims.* This is because Christians claim that there is one and only one God. As a consequence of this claim, if Christians hold that Muslims do not worship the one God, we must hold that they worship *nothing*, an *empty created idol*, or else *something demonic*. Now, such a belief would not in itself be disrespectful. But Muslims *also* claim that there is one and only one God. Indeed, the claim to worship that God is likely the most central claim of Islam. So for Christians to deny that Muslims worship the one God is to deny the heart of their confession of faith. No matter how respectfully (or infrequently) Christians tried to communicate that denial, many Muslims would undoubtedly receive it as deeply disrespectful. Since a mutual sense of respect is an important ingredient in public cooperation, cooperation between Christians and Muslims would thus be impeded.

Third, and perhaps most unsettlingly, *if the bulk of Christians held, as many do now, that Muslims actually worship a demonic force, they would have compelling reasons not to cooperate with Muslims.* To do so would be to cooperate in a movement of opposition to God.

Clearly, the stakes are high when answering these questions.

Before doing our best to give our answers, we need to recognize that as Christians, we are called to follow the truth, regardless of the consequences to ourselves. If we are convinced that the god of the Qur'an is no God at all, then we cannot pretend otherwise for the sake of amiable social relations. Thankfully, there are good reasons to believe that Dr Mohler and those who agree with him are wrong about Allah. Not only should Christians feel free to use the word "Allah" in their worship of God if it's natural to do so in their language, but Muslim speech about and worship of "Allah" is not by definition worship of a false god. But how do we know this?

The first thing to do is recognize the inadequacy of all human language about God. God is unimaginably transcendent – beyond, above, greater than any and all creatures. Our words are the words of creatures, and so they simply cannot *refer* to God in any straightforward way. *All* of our conceptions of God fall short. *All* of our words fail. And yet we often don't realize that they do – at least, we don't act like they do. Instead, we tend to worship these ideas and words about God in place of God and so fall into idolatry ourselves. We truly worship God only when God by grace lifts up our faltering words and all-too-human thoughts and receives them as worship. We should, therefore, always maintain a stance of humility when talking about a subject like this one.

Having said this, we can turn to the question of Christian use of the word "Allah". It is important here to note that Christianity has always been a fundamentally translatable faith. Recounting the miracle of Pentecost, the Book of Acts says:

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. … And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, 'Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear,

each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.' (Acts 2:4-11)

From the start, the gospel is not attached to any one language – even the language of Jesus. Rather, by the power of God's spirit, it adopts and indwells the languages of all who are there to hear. We can see the continuation of this feature of Christian faith in the New Testament, which uses common Greek words to translate Aramaic and Hebrew words referring to God. And also in the fact that the word "God", which English-speaking Christians use in their Bibles and worship, comes from an Old English word used long before Anglo-Saxons started converting to Christianity. Using generic words for "god" from local languages is how Christians can talk about God. If "Allah" is one such word, then Christians ought to feel free to use it.

It turns out that "Allah" is just such a word. Indeed, if you want to translate the Greek *ho theos* (literally "the God" in English), which is found in John 20:28, Matthew 1:23, and elsewhere, there really is no good option in Arabic other than "Allah". Unsurprisingly, then, we have evidence that Arabic-speaking Christians have used "Allah" in their worship and their scriptures at least since the 9th century. It's very possible that they did so before the time of Muhammad.

But even if it is natural for Christians speaking certain languages to call God "Allah", there might be good reasons for them not to use this name. Specifically, it is only prudent for Christians to pray to and worship "Allah" if the meanings associated with that word are not radically opposed to what Christians say about God. Otherwise, they do in fact unnecessarily risk confusion, as the Malaysian court claimed. Early Christians

did not call God "Apollo" or "muse" after all.

Some Christians claim that the "Allah" whom Muslims worship cannot be the God of Jesus because the meanings of the word are just too different from what English-speaking Christians mean by "God" or Spanish-speaking ones mean by "Diós". Therefore, they conclude, Christians should not refer to God as "Allah". They usually emphasize two points: (1) Muslims reject that Jesus was and is the incarnate Son of God and (2) they deny that God is Trinity. We agree that these are two of the most important claims of Christian faith. Without them, we believe, one misses the decisive revelation of God and the very heart of who God is. Even so, just because someone denies these claims does not by itself mean that she doesn't believe in and worship God.

Consider the vitally important case of Judaism. Incarnation and Trinity are perhaps the two most significant differences of belief between Christians and Jews, and yet the vast majority of the Christian tradition, beginning with the New Testament, has held that the Jews believe in the same God as Christians. The gospel stories about Jesus show him assuming that the Jewish religious leaders with whom he disagreed believed in the same God he proclaimed, even though many of them failed to understand God and God's relationship to Jesus in fundamental ways. When Jesus debates those leaders over his status as Son, he does so *assuming* that he and they are both talking about the God whom Jesus claimed to reveal (John 5).

Importantly, Jesus extends his assumption about common ground to people other than his fellow Jews. In John 4:1-42, Jesus discusses the right way to worship God with a Samaritan woman. He assumes that he and the woman are talking about one God, even though he affirms the superiority of the Jewish understanding of that God: "You worship what you do not know; we worship what we know, for salvation is from the Jews"

(4:22). The woman worships God, Jesus says, even if she does not understand God as well as the Jews.

In accord with Jesus' example, Augustine extends a similar assumption to the Greek Neo-Platonist philosophers. Speaking to God in his *Confessions* about some Neo-Platonist books that he had read earlier in his life, Augustine writes: "The books say that before all times and above all times your only-begotten Son immutably abides eternal with you" (7.9.14, translated by Henry Chadwick). These same philosophers deny the incarnation, and so miss the saving truth of the gospel, according to Augustine. But nevertheless, he thinks their books really talk about *God*. The disagreement is about what Jesus reveals about God and how God is related to Jesus.

All of these examples address monotheists, people who believed that there is one and only one God. At a minimum, they would agree with one or another version of three claims that are central to Christian faith:

1. There is only one true God. Any other supposed "god" is no god at all.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is different from everything that is not God. The cosmos is not God.

Importantly, claims very much like these can be found in the Qur'an. For example:

1. "Know, therefore, that there is no god but God" (47:19).
2. "It was He who created the heavens and the earth in all truth" (6:73).
3. Allah is "the Merciful One who sits enthroned on high," which is usually taken to mean that God is beyond the created world (2:255).

Consequently, there is good reason to treat Muslim beliefs in and claims about Allah in the same way Jesus treated Jewish and Samaritan beliefs and Augustine treated the Neo-Platonists. We may disagree about immensely important things about God, but we are disagreeing *about God*, not *between gods*, so to speak.

But even granted Christian and Muslim agreement on the claims of monotheism, some would raise the objection that the *character* of "Allah" in the Qur'an and Islam radically differ from the character of God as revealed by Jesus. Monotheism aside, they would say, is it not just as misleading to treat them as the "same" in any practically important sense?

There is no way to answer an objection like this definitively in a short article (or even a rather long one), but we think that there are good reasons for rejecting this argument, and we would like to offer a very rough sketch of what those reasons are.

Let's start by noting a common stereotype about Christianity and Islam. The Christian God – so the stereotype goes – is loving and merciful, but Muslims believe that Allah is demanding and punitive.

This stereotype mischaracterizes *both* Christian and Muslim understandings of God. Christians *do* believe that God is loving and merciful. But a robust picture of God as portrayed in the New Testament must include the recognition that God is just (e.g., Romans 3:5), makes demands of us (e.g., John 15:10), and is unwavering in judgment against sin (e.g., 2 Peter 2:4-9). Muslims *do* believe that Allah issues commandments and punishes evil. But in the Qur'an God is consistently praised as "The Merciful," "The Compassionate," "The All-Forgiving," "The Generous," "The Benevolent," and "The Loving." The stereotype gives us an incomplete picture of both faiths.

There are – we emphasize this – crucial differences between how Christians and Muslims understand God's character. But those differences do not erase the commonalities. For example, Christians emphasize that God loves unconditionally, whereas most Muslims do not. But that does not change the fact that nearly all Christians and Muslims believe that God loves.

Overlaps also exist between the *commands* that Christianity and Islam believe God makes for human beings. The important document *A Common Word between Us and You*, issued by many of the world's leading Muslim scholars and clerics in 2007, points out that *love of God* and *love of neighbour* are central to Islam as well as to Christianity. The God of the Qur'an underwrites the commandments on which Jesus says "the law and the prophets hang" (Matthew 22:40). Again, there are substantial differences. For instance, Jesus unequivocally commands that we love our enemies. Many Muslim thinkers and leaders insist that we should be kind to all, but they tend not to include enemies among the neighbours whom we are commanded to love. But again, the differences do not erase the commonalities.

This discussion of commonalities begins to shed light on the possibility of cooperative forms of reasoning that we raised above. Exploring how Christians ought to relate to Allah has led us to see significant common ground between Christianity and Islam. This common ground does not mean that Christianity and Islam are the same faith. They are not. Nor does it mean that Christians and Muslims agree about everything important. They do not. But it does mean that our visions of the common good are likely to overlap in meaningful ways. We have somewhere solid to plant our feet as we strive to promote that good. And for that we should be thankful to the one God who is over all.

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Professor Miroslav Volf teaches at Yale University and is author of Allah: A Christian Response [2011].

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[1] Since the completion of this article and on 23 June 2014, the Federal Court of Malaysia ruled by majority opinion against allowing the Catholic *Herald* to appeal the earlier High Court judgement which prohibited its use of the word "Allah".

In our Time: the Dynamic Relationship between Christian Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue

The following papers by Peter Colwell, Keith Clements and Peter Riddell were given at a one-day conference organized by Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI) at Heythrop College in September 2013 with the title "In Our Time: the Dynamic Relationship between Christian Ecumenism and Interreligious dialogue" . The conference explored the relationship between ecumenical and interfaith dialogue, whether ecumenism has been replaced by interfaith engagement and how the two interact. These ideas were further developed and presented during a subsequent "Madang" at the 10th Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Busan, South Korea in November 2013.

Why this topic?

The following are opening words at the conference from Peter Colwell, Deputy General Secretary at Churches Together in Britain and Ireland, based in London.

Have you heard the one about the Jewish Rabbi, the Muslim Sheikh and the Christian Minister sitting in a Kosher Restaurant? Well that minister was me, and the Sheikh is here too! But the story is not what it seems for it is not a joke but one of the countless and uniquely precious moments that occur in interreligious dialogue. A profound discussion between three individuals, firmly rooted in their own faith, yet drawn into discovering themselves more deeply and more fully by an encounter with the religious other, where one is sometimes perplexed and fascinated, gently challenged, and joyfully affirmed.

My own journey of dialogue began with the Christian Ecumenical encounter. A Lancastrian teenager from a non-Conformist background and his encounter with the Roman Catholic, Anglican and Orthodox faiths, enabled him to respond more fully to his own sense of God's call to Christian ministry. This later led to that further encounter with the religious other, with Muslim, Jews, Sikhs, Hindus and Buddhists in occasions such as that recent one in a Kosher Restaurant.

The Christian encounter with the religious other often begins with the ecumenical journey. *Nostra Aetate* above all affirmed the truth of this, recognizing that Christian unity was not a search for ever-increasing inter-Christian chumminess but a recognition of God's call to us to be reconciled to each other, to all peoples and to God. It is a much used quotation, but Desmond Tutu's observation at Santiago de Compostela in 1993, "a divided church is too weak to resist apartheid" was alluding to the organic link between Christian unity and justice and reconciliation in the world.

The exhortations of the early decades of the ecumenical movement, for a Christian unity that looks outwards to the reconciliation of peoples to each other and to God, speaks of a vibrant and dynamic relationship between Christian ecumenism and interreligious dialogue. But are they the same thing? Sometimes I encounter people who think they are. Occasionally one encounters the view that the search for the visible unity of the church has achieved all that it is likely to, and therefore the dialogue of the religions is the more urgent, and has become the "new ecumenism".

However, if ecumenism is reduced to mere co-operation, entering "ecumenical space" that has no content or direction, and if interreligious dialogue is only about eye-catching events and religions gaining the ear of politicians, then it is easy to see why some might regard ecumenism as passé, and why some have already become cynical about interreligious dialogue or more accurately what some are already calling "the interfaith industry".

This day conference is taking place because of these and other concerns. Churches Together in Britain and Ireland (CTBI), formerly the British Council of Churches, is a fellowship and council of churches across the four nations of Britain and Ireland. It seeks to be an expression of the churches call to be one in Christ, but in its work recognizes that reconciliation is broader than merely churches being together. Interreligious dialogue is now an important expression of recognizing God's call to unity. CTBI has been invited to lead a workshop at the Assembly of the World Council of Churches in South Korea in a few weeks' time, on the relationship between ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue and whether one has replaced the other, or whether the two exist in a creative and dynamic relationship.

We are here today to begin that conversation. Not necessarily to answer directly what might be regarded as a somewhat crude question "is interfaith the new ecumenism?" but to explore the relationship between these two distinctive, yet complimentary modes of engagement.

This is a partnership between Heythrop College, and CTBI's own Interfaith Theological Advisory Group and I am delighted that our three speakers are here, for they are some of the leading thinkers in what they have to say. We will begin with an exploration of what is distinctive about Christian ecumenism and then move on to reflecting on aspects of how Christian ecumenical and interreligious encounter have impacted each other in two very different contexts: that of the Middle East and of South East Asia and Australasia. But your contribution is important too, and I hope that listening to and learning from each other today might enrich CTBI's contribution to the discussions in Korea.

Interfaith and Ecumenical Dialogue
Resonances, Differences, Problems and Possibilities:
A View from the British and Irish Context

Peter Colwell

I want to begin with the story of Lyndhurst Road United Reformed Church in Hampstead, North London. The church was a successful and distinguished congregation situated in a prosperous suburb of London, known for the large number of middle class people with strong liberal convictions. However, in 1978 whilst it had a large and healthy membership, it voted to close and sell its building. Its decision to close had nothing to do with any negative view of itself, its size, financial solvency or its long-term viability. It closed out of a strong and radical conviction that the visible unity of the church was an achievable goal within a few years, and that the achievement was only likely if sacrifices were made if aspects of the institutional church – including the excessively large number of church buildings and separate congregations – were to change. And so they closed, and dispersed to other churches in the fervent belief that this would help to achieve the visible unity of the church. The church building is now a recording studio and has hosted artists as diverse as Jimmy Somerville, Robbie Williams, Ian Bostridge and Murray Perahia – a different sort of ecumenism I suppose! Today we look back and judge their actions to be naive; however, it reflected a strong and visionary belief at the time that the goal of visible unity was achievable within a generation, if not a decade.

In the second decade of the 21st century, the ecumenical movement looks very different and much of the visionary and even revolutionary beliefs of what ecumenism could achieve seem quite remote from current ecumenical priorities. Then, unlike now, the ecumenical movement believed that it had the potential not only to transform the church, but to change the world. This conviction was reflected as recently as 1989 when, with the creation of the Council of Churches of Britain and Ireland, Bernard Thorogood, General Secretary of the United Reformed Church, was reputed to have commented upon how bringing the Roman Catholic Church into the ecumenical structures for the first time offered the realistic prospect of genuine reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, thus seeing the end of the enmity and violence that had plighted so many communities.

When we turn to interfaith dialogue we see striking similarities in the convictions and beliefs as to what is achievable. For the most part, practitioners of interfaith dialogue have not pursued the goal of seeking the unity of religions, however, the conviction that dialogue and cooperation is the key to solving many of the world's ills is certainly prevalent. Hans Kung best summed up that conviction when he said:

No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions.[1]

Is it still the case that the ecumenical movement believes that the one church will inevitably have a transformative impact on the world at large? The view of Kung and others that interfaith dialogue can effect global change might well be seen to have moved away from the Christian view that the existence of the church in the wider community can change the course of human history, or at the very least that the church can only achieve this in partnership with others.

However, Archbishop Michael Fitzgerald suggests how this relates to the ecumenical identity of the church:

…dialogue is not simply about living in harmony and cooperating for the benefit of humankind, important though these goals may be, but rather is called to go deeper. There is constant invitation to Christians and people of other religious traditions to live out to the full their religious commitment, to respond with greater fidelity to God's personal call. In this way relations between people of different religions can become truly a dialogue of salvation.[2]

If so, this has profound implications for the next stage in the ecumenical journey: for if ecumenism is still concerned with human transformation, then how does dialogue with other faiths intersect with this? However, if ecumenism is only concerned with denominational or confessional cooperation, then what is its global significance? These are not only important questions for inter religious dialogue but they are important questions for Faith and Order too. Michael Barnes gives us one particular pointer as to how this Faith and Order question might be explored:

The Church is Catholic because it is, in principle, the whole of humankind redeemed in Christ; at the same time, the Church exists not as some distant ideal but as this community of faith on pilgrimage with others. To put it another way, the Roman Catholic Church is a particular Christian community but a community which exists not for itself but for others; its identity is truly to be found only in and through the relationships it establishes with others.[3]

In the post 9/11 context, the view that interfaith dialogue was key to overcoming violence in the name of religion became unassailable. The former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was almost evangelical in his espousal of this view, with key Government initiatives in this area being inspired by his conviction. After he stood down as Prime Minister, he founded the Tony Blair Faith Foundation, which aims

to "provide the practical support required to help prevent religious prejudice, conflict and extremism." This thinking continues to form part of the orthodoxy that informs UK Government policy, including projects such as Prevent, Near Neighbours and the Inter Faith Network for the UK. In short, this model of interfaith dialogue has strong resonances with some of the more visionary elements the ecumenical movement. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that many of the Christians most committed to the political model of interfaith engagement are those that see little merit in the search for Christian unity.

A model of interfaith dialogue thus emerged that has at its heart a strong political aspiration that offers a realistic promise of social and political change at a time when the ecumenical movement seems to have lost much of its radical and visionary edge. Archbishop Rowan Williams has spoken of the ecumenical boat being becalmed and many have spoken of an ecumenical winter. Furthermore, as denominations become concerned with defining, redefining and sometimes even recreating their ecclesial identities – often over and against the ecumenical movement, making consequential restrictions on what ecumenical councils might do – the activists and visionaries have left the ecumenical scene. In some cases, they have been picked up by interfaith dialogue efforts, Kung being a notable example.

The perception that the "agenda has moved on" from ecumenical to interfaith, at least in terms of what might achieve genuine social and political change for the better, is largely the reason why some have characterized interfaith as "the new ecumenism". Whilst that is certainly a crude and simplistic analysis, it is easy to see how such a view might emerge. Whilst the two forms of dialogue are clearly concerned with different goals – leading one to easily dismiss the characterization – it is also possible to see how the two have elements of resonance with each other and also where they have created new challenges and opportunities with one another.

Yet there is a different story to be told about interfaith; one that is located at the heart of the ecumenical movement. Religious diversity has for some time been recognized as an important ecumenical challenge. In 1979, the World Council of Churches produced guidelines on interfaith dialogue, upon which the British Council of Churches developed the Four Principles of Interfaith Dialogue. These four principles are:

- Dialogue begins when people meet each other
- Dialogue depends upon mutual understanding and mutual trust
- Dialogue makes it possible to share in service to the community
- Dialogue becomes the medium of authentic witness

They were adopted by various BCC member churches.

The ecumenical movement and the Roman Catholic Church, building upon *Nostra Aetate*, has often led the way in pioneering interfaith and interreligious dialogue.

In addition to this broader point, a number of other concerns are worth noting in the wider context of the relationship between ecumenical and interfaith dialogue.

Religious diversity is a reality of globalization that has transformed how people view their communities and the world. Furthermore, the reassertion of religious identities, often manifested in overt political forms, has presented important political and theological challenges. Whilst much of this has led to the political prioritizing of interfaith dialogue with a number of politically-motivated initiatives, much less has been said and written about the impact upon Christian and especially ecumenical self-understanding. Christian communities who have existed in Muslim-majority contexts have for many generations been sensitive to Islamic polemic about the relationship between unity and truth (and conversely between disunity and untruth), however, there has been less exploration of how religious diversity, especially in the West,

has impacted Christian ecumenical self-understanding at a time of apparent decline and rising secularization.

There has been a tendency in the face of greater religious diversity towards a levelling out of intra-Christian difference for fear of providing a "poor Christian witness" to other faiths. This is particularly acute when many churches which were once dominant in society feel the pinch of decline and wish to continue asserting the Christian character of Western society. As such, differences within and between churches are often ignored or obscured. There is a curious paradox here: that at a time when national church leadership attempts to reassert itself – and in some cases recreate their ecclesial identities over and against the ecumenical movement – those involved in official or semi-official interfaith dialogue initiatives present Christianity in basic and elementary "ecumenical" formulae.

The need to present Christianity as more united than it actually is also an issue for those within other religion traditions who wish to present their faith as lacking disunity, or who wish to present their own tradition as normative of a world faith. This can in fact seriously distort interfaith dialogue. For example, in the British context, the Swaminarayan movement is relatively large and politically well-connected for all sorts of historical and economic reasons and as such has been perceived by many Christians as being representative of Hinduism globally – whereas in India it is a relatively small and less influential tradition.

In part, the modern ecumenical movement grew out of a European context where intra-Christian divisions were the primary religious context, with the blight of centuries of anti-Semitism to offer any non-Christian narrative, although that should not be understated. The present European context is a very different one, characterized by growing religious pluralism, decline in many established European churches, growth in migrant churches (often Pentecostal in character) and growing secularization. When it

comes to movements for social justice – a key expression of the ecumenical movement – there is an important question to consider. The Christian ecumenical approach to social justice in Europe has assumed that it was the only faith-based locus for movements for social change, but this was in the context of significant ecclesial strength and dominance. Do these assumptions still hold true? What we are witnessing at present is the growth in a number of cross-denomination, grassroots initiatives that work for the good of local communities that have developed apart from local and national ecumenical structures (e.g., Food Banks, Street Pastors). Many have characterized this as an example of how ecumenism is still flourishing without traditional ecumenical structures. Bob Fyffe (General Secretary of CTBI) has described these phenomena as the "post-ecumenical context", especially given that they inevitably take no account of traditional Faith and Order questions and thus leave unanswered questions as to why Christians remain divided. However, an additional question is: why do such Christian-only initiatives continue to make sense in the new plural context? The CTBI research "A Good Society" reveals that many church-based social initiatives are undertaken not only ecumenically but also in partnership with with people of other faiths, and indeed people of no faith. This suggests that the praxis of ecumenical work for social justice is increasingly undertaken in partnership with other faiths. So in one sense, a "new ecumenism" has emerged with movements for social change that initially had their home in the search for the visible unity of the church but have been led to the wider search for reconciliation and justice. In some ways this can be understood as a return to the classical understanding of *oikoumene.*

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[1] Hans Küng, *Islam, Past, Present and Future* (London: Oneworld, 2007), xxiii.

[2] Michael L. Fitzgerald and John Borelli, *Interfaith Dialogue: A Catholic View*

(Maryknoll, NY: SPCK, London & Orbis Books, 2006), 180ff.

[3] Michael Barnes, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions* (Cambridge, 2002), 35.

What is Distinctive about Christian Ecumenism and Why Does it Matter?

Keith Clements

In early 2013 I was in Sri Lanka, and while in the city of Colombo I spent a morning at the Sri Lankan Baptist headquarters where I had been asked to lead a seminar for pastors and part-time theological students. Our subject was the ecumenical movement, and we had a very interesting hour or so exploring topics like New Testament understandings of the body of Christ, different forms of ecumenism, unity and diversity and so on. Towards the end of the session a young woman who had been silent the entire time raised her hand to speak. With the help of an interpreter she explained that she was from a Tamil Hindu background and had become a Christian just two years prior. Her question was very simple: "Why are there so many different churches?" Though I should not have been surprised, I found that I was indeed surprised to hear this basic question. I should not have been surprised because, like many, over the years I've taught, written and preached on how a main impetus for the modern ecumenical movement came from the missionary outreach of Western churches to the wider world. When missionaries arrived in Asia or Africa preaching a gospel of love and reconciliation, they then had a hard time explaining its relevance to non-Western situations of difference and division that had arisen in Christian Europe centuries earlier. The fact that I was surprised at hearing the question coming at me from the contemporary Asian context showed how in fact even I, a supposed ecumenist, had grown inured to the persistence of a divided church, and how historical explanations so easily become complacent justifications. So I was glad and grateful to the questioner for bringing me back to basics with a salutary jolt.

But I also recall a conversation three or four years ago in London with a Baptist pastor, following a talk I had given to Free Church representatives on the need to revivify the ecumenical movement in Britain and the involvement of the Free Churches. He was of a decidedly evangelical stamp, and working in an inner city area of London. He told me that he thought ecumenical discussion today was just like moving deck chairs on the *Titanic*. No surprise there, but then he went on to say that he felt he had more in common with the local Imam than with the vicar in the Anglican parish!

Recalling exchanges like these in Colombo and in London I certainly feel the force of today's topic. On the one hand, I believe that the search for visible Christian unity is a non-negotiable imperative. At the same time, its fulfillment has to be negotiated in the world as it is, a world of religious plurality and social and political conflicts in which religion is often a factor. Christian ecumenism therefore needs to critically assess whether it is providing solutions to the world's needs or is itself merely part of the problem.

Right at the start, I want to say that the distinctive nature of Christian ecumenism is conveyed in the very phrase itself; it links "Christian" and "ecumenism" – of Christ, of the *oikoumene*, of the whole inhabited earth. There is a particularity about being Christian, and there is universality about belonging to the whole inhabited earth. Neither the particularity nor the universality is to be played off one against the other, indeed neither can be properly understood without the other. It is a case of – to use the subtitle of my recent book – "living in more than one place at once."[1] Moreover, the most distinctive thing of all about Christian ecumenism lies in its keeping the relationship and the creative tension between the two. It is a relationship already clear in Scripture, especially in the Pauline letters and above all in the Letter to the Ephesians where we

find the Apostle laying out the special nature of the church as the body of Christ. Its members are united in love and mutual dependence through faith in Christ in the unity of the Spirit: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph.4:4); yet this also part of God's plan in Christ "for the fullness of time, to gather up all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth" (1:10). God wants, and is working towards, a united church, a united *oikoumene*, and ultimately a united, reconciled universe.

What is Distinctive about Being Christian?

The first issue, then, is what is distinctive about Christianity, or being Christian? A prime distinctive of being Christian is the church, the community of faith in Christ, the body of Christ. Being Christian is not being one of a conglomeration of persons of similar views, but being the church. The Church is not just a society or an association of people who hold the same or similar beliefs denoted as "Christian", or sharing the same code of ethics. It is a concrete community of people who are "in Christ" by faith confessed in baptism, gathered in hearing his word, nourished by the Eucharist and leading a common life ordered by Christ. In the young Dietrich Bonhoeffer's phrase, the Church is "Christ existing as community"[2], a community which is created by his word, and lives by faith in the forgiveness of sins, forgiven and forgiving. It is a very human community, but in Christ it is a new humanity, and part of this newness consists in its bringing together parts of the old humanity that had been estranged and hostile to one another: "For [Christ] is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups [Jews and Gentiles] into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, of hostility between us … that he might create in himself one new humanity in place of the two, thus making peace, and might reconcile both groups to God in one body through the cross…" (Eph. 2:14-16). It is about flesh, body and visibility. The Church is not primarily a matter of institution(s) – it is a very specific, human, earthly and visible community. As the new humanity, it is a contradiction for the church to be sundered whether confessionally, racially, nationally, or by any other human difference one can find in the *oikoumene.* Christian ecumenism flows directly from ecclesiology, an understanding of that to which the church is called. This is most strikingly demonstrated in what many of us who are not Roman Catholics read with a kind of envy – the documents of the Second Vatican Council – where the Dogmatic Constitution on the Catholic Church, *Lumen Gentium*, seems to flow effortlessly into the Decree on Ecumenism, *Unitatis Redintegratio*. Speaking of the Eucharist, *Lumen Gentium* states: "All men are called to this union with Christ, who is the light of the world, from whom we go forth, through whom we live, and towards whom our whole life is directed"[3]; and "hence the universal Church is seen to be "a people brought into unity from the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit."[4] *Unitatis Redintegratio* bases its appeal to seek unity with the "separated brethren" of the Catholic Church on this very same ecclesiology. Christ seeks to establish "his holy Church everywhere in the world till the end of time, not only increasing it but "he perfects its fellowship in unity: in the confession of one faith, in the common celebration of divine worship, and in the fraternal harmony of the family of God"[5]; a unity whose highest exemplar and source is the Holy Trinity.[6]

A prime particularity of Christians is surely located in understandings of the Church as a community in Christ, a community which, if not actually one as yet, is seeking to be one. The statement of the 1961 WCC Assembly in New Delhi still stands as an inspiring and challenging vision of the goal of unity:

We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Saviour are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one gospel, breaking the one bread, and having a corporate life reaching out in witness and

service to all, and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people.[7]

Whatever precise form that unity will take is itself a matter for debate and as we well know, there are a number of models for unity that have emerged over the years: organic union between churches; conciliar unity; reconciled diversity; and so on. But the call to seek unity is non-negotiable unless we wish to renegotiate the gospel of Christ. Admittedly, this is not the most popular thing to be saying these days – visible unity is now repeatedly left to the "any other business" section on churches' agendas in favour of "more exciting" topics. The eminent American theologian and sociologist of religion, Martin E. Marty, in 2012 sounded "the death knell of committee ecumenism," which he thinks is how "committed ecumenism" is too easily read; that is, ecumenism as practised over the past 100 years.[8] He was expressing a widely held attitude that Christian unity is now no big deal: churches are no longer anathematizing each other, Christians no longer burn each other as heretics and we all get along reasonably well, so why bother further? That is certainly a tempting scenario until one examines, for example, the continuing division between Eastern Orthodoxy and the Catholic and Protestant West which has huge geo-political implications; or on a much more domestic scale the agonies still experienced by inter-church families with parents of different Christian traditions; or the drifting isolationism and casual "live and let live" attitude undergirded by a creeping self-sufficiency that we find present in and between denominations in the UK, matched by an increasing obsession with denominational identities (which in fact matter less and less to most people, especially in the younger generations). While this may seem quite innocuous, is it with the oneness of the passion – passion in every sense – which Jesus prays in the upper room?

In lament of the current lack of ecumenical passion in the church today, I quote Mary Tanner who, lamenting the current lack of ecumenical passion, spells out where the call for unity should be reignited:

It is about how we are all held in communion – when we agree and when we disagree – so that we refuse to say 'I have no need of you'. But, under the Spirit's guidance, stay together, learning from one another as we seek to discover the mind of Christ for the Church. It is about how local churches are held in communion with all the local churches, in the universal Church – that is the Church through the ages and around the world today.[9]

The Wider Context

A very brief foray into the historical context is needed here to counteract any amnesia regarding the ecumenical story so prevalent today. When what we term the "modern ecumenical movement" began some 100 years ago a vital element in it was the gathering of churches and Christian organizations from the global *oikoumene.* William Temple, at his enthronement as Archbishop of Canterbury in 1942, spoke in his inaugural sermon of "the great new fact of our time" – the existence of a truly worldwide Church.

The modern ecumenical movement has *always* been conscious of the wider context of humanity in which the church is set and which it is called to serve; this includes awareness of the presence of other faiths. This awareness was present even before the 1910 Edinburgh World Missionary Conference, often hailed as the birth of the modern ecumenical movement. However, I must admit to being a bit of a heretic here because I do not myself believe that Edinburgh 1910 was the real fountainhead of the ecumenical river. I would locate that origin a couple of years earlier in the pioneering attempts at a peace movement by the British and German churches during 1908-09, which later broadened to form the World Alliance for Promoting International

Friendship through the Churches on the eve of war in 1914. Soon after the armistice in 1918, the World Alliance played a vital role in the genesis of the Life and Work Conference of Stockholm in 1925 and the Universal Christian Council for Life and Work, which was the most inclusive ecumenical body up until the formation of the WCC into which it was incorporated. An increased consciousness of the needs of a divided and conflict-laden *oikoumene* thus began to bring the churches together, and not solely on social-ethical matters but on others – for the early leaders of Life and Work such as bishops Nathan Söderblom of Sweden and George Bell of England were profoundly convinced that only a united Christian church could credibly witness in the world to a reconciling God. It was thus a real concern for peace in the *oikoumene* that was a vital impulse in the first ecumenical stirrings of the last century. This peace also extended beyond the church. Even as those first Anglo-German exchanges were being organized, the prime movers – the British Quaker J. Allen Baker and the German Eduard de Neufville – envisioned the possibility of all the major world religions forming kind of league for peace.[10]

The Edinburgh 1910 conference was inspired by the missionary watchword of the hour: "The evangelization of the world in this generation." By that very same token it could not ignore the *oikoumene* or at least what it called "the non-Christian world" and the presence of other faiths within it. Indeed, the attention Edinburgh gave to other faiths in one of its six sections was impressive. So, too, was the seriousness with which world religions were treated in one of the permanent organs that followed Edinburgh 1910: namely, the journal *International Review of Mission*, edited by J.H. Oldham. The first issue, released in 1912, dealt extensively with non-Christian religions in a particularly striking essay, "The Vital Forces of Christianity and Islam", written by Temple Gairdner, a chronicler of the Edinburgh conference.[11] Gairdner went on to become a Church Missionary Society teacher in Cairo and an outstanding

Arabist and scholar on Islam.[12] there was always a question underlying any early ecumenical treatment of other religions: were the non-Christian faiths being regarded primarily as evangelistic targets or as partners in lifting the world towards God? This question surfaced mightily at the next World Missionary Conference in Jerusalem in 1928, where the overall mood was markedly different from Edinburgh 1910. Strong voices, especially from liberal quarters in the USA, declared that the main threat to Christian faith was not Islam or Hinduism or Buddhism, but *secularism*.[13] In combating pervasive, worldwide secularism all the religions were fighting on the same front. Each religion, including Christianity, had to develop and offer the best of its resources to be shared with the other faiths, and in turn be prepared to receive the best from other faiths. The ecumenical movement, however, could not find unanimity on this front then and it still remains a challenge today. Debates regarding the uniqueness of Jesus Christ in the purpose of God, the possibility of God's Spirit being at work in other faiths, and the role of evangelism still feature repeatedly in ecumenical discussions, and certainly at the WCC level. But dialogue with other faiths has been a special concern within the WCC since the early 1960s, and within the Roman Catholic Church from Vatican II onwards.[14] In short, awareness of other faiths within the *oikoumene*, and, increasingly, actual dialogue with people of other faiths, has long been part of the "old" ecumenism. That this has been so, however, is due to the ecumenical movement always taking seriously the *oikoumene* as a whole, of which other faiths are a part. It is to this feature that I turn now, for it highlights what is – alongside the commitment to the unity of the Church – a prime distinctive of Christian ecumenism.

Church as Particular Sign – For the Whole *Oikoumene*

"Faith and Order" is that stream of ecumenism which deals with theological dialogue between the churches and reflects on the nature of the unity that we

seek. Of all the streams of ecumenism Faith and Order could easily be assumed to be the least concerned with the wider context in which the churches are set. For a long time this was so – certainly up to the 1960s – but this is now no longer the case. I was a member of the WCC Plenary Commission on Faith and Order from 1985 to 1998, and during that time was always impressed by how again and again our theological work engaged with the context of justice and peace issues as much as with the churches themselves. Especially memorable was a presentation made in a plenary meeting in Stavanger, Norway, in 1985 by Frieda Haddad, a Lebanese lay theologian of the Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Antioch. I say "presentation" but in fact she was not herself able to be present in Stavanger – Lebanon was still enmeshed in the terrible civil war – the road to Beirut airport was one of the most dangerous in the world (we tremble again for Lebanon today) – and her paper was read on her behalf. It was entitled "The Christian community as sign and instrument for the renewal of human community: a Lebanese perspective." She described how Lebanon had inherited from both Ottoman and French rule a system of government which preserved the *millet* system, whereby limitations and rights of each religious community were carefully set out, including the proportions to which they were entitled to be represented in government. These policies were established to provide checks and balances against any one community becoming either too dominant or too marginalized and oppressed – a precarious balance, as Lebanon's history shows all too well. But Haddad argued that from her faith perspective, this policy was inadequate for an understanding either of how she understood her Church, or what it meant to be a member of Lebanese society. It reduced human "community" to legally defined associations. So she asked: what does it mean to be "Church" in Lebanon, and what does it mean to be Christian in Lebanon? In a powerful and moving manner, given the fearful nature of her then current context, she protested

against thinking in primarily legal and institutional terms – whether of Church, society or nation. She went on:

… [H]he who takes his citizenship seriously works earnestly for the advent of a renewed human community where the "other" lives, for he cannot legitimately share in the communal reality of the body politic without sharing in the reality of the other, he cannot conceive of himself as answerable to state laws without answering at the same time for the other. In simple and direct terms this means, for instance, that the unbearable living conditions of the displaced, no matter what their religious affiliations are, are unbearable to me personally. Their uprooting from their villages and towns is my personal uprooting. This involvement with the other rules out any theological formulations what would consider the other as "unholy", or as incapable of being hallowed. I cannot look at him as being part of the human community whereas I am part of the "Christian" community. My life and his life are interwoven in the body politic. My hope of salvation, my way to the infinite passes through the other, through our fulfilled finitude.[15]

For Frieda Haddad, then, being Church in the difficult context of Lebanon meant an unconditional identification with the *whole* of her society as a human community and its crying needs, a commitment transcending all demarcations and assumed tribal loyalties. She wanted to speak not so much about "Christian witness and mission" in a majority Muslim society but more about social education for the elimination of authoritarian legal structures and a revolution in the understanding of what it means to be human in community. In conclusion, Haddad remarked:

The Christian community is not a minority group seeking to elaborate for itself a defensive standpoint over and against the yearnings of the human community in which it is called to live. It rather seeks to nurture in its bosom a genuine openness to the common heritage that binds Christians and Muslims together.[16]

The Church should take as its point of reference the whole life of the *polis*, the body politic, the human community, and seek to discern signs of hope for its future. Haddad recognized the danger that this thinking might drift merely into ethical pragmatism, but she maintained the God-ward dimension of Christian responsibility, a responsibility that may include suffering, perhaps a suffering with the body politic without either abandoning it or being blinded by any of its movements or ideologies. Notice, Haddad still assumed the Christian community to be a distinct entity, indeed an embodied one (the language of a "nurturing bosom" implies this); and in fact she has sharp words on some shortcomings in ecumenical solidarity on the part of the churches outside Lebanon during that period.

The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community

The title of Frieda Haddad's paper echoes what was a major study programme of Faith and Order at that time: "The Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community", a study which still informs our concerns 20 years later. The programme examined how we maintain the specificity of the church as body of Christ with the universality of the hope given to the whole *oikoumene*, without playing off one against the other but maintaining the necessary and creative tension between them. The Church is not itself the kingdom but is a prophetic sign and instrument of the kingdom. It does not itself realize the kingdom in its fullness, but surrenders itself to God in the power of the Spirit to be a kind of first fruits of that kingdom, a sign of it upon the earth. As such, it must manifest in its own life what it means to be a community of mutual acceptance, forgiven and forgiving, free in its diversity and one in all its differentiations but it equally identifies with the whole of the *oikoumene* without reservation. It vicariously exists for the sake of the *oikoumene* before God. Those who stand under and receive the word of Christ, the church-community, are not a separate species from the *oikoumene,* the inhabited world. Says Bonhoeffer:

It means that there are human beings who allow themselves to receive what, from God's perspective, all human beings should actually receive: it means that there are human beings who stand vicariously in the place [stellvertretend dastehen] of all other human beings, of the whole world.[17]

There is thus an ultimate solidarity here with the whole human family. Our approach to people of other faiths can only be on this basis: they are part with us of the *oikoumene* – as too are the people of no faith and those of no religion also. In this respect we do well to heed the words of Lesslie Newbigin, who speaks of rejoicing in the light wherever we find it:

Here I am thinking … Not only of the evidences of light in the religious life of non-Christians, the steadfastness and costliness of the devotion which so often puts Christians to shame; I am thinking also of the no less manifest evidences of the shining of the light in the lives of atheists, humanists, Marxists and others who have explicitly rejected the message of the fellowship of the church. "The light" is not to be identified with the religious life of men; religion is in fact too often the sphere of darkness, Christian religion not excluded. The parable of the Good Samaritan is a sharp and constantly needed reminder to the godly of all faiths that the boundary between religion and its absence is by no means to be construed as the boundary between light and darkness.[18]

The *oikoumene* includes, because it is bigger than, other faiths. In this light, it would be ironic if our concern for interreligious dialogue in fact led to a narrowing of our understanding of the *oikoumene.* Equally, our vision of the redeemed *oikoumene*, however grand, will lack substance if it is not illuminated and sustained by our belief in and experience of the reconciling, unifying work of the Spirit tying us in the bonds of peace in the particular community of Christ. The Apostle Paul describes this as the "mystery" of God's will. We are not too keen on "mysteries"; sometimes, quite

rightly, mystery is dismissed as just another word for obscurantism or foggy thinking. A mystery in the proper sense, however, is something we can neither fully get our minds around nor get away from. And in this case one of the ways we try to get away is by severing the link between church and *oikoumene*; we become purely church-focused or *oikoumene*-focused, concerned only with a church-without-world or a world-minus-church perspective. Christian ecumenism is distinctive because it unequivocally holds together the quest for one church and the hope for one world, until the reign of God comes in all its fullness and God is all in all.

Keith Clements, *a British Baptist, was general secretary of the Conference of European Churches 1997-2005, has written extensively on ecumenical life and thought and is the author of* Dietrich Bonhoeffer's Ecumenical Quest *(WCC 2015).*

[1] Keith Clements, *Ecumenical Dynamic: Living in More than One Place at Once* (Geneva: WCC, 2013).

[2] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Clifford J. Green (ed.), trans. Reinhard Krauss and Nancy Lukens, Vol. I of Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works. 16 vols. (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 161.

[3] Vatican Council II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* (21 November 1964), par. 12, in Austin Flannery (ed.), *Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents*, Vol. I, (Leominster: Fowler Wright, 1980 [1975]), 351.

[4] *Ibid.*, 352.

[5] *Unitatis redintegratio*, "Decree on Ecumenism", in Austin Flannery (ed.), op. cit., 454.

[6] *Ibid.*, 455.

[7] Cited in G. Gassmann, "Unity" in N. Lossky Gunther Gassmann, "Unity" in N. Lossky et al. (eds.), *Dictionary of the Ecumenical Movement*, 2nd edition (Geneva: WCC, 2002), 1171.

[8] Martin E. Marty, "The Death-Knell of Committee Ecumenism", *Sightings* (2 April 2012). See Clements, *op. cit.*, 23.

[9] Mary Tanner, "Celebrating Edinburgh 1910: Reflections on Visible Unity", *Theology* 114 (Nov.-Dec. 2010), 407.

[10] See Clements, *op. cit.*, chapter 4, "First to See the Future: the Anglo-German Churches' Peace Exchanges 1908-1909".

[11] W. H. T. Gairdner, *"Edinburgh 1910." An Account and Interpretation of the World Missionary Conference* (Edinburgh, London: Oliphant, Anderson and Ferrier, 1910).

[12] See Clements, *Faith on the Frontier. A life of J. H. Oldham* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark; and Geneva: WCC, 1999), 73-108. On Edinburgh 1910, see Brian Stanley, *The World Missionary Conference, Edinburgh 1910* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

[13] International Missionary Council. *The Christian Life and Message in Relation to Non-Christian Systems: Report of the Jerusalem Meeting of the International Missionary Council 1928*, Vol. I (London: Oxford University Press, 1928).

[14] Cf. "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions", in A. Flannery (ed.), *op. cit.*, 738-749.

[15] Frieda Haddad, "The Christian Community as sign and instrument for the renewal of human community: A Lebanese perspective", in T. F. Best (ed.), *Faith and Renewal: Reports and Documents of the Commission on Faith and Order Stavanger 1985, Norway* (Geneva: WCC, 1986), 187.

[16] *Ibid.*, 190.

[17] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Volume 6 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 403.

[18] Lesslie Newbigin, *The Open Secret: Sketches for a Missionary Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), 198.

Allah Contested:
Christians and Islamization in Malaysia

Peter Riddell

On 5 March 2014, Malaysia's Federal Court deferred a decision in a court case between the Malaysian government and Malaysia's Catholic newspaper, the *Herald*. The newspaper had appealed against the government ban on Christians using the term "Allah" in their translations of the Bible into the Malay language. As the Federal Court deliberated on this case, Muslim groups assembled in considerable numbers outside the Palace of Justice, hoping for a ruling in favour of the government.

This case has been ongoing for over 25 years. In the following discussion, we will consider the background to this issue and the wider context of Christian-Muslim relations in Malaysia.[1]

Malaysian Pluralism and Islamization

Malaysia presents a fascinating case of ethnicity and religion intertwined. The country's population of around 28 million is approximately 50% ethnic Malay, with almost 25% Chinese, a further 11% indigenous, another 7% Indian and the balance divided between various ethnicities. The Chinese and Indian communities represent a legacy of British colonial rule, when their ancestors were brought to the British colonies to be involved in various kinds of economic activity.

In religious terms, this ethnic diversity translates to religious plurality. Around 60% of Malaysians are Muslim, with 19% Buddhist, 9% Christian, 6% Hindu and the remainder represented by diverse minority faiths.[2] The integration of ethnicity and religion is best seen in the case of the Malays, with the 1963 Constitution of Malaysia defining a Malay as a Muslim.[3] Hence critique of one is easily seen as an attack on the other.

In such a demographic context, Malaysia offers a fascinating possibility for a dynamic expression of Islamic pluralism, with Muslims constituting a bare majority and other faiths offering potentially significant voices in the Malaysian interreligious dialogue. However Malaysia's 50 year history as a state has had periods of interethnic and interreligious trauma.

From the outset, political leaders attempted to express social realities in constitutional terms, recognizing the pluralism but seeking to shore up Malaysia as a majority Muslim nation. This is clearly seen in the Constitution:

Islam is the religion of the Federation; but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation … State law and … federal law may control or restrict the propagation of any religious doctrine or belief among persons professing the religion of Islam.[4]

This delicate balance worked relatively well for the first few years of the independent nation. But racial riots in 1969, followed by the surge of Islamic revivalism from the 1970s onwards, posed significant challenges for Malaysia's political and social leaders. Religious identity assumed an ever greater role in shaping the self-perception of Malaysia's citizens, overtaking old ethnic boundaries to some extent. Malaysian lawyer Philip Koh speaks of this dilemma:

… the post-colonial political dilemma: identity politics and race politics, where religion has become a boundary marker. As race weakened as the identity marker – with divisions between urban and rural Malays – the glue of religion became stronger to evoke primordial sentiments.[5]

Malaysia's governing alliance of parties, dominated by the modernizing Muslim

United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), sought to harness rising Islamic identity to marginalize their Islamist opponents on the political stage, the Islamic Party of Malaysia (PAS). Under Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad (1981-2003), the National Alliance government launched its own Islamization drive. Political speeches became more embellished with Qur'anic quotations, there was an observable increase in programs with Islamic content on the government-controlled television and radio stations, and a course in "Islamic civilization" was made compulsory for Muslim university students.

Additionally, the National Alliance government established a plethora of new Islamic institutions, including a government Department of Islamic Development, an Islamic university, an Islamic bank, and an Islamic foundation for social welfare. Philip Koh explains the significance of these moves:

The Malaysian Government set up, at both federal and state levels, a power apparatus – JAKIM (Department of Islamic Development Malaysia) and so forth. These developed a momentum of their own. As officers were appointed to them, they had their own key performance indices. What we have is a concatenation of these cumulative bodies. In such a developing environment, the Islamic political parties – UMNO and PAS – sought to out-Islamize the other.[6]

Dr Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia, points to the pervasive presence of this official Islamic bureaucracy:

Mahathir centralised Islamic affairs in order that the Government would have firm control. So the Government, with its Islamic federal agencies, and relationships to the states (because in the Constitution Islam is a state matter), keeps tabs on matters and does not allow any other Muslim groups to determine what is Muslim and what is not. So fatwa councils become very important. Fatwa council members are government appointees so they are after the same things the Government endorses.... What has developed therefore is a highly centralised bureaucratic and dominant Islam represented by the institutions at Federal level and at State level.[7]

The tense Islamization dance between Malaysia's two main Muslim political parties assumed a particular hue in the states of Kelantan and Terengganu, both won at different times by the Islamist PAS. No longer was the conversation primarily about Islamic values. Rather, PAS was committed to introducing Islamic law in the areas that it controlled. In response, Prime Minister Mahathir upped the Islamization ante and declared in October 2001 that Malaysia was already an Islamic State.

After 22 years at the helm, Prime Minister Mahathir stepped down in 2003 and was succeeded by the urbane and intellectual Abdullah Ahmad Badawi. Many Malaysian Muslims were reinvigorated and redirected their loyalty away from the Islamist PAS opposition back to the modernizing UMNO. PAS was decimated in the Federal elections of March 2004 and many Malaysians, especially non-Muslims, wondered whether the decades of Islamization were going to end. Indeed, Prime Minister Badawi's style was quite different from the hectoring, anti-Western stance of Mahathir. He seemed to promise a softer, more moderate and inclusivist approach to Islam, with barely veiled criticism of Islamist opponents in statements such as the following, made at an August 2004 World Council of Churches Faith and Order Commission meeting:

Many people practice their faith in absolutist terms … They refuse to take into account the modern world in which we live ... For those who are rigid, dogmatic and absolutist, it does not matter whether you are in the tenth or 21st century, you must live according to the literal teachings of your religion.[8]

Yet, to the relief of some Malaysians and the dismay of others, Islamization continued apace. Book banning

increased, Muslims were barred from watching the film "the Passion of the Christ", the Islamic State debate continued to fester and there were ongoing concerns about the issue of conversion and apostasy. In the words of Dr Ng Kam Weng, Director of the Kairos Research Centre: "Under Badawi, for the first time, we had a Prime Minister including in the five year plan that social policy will be based on Islam."[9]

When Badawi in turn handed over the reins of the prime ministership to his deputy Najib Tun Razak in April 2009, Malaysians again wondered whether the years of Islamization would draw to a close. Indeed, in an attempt to broaden its base of support, the hitherto unambiguously Islamist PAS adopted a more pluralist face in an attempt to win votes away from UMNO.

However, it could be said that what the Islamization train unleashed in the last decades of the 20th century in Malaysia was beyond the capacity of Badawi and Najib to stop, even if they so wished. Eugene Yapp, Secretary-General of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia, concisely summarizes the options available to the last two Malaysian Prime Ministers:

Badawi inherited a country with an Islamic mindset. The [Islamising] institutions and personnel were already there by the time that Badawi came to power. The [Muslim] NGOs were already embedded into Malaysian civil society and were able to influence social and political policies. Badawi attempted to have a more moderate form of Islam through his Islamic Hadhari idea. He wasn't able to carry that out. It just remained a proposition on paper. So when Najib came to power he was already facing a Godzilla. There is no way he could turn the clock back, even if he wanted to. He has to play the game in order to survive.[10]

Prime Minister Najib has promoted a vision of "One Malaysia", emphasizing cohesion within plurality. But the consolidation and promotion of Islam in the multi-faith nation remains highly visible, as seen in the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025. All Malaysian children in government or grant-maintained private schools must study the same five core subjects at the heart of their education program: Malaysian language, English, mathematics, science and history. Those five represent unity in the curriculum. However the sixth core subject shows differentiation; some say discrimination. Muslim students are required to study Islamic Education. In contrast, non-Muslim students are not able to study their own faiths, but must study Moral Education.

Religious Minority Concerns

Observers of the Malaysian situation are reminded of the Wimbledon tennis tournament and its differentiation between the main game and the side game. In Malaysia, the main game is intra-Muslim rivalry, while the side game is its impact on non-Muslim religious minorities.

The rising tide of Islamization in the 1980s translated to a raft of measures, such as the Selangor Non-Islamic Religions (Control of Propagation Among Muslims) Enactment 1988, that prohibited any statements, publications or acts aimed at propagating non-Islamic religions to Muslims. This Act was passed in a broader context which facilitated other measures that seemed to disadvantage non-Muslim minorities. So while Muslims were entitled to a tax rebate on their charitable contributions (*zakat*), there was no such entitlement for other faiths. Obstacles were placed to the construction of new churches and the importation of non-Islamic religious literature. Furthermore, under government quotas the proportion of mosques to Muslims was around 1:800 while for non-Muslims the parallel ratio for their houses of worship was 1:4000.[11]

Religious minority concerns – and indeed those of Malaysia's Muslim majority as well – were no more evident than on the tortured topic of apostasy. Indeed, the Non-Islamic Religions Enactment 1988

was designed first and foremost to protect the Islamic community from loss of numbers through proselytization or propagation of non-Islamic religions to Muslims. This was supported in subsequent pieces of legislation on more specific issues. For example, in June 2002, the Director of the National Department of Registration, Datuk Azizan Ayob, announced that the change of a Muslim name to a non-Muslim name and vice versa must be supported with a letter from the Islamic Department or the relevant State Syariah Court.[12] Inevitably, such Islamic bodies would be more favourably disposed to name changes in the direction of Islam.

While the state apparatus worked hard to shore up Muslim numbers, it was used to facilitate the erosion of non-Muslim numbers. Several state bodies are active in facilitating the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam. In almost triumphalist mode, the Deputy Director of Human Development of the government Department of Islamic Development (JAKIM) announced in December 2013 that 105,079 people had converted to Islam in Malaysia up to 2012, and that his department would soon launch an official database of these conversions, under the title *e-muallaf*. His statement summed up the perspective of many Malaysian Muslims on this question:

After this, no one can deceive the Islamic Development Department and the database will also ensure that the converts will not be overlooked in the Islamic missionary programme…. I hope Muslim converts will hold strong to Islamic teachings and not be influenced by the persuasion of people of other faiths who promise and give them aid in cash and kind, but with an ulterior motive for them to leave Islam.[13]

This brings us back to the debate about Christians using the term "Allah" for God in the Malay language translations of the Bible. At the heart of this issue from Muslim perspectives is the fear that such Bibles will mislead Muslims into apostasy from Islam.[14]

The 1988 Selangor Non-Islamic Religions Enactment was representative of a series of laws by Malaysia's states prohibiting the use of over 40 words deemed Islamic, including "Allah", in non-Muslim literature.[15] In subsequent years, Malaysian authorities confiscated a range of Christian literature seen as contravening this law. The ban was reaffirmed by the Malaysian Cabinet in late 2006 and early 2008, in response to ongoing tension and disagreement between government authorities and Christian groups about this issue.

In the wake of the confirmation of the government ban, the Malaysia Catholic newspaper, the *Herald*, took the ban to the Malaysian High Court for judicial review in May 2008. To the surprise of most observers, Malaysian High Court Justice Datuk Lau Bee Lan issued her ruling in December 2009 in favour of the Church, allowing Catholics to use "Allah" to describe the Christian God in the national language.

Incoming Prime Minister Najib quickly indicated that the Home Ministry would take this decision to the Malaysian Court of Appeal. Muslim scholars and NGO activist groups sprang to the support of the government, with their viewpoint well expressed in earlier writing by Ahmad F. Yousif:

... the appropriation of words from one religious tradition in an effort to deceive people into accepting another tradition oversteps the boundaries of religious freedom and enters the area of surreptitiousness.[16]

It should be noted that while the debate was ostensibly about the use of the term "Allah", far more lay at stake in the eyes of many Christians involved. Father Lawrence Andrew, editor of the *Herald* and chief spokesman of the case against the government,[17] pointed to the broader context surrounding the issue:

As a church we have suffered very much. Missionaries were thrown out of the country.[18] We had the best mission schools in this country and we ran many

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hospitals. Even before Mahathir came to power, the crucifixes in the schools had to be taken down. Churches were not allowed to put up crosses. Today, our Catholic schools are usually run by Muslims. They are not allowed to teach Christianity. They can only teach Islam or Moral Education … All this predated the Allah debate….[19]

For Father Andrew and his Christian supporters, the time to make a stand after a lengthy period of erosion of Christian rights was at hand. He continues:

[The Allah] debate really represented drawing a line in the sand. I said enough! It's not just about the word "Allah". It's about every Malaysian Christian, Christian families, the next generation. If we do not fight for our fundamental rights, there will be nothing left for us. The Malaysian government has denied us of our fundamental religious rights, but the world is watching. So I call on the people to pray unceasingly.[20]

The Malaysian government's case came before the Court of Appeal on 11 September 2013. Large numbers of both Christians and Muslims gathered outside the court on the day that the appeal was heard. In the event, the three judges responsible for the decision – all Muslims – found in favour of the government's appeal. The ban was thereby reaffirmed.

Not to be outdone, the *Herald* took the decision to the final stage: an appeal to Malaysia's Federal Court. The case was set to be heard on 24 February 2014 but was deferred until 5 March and, on the latter date, was deferred further. The Allah debate has served as a festering sore, adding to the already elevated level of tension between Christians and Muslims and indeed, between non-Muslims per se and Muslims. These tensions were exacerbated on 2 January 2014 when the Department of Islamic Religion of the State of Selangor (JAIS) raided the Bible Society of Malaysia offices seeking Bibles containing the word "Allah".[21]

This discussion of religious minority concerns has emphasized Christian perspectives. Of course, religious lines are blurred when it comes to political and social controversies. While most Christian groups have supported the challenge to the ban on the use of "Allah" by non-Muslims, Muslim support for the government ban has been by no means universal. Father Lawrence Andrew refers to some support received from Muslims:

The secular NGOs are the ones who speak out [in our defence]. Our strong opponents have been [the Islamic NGO] Perkasa, led by Ibrahim Ali. For the Government, it is a political agenda, so we just put that aside. The other political parties, like PAS and Keadilan, are open to us using the word "Allah". From time to time PAS will make a reserved statement. Politicians are politicians. I gave an interview with a Malay group, Project Dialog … I was very critical in that interview. They printed my comments without alteration on their website.[22]

Dr Ng Kam Weng elaborates on this question of sympathy among some Muslims for the Christian position:

You have young professionals, like the Islamic Renaissance Front. They emerged from the Muslim Professional Forum because of [some with] hardline positions [in] the MPF and have become a voice of pluralist moderation ... You have still younger ones who champion dialogue. So something seems to be happening in the young professionals.[23]

Religious Minority Responses

A fascinating effect of Islamization in Malaysia has been seen in the way that religious minorities have come together to face up to what they perceive as a common challenge. Within five years of Dr Mahathir assuming the prime ministership, a number of umbrella bodies emerged among Malaysian non-Muslims to coordinate the response to Islamization. In 1983 the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, and Sikhism (MCCBCHST; Taoism was added later) was formed to jointly address the commonly perceived challenge of Islamization. In the same year, different

evangelical groups formed the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF) in response to 1981 legislation forbidding ownership of the Bible by any Malaysians except Christians.

From a Christian perspective, perhaps the most striking development was the formation of the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM) in 1986 as the government-driven Islamization programme increased in intensity. This included a broad-based Christian Alliance, including almost all Christian denominations: Catholic, Council of Churches of Malaysia member churches and NECF members. It speaks for about 90% of Malaysia's 2.5 million Christians.

These umbrella bodies became increasingly active in lobbying for the rights of non-Muslims in Malaysia. For example, the MCCBCHST lobbied the government on a range of issues, including the following:

- insufficient burial grounds for non-Muslims;
- obstacles to construction of places of non-Muslim worship;
- banning of Christian symbols (e.g. in 2004 Christian symbols and hymns mentioning Jesus Christ were banned from national Christmas celebrations);
- exclusion of non-Muslim programming from public media; and
- restrictions over distribution of Bibles in hotels.

In July 2012, the MCCBCHST adopted a resolution at its 30th General Assembly that was proposed by the Christian Federation of Malaysia along the following lines:

… the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) shall propose … as part of the National Education Policy the provision that all religions be allowed to teach their respective scriptures in national or in government-aided schools (for example, the SPM Bible Knowledge in the case of the Christians) wherein examinations thereto shall be prepared

and graded by the respective authorities of each religion and recognised by both the Ministry of Education and the Department of Education.[24]

As we have seen in earlier discussion, the government did not take account of this resolution in formulating its Education Blueprint 2013-2025.

Meanwhile, the Christian Federation of Malaysia was increasingly active in its own lobbying of government in the face of rising Islamization. The CFM has been outspoken in support of the challenge to the Federal Government by the Catholic *Herald* regarding the use of "Allah" by Christians. In a press statement of 9 January 2013, the CFM pointed to the long history of Christians using "Allah" and declared their intention to stay the course:

Christians in Malaysia have had a Bible in the Malay language and indeed celebrated its 400th anniversary last year[25]… Malaysian Christians have been using the word "Allah" in our Bahasa Malaysia Bibles and in our faith to signify the Almighty God and we will continue to do so.[26]

Indeed, the term "Allah" has been used in Christian literature in Malay from the region to refer to God since at least the first half of the 17th century. For example, a Malay-Latin dictionary published by the Vatican in Rome in 1631 for the use of Catholic missionaries in the Malay world clearly renders Latin "Deus" with the Malay "Alla".[27]

Conclusion

It would be inaccurate to suggest that all Christians and all Muslims are at loggerheads in Malaysia. The Catholic *Herald* has received criticism from some Malaysian Christians for challenging the government ban. Furthermore, some Muslims in Malaysia have been highly critical of the government's position.

There is a clear tension between public government discourse calling for social cohesion and "One Nation", on the one hand and privileging the place and

promotion of Islam over other faiths on the other. International factors are an issue to some extent, with Islamic revival being a powerful force around the world. The cooperation between diverse elements of the Malaysian Christian churches, as well as the support from other religious minorities and, indeed from some Muslim groups, provides some hope for the long-term future of one of the most pluralistic and interesting Muslim majority countries in the world. Malaysia is a case study worth watching.

Dr Peter Riddell *currently serves as Vice Principal (Academic) at the Melbourne School of Theology, and has published widely on Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations.*

[1] I am grateful to the Australian College of Theology and the Melbourne School of Theology for grants in support of field research in Malaysia reported on in this article.

[2] The space limitations of this article do not allow us to consider the special case of Malaysia's eastern states of Sarawak and Sabah, where Christians constitute much larger minorities of 41% and 20% respectively. Nevertheless, the key issues raised in this paper apply equally to those two states.

[3] *Laws of Malaysia: Federal Constitution.* 16 September 1963, 130. Efforts are afoot in recent times to specify Sunni Islam as Malaysia's only legally-recognized Islamic sect; See "In Redefining Islam, PAS-DAP Reps Take Divergent Paths." *The Malay Mail Online.* Malay Mail Online. 8 December 2013. Web. 17 November 2014.

[4] *Laws of Malaysia: Federal Constitution.* 16 September 1963, 17.

[5] Excerpted from interview held at offices of the *Herald*, Kuala Lumpur, 11 December 2013.

[6] Excerpted from interview held at offices of the *Herald*, Kuala Lumpur, 11 December 2013.

[7] Excerpted from interview held at the offices of the Council of Churches Ecumenical Centre, Petaling Jaya, 10 December 2013.

[8] See www.pmo.gov.my/ucapan/?m=p& p=paklah&id=2874, accessed 20 March 2014.

[9] Excerpted from interview held at the Christian-Muslim Study Centre, Oxford, 6 December 2013.

[10] Excerpted from interview held in Petaling Jaya, 13 December 2013.

[11] http://religiousfreedom.lib.virginia.edu/rihand/Malaysia.html, accessed 20 March 2014.

[12] Julie Lim, "Changing Details in Identity Card Not Easy for Converts", *Herald, The Catholic Weekly* (30 June 2002), 19.

[13] www.themalaymailonline.com/malaysia/article/jakim-to-compile-data-on-muslim-converts-through-e-muallaf, accessed 20 March 2014.

[14] Clearly seen in a 2013 booklet produced by the Selangor Islamic Council: *Wajib Pelihara Kesucian Nama Allah* (Shah Alam: Majlis Agama Islam Selangor, 2013).

[15] A full list of the words is available at Ng Kam Weng, *Doing the Right Thing: A Practical Guide on Legal Matters for Churches in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Kairos Research Centre, 2013), 52-3.

[16] Ahmad F. Yousif, *Religious Freedom, Minorities and Islam: An Inquiry into the Malaysian Experience* (Selangor: Thinker's Library, 1998), 178.

[17] "Fr Lawrence Andrew SJ: A Glimpse at the Man behind HERALD." *The Pilgrim Online.* Church of St. Francis Xavier. 6 September 2013. Web. 17 November 2014.

[18] This occurred in the 1970s.

[19] Excerpted from interview held in Kuala Lumpur, 11 December 2013.

[20] Excerpted from interview held in Kuala Lumpur, 11 December 2013.

[21] www.thestar.com.my/News/Nation/2014/01/02/Jais-raid-Bible-Society/, accessed 20 March 2014.

[22] Excerpted from interview held in Kuala Lumpur, 11 December 2013.

[23] Excerpted from interview held at the Christian-Muslim Study Centre, Oxford, 6 December 2013.

[24] http://harmonymalaysia.wordpress.com/author/manyfaithsonenation/, accessed 12 September 2013.

[25] Translation of the Bible into Malay began with the Gospels of Matthew and Mark between 1628 and 1631 by two officials of the Dutch East India Company, Albert Cornelius Ruyl and Jan van Hasel. Cf. Robert Hunt, "The History of the Translation of the Bible into Bahasa Malaysia", *Journal of the Malaysian Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*, vol. 62 part I (1989), 35.

[26] www.stm.edu.my/downloads/prayer/cfm_bm bilbles_allah_09012013.pdf

[27] *Dictionarium Malaico-Latinum & Latino-Malaicum* (Rome, 1631), 2.

Greetings to the WCC 10th General Assembly

Rev Yasutaka Watanabe
Chairperson of the Board of Trustees, Rissho Kosei-Kai

Good morning, everyone. It is such a great pleasure and honour for me and Rissho Kosei-kai to greet you today on the occasion of this 10th World Council of Churches (WCC) Assembly. We are grateful for this opportunity.

Rissho Kosei-kai is a lay Buddhist organization based in Japan. Its members try to contribute to world peace by practicing the teachings of Shakyamuni Buddha in the home, the workplace, and their local communities. Rissho Kosei-kai was established in 1938, and has about 1.29 million member households, 238 Dharma centres in Japan, and 68 Dharma centres in 21 other countries. While committed to the spread of the Dharma, or the Buddha's teachings, we collaborate in efforts for world peace with people of other religious and cultural backgrounds, not only in Japan but worldwide.

Taking a look back at the history of our interreligious cooperation, it was in 1969 that Rev. Nikkyo Niwano, the founder of Rissho Kosei-kai, visited Dr Eugene Carson Blake, then WCC General Secretary, in Geneva, to seek the WCC's cooperation in preparations for the establishment of the World Conference of Religions for Peace. Since then, we have continued our cordial relationship with the WCC. We have been given opportunities to participate in every WCC assembly since 1983, and also have supported some WCC programmes in the Middle East and Asia. In 1986, the Niwano Peace Foundation, affiliated with Rissho Kosei-kai, awarded its fourth Niwano Peace Prize to Dr Phillip A. Potter, a former WCC General Secretary, for his consistent commitment to interreligious understanding and dialogue. That was another memorable moment in our history. Moreover, in 1999, Dr Konrad Raiser, then WCC General Secretary, visited Rissho

Kosei-kai headquarters in Tokyo and gave a speech at one of our ceremonies.

In the world today the WCC is a unique fellowship in its mission, history, and scale. Many Christians have long wished for a union of their churches. For this great goal, WCC has promoted not only studies and discussions but various concrete efforts addressing real issues and respecting people. This is a great accomplishment in recent history, for which we express our deepest respect. Today the WCC enjoys the participation of major Christian churches and a strong relationship with the Catholic Church. Indeed, it is a real global fellowship, and its achievements have been internationally recognized.

Moreover, the WCC has engaged in not only ecumenical activities but also interreligious dialogue and cooperation, from a perspective of how Christians can live in harmony with people of other religious traditions. One fruit of those efforts is a document titled "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct," which was jointly promulgated in 2011 by the WCC, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID), and the World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) in 2011. We, as Buddhists, have learned a lot from the document, which recommends some important attitudes for Christians towards people of other religions.

This morning, this plenary session focuses on Asia. It is a region where the WCC could fully exert its potential, which I have described. Asia is a region of rich diversity in people, cultures, and religions. Asia is like an immense, richly colourful tapestry. Because of this, the wisdom such as the document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct" is greatly needed. The WCC's concrete activities have included the

organization of programmes this year and in 2010 for dialogue with non-Christians in Thailand. We of Rissho Kosei-kai have learned much from those programs and are hoping for further collaboration in the future.

World peace cannot be achieved in one day. However, I believe that we can reach it step by step by through interreligious dialogue and cooperation based on the common visions and ideals in our hearts. It is my earnest hope that we all together share this idea here today, and that we will humbly continue to do our utmost to live together in harmony.

Many meetings and programmes have already convened since the beginning of this assembly on October 30th, and more events await us. I would like to conclude my greetings by praying that all the participants in these events will interact earnestly and cordially, and that this assembly will bear abundant fruit thanks to the wonderful hospitality of our Korean friends.

Thank you.

1 November 2013
Busan, Korea

Greeting to the WCC 10th General Assembly

Rabbi David Fox Sandmel
International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations

Shalom. It is my honour and privilege to bring greetings on behalf of the International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultations to this Plenary Session of the 10th General Assembly of the World Council of Churches. The International Jewish Committee on Interreligious Consultation represents Reform, Conservative and Orthodox Jewish movements, the Anti-Defamation League, the American Jewish Committee, B'nai B'rith International, the Israel Jewish Council for Interreligious Relations, and the World Jewish Congress. It was founded over forty years ago to cultivate relations with other international religious bodies.

This past week, as part of synagogue worship around the world, Jews read from the book of Genesis about the birth of Jacob and Esau, the twin sons of Isaac and Rebecca, who seemed, from their very conception, to be in conflict with one another – "and the children struggled within her." (Gen. 25:22) Throughout the centuries, Jewish and Christian biblical commentators often understood the relationship between our two traditions to

be reflected, if not foretold, in this struggle. Each community considered itself to be Jacob, or as he came to be known, Yisrael – Israel, God's true and only covenantal partner. Each saw the other as Esau, who rejected God and God's promises. These mutually exclusive interpretations resulted in distrust and enmity, violence and persecution, including, within living memory, the destruction of six million Jews in the Shoah, the Holocaust. It is, therefore, with gratitude that we remember that the World Council of Churches, at its founding meeting in 1948 in Amsterdam, stated unequivocally "anti-Semitism is a sin against God and man."

In light of this history, we Jews view with horror the growing violence against Christians and Christian communities in places such as Egypt, Syria, India, Nigeria, Indonesia, and Pakistan. We are dismayed that the world seems to ignore the suffering that is being inflicted. It is particularly unjust to the peoples in those places, and prolongs their pain, when their plight is minimized, and hypocritical when other conflicts are spuriously given as the

reason for their situation, let alone identified as more important.

We gather here in Busan as Israelis and Palestinians are in the midst of negotiations that, we pray, will lead to the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel so that Jews, Christians and Muslims can live in peace with one another and worship without fear at their holy sites. We are heartened by those on all sides who are working not only to achieve a political solution but who also strive together to overcome trauma, such as the Parents Circle Family Forum, a joint Palestinian Israeli organization of over 600 families, all of whom have lost a close family member as a result of the prolonged conflict, and whose activities have shown that the reconciliation between individuals and nations is possible. These brave families teach us that peace can only come if the subjective perceptions of justice on all sides are considered and respected. I note here as well Israeli hospitals where Jewish and Arab physicians and nurses are treating hundreds of wounded Syrian men, women and children as well as IsraAid, an Israeli NGO that provides disaster relief around the world and is currently working quietly with Syrian refugees in Jordan.

These examples show us how people from different nations and traditions can be, in the words of Isaiah, "repairers of the breach and restorers of the lanes for habitation."

I now turn back to Genesis: we should also remember that the conflict between Jacob and Esau is not the end of the story of their relationship. In two weeks, we Jews will read about the reconciliation between the two brothers (Gen. 33) and how they later cooperated with one another to bury their father Isaac (Gen 35:29). It seems that they were able to overcome the strife that began in the womb. Today, in many parts of the world, Jews and Christians now live in harmony. While we disagree about whether the Messiah is to come or come again, we are, in the felicitous phrase of the Christian theologian Clark Williamson, "partners in waiting." Until that day, we can and must work together to alleviate suffering, promote justice and repair our world for the reign of God. *Ken yehi ratzon*, may this be God's will. Amen.

4 November 2013
Busan, Korea

Greeting to the WCC 10th General Assembly

Prof. Dr Din Syamsuddin
President of Muhammadiyah, Indonesia
President-Moderator of Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP)

Eminences, Esteemed Christian Leaders, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, I would like to extend my gratitude to the World Council of Churches for inviting me to this great General Assembly. I feel that I am really honoured and delighted to be here meeting with so many Christian leaders from all over the world. Allow me to convey the warmest greeting to all of you from Muslims in Indonesia, the most populous Muslim country in the world, in particular from

members of my organization, Muhammadiyah, which is sometimes labelled as a Protestant Islam, and from the big family of the Asian Conference of Religions for Peace (ACRP) or Religions for Peace - Asia.

The organizing of this General Assembly is timely and urgent. We are all now facing tremendous challenges in today's world. The promise of a peace dividend brought about by the new era is yet to materialize. Our common dream of a new world

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civilization based on peace, social justice, equality, prosperity and harmony has yet to become a reality. It is indeed disheartening to see that conflicts remain a defining characteristic of today's world. Tension between the Muslim world and the West, especially in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks, has brought about phobia among certain communities in some Western and Muslim countries.

Ladies and Gentlemen,
We are now living in multi-cultural and multi-religious societies. No single society that is monolithic. All great cultural and religious traditions have to deal with plurality and diversity of cultures and religions. These pluralities are both given and generated. As mentioned in many verses of the Holy Qur'an, God created mankind into races, nationalities and ethnicities with different skin colours and languages, with one purpose that is to engage in mutual understanding, mutual respect, and cooperation. Plurality of religions is also a part of God's Will. Indeed, plurality is observable signs or evidence of God Almighty for intellectuals, knowledgeable persons.

Cultural and religious plurality becomes more complex in line with development and interactions between people from different faiths and cultures. Plurality is resulted from creativity and adaptation of people to cope with realities, changes and challenges.

As a matter of fact Christianity and Islam, together with Judaism, are of the same root, the Abrahamic faith. Therefore, despite their differences especially in theology, that is the way of each in conceptualizing The Almighty God, there are many similarities between Islamic teachings and the teachings of Christianity.

Therefore, it is urgent for the Christians and the Muslims, in particular, to find a common word, that is, inter alia, that our respective religion is from God but for human being and humanity. Therefore, is important for the Christians and the Muslim to engage in emphasizing of commonalities rather that sharpening of differences. It is a time for us to curb dramatizing differences, and change it with mainstreaming indifferences. It is much better for us to find our common word in order to face our common enemies.

Our common enemies are not the religious others, but problems faced by our societies, such as poverty, illiteracy, injustice, discrimination, violence and terrorism, and many other forms of the absence of peace.

By so doing, we the people of different faiths will engage together in common actions. This is, indeed, the positive unity.

Thank you.

5 November 2013
Busan, Korea

WCC 10th General Assembly Report
Ecumenical Conversation #10:

Exploring Christian Self-Identity in a World of Many Faiths

Description of the Purpose of the Ecumenical Conversation

In the twenty-first century, Christians in many different contexts and parts of the world need to articulate their faith in conversation with people who are followers of other religions. This Conversation reflected on a number of central Christian themes (such as our understanding of God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, creation, salvation, the Bible and the Church). Though Christian thinking and practice about such issues may be challenged as we engage with people of other religions, it can also be a creative undertaking, encouraging us to return to the roots of our faith and to reflect more deeply, discovering Christian insights speaking directly to this religiously plural world.

This Ecumenical Conversation sought to be a space for holding a genuine conversation in which different views on serious questions about the relationship between Christianity and other religions might be expressed courteously, heard graciously and honoured. The Conversation drew as a resource on the consultations organized over the last decade by the WCC in the area of "Christian self-understanding in the context of religious plurality." The draft report produced as a result of these consultations, *Who do we say that we are?*, acted as a background resource for the Conversation. The Conversation also acted as a springboard for future interreligious work, integrating both theological and practical dimensions.

The Conversation was framed using the motifs and themes of Faith, Hope, and Love.

Narrative Report of the Proceedings

Session 1

The Conversation was introduced with a quotation from Hans Küng:

No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions.

It was then reminded of the twin Christian commitments to universality, expressed (for example) in the belief that all human beings are created in the image and likeness of God, and to particularity.

Since the first session focussed on "faith", the participants were invited to discuss in small groups the impact that their particular interreligious context has on their understanding of their own faith and whether there are key aspects of their faith that are affected by their multireligious context.

Four panellists explored the "scandal of particularity" by offering their reflections on John 14:6:

- Rabbi David Sandmel recognised that this text is central to many churches' understanding of mission but said that his emotional response to it was negative. It sounded like and had been understood as a judgement on Jews which, at times, had led to segregation, persecution, and violence. Acknowledging the sensitivity of the conversation and the harshness of his language, he shared his concern that targeted mission to Jews is "a gentler form of genocide". He thought interreligious dialogue should explore both similarities and differences and that it was important to discuss this text.

- The Revd. Dr Sathianathan Clarke spoke of the doctrine of the Trinity as the best kept secret of the Christian tradition and the way it expresses both the "scandal of particularity" and the "gift of divine plenitude". He recognised that the challenge is in John 14:6b and proposed that this and other texts need to be read in the light of the Trinity. He spoke of the commandment to love, saying that the way is love and the truth is love, and they are always grace-filled because of love.
- Dr Parichart Suwanbubbha encouraged people of different faiths to give respect to their texts within their own tradition and to keep their eyes and ears open in order to learn from others. She spoke of an approach being "best for you" and of some Buddhists also being concerned about the exclusivist views in some of their texts.
- The Revd. Bonnie Evans-Hills pointed to the two great commandments, saying that Christians needed to read all the "I am" sayings through those commandments to love God and neighbour. She also said that it needs to be recognised that these sayings speak about Jesus, ourselves, and everyone else: we journey with companions on the way; truth includes responsibility to God, others, and ourselves; life is related to light in John and includes knowledge of God, others, the world, and self.

In response, participants offered the following comments:

- Jews have already come to the Father.
- Jesus did not make universal statements such as, "You have to walk one way."
- God is at the centre and, in the Christian tradition, "way" can refer to the mediator and/or to a model of ethics.
- This text should not have such a high profile because Christians are not agreed about it; the problem is not what people believe but social relationships and people will use different texts to justify those.

The participants then engaged in a study of Mark 7:24-30 in small groups with guided notes and questions ("Jesus and a Syro-Phoenician woman: a test case for learning from the other"). In the plenary that followed, the following comments were made and questions asked:

- Jesus was rude and offensive but showed himself teachable.
- A Jewish woman participant appreciated that Christians were prepared to wrestle with their scriptures and, after an explanation of the passage, shared with others in a feminist approach to it.
- Abraham criticised God and this story makes Jesus more accessible.
- There is a fine line between self-criticism and self-denigration and, in an interreligious context, it is not appropriate for Christians to speak of Jesus as rude and offensive but teachable.
- Was it good to put Rabbi David in the position of commenting on John 14:6?
- This is a story about universalism: Jesus acts on both the "Jewish" and "Gentile" sides of the lake.
- Is it right to introduce questions that are not particular concerns of the text?

Participants were invited to look at a number of contextualised pictures of Jesus and to consider the particular features of Christ that would reflect their interreligious context.

Session 2
Since the second session focussed on "hope", the participants were invited to share in small groups their images and ideas of Christian hope in our world of many faiths and to ask whether these are material, spiritual, personal, communal, or a blend of these.

In the plenary that followed, the following comments were offered:

- It is important to recognise people as human beings rather than through their morals.
- Pope Francis washing the feet of prisoners.
- Christians among the people, not using their walls for hiding.
- Christians with the people, sharing with them, and getting their hands dirty.

Three panellists explored what hope means in certain difficult political contexts:

- Bishop Angelaos spoke of how a persecution complex can develop in some difficult situations. He observed that, in Egypt, many people had been struggling with a loss of national identity and that this had led some to retreat into a solely religious identity. He proposed that religious identity should help people be faithful and good but should not dictate particular political solutions.
- Miss Esha Fakhi spoke of the Islamic understanding of hope in terms of the unity of humanity, noting that the purpose of variety in humanity is to show God's glory, not to give an identity that rivals the core identity of being one. She said that the best way to practise faith is to act, loving all neighbours whatever their religion. She referred to the recent attack on the Westgate shopping centre in Nairobi observing that people of different faiths/religions were killed and injured, and had their businesses destroyed.
- The Revd. Johnson Mbillah said that Christian hope is focussed in the Incarnation; that God has been one of us brings us hope. He acknowledged that mistakes have been made in history but said that the gospel is not coercive since God gives freedom and that should be respected. He claimed that Christians have a reasonable rather than an unreasonable hope. He expressed concern about religious extremists who ally their religion to their political cause.

In the plenary that followed, the following comments were made and questions asked:

- There needs to be a high standard of political tolerance in a multireligious world; people should be able to share and witness to their beliefs, learn from others, and change their religion.
- Religious tradition should not be directly related to a political view but should inspire action.
- We need to be clear about the meaning of "tolerance": it can be passive or active; respect is, perhaps, a more positive notion.
- What is the distinction between the "politicization of religion" and the "religionization of politics"?

In groups and with reference to extracts from the Baar Report, *Christian witness in a multireligious world*, and the "Eschatology" section of *Who do we say that we are?,* the participants explored two questions:

- What are the essential elements that must be included in our one common Christian hope?
- Are there aspects of hope that do not make sense to other religious traditions in your context? How do we express these in such situations?

In the plenary that followed, the following comments were offered:

- God is still active and gives hope since we are all part of creation.
- Accountability is related to whether we feed the hungry, visit the sick, etc. (Matthew 25:31ff).
- Being trustworthy is a key characteristic alongside accountability.
- Affirmation for the documents about dialogue.
- As well as being eschatological and apocalyptic, hope is about the here and now, especially on matters of social justice, and can entail working with others.
- Some Christians are against interreligious dialogue and cooperation so not all are of one mind.

- Some people are unable to make sense of hope in their own religious tradition.
- Four key words emerged linked with hope: liberation, justice, peace, and life.
- God is with the marginalized.
- It is important to be committed to our own faith and open to others.

The session concluded with The Lord's Prayer including pauses between each petition to enable participants to name examples of Christian hope.

Sessions 3 and 4
Since the third session focussed on "love", the participants were invited to share in twos and threes what Christian love means in our multireligious world.

Using an "open fish bowl", Fr Indunil, Dr Ali Helmi, Dr Yasmine Motawy, Dr Parichart Suwanbubbha, the Revd. Dr Wesley Ariarajah, Dr Idris Tawfiq, Dr Debbie Weissman, and others discussed their understanding of love in a multireligious world.

The conversation focussed on love as doing things for other people (including saving the lives of those of other religions and helping them observe their traditions) and the concept of unconditional love, both divine and human; it was recognised that love is a very rich concept and beyond our understanding; it was said that the starting point of love is the other, true love is not uncritical, it is transformative and healing, and is marked by humility, respect, reverence, and equanimity when others do not respond in love; people of different religions spoke of the relationship between the love of God and human love; some talked of love in terms of self-sacrifice, a readiness to put ourselves out, and a willingness to be uncomfortable for the sake of others; reference was also made to Taoist and Confucian understandings of love.

In preparation for the fourth session, participants formed groups to identify the implications of the Ecumenical Conversation for the work of the WCC

over the next five years. In the process of formulating the affirmations and challenges in the fourth session, there was significant discussion about whether to refer to the demonstrations by some Korean Christians against the WCC's engagement in interreligious dialogue.

Ecumenical affirmations and challenges to be addressed by the churches, ecumenical partners and the WCC

The participants **affirm**:

- the place of and contributions made by those of other faiths/religions in this ecumenical conversation;
- that, through dialogue and common action, both our Christian self-understanding and our relationships with partners of other faiths/religions may be deepened and enriched;
- that the world of many faiths/religions invites Christians to wrestle with the "scandal of particularity" and the "gift of divine plenitude";
- that theological questions relating to interreligious dialogue are still very significant and unresolved within the Christian community; and
- that there is an intrinsic interreligious dimension to all the work of every church, ecumenical body, and the WCC.

The participants acknowledge as **challenges**:

- the relationship between inter-church and interreligious dialogues and encourage the WCC and its ecumenical partners to explore this relationship, including the ecumenical diversity in approaches to interreligious dialogue;
- the opportunities for people of different faiths/religions to act together locally, regionally, and globally to love their neighbours and to work for justice and peace;
- the importance of the WCC taking into account comments made in this ecumenical conversation (e.g., that Jesus commended the faith of a

woman of another religion (Mark 7:24-30), that Christian hope is focussed in the Incarnation, and that true love is not uncritical (see Proverbs 3:11-12 and Revelation 3:19)) and ensuring that they contribute to the final version of *Who do we say that we are?* The participants encourage the publication, distribution, and study of this report;

- the need for churches and the WCC to continue to be prophetic, to take risks even when there is potential for misunderstanding, and be prepared to become pilgrims in our thoughts and self-identities towards other religions; and

- that the WCC needs to take seriously *all* aspects of interreligious dialogue, "the dialogue of life, social action, theological exchange, and spiritual experience" (*Dialogue and Mission, PCID, 1984*), and how they mutually inform each other.

The above text is reprinted with permission from WCC 10th Assembly document number EC 10.2.

WCC 10th Assembly Report
Report from Ecumenical Conversation #16:

Religions Working Together for Peace and Freedom

Description of the Purpose of the Ecumenical Conversation

The purpose of this ecumenical conversation is to help explore and imagine contextually relevant models of interreligious engagement which can lead to peace and freedom, by facilitating a candid and creative engagement with theological ambiguities and contextual complexities surrounding the relationship between religions and the themes of peace and freedom so that interfaith collaboration can become a "dialogue of" and "dialogue for" life.

Narrative Report of the Proceedings

The conversation opened up space for the participants to listen to Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim and Hindu perspectives on peace and freedom and in the context of small groups dialogue on how interreligious collaboration can engage with issues of peace and freedom in today's world where there seems to be a counterproductive intersection between religious fundamentalism and ethno-centric and majoritarian politics.

A variety of methodologies including small groups, fish bowl, parking lot, and thematic presentations were adopted to make the process informative, interactive and introspective.

In the **first session** from a Buddhist perspective Rev. Watanabe (chair of trustees of Risso Kosei Kai a lay Buddhist movement based on the Lotus Sutra) emphasized that recognition of one's true nature would lead to harmony which would lead to world peace. From a Jewish perspective Assistant Rabbi Amorit Rosen reiterated that Peace and justice are not just commandments, but are imperatives to be pursued along with hospitality which is being able to deeply listen by holding an emotional space for the other. In the small group discussions and fish bowl conversations that followed participants reflected upon how religions could be both a problem and promise for peace building. They pointed out that cohabitation with people of different religious groups would lead to the coalescing of religious values leading to peace. While recognizing hospitality to be an important value for peace to flourish, the participants also noted that religions, and relations between religions, have developed and changed, sometimes towards being more harsh and sharp mostly due to the intersection of religion with political gain. The need to acknowledge that there are different levels of peace: individual (peace and acceptance is easier) and societal (more difficult) was also pointed out. Following this Wesley Ariarajah spoke on how religions can work together for peace and emphasized the need for affirming common values which can enrich one another and urged us to find common ways of speaking and developing a common language for peace. He also reminded us that the theological questions which religious traditions answered as they developed in history are not our questions today. Therefore, all religions have to re-evaluate their theologies. The younger generation must be willing to understand identity differently. They must reconsider it in a way that helps them to look at the other as co-traveller in a common journey and a common pilgrimage for peace.

During the **second session** held on November 1, participants recorded their impressions of the previous session using the parking lot method and a brief time of brainstorming on religious freedom. Addressing the participants the Archbishop of Canterbury Justin Welby emphasized the need to think about religious freedom in the context of conflict. According to him at the heart of the

Christian view of peace building, is the idea of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the generous welcome of Christ, expressed by those who take the time to welcome the other. Christian peace building has at its heart transformation, not conformity. Christian reconciliation seeks the continuation of difference without violence, or the suppression of diversity. Christian peace building is based on six principles - the six R's: Research, Relationship, Relief, Risk-taking, Reconciliation and Resourcing.

From a Hindu perspective Prof. Ram Punyani distanced Hindu fundamentalism which targets Islam and Christianity from Hinduism which celebrates the idea of *vasudhevakutumbam* the idea of the world as being one big family. This type of Hinduism encouraged a morality which celebrated different traditions and adopted each other's values and traditions. He spoke of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi as the epitome of the values of Hindu religion. Therefore in the context of peace it is important to distinguish mainstream Hinduism from the political tendencies which pose threats to other religious communities in the name of Hinduism. From a Buddhist perspective Dr Parichart Suwanbubbha highlighted how conflicts were related to misuse of power how conflict like suffering must be accepted rather than being translated into violence. Given the impermanence and changeability of everything conflict demanded that we face the situation, understand its root cause, learn lessons from the conflict and go beyond it. Without resorting to stereotyping one another through interreligious dialogue religions need to be able to challenge each other. From a Muslim perspective, Prof. Idris Tawfiq emphasized the need for interreligious dialogue to be honest. Expressing dismay at how his faith has been attacked in two of the plenary sessions he highlighted how if discourse is to be honest, we must be careful not to offend with words. Prof. Tawfiq reiterated that Islam does not kill people but came to the Arabian Peninsula in the 7th century to set people free from idol worship, mistreatment of women, and to deliver

people from their additions to drugs and drinks and other mind altering substances. Muslims themselves were exhorted not only to protect, but to cherish the Christian presence, not just to tolerate but to celebrate according to a covenant from Prophet Mohammad to Christians. The day concluded with silence – of repentance, awe, and reconciliation – followed by the prayer of peace of St Francis of Assisi.

In **session 3** of the conversation participants engaged in depth with the issue of religious freedom in small group settings. The following issues emerged – the tension between religious and democratic freedom whereby democratic decisions may curtail religious freedom of minorities, the role of political power in determining religious freedom, the gap between constitutional provisions for religious freedom and actual practice. In the form of case studies Prof. Ram Puniyani (India-Hindu), Prof. Sanaa Makhlouf (Egypt-Muslim) and Rev. Dr A. W. Jebanesan (Sri Lanka-Christian) presented case studied relating to religious freedom of minorities. Prof. Puniyani spoke of the threat that Hindutva (an extreme politicised version of Hindu fundamentalism) posed for Muslims, Christians and other oppressed groups in India. Built on "upper caste" values Hindutva seeks to abolish pluralism diversity and democracy space. By aggressively advocating the legalized prevention of religious conversions through euphemistically termed "freedom of religion bills" it poses threats to the religious freedom of the oppressed communities like the Dalits and indigenous peoples to convert to Christianity and Islam. Hindutva is not just a threat to minority religions and marginalized groups but a threat to the moral fabric of Hinduism which believes in freedom and diversity of religious affiliation. Speaking from the Egyptian context Prof. Saana Makhlouf pointed out the challenges that religious extremism posed for minorities, who are actually the indigenous communities. Reflecting upon recent events where people accused of desecrating religious symbols of a minority

religious group could be acquitted because of legal loopholes, Prof. Makhlouf pointed out the limitations of law in relation to religious freedom and said:

The law itself will not protect us. Our constitution says that it is against the law to desecrate symbols of religion, and yes, we need such laws. But more importantly, we need the spiritual or religious leadership to emphasize the spirit of the law in order to ensure that it is not misapplied.

The mobilization and politicization of religion for identity struggles weakened the community values which protected people. Therefore the politicization of religion was an important question for religious freedom.

Reflecting upon the Sri Lankan context Rev. Dr A. W. Jebanesan spoke of the spread of Christianity in Sri Lanka through colonial power and highlighted how times have changed after the civil war which ended in May 2009, which led to the rise of Buddhist nationalism with a renewed force, whereby being Sri Lankan meant being Buddhist. Such nationalism should not be associated with the majority of Buddhists, yet is a powerful force which poses threats to Christian and Muslim minority groups in Sri Lanka. He highlighted how religious freedom is under threat when religion is connected with nationalism. Speaking about best practices for religions to work together for peace and freedom Rev. Dr Joseph Prabhakar Dayam suggested a move from our singular identities to embrace the multiple identities that constitute human identity for harmonious well-being in a pluralistic context. As best practices Dr Dayam suggested co-habitation, commensality and co-walking whereby all religions move beyond mere ideas of coexistence and, recognize that we all share the resources that are given by one God to all God's people and live within a deep relationality in the habitation of God.

In the **final session** on November 5th participants worked in small groups to produce a set of affirmations and challenges and came up with a set of affirmations and challenges.

Ecumenical affirmations and challenges to be addressed by the churches, ecumenical partners and the WCC

Affirmations
The participants affirm the need to harvest resources, models and examples of individuals, groups and ministries joining together across lines of faith to do justice, love, kindness and walk humbly with God in response to the cries of the world's people and all creation.

The participants affirm that entering into religious dialogue not only enriches and strengthens our own identity, but also opens space to engage with the wider issues related to identity-based conflicts.

The participants affirm the need to recognize the diversity within each religious tradition taking into consideration the diverse geographical and political contexts in which they exist.

The participants affirm the need for Christians to learn about other religions, their texts and traditions in a posture of humility and openness.

The participants affirm the need for interreligious dialogue to be contextually embedded and shaped by people in the margins.

Challenges
The participants acknowledge as a challenge the difficulty to recognize that often the causes of religious conflict are due to the political instrumentalism of religion.

The participants acknowledge as a challenge the exclusivist theologies which inhibit the willingness and courage to engage with people of other religions to build a future with justice and peace.

The participants acknowledge that some contexts are not conducive for religious freedom and pluralism to thrive.

The participants acknowledge the difficulty of understanding a religious tradition on its own terms without interpreting it through a Christian lens.

The participants acknowledge the challenge of going beyond academic dialogue and engaging local communities in face to face conversation with a hermeneutic of suspicion and an orientation towards action.

The participants acknowledge as a challenge the difficulty of having representative religious leaders at interreligious dialogue events which often exclude women and young people.

The above text is taken from WCC 10th Assembly document number EC 16.2.

Full Communion Partners and Interreligious Relations:
A Comparison of Efforts and Outcomes of the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America

Lucinda Mosher

Because I am an Episcopalian who works as an educator, author, and consultant in the arena of interreligious relations, I have had many occasions to lecture and write on how The Episcopal Church attends to interfaith matters.[1] For more than a decade, however, I have been a regular instructor for a particular congregation of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA) and have had opportunity to work closely with several scholars who have served as staff for the ELCA's denominational interreligious relations.[2] The Episcopal Church and the ELCA are full-communion partners. Thus I am curious: what are the similarities and differences in their conduct of interreligious relations? This essay provides a brief description of these two denominations, explains what it means to say that they are in "full communion," then offers an overview of their parallel approaches to interfaith work under four rubrics: location of interreligious work in the denomination's structure; moves with regard to Jewish-Christian relations; attention to Christian-Muslim relations; and articulation of a theological rationale for interreligious engagement. Finally, it posits some ways forward.[3]

Full Communion Partners

The formal presence of Anglican Christianity in what would become the United States of America dates from the planting of a Church of England parish at Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. The Episcopal Church (TEC) as a separate entity dates from 1789, when formal separation from the Church of England was achieved by the ratification of its own constitution at its first General Convention. Geographically, its 7154 parishes (congregations) are organized into 111 dioceses (10 of these being outside the

USA) – which in turn are grouped into nine provinces. Today, with an official expression in at least 16 countries, this multinational denomination is best described as being "in the USA" rather than "of the USA."[4] The primary governing and legislative body of The Episcopal Church is the General Convention, which meets every three years. General Convention is bicameral: to take effect, resolutions must be passed by both the House of Deputies and the House of Bishops. Resolutions so passed become the voice and policy of The Episcopal Church. Standing Commissions are small groups of clergy and laity appointed to oversee particular concerns, thus often are the authors of resolutions brought to General Convention.

Lutheranism in North America dates from the mid-17th century. However, the ELCA is a young denomination, formed by the merger in 1988 of the American Lutheran Church, the Association of Evangelical Lutheran Churches, and the Lutheran Church in America. Like TEC, the ELCA is also multinational, given the presence of two ELCA synods in the Caribbean. The ELCA organizes its 9533 congregations into synods – 65 in all, in 9 geographic regions. Its primary decision-making body is the Churchwide Assembly, which convenes every three years to elect the denomination's officers, establish churchwide policies, and conduct other denominational business. Interreligious-relations resolutions passed and documents endorsed by General Convention on the one hand, and the Churchwide Assembly on the other, become the policy and official teaching of that denomination.

According to 2012 figures, TEC's membership stands at 2,066,710

(1,894,181 in the USA), whereas the ELCA's membership is 3,950,924. TEC and the ELCA have been in full communion since 2000.[5] "Full communion" is not a merger. Rather it is a celebration of what is held in common and a sharing of each body's specific gifts. It is an agreement that respects differences while affirming each other's catholicity and apostolicity. Thus there follows mutual recognition of baptism, sharing of the Eucharist, the possibility of exchange of clergy, and shared witness and service.

Locating the Work

Each denomination has long had an Office of Ecumenical Relations: TEC, since the middle of the 20th century at least; the ELCA, since its founding in 1988. By the beginning of the 21st century, each denomination had expanded the focus of this office and had renamed it to include interfaith or interreligious relations. For TEC, this also necessitated changes in the name and duties of the Standing Commission on Ecumenical Relations – the body with official oversight of such work. This was accomplished with an amendment of the church's Canons at its 2003 General Convention. Thus TEC now has a Standing Commission on Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. Currently, the Reverend Margaret Rose is TEC Presiding Bishop's Deputy for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations. Kathryn Lohre is the ELCA's Assistant to the Presiding Bishop for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, with interreligious concerns being one of her particular responsibilities; she succeeded Donald J. McCoid in March 2014.[6]

Each denomination has a network of officers (and, in some cases, committees) who, at the behest of their local bishop, attend to interreligious concerns at the regional level: EDEIO (Episcopal Diocesan Ecumenical and Interreligious Officers) and LEIRN (Lutheran Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Representatives Network). These two networks meet annually in conjunction with the annual National Workshop on Christian Unity.

TEC and the ELCA have always been strong advocates for working ecumenically on interreligious concerns. In fact, throughout the 20th century, it was TEC's explicit preference to conduct interreligious relations ecumenically rather than on its own. Nevertheless, it advocated grassroots dialogue between Episcopalians and people of other faiths. Indeed, TEC's earliest comprehensive statement on interfaith relations *Principles for Interfaith Dialogue* (1994) – included guidelines for local initiatives. Both churches have long participated in multilateral interreligious groups such as Religions for Peace USA and the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions. Most significantly, however, TEC and the ELCA have been strong supporters of the longstanding Interfaith Relations Commission of the National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA, which is now the Convening Table for Inter-Religious Relations and Collaboration on Topics of Mutual Concern. Late in the 20th century, TEC provided vigorous support by seconding the Reverend Dr Bert Breiner to NCCC Headquarters in NYC, where (with the Reverend Dr Jay Rock, a Presbyterian) he served as Co-Director for Interfaith Relations for nearly eight years. An important outcome of this period was the formulation and promulgation of *Interfaith Relations and the Churches: A Policy Statement of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the U.S.A.* (10 November 1999) – a process in which a number of Episcopalians and Lutherans played vital roles.

Jewish-Christian Relations

Unsurprisingly, Jewish-Christian relations have received more attention from both denominations than other interreligious concerns. TEC's 1964 General Convention condemned anti-Semitism entirely, specifically ruling out the charge of deicide and other such accusations. The same resolution committed TEC to initiation of dialogue with appropriate Jewish organizations, such as the Synagogue Council of America. These General Convention actions set the stage for the establishment, in 1973, of the

Presiding Bishop's Advisory Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations. As a result of the 1979 General Convention's call for the teaching of neighbourliness to Jews[7], *Guidelines for Christian-Jewish Relations for Use in the Episcopal Church* was issued in 1988.[8] The 1994 General Convention urged congregations to undertake dialogue with Jews – reiterating this call even more firmly in 1997.[9]

Taking a different sort of step, the 1991 General Convention mandated that "the Presiding Bishop's Committee on Christian-Jewish Relations be consulted [in the future] whenever liturgical materials are developed or adopted for use by the [Episcopal] Church."[10] This request was informed by the notion that, if indeed praying shapes believing (*lex orandi lex credendi*), then TEC's liturgy should be free of language that is disrespectful of or harmful to Jews. The 2006 General Convention issued TEC's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music an even stronger mandate along these lines. Fulfilling it would require educational materials offering a rationale and methods for addressing anti-Judaism in the liturgy and life of the Church. Toward that end, *Dismantling Christian Anti-Judaism*, a 2009 report of the Standing Commission, was authored by commission member Marilyn Salmon.[11]

Mentioning the efforts of TEC's Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music to combat anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism calls attention to the fact that both TEC and the ELCA work ecumenically on these issues. Both denominations are current participants in the Consultation on Common Texts, which (among other things) is working to expunge anti-Jewish rhetoric from the liturgy – particularly for Holy Week and Easter.[12] It also calls attention to the fact that churchwide interreligious work does not always stay neatly under the umbrella of the office with "interreligious relations" in its name. Beyond the scope of this essay is the work, over the decades, of the Peace and Justice structures of The Episcopal Church – which adds layers of complexity to matters of Jewish-Christian concern.

When it comes to conduct of interreligious relations, the big difference between TEC and the ELCA, is their very different starting points. For the ELCA, that starting point is the Lutheran legacy of a deeply troubling relationship with Jews because of Martin Luther's own anti-Semitism.[13] The formation via merger of the ELCA in 1988 brought together a number of initiatives seeking to address this matter since the 1960s. In the early 1990s, the ELCA established a Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. The earliest fruit of its work, issued on 18 April 1994, is the ELCA's *Declaration of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America to the Jewish Community.* An explicit rejection of "Luther's anti-Judaic diatribes and violent recommendations," it expresses grief for "the complicity of our own tradition within the history of hatred" and asserts its "urgent desire to live out our faith in Jesus Christ with love and respect for the Jewish people."[14]

In addition, members of the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations developed and issued practical materials. *Guidelines for Lutheran-Jewish Relations* (1998) is a four-page leaflet providing a brief rationale referencing the *Declaration* (1994), plus fifteen concrete suggestions with regard to attitudes and actions, in light of the repentance expressed in the 1994 document. Close on its heels came *Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Jewish Relations*, a series of eight four-page flyers with instructional text and discussion prompts developed by members of the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. Titles include: Judaism Then and Now; Covenants Old and New; Law and Gospel; Promise and Fulfillment; Difficult Texts; Jewish Concern for the State of Israel; Tikkun Olam – Mending the World; and Christians and Jews in the Context of World Religions. These items were included on a list of online Jewish Resources for Campus and Congregational Use – some developed by the ELCA itself, others by its ecumenical partners – posted by the ELCA's churchwide Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations office. Also published

along with *Talking Points* was a pamphlet entitled *Resources for Further Study,* which included pre- as well as post-dialogue suggestions.

Eventually, the Panel created a book of essays entitled *Covenantal Conversations: Christians in Dialogue with Jews and Judaism* (2008). Each chapter in the book addresses the issue covered in one of the Talking Points, the aim being to provide a fuller explanation for pastors, teachers, or congregants. To this book the Panel added (in 2010) a DVD with the same name, intended for adult education. Each video segment is an interview with the author of a book-chapter. The author is asked to explain how she or he became interested in Jewish-Christian relations, to identify an idea found in the chapter she or he wrote, and to suggest how a community of faith can respond to the issue under discussion.

In 2002, the ELCA entered into formal dialogue with the Union of Reform Judaism (represented by members of the Reform Movement Commission on Inter-Religious Relations). Among the many topics explored have been Lutheran and Jewish identity and self-understanding, governing structures, and understandings of "covenant". While this dialogue no longer exists in a formal way, it was nevertheless valuable during the first decade of this century. During that same period, the ELCA was also a regular participant in the Jewish-Christian National Dialogue Roundtables convened by the National Council of Churches, which often took up thorny topics dealing directly with the modern state of Israel – as was TEC.

Christian-Muslim Relations

For both TEC and the ELCA, the 9/11 attacks in 2001 brought the need to address Christian-Muslim concerns into focus afresh.

The Episcopalians had made some earlier moves. In 1979, TEC's General Convention had instructed the Standing Commission on Ecumenism "to identify existing conversations between the Christian community and Islam," and to "commend and encourage" such dialogues.[15] This call was reinforced by the General Convention in 1982, which determined that this take place by means of dialogues sponsored by the National Council of Churches.[16] In 1991, General Convention called for study of Islam and engagement with Muslims at the diocesan level. In 1994, General Convention again reiterated its call for dialogue between Episcopalians and Muslims.[17] A Presiding Bishop's Advisory Committee met with distinguished Muslim leaders in 1995.

However, only in responding to the 2001 attacks did a theological rationale for Episcopal-Muslim relations begin to be articulated. Presiding Bishop Frank Griswold's immediate response was a pastoral letter, issued on the night of 9/11/01. This was followed by a sermon on 21 September 2001, preached at a previously scheduled gathering of Episcopal Church bishops, who then issued their own pastoral letter: *On Waging Reconciliation* (26 September 2001).[18] All three documents address Christian-Muslim concerns in profoundly incarnational and soteriological terms.

On 9/11, ELCA Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson also issued a brief letter of concern and consolation. As a denomination, the ELCA responded to the attacks by asking, "How do we build relations with Muslims?" An obvious answer was to call for the establishment of a Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations parallel to the quite active and useful Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Jewish Relations. However, it would be 2008 before this task force was in place.

Meanwhile, in 2006, the ELCA Ecumenical and Inter-religious Relations Section produced *Windows for Understanding: Jewish-Muslim-Lutheran Relations,* a 70-page downloadable booklet containing information about Judaism and Islam, annotated book and video suggestions, a glossary, short essays on pertinent topics, and web addresses for relevant organizations. The

development of this resource indicates an awareness that bilateral Jewish-Christian and Christian-Muslim dialogues are never entirely independent of each other.

Then, on 11 October 2007, an international and diverse group of 138 Islamic leaders and scholars issued *A Common Word Between Us and You,* a call for Muslim-Christian dialogue. The very next day, Mark S. Hanson responded as Presiding Bishop of the ELCA and President of The Lutheran World Federation, accepting the invitation "in the belief that Jews, Muslims, and Christians are called to one another as to a holy site, where God's living revelation in the world is received in reverence among the faithful and not in fear of our neighbors."[19]

The Episcopal Church's reply to the *Common Word* initiative was crafted in February 2008. Input had been requested by advisors assisting then Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams in preparing an official response from the Anglican Communion as a whole. TEC's Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations Officer chose to do so in the form of an open letter of acceptance of the invitation to dialogue. Entitled *Renewing Our Pledge*, it was hoped that this document might also be of immediate help to Episcopalians.[20] Later in 2008, both the ELCA and TEC were parties to *An Ecumenical Response to 'A Common Word Between Us and You' by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.*[21]

The ELCA had long discussed the need for a Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations. In fact, when *A Common Word* was issued, such a group was well on its way to being formed for the purpose of learning as a denomination about the history of Christian-Muslim relations, providing accurate information about Islam, combating virulent anti-Islam/anti-Muslim rhetoric, and building relationships and identifying possibilities for collaboration with Muslims. Thus *A Common Word* was received by the ELCA, not so much as an urge to action, but as a confirmation of the importance of

its new endeavour. When the Consultative Panel held its first official meeting in March 2008, time spent on *A Common Word* included a presentation from Dr Michael Shelley, the ELCA's representative on the team writing the NCCCUSA response.

One of the first products of the Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations was *Talking Points: Topics in Christian-Muslim Relations*. This series of eight four-page flyers, each including several discussion prompts, is aimed at the North American context directly. Topics include the Bible and the Qur'an; Jesus and Muhammad in the Qur'an; Islamic law; women; forgiveness and salvation; ecology; hospitality and friendship; and Lutheran versus Muslim concepts of God. An addendum to this series, *Walking Points: Further Study and Action Proposals in Christian-Muslim Relations,* is a wonderfully practical and varied set of suggestions suitable for implementation locally or regionally.

In September 2010, when Islamophobia escalated during the US mid-term political campaign season, and was fueled by a self-appointed clergyman's widely broadcast plan to burn Qur'ans, Donald J. McCoid, then Executive for Ecumenical and Inter-Religious Relations, represented the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America during an emergency interfaith summit in at the National Press Club, Washington, D.C. Nicholas Richardson, Communications Officer of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, was also a participant. Out of this meeting of some 40 leaders came a joint statement "calling for unified action from faith communities to promote tolerance and put an end to the recent increase in anti-Muslim rhetoric and hate crimes."[22] Out of this meeting also came the founding, in November 2010, of Shoulder-to-Shoulder, a national campaign by more than 20 interfaith, faith-based and religious organizations dedicated to ending anti-Muslim sentiment: "Shoulder-to-Shoulder works not only on a national level, but offers strategies and support to local and regional efforts to address anti-Muslim

sentiment and seeks to spread the word abroad." Both TEC and the ELCA are charter members.[23]

In 2012, both TEC and the ELCA accepted complimentary copies of the six-DVD series, *Discover Islam* – a resource endorsed by the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). Before these were distributed to its Synod offices and seminaries, the ELCA Consultative Panel on Lutheran-Muslim Relations partnered with A Center of Christian-Muslim Engagement for Peace and Justice at the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago to develop a study guide in the form of a leaflet for use with each DVD. Authored by Carol Schersten LaHurd, Ph.D., these leaflets provide an overview of key points to be covered by that DVD, plus discussion prompts and additional Lutheran resources on this topic. TEC has been most appreciative of these ELCA study guides and has commended them to Episcopalians making use of the *Discover Islam* DVDs.

While ISNA is not the only Islamic organization with which TEC and the ELCA have worked, it has been a significant conversation partner for both. In September 2004, the Right Reverend Christopher Epting, then TEC's Deputy for Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations, became the denomination's first officer to address the Annual Convention of the Islamic Society of North America. On 11 September 2011, Dr Syeed Sayyid of the Islamic Society of North America addressed the ELCA Churchwide Assembly – the first Muslim guest to do so.

Theological Rationales

An important question, however, concerns the basis on which such interreligious engagement takes place. As early as 2006, TEC attempted to articulate an official theological rationale for interreligious relations work as a whole. The desire was for a document that would establish the basis for interreligious dialogues, as does the Chicago-Lambeth Quadrilateral for ecumenical

conversations. TEC achieved this in 2009 with General Convention's endorsement of *Theological Statement on Interreligious Relations,* making this document TEC's canonical teaching on the matter. The 2012 General Convention reaffirmed this teaching, but it still awaits wide study. In an effort to facilitate that, the document was published early in 2014 as *Toward Our Mutual Flourishing: the theological statement on interreligious relations of The Episcopal Church: Text and Study Guide.*[24] The Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations is encouraging dioceses to distribute and teach this document.

The ELCA has taken note of TEC's rationale and continues to consider what would be most appropriate for its own polity. To date, it has chosen not to take this step. It part, this may be due to the fact that the sets of *Talking Points* and other interreligious relations materials already include theological rationales in their introductions. Furthermore, any need for such a denominational theological statement may well have been fulfilled by the recent ELCA document *Why Follow Luther Past 2017? A Contemporary Lutheran Approach to Inter-Religious Relations.* It reiterates the ELCA's earlier repudiation of Luther's anti-Jewish behaviour, but goes on to contextualize it, thus making it possible to commend "underlying principles of Luther's theology [which] open exciting and fruitful possibilities for a more respectful and workable understanding of inter-religious relations" – and not just for Lutherans![25]

Conclusion

Where are these two denominations now? Both TEC and the ELCA have now welcomed interfaith observers at their denominational gatherings (General Convention and the Churchwide Assembly, respectively) repeatedly, and this practice is sure to continue.

TEC has had Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian advisory committees in previous decades, but does not at present. The ELCA's two Consultative

Panels (Jewish and Muslim) include Lutherans only, although they have fulfilled their role by consulting with Jewish and Muslim partners as needed. The question is now being asked: is this the appropriate way to proceed in the future? These two Consultative Panels have existed in parallel since 2008, but only in 2012 did they meet together for the first time – an occasion which gave rise to the development of a joint interreligious case studies project to explore the realities of interreligious engagement throughout the church.

In fact, the ELCA has taken a robust step beyond the Abrahamic conversations that have dominated interreligious relations to date. In Fall 2012, the ELCA launched its *Inter-Religious Case Studies Project* – a challenge to its membership to think anew about what it means to be Lutheran in a rapidly changing religious landscape in which neighbours may well be serious adherents of some other faith. Members have been encouraged to submit "stories of congregations and individual members engaging with people of other religions through an ELCA ministry or some other denominational or institutional activity," such as an account of interreligious social action; interreligious occasions such as weddings, funerals, or prayer services; or evidence of personal transformation through interreligious encounter or engagement.[26] The Case Study Working Group met early in 2014 to take steps toward collating these stories as a resource for study and conversation.

Mention of the ELCA Case Studies Project calls to mind the fact that, on the local level, Lutherans and Episcopalians often collaborate in addressing America's multifaith concerns. For example, the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska and the ELCA have partnered to form an ecumenical faith community as the Christian presence on the campus of the Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha.[27]

Where next? Both denominations recognize the need to attend to concerns beyond those of the Abrahamic religions. The ELCA is exploring the possibility of engaging in dialogue, either bi-laterally or ecumenically with other, non-Abrahamic traditions, and such broadening of the table was evidenced by the fact that a Sikh leader addressed the 2013 Churchwide Assembly. As the real possibility of an official Sikh-Lutheran dialogue has emerged in recent weeks, details have been shared with TEC. This can rightly be seen as evidence of the growing commitment of the interreligious relations officers of the two denominations to work together.

In response to mandates issued by the 2012 General Convention, TEC is conducting a diocese-by-diocese survey of grassroots interreligious activities. As well, the Episcopal Church's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations is investigating possibilities for experiential learning that might expand the knowledge and comfort level of TEC's bishops and ecumenical officers (and, indeed, all Episcopalians) with religiously diverse contexts – thus their ability to work more agilely therein. The Network of Inter Faith Concerns of the Anglican Communion has called for a consultation later in 2014 on Anglican relations with Hindus in diaspora. Might TEC's interreligious relations officers (diocesan as well as churchwide) contribute to this discussion in some way?

The question pressing both denominations at present is this: how do these two denominations expand and deepen their conduct of interreligious relations in an era of restricted resources? Where is the budget? Can TEC and the ELCA commit to collaboration in the arena of interreligious relations? Given the expertise and enthusiasm for interreligious concerns possessed by the officers currently handling that portfolio for The Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, such collaboration seems likely, and would bear much fruit.

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[1] See particularly, Lucinda Allen Mosher, *Toward Our Mutual Flourishing: The Episcopal Church, Interreligious Relations, and Theologies of Religious Manyness* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012).

[2] Note that the ELCA uses "inter-religious" in naming this work, whereas TEC uses "interreligious". When writing about each denomination, I have endeavoured to use its preferred spelling. Technically, the chief ecumenical and inter-religious officer of the ELCA is the Presiding Bishop; the same is true for The Episcopal Church. In each case, the denominational ecumenical-and-inter-religious officers are deputies of the Presiding Bishop.

[3] I am grateful to Margaret Rose (TEC) and to Kathryn Lohre, Donald McCoid, Darrell Jodock, and Mark Swanson (ELCA) for their help with this article. Any errors are mine entirely.

[4] For TEC statistics, visit www.episcopalchurch.org.

[5] A proposed *Concordat of Agreement* between the ELCA and TEC was first presented to the General Convention of the Episcopal Church in 1991. It was accepted by General Convention in 1997. The ELCA's Church-wide Assembly accepted a revision of this document, *Called to Common Mission,* in 1999, which, ultimately, was accepted by TEC's General Convention in 2000. For the full text of *Called to Common Mission: A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the Concordat of Agreement*, see *Report to the 73rd General Convention of the Episcopal Church, 2000* (New York: General Convention, 2000), 101-12. http://www.episcopalarchives.org/e-archives/blue_book/reports/2000/bb_2000-R008.pdf. Last accessed: 17 November 2014. For the text of Resolution 2000-A040, "Accept *Called to Common Mission* as the Basis for Full Communion," see General Convention, *Journal of the General Convention of ... The Episcopal Church, Denver, 2000* (New York: General Convention, 2001), 474. http://www.episcopalarchives.org/cgi-bin/acts/acts_resolution.pl?resolution=2000-A040.

[6] The other is the Reverend Donald J. McCoid.

[7] General Convention Resolution 1979-A044 and Resolution 1988-B004. All acts of General Convention for the years 1976 to 2009 may be found at The Acts of Convention. *The Archives of the Episcopal Church.* TEC. Web. 17 November 14.

[8] *Guidelines for Christian-Jewish Relations for Use in the Episcopal Church,* General Convention, July 1988. The full text of this document is available at http://www.bc.edu/dam/files/research_sites/cjl/texts/cjrelations/resources/documents/protestant/Episcopal_Guidelines.htm.

[9] See Resolutions 1994-A102, 1994-D130, and 1997-D055.

[10] Resolution 1991-D181.

[11] See *The Blue Book 2009,* 189-91.

[12] www.commontexts.org/history/members.html.

[13] Kathryn Lohre made this point in a telephone conversation with the author on 28 March 2014.

[14] For the full text of the declaration, see: http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Declaration_Of_The_ELCA_To_The_Jewish_Community.pdf.pdf.

[15] Resolution 1979-D133.

[16] Resolution 1982-A046.

[17] Resolution 1994-A102; Resolution 1994-D130.

[18] Released by the Office of the Presiding Bishop, "On Waging Reconciliation: A Statement from Bishops of the Episcopal Church." *The Episcopal Church Website.* TEC. 26 September 2001. Web. 17 November 2014.

[19] "Christian Responses: Response from Rev. Mark S. Hanson." *A Common Word.* ACW. 12 October 2007. Web. 17 November 2014.

[20] An explanation of the nature of this document and its full text can be found in Mosher, *op. cit.*

[21] This response was issued on issued on 8 October 2008. "An Ecumenical Response to 'A Common Word Between Us and You' by the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA." *NCCCUSA Website.* NCCCUSA. Web. 17 November 2014.

[22] "National Religious Leaders Convene Emergency Interfaith Summit." *Shoulder to Shoulder Website.* Should to Shoulder. 7 September 2010. Web. 17 November 2014.

[23] http://shouldertoshouldercampaign.org/

[24] This booklet may be downloaded and printed as needed. See http://library.episcopalchurch.org/document/toward-our-mutual-flourishing.

[25] http://download.elca.org/ELCA%20Resource%20Repository/Why_Follow_Luther_Past_2017.pdf. TEC's Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Relations commends this document to Episcopalians.

[26] See http://www.elca.org/Faith/Ecumenical-and-Inter-Religious-Relations/Inter-Religious-Relations/Case-Studies.

[27] http://www.episcopaltrifaith.org/.

The Praxis of Dialogue: Can We Go Yet Further?
Douglas Pratt

This article is an exploration of the models and types of interreligious dialogical engagement with a view to addressing the issue of how to proceed in the future, as compared to dominant patterns of the last 30-50 years.

World Council of Churches Models

Systemic dialogue – the dialogue of experts

Systemic dialogue refers to the notion of dialogue as a discursive interaction between faith systems, mediated through the meeting of minds. This is the arena of discussion, enquiry and debate undertaken by expert representatives. In some ways, this is the classic understanding of what dialogue is about: an intellectual exercise and quest. Although it was perhaps one of the earlier models employed, it was eventually eschewed by the World Council of Churches (WCC) in favour of communitarian and relational models on the basis that dialogue is primarily an interpersonal engagement.

Interpersonal socially-focused dialogue

Dialogue, as a meeting of persons, is given substance in respect to addressing concrete social issues. Within the WCC, inter-systemic dialogue was effectively dismissed as an abstract, arid exercise – the antithesis of genuine dialogue – for dialogue was understood to be primarily, if not solely, a relational experience; a meeting of people of different faiths set within a context of real communal life and interaction.

Communitarian dialogue

This third model sees dialogical engagement as a modality of community building where the agenda is of a socially-enhancing nature: the quest for peace; the promotion of harmony; the agitation for justice; the combating of social ills; and so on. Indeed, this has arguably been the predominant model of WCC-related interfaith initiatives and dialogical engagements. It is attractive because of its pragmatic orientation, and because it allows for relatively clear, identifiable and measurable outcomes. Its aims are high and good. But, in effect, it is an exercise in social engagement *per se*, as opposed to an exercise of deep intercommunal understanding wrought through dialogue. It also means that underlying thorny issues of an ideological and/or theological nature can be glossed over – but not entirely so, for there is an educational dimension that WCC work is always inclined to address, and this leads me to the fourth model.

Relational dialogue

Relational dialogue is enacted wherever dialogue is promoted on broadly educational grounds: mutual enrichment; deepened understanding; the need to combat ignorance and prejudice; and together with the aim of building interpersonal relations of goodwill – especially among religious and community leaders. In many ways, this can be seen as an extension or development of the communitarian model of dialogue and it brings the interpersonal dimension to the fore. But here there is also the internal aspect of promoting intra-faith dialogue *about* interfaith engagement, so encouraging and enabling Christian communities to learn about their religious neighbours and to reflect upon the theology of the religious "other". Arguably, the relational dialogue model, with its two-fold focus of being self-directed and other-directed, is theoretically, if not also practically, a prerequisite to the communitarian model. In order to undertake interfaith engagement successfully as a community-enhancing activity, there needs to be a foundation laid of relationship-building and mutual acceptance – and therefore a measure of mutual understanding.

However, programmes that draw multifaith or bilateral communities together in a common project have tended to gain more popular support with respect to WCC priorities and wider constituent Church

endorsements. As a rule, Christians are good at loving their neighbours, but not necessarily at getting to know them deeper – let alone accepting them unconditionally. Thus it is the communitarian model which, I suggest, has been more prominent.

Vatican Models

It was primarily through Catholic developments that the now standard fourfold model for dialogical engagement – Life, Action, Experience and Discourse (LAED), to which we will turn shortly – was articulated. However, I suggest that other distinctive models may be discerned. The Roman Catholic Church, through the Vatican State, engages in formal diplomatic relations with the nations of the world. As an official Vatican organization, the contacts which the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) has with the world of other faith communities tend to be at high social and/or governmental levels. The dialogue in which it is engaged is often between leaders. At the same time, the task of interreligious dialogue is a mandated work of the Church at large, supported and nurtured by the Vatican. And wherever there is dialogue, there is also proclamation: the mission of salvific proclamation forms the default horizon within which, for the most part, dialogue takes place. So it is that, within these contexts, three distinct and mutually interactive models of interreligious dialogical engagement may be identified.

Ambassadorial dialogue
In the first place can be found ambassadorial dialogue for, as noted, the Vatican is itself a sovereign state with all the diplomatic responsibilities and relationships that pertain thereto. This is not to be underestimated. It influences the means of engaging and relating to any "other" as such. Many countries have ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, and in turn the Vatican has ambassadorial representation and relationships around the globe. So it should not be surprising that this relational modality is found prominent in interreligious relations. In many situations, of course, state and religious relations coincide. A mark of the ambassadorial mode is that steps are taken to maintain long-term relationships: specific dialogue-oriented events may be themselves *ad hoc*, infrequent, and irregular; but the relationship between dialoguing parties can be nurtured over time nonetheless. The annual goodwill message to Muslims throughout the world marking *Eid al-Fitr*, the end of the fasting month of Ramadan, may serve as an example. Since 1995, similar annual messages have been sent to Hindus, in respect of *Diwali*, and to Buddhists in respect of *Vesakh*. In the ambassadorial mode of dialogical relationship there is – or, at least, there is a presumption of – an encounter of equals: the establishment and maintenance of cordial and functional working relations is the order of the day. In this context, the undergirding task is the patient and mutual self-presentation of one side to the other in the interest of fostering mutual authentic knowledge and respect. Within the context of interreligious relations, the ambassadorial mode is a way of relating that requires clear assertion of identity: Catholic interlocutors in dialogue are unmistakably clear in their Christian identity and concomitant assertions concerning the nature of ultimate reality.

Propaedeutic dialogue
The second model refers to the style, or dimension, of interreligious engagement which involves a careful, didactic explanation of the self to the other as a means of preparing the ground for further development and deepening of relationship. This allows for mutual invitation and responsive engagement. As with the ambassadorial model, it is premised on the reciprocities and protocols of the host-guest relationship paradigm. Inherent in this model is the fact that much careful attention is paid to identity explanation. This involves the clear articulation of an apologia. Pains are taken to assert and explain what it means to be Christian – indeed, to be Catholic. References here abound with the language of "proclamation", "mission", or "outreach". Dialogue is here often referred to in terms of clearing the way for

appropriate evangelical "invitation and witness". Certainly, the propaedeutic dialogue model is a valid form of interreligious engagement, one that is premised on both respecting the integrity of the "other" and upholding one's own assertions and truth references.

Humanitarian dialogue

The third Vatican model may be called humanitarian dialogue. This can be discerned, in particular, in terms of a dialogue of action, when engagement occurs not in attending to issues of identity, relationship and understanding – such as would be expected in the context of dialogues of discourse and religious experience, and implied within the dialogue of life – but rather in the coming together of two or more parties in the quest for a common goal or the commitment to joint action for the greater good of the human community, whether in a local or wider context. Such dialogue, more particularly, is an expression of the local or regional church in action. This model is, of course, the equivalent of the communitarian model of the WCC, but the wider context is somewhat different. A number of PCID-sponsored dialogues, such as, together with the WCC, the 1993 conference on "The Spiritual Significance of Jerusalem for Jews, Christians and Muslims", or various other consultations on the Middle East, have focused on socio-political issues and allied humanitarian concerns involving questions of justice, human rights, freedom, and so on. The humanitarian model stands alongside, and may even intertwine with, the propaedeutic and ambassadorial models.

LAED Models of Dialogue

In working to promote interreligious dialogue within the Catholic Church, the Vatican has produced and articulated four models of dialogue (often regarded as the "standard" models of dialogue).

Dialogue of Life

This is when dialogical engagement is an epiphenomenon of everyday interactions; dialogue is not so much an intentional discursive encounter as the simple fact of daily engagement between persons of differing faiths wherein, at the very least, the matter of faith identity is neither the focus nor an element of the engagement, yet it is nevertheless present and at least understood to be so.

Dialogue of Action

In the dialogue of action, interlocutors are engaged in dialogue when achieving or working to achieve a common goal or purpose in respect to the wider social good. This could involve the interlocutors taking open recourse to religious values and sentiments, but without presupposing religious interaction or critical discussion *per se.*

Dialogue of Experience

The intentional dialogue of experience refers typically to religious or spiritual exchanges whereby interlocutors experience first-hand the deeper dimensions of another's religious life. This model could also involved arranged communal inter- or multi-religious activities, such as praying for world peace or responding in a liturgical fashion to a disaster or notable event facing the community.

Dialogue of Discourse

This form of dialogue usually involves representative intellectual experts who meet for in-depth conversation and discussion around agreed theological, spiritual, ideological or religious agendas. Such an intellectually-driven, discursive encounter can also occur at other levels and involve wider constituencies – from engaged laity to informed students and others professionals who may not regard themselves as "representative experts" but who can intelligently engage on these topics with others.

Dialogue of Relational Engagement

Situated some place between the dialogues of life and action there lies what is termed the "dialogue of relational engagement", which reflects some of the motifs and elements of the WCC and Vatican models for dialogue. However,

this model's purview is much wider than dialogical engagements initiated from within the Church. This form of dialogue predominates the various expressions of the "interfaith movement": councils, forums and organizations. It promotes sustained engagement as an intentional way to build trust, fellowship and a sense of interfaith community among participants. It marks a way of being religious "inter-religiously"; it situates religious identity within a religiously pluralist context.

A Deeper Engagement: Transcendental Dialogue

Interreligious dialogue – contemporarily understood by many as "interfaith engagement", which denotes an encounter inclusive of but broader than merely discursive dialogue – is here to stay. Interreligious dialogue and engagement is anything but static; attaining relational breadth also requires developing spiritual and intellectual depth. So the question remains: can interreligious dialogue go yet further in the cause of contemporary interfaith engagement? Following on from the trajectory of dialogical models and development treated thus far, I wish to argue here for a specific model of dialogue – a model that is the logical "next step" in extending and deepening interfaith engagement.

Of course, there have been many attempts to articulate models of dialogue.[1] To be sure, dialogue is primarily a mode of interpersonal relationship: it is people, face-to-face, who engage in a dialogical encounter. It is a modality of relational being; a way of "loving one's neighbour". Furthermore, within the context of relationship – as opposed to a point-scoring debate – the experience of dialogue can precipitate a change in perspective: "Things look different when one meets at the boundaries, or when one is invited into the spiritual realm of the other."[2] The substantive focus of interreligious dialogue is not simply the fomenting of good interpersonal relationships across the religious traditions involved therein, however vital they may

be. Undergirding the authenticity and validity of all practical models of dialogical engagement there is the need for, and the possibility of, a model that takes dialogical engagement to new depths of meeting and meaning. It is what I call *transcendental dialogue.*

This model of dialogue extends beyond a dialogue of discourse. It recognizes a relational shift: from declaratory dialogue (i.e., the discursive dialogue of mutual education or the parallel monologue of the "presentation of credentials" so that each party knows the "other" in their otherness, but not necessarily any more than that) to exploratory dialogue (i.e., deepening the discussion of mutual appreciation and understanding, together with correlative self-reflection that seeks to examine more closely what each party is about and what can be genuinely learnt from the other), to developmental dialogue (i.e., outward-faced, forward-moving and co-creative construction of meaning, understanding, and expression) whereby both transcend but do not negate their original identities and articulate a "new" co-owned narrative of mutual authenticity.

This model seeks to take up elements of the aforementioned models while also attempting to go beyond them. Here the dialogue of discourse may come into its own more properly – not by supplanting more practical, relationship-affirming models of interfaith engagement, but rather by undergirding and supporting them on the one hand, and addressing deeper issues which often underlie practical interfaith engagement on the other. To some extent, this may already be the case with aspects of the dialogue of religious experience. It represents the ideal of theological dialogue at its best: the open-ended quest for truth and understanding which, by way of insight gained in and through dialogical encounter premised on a combination of the relational and systemic dialogue models, takes interlocutors deeper into and extends their own tradition.

The key is that such intentional and cognitively-oriented dialogue involves

careful and mutual exploration of critical issues and questions of ideological and theological differentiation; it involves a sharing in the development of mutually efficacious interpretation and cross-conceptualization. Specialized dialogues of this kind are now happening, for example, the Building Bridges Seminar and the Scriptural Reasoning movement. The idea is to engage in what James McEvoy refers to (with reference to Hans Georg Gadamer's "rich sense" of dialogue) as a dialogic partnership that "far exceeds the experience of individuals trading opinions"; rather, interlocutors "ruminate back and forth and come to a new understanding" where "dialogue is led by the subject matter rather than individual wills."[3] With respect to interreligious engagement, the aim of such a transcendental model of dialogue is not to provide an intellectual panacea, nor to presume cognitive engagement as the superior dialogical modality *per se.* Rather, I would contend the proper function would be to roll back the barriers that inhibit efficacious diaconal and cooperative modalities of engagement. For it is undoubtedly and painfully the case that there have been many situations in recent times where previously good communitarian and relational dialogue has been the case, but in situations of profound and traumatic socio-political upheavals it has been all too quickly brushed aside.

Dialogue of Narrative Belonging

Religious identity may be regarded as a construct of multiple-narrative belonging. The narrative dimension of religion constitutes the arena of "indwelling" that gives shape and substance to religious identity. That is to say, religious identity is a function of the narrative tradition with which an individual not only identifies in a cognitive sense, but also "dwells in" by virtue of the narrative providing reference points of meaning and a font of imagery and value that informs both identity and the living out of that identity by way of the religious life pursued. Thus we "indwell" our specific religious narratives: religious identity is a matter of "belonging" to or

within a particular narrative tradition. This "narrative" dimension includes the vast font of myth, legend, story, history, and so on, in which an individual is understood to "dwell". Narrative, in this broad sense, constitutes the primary source for religious identity. And it involves multiple levels – from the overarching macro (e.g., one is "Christian" or "Buddhist"); to local-macro (one is "Western" Christian or "Mahayana" Buddhist); to that of a focused-macro level (one is "Anglican" Western Christian or "Tibetan" Mahayana Buddhist); thence a relatively micro level (one is "Australian" Anglican Western Christian or "this or that lineage" of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhist); and so to the micro-local level (one is the "Sydney Diocese" variant of Australian Anglican Western Christian or from a "Swiss-based" lineage of Tibetan Mahayana Buddhism).

At each of these levels there is attached a narrative that provides components of identity reference for both the individual and their respective community. So within a person of a "Christian" or a "Buddhist" religious identity, there often exist many varying identities. Of course we know this intuitively and experientially; but I hope I have sketched an analysis or framework that gives some rational shape to this multiplicity, for when it comes to religion, concepts of "narrative" alone are complex and multi-dimensional. And, I suggest, it is in this multiplicity of religious identity in which an individual can be said to "indwell" in terms of the substance of his/her religious identity – this is the context of one's religious belonging.

The elements comprising the narrative dimension are many and varied. They include a range of material – myth, legend, history, etc. as noted above – as well as ethical and experiential elements. These refer to the diverse ways in which the religious individual "lives out" his or her religious identity in respect to values, attitudes and behavioural principals on the one hand (moral guidance for attitude and action), and, on the other, the manifold patterns of private and public religious practice, observance, ritual and so forth. Religious ethics encompasses both

common values – such as the "Golden Rule" – as well as specific and distinctive teachings often manifest through culturally-loaded norms conveyed by way of commandments, law-codes, moral injunctions and imperatives, and the processes and values attached to education and enculturation.

The experiential elements include both personal expressions of piety on the one hand, and behavioural patterns associated with rituals, festivals, and public events on the other. Elements of the narrative dimension of religious identity can also be found in the "mental grounding" of religious life and sensibilities – in the metaphysical presuppositions that, for the most part, underlie religion and yet often remain quite unrecognized or become highly confused and confusing.

Finally, as argued above, all religious people "indwell", to a greater or lesser degree, their respective religious narrative – it provides for life references, points of meaning and frameworks of under-standing that inform a religious individual's existence. A dialogue of narrative belonging may be able to recognize, and so take into account, the difference between "broad" and "narrow" narrative indwelling. Religious interlocutors who indwell their own religious narrative tradition broadly are likely to be open to new ideas and insight, open to engaging with a religious other and are open to the very prospect of interfaith dialogical encounter on a deep level. However, when one's narrative base is distinctly narrow, the indwelling of religious life is correspondingly confined. Indeed, this very narrowness often sets a fundamentalist apart from the wider religious tradition and community which, by contrast, will have the tendency to admit to wider readings of its common narrative, thereby indwelling it with a greater measure of interpretive flexibility. It is therefore clear that a narrow indwelling lies at the root of all forms of religious exclusivism and extremism.

Conclusion: The Journey of Dialogue

Interfaith dialogue is no quick fix. In an age when virtually all we do is subject to some form of arbitrary quantification, when the achievement of a measurable goal is a *sine qua non*, dialogue can be too readily dismissed as having no measurable outcome. But this is to miss the point of dialogue. Dialogue is a goal; there is no temporally final and measurable goal of the journey. The journey is the goal: engagement is the purpose. The way of the journey reformulates our religious identity; the dialogical "way" is engaged as the "way" of being religious. This is especially so if we intend to go even beyond other models of dialogue towards a transcendental model which extends and complements the WCC and Vatican models. It requires that each dialogue partner is secure and comfortable in their grounding identity, and is not closed to having that identity critiqued, extended, even challenged – and thereby also enriched. It presupposes that we address the deep and thorny matters of theology and religious ideologies and worldviews as a priority for interfaith engagement rather than, as has so often been the case, leaving such issues aside in favour of a more homogenous, often pragmatically-focused, agenda of the moment. I suggest there is a pressing need to develop and promote this model. For if the issues facing humanity around the world today are to be successfully addressed, and their negative impacts genuinely ameliorated, it will require a true deepening of interreligious dialogical encounters in order to resolve underlying conflicts.

The goal of mutual understanding is not the only legitimate aim of dialogue: mutual critique with respect to "judgement and criticism of religious beliefs or practices" with a view to probing to the depths the challenging issues of the day is inherent to good and needful dialogical engagement.[4] This deeper dialogue cannot be shunned. Dialogue is always a "risky" business, of course: it carries with it the possibility that, in consequence to genuine openness, the outcome may well be radical change. To

be sure, if there is absolutely no change, no modification to one's understanding of the other, no deepening of self-awareness and no deepening or extending of one's theological understanding, then one has to wonder about the authenticity of the dialogical engagement in the first place. Change as a result of dialogue need not be radical; but if it is entirely absent, did dialogue really take place?

The need for deepening and strengthening interfaith, and so inter-communal, relations through interreligious dialogue has never been greater. The recent invitation issued from the Muslim world to Christians indicates that at least one interlocutor also sees the point – and the urgency.[5] Furthermore, the call is to engage in theological dialogue, and at a deeper level. It would seem the opportunity for the Christian Church to rise to the challenge of a dialogue capable of addressing contemporary issues of increasing fundamentalism, exclusivism, and collusion with varying forms of terrorism[6] has never been so obvious or inviting. The transcendental mode of dialogue I have outlined here is apposite to this sort of challenge, and the argument that a Christian ecumenical theology of dialogue should embrace the necessary re-thinking of theological understanding and formulation – a theology *after* dialogue – as a third "moment" in the theology of dialogue is also amply supported by such a dialogical call.

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[1] See, for example, Part I of Werner G. Jeanrond and Aasulv Lande (eds.), *The Concept of God in Global Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2005); cf. Bob Robinson, *Christians Meeting Hindus: An Analysis and Theological Critique of the Hindu-Christian Encounter in India* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2004), 60ff.

[2] Notto R. Thelle, "Interreligious Dialogue: Theory and Experience" in Viggo Mortensen (ed.) *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue* (Michigan: W. M. B. Eerdmans, 2003), 132.

[3] James McEvoy, "Proclamation as Dialogue: Transition in the Church-World Relationship", *Theological Studies,* 70 (2009), 896.

[4] Paul J. Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics: A Study in the Logic of Interreligious Dialogue* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1991), xi.

[5] See *"A Common Word Between Us and You": An Open Letter and Call from Muslim Religious Leaders* (Jordan: The Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2007CE / 1428AH); cf. Douglas Pratt, "An Uncommon Call: Prospect for a New Dialogue with Muslims?" *Asian Christian Review,* Vol. II No. 2 & 3 (Summer/ Winter 2008), 36-53.

[6] Cf. Douglas Pratt, "Ideological Containment: Islamic Extremism and the Option of Theological Dialogue" in Sayed Khatab, Muhammad Bakashmar and Ela Ogru (eds.), *Proceedings of the 2008 GTReC International Conference* (Melbourne: Global Terrorism Research Centre, Monash University, 2009), 217-232.

Interfaith Dialogue with the Abrahamic Religions: Ecumenical Reflections

Cho Yong Seuck

Introduction

The concept of Abrahamic ecumenism that became well known through the work of Karl-Josef Kuschel, a student of Hans Küng, denotes a vision of peaceful coexistence between Judaism, Christianity and Islam beyond intra-Christian ecumenism. Choosing the word "ecumenism" presupposes that, apart from all differences, there exists a fundamental, common spiritual element that unites all these traditions into one community: they all relate to Abraham, a key figure in their religious texts, because his faith as the common origin of each of the three Abrahamic religions offers the model for belief in the one God.

The three Abrahamic religions are united by shared values, but at the same time, there are also differences that must be respected: a basic conflict of Judaism, Islam and Christianity is the question of the Messiahship of Jesus. Nevertheless, their differences should not be an obstacle on the way to a peaceful religious community. It is argued that Abrahamic ecumenism can offer Judaism, Islam and Christianity a theological framework for a society in which people of different religions live peacefully together. On the whole, it seems to me that the phrase "Abrahamic ecumenism" accentuates the similarities rather than the differences between the three religions, because Abrahamic ecumenism refers to initiatives aimed at greater religious cooperation through their shared humanity and spirituality.

This essay will focus on the ecumenical potential of the Abrahamic monotheistic religions. However, the aim of this essay is not to discover a new common monotheistic religion, but to promote interfaith cooperation, which can serve as an important educational tool for tolerance and peace and testify to religious alternatives to extreme religious fundamentalism. To begin with, this article will briefly sketch the theological concept of Abrahamic ecumenism. Then it will present a more detailed view of the monotheistic concept of Abrahamic ecumenism .

Abrahamic Ecumenism: Toward Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation

Karl-Josef Kuschel ardently pleaded the case for Abrahamic ecumenism, i.e., an ecumenism of Jews, Christians and Muslims who all look back to Abraham as their ancestor in faith. Abrahamic ecumenism points to Abraham in respect to his *person*: he is one of the greats of human history and deeply rooted in our collective memory. Therefore, Abrahamic ecumenism is not forward-looking but backward-looking: it wants to go back to the patriarch Abraham[1] in the conviction that he plays a key role whereby Jews, Christians and Muslims can work together in mutual respect and for the common good. Methodologically, this is an anthropological approach. Therefore, the focus of Abrahamic ecumenism is in learning and examining the real-life contexts which gave rise to their different understandings of the one God.

Since Judaism, Christianity and Islam all trace their spiritual ancestry to Abraham and view him as a paradigm of the human-divine relationship, there is an attempt to depict him as a figure who can help reconcile the three related but divided religions. Nevertheless, for Jews, Christians and Muslims, believing like Abraham does not mean a rigid clinging to the past and to inherited possessions, but rather going forward in peace.[2]

This ecumenical project aims for peace in the world through dialogue between Abrahamic faiths in order to realize this

ideal. This project underlines the purpose of the interfaith dialogue with the Abrahamic religions: "No world peace without peace among religions."[3] Thus, the religious tolerance and cooperation needed for a peaceful future should be practiced. In the spirit of Abrahamic ecumenism this project is not a pleasant illusion, but a living reality. Furthermore, this kind of ecumenism understands the existence of Christian faith to be structured trialogically: Christians cannot witness their faith without Jews and Muslims, and conversely, Jews and Muslims cannot reflect their faith without the other two religions. The trialogical relationship and the interactions and convergences that exist among the Abrahamic faiths are valid for all three children of Abraham.[4]

A Monotheistic Perspective on Abrahamic Ecumenism

This ecumenical concept can go beyond theocentric/monotheistic perspectives and be further developed, as all three traditions can demonstrate together their belief in the one God in different ways joined by monotheism. The concept of "monotheism" tends to be dominated by the concepts of God in the Abrahamic religions, such as Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

However, though all three religions claim to be monotheistic, Christianity's complex Trinitarian doctrine can present a conflict with Jewish and Muslim concepts of monotheism: Jews and Muslims have understood the Christian doctrine of the Trinity as a kind of polytheism whereby Christians deify a human being – this is then understood as idolatry.

In this regard, I suggest that Christian theology makes its own specific contribution to the trinitarian dilemma of "Abrahamic ecumenism" not by looking only to Abraham but by taking as its starting point Jesus Christ, and what we can discover about his communion with God. Jesus Christ is more than a prophet, an example or an advocate: he is the foundation of the new communion with the

triune God. Since the beginning of the third century the doctrine of the Trinity has been stated as "the one God exists in three Persons and one substance, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit."

Therefore, in interreligious dialogue we should try to overcome this misunderstanding about revelation from the basis of the three monotheistic religions. Each Abrahamic religion claims to be monotheistic and to worship an exclusive God, however, by putting together these three distinct understandings of monotheism we can have a deeper understanding of the nature of the One God. In addition we need to acknowledge how this doctrine can also be defined as the expression of doxological experience[5] and reinterpretation of the triune God. The question of the proximity and distance between God and humanity – expressed differently in each of these three religions – is at the heart of their interrelationship.

Conclusion: Harmony in Diversity

An awareness of "ecumenical responsibility" is growing in the realm of interfaith work as ecumenism is now recognizing and reckoning with the unChristlike character of its divisions as it attempts to grow beyond Christian churches. In this regard, the ideal found within the concept of interfaith cooperation is that of a lived dialogue – it is imperative for religious people who seek to promote peace and justice in a globalized world that interreligious dialogue consist of people getting to know each others' daily lives as religious followers and learn to respect each other's religious practices. It is often not doctrine that dictates the experience the followers of the different religions have of each other's faith.

A concept of Abrahamic ecumenism which extends beyond concepts of intra-Christian ecumenism indeed provides a relevant basis for interreligious dialogue and interfaith cooperation. Engaging with religious others on such a basis could lead to discoveries of the hidden and witnessed presence of God in other monotheistic

religions and deeper understandings of truth. However, this concept is clearly conditioned by perceptions of the similarities and differences in the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions, and with respect for diversity some are detailed here:

Similarities: Abraham, an excellent example of one who underwent sanctification, is an intensely divisive figure between Jews, Christians and Muslims. A criterion for true religion can be found in his faith: in the way he reacts to the call of God, in the way in which he calls upon God, and in the way he enters into communion with the one God despite his idolatrous context.

Differences: for many Christians, Abraham is the apostle of salvation by faith alone in opposition to Torah-existence. For Jews, Abraham is the Torah-observant father of the Jewish nation, and a reminder of God's irrevocable covenant with the Jews. For Muslims, he is the prototypical Muslim prophet and validator of Muhammad's claim. As such, it is important to remember that Abraham, though founder of Judaism and Islam, is not entirely central to Christian faith. Thus, when Christians speak of Abrahamic ecumenism, they must first consider this great difference: for Judaism, Abraham is the forefather of the chosen people, and for Islam, he is the prototypical true worshiper of the one God. For Christians, though Christ does refer to Abraham's faith, Abraham was the originator of Israelite history while Jesus appears to be its culminator.

In conclusion, harmony in diversity should always be regarded as the most important principle of Abrahamic ecumenism.

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[1] Karl-Josef Kuschel, *Streit um Abraham: Was Juden, Christen und Muslime trennt - und was sie eint* (München: Piper, 1994).

[2] *Ibid.*, 298-304.

[3] Hans Küng, *Projekt Weltethos* (München: Piper, 1990), 121. Out of his concern for the future of Christianity, Hans Küng wants to shift the focus from Christology to "Jesuology for interfaith dialogue" with the followers of the three Abrahamic faith traditions because he views Christology as the biggest obstacle to such dialogue. His theological solution is the Global Ethic Project, a world religion to build a decent society. It is even conceivable for him that the traditional doctrine of Jesus as God must be given up. He thus formulated a modified draft of the doctrine – one which is not Christology but a Jesuology in the context of interreligious dialogue.

[4] Hans Küng, *Wozu Weltethos? Im Gespräch mit Jürgen Hoeren* (Freiburg: Herder, 2002), 73.

[5] Andre Ritter, *Der Monotheismus als ökumenisches Problem* (Hamburg: Eb-Verlag, 1998), 289.

Mapping Eastleigh as a Public Platform:
The World of Street Preachers

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Background

Kenyan Muslims constitute a significant minority of between 10 to 15% of the total population.[1] In the last ten years, the public presence of Muslims has become more noticeable than before. While this presence can be attributed to the global resurgence of religion in general and in Kenya in particular, it could also be traced back to various events in the recent past. These include the August 1998 twin bombings of the American Embassies in Nairobi and Dar-es-Salaam, which galvanized Muslims together against what they considered a "negative" image of Islam portrayed in the media.

The other articles in this book by Willem Jansen, C.B. Peters and Halkano Abdi have demonstrated the various ways in which Muslims in Eastleigh are participating in the public space. Another important way through which Muslims are negotiating their place in the public square

is public preaching. I approach the phenomenon of public preaching from the perspective of religion in the public sphere. The notion of the public sphere is an important approach for analyzing the contemporary revival of religion. This approach can be useful in explaining the resurgence of religion in the contemporary context in its complex and variant dimensions.[2] Tayob argues that "the role of religion in public life seem[s] a more neutral approach to a complex and sensitive phenomenon" of religion that has dominated public life since the 1970s.[3] This theoretical approach is different from previous approaches that have examined religion from sociological and political dimensions. In locating Islam within the notion of religion in the public sphere, public Islam refers to a discourse within a new space (Muslim public) where ideas are presented and developed.[4] Such new spaces include open-air markets, streets and stadiums where public preaching takes place. In addition to locating the present study within the above theoretical framework, I approach public preaching in Eastleigh as forms of *daʿwah.*[5] My approach in this contribution, thus, goes beyond the limitations of previous approaches to studying public Islam as *politics* or *economics*, which are equally valid considerations in the study of religion. The contribution seeks to reflect much more critically on public preaching as a religious practice within public Islam. By focusing on preaching and *daʿwah*, I hope to extend the understanding of religion *qua* religion in the public sphere.

Public Preaching

Mihadhara (public preaching) is one of the most common religious phenomena in Eastleigh. A walk through this vast suburb will show various groups of Muslims staging their "sermons" in different parts of the estate; there is no single day that these activities are not taking place. There

are various similarities and differences between the public sermons I studied in Mumias, Western Kenya and those presented in Eastleigh.[6] In both cases, these are public activities that are geared towards calling Christians to Islam. Moreover, in both places the preachers are mostly former Christians who converted to Islam. Therefore, the preachers have no formal training in religious sciences. Unlike the sermons in Mumias, sermons in Eastleigh are staged simultaneously by various preachers at various locations of this estate. Moreover, unlike similar events in Mumias, held particularly in the afternoons, the preaching activities in Eastleigh take place at various times of the day between 10:00 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. While the audience at the events in Eastleigh is mostly composed of Muslims of Somalian descent because of their demographic dominance in Eastleigh, in Mumias the audience is mainly composed of local *Wanga* Muslims.[7]

In Eastleigh, the sermons are given mainly by Muslims based there. Occasionally there are visiting preachers from other places such as Uganda and Tanzania. The sermons are a form of polemical *daʿwah* in the style of Ahmed Deedat.[8] However, the various preachers employ the Bible in a variety of ways. While some use the Bible to support Qur'anic positions, others are more emphatic in rejecting its validity.[9]

The attendance of Muslims at the preaching events in Eastleigh ranges between 200 and 500 people.[10] Unlike the sermons in Mumias, Western Kenya, which include significant publicity activities (for example, using a public address system), the sermons in Eastleigh do not always have such prior publicity because of their regular nature. Both Muslims and Christians in Eastleigh are familiar with *mihadhara* as a part of their religious landscape. They know very well the venues and times when these events are held. Moreover, Eastleigh is also a place with a strong Muslim presence; hence there is no need to spend so much time calling out to Muslims and others to attend the events as is the case in Mumias, where the sermons are not held on a daily basis and Christians are many.

In order to be allowed to preach in open spaces, the preachers are required to get a government permit. One of the public preachers called Farah stated that he was supported by the Muslims to pay for the permit.[11] To my knowledge, none among the preachers have been refused a permit. At the beginning of the sermons, the crowd usually numbers about two hundred people. As the sermons intensify, the audience grows bigger and bigger making it difficult for those who arrive late to find a place to sit.

The infrastructure and seating arrangement at an open air preaching event is significant for how the sermon and debate is staged. There is always a table, a chair and a microphone for the person whose task is to audibly read both the Bible and Qur'an. A Christian interlocutor, whenever there is one, sits on the opposite end of the Muslim reader of the various sacred texts. A moderator for the session is sandwiched between two Muslim preachers. He, too, has a microphone on the table in front of him. It is common to have two or three Muslim preachers taking turns to preach during one event. When no formal Christian interlocutor is present, the Muslim preacher tries to invite and/or goad one from the audience, sometimes successfully, and other times not. The polemical engagement between a Muslim and a Christian counterpart is an important part of the *mhadhara* as it contributes to its public appeal and its claim to be a form of outreach. Therefore, many preachers spend considerable effort to ensure that a "debate" is staged.

There is provision for seating for visiting *Imams* from local mosques and prominent Muslim traders. The Christians stand in one corner of the preaching site while Muslims stand in the opposite direction. Women have a separate space reserved for them at a considerable distance from the men. They cover their heads with headscarves in accordance with Islamic

norms. Some participants have pens and pieces of paper and make notes of the various qur'anic and biblical texts used by the preacher. The organizers also make sound recordings of the sermons for mass distribution. Sometimes Muslims sell compact disks (sold for 100 Kenyan shillings, or 1.25USD, in 2012). Other items like Qur'ans, white caps and prayer mats are also on sale.

A public address system is used to amplify the sermon. This device is powered by a small generator placed immediately behind the preacher. There are two or three big speakers strategically hoisted up and facing different directions. There is one microphone for the Islamic preacher, another for his Christian counterpart and a third for the reader of the Qur'an.

Effects of the Sermons

Public preaching has, on several occasions, led to tension and violence in Eastleigh. Because of its approach, which is mainly adversarial and touching on the central doctrines of both Christianity and Islam, the members of the audience are always tense and exhibiting a negative attitude towards each other. In an interview with Abdurrahman Hassan, he clearly explained the effects of these activities:

Sometimes Muslims have exchanged bitter words with their Christian counterparts while preaching. I clearly remember in June 2005 when the exchange was so bitter that Muslims and Christians engaged in physical fights and the police had to intervene.[12]

The background to this incident is that during a preaching event a Christian interlocutor referred to the prophet Muhammed using derogatory words. The Muslims present shouted "*takbir*" leading to the ensuing fight.[13] On a different occasion, Joseph Ngola, a Christian interlocutor, posed a question to a Muslim preacher, which proved difficult for the Muslim to answer. According to Ngola, one Muslim from the audience stepped forward and slapped him hard on the cheeks. However, some Muslims in defence of Ngola intervened before a full-scale fight between Muslims and Christians could begin.[14] The above two examples serve to show the adversarial nature of public preaching and its effects on how members of the two traditions relate to one another. These forms of engagement on many occasions force the intervention of the police to restore law and order.

The Sermons

I will now examine three sermons preached in Eastleigh at various periods to demonstrate the various ways in which the preachers engaged in the public square.[15] The first sermon was by Abdalla Ali, a young Muslim aged 29. He was born in a Christian family and converted to Islam while a student at a local secondary school. Ali stated that his attraction to Islam was caused by the "simplicity of the religion" unlike his previous tradition that contained difficult doctrines like the Trinity. Ali began his preaching work first through an apprenticeship programme with one of the preachers before beginning to preach on his own much later. The second preacher was Suleiman Abdalla, also a former Christian from a Pentecostal tradition. Abdalla converted to Islam following a religious experience in which he was miraculously healed following prayers by a local Imam. His engagement in preaching is a way of thanking Allah for the blessing of healing.[16]

"The Cross is Cursed" - Ali
Abdalla Ali's sermon, preached on 13 March 2010, addresses the question of the significance of the cross. The broader context of Ali's sermon is his concern over what he sees as a satanic tradition called Free Masons and its presence in the public square. He explains to the audience that there are several symbols of the Free Masons Church. He explains these signs as: one eye found on the currency of the United States of America; three fingers which he argues the famous soccer player for the Brazilian National team, Ronaldino, flashes in salute whenever he scores a goal; a burning flame used

during the Olympic Games; and finally, the cross. Without citing the specific qur'anic chapter and verse, Ali states that Satan told God that he would go down upon the earth and mislead his people. Ali explains that such misleading of God's people includes telling people to eat animals that are *haram* (forbidden) such as pork – an obvious reference to the Christians who were present. He then continues to explain that Satan informed God that he would dominate people's lives in all directions, "behind them, in front of them, on their right and on their left." This kind form of dominance, Ali explains, forms the cross, an important symbol in Christianity. Therefore, he argues that the cross is a satanic symbol as Satan clearly presented it before God as the manner in which he would dominate people's lives. Ali then gives a text from the Bible to back his arguments: "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree" (Galatians 3:13). In quoting this biblical text, Ali is solidifying his earlier argument based on the Qur'an that Satan made use of the symbol of the cross and, in a similar vein, the Bible presented the cross in a negative light. Based on this argument, Ali dismisses the Christian teaching that Jesus could have been crucified on the cross, stating that: *"Ukiwekwa juu ya msalaba, wewe umelaaniwa kwa mjibu was Biblical"* (According to the Bible, you are cursed if you are hanged on the cross). At this point, a Christian interlocutor called James Makokha raises his hand and is allowed to engage with Ali. He states that Ali is interpreting the Bible using his own understanding and that he is not guided by the Holy Spirit. Ali responds by asking Inganga to provide an alternative interpretation. He also challenges Makokha to explain to the audience the nature of the Holy Spirit as it is another "confusing Christian doctrine". Makokha attempts to explain the meaning of the cross from a Christian perspective, and argues that what might appear to be a "curse" is actually redemptive in Christian belief. Ali quickly responds by saying that is simply a human idea (*zana*) and has no basis in scripture. He challenges Makokha

to give a biblical text to back his assertions while Makokha requests to be given more time to find a text. *"Takbir,"* shouts Ali, to which all Muslims respond "Allah *Akbar*". Christians, he argues, do not have enough *elimu* (education) and need to go back to school.

"Do not Mix Men and Women in Mourning" - Abdallah
The second sermon that I will examine was preached by Suleiman Abdallah on 29 March 2013 on 9th Street in Eastleigh. In his sermon, Abdallah argues that it is wrong for Christians to mix males and females during public events such as funerals and worship. He bases his argument on Zechariah 12:11-14, a context in which people are mourning but with the two genders separated from one another. He asks the reader to read the text:

On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, and all the rest of the clans and their wives.

Based on this reading, Abdalla argues that there should be proper decorum in mourning characterized by the separation of males and females: "You might be mourning here, and there is someone's wife next to you. If a female's thigh is next to yours, there will no longer be mourning but something else." Abdallah argues that whenever Muslims advocate for such religious decorum, they are accused of discriminating against women. He challenges Christians, stating that if they did not separate the two genders in funerals and worship, God would punish them as his teaching on this matter was clearly in the Bible.

"Jesus worshipped in a Mosque not a Church; Emulate him" - Salim
Babu Salim preached on 7th Street Eastleigh on 10 April 2013 on the above

theme. He begins his sermon by inviting a Christian to engage with him. The first Christian, Emmanuel, refuses to step forward for the engagement despite repeated appeals by Salim to do so. Eventually another Christian called Andrew is persuaded to come forward. Salim then proceeds: "Andrew Nganyi you are a Christian, I am a Muslim. The Muslim believes in Jesus, so does the Christian. Why then do they worship in different places?" Nganyi argues that during the times of Jesus, he did not worship in a specific place as he was an itinerant preacher. "Are you telling us that Jesus never entered a church?" asks Salim. This time round, Nganyi states that Jesus' church was a synagogue. Salim then challenges Nganyi that if anyone today is seen worshipping in a church, he is not a true follower of Jesus. He challenges Nganyi to read a text from a Kiswahili Bible in Luke 4:16 which translates the meaning of synagogue as "Jewish Mosque". On the basis of this translation, Salim then argues again that Jesus worshipped in a mosque, not a church. Nganyi agrees with him. "I go to the mosque and you attend the church; who is following Jesus?" Salim asks. He quotes Matthew 12:30, which states "whoever is not with me is against me" to argue how the fact that Christians do not go to mosques like Jesus did demonstrates that they do not follow Jesus.

There are some salient features about the sermons that one can identify. From their Christian past, all the preachers extensively use the Bible in varied ways. All the preachers use the Bible to support their arguments. Such preachers interpret the Bible from qur'anic perspectives. Second, in their attempts to use the Bible, the preachers' plans are disrupted by Christian interlocutors who present objections to the preachers' use of textual sources and offer alternative interpretations. Sometimes, the interlocutors demand "evidence" from different textual sources. At other times, they completely reject the interpretations given. They also challenge the preachers' positions, citing historical evidence. Most

of these engagements end without a clear "victor" in the debate. However, it is important to recognize that Muslim public preaching is a staged debate, reflected in the setting of the scene, the placing of interlocutors, and the call by Muslims to argue, debate and prove themselves.

The preachers also use various rhetorical approaches. This is not surprising given the very long duration of these public encounters. They repeat verses of the Bible and the Qur'an as they were read in public. Through using such repetitions, the preachers are able to emphasize certain points that they wish to make. They also sing Christian songs to match their appeal to Biblical texts. While singing, they change their voices and body movement to emphasize certain points. The preachers engage with the audience, asking them to argue. The preachers also rely on the audience for support as they publicly call out "*Takbir*" (lit. "to make (God) great") and the Muslim audience responds *"Allah Akbar".*

In summary, public preachers in Eastleigh and their sermons represent new religious authorities. All the preachers I interviewed are former Christians who strive to occupy a position of authority in society. Their claim to authority is based on their religious experiences. The preachers' religious encounters are varied but all impact on their decisions to begin preaching. The preachers use their knowledge and experience of Christianity to make a claim for the superiority of Islam on the basis of the Bible. While more orthodox Islamic preachers would support their arguments by relying on an authoritative discursive tradition where their sources would be the Qur'an and *hadith,* the sermons demonstrate how these preachers attempt to find a foundation on the Bible for Islamic arguments. As former Christians, they use the Bible easily to support their positions, with liberal references to the Qur'an. The main foundation is the Bible, even though the theology is Islamic. Some of the preachers are more active opponents of the Biblical narratives relating to Jesus, but they repeatedly return to the Bible to

support their Islamic arguments. In their attempts to achieve this goal, the public preachers encounter Christian interlocutors who ask questions and challenge their use of textual sources. However, the Muslim preachers overcome this challenge through staged events using various rhetorical means. In their staging of their sermons, they use the Bible, Christian beliefs and songs. This approach proves effective in their work even though their Christian interlocutors and many in the audience remain unconvinced.

Finally, the public sermons are staged as debate and contestations. They set up the public preaching places as debating rooms, where preachers, supporters and opponents take their place. They then frame questions for debate, and produce evidence to prove their point. Irrespective of the merits of their argument, it is important to recognize how *daʿwah* in this manifestation is a form of public duel. There are elements of self-renewal evident, but the dominant approach is marked by debate, competition and contestation.

Conclusion

This contribution has demonstrated how through public preaching, Muslims call non-Muslims to engage in public space through polemics. I have argued that this approach to *dawah* has negative effects on interfaith relations. At the Centre for Christian-Muslim Relations in Eastleigh, we attempt to offer a different model of engagement between Muslims and Christians. This approach mainly involves Muslims and Christian engaging in joint projects such as mapping, environmental conservation and advocacy. We believe that better relations between members of various religions are best achieved through such joint ventures and not so much through debates. The underlying assumption in this approach is that "religion is not just a question of belonging to a particular faith community; it is also a force that seeks to contribute to the transformation of society."[17] This approach to dialogue is a more practice-oriented

move away from formal dialogue (from above) to a dialogue of commitment through practice (from below). This process is cognizant of the religious diversity in diverse contexts. From our experience of using this approach, it enhances a feeling of security and self-assurance such that those involved become more open to each other. It also often leads to intra-religious dialogue during which participants can learn from each other.

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[1] Arye Oded, *Islam and Politics in Kenya* (London: Lynne Rienner, 2000), ch.1.
[2] Jose Casanova, *Public Religions in the Modern World* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 1994).
[3] A. Tayob, "Politics and Islamization in African Public Spheres", *Islamic Africa*, Vol. 3:2 (2012), 139-168.
[4] *Ibid.*
[5] The term *da'wah* is the equivalent of the term "mission" in Christianity, even though there are technical variations in the way the two terms are used.
[6] The author carried out a study of Muslim and Pentecostal public sermons in Mumias, Western Kenya as part of his doctoral work between 2009 and 2013.
[7] The Wanga is a sub-tribe of the larger Luhya tribe in Mumias, Western Kenya.
[8] Ahmed Deedat (1918-2005) was a well-known Muslim polemicist based in Durban, South Africa. He specialized in open-air debates with Christians in which he largely dismissed key doctrines of Christianity, arguing that Islam was the only valid religious tradition.
[9] This point was especially evident during my study of sermons in Mumias, Western Kenya.
[10] *Mihadhara*, with a much higher attendance of up to 1000 people, were occasionally staged at Uhuru Park in Nairobi; these are staged approximately once per year.
[11] Interview with Ibrahim Farah, 13 April 2010.
[12] Interview with Abdulrahman Hassan, 22 March 2013, Eastleigh, Nairobi.

[13] *Takbir* is the invocation of the religious phrase *Allahu Akbar* (God be praised). In the context of public preaching, this phrase is mostly used by Muslims when the preacher has said something which, in the opinion of the Muslim audience, is a significant score against the Christian interlocutor.

[14] Interview with Joseph Ngola, 29 March 2013, Eastleigh, Nairobi.

[15] The names of the preachers have been changed to maintain their privacy, as they had not been consulted about this article.

[16] Interview with Suleiman Abdallah, 29 March 2013, Eastleigh, Nairobi.

[17] Michael Ipgrave, *Building a Better Bridge: Muslims, Christians, and the Common Good: A Record of the Fourth Building Bridges Seminar held in Sarajevo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, May 15-18, 2005* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2008), 69.

Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World – Three Years On

Thomas Schirrmacher

The Fourfold Results of the Document

The document

The question of ethics in missions and dialogue has, in recent years, been increasingly asked in intra-Christian dialogues,[1] as well as in relationships between religions.[2] However, a political question has also been asked, and that is the extent to which the human right of religious freedom[3] – including the right to public self-expression on the part of religions and the right to religious conversion – may and must be limited by other human rights.[4] Christian witness is not an ethics-free space; it requires an ethical foundation which is biblically based, so that we truly do what Christ has assigned us to do.

With this background, the Pontifical Council of Interreligious Dialogue (PCID) and "Interreligious Relations and Dialogue" (IRRD, the dialogue programme of the WCC) started a process of small and larger consultations. The World Evangelical Alliance (WEA) was then invited through the WCC to join the process. The consultations finally led to the launch of the document "Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World"[5] in 2011 by the Vatican, the WCC and the WEA.

The document does not have any canonical or legal character. Situations in different countries and cultures are in fact so different that short, succinct statements can often not do them justice. For that reason, general guidelines and recommendations have been formulated in the last section of the document.

Throughout this article I will call it "the document" for the sake of convenience.

Tracking the use of the document

Even though Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran stated at the launch of the document: "Today represents an historic moment in our shared Christian witness", and the WEA formulated "Today we write history"[6], one rarely knows of documents of this kind and what their future will be after they are launched. This document, especially, did not fit any earlier category and it was not clear how it would be received beyond the interreligious dialogue community that produced it.

But somehow the document made it! Already by 2014 it has become a standard reference in interreligious dialogue and in mission. Rosalee Velosso Ewell, director of the Theological Commission (TC) of WEA, and John Baxter-Brown, formerly with WCC, now with TC, stated: "Over the past two-and-a-half years the document has been studied and appropriated in many places: Brazil, India, Norway, Thailand, Nigeria, Myanmar and various other places. Different church bodies have used the document to draft their own codes of conduct; mission agencies and international relief organizations have also adapted its content and used it as a study guide for staff working in interreligious contexts. In some cases, the meetings to discuss the document and its contextualization have been the very first truly all-Christian gathering in that country."[7]

Clare Amos, now WCC programme executive for inter-religious dialogue and cooperation, commented of a meeting of all Canadian churches:

The willingness of such a wide range of Christians to participate in this process is a very significant development. The key task now is to ensure that recommendations of the document are

widely known and adopted through the whole Christian constituency.[8]

Similarly, Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku, currently Under Secretary of PCID, wrote: "If implemented rightly, the 'Recommendations for Conduct' certainly will pave the way for new ecumenical and interreligious relationship ...."[9]

It is amazing that there has been no real criticism of the document in principle. This is even true for the vast majority of Evangelicals and Pentecostals. I only know evangelical criticism of the content from Evangelicals in the U.S.A., but none of it reached any major Evangelical body, mission society or theological school.[10]

In circles linked to the WCC or the Catholic church, though there has been some querying about whether the evangelical signatories really meant what they signed, or whether perhaps they understood the whole debate on proselytism these concerns were not directed against the actual content of the document.

All three bodies have sent the document to their major member bodies several times (thus to all Catholic bishop conferences, all WCC member churches, and all WEA national bodies), they have publicized it on their websites and printed the document in books and readers to be used among their members worldwide.

For example PCID has stated: "Copies of the document have been mailed to all the Apostolic Nunciators throughout the world," and also to:

...the Presidents of the Catholic Bishops' Conferences all over the world inviting them to read and make it available to all the Bishops of the Episcopal Conference, Superiors of Religious Communities, Members of Regional and National Commissions for Interreligious Dialogue, and other interested Christians. The PCID also has requested the respective Presidents of the Episcopal Conferences to send, in due course, feedback, sharing with it the experiences of how the document is received and what challenges Christians and other believers face in bearing witness to the tenets of their religions.[11]

The WCC and the WEA websites offer translations into Dutch, French, German and Spanish,[12] and the Vatican website offers translations into French, German, Italian, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish and Swahili.[13] There are official translations into Swedish, Russian and Arabic not available on the web.

For my short speech at the launch of the document[14] I started to gather information on the history of the process, which I later expanded.[15] In the archive of the International Institute for Religious Freedom (IIRF), we not only store the whole launch on film and archive photos of people involved, but we store texts, press releases and discussions about the document from 2011-2014.

It is hard to keep track. Without the internet, it would be impossible. However, because many African churches do not run websites it can be hard to track the history of the document in Africa, for example.

Having kept up to date with the use of the document worldwide, I would judge that the three bodies are on an equal level in emphasizing the document globally. That is, they all constantly use the document on international, regional and national levels for their own motivations and without waiting for others to use it first. The document seems to be in line with the thinking of each body and something they feel able to own and not adopted merely because it is an ecumenical document.

When a small group of people, including some who were involved in the process leading up to the production of the document met in Geneva by invitation of Clare Amos of the WCC to review the use of the document 18 months since it had launched,[16] all agreed that the reception of the document went far beyond what anyone had expected.

Fourfold results

The executive director of the Theological Commission of WEA, Rosalee Velosso Ewell from Brazil, who recently attended a study day on the document in Beirut with representation of all three major bodies and a Muslim speaker, stated:

This document is unique and its necessity lies in its nature: it is genuinely a mission document, it is genuinely an ecumenical document, it is genuinely an inter-religious document, it is genuinely a biblical document, and it is a historic document. Despite its brevity and simplicity, it is necessary in that these things have never been said jointly, by these three bodies who represent about 95% of Christians worldwide.[17]

Similarly, Klaus Schäfer, Director of the Center for Mission and Ecumenism of the "Nordkirche", a German Lutheran member church of WCC, endorsed the document in the journal of all Lutheran churches in Germany (VELKD). Despite the absence of some additional topics,[18] Schäfer signals five areas that make the document special: (1) ecumenical relations; (2) moving dialogue and mission mindedness towards each other; (3) ethical standards for mission; (4) using human rights argumentation concerning mission; and (5) the joint emphasis on the *missio dei.*[19]

From the Catholic side one can hear similar things. Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku wrote several similar articles on behalf of PCID which look back one[20] and two years[21] after the document's launch. He writes: "It is the first document of its kind in the history of the Church"[22] because "The three Christian world bodies" did it on the broadest ecumenical level. He continues:

Representatives of 90% of the world Christian population have formulated an ecumenical missionary approach to witness to the world. Its success depends on how respective churches and ecclesiastical communities implement its recommendations for Christian mission worldwide.[23]

He adds: "The document also gives birth to a new ecumenical theology of mission."[24]

Let me systemize the five areas or effects of the document, even though the five points can be found in most statements on the document in one form or the other:

1. Interreligious dialogue was accepted by all three bodies and is no longer seen to be in opposition to the mission-mindedness of the church.
2. It brought missiologists of all camps together and became a major document for mission studies. It made the discussion of "the ethics of mission" on the basis of the *missio dei* an integral part of mission theology.
3. Ecumenical relations: Meetings with the same range of the three world bodies became normal on an international, continental and national level, as never before.
4. Human rights: Interreligious dialogue and mission go hand in hand with human rights thinking and human rights are seen as a joint ecumenical heritage.

1. Interreligious dialogue

This of course was the original intent of the document.[25] The (Buddhist) Prime Minister of Thailand said in his welcome speech at the final consultation for the document in Bangkok, that it "is indeed an important step for the promotion of inter-religious harmony."[26]

The interreligious reception of this document is evident: a Muslim representative spoke at the event in Beirut, a Hindu representative in Toronto. The Council of Centers on Jewish-Christian Relations proposed that the document to be studied by dialogue groups.[27] Spring Hill College added the document to its "Theological Library: Jewish-Christian Dialogue."[28] Rabbi A. James Rudin started his positive comments on the document: "In a rare showing of Christian cooperation."[29]

At the World Assembly of Religions for Peace in Vienna in November 2013, the

document was discussed in several workshops. The Vatican, the WCC and the WEA were all represented by their leadership and their interreligious dialogue staff, so it gave each group a unique chance to evaluate the document.

The document gave interreligious dialogue a prominent place in ecumenical relations and ended old discussions regarding mission versus dialogue.

Despite these events and though the original intent of the document was to further interreligious dialogue, there has been little evidence of results which go beyond the Christian community.

2. Mission studies

The second unexpected area of the document's influence is in the academic study of mission. Missiologists and professors of mission studies around the globe welcomed the document. It became a topic at the International Association of Mission Studies (IAMS) annual meeting in August 2012 in Toronto, Canada, with Evangelicals and non-Evangelicals together presenting the document's consequences for mission studies.

Dana L. Robert writes in her report "Forty years of the American Society of Missiology":

*With the shifting configuration of world Christianity, fresh patterns of ecumenical conversation became important, such as the Global Christian Forum and the 2011 document, "*Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World."[30]

The emphasis on the *missio dei* concept made the document of great interest to Catholic, conciliar and Evangelical missiologists alike and proved that the concept had become a point of reference for all.[31]

The document has also become a standard point of reference in all kind of studies in the area of the science of mission[32], and from my judgment, since 2013 it has become the document that is

quoted more than any other in academic mission studies.

In Germany, the document led the conciliar Deutsche Gesellschaft für Missionswissenschaft (DGMW) (mainly professors teaching missions at universities), and the Association of German Speaking Evangelical Missiologists (AFEM) together, when the AFEM was invited to present the document at the yearly convention of DGMW in the Akademie Chateau du Liebfrauenburg in Liebfrauenberg, Elsass, France, September 2012.[33] It also led to a closer relation between AFEM and other Evangelical institutions and the Evangelische Missionswerk in Deutschland (EMW), especially during the official process of acceptance of the document in Germany.

3. Ecumenical relations

The goal of the document was not to improve ecumenical relations as such, otherwise different bodies like the Pontifical Council for Christian Unity (PCCU) would have been involved. It was specialists on dialogue, religions and mission who worked together on behalf of the responsible structures within the Vatican, WCC and WEA. It was built on a longstanding ecumenical relationship between PCID and IRRD, with the Religious Liberty Commission (RLC) of WEA coming in at the invitation of the WCC.

Yet in the end, and for the first time ever, the three largest Christian bodies signed a document that not only made history, but changed ecumenical relations for the better and on a worldwide scale.

There has always been cooperation between the Vatican and the WCC; there was and is an ongoing dialogue between the Vatican and the WEA, and the WCC and the WEA in recent years have started to cooperate in conferences or human rights activities. The Global Christian Forum (GCF) was also started and is still being supported by the Catholic Church, the WCC and the WEA, as well as other Christian World Communions.

However, when the three bodies signed the document and brought it to their regional and national levels, they automatically brought up the question of the discussion and adaption of the document.

The Academia Christiana in Seoul organized a symposium "A New Horizon for World Christianity: The Convergence between the Ecumenical and Evangelical Understandings of Unity and Mission?" While the document was not the sole reason for prompting the conference, it stayed central to the debate between two Germans representing the WCC and the WEA (Martin Robra, a senior staff member of the WCC, and Thomas Schirrmacher) and two Koreans working in high leadership positions in the WCC and the WEA (Jooseop Keum. Director of the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism and Sang Bok Kim, then Chairman of the International Council of WEA).[34] A report states:

Robra labelled the joint declaration "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" as a major step forward. Additionally, global Christian bodies are less and less interested in expanding their own institutions or making more of themselves. Rather, they are out to promote actual cooperation between all Christians, also with those outside of these bodies.[35]

4. Human rights
The issue of how the human right to freedom of religion and belief – including the integral aspect of every person's right to propagate one's own religion – is often outweighed by other rights is increasingly discussed around the world.[36] This is a question that concerns all human rights thinking and is not in itself a Christian question.

The document implies that not everything done in the name of religious freedom can be justified by human rights. It however also pledges that mission cannot be *missio dei* if it violates human rights of others. Human rights thinking is thus just

as much an ecumenical heritage of all three bodies, as it is an integral part of theology, as it is not only important as a legal category, but sees human dignity as a God-given status even mission cannot and will not overstep.

That this is in itself a major achievement of the document has been acknowledged several times from various sides.[37]

Global, Regional and National Adaption of the Document

Assembly of WCC in Busan
A good example is the WCC General Assembly (GA) in Busan in November 2013. It is not possible to list here all instances in which the document was referenced, but I will mention the most important ones. Already before the GA, the Programme Guidelines Committee printed the document and called for its use three times.[38]

Both the moderator of the WCC Central Committee, Walter Altmann,[39] and the WCC General Secretary, Olav Fykse Tveit,[40] praised the document in their reports, both in the written and the spoken versions;Tveit even three times.

The document was printed as a major document in the "Resource Book" that every delegate received.[41] The document was also discussed in several of the so-called "Ecumenical Conversations" and workshops; Rosalee Velosso-Ewell for the Evangelical and Fr. Indunil J. K. Kodithuwakku for the Catholic side were both invited to present the document.[42] In my short plenary on behalf of the WEA, I mentioned the document as evidence for a new phase in the relationship of the WCC and the WEA.[43]

The document is also mentioned in the new mission statement of the WCC "Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes", written by the WCC Commission on World Mission and Evangelism (CWME). There also is a section that summarizes the document.[44] It should be noted that a delegate from the WEA missions

commission is a full member of CWME and that the WEA has been consulted by CWME several times. Since the new mission statement had its own day of treatment in Busan, the document and the topic of the ethics of mission were once more presented in Busan.

Christian World Communions and Churches

I only give some examples from the internet of how Christian World Communions or large churches are sharing the text, as it is impossible to track all examples globally of where churches have endorsed and distributed the text.

The World Methodist Council, affiliated with the WCC, issued a reader[45] for its meeting 1-13 September 2013 and included the document. The Council then voted in favour of the following statement:

The World Methodist Council recommends to its member churches the document "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World" for study and encourages its members to follow the "recommendations for conduct" of the document.

The Presbyterian Church (USA) endorsed the document and advised all local congregations to study it.[46]

The World Reformed Fellowship (WRF), affiliated with the WEA, opened a broad discussion on the document on its website. Those critical did not argue against the text itself but argued that the three signatures portray a false sense of unity. Nevertheless, it was obvious that the WRF was on the side of the defenders of the document,[47] who even argued why Calvin would have been in favour of the document.[48]

Because of the Roman Catholic Church being one large church, the equivalent of such endorsements can be seen by endorsements of national bishop's conferences[49] or Catholic mission networks endorsing and printing the document.

Let me take Catholic orders as an example here. The Salesians of Don Bosco included the document in their reader of important mission documents and for their work among Muslims.[50] The Franciscans made the document central to their peace-making programme in Christian-Muslim dialogue.[51]

Asia

The sixth meeting of the Asian Movement for Christian Unity (AMCU) was held in Bangkok, Thailand from 3-5 December 2013, which was attended by 37 participants representing the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA), the Federation of Asian Bishops' Conferences (FABC) and the Asia Evangelical Alliance (AEA). The final statement, sent together with a letter to all churches in Asia from the three bodies,[52] states: "AMCU VI rejoiced in the uniqueness of 'Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World' which represents the consensus of three major world bodies of the Christian church."[53] It goes on to say:

The participants in AMCU VI strongly commend this document to all the churches of Asia.
1. *The document should be translated into local languages,*
2. *The document should be made available to theological colleges and seminaries as significant study material,*
3. *The document should be used to implement a living dialogue based on the Bible, recognising that Jesus is the focus of mission,*
4. *The articulated spirit of the document should find its way into bible studies, teaching and preaching for all ages and interest groups,*
5. *The churches should study the document together and use the document for interfaith dialogue,*
6. *The churches should respect different cultures and apply the insights of the document in a culturally sensitive way, and*
7. *The churches should be prepared to accommodate and understand different approaches to implementing the document.*[54]

The national level

Turning to the national level, in Malaysia, for example, I found the document or an endorsement of it with a link on the websites of the Catholic Church,[55] the Seremban Church,[56] the Methodist Church,[57] and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF), Malaysia's member body of the WEA.[58]

Churches Together in England, the British council of churches,[59] endorsed the text, as did the Evangelical Alliance of the UK[60] and the Catholic Bishops' Conference in Great Britain, which is a member of Churches Together in England.

The same is true of other countries: all national networks of the three Christian world bodies endorsed the text on a national level, often without consulting with the other two. Even in countries where representatives of the three Christian streams did not officially discuss or even endorse the document together, it was presented by all three streams; thus it was usually represented by the vast majority of Christians in the country.

In Germany I experienced a fact that is true elsewhere: all three streams distributed and endorsed the document initially each for their own constituencies, yet because of this the question came up: why not come together, discuss the document and then endorse, accept or adapt it together? This process can take some time, and thus the official ecumenical acceptance of the document in Germany, for example, will take place on the third anniversary of the document. I know of other countries which have just now started a similar process upon the realization that the document has been well-appreciated in all streams of Christianity in their countries.

Let us proceed to examples of regions and countries in which the three streams officially discussed, presented or endorsed the document on a national or even broader level.

Canada

In Canada, the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops organized their own conference at the University of Toronto to discuss the document in November 2011.[61] A wide range of topics concerning the adaption of the recommendations for Canada were discussed. The conference was a joint effort by the Commission for Christian Unity, the Commission of Religious Relations with the Jews, and the Commission for Interfaith Dialogue of the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

Eleven days later in November 2011, the University of Toronto was the place of a similar conference initiated by the WCC and jointly organized by the Evangelical Fellowship of Canada (the Canadian member body of WEA), the Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Canadian Council of Churches, and the Canadian Churches Forum for Global Ministries. They also asked Pandit Roopnauth Sharma, President of the Hindu Federation of Canada, to speak on the document.[62]

The Anglican Church in Canada followed with its own meeting of bishops to discuss the document on 6 November 2012, and invited Archbishop Rowan Williams to give his evaluation.[63]

The Pentecostal Association of Canada in published a book in 2013 based on the document.[64]

Lebanon

The following report was found on the website of the Institute for Middle East Studies:

The Institute of Middle East Studies in collaboration with World Vision was privileged to host an important discussion on the Arabic language version of the landmark document, "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World: Recommendations for Conduct" [Arabic/English] this past Tuesday, February 11, 2014, at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary (ABTS) in Beirut, Lebanon. Following an introduction by Rev. Charles Costa, Chairman of the

Board of Trustees of ABTS, two of the key contributors to the document, John Baxter-Brown, former consultant on evangelism to the World Council of Churches, and Rosalee Velloso Ewell, executive director of the World Evangelical Alliance Theological Commission, presented the document, discussing both its content and the process by which it was developed.[65]

The three main speakers, besides the guests from abroad, represented the three Christian world bodies. Beside the Christian speakers, Sheikh Dr Mohammed Nuqqari, Director of the Islamic-Christian Forum for Businessmen in Lebanon and head of the Sunni Court in Chtaura, presented his view of the document and made the observation that "the principles of the document are applicable to Muslims as much as they are applicable to Christians."[66]

Germany

Nikolaus Schneider, chair of the council of the German Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland (EKD) and thus the highest representative of Germany's historic Protestant churches, endorsed the document in his address to the German Society for Mission Studies (DGMW) in October 2011.[67] Christoph Anders, director of EMW and thus the highest representative of mission within Germany's historic Protestant churches, wrote in his invitation to the first meeting on the document on behalf of representatives of all churches and mission movements in Germany: "This was a great moment of the worldwide ecumenical movement."[68]

On 27-28 August 2014, the National Council of Churches of Germany (ACK), which includes the Roman Catholic Church and the German Evangelical Alliance, acting together with many other groups and organizations, were invited to a two-day study conference at which German church leaders symbolically took the text out of the hands of the three global church bodies and passed it to representatives of all kinds of church and mission groups for adopting and adapting it for their contexts.

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[1] See Elmer Thiessen, The Ethics of Evangelism. A Philosophical Defence of Proselytizing and Persuasion, Paternoster / Exeter 2011; Pope Benedikt XVI. in his encyclica Spe salvi, 2007.

[2] All codes on mission existing worldwide, secular, religious or Christian, are discussed and compared in Matthew K. Richards / Are L. Svendsen / Rainer Bless, Codes of Conduct for Religious Persuasion. The Legal Practice and Best Practices, in: International Journal for Religious Freedom (Cape Town) 3 (2010) 2, 65-104. The ecumenical document is discussed p. 67, 93-94, 103. An adapted version is Matthew K. Richards, Are L. Svendsen, Rainer Bless. "Voluntary Codes of Conduct for Religious Persuasion: Effective Tools for Balancing Human Rights and Resolving Conflicts?". Religion and Human Rights 6 (2011) 151–183; http://www.kmclaw.com/media/site_files/100_Richards_volunatry%20code_2011.pdf

[3] Cf. die international academic consultation at the State University of Bamberg: Marianne Heimbach-Steins / Heiner Bielefeldt (Hg.), Religionen und Religionsfreiheit. Menschenrechtliche Perspektiven im Spannungsfeld von Mission und Konversion, Würzburg 2010.

[4] See the Oslo Declaration, signed by representatives from all religions in Norway plus experts from the academic field: "Oslo Declaration." *Oslocoalition*. Web. 5 July 2011. www.oslocoalition.org/oslo-declaration/

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Bilateral Dialogue between the World Council of Churches and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue, Tehran

A bilateral dialogue between the World Council of Churches and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Iran has been maintained for almost 20 years. Meetings have taken place normally every 2-3 years, alternatively in Geneva and Tehran.

Following a gap of some years the meetings were restarted in 2012. The communiqués from the 2012 and the 2014 meetings are given below.

*— **Clare Amos**, Programme Coordinator, Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation*

Joint Communiqué of the 6th Meeting for Dialogue between the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue (CID) from the Islamic Republic of Iran and the World Council of Churches (WCC)
17-18 September 2012, Geneva

The World Council of Churches and the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (Tehran, Iran) held their sixth meeting for dialogue in the Ecumenical Institute, Bossey, near Geneva, Switzerland, on 17-18 September 2012 which corresponds to 27-28 Shahrivar 1391. The overall theme for this meeting was "Interreligious Dialogue and Society: Ways, Means and Goals."

The meeting was the continuation of the process of dialogue between the WCC and the CID which began in 1995. Participants from the WCC came from Britain, Germany, Iran, Lebanon, Pakistan, Switzerland, and the United States. They met with five Muslim scholars and religious leaders who came from Tehran and Qom.

The General Secretary of the WCC, Rev. Dr Olav Fykse Tveit, welcomed the Muslim and Christian participants and spoke about the importance of the meeting at this time of considerable tension. During the two days of the meeting participants listened to stimulating papers and reflections exploring various aspects of the overall theme: how to spread the outcomes of interreligious dialogue and evaluate its impact; the opportunities and challenges involved in conveying the outcomes of dialogue to

wider society; the role of key actors from religious, social and academic circles in disseminating interreligious dialogue; the importance of involving women and young people in promoting the wider acceptance of interreligious dialogue. The papers reflected the different geographical and social contexts of the participants.

Dr Mohammad Reza Dehshiri, Vice-President of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization, Tehran, also shared his vision for dialogue:

- The basic requirement includes Commitment, Cooperation and Comprehensiveness.

- Its methodology should be Reciprocal, Respectful and Representative.

- Its approach required Participation, Proclamation and Promotion.

- Ways for dialogue included Exchange, Education and Evaluation.

- Dialogue needs to Involve people in mutual understanding, offering an Incentive approach, and be an authentically Indigenous dialogue from generation to generation.

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The members of the Muslim and Christian delegations emphasized the following points:

- Dialogue is the best means of overcoming misunderstandings and fostering mutual appreciation and peaceful coexistence between the adherents of different religions in today's multicultural world.

- Dialogue at the theological and philosophical level may result in significant gains in mutual knowledge, understanding and insight about each other's religion; however it is also very important to seek to spread the fruits of such personal encounters to the members of wider society.

- We will make every effort to spread peace, friendship and peaceful coexistence among the adherents of different religions by encouraging various forms of dialogue: conceptual, joint social action and in daily life.

- The need to work strategically with various forms of media, to share the results of interreligious dialogue, was underscored.

- The participants emphasized the importance of encouraging young people to actively take part in interreligious dialogue and of ensuring that future generations promote the value of peaceful coexistence and respect for their fellow human beings, irrespective of their religion.

- We encourage the active participation of women in interreligious dialogue at all levels, recognizing women's previous initiatives.

- We agree that effective dialogue can constitute a significant means to counteract the words and actions of those who incite religious hatred or seek to deliberately dishonour what is sacred to others.

- We encourage interreligious dialogue in all sectors of society with the aim of involving all in ensuring justice, equality, non-violence, welfare, friendship and compassion in society.

We commit ourselves to taking steps towards the goals and hopes expressed in this communiqué. When we meet again in 2014 in Tehran we will share what has been achieved in various contexts.

Participants

Christian

Rev. Dr Martin Affolderbach

Rev. Dr Jean-Claude Basset

Dr Elias El-Halabi

Rev. Bonnie Evans-Hills

Dr Heidi Hadsell

Rt Rev. Leo Paul

H. E. Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian

Muslim

Mr Rasoul Dadashi Azar

Dr Mohammad Reza Dehshiri

Dr Ali Mohammad Helmi

Dr Mohammad Hossein Mokhtari

Dr Mohammad Saeedimehr

WCC Staff:

Mrs Clare Amos

Ms Marietta Ruhland

**Joint Communiqué of the 7th Meeting for Dialogue between the
Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Republic of Iran (CID)
and the World Council of Churches (WCC)**
15-16 February 2014, Tehran

The Centre for Interreligious Dialogue of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization and the World Council of Churches held their 7th round of dialogue on "Spirituality and Modernity" in Tehran on 15-16 February 2014.

The dialogue, which was held on the invitation of the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue in Tehran, is a continuation of the dialogue that was launched between Iranian Muslim scholars and Christian scholars from the World Council of Churches in 1995.

The Muslim and Christian participants in this round of talks agreed on the following points:

- The importance of emphasizing our common belief in the one God (Allah) as a foundational pillar for our common spirituality.

- The need to pay attention to spirituality as a key solution to the fundamental problems of humanity. In this respect interreligious dialogue not only prepares the ground for an exchange of views, but also makes it possible for the followers of our religions to have a mutual understanding of each other's religious teachings and to take a common stance regarding the concerns of contemporary human society.

- Interreligious dialogue offers a vital path to enable the establishment of peace and security. It strives for a world free from violence and extremism, underlining the commitment of both Islam and Christianity to work for peace in our world. This peace and friendship can be achieved through respecting the diversity of cultures and religions as well as by a shared commitment to ethics and spirituality. Effective dialogue can be an important tool to counteract the words and actions of those who incite religious hatred or seek to deliberately dishonour what is sacred to others. It is vital that such dialogue can find ways to involve women and young people.

- Bearing in mind our responsibility to attract the international community to take seriously peace, friendship and cooperation, we expressed our intention to work together on a common charter for peace and justice. We welcomed the UNGA Resolution "A world against violence and violent extremism" and emphasized the role of religious scholars in preventing violence and extremism.

- There is a growth in the disparity of wealth and power in our world, which can offer particular challenges to the ethical values and the commitment to peace which lie at the heart of both our religions.

- Islam and Christianity have different understandings of spirituality and modernity. Our dialogue was a time of real exchange about these differences, both between and within our delegations. However, we would all want to acknowledge the role of spirituality in helping to develop an interreligious connectedness which engages women and young people. We noted that one effect of modernity is a focus on subjectivity, which despite fostering human welfare in some respects can also be detrimental to human tranquillity. It is important to use the tools and insights offered by our respective religious traditions to establish a spirituality which offers humankind both welfare and tranquillity.

- Both sides emphasized the importance of strategic interaction with public media to promote the achievements of interreligious dialogue in our societies. We called on the media to highlight successful examples of solidarity and cooperation across religious divides.

- Modern social networks and media play an important role in promotion of the culture of dialogue. The proper utilization of such media can promote the sharing of our religious and spiritual values among young people.

- Given the approximately 20 years since this dialogue was established, we feel it is time to undertake a review of the process, discussions and results of our meetings, and will find ways to ensure this review takes place over the coming year.

The World Council of Churches expressed their particular gratitude to the Centre for Interreligious Dialogue for their generous hosting of the meeting, and in turn the Centre offered their appreciation for the efforts made by the team from the World Council to come to Iran for this meeting. We jointly call for serious efforts to implement the suggestions made in this communiqué, and will review the results during our next round of talks. We plan that this next round of talks, which will be hosted by the World Council of Churches, should take place in 2015 or 2016 in Switzerland. Between now and then we will actively seek opportunities for contact and exchange between representatives of our two organizations.

Participants

Bishop Leo Paul

Rev. Dr Martin Puehn

Rev. Dr Jean-Claude Basset

Dr Elias Halabi

Archbishop Sebouh Sarkissian

Rev Sargez Benjamin

Dr Clare Amos

Ms Marietta Ruhland

Also invited but unable to attend:

Dr Heidi Hadsell

Rev Bonnie Evans-Hills

News from the WCC Interreligious Dialogue Office and Networks

Newly Published

A major report on Christian identity in the context of religious plurality was accepted by the Central Committee of the WCC at its meeting in July 2014. Entitled "Who Do We Say that We Are? Christian Identity in a Multi-Religious World" the report is the culmination of a process of exploration that has been going on for more than a decade. The report will be published in booklet form, and also as part of a forthcoming issue of *Ecumenical Review.* Work is now being undertaken on a study guide to encourage widespread use of the report.

Two recent books with an interreligious slant have recently been published by the World Council of Churches:

- *Being Open, Being Faithful: The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue*, by New Zealand scholar Douglas Pratt, explores how the history of interreligious encounter and dialogue has challenged and changed the attitudes of world religious traditions. Paying particular attention to WCC and Roman Catholic engagements with other faiths, Pratt examines the issue of Christian discipleship in the context of interreligious engagement.
- *Peace-ing Together Jerusalem*, written by Clare Amos, WCC Programme Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, explores what Jerusalem means for Christians, both theologically and in the practical situation of today's Middle East. See note on previous page.

Also to note and just published on a topic that clearly repays further attention: *The Meeting of Opposites? Hindus and Christians in the West* by Andrew Wingate, SPCK, October 2014.

Courses

Two interreligious short courses designed for young people between 18-35 will take place in 2015. The Bossey Interreligious Course, geared towards young Jews, Christians and Muslims, takes place in Switzerland 27 July – 14 August 2015. The focus of the next course will be on wealth and poverty in Christianity, Islam and Judaism. The second YATRA (Youth in Asia Training for Religious Amity) course will take place in an Asian location, in June 2015. More details and application forms for the courses will be available in January 2015. To register your interest in either course, please contact clare.amos@wcc-coe.org, who will ensure you receive application materials once they are available.

Two short courses with an interreligious slant are being organized by partners and collaborators of the WCC. The Henry Martyn Institute in Hyderabad, India is organizing a summer course on interfaith relations 4-15 May 2015. The University of Religious and Denominations in Qom, Iran is running a course on Shia Studies 7-17 March 2015. For more details on either, contact the WCC interreligious office.

Upcoming

Over the coming months, the WCC interreligious dialogue staff will be working with member churches and with the staff of Faith and Order to explore issues relating to the relationship between inter-church and interreligious dialogue.

Finally, as part of the celebrations to mark the 50th anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, the WCC is planning to organize a conference on fundamentalism and dialogue in world religions. This is likely to take place in November 2015.

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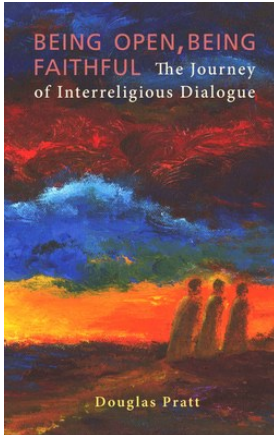
Being Open, Being Faithful
The Journey of Interreligious Dialogue
Douglas Pratt

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Douglas Pratt is Professor of Religion at the University of Waikato, New Zealand. His research centres on Christianity, Islam, and Christian-Muslim relations. Author of many studies in the area, he has also been a visiting professor in Birmingham, Oxford, Heidelberg, Rome, Washington, D.C. (Georgetown), and the International Islamic University, Malaysia.

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Clare Amos, Programme Executive for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation, World Council of Churches, recently was awarded the Lambeth Doctorate in Divinity for her work in ecumenical and interreligious encounter.

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