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# Perspectives on theology of religions

Edited by  
**Jaco Beyers**

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**JACO BEYERS**





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*This publication is dedicated to Professor P.J. van der Merwe (1944–2014) who, during the period while he was Head of the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology at the University of Pretoria, contributed to the formation of a whole new generation of academics and clergy. His wisdom and insight into the relations of religions contributed hugely to the way in which theology of religions is still practised today at the University of Pretoria. His knowledge on matters relating to religions and society influenced theological reflection on interreligious relations.*

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## ■ Research Justification

In the public theology discourse, the concept 'public square' has become significant. In today's multicultural and globalised world it is inevitable that people with different religious affiliations will encounter one another in the public square. 'Public theology' cannot but become 'theology of religions'. Scholars in the field of religion studies are compelled to reflect theologically on the relevance of religiosity in the postmodern secular world. The term 'theology of religions' refers to the academic inquiry into the relationship between religions. The collected essays constitute such an inquiry. In the end, it is not so much about the encounter of religions, but rather of people. Religion is no longer regarded as a monolithic body of beliefs and practices. The authors concede that the concept 'religion' is too fluid to be delineated precisely. The book's approach to the relationship between religions, i.e. 'theology of religions', reflects how the authors understand the origin and nature of religion (a 'theology of *religion*' in the singular). This book focuses more on 'theology of religions' (plural) than on 'theology of religion' (singular).

The main objective of the book is to present a variety of perspectives on how theology of religions manifested in different contexts. This includes historical (i.e. Luther's theology of religions and the Roman Catholic position on other religions as taken by Vatican II) as well as cultural and religious perspectives.

In the first chapter, the editor gives a brief overview of the development of the discipline of theology of religions. The postmodern era is characterised by an almost non-foundational approach. The second chapter traces the development of the discipline in the Roman Catholic tradition in particular. This contribution is based on the insights of P.J. van der Merwe (1944–2014), who as researcher and Head of the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology at the University of Pretoria, developed a specific theological position on non-Christian religions. A whole generation of theologians was trained in this school of thought. He passed away in 2014 and this publication pays tribute to his life's work on religions and their relations.

The contributions that follow are the culmination of the research of postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria. The third chapter presents a perspective on the Reformation, with a particular focus on Martin Luther. In this year of the quincentenary anniversary of the Reformation the legacy of Reformed belief is highlighted. The fourth chapter describes the relationship between Christianity and Islam from the perspective of a willingness to embrace. The fifth chapter analyses the relation between Christianity, Judaism and Islam from the perspective of intergroup threat theory. A model for theology of religions in a South African context is developed in the sixth and final chapter.

This scholarly book pays tribute to the academic contribution of P.J. van der Merwe, mentor of the authors of these multifaceted reflections on theology of religions. The target audience is specialists in the field of religion studies. The distinctive contribution of the book is the innovative perspectives on the relationship between Islam and Christianity in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant contexts.

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# Abbreviations appearing in the Text and Notes

FTLT	Focus Team Leadership Training
WA	<i>Weimarer Ausgabe</i>
WCC	World Council of Churches



# Notes on Contributors

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Allen completed both his BTh (2013) and MDiv (2015) at the University of Pretoria. His primary areas of interest are the Departments of Missiology and Science of Religion. Here he completed his research paper 'The will to embrace' under the guidance of Prof. Jaco Beyers. After school he did a year of missions training with Focus Team Leadership Training (FTLT) (2009) before starting his formal theological education. As a student he served on and later chaired the University of Pretoria's missions society, which included numerous cross-cultural ministry opportunities and engaging with people from diverse religious backgrounds. He was part of the leadership of a new monastic community, Intentional Living, situated in the inner city of Pretoria (2012–2013), and whilst completing his Master's degree worked as a youth leader at a congregation in Centurion (2014–2016). He is currently serving as a youth leader at Crossroads International Church in Amsterdam. A personal passion and research interest of his is interfaith dialogue, specifically between Christian and Muslim faith communities. As the world is facing increased religious extremism, the question regarding peaceful coexistence seems more important than ever. He hopes to continue to contribute towards this field and to develop helpful theology that promotes peaceful coexistence whilst remaining faithful to our distinctive witness. Email: rabaatsen@gmail.com

## ■ Jaco Beyers

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# Foreword

In a multicultural and globalised world it is inevitable that people with different religious affiliations come into contact with one another. In the end, it is not religions that meet, but people. Religion can no longer be considered to be a monolithic block consisting of beliefs and practices. Without the intention of simplifying the definition of religion, let us rather agree that the concept 'religion' is too fluent to delineate precisely. The way in which the relationship between religions (theology of religions) is viewed, has much to do with the way in which the origin and nature of religion (theology of religion) is understood. This publication wants to focus on the former.

The purpose of this book is to present several perspectives on how theology of religions plays out in different contexts. This includes historical perspectives (i.e. Luther's theology of religions as well as the position of the Roman Catholic Church towards other religions as declared at Vatican II), as well as cultural and religious interactions.

In the first chapter a brief overview is given by the Editor of the development of the discipline of theology of religions, to indicate how in a postmodern era an almost non-foundational approach has become evident. In the second chapter an overview of the development of this discipline in the Roman Catholic tradition is presented. This contribution is based on the insights of P.J. van der Merwe (1944–2014), who for several years acted as researcher and eventually Head of the Department of Science of Religion and Missiology at the University of Pretoria. Under his guidance the theological position on non-Christian religions was developed. His thoughts influenced a whole generation of theologians trained within this school of thought. With his passing in 2014, this publication serves much as a testimony to his life's work spent on studying religions and their relationships.

The rest of the contributions comprise research done by postgraduate students at the University of Pretoria. Chapter three is a perspective on the Reformation, in particular from the point of view of Martin Luther, as presented by Elmien Shaw. As this is the year of the 500th celebration of the Reformation special attention is given here to a Reformed perspective. In Chapter 4 Allen Baatsen attempts to describe the relationship between Christianity and Islam from the perspective of a willingness to embrace. Johannes Janse van Rensburg then attempts in Chapter 5 to analyse the relationship between Christianity,

Judaism and Islam from the perspective of intergroup threat theory. In the final chapter Tessa Freeman presents a model for theology of religions within a South African context.

With this publication, acknowledgement is given to P.J. van der Merwe as mentor and theologian.

**Prof. Jaco Beyers**

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# A historical overview of the study of the theology of religions

Jaco Beyers 

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## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

It is commonplace that our world has become plural in more than one way (Kärkkäinen 2003:18). Isolation is something of the past. A growing number of communities are linked to a widening network and exposed to influences far outside their traditional range. Homogeneous communities are becoming the exception and plural communities the rule. Our world is changing into one huge plural society. This plurality applies to all levels of existence, such as religious affiliation, race and culture, social and economic status and even world view.

Plurality also implies connectedness. Globalisation has made the inhabitants of this planet aware of their differences. Open access to society and world communities at large

---

1.This section does not have the intention of presenting a complete historical description of the development of the thoughts leading to a theology of religions; it merely presents a broad overview in order to reach an understanding of the complexity of the matter.

not only brought people into contact, but multiplied divergences. Any claim or statement purporting to have fundamental and/or universal implications must be prepared to be tested in this worldwide forum. The world has become a global village, and modern communication technology links the most outlying communities to the worldwide network. A global citizenry is developing.

The position and status that religions enjoy in society are also changing. Kärkkäinen (2003:19) indicates how those that do not believe and those that believe differently, engage in society. Values and religious viewpoints previously accepted without question, must be prepared to be questioned. They may even be subjected to attack or ridicule. In many instances religious communities need to go the way of confrontation in order to retain formerly unquestioned positions or rights. Religious leaders who had the ear of the authorities a couple of decades ago have since found that their influence has been reduced to the size of the community they represent.

Christians increasingly experience challenges from people of other faiths. In such situations it is imperative that they are aware of their own position as well as that of the other parties. Christians, members of churches, congregations and churches are frequently invited to cooperate with other faiths in projects of common interest, but in many cases it is unclear whether such cooperation would be in order in terms of the Christian perspective.

The church and its members are moving into unknown territory. Theology is called upon to provide answers to previously unheard questions. These and many other points end up on the agenda of our subject of the theology of religions. We are functioning at the cutting edge of theology.

## ■ Theology of religion (*Theologia religionis*)

This subject covers theological reflection on and technical debate about the phenomenon of religion with a view to a theological theory of religion. Dupuis (1997:7) indicates that the theology of religion asks from a Christian perspective what religion is, and seeks to interpret the universal religious experience of humankind. It further investigates the relationship between revelation and faith, faith and religion and faith and salvation. The understanding of the nature of the own religion evidently leads to an understanding of the relation with other religions.

The question about the origin, nature and essence of religion remains one of the fundamental theological issues, especially in the context of our time. In fact, many modern theologians would claim that religion as phenomenon provides theology with a most important theoretical challenge. A theological theory of religion is essential for the church's understanding of itself. It is also of fundamental importance to the theology of religions, as well to the rest of theology.

## ■ Theology of religions (*Theologia religionum*)

Theology of religions is concerned with theological reflection on the meaning and value of other religions (Kärkkäinen 2003:20). This is where theology focuses on religions that are neighbours or challenging the message and/or mission of the church – with a view to evaluating such religions and the challenges they pose from a Christian perspective, and also to reach a deeper level of understanding.

Theology of religions also aims to formulate principles and guidelines regarding the practical coexistence, witnessing toward and dialogue with members of other faiths.

Ever since Christianity had to consider its relationship with other religions, a debate started which has not ended. This apparently started as an intrareligious debate between Christians as how to understand the relationship between Christians differing on interpretations of matters of faith. The apparent statement made by Origen that no salvation is possible outside the ‘house’ of the church was directed against nonconformist and sectarian groups within Christianity. In his commentary in a sermon from Joshua 2:19, Origen states that salvation belongs only to those residing inside the house, which is the family represented as the church (Dupuis 1997:87). The Church Father, Cyprian, had the same intention when he formulated the famous principle ‘*extra ecclesiam nulla salus est*’ [‘outside the church there is no salvation’] (Dupuis 1997:88). This was done within the context of the struggle between the church and sectarian groups (Berkouwer 1965:231). Later on<sup>2</sup> this principle became the official church position and was applied far beyond its original scope in terms of intent and time (Berkouwer 1965:230); it was now applied to all who found themselves outside of the church, Gentiles included. Even the most spiritual and pious Gentile should convert to the Christian faith and church in order to be saved. Piety as such offered no hope of salvation (Kärkkäinen 2003:64).

During this early period, Christianity had to consider its relationship with mainly two religions: Judaism and that of the Gentiles. The relationship with Judaism has a complex history.

## ■ Judaism

Scholars seem to agree on the fact that Judaism and Christianity had an apparent close connection. Compare in this regard discussions by Jung (2008), Rendtorff (1998), Kessler (2010:4) and Frankemölle (2006). Amongst the first Christians were people who belonged to Judaism. Crossan (1999:x) stresses this point by indicating that in its time of origin,

.....  
2. Dupuis (1997:89) indicates the commencement of this notion when Christianity became the state religion.



Christianity cannot be separated from Judaism. When Crossan (1999:xi) uses the word Christianity, he declares that he means 'Christian Judaism'.

The original relation between Judaism and Christianity is, however, unclear. This is due to the fact that Judaism at this stage was already a heterogeneous community, consisting of identifiable groups such as the Sadducees, Zealots, Essenes and Pharisees. To this list Frankemölle (2006:27) adds the Galilean and Alexandrian versions of Judaism as well as the messianic renewal movement represented by Jesus and his followers. One such faction within Judaism was Christianity (Kessler 2010:4). This is confirmed by Neusner (1984:22) when he indicates that for a long time, Christianity was a form of Judaism.

Giffen (2013:80) indicates how a Talmudic reference (Tractate *Sanhedrin* 29c of the Order *Nezikin*) mentions that at the time of the Temple destruction (70 CE), 24 varieties existed within Judaism. Frankemölle (2006:25) refers to the period between the Temple destruction in 70 CE and the Bar Kokhba revolt in 132–135 CE as the 'Jabne period' due to the synod of Jabne held in 95 CE. Reed and Becker (2003:4) indicate how the 'Council of Yavneh' made an end to sectarian disputes within Judaism, set the rabbis into power as leaders of the nation and dispelled Christ believers from amongst the Jews. From this time onward Jews preferred to live isolated from the Greco-Roman world, set apart from Christians and Gentiles alike (Reed & Becker 2003:5).

Kessler (2010:5) indicates how, during this time, which he refers to as the Second Temple period, a gradual separation occurred between the Jewish descendants of the Pharisees and Christianity. Reed and Becker (2003:4) indicate from a Christian vantage point how the gradual separation between Christianity and Judaism occurred when Christians no longer focused on their relationship to Judaism but rather to Greco-Roman culture. The separation between the two religions arose despite the common origins they shared during the Second Temple period (Reed & Becker 2003:5).

## Gentiles

As regards the relationship with Gentiles, the statement ascribed to Cyprian mentioned earlier applies: Outside of the Christian church there is no salvation.<sup>3</sup> Even the most spiritual and pious Gentile should convert to the Christian faith and church in order to be saved. Piety as such offered no hope of salvation. At least Gentiles were not considered to exist outside of the scope of conversion and salvation. Upon conversion Gentiles were welcomed into the Christian community or the kingdom of God (Dupuis 2001:23).

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<sup>3</sup>Compare in this regard the extensive discussion by Dupuis (1997:88) of the development and application of this notion throughout early history.

The positions which early church fathers held on the Gentiles vary on a continuum. Some church leaders considered gentile philosophy to be of some value in understanding Christian doctrine. Origen enjoyed the esteem of contemporary philosophers, and was a friend of the new-Platonic philosopher Plotinus. Origen's theology displayed distinct new-Platonic features. He had no qualms in making use of Greek philosophy to 'enrich' Christian theology. He defended this by a peculiar exegesis of Exodus 3:21, 11:2 and 12:35: The Egyptians were forced to hand over to the Israelites sacred golden and silver objects from their temples. These were melted down by the Israelites and refashioned into sacred objects for the Tabernacle. In the same way, the church was allowed to adopt concepts and ideas from gentile philosophy and learning on the condition that they were Christianised.

As opposed to this, some leaders indicated with indignation the falsity and evil of gentile philosophy. Tertullian was one of the earliest theologians not only to reject non-Christian religions and rituals, but also non-Christian learning, scholarship and philosophy. He famously asked: '*Quid Athenae Hierosolymis?*' ['What has Jerusalem in common with Athens?']. He was trained in classical scholarship, law and philosophy, but after his conversion regarded this as nothing. He opposed the apologetic tradition of his time, that is, offering philosophical and learned arguments for the Christian faith. Faith does not follow clever arguments and logic – it is the fruit of conversion and rebirth.

Dupuis (1997:102–109) discusses several theologians who exhibited a positive attitude towards other religions. A letter of friendship from Pope Gregory VII (1076) to the Muslim King Anzir of Mauritania emphasises a possible good relationship with Gentiles. Peter Abelard's treatise *A Dialogue of a philosopher with a Jew and a Christian* indicates a sentiment different to the official position that outside of the church there is no salvation. Francis of Assisi's peaceful approach to Muslims also illustrates a positive attitude towards non-Christians. Nicolas of Cusa's treatise *The Peace of Faith* emphasises the notion that all religions are worshipping one God with varying rites.

## Islam

When Islam appeared on the scene from the 8th century onward, Christians had to express their position in relation to this monotheistic religion. Islam exploded from Arabia at roughly 600 CE. Muslim armies conquered large parts of the Byzantine Empire (including northern Africa). Byzantium suffered huge losses but continued to play an important role as a local power for a number of centuries to come. By the time of 700 CE Muslims ruled over Spain and Portugal. In 732 CE they were stopped in southern France by the armies of Charles Martel, when they withdrew to the Iberian Peninsula.

During the next phase the Muslims began to absorb the cultures and learning of the peoples they conquered. Whilst Western Europe stagnated, the Muslim world moved

towards learning and sophistication. The works of Greek scholars and philosophers were translated into Arabic and eagerly studied. The metaphysical views of Plato and Aristotle found their way into Muslim theology. In the meantime the literature of Aristotle was lost in the West and rediscovered only centuries later. A Latin translation was made from the Arabic translation of his works only in the 12th century, long after Arab philosophers like Avicenna and Averroes developed extensive philosophical systems based on Aristotelian ideas. The famous Jewish philosopher-theologian Maimonides preferred Muslim countries (and peers) and never entered Western Europe. Avicenna, Averroes and Maimonides exerted influence on European scholastic theology and philosophy.

Seven crusades were organised from Western Europe during 1096–1270. The intention was to drive the Muslims from the Holy Land and seize pilgrim centres from Muslim control. A few of these crusades were well organised. For some time Muslims were driven from certain Mediterranean regions. Germanic kingdoms were established in Palestine and Syria. In the long run, however, the effect was dubious. The irony of it all is that the crusaders also acted against Byzantine interests, as result of the Eastern church being excommunicated by the Pope. During one of the crusades the crusader fleet and armies turned against Constantinople and looted it for weeks, which weakened the city and hastened its eventual demise. The crusades nonetheless brought a great number of people from Western Europe into contact with foreign cultures, and they were stimulated by new ideas and customs.

## Christianity

The theology of Thomas Aquinas (12th century) contributed hugely to the Christian expression of relationship with other religions. His theology became the official theology of the Roman Catholic Church at the time of the Counter-Reformation.

Aquinas produced a library of books, of which the *Summa* series stands out. One such treatise, *Summa contra gentiles*, deals with the relationship between the Church and the Gentiles. Aquinas rehabilitated Pelagianist thought and made it a mainstay of his theology. His theology can be described as a double-tiered structure. The bottom level is nature (including human nature, or the natural state of man) injured by the Fall of Adam and Eve, but not completely ruined. The top level is the kingdom of God and the dispensation of grace. The kingdom continues nature, which is restored by grace (*gratia infusa*). Within human nature there remains something capable of recognising God and his grace; all humans have this innate ability to know God. Whilst Augustine taught a radical break between nature and grace and therefore the necessity of rebirth or a new creation, Thomas taught continuity between nature and grace, and instead of rebirth proposed fulfilment.

For Aquinas the image of God in man was reflected by human intellect. He related salvation to knowledge: Proper knowledge, according to his optimistic view of man, should result in a proper attitude, will and acts. He also accepted the possibility of revelation in Creation. Since the Creation was God's work, it follows that Creation is essentially God-centred. The same principle would apply to man; since man was created by God, all humans should be God-centred. This is exemplified by a universal *desiderium naturale*, that is, a natural desire for wholeness and divine perfection.

All of these factors lead to religion: All human beings and communities are, according to him, religious in one way or another. Non-Christian religions are not worthless or without any merit – they must be seen as taskmasters and training grounds with a view to true religion. When a gentile pious person becomes a Christian, his or her existing religiosity and experience of transcendence is merely continued, fulfilled and absorbed by the true religion of the Church.

The Catholic theologian of the 16th century, Bellarmine, formulated the following principles on the Church's relationship with non-Christian religions, based on Thomas Aquinas' propositions (Berkouwer 1968:18–19):

- Any human being may sense God spontaneously, that is through their innate senses and intellect, by observing and reflecting on God's creation. The Fall injured this ability, but not completely nor without hope of healing.
- It is God's will that all human beings be saved. Therefore, it can be accepted that he would provide ways and means to make this possible. It should be accepted that he would have provided ways and means of membership to those who, through no fault of their own, never heard of Jesus or his Church.
- Non-Christian religions have a preliminary legitimacy.

During the Reformation period Reformers such as Luther and Calvin uniquely formulated how they perceived the Protestant position on other religions.<sup>4</sup>

## Vatican I and afterwards

During Vatican I (1869–1870) it seems that some Council fathers were quite willing to revisit the rigid interpretation of *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. Many of them pleaded for a more accommodating interpretation. In 1943 Pope Pius XII stated in his encyclical letter that the Church accepts the existence of piety outside the Church, and that such pious individuals should be regarded as votum members of the Church. This was an example of how the ideas of Bellarmine percolated through.

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4. See later chapter dealing exclusively with the theology of religions of Luther.

## Towards Vaticanum II

During Vatican II a more inclusive theology of religion and religions was proposed. The name of Rahner was most prominent, as he more than anyone else influenced modern Roman Catholic theological thought. His contribution in preparation for the debates of Vatican II cannot be underestimated, the following being main points of his thought:

- Christianity is the absolute religion, since it stemmed from the unique self-revelation of Jesus Christ. Christianity cannot recognise any other religion as equal or similar.
- The non-Christian religions display elements of a natural and innate notion and knowledge of God. This knowledge became warped through sin, but can nevertheless be rescued by God's grace. The various non-Christian religions have their place in God's salvation plan, that is as steps in God's staircase towards full knowledge and salvation. They should be regarded as preliminary ways and structures toward salvation.
- The non-Christian pious are encountered by Christians not as pagans but as persons with whom God already involved himself – in Rahner's terms as 'anonymous Christians'. Paul's words to the Athenians may be relevant, '[w]hom therefore ye worship in ignorance, Him I declare unto you' (Ac 17:23b).
- Eventually, explicit witnessing of the gospel will still have its place, especially in the light of the 'incarnate nature and social structure of God's grace', and because explicit Christian faith offers a better chance of salvation.
- Due to the religiously plural world of our time, the style of confrontational evangelical crusades became impractical and even undesirable. In any case, we should not think of those belonging to other religions as hopelessly lost. The Church should realise its new role in the world: that of vanguard or sacrament of God's salvation amongst the nations.

## Vatican II and afterwards

During the Council (1962–1965) the outside world saw how the old-style Catholic theology represented by Cardinal Ottaviani was swept away by the New Theology. The Council expressed its views on non-Christian religions in two documents: *Lumen gentium*, on the nature of the Church, and *Nostra aetate*, specifically on the attitude of the Church regarding non-Christian religions. The kind of theology of religion and religions reflected in these documents may be described as inclusivistic, fulfilment theology or sacramental theology. The moment these documents became public, Rahner's influence was evident.

Towards the end of the Council meetings some Council fathers expressed uneasiness, as they realised the far-reaching implications of their decisions, especially for the missions

of the Roman Catholic Church. The Reformed Dutch theologian Berkouwer (1968:23) aptly commented that *Lumen gentium* and *Nostra aetate* removed the urgency of mission. Today we know that the missions of the Roman Catholic Church were negatively affected for decades to come.

Within and without the Roman Catholic Church a chorus of voices resounded against an optimistic appreciation of non-Christian religions and religiosity as such. Whilst the World Council of Churches (WCC) moved away from a theology of fulfilment in favour of theocentrism, the Roman Catholic Church continues on this road.

It is clear that Christians had been thinking about the intra- and interrelationship between Christianity and other religions right from the onset, although the formalisation of interreligious models only came later. Kärkkäinen (2003:23) indicates how the theology of religions is only a recent development. The study of interreligious relations can be divided into three distinct periods, which are not merely chronologically historical periods succeeding each other but have been constructed according to developmental issues and changes in approaches. The period designated as the Golden Age describes where models became formalised and fixed as traditional. The second period reflects a time when the interreligious debate ended in an impasse due to the fact that the traditional models no longer stimulated debate. As a solution the acceptance of pluralism is suggested, almost relativising religious uniqueness. The current era is characterised by new endeavours opening up new avenues for describing interreligious relations.

## □ The Golden Age

D'Costa (1986:2) is of the opinion that the large-scale exposure of the West to other religions came through the advance of scholarly sciences such as Anthropology, Sociology and Oriental Studies. Widespread travels and journeys of discovery since the Renaissance and Enlightenment contributed to the knowledge of other religions.

One of the first attempts at identifying the different Christian positions on the relationship between Christianity and other religions was presented by Ernst Troeltsch (1912). Troeltsch's approach is defined by Knitter (1974:7–9) as a cultural-historical, individualistic and evolutionistic theory to explain the development of religions. Consecutive engagements with the transcendental in specific historical contexts can lead to a deeper and more spiritual expression in religion. Some religions can therefore exhibit a deeper and more spiritual pattern. Religion and culture become intertwined over time. Based on this interpretation, Troeltsch's theory would suggest that all religions are relative and therefore all are of equal value (all religion is good). Religions feed and nourish one another over time; this contributes to the character of religions and enrichment of personal experiences of the absolute (Troeltsch 1912:104–105).

## A historical overview of the study of the theology of religions

From a Christian-biased understanding Hendrik Kraemer (1958) divided religions into two main groups: revelation and natural religions. Revelation becomes the key to theological understanding of the relationship between religions (Kraemer 1958:157). For Kraemer the only true religion is worshipping God who reveals himself in Jesus Christ. All other religions are false (Kraemer 1958:28) and idolatrous (Kraemer 1958:286) when they try and know God from outside of the revelation in Christ.

However, Kraemer does not have a completely negative view of non-Christian religions. Religion is the human response to the general revelation of God (Kraemer 1958:287); God also works in other religions (Kraemer 1958:292). As to where and how God is busy with other religions, Kraemer remains vague. He does however suggest openness towards other religions.

During the Vatican II period (1965–1967) the need for a clear delineation of models of interreligious relations became apparent. Owen Thomas (1969) presented the different positions that theologians could take regarding the relationship of Christianity to other religions. Thomas identifies such positions as rationalism, romanticism, relativism, exclusivism, dialectic, reconception, tolerance, dialogue, catholicism and presence. Paul Knitter (1974, 1985) identified the three dominant positions<sup>5</sup> as, (1) the conservative evangelical position, claiming Christianity to be the only true religion, (2) the Protestant position, indicating that salvation is in Christ but not exclusively, (3) a Catholic understanding of multiple ways to salvation, with Jesus as the preferred way and (4) the theocentric position, positing God at the centre of attention and search for salvation. The three traditional paradigms that transpired from this search for understanding were identified as pluralist, exclusivist and inclusivist (compare D’Costa 1986).

Hans Küng (1987) contributed to the debate by simplifying the four categories of understanding as (1) no religion is true, (2) one religion is true, (3) all religion is true, and (4) one religion is true and all religions share in this truth. Küng is of the opinion that we may learn about God in all religions. Even idolatry may be regarded as invisible worship of God, witnessing Christ without realising it. He termed the non-Christian religions ‘normal’ ways to find salvation and wholeness, whilst the church was the ‘extraordinary’ way. On the other hand, he would concede that these religions harboured much of what is unholy, sinful and degenerate, therefore he was not prepared to refer to such religions as instances of ‘anonymous Christianity’. Küng favoured dialogue.

Different models for understanding the relationship between religions were developed. Compare Jacquis Dupuis’ (1997, 2001) alternative to the three traditional paradigms. Dupuis suggests models of ecclesiocentrism (1997:185, 2001:76) (alternative description of the exclusivist position), Christocentrism (alternative description of the

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5. Knitter considers position [1] as a variant of [2] and considers them as one position.

inclusivist position) (1997:185, 2001:77), and theocentrism (pluralist position) (1997:188). Dupuis refers to Hick's Realitycentrism (1997:193, 2001:79) as a variant of theocentrism where the centre of all religions is not God but an ultimate reality.

Knitter (2005) eventually updated the traditional models (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism) by adding a fourth possibility called the acceptance model. This is an effort at addressing the theology of religions taking the postmodern context into consideration. According to the acceptance model Christians can only accept that there are differences between religions and that there is nothing in common (Knitter 2005:181).

## □ The impasse

Kenneth Rose (2013) predicts that pluralism will be the only coherent explanation of and solution to religious diversity. With pluralism, Rose (2013:9) refers to the theory of John Hick as the theological foundation of the relationship between religions. Pluralism serves as a theory suggesting a solution to exclusivism and inclusivism. Those asking about the relationship that Christianity ought to have with other religions will eventually have to agree to the pluralistic view, according to Rose (2013:2), who acknowledges pluralism as inevitable. The current context and paradigm of our time mean that one religion can no longer be the only measure of all other religions.

Pluralism recognises the validity and equality of all religions: No religion can be considered inferior to the other, all religions must be viewed as having knowledge of that which is considered transcendental, and every religion presents a valid mode of existence. No longer can one religion deny or exclude the position and status of the other. It is clear that pluralism can lead to relativism. If all religions are considered equal, religious affiliation does not matter. This brings about the danger of syncretism (Hedges 2010:237) – allowing religions to exchange elements to such an extent that the unique identity of a religion disappears (Rose 2013:73). Pieris, quoted by Hedges (2010:238), defines syncretism as the 'haphazard mixing', synthesis and creation of a third religion which leads to destruction of the identities of both religions which are in contact.

In an attempt to identify the essential differences between religions, Paul Hedges (2010) identifies the problem of how religions address plurality and the claim to particularity by each. The polarity between plurality and particularity drives the debate on interreligious relations. Religions seem to have reached a deadlock: How can religions coexist whilst acknowledging the reality of the plurality of religions, yet simultaneously each religion lays claim to the uniqueness and particularity of its expression (Hedges 2010:9, 228)?

It is clear from the discussion presented by Hedges that all traditional models lead only to an impasse, as no solution is presented where the particularity and plurality of religions



receive equal attention. Hedges (2010:2) suggests that the most appropriate model is pluralism, which suggests radical openness to the religious other (Hedges 2010:111, 230) and is necessitated by Christian tradition (Hedges 2010:2).

Hedges (2010:3) acknowledges that the context within which he posits is a postliberal theology of religions. From this position the plurality of religions needs to be acknowledged and accounted for. Hedges' attempt at arguing a theology of religions tries to create a balance between plurality and particularity. Over time Christianity evolved into a position of 'radical openness' towards other religions (Hedges 2010:2). However, this does not imply subscription to the classical position of pluralism as presented by John Hick (Hedges 2010:113–115); Hedges (2010:229) suggests a need for respect of the plurality as well as the particularity of religions.

Pluralism as presented by Hick and Knitter (1987) focuses on that which religions have in common, ignoring the differences. God is set at the centre, as all religions seem to describe the same reality. Christ as the stumbling block in relations between Christianity and other religions is removed from the equation, focusing now only on God (theocentrism). Hedges suggests that a radical openness towards other religions should acknowledge the existence of differences and not just ignore them. Hedges suggests that such radical openness is an effort to avoid the impasse of the pluralist-particularist deadlock.

Christianity which is depicted as being 'closed', as opposed to a radical, open Christianity, focuses on set doctrines, beliefs and creeds, excluding all that differ, and enforces dominance by claiming the sole right to truth (Hedges 2010:230). Hedges (2010:230) suggests that this 'closed' position grew not from a search and application of the truths found in the gospel, but rather from socio-political concerns which formed the Christian identity as the dominant power in society.

Radical openness for Hedges (2010:247) entails the possibility of mutual fulfilment of all religions. As to what exactly he suggests by 'mutual fulfilment', Hedges (2010:249) only mentions that he does not want to present 'easy answers' nor suggest a 'simple recipe', indicating that mutual fulfilment should imply the 'need for religions to overcome the building of barriers and embrace a radical openness to one another.' The way in which this is expressed is contextually determined; in every context 'the voices that come to us from the margins' ought to be accepted (Hedges 2010:251). Acceptance of the 'Other' implies critically questioning the Own. Hedges (2010:252) suggests that Christianity seriously needs to question whether the traditions, denominations and doctrines have not become the idols that Christians worship. Openness toward other expressions of religiosity cannot deny, ignore or oppress other religions.

With radical openness Hedges suggests a way forward and stimulus for debate, creating a way out of the impasse created by plurality and particularity.

## □ New ventures

Part of escaping the impasse of polarity and particularity requires new and creative thinking, and in this regard Hedges presented a possible solution. Further suggestions are presented by David Cheetham and Jenny Dagers.

David Cheetham (2013:1) tries to 'devise(s) creative ways of meeting others and dealing with new circumstances' and to set the scene for interreligious encounters. In his own words (Cheetham 2013:2) he is creating appropriate 'spaces' or rooms where religions will feel comfortable to meet. The 'spaces' Cheetham (2013:5) identifies are deep levels, referring to non-theological spaces, spaces not obviously religious, liminal spaces. Another possible space for meeting is interspirituality (Cheetham 2013:6); with this concept Cheetham refers to the sharing of spirituality, including activities such as prayer, meditation, worship and spiritual experiences.

Cheetham's (2013:7) most prominent contribution lies in his suggestion of changing the nature of interreligious encounter from the religious into the aesthetic, and the possibility of ethical spaces or moral ways of meeting. Cheetham (2013:123) suggests a new and different meeting space based on an 'aesthetic attitude', meaning to view other religions as one would view a work of art, emphasising ways of seeing (Cheetham 2013:127). The goal is to experience empathy between religious traditions on an aesthetic level. This can be reached by being an 'imaginatively participating perceiver' (Cheetham 2013:147) and not necessarily a participant. Viewing the Other becomes a subjective activity. Seeing the other for what it is and appreciating the uniqueness and beauty within the other leads to mutual appreciation.

Ethical spaces become a further suggestion for ways of seeing the other (Cheetham 2013:149). An attempt at interreligious ethics was suggested by Hans Küng at the World Parliament of Faiths in 1993. Cheetham (2013:157) is sceptical of this space, as any neutral global ethics will not necessarily be sensitive towards the particularities within different cultures and traditions.

As a last possible space of meeting, Cheetham (2013:177) suggests the attitude exhibited by the Scriptural Reasoning movement, which sees meeting not as a discussion forum of differences or similarities, but emphasising 'understanding above agreement; collegiality above consensus' (Cheetham 2013:179). This particular space of meeting is not defined along theological lines and therefore opens up the possibility of meeting in spaces in-between.

Cheetham's contribution is an honest attempt at creatively seeking for new ways of meeting. His approach focuses on ways of seeing and meeting the other and the spaces where meeting might be possible, and not necessarily on the content of the meetings. He is trying to set the scene for the encounter, preparing conditions conducive to meaningful

encounters between religions. In this sense he presents a novel way of perceiving the theology of religions.

Jenny Dagers (2013) attempts to establish a theology of religions which takes the current context (i.e. postcolonial) into consideration as the acting paradigm for thinking about other religions.<sup>6</sup> Traditional models of theology of religions consisted of 'Eurocentric imperialist attitudes' (Dagers 2013:1); she suggests postcolonial theologies of religious difference to indicate the transition from a monologue by Eurocentric Christians to acknowledging religious plurality. Dagers (2013:2) suggests that within a postcolonial context a revised particularist theology of religions is necessary, in order to acknowledge the particularity of religious traditions and simultaneously respect the integrity of Christianity and other religions. She suggests a Christian particularity grounded in Trinitarian theology, which would encourage Christianity to act with hospitality towards postcolonial theologies, recognising interreligious concerns. Compare Hedges' (2010:231) suggestion of biblical hospitality as a guide for interreligious encounter that takes radical openness seriously.

Dagers (2013:2) does not intend a pluralist theology of religions – she proposes a continuation of the pluralist theology of John Hick. Hick's theory would view other religious traditions as complementary. She sees the task of the revised pluralist model as to turn 'theology of religions towards the dynamic process of constructing lived religion within each received tradition' (Dagers 2013:2). This new way of thinking is necessitated by the religious diversity characterising the postcolonial environment. The context within which other religions are viewed is no longer a Eurocentric, Christian-pivotal perspective, but a disentanglement from this position in order to recognise and acknowledge diversity. Over centuries the understanding of other religions through the lens and in terms of Christian doctrine caused an entanglement, which is why Dagers (2013:18) suggests a process of disentanglement. By disentanglement Dagers refers to the process of acknowledging the value of local religious expressions, as seen from their own point of view. This inclusivity of other's points of view is what Sugirtharajah (2006) proposes should happen in a postcolonial approach necessitated by the current world context.

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6.Compare Sugirtharajah's (2006:8) distinction between postcolonial and post-colonial. The hyphenated form refers to a historical period succeeding the period of colonialism. The unhyphenated form refers to a theory and approach by the colonised to the ruling knowledge systems introduced by the colonisers, and an attempt at restoring the past while questioning neo-colonising tendencies. It is clear that postcolonial refers to a certain methodology of inquiring and responding. This approach is to investigate and critically analyse all structures of power, dominant systems of thought and ideologies. The goal of postcolonialism is to give recognition to perspectives of marginalised people, cultures and religious entities which were once regarded as inferior.

## ■ Conclusion

Any theology of religions is constructed by taking note of communalities and/or differences. The differences can divide and lead to a situation where the exclusivity of a religion is emphasised; the similarities approach endeavours to seek communalities and emphasise what religions consider as mutual. Knitter (2005:112) identifies three bridges to be crossed by Christians in order to comply with the requirements of the mutuality model: a philosophical-historical bridge, religious-mystical bridge, and ethical-practical bridge.

The philosophical-historical bridge is represented by the position of John Hick, who suggests that there might exist only one Divine Reality with many cultural expressions. Religions over time have tried to grasp the Real, and no religion can therefore claim to know the complete truth about the Real, as human efforts are contextual and socially constructed and therefore limited. Once Christians accept this stance, they have crossed this bridge, exchanging a Christocentric position for a theocentric position.

The religious-mystical bridge emphasises the fastness and infiniteness of the Divine Reality (Knitter 2005:125); in spite of the different ways in which the Divine Reality is perceived by different cultures, one mystical core experience remains at the centre of all. Raimon Panikkar represents this path. For Panikkar the Divine lies in a mystic cosmic power, which according to him, is constituted by the cosmos, the Divine and the human (Knitter 2005:127). By crossing this bridge, Christians acknowledge the existence of one cosmic Divine Reality, although perceived not only as one but as many. The Divine Reality exists in the diversity of humanity, and can therefore never be reduced to only one. The diversity of the Divine shines through the different religions (Knitter 2005:130).

The third possible route is supported by pillars of ethical responsibility (Knitter 2005:134), which enables an interfaith exchange. The essence of this position entails religions seeking communal concerns (i.e. global responsibility, social justice, etc.) and acting upon them. The emphasis is not on communalities in terms of similar content, but rather points of contact: A common concern attracting the attention of different religions. As such points of contact, Knitter (2005:137) suggests the following elements: poverty, victimisation, violence and patriarchy. Crossing this bridge would imply that Christians engage on a practical and ethical level with comprehensive ethics in relieving global suffering.

Both Dagers and Cheetham suggest novel approaches to creating a theology of religions. Any theology of religions requires setting out from one's own comfort zone and engaging the other in some kind of no man's land. This will require a deduction as well as a multiplication. One will need to tone down one's own requirements and preconditions for engagement, which implies a loss (deduction). However, once engaging the other one will gain in insight – not only understanding another religion, but also seeing reality through the eyes of the other, therefore multiplying one's own knowledge.

A historical overview of the study of the theology of religions

A theology of religions requires not only seeking similarities but also identifying differences, and then seeking points of contact. The purpose of this analysis is to suggest a comprehensive approach to understanding religions.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 1

A brief overview is given by the editor of the development of the discipline of theology of religions to indicate how in a postmodern era an almost non-foundational approach has become evident. For a Christian understanding of interreligious relations an understanding of the origin of religion (theology of religion) is just as important as a theological evaluation of the relationship between religions (theology of religions). In this first chapter, a historical overview of the way in which Christianity thought about its relationship with other religions (especially with Judaism and Islam) is presented. Over history, three distinct phases can be identified, namely, (1) a Golden Era during which the main theories of interreligious relations were formulated (namely exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism), (2) an impasse during which the traditional theories no longer proved to provide a sufficient framework for understanding the relations (pluralism and particularism are important polarities to be kept in balance, although the balancing act can end in a deadlock) and (3) a third phase which introduces a discussion of New Ventures on interreligious relations. The theories of scholars such as Paul Hedges, Jenny Dagers and David Cheetham are discussed as new ways forward out of the impasse. An overview of past theories is presented, as well as the most recent theories on interreligious relations.

# Commentary on the documents *Nostra aetate* and *Lumen gentium*<sup>7</sup>

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By including this translated section of the doctoral thesis of the late Prof. Piet van der Merwe, the Editor gives recognition to the contribution made by him to formulating a theology of religions. In this section, from his dissertation he discusses how Vatican II contributed to the understanding of religion and human nature. It also paved the way for determining a particular theology of religions still evident in Roman Catholic circles today. In this chapter, the main documents contributing to formulation of this theology of religions, *Nostra aetate* and *Lumen gentium*, are discussed. Through analysing these documents it becomes apparent that the Roman Catholic theology of religions is grounded in an understanding of the unity of humankind. This unity is based on, (1) unity as an empirical fact, (2) unity as a result of God's providence and (3) unity as a result of

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7. Translation of a section of the dissertation by Prof. Piet van der Merwe, 'Die Godsdienste by Vaticanum II' (Religions at Vatican II), 1977, presented in part compliance with the requirements for the degree DD under the supervision of Prof. F.J. van Zyl at the University of Pretoria. This section of the dissertation is presented posthumously.

humankind's search for truth. This provides guidelines on how to think about the existence of other religions and the relationship between these religions.

## ■ Introduction

The history and development of *Nostra aetate* and *Lumen gentium* indicate that it never was the intention of Vatican II to create a theology of religions. This idea developed gradually and was influenced by different aspects. Eventually, the theology of religions that did arise was, like all matters, discussed in conciliar documents: the result of church-political compromises within the framework of churchly doctrine. Much more was at risk than theological considerations, which is why a theology of religions was more or less developed.

To do justice to a document such as *Nostra aetate* would be to evaluate it not only from a religious-theological perspective but within the framework of the total intention of the Council. The intention of this study is not to evaluate the success of the Second Vatican Council but to consider the aspect of the theology of religions. Therefore, *Nostra aetate* is only evaluated as religious-theological declaration.

Willem Adolph Visser't Hooft, former general secretary of the WCC, called *Nostra aetate* a disappointing document without much content, terming it not much more than a couple of courteous remarks about non-Christian religions (see Littell 1975:63–64). With this he expressed the views of many within and outside of the Roman Catholic Church and Christianity. There was so much the Council could have said, and still there was no answer as to whether it truly had any value to speak so little on such a complex issue. It can also not be denied that the Roman Catholic Church remained one of the few churches to issue an official declaration and to document the church's relation with non-Christian religions, and to still officially engage with the world of non-Christian religions surrounding Christianity.

The most important document pertaining to non-Christian religions is the declaration of the church on non-Christian religions, *Nostra aetate*. It is not a very long document as it was decided that the issue should be addressed in a short declaration. The feeling was probably that the matter arose unexpectedly, and that it refers to quite a new discipline. It was therefore deemed appropriate to mention only a few principles, and to assign the remainder to the future. Whilst such an argument is understandable, the result was that more questions arose than were answered. The sketchy way in which the matter was addressed opened up the opportunity for a multitude of interpretations and assumptions which do not always concur but seemingly deserve the right to exist. The advantage was that a lively debate ensued, and that the discipline of theology of religions received a huge impetus.

In the commentary made here and discussion following on it, the scheme of *Nostra aetate* is outlined.

## ■ The goal of the Council in discussing non-Christian religions

One of the main reasons that the Vatican II speaks about the church's position on non-Christian religions is suggested by *Nostra aetate* as a pastoral conversation. Pope John XXIII intended this Council to be a pastoral council. The attitude reflected in the opening words '*Nostra aetate*', is a topic that arose frequently in the discussions of the Council goers. No other council in the history of the Roman Catholic Church was as aware of the world outside the church. It also reflected the attitude that Pope John XXIII projected onto the Council. The church had to awake from the stagnation which its traditional monastic introversion brought about. Windows towards the outside world had to be opened. '*Aggiornamento*' meant that the church had to be brought up to date so that it could play its role in the world in the current time. In '*Nostra aetate*' we hear an echo of the rallying call '*aggiornamento*'.

*Nostra aetate* also expresses the changed outlook of the Roman Catholic Church towards the secularised world. After the destruction of the Corpus Christianum it was as if Rome retracted into a monastery. The church with these opening words and especially with a document like this, wanted to declare the pastoral constitution of the church in the modern world (*Gaudium et spes*) – that the time has passed for the church to concur with rulers for worldly power, or that the church distances itself through doom prophets from the world. The church acknowledges the existence of an autonomous, secularised world (Stransky 1966:342) and by implication, wants to deny that the current era we live in is weaker than the previous.

The opening words also speak of the openness of the church. The church does not want to dictate without listening, but wants to listen. The church wants to thoroughly comprehend the factual situation of the world and let these facts determine its decisions. It is therefore a prophetic relation with the world where the church wants to act as interpreting prophet.

Karl Barth was, however, of the opinion that in spite of its good intentions the Council did not accomplish a prophetic and thorough handling of the modern issues in the world. For example, he finds *Gaudium et spes* on this matter too superficial and sketchy (Barth 1969:28). It is a question whether Roman Catholicism with its current approach to religiosity and reality is capable of addressing the occurrence of secularisation in its fullest consequence (Barth 1969:206).

*Lumen gentium* 16 fits into a totally different context. This document is not meant for a public reader outside the church, but for the church itself. Therefore, this document is written in a more introverted style. Even where it refers to non-Christians, the frame of reference is still the church. Article 16 is the last section of a subsection which



addresses the catholicity of the church and that is included; Article 14 deals with the formal members of the Roman Catholic Church and Article 15 with non-Roman Christianity.

The second sentence of *Nostra aetate* states the grounding of the church's declaration on its attitude towards non-Christian religions, and also describes the purpose of the document. This sentence was added late in the development of the document, based on some Council members expressing their concern that the document might just be an expression of some nice thoughts on non-Christian religions (Neuner 1968:45). The document is presented as being born from the task of the Church to improve unity and love amongst people, with the purpose to build bridges and increase agreement. At least two issues are important, namely, (1) the declaration is not grounded in the creation of the Church and (2) the declaration is not meant to contain issues of essential meaning in the relationship between the Church and non-Christian religiosity.

1. The fact that the declaration is grounded in the task of the Church to improve unity and love amongst all people, means that it is not connected to the essential task of the Church, and therefore will also not be concerned with matters essential to the Church. The document does not result from a serious consideration of the gospel which ought to be declared to all people and nations, but is based on unity and love (The nature of the unity and love is not clearly defined). There is an argument to be made that *Nostra aetate* is not only a theology of religions but in fact also a conversation with non-Christians, addressing not only Church members but non-Christian readers as well. It would not have been wise to address non-Christians as perceived by the Church as objects of mission. Still, we might feel that the Church could have said more on its own understanding of its existence within the world of religions. As formulated here it creates the impression that the declaration represents an anthropological position and is based on a common anthropological element.
2. The declaration is not willing to address issues which, according to the Church, are of essential meaning to the relationship between the church and non-Christian religions; for example, it does not address the salvific position of non-Christian religions. In fact, the declaration says nothing about salvation. It also does not address the bigger basic and structural issues which separate the church and non-Christian religions. However, it addresses that which humankind has in common and which leads to unity – thus the communalities between the church and non-Christian religions. It appears as if the theology of religions and the interreligious conversation of which the declaration is a representation as an example, is based on the same 'elementa' doctrine formulated in the *Unitatis redintegratio*, on which the connection between the church and piety outside of the church is made based on

certain communal elements or values. Such an approach needs to be thoroughly evaluated.<sup>8</sup> We therefore stand with the statement that the communalities between religions is much more complex than the declaration proposes (Neuner 1968:47). Religious phenomena carrying the same meaning in different religious contexts are indeed very rare. Points of contact, on the other hand tend to end up as points of difference. Interreligious conversation is much more than compiling a list of communalities.

The way in which *Nostra aetate* is grounded and the purpose announced for it differs hugely from *Lumen gentium* 16. *Nostra aetate* is concerned with the church's treatment of non-Christian religions; *Lumen gentium* is concerned with the relation between non-Christians and the Church, more specifically with the possibility of salvation for those belonging to non-Christian religions and also atheists. There are two indications that *Lumen gentium* 16 has more meaning for the Church than *Nostra aetate*, (1) in *Lumen gentium* 16 the focus is on the Church and the gift of salvation, which is a promise to the Church and (2) where *Nostra aetate* is expressing an attitude, *Lumen gentium* 16 is concerned with a relationship with specific content and meaning. The possibility of salvation outside of the formal borders of the Church is connected to a specific relation between the Church and the non-Christian pious. The Council did not denounce the statement made by Cyprian, '*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*', but extended its understanding of Church to such a degree that it can now be claimed that the Church of Rome exists in an invisible form even outside of the formal borders of the Church. Three forms of affiliation to the church can be identified: membership, initiation and 'focused on'. Membership is the privilege of formal members; initiated refers to how non-Roman Christians relate to the Church of Rome; whilst 'focused on' refers to non-Christians. The matter of churchly affiliation of the non-Christians needs more elaboration.<sup>9</sup>

A further difference between the two documents is their purpose: *Nostra aetate* is concerned with non-Christian religions, whilst *Lumen gentium* 16 is concerned with the adherents of those religions. *Lumen gentium* thus addresses non-Christians on an individual level. The implications of this are addressed in a later section.<sup>10</sup>

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8.The following chapter of the dissertation does provide such an evaluation, which is not presented here due to lack of space.

9.In the dissertation a separate section (see p. 263) is devoted to this discussion. Due to space restriction it is not discussed here.

10.In the dissertation a separate section (see p. 148) is devoted to this discussion. Due to space restriction it is not discussed here.

## ■ The unity of humankind as background to religions

The declaration starts off with the remark that the most prominent characteristic of the modern time is the increasing unification of humankind and nations. This section is one of the last parts to be added to the declaration. When the declaration was extended to include the complete non-Christian world, this section was added to place religions within the framework of humankind (Neuner 1968:43) and to indicate that this document does not address religions as phenomenal entities (as science of religion might do), but as a matter which humans are concerned with. Humans are presented as co-carriers of human fate and are therefore bound in unity.

The unity of humankind is presented in three paragraphs, each with a distinct argument, namely (1) the unity of humankind as empirical fact in the modern world, (2) the unity is based on God as Creator and end goal of humankind and (3) this unity is also based on the one human search for the great truths of life.

## ■ The unity of humankind as empirical fact

The declaration starts with an argument that the modern context made humankind aware of unity. No one and no nation can exist in isolation any longer. Communication and transport connects everybody, and the wide world has been reduced to one planet. Further, the economic, social and political aspects of the world have become so complex that one can no longer exist without the other. Everyone and each nation not only has to take its direct neighbour into consideration but in fact the whole world, whether we like it or not.

Hans Küng reckons that the Roman Catholic Church's way of thinking about non-Christian cultures and religions has been influenced by an awareness of the modern situation in the following way:

1. The current proximity of nations, cultures and religions dismissed ignorance and misinformation. Knowledge brought understanding and destroyed previously held misconceptions and biases.
2. The church came to the shocking realisation that the Western culture and religious environment does not hold a monopoly on morality and spiritual superiority. Many non-Christian cultures became known to the West through their moral and spiritual values – often in opposition to the moral decay and regression characterising Western communities. The question begs to be asked: Can the religions according to which these cultures and nations live be so terribly evil and wrong when the fruits they produce compare favourably with those of the church?
3. There was also the revealing awareness that the Christian statistical position in the world no longer seemed positive and continues to diminish. The church continues to

resemble a minority group in history. Of all the people who lived on earth, the majority never belonged to Christianity.

Küng asks the question whether the church can be so arrogant to think that Christianity, and more specifically the Roman Catholic Church, which represents such a small percentage of humanity through all the centuries until today, can be the unique vessel of salvation. The problem becomes bigger when the future is taken into account (Küng 1967:27).

Against the revealing awareness Küng described, calm progress was made by science of religion gradually and scientifically dissecting the non-Christian religions to which theologians made a substantial contribution. It became evident that at some stage the church had to take notice of the non-Christian religions and declare its relation to them in a theology of religions – rather than a negative sidelining of non-Christian religions and labelling them as the work of the Devil, as in the past.

## ■ Unity as a result of God's providence

In the following two sentences *Nostra aetate* discusses the unity of humankind as the result of God's creation, his providence and his one goal which he intended for everyone. It is noteworthy that at this point the document talks about 'nations' (*gentes*) instead of 'people', to which paragraph one refers. The document therefore also wants to highlight this aspect: That the role of the existence of nations in history cannot be ignored. Thus, the document moves from the individualistic approach to a collective perspective, to come to a treatment of collective religions and not only individual spirituality. This collective perspective is related to the unity of humankind. The history of humankind is not a string of isolated and haphazard events, but a continuous process where the one human race moves from its origin towards its eventual destination (Neuner 1968:46).

The historical perspective applied here is not that of general history, but that of salvation history. All people and nations are somehow concerned with the salvation history, even if they have not yet heard the biblical message, because they have one common origin and one common destination. Even the diversity and dispersing of humankind cannot destroy the unity, since this can also be traced back to the one God who intended it. It can even be suggested that the doctrine of cosmic salvation history is at play here.

In spite of the biblical references which *Nostra aetate* uses to substantiate the arguments made, this section does not mention God in terms of his revelation in Jesus Christ. To tell the truth, Christ is only mentioned later on in the document. The understanding is that it starts off with a general teaching of God. Perhaps this is a way in which the document refers to those elements that humans have in common. To be honest, Paul's speech on the Aeropagus did not start much differently.

In the first section an important element comes to the fore in a most subtle way: God's salvific plan is stretched out towards all. The unity of humankind also includes God's intention to save all humans.

*Lumen gentium* 16 states it more directly: God is not far from anyone who seeks him in shadows and images, because it is he who gives life, breath and all else and he is the Saviour who wants to save all humans.

The doctrine of God's universal salvation is one of the cornerstones of the theology of religions of Vatican II. God wants to save all, so it must be assumed that he will construe ways to save all. The Roman Catholic Church declared at Vatican II that religiosity is a phenomenon directly related to God's salvific plan for humankind. This statement will need some consideration.<sup>11</sup>

Many Protestant theologians do not interpret the universal salvific plan of God through Christ in a literal sense – especially not in a way that implies the automatic application of salvation to all humans. The act of salvation of Jesus carries universal implications, meaning he is far more than a Jewish Messiah. His message is meant for all people and his gift of salvation is intended for the whole of humankind – to be accepted or rejected. The salvation through Jesus cannot be attained without the acceptance of his message (König 1973:93).

## Unity as the result of the human search for truth

In the next section a discussion of the abstract human nature follows. The trend in this part is philosophical-phenomenological. There is thus a deviation from the factual approach in the first and the semi-hermeneutical approach in the second paragraph. In this paragraph an investigation is made into the most basic correspondence in the human religious search for reality and truth. It comes as no surprise that this approach is utilised as the Bible never presents humans as religious beings or addresses the phenomenon of religion. Whosoever wants to investigate this matter must follow a phenomenological approach. An analogical case is the way in which Calvin starts his *Institution*. He decided to start with humans as religious beings and the phenomenon of religion, but was dependant on references from classical wisdom and not, as is the case in the rest of his work, on biblical references.

If the Council earlier, by implication, was of the opinion that the church should take the modern world and the constitutive elements thereof seriously, it here wants to identify the religions and their influence as one of the main elements. The Council

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11. In a later section of the chapter this matter is discussed in more detail. So is the universal salvation implied in the religious-theological approach of Vatican II.

expresses the opinion that although ideologies today are an important factor in the current world situation, it still are religions which determine human existence.

The unity of humans as religious beings lies not in the answers they produce but in the questions they ask. The general impression when surveying the world of religions is the multitude of different doctrines, systems, customs, rites, et cetera. However, one is overwhelmed by the one factor lying at the root of all – the way in which humans experience themselves and their existence (Neuner 1968:47). The document asks by implication whether it is not possible in an interreligious conversation to start with the questions rather than with the answers. This should not be confused with an academic conversation, but is an existential matter. That is the reason why academic terms such as ‘problem’ were avoided and words like ‘mystery’ and ‘secret’ were used (*aenigmata*) (Neuner 1968:48).

The most basic question is ‘What is human?’ Then questions follow in sequence of general importance. The document does not address these questions in detail but suggests a guideline for future dialogue. The advantage of this approach is that non-Christians are reminded that Christianity is no less the result of a serious consideration of these questions than their own religions or philosophies are. The same reminder applies to Christianity. The message between the lines is that each religion deserves to be treated with respect and taken seriously since it is the expression of the deepest concerns and sentiments of its adherents. Non-Christians also receive the assurance that the Roman Catholic Church respects their religion as an expression of their deepest being, and this awareness will be reflected in their treatment by the Roman Catholic Church.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 2

In the second chapter, an overview of the development of the discipline of theology of religions within the Roman Catholic tradition is presented. This section consists of a translation of a section of the doctoral thesis of the late Prof. P.J. van der Merwe. In this particular section selected from his dissertation, Van der Merwe discusses how Vatican II contributed to the understanding of religion and human nature. It also paved the way for determining a particular theology of religions still evident in Roman Catholic circles today. In this chapter, the main documents contributing to the formulation of the theology of religions, *Nostra aetate* and *Lumen gentium* are discussed. Van der Merwe presents a thorough translation of these documents in his dissertation. Here only his discussion of these documents is presented. Through analysing these documents, it becomes apparent that the Roman Catholic theology of religions is grounded in an understanding of the unity of humankind. This unity is based on, (1) unity as an empirical fact, (2) unity as the result of God’s providence and (3) unity as a result of humankind’s search for the truth. This analysis provides guidelines on how to think about the existence of other religions and the relationship between these religions.

# Theology of religions in Martin Luther

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## ■ Background

When the recorded history of the Reformation is taken into account, it seems that the Protestants were aloof and sometimes even hostile when it came to mission and relations with other religions (Bosch 2012:248). Warneck (1906:11) described Martin Luther's conception of mission as follows: 'Luther never entered into a polemic against foreign mission; he simply didn't speak of it.' Bosch (2012:249) disagrees with this. He (and other academics) are of opinion that the Protestants are being measured against a definition of mission that did not exist until the 19th century (the great missionary century); mission as understood in the 19th century did not receive adequate attention during and even two centuries after the Reformation. Organised mission was challenging in this time and included many practical issues. Bosch (2012:250) lists five reasons for this, namely, (1) the Protestants' fundamental task was to reform the church of their time, which took up most of their time and energy, (2) the Protestants had no direct contact with non-Christian people, (3) the churches of the Reformation were constantly in survival mode and could barely organise themselves until 1648 and (4) when the Reformers left monasticism they left a developed and

effective missionary agency, and developing of such an agency would take ages (cf. Van der Westhuizen 1984:134) and (5) internal struggles and feuds amongst the Protestants kept them very busy, leaving time for few attempts to mission to those outside the Christian framework.

The above outlines the background to the context within which Martin Luther's theology developed. Next his theology and how it manifested itself in his conception of mission and other religions is discussed.

## ■ Martin Luther's theology

To say that the Protestants had no missionary awareness is to misapprehend the essence of their theology and ministry. Martin Luther's theology provided the church with solid guidelines and principles which have contributed greatly to its mission (Holl 1928:237, 238; cf. Van der Westhuizen 1984:125). Van der Westhuizen (1984:134) is of the opinion that Luther regarded the Reformation as mission because it addressed the needs of his time. Luther was renowned for his compound, well-thought through views on theological issues, and to deny his missionary awareness would be absurd (Van der Westhuizen 1984:137).

Martin Luther's theology begins and ends with reforming through and to the 'Word of God' (Van der Westhuizen 1984:138). The Word of God is needed for faith and salvation (*sola scriptura*) (Mann 2013:224). Luther understood 'the Word of God' as much broader than just the Holy Scriptures. To him any communication, particularly preaching, where the message of the Holy Scriptures is revealed, was the 'Word of God' (Mann 2013:224). Luther earnestly translated the Bible so that all people could hear the gospel in their own language (Van der Westhuizen 1984:123). This was important to him because the gospel should (Augustiny 1963:133) '*niet één of drie volken, maar die gehele Wereld zou bereiken*' [be heard by not only three of four nations, but the whole world].

The motivation behind the Reformation revolved around the right understanding of the righteousness of God (Schultze 1984:53). Luther rediscovered and introduced Pauline theology to the 16th century, with Romans 1:16–17<sup>12</sup> at its core (Bosch 2012:245). His theology does not begin with what man can do to receive salvation, but rather with what God has already done in Christ (*sola Christo*) through grace alone (*sola gracia*), which is received through faith alone (*sola fide*) – the channel through which grace is received and not by doing good deeds (Mann 2013:223) – the so-called tension between law and gospel (Beyers 2013:10). Man is made righteous as an act of God's mercy (Schultze 1984:59).

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12. [v. 16]: For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. [v. 17] For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, 'The righteous shall live by faith'.



## ■ Luther on mission and other religions

For Luther a fundamental theological truth was proclamation of the gospel (Van der Westhuizen 1984:132). Preaching constituted the centre of mission for him. Luther compared the church's missionary work to the ripples that a stone makes when it is thrown into water. The concentric undulations would in a societal context eventually reach others – the individual, the family and nation should become the church's bearer of the good news (Van der Westhuizen 1984:126). For Luther organised mission was a component of the Roman Catholic age, and therefore he rather encouraged organic mission. Luther was of the opinion that missionary personalities were a gift of God, but that the gospel has the ability to undulate on its own (Van der Westhuizen 1984:132).

Luther considered geographical Christianisation of heathen nations as almost completed on the grounds of the understanding of Psalm 117 and John 10 (Van der Westhuizen 1984:127, 135). He was aware of the unbelieving heathens but was of the opinion that they would not convert. Luther was initially very friendly with the Jews because he believed that the Roman Catholic Church abused them. He believed they had to be approached with kindness and taught the Word of God. He later revised this and become convinced of their inability to confess Jesus as the Christ; his approach then became judgemental and uncompromising (Van der Westhuizen 1984:128; cf. Beyers 2013:11). Luther believed (according to Jesus' teachings) that salvation does not rely on birthright – the Jews, like everyone else, are saved by faith (Mann 2013:226).

In his attempt to communicate the gospel clearly Luther differentiated between the true and the false religion. False religion is inspired by evil. Luther judged Jews and Turks (as was the custom at the time to refer to Muslims) as being part of a group of people who are considered enemies of God (Miller 2013:428). According to Luther humankind could be divided into two groups: those following the true religion and those following the false religion. False religion is based on acts of self-righteousness, where humans are dependent on their own acts to bring about salvation for themselves (Miller 2013:428). Luther does mention Jews and Muslims together in his works (Miller 2013:427), but he had different theological arguments on the theological status of each.

Apparently Luther had a positive and friendly attitude towards Jews (Kaufmann 2017:383). In his *That Jesus was born a Jew* (1523, WA, 314-336) Luther goes so far as to berate the church for treating the Jews badly. Kessler (2010:120) is of the opinion that Luther's 1523 document should be seen as a missionary guide aiding Christians to convert Jews to Christianity. Why did Luther have a positive attitude towards Jews? Two reasons are apparent. Firstly, in order to understand the Old Testament Christians had to have a good understanding of the Hebrew language. The Jewish ability to read and explain the Hebrew Old Testament was seen as an aid to Christians (Kaufmann 2017:386). Secondly, Luther considered the Reformation to be the first occasion during which the gospel was

explained correctly. This would have given the Jews the opportunity to repent their wrongs and convert to Christianity (Barth 2009:411). The Christian way of treating the Jews with love and respect was an imitation of the grace of God, and ought to have convinced the Jews to convert to Christianity. Jews were supposed to recognise God in Christ and spontaneously react with conversion (Kaufmann 2017:383).

Luther's objections towards the Jews were Christ-centred, according to Miller (2013:429). Luther was convinced that the Old Testament could be interpreted Christologically. The Jews had an incorrect (or false) interpretation of the Old Testament and were in need of correction in order to believe in Christ. The gospel as preached during the Reformation would provide the Jews with clarity on the Old Testament and lead them to conversion. Luther subscribed to supersessionism when it came to the Jews; Christians replaced Jews as the chosen people of God. Luther explained this in his commentary on the Psalms (WA 3 & 4); as punishment for turning their back on God, Jews will receive eternal punishment by God to experience exile and oppression (Miller 2013:430).

Luther was disappointed in his expectation that Jews would convert to Christianity. His apparent positive attitude towards Jews changed into growing discontent (Chazen 2000:21). This eventually turned into outright aggression towards Jews, as is clear from Luther's *On the Jews and their Lies* (1543, WA 53, 417–552). In this document Luther advises Christians to ban Jews from society, and advises them to go and live amongst the Turks (Kaufmann 2017:382). Luther even encouraged Christians to take possession of Jewish properties and burn their holy literature. Luther proclaimed that by not converting to Christianity Jews were in fact opposing the pure gospel and affirming their lies and false teachings. Luther had even more anti-Jewish literature: *On the Schem Hamphoras and on the lineage of Christ* (WA 53, 610–648) and *On the last words of David* (WA 54, 16–110).

Luther did not utilise rational or theological arguments in his writings on Jews; according to Barth (2009:411) he used emotional and irrational language. For Luther the Jews, just like the Roman Catholics, obstinately opposed the grace of God. Luther participated vehemently in the accusations and making a caricature of Jews typical of his time (Kaufmann 2017:383). As to his change of mind about the Jews, Luther responded by saying that it was ignorant naiveté on his side to once have had positive ideas about Jews (WA 53, 523). Luther's conclusion was that Jews were also now part of the enemies of the church (Kaufmann 2017:384). Jews were guilty of participating in the crucifixion of Jesus, and as punishment for this God brought about blindness upon the Jews, causing them to be unable to recognise Jesus as the Messiah and convert to faith in him (Kaufmann 2017:384).

As to Luther's view of Islam, he was also (just as with the Jews) apparently positive. From the outset Luther was opposed to military action against Muslims. Luther interpreted the Muslim threat to Europe and Christians as God's punishment of

Christians (Miller 2013:431); God sent the Muslim invaders as punishment for injustices committed by the church, using the gentile nation of the Turks as part of his plan. Luther interpreted the Muslim punishment in light of the eschatology (Miller 2013:432); for him the final judgement of God will appear after the Muslim invasion (WA 30/2, 162).

Only later on did Luther understand that military action was necessary (Kaufmann 2017:379). He became more and more negative towards Muslims, describing them as heretics and worshippers of Satan (WA 30/2, 116, 32). The fact that Muslims portrayed Jesus as a mere human being, born from a virgin and amounting to nothing more than a good prophet, convinced Luther that Muslims were heretics and followers of the false religion (WA 53, 280, 7). For Luther the vicious and cruel ways in which Muslims treated their enemies were further signs of Islam being an anti-Christian religion (Kaufmann 2017:379). For Luther Islam portrayed Jesus falsely based on heretical Christian interpretations as found amongst the Arian and Nestorian sects.

From a theological point of view Luther's distinction between law and gospel as ways of humans approaching God is important in determining Luther's theology of religions. The law would represent human efforts to approach God and convince him to provide forgiveness and grace based on human good deeds. These human efforts are filled with error and limitations – they are pure sin and false. Only the revelation in Jesus Christ can bring true knowledge of God. Knowledge of redemption is attainable only through faith through the grace of God, as revealed in the Word of God.

Luther judged that Islam was guilty of this moralism and ethical human behaviour based on the human attempt to fulfil all requirements of the law and through this, expect redemption. This caused Luther to classify Jews, Muslims with Roman Catholics as false religious-seeking redemption based on human achievement and accomplishment (Kaufmann 2017:374). It is through faith alone that redemption can take place. This makes Christianity unique amongst religions (Kaufmann 2017:376). Jews, Muslims and Gentiles do not know Christ; so too the Roman Catholics believe in the false Christ. Only Christians know Christ and believe that redemption is only through faith in him.

After apparently viewing the Muslim invasion as part of God's plan, Luther changed his mind and realised that military action against the invasion was necessary. He now rallied the German people to participate in the war against the Turks. His call to arms was, however, different than the papal call to participate in the crusades. Luther did not predict any blessing to follow upon participation in the war; no forgiveness or redemption as reward was predicted, as the Pope declared would follow participation in the crusades. Luther's call also differed in the sense that where the Pope saw the crusades as a holy war protecting the religion of Christianity, Luther saw the war against the Turks as a struggle for survival. No crusade rhetoric was permitted in talk about the struggle against the Turks (Miller 2013:432). Luther encouraged soldiers to prepare

themselves spiritually before engaging the enemy. Prayers and confession of sin was necessary before entering the battlefield.

Luther's theological position on Jews and Muslims was determined by his understanding of redemption. It was clear to Luther that Jews as well as Muslims followed self-righteous religions, trying to bring about their own salvation through their own attempts (Kaufmann 2017:380). Luther continued to hope that the Jews would convert to Christianity one day (2017:386).

As for the Muslims, it seems as if Luther also had a positive understanding of Islam. Luther encouraged Christians to study the Qur'an and know what the Muslims believe in (Miller 2013:432). Luther even praised the Muslims for their piety (Miller 2013:432). Although seeing Muslims in a positive light, Luther still judged that Jews as well as Muslims were like the Roman Catholics – participating in false religion that will eventually lead to condemnation.

Luther supposes that non-Christians are the unelect. Mission had to take place amongst those who could not provide proof of their faith, those who were stubborn and unelected – the Muslims, Jews and Gentiles (Van der Westhuizen 1984:135). Luther acknowledges that God's elect are not limited to the known and he therefore believes that there are still unknown elect, but that God himself will reach out to them (Van der Westhuizen 1984:136). Luther's interpretation of Matthew 24:10 was that the proclamation of the gospel has already been done to all of the nations, but it should be continued, especially considering the Roman Catholic Church and its doctrines.

## Conclusion

Martin Luther's theology always corresponded to the needs of his time. He said in his 'Table Talks' that the Holy Scripture cannot and should never be understood outside the current situation and practice (Van der Westhuizen 1984:135). This motivated him every time to go back to the Bible where he read passionately and devotedly, to come to the correct insights. It can be said that Martin Luther's conception of mission and what it entails had deficiencies, but from his Bible translation and his faithfulness to the Bible, another picture is painted (Van der Westhuizen 1984:124).

With regard to the theology of religions as explained by Paul F. Knitter (2012), Martin Luther's theology would probably be placed under the replacement model, and any dialogue would have been difficult. Although he believed that Christianity was the only true faith through the justification of God, it could never be said that he was a fundamentalist in any way. His theology contributed to the church's understanding of *missio Dei*. Martin Luther's theology attended to the needs of his time; he would now probably come to other insights in our highly pluralistic society.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 3

This chapter is a perspective on the theology of religions of the Reformation, and in particular from Martin Luther. During the year of the 500th celebration of the Reformation, it is appropriate to pay special attention to a Reformed perspective on the theology of religions. It seems as if, with the dawn of the Reformation, missionary work was no longer considered a priority for the church. This is evident from the lack of encouragement by the Reformers to carry out mission work and even the hostile attitude towards non-Christian religions. As to the lack of mission work, there are, however, scholars indicating the opposite. The definition of mission work during the Reformation period was quite different to what today is regarded as a definition of mission work. As the Reformers also focused their energy on reforming the church there was not enough energy left to put into mission work as well. Martin Luther serves as an example of the attitude Reformers exhibited towards non-Christian religions. For Luther, Judaism and Islam were evil as their followers lived according to the law, trying to justify themselves before God through performing good deeds. Luther's apparent positive attitude towards Judaism made way for a later hostile attitude towards Jews.

# The will to embrace: An analysis of Christian-Muslim relations

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‘Without the will to embrace the other there will be no truth between people, and without truth between people there will be no peace’ (Volf 1996:224).

## ■ Introduction

Over the last couple of decades there has been an intensified interest in developing a thorough theological framework for how Christians and Muslims can relate to one another. This interest has grown in part due to an uptake in militant extremism in recent years, which has resulted in reactionary responses on a global scale. This has spiked fears and uncertainties, leading to violent outbursts. Furthermore, it has led some to claim that the future of the world depends on whether we will be able to develop a framework on how the two largest religions in the world can coexist.

This research presents an analysis of the history of Christian-Muslim relations in order to understand the nature of the conflict. A theological motivation is developed for

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why Christians need to get involved with Muslim interfaith dialogue in order to promote peace and justice, whilst respectfully creating room for one another to coexist. Churches and missions have a duty to remember their calling to service, reconciliation, peace-making, evangelism and dialogue. We have a task to educate our people in relation to Islam, to teach the forgiveness of sins and to reach out in love to Muslims in word and deed as the bearers of the gospel, '[w]e can no longer ignore neither Islam, nor Muslims' (Miller 2006:427).

In approaching the issue of interfaith dialogue, some of the major initiatives which are currently at the forefront of developing models and suggestions as to how we can practically live peaceably together will be discussed. By means of a comparative study I attempt to illustrate that Christianity and Islam are sufficiently similar to one another to be able to engage in an interfaith dialogue by focusing on the central claim of both religions, which is God is a unity, or one. Many will find this to be a difficult task, as the inherent inquiry underlying the comparison asks whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The answer to that question will have severe consequences for how our respective faiths are to relate to one another.

However, a recurring problem surfaces when discussing interfaith dialogue, which relates to the unique particularity within each religious tradition, in other words, that which sets one religion apart from another. This also gives rise to the question of whether faithful witness, which I use to refer to mission or *Da'awa* for Muslims, has any place within interfaith dialogue. We need to realise, however, that this central claim of both religions to proclaim the gospel is perhaps also amongst one of the main driving forces for religious conflict. Therefore a careful theological consideration is needed from a Christian perspective with which we can engage in dialogue as a means to promote a common coexistence, whilst being faithful to our call to proclaim the gospel.

## ■ Research problem and relevance of the study

A publication of The Pew Research Forum (2015) indicated that Christianity and Islam will make up just over 60% of the world population by the year 2050, with near parity in numbers: an estimated 2.8 billion Muslims and 2.9 Christians. Given these projections, the importance of how these religions relate to one another cannot be more adequately emphasised. Although other religions should also be considered as major role players on the world scene, none of the others have the comparative significance that Christianity and Islam have. As the document 'A Common Word Between Us and You' (A Common Word 2007) states in its opening lines:

Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. (n.p.)

These facts are also of growing importance since religious affiliation is no longer geographically determined. We truly live in a world of religious plurality. No matter where one travels, these shifts within society are physically tangible as different religions become much more visible, a result of various social identity markers, that is, clothing, jewellery and other religious attire. The implication of these changing realities is that engagement with one another becomes increasingly unavoidable. These engagements however, are marked by outright suspicion, uncertainty or even (depending on context) hostility. Volf (2011:1) states that a deep chasm exists between Islam and Christianity, a chasm of misunderstanding, dislike and hatred, that separate these religions. For the most part of our day-to-day lives we seem to be 'okay' with viewing each other on the periphery – but for how long this can be maintained is an increasing uncertainty in most parts of the world. To this uncertainty we can add factors such as rising population, growth, and a progressively interconnected and interdependent world, along with diminishing natural resources. It seems clear that conflict between Christians and Muslims will multiply in the near future due to the assertion of these religions within the political arena, especially where democracy is dominant.

If the history of conflicts between these two religions is anything to go by, there is seemingly no alternative outcome. Yet in recent years there has been a growing sense of urgency amongst religious leaders from both sides for the need to foster common ground and better understanding of each other for the sake of all humanity. The importance of studies like these is their invaluable contribution to global dialogue, given that Christianity and Islam make up the majority of the world's population. These brief observations mark our respective histories of conflict directed towards each other. In short, this study aims to present an analysis of Christian-Muslim relations throughout history and how through dialogue we can promote peace and justice, by valuing what they hold in common whilst allowing and respecting that which is particular to our respective faiths.

For the purposes of this chapter four main areas will be focused on in order to clearly understand the complexity and urgency of the global situation. Once that has been established, we will start to develop from a uniquely Christian perspective a paradigm for interfaith dialogue to take place. This inquiry starts off with an analysis of conflicts between Christianity and Islam throughout history, and how the continuation of these conflicts mars any possibility of future peace. Accordingly it serves to illustrate the need for and complexity of developing new paradigms for us to coexist.

The second phase of the chapter focuses on underscoring the Christian motivation for engaging with Muslims with respect to dialogue. Here I will be relying heavily on the work of Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and embrace* (1996). Along with this discussion concepts justice, peace and reconciliation will come to the fore, which we need to critically evaluate to underscore how interfaith dialogue could promote these, and as such actively work against prejudice, suspicion and misunderstanding.



After we have established the basis and motivation for interfaith dialogue, we will critically reflect on the practice and possibilities it can open up for the future. A brief discussion on different models of interfaith dialogue will be offered and evaluated. Our focus will then turn to a comparative study of Christianity and Islam, in particular that which both religions hold in common. This will be done with specific reference to the one true God, as creating common ground for dialogue for people of either faith to build relations with the other.

In the section which follows the biblical theme of hospitality a specific framework for interfaith dialogue will be looked at. Hospitality will be presented as a non-threatening environment whereby the other is invited in as an act of the 'will to embrace', where open and safe dialogue can take place. Within this context dialogue again is understood as a twofold task of facilitating peace whilst at the same time bearing faithful witness. The last section takes this act of 'faithful witness through dialogue' seriously into account. Here it will be argued that during interfaith dialogue we have the clearest opportunity to authentically and faithfully, in a non-threatening manner, communicate our unique Christian particularities.

Over the last couple of years I have had a fascination with and keen interest to get to know and learn as much as possible about Islam. Initially my prime motive was singular in focus – to learn how to proclaim the gospel to Muslims and how to disciple them into the 'maturity' of the Christian faith. Yet my own world has expanded as I have gained various insights through 'on the ground experiences' in observing Christian-Muslim relations in a variety of contexts across Africa and the Middle East. This combined growing urgency within me to work towards social justice has had profound implications for how I view and live in the world. In bringing these two passions of Muslim ministry and a desire for holistic faithful witness together, they have combined to stir an interest in interfaith dialogue, which in a way gave birth to this research.

## ■ Limitations

This study has various limitations which need to be kept in mind. Firstly, a Christian perspective is presented on how we as Christians are to make sense of the Muslim community, and accordingly relate to them as people who live with Christians in a global, interdependent society. Muslims need to consider a similar research project from their own point of view, specifically in terms of how they understand the Christian theology of the Trinity, and whether or not a suggested claim such as whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God has any implications for them, especially in terms of *Da'awa*.

The second limitation for this research is the incapability of presenting all the various Christian positions on the matter of how Christians are to relate to Muslims. The reality is that we have a very diverse faith community with diverging points of view on this

matter, and the same would be applicable for the Islamic community. Therefore, my attempt here is to try and speak in broad terms in order to give voice to what has been termed 'normative Christianity'. In other words, the presentation here should be agreeable to the Christian community at large.

The third limitation is that interfaith dialogue takes many forms and has an intricate amount of plausible outcomes. However, this goes beyond the scope of this research and chapter. It is our aim here to develop the urgency for dialogue, along with the corresponding theological framework for dialogue to take place where it creates room for 'faithful witness'.

The last limitation relates to the nature of comparative study, which will be applied here. Comparative study either seeks similarities or points of divergence. For the purpose to promote dialogue and reciprocal embrace, the study is limited to key commonalities shared by Christianity and Islam. This point will be further argued in a way such that it cannot be dissolved or annulled by any other point of disagreement.

## Methodology

Having identified the particular focus areas to be researched, the following research methodologies will be applied. Firstly, for the bulk of the research a scientific literature study will be conducted on almost every level of the research enquiry. By reviewing various academic articles and books I hope to develop a thorough understanding of the nature of the religious conflicts related to Christianity and Islam, especially looking for instances where certain events provoked aggressive responses from the other faith. Furthermore, the literature study will aid in developing a thorough theological framework for understanding interfaith dialogue and its uses in terms of promoting justice and peace throughout the world.

In terms of underscoring the possible content for interfaith dialogue, as 'people under the same roof', the comparative study will be reflecting between Christianity and Islam in order to determine which aspects of our respective faiths we hold in common. In particular, special focus will be on the notion of the 'one true God'. The importance of this specific focus will become clear as the study progresses.

Furthermore, by means of the comparative study we will be able to identify the very specific particularities within the Christian tradition which differ from the Islamic faith. These particularities will essentially centre on the person of Jesus and form that basis of our specific Christian mandate to bear faithful witness.

Throughout this research references will be made both to the biblical texts as well as the Qur'an. Where scripture is used, a text-critical, socio-scientific and socio-historic reading of the text will be rendered in order to thoroughly grasp the social context of the text. We will specifically be looking at principles uncovered through a hermeneutic

process which could then be applied to our current context, in particular those which might pertain to interfaith dialogue. The following theological disciplines are presumed to be of importance for the research task at hand: Religious Studies, Missiology, Dogmatic, and to a certain extent Pastoral Care.

## ■ Historical overview of religious conflict

In the introduction it was noted that relations between Christians and Muslims range from disinterest and uncertainty, to misunderstanding and even hostility. This context serves as enough reason for the development of better understanding of how Christians and Muslims interact, both theologically and practically. However, given the increase in tension between these religions in recent years due to an uptick in extremism since 9/11, as especially portrayed through the media, hostility and fear seem to dominate the attitude towards each other.

History gives us perspective into understanding current tensions. More than that, history serves to prevent us from being ignorant of the current realities whilst promoting new possibilities for the present. The way we understand religious conflict will shape how we understand the purpose and place of interfaith dialogue and inform the attitudes of how we engage in dialogue.

For those of us living in very fast-paced societies, lingering on the past seems like time wasted. Yet in a pastoral sense we know that the past is never truly past – it remains alive within memory. For that reason something like the crusades or the Fall of Constantinople will always inform our current experience.

Miroslav Volf (2011:2) explains that current events take Christians back to relive past ones; in other words, the experience of present danger or threat brings back memories of past injury, and that past injury is seen as likely to repeat itself within the present situation: What happened then will most likely happen again. These relived memories and fear of history repeating itself stir aggressive energies which often result in violent actions, either by individuals or larger groupings of people, and even nations.

Before reflecting on some key historical events we should consider what makes a conflict religious. Since very few conflicts historically are strictly religious in nature, they often involve ulterior motives relating to material goods such as freedom and territory, economic resources, political power, et cetera, in which religion often seems to play a minor role (Volf 2011:4). There are also numerous examples of conflicts which directly concern religious issues, even though other issues may be involved as mentioned. A particular case in point would be conflicts which involve holy sites – like Jerusalem, for example. Jerusalem was captured in 638 CE by the Arabs and has been in an almost continuous state of conflict since then.

Furthermore, the religious practices of evangelism and *Da'awa* have caused immense tension and violent conflicts in various areas of the world. Other specifically religious reasons for conflict often exist where one religion is a minority under the rule of the other; in such cases very specific persecution and hardships can befall the minority group. Social identity theory suggests that the related issue of social identity markers (in this instance, certain religious attire) often make a group of people a target for persecution.

Volf (2011:5) observes that sacred things need not be involved for conflict to take place, but when sacred things are at stake, conflicts become exacerbated. The issue is seemingly not whether the conflict is religious or not, but that when religious people partake in conflicts, these become increasingly intensified. In the words of Hans Küng (Knitter 2013:247) 'there will be no peace among nations unless there is peace and cooperation between religions!' Later I will deal with the theological content around which dialogue can take place to promote peace and cooperation between Christianity and Islam specifically.

For our purpose a selected number of conflicts are chosen for reflection, and brief key responses to these conflicts will be highlighted. However, this task is difficult since, as Robert Wilken (2009:26) points out, Islam has historically always been more than a faith with which Christianity cannot simply relate as one religion to another without reference to social, cultural and political factors.

The focus here will not rest so much on these 'other factors', but more specifically on those conflicts that have an underlying theological motivation, or that crossed the line of the sacred which invoked a theological response from the other faith. Where applicable, the relevant discussions between the religious leaders, along with any other relevant insights which might be useful for the present context of conflict, will be referenced.

## **Islamic expansion and the crusades**

No event in the history of Christianity was more unexpected, more calamitous and more consequential for Christianity than the rise of Islam (Wilken 2009:19). The rapid and vast expansion of the Arabs throughout the 7th century irrevocably and completely transformed society. Within a decade three major cities (Damascus in 635, Jerusalem in 638, and Alexandria in 641) of the Christian Byzantine Empire succumbed to the foreign invaders. These events were so unexpected and happened so fast that the Byzantine Empire could hardly mount a defence. The irony was that the rumours of a growing force in the Arabian Peninsula were of little concern, with other major conflicts taking place across the empire. Sophronius, the patriarch of Jerusalem, overconfident that the Saracens were no real threat, before the conquest of Jerusalem encouraged the faithful with these words: 'We will laugh at the demise of our enemies, the Saracens, and in a short time see their destruction and complete ruin' (Wilken 2009:19). Up until that point

the global centre of Christianity was in the Near East; up until today Muslims are still in Jerusalem and have been in a confrontation with Christianity ever since.

Christians in the 7th century had difficulty grasping the realities of Islamic expansion through the Arab conquest. These were not merely marauding armies conquering their cities; these were heralds of a new religion and architects of a new civilisation. One of the first recorded Christian comments relating to Muhammed appeared shortly after his death; an old man remarked, '[h]e [*Muhammed*] is false, for the prophets do not come armed with a sword' (Wilken 2009:20). Then again, Islam is not merely a faith in the same way that Christianity is, but is an all-encompassing social, cultural and political phenomenon.

A caliphate was established in the ancient Christian city of Damascus, whereby new communities were formed in the conquered territories, held together by common beliefs and practices. The invaders initially kept themselves apart from the local societies, maintaining their identity and thus gradually displacing the culture of the occupied region. During the caliphate of Abd-al-Malik and his son Hisham, Arabic became the official language of administration, commerce and learning. New currency was minted inscribed in Arabic, '[t]here is no god but God alone. He has no companion'. This was considered a direct reproach to Christians (Wilken 2009:20). Islam asserted itself during this period as an all-encompassing religion, dominating private and public life.

As a dramatic public gesture the Dome of the Rock was built on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Judges were appointed to administer the emerging body of law, which over time became known as the *Shari'a*. *Shari'a* is to be understood as an evolving body of social practices more than a fixed code. *Shari'a* has become a defining marker of Muslim identity, adding to the complexity of dealing with it today, as it is not merely legal in nature. By the year 750, 50% of the world's Christian population found themselves governed by Muslim authority. Their rights and privileges were limited by their legal status as *dhimmis*, that is, members of a restricted and inferior minority subject to an arduous tax (Wilken 2009:21). In most of these regions originally conquered by the sword the subject peoples eventually embraced the religion of their conquerors.

Islam continued its relentless military conquest westward, sparking the beginning of the first crusade towards the end of the 11th century. In terms of Christian-Muslim relations, the brutality of the crusades probably marks the darkest period as a specific Christian counteroffensive against the occupation of former Christian lands. In light of the context, the crusades were an understandable attempt on the part of the Christian world to halt the advance of Islam, reclaim lost territory and, importantly, recapture the holy city of Jerusalem. Ultimately, however, the crusades ended in failure since the territories that were gained were reclaimed within two centuries (Wilken 2009:22). However, at that time brutality was not really used to define one religion over and

against another; it was merely understood as a clash of civilisations. It is only within recent history that the crusades have been stirred within memory to serve contemporary agendas as a controversial issue. This has gained a great deal of public attention, more specifically when it comes to interfaith dialogue.

Islamic expansion and the Christian crusades, although not discussed here in detail, form the basic reflection in terms of fear of those memories being relived in the present. We live with the continual fear that our current experience may lead to that kind of experience, thus marking one of the greatest stumbling blocks which we need to get across for true interfaith dialogue to take place. These can quite correctly be understood as such, but in terms of a constructive contribution for our purpose we need to look to the Turkish conquest of Asia Minor, which was of far greater significance. Wilken (2009:22) points out that the arrival of the Turks prepared the way for the eventual fall of Constantinople in 1453.

## Turkish conquest

The city of Constantinople was the capital and bastion of Christianity for both the Roman and later the Byzantine Empire situated in Asia Minor, modern-day Turkey. Constantinople stood at the centre of the Eastern Christendom for nearly 1000 years. Following the Islamic expansion by the Ottoman Empire, Constantinople became the Islamic capital of the Empire. This, the conquering of Constantinople had far greater consequences for Christianity than the crusades, especially considering demographics. In the 11th century Asia Minor was almost completely Christian, by the 16th century, Muslims made up almost 92% of the population (Wilken 2009:22). Thus, by the beginning of the 16th century, Islam had a new powerful political centre in Constantinople, and already then they started putting roots down in South-Eastern Europe, where they remain to this day (Volf 2011):

At sunrise the Turks entered the city near San Romano ... They went rushing about the city, and anyone they found they put to the scimitar, woman and men, old and young, of any condition. This butchery lasted from sunrise, when the Turks entered the city, until midday, and anyone whom they found was put to the scimitar in their rage ... They were all running furiously like dogs into the city to seek out gold, jewels and other treasure, and to take merchants prisoner. They sought out monasteries, and all the nuns were led to the fleet and ravished and abused by the Turks, and then sold at auction for slaves throughout Turkey, and all the young women also were ravished and then sold for whatever they would fetch ... The Turks loaded all their ships with prisoners and with an enormous quantity of booty. (p. 42)

During these conflicts for Asia Minor an encounter took place between Byzantine Emperor Manuel II Palaeologus and an educated Persian on the subject of Christianity

and Islam in the 14th century. Manuel (Volf 2011) made the following comment relating to the violent nature of Islam:

Show me just what Muhammed brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith that he preached. (p. 22)

This recorded statement was made by Manuel in 1391, long after what remained of the Byzantine Empire became a client state of the Turks in 1379, just before the eight-year siege of Constantinople (1394–1402). The Turks were engaged with various conflicts around that time, having conquered Thrace, Macedonia and the Serbian Empire.

It was clearly evident during that time that the sword of the Muslim Turks was deployed with the purpose of conquering, subduing and threatening. Manuel's comments on the inhumanity and evil of the conquerors at that time did not mean much. Yet it is interesting to note that these events, recently referenced in 2006 by Pope Benedict XVI in the famous speech at the University of Regensburg, caused much fury and protest amongst Muslims (Volf 2011:19). Importantly, it resulted in renewed efforts initially from Muslims but also from Christians to promote peace and understanding amongst all religions. These developments, as a key contribution to interfaith dialogue between Christians and Muslims, are specifically examined in the following section.

The Fall of Constantinople meant that suddenly Rome itself, the centre of Western Christendom, was under threat and in very real danger. Some even feared that the whole of Europe might have followed the same fate. Europeans were left with two very distinct options of how to respond to these worrying developments in the east: the tried, and to a large degree unsuccessful approach of organising a military crusade, or the new and untested option of engaging in dialogue.

Volf (2011:41–59) discusses both of these responses quite extensively in light of the respective advocates for each: Aeneas Silvius Piccolomini, later Pope Pius II, as the vigorous and persistent advocate for another crusade, and Nicholas of Cusa representing the call for dialogue. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to go into detail; I merely summarise the position of Nicholas below, as it pertains to our theme of interfaith dialogue. Even though the context of this situation is vastly different from anything we are currently dealing with, the option of weapons versus words remains open to us. It would be beneficial for us today to grasp why Nicholas opted for dialogue, and how he navigated the theological issues related to such a task.

Shortly after these events Nicholas set his mind to the task of writing a treatise titled *On the Harmonious Peace of Religions*, wherein he effectively argued for a direct alternative to the crusades (Volf 2011:47). Nicholas envisioned a conference, or dialogue as we would refer to it, as a joint venture or search for truth through argument. The basis for such a conference depended on two important yet controversial convictions. Firstly, that all people, whether they knew it or not, worship the one and only true God, whereby he

aligned himself with some of the great Christian fathers such as Augustine. He hoped that a dialogue where different religions expressed their unique way of worshipping the one true God would result in peace. Importantly though, by this he does not see all religions as equal – he understood Christianity as the final and complete revelation of God, and that other religions seek to express the same but are filled with errors and incomplete revelations. The second conviction relates to how he understood the error in different religions: for Nicholas error rests ultimately in ignorance and not the wilful rejection of a manifest truth.

The central question which Nicholas sought to answer regarding Muslim-Christian relations relates to the question of God's unity, his oneness. He builds a lengthy argument, claiming that that which Muslims reject about the Trinity, Christians also indeed need to reject, followed by an argument out of the Qur'an that Muslims ought to accept what Christians believe about the Trinity. He maintained that Christians and Muslims both worship the one true God, albeit with different names and in different ways, whilst insisting that the Christian faith offers the most reliable and complete revelation of that one God (Volf 2011:56). Ultimately, for Nicholas the situation called for a battle of ideas, not a battle of swords. This notion of the one true God will be returned to in a later section.

## Siege of Vienna

The conquest of the Turks continued after the fall of Constantinople, with various kingdoms across Asia, Africa and Europe falling under Ottoman control in the first few decades of the 16th century. The Ottoman Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent steadily started making major inroads into the western territories, capturing large portions of eastern, central and southern Europe. It became evidently clear that the Ottoman Empire was one of the greatest existing political and military powers of the day. Suleiman the Magnificent prepared a force numbering nearly 100 000 to march on Hungary and lay siege to Vienna. By November 1545 Suleiman completed his fifth campaign in Hungary, capturing Hapsburg's forts and annexing nearly all their Hungarian territory (Volf 2011:61). The realm of the Ottoman Empire stretched from Persia in the east to Croatia and Hungary in the west. On 10 November 1545 a truce was negotiated, bringing the extensive expansion of the Turks to an end.

It is during this period that the Protestant reformer Martin Luther reflected substantially on whether Christians and Muslims have a common God. Ironically, that almost never seemed to be the question, but rather whether Muslims and Christians share in the important characteristics of God, such as God's absolutely unconditional love. In 1530 he wrote with no exaggeration, '[w]e now have the Turk and his religion at our doorstep.'



Again, this does not present a complete overview of Luther's dealing with the topic, but merely an overview of his position, as the intricacies will be dealt with later. As has already been stated, for Luther the question does not have anything to do with whether Christianity and Islam have a common God, in terms of substance, he takes this for granted. For Luther as a theologian the question was not about a clash of civilisations, but had more to do with the salvation of the human soul. He maintained that the Muslim convictions about God and their spirituality were utterly inadequate for salvation (Volf 2011:67). He promoted Islam as being good for this life, but not for the life of the world to come. If you wanted a religion centred on morality, Islam would be a good choice.

He dealt with the issue by relating the Islamic view of God to that of the Samaritans, in particular by referring to John 4, where Jesus responds to the Samaritan woman: 'you worship what you do not know' (v. 22). For Luther a major problem centred on the denial of the Trinity and the death of God's son on the cross. This led him to claim that in the hearts and mouths of Muslims, the true God morphs into no God at all. Their worship is directed towards the correct object, the 'One True God', but they distort that object almost beyond recognition (Volf 2011:71). However, it should be noted that for Luther this was not merely the case for Muslims, he even placed most Christians under this criterion. It was not a polarity of 'us' Christians versus 'them' Muslims, it related more to some Christians as those who correctly understood God and knew how to relate God correctly, versus most Christians and all non-Christians who do not (Volf 2011:74). Accordingly, Luther agrees that there is a lot of commonality between Christianity and Islam, especially in how the Christians view God. Yet all commonalities are ultimately unimportant in terms of his primary concern of standing before God.

## Recent examples: Denmark, Nigeria and Indonesia

Recently there has been an extremely high escalation of conflict, often designated as conflict between Christians and Muslims. Here I attempt to briefly reflect on three countries where this has been the case, and where the situations were seemingly interrelated. As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, religious conflicts are difficult to define, especially in today's world where they are cultivated out of various forms of political transition, socio-economic circumstances, and the cumulative effect of sustained grievances. I develop this primarily as a base discussion for the following section, where we will engage with the motivation for a Christian response, specifically relating to what Rasmusson (2008:215) defines as an 'us versus them' syndrome in Christian-Muslim conflicts. It should be noted that the narratives below do not reflect the entirety of the situation on the ground in the respective countries, since good relations between Christians and Muslims are also being maintained.

Denmark's largest newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* published 12 caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad on 30 September 2005, and were again reprinted in 2008 (Rasmusson 2008:216). These images depicted the Prophet in various demeaning ways, such as wearing a turban in the shape of a bomb with a burning fuse, or wielding a cutlass. Another had him saying that paradise was running short of virgins for suicide bombers. These are considered blasphemous within Islam. This incident drew sharp criticism from the global Islamic community, including Indonesia and Nigeria, and in the latter it even resulted in violent riots and killings.

In Nigeria's northern regions within the Plateau State, in the city of Jos, riots were triggered in 2001 due to issues relating to land ownership and access to public offices of the so-called indigenous people. The predominantly Christian Birom, Anaguta and Afizere peoples make up the indigenous grouping, whereas the Muslim Hausa-Fulani peoples are regarded as settlers. The Muslims as a minority group felt discriminated against. Violent conflicts and riots erupted throughout the region, especially in 2002 and 2004. This led to the eventual declaration by the president that the Plateau State was in a State of Emergency (Rasmusson 2008:217).

Indonesia experienced one of its most violent and persistent conflicts between December 1998 and 2001. Muslims and Christians in Poso, Central Sulawesi erupted in violence after a Christian and a Muslim got involved in a street brawl. The arrival of extremist groups such as Laskar Jihad in the region escalated the violence. Initially a private conflict, it soon evolved into a communal conflict which resulted in the death of hundreds of Muslims and Christians, with millions being displaced and destruction of private and public property (Rasmusson 2008:218).

However, in all three cases these conflicts cannot be categorised as solely religious, with the possible exception of the case in Denmark. A multitude of other factors were also clearly involved, such as economic inequalities, public ambition, feelings of neglect and exclusion, as well as ethnic, cultural and social envy (Rasmusson 2008:218). However, these struggles are often framed in religious terms, thus becoming a tool to be used within the struggles, but to state that this is the sole cause would be an oversimplification.

The dichotomy between 'us' and 'them' plays a crucial role in understanding these conflicts. It relates specifically to the socio-economic conditions of one group over and against another, specifically reflecting questions related to social identity as defining symbolic markers, but also the markers which define a group as unique and separate. If these identifying markers are threatened, conflict becomes the expected response in the sense of self-preservation. For example, in the case of Denmark various ministers went as far as stating that Denmark must be defended from those who come from the outside, with reference to the current influx of Muslim immigrants (Rasmusson 2008:222).

For them, reaction to this influx of Muslims is like resistance to invading German soldiers during World War II.

Religion, although not necessarily central to the various conflicts, plays a central role in our social understanding of who we are. Religion further informs our perspective and understanding of the other. It becomes a small jump to view people of another religious tradition, say Islam, from the perspective of Christianity as people worshipping another completely different God; hence they would be viewed as 'the other' or even as an 'enemy'. Rasmusson (2008:222) points out that the 'us' versus 'them' syndrome is commonly associated with images of enemy and fear; even majority populations can feel discriminated against by the 'other' – those they see as a threatening enemy.

These situations are continually exacerbated on a daily basis by the media, which often only portrays one-sided, negative stories of the 'other' or 'enemy', depending on the context. From our predominantly Christian context, it would place the spotlight on negative stories of Islam in particular, stirring fear and general mistrust towards Muslims. These often then lead to violent reactions by some, which are then again in turn exploited within the media and by populist politicians, contributing to the atmosphere of fear and mistrust – thus forming a vicious cycle.

## Minority contexts, religious freedom and extremism

One of the major complexities of Christian-Muslim relations relates specifically to how we can coexist together, especially given our multireligious, interdependent and closely connected society, where the dichotomy between specific Christian civilisations and Muslim societies has become increasingly distorted. As indicated earlier the dialogue which needs to take place is not merely religious in nature, but needs to move beyond that to the lived experience of people coexisting together.

This becomes painfully difficult in regions where one religion is in the minority, such as in the case of Denmark. In a brief survey of the *Open Doors World Watch List* (2015), this becomes especially painfully clear from a Christian perspective, seeing that the majority of states where Christians are experiencing various forms of persecution are predominantly Muslim. This is part and parcel due to the Muslim claim that Islam is a totality, a complete system that covers each and every aspect of human life (Naim 1995:11). Research has shown that people from ethnic or religious minorities experience direct and indirect forms of discriminatory treatment in the labour market (Rasmusson 2008:219).

For that very reason, although going beyond the scope of this research, interfaith dialogue needs to wrestle with the issue of religious freedom. We need to underscore how our religious identities can coexist peacefully with one another, whilst creating room for our outward expression, be it in the form of Muslim *Da'awa* or Christian

mission, whilst recognising that it is exactly our differing outward expressions which contribute to the challenges of their coexistence. In the final section I hope to show specifically how religious dialogue can promote authentic Christian witness.

Another aspect to which very little attention is devoted is the issue of religious extremism. In recent times this has become a real metaphorical elephant in the room for interfaith dialogue and any possibility of peaceful coexistence. It is interesting to note that religious extremism is a relatively new phenomenon, and only seriously presented itself as a question for interfaith dialogue after the horrific events of 9/11. Volf (2011:255–262) devotes his final chapter to this thorny issue, advocating a multipronged approach to combat religious extremism, and for specific engagement with the religious communities from which these extremists come. Denying this part of one's religious identity is not helpful, and rather simply lends credence to the claim by extremists that they possess the truth. The reality is that extremism on the one side breeds extremism on the other – negative views and negative actions often elicit corresponding and even augmented negative views and actions in return. For example, Pastor Terry Jones, who burnt copies of the Qur'an on September 11, 2010, sparked protest in many Muslim countries which left two people killed and many wounded in Afghanistan (Independent 2010).

Important for this discussion though, is the fact that religious extremism and, in a very specific way, Muslim terrorism breeds fear and suspicion, and more importantly how these supposed violent propensities can be reconciled to the one God to whom Muslims owe ultimate allegiance. This then becomes one of the central reasons why people doubt and are increasingly hesitant to engage in the 'absurd' possibility that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

It is in light of this dark and at times shameful history on both sides that we need to ask new questions if we are to envision any kind of alternative future. In order to move forward, we will need to become very real and frank about our shared experience of history. Whether we agree that those actions were authentically Christian or Muslim becomes irrelevant.

There is a very apparent danger if we do not acknowledge these events in that we can have a faith without history or, perhaps even worse, a history without faith (Naim 1995:10). The reality is that these historical events help shape our social construct of the other religion, which leads to a kind of 'us' versus 'them' mentality which breeds hostility. Steven Haggmark (2008:38) observes that we use these memories to establish abstract generalities which we accept as fact, and accordingly create an 'enemy' that is based on our own cultural biases and generalisations.

In other words, our understanding and response towards the other faith is socially constructed. We need to continuously ask ourselves to what extent is our picture of Islam

socially constructed and then generalised to the point of being dangerous. These images or memories discussed above merely serve to highlight some of the negative images used in our social construction, whether we have all the facts together or not. It is images like these which make it increasingly difficult for dialogue aimed at peace and justice to take place. Only genuine human encounters can undermine this process.

## ■ The will to embrace

It is clear from the combined histories of both traditions, Christian and Muslim, that our engagements have been marred by extreme violence, along with recent events. These narratives fuel growing suspicion, fear and hatred towards the other. The problem in almost all of these instances narrated in the previous section relates more to our perceptions of the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ rather than the diversity itself (Rasmusson 2008:215). Volf (1996:16) argues this point a bit differently, stating that these ethnic, cultural and religious conflicts are part of a much larger problem of identity and otherness. The rhetoric which often follows is that of a protective and positively defined ‘we’ versus a threatening and negatively defined ‘them’.

In this section a possible Christian response to these given realities and perceptions is explored as a possible theological framework for moving forward to a just and peaceful society where dialogue becomes the practical application. In other words, what kind of people are we to become – ought we to become – in order to live in harmony with others? Wolterstorff (in Volf 1996:21) stated that we need to concentrate on fostering the kind of social agents capable of envisioning and creating just, truthful, and peaceful societies, shaping a cultural climate in which such agents thrive.

I turn now specifically to the work of Miroslav Volf and his book *Exclusion & Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (1996). As a leading voice within mainline Christianity on Islam, a professor at Yale and the founding director of the Yale Centre for Faith and Culture, he has extensive personal experience of dealing in dialogue between cultures and religions. In particular, he is serving on the executive board of the Centre for World Dialogue, which believes that dialogue and the exchange of views has a vital role to play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts (Centre for World Dialogue, n.d.). Given the social realities as described above, it demands that we place identity (‘Christian’) and otherness (‘Islam’) at the centre of our theological reflection (Volf 1996:17).

An important note for the discussion to follow is that the work of Volf primarily centres on how the Christian faith is to be understood in terms of their racial, ethnic or cultural identities, and from that position, how the one relates to the other. However, this is not our primary concern here, but more so, as in the later part of his work, how our

Christian identity determines how we should relate to others. For our purposes much of his work is interpreted in terms of a religious other, specifically a Muslim other.

## The cross and conflict

Any theological reflection on how we are to relate to any other, regardless of whether the other is defined on socio-economic, political, racial, cultural, sexual or religious lines, our departure point should always reflect the life and ministry of Jesus, and in particular a reflection of the cross as both an act of solidarity and of self-giving love.

Since we are dealing with conflicts, an ethical consideration is of some importance. Through the lens of the cross there is a beckoning to stand in solidarity with the oppressed and suffering, whilst at the same time the supplemental theme of atonement for the perpetrator. Moltmann (1992:129–131) argued that in the sufferings of the cross were not only the sufferings of Christ but also those of the poor and weak which Jesus shared in his own body in solidarity with them. Christ accordingly identifies with the victims of violence and identifies the victims with God. In the same way that the victims need to be liberated from suffering caused by oppression, oppressors need to be liberated from injustices committed. Volf (1996:23) observes that the cross is a divine atonement for sin, injustice and violence on the earth: 'But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: Whilst we were still sinners, Christ died for us' (Rom 5:8).

Where Moltmann (1992) expressed specifically the solidarity of the cross to the victims, we will move more towards the motivation of this solidarity, which is understood as God's self-giving. God gave of himself on the cross for the sinner and the evildoer in order to receive them into divine communion with himself. The question then becomes to what extent are we willing to give of ourselves to our enemies? This theme, which we derive from the cross, is often referred to as self-donation. Important for consideration is that solidarity as expressed by Moltmann cannot be separated from self-donation. All who suffer can find comfort in the solidarity of the crucified, but only those who struggle against evil by following the example of the crucified will discover him at their side. Volf (1996:23) adds that to claim the comfort of the crucified whilst rejecting his way is to advocate not only cheap grace, but a deceitful ideology.

The call of all discipleship centres on the pattern of life and death shown by Jesus. The theme of self-donation, or Christ's self-giving love, stands at the centre of Christian theology. Even our practices as a faith community express this central truth. The two sacraments, that is, baptism and communion, serve to reiterate this point continually in the lives of followers of Christ. Baptism serves as identification with the death of Christ (Rom 6:3), whilst communion calls us to remember Christ as the One who gave his body for us (1 Cor 11:23–24). Moltmann (1992:137) states beautifully that the self-giving love

of Christ is rooted in the self-giving love of the triune God. This is at the very core of the Christian faith – the very fact that Christ modelled self-giving love to all on the cross – and in turn it becomes a demand to be followed by his followers. For our Christian reflection on Muslim-Christian relations, this is our departure point to know Christ, and indeed, him the crucified (1 Cor 2:2).

We should, however, be careful not to overromanticise the act of self-donation, as the act of modelling Christ's example often leads to similar results. We might hope for reciprocal self-donation, as that would inevitably result in perfect love, and thus a perfect world. However, the reality is that this kind of reciprocity is hardly ever achieved or fulfilled. Self-donation is more often than not met with exploitation and brutality. Thus the road we choose to walk is not an easy one nor for the faint of heart, but then again it is for the faintest of hearts. Volf (1996:25–27) speaks of this as the scandal of the cross, stating that in a world of violence the cross – that eminently counter-cultural symbol – lies at the heart of the Christian faith. However, by this we should not think that the scandal refers to the inherent danger and threat of exploitation associated with self-donation, since any suffering experienced can be endured – especially if that suffering bears the desired fruit.

The true scandal is when we engage with the act of self-donation, and it does not bear the desired fruit. Hope deferred makes the heart sick (Pr 13:12). To state it emphatically: You give of yourself to the other, and the hope to end violence is not met – rather, violence continues and destroys you. Volf (1996:26) calls this pain of failure and violence a cry before the dark face of God. The reality is that there is no way around the scandal since it is at the core of the Christian faith. Our only valid responses are either to reject the cross, or take up the cross to follow in the footsteps of the crucified 'and be scandalized ever anew by the challenge' (Volf 1996:26). The beauty and reward, however, lie within the scandal, that in the act of self-donation – whether it bears the desired fruit or not – we will find ourselves in the company of the crucified.

Before moving on to the 'will to embrace', as the heading suggests, a theological framework for why the animosity or tension exists between Christians and Muslims needs to be developed. Only once this has been established can we return to the act of self-donation or, more correctly, the will to give of ourselves to others, and 'welcome' them by reinterpreting our own self-identification as Christians in order to make space for them, 'the other'. This should happen before we place judgements upon whom or what 'the others' are, critically avoiding any broad generalisations, except for identifying them in their humanity. We need to consider the humanity of Christians and Muslims as people occupying the same space, as Volf (2011) refers to all of us as people 'living under the same roof'. This then becomes an important reflection for us, as we cannot really avoid one another, as has been established in the previous section. Perhaps an important disclaimer regarding 'the will to embrace' is that it precedes any 'truth' about others and

any construction of their 'justice'; therefore it is absolutely indiscriminate and strictly immutable, transcending the moral mapping of the social world into 'good' and 'evil'.

## **Differentiation and exclusion**

Without expanding at great length here on what Volf (1996) articulates in this regard, the fact has already thoroughly been established that there exists conflict, whether perceived or real, between Christianity and Islam. These conflicts are multidimensional in nature, drawing on a lot of different socio-economic and political factors, but are often exacerbated as a result of religious connotations. Exclusion has enormous negative connotations within ministry reflection, something which ought to be avoided. It is, however, also extremely helpful in identifying various boundaries which can then be evaluated. If we go about life without underscoring exclusion, we become oblivious to the very fact that boundaries indeed do exist. In a very raw sense, 'us' Christians versus 'them' Muslims are helpful religious designations but also harmful, in that they breed suspicion and malintent towards the other.

Volf (1996:65–68) opts to speak of differentiation as opposed to separation, which he explains in the following way: differentiation consists of 'separating and binding', which expresses something of how identities or objects relate to one another, whereas separation would always result in 'self-enclosed, isolated, and self-identical beings'. Differentiation becomes important for our dialogue, in that Islam and Christianity cannot be seen as separate entities which have nothing to do with one another. As already seen, religions interact with one another in either positive, constructive relations or, more often than not, negative and violent conflict towards the other. Social ('religious') identity is formed through a complex process: We are who we are not because we are separate from others who are next to us, but because we are both separate and connected, both distinct and related; the boundaries that mark our identities are both barriers and bridges (Volf 1996:66). In terms of interfaith dialogue one chooses to focus on those aspects of our various religions which define one as distinct, but also on what all might have in common in order to build bridges to engage with the other. Others, however, would point to the selfsame aspects as a means for debate and sowing further division which seeks to prove 'truth', but does nothing to promote peace or justice. As stated earlier, the will to embrace preceded 'truth'.

Our identity results out of our distinction which we discover in relation to the other; in a very real sense we negotiate our identity in interaction with one another. Exclusion then becomes the 'sinful activity of reconfiguring the creation' (Volf 1996:66). It is a twofold action moving against differentiation; firstly by removing oneself out of the pattern of interdependence, which inherently defines the other then as 'enemy' which must be pushed away or driven out for one's own preservation. Secondly, the removal of



separation, in other words not recognising the other as someone belonging to the pattern of interdependence. This leads to viewing the other as an inferior who needs to be assimilated or subjugated by the self. This often becomes expressed in our attitudes towards mission, or as violent conflict.

Volf (1996:72–139) identifies the following forms of exclusion and their remedies: If we do not engage with these remedies of exclusion, then exclusion will always lean towards its extremes, which seek to kill and destroy – that is, exclusion as elimination. Exclusion can also take another subtle form, and that is assimilation, whereby the argument is simply ‘we will refrain from killing you or casting you out, if you are willing to become like us.’ In other words, you must reject your identity.

## □ Renaming

Renaming involves behaviours or beliefs which have been falsely labelled as ‘sinful’. These are often expressed as gross generalisations and ill-informed judgements, for example, ‘all Muslims are terrorists’. Often simply by renaming things which were deemed unclean or impure, Jesus offset the binary logic which defines social life. Christians need to reinterpret how they view others, and abolish the system of exclusion that this creates.

## □ Remaking

In addition to removing labels, Jesus made clean things out of truly unclean things, by engaging with the outcast and marginalised of society. This relates to tearing down the barriers created by wrongdoing in the name of God, whose love knows no boundaries. It is the active engagement with those who are guilty, the ‘extremists’ and the ‘terrorists’, where they are sought out and brought into the communion.

To move again beyond all of these forms of exclusion we need to return to the cross. This relates to how we understand ourselves as Christians. Galatians 2:

I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and himself for me. (vv. 19–20)

Here Paul reflects on his own identity, and the way he understood himself. He presumes a centred self, more specifically a wrongly centred self which needs to be decentred by being crucified. In other words, his conception of himself needs to be crucified and laid down. However, one is never truly free from one’s identity, as the self is continuously recreated. Volf (1996:71) calls this new crucified centre a decentred centre, which is defined by self-giving love which continually opens the self up, and makes it capable and willing to give itself for others and to receive others in itself, which was patterned by the suffering Messiah.

## Embrace

The previous section developed a thorough understanding of the varieties of conflict which are all, to varying degrees, defined as religious conflict, specifically between Christianity and Islam. I explained these as being understood either as a ‘clash of civilisations’, or within the most basic polarity of exclusion, as ‘us’ versus ‘them’ or perhaps even ‘either us or them’. Volf (1996:99) observes that the stronger the conflict, the more the rich texture of the social world disappears and the stark exclusionary polarity emerges, around which all thought and practice aligns itself. This will be all the more true for conflicts of a religious nature, as they are defined by our deepest convictions.

The most common response when conflict emerges is that of simply I ‘don’t have a choice’, which stems directly from the logic within an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ mentality, seemingly oblivious to the very fact that to destroy the other or be destroyed is itself a choice. If there is will, courage and imagination, these stark polarities can be overcome, suggests Volf (1996:99). Christians can resist the pull and rediscover their common belonging. For our reflection here we will again turn to the cross as our ultimate expression of God’s reception of hostile humanity into divine communion, as a model for how we as humans should relate to others.

Before engaging with Volf’s model of embrace, a comment reflecting back needs to be made. In attempting to deconstruct the conflicts above, one often falls into the liberation loophole of attempting to identify who is the oppressor and accordingly who is the oppressed, as existing within the ‘us’ versus ‘them’ polarity. However, as one has seen, both Christians and Muslims are historically guilty of gross violence towards the other, thus making such distinction improbable. Therefore our point of departure rests not in the value of freedom, of who is right and wrong, but should echo that of Gustavo Gutiérrez (1988) who insisted that love is ultimately:

[T]he deepest root of all servitude is the breaking of friendship with God and with other human beings, and therefore cannot be eradicated except by the unmerited redemptive love of the Lord whom we receive by faith and in communion with one another. (p. xxxviii)

An interesting notion is raised by Volf (1996:109) where he advocates for placing our understandings of conflict and global events in the world of growing plurality, to be situated within the grand narrative. That would be the grand narrative of the Christian faith, as is the fact that Christ will return and in front of him every knee will bow. Although not expressed in these words, he speaks of the ‘final reconciliation’ when we all will appear before God. He does this not in a way to defer one from dealing with the conflict at hand, but to illustrate that the final reconciliation is in the hands of God. We cannot push people towards that, or other forms of salvation, specifically universal salvation which would remove differential boundaries, as discussed earlier. Rather, he suggests that we should recognise that along with new understandings and peace

agreements, new conflicts and disagreements are permanently generated. He is almost saying 'let's not get lost in our theology, but be real with what is happening in the world.' Therefore he suggests that we should not wrestle with how to achieve the final reconciliation, but rather focus on what resources are needed to live in peace and struggle against oppression in the absence of the final reconciliation.

With regard to embrace Volf suggests four movements which we need to move through in order to truly embrace the other: repentance, forgiveness, making space in oneself for the other, and healing of memory.

## Repentance

Volf (1996:112) starts off by explaining the ministry of Jesus specifically in a political capacity amongst the poor and marginalised. He focuses more on the fact that Jesus proclaimed a lot more than would be expected of any politician at that time: Kindling hope in the hearts of the oppressed and demanding radical change of the oppressors whilst communicating the message of God's unconditional love and the people's need for repentance. These two centralities, on which Jesus' ministry was based, can be deemed to be the most hopeful aspects of Jesus' message: divine love and repentance addressed to the victims. Repentance is not merely 'to make a radical alteration in one's life', it is to make a turnabout of a profound moral and religious import which inherently implies the recognition that you have made a mistake, but more than that, that you have sinned.

What is striking in this message is to whom the call of repentance is addressed. Not only had those been called to repentance who were oppressors, but also importantly so were the victims of oppression themselves (Volf 1996:114). This is important for us because, as was stated earlier, in conflict we cannot distinguish between oppressor and the oppressed, and neither did Jesus make this distinction. That is exactly what makes the proclamation of Jesus so revolutionary – the connection he makes between the hope that he gives the oppressed and the radical change that he requires of them.

He continues to explain that the reason for the need for repentance on behalf of the oppressed is because not only do these need material and psychological help, but they also have a deeper need to be released from their understandable but nonetheless inhumane hatred towards the oppressor in their hearts. The value of this cannot be overemphasised given that in any conflict, the role of the 'victim' continuously shifts. Therefore the victims need to repent because social change that corresponds to the vision of God's reign cannot take place without a change of their heart and behaviour.

It should be observed here that it is not clear exactly what Jesus called his followers to repent from, or rather that Jesus nowhere clearly defines sin. Gnilka (1993:212) defines sin according to Jesus as a failure to live the life of discipleship as described in the Sermon

on the Mount. Thus accordingly sin could have an extremely broad application, but the apt application for our purposes would be to reflect on the failure of loving your enemies and praying for those who persecute you, for example (Mt 5:44). Repentance accordingly becomes an extremely powerful force combating suspicion, hatred and the breeding of contempt towards the other. Volf (1996:116) states that to repent, one resists the seductiveness of sinful values and practices, and lets the new order of God's reign be established in one's heart.

It is a radically different response to that of the oppressor. By repentance the victim's response is no longer determined by the terms of the oppressor, such as the circumstances under which the conflict was carried out, the values which dictated the conflict, and importantly the means by which these were fought. Repentance 'humanises' the situation, preventing the victim from either mimicking or dehumanising the oppressor. Victims need to repent of what perpetrators do to the soul – to repent of the fact that all too often they mimic the behaviour of the oppressors, and let themselves be shaped in the mirror image of their enemy (Volf 1996:116). One can take this a step further, and argue that they need to repent of their ungrounded defence of their reactive behaviour by claiming that they are not responsible, or that such actions are needed for liberation. If repentance fails to occur on all of these levels, the full human dignity of victims will not be restored and the desired social change will never occur.

Volf (1996:117) presents a narrative from the conflicts in his home country in Croatia and/or Serbia, and the violence which had occurred there. In the narrative he explains that the violence and disgrace that was suffered created hate. However, he makes the beautiful remark that 'under the onslaught of extreme brutality, an inner realm of freedom to shape one's self must be defended as a sanctuary of a person's humanity.'

The repentance of the oppressor is not discussed here, as such repentance is a given requirement. Perhaps just a note on how the gospel demands more from the oppressor in terms of repentance; for them repentance is more than just the purifying of desire and the mending of ways. It also implies the making of restitution to those they have wronged (Volf 1996:117). Genuine repentance on the side of the oppressor often results in super-abundant restitution, which is an attempt to offset the injustice of the original violation. Derrida (in Caputo 2007:69–72) explains this in economic terms: The act of giving, in this case the taking thereof, results in perceived debt within the beneficiary, who then needs to (in a reciprocal way) repay that perceived debt. He argues that these exchanges always result in being reciprocated, and set of a circle of return as each exchange opens up a perceived debt in the other.

Volf (1996:118) emphasises that the need to talk about the victim's repentance has to do with 'the creation of the kind of social agents that are shaped by the values of God's Kingdom and therefore, capable of participating in the project of authentic social

transformation.' Repentance then becomes the point of departure if one is to authentically respond from within a Christian narrative, respond to the social realities of animosity between Christians and Muslims and perhaps move towards an alternative outcome.

## □ Forgiveness

Repentance is always shrouded in the pain and the promise of genuine confession. However, it is a fundamental step which needs to take place as it forms the departure point for forgiveness. Caputo (2007:73) argues that the only thing that can truly be forgiven is the unforgivable; the only condition under which true forgiveness becomes possible, is when forgiveness is impossible. Forgiveness, especially in cases of extreme violence, is that thing which is beyond understanding, beyond reason, beyond all accounting and all cost. In this sense, forgiveness bears witness to the possibility of the impossible. Therefore it is a gift and in a very true sense of the word, 'grace' (Moltmann 1987):

A person who thus admits his guilt and complicity renders himself defenceless, assailable and vulnerable. He stands there, muddled and weighed down. Everyone can point at him and despise him. But he becomes free from alienation and the determination of his actions by others; he comes to himself, and steps into the light of a truth which makes him free. (p. 43)

Although being the first step, repentance within the perceived 'us' builds anger within the heart of every victim against whom an injustice has been committed. The words of Christ on the cross become deemed impossible and turned upon themselves: 'Forgive them not, for they know what they do!' (Lk 23:34). Revenge becomes the logical and powerful emotion which often tends to dictate our response, whereby we argue that the oppressor deserves unforgiveness or, put differently, it would be considered unjust to forgive. In terms of forgiveness it would go a long way if the oppressor confessed and repented, yet this is hardly ever the case. When this occurs Volf (1996:120) claims that both the victim and the perpetrator become imprisoned in the autism of mutual exclusion, unable to forgive or repent and are then united in a perverse communion of mutual hate. Revenge is deemed the only option, and an injustice demands to be repaid in kind. A spiral of vengeance is soon to follow, since under the guise of seeking justice the one group acts out in violence or so-called 'just' revenge, which is in turn perceived by the other as an injustice, which again beckons 'just' counter-revenge.

The only way out of the endless cycle, the predicament of irreversibility, is through forgiveness (Volf 1996:121). Volf understands forgiveness as a genuinely free act which does not merely react, but breaks the power of the remembered past and transcends the claims of the affirmed justice, and so makes the spiral of vengeance grind to a halt. It should be self-evident from this description that forgiveness is incredibly powerful and bears immense social import in terms of dealing with conflicts. In being crucified, Jesus

became the ultimate example of his own teaching. When Jesus prayed on the cross to forgive the unjust that placed him there, the power of revenge was overcome. The law of retaliation became null and void. It is in the act of forgiveness that one becomes liberated and truly free, and in a very specific way, free from the obligation to evil deeds.

An immediate objection at this point would be to ask, but what about justice? Volf (1996:122) remarks that the very idea of forgiveness implies an affirmation of justice. The expression in the Lord's Prayer, for example, to forgive our debts as we forgive others (Mt 6:12), expresses an element of debt. One could argue then, if justice is included, why forgiveness? Volf (1996:122–128) establishes a lengthy argument in this regard on the merits and criticism of restorative justice, which is not of importance to us at this moment. Suffice that he concludes that strict restorative justice can never be satisfied.

Bonhoeffer (1995:144) argued that forgiveness provides the framework to properly understand justice in which it can be fruitfully pursued by stating that 'only those who are in a state of truthfulness through confession of their sin to Jesus are not ashamed to tell the truth wherever it must be told.' Once one has forgiven, one can pursue justice without falling into the trap or temptation to pervert justice into an injustice.

The rage and anger expressed earlier, which often swells up in the face of injustices experienced, has its correct place before God. These are often expressed in the language of the Psalms which call for the imminent destruction of enemies. Important to understand is that these are reflective outbursts in the context of prayer, where we voice with outrage from the depths of our souls our deepest emotions. These are never to be understood as emotions to be acted upon. Volf (1996:124) states that in the act of placing unattended rage before God, we place both our unjust enemy and our own vengeful self in front of God who loves and does justice. It is within this place before God that hate seems to regress and a seed for the impossible is planted, to forgive the unforgivable. In front of the cross of Christ our enemy moves from monstrous inhumanity to the sphere of our shared humanity, and the victim from proud innocence to common sinfulness.

Forgiveness is expressed most vividly through the imagery of the cross, as it symbolises both the destructiveness of humanity as being contrasted to the greatness of God's love. The cross is not merely the suffering of an innocent person, but is extended in the passion narrative as a tortured soul which offers its body up as a prayer of forgiveness to the torturers. From the imagery of the passion narrative Bonhoeffer (1995:95) saw that forgiveness itself is a form of suffering. In other words, when we forgive we admit in part that we have suffered a violation, and further suppress our rightful claims of strict restorative justice.

## Making space in oneself for the other

We cannot, however, stop at forgiveness and accordingly go our separate ways. Although some would advocate for a position that each, after repentance and forgiveness has

played out, in the sense of justice as well, should go their separate ways – especially in situations of extreme conflict. This possibility as we know has closed itself up to us as we live in a pluralistic and interdependent society where interaction with the other is unavoidable. Correctly understood though, the cross as a symbol of forgiveness serves as the boundary between exclusion and embrace, as it has the power to break down the walls of hostility.

Volf (1996:126) remarks that the passion of Christ aims at restoring communion between former enemies, even those who persistently refuse to be reconciled. The central message of the gospel and that of the cross centres around this understanding, that Christ refuses the other to remain as an enemy whilst creating space within himself for letting the offender in: ‘While we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son’ (Rm 5:10). In God’s relentless pursuit to break the power of human enmity without violence and receive humanity into divine communion, ‘God gave himself up in Christ’, is the fact that he did not have to give us up. ‘As an expression of the will to embrace the enemy, the cross is no doubt a scandal in a world suffused with hostility’ (Volf 1996:126). The cross becomes the ultimate symbol of offence in a world of violence. We would do well to remember that the call to follow in the fate of the crucified and his demand to walk in his footsteps remains open to us (Mt 16:24; Lk 14:26).

If we follow in the footsteps of Christ, we ought to mimic the two dimensions of the passion narrative in our relations towards others, especially those we deem as our enemies. The two dimensions reflect God’s self-giving love which overcomes human enmity, and further creates space within him to receive estranged humanity. Volf (1996:128) uses the imagery of Irenaeus to express that when the Trinity turns towards the world, the Son and the Spirit become the two arms of God by which humanity was made and taken into God’s embrace. We would do well to always remember that we ourselves were in enmity towards God. Despite this God, who gave himself in love and loves us with the same love with which they (the persons of the Trinity) love each other, drew us into communion with himself.

Therefore, much of the meaning of the cross is surmised by the injunction ‘to embrace each other’. As we have been embraced by the outstretched arms of the crucified God, we ought to open up our arms, especially for those one deems enemies, and make space within ourselves for them. We should invite them in, so to speak, so that we might together be able to rejoice in the eternal embrace of the triune God (Volf 1996:131).

This becomes very practical in terms of our motivation to engage with Muslims, to hear and become part of their narrative. To ‘invite them in’ becomes our motivation to practice Christian hospitality as an act of deeply expressing the will to embrace.

## □ Healing of memory

This last move within the act of embrace or the actual embrace goes to a large extent beyond the scope of this research, as it starts to touch on the practicalities of reconciliation which come as a result of the willingness to embrace. Since the motivation for this section is to illustrate the Christian motivation to engage with interfaith dialogue, I opt to leave the possibilities of dialogue open-ended, as indeed they truly are, and as the final section will also illustrate.

The healing of memory which Volf (1996) speaks of is a kind of forgetting which he develops from the presupposition that matters of:

[T]ruth and justice have been taken care of, i.e. the perpetrators have been named, judged and hopefully transformed, that victims are safe and wounds are being healed, a forgetting that can therefore ultimately only take place with the creation of all things new. (p. 131)

Forgetting, or rather the healing of memory, has much more to do with remembering correctly. Volf advocates that when victims remember correctly, the memory of inhumanities of the past will shield both them and all of us against future inhumanities. If perpetrators remember rightly, the memory of their sins will help restore their guilty past and transform it into soil within which a more hopeful future can grow. However, we need to go a step further – and hence the wording of ‘forgetting’. In order to truly go beyond past grievances we need to be able to let them go, that is, let go of the memory of the past, if we truly want to be reconciled one to the other. It is only in the willingness to forget that we can start to remember rightly. Forgetting here is distinct to other responses which often tend to either deny or reject the past. Holding on to the past in a defensive way from a specific perspective inherently means that the injustices have not yet been confessed, repented or even forgiven. Forgetting in this sense is a means of being free of that troublesome past, in that it does not dictate our current responses towards the other.

Volf (1996:135) explains that no final redemption or reconciliation is possible without the redemption of the past. Since every attempt to redeem the past through reflection must fail because no theodicy can succeed, the final redemption is unthinkable without a certain kind of forgetting. To understand this we need to consider God’s ‘forgetting’ in terms of our sins as a plausible model for our human forgetting. At the centre of God’s all-embracing memory there is a paradoxical monument to forgetting that which was done on the cross of Christ (Volf 1996:139). There is a direct link between the way God forgets, and the way God forgives the sins of humanity. He does this by taking sins away from humanity and placing them upon God-self (Jn 1:29; Rv 22:1–4). Thus, understanding memory in light of both Christ’s suffering and the glory of God’s new world, forgetting ultimately takes on an eschatological character, where forgetting removes the injury of memory as the last obstacle in the process of embrace.



## ■ The drama of embrace as a metaphor

In what follows I briefly describe the act of embrace as a metaphor for our engagement with others, or more specifically others with whom we share a degree of hostility (Volf 1996:140–148). The drama echoes the four movements that were described above. Throughout we will also then be reflecting on how interfaith dialogue mimics the drama.

### □ Opening the arms

Simply put, with the act of opening the arms we express the desire for the other, suggesting the pain of their absence and the joy of the other's anticipated presence. It is the creating of space within ourselves for the other to enter, as an act of self-donation. By the opening of the arms we express the desire for engagement, that we have the adequate space for that desire to be fulfilled, and that the formally perceived boundaries are now crossable. It is the invitation, the initial will to embrace. The hosting of an interfaith dialogue, or just a meal for interaction to take place, could be deemed as this initial action since it communicates a desire for engagement with the other, but remains open as the other has not as yet responded.

### □ Waiting

This is the continuation of the movement towards the other. It presses in to fulfil the expressed desire by the opened arms, the created space, the opened up boundary, et cetera. However, it stops just short of engaging the other. The other cannot and will not be coerced or manipulated into an embrace. Therefore the waiting is a proper waiting that has the power to potentially move the other into a movement towards the self, the stirring of desire. These initial two movements are often one-sided in their origin, and can never move towards their desired goal without reciprocity from the other, hence the importance of this discussion as the first step.

### □ Closing the arms

The goal of the will to embrace comes to realisation; a reciprocal act takes place in which both have moved through the act of opening up the arms and waiting – each giving of themselves to create room for the other. Hegel (1977a:112) defines this action as two-sided because it is the action of the one as well as of the other. In the act of embrace the identity of each person is maintained; however, at the same time it is altered or transformed and the uniqueness of the other is also affirmed as being different. Importantly though, the act of embrace, regardless of being a neighbour or an enemy, signifies something of commonality. This place can only be achieved by the selfless giving up of oneself for the other – it is 'a necessary *via dolorosa* in a world of enmity and indifference toward the joy of reciprocal embrace' (Volf 1996:146).

Here it relates to interfaith dialogue in that we do not engage in the dialogue of truths as a matter of debates, of us over and against them, we rather seek commonality at first and from there work towards the common good. This reciprocal nature helps develop values and rhythms through which we can then communicate our unique particularities within interfaith dialogue. These engagements also tend to define the determination of such dialogue, considering that the outcome will always be varied and open-ended, depending on the context, participants, and nature of the dialogue. Therefore we leave the outcome open-ended for the realm of the impossible, embracing a multifinality where various outcomes – some previously inconceivable – become possible.

It is always imperative to remember that the embrace can be refused at any moment and that is okay, but it does hinder the exchange of mutual giving and receiving. Therefore a certain risk lies in embrace as we do not know how the other will respond to our invitation. We most likely will be misunderstood, despised and even violated. Looking back to our imagery of the cross as a symbol of embrace with Christ's arms extended, we can rest assured that many would not return an aligned desire to embrace. Nonetheless, we need to continuously seek opportunities where one can extend one's own arms as a sign of the will to embrace.

From a dense theology of the cross as a universal symbol of embrace, of selfless giving and creating room for the other, it would be unfaithful for us to consider any other response to Islam than to be willing to engage in dialogue. It is within the realm of dialogue that we can come openly to give of ourselves, and become vulnerable. We can share and confess our history of sinfulness towards each other, forgiving one another's transgressions. Perhaps then we can start to create room for the other as we live together under the same roof.

In this process the hope of an undetermined future presents itself. This is where our memories of the past can be restored in order for us to live peaceably amongst one another whilst expressing our unique particularities which make us distinct from one another. Ultimately in the act of embrace we are separate, but for that faintest of moments we become interdependent, holding and leaning on each other, where our defined boundaries become porous. This possibility of mutuality allows for justice and forgiveness to respond to violence in an appropriate way. Embrace then becomes a matter of Christian charity and self-respect, 'if we continue to view ourselves as apart, we do violence to ourselves and to others' (Oppenheimer 2003:21).

## ■ A Common Word and interfaith dialogue

Over the course of the last decade a lot of emphasis has been placed on the role of dialogue between Christians and Muslims as a means of developing greater understanding of the other in order to foster peaceful and just living relations. This became especially urgent

after the Danish incident of 2006 with the demeaning caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, which threatened peace and security in many parts of the world. These events forced leaders of various nations and transnational organisations, including the United Nations' Kofi Annan, to speak out (Volf 2011:20).

In this section one of these initiatives for dialogue between Muslims and Christians will be explored, developed from an Islamic perspective and its respective Christian responses. This is an extremely remarkable and unprecedented development, unlike any in the history of Christian-Muslim relations – a defining development for the road forward.

## Background

At the end of Ramadan on 13 October 2007 Muslim scholars sent an open letter to all Christians inviting them to engage in dialogue on the basis of world peace and the central call to both Christians and Muslims to love God and love thy neighbour (Speelman 2010:110). This document was supported by various quotations from both the Bible and the Qur'an.

The letter came as a response from the Islamic community to the so-called and now famous Regensburg lecture of Pope Benedict XVI in September 2006 (Volf 2011:19). In the lecture the Pope aligned himself to a large extent with an array of voices from the international community who stated that freedom of expression does not include the right of desecration. The Pope called for mutual and urgent respect of religions and their symbols. He did not leave it at that: He indirectly and gently rebuked the violence within Islam as well, with specific reference to the various riots, killings and burning of property in response to the events which took place in Denmark. Most Muslims would wholeheartedly agree with the Pope up until this point.

However, the Pope went on to reference a medieval theologian, Manuel II Palaeologus, who commented negatively on Islam just before the fall of Constantinople (Volf 2011, cf. Speelman 2010:110):

Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached. (p. 22)

The Pope seemed to be implying that Islam is a violent religion, and the cause of its violent nature lies in the character of the Muslim God. Soage (2007:138) commented that in this way the Pope put the caricatures of the Danish newspaper into words. This resulted in a call for a 'day of anger', which led to violent protests with effigies of the Pope being burnt in Basra, Iraq, a Catholic nun being shot in Somalia, the Kashmir Valley almost being shut down by protests, and al-Qaeda vowing to conquer Rome, amongst others (Volf 2011:21).

The fact that the Pope referenced Manuel was not the heart of the contention which triggered the corresponding violence; the Pope effectively argued that violence was but a mere symptom of erroneous ideas about the nature of God. He argued further that within Christianity God is reason, *logos* (Jn 1:1), whereas in Islam God is a transcendent and pure will, and that these stand diametrically opposed to one another. This understanding is further expressed in how Christianity's God of reason encourages reasoning, deliberation, and persuasion, whereas the God of pure will of Islam demands obedience and promotes violence (Volf 2011:24). Thus the Pope ultimately understood that at the heart of our religious differences lie completely different understandings of God (Vatican 1999):

## A Common Word

The immediate response to the Regensburg address was an 'open letter' a month later signed by 38 Islamic scholars, where they in point-by-point form refuted the Pope's statements with well-reasoned, measured arguments, and further wanted to debate with him about what they saw as erroneous interpretation of their faith tradition (Speelman 2010:110). Apart from dealing with the issues raised by Pope Benedict XVI, the 'open letter' also served to remind the Pope that since the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) the Catholic Church has affirmed that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. The letter essentially argues that although Christians and Muslims have different understandings of God, they still worship the same God (Vatican 1999):

We Christians joyfully recognise the religious values we have in common with Islam. Today I would like to repeat what I said to young Muslims some years ago in Casablanca: 'We believe in the same God, the one God, the living God, and the God who created the world and brings his creatures to their perspective'. (n.p.)

Volf (2011:28) observes that within this initial 'open letter' lay a hidden but truly revolutionary idea, which the letter refers to as the 'common essence' between Christianity and Islam, and that the two greatest commands as articulated by Jesus are (Mk 12):

The first is 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength'. The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'. (vv. 29–31)

The authors of the letter communicated, in contrast to the Pope who only saw differences and incompatibilities, that they saw similarities amid the undeniable and inextinguishable differences. They believed that our shared convictions about God can serve as a bridge between two communities, not only as a source for division (Volf 2011:27). Exactly one year after this 'open letter' on 13 October 2007 a longer text was published which expands on this very argument, titled 'A Common Word between Us and You' (A Common Word 2007).

The argument of a Common Word basically follows through with three interrelated movements, starting by expressing our common devotion to the one God, or 'love' of God, although differently expressed in our respective faith traditions. The letter follows with our common expression to seek justice and peace, motivating it by underscoring that it is love of the neighbour which motivates such action. It is on the basis of these foundational values, of love for God and neighbour, that common ground is established for dialogue to start taking place.

The opening lines of the document start with the Islamic confession of faith, '[i]here is no god but God, Muhammad is the messenger of God', and continues to expound on the unity of God, quoting Muhammad (Speelman 2010):

[T]he best that I have said – myself, and the prophets that came before me – is: 'There is no god but God, He Alone, He hath no associate, His is the sovereignty and His the praise and He hath power over all things'. (p. 111)

Muhammad accordingly calls Muslims to be devoted to God with all their heart, all their soul and all their mind, and in this form of devotion it relates to the call to 'love God'. Volf (2011:29) observes that 'love' for God does not appear in the words of Muhammad. He explains that in no way does Muhammad attempt to say anything about how humans should relate to God, rather he is describing God. These descriptions that he uses imply a specific human attitude towards God – that the one God demands exclusive devotion on the part of humans.

Speelman (2010:112) explains how for Jesus the love of the neighbour is but one side of the same coin, with the love of God on the other. This is essential also in Islam, as without it there can be no true faith in God and righteousness (Surah 2):

[R]ighteousness is he who believeth in God and the Last Day and the angels and the Scripture and the prophets; and giveth wealth, for love of Him, to kinsfolk and to orphans and the needy and the wayfarer and to those who ask ... Such are they who are sincere. Such are the pious. (p. 177)

The document thus lays, by these two arguments, common ground for dialogue whilst affirming that both religions are distinct from one another. These two greatest commandments are the foundation for common ground, and a link between the Qur'an, the Torah, and the New Testament (Volf 2011:29).

Most Christians will be sceptical as to whether these great commands to love God and love thy neighbour stand central to the Islamic faith; however, this is a question for Muslims to answer. It is positive to note that the 'Common Word' document was originally signed by 138 authoritative voices from across the Islamic world, representative of senior leaders and scholars from around the globe and all streams of Islamic thought. The list has grown immensely since being written and signed by authoritative figures from both Christianity

and Islam (Speelman 2010:110). It is indeed unprecedented to hear a unified voice from a deeply divided Islam, which fans a flame of hope for the future in new ways like never before. According to Sabra (2009:90–91) the ‘Common Word’ is an important interfaith dialogue initiative, especially as it reverses the trend that dialogue has always been a Christian initiative towards Muslims, and consequently always met with suspicion and reservation.

The ‘Common Word’ was drafted in part in response to the events of Regensburg, as noted earlier, but perhaps more specifically to respond to the growing deterioration of relations between Muslims and Christians. These religions make up more than half of the world’s population and accordingly the document recognises that the world cannot be at peace if our religions are not at peace (Volf 2011):

[W]ith the terrible weaponry of the modern world, with Muslims and Christians intertwined everywhere as never before, no side can unilaterally win a conflict between more than half of the world’s inhabitants. Thus our common future is at stake. (p. 30)

Given the animosity, suspicion, fear, and continuous conflict which seems to define the Christian-Muslim engagement, the critical question that one needs to engage with is whether it is indeed possible to move away from a clash of civilisations’ mentality, or an ‘us’ versus ‘them’ syndrome, towards peaceful coexistence of our faith traditions. Does something as feeble as ‘love’ for God and neighbour inspire enough motivation to bring about the change that we desire?

The ‘Common Word’ initiative is perhaps the best point of departure in expressing that which is essential to both Christianity and Islam: the love of God and neighbour. More than that, the document serves to show how this love, which is essential and common to both, has the power to bind us together to promote – even demand – that regardless of our faith tradition, we accordingly seek the common good of the other. Coming to this conclusion, Volf (2011:31) states ‘a deep faith no longer leads to clashes; it fosters peaceful coexistence.’ Deep faith as expressed through love and love understood as active care leads to respect for others and struggle for the rights of others.

However, as we have already alluded to, the presumption of the document is that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. This position sits with difficulty with most Christians today, regardless of the fact that for the most part this has not been disputed within the Christian tradition. On the other hand, for Muslims this issue is settled within the Qur’an, ‘[w]e believe what was revealed to us and what was revealed to you. Our God and your God is one, and to him we submit as Muslims’ (*Al ‘Ankabut* 29:46). Also (*Al Shura* 42):

God is our Lord and your Lord; we have our works and you have your works; there is no argument between us and you; God brings us together; and to him is the final destiny. (p. 15)

In the following section this theology will be developed from a Christian perspective.

## The Christian response

The 'Common Word' document is addressed to prominent Christian leaders across the world, in particular to Catholic, Orthodox and mainline Protestant denominations. It has sparked a variety of responses, both positive and negative, and led to continuous and sustained debate on the issue of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

One of the earliest responses came from the Chief of Rabbis of Israel and the Archbishop of Canterbury on October 31, 2007, where both religious figures expressed deep respect for the spirit of the letter and pledged to 'commit themselves and encourage all religious leaders to ensure that no materials are disseminated by our communities that work against such vision' (Ali 2009:117).

The most publicised responses came from four prominent scholars of Yale Divinity School the very next day, and has become known as the Yale response. They wrote (Yale 2009):

We receive it [*A Common Word*] as a Muslim hand of conviviality and cooperation extended to Christians world-wide. In this response we extend our own Christian hand in return, so that together with all other human beings, we may live in peace and justice as we seek to love God and neighbours. (n.p.)

This was followed up by a conference at Yale in July 2008 entitled 'Loving God and Neighbour in Word and Deed: Implications for Muslims and Christians', which was attended by over 120 leading Muslim and Christian scholars and leaders. At the conference, a unanimous commitment was made to 'learn to love each other. Let us learn to love all neighbours and let us do that in the name of our common future and in the name of our one God' (Yale 2009).

Ali (2009:118–119) observes various other very positive responses which all in differing ways echo the voice from Yale, in particular the press release of March 20, 2008 entitled 'Learning to Explore Love Together' by the WCC, stating that the document was an encouraging new stage in Muslim thinking about Christian-Muslim relations (Oikoumene 2008). A few months later a consultation was held in Geneva, which represented a fellowship of WCC member churches, the World Evangelical Alliance, and a variety of Christian Communion Churches, which included the Roman Catholic Church, where they worked on the issue of Christian self-understanding in relation to Islam (Ali 2009:119).

However, as noted, the responses from the Christian community were not all as positive. The Barnabas Fund called it a misrepresentation of the truth, and a 'veiled threat calling for the acceptance of Islamic dominance' (Ali 2009:120). Others argued that the document contains nothing 'new' or 'common', and as such nothing positive to contribute to Muslim-Christian relations. Volf (2011:34–35) makes specific reference to the influential Pastor John Piper of the Bethlehem Baptist Church in Minneapolis, Minnesota,

who did not respond directly to the document but responded to the underlying assumption that the God of Islam and Christianity is the same. His argument essentially surrounds the person of Jesus, and that for Muslims God is very much unlike Jesus, and that the difference is profound. Accad (2011:181–182) observes that numerous evangelicals accuse Christians engaged in dialogue with Muslims of naivety and ignorance of the true nature of Islam, with some viewing the document as a Muslim deception or a ploy to dismantle the Christian mission enterprise. In May 2009 a book was published by Advancing Native Missions, titled *The Common Word: the Undermining of the Church* (Maqdisi & Solomon (2009)), wherein they specifically appeal to the Christian community to withdraw their endorsement of the ‘Common Word’. They argue that the Common Word trivialised the incomparable love of God and of the neighbour through the acceptance of a commonality, which they state the signatories knew all too well to be a well-crafted illusion.

According to Accad (2011:181) most evangelicals are primarily reactionary and experiential in their attitude to Islam and Muslims, stating that most of these negative attitudes expressed above do not stem from a comprehensive historical, theological, and liturgical reflection and analysis of Islam’s nature. He goes on to call for a proper Christian theology of Islam to be developed, which will do justice to the multiple dimensions and diverse manifestations of its religious world.

## ■ Dialogue

It is without a doubt that initiatives like ‘A Common Word’ and its corresponding responses from both the Islamic and Christian communities are extremely inspiring, regardless of whether one agrees with it or not. It presents us with a viable theological framework and practical suggestions for successful dialogue. However, one of the major challenges relates to what extent both faith communities will reflect positive effects of such initiatives at a grassroots level.

Ali (2009:121) identifies three issues which he deems of vital importance for these initiatives to succeed. Firstly, understanding that the rules for any sort of dialogue or conversation across religious and cultural lines are not different from those for a successful interpersonal relationship; secondly, that dialogue needs to make a serious attempt to understand the world views of the participants in the dialogue; and lastly, the need to disentangle the issue of salvation from the dialogue. This last point of Ali is, however, debatable since our understanding of salvation is indeed central to our unique particularity within the Christian tradition. How we go about it in dialogue needs to be thoughtfully considered. A detailed discussion on this matter will be presented in the final section.

During June 2015, at the annual ‘Middle East Consultation’ at the Arab Baptist Theological Seminary, Lebanon, prominent leaders engaged with ministry to Muslims,



gathered to discuss that year's theme of 'Identity and Belonging'. Given the unique context of Lebanon, with a comparatively large population of both Christians and Muslims living in a relatively continuous state of 'fragile' peace, much can be learnt in terms of expressing our particular faith traditions whilst coexisting peacefully as belonging to the same communities. Some of the contents of the Middle East Consultation will be reflected on later, specifically as we move towards the notion of developing liminal spaces and dealing with the issue of evangelism. George Sabra (2009) reflects critically on the Lebanese experience of Christian-Muslim relations, and identifies three levels of dialogue which are applicable to our current considerations:

1. The 'existential dialogue' of everyday life, which is non-reflective and relates to the day to day dialogue as a result of shared, lived spaces where Christians and Muslims live, work, study, et cetera. These engagements are typically a grass-roots experience. Sabra (2009:90) comments specifically on the context of Lebanon, and that it is in an advanced form of a close relationship between the members of the two religions, which is a rare occurrence. However, this is increasingly becoming true in our global society, where the dichotomy of a specifically Christian society or specifically Muslim society is steadily deteriorating.
2. The second form of dialogue he terms the 'dialogue of life', where Christians and Muslims come together to discuss and exchange views on issues that emerge out of living together. These can range from joint citizenship, justice and peace, to moral values and freedoms of expression, and various political, economic and social issues.
3. The last and perhaps most difficult form is a 'dialogue of truth' where religious scholars and theologians discuss and debate matters of faith and doctrine.

The question remains though which type of dialogue 'A Common Word' presents to us. Although these three forms of dialogue are distinct from one another, they are also very interrelated; our faith and understanding of God inform in part our views on socio-political issues, which in turn in part inform our lived actions amongst those we live with. These constructions, as discussed earlier, are obviously a lot more complex. Clearly 'A Common Word' does not fit into the first form of dialogue, since it is a reflective and intellectual undertaking. However, the first form of dialogue is at the forefront of our intended or desired outcome – to come to a place where we can peaceably live in loving relationships with one another. The dialogue accordingly presents itself as both a dialogue about life and about truth. It moves beyond mere understanding and mere tolerance, which Sabra (2009:91) understands as a condescending stance – a position where one who claims to have the truth look down upon those who deny or attack that truth. By arguing that the twofold theme of love of the one God and love for the neighbour is the most essential principle for both faiths, the document creates common ground on the basis of love – which, it argues, enables the goals of peace, harmony and mutual good.

## A couple of considerations regarding dialogue

Considering that the document is written by Muslims to a Christian audience and, importantly, presents Christian teaching by Muslims on the basis of Christian Scripture, rather than the Qur'an's understanding of Christianity, is truly unique and remarkable. But 'A Common Word' does raise some questions, especially as it claims that the dual command to love God and neighbour constitutes the essence of what it means to be Muslim. Do Muslims in general adhere to this interpretation of Islam, or is the 'Common Word' perhaps an attempt to restate Islam for Muslims in this way? If the document is to be a fruitful addition to interfaith dialogue, this question needs to be answered by Muslims.

Secondly, it is noteworthy to observe that when the documents states '[t]here is no God but God, He Alone, He hath no associate' and the call to love God alone, it is not interpreted as anti-Trinitarian, or anti-Christological in any manner. This is an exceptionally positive interpretation of the Qur'anic denial of God having an associate, and opens up promising doctrinal dialogue between Christians and Muslims, which will be focused on in the following section. However, it also raises a certain level of suspicion amongst Christians, since the document makes no reference to the Trinitarian theology of Christianity, seemingly in a subtle way serving to correct Christians. However, this remains ambiguous in the text.

Furthermore, the document itself in its treatment of 'love of the neighbour' falls short in comparison to the section on 'love of God'. Sabra (2009:96) maintains that this is very disappointing considering that the whole point of the document is to promote a peaceful and harmonious relationship between Muslims and Christians. What complicates the matter is that when 'love of God' is addressed, a clear identification is made as in a total devotion to the one God; whereas with the 'love of the neighbour' it is left open to interpretation. This becomes highly problematic in that how Christians and Muslims understand who their neighbour is differs greatly. Within Christianity your neighbour could be your enemy, and indeed that is implied. In Islam, however, your neighbour is someone who is worthy of love, and can be anyone except those who 'wage war against Muslims on account of their religion, oppress them and drive them out of their homes' (Sabra 2009:97), which essentially boils down to the enemy. This could be viewed as being either positive or negative, but the document remains a fruitful consideration for dialogue.

This historic initiative holds within it the promise or potential to form a good basis for a dialogue of truth to continuously take place with the purpose and hope of peaceful coexistence between the adherents of Christianity and Islam. The document 'A Common Word' in its entirety rests upon a foundational assumption of whether it can be said that Christians and Muslims believe in the same God or not. Within Islam this is presumed,

and thus not addressed in the document. Indeed, Christians and Muslims would agree that they do not hold the same beliefs regarding the one God that they worship. This is, however, not the question being asked. Ironically we dispute these particular beliefs amongst those within our own respective faith traditions – how much more with the beliefs of a different faith? The question really centres on whether the object of our devotion, love and worship is the same or, in the words of Volf (2009:36), ‘is the God whose final self-expression is found in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, the same God as the God of the Qur’an?’

## ■ The cross, the crescent and the one true God

Having accordingly established the theological and specifically Christian motivation for dialogue to take place, an attempt will be made to illustrate the dominant theological concepts which form on the one hand the content of interfaith dialogue between Christianity and Islam, and on the other make that very conversation possible or even necessary. This is especially true if we focus on the very foundational claim found within both Christianity and Islam, the belief in one God. The real question for us in this section will therefore mainly centre on whether this one God that we adhere to is indeed the same God or not. Since both religions make the claim, it ought to have a profound impact on how we understand the other. If the ‘one God’ claim differs drastically, conflict is sure to follow – but what if they are similar? What possibilities would such a view open up, not only for the sake of dialogue, but for promoting justice and peace?

Having established that for Muslims the question of whether Christians worship the same God as they do has already been settled, we noted how in the Qur’an, in *Al ‘Ankabut* 29:46, the very specific claim is made with reference to Christianity, ‘[o]ur God and your God is One: and to Him we bow.’ So the development of our understanding of the unity of God, and whether Muslims and Christians are worshipping the same God, is primarily the responsibility of Christians – since the assertion that they do sits uneasily with most Christians. That would, however, be an oversimplification of the matter, as Volf (2011:79) correctly observes that Muslims make two distinct affirmations which intensify the need for dialogue. Firstly, as mentioned, they claim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God; then secondly they maintain that the central beliefs in Christianity seriously compromise the most important characteristic of God, which is his oneness. The Qur’an suggests that in the Christian doctrine of the Trinity the Christians have added partners to God, or ‘joined gods’ (*Al Baqarah* 2:135) Towards the end of this chapter the issue of the Trinity will be specifically dealt with.

Perhaps an introductory reflection on the matter will be helpful and possibly defuse some of the early objections and hesitations towards our current discussion. Phil Pharshall (2013:28), who has extensive experience in terms of ministry amongst Muslims, makes

the following observation: When Muslims convert to Christianity, he often poses the question of whether when they became Christian, they started worshipping a different God from what they used to worship as a Muslim. To this the response has been, without exception, a strong 'No'. He continues to state how these Muslim converts are in no way compromising their faith in the biblical God; from childhood they have been taught an ongoing continuity of God's being and acts as presented in the Torah (Law), *Zabur* (Psalms), *Injil* (Gospel) and the Qur'an.

Theological tension arises out of the distinction of Muslims who hold the view that Christians have perverted monotheism, and of Christians who in turn view Muslims as undercutting the central message of God's redemptive work by denying the saving work of Christ. Pharshall (2013:29) maintains that for him Islam presents an inadequate and incomplete, but not totally misguided, view of God. Accordingly, he deems it unfair to suggest that the God of Islam is absolutely distinct from the God of the Bible. Yet he maintains, in similar fashion to Piper, that the crucial point revolves around the person of Christ – and that Islam and Christianity are irreconcilable over this central issue.

## Language and comparison

Before we attempt to grapple with the theological discussion which Pharshall alluded to, we need to make sense of the linguistic designation within each faith: Whether to refer to the Being we understand respectively as God or Allah. Volf (2011:80–81) observes that both Christians and Muslims have difficulty with the term 'Allah' as referring to the Christian God, citing various instances where this has led to conflict in communities, as was the case in Malaysia. At this point it is merely a linguistic hurdle that needs to be crossed, especially considering that it is quite common amongst Christian communities in the Arab-speaking world to refer to God as 'Allah'. However, the objection for Christians is the inherent implication of usage of the term 'Allah'. The argument often goes as follows: When Christians refer to God, by definition they imply Jesus as the begotten Son of the Father, but by referring to 'Allah' that designation is not possible, as 'Allah' by definition does not have a Son. Therefore these terms cannot be used to refer to the same Being.

Semantically speaking though, this argument does not make sense as it prescribes a specific definition which is not normatively maintained by either religion. 'Allah' is simply the Arabic word for 'God', in the same way that 'Theos' is Greek for 'God'. Perhaps to clarify we should observe that 'Allah' or 'God' is not a proper name, but a descriptive term which can be translated, unlike proper names. Christians have for millennia referred to God as 'Allah', long even before the emergence of Muhammad, for example the Copts in Egypt who have been around since the 1st century (Volf 2011:82).

Most of the people who object to the usage of 'Allah' as a designation to refer to God object based on the presumption that Christians and Muslims worship different gods. An acknowledgement of that distinction refutes the argument, as a different word does not imply a different God. Inversely, the opposite argument is also true and important to remember, that using the same word for God does not mean that our gods are the same. People can share the same name, for example 'Allen', which is my name, but also the name of my aunt who stays in The Netherlands. Now for argument's sake, suggest that we were visiting each other and another family member entered the room, and asked 'Allen, how is your son doing?' Everyone present would know that the family member was addressing my aunt, as I do not have any children yet. This is a crude example, but serves to illustrate how one can have the same name, yet remain distinguishable in terms of referent, that is, the object or person to which the name points.

This however raises some new questions as to how many attributes or properties have to be shared in order to be the same. When applying this logic to God though it becomes more complex since we believe that God is one, eternal and unchanging. Therefore we cannot rightly compare him with another, as there is no plausible other within our framework as Christians, and indeed for Muslims as well, thus making a comparison between the Christian God and the Muslim God redundant. Nonetheless, that is the essence of the question at hand: Whether the thoughts and utterances of Muslims that are expressed in terms of being about 'God' have the God that Christians worship as their object (Volf 2011:84).

In the following section such an analysis of the dominant thoughts in contemporary theology will be presented to illustrate that the descriptions of the object of Christian and Muslim affection are sufficiently similar so as to refer to the same object.

Before doing that, we should ponder the theological challenges if our conclusion points to the 'different' alternative. Volf (2011:84) points out that from a Christian perspective there are basically three options open to Muslims, if Christians claim that they worship a different God. These would be that the God Muslims refer to (1) is another God, (2) is no real object, or (3) is an idol. The latter two dissolve into one another. Remember how Paul claimed that no true idol god exists (1 Cor 8:4). Thus, from a Christian point of view Muslims are either worshipping a collective projection which does not exist, or the Christian God.

An initial approach to the question at hand would be to compare Islam to the likes of other religions as found in Scripture by way of analogy, for example to the Samaritans. Here the question never seems to be whether they worshipped the same God as Christians or even Jews for that matter, but that they merely did so without true knowledge of God. This sufficiently explains the distinction for a lot of Christians, but when taken to its full length of application, it would place idolaters and atheists all under the same description. For this reason many others find the argument unpersuasive, especially considering the well-established understanding of God that Islam holds.

Volf (2011:87) advocates for an actual comparison between what Christians and Muslims say about God, to see which elements within their respective descriptions they hold in common; that is, if the Christians are to come to an agreement of whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God or not. In Romans 1:20 Paul wrote the following, '[e]ver since the creation of the world God's eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things God has made.' This is generally understood to mean that all religions contain within themselves some knowledge of the one true God. This then serves as motivation for a comparative study between our religions to determine those elements which we indeed hold in common as descriptions about God.

Another common departure point relates to our shared history, or common Scripture. This follows a comparatively similar argument to how Christians relate to Jews. The question has not really ever arisen, or at least not from a Christian point of view, as to whether Jews worship the same God as Christians do, on the basis that Christians view the Scripture of the Jews as their own. The question then for us becomes whether the Qur'an and the Bible are similar enough in content so that we might assert that we share a common Scripture with Islam.

In terms of content we find numerous parallels and overlaps in sections of the Bible with the Qur'an. In terms of revelation the Qur'an states (*Al Baqara* 2:136, *Al Nisa'* 4:136):

We believe in God, and the revelation given to us, and to Abraham, Ishmael, Isaac, Jacob, and the descendants and that given to Moses and Jesus and that given to all Prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between one and another of them. (v. 136)

It would appear that for Muslims we share a common revelation through our common ancestry, and therefore they would conclude that we worship the same God. Volf (2011:88) argues that this would settle the argument for Christians on one condition, and that is that Muslims need to agree that the Bible contains the authentic content of God's self-revelation to Abraham, Moses, the Prophets and Jesus. This would then indeed constitute being a sufficient indicator that Christians and Muslims have significant overlaps and therefore a common Scripture.

However, would Muslims agree to such an assertion? This seems to be the general consensus amongst Muslims, that indeed they do believe in the revelation to all of these prophets, just not as it is recorded in the Bible. This follows directly from the Qur'an, where it explicitly states that Christians have gone astray from the original revelation (*Al Ma'idah* 5:14, 66, 68). Thus Muslims would agree only with common Scripture and the revelation recorded in the Bible in as far as it is in agreement with the Qur'an. Therefore, for any sensible comparison, we will need to compare the content of what is said in the Bible and the Qur'an about God, to determine whether the God they worship has the same object in mind.

Volf (2011:89–91) argues that in a comparative study we seek to establish that which is ‘sufficiently similar’ – noting that our descriptions about God need not be identical, and at the same time they cannot be radically different in order to refer to the same object. The point is that our descriptions regarding God would be different to some extent, which is to be expected. This normally finds expression in our different understanding of God’s goodness, or what it means to thank God, et cetera. These variations cannot be diametrically opposed to one another as this would clearly imply the worship of another God, or given the Christian paradigm to state that they worship no god (Volf 2011):

Are they so radically different that they cannot be referring to the same object? And to what extent and in what regards must they be similar to be referring to the same object? (p. 91)

Therefore we need to concentrate on what is common within our respective faith traditions, whilst at the same time keeping an eye out for that which is decisively different.

Remember that the context here is interfaith dialogue, and for that reason we go about this discussion in a way which might or might not promote those ends. For that reason our approach takes any similarities or commonalities seriously. Volf (2011:92) observes that we could follow a ‘differences’ approach in a comparative study, but notes that this would, for obvious reasons, produce completely different results which only serve to alienate Christians and Muslims further from one another. Nonetheless, it is important to keep both together since differences will show any incompatibilities, although that should not be our departure point. These different approaches are often born out of a desire to express our unique Christian particularity, as what sets Christianity apart from all other religions. This is a valid point worth considering, but given our particular Christian perspective and reflecting on the words of Jesus to love your enemies (Mt 5:43–48), our Christian motivation as the ‘will to embrace’, a blended approach seems to be the most appropriate.

## A common God

One of the most authoritative statements for Christians on the matter of whether Muslims worship the same God comes from the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) called together by Pope John XXIII, where they published a short official document on non-Christian religions titled *Nostra aetate* (1965). In the first lines dedicated to Islam we read, ‘[t]hey adore the one God, living and subsisting in himself; merciful and all-powerful, the Creator of heaven and earth, who has spoken to men.’ It is important to note that the text does not explicitly state that Christians and Muslims worship the same God, but that it seems to imply such a deduction. Volf (2011:96) observes that the document appeals to a sufficiently similar description of the object of worship, which implies that the object of worship is the same.

Whether Christians and Muslims would completely agree with the assessment of sufficient similarities is not really of consequence, since both religions have strong disagreements amongst themselves regarding the descriptions of God. However, the appeal here is not to every discrepancy, rather it is addressed to what Volf (2011:97) calls normative Christians and Muslims who broadly embrace the traditions of their respective religions. Below a brief presentation is given of Volf's (2011:97–110) examination of the similarities of the descriptions of God and his discussion in terms of similarities in commands within the two faiths, to reinforce the claim that Christians and Muslims worship the same God.

Volf (2011:97–98) establishes three foundation beliefs which stand central to the Christian and Muslim understanding of who God is:

1. There is only one God, the one and only divine Being.
  - B: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is One.' (Mk 12:29)
  - Q: 'Know, therefore, that there is no god but God.' (*Muhammad* 47:19)
2. God created everything that is not God.
  - B: 'In the beginning ... God created the heavens and the earth.' (Gen 1:1)
  - Q: 'He is the Creator of the heavens and the earth.' (*Al Shura* 42:11)
3. God is different from everything that is not God.
  - B: God 'dwells in unapproachable light, which no one has ever seen or can see.' (1 Tim 6:16)
  - Q: 'No vision can grasp Him. But His grasp is over all vision: He is above all comprehension, yet He is acquainted with all things.' (*Al An'am* 6:103)

Volf (2011:98) suggests that if these similarities could point to God, both would point to the same object. Especially considering the last point, it seems self-evident that everything else is not God, and thus the only thing remaining is God. The argument, although abrupt, serves to simply illustrate that from specific and overlapping convictions about God found in the Scriptures of both faith traditions, they point to or suggest a common subject when both religions speak of worshipping God.

This presentation is not thorough in terms of all that Christians or Muslims will want to bring to the table when engaging in interfaith dialogue. The importance of these three descriptions regarding God as one, the creator of all, and 'incomparable and incommensurably' different, serves to designate the object of the discussion or comparison and has been identified. Therefore a referent has been established with whom both religions can agree. However, other descriptions can be raised which might perhaps be radically different. In application though, other suggestions would challenge the foundation we have now established. These differences in description will only lead one religion to insist that the God of the other religion is not worthy of being called 'God' or, more specifically, being called the God of the other. These differences Volf (2011:100) maintains are still referring to the same object, but indicate a difference in how each religion assesses the character of that object.



Recognising these discrepancies we need to identify a 'sufficiently similar' characteristic within God whereby all other characteristics can be evaluated. For example, considering how in our first section, where a history of religious conflicts was sketched, we could easily lead a person to think that within either Christianity or Islam their vision of God is ultimately evil. Contrasting this to what Volf (2011:101) identifies as the fourth element of 'sufficient similarity', which is God's goodness (1 Jn 4:16; *Al Buruj* 85:14), the former vision of God as being evil – although in our human experience might be an expression of our view of a God, and thus accordingly has the same 'object' in mind – distorts the God beyond recognition since God cannot be both evil and good at the same time. It is interesting to observe how even within Christianity and Islam it is debated how each faith should correctly understand these four elements. Of some importance for us is that each faith, although agreeing on these four elements that they point to the same object, essentially maintains that the other holds some erroneous view on at least one of these elements. The biggest argument centres on God's oneness, which I aim to resolve below in a discussion regarding the Trinity.

Volf (2011:105–110) continues to illustrate by comparing the commandments found in the Qur'an and the Bible that there is sufficient overlap to emphasise that each religion points to the same object. He starts off with a discussion on the two greatest commands: To love God with our whole being, and to love our neighbours as ourselves. These serve, as 'A Common Word' also observed, to indicate that similar commands suggest similarity in understandings of God. These commands are intricately related to one another as an expression of God's character. Consider 1 John 4:7–8, which calls us to love one another, because love is from God, and continues 'God is love'. As Christians we imitate God's command to love in order to align ourselves with God's character. Therefore we might conclude that God's commands are directly related to his character.

Volf continues to illustrate this by doing a command by command comparison of the Ten Commandments, which emphasises the point already made. He illustrates various other commonalities, but also touches on a unique Christian difference not found in the Islamic sacred texts – the command to love one's enemies (Mt 5:43–48). Although Christians struggle to live out this command, it is a central, particular concept of our faithful witness to the world as a message of God's unconditional grace, '[i]t is a clear consequence of the Christian conviction that God is love' (Volf 2011:110).

Another important distinction which he continues to highlight is that although the commands are the same, their corresponding punishments for breaking them are seemingly worlds apart. The Qur'an observes some extremely harsh temporal punishments on transgressors, whilst the God reflected in the New Testament does not impose any temporal punishment, but extends grace and mercy. This extension of grace and mercy is a very unique Christian expression of our faith. However, this distinction in temporal punishments does not suggest that Christians and Muslims do not worship the same God.

If we were to make such a suggestion we would need to wrestle with the Old Testament, which is filled with temporal punishments. If we go this route, we would end up annulling our presupposition that Jews and Christians worship the same God.

Muslims and Christians agree on the following six claims about God (Volf 2011):

1. There is only one God, the one and only divine Being.
2. God created everything that is not God.
3. God is radically different from anything that is not God.
4. God is good.
5. God commands that we love God with our whole being.
6. God commands that we love our neighbours as ourselves. (p. 111)

## One God or three

Up until now a process has largely been followed to develop or promote the understanding that there is an exceeding amount of overlap in the religious traditions of both Christianity and Islam, in order to plausibly suggest that Christians and Muslims worship the same God. Perhaps to state it differently for those who have not come to this conclusion, Christians and Muslims share fundamental parallels in their understanding of the objects they respectively worship, enough so that one can suggest that this object of worship ought to be one and the same. At the very least their theologies are surprisingly similar, enough so to validate further inquiry and dialogue for better understanding.

One of the biggest hurdles for Muslims to overcome to come to this point is a thorough understanding of the Christian theology of the Trinity. The oneness of God, *Tawhid*, is a principle which stands at the heart of Islam (Volf 2011:129). Christians are very aware of the problematic theology of the Trinity in terms of Muslim engagement. Since most Christians struggle to grapple with the concept themselves, they avoid engagement with Muslims simply on the basis of the fear that it might surface in a discussion, which indeed it will. According to Muslims the doctrine of the Trinity violates their greatest sin of *shirk*, which is unforgivable and blasphemous in that it implies adding a partner to God, or the association of other beings of equal status with God (Ipgrave 2008:21). Therefore in obedience to the Qur'an Muslims reject what Christians appear to affirm, that God had a son and that other gods should be joined to God and that God is but one of three beings. The objection is rather straightforward: Do Christians in any way divide the divine essence in the way they speak of God? A lot of ground has to be cleared to return to a place where Muslims could see that Christians in fact do not divide the divine essence.

McGrath (2007:247) explains how Mohammed most probably encountered unorthodox statements regarding the Trinity which led to Islam's strenuous objection.

He then continues to reaffirm that the doctrine of the Trinity has never been seen – at least within the Christian tradition – to be compromising or contradicting the unity of God. Recall the words of Nicholas of Cusa (Volf 2011:135), '[i]n the manner in which Muslims and Jews deny the Trinity, assuredly it ought to be denied by all.'

A helpful development within Christian theology is that of *perichoresis*, which explains how the three divine 'Persons' of the Trinity are tied together in a mutual indwelling. Volf (2011:137) explains how the understanding of God not ever being alone, or that the Persons are always 'in' each other, implies that the being of God remains one, in that one cannot say 'to be one is not to be the other', which results in a shared or undivided activity in the Being of God since the act of one Person is always done by all three Persons, as they are in each other and act through the activity of the one Person. This affirmation resolves problems relating to whether Christians divide the divine essence, since the Persons are always within him and act undividedly.

The first chapter of John affirms this way of thought, by stating that the 'Word became flesh', and the Word as such 'was God', and was 'within God' (Jn 1:1–2, 14). Similar expressions are found throughout the Bible; consider John 1:33–34, 10:38, et cetera. The centrality of the issue centres on the divinity of Christ as the incarnate One. Christians affirm that in Christ all three Persons are present and act in that one Person who became incarnate (Volf 2011:138). Volf continues to explain how all language is inadequate to describe God, such as the usage of 'Persons' which is commonly understood as separate entities in the Trinity, where Christians use the word simply because there is no better word to describe or express what they believe. They use the word knowing that we must mentally adjust its meaning when referring to the Trinity. Volf (2011:142) also grapples with the issue of numbers, arguing that God is unique and categorically different from the world. However numbers remain a bit of a conundrum for the mind to get around, as we exist within the world which can be numerated (Volf 2011):

To say that there are three 'Persons' in God means only that there are three eternal, inseparable, and interpenetrating agencies; and in each, the other two are present, and in each, the single divine essence is present. (p. 142)

This section is not to persuade Muslims of the validity of the Trinity, to which many would still disagree after these arguments above. The purpose is to illustrate that the objections made by Muslims with regard to Christians dividing the essence of God are unfounded, and that the things to which Muslims object accordingly need to be objected to by Christians also. Furthermore, our shared affirmation of the unity of God should draw us closer to one another, rather than being a dividing rift. In the words of Jesus, 'the Lord our God, the Lord is one' (Mk 12:29). It follows then, as Volf (2011:142) argues, that the denial of the Trinity on the part of Muslims is insufficient ground to deny that we worship the same God.

The Trinity cannot be removed from the Christian faith as it stands central to our religious self-understanding and becomes the frame through which we perceive and relate to the world. It is a foundational affirmation of how Christians believe God has made himself known to the world in that God had to become incarnate without dividing himself, and come to humanity as God. Furthermore, the Trinity is an expression of God's love within himself, which in turn explains his love towards us.

The purpose of this section was not to conclusively determine whether Christians and Muslims worship the same God, as Volf suggests. Personally I am not completely convinced, but choose to leave that open-ended. The purpose here was to illustrate the importance and value of the theology of the unity, or oneness of God, for interfaith dialogue with Muslims, as a foundational departure point which will determine much of the possible outcome of such a dialogue. Any plausible affirmation of whether one worships the same God serves as an uncomfortable obstacle to any who wish to engage in religious conflict.

## ■ Christian hospitality and interfaith dialogue

Earlier it was established that our Christian faith urges within us a will to embrace the other, the one who is wholly other and different from us, which then was applied to our relation with Muslims. In the opening section we established the underlying animosity which exists between Christians and Muslims. As Christians we have a very specific motive to love those whom we deem our enemies, and a call to move towards others to promote justice and peace. In this section it is argued that Christian hospitality is our foundational and creative biblical notion to invite the other into a space which we have created within ourselves. Hospitality is an expression of our willingness to embrace Muslims in a respectful way, and to promote dialogue with the hope of cultivating an alternative future compared to the history we have experienced together.

From the Scriptures we know that hospitality is no small matter for Christians. We continuously throughout the gospel find Jesus generously giving and receiving hospitality. It seems so foundational that it makes its way into the parables of Jesus with such weight that it would seem as if a failure in the practice of hospitality would lead to a fractured society, and if left unattended it would hinder kingdom exploits (Lk 14:15–24).

Within the ancient Mediterranean world view the art and practices of hospitality were considered a fundamental moral virtue. Hospitality as a basic practice often occurs on the borders of society's defined lines of 'us' versus 'them'. Hospitality, standing central to aspects of human activity, informs family and friends to engage with strangers and enemies. Hospitality facilitates the social process whereby someone who is an outsider can cross boundaries from being a stranger to being a guest, from a person we formerly deemed hostile to a friend.

## ■ Stages of hospitality

Barton (in Mittelstadt 2014:132) suggests that hospitality moves through three stages, which are used as a reflection on the process of interfaith dialogue. These stages are evaluation, incorporation and departure.

### □ Evaluation

A host evaluates a stranger to determine if incorporation of this guest is possible without undue threat to the security of the group for whom they are responsible. Most of my argument considers this topic of evaluation as discerning the position of Christians and how we view the ‘other’ (Muslims). In our evaluation thus far we have established both the motive for our engagement and willingness to invite the other to dialogue. We further developed some theological common ground, which indeed creates a neutral environment for dialogue to take place.

### □ Incorporation

Once the stranger has been evaluated, invitations are extended in order to incorporate the stranger as a guest. Here, in accordance with the culture-specific codes of hospitality, and in this case religious culture, the host will extend obligations understood by both parties. Most interfaith dialogue initiatives develop various values or principles which would govern the engagement of interfaith dialogue, for example, a common restriction imposed on interfaith dialogue is evangelism. These guidelines form the common ground, or as was noted earlier in other words, the first phases of the reciprocal embrace which we want to see taking place.

### □ Departure

The state in which the stranger (and I would include the host as well) leaves the engagement of hospitality is incredibly important, since the stranger has now become a guest and perhaps even more – a friend. A healthy parting of ways is when the guest is honoured and sufficiently refreshed, resulting in solidifying future relations between the people from their respective communities. In this sense dialogue as hospitality has opened potential to bridge the gaps of hostility and animosity towards the other. This then leaves both the host and the guest transformed.

Often in our reflections on Romans 12 we miss the refrain from Paul to ‘extend hospitality to strangers’ (v. 13). Exhortations like these are found throughout the Pauline literature, as he extends the obligation to practice hospitality to believers, but also because

he depended on their hospitality. During hardships and trials Paul also keenly observed the frequent absence of hospitality and severe experiences of hospitality from his enemies (1 Cor 4:11–13; 2 Cor 6:4–10, 11:21–33). Mittelstadt (2014:134) argues that Paul understood the church as a metaphor for the household of God. As overseers of God's household, Christians serve as stewards and are as such obligated to exhibit the best qualities of familial and institutional hospitality. However, developing an understanding of hospitality from Scripture is difficult since hospitality is an intricately interwoven value within the narratives of Scripture.

Luke observes this value more keenly than any other of the Gospel authors, for example, in Acts 2 one needs to be aware of the enlarging vision of God's kingdom which takes place as a result of hospitality during Pentecost. Acts 2 narrates the story of how the disciples waited in an upper room to receive the Comforter, or Spirit, which had the profound impact of allowing them to speak in tongues (Ac 2:1–12) recognisable to people from every nation. In this emphatic fashion the ministry of Jesus is extended by the working of the Holy Spirit. This event speaks of the hospitality of God, to call upon all peoples on earth to embrace an open-ended vision which purposefully acts as barrier-breaking inclusivity (Mittelstadt 2014:135).

Not all of the values and movements within hospitality will be expressed, as in many ways it overlaps with those discussed earlier within the 'will to embrace' as an expression of the radical inclusivity we see in Christ. Suffice to say then that the gospel urges us to practice hospitality and extend it radically towards the other, especially those whom we would consider not fit to receive our hospitality. Mittelstadt (2014) expresses that hospitality has the power to overturn marginalisation and combat separation with inclusivity. Hospitality further offers itself as a symbol which is similar to Holy Communion, in that it reflects the very heart of the gospel. In Luke 24:30–31 we encounter the beautiful narrative of how 'he [*Christ*] took bread, blessed it, broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognised Him.' Thus, hospitality is in itself a sacramental encounter.

In this way hospitality takes on a missional and eschatological character. Simply by inviting 'others' (Muslims) for a meal, we in a symbolic sense are inviting them to the Lord's table where their eyes might be 'opened'. Eschatologically speaking, hospitality inaugurates the partially realised kingdom and also stirs up imagery from the Gospels (Lk 14:22) of the future banquet, 'on the mountain the Lord Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples' (Is 25:6–7).

## Hospitality and interfaith dialogue

Fernandez (2013) develops various competencies or qualities of religious leaders who are capable of leading faith communities within a multireligious context. These have been

arrived at as a result of extensive interfaith programmes built on the basis of Christian hospitality. These competencies are as follows:

- Awareness and recognition of our religiously plural setting.
- Appreciative understanding of other religious traditions.
- The need to relate to other religious traditions on their own terms.
- Recognition of the religious stranger as a subject companion, both in terms of meaning-making, that is developing understanding, and world-making, working together towards the common good.
- Considering them as hermeneutic companions and engaging with them in interfaith reading of texts and contexts.
- Being at home in one's own house, that is, we need to develop a depth of understanding of our own religious tradition.
- Reaching out and being open to going deep – in the depth of our religious tradition lies the heart and openness to the other.
- Religious identity must be understood in right relationship to the whole, denouncing supremacy as far as possible.
- Practising the hospitality of receiving, whilst also offering hospitable space and hospitable presence.
- Hospitable relations demand that expressions of one's deep convictions be communicated with honesty, respect, and openness.
- Ability to make normative or ethical decisions in the midst of competing moral and religious claims.
- Developing the ability to integrate multifaith traditions and normative claims in relation to socio-political institutional dynamics.
- Importantly, knowing how to live with unanswered questions.

From the above list of competencies it should be self-evident that hospitality is not merely a simple meal we present, but a deep opening up of ourselves, inviting the other into sharing together out of the depths of our self-understanding. This occurs in order that we may learn and grow together within a non-threatening common ground, where we can respectfully consider the other and work together towards the common good. Just perhaps, within that space, something of the divine might take place, where the eyes of both Christians and Muslims might be 'opened', and where formerly unimaginable possibilities and realities might just start to emerge.

## ■ Particularity and faithful witness

In this final section the very specific fear and hesitancy amongst many Christians is briefly addressed: That dialogue threatens the place of evangelism. This is strongly disagreed with here, since it is within the context of interfaith dialogue that we get the opportunity

to give authentic expression to the particularities within our Christian faith, and as such bear faithful witness to the gospel.

One of the major concerns for many Christians relates to the fear or concern that dialogue with Islam hinders our call to evangelism. Patrick Sookhdeo (in Accad 2011:181) identifies the approach of dialogue as being birthed within liberal theology, describing it as little more than ‘accommodationism’, and stating that interfaith dialogue seriously threatens evangelism. Earlier we observed how accusations like these were levelled against Christians in support of the ‘Common Word’ initiative. However, these accusations find some legitimacy in that various policies of non-proselytism have been adopted by various Christian church entities as a prerequisite of Christian-Muslim dialogue.

It seems that our Christian history forces us to choose between dialogue in search of common ground and evangelism which emphasises a concern for distinctiveness. Unfortunately, the endorsement of one has sadly resulted in the violent rejection of the other. This violent dichotomy verges on a personality disorder, states Accad (2011:184), almost to the extent of a kind of spiritual psychosis. This presents a troubling dualism; on one side is the danger of dialogue without evangelism, which is not evangelical at all, and on the other, and in light of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, dialogue which does not promote peace would not be Christian at all. This dualism in mission is often misrepresented as a choice between kingdom (‘dialogue’) and church (‘evangelism’). The following deconstruction by Caputo (2007) might be helpful:

The idea behind the church is to give way to the Kingdom, to proclaim and enact and finally disappear into the kingdom that Jesus called for, all the while resisting the temptation of confusing itself with the kingdom. (p. 35)

Nowhere in Scripture are we called to establish a particular (most likely our own subjective) expression of church amongst the nations, the call has always been for the kingdom. The church in this sense is not the establishment or final goal of missions, it rather becomes but the question, an interim provisional plan B, continuously asking how in this specific moment in time to best reflect and proclaim the message of Christ presented to us within Scripture as the kingdom.

During dialogue there is often the request that all forms of missionary activity be stopped, since it often creates conflict between communities and does not reflect tolerance of other faiths, especially if we consider the possible result and implication of conversion (Accad 2011:183). During a panel discussion of the Middle East Consultation 2015, a leading cleric and one of the heads of the judicial system in Lebanon echoed a similar request for both Islamic *Da’awa* and Christian mission to stop. This was not with reference to dialogue specifically, but in general, relating to the lived experience of our faiths in a multipluralistic world. His major argument centred on the complexity, pain and challenges involved in the process of moving from one faith to another.



However, Accad (2011:183) argues that it would not be reasonable or fair towards Christians or Muslims that when presented with the beauty of the others' faith, to deny the possibility for an individual to convert and to become an adherent of another faith. The fears expressed about dialogue as an alternative to evangelism are unfounded, and perhaps motivate us towards a better understanding of evangelism. After surveying various Scriptures, he (Accad 2011:184) comes to the conclusion that there is no concept of interreligious conversion in the New Testament, when it comes to turning from any world view and embracing the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is never suggested that a Jew should reject Judaism and adopt a new religious way in order to accept Jesus' claims about himself. Repentance within the New Testament is not the turning away from a former religious affiliation, but from certain attitudes, behaviours and ways of thinking. At the end of this section a story will be narrated which reflects this more clearly.

The post-Christendom era forces us to abandon the dichotomy between evangelism and dialogue, and move towards a multipronged and holistic approach to mission. Accad (2011:185) states that the emerging generation of missionaries prefers to think of themselves as developmental workers and peacemakers. These are not seen as mere platforms of pretence with no substantial work to justify it, but rather as real and legitimate platforms, actual jobs, where they can live out the kingdom of God as global Christians. In this way, dialogue becomes by definition missional, where there is no standby of proclamation for the sake of dialogue. Dialogue should thus be seen as a complementary function of the proclamation of the gospel. With regard to the Middle East Consultation that was referenced earlier, Accad (2011:186) explains how Christians and Muslims are brought together during the Consultation to interact in a dialogue forum. He continues to state that the motivation and purpose of the Consultation is decidedly and unapologetically missional, passionately dialogical, and holistically transformational, both for us and for our Muslim partners in dialogue.

Accad (2011:186–189) references various values which they have learnt over the years of interreligious consultation, some of which we will briefly highlight here. Firstly, honesty and transparency through everything that we communicate in our lived lives within the Christian community, the media and within the world at large, are extremely important. He makes this observation especially with reference to living within a predominantly Muslim context in Lebanon, but more so given our interconnected world. Information on what we do elsewhere is easy to come by. Various missions' organisations similarly advise new missionaries to clean their online footprint before engaging with ministry in any context where the gospel is not freely accessible.

Accad (2011:186–189) continues to note how we should learn to speak fairly and avoid generalisations of Islam. Transparency goes further though, as it is not only about the integrity of discourse but also about being candid about the agenda and objectives.

He claims that Muslims appreciate clarity and honesty and would much rather engage in conversation with persons who are serious about their faith, which leads them to passionate evangelism, as opposed to those who are not (Accad 2011:187). Both Christians and Muslims should be excited about the opportunity through dialogue to present the other with a balanced and attractive discourse on central particularities of their respective faiths.

It is within this space of being transparent and honest about our faith convictions, where we open ourselves up through humility and a willingness to listen to the other, that new possibilities present themselves to us, and where personal and communal transformation can take place. Accad (2011:189) concludes that we should embrace a missionary task which is both supra-religious and thoroughly Christ-centred.

The WCC, in their official document on mission titled *Together Towards Life* (Oikoumene 2012:27–26), makes the following assertions with regard to evangelism in interfaith dialogue: Dialogue is a way of affirming our common life and goals which are the affirmation of life and the integrity of creation. Dialogue only becomes possible, according to the document, if our departure point is the expectation of meeting God who already has preceded us, and has been relating with people within their own contexts of culture and convictions. Dialogue accordingly creates room for an honest encounter wherein each member brings to the table all that they are in an open, patient and respectful manner. The document continues to explain how evangelism and dialogue are distinct, but interrelated. It observes that evangelism is not the prime focus of dialogue, but that the clear presentation of the gospel of Jesus Christ has a legitimate place within it. Evangelism further involves listening to and being challenged and enriched by others (Ac 10:1–43).

We conclude this section with some practical but important suggestions. Firstly, dialogue is important both in contexts which are multireligious and, perhaps more importantly, where it is necessary to protect the rights of minority groups and religious freedom so that all can contribute to the common good of all the representatives within a community (Gn 1, cf. Oikoumene 2012:26):

Religious freedom should be upheld, because it flows from the very dignity of the human person which is grounded in the creation of all human beings, in the image and likeness of God.  
(v. 26)

The way we treat one another through love is a demonstration of the gospel we proclaim. The 'Common Word' initiative, which uses this very specific Christian language, gives us a clear opportunity to demonstrate the gospel through our lives within a framework established by Muslims. Lastly, we need to emphasise a theology of presence as a means of witness, especially in the way we engage with Muslims, to practice love and justice and accordingly, to represent Christ.

## ■ Missional theology of interfaith dialogue

In the following section the work of Terry Muck (2011) is briefly surveyed. He advocates for a missional theology of dialogue to be developed, and identifies four characteristics which are critical for this:

- It should be based on an orthodox recognition of God's revelation to all.
- It should fully embrace Christian humility.
- It must be grounded in a love of one's neighbours.
- Such a theology needs to make known to all involved, the commitment to Christian witness.

In the biblical text of Romans 1 Paul makes it clear that God has created, that God has not left anyone to themselves, and that God has given us all the capacity to know of God's existence. Throughout the history of the church almost every great theologian has built into their systematic representations references to God's ubiquitous presence. Justin Martyr spoke of the *logos spermatikos*, John Calvin of *sensus divinitatis* and Martin Luther of *Deus absconditus*, or in the words of John Wesley simply 'common grace' (Muck 2011:191). The general understanding with regard to these concepts is that God has somehow through various means made himself known to all people. Whether these people recognised it as such, however, is a different matter. These perceptions or experiences bring people to the knowledge that God indeed does exist. Importantly, though, the possible knowledge gained from such religious experiences is incomplete and incapable of leading to salvation. This then becomes the theological basis for us to be willing to listen to the religious narratives of other faiths, and encourages the exchange of interfaith dialogue. Muck (2011:191) argues that we miss the opportunities for mutual learning which take place when those whom God has created, whether Christian or not, share with each other the many evidences of God's glory and how they are affecting our lives. This theology is extremely important for understanding the place of interfaith dialogue, as it runs the risk of falling into one of two extremes: On the one hand of being minimised, so that the dialogue no longer functions as a space for mutual learning and essentially then becomes reduced to a monologue, and on the other hand exaggeration of mutual learning within dialogue, which can lead to pluralism where all voices in dialogue become truth and thus can lead to salvific efficacy.

Dialogue is based on the recognition that we do not know everything and have much to learn, 'for now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face' (1 Cor 13:12). Many Christians are hesitant of this way of thinking – that we can actually learn something from other faith traditions – since it seemingly might imply that we are admitting to a weakness within the Christian faith, thus something which can be exploited by other religious traditions. However, the inverse is reflected within Scripture, that true weakness would not be willing to make such an acknowledgement. Hiebert (1999)

advocates for a type of critical realism as an epistemological stance for missionaries, which would help us to avoid the twin dangers of extreme foundationalism, which leads to intellectual arrogance, and postmodern idealism, which in turn leads to relativism. Critical realism is built on two principles, firstly that absolute truth exists, and secondly that humans can only know truth imperfectly, or as the postmodernist would put it, 'all truth is subjective'. For Christians truth is presented through the mechanism of faith, which is a subjective exercise informed by Scripture, and it is by this truth that we measure all truth.

Missional theology for dialogue must be grounded in a love of neighbour (Muck 2011:192). Hostility is not conducive to dialogue. Participants who want to partake in interfaith dialogue have various reasons and motives for engaging with people of different religions, but those motivations need to be saturated in love. Paul noted that any interaction without love is meaningless (1 Cor 13:1). This notion of love also marks the will to pursue the common good of the other. Our desire is always to seek the common good of all people, especially in promoting harmonious coexistence with those of other faiths, and in contending for justice.

Muck's (2011:192) last theological departure point relates to the earlier discussion on transparency, where he states that a missional theology of dialogue makes known to all involved our commitment to Christian witness. It is on this point of witness where we expressly recognise the Christian faith to be universal and exclusive. Indeed dialogue only becomes truly meaningful if people are clear about their strongly held convictions. Muck (2011:192) argues that this should be done amongst people of good will, where an honest atmosphere has been created. The participants in such a dialogue will be free to be who they really are, with confidence that others, to the best of their abilities, are doing the same.

In the engagement of interfaith dialogue one enters the space liminally. In other words, one is treading on ground that is not yet defined, an open conversation that is moving somewhere – we hope towards peaceful coexistence, or perhaps even another, where the other recognises the beauty of the gospel and responds to it. The truth is we just do not know what might possibly occur as a result of dialogue. Interfaith dialogue often opens up formerly unseen possibilities, such as the creation of alternative faith communities, communities which we formerly could not have perceived as being possible. These communities, although existing within either the Christian or Islamic tradition, do not conform to any existing explicit understanding or definition of the respective faith community in which they exist. This often results in them being persecuted by people of their own faith tradition. The following narrative came to light during the Middle East Consultation of 2015 in Lebanon: A woman who became a follower of Christ as a result of interfaith dialogue deeply challenged our preconceived ideas of what should happen as a result of conversion from Islam to Christianity.

The woman will be referred to as Sara, a pseudonym to protect her identity. She comes from a country with a relatively large Christian population, although predominantly Muslim. She grew up as a Muslim, only to 'convert' to Christianity in her early 40s. The word 'convert' here is not defined as becoming a Christian, as she rejects the term completely, but converted in the sense of professing to be a follower of Jesus. It was a struggle to place or understand her faith convictions initially, especially considering how she continuously, throughout our discussions, would say that she is Muslim. However, for Sara to be Muslim was not a profession of her faith, but a profession of her social or cultural identity. We need to remember that Islam is a complete way of life and not everything is necessarily religious in content.

Perhaps the work of Tim Green (2015) would be helpful in order to understand these seemingly irreconcilable identities. Tim would argue that at a core identity level Sara is a follower of Jesus, but this core identity does not necessarily need to define her social or even collective identity. Why this is important though, relates to the perceived threat that might follow a person that turns to Christ out of Islam. Persecution and death threats are well reported to follow a proselyte. Interestingly enough, as was discussed at length at the Middle East Consultation 2015, persecution is not necessarily a result of turning away from or rejecting your faith, more often persecution has to do with the betrayal of rejecting the social or collective identity which the person belongs to.

Thus, in the case of Sara the perceived persecution from her Muslim friends and family is very limited, despite the fact that they know she is a follower of Christ. This has allowed her to remain embedded to some extent within her Islamic community, where she has established an alternative faith community. This community looks and feels very Muslim in terms of its practices and liturgical rhythms, yet it is within this very alternative expression of faith that she gets to share the gospel of Jesus. Sara often expressed that she cannot relate to the Christian communities socially and culturally, as they are so different from her that she does not feel welcome. It is out of those experiences that the need for her to establish her own unique faith community grew, one in between the borders and not strictly defined as being Muslim nor Christian, at least not in the traditional sense of those words. In the words of Volf (2011:198), the name and religious identity is unimportant, the reality of following Christ as Lord is.

Results like these raise questions on the notion of blending religions, which is something not advocated here. Yet, as I argued earlier, the results of interfaith dialogue are varied and unpredictable as they are determined by those involved and the way the dialogue is structured to take place. However, these considerations go beyond the scope of this study, and are occurrences in any religious tradition. Rather, our question relates to our response to these communities, should they occur.

In conclusion, we need to acknowledge our unique differences and how interfaith dialogue creates various opportunities for us to communicate faithfully that which we

believe. Faithful witness within dialogue should not take place in a way that compels someone into a response, but with love we faithfully proclaim with open arms. The missional aspect within interfaith dialogue beckons us to truthfully know ourselves and the unique particularities of our own faith as well as that of Islam, and accordingly to spread our faith respectfully.

## ■ Conclusion

We live in an ever-growing complex, pluralistic society where tensions between social, cultural, ethnic and religious lines are being pushed to the forefront of our lived lives. Relations between Christians and Muslims are extremely tense and have gained increased momentum and publicity in recent years. We observed early on in this research that there is an amplified sense of animosity, suspicion and even enmity between these two global religions. History has shown that religious conflict in particular is greatly intensified, and these two religions have a brutal history. If something does not change in terms of how we view one another, the future itself seems a frightening place.

Throughout this chapter significant changes in recent history have been pointed out, with growing support amongst religious leaders to promote interfaith dialogue. In as far as possible, we have respectfully looked at some of the Islamic initiatives as a major step in the right direction if we are to promote peace and justice as people living under the same roof. 'A Common Word' has opened up a whole new world of possibilities and willingness from Muslims to learn from and engage with the Christian community.

Before the 'Common Word' initiative most attempts at interfaith dialogue were driven from a Christian point of view, and often bore little fruit. 'A Common Word' has spurred a whole new motivation and energy. From here we developed, almost as a response, the uniquely Christian motivation of why Christians are compelled to engage in dialogue. Here the will to embrace was expounded as a theological metaphor for inclusivity and dialogue. The will to embrace urges us to accept the other unconditionally, as Christ accepted the animosity within us.

The will to embrace is a call to create room within ourselves for the other, to sacrifice our particularities but for a brief moment, so that reciprocal embrace can take place. Only once this reciprocal openness presents itself, can we safely start learning and engaging with the other, perhaps then, as part of the actual embrace, our particularities might also receive room to be presented as faithful witness. This theme was further expanded upon where we related the will to embrace to the theology of hospitality as a uniquely Christian way of creating room for the 'stranger' to be welcomed and relationships to be built, whilst maintaining at the very core a missional and eschatological witness.

‘Together towards life’ by Oikoumene (2012:25–26) summates our concluding position by bringing these various aspects of interfaith dialogue together in the following way: Interfaith dialogue functions as hospitality and as a theology of presence which authentically communicates something of the gospel by wholeheartedly accepting the other. This leads to the creation of liminal spaces where we can listen and learn from the other, whilst offering an honest encounter where we can proclaim our deepest convictions in a patient and respectful manner.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 4

The relationship between Christianity and Islam from the perspective of a willingness to embrace them is described in this chapter. Over the last decade, there has been an intensified interest in developing a thorough theological framework for how Christians and Muslims can relate to one another. This interest has grown in part as a result of an upsurge of militant extremism in recent years which has resulted in reactionary responses on a global scale. This has spiked fears, suspicions and uncertainties, leading to violent actions and retaliations. Furthermore, it has led some to claim that the future of the world depends on whether we will be able to develop a framework on how the two largest religions in the world can coexist. This research presents an analysis of the history of Christian-Muslim relations to understand the nature of the conflict. A theological motivation is developed for why Christians need to become involved with Muslim interfaith dialogue to promote peace and justice, whilst respectfully creating room for one another to coexist. Churches and missions have a duty to remember their calling to service, reconciliation, peacemaking, evangelism and dialogue. Christians worldwide have a task to educate people on relations with Islam, to teach the forgiveness of sins and to reach out in love to Muslims in word and deed as the bearers of the gospel. This attitude of reaching out is encapsulated in the expression ‘a willingness to embrace’.

# An assessment of the Theology of Religions

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## ■ Motivation for the study

The world we live in is a pluralistic religious environment. Religions engage with one another on many different levels, ranging from individuals from different religious backgrounds sharing the same work and living space, to religious institutions having places of worship next to one another. The relationship between religions has been categorised over centuries, with scholars agreeing that there are traditionally three categories describing this, namely, (1) pluralistic, (2) inclusivistic and (3) exclusivistic (D'Costa 1986:18). There are also attempts to extend the categories to include alternative ways of describing the relationship between religions.

My departure point for this study will be intergroup threat theory. However, I only look at the theory in the first section, and then move on to other subjects relating to dialogue. I begin with threat theory as an argument for dialogue. In a world with different social dynamics and religions, we need to move past intergroup threat. There will never be peace and harmony in the world as long as different groups are suspicious of one another. However, dialogue is a very complex process. Therefore I will look at the

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different approaches to other religions and search for an approach which will promote dialogue and interreligious ecumenism.

The focus of this study will be on the exclusivistic paradigm. I will look at how the exclusivistic paradigm influences the way we relate to other religions in dialogue, and how the paradigm addresses the humanitarian problem which all nations face. Is this an effective way of dialogue and relating to other religious communities? In the first section we research whether intergroup threat is more common in exclusivistic communities and fundamental groups. If this is the case, I will search for alternatives to the exclusivistic approach. How can humanity work together for the better of humanity, despite their religious differences?

## ■ Research problem

Within the exclusivist paradigm adherents view their religion as the only true religion, and therefore also the only means of salvation (Knitter 2008:26). It is important to note that exclusivism is present in Christianity, Islam, Judaism and many other religions – it is not an exclusively Christian perspective. The problem is that in many cases other religions are viewed as inferior or invalid, and the religious views of the other are disregarded.

I am approaching this subject from a Christian perspective, which compels me to take a look at the central role that Jesus plays in our faith. What do Christians make of texts that state that Jesus is the only means of salvation? This is not something that we can ignore. We need to make a serious effort in working with these texts in a responsible way that allows for dialogue and even interreligious teamwork, so that the whole of humanity can benefit. Schillebeeckx (1990:50–51) says, '[t]he unshaken certainty that one continues to possess the truth oneself whilst other are mistaken are [sic] no longer a possibility.' As Knitter (2008:8) says, 'religions have to come together not to create a new singular religion, but to form "a dialogical community of communities".' This will never be possible if different groups are suspicious of the unknown 'other'.

The problem lies in the fact that all religions feel that they are the only true religion. Citing Scripture is not a way to address this problem, because the truth of Scripture is relative. Christians only regard the Bible as the Word of God, and disregard any other scriptures. In the same way, Islam and Judaism disregard the scriptures of other religions. The issue is much more complex than merely throwing scripture at it. The Bible does have authority when it comes to the convictions of Christians, but in a multireligious setting we have to accept that other religious scriptures would also be used, and that they have authority for the followers of that particular religion. (When I discuss comparative theology, we will see that comparing scripture might be one of the approaches that can help overcome this problem.) How can we expect that one of these scriptures should be used as the norm?

We must accept and acknowledge the plurality of scriptures, because it is never going to change (Hick & Knitter 1987:69, 77–78). We need to find an alternative approach, which might lie in dialogue. But how do you do dialogue in a respectful way, without trying to force your views on the other, if both feel that they possess the only truth and means to salvation? I will try to determine if there are guidelines that can assist us in dialogue to enable us to cooperate, rather than trying to manipulate the other to accept our faith or religious views.

A further question that we need to consider is whether we can learn from one another. Is there any value in the other which can help us improve our knowledge of ourselves, and even our faith? Does an approach to learn from and help other religions not contradict the great commission that we have received?

The fact remains, religious pluralism is here to stay. We will always be confronted with other religions and other world views. We have to take a serious look at how we are going to relate to one another, because we are exposed to the other and the foreign on a daily basis at work, school, and even social gatherings. We need to figure out a way in which we can relate to other religions (Knitter 2008):

Above all, there has been a growth in the sentiment that religious plurality needs to be taken account of in our changed historical circumstances. What the Muslim could say and think about the Christian and Jew in a former age no longer seems adequate. What Christians once said to dismiss summarily the claims of Islam needs similarly to be re-examined, above all in the light of experience that reveal the grace and the truth present in our Muslim neighbours. (p. 3)

Thus, my research problem is how we enter into religious dialogue in a respectful way, without hidden agendas, so that both parties will benefit. We need to determine guidelines for dialogue that both parties can agree upon, and find a way in which we can enter into dialogue despite our different faith convictions.

## ■ Hypothesis

I will look at what the view of the exclusivist approach is, as well as how it is influenced by fundamentalism. Furthermore, I will look at what dialogue is and how we can effectively enter into dialogue with the purpose of working together. I will propose working with a theocentric approach rather than Christocentric approach, which might lead us to an interreligious ecumenism. If we can find a way to look past our religious differences, then we might be able to work together for the benefit of humanity. I will evaluate past approaches and attempt to find those that might be more open to the religious ‘other’. I feel that this is a contemporary problem due to the obvious evidence that different

groups (social as well as religious) experience intergroup threat. In an article (Van Gelder, *Time Magazine*, 26 June 2015) that I refer to it will become clear that this is not only a problem which other countries face, but one that is also present in South Africa.

## ■ Method

The method that I use is a purely literary study. I specifically look at the works of Paul Knitter, as he pays a lot of attention to exclusivism and its influence on dialogue. He also proposes and defines the acceptance model. Then I look at the work of D'Costa, and the new approaches (comparative theology and postmodern postliberalism) which he proposes, which I will investigate and evaluate as alternative approaches to other religions. Furthermore I will look at Hicks' proposal to move from a Christocentric to a theocentric approach in Christianity. I will also look at Sweet's proposal and definition of interreligious ecumenism. The method will be a critical evaluation of the exclusivistic approach and a search for alternative ways of relating to other religions. Thus, I will conduct a critical, evaluative study of research that has already been conducted.

My research approach is from a theological departure point, and uses a quantitative method. Qualitative research is exploratory research to understand reasons, opinions and motivations. It provides insight for quantitative research. Quantitative research is a way of qualifying a problem by generating data that can be transformed into statistics. It is used to qualify opinions, attitudes and behaviour.

## ■ Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to show that dialogue is critical with regard to the intergroup threat theory. I will define exclusivism, fundamentalism and dialogue, and then investigate if the exclusivist model leaves room for dialogue, and what dialogue according to this model will look like. If it does not leave room for dialogue, I will examine the reasons for it and what we need to change in order for dialogue to be possible. I will then try to suggest alternative approaches that we can follow for dialogue to be possible.

## ■ Expected results

The result that I expect to find is not only a way for the exclusivistic model to enter into dialogue, but also definition of guidelines on how this dialogue will be conducted. Apart from that, I also want to propose alternative ways of relating to other religions, as well as the possibility of working together despite our religious differences and contradictory faith convictions. I also expect to describe the possibility of a theocentric approach to religions, which would make interreligious ecumenism possible.

## ■ Group threat theory

Society is made up of different social groups, each with their own group dynamics. Recently there have been a lot of studies (i.e. Ryan King, Darren Wheelock, Mark McCormack) on how these groups influence each other. In a global world it soon became apparent that groups would experience threats from other groups. This theory is called group threat theory. In this section I briefly look at what group threat theory is, and discuss the dynamics that lead to group threat. I also discuss the two types of threats described by Stephan, Ybara and Morrison (2009). Different factors are responsible for different reactions and consequences, which will become clear throughout this section. The consequences of these threats lead to discord in societies. I therefore examine a short theory of a possible solution to the threats, which might enable us to build a society with more trust between groups.

Seeing that this chapter is about interreligious dialogue, I then move from a definition of intergroup threat theory to religious intergroup threat theory, where I explain threat as experienced in different religions. I will look at the relationship between Christianity and Islam as an example of the extent of and reasons for the threat experienced between religious groups. In the section about religions intergroup threat it will become clear how closely the religious intergroup threat is linked to exclusivism and religious fundamentalism. The link between threat and lack of knowledge will be clarified, and it will be explained how Christians misunderstand Muslims, and vice versa.

To conclude this section I will refer to an article published in *Time Magazine* (Van Gelder, 26 June 2015), which shows clearly how group threat is present in South Africa, even though it is not reflective of religious intergroup threat theory in South Africa.

## ■ What is intergroup threat theory?

We live in a pluralistic world with different religions, races and ideologies, each forming their own social groups with their own group identities. These groups also have certain criteria for being part of this group. This means that some are included whilst others are excluded. Those included share in benefits only available to those who belong to the in-group. Benefits would normally be acceptance and social support with rules, norms, values, et cetera. We want to belong to these groups, and we fear the destruction thereof. This provides people with tradition, language, culture and religion. Because people's own groups are so important, other groups are considered a threat (Nelson 2009):

'Tribes' that possess the power to harm or destroy the in-group are a threat to the very existence of the in-group, while 'tribes' that possess different values are a threat to the unified meaning system of the in-group. (pp. 1–2)

Intergroup threat is when one group experiences the feeling or reality that the other will cause them harm. There are two types of threat, namely, (1) *realistic threat*, which refers to physical harm or a loss of resources, and is a threat to the group's power, resources and general welfare and (2) *symbolic threat*, which is the threat to one's identity, values or integrity, religion, beliefs, et cetera. As Nelson (2009:2, 4) states, '[t]he primary reason intergroup threats are important is because their effects on intergroup relations are largely destructive.' Threat can also be experienced as individuals. Individual realistic threats would refer to pain, torture, death and economic loss, whilst individual symbolic threat refers to a loss of honour, identity or self-esteem (Nelson 2009:2, 4).

One factor in intergroup threat is the threat to the power of a group. Low-power groups are more likely to experience this threat, but high-power groups would react more severely to the experience. Another aspect are cultural dimensions, as cultural values can influence the experience of threat. People living with a strong community concept of culture may be especially prone to intergroup threat. 'Tight' cultures emphasise the importance of conforming to group norms and values, and will therefore experience higher levels of threat. As Nelson (2009) states:

In the case of cultural dimensions, the underlying premise is that some cultures may predispose people to feel threatened by out-groups, particularly those cultures that emphasize close ingroup ties (a specific aspect of collectivism), rules and hierarchy which may be jeopardized by out-groups (uncertainty avoidance, tightness, power distance, and mistrust, security/low benevolence). (p. 6, pp. 9–11)

The intergroup threat has a number of consequences:

1. *Cognitive responses*. Intergroup threat changes the perceptions of the out-group and establishes new stereotypes. It will lead to ethnocentrism, intolerance, hatred and so on. Communicative and memory biases are amplified by the experience of threat, which will lead to negative descriptions of the out-group and misanthropic memory errors. The in-group will especially remember *negative* behaviour by the out-group. Attitudes toward the in-group would become more favourable, which would increase the feeling of threat. This response makes violence against the out-group more likely, and easier to justify (Nelson 2009:16–18).
2. *Emotional responses*. These responses include fear, anxiety, anger and resentment. It will result in a loss of empathy for out-group members, but an increase of empathy for the in-group members. Studies show that these feelings can evolve to feelings of *Schadenfreude*, which means a group or person takes pleasure in the suffering of the out-group. Different out-groups can also induce different emotional responses. Gay men may threaten a straight man's values, which might result in disgust, whilst another ethnicity may induce fear and hatred because the experience induces realistic threats (Nelson 2009:18–19).

3. *Behavioural responses.* These responses can range from withdrawal to discriminating, lying, stealing and harassment. In some cases this response can result in hostility toward the out-group. It can also lead to negative reactions within the in-group, such as an increase in in-group norms and boundaries; 'Indeed, threats to the ingroup's status and core values have both been found to trigger derogation of deviant group members' (Nelson 2009:20–21).

The nature of the cognitive, emotional and behavioural responses may depend on whether the threat is realistic or symbolic. Symbolic threats will lead to dehumanisation, delegitimation, moral exclusion, and so on and more than likely lead to an increase in in-group boundaries, and conformity to rules and values. Realistic threats might lead to withdrawal, avoidance and aggression, whilst more drastic responses may include strikes, boycott or even warfare (Nelson 2009:22–23).

## ■ Reducing threat

So far I have referred to the editor of the book, Todd D. Nelson (2009); the chapter on 'Threat Theory' was written by Walter Stephan, Oscar Ybarra and Kimberley Morrison (2009). I came across this chapter's draft version, which Walter Stephan and Marisa Mealy wrote (2011), in which they referred to possible ways of reducing threat and responses to threat. I shortly discuss their proposed solution as it refers to dialogue, which is also my personal approach to the problem.

Realistic group threats, according to Stephan and Mealy (2011), can be reduced by declarations of peace and prosecuting those that commit crimes against humanity. Leaders should come together and renounce violence and hatred, and engage in civil public discourse or dialogue. They should also establish verifiable steps toward promoting intergroup peace. To address symbolic threat offensive symbols must be outlawed and the leaders must undertake media campaigns to promote peace and reconciliation. Media should also provide fact, accurate reporting on any incidents that could be interpreted as actions from the out-group (Stephan & Mealy 2011:5). The key to maintaining peace and reconciliation is dialogue between the different groups, but as it will become clear in the remainder of the chapter, dialogue has many elements and is a complex process. My approach or departure point to the subject is interreligious dialogue.

## ■ Religion and intergroup threat theory

In this section I look at the work of McCormack (2012), who wrote his thesis on religion and in-group threat theory, based on studies about the situation in America. Even though the study wasn't conducted on intergroup relations in South Africa, analysis of the data is

relevant to the situation in South Africa. McCormack (2012:1) says that religious freedom made great progress in America, but only amongst Protestant groups. Minority religions such as Muslims and Jews still experience negative attitudes. His study primarily focuses on the relationship between Christians and Muslims (McCormack 2012:1–2).

America used to be extremely anti-Catholic, as the Catholics' loyalty to the Pope was seen as a threat to their familial structure and political stability. Americans experienced a symbolic threat by Catholics, Mormons and Freemasons because they felt that their values were in danger. Muslims are currently seen as the biggest threat to Christians as they challenge Christians' fundamental teaching about Christ (McCormack 2012:3–4).

McCormack (2012) argues that religious groups such as Evangelical Protestantism and other fundamentalist groups often provoke religious prejudice:

Significant advancements have been made in examining individual theological belief systems and religious worldviews and their relationship to prejudice. Merino examined the relationship between theological exclusivism and views of religious diversity and willingness to include non-Christians in social life, finding theological exclusivity to be strongly and negatively associated with views of religious diversity generally and strongly associated with a decreased willingness to include non-Christians in the life of the community. (p. 6)

For Christian communities the experience of threat is normally connected to their identity – they feel that their values and ideologies are disintegrating or being challenged. These feelings are a response to a decrease in young people in churches as well as the exclusion of Christianity in the public sphere (both also visible in South Africa). They experience threat to their in-group due to the loss of Christian influence in society (McCormack 2012:16).

## The threat of the religious other

McCormack focuses his study on Christians' experience of the threat of the religious 'Other', which is based on the presence of Muslim communities. Participants of the study feel that Muslims hate Christians and seek to subvert American society (McCormack 2012):

Assumptions about the actions and intentions of Muslims are often of a subversive, conspiratorial nature, placing them in direct opposition to the dominant American culture and to the long-standing American values of democracy and freedom. Muslims are 'all terrorists' and 'all hate us', as one resident suggested. (p. 19)

Obviously, these statements are assumptions about the Muslim community, which are not based on any facts. These views are based on two qualities: Violence and autocracy. Many people view Muslims as a violent community. The root of Muslim violence was viewed as embedded in the religion of the Muslim community (McCormack 2012):

Important to note in these depictions of Muslim violence is that residents frequently made *claims to knowledge* of central Islamic teaching and practises – residents presume to ‘know’ about Islam ... Thus, there is a pervasive sense of ‘knowing’ about Muslims, though such claims were rarely, if ever, substantiated by textual or otherwise authoritative sources of knowledge. Further, this ‘knowing’ most commonly centred around perceptions of the violent nature of Muslims. (pp. 20–21)

Muslim culture is viewed as dramatically different and opposed to Christian or American culture. Participants then try to explain what life could turn into if Muslims are not resisted (McCormack 2012:22). It becomes clear why the in-group Christians view the out-group Muslims as a threat, and it seems that it is more of a symbolic than a real threat. But Americans or Christians are not the only groups that experience threat, and that is what threat theory is all about.

Nelson (2009) views in-group threat from the Muslim perspective. McCormack viewed interreligious relations and intergroup threat from a Christian fundamentalist position and Nelson from a Muslim fundamentalist position. In the last two decades no other group has been responsible for more international acts of terrorism than militant Muslim fundamentalists. Although there are many different reasons for this, one basic reason integrates them all: They feel threatened by Western culture. Muslim culture is collectivistic, culturally tight, and mistrusting of the out-group. Western culture is dramatically different from this, which threatens fundamental Muslims (Nelson 2009):

Fundamentalist Muslims are deeply concerned about the continued existence of the culture in its traditional form. Acts of terrorism is a response of the fundamentalist Muslim community to these threats, which in turn leads Western Christian communities to respond likewise. (p. 12)

It is clear how a lack of understanding of the religious *other*, as well as a fundamentalist point of view, can put interreligious relations under stress. Mixed with assumptions, it creates the perfect circumstances for intergroup threat and mistrust of the religious other. It becomes clear how important it is to address interreligious dialogue, and the need to find a new approach to relate to other religious communities.

## ■ Reflection on *Time* article of 26 June 2015

On 26 June 2015 *Time Magazine* published an article ‘How a right-wing South African group incites a new wave of white fear’ (Van Gelder 2015) that demonstrates how this intergroup theory functions perfectly in South Africa. It refers to an American young man who was involved in a mass shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charlestown in the United States of America. The article states that this young



man felt that his way of life was under threat from people of colour. He did not have any relation to South Africa, but shares the ideology of white primacy held by many white persons worldwide. The article then looks at communities and more specifically at the community at a camp for young white South Africans where it is taught that separation between white and black must be maintained.

The article tells the story of a group of young boys who went on a holiday camp aimed at the survival of white South Africans. The boys are all white and Afrikaans-speaking. In the article Eliria Bornman of the University of South Africa explains that their actions are a response to their new position in South Africa. Many of these boys as well as the white community feel unsure about their place in the new South Africa. They have a strong sense of identity and are filled with a lot of anger – anger which is fuelled by positive discrimination. Discrimination and the threat of not finding work due to the colour of one's skin is a realistic threat experienced by in-group members.

*Komandokorp*, the group that leads these survival camps, is a dangerous and extreme right-wing group whose mission is to protect its own people (white and Afrikaans) against the attacks and threat of black South Africans. Sixty per cent of boys that attend are volunteered by their parents, whilst the other 40 volunteered themselves. The *Komandokorps* feeds on anxiety. Crime and violence in South Africa breeds fear, which is fertile ground for an organisation such as the *Komandokorps*. Jooste, the leader of this camp, is desperate to preserve the Afrikaner identity through its language, culture and symbols.

This article clearly reflects the in-group threat of white communities, which is also reflected in recent events in South Africa. Statues have been destroyed and dishonoured, racism and hate speech abound. People that are often in the news are people like Julius Malema, Sunette Bridges, and Steve Hofmeyr, characters described by many as racists. However, these are people that understand the in-group threat, and act on it. In-group threat theory says that a group's values and identity are important to the group, and these images are used to draw the group closer together. Steve Hofmeyr recently released a new song called *We will survive* which is full of images of Afrikaner identity:

*Daar is 'n land en 'n volk, in een taal gedoop,  
Met gebeure en buskruid en bloed verkoop,  
Wat weer en weer van sy knieë af moet streef,  
Ons sal oorleef*

[There is a land and a nation, baptised into one language,  
Bought with events and gunpowder and blood,  
That will rise to its knees again and again,  
We will survive].

He also includes religious imagery:

*Ek lig my oë, tot die berge op,  
Waar sal my hulp tog vandaan kan kom,  
Ag my God, jou woorde lê deur my geweeft,  
Ons sal oorleef*

[I lift up my eyes to the mountains,  
Where would my help come from?  
Oh my God, your word is entwined in me,  
We will survive].

Steve Hofmeyr uses the imagination and identity of the white Afrikaner in his song in order to show the white South Africans who experience perceived or real threats that he is on their side. My aim is not to focus on intergroup threat theory or the Afrikaner experience of threat, but to demonstrate that all communities experience threat. It is common to the whole of humanity.

I believe that dialogue is the way to move past the experience of threat in a community that is diverse but trusts one another. Dialogue is a complex process with many different elements. Here I search for possible approaches to interreligious dialogue. I look at past approaches to other religions and dialogue, and propose alternatives.

I first explain exclusivism and the view of exclusivistic approaches to other religious communities, and then look at the link between exclusivism and fundamentalism. Then I will examine what dialogue is and how we can work towards more effective dialogue. My argument is that the traditional threefold approach of the past is not effective, and this leads me to search for alternative approaches. If we can find an approach for dialogue that can accept the other for who they are and make room to work together for the better of society, we will be able to work past misconceptions and misunderstandings, fostering trust, which will enable different faith communities to work together for the benefit of the 'other'.

## ■ Defining exclusivism

I will now seek to define what is meant by the term 'exclusivism'. To do this I will look at the origin of exclusivism, as well as arguments for and against it, in order to determine whether exclusivism leaves room for dialogue or not. As my departure point is that of Christian theology, I will look at exclusivism as a paradigm from a Christian departure point. I will also distinguish between total replacement and partial replacement. The total replacement approach is of the opinion that there is only one true religion, which must replace all religions (Knitter 2008:23, 26). Partial replacement says that God does reveal himself in other religions, but salvation is only available through Christ (Knitter 2008:33, 36).

## ■ The exclusivist approach

The departure point of the exclusivist approach is that Christianity possesses the absolute truth (Knitter 2008:26; Netland 1991:9), any truth claim by any other religion is false and misleading. It is of the opinion that God revealed himself in the Bible, and that Jesus is God incarnate. No salvation is possible without Christ, and therefore no other religion can bring about salvation (Netland 1991:9). Because of humanity's inherently sinful nature there is very little good and limited knowledge about God in other religions. Jesus is the only way to salvation, and therefore we are obliged to do mission work. There must be a call on all people to turn from their sinful lifestyles, to repent, and to make a conscious decision to confess in the name of Jesus (Meiring 1996:229). It is very important to note that the exclusivist approach is not only present in the Christian tradition, but also in many other religions. Most people regard their own religion as the only truth (Netland 1991:35).

## ■ Total replacement model

The total replacement model feels that Christianity should replace all other religions. Mission work was always done with the intention that all people should become Christians. God's love is universal, but it is only realised through Christianity. This view is especially found in fundamentalist or evangelical communities (Knitter 2008:19). As I have mentioned, the total replacement model views other religions as so lacking and deviant that Christianity must replace them (Knitter 2008:23).

Kraemer (1938) and many others who support his perspective feel that salvation is only possible through the grace of God (D'Costa 1986:57; Kraemer 1938:101). This approach is strongly based on biblical texts, and holds that texts such as John 14:6, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me', should be viewed in a serious light. Another verse that is very important is Acts 4:12, '[a]nd there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given amongst men, by which we must be saved.' According to these two texts Jesus is the only Saviour and truth about God is only revealed through Jesus. Therefore Christians have the responsibility to preach this message to the world. This proclamation of the message should be done in the context of the people to whom we take the message. The Christian truth should be brought to them in their own language, and according to their culture and understanding of reality. Kraemer proposed that any truth claim should be evaluated in the light of God's self-revelation in Jesus (D'Costa 1986:57, 70; Kraemer 1938:107).

Karl Barth played a large role in establishing the viewpoint of the replacement model. Barth experienced the evils of World War II, and believed that humans couldn't get their act together without God (Knitter 2008:24). His message was based on four principles (Knitter 2008:23–25), namely:

1. We are saved by grace alone. We live in a violent suffering world, and we cannot get out of this mess without God. The only way we will get out of it, is through a higher power, grace.
2. We are saved through faith alone. We are unable to change the world or our circumstances on our own; we need to trust God to help us. Faith alone, and not human acts, could change this situation.
3. We are saved by Christ alone. It is in Jesus Christ, and only in him, that God has acted in this world. It is only through love that God has saved us and sent his Son, not because humanity deserves it.
4. We are saved by Scripture alone. The Scriptures communicate the reality of Jesus Christ to us. It is the truest revelation that we will ever find. Through Scripture God tells humans that he is God.

## □ Barth on religions

When we look at Barth's view of religions, it is clear that he does not view Christianity as superior to other religions; for him all religions are unbelief (Knitter 2008:25). It is a human, manufactured attempt to anticipate what God wills us to do, which replaces God's work. Religion prevents humans from doing what humans must do, and that is to step back and allow God to be God. All religions, including Christianity, are the opposite from what they appear to be; rather than through religion, we are saved through grace (Knitter 2008:25). Barth warns against comparing Christianity with other religions, not because of the differences but because all religions are the same. Nothing differentiates Christianity from any other religion. Still, he proclaims Christianity as the one true religion, reason being that Christianity knows that it is a false religion. But because of Jesus, saving us through grace, Christianity is the only true religion. Christianity is the only religion that contains the revelation of God. Barth therefore says that Christians should respect religious freedom, but because Christianity is the only religion with the revelation of God, Christianity has nothing to relate to other religions, and therefore dialogue is impossible. He also warns missionaries not to try and find points of contact with other religions, but only to approach them in a loving way and let the light of God shine in (Knitter 2008:26).

## □ Theological view of the total replacement model

This model feels that all Christians should take the New Testament seriously, especially concerning Jesus as the only means of salvation. Without him, humans cannot get out of their sinful existence. Any view that would move away from this message is watering down and abandoning the gospel of Jesus, not reading the Bible literally. Despite this view, they are hesitant to declare that anyone that has not heard and therefore does not follow Jesus, would be condemned. They believe that the Bible is not the only source of

this view, but also our own ability to reason. For the total replacement model it is then reasonable that God will provide only one, singular path through which humans can be saved (Knitter 2008):

So Geivett and Phillips reason that in the midst of so much uncertainty, unclarity, and fear, in the face of so many different and doubtful ways to go, doesn't it make immanent sense that, if there is a God, this God would provide us with a clear set of directions, a sure helping hand, an assurance that within and beyond the uncertainties, there is purpose to life and a well-defined path to walk toward it? ... What human beings need is one clear, God-given path! (pp. 27–30)

A God-given revelation of this one truth stands above any human-made system. Leslie Newbigin (1989) states that:

[T]o affirm the unique decisiveness of God's action in Jesus Christ is not arrogance; it is the enduring bulwark against the arrogance of every culture to be itself the criterion by which others are judged. (p. 169)

Despite their view, they do not want to argue based on the Bible alone – they want a chance to share the gospel, convinced that through the power of God salvation through Jesus alone will be revealed and proved to each person. The total replacement model wants an opportunity, or competition, where all religions share their convictions. They are convinced that God will then prove their message as the only truth (Knitter 2008:31).

### Partial replacement model

The partial replacement model views the total replacement model as too harsh. Exponents feel that there is some value in other religions, and that they can communicate the love of God, '[i]n fact, their basic criticism of the Total Replacement Model is that it missed the very real presence of God within the world of other religions' (Knitter 2008:33). However, there is still no salvation in other religions. The goal of dialogue is then to be able to understand other religions better in order to replace them. This model celebrates the revelation of God in other religions. God is present within the persons and the structures of other religions. According to them there are three ways in which God reaches out to people in other religions, namely, (1) the first chapter of Romans states that God speaks to others through the power of nature, and through their own conscience, (2) confirming that the power of nature speaks the language of God, Paul says to the Gentiles that God has not left them without a witness to do good and (3) the same Word that created everything became flesh in Jesus, and now gives life to everyone (Knitter 2008:33–34).

### Various theologians

Early church fathers believed that God not only speaks in Christianity. Both Calvin and Luther believed that a 'sense of God' was instilled in humans, which drives people

to seek God. Tillich (1963:4) said that people feel the presence of God when ‘they are grasped by an Ultimate concern’ – the answer to the question of the meaning of life. Pannenberg (1968:3–21) said that the process of history is the stage for God speaking to humanity. We become aware of God through our search for questions and the events of history. For him, the history of religions is the history of God’s interaction with humanity (Knitter 2008:34–35).

## □ Kraemer on religions

Kraemer has a similar view of other religions as Barth. He agrees that Christianity is the only true religion, and also makes a distinction between religion and faith. Despite this, Kraemer says that God without a doubt reveals himself in other nations and their religions. His position towards other religions is based on categorising religions into two groups: The prophetic religions and the natural religions. His view of other religions, according to some, can seem as if Kraemer views religion as simply a product of man. Kraemer himself admits that he made too little of God’s presence in other religions (Beyers 2001:93–94).

When Kraemer speaks about natural religions, he also calls them primitive religions. By primitive he does not mean that the followers are primitive, only that they do not make a distinction between religious life and secular life. All aspects of life are connected. These religions seldom change and are not affected by outside elements, he describes them as static and isolated. They do not have any vision of spreading their message, their only goal is to sustain the present order. Within these religions there is no notion of ethical or religious absolutes. In the prophetic religions there is a strong awareness of God and the need to proclaim their beliefs. These religions are dependent on God for their revelation; here we find sin as the will of man, which opposes the will of God, and followers have the godly commission to spread its divine truth. When Kraemer speaks about primitive religions he does not mean that other religions are more evolved or superior, and feels that this would prevent any efforts to enter into dialogue. When natural religions come into contact with prophetic religions, it is no problem for the former to take up beliefs from the latter. Natural religions tend to view all religions as the same (Beyers 2001:94–95).

When Kraemer speaks about the relationship between religions he becomes more negative. In his book *Godsdienst, godsdiensten en het Christelijk geloof* (1958) it is clear that he approached the subject from a Christian point of view. He says that the study is from the departure point that Jesus is the way, the truth and the light. He is convinced that Christianity is the only true religion, that salvation and revelation are only found in Jesus, and that only in Jesus are we able to interpret the total religious history of humanity. Christianity contains all answers to salvation and therefore salvation is only available within the Christian religion (Beyers 2001:95–96).

Kraemer makes a distinction between religion and revelation, classifying religion as that which humans think about God, and revelation as that which God thinks about humans. This is his departure point when he talks about the relationship between religions. Revelation is the self-revelation of God by God alone. Jesus is this revelation, and all religious history of humans must be interpreted in and through Jesus. Revelation and salvation isn't one package, according to Kraemer. Salvation is only available in Jesus, but God reveals himself to other religions as well. This view is based on his understanding of God's eternal covenant with all of humankind. Kraemer and Barth have different opinions about God in other religions: Kraemer says that God can and does work in other religions, whilst Barth rejects this view. Kraemer says that salvation comes as an answer to revelation, and this answer is faith in Jesus Christ. Other religions are present because of human, sinful attempts at trying to relate to God instead of meeting the answer of faith (Beyers 2001:98–99).

Still, Kraemer argues for a more positive attitude towards other religions in order to keep the possibility of dialogue and contact open. Kraemer has a more positive approach to other religions than most researchers with an exclusivistic approach: He says that God still relates to other religions because of his eternal covenant. Thus Kraemer allows some room for other religions (Beyers 2001:100).

## Theological view of the partial replacement model

God speaks to other people through their own religions. Other religions not only make people aware of the divine, but also teach them that the divine is a personal and loving being. This evangelical model sees other religions as God-willed, because humans need redemption but are unable to redeem themselves. Through other religions, God leads them to the search for him. However, they still feel that there is no salvation in other religions, like what we find in Christianity. This argument is based on two reasons, outlined below.

1. The New Testament nowhere states that someone can be saved through the general revelation of God. Salvation is brought by Jesus alone. God's action of reaching out to humans became reality in and through Jesus (Knitter 2008:35–37). Carl Braaten (1992:74) said that, 'Christ is not merely *expressive* of a divine salvation equally available in the plurality of religions; salvation is constituted by the coming of God in the concrete history of Jesus of Nazareth.' Exponents feel that we would contradict what Christ is all about if we should allow for other means of salvation. Therefore, for anyone to be saved they have to come into contact with Christ, which they do when Christ is preached to them. When Christ is preached, revelation would follow (Knitter 2008:38).

2. Evidence from other religions is found in the history of religions. Despite what the followers of other religions learn through their faith, salvation is nothing but trying to save themselves. According to Tillich (Knitter 2008:39–40) all religions forget that their signs, symbols and rituals are not the divine, but merely point to the divine.

## Are other religions lost?

Clearly both exponents the total replacement and partial replacement models are of the opinion that there is only salvation in and through Jesus Christ. But if God is such a loving God, does that mean he will send someone that never heard of him to hell? Isn't something wrong with this view? The argument from the replacement model is that if people are lost, we cannot blame it on God. People, whether Christian or not, rebelled against God; all people know enough about God to *rebel* against God, and all people do. People are not condemned for not knowing Jesus, they are condemned for not following the light of God. Some evangelicals within the replacement model still feel that this is a harsh view. They feel that humans can't make anything of general revelation without Christ. However, the conclusion remains the same: People who have never heard of Christ are still lost. The reality is that the Bible never provides a clear argument for what happens to those who have never heard about Jesus. The only thing that the Bible does say is that when someone is saved, it is through Jesus (Knitter 2008:44–45).

There are optimists who feel that we:

[D]on't find in the Bible evidence that unambiguous and stress that if God is free to save anybody, God's love will move in the direction of forgiveness. Yet they don't want to say for sure, or how. That would be going beyond the Bible. But they hope. (p. 45)

There are a couple of theories on how someone that never heard of Christ might be saved:

1. The last-minute solution. God will send a messenger to those who lived a moral life, just before their death, to tell them about Jesus and salvation through him.
2. The after-death solution. A final opportunity will be granted to those who did their best with what they had.
3. The election solution. This argument states that God knows what would have happened if things were different; therefore God knows who would have accepted the message, and then saves those individuals.
4. The exception model. God makes exceptions for the holy people in other religions.
5. The universal solution. Jesus died and was raised for all people, and therefore at the end of time all will have the opportunity to hear and accept the message. The God of history will then also be revealed as the God of all religions.
6. The wider mercy solution, also known as inclusivism. God is present in the whole universe, and therefore his grace is available to the whole universe. (Knitter 2008:45–47)



## ■ The history of Christian exclusivism

To understand Christian exclusivism better we need to look at the history and development of the Christian exclusivist paradigm. The subject matter can be taken as far back as the Old Testament. Exclusivism originated out of a deep-seated monotheistic faith in God, which revealed himself in and through Jesus Christ, the Messiah. Now salvation was possible for all, but only through Jesus. This view resulted in the stance that all other religions were idolatry. The early church was particularly strict concerning the subject. The context of the early church was one of plurality of religions and convictions. The early Christians were also very critical of the values and practices of other religions. Another contributing factor was the persecution which the early church faced, not only from other religions but also from Judaism. Christians were viewed by Judaism as heretics within the Jewish faith. Justin Martyr was the first to form a notion of possible tolerance towards other religions. His approach was that other religions possess truth claims which actually belong to the Christian religion. According to him all people possess the seed of the divine *logos* (Netland 1991:12), however, their knowledge of the *logos* was incomplete and distorted, which resulted in errors in their teachings. The church in the Middle Ages continued to grow more exclusivist and negative toward other religions. By the 13th century the church was severely exclusivist, and held that there was no salvation outside the Christian church. Exclusivism was the dominant departure point in both the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant church up to the 19th century. From the perception that those outside the church are lost grew a powerful missionary conviction. To have a better understanding of missionary movements they must be viewed in the light of Christian exclusivism (Netland 1991:10–14).

In the early 20th century missionaries had a very open approach to other religions. At the international Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910 missionaries called for a dialogue and cooperation with other religions. In 1938 there were still calls to work with other religions in overcoming the dangers of fascism. In 1971 the WCC set up a unit of Dialogue with People of Living Faiths. The purpose was to promote respect for the other in dialogue. In 1977 the WCC issued its Guidelines on Dialogue. These urged Christians to enter into dialogue with other religions as part of our calling, '[s]o while the WCC was pushing dialogue beyond the replacement model, its theology was still located in a perspective of total replacement' (Knitter 2008:42–43).

The understanding of Christian exclusivism is that where other religions have a different truth claim, the other religions are wrong. Traditionally they said that Christians and Muslims can't both be right about the identity of Jesus. Christians claim that Jesus is the incarnation of the only living God, he was both fully God and fully man. The claim that Jesus is God is blasphemy according to the Muslims, even though Jesus was one of the greatest prophets that ever lived, he was nothing more than a mere man. This is a

fundamental point of separation between Christians and Muslims. It is possible for both Christians and Muslims to be wrong about the identity of Jesus, but it is impossible for both to be right. This example demonstrates the problem we face with different truth claims. In this case the exclusivist Christian group would not debate with the Muslims, and simply discard the Muslims' truth claims (Netland 1991:112).

For Netland (1991) this is one of the major problems with the exclusivist paradigm. Whilst truth is a legitimate claim in other domains, it is out of place in religion:

Even if there is a sense in ordinary life or in science in which truth can be regarded as propositional and exclusive, to think of religious truth in these terms is to indicate that one really does not understand what religious faith and truth are all about. Religious truth is not like ordinary truth. It is unique and thus not necessarily subject to the limitations inherent in ordinary truth. (p. 113)

## ■ Arguments against exclusivism

Truth claims are not the only argument that we will encounter against the exclusivist paradigm. In the section that follows I will refer to some of the arguments directed against this approach.

The more the Protestant tradition was exposed to and participated in dialogues with other religions, the more critical it became of the exclusivist approach. Criticism comes from theologians and exegetes who are of the opinion that exclusivist Christology is not the only approach that can be assumed from Scripture. As a result more and more people are asking questions about the possibility of multiple ways of salvation (Meiring 1996:229–230). For Gillis (1951:168) the problem is that this approach rests too heavily upon the literal interpretation of Scripture. It limits the possibility of salvation to a very small group and interprets God's activity in the world in a small historical, cultural and demographic sphere. The implication is that all who did not hear about Jesus would be lost. With only 28% of the world's population being Christian, it means that 62% of humanity will be condemned. This raises not only the question about those who did not hear about Jesus, but also those who died before Jesus was incarnated.

If, as in Christian doctrine, God is the Creator of all that exists, why would he allow the majority of people to be lost or separated from their Creator? The Christian religion is foreign to the biggest part of the world. If God wants humanity to reach perfect fullness, he must also allow an opportunity for humans to reach that fullness. Says Gillis (1951:168, 170), '[i]t appears cruel that God would punish faithful Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists because they have followed a different religious path from Christianity.' For D'Costa (1986:75) the biggest problem with the exclusivist paradigm is that it doesn't take God's saving will into consideration (D'Costa 1990):

The question that arises when God is presented as being exclusively at work in Christianity is whether this does not reduce the universality of God to such an extent that God is made to appear as the tribal deity of a rather imperialistic form of Western Christianity. (p. 31)

This exclusivist approach makes it difficult for communities within countries like India, where there is a plurality of religious traditions present. Hick and Knitter (1987:69) argue that this viewpoint has a negative influence on the relationships between community members within a specific community, and can make it difficult for these members to live together in harmony. It causes division between God and humanity, between humanity and nature, and between different religious traditions.

Those that support this theory base their beliefs about Jesus on the authority of the Bible. The Bible does have authority when it comes to the convictions of Christians, but in a multireligious setting we have to accept that other religious scriptures would also be used, and that they have authority for the followers of that particular religion. How can we expect that one of these scriptures should be used as the norm? We must accept and acknowledge the plurality of scriptures, because it is never going to change (Hick & Knitter 1987:69, 77–78). The Christian exclusivist point of departure regarding other religions is based on four presumptions, namely, (1) Jesus is God incarnate, fully God and fully human, (2) salvation is only possible through Jesus' being and work, (3) the Bible is the written revelation of God, therefore it is authoritative and (4) where the Bible does not agree with the truth claims of other religions, the latter can be regarded as false and misleading (Netland 1991:34).

According to Netland (1991:27–33) there are seven reasons why Christian exclusivism is being rejected:

1. The fact that people are exposed to other religions leads people to tolerate the followers of other religions. In big cities it is not uncommon to have neighbours who are Hindus or Buddhists, et cetera. It is very easy for people to condemn or classify them as heathens, but when you get to know them and they become your friends it is no longer that easy. The same is true when people are exposed to great religious leaders of other religions. Christians are convinced that the Christian religion has great moral values, but for many Christians it is shocking to realise that there are other religious traditions with even higher moral values than Christianity. It is arrogant to insist that Christianity is uniquely true, when we find just as many respectable people in other religions (Netland 1991:28).
2. There is a growing sense of scepticism towards religion, which is visible in the 20th century and can be traced back to philosophers such as Hume and Kant, where more recent influences were those of logical positivism. Students who have received tertiary education are also more sceptical in general. Even in Theological Studies academics are careful about making truth claims. Religions

that claim that God revealed himself to them are then viewed with suspicion. There is also increasing scepticism about the Bible, and more especially with regard to the New Testament. There is wariness about what the New Testament says concerning what Jesus did and said. The perspective is that we cannot make any theological conclusion about something Jesus might possibly not have said; therefore we cannot base exclusivism on texts such as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12 (Netland 1991:28–29).

3. 'Along with scepticism we must note the growing impact of relativism. Philosopher Roger Trigg (1983:297) has observed that historically epistemological and moral relativism have always been attractive options when people who had previously led settled and complacent lives are suddenly confronted with new and different ideas and practices' (Netland 1991:29). It is very clear that an increase of exposure to different religions leads to an increase of relativism. People are becoming more open to the viewpoints of others, and there is a general feeling that everyone should be allowed to believe what they are comfortable with, and to form their own opinion. The fact that Christians insist that they possess the only and unchanging truth, and that this is a universal truth, results in many people rejecting Christianity. Allan Bloom (1987:25; Netland 1991:29–30) said, '[t]here is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative.'
4. A differentiation is made between the public arena of facts, and the personal sphere of values and opinions. Truth belongs to the arena of facts. Because religion is viewed as a personal matter, some feel that it is out of place to ask questions about truth and falsehood. Religion cannot be verified or falsified. It must be approached with openness and tolerance. People should be motivated to find a religion which they feel comfortable with. No one religion can be relevant to all people in all circumstances (Netland 1991:30–32).
5. Some reject the approach which the Christian exclusivism paradigm has towards religions because it is pragmatic; it only asks questions about what a religion does for its followers, but not about truth. For many the purpose of religion is as a coping mechanism for the harsh reality of the world, to give them peace when they experience trauma '[t]hus, to look to religion to answer ultimate metaphysical questions about the nature of humankind and its relation to God – if there even is a God! – is to misunderstand the nature and the role of religion' (Netland 1991:32). The argument then becomes that all religions should be evaluated according to what they do for their followers: If a person experiences peace in Hinduism, then Hinduism is the best religion for that person (Netland 1991:32).
6. Not only is the exclusivist approach viewed as arrogant and intolerant, it is also viewed as a factor that divides communities, cultures and religious communities. Our world is becoming more and more like a 'global community' in which we

are interdependent. We all face the same dangers, such as famine and overpopulation. It is important that we live in peace with each other, despite religious and cultural boundaries (Netland 1991:32–33).

7. Soteriological universalism is more commonly accepted, even in some Christian circles. More and more people are convinced that in the end all religions lead to God's salvation. The Christian exclusivist approach, which rejects this point of view, is seen as out of date and out of feeling with the pluralistic world. Their morality is also in question. If God is a loving God, then is he not morally obligated to give each person a fair chance of salvation? If Jesus is the only way to salvation, it automatically cuts all that have not heard of him from any chance of salvation. Is this not unfair, seeing that it is not due to any fault of their own that they have never heard of Jesus (Netland 1991:33)?

There are three further points to take note of concerning Christian exclusivism, namely, (1) Christian exclusivism does not say that all statements made by other religions are false, instead it acknowledges that there might be some truth in what they express, (2) Christian exclusivism acknowledges that other religions also have value, and that Christianity can indeed learn something from them and (3) Christian exclusivism is not the only form of exclusivism that exists, and other religions also possess an exclusivist perspective (Netland 1991:35).

## ■ Defining fundamentalism

Fundamentalism and exclusivism are closely linked and both have the same theological departure point. As we have seen, the exclusivists' viewpoint is that they alone have the truth (if you look at the total replacement model), and that they alone will be saved. In this section I seek to define fundamentalism, and explain what the causes of this movement are. Although exclusivism and fundamentalism have the same characteristics, they do not have the same causes. As I have shown, Christian exclusivism really took shape as a reaction to the pluralistic religious world in which early Christianity found itself. In this section I will prove that fundamentalism was a reaction to modernisation and secularisation. It will also be clear that exclusivism and fundamentalism have the same attitude towards other religions. Furthermore I will also examine the way in which the fundamentalist movements view Scripture, and how much authority they connect to it. From there I will identify and discuss the characteristics of this movement. When I discuss the development of fundamentalism it will become clear that it developed much later than exclusivism. (In this regard Krüger (2006) is an exception and takes fundamentalism back to about 4000 years ago. There are different opinions of when fundamentalism first appeared and when the term was first used.) Exclusivism, therefore, influenced fundamentalism, but fundamentalism did not bring about an exclusivistic approach to other religions.

Fundamentalism is a response to already conservative or traditional movements when they experience a threat. Someone or something attacks their group, culture or themselves, whether it is a movement like modernism or a perceived 'devil'. Something is threatening and they have to fight back (Küng & Moltmann 1992:3). 'When people feel threatened, they retreat and build barriers of authoritarianism, rejecting secularism and religious pluralism. They are afraid of losing their religious commitment in a pluralist society' (Shenk 1997:23). Almond, Appleby and Sivan (2003:90) say these are the true believers of a faith, whose main interest is to protect their religious way of life. Berger (2010:7) defines fundamentalism as follows, '[f]undamentalism is the attempt to restore or create anew a taken-for-granted body of beliefs and values.'

The shape or method of opposition by fundamentalists will be determined by what they feel the requirement of their resistance demands (Küng & Moltmann 1992):

Fundamentalism in different religions necessarily and inevitably has nothing in common in respect to theological substance. Each exists, among other things, for their leaders and members to create distance from and antagonism to the claims of other faiths. There may be a common theological reference point in Allah, Yahweh, and the God of Jesus Christ, but fundamentalists would be the least likely factions in the various faith communities to acknowledge the validity of such a proposition or to experience common witness or worship. (pp. 3–4)

In Christianity this 'fundamentalism' is often used to describe Christian leadership which adheres strictly to the Bible. Whilst the world changes, for them the Bible is the one constant that they can always rely on. Fundamentalists would very quickly see themselves as superior to anyone who does not have the same views. They will also reject anything and anyone that appears to contradict the 'truth', Parsons (2000) has the following view:

Another Christian will be assessed, not on his or her acceptance of Christ, but on whether he or she has similar 'sound' views on the place of Scripture. Such views will involve an acceptance of their total accuracy and inerrancy. (p. 200)

There are also different categories of fundamentalism. The first category is based on religion, and protecting their religious view. The second category is called ethno-nationalism, and is concerned with race and ethnicity, even though it still contains religious goals. The third category is classified by the media as fundamentalism due to their religious trappings, militancy and visibility (Almond et al. 2003:90).

Krüger (2006) views 'fundamentalism' as a very broad term. He says that the historical marker was in 1895 at a Bible conference in New York which decided on five fundamentals of Christianity, namely, (1) the inerrancy of the Bible, rejecting the historical-critical study of the Bible, (2) the divinity of Jesus, (3) the virgin birth of Jesus, (4) the death of Jesus, which is atonement for our sins and (5) the physical resurrection and return of Jesus Christ. Other aspects were included in the 20th century, namely, (1) the way and time in which the cosmos was created, (2) the way and time that human life came

into existence and (3) society and elements such as the status of women (Krüger 2006: 887–888).

Fundamentalism is not unique to Christianity, presently the most common example of this is Islam. It is also important to note that fundamentalism is not the same as ‘conservatism’, ‘traditionalism’, or ‘orthodoxy’. Krüger (2006:888) defines it as ‘the selective combination of traditional and modern/“post-modern” cultural and religious elements to protect and promote collective identity and interests in contemporary society.’ The fact is that fundamentalism is closer to modernity and its elements than traditionalism is. “Fundamentalism” thus understood, implies not only a set of substantive ideas, but also a particular cognitive style and stance, as well as a style of social positioning’ (Krüger 2006:888). We should not expect fundamentalism to disappear any time soon.

## ■ Properties of fundamentalism

Fundamentalists claim that they are fighting for and defending the upholding of the right beliefs and the right behaviour. To do this they form new methods, ideologies and structures within their faith. These new approaches could even contradict their tradition and practices of earlier generations. They might even see those that want to protect traditions and practices, but who are not willing to fight back, as part of the enemy. They would also deny the fact that their actions are radically new, and argue that what they do and believe in are based on sacred teachings (Almond et al. 2003):

They are nonetheless careful to demonstrate the continuity between their programs and teachings and the received wisdom of their religious heritage. A pronounced rootedness in Scripture and/or ‘purified’ tradition, coupled with a reluctance to embrace ‘New Age philosophies’ or ‘Spirit-inspired new relations’, characterizes fundamentalism as a religious mode. (pp. 92–93)

In the following section I briefly discuss the five ideological and four organisational characteristics of fundamentalism as explained in Almond et al. I then review the 10 characteristics as Krüger explains them (he takes a look at the way modernity influenced and brought about fundamentalism), as well giving as a short explanation of the characteristics outlined by Küng and Moltmann (1992).

## ■ Ideological characteristics

1. *Reaction to marginalisation of religion.* Fundamentalist movements are always in reaction to and defence against something that threatens them. Fundamentalism can be a militant effort to counter any trend that endangers their beliefs or religion. For Almond et al. (2003:93) to classify a movement as fundamentalist, they have to be concerned with the erosion of the religion and the role of religion in society.

‘Whatever else fundamentalism may be ... it is a defensive reaction to the fragmentation, pluralisation, and relativisation of knowledge and understanding that are part and parcel of our time’ (Berger 2010:17).

2. *Selectivity*. Fundamentalism is selective in three ways: They will select certain aspects of their religion which they want to reshape; they would select certain aspects of modernity which they want to embrace; and they would also select and single out a certain consequence of modernity (Almond et al. 2003:94–95).
3. *Moral dualism*. There is a dualism between light (good) and dark (evil), and ultimately light will defeat dark. Even though the movement does not promise purity from the darkness, it does promise protection from the darkness (Almond et al. 2003:95–96).
4. *Absolutism and inerrancy*. The scripture of this religion is true, accurate and original. It is believed that this scripture is of divine origin (with some Eastern religions as exceptions to the rule). The scriptures are absolute. Fundamentalists then reject hermeneutics developed by secularised philosophers. This does not mean that fundamentalists have a monolithic interpretation, just that they reject interpretations by outsiders (Almond et al. 2003:96).
5. *Millennialism and Messianism*. The Messiah will bring about the end times, accompanied by trials and tribulations. There is a promise that there will no longer be any suffering, and that the believer will achieve victory (Almond et al. 2003:96–97).

## Organisational characteristics

1. *Elected, chosen membership*. Fundamentalist groups tend to have an elected group, sometimes even called by a term or name such as ‘the faithful’ or ‘Covenant keepers’. They might also commit a lot of energy to make and keep a distinction between the ‘insider’ and the ‘outsider’ (Almond et al. 2003:97).
2. *Sharp boundaries*. There is normally a strong theme of being saved or being sinful and lost. Boundaries may also be implemented on elements such as a distinct vocabulary or even a dress code (Almond et al. 2003:97–98).
3. *Authoritarian organisation*. The organisation is usually based on a leader–follower principle, with elements such as heavenly grace, access to a deity, and complete understanding of the truth (Almond et al. 2003:98).
4. *Behavioural requirements*. Sinful behaviour would be opposed, and described in detail. Rules about drinking, sexuality, speech and discipline would be described. There would also be supervision of what members can read and listen to (Almond et al. 2003:98).

Krüger (2006:906) lists the following characteristics of fundamentalism, namely:

1. In the current social and cultural era, fundamentalism remains a possibility within all institutionalised religions. It is our current social, cultural and religious world that brings about the crisis experienced by religion. It is an unhealthy but unavoidable side-effect of our times.



2. Fundamentalists feel marginalised by society. The 'others' are referred to as sell-outs or an unfaithful group, and normally would be labelled with a term that indicates that they are infected or contaminated. This is similar to Almond et al.'s above-mentioned point which states that fundamentalists are normally an elected group. This point also echoes some of the thoughts mentioned under Almond et al.'s first point, stating that fundamentalists feel marginalised.
3. Fundamentalism is a mixture of elements found in normative religious traditions and modernity. 'The results can be ingenious, but does [*sic*] not represent the creative cutting edge of cultural and religious developments' (Krüger 2006:906).
4. Fundamentalism is especially present within 'the religions of the book' and the scripture is understood to be without fault. This perspective is not only held by the 'religions of the book' (Krüger 2006:906) – Almond et al. discuss this in their fourth point.
5. Fundamentalism struggles to deal with plurality, multiple interpretations or contradictory viewpoints. It oversimplifies complex issues and accuses opponents of a lack of character. They do not struggle with difficult issues, but simply cut them off by reciting scripture.
6. 'Fundamentalism reduces the various levels of traditional-religious language and discourse to a single level, with minimum allowance for the mytho-poetic dimension of such discourse. Religious language is reduced to the status of quasi-rational or scientific discourse of "fact"' (Krüger 2006:906).
7. Fundamentalists struggle to accept modern insights into historical culture and religious aspects and meanings. They don't like the idea that it is a humanly constructed product. They react with anxiety and anger about what is seen as a weakening of the distinction between the word of God, and the word of humans. They are uncomfortable with the possibility of scripture being human thought and explanations about an encounter with God.
8. Fundamentalists have a dualistic distinction between light and darkness. Almond et al. also mentioned this point. The light is associated with God, and darkness with evil. 'Light' (or truth) and justice are on the one side, the side they are on, and therefore against anything or anyone different from them. This element does not leave room for dialogue, because the other party is seen as wrong or misleading even before dialogue has begun.
9. 'Fundamentalism tends to enforce internal consolidation and conformism to existing group norms and power relations with strict controls of mind and behaviour, which often leads to the charge of hypocrisy' (Krüger 2006:907).
10. Fundamentalism has an adversarial stance. *Others* are seen as opposition or even enemies; this means that violence, emotion, verbal or even physical attacks are very strong possibilities.

Küng and Moltmann (1992) give the following description of the characteristics of fundamentalism:

An attitude to a basic value or basic idea which must be protected in a perfectionist way; in addition, there is an anxiety about the loss of this value through compromise. Characteristics of this is a need for: Anchoring; Clear identification; Perfectionism; Simplicity. (p. 23)

It is clear, according to the section on intergroup threat, that the fundamentalist wants to protect identity, group values and core.

## ■ Development of fundamentalism

There are various forms of fundamentalist movements which formed in various historical backgrounds, but there is one basic cause for the development of these movements: The expansion of modernity (Cerutti & Ragionieri 2001:55). Almond et al. propose that the cause of fundamentalism is secularisation. With the threat of secularisation religions can either respond adaptively or militantly (Almond et al. 2003:121–122). Berger agrees that certain secular views gave rise to fundamentalism, and that with secularisation came the notion that religion should be removed from the public sphere (Berger 2010:8). This was a powerful movement which saw the churches running empty. The supernatural was seen as being absent or at best very distant. Religious dogma was reduced to myths and fiction. People felt that their lives became meaningless, and they started filling them with other sensations to give them a feeling of purpose. However, some held onto the belief that there is more to life. The fact is, when an old religion or religious view eroded, a new one was formed in place, '[r]eligions have survived not necessarily because it [sic] is true, but because of the universal human need for transcendence' (Shenk 1997:24). Secularism could not replace religion. The more secularism proclaimed that there is no God, the stronger the search to recover the impression of the need for God.

Whilst Krüger (2006:887) said that fundamentalism became a term in 1985, Parson (2000:196–199) is of opinion that the first time the word 'fundamentalist' was used was in the 1920s, to describe a Christian Protestant group which opposed modernism in American churches. They were called this because they identified themselves with a theological viewpoint that was published in a series of 12 booklets called '*The Fundamentals*'. The booklets were a response to modernism as well as increased critique of the Bible. 'Fundamentalist' is also a term used in all the different religions to describe someone with a specific style of beliefs. They might then submit to the authority of that religion in such a way that they do not question it, or follow any independent thought. Not only did modernity bring theories such as evolution, but also a questioning of the Bible through the historical critical approach. Furthermore, Christianity was placed in the same category as any and all other religions (Knitter 2008:20; Ter Haar & Busuttil 2003:28). Ter Haar and Busuttil (2003:1) give a different date and place of origin for the phenomenon and term fundamentalism, and are of opinion that it started in 1979 with the Islamic revolution in Iran.

Krüger (2006) takes the development a lot further back than Parsons and Knitter. He used a table to explain society and religion, and the phenomenon of 'fundamentalism', from 200 000 years ago. He says that 'fundamentalism' became clear about 4000 years ago.

According to him 'fundamentalism' grew much stronger by the 16th century, and from the 19th century onwards it was well established. With the development of industry, science, technology and other cultures and societies, older theologies and philosophies were left behind, which meant that religions found themselves in a serious crisis (Krüger 2006):

Originally going back to the insights of creative individuals, they have fallen behind the cutting edge of modern culture, and, forced to interact with the forces of modernity, they were pushed out of the central cultural and social position they once had. (p. 892)

Traditional religions reacted to this in three ways, namely, (1) new religions and religious movements came into existence, for example the Baha'i faith, which tends to go back to ancient practices, (2) some movements tended to turn to a mystic attempt to achieve silence beyond institutional religion and (3) the last reaction was to become fundamental. Fundamentalism, as Krüger puts it, is a child of its time. It is present in all religions – Buddhism and Hinduism included, not only Christianity or Islam. It doesn't, however, seem to be present in the African religion (Krüger 2006:892–893).

The Christian fundamentalists became divided in the 1940s to 1950s when a sector moved away from the main group since they did not share in 'their anti-intellectualism, and their lack of social concern' (Knitter 2008:20). They called themselves the 'National Association of Evangelicals'. In the 1970s we saw further development into 'New Evangelicals' or 'Ecumenical Evangelicals'. They were more open to working with other churches and felt that the fundamentalists were too rigorous in their belief that the Bible is without error (Knitter 2008:20–21).

In this section I have argued that fundamentalist movements are religious groups, as all have some sort of religious influence. These movements form as a response to a feeling of danger and opposition from certain elements in society. To protect themselves and their religious views, they construct authoritarian structures and beliefs to isolate them from any and all threats that oppose their views, beliefs or experiences. As I have mentioned earlier, it is clear that fundamentalists distance themselves from other religions because they are concerned with protection of their own identity and values. They are also not open to dialogue, as this is seen as opening up to others and thus endangering their identity.

It also became clear that fundamentalists distance themselves from others within their own religious tradition who do not hold the same interpretation or convictions which they do. Scripture plays a central role in fundamentalist movements; it is the ultimate authority and believed to embody the only and faultless truth. According to fundamentalists anyone that does not hold this view of scripture has drifted from the truth. I also discussed the ideological and organisational characteristics, with small differences given by different researchers. The main cause of the appearance of fundamentalist movements is clearly modernisation and secularism.

## ■ Defining dialogue

In this section I will try to define interreligious dialogue. I will also explain that the purpose of dialogue, in my view, is to learn about other religions and eliminate any misconceptions which might lead to wrong assumptions. I then look at some ground rules that need to be in place in order that dialogue can be conducted in such a way that the other party will always be respected.

Does dialogue have any value for us and other religious communities? When we talk about interreligious dialogue, the first question that arises is why is it necessary? One reason for the need for dialogue is the dramatic shift in the understanding of truth. This change not only makes dialogue possible, but also necessary (Swidler 1987:7). In the section that follows I will try to explain how dialogue can help us to understand the other, and even to accept different views and understandings of truth. I identify areas and phases of dialogue which can help understand the process and guide it towards a fruitful conclusion.

It will be clear that dialogue is immensely challenging, and we have to pay attention to the obstacles and hindrances that may prevent honest dialogue. In the end it will also be clear that dialogue provides benefits which we should not ignore or neglect. I will also look at what the exclusivist's, inclusivist's and pluralist's approaches to dialogue would be and whether they leave room for dialogue.

## ■ What is dialogue?

Dialogue is a conversation between parties with different views on a specific subject. The purpose of dialogue is for the different parties to learn from one another in order to grow and change. When we learn what the other party really believes, it will bring a change in attitude towards them (Swidler 1987:6). God does not fail to reveal himself to individuals or faith communities. Dialogue then is a means to discover knowledge and richness in other religions. In interreligious dialogue, Dupuis (1997:365) says, the Church is looking for the 'seed of the word' and the 'rays of truth' in other religions. We will then discover the presence of God in other religions, and be able to understand our own identity better.

The purpose then is not to manipulate or force the other person to believe what I believe, but rather to learn what they believe. This is a different approach from what we have seen in the past, where dialogue was held with the intent to defeat our opponent, and learn about them in order to convert them to our beliefs and faith. However, dialogue is not a debate – it is less about talking, and more about listening with the intention to understand the other's position as sympathetically and openly as possible. If the other person's argument is persuasive, we have to change (Swidler 1987):

Until quite recently in almost all religious traditions, and certainly within Christianity, the idea of seeking religious, ideological wisdom, insight, truth, by way of dialogue, other than in a very initial, rudimentary fashion, occurred to very few persons, and certainly had no influence in the major religious or ideological communities. (p. 6)

Seeking religious truth through dialogue was not only not an option, it was not allowed. This changed when Pope Paul VI stated in 1964 that dialogue was demanded due to the modern, pluralist society that people found themselves in. Furthermore, the Vatican sees it as our Christian responsibility to promote dialogue with other religions, and the willingness to engage in dialogue is seen as a strength (Swidler 1987:6–7).

Dupuis (1997:359) makes a distinction between dialogue as an attitude or the spirit of dialogue, and dialogue as a distinct element. The ‘spirit of dialogue’ refers to the respect and friendship which fills the elements, which in turn constitutes the evangelisation of the church (Dupuis 1997):

Dialogue means all positive and constructive interreligious relations with individuals and communities of other faiths which are directed at mutual understanding and enrichment, in obedience to truth and respect for freedom. It includes both witness and the exploration of respective religious convictions. (pp. 359–360)

Swidler (1987:6) views dialogue as the process of speaking to other religions, in order to learn and grow past misconceptions. His aim is getting to know the other, whereas with Dupuis – even though he recognises that dialogue is to get to know the other – it seems like evangelisation is the ultimate goal. According to Dupuis dialogue is an invitation for the other to become part of the Christian faith; he does however state that the aim of dialogue is not to convert, even though the person in dialogue has the responsibility to witness (Dupuis 1997:360).

Reuel Howe (in Copeland 1999) defines dialogue as follows:

Dialogue is that address and response between persons in which there is a flow of meaning between them in spite of all the obstacles that would normally block the relationship. It is that interaction between persons in which one of them seeks to give himself as he is to the other, and seeks also to know the other as he is. (p. 99)

## ■ Development of interreligious dialogue

Dialogue between religions only came into being in the latter half of the 20th century. Until then any relation between religions was in the form of apologetics, meaning that the different religious representatives tried to prove their own religions as superior to the other. When the science of the study of world religions came into being religious dialogue basically existed at the level of individual dialogue. This renewed interest in other religions resulted in interreligious conferences, such as the first meeting of the World

Parliament of Religions in 1893. Dialogue here referred to different individuals from different religions taking turns in monologue (Copeland 1999:97–98).

However, religions were still not meeting each other. Hendrik Kraemer was very prophetic about the future of interreligious dialogue when he referred to ‘the *coming* dialogue of world cultures and world religions’ (in Copeland 1999:98). Kraemer made this statement in 1960, but at that time dialogue between religions was not really advanced. By then study centres were already established in Asia and Africa with the specific purpose of ‘in situ study of the religions by Christians and the development of interreligious dialogue’ (Copeland 1999:98). These study centres were related to the International Mission Council, and later to the Division of World Mission and Evangelism of the WCC. Under the leadership of Dr Stanley J. Samartha, dialogue between different parties became more common and Christian initiatives were very prominent (Copeland 1999:98).

When interreligious dialogue takes place it is not enough for different parties to discuss the meaning of life and how to live accordingly, it has to take place amongst people that are part of the specific religious community. In order to represent Christianity in dialogue, the person involved needs to be Christian. Swidler (1987:13–14) gives the following rules for dialogue, which he learned through his experience. I also look at the assumptions needed for dialogue as discussed by Copeland, but because they reflect a lot of what Swidler says, I use Swidler as a framework and expand this with assumptions which Copeland (1999:99–102) notes:

1. The purpose of dialogue is to learn in order to grow and change our perspectives of the other. When we learn about the perspective of the other, we have to act according to what we have learned. Our aim should also not be to debate in order that the other party can change. If both parties come with the intention to learn, grow and change, our dialogue partners will change their approach to us as well. This is much more effective than debate (Swidler 1987:14).
2. Interreligious dialogue is two-sided. This means that it is not only dialogue between two faiths, but also dialogue within the specific faith community. For example, Christians will enter into dialogue with other Christians; then the whole community can learn from interreligious dialogue (Swidler 1987:14).
3. Each party must come to the dialogue with honesty and sincerity. No false fronts may be kept in dialogue. Difficulties that partners face in their own religions and possible future shifts must also be declared. Each partner must assume complete honesty and sincerity from the other. If there is no honesty and sincerity, truthful dialogue will not be possible (Swidler 1987:14).
4. We must not compare our ideals with our partner’s practices. We have to make sure we compare ideals with ideals, and our practices with our partner’s practices (Swidler 1987:14).

5. All parties must define themselves. Only a member of a specific faith community can define that specific faith community. Being exposed to the other will lead a faith community to grow and change, and in turn they will be able to define themselves more clearly (Swidler 1987:14). The different parties also need to be well prepared in order to define themselves. In this way the dialogue would be a serious confrontation, '[t]o know what one believes and to be ready to give an answer concerning one's fundamental hope is essential' (Copeland 1999:100–101).
6. Each participant must come to the dialogue without assumptions of the other. The approach should be to listen with openness, and attempt to agree with the other, without violating their integrity (Dupuis 1997:378–379; Swidler 1987:15). Copeland says we must come to dialogue with assumptions. However, when Swidler says we must not come with assumptions he means that we should not assume and make up our mind what and how our dialogue partners will say, think and respond, and react on the basis of that. When Copeland says assumptions he means things that we need to understand and take into account, a presupposition. He says that we need to enter the dialogue with some knowledge of the other party which will help eliminate assumptions, and help eliminate the need for extensive explanations. It is important to allow the other party to define their own religion. This is one of the goals of dialogue – to broaden mutual understanding and knowledge: 'One may find that what one *thinks* are the tenets of another's faith are not at all what this religion believes and teaches. For all this, some basic knowledge of the other's faith, subject to correction in dialogue, is certainly preferable to none' (Copeland 1999:101).
7. Dialogue can take place only between two equals; in order for two parties to learn from one another, one cannot view the other as inferior. Only if both parties come to learn from each other can they be viewed as equals (Swidler 1987:15).
8. Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust. In order to build trust, it is advised to start with issues which two parties have in common. As trust is built we can then move on to issues which are more difficult to discuss (Swidler 1987:15).
9. Persons that enter into religious dialogue must at least be critical of themselves, but also of their religious tradition. A lack of self-criticism implies that one's religion already has all the truth, and such an attitude makes dialogue impossible. Not only that, it also points to a lack of integrity (Swidler 1987:15–15). Copeland (1999:101) acknowledges the risks of interreligious dialogue that we all need to take: 'Authentic dialogue requires both parties involved to be open to criticism of their most cherished beliefs without taking offense. It requires that they be willing to subject their basic convictions to serious challenge.'
10. Each partner must attempt to experience the religious view from within. Religion is not only part of the head, but also part of the heart and soul (Dupuis 1997:380–381; Swidler 1987:16). Newbigin (in Copeland 1999:102) said: '... we are vulnerable ... We

do not possess the truth in an unassailable form. A real meeting with a partner of another faith must mean being so open to him that his way of looking at the world becomes a real possibility for me. One has not really heard the message of one of the great religions that have moved millions of people for centuries if one has not been deeply moved by it, if one has not felt in his soul the power of it.'

11. Acknowledge the common humanity that all people share. We have to use language and interpretations shared by all, or at least understood by all '[t]his commonality goes deeper than ordinary speech, however, for religious language often reflects the profound, subtle and esoteric nuances of faith' (Copeland 1999:99). A lot of the articulation and clarifying of language and terminology will take place in dialogue. When we say we have to acknowledge the commonality of humanity we mean that, even if other dialogue partners do not agree with the notion that all of humanity was created in God's image, we acknowledge the desire of all of humanity to find the deeper meaning of life (Copeland 1999:99–100).
12. All parties involved in dialogue must show respect to the other party's convictions. It is not helpful to ignore the beliefs of other parties. It would be easier and more appropriate to ask for mutual respect than mutual theological convictions (Copeland 1999:100).

## ■ Goals of dialogue

A distinction must be made between intrareligious dialogue, which is the dialogue between members of the same religion, and interreligious dialogue, which is a dialogue between different faiths. Intradialogue is to bring about a pluralistic unity within a specific faith community. Unity and uniformity are not the same, and uniformity is not the goal. The goal is not to have one overarching religious ideology, the goal is rather to know ourselves more profoundly, to know the other more authentically, and to live according to this knowledge (Swidler 1987):

We come to know ourselves largely by contrast ... Through interreligious and inter-ideological dialogue we will come to know better our own religious, ideological selves with all their consistencies and contradiction, their admirable and abhorrent aspects. Our dialogue partners will serve as mirrors for us ... (p. 26)

However, Dupuis (1997:376) states that the aim of interreligious dialogue is not only to gain knowledge (whether knowledge of ourselves or of the other), or to build friendly relations with other religious communities. Dialogue is to respond sincerely to the call of God to deepen our faith in Jesus, our mediator – a call for all to enter into a deeper relationship with God (Dupuis 1997:376).

In dialogue we will get to know our differences, and we might find that there are contradictory differences, but there will also be complementary differences. However, if



they are complementary we can expect that they only function properly within a specific faith tradition, and will not serve the same function in other faith structures. We will also find contradictory truths and values in the different faiths. But what should the behaviour of the parties be when claims are contradictory? Should they remain in dialogue, or ignore, tolerate or oppose each other? This is a serious problem with value judgements, but what about issues such as sexism? The course of action then becomes less clear-cut. We can be sure that sooner or later we will come across issues that will have to be opposed. We will then have to determine on what grounds we are to oppose these differing ideologies, and whether it is of such importance that it merits opposition. The argument then is that any values or ideologies that are hostile to human life and existence are to be opposed. The foundation for being human is a person's autonomy – his ability to make decisions based on his own reasoning and conscience, basic human rights and dignity for all (Dupuis 1997, cf. Swidler 1987:27–29):

Sincere dialogue implies, on the one hand mutual acceptance of differences, or even of contradictions, and on the other, respect for the free decision of persons taken according to the dictate of their conscience. (p. 367)

## ■ Important areas and phases of dialogue

Swidler (1987:16) identifies and shortly describes three phases that we find in interreligious dialogue, namely:

1. The first phase is where we get to know the other, and this is a phase we never completely work through. Here we learn about our misconceptions of the other, and begin to know them for what and who they truly are.
2. In the next phase we are able to discern values and practices in the other that we can appreciate, and appropriate into our faith.
3. In the third phase the different partners begin to discern new truths and values that neither were aware of, and start to explore them. Thus, patient dialogue can lead us to new revelations and unveiling of reality.

Swidler (1987:16–20) goes further to identify three areas of dialogue:

1. Dialogue is practice. This is where we collaborate to help humanity. Religion is not only concerned with what life means, but also with how we can live according to this explanation of the meaning of life. Many problems that humanity faces bring forth action on the part of religious ideology. If different religions can work together to oppose and change these problems, we will have a much greater impact than we would have had if working as individuals, even if our work was parallel to others.' Working together could also help strengthen interreligious dialogue. This is an important area of interreligious dialogue, because action that does not lead to dialogue is mindless,

and dialogue that does not lead to action is hypocritical (Swidler 1987:16–17). Dupuis (1997:363) calls this dialogue of common commitment ‘the works of justice’.

2. The spiritual area of dialogue consists of experiencing the religion of your partner from within. John Dunne (1972:ix) refers to this as ‘passing over’, ‘[p]assing over is a shifting of standpoint, a going over to the standpoint of another culture, another way of life, another religion. It is followed by an equal and opposite process we might call ‘coming back’, coming back with new insight to one’s own culture, one’s own way of life, one’s own religion.’ Here we must use our imagination to experience the feelings, stories and symbols which our partner experiences (Swidler 1987:17). This area is the sharing of prayer and contemplation in our common search for the absolute (Dupuis 1997:364).
3. The last area is the intellectual area (intellectual dialogue) (Dupuis 1997:364), which might be the biggest challenge for dialogue. The problem is how I can speak about my theological beliefs and ideologies in such a way that will allow my partner also to speak about *their* theological beliefs and ideologies, without either of us having to violate our integrity? Swidler’s (1987:18–19) argument is that we have to work together towards a universal theology, a reasoned reflection upon convictions. This means taking all of the insights of a faith to explain the meaning of life and how to live accordingly, ‘[w]hat makes it universal is that the categories of reflection are such that they can be understood and embraced by persons of all religions or ideologies, not just a particular one, or particular set – for instance, Christianity, the Abrahamic religions or the theistic religions’ (Swidler 1987:18–19).

The task for religious leaders of the different faiths is to express their reflections in categories, images and terms that the other can relate to. For example, Christianity could use language that will be familiar to the other Abrahamic religions (Swidler 1987:19).

## ■ Challenges and barriers to dialogue

One of the challenges to dialogue is finding a theological approach that leaves room for interreligious dialogue. Hick and Knitter (1987:81) argue for a paradigm shift away from Christocentrism to theocentrism, as they feel that an inclusive Christological approach does not leave room for dialogue. Dialogue can only take place if the partners are equal. The problem then is, can Christians truly enter into dialogue if they believe that Jesus is the only means to salvation? This forces us to look at two aspects which I have already mentioned in brief, commitment and openness.

## ■ Commitment and openness

One must not try to bracket your own faith, or expect the other to bracket their faith. To be honest and sincere both parties must accept that we enter into dialogue from our

specific religious backgrounds, and to do this with integrity we have to remain faithful to our religious convictions. Dupuis (1997:378–379) further argues that in order to remain faithful to our integrity we cannot compromise our own convictions. He also warns against syncretism in our quest to find common ground (Dupuis 1997):

As the seriousness of the dialogue, the toning down of deep convictions on either side, so its openness demands that what is relative be not absolutized, whether by incomprehension or intransigence. In every religious faith and conviction there is the danger, and a real one, of absolutizing the relative. (pp. 378–379)

With this Dupuis clearly argues that in order for dialogue to be honest and sincere we have to remain committed to our faith convictions, and open to the fact that our partner will also be committed to theirs (Dupuis 1997:379).

As mentioned above, we have to be open to the faith conviction of our partner. This means also being willing to experience their religious experience within ourselves (Dupuis 1997):

In all events, with the cautions that we've indicated, it is sure that, in order to be true, the interreligious dialogue requires that both partners make a positive effort to enter into each other's religious experience and overall vision, insofar as possible. We are dealing with the encounter, in one and the same person, of two ways of being, seeing and thinking. This 'intra-religious dialogue' is an indispensable preparation for an exchange between persons in the interreligious dialogue. (pp. 380–381)

Brümmer adds another problem, specifically aimed at Judaism, Christianity and Islam. These religions are not unchanging systems which can be compared to one another (Brümmer 2005):

They are *traditions* that have developed, changed and diversified in the course of time. In many ways the differences *within* each of these traditions are as great as those *between* them. (p. 116)

This fact highlights the necessity of not only interreligious dialogue but also intrareligious dialogue, which I have already mentioned.

Copeland refers to barriers on the Christian side as well as the side of other religions. To start with, interreligious dialogue is not without controversy. On the Christian side we see that Christians fear that evangelism will be abandoned for the sake of dialogue with other religions, which might result in relativism and syncretism. The fear of other religions is that dialogue is a subtle way for Christians to convert them to Christianity (Copeland 1999):

The barriers to the dialogical relationship between religions are formidable: for example, at best there are the deep differences between religions, the passion that accompanies religious commitment, and the esoteric nature of religious experiences and religious language. (p. 99)

Copeland also feels that Westerners have a further advantage, because dialogue will always occur in English. Furthermore, he feels that Westerners enjoy other advantages

politically and economically, and that there are still some remainders of colonialism to deal with. These barriers are so formidable that some scholars feel that true interreligious dialogue will be impossible (Copeland 1999:99).

When looking at which interreligious paradigm is best for dialogue, some feel that pluralism is the best way forward. Paul Hedges (2010) in his book *Controversies in interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions* explores the different aspects of pluralism in dialogue. Copeland (1999), however, does not agree:

[D]ialogue is possible is possible for nonpluralist Christians without an imperialistic or a Christianity-centred attitude. Indeed, it can be argued that a pluralistic view, insofar that it relativizes Christology and Trinity, makes Christian dialogue impossible, since in that case the pluralist has already forsaken a traditional and, in my judgement, essential Christian claim for the sake of dialogue. (p. 99)

## ■ Fruits of dialogue

Cobb (1982) argues for a mutual transformation through dialogue. A mutual transformation between two religious traditions can lead to osmosis of complementary elements (Dupuis 1997:381–382). Panikkar (1978:149–153), on the other hand, feels that religions are different from one another, and must strive to keep their different identities. We should not aim to destroy different identities, neither should we try to bracket our faith in dialogue. Panikkar argues for syncretism, which according to him, will enrich both partners in dialogue. He says that God's Spirit is at work on both sides of the dialogue, and it can therefore not be a monologue. Christians do not possess a monopoly on truth, and must therefore be open to not only giving, but also receiving. Dupuis feels that through dialogue Christians can walk with others into a deeper understanding of truth (Dupuis 1997:382).

There is a twofold advantage to dialogue with others (Dupuis 1997:382), (1) we will enrich our own faith by discovering new depths of the Divine Mystery and (2) dialogue can serve as purification for our own faith (Dupuis 1997):

The shock of the encounter will often raise questions, force Christians to revise gratuitous assumptions, and destroy deep-rooted prejudices or overthrow certain overly narrow conceptions or outlooks. Thus the benefits of the dialogue constitute the challenge to the Christian partner at the same time. (pp. 381–382)

Copeland proposes four things that interreligious dialogue will lead to. In the first place, dialogue will help us to understand each other better. Like Dupuis, Copeland (1999:104) also says that when we understand the religions of others better, we will also understand our own faith better. Dialogue will give us insights into how Christianity can be contextualised and indigenised in other cultures of the world. For Copeland (1999:104)

dialogue will help us in evangelising the world, and establish the universality of Christianity. It is important to note that Copeland does not suggest dialogue as a platform to convert our conversation partners – he distinctively says that dialogue is not the same as evangelism, although dialogue will provide a context and method for evangelism. There are two sides to the coin. On the one hand, we need to assure our dialogue partners that our aim is not to convert them, but the sharing of knowledge. (As I have mentioned above, other religions fear dialogue with Christians because they feel that it is a subtle attempt to convert them to Christianity.) The other side of the coin is that we as Christians have the conviction that we need to evangelise the world. Christians believe that Jesus is the Lord of all, and we want others to recognise this fact (Copeland 1999:104–105). The last benefit would be one that the whole of humanity would benefit from (Copeland 1999):

[T]here is ... is some promise that dialogue between Christians and persons of other religious commitments will show ways to cooperate in active measures toward building a better society and a better world. (p. 106)

Together people from different religions can take responsibility for ethical issues such as global warming, global responsibility, human rights, and many more.

## ■ Dialogue from an exclusivist viewpoint

Where previously I have defined what exclusivism is, I now briefly discuss exclusivism's approach to dialogue with others. This approach believes that it is only through the cross that God's love enters into the world, and only through the cross that God can be known. Exclusivists feel that without the particular knowledge of Jesus, you cannot know God at all. Some feel that this view is preposterous (Brümmer 2005:120). Christians believe that Jesus was the Word of God revealed, but this was the same Word of God that was already revealed in the Torah. How can we then claim that the Jews and the people of the Old Testament do not really know God? Calvin said that Abraham and other prophets were the light of God to the world. How can we say that they do not know God because they do not accept a specific revelation of God?

Similarly, the Qur'an contains literature also found in the Torah and the Bible. Wilfred Smith (1976:17) speaks about the faith of his friends that belong to other religions, and says that it is ridiculous to think that they do not know God. He says that God in all his wisdom is able to reveal himself to anyone he chooses to reveal himself to. Christians cannot claim that we have a unique privilege to the knowledge of God. In the same way, other religions cannot claim to have the only knowledge of God. When Smith says that his friends from other religions also know God, he refers to knowledge of the heart and not knowledge from the head. We can only know God to the extent that we have fellowship with God. It is only through our

knowledge of God that we can discern that others, inside and outside the Church, really know God. It is only in the light of God's revelation in Jesus that we can truly know what it means to know God. Therefore, Smith says that because God is what he is, we know that others live in his presence (Brümmer 2005:119–121; Smith 1976:17).

This then means that, because of God's revelation in Christ, Christians will be able to discern God's revelation in other religions. This also applies to Jews and Muslims, but they accept different paradigms for their faith (Brümmer 2005):

In spite of the fact that these three traditions have different paradigms of faith, these different paradigms may yet enable them to discern the faith of their common father, Abraham, in each other and thus together seek their ultimate happiness in the loving fellowship of Abraham's God. (p. 121)

Brümmer's point of departure is that he looks for similarities in dialogue, whilst other theologians, like Dupuis, search for differences and build dialogue around these.

## ■ Dialogue in inclusivism and pluralism

### ■ Inclusivism

Karl Rahner (in Coleman 2007:8) presented the concept of anonymous Christianity; he says that God's saving grace is at work outside the church in other religions, even if they are not aware of it themselves. However, the problem is that Rahner does not extend the boundaries of the visible church. This means that even though he says that God's grace is for all people in all religions, there is still a church which is exclusively Christian (Coleman 2007:8–9). Coleman (2007:9) asks the question, '[d]oes ... the Rahnerian inclusivist position put Christians in the strange position that they know more about the so-called "anonymous Christian" than those so-called anonymous Christians know about themselves?'

Does dialogue in this sense really lead us to know more about other religions than we know already? Christians have beliefs and practices that others do not accept, and the converse applies. Does the inclusivist view really allow the other to *be* the other? Coleman is of opinion that this view only hinders true dialogue. We want our dialogue partners to be baffled and amazed at the work of the Spirit, whilst we simply assign any ailments of their religion to the work of the Holy Spirit; however (Coleman 2007:9–11), '[m]y own Buddhist friends assure me that this is not the case and that I will never appreciate the Dharma to the extent that I persist in this belief' and, 'If we really believed that Christ and the Spirit is working in other religions, why would we feel the need to convert them?'

## Pluralism

Pluralism says that all religions are equal – they are just different paths to God. It rejects the view that Christianity is unique and regards this view as arrogant and ignorant, viewing this claim as a way for Christians not to take other religions seriously. ‘In the end, all religions are partial and incomplete interpretations of a transcendent Absolute who remains a mystery’ (Coleman 2007:11). Pluralists want Christians to abort their missionary activity and their claim that Jesus stood in a unique relationship to God. Jesus offers a privileged access to God, but not an absolute access (Coleman 2007:11).

If this view is followed, there is no different way to salvation and no significant theological differences. This view also discourages dialogue. For the pluralist, religious differences do not count, we all encounter the same God. Theological differences are the elements that force us to enter into dialogue with others (Coleman 2007:12). I agree with the point which Coleman is making. The aim is not to eliminate our differences – it is these differences that make dialogue necessary and that can enrich our understanding of God and the world.

Clearly exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism each has its own problems. All three approaches have been found wanting, ‘[i]here true tensions and inconsistencies in the present theology of inter-religious dialogue’ (Coleman 2007:21). But what do we do now?

Coleman proposes an approach called ‘comparative theology’, which moves away from doing a comprehensive theology into development of practical skills for living creatively and responsibly with people from other religions. In this way Christians do not have to forsake their core beliefs (Coleman 2007):

Comparative theologians remain on the look-out for whatever will assist Christians to respond creatively to religious diversity. They listen respectfully to what seems similar (or has some overlap with) to their own truths. They cooperate in areas of justice and peace. They know that God does not deal with some people religiously and others only morally and neither should they. Comparative theologians should also listen respectfully to what seems utterly foreign to Christianity. They try to see how, in doing so, they can deepen their own understanding of Christianity, find, perhaps, some hidden corresponding analogue to the truth of the other religion. They undertake a dialogue of friendship by cultivating deep inter-religious friendship. (pp. 21–22)

I have defined *what* dialogue is and explained what the *purpose* behind dialogue is. The basic goal of dialogue should be to learn about the other, in order to understand and change. If this is the attitude of both parties, we will be able to work together in tolerance. This understanding of the other also leads to an understanding of ourselves. The intent cannot be to make converts.

I also explained some ground rules when it comes to dialogue. In the discussion certain phases and areas of dialogue became apparent. We have also identified a couple of

challenges that we will face in dialogue, as well as the benefits that we will experience if we are respectful, open and honest with one another. I have concluded the description by discussing what dialogue would look like in the exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist approaches. It has become clear that none of these approaches really allow for fruitful dialogue.

With reference to Coleman I mentioned a possible alternative approach called comparative theology. In the end, dialogue does not serve as a means to an end. There is more value to dialogue than just attempting to convert the other: There is a world of wisdom in the *other*. If we take time to get to know them, we will discover the value within them – but also deepen our understanding of the values within our own religion or faith. Dialogue is a necessary part of religious life, and it is a part which we have to nurture.

## ■ Searching for alternative approaches

I now propose alternatives to the traditional threefold (exclusivist, inclusivist and pluralist) approaches, and explain why I do not think that these approaches leave room for dialogue. To do this I will reflect on how they influence dialogue, and explain why interreligious dialogue is so important. It will also be clear that interreligious dialogue can lead to interreligious ecumenism, and I will also investigate and explain what is meant by the latter term. It will be necessary to explore whether it is possible to have an interreligious ecumenical movement.

Furthermore I will explore Hick's proposal of a Copernican revolution, and explain his theory of moving away from Christocentrism toward theocentrism. In conclusion I will discuss and propose alternative approaches (acceptance, comparative theology and postmodern postliberal theology) in which dialogue might be successful and yield the desired fruits. The discussion on the alternative approaches will not, however, be without criticism.

We need to find other approaches when it comes to dialogue and relating to other religions. The exclusivist approach is not open to dialogue, other than to debate and try to convince the partner to conversion (Knitter 2008):

And that means the only kind of dialogue Christians can have with persons of other faiths is one in which Christians try to get to know those faiths better in order to replace them with Christianity. (p. 33)

This cannot be the ultimate goal of dialogue. Furthermore, exclusivism is also seen by many as being intolerant (Netland 1991:302). Even though exclusivists feel that their faith is the only faith that can and will save, they are still willing to enter into dialogue.



Even though fundamentalism holds the same viewpoint as exclusivism, exclusivism is not the cause of fundamentalism. Factors such as modernisation and secularisation led to the development of fundamentalism (Almond et al. 2003:121–122; Cerutti & Ragionieri 2001:55). The aim of fundamentalism is to isolate and protect against any and all elements that threaten them, this movement is also not open for dialogue.

The goal of dialogue should be to get to know one another and learn from one another. If religions do not get to know one another they will never trust each other, and working together will be impossible. As long as our goal is only to convert the other, there will never be trust between different dialogue partners.

In order to overcome challenges in society such as terrorism, hunger and ecological struggles we need to work together. We will be more effective working together than working in parallel. If we do not enter into dialogue with one another, working together will not be our only concern – we will also be faced with continued hostility between different religions.

## ■ How can dialogue help?

I explained in the previous paragraphs why interreligious dialogue is so important. D'Arcy May (1998) has the same concern when he states:

In recent years more and more people have become deeply concerned about the increase in fundamentalism within all religious traditions and the severe conflicts around the world where religious symbolism and sentiments are used and abused for social and political ends. This is an important concern, and calls for careful analysis and concerted action, so that some of the advances made in interfaith relations are not lost to political expediency. (p. 14)

Dialogue is a way in which we can get to know the other, and realise that they face the same challenges and struggles that we do. We become aware of their fears, their aspirations, and their idea of an ideal society. When we realise how similar our fears and ideals are, we might be willing to work with them, and perhaps even work towards addressing issues which they are facing. We might be able to assist or help them. As Niebuhr (cited in Cracknell 1986:121) said, '[t]he chief source of man's inhumanity to man seems to be the tribal limits of his sense of obligation to other.'

Dialogue will make us aware that we have an obligation to others, and not just toward our own people. Dialogue is a part of service to society. Willingness to enter into dialogue, and accept the other for who they are, is an example of Christian love '[i]t is a joyful affirmation of life against chaos, and a participation with all who are allies of life in seeking the provisional goal of a better human community' (Cracknell 1986:122). It is not a secret weapon, or an agenda for conversion; it is living our faith in Jesus, and serving the community (Cracknell 1998:122).

I have mentioned that those who argue for the partial replacement model ask that we have a religious competition, where all share their faith in an open discussion and God will convince the other that he is the one true God. Almost the same argument is provided by C.S. Song (in Copeland 1999:106–107), he argues that for the Church to make any kind of impact in Asia, they have to work with the Asian religions. The goal of their cooperation is to transform society in order for people to be free and equal and for justice to triumph. Working together like this would set the stage for people to be exposed to Christianity and for God to work in their hearts (Copeland 1999:106–107).

Dialogue would open up two areas of cooperation: Religious freedom and interreligious cooperation. Religious freedom means that everyone will have the right to practice their religion, and culture, without the threat of others discriminating against them. It also means that every religion has the right to fulfil their mission. Then everyone will have the freedom to live out their faith, without the threat of extremists attacking them (Copeland 1999:107–108). If we can cooperate in interreligious cooperation we will be able to serve the community in a spiritual and ethical dimension. All religions have the conviction that they have to serve others in society, and we will be more effective if we work together (Copeland 1999):

[W]hen a person is hungry, particularly a child, it makes little difference whether the bread given is Baptist or Buddhist, Muslim or Methodist. Surely there is a pressing need for cooperation between religions in meeting the tragic need of suffering people. (pp. 108–109)

Sweet (2005:417–418) proposes interreligious ecumenism as a model for dialogue between different religions which will allow a number of participants to be involved in the dialogue, and allow different ideologies to be voiced. Ecumenism is a movement which allows cooperation and understanding between different religious denominations. It also refers to the universality of the Christian church. It is derived from the Greek word *oikoumene*, which means ‘the whole inhabited world’. Ecumenism suggests that, despite their differences, different communities can work together and live in peace. Ecumenism was generally used in terms of the Christian tradition, with the aim of Christian unity. As a religious movement, ecumenism professes to try to ‘know, understand, and love others as they wish to be known and understood’ (Sweet 2005:417–418). The aim is to find what is shared, as well as where groups and individuals disagree, and to bring these different views together without confrontation. This will allow different groups to live and work together, it can even lead to new interpretations of truth.

Ecumenism rests on certain presuppositions about the religious traditions. The different religions or faiths are committed to the recognition of truth, and acting upon these truths. The different religions and religious perspectives do contain truth.

There are truths that all can and do share, and therefore all faiths contain some truth. There is no one group that can express all truth. There are truths that can be found in the values, experiences and practices of others.

Your personal religious beliefs are part of who you are, and cannot be separated into a private sphere, self-sufficient of the public sphere. All dialogue and discussions must begin with these presuppositions in mind (Sweet 2005:418–419). This ecumenical approach would challenge the secular idea that private convictions should be separated from public dialogue if social harmony is to triumph. Ecumenism acknowledges differences and diversity, and it does not require a neutral ground where there are no personal commitments in order to be successful. Through dialogue with one another we will realise that we cannot fully understand or articulate our own tradition's beliefs without being exposed to the views and beliefs of others. Interreligious ecumenism not only aims at cooperation, but also finding what unites the different religious traditions, 'while ecumenism ... acknowledges the legitimacy and the value of difference, it aims at the mutual recognition of unity, but this unity is not identity or uniformity' (Sweet 2005:418–419).

For interreligious ecumenism to be successful, those that are involved need to acknowledge that there are certain interests, values, and concerns that all religious, political and cultural traditions share. These interests, values, and concerns reflect our human nature (Sweet 2005:420–422). If we all share the same issues, we should all attempt to resolve these issues. It would be much easier and fruitful if we would address issues with the help of others, no matter their religious views (Sweet 2005):

Ecumenism recognizes, then, that religious belief is not just about a transcendent reality, but is also about this world. It holds – as many, if not most, religious believers hold – that the truths of religion are truths which concern and affect human life and flourishing *in concreto*. These basic interests and values related to our understanding of ourselves and our world underline our distinctively religious beliefs as a whole, and it is because these interests and these values are or can come to be seen as also basic to the religious beliefs of others, that discussion and dialogue among those of different religious denominations can begin. Ecumenical dialogue generally does not start off by asking, 'What is the divine?' A more productive starting point may be the question, 'What is it to show love to our fellow human beings?' (pp. 420–422)

This raises a concern when it comes to interreligious dialogue. The danger exists that we could move so much toward humanitarian problems that we fall into humanitarianism. We should be careful not to become so focused and driven by humanitarian problems that we lose sight of the transcendent. Interreligious ecumenism has the aim of resolving issues in society, but its aim is also to give us common ground for dialogue, and not to be a replacement for dialogue about God and spirituality.

## ■ What is necessary for a theology that allows religious pluralism?

Hick and Knitter (1987:81) propose that we move away from a Christocentric to a theocentric approach to religion. All religions revolve around God, and even Christianity revolves around God. Christianity should no longer be seen as the centre of the universe of faiths, which Hick (in Hick & Knitter 1987:81) calls the ‘Copernican revolution’. The central aspect of God’s nature is his universal saving will, if it be God’s will that all be saved, then salvation will not be worked in order that only a small group of people be saved. All religions therefore lead to the same God. But if Christians accept that they can only know God through Christ, how can they shift away from a Christocentric approach to a theocentric approach? For many the shift away from Christ is a separation of what Christianity is and of a Christian perspective (McGrath 1993):

But during the last hundred years or so we have been making new observations and have realized there are deep devotion to God, true sainthood, and deep spiritual life within these religions; and so we have created our epicycles of theory, such as the notion of anonymous Christianity and of explicit faith. But would it not be more realistic now to make the shift from Christianity at the centre to God at the centre, and see both our own and the other great world religions as revolving around the same divine reality? (pp. 460–462)

The fact that all religions have their own interpretation and understanding of God should not be seen as contradictory, but as supplementary to one another. But for many Christians you cannot remove Christ from the central message of Christianity, because according to them you only meet God through the revelation that takes place within Jesus Christ (McGrath 1993:460–462).

Dupuis (1997:191) states that being Christocentric does not mean you are not theocentric, or vice versa, as they are not contradictory viewpoints. When you are theocentric you are also Christocentric; Jesus doesn’t replace God in Christocentrism, nor does Jesus fall away in theocentrism (Dupuis 1997):

This amounts to saying Jesus Christ is the medium of God’s encounter of human beings. The man Jesus belongs, no doubt, to the order of signs and symbols; but in him who has been constituted the Christ by God, who raised him from the dead (Acts 2:36), God’s saving action reaches out to people in various ways, knowingly to some and to others unknowingly. (p. 191)

To have a Christocentric approach to dialogue is to exclude other religions. The division between religions and Christianity is specifically Jesus. To say we focus on God, and we believe that Jesus is God, do we really move away from Christocentrism?

The goal is not to remove Jesus from Christianity, or even deny him in dialogue. The argument is, as I have mentioned above, rather to focus on what unites us in dialogue

than what divides us. Let us not focus on Jesus and the different views concerning Jesus, it also doesn't mean that we have to deny Jesus in dialogue. As you will see below, tolerance is to allow each to hold his own views. But let us seek out the contact point between us and the other – let us start a dialogue from perspectives and values that we share. Let us start with God's love for people, or our calling to reach out to the suffering. These are themes that surface in all religions, and if we start here we will be able to work towards cooperation and interreligious ecumenism.

## ■ Previous approaches

Arnold Toynbee, a critic of exclusivism, said that in order to move away from exclusivism and intolerance we need to change our idea that Christianity is unique (Netland 1991:303). As we have seen, there are different forms of exclusivism and it would appear that the exclusivist viewpoint is intolerant. However, this intolerance does not manifest in the sense that they do not want anything to do with one another, or that they behave violently towards the other: Their intolerance appears in terms of religions not wanting to work together.

Let us look at what tolerance means. Netland (1991:305–307) identifies three categories of tolerance – legal, social, and intellectual, namely:

1. *Legal*. There is a kind of legal tolerance which allows for freedom of religion and also declares basic human rights for all, regardless of gender, ethnicity or religion.
2. *Social*. This states that all should be treated with dignity in social settings, regardless of their views and beliefs. Even though others might not share the same conviction that we hold, we still believe that they are created in the image of God, and treat them as such.
3. *Intellectual*. Tolerance here is to accept the views of the other even though we do not agree with them, since we still accept them as a being.

Tolerance is to respect someone's views or beliefs – but it does not mean we have to accept and have the same views. In this sense, the partial replacement paradigm isn't intolerant. Netland (1991) defines intolerance as the refusal to accept something that we ought to accept morally:

Certainly, one can consider the beliefs of another to be false and yet treat that person with dignity and respect. For to deny this is to suggest that we can only respect and treat properly those with whom we happen to agree. (pp. 308–309)

He continues to pose a scenario where a woman is raped and someone witnesses it. Even though it is in his power to do something about the situation, he turns away. Is this not intolerance, especially if this man is from a different religion or ethnicity? If we then look at society, and we witness the struggles of humanity, is it not intolerant to ignore this or not to act or work with another because they are from a different religious tradition?

According to this description of intolerance, it would seem that exclusivism is intolerant (Netland 1991:305).

Clearly we need different approaches – more *tolerant* approaches – if we are to enter into dialogue with the hope of benefitting humanity. In the next section I shortly discuss three alternative approaches that we can look at, however, length restrictions mean I will not be able to go into these models' approaches or consequences in dialogue.

## **Inclusivism and/or fulfilment model**

This model is midway between exclusivism and pluralism, and both accepts and rejects other religions. As with the partial replacement model, this model believes that there is grace within other religions but no salvation apart from Jesus. Advocates of this model also want to avoid confrontation with other religions. They acknowledge the possibility of salvation outside Christianity – but this salvation is brought about by Jesus. In some way Christ is present in other religions. Christ is the source of all truth and goodness, and because other religions also have a degree of truth and goodness, Christ is also present in these religions in a mysterious way (Shenk 1997:43).

D'Costa (2009:7) is of opinion that there are two inclusivistic approaches, namely:

1. *Structural inclusivism*. Christ is the revelation of God but there is salvation outside the church. Even though salvation is available in other religions, that salvation is always through Christ, '[t]his type of inclusivism contains the pluralist legitimation of other religions as salvific structures whilst also holding to the exclusivist claims of the causal saving grace of Christ alone'.
2. *Restrictive inclusivism*. Christ is the revelation of God, 'although salvation is possible outside of the explicit Christian Church, but this does not give legitimation to other religions as possible or actual salvific structures.'

Theologians who hold this view are careful to restrict God's inclusiveness to other cultures, but not other religions. These two views are ontologically and causally exclusive, but not epistemologically exclusive (D'Costa 2009:7).

## **Pluralism and/or mutuality model**

Pluralism does not accept Christianity or Jesus as unique – and holds that it is no more true than other religions. All religions are representations of God and provide salvation (Shenk 1997):

Proponents of religious pluralism believe there are many paths to God, each equally valid. Since God is revealed to human beings in a variety of forms, and since the human response to God varies, no religion can claim supremacy. (p. 53)

They feel that just as the early Christians learned that salvation was not only for Jews, Christians have to realise again that salvation is not exclusive to Christianity. In the same way that God's love is universal, 'his salvation is also universal (Shenk 1997:53–54). A pluralistic approach to other religions could lead to a more tolerant approach to other. If we were of the opinion that all religions lead to one God, the differences between us would no longer divide us. There would no longer be the tension of 'we are right and you are wrong'.

D'Costa (2009:6) makes a distinction between three types of pluralism (D'Costa 2009:7):

1. *Unitary pluralism*. All religions are equal and valid paths to the one divine reality, with 'unitary' referring to one divine being behind the phenomenon of a pluralistic religious environment.
2. *Pluriform pluralism*. Religions are or can be different paths to different divine realisms.
3. *Ethical pluralism*. A religion relates to a divine being according to their ethical codes and practices, and should therefore not be judged according to their ideas about the divine. All three views hold that Christ is only one revelation amongst many, therefore all religions can learn from one another.

## Alternative approaches

Recently a couple of new approaches have arisen that seek answers to the debate of religions.

### Acceptance model

This approach says that there is no one religion that is superior to other religions. It also holds that we do not have to search for something that we have in common in order to make one religion just as valid as the other. We have to accept that we live in a world with a diversity of religions, '[t]he religious traditions of the world are really different, and we have to accept those differences – that, you might say, is the one-line summary of this model' (Knitter 2008:173). In the same way that fundamentalism was brought about as a response to secularisation and modernisation, the acceptance model is influenced by postmodernism.

There are a number of important things to note about postmodernism, namely, (1) it rejects the idea that reason is an effective way to get to truth, (2) there is no such thing as 'facts' since these are always influenced by culture, (3) science is not the only way to gain knowledge of the world and (4) it also feels that there is no ultimate truth (Knitter 2008:174–175). If we can accept that there is no ultimate and objective truth, we will have to acknowledge that we do not have an objective truth. If we cannot know an ultimate truth, then we also have to leave room to acknowledge that the other

religion is not necessarily wrong. The approach then would be that because we do not know for sure that we are right and the 'other' is wrong, we have to tolerate the other's view. We do not possess full truth, without error, and the other is not totally wrong or without truth.

This is probably the single pillar upon which postmodernism is based – the fact that there is no ultimate truth. There is no ultimate truth because there is, and will always be, diversity. Diversity will always dominate over unity (Knitter 2008):

Truth is always truth. It always takes different shapes and assumes different identities – to the point that 'it' is no longer one, but many. ... If any one culture thinks they have the one unifying truth that will embrace all others, it will not be a truth that others can see but a truth that will be forced upon them. (p. 175)

If there is no ultimate truth, no single religion will be able to claim that truth. This means that no religion will ever be superior over another.

Knitter says that the best approach to dialogue then would be to be who we are, and be as authentic as we possibly can be. In this way the other will be able to get to know the real us. It will then not be necessary to remove fences and build common ground. The lack of common ground makes dialogue a bit more difficult, and this is considered a weakness of this paradigm. The strength, however, is that we do not start dialogue with our own presuppositions (Knitter 2008:183–184). Coming to dialogue without presuppositions is also one of the requirements for open and honest dialogue. It then makes sense that this model is seen as one of the best and more effective approaches to dialogue.

## Comparative theology

Comparative theology and postliberalism developed in the late 1980s. There are three reasons for this development:

1. It is a reaction to the focus on questions of salvation that have dominated the debate between the traditional approaches to other religions (exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism). The new movements have moved the focus to the reading of texts of other religions, and the impact on Christian reading and practices. It also looks at the socio-political aspect of interreligious meetings (D'Costa 2009:8).
2. 'In reaction to the question of the validity (or otherwise) of other religions being discussed in abstraction of those religions, these movements have stressed the particular and contextual engagement with particular religions, avoiding generalizing from one particular to the general' (D'Costa 2009:8).
3. These shifts also reflect the philosophical beliefs (D'Costa 2009:8).



Comparative theology is the notion that we should stop our attempts to provide a framework for all religions. We should therefore engage other religions in their particularity, in order to see what we as Christians can learn from their scripture and practices, '[w]e do not need a theology *of* religions, but multiple theologies *in* engagement *with* religions' (D'Costa 2009:8). I agree with what D'Costa is saying. If we engage Eastern religions and dialogue on their practices of meditation, for example, this can enrich Christians' meditative practices.

Comparative theologians agree on seven points. Firstly, the three traditional approaches make Christians immune against the power of other religions, because they were fixed on the salvation of non-believers but cared very little about the religions themselves. The dialogue between religions must become the centre of the situation as it reflects the situation of the religious world of modern society (D'Costa 2009:37). Secondly, dialogue comes before theology of religions as it is a practice and not a theory. We must learn about and from other religions before forming theories about them (D'Costa 2009:37–38). Thirdly, with the comparative approach the specific religion becomes the focus in dialogue, which means the comparativists would become specialists in religions (D'Costa 2009:38). Fourthly, the theories of the theology of religions, according to the traditional paradigms, must now be rethought to make way for 'comparative theology of religion'. Comparativists realise that you can no longer speak generally about religion, but religions become known through close engagement with texts and practices of other religion '[t]his in part is a cultural-linguistic point that meanings are generated through the practice of texts and cannot be divorced from the cultural-linguistic world within which they are given' (D'Costa 2009:38). One of the new directions of theology of religions is material religion. It includes all material elements of religion such as books, rituals, symbols, et cetera. D'Costa only refers to literature. Fifthly, comparative religion sought to understand the differences and similarities, without being transformed or influenced themselves. Comparative theology expects a transformation in the light of their exposure to the other. For a few people this approach to dialogue will lead to multiple identities, with a person embracing elements of other religions. However, multiple identities are not the goal of comparative theology (D'Costa 2009:38). Sixthly, Fredericks is critical of pluralists who mythologise Christ as a prerequisite for dialogue, because it is the differences and loyalties to the different religions which make dialogue engaging '[a]ll the comparatists want to uphold strong doctrinal claims and represent Christianity in its orthodox form' (D'Costa 2009:39). Lastly, 'comparative theology is a call for multiple theologies in engagement, not a singular theology of religions' (D'Costa 2009:39).

There is however, some criticism against the comparative theological approach. D'Costa feels that this approach is not critical enough towards other interpretations of truth. To be open to the power and novelty of the other religions also implies that we will do so from a theological point. None of the comparativists make any judgement when it comes to the question of truth claims (D'Costa 2009):

These are too early days to judge the comparativists, but one might raise two tentative questions. If there are no challenges and questionings of these other texts, but simply a self-referential transformation, can this be called ‘comparative’, ‘dialogue’ or even Christian? Mission, intrinsic to Christian witness, seems to have no place in the theological project except a deferred role. To put it differently, inculturation is divorced from mission and this may reflect that it is contextually defined by academic practice, not ecclesiological witness. Further, if comparative theology is allied to real engagement with living religious people, although obviously it needs not be in terms of some of its explicit goals, then are these texts not susceptible to critical questioning in respectable and reverential study, both intra-textually and inter-textually? (pp. 40–42)

## ■ Postmodern postliberalism

There are two groups of postmodern postliberals, but both focus on social and political engagement. Ethical deconstructionists, like the ethical pluralists, want to shift the engagement to politics. Some of these theologians think that theology is politics whilst others think theology involves politics. Radical orthodoxy or rhetorical out-narrationists share the view that theology involves politics, but the two are not reducible to each other. The focus lies with the political engagement, but rhetorically arguing that Christianity is the truth, out-narrating other religions. They propose that only Christianity can bring about civil peace (D’Costa 2009:8). D’Costa takes a closer look at these two branches, with his own criticism of both.

## □ Ethical deconstruction

D’Costa focuses on the work of Henrique Pinto, which looks at Christianity as a set of practices rather than an ahistorical truth. D’Costa (2009:45) feels that Pinto ‘undermines unitary notions of “Christianity”, or indeed, the “world religions”.’ Pinto rejects the traditional approaches because they are based on a unitary model of truth. He says that exclusivism and inclusivism, with their claim to truth, reproduce the elements of imperial discourse. Pluralism, on the other hand, evades the real differences between different religions (D’Costa 2009:46).

This approach will mean that there is no longer a focus on one religion’s truth claims, but on the ethical practices, allowing the different practices of the different religions to transform one another. Through this approach there is no longer an imperialist, privileged religion. Pinto’s argument is that we should read our scriptures together with the scriptures and practices of other religions that are thrown together within the modern world (D’Costa 2009:46–47).

D’Costa has a problem with the methodology of this approach. Theology is translated into philosophy so vigorously that it is losing its independence ‘[i]n Pinto’s hands,

theology has no proper object.' He says that Pinto's approach is so relativistic that it could easily be classified as pluralism. According to him, Pinto's Christian credentials should be questioned, because his Foucauldian framework is more important than his Christology, the Trinity and the church. Pinto was influenced by French deconstructionist philosopher Michel Foucault (D'Costa 2009:45, 47–48).

## □ Radical orthodoxy

D'Costa looks at the work of John Milbank when he discusses radical orthodoxy. According to him, Milbank's unique contribution to the debate lies in giving theology a voice which will allow theology to criticise culture, 'Milbank tries to show how sociology, politics, and the other disciplines read the world from their viewpoint, often encoding religion within alien reductive categories' (D'Costa 2009:48–49). He develops an alternative Christian narrative for a world that interprets Creation without God (D'Costa 2009:48–49).

Milbank's view of the theology of religions is summed up as follows (D'Costa 2009: 49–50):

- He views religion as the organising categories for a culture.
- He also criticises inclusivism and pluralism, which sees other religions as merely reflections of themselves.
- Milbank is also critical of the ethical practice; he takes the ethical praxis in the work of Knitter and others back to 'the universal discourse in modernity', where rules and laws are prioritised above all other discussions. The ethical turn assumes that theory can be bypassed by emphasising social practice alone, as if practice stands separate from theory.
- Milbank shows the imperialism of the pluralistic approach by showing how Knitter imposes ethical criteria from the secular world on all religions, secular ideas such as 'justice' and 'peace' are made normative for all religions.
- Knitter advances the spurious argument that there is agreement within these religions about such norms. The only agreement comes from secular liberals within each religion, that fail to represent the religious tradition in terms of their founding texts and key premodern authoritative traditions.
- Milbank says that the Trinity is equal to the Hindu gods, by showing Eastern and Western understanding of power, justice and good varies. He is critical of modern Hindus who want to engage in dialogue, saying they are more likely to be representatives of liberal modernity than their ancient religious traditions.
- Milbank says there is a deep discontinuity between premodern and modern versions of religions, with no commonly accepted norms whereby religious culture can discuss fundamental matters. All rationalities are religion-specific, finding authority within that revelation, text and teachings.

- There is no place for rational dialectics in terms of mutually accepted fundamental starting points (the use of reasoned argument to defeat an opponent decisively), although there is a place for limited reasoned criticism, noting internal inconsistencies, poor argumentation, and faithlessness to the source.
- Milbank is more concerned with mission than with dialogue, as he feels that Christians are supposed to ‘out-narrate’ other religions when it comes to dialogue.
- Milbank never discusses issues of salvation or any other themes we find in the traditional threefold paradigms. He invites dialogue in terms of socio-political questions, ‘because postliberalism and postmodernism have at least established one thing: Christianity is a form of social power.’ He says that Christianity is uniquely equipped to handle modern and postmodern forms of dialogue, because Christianity is the truth.

I do not agree with this last point, as it seems to be a lot like the inclusivist and exclusivist view in that the only truth is in Christianity. Would postmodernism and postliberalism not especially argue that no specific religion has ultimate truth, and therefore no one religion would be uniquely equipped?

As with ethical deconstruction, D’Costa also critiques Milbank’s radical orthodoxy. He agrees with Milbank’s first three statements. On the fourth statement he states, ‘Milbank assumes that all religious traditions are constructed out of a “seamless narrative succession”, which is an ‘uncharacteristic ahistorical judgement.’ D’Costa (2009:51) says that Hinduism is far from a ‘seamless narrative succession’ as it displays cultural forms where the caste system has been challenged. Milbank’s statements are based on an orthodox Hindu’s thesis, which have been deeply challenged by many Hindu and non-Hindu scholars (D’Costa 2009:51). D’Costa feels that he still needs to work on this notion of ‘out-narration’. Whilst he agrees with Milbank that ‘out-narration’ is necessary, both in mission and a methodological sense, he asks whether it should be held in an ‘either/or’ contrast with rational dialectics. He is also not sure how Milbank wants to receive Christ from other cultures without some common ground (D’Costa 2009:52).

## ■ Evaluating comparative theology and postmodern postliberalism

The comparatist and postmodern postliberalists emphasise the socio-political nature of theology as well as that the church is in the world and theology is an embodied practice. However, D’Costa feels that the comparatist approach is really only inculturation, and neglects missiological aspects. The postmodern postliberal approach emphasises mission, but neglects inculturation and rational discussions. Mission, which is a socio-political action, and inculturation, which is a social and political process ‘cannot be attended to

without close knowledge of the actual culture or religion that is being engaged, both in its historical perspective and in its contemporary shape' (D'Costa 2009:53–54).

I have proved that the traditional threefold approaches are not willing to enter into dialogue with other religions, other than to convince and convert them. They will not enter into dialogue for the sole purpose of getting to know the 'other'. Through dialogue we will be able to build trust, and get to know that which is foreign to us, we will see that the 'other' faces the same struggles and fears which we face.

Furthermore, it became clear that interreligious ecumenism might not only be possible, but that there is a lot of value within this approach. It would allow different communities to work together for the good of society – not only their local society, but even the global society. Sweet's proposal of ecumenism, agrees to the acceptance model to a large extent, as it doesn't require common ground between religions. However, even although Sweet acknowledges that there are different truths, he does want to find and focus on what unites the different religions, even though this is not a requirement.

Many people are uncomfortable with the proposal of moving from Christocentrism to theocentrism, but as became clear in our discussion, this does not mean that we will no longer recognise Jesus as the Saviour, or that we will deny him in dialogue. It only means that we will focus our dialogue on God, and themes such as love and compassion. In my explanation of what intolerance means, it became clear that we cannot turn a blind eye on those who are suffering, regardless of whether they are Christian or Muslim.

I have briefly discussed the traditional threefold approaches, and it became clear that these do not leave room for true dialogue. In looking for alternative approaches, I discussed the acceptance model, comparative theology, as well as postmodern postliberal approaches. As became clear in the critique on these models, they are not ideal approaches. However, as D'Costa said, it is still very early days for these approaches, and they might need some further examination (D'Costa 2009:42).

It might seem that the most effective model on interreligious dialogue would be the acceptance model. We do not have to create common ground in order to be able to enter dialogue, we only need to be open and honest, and accept the other for who they really are.

## Conclusion

In this chapter I discussed and explained how the exclusivist paradigm or approach related to other religions. I proved that an exclusivist approach to other religions is not viable, because it will always regard the 'other' as strange and wrong, and will never really be open and accepting towards them. The problem with this is that we are confronted with the 'other', as I have mentioned, at school, work and even at social gatherings. In

South Africa, where we are confronted daily with other religions or ethnic groups, it is necessary to find a new approach to others. I described the inclusivist and pluralist approaches as the traditional threefold approaches. I then proposed new approaches like the acceptance model, comparative theology and postmodern postliberalism in search of possible alternatives to our problem.

I also described dialogue and explained how the exclusivist paradigm influences dialogue. I explained the need for dialogue, as well as certain approaches and principles in the process, if we are to cooperate with one another. It also became apparent why there is such a great need for dialogue. If we have any hope of working together to the benefit of humanity, we have to enter into open and honest dialogue, and that requires acceptance of the other party despite the issues and differences between us. Even if cooperation is not our goal, it will at least help reduce the intergroup threat which so clearly influences all social groups.

It was clear how intergroup threat is influenced by exclusivism and fundamentalism. I explained how the fact that exclusivists view their religion as the only religion in which truth and salvation negatively influence relationships, not only between religious groups but between colleagues, neighbours or even strangers. It is also important to note, as I have already mentioned, that exclusivism is present in all religions. Clearly there is much more that can be said about the subject matter, such as studying the central role of Jesus in Christianity, and especially in Christian exclusivism.

Another issue that needs research is the role of scripture in religion. All religions believe that they have the truth and salvation, all based on their various scriptures. The concern is then that all religions use their scripture as authority on this subject. If we would enter into dialogue with the departure point that it should be based on scripture, this would leave us with another very important question: Whose scripture would be seen as normative? However, if we follow the acceptance model as our approach in dialogue, we will not have to establish a normative scriptural position. Then we could accept that we do not have the same approach to scripture, and accept that it is a subject which we will disagree on. Even though we disagree on this and other subjects, it does not hinder dialogue, as we have accepted it as a point of disagreement. The goal of comparative theology is to read each other's scripture, which could also be a possible alternative approach from which dialogue could benefit.

We have also seen that in order for dialogue to be effective we cannot enter it with the mindset of converting the other. The most effective approach is to have the attitude that we want to learn from and about the other. The goal of learning is also not to get to know the 'other' in order to know where to hit with evangelism – the goal is to get to know the other for who they are and to erase misconceptions, in order that we can build relationships through which we can work together. Eliminating misconceptions about the other will also reduce the intergroup threat experience. When we listen to the 'other'

we might even stumble across wisdom, or methods of serving and ministering to people, which we have not investigated before.

It also became clear that religious pluralism is here to stay. This makes dialogue very important and much needed. Due to the change in perceptions of truth that came with postmodernism, exclusivism is no longer an acceptable approach to other religions. For this reason I propose the acceptance model as a way of relating to other religions. My argument is that we should follow the acceptance model, and for this to be possible we have to approach one another with openness and honesty. The acceptance model is more in line with my personal views than the comparative theological and postmodern postliberal approaches. I feel that these latter approaches are so concerned with being accepting and open to the other that anything goes, and we lose the essence of what dialogue is about.

I have proposed that, in order to benefit humanity and address the suffering of those who cannot help themselves, it is necessary that different religions work together. In order for this to be possible we have to be able to enter into dialogue, which is not possible with an exclusivistic, inclusivistic or pluralistic approach. In order to be more open to dialogue I looked at Hick's proposal that we move from Christocentrism to theocentrism. I explained that this move does not mean that we remove Jesus from Christianity, or deny him in dialogue – it is simply a shift in our focus. This might assist us in looking past our religious differences.

I have successfully completed my objectives to define exclusivism, fundamentalism and dialogue. I also determined that exclusivism does not leave room for dialogue and that we have to search for alternative approaches. My proposed alternative would be to use the acceptance model as proposed by Knitter, or the comparative theology or postmodern postliberal approaches as discussed by D'Costa. In my opinion the acceptance model can be followed successfully, and it might even be unnecessary to move from Christocentrism to theocentrism.

The result which I expected was to find a way for exclusivism to relate to other religions and to enter successfully into dialogue. However, I discovered that even if exclusivism would enter into dialogue, it would be to convert the 'other' rather than to understand and work together. Exclusivism and fundamentalism are also an element of the intergroup threat experience and do nothing to reduce these experiences. I have identified and discussed the ground rules for dialogue if we wish it to be fruitful. Furthermore I have successfully identified and discussed alternative approaches to dialogue, even though I was not able to enter into the deeper ramifications that they would have on dialogue. I have also shown how a move from Christocentrism to theocentrism could improve interreligious dialogue, if we chose to take that route.

Further research could be necessary to determine *how* we could move past fundamentalism and exclusivism to more open approaches. A look at the influences of the different approaches on and implications for dialogue might also be necessary. Further research might be done on how dialogue functions in these different approaches, and how they would look from the viewpoint of specific religious traditions.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 5

It is attempted to analyse the relationship between Christianity, Judaism and Islam from the viewpoint of the intergroup threat theory. Although the departure point for this study is the intergroup threat theory, there are other elements related to dialogue discussed as well. An explanation of the threat theory serves as an argument for dialogue. In a world with different social dynamics and religions, we need to move past the intergroup threat. There will never be peace and harmony in the world as long as different groups are suspicious of one another. Dialogue, however, is a very complex process. The different approaches to other religions are discussed, and a suggestion is made for an approach which will promote dialogue and interreligious ecumenism. The focus of this study is on the exclusivist paradigm. The way in which the exclusivist paradigm influences the way we relate to other religions in dialogue and how the paradigm addresses the humanitarian problem, which all nations face, is discussed. In the first section of this chapter, there is an analysis of whether the intergroup threat is more common amongst exclusivist communities and groups with a fundamental orientation. A search for alternatives to the exclusivist approach is then presented. The question addressed here is, how can humanity work together for the better of humanity, despite their religious differences?



# Theology of religions: Models for interreligious dialogue in South Africa

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## Introduction

To encounter a different culture, tradition or religion (which terms seem to be entwined with one another) one merely has to converse with a colleague or neighbour, turn on the television, read the news or go to a local store. Kärkkäinen (2003:17) observes that other religions used to be distant, almost exotic, and were merely vague topics for enjoyable conversation. These other religions – which could previously be ignored – ‘have come much closer to us whether we live in the West or elsewhere’ (Kärkkäinen 2003:17–18). What may also be true is that some Christians might still be blind to people from other religions, or purposely ignore other faiths. The World Council of Churches’ (WCC) Central Committee (2002:2), however, has made the point that religious plurality is becoming unavoidable, and in their 2002 report concerning religious plurality stated that almost all Christians all over the world live in religiously plural contexts. This in itself is not the problem being stated, but rather a promise of new and exciting opportunities for obtaining knowledge and understanding of different people and the characteristics that make them different.

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The problem which is stated is the reluctance of Christians to engage with fellow South Africans from other traditions. To put it more plainly: South African Christians seem to be struggling to find a comfortable standpoint about religious plurality and how to engage with people from other religions. Tutu (2013) refers to this struggle by saying that:

[I]n times such as our own – times of change when many familiar landmarks have shifted or disappeared – people are bewildered; they hanker after unambiguous, straightforward answers. We appear to be scared of diversity in ethnicities, in religious faiths, in ideological points of view. (p. 4)

Viewpoints on how to go about living and working (and for all intents and purposes, coexisting) with people from differing religions seem to extend from exclusivisms and particularities to inclusivisms and pluralisms (see Hedges 2010:20–27 and Knitter 2012 for the different approaches Christians have towards other religions). The WCC (in their 2002 report on religious plurality and Christian self-understanding) (WCC Central Committee Interreligious Relations and Dialogue 2002:2) voices their concerns about this by saying, 'persistent plurality and its impact on their<sup>13</sup> daily lives are forcing them to seek new and adequate ways of understanding and relating to peoples of other religious traditions.'

Although the 2001 census found that the majority of South Africans are Christians (see Statistics South Africa 2011:24), a growing number of emigrating South Africans now find themselves living in countries inhabited by people who are not all Christians. In recent decades the population of the world has gained increasing access to foreign people, their culture and traditions, '[n]ot only are ideas migrating, so are people' (Knitter 2012:5). This is of course due to the advances in technology which have opened up new channels of communication for all the world to use.<sup>14</sup> People across the globe have, as Kärkkäinen (2003:19) states, 'much more to do with each other, whether they want to or not, in schools, markets and workplaces, even in families through intermarriage.' Kritzinger, Meiring and Saayman (1994:83) ask this question, '[h]ow is one to think of other religions, and how are we to deal with the faithful of other religions?' This is the question being asked by South Africans who live in a country where they are surrounded by many cultures, languages, traditions and religions.

The case that is being stated is that although people from different religions might be segregated in terms of their traditions, places of worship and cultures, they are now confronted by one another within their neighbourhoods, classes, workplaces, media,

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13.'This', 'their' and 'them' refer to Christians living in a religiously plural society.

14.See Knitter [2012:5] who states that obtaining knowledge about other religions can be easily done by browsing the Web or turning on the television.

social networking, and so on. Kärkkäinen (2003) refers to John Habgood (the Archbishop of York), who stated that:

Other faiths used to belong to other lands. At home rival religious claims could safely be ignored. Or, if not ignored, patronized. The superiority of one's own faith was so evident that the alternatives could somehow be brought within its purview without posing any real theological or social threat. Today things are different. Different faiths are practiced cheek by jowl in most parts of the world. (p. 17)

Therefore any attempt to avoid or ignore the religious Other is increasingly becoming a futile endeavour.

In my own church I often hear people talking about their relationships with colleagues who form part of a different religious tradition, they speak in awe of the fact that these people are in so many ways similar to themselves, although they still seem to be unsure of which topics are appropriate to discuss with these religious Others,<sup>15</sup> and which are not. There seems to be a realisation amongst Christians that there can no longer be references to *us and them*, but rather to *us amongst them*.<sup>16</sup> This is especially true in a country where citizens have the freedom to choose which religion they want to belong to, as well as where and how they practise their religions. This leads to religious people being allowed (not necessarily by their fellow South Africans, but by law) to be openly religious anywhere in South Africa, because they are protected by the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa.<sup>17</sup>

Another perspective which must also be acknowledged is that of *them amongst us*, which might seem to be a more accurate way of looking at the South African context, if one takes the latest census data into account, which state that Christianity is still the predominant religion in South Africa (see Statistics South Africa 2011:24). Therefore it would seem more accurate to view the South African context by saying that 'they', being the religious Others, are amongst 'us', who form the largest religious group in South Africa, the Christians. It can also be possible that there is no 'us', due to the fact that there can be many denominations, sects and ideologies in all religions, which causes there to be no unified 'us' or 'them'.

However, if one were to agree with the existence of the so-called *them amongst us* idea, the communication between these two groups can possibly be a challenge. But as

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15.A term coined by Hedges (2010:5). He uses the term 'Other' with a capital 'O', out of respect for and recognition of people from a different religion.

16.See Knitter (2012:5) who states that '[t]oday the reality of other religions no longer exists across the border'.

17.Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Chapter 2 (Bill of rights), No. 15 (Freedom of religion, belief and opinion).

Kärkkäinen (2003:18) states, the communication with the religious Other can also be viewed as the most significant opportunity for the Christian church in the new millennium. The question is: What are these opportunities and what do they allow Christianity to do? This is a question which this chapter will attempt to come close to answering.

For this chapter, it is also important that a distinction be made between having *knowledge of* some other religious groups, and having *exposure to* other religious groups. There is a difference between being knowledgeable about religions other than your own and having been exposed to different religions. Knitter (2012:203) refers to comparative theology as having the same approach. This type of theology states that the foundation for a theology of religions might be found better in dialogue (therefore an experience of the religious Other) than in theology. What this means is that although a person might be acquainted with the principles, history and traditions of the various different religions, it does not mean they have had any experiences pertaining to any religion other than their own. The problem arises when one is exposed to various religions without having any knowledge of the histories, traditions and principles of these religions. It is possible that this exposure without knowledge can create a problem when people from different religions are forced to live and work together. This problem can possibly be cleared up, or at the very least be unravelled, by an openness to dialogue. It is through dialogue with people from different religions that one can become more knowledgeable about and considerate of their religion and how it affects the way they live their lives and the way they think (see Knitter 2012:41; Netland 1991:297–300).

Paul Hedges (2010:13) states that when we are informed by a particular thought world of what other religions are, it will affect how we engage the religious Other. The question is: Is it then not more effective to be informed by religious people themselves about what they believe? This will enable us to grasp an understanding of their particular thought world, which will make engaging with the religious Other far more efficient.

Nevertheless, interreligious dialogue introduces us to a host of new difficulties. The globalisation of political, economic and religious life brings new pressure to communities that have been living in geographical and social isolation for years.<sup>18</sup> Hedges (2010:1) states within the first sentence of his book *Controversies in Interreligious Dialogue and the Theology of Religions* that by its very nature the concept of interreligious dialogue is embedded within controversy. There are various reasons why dialogue between people from different religions may be difficult, especially when culture, economics, politics and a history of violence are involved. There is a history of warfare between the various religions (see Hedges 2010:1). A wall has been put up between them, a wall of protection

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 18.This viewpoint is shared by the report written by the WCC in 2002 on Religious Plurality and Christian Self-understanding [see WCC 2002:3].

from one another, and it cannot be said that no harm, based on religious views, has been done by one group to the others (and vice versa). Take Christianity for instance: This is a religion with a history of warfare, colonialism, crusades and persecution. It is this past that makes it difficult for Christianity to position itself in relation to other world religions (Hedges 2010:1). Unfortunately, Christianity is not the only religion with a violent past, whether the conflict has been between Christian and Jew, Hindu and Muslim, Muslim and Christian there have been many wars fought amongst the various religions.

From a Christian perspective one can merely take a look back into the past to see what role politics can play to create tension. In Christianity, the relationship between church and state has always been controversial. During the reign of Constantine (in Rome, from 272–337 CE), Christianity not only became the *religio licita*,<sup>19</sup> but it very quickly became the only legitimate religion in the Roman Empire. With Christianity being the *religio licita*, certain compromises were inevitable. Bosch (2011:411) states that these compromises frequently involved social justice. During the reign of Constantine up to the dawn of the modern era, the membership of state and church overlapped, and this led rulers to think of themselves as being similarly responsible for both the religious and moral life of their subjects as they were for politics. Therefore, the realms of religion and politics seemed to collide (cf. Bosch 2011:411). The homogeneity of state and church unfortunately was not the best political route for all citizens.

Another example of injustice is the crusades of the 11th–13th century, which undoubtedly left a severe and tragic rift between Christendom and Islam. It is highly unlikely that the history of violence between Muslim and Christian will not have an effect upon dialogue between these two parties. In the Islamic culture the crusades are still regarded as cruel and savage onslaughts by European Christians, and traditions have formed around some of this history. Saladin, the Kurdish warrior, is still honoured as being a hero who fought against the crusaders (Reston 2007:XIV). The WCC (2002:3) refers to the contradiction that one finds in the history of Christianity: On the one hand, Christianity speaks of a God of love and acceptance, but on the other, 'its history, sadly, is also marked by persecutions, crusades, insensitivity to indigenous cultures, and complicity with imperial and colonial designs.' This leaves Christians at a disadvantage when approaching the sphere of dialogue. However, Christians have been cast in both the persecutor and the persecuted roles where the history of violence is concerned.

It is well known that Christians and Jews have not shared a past of camaraderie. The rift between Christendom and Judaism began with the start of the Christian movement, which emerged from Judaism, most of the first converts to Christianity were Jews. This led to the question of the authority of Jewish law concerning Christians who were not

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19. Translated as approved religion or permitted religion.

formerly Jews. There was a break between those who were circumcised and living in accordance with the law, and those who were not (cf. McGrath 2007:445). Of course these problems led to antagonism between Christians and Jews. Lasker (1999:23) writes about the cruel way in which Jews were persecuted in the Middle Ages and says that Jewish life in Western Europe crumbled due to 'persecution, massacres, forced conversions and eventual expulsions.' He further paints the picture of worsening Christian attitudes towards Judaism due to economic, political and legal changes in medieval Christendom. This history has left scars and creates a backdrop of strain in the relationship between Judaism and Christendom.

The strain between these two religions is not the only schism between religions. The rift between Hinduism and Islam can also be mentioned. This rift started in 67 BCE in India and still bears some painful consequences.

The Sri Lankan Civil War was another historical event which created a painful rift between the Sinhalese people (who are predominantly Buddhists with a small percentage of Christians) and the Tamil (who are Hindus).

Colonisation is another historical event which had an effect on how different religions interacted with one another. For instance, European colonialist activities and policies towards other religions in India in the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries led to Islamic people reacting with violence towards Christians. South Africa did not escape the effects of colonialism, and Christian missionaries were intrinsically involved in this process. Comaroff (1986) explains the result of the involvement of Christian missionaries in South Africa during colonisation by saying that:

[W]hile the mission introduced a new world view, it could not deliver the world to go with it. And this contradiction, in turn, gave rise to various discourses of protest and resistance. (p. 1)

A further theological challenge became apparent during the 19th century when missionaries from the West embarked on a mission to convert all the world, but quickly came to realise that there were common features amongst the various religions they came across. What does one make of these common aspects? Can one allow these aspects to change the way one views the religious Others? Should these aspects be allowed to cause one to view one's own religion differently?

Politics has evidently played a significant role in creating wars amongst adherents of different religions. When a political leader makes decisions based upon their own religious views, excluding citizens from other religions, it has dire consequences. Another unfortunate fact is that this history of violence (or at the very least animosity) has not remained in the past. One merely has to think of the current state of war raging in Syria and the Gaza Strip to know that violence and war are alive and well in the present. The further fate of the hundreds of young women being kidnapped in Chibok in Borno State,

Nigeria, on 14–15 April 2014 by Boko Haram (an Islamic Jihadist<sup>20</sup> and *Takfiri*<sup>21</sup> terrorist organisation based in Nigeria) comes to mind. The persecution of homosexuals and the religious campaign of violence against these people (which has been predominant in African countries such as Uganda) have created a perception of religious people being restrictive, violent and intolerant.

These conflicts and tales of war have created scars, which make dialogue between different religious groups very difficult, something which must be handled with the utmost care and sensitivity. The WCC (2002:1) states that it is precisely because of these conflicts that we must become aware of the importance of interreligious relations, ‘the rise of religious extremism and militancy in many situations has accentuated the importance of interreligious relations.’

Apart from the political hurdles, one must note that there will also be issues involving theology when interreligious dialogue is discussed. Paul Hedges (2010:1) focuses on the ‘more theoretical and theological issues.’ He explains why he does this, by using an argument put forward by Jeannine Hill Fletcher, ‘[t]heory has material consequences.’ Moreover, these consequences have an impact on the way that the religious Other is viewed and treated, which can impact severely on a country in which so many religions and cultures are living together, working amongst one another and sharing the same space and resources (see Hedges 2010:1).

A primary theoretical difficulty concerning dialogue amongst religions is the impasse between various theoretical standpoints, such as liberal and postliberal, modern and postmodern, exclusivism and inclusivism, as well as pluralist and particularist views (Hedges 2010:1). This can be illustrated by taking a look at the different stances on the concept of salvation, one of these theological issues at the centre of interreligious dialogue: Is salvation only found within one religion, meaning that there is only one true path to salvation, or are there many routes one can take leading to salvation? If one states that all religions lead to salvation, one is faced with the issue of relativism, meaning that if all religions lead to salvation, they are all valid, leaving the idea of salvation as almost being *cheap*, with a feeling of *everything goes* (as in the proverb that all roads lead to Rome).<sup>22</sup> However, if there is only one true path to salvation, one is faced with the question of

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20.Jihad is seldom referred to as being one of the six pillars of Islam and refers to a ‘struggle’ against those who do not believe in the Abrahamic God, Allah. This struggle can be viewed as an inner struggle or in this specific case to a physical struggle. It is associated with those extremist Muslims willing to harm others for not believing in Allah or those who are not true to the Qur’an. The concept of Jihad is, however, ever-changing [according to historical circumstances] see Heck (2004).

21.Takfiri refers to a Muslim who accuses a fellow Muslim of apostasy (disaffiliation from a religion by a member of that specific religion).

22.Different paths can take one to the same goal.

which path is the true path to salvation and what becomes of those who do not follow this specific path? It can also not be valid to view one's own religion as the only true path to salvation, without having – at the very least – made an effort to obtain some grain of knowledge of other religious views.

The exclusivist stance claims that there can only be salvation in the Christian church, which means that other world religions have no part in salvation and play no role pertaining to salvation (see Knitter 2012:23, 27–28). This means that those who have not heard of Jesus Christ are eternally lost. This is the extent to which exclusivism goes. Pluralists, on the other hand, believe that other religions can certainly lead to salvation and that Christianity as well as other world religions hold salvation within them, thus there are many paths leading to the destination of salvation (see Kärkkäinen 2003:24–25). Another group one can mention is the inclusivists. According to Kärkkäinen (2003:25), inclusivists believe that 'while salvation is ontologically founded on the person of Christ, its benefits have been made universally available by the revelation of God.' These claims about salvation briefly illustrate the difficulties in terms of different standpoints pertaining to openness to dialogue.

Therefore, the problem at hand is how one crosses the bridge of uncertainty and all the issues involved with interreligious dialogue so as to be able to engage with people from different religions and what benefits are there to such an endeavour? Can the fact that there are quite a few religions being practised in South Africa be beneficial in terms of social justice? How can we make the best of the fact that there are so many religions in our country?

For the discussion about interreligious dialogue, one must involve the theology of religions. Interreligious dialogue is the *praxis*, which cannot be viewed without its *theoria*, which is the theology of religions. To have one without the other would have less value (Hedges 2010:13).

Kärkkäinen (2003:20) defines Christian theology of religions as attempting to 'think theologically about what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths and about the relationship of Christianity to other religions.' This is also where the initial thoughts for this chapter started, with the question of the value and relationship that different religions (amongst one another) can have in the South African context.

## ■ Does the problem outweigh the solution?

With all these difficulties, controversies and the conflict between different countries and religious groups, one might ask whether it would be at all possible for people who adhere to different religions to converse meaningfully. However, there have been a few



occurrences which have been glimpses of hope for interreligious dialogue to take place in South Africa and for religions gathering and working together. The WCC Central Committee (2002) made the following statement more than 10 years ago, a statement I regard as one of these glimpses of hope, as it proclaims that the task of interreligious dialogue (and interreligious relations for that matter) is not a futile endeavour:

There is greater awareness of the interdependence of human life, and of the need to collaborate across religious barriers in dealing with the pressing problems of the world. All religious traditions, therefore, are challenged to contribute to the emergence of a global community that would live in mutual respect and peace. At stake is the credibility of religious traditions as forces that can bring justice, peace and healing to a broken world. (p. 3)

The WCC (2002:5) also notes that there is a pastoral need to equip religious people within Christian communities to live and coexist in a religiously plural context. This reveals a level of openness and willingness to communicate with the religious Other. It seems that not only has the situation shown the need for dialogue, but also that people have become more eager to participate.

We can celebrate certain events in history, which have provided that religious people do have the ability to work together and agree on certain issues. One of the most important efforts to promote dialogue between different religions was The Parliament for World's Religions which took place in Chicago in 1893. Swidler and Cornille (2013:6) describe this gathering as the 'birth of interreligious dialogue worldwide.' This was the first formal interreligious gathering to be held. The third gathering of the World Parliament of Religions returned to Chicago in 1993. Kenney (2000:252) refers to a document, *Towards a Global Ethic: An initial declaration*, which provided the essential focus of this gathering, 'Towards a Global Ethic articulated several of the moral and ethical directives held in common by the great religious and spiritual tradition.' This document became an important part of the Parliament's next gathering in 1999, named *The Call to our Guiding Institutions*.

South Africa was the next destination for the gathering of the World Parliament of Religions where 'The Call' was the guiding document. This gathering, which was held in Cape Town from the 1st until the 8th of December 1999, brought the directives to bear on the roles and responsibilities of the guiding institutions in the 21st century (Kenney 2000:252). The South African setting also provided thousands of people with the opportunity to witness at first-hand the role that religion and spirituality played in creating a democratic South Africa. This meeting was an important forum for people from different faiths to learn from one another's experiences (Martin 2000:61).

Kenney (2000) explains the intentions of the gathering in Cape Town just before the start of the new millennium as follows:

It was not the intention of those who gathered in Cape Town to create a new religion, or to diminish in any way the precious uniqueness of any path. Instead, they came together to

demonstrate that the religious and spiritual traditions and communities of Cape Town, of South Africa, and of the larger world can and should encounter one another in a spirit of respect, and with an openness to new understanding. They joined with one another in a spirit of dialogue and cooperation, seeking to discover new ways to rise to the challenges and the opportunities of life at the threshold of a new century. (p. 249)

Vatican II (1962–1965) can also be seen as a major event and turning point in history, concerning interreligious dialogue. At this event, a declaration on the relation of the Catholic Church towards non-Christian religions was passed by all Catholic bishops of the world as well as the Pope. In this declaration, which is known as *Nostra aetate*, it was made clear that the Catholic Church rejected nothing in these religions and urged all members of the Church to enter into dialogue and collaboration with the religious Other (cf. Swidler & Cornille 2013:7–8). Swidler and Cornille (2013:8) state that the Catholic Church immediately acted upon this declaration by setting up councils for relations between the Catholic Church, other Christian churches and non-Christians. It seemed as though dialogue had become important in the Catholic sphere. The Catholic Church's openness to dialogue urged all Christian denominations to become involved with this movement (Swidler & Cornille 2013):

[T]he full-bore entrance of the Catholic Church into dialogue exponentially increased the involvement of all the other Christian Churches as well as the Jews. Every church either expanded or created new approaches to foster dialogue. (p. 8)

Swidler and Cornille (2013:9) also refer to the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, which holds a special place in Swidler's life as it was established by himself and his wife, Arlene Anderson Swidler, as an 'excellent bellwether marking the progress of the Interreligious Dialogue Movement.' This journal is a scholarly periodical devoted to interreligious dialogue and involves Jewish, Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist associates.

In 2007, six years after the attack of Al Qaeda on America, Islam entered the movement of dialogue. This was due to 138 Muslim leaders from around the world who opened up the gates for dialogue by publishing a public letter inviting all Christian leaders and scholars to join them in dialogue (Swidler & Cornille 2013:9–10).

Brian McLaren (2012:226–231) writes about some of his own experience of interreligious friendship and how people are able to support the religious Other in trying times. He shares the story of his own congregation reaching out to local mosques during the tragic events which occurred in the United States of America on 11 September 2001. As South Africans we can learn from these instances of successful interreligious dialogue (in the hope that more of these events will take place in our own country), not just in a formal or institutionalised manner, but in our daily lives.

In my own experience, members of the younger generation are becoming more open to dialogue. In my own family, more than one religion is represented and there is mutual

respect for every family member's religious views, denomination and traditions. During my studies, I have become acquainted with members of different religious groupings. On campus, there is an array of many cultures, religions and races. This openness towards others is probably due to the fact that segregation was not part of their (or my own) context whilst growing up. Members of the younger generation today are more comfortable with people who differ from them (cf. Knitter 2012:7–8), as they have grown accustomed to living in an ever-changing world in which people are constantly changing and evolving.

Another aspect which must be factored in are the similarities shared by different religions. Knitter (2012), in his book *Introducing Theologies of Religions*, highlights the mutual aspects in the different world religions by using a sports analogy:

[T]here's got to be something that the religions have in common that makes the game of dialogue possible in the first place. You might say that they all have to be playing soccer. If one religion, as it were, plays 'basketball' and the other 'baseball', they're not going to be able to play with each other. (pp. 110–111)

This means that on some level all religions have to have something in common for dialogue to take place. However, this does not mean all religions are essentially the same – this then would again fall back on relativism – but in every religion there has to be some similarity. Take humankind for instance, all humans are different, they differ in age, race and nationality, however, every human being in some sense has something in common with all other humans. For example, Knitter (2012:9) refers to Karl Rahner, who stated that all people have an inexhaustible need to know and to love '[t]he human being is a being that needs to know and to love/be loved.' Therefore, the need to be loved and to know are two of those things that all human beings have in common.

Knitter (2012:112–113) refers to three bridges that connect all religions to each other. The first of these so-called bridges is the philosophical-historical bridge. When we refer to the historical part, we can say that all religions are historically limited. When Knitter (2012:112) refers to the philosophical part of this bridge which all religions have in common, he means that there is the philosophical probability that there is one Divine reality within all religions. A second bridge, the religious-mystical bridge, rests on the fact that the divinity or 'the Divine', according to Knitter (2012:112), is experienced by any one religion and yet it is also present in the mystical experience of all of them. The last of these bridges refers to the ethical concern of all religions and is called the ethical-practical bridge. The suffering of the Earth and its inhabitants is a central concern for all religions. Knitter (2012:113) says that this suffering is important to all religious people and calls all religious groups to action, 'which if taken seriously will enable them to realize an even more effective dialogue with each other.'

It is therefore clear that although there are many difficulties involved in dialogue amongst religions, dialogue can and has already been a successful endeavour amongst the various religions. This is due to the fact that there are similarities between the various religions (as mentioned above). My hypothesis is that the difficulties do not outweigh the solution, but rather point to the fact that a solution is of the utmost importance. In a country where so many cultures, traditions, languages and religions are involved, there seems to be no better time than the present for us to start communicating with one another.

## ■ Methodology

The methodology of this study can be referred to as being a mixed-method approach, as quantitative as well as qualitative research will be used. In a certain sense this study is also a literature study, therefore a broad overview of recent research in the field of interreligious dialogue and theology of religions will be given. The *praxis* of interreligious dialogue can be helpful, especially for a country like South Africa, because this country is the home of many different religions, including African traditional religions and ancestor veneration. Therefore, the different models and theories involving the theologies of religions (*theoria*) will be researched and brought to light. Recent theologians, such as Paul Hedges, David Cheetham and Paul Knitter, have devoted their attention to the theology of religions. The aim is to study recent literature and to bring the work of the various writers into conversation with one another. The work of these theologians, as well as others, will also be brought into conversation with the South African context. This is where the quantitative as well as the qualitative data are relevant.

Census results will be used to paint a broad picture of the South African context and the role of predominant religions. The data retrieved by Statistics South Africa (census) are the quantitative facet of the study. The study will, however, also have a qualitative facet: The aim is to converse with adherents of the different major religions in South Africa and to gain some information about their experiences with other religions, as well as to gain some perspective on the significance which the respondents attach to their religious views in relation to people who differ from them. Therefore, a set of questions will be put to respondents drawn from the different major religions in South Africa (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism and African traditional religions). These respondents are more than just anonymous dialogue partners, they are fellow researchers. Buddhism will be discussed as well, although as Buddhists constitute less than 0.05% of the population of South Africa, I have been unable to find a respondent to participate. Therefore, the census data will be used when referring to Buddhism in South Africa. A number of relevant questions have been compiled, however, the dialogue partner will determine the direction that the conversation takes.

## ■ Why the South African context?

Kritzinger et al. (1994:80–81) use the results of the 1980 census in South Africa to sketch the religious make-up of our rainbow nation. The results showed that there was quite a small percentage of Hindu, Muslim, Jewish and other non-Christian South Africans living in South Africa during the 1980s. Kritzinger et al. (1994) referred to the country as being ‘overwhelmingly (nominally) Christian’ and also stated the following that is of importance for this present study:

This, however, does not mean that the interreligious dialogue will not be an important feature of South Africa in the years to come. It is questionable if we are quite ready for this exercise. (p. 81)

South Africa has been a democratic country for 20 years, during which the Constitution has protected the citizens of this nation and allowed them the freedom to choose their own religious views and to voice these views. Maybe now is as good a time as ever for interreligious dialogue. The argument of this study is just this: As a country, South Africa is currently at a time in its history where its citizens are more ready than ever to take part in interreligious dialogue (cf. Knitter 2012:7). This dialogue might be long overdue.

Being a South African myself, studying in an environment where many of my peers are from various religions, and due to the fact that I was born into a multifaith family, I have experienced interreligious dialogue. I have also experienced how rewarding interreligious dialogue can be, but have witnessed how if not treated with sensitivity, dialogue could damage relationships. Diversity is a predominant characteristic of South Africa and it is a part of the everyday life of South Africans, therefore it is an ideal context in which to initiate such dialogue.

Due to the fact that the information used by Kritzinger et al. (1994:81) is gained from the results of the South African census in 1980, these data are admittedly outdated. However, one is faced with a predicament when trying to gain knowledge about South Africa’s current religious statistics. In the latest South African census (2011) no inquiries were made involving religious views. When further investigation is done about the reason why the question of religion was no longer inquired about in the census done in 2011, Statistics South Africa provides the answer by saying that:

In 2008, Stats SA embarked on a series of user consultations, to get advice as to what questions should be asked in the questionnaire. The question on religion was low on the list of priorities as informed by the users of census data, and it therefore did not make it onto the final list of data items.<sup>23</sup>

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23. See the Statistics South Africa website at <http://www.statssa.gov.za/census2011/faq.asp> for more on how the latest census was conducted.

We can assume that because the Constitution of South Africa permits all people living in South Africa the freedom to choose their own religious views, the users of the census data viewed questions concerning religion as irrelevant. As there are no new statistics on the religious make-up of South Africa, one is forced to use the statistics gathered by the census done in 2001.

This chapter consists of four sections. Firstly, the problem on which this study will focus is described as well as the parameters of the study: This being the South African context. Secondly, a focus on the *theoria*, which is the theology of religions, will follow. The different models for the variety of approaches found in the theology of religions pertaining to the existence of many different religions will be discussed. Paul Knitter's book on the theology of religions (*Introducing Theologies of Religions*, 2012) will be the main source used, as he gives a detailed account of the different approaches towards the existence of various religions.

The third section will focus on the South African context. The situation of the context will be sketched by using census data as well as information that has been gathered by conducting interviews and discussions with respondents. In the last section the focus will be on the benefits of dialogue, and Knitter's (1995) approach to dialogue will be discussed (as a possible approach for interreligious dialogue in South Africa) and Tutu's (2013: 21–24) views on ubuntu will be examined to determine how dialogue may serve the interests of South Africans.

## ■ The theology of religions

In this section the focus will be on defining the concept of theology of religions and the models that have been formulated by this theology, so as to explain the different ways Christianity has reacted towards other religions. Various definitions of the theology of religions will be provided and compared with one another. Knitter's (2012) use of four main models concerning the theology of religions will be examined and brought into conversation with other views on how Christianity has reacted when faced with the reality of a multireligious world. Practical examples of these models will be provided and the dialogues will be categorised according to these models.

## ■ What is the theology of religions?

The theology of religions is the discipline of theological studies which attempts to measure the value of other religions as well as to account theologically for the meaning of these other religions (Kärkkäinen 2003:23). This field of study is occupied

with questions pertaining to the existence of multiple religions. These questions lead to many other questions that must be considered. Barnes (2002:6) refers to these questions as:

Open-ended questions of the possibility of God in the world of many faiths ... [*that*] have emerged in recent years as a distinct area of theology, often referred to as the theology of religions. (p. 6)

Kärkkäinen (2003:23) lists some of these questions: If there is but one Deity (being God), how is it then not possible to have only one religion? Are all these religions valid? How does one decide upon only one religion? Do all the different religions relate to one another or is the content of these religions conflicting? Gorski (2008:5) adds to these questions: Does God act within other religions? Can these religions lead to salvation, and are non-Christian religions true religions? The attempt of Christian theologians to answer these questions (and others that arise subsequently) constitutes this discipline, the theology of religions (Knitter 2012:2; cf. Gorski 2008:5).

This area of theology requires theologians to study Christian Scripture and traditions as well as the work of historians and 'comparative religionists' (Knitter 2012:2). They will then have to view this knowledge in relation to the fundamental texts of other religions as well as conversing with the followers of other religions in order to understand them more adequately (see Hedges 2010:17).

Hedges (2010) says that in its basic form theology of religions:

[I]nvolves constructing an interpretation of how Christianity relates to other religions, what the nature of these other religions is, and what may happen to followers of other religions soteriologically (to do with salvation). (p. 16)

He refers to the theology of religions as being a subbranch of the larger discipline of Christian systematic theology, 'which deals with the superstructure of Christian faith in terms of doctrine and belief' (Hedges 2010:6–17). The existence of other religions in relation to Christianity forms a part of systematic theology.

There are various theological positions on the relation of Christianity to other religions. Knitter (2012) refers to these major theological positions as 'models' and identifies four of the predominant models as: The replacement model, the fulfilment model, the mutuality model and the acceptance model. Every model is in some way based on or in accordance with the views of a theologian who influenced the conception of the specific model. Each of these models, as well as the views of the theologians who are influential on these theologies, will be discussed subsequently. Relevant contributions will also be discussed.

## ■ The major theological views on the relation of Christianity to other religions<sup>24</sup>

These theological views are expressed as models, which makes the *theoria* of the theology of religions more substantial.

### ■ The replacement model

In the problem statement an exclusivist view or exclusivism was referred to. This model is just that. Hedges (2010:20) puts it plainly that, ‘exclusivisms are the range of beliefs that say only Christianity leads to salvation and that, generally, anyone who adheres to a different religion must therefore be going to damnation.’ Plantinga (2000:400), who argues against other theologians’ (Knitter 2012:113–114)<sup>25</sup> pluralist views, defines his views on exclusivism by saying (see Meeker 2006):

[F]ollowing current practice, I shall call [*exclusivism the view*] ... that the tenets or some of the tenets of one religion – Christianity, let’s say – are in fact, true ... [*and*] any propositions, including other religious beliefs, that are incompatible with those tenets are false. (p. 194)

Knitter (2012:19) further explains what this concept of exclusivism or replacement means, by saying ‘Christianity is meant to replace all other religions. This is the first of the Christian attitudes toward other faiths.’ There are differing views on how Christianity must replace all other religions and how such an endeavour should take place, but ‘Christian missionaries throughout the centuries have cast forth into the world with the conviction that it is God’s will to make all peoples Christians’ (Knitter 2012:19).

This model is based on the conviction that there is but one God and that it is the will of this one God that all people belong to only one religion, this religion being Christianity. It is not necessarily true that this model supposes that all other religions are of no value. However, if these religions are in some way of value it is merely of transitional or conditional value. This means that other religions are only truly useful if they lead the religious person to Christianity (Knitter 2012:19).

What does this mean for the salvation of humankind? Knitter (2012:19) explains the model’s stance on salvation as follows, ‘God’s love is universal, extending to all; but that love is realized through the particular and singular community of Jesus Christ.’

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24.This section is compiled using the research of Paul F. Knitter (2012). Other sources will be used and referred to in the text.

25.Specifically John Hicks’ pluralistic views, which will be referred to when the mutuality model is discussed later on.



Knitter (1995) says that the replacement model suggests that:

[A]ny recognition of the truth or saving power of other religions or religious figures is a slap in the face of God; it denigrates what God has done in Jesus.<sup>26</sup> (p. 27)

This model might seem outdated, but Knitter (1995:26) stated in the mid-1990s that it was alive and well, and repeats this statement in a later publication in 2012. In both publications he places this model first on his list of Christian theologies of religion, as he believes that this model should not be underestimated because it is the predominant attitude amongst Christians when assessing the value of other religions.

This model can be separated into two different positions: The concepts of total replacement and of partial replacement.

## Total replacement

The approach of the total replacement model is based on the conviction that all other religions are completely lacking, aberrant and unwonted and that Christianity will inevitably have to take the place of all other religions (Knitter 2012:19–32). This model has historically been the predominant view of mainstream Christian churches (Knitter 2012:23).

The theologian who has been most influential with regard to this model is the Protestant Karl Barth (1886–1968). According to Knitter (2012:23) Barth laid the theological foundations for the replacement model’s understanding of other religions. Karl Barth’s theology was not necessarily aimed at being a theology of religions, however, his view on religion in general is the main focus of this model. Barth formulated his theology in a changing context where Christianity had to adapt to the humanism which came with the Enlightenment of the 1920s and 1930s. In reaction to the liberalism brought forth by the Enlightenment, Karl Barth set out to find a way to relate the message of Christ with the changing times. In his writings he came to the conclusion, which he believed to be the message of the Gospel, that ‘human beings cannot get their act together by themselves. But with God, they can. Yet, for this to happen, humans have to step back and let God be God’ (Knitter 2012:24).

For Barth the four *solas*<sup>27</sup> embodied the good news of the New Testament. The first *sola*, *sola gratia*, states that humankind cannot save itself; human beings are burdened by sin and their fallen nature and cannot be freed of these things by themselves (ourselves). It is therefore grace alone which ensures that sinners can be freed. The second *sola* states

.....  
26.This is more of a total replacement statement, than a partial replacement statement.

27:‘Sola’ means alone or only.

that humankind is saved by faith alone, *sola fide*. Humans can be saved, but this salvation is not due to the good deeds or any work that has been done. This means that trust is extremely important (Knitter 2012):

[T]o trust to do nothing else but turn oneself over completely to someone else, is so frightening that it feels impossible – Barth would say it *is* impossible. Thus, the need for the third ‘alone’.  
(p. 24)

The third sola, *sola Christo*, states that it is in Christ alone, that God has granted salvation. It is through Christ that humankind is reconciled with God. This sola has serious implications for religions that do not acknowledge the existence of Christ as the Son of God. The last sola, *sola scriptura*, states that it is through the Bible that the reality of Jesus and this salvation he grants becomes clear to humankind (Knitter 2012:24–25).

Barth (1956–1975), makes the following statement about religion, based on the Bible and his belief in the *solas*:

Religion is disbelief. It is a concern, indeed, we must say that it is the one great concern, of godless man ... From the standpoint of revelation religion is clearly seen to be a human attempt to anticipate what God in His revelation wills to do and does do. It is the attempted replacement of the divine work by a human manufacture. The divine reality offered and manifested to us in revelation is replaced by a concept of God arbitrarily and wilfully evolved by man. (pp. 299–300)

Barth portrays humankind to be, because of religion, exactly what it should not be. Humanity does not stand back and allow God to be God, but creates rituals, laws and beliefs of their own, instead of merely trusting God (Knitter 2012:25). This is Barth’s way of saying that religion is man-made and not the product of divine work. Religious people are not saved by their religions, beliefs or works of faith, but by the grace of God. Therefore, all religions are inadequate, not only non-Christian faiths, but Christianity too. Knitter (2012:25) states that not only other religions are harshly judged by Barth, ‘he levelled [*his criticism*] not only at “other” religions but also, and especially, at Christianity.’ Kärkkäinen (2004:17) points out that ‘Christianity is not immune to criticism of religion.’

One then wonders if there is any true religion. According to Barth there is. Even though Barth placed all religions in the same category of active idolatry, he states that Christianity is the true religion (Knitter 2012):

Christianity is the true religion because it’s the only religion that knows it is a false religion; and it knows, further, that despite its being a false and idolatrous religion, it is saved through Jesus Christ. (p. 26)

Barth’s view of Christianity being the only true religion places Christ at the centre of the argument. Christianity then has no need to partake in dialogue with any other religion; these religions have no saving grace, they have no Jesus and therefore there is no need for

dialogue. There can be no relationship between Christianity and other religions. Barth (1956–1975:295–296) states this clearly by saying ‘we have here an exclusive contradiction.’ The only option for the Christian is to ‘lovingly and respectfully announce the Gospel and let the light of Christ take the place of the darkness that exists without him’ (Knitter 2012:26).

It is important to note that Karl Barth’s theology is not the only foundation for the total replacement model. Something that must be factored in is that the New Testament plays an essential role in this model. Knitter (2012:27) states that it is because Barth’s theology of religions is ‘normed by the biblical witness’, that it has such an impact on this specific view of religions. The Bible and specifically the New Testament is of fundamental importance to the Christian religion; it is what Christians base their lives on and therefore it plays a significant role in the lives of all Christians, no matter what church they belong to. Knitter (2012) highlights the imperative role of the New Testament in Christian thought about other religions, by saying:

One does not necessarily have to take the Bible literally to recognize that one of the most evident and central messages of the New Testament is that Jesus is the means, the only means, that God has given to humans by which they can figure out what life is all about and get out of the mess they’re in. (p. 27)

There are a number of New Testament texts which plainly state that Jesus is the only way to salvation. These texts include Acts 4:12, 1 Corinthians 3:11, 1 Timothy 2:5, John 14:6 and 1 John 5:12. These are not the only texts that could be listed as essential to this model. There are texts that highlight the hopelessness of humankind without Christ<sup>28</sup> and texts which focus on the necessity of hearing and believing the gospel in order to be saved<sup>29</sup> (Knitter 2012:28). One cannot avoid these texts when dealing with the Christian theology about other religions. These texts are central to the way Christians view their faith and therefore have a significant impact on the way Christians view other religions.

For Christians, who base their lives on the New Testament as followers of Christ, it is not difficult to believe that there is only one way to salvation and that this is exactly what God has provided through Christ. Therefore, based upon their belief in the Bible they make it clear that if Jesus is the only way to salvation, all other religions and paths to salvation must be false and must therefore be replaced by Christianity. Knitter (2012:30) states that due to living in a world with so many uncertainties and difficulties, humankind in some way seeks one solution, one path to a unified, cooperative truth that they can be sure of. The replacement model provides just that: A singular God-given way which makes complete sense.

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28. See the first three chapters of the letter addressed to the Romans.

29. See John 3:36, Romans 10:14, 17.

However, there is a less exclusivistic version of the replacement model, which focuses on the presence of God within the sphere of other religions. In what follows the concept of partial replacement will be discussed, which is the second branch developed in the model of replacement.

## □ Partial replacement

What differentiates the partial replacement model from the total replacement model is that this branch of the replacement model states that God is revealed to all people (Knitter 2012:33–49). Whereas in the total replacement branch it is stated that other religions have no value, because God is not present in any religions besides Christianity, this model rejoices in the genuine revelation of God in other religions (Knitter 2012:33). The partial replacement model ‘represent[s] ways in which God gives answers and reaches out to the human search’ (Knitter 2012:34).

Knitter (2012:34) states that the reason why Christians should be open to recognising God’s presence in other religions is that there are various texts in the Bible stating this. Examples are Romans 1:20 and 2:15, which speak of God communicating to people through nature (creation) and the human conscience. Acts 17:27 states that God is not far from ‘each one of us’ and Paul announces to the Athenians that it is through God that they (we) live and exist (or as the text puts it ‘have being’). Knitter (2012:34) lists the beginning of the Gospel of John (Ch. 1, vv. 1–4) as one of those texts that state that God is present in all people. The Gospel according to John states that the Word gave life and that ‘this light was the life of *all* people.’

One can also refer to the Reformers, specifically Martin Luther and John Calvin, who spoke of a sense of God inherently instilled into human nature (Knitter 2012:34). This sense of the divinity (*sensus divinitatis*) or a seed of religion (*semen religionis*), as it is also referred to, has been planted into all humankind by God (McGrath 2007):

God has endowed human beings with some inbuilt sense or presentiment of the divine existence. It is as if something about God has been engraved in the heart of every human being. (p. 161)

What is referred to here is ‘not so much a case of God speaking to people, from above and beyond; rather, God’s voice is heard within’ (Knitter 2012:34–35). Calvin also spoke of the universality of religion as a consequence of this built-in sense of God.

Other theologians such as Paul Tillich and Wolfhart Pannenberg speak of the presence of God in all human beings in their own way. Tillich speaks of the fact that the presence of God is revealed when one is grasped by what he refers to as an ‘Ultimate Concern’. Pannenberg, on the other hand, refers to the process of history as being the vessel for God’s presence in the lives of humans (Knitter 2012:35).

Therefore, it is clear that the partial replacement model declares that God speaks not only to Christians, but that he is present in other religions as well. These religions can make believers aware of the existence of God and of his loving, caring nature. All religions have redemption as a theme and create the awareness that God is needed for salvation. Therefore, all religions reveal some truth about God (Knitter 2012:36).

When this model maintains that God is present in all humankind and that all religions in some way have value, it does not mean that salvation can take place through other religions. Although these religions may be of some value and there may even be revelation in them, there can be no salvation without Christ. This model (Knitter 2012):

[C]annot affirm that God also brings to other believers to what Christians call salvation – that is, unity with God, to a sense of being loved, affirmed, forgiven, and held by God, and to the assurance of eternal life after death. While these theologians say clearly that God reveals in other religions, they just as clearly declare that God does not save in other religions. (p. 36)

The partial replacement model bases the declaration that salvation cannot be found through other religions on the New Testament. Although the New Testament makes references to God revealing himself to all humankind, it makes no statements of general revelation as vehicle for salvation. We are yet again back to the *sola* which declares that it is through Christ alone that one is saved (Knitter 2012:37; cf. Knitter 2012:24). The rift between God and humanity, caused by sin, has been mended by Christ and it is solely through Christ that humanity is reunited with God.

Braaten (1981; see Knitter 2012:37) speaks about the way salvation is understood in terms of this model:

In the texts of the New Testament and early Christian traditions Jesus is depicted not as a saviour but as *the* Saviour, not as a Son of God, one among many in a pantheon of gods and half-gods, but as the one-and-only Saviour of the World, God's only begotten Son. This exclusivity claim is part of the kernel of the gospel, not so much husk that can be demythologized away ... Jesus is the one-and-only Saviour, or he is not Saviour at all. (pp. 74–75)

Pannenberg (1990:100–101; see Knitter 2012:37–38) had his own reason for stating that Christians must insist that Christ is the only Saviour: Christ himself made this statement about himself. He bases this claim on what Knitter (2012:3) calls 'the surest thing we can know about the historical Jesus', which is that Jesus thought himself to be the eschatological prophet. Pannenberg (1990) puts it this way:

[S]ince the impending future of God was becoming present through him [*Jesus*], there is no room for other approaches to salvation besides him. [...] The presence of God in Jesus was not first a matter of Christian experience, but a claim of Jesus himself and this claim involved eschatological finality. (pp. 100–110)

To say that humanity can be saved by anyone (or anything) other than Christ would be to contradict Christ himself (Knitter 2012:38). Not only is Christ seen as the only Saviour, but it is also only through Christ that humanity knows that it can be saved by faith alone. This means that to be saved and to 'know and truly feel the power of God's love and presence, they somehow have to come into contact with Christ' (Knitter 2012:38). This then leads us back to *sola scriptura*, because it is through the Bible that one comes into contact with Christ. Therefore, it is through the preaching of the gospel that one comes into contact with Jesus, who then makes humanity aware of the need for salvation. This again means that the revelation which takes place through other religions cannot lead to salvation; these religions 'can't bring this revelation to fruition' (Knitter 2012:38).

According to this model the Christian idea of salvation differs acutely from other religions' view of salvation (Knitter 2012:39). In these other religions there is a need for the followers of these faiths to save themselves. In other words, the followers try to win God's love and salvation by doing good deeds, they do not trust in God or his grace. Brunner (1980:122) states that in 'non-Biblical religions, humans seek themselves, their own salvation; even in their surrender to the Deity, they want to find their own security.' Two other criticisms that this model has against other religions are that they either personalise<sup>30</sup> or depersonalise<sup>31</sup> God (Knitter 2012:39). Tillich adds another critique by saying that all religions lose sight of the fact that rituals and words are merely symbols for the Divine and that they are not the Divine itself; no words or rituals can become God, they are used only to express something about God (Knitter 2012:40).

Although this model maintains that salvation is impossible through any other religion than Christianity, its approach to revelation being a possibility in other religions allows for the possibility of dialogue between Christianity and other religions. No matter the state of their salvation, the religious Other is still a child of God and therefore should be respected. Netland (1991:297–300) states that there are topics that can be discussed amongst religious people from different faiths and that these discussions can be valuable. In dialogue with one another, people from different faiths can trade information about the content of their religions; this can be conducive to correcting the prejudices, mistrust and conflict between religions. Social, environmental and political concerns can be shared in the attempt to create cooperation amongst the differing faiths, to resolve some of the possible issues in concerning these topics (Knitter 2012:41).

The dialogue will, however, inevitably lead to the differences and similarities between the religions that take part in this dialogue, and based on the replacement model the differences will undoubtedly outweigh the similarities. Pannenberg states that this, the

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30. Making God out to be a divine being whose actions are predictable or can be dictated.

31. Making God out to be an abstract concept or principle that cannot be grasped or understood.

similarities and differences between religions, are exactly what has become the subject of dialogue (see Knitter 2012:41). Knitter (2012) explains what is meant by this statement:

Persons from different religions can best help each other by talking about their disagreements – where they think the other is wrong; why each party believes that its views is superior to others ... This is where the dialogue becomes interreligious, where religious people are not just trading information or working on social matters but talking about what really matters to them: God's truth. (p. 41)

It is also important that dialogue be carried out with mutual respect for the religious freedom of the religious Other – this is especially important in the South African context, as religious freedom is enshrined in the Constitution of South Africa.<sup>32</sup> A dialogue carried out with respect becomes evangelism, not proselytising<sup>33</sup> (Knitter 2012:41). The partial replacement model states that if dialogue is handled with respect and sensitivity and does not lead to the condemning of one another, then Jesus will prove himself to be the name in which people come to know God. Thus, according to this model, other religions do pave the way for the acceptance of the gospel, 'but it is a negative preparation: they provide questions, or indicate directions, which only Jesus can answer and guide' (Knitter 2012:41).

Once again Braaten's (1977) views can be used to summarise the relationship of Christianity with other religions, according to this model:

Religions are not systems of salvation in themselves, but God can use even them to point beyond themselves and toward their own crisis and future redemption in the crucified and risen Lord of history. (p. 109)

Therefore, God can make use of other religions, they are not merely useless and thus cannot be rejected completely (Knitter 2012:42).

It must, however, be stated that amongst exponents of the replacement model there is no consensus about the salvation of people who have never heard of Christ. Some state that these people perish (see Knitter 2012:45, where he refers to opinions of fundamentalists who follow this line of thinking), others invoke a kind of Christian agnosticism. They do not know what happens to a person who has never heard of Christ and the salvation found in him. There are, however, those optimists who believe that in some way God will save those who have never had the opportunity to accept Christ as Saviour. Whether he saves them by giving them a choice after death, sending them a messenger in their last minutes of life or determining whether they would have accepted Christ if they had the chance, in some way they could be saved (Knitter 2012:46–47).

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32. See Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), Chapter 2 (Bill of rights), No. 15.

33. Convert or attempt to convert (someone) from one religion, belief, or opinion to another.

In what follows, the second model, the fulfilment model, will be explored to show how Christianity will inevitably have the task of fulfilling the many other religions.

## **The fulfilment model**

In this model the keyword is no longer *replace*, instead it is *fulfil*. This model uses the insights of the replacement model, affirms them, but also aims to answer the question posed by it (cf. Knitter 2012:63–98). Knitter (2012:63) states that the fulfilment model offers a theology that gives equal emphasis to the two foundational Christian convictions we have already heard about, ‘that God’s love is universal, extending to all peoples, but also that God’s love is particular, made real in Jesus Christ.’ He further states that this model embodies the majority of present-day Christianity.

The work of Karl Rahner was most influential with regard to this model, he is ‘arguably the most influential Catholic theologian of the twentieth century’ and he is the theological pioneer of the fulfilment model (Knitter 2012:68; see Kärkkäinen 2004:31). Rahner based his theology of religions on a statement which is central to Christianity: God is love. These three words, however, have certain implications. For Rahner, the implications of this central Christian concept of God being love are that ‘God wants to reach out and embrace all people and beings’ (Knitter 2012:68). Therefore, God wants to save all people. This influential theologian ‘reminded us that what God wants, God does’ (Knitter 2012:68). This means that God will in some way act. If he is love and therefore wants to save all people, he will take the necessary steps to save humankind.

Rahner states that the way in which God acts is by communicating or revealing himself to all human beings. Knitter (2012:68–69) explains this concept by saying that God makes himself present and that this leads to all people being enabled to feel the reality (‘the peace, the affirmation, the tug, the lure’) of God’s presence. A term that remains central here is (yet again) grace, ‘God gives saving grace to every single human being. Otherwise, God really doesn’t love every single human being’ (Knitter 2012:69).

Rahner adds that humankind’s human nature is not so natural after all. Kärkkäinen (2004:33) says that human beings are not merely a part of ‘nature’, but they are ‘oriented toward an infinite, mysterious horizon of being that Christians know as God. In a sense, the human being as such is “super-natural,” oriented to something beyond nature.’

Knitter (2012:69) offers his own explanation of Rahner’s thinking by saying that if we as humans truly had the capability of being ‘natural women and men’, human beings would feel something more than their human nature, ‘we would feel our *graced* nature.’ This means that humankind would then be able to feel the power and presence of the Divine. Rahner refers to this as supernatural existential. Again Knitter’s (2012) explanation of the concept of supernatural existential is useful:



[O]ur very existence is more than nature – it is ‘super-nature’ – much, much more than what we think we are. Rahner used to say that there is no such thing as ‘just nature’ (*nature pura*): by being human, we are more than human. More simply: to touch and feel what we really are is to touch, or be touched by, the Divine, the Spirit of God. One might even say that human nature is of a piece with divine nature. (p. 69)

Rahner describes various ways in which the Divine and grace are present in human nature. It is an in-depth feeling, ‘vibrating’ within the most human activities. For him “grace” is not like a suit that we put on to look like God’s children; rather, it is like the electricity that lights up a light bulb to make it what it is’ (Knitter 2012:69). This analogy means that the love of the Divine does not merely welcome or receive humanity, it enters into the human being, fills humankind and permits a person to live differently, to be transformed. This transformation happens from within (Knitter 2012):

Among many particular examples that he [*Karl Rahner*] gives of how we can feel this divine presence within us, the most basic is what he called, in German, the *Vorgriff*. Signifying something built into our human nature, it means, loosely, ‘reaching for more’. In all that we reach out to, we are always reaching for more than what we try to, or do, grasp. (p. 69)

This concept of reaching for more can be best seen when one thinks about the need of every human being to know and to love. No matter the amount of knowledge a person has, there is always a need to know, the more a person knows the more they want to know. Knowledge leads to further questions, some to which answers are found and others which merely lead to more questions. The same can be said for love, the need of a human being to be loved and accepted, when responded to and reciprocated, is extremely satisfying, however, the need never becomes completely satisfied (Knitter 2012:69). Knitter (2012:69) states that it is in the love that a person receives or gives to another that the ‘tug’ of a greater love is experienced, ‘it is in loving and being loved by finite others that we love and are loved by the infinite Other.’

Rahner does not deny the existence of sin or selfishness, but views the relation between sin and grace, in the same way Paul did when he spoke of grace in his letter to the Romans, ‘[w]here sin increased, grace abounded all the more’ (Rm 5:20). This is what Knitter (2012) refers to as being the good news

If we have fallen into a deep ditch, we’ve also been given the means to crawl out of it. If selfishness and greed are, as we hear so often, simply ‘part of human nature’, the ability to love and care about others is even deeper, more powerful and satisfying part of human nature. (p. 70)

This is the reason why Rahner refers to himself as someone who is optimistic about salvation. He believes that goodness and evil are not in a 50/50 relation to one another, goodness always prevails. Goodness or grace is much stronger than evil, ‘our potential to be “saved” is greater than our reality as “fallen”’ (Knitter 2012:70).

Rahner also makes the startling claim that God is active in all religions. He comes to this conclusion by taking a look at God's presence in human history (Knitter 2012):

If we believe that God acts and breathes throughout human history, and we believe that that breath has to take visible, material shape, then the religions are the first areas we should investigate for clues of that Divine breath or Spirit. (p. 1)

Rahner believes that salvation is possible through religions other than his own. God is drawing all people closer to him through their distinctive religions. According to him non-Christian religions can have a positive effect on people, because they are a means of gaining the right relationship with God and thus the attainment of salvation. This means that the religious Others cannot merely be saved *despite* their religion, but rather *because of* their religion.

Knitter (2012) states that Rahner did not approve of all religions, he merely established the possibility of the Divine in other religions:

Whether the possibility is a reality has to be a further conclusion from the concrete study of, and dialogue with, persons of other faiths. Rahner was just opening a possibility – but one that never before was open for Christians. (p. 71)

However, Rahner did not doubt the fact that there are corrupt and illegitimate facets of all religions and that all people have the responsibility to use their own discernment to decide what the imperfections and fallacies in these religions are. Rahner's theology of religions can be summarised in three parts. Part 1 states that God's grace, his nurturing presence, is part of human nature; the second states that grace must always be embodied; and the third part ensures that his theology of religions is a Christian theology of religions, by stating that all grace is Christ's grace (Knitter 2012:72). This means that if God's grace and his presence are infused in human nature and history, it is solely due to Jesus Christ's acts in humanity. Rahner uses theological terms to indicate the way Jesus is involved in salvation: Christ is not the efficient cause of salvation. He is, however, the final cause of salvation. Knitter (2012) explains what this means:

Efficient causes produce something that wasn't there to begin with. Final causes represent the goal of what is being produced and so make possible and guide the entire production ... Jesus, says Rahner, is not the efficient cause of God's saving love. Such love has always been there, a given part of God's very nature. But Jesus is the final cause of this love insofar as in him we see what God is up to, what God intends to bring about in giving the Divine Spirit to all people. (p. 72)

Therefore, Jesus is in this case depicted as the total and final assurance of God's love and care being present in humanity, and he also assures humankind of their final destination in this life and the next (Knitter 2012:73). In Rahner's view the differences between the replacement model and the fulfilment model are evident; whereas the replacement model

states that salvation is only possible if one knows Christ, the fulfilment model states that those who do not know Christ can still experience the Divine saving love. However, they will not be able to see where this saving love is leading and what its purposes and possibilities are (Knitter 2012:73).

This view of salvation leads to an interesting view of the religious Other. People who are not part of the Christian religion are in a certain sense already Christians – they experience what Christians experience and they are also directed towards Christ, but they do not realise it yet. They can be referred to as anonymous Christians. It was, however, never Rahner's intention to depict the religious Other as anonymous Christians, but to liberate Christians to think differently of the religious Other, to help Christians realise that God himself can form Christians in whatever way he wishes (Knitter 2012:73–74). Rahner's view therefore does not set limits for the way in which God is present in humanity, or the way God acts towards humankind. Tutu (2013), however, has an opposing opinion and admonishes Christians:

[N]ot to insult the adherents of other faiths by suggesting, as sometimes has happened, that for instance when you are a Christian the adherents of other faiths are really Christians without knowing it. We must acknowledge them [*the religious Other*] for who they are. (p. 6)

What does Rahner's concept of the anonymous Christian mean for the church? Rahner (1966:133) says that the church should consider itself the 'historically tangible vanguard and the historically and socially constituted explicit expression of what the Christian hopes is present as a hidden reality even outside the visible Church.' Therefore, the task of the church is merely to make visible and clearer, that which is already there (Knitter 2012):

This means that the purpose of the church is not to rescue people and put them on totally new roads (although sometimes it will be necessary); rather it is to burn away the fog and enable people to see more clearly and move more securely. (p. 74)

It is clear that Rahner's theology of religions is much more inclusive than is suggested by the replacement model, however, it is still limiting in a certain sense. As Knitter (2012:75) says, Rahner's view of other religions still has an 'only', that cannot be surpassed and/or bypassed by other religions – only Jesus Christ is the final cause of salvation. Knitter (2012) uses a biblical figure to explain Rahner's theology of religions:

[O]ther religions, with all their possible truth and goodness, are to serve, as it were, the role of John the Baptist: to prepare the way, to make people ready to take the last step to join the Christian community, and thus, finally, to realize the meaning of the riches they had already been given ... Once other religions truly encounter Christianity, once the Gospel is really announced to them ... then the religions, like John the Baptist, have to step aside and make way for Jesus Christ. Before Jesus, all other religions lose their previous validity – or better, they *fulfil* it. (p. 75)

Whereas the first model, the replacement model, leans towards the particularistic position (salvation is found only through Christ), the second model, the fulfilment model,

leans slightly more towards the universalistic position (God wants to save all people and salvation is found outside of Christianity, when people are led to the realisation that Christ is the Saviour of humanity).

This model allows for the possibility that other religions can be channels of the Divine's saving love and that the 'Divine Spirit can breathe in other religions ... The Spirit touches people through other people, through stories, gestures, music, and dance – and may do so through other religions' (Knitter 2012:101). The belief that salvation and revelation, as well as the presence of the Divine, can be found in other religions, and therefore amongst the religious Others, places dialogue at the heart of this model. Dialogue then becomes essential according to the fulfilment model. This dialogue would have to take place in an atmosphere of mutual participation, respect and willingness to listen and learn.

There is, however, one particularity which is non-negotiable<sup>34</sup> according to this model, and this is the conviction that although the Divine's saving love and their presence cannot be limited to Christianity, Christ remains the fulfilment of all religions.

## The mutuality model

The mutuality model places even more emphasis on the universality of salvation as it states that there are many true religions and that all of these religions are called to dialogue (see Knitter 2012:109–157). Knitter (2012:109) speaks about how the time we are living in has had an effect upon people's views on the various religions: 'We are living in a time when many Christians are beginning to let go of exclusivist [*read replacement model*] and absolutist [*read fulfilment model*] claims.' There has therefore been progression in people's approaches to other religions. Borg (1999:96) speaks of this progression by saying that persons who agree with the mutuality model feel that the traditional theological telescopes that show other religions as ultimately having either to be replaced or fulfilled by Christianity are not really showcasing the possibilities in either other religions or the gospel of Christ.

This model seeks to find a way for Christianity to have a more authentic and/or sincere relationship with people from other religions; the mutuality model therefore views dialogue as a necessity for all religions (or as Knitter [2012:110] puts it, dialogue is a 'rock-bottom concern'). This model views all people as 'potential dialogue partners' (Knitter 2012:110). Secondly, this model seeks to find or create a fair space of equality for dialogue, as equality is important. This equality of all religions does not entail that all religions are equal, but that every religion has equal rights to voice their views and to be heard. Christians cannot expect all people to listen to their views without being prepared

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34.Cf. Knitter (2012:102–103) for other non-negotiable convictions in Christianity.

to listen to the various voices of the religious Others. A dialogue amongstst the various faiths then seeks to preserve and celebrate the differences and diversities in all religions, and also seeks to find the things that the various religions have in common (see Knitter 2012:110–111).

Lastly, this model seeks to find a clearer understanding of Jesus' uniqueness, which will sustain dialogue (Knitter 2012:111). Clearer understandings of Jesus and his unique characteristics are important to this model, because some traditional understandings of Christ and his church can create doctrinal complications for 'the ethical obligation to engage in authentic dialogue with others' (Knitter 2012:111). This model, therefore, seeks to celebrate and cherish the uniqueness of Christ, without diluting the uniqueness of other religions.

This model focuses on three bridges or connections between all religions, which were described earlier. These bridges are: Firstly the philosophical-historical bridge (that focuses on the historical limitations of all religions and the philosophical possibility of the one Divine Reality behind it); secondly, the religious-mystical bridge (based on the belief that the Divine is both more than anything experienced by any one religion and yet present in the mystical experience of all religions); and thirdly the ethical-practical bridge which focuses on the fact that all religions have a common ethical concern and responsibility to those who suffer (Knitter 2012:112–113).

The pioneer of the first bridge, the philosophical-historical bridge, is a theologian named John Hick. Hick's theology of religions seeks not to place the church, or Jesus, at the centre of the religious sphere of humanity, but to place God at the centre. This God he prefers to refer to as the Real, so as to ensure that people do not merely associate the image of the Divine with Christianity's view of God (see Knitter 2012:114).

Hick's hypothesis is based on the existence of the Divine Reality. If there is a Divine Reality, 'it forms the heart of all the different religions' (Knitter 2012:115). One of the reasons Hick provides for this Divine Reality's presence in the heart of all religions is that it serves the practical purposes of communication and cooperation between all religions:

*[I]f there is not a common source or goal for the religions, then not only do they speak different languages, but they're going in different directions ... For a creative Intelligence to have come up with such an arrangement would not speak well of creativity or intelligence. (p. 115)*

Hick provides another explanation for Divine Reality being at the centre of all religions. From his study of religious history, he has found that from as early as 800–200 BCE religions have had a common goal or agenda: Improvement of the human condition on Earth, by urging humanity to leave behind its self-centred lifestyle and turn towards a Reality-centred (God-centred) way of life (Knitter 2012:115). Knitter (2012:115) adds to this thought by saying that this is the reason why all those who are perceived as being

'holy' in the different religions, despite these religions being different in many ways, seem to be depicted in the same way, '[t]hey are persons who are profoundly at peace with themselves and trying to live in peace with others' (Knitter 2012:115). Another similarity between religions, which Hick describes, is the double nature of the Godhead in all religions. God transcends what can be experienced by humanity, but is also finitely experienced by humanity. The Godhead is infinitely above humanity's earthly experiences, but is also involved in all that is created by them. (Knitter 2012:115).

Hick also states that the Real cannot really be known, only an image of the Real can be known, this is due to the fact that the mind has its own way of processing that which is being perceived. Therefore, the Divine is real and also mysterious. This means that what the different religions claim about the Real is true, but it is merely a fraction of the entire truth.

Knitter (2012:116) quotes Hick, who says that the many religions of humanity therefore 'constitute different ways of experiencing, conceiving, and living in relation to an ultimate divine Reality which transcends all our varied versions of it.' Each religion, therefore, paints its own picture of who the Real is, of that which they believe to be true. They do this by using symbols, myths and metaphors. Each religion has its own symbols, myths and stories about the Real, 'Hick goes on to remind us that if that which is symbolized – the Real – is one, the symbols by which it is perceived and expressed will be many' (Knitter 2012:116–117). There are many symbols for the Real, because the Divine is versatile and humanity is characterised by diversity in culture.

The danger involved with the notion that there is but one Divine Creator, the Real, is that it could lead to relativism, if there is but one Divinity, 'reality' behind all the various religions, then does that not mean that no matter what religious path a person follows, it will inevitably lead to the same place? Then the differences in faiths would not be of any consequence, because all religions then lead to the same destination. Knitter (2012:118) states that this is not what Hick proposes. Differences in religions are of consequence. and not all religions lead to the same destination (Knitter 2012):

This is evident to anyone who has paged through the book of religious history. No one can deny how much damage the religions have done ... there are many things in history and present-day practice of religion that are simply intolerable. (p. 118)

These things include the crusades, apartheid and torture, amongst others, and prove that despite all the good and positive features in all faiths, there is also a lot of evil. Therefore, we should be able to tell the difference between those practices that are good and those that are evil, so that the practices that lead one down a path of evil can be avoided.

Hick does not state that all religious views, events, beliefs (or people, for that matter) are of equal value (Knitter 2012:118). He also provides a way in which one can evaluate whether a religious view or practice is of value. If the practice is focused towards

promoting the self-sacrifice for the good of others and it is a voluntary renunciation of ego-centeredness and a self-giving to, or self-losing in, the Real, then it has value, because it will then promote compassion, acceptance and love for all humanity (Hick 2004:325). Knitter (2012:119) maintains that the guiding factor Hick uses to avoid relativism is ethical, rather than doctrinal or experiential. Hick also states that one can never truly evaluate or rank the various religions (Knitter 2012):

Whether any one religion excels all the others can be known only when the journey is finished ... when history has ground to a close ... So what can be known only at the end should not distract us during the journey. For now, we should keep trekking – walking together and helping each other along our different paths. (p. 119)

Knitter (2012) explains the way Hick suggested Christians should approach dialogue with regard to the subject of Jesus:

[B]efore their brothers and sisters in other religions, Christians can and must continue to announce that Jesus is *totus Deus* – wholly God. But they cannot, and should not, claim that he is *totum Dei* – the whole of God. All that he was and all that he did and said were transfused with, and so expressive of, the Divine Spirit. But all that the Divine Spirit is and does cannot be confined to Jesus, or to any human incarnation of the Divine. (p. 123)

Hall (1988:33) states clearly that 'Jesus as he is depicted in the Gospels and the Epistles of the newer Testament, does not wish to be considered (as it were) all the God of God there is.' Hick (1973:159) concludes that this leaves the possibility open that other religious leaders and figures might also be *totus Deus*, 'wholly God'. This may be a difficult concept for any Christian to grasp, as most Christians learn from a young age that Christ is Lord, he is the human incarnation of God. This means that accepting that Christ is not the whole of God might be challenging for Christians. However, Jesus' double nature – fully human, but also fully God – can help in this instance, as Christianity states that the Divine is a transcendent Deity. Therefore, Christ (and the Holy Spirit) are immanent in God, therefore wholly God, but not all there is to God.

There is a second bridge to consider: The religious-mystical bridge. This bridge relates to those who believe that the Divine, the 'Mysterious Real', is being experienced within the many different religions and that there is (Knitter 2012):

[A] core mystical experience pulsating within the religious traditions that have endured through the ages. And if there is a core mystical experience pulsating within the religious experience, there is a core Mystical Reality within them all. (p. 125)

This accounts for the differences in religions, because each individual and each community has their own distinctive social context, thus they each experience the same mystical reality, but in a different way. This bridge seeks not to avoid or neglect the differences in the different faiths, but to show how these differences do not contradict the mystical similarities in the different faiths. This model takes the mystical path in trying to

understand something about religious pluralism, and that all religions are unified and that this unity can be experienced on a mystical level (Knitter 2012:125–126).

The person who has been most influential to this bridge is Raimon Panikkar. Knitter (2012) explains Panikkar's views as follows:

[W]hat he [*Raimon Panikkar*] sees from a vantage point of mystical experience is something that feeds both the prolific variety and the deeper unity of all religions. He has called it 'the fundamental religious fact'. It's a fact that 'does not lie in the realm of doctrine [*but*] may well be present everywhere and in every religion'. It's something that can be only known through experience, but once experienced, it tells us something very real about the world and about ourselves. As an experience, it imbues us with a sense of being at-one, connected, united, part of. (p. 127)

This Mystery which humanity is united with is an immanent reality which consists of three components: The Divine, humanity and the world. These three components are directly connected to one another, they differ but are intimately related to one another, the one is 'life-givingly related' to the other (Knitter 2012:125). Panikkar refers to these three components and their mystical relatedness as a cosmotheandric<sup>35</sup> reality. Panikkar (1993) elucidates the concept as follows:

The cosmotheandric principle could be formulated by saying that the divine, the human and the earthly – however we prefer to call them – are three irreducible dimensions which constitute the real, i.e., any reality inasmuch as it is real ... What this institution emphasizes is that the three dimensions of reality are neither three modes of a monolithic undifferentiated reality nor three elements of a pluralistic system. There is rather one, though threefold, relation which manifests the ultimate constitution of reality. (pp. ix–x)

This means that whatever the Divine is, 'it breathes within human and material' (Knitter 2012:127). This relationship between the divine, humanity and the earth is not static, but is ever-changing and growing. Panikkar (1973) continues:

Man and God are neither two nor one ... There are not two realities: God *and* man/world, but neither is there one: God *or* man/world ... God and man are, so to speak, in close constitutive collaboration for the building up of reality, the unfolding of history, and the continuation of creation ... God, man and the world are engaged in a unique adventure and this engagement constitutes true reality ... Cosmotheandricism is in a paradoxical fashion (for one can speak in no other way) the infinity of man/world ... and the finiteness of God. (pp. 74–75)

Therefore, it is this cosmotheandric experience of reality that dwells within and is made available through the various faiths of the world (Knitter 2012:128).

Panikkar prefers not to speak of a common denominator in all religions, as he does not think there is such a thing (Knitter 2012:128). He defines the concept of unity by

.....  
35. In Greek: *cosmos* = the world, *theos* = the Divine and *aner* = human [Knitter 2012:127].



saying that one cannot measure one religion by the other, 'or all of them by a common yardstick' (Knitter 2012:129). What does this then mean for the unity of the different faiths? Knitter (2012) explains Panikkar's viewpoint by saying that:

[I]f there's any unity within the world of religions, it's surrounded and protected by a wall of diversity. You can't find the unity without the diversity. Why is this so? For Panikkar the 'Mystery' within the religions is a reality that doesn't exist 'in itself' – that is, without humans and the world. So it has its being within the diversity of humanity and the world. (p. 129)

This then leads to the conclusion that God or the Divine is itself as diverse as the different world religions. Because the Spirit of the Divine is above reason, it cannot be boxed in. Therefore, Panikkar (1974:517) says that all religions must 'give up any pretence to monopoly of what religion stands for.'

For Panikkar dialogue is important, as in dialogue religions can learn, grow and expand their own identities (Knitter 2012:130). Panikkar uses the term *perichoresis*, that the early Greek theologians used to explain the Trinity as connected (or how the Trinity 'dances together', Knitter [2012]):

Just as the three persons of the Triune God receive, maintain and deepen their differences precisely by dancing in and out of each other, so the religious traditions of the world can dance in dialogue with each other and so grow in both difference and togetherness. (p. 130)

The last bridge connecting Christianity with other religions is the ethical-practical bridge. The thesis is that the ethical responsibility that all religions share can be the pillar on which an interfaith bond can rest. Knitter (2012:134–135) states that this is global responsibility and says that 'in being responsible for our endangered globe and all its inhabitants, the religions have new opportunities to understand both themselves and each other.' This bridge deals with what all religions are faced with, the existence of suffering (Knitter 2012):

There is a tremendous amount of suffering in our world today. If there's not more of it than ever before, we seem to be more aware of it. Also, it seems to be more threatening and unsettling than ever before. (p. 137)

There are various forms of suffering, which include poverty, victimisation, violence and patriarchy (cf. Knitter 2012:137). It is, however, not just humankind which suffers – this suffering extends to the Earth and all creatures. As humanity keeps growing, the Earth suffers increasingly, trying to keep up with this growth and consumption. Suffering is therefore not confined to one particular faith – all people are affected by it (Knitter 2012:138). All religions are faced with this problem.

Knitter (2012:138) states that if there were to be a religion that denies the experience of suffering and does not see it as a challenge which must be faced by all religions, then

that religion would have lost its relevance, 'if a religion has nothing to say about ... suffering, whatever else it says is either uninteresting or distracting.' Rabbi Irving Greenberg, former chair of the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Council, put it more boldly when he said that no theological statement should be made that could not be credible in the presence of burning children (Kearney 2013:60). The existence of suffering and the challenge of easing this suffering becomes the common ground for all faiths, where they must take a stand, 'a common stand' (Knitter 2012:138). Tutu (2013) speaks very passionately about the responsibility of all religions to ease injustice (a form of suffering which has been experienced in South Africa and across the globe):

[P]eople of religion have no choice in the matter. Where there is injustice and oppression, where people are treated as if they were less than who they are – those created in the image of God – you have no choice but to oppose, and oppose vehemently and oppose with all the force you have in your being, that injustice and oppression. (p. 19)

In his view of injustice and suffering, Tutu (2013:19) refers directly to the South African context by referring to the suffering caused by apartheid and racism.

Even if there are many different religions, they all share the same endangered context, the Earth. All religions have the same agenda. This shared agenda creates a bridge for dialogue. Knitter (2012:139) says that this bridge creates the platform for stating that talking after acting will make for better talking, 'if religious persons first spend time acting together in order to relieve eco-human suffering, they will be able more successfully to talk together about their religious experiences and beliefs.' It is when different faith communities work together that they will find themselves becoming friends (Knitter 2012):

In this kind of religious sharing among those who have struggled for justice and well-being, people will likely discover that they have 'new ears with which to hear' what a friend from another religion is saying. (pp. 141–142)

Knitter (2012) also notes the importance of the ending or easing of human suffering in the good news brought by Jesus:

[F]or Christians who follow Jesus the liberator, the first order of business in a theology and dialogue of religions will be to ask where and how these other religious communities might be trying to bring about what Christians call the Reign of God – where are they seeking to replace a world of human suffering and injustice with a society of compassion and equality. (p. 146)

It is therefore clear that the advocates of the mutuality model are realistic about the plurality of religions, and that this is the reason they seek bridges to connect the different religions in the hope that dialogue will be possible and the many different faiths will find common ground on which to walk. This model states that in some ways all religions are the same but also unique, and therefore the mutuality model seeks a context in which all religions can be enriched by each other.

## The acceptance model

The last model, the acceptance model, maintains that there are many true religions, and therefore it seeks to find ways to bring about peace amongst all faiths (see Knitter 2012:173–247). Knitter (2012) explains this model as:

[A]n approach to other faiths that feels it can better speak to the way people nowadays understand themselves and their world and at the same time fix those aspects of previous theologies that don't seem to work very well. (p. 173)

This model seeks not to find the similarities between the different religions, but to accept the diversity in all religions, '[t]he religious traditions of the world are really different, and we have to accept those differences – that, you might say, is the one-line summary of this model' (Knitter 2012:173).

This model was formed in and for the postmodern times that we are living in. Postmodern views do not embrace the concept of universal truths, but rather view difference as being 'life-giving' (Knitter 2012:175). It is therefore in a postmodern world view that diversity is embraced, as the *many* cannot be boiled down to the *one*, '[d]ifferent things can be interrelated, connected and brought into unifying relationships, but never to the point where you lose diversity' (Knitter 2012:175). Because of this one can say that truth is always many truths. Truth takes many different forms, to the point that it becomes not one, but many. Knitter (2012:175) declares that if there were to be one absolute truth, humankind would never know it, not in the present. He further states that 'truth is always plural not singular because (1) all human experience and all human knowledge are filtered and (2) the filters are incredibly diverse.' No person can separate themselves from the cultural, historical and social filters through which they view the world (Knitter 2012:175), therefore one world view cannot be measured according to the religious-cultural filters of another (Knitter 2012:176–177).

A theologian that has been one of the leading influences in this model is George Lindbeck. He provides a new perspective on religion, which can be referred to as the cultural-linguistic perspective (Knitter 2012:180). Lindbeck (1984:33) explains what he means by the postliberal cultural-linguistic perspective, thus '[a] religion can be viewed as a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought.' Knitter (2012) explains what this assertion means for the role of language in religion:

[T]he sequence is not: first the idea and then the articulation in words. Rather, it's the word and images that we are given by our religion that give shape to our religious thoughts and convictions. Really, words enable us to have thoughts in the first place! No one can think nakedly, as it were. Thinking is always dressed in some images and words ... Without religious words, we would not have religious feelings. (p. 180)

Lindbeck (1984:34) is of the opinion that a person must first have ‘external thoughts’ given to them by their culture and religion, before it becomes possible to have internal words in their minds and hearts. What then is also true is that the religious language a person receives from their culture makes and shapes the religious experience they have. Lindbeck (1984:33) says that ‘communicative symbol systems are a precondition ... for the possibility of experience.’ Therefore, people’s individual identities are not truly individual (Knitter 2012:180). Genetics obviously plays a role in who a person is, ‘but also ... who we are is determined by the communal and religious worldview that we are born into’ (Knitter 2012:180). Lindbeck (1984:33) regards religion as a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals ‘rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.’

Lindbeck’s view is that not only does an individual have filters through which they understand the world, but these filters determine what is being seen (Knitter 2012:181). Knitter (2012:181) states that these filters do not just identify meaning, they give meaning; they do not merely mediate, they create. Therefore, religious language creates the world we live in (Knitter 2012:181). Due to this, it is difficult for people who are pioneers of the cultural-linguistic approach to talk about that which religions have in common. If languages create the world and/or context in which people live, and these languages are different, then the worlds of these people will be different – therefore there can be no common ground (Knitter 2012:181).

This is the reason why Lindbeck (1984) rejects an inner experience of God which is common to all human beings:

There can be no experiential core because ... the experience that religions evoke or mould are as varied as the interpretive schemes they embody. Adherents of different religions do not diversely thematise the same experience, *rather they have different experiences*. Buddhist compassion, Christian love, and ... French Revolutionary *fraternité* are not diverse modifications of a single fundamental human awareness, emotion, attitude, or sentiment, but are radically (i.e., from the root) distinct ways of experiencing and being oriented toward self, neighbour and cosmos. (p. 40)

Therefore, it is impossible to translate one religion into the religious language of another; religions are untranslatable (Knitter 2012:181). However, there are overlapping terms in the different faiths, but these have different meanings and functions in the different faiths, because these faiths are different. Knitter (2012:182) explains that Lindbeck is insisting on a lack of common ground, and the impossibility of one religion really understanding and judging another – not because he wishes to isolate the different religions from each other, but because he wishes to preserve, protect and honour the differences between the different religions (Knitter 2012:182).

The question now is what the acceptance model says about dialogue. If religions are so completely different, is dialogue even possible? Knitter (2012:183) states that this

model is not against dialogue, but it seeks to be realistic not only about the advantages of dialogue but also its limitations and its 'dangers'. This model uses the concept of the different faiths being good neighbours to each other. Knitter (2012) explains what it entails to be a good neighbour:

Religions are to be good neighbours to each other. But to do that, each of them needs to recognise that, indeed, 'good fences make good neighbours'. Each religion has its own backyard. There is no 'commons' that all of them share. To be good neighbours, then, let each religion tend to its own backyard, keeping it clean and neat. In talking with one's religious neighbour – and that's what good neighbours do with each other – one is advised to do so over the back fence, without trying to step into the other's yard in order to find what they might have in common with oneself. (p. 183)

The key is that a neighbour must not attempt to make his own and his neighbours' backyards look exactly alike, as this would lead to a religion trying to fit into a culture and philosophy that is not its own. This may cause a religion to lose its own unique identity (Knitter 2012:183). How can one faith then be a good neighbour to another? Knitter (2012) says that:

[I]n a neighbourhood of religions, the first step in being good neighbours will not be to remove the fences and try to build a religious commons, but to try to be who we are as authentically as possible and to let our neighbours see who we are as we talk over our fences. (p. 183)

So the first key is just for religions to observe who their neighbours truly are, which means that every religion must just be true to themselves and live as authentically as they possibly can (Knitter 2012:184). This is then the foundation for further dialogue. Knitter (2012) states that this is an advantage for the different faiths:

[B]ecause postliberal Christians do not presume to know what is at the heart of all religions. Therefore, they don't start measuring each religion according to how much each one shows that common heart. (p. 184)

For this reason, there is no agenda for dialogue. Every religion will have to decide what the next step in this dialogue will be '[t]he conversation and the relation between religious believers will just happen, if they happen' (Knitter 2012:184).

A second theologian identified by Knitter who has impacted this model, is S. Mark Heim. To Heim religions are different from one another in every way: They have different endpoints and are different realities. He speaks of the concept of salvations, stating that all of the different faiths of the world are envisioning and attaining salvations, not salvation, '[t]hey're all moving toward different destinations, and, we can presume, they are arriving' (Knitter 2012:193). He believes that there is no such thing as a sole fate for all humanity, therefore until the end of time religions will stay different, 'and this means that after death people will be "happy" and "fulfilled" in very different ways' (Knitter 2012:193).

Heim (1995:153–155) extends these differences further by saying that there is not only one Ultimate or Divine, but a multiplicity of Ultimates '[t]his view suggests that when we're dealing with what is "ultimate" or "most basic" or "transcendent", we're better off using the plural rather than the singular' (Knitter 2012:194). Heim, therefore, states that there is a plurality amongst the religions, because there is a plurality within God. He then uses the image of the Trinity to explain what he means.

Heim also declares that to be is to be in relationship '[o]ne cannot simply exist; one must exist with. And that means that every-one needs an-other one' (Knitter 2012:195). Knitter (2012) explains what Heim's conclusion is:

[W]hat is true of God, is true of the world God created: to affirm that the being of God must be Trinitarian – that is, community of differences in relationship – is to also affirm that all beings must draw their existence and life from differences that give rise to relationship. (p. 149)

In Heim's (1995:175) own words, 'there is no being without difference and communion.' Therefore, there are many really different ways in which humanity relates to and finds fulfilment in God. The concrete form of these many different ways of relating to God is the many different religions (Knitter 2012:195).

Heim's viewpoint of many salvations creates a new perspective on dialogue. People from different faiths differ so much that no agreement or disagreement can be a threat. There is no fear of pushing the religious Others away nor a need to make them convert, as this model makes the dialogue partners comfortable with the fact that one faith's way is not the only way. Heim (1995:175–176) says that this dialogue is different from the dialogue made possible by the other models, because when a dialogue partner is facing someone who they know is utterly and unimaginably different from themselves, then this person has the opportunity to face another religious truth that is both 'real and alternative', and can open themselves to the possibility of learning something new. Knitter (2012:197) states that this model is extremely positive about dialogue. Heim is therefore also committed to dialogue and states that even though all religions are vastly different, they can and must talk to and learn from one another (Knitter 2012:198).

This dialogue will be characterised by the fact that a religious person will always view their own religious views as superior, but must then also accept the validity of other similar claims (Knitter 2012):

[A]nd to accept means to take seriously, to open oneself to the possible truth of such claims. Now we can better grasp what Heim means when he insists that we can be challenged by another religion only when we accept that it is really different from our own. (p. 198)

Dialogue cannot only lead to new knowledge about other religions, it can also bring forth a change in oneself (Knitter 2012:199). This model also states that dialogue can have an effect upon the state of suffering and the relief of injustice (Knitter 2012:200).

Heim is also an advocate of a Christocentric approach to dialogue. Knitter (2012) states the two reasons why Heim is Christ-centred:

First, it is only through Christ that Christians have come to experience and understand God as triune – that is, as inherently and profoundly relational both within God's self and with all creatures; but, second, Christ makes clear (or should make clear) to his followers that precisely because God is so personal and relational, God thrives on *particularity and diversity* in the way God relates. Since God's creatures are so different, God's relationships with them – God's revelations to them – will be really different. (p. 201)

This approach then 'enables Christians to balance the wobbly seesaw between full commitment to Jesus and a full openness to other religions' (Knitter 2012:201). Heim (1995:201; see Knitter 2012:201) says that when Christians resolve to follow Christ with their whole mind and heart, they must also keep the same mind and heart open to what God may do through other religious figures, 'Christ tells them [*Christians*] that God loves particularities, lots of them' (Knitter 2012:201). Therefore, Heim believes, as a Christian, that God can make use of other systems to reveal himself and save (Knitter 2012:201–202).

Other theologians who are advocates of the acceptance model view the process of forming a theology of religions in a reverse way, which means they state that dialogue must not be the final destination of a theology of religions, but that dialogue should be the starting point in the process of forming a theology of religions (Knitter 2012:203). These theologians state that a Christian theology of religions will be the fruit of dialogue and not the 'prelude' to it (Knitter 2012:203). They also state that any theology of religions must be a comparative theology of religions. According to Knitter (2012:204) this will mean that Christians will have to forget about 'what they think their tradition and theology tell them about other religions and simply go and see what the other religions say about themselves.' This is then the suggestion that comparative theology makes (Knitter 2012):

[B]ecause Christians do not yet have enough data, as it were, to put under their theological microscopes and because theology without data can easily become a blinder or an inoculation to what other religious traditions are proposing, let's call a temporary moratorium on all our theologizing about other faiths so that we can allow ourselves to actually talk with and learn from them ... The different models for a Christian theology of religions seem to be stuck; so let's leave them on the side of the road and look for help elsewhere – in the actual study of other faiths. (p. 204)

The proponents of comparative theology declare that not only does comparing one's own religion with others helps a person to form a Christian theology of religions, it also helps a religious person with their own self-understanding. The question is, however, how does one start to engage in this dialogue? Knitter (2012) explains what the comparative approach is:

Instead of taking up broad, often complex, issues like ‘the Christian and Buddhist notion of Ultimate Reality’ or ‘the Self in Hinduism and Christianity’, comparativists suggest that we zoom in and focus on particular texts or movements or images. In other words, limit the territory and explore it carefully. What one finds by way of similarities or differences in one small plot of dialogue will be road signs for further paths of conversation and exploration. (p. 222)

These dialogues will have to be entered into with respect, patience and trust (Knitter 2012:223). The comparative theologians put emphasis on friendship, ‘[m]ake friends who will guide you along the way’ (Knitter 2012:223). Comparative theology states that it is in friendship that we learn most about the religious Other – more than can be learnt in studying texts.

It is clear that the acceptance model wishes to create a feeling of comfort and acceptance for the many different religions, and seeks to celebrate these differences and uniqueness in all religions, without having to make one religion conform to another. In this model dialogue is a key component. This model seeks not to ask where all religions are the same, but rather wishes to embrace diversity.

## ■ Evolution from replacement to acceptance

In this section the different Christian theologies of religions have been described. There has been a clear evolution from the replacement model to the acceptance model, the first model stating that the only valid religion is Christianity and the last model embracing the many different religions. There has also been an evolution of the importance and possibility of dialogue, which seems impossible and futile in the total replacement model, but seems to be a necessity for all religious persons according to the acceptance model. Therefore, all the models, with the exception of the first model (the total replacement model), could be viewed as possible models for interreligious dialogue in South Africa.

The evolution from the first model to the last model does not mean that the first model (the replacement model) has now been left in the past, the replacement model has not been *replaced* by other models. There still seem to be advocates for all the different models. This will be delved into deeper in the next section, in relation to the interviews conducted with various respondents.

However, it must also be stated that these approaches are not the only ones there are regarding the many different faiths. It is also possible for a religious person to agree with many of the statements made in the various models, without committing to any specific one. Knitter (2012:216) states that the theory behind some of these models may lead a person away from some models in favour of others. Others might come to the conclusion that they do not fit into any of the stated models, and for these people the exploration



will continue. Whatever the case may be, these models are merely a broad overview of the leading theological approaches to the reality of religious pluralism.

In the next section the South African context will be sketched and the responses of a number of South Africans to the issue of multifaith dialogue examined.

## ■ The South African context

In this section the main focus will be on South Africans and their religious views. Firstly census results will be discussed, and a better perspective found of what the predominant religions in South Africa are. Secondly, information gathered through dialogues (or interviews) will be provided. The results of these dialogues will be discussed in light of the models which were the main focus of the previous section. Therefore, the strategy will be to relate the findings of the dialogues with the theories provided. Information in the previous section was based on the recent literature, and constitutes the literature review section of the mixed-method approach of this study. The current section was compiled using both quantitative information (census statistics) and qualitative information (findings of the dialogues).

## ■ What the statistics say about the South African context

As already stated, the most recent statistics about the religious groupings of the South African population were gathered in 2001 by Statistics South Africa during the national census. In the more recent census (which was held in in 2011) the section on religious groupings was not included in the questionnaire.

During the 2001 census Statistics South Africa (2011:24) gathered information about the religious groupings of South Africa and compared their findings with the statistics gathered in the 1996 census. In the 1996 census the information gathered showed that approximately 30 million South Africans (or people who are not citizens, but live in South Africa) stated that they were Christians (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). These Christians fall under various categories, such as mainline Christians,<sup>36</sup> African Independent churches, Zion churches, Pentecostal or Charismatic, and some merely stated that they were Christians from another denomination. In 2001 the statistics showed that the Christian population had grown, as 35.8 million people who

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36.The mainline churches in South Africa are Reformed churches, Anglican churches, Methodist churches, Presbyterian churches, Lutheran churches, Roman Catholic churches and orthodox churches as well as the United Congregational Church in South Africa (Statistics South Africa 2011:24).

live in South Africa stated that they belong to a Christian religious group of some kind (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). Statistics South Africa (2011:24) found that in both the 1996 and the 2001 censuses one-third of the population stated that they were associated with one of the mainline Christian religious groupings. In 2001 another one-third of the population stated they belonged to one of the independent Christian churches<sup>37</sup> (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). This means that in 2001, 79.8% of the South African population consisted of people who viewed themselves as Christians (Statistics South Africa 2011:28).

The 2001 census found that merely 0.3% of the population in South Africa viewed themselves as being a part of the African traditional belief. The Jewish population also had a very low percentage, with only 0.2% of the South African population stating that they were Jewish. Hinduism and Islam had nearly the same percentages: Hinduism – 1.2% and Islam – 1.5%. Under the category of ‘other religions’ the percentage was 0.6%, however, 0.9% of the population stated that they were participants of an Eastern religion. Buddhism was not listed as one of the religions that were practised in South Africa (in 2001), but it can be assumed that Buddhism forms part of these Eastern religions (Statistics South Africa 2011:24, 27–28).

Furthermore, 6.8 million people living in South Africa during the time of the census in 2001 stated that they had no religious affiliation whatsoever. This constitutes 11.7% of the people who took part. This number increased between the censuses of 1996 and 2001, as there were only 4.6 million people in South Africa who had no religious affiliation in 1996 (Statistics South Africa 2011:24).

It would be unwise and invalid to make any assumptions about what the statistics for religions in South Africa would be today. There has been no quantitative study, like a census since 2001, therefore one cannot be certain about what the current statistics would be. It is clear when one compares the information gathered in the 1996 census with the information gathered during the 2001 census that everything did not stay the same – some religious groupings grew in numbers, others declined, but none of them stayed the same. Therefore, we can only speculate that this would be the case if new statistics were gathered. What we can be somewhat sure of is that the religions mentioned in the censuses done in 1996 and 2001 would not have ceased to exist in South Africa, as it was not very difficult to find respondents from each of these religions to participate in this study (with the exception of the Eastern faiths).

It is, however, of some assistance to view these older statistics in order to get a (narrow) view of the religious groupings that have been practising in South Africa and to learn more about the religious make-up of this country.

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37.This group includes Zionist churches, iBandla lamaNazaretha and Ethiopian-type churches (Statistics South Africa 2011:24)

## ■ Why interviews?

The previous section focused on the different approaches in Christian theology of religions towards the religious Other, and it seemed important to obtain more insight into these religions. It seemed futile to do a study about the relationship between the various religions without obtaining more information on how people from the various religions in South Africa approach their fellow South Africans who are adherents of different faiths. What better place to learn more about religious people's approaches towards other religions, than from various religious people themselves? This study is about the possibility of interreligious dialogue – therefore dialogue simply had to be a part of this study.

It is important to note that with these interviews the aim was not to make generalisations concerning the different religions in South Africa. It would be inaccurate and irresponsible to base the approach of an entire religion towards other religions on a few participants' views. However, these interviews can be used as examples of theories. These interviews were also helpful as the respondents assisted this study by giving their perspective on other religions, as a result of which, not only a Christian voice (or perspective) was considered in trying to come up with a solution to the problems that were listed earlier.

Six respondents agreed to participate in this study. They are all South Africans, but differ in age and originate from different provinces in South Africa. Most of the respondents currently live in Gauteng province. All of the respondents will remain anonymous. They are all from different faiths, these being: Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism and African traditional religion. In what follows is an overview of the dialogue conducted during the interviews with the various respondents, and will then be compared to the theories discussed earlier. It is important to note that it is highly unlikely that any one of these dialogues would fit exactly into the parameters of merely one of the models. Therefore, the aim is to identify the various similarities (and differences) between these dialogues and the models discussed.

## ■ Dialogues with the religious other

### ■ Respondent A – Islam

Respondent A is a Muslim woman in her twenties, who recently got married. We met during the holy month of Ramadan. I met her at her place of work, which is in Pretoria, and she was extremely accommodating and easy to talk to.

She was open to the idea of talking about her religious views and spoke with ease about her culture and traditions. When I asked her to describe her religious views, she

referred to herself as being a Muslim, who believes that there is only one God. She specifically mentioned that she does not believe that the Son of God had lived amongst humans, this of course in relation to what Christianity believes Jesus Christ to be. She did not seem at all phased by the existence of other religions and said that she accepts that her own religion is not the only religion, and that all people believe differently in some way. However she views Islam as the last religion, although she is knowledgeable about the fact that it is not the first religion. Therefore, she perceives Islam as being the youngest, most recent religion and the one to which she devotes her life.

Respondent A mentioned that she has never lived with anyone from a different religion and that she previously lived in a predominantly Islamic area before she got married. Growing up in Pretoria and living in Erasmia, which is a neighbouring suburb of Laudium (an area situated northwest of Pretoria) ensured that she lived in a predominantly Muslim and Hindu context. The residents of Laudium are predominantly Hindus or Muslims, having equal representation of each religious group. She and her husband now live in a complex where not all of the people are Muslim. It seems that they do not have close relationships with their neighbours. This is more likely due to their having recently moved into this new home. Respondent A and her husband both also work full-time and do not have a lot of time to become acquainted with their neighbours.

Respondent A mentioned that she does have quite a few friends who are Christian and that she works in an environment where she is only one of two Muslims. This does not hinder her at all, she seems very content with her work environment and colleagues. She spoke about one of her close friends, who happens to be one of her colleagues. This friend of Respondent A is a Christian. She spoke about the fact that this friend often shares her Christian beliefs with her and that she seldom refers to Bible texts during these conversations. Respondent A said that it is during these conversations that she notices many of the similarities between her own religion and Christianity.

Although Respondent A went to an Islamic school, she mentioned that she had spent a lot of time growing up amongst Hindu friends. She describes her parents as being open-minded, and this had an impact on her. As a family they have respect and acceptance for other people's religious views. However, she mentioned that her own parents are more open to non-Muslims than her husband's parents, who shy away from close relationships with non-Muslims.

Respondent A said that she views South Africa as a hub for many different religions and cultures. She seemed comfortable with religious plurality. This respondent mentioned that she has visited Muslim countries and felt at home in these countries, and supposed that it would be culturally and religiously more comfortable for her if South Africa was an Islamic country, even though she is not bothered that it is not so.

On the sensitive topic of salvation, she referred to the *Kalimahs* (or *Kalima*, which is Arabic for 'word') which are memorised and repeated by Muslims, in which they proclaim

their belief. She talked about belief in the oneness of God and said that salvation lies in the hands of God (Allah) and that he is the One who decides who will spend eternity in paradise and who will not. She was reluctant to say that others who are not Muslims will not go to paradise. However, she explained that this does not mean that she thinks that all people will go to paradise. Therefore, Respondent A does not condone relativism, but does not want to reduce salvation only to Muslims. She clearly reflected traditional Islamic thoughts and beliefs when speaking about the concept of salvation. People cannot decide who will be saved, only Allah can make this decision.

She views communication and dialogue amongst the different religions not only as important, but also as something that cannot be avoided. She mentioned the importance of the different religions conversing with each other, because she believes that this is important for South Africa. If all the religions could work together in some way and agree on a few ethical viewpoints, it would be for the greater good of our nation.

Respondent A, being aware of the fact that her interviewer was not a Muslim, had no reservations about talking about her own religious views and how these were in many instances similar to those of other religions. She also mentioned the ways in which her religion differs from others. In short, the conversation with Respondent A was positively experienced by the interviewer, because the respondent was extremely friendly and willing to share her views and personal experiences. The interview was informative and both interviewer and respondent were open to learn and share with one another.

## Comparing the dialogue with Respondent A with Knitter's acceptance and mutuality models

Early on in the conversation with Respondent A, the word *acceptance* came up. This was almost the first thing she said. It was as if before she stated her own religious views, she firstly wanted to make the fact clear that she accepts other people's views and has no problem listening to the religious Other. This immediately brought the acceptance model (cf. Knitter 2012:173–247) to mind. What further made me, what this respondent said, relate to the acceptance model is that she highlighted some of the differences between her religion (Islam) and others (Christianity) – almost as if she was at ease talking about the differences between her own religion and other religions and believed that differences need not be the end of further conversation, it certainly did not put an end to the dialogue.

However, in the reference she made to Jesus she stated that she did not view him as being the Son of God. She did not make this statement to attempt to halt the conversation, rather it seemed as if she was merely highlighting the differences between her belief and the views of her dialogue partner.

When Respondent A started talking about her close friendship with a Christian friend and/or colleague, she started highlighting the similarities between her own religious views and Christian views. She even spoke about the similarities between the Bible and the Qur'an. The similarities she emphasised made what she stated lean more towards the mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157), as she expressed some of the *mutual* aspects between Islam and Christianity. This then moves away from the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247), as it states that all religions are completely different because religious views are formed by linguistic and cultural influences. Religious people speak different languages and therefore they are different.

She moved back to the idea of acceptance when speaking about her own parents, and stated that they have respect and acceptance for other religions. However, she spoke of how her husband's parents are not open to the religious Other, which makes their approach to other religions lean more towards exclusivism – which recalls the replacement model.

Something Respondent A said about the South African context which also seemed to move towards the acceptance model is that it would possibly be more comfortable for her if South Africa was an Islamic country, but at the same time she maintained that she does not mind the religious plurality in South Africa. Respondent A views this country as being a hub for many religions. Naturally, each person prefers their own religious views, but this does not mean that they do not accept other religious views.

According to the partial replacement model (Knitter 2012:33–49) other religions (besides Christianity) play some sort of role in religious people attaining salvation. This can be related to Respondent A's statement of the important role the *Kalimahs* play in salvation – therefore the importance that Muslims recite their beliefs. However, she declared that only Allah can decide who will be saved and who not. She does not have exclusivist (or replacement) views about salvation, as she was extremely reluctant to say that people from religions other than Islam will not be saved.

Respondent A highlighted the importance of dialogue. Her view of dialogue and the purpose of it is similar to the ethical-practical bridge which is referred to in the mutuality model. According to her, dialogue may ease some of the injustice in South Africa. In her approach to this conversation she also seemed to be open to dialogue and comfortable with discussing her religious views. Overall it seems that this dialogue had many similarities with the acceptance model and the mutuality model.

## **Respondent B – Christian**

Respondent B is a Christian man in his late twenties. He was the second respondent that I met with. He was eager and open to speak about his religious views and seemed very interested in the study. We met in Pretoria, where he works. He stated that the city took

a lot of getting used to, because he is originally from the Free State, where he grew up on a farm.

The first question on the list was easy for him to answer: I asked him to describe his religious views. His answer was that he is a Christian who believes that there is only one God and that this God is the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He spoke of God the Son as the Saviour and used the words of the Heidelberg Catechism, which are, 'my only comfort in life and death is that I belong to Jesus Christ.' He further described himself as a follower of Christ.

When I asked him about how he views other religions, he said that he is comfortable with other religions. However, he believes that these religions are merely people's attempt to follow the one true God in the way that makes sense to them in their culture. He also mentioned the responsibility of all Christians to 'convert' these people to Christianity. In other words: Christians are sent by God to share his loving message with others. He said that this 'sharing of God's message' is done through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and according to each Christian's specific gifts and talents.

Respondent B currently lives alone and has never lived with someone who was not a Christian. He grew up in a Christian household, but he views himself as more open-minded than his parents, who he perceives being fundamentalists who do not sway in their views. He mentioned that he only met people from other religions after he left school. He has no close friends who are from one of the other major religious groups in South Africa. However, Respondent B mentioned that within his circle of friends there are non-believers. He referred to some atheist friends and that he has quite a few friends with whom he regularly has debates and conversations concerning their religious views. He works in an environment where most of his colleagues are not vocal about their religious views, but he is aware of a few Muslim and Hindu co-workers who he enjoys working with. However, he would not classify them as being his friends and said that they keep to themselves.

He does not necessarily view South Africa as being a religious hub, but views South Africa as a predominantly Christian country, and said that South Africa is rather a hub for many Christian denominations, because all of the other religions are in the vast minority.

Respondent B views salvation as being granted to those who believe in Christ as the saviour of all humankind. He mentioned that salvation is offered to all people through the grace of God granting it by sacrificing his Son for the sins of humankind, but that humankind has a choice as to whether to accept this salvation or not.

He views dialogue between religious people as important, whether they share the same religious views, or not. According to him interreligious dialogue can be viewed

as an opportunity to share God's love with people who have yet to accept him, but he is also aware of the fact that these types of dialogue must be carefully and respectfully dealt with.

Respondent B was very open to conversation and eager to share his views. He is a devoted Christian and well informed about the Christian tradition, but has not had very much experience with other religions.

## □ Comparing the dialogue with Respondent B with Knitter's partial replacement and fulfilment models

The dialogue with Respondent B brought forth some concepts which are similar to the partial replacement model (Knitter 2012:63–98) and the fulfilment model (Knitter 2012:33–49). He stated that he is a Christian and finds comfort in the feeling of belonging to Christ. He stated that other religions are the attempts of people to follow (the One) God in their own culture and traditions. This stated *attempt* of others to follow God leads one to think that this respondent attaches some value to other religions, as they in some way lead people to God. This is similar to the fulfilment model and Rahner's concept of anonymous Christians – it is almost as if Respondent B stated that the religious Other is already a Christian, but is just not aware of it yet. In a certain sense Respondent B's view of other religions also recalls some of the partial replacement model, because if other religions are the attempts of people to follow the true God, then something of this God has to be revealed in these religions for followers to have the need to follow – and as the partial replacement model states, revelation is possible in other religions.

When speaking about the importance of dialogue, Respondent B stated that it can be a window for Christians to share God's love with the religious Other. This closely relates to what the partial replacement model says about dialogue. In this model dialogue (when carried out with respect and sensitivity) can be evangelism (see Knitter 2012:41). This means that if dialogue is handled correctly and does not lead to the condemning of one another, Jesus will prove himself to be the name in which people come to know God (Knitter 2012:41).

Respondent B shared his views on salvation and stated that it is only through accepting Christ as the only Saviour of humanity that someone can be saved. This relates to the partial replacement model, which states that Christ is 'the one-and-only Saviour of the World' (Braaten 1981:74; see Knitter 2012:37). However, Respondent B's views on salvation are also parallel to the fulfilment model and Rahner's views on grace. According to Rahner God grants all people his grace, because God loves all people. Respondent B



shares this view and stated that God's gracious act of saving humanity is meant for all human beings (see Knitter 2012:69).

Respondent B depicted South Africa as being predominantly Christian with the other religions being in the minority. This relates to the census data gathered in 2001 (Statistics South Africa 2011:24). Therefore, Respondent B's view of the South African context is (or at least was) accurate. However, this respondent still views interreligious dialogue as important and is open to it, despite the fact that he is part of the majority religion, Christianity. However, he depicted dialogue as being a one-way street, speaking only about what Christianity can bring to the table. Respondent B did not refer to the effect that dialogue could have on him or any other Christian involved in an interreligious dialogue, he focused on what effect interreligious dialogue between a Christian and the religious Other can have upon the religious Other.

## **Respondent C – Christian who converted to Islam**

Of all the respondents who were interviewed, Respondent C had the most intricate and interesting religious journey. Respondent C is a Muslim woman in her mid-forties. She was born and raised in Pretoria. What makes her religious views and the conversation that was held with her interesting is the fact that she was raised as a Christian. At the age of 37 years she married a Muslim man and converted to Islam. She was previously married to a Christian and had four children with him, but due to being abused by this man, got divorced. She then entered a loving relationship with a Muslim and had to convert to Islam so that they could get married. Respondent C refers to her conversion from Christianity to Islam as a 'reversion', as she views herself as only becoming a truly religious person after becoming a Muslim.

When asked about her religious views, she stated that she was raised as a Christian and still views herself in many ways as being a Christian, who is 'protected by the blood of Christ'. This respondent believes that Christ is the Son of God. She believes in the oneness of God, and therefore it was possible for her to convert to Islam, as there is only one God. She says that the process of becoming a Muslim was not easy, because of one fact: Muslims do not believe that Christ is the Son of God. Respondent C also mentioned that she found the Muslim way of life difficult at first, because it is vastly different from the way she was raised. She mentioned that from the day she converted to Islam she had to get used to dressing differently, eating differently and worshipping God differently. She was honest about how it took her quite some time to get used to the segregation of men and women in the Mosque (this became clear during her second marriage ceremony, which was vastly different to her first wedding).

Because Respondent C converted to Islam, she was asked to express in her own words what her experience of Islam has been:

The Muslim Religion has provided me with an immense amount of insight into what loving God and having faith, trust, etc. in Him, means. A Muslim is such a devout person and it saddens me that I didn't see more of this in people, when I was growing up as a Christian. The Muslim community views themselves as being an enormous family, who is always there for those needing assistance, whether it be financially, spiritually or otherwise.

This respondent highlighted many similarities between Islam and Christianity and spoke of how she feels, that she definitely still worships the same God, just in a different way. She spoke of many things which are similar between the Christian message and the Islamic message: God is depicted as the Creator, the One true God; Muslims and Christians are similarly urged to take care of those in need; love is central to both ways of living; Christ is described in both holy texts, et cetera. Respondent C spoke of the one true Creator being the central point of both Islam and Christianity.

Respondent C said that in her work environment she is not the only Muslim, but that there are quite a few colleagues who are from different religions. She has only lived with Christians, her parents and siblings, and now her (Muslim) husband. They reside in Johannesburg, but she grew up in Pretoria (and her husband in Cape Town). She stated that her family and children have been immensely supportive of her religious choices and they have embraced her new religion. However, some of her friends have not been so welcoming to her new religious views.

She is very comfortable with religious plurality. She declared that she has respect for people from different religions. However, she does believe that there are many religions who worship idols, but mentioned that it is not her place to judge others, as Allah is the only one who can decide who will be saved. She maintained that all people will answer for their sins and that it is Allah who will decide upon their fate.

Respondent C referred to South Africa as being a wonderful country to live in due to the fact that it has many different religions, cultures and races. She is comfortable with calling South Africa a hub for many different religions, and referred to her travels around South Africa and her experiences with different religions. When the focus was on interreligious dialogue she stated that it can be of use only if all parties taking part are open-minded and respectful towards one another. According to Respondent C people can benefit from dialogue if they are willing to put their judgements aside. She said that it would be beneficial to all South Africans if they could understand the adherents of different religions more adequately.

The conversation with Respondent C was extremely insightful. She seemed comfortable and spoke with ease. This respondent was extremely helpful and kind and can be described as an ideal dialogue partner. It was interesting to note how comfortable she was speaking about both Christianity and Islam, and how in some ways she is devoted to both religions.

## □ Comparing the dialogue with Respondent C with Knitter's mutuality model

In this dialogue it is quite difficult to discern a specific model due to the interesting religious journey of this respondent. Knitter's models are broad theories which do not consider the fact that religious people may have intricate stories which do not fit into the parameters of any specific model. Of course the mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157) comes to mind, as this respondent spoke of the things that Islam and Christianity have in common, and this model states that there are many true religions and that all religions are called to dialogue. It seems as if although this respondent has an internal dialogue, she brings Christian views into dialogue with Islamic views. She was also able to highlight many factors that Christianity and Islam have in common. This means she can identify many topics which could be the foundation for dialogue to take place.

In the mutuality model, dialogue is central. The mutuality model views all people as 'potential dialogue partners' (Knitter 2012:110). This model promotes equality and creating safe spaces for dialogue. However, it is important to note that the equality which this model seeks does not declare that all religions are equal, but rather that every religion has the equal right to voice their views and to be heard. This was also a point made by Respondent C. She wanted to make it clear that she does not necessarily feel that all religions are equal, and acknowledges the existence of religions which are idolatrous.

A further characteristic of the mutuality model is that it seeks to celebrate the uniqueness of Christianity, but does not want to water down the uniqueness of other religions (Knitter 2012:111). Respondent C also acknowledged that her view of Christ is unique, because it is different from Islam's view of Christ. She therefore, views herself as being a devoted follower of Christ whilst being a Muslim.

Some of what Hick stated can be brought into relation with the views Respondent C shared. Hick stated that the Divine reality is the heart of all religions (Knitter 2012:115). This respondent stated clearly that God, the Creator of all things, is the central point of both Christianity and Islam. He remained the central point of both the Christian life she led as well as her Muslim life.

Respondent C briefly mentioned the ethical responsibility of both Islam and Christianity to take care of those in need. This relates to the ethical-practical bridge, which forms part of the mutuality model. This bridge states that even if there are many different religions, they all share the same concern for those in need (Knitter 2012:134–138). The mutuality model is based on the realisation that in some ways all religions are unique, but religions share some of the same aspects and concerns. Respondent C seemed to be aware of the similarities and the uniqueness of both Islam and Christianity.

This respondent stated how important it is that when approaching dialogue, people from different religions should be respectful. What was interesting is that she mentioned her family's respect for her new religious views and how they have embraced her conversion to Islam. She did however mention how some of her friends were not so open to speak about her new religious views. It is therefore important to note how valuable close relationships can be for interreligious dialogue (see Knitter 2012:223). This respondent's family, that is closest to her, is open to dialogue, but those who are not so close to her are less understanding.

## ■ Respondent D – Hindu

The fourth respondent, Respondent D, is a Hindu woman in her early twenties. The meeting took place on the main campus of the University of Pretoria and Respondent D was an eager and friendly dialogue partner. She was born and raised in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal, but due to her studies had to move to Gauteng and currently lives in Pretoria.

When asked about her religious views, Respondent D, described herself as a Hindu, but stated that she has found many truths in the religions of others and has come to respect people from different religions. She stated that she enjoys taking part in other religions' traditions. She went on to say that culture, to her, plays an important role in a person's religious views, because she believes that the Divine reveals itself to all people in different ways and cultures. The Divine therefore uses a person's culture to reveal some parts of themselves to all people. She therefore found it important to explain that all religions are valid, because all religions have their own way of expressing their passion for the Divine.

She stated that she grew up amongst other Hindus, but had many experiences with Muslims who lived in her neighbourhood. She has had many different experiences with various religions, and currently most of her peers are Christians. She has become close friends with many Christians and says that most of her encounters with other religions in the past two years have been with Christians. She lives in a student hostel where all the other girls on the floor that she lives on describe themselves as Christians. She has gone with them to a Christian Bible study where she spoke about her religion. She mentioned that she has had a few conversations with peers who describe themselves as atheist, something she finds strange.

Respondent D views South Africa as a country with many different religions and agrees with the depiction of South Africa as a hub for many different faiths. She views South Africa as segregated in terms of religion; there are Hindu parts, Muslim parts, Christian parts, et cetera. It seems to her that the different faiths, in certain areas of the country, keep to themselves. She is comfortable with all other faiths. To her all faiths are valid.

What is important is the vigour and passion in every religion. She believes that God is present in all people – she calls this the ‘atman’, the ‘spark of God in all people’. She stated that Hinduism as a religion does not seek to devalue any other religion.

When Respondent D spoke of salvation she said that Hinduism states that salvation is for all people and that no one is denied salvation. One does not have to be a Hindu to attain salvation. Salvation to her is self-realisation, because in her faith salvation means to realise the fact that a person is not merely a perishable body, but an immortal soul, in which God dwells. She believes in reincarnation and that once a person is perfected, moksha is achieved, which is oneness with God. She maintained that Hinduism does not believe in an eternal heaven or hell, Hinduism rather refers to states of being, where karma is burnt off. People are then reborn once karma has been burnt off. Respondent D declared that all people have one path, which is the path to God.

She believes that it is not necessarily important for different religions to engage in dialogue, but it can be the source of joy if one is open to it. However, this depends on every person’s own path in life. Therefore, if dialogue with others is brought into a person’s path, it can enrich their lives as long as all parties involved are respectful. Therefore, Respondent D would not refer to dialogue as being important for all people, but said it can be enriching to those who choose to partake in it. However, she does not think it is necessary for a person to seek out dialogue. If a person is true to their faith and does not come into contact with adherents of other faiths, then so be it.

Respondent D declared that from an ethical or social justice standpoint interreligious dialogue can be fruitful to the South African context and can lead to religious people understanding each other better, as it might help dissolve some misconceptions about the different faiths.

The conversation with Respondent D was interesting as she was able to speak passionately about other religions as well as her own faith. She was open to answer all the questions directed at her and could share her own religious views eloquently.

## Comparing the dialogue with Respondent D with Knitter’s acceptance model

The dialogue with Respondent D related closely to the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247), as she stated that she is a Hindu but has also found many truths in other religious traditions. The acceptance model maintains that there are many true religions, and it seeks ways in which there can be peace amongst the various religions (Knitter 2012:173).

Respondent D mentioned that culture has an influence on religion and due to the fact that there are many different cultures, there are many different religions. This is a view

which echoes what Lindbeck (1984:33) states. He maintains that religions are a kind of cultural (and linguistic) medium ‘that shapes the entirety of life and thought’ (Lindbeck 1984:33; see Knitter 2012:180). A person’s culture can be viewed as a filter for the way in which they perceive the Divine. The acceptance model does not seek to find similarities between religions, because if languages and cultures are different, then the world and the way all people perceive the Divine are also different (see Knitter 2012:181). It was clear during the dialogue with Respondent D that she is knowledgeable about the religious Other (especially Muslims and Christians), but she did not feel the need to express similarities between the different religions.

In the acceptance model Knitter (2012:183) explains how dialogue between adherents from different religions can be possible, by saying that religions are to be good neighbours to one another and should not seek to be exactly like one another or to break down the fences that make good neighbours. This relates to what Respondent D stated about interreligious dialogue: If one is confronted with the religious Other (or is led to conversation with the religious Other), they must respectfully enter into dialogue with this person. She also maintained that dialogue can be a source of joy, if it is brought onto someone’s path.

Respondent D stated that salvation is not only for Hindus, but for all people. This again relates to the acceptance model, because this model declares that religions differ so vastly, therefore no agreement or disagreement can be threatening. Therefore, there will be no need to force any person to convert to the other’s religious views (for salvation to be attained), because this model seeks to make people comfortable with the differences between faiths. Respondent D certainly seemed comfortable not only with her own faith, but other faiths as well.

The acceptance model encourages dialogue, on the other hand this respondent does not see dialogue as a necessity for a religious person. However, like Knitter (2012:223), Respondent D notes how important respect is if dialogue naturally enters one’s path.

## **Respondent E – African traditional religions**

The fifth respondent, Respondent E, is a man in his late twenties, who spoke to me about African traditional religions, which he views as an intricate part of his life. He lives in Pretoria but grew up in Ulundi, a town in KwaZulu-Natal. He seemed open to conversation and did not hesitate to share his experiences.

When asked about his religious views, he said that he has been influenced by Christianity and celebrates Christian holidays. However, due to the way he was raised he remains deeply connected to his African traditional heritage. He declared that he believes in one God, the Creator of all things, and the sacredness of what this God created.

He mentioned that he believes in the existence of both good and evil spirits. Respondent E stated that because of the way in which he was he feels a close connection with his ancestors and their beliefs. He said that even though he views himself as a Christian, he cannot separate himself from traditional African views, they are part of his culture and come naturally to him.

Respondent E mentioned that it is difficult to speak about the broad concept of African traditional religions, as they are closely related to culture and Africa is diverse when it comes to culture. Each culture has its own interpretation of religion. Therefore, this respondent merely attempted to express his own views on African traditional religions.

Currently, Respondent E lives alone, but when he lived with his parents in KwaZulu-Natal he lived amongst many different people who were, like him, true to their African traditional heritage. He mentioned that he studies in Pretoria and has many Christian friends and some friends who grew up with African traditional beliefs. He said that although the campus where he studies has a variety of students with different cultures and religions, he does not come into close contact with any of these students.

Respondent E described South Africa as the home of many different religions and cultures. He stated that even though there is seldom segregation between different religions and cultures, they are all connected in some way, as they all live in the same country and are all responsible for the preservation of it. When asked about his thoughts concerning religious plurality, he said that he respects all people's beliefs. He does not view his own religion (or culture) as being superior to others. He maintained that just as there are different cultures, there are different religions. According to this respondent culture has a big impact on religion.

Respondent E declared that although he finds no fault with other religions, many people do not share the same sentiment, as African traditional religions are frequently perceived to be barbaric and savage. Therefore, his wish is that others would be more accepting of African traditional religions, just as he is open to learning more about the religions of others.

When asked about his views on salvation, he expressed what the African traditional religions' views are about salvation and also what his own views are. Respondent E said that African traditional mythology states that there was a time when the Divine and humanity lived in a state of harmony. This was paradise. However, God withdrew and now humanity is separated from him. This condition is permanent. There is no mythology that refers to salvation or that God would restore the previously experienced harmony. In African traditional religions, there is no belief that the unity between God and humanity will be restored. The highest goal people aim to achieve in African traditional religions is ancestorship. This is, however, merely a continuation of the earthly life. It is also important to note that ancestorship does not necessarily refer to being (re)united with

God – when you are an ancestor you are not in the same ‘place’ as the Divine. The decision of where an ancestor is, is up to God.

Therefore, it is clear that the Christian idea of heaven is not present in African traditional religions. Rather, the focus is on the hope of becoming an ancestor. Heaven is not found after death, it takes form in this reality when one is healthy, has a good harvest, has healthy children, et cetera. These are the forms of salvation experienced in this life. He maintained that when a person lives a wicked life, where they are promiscuous, harms others, destroys harmony and is not respectful towards creation, they are punished and do not experience this earthly salvation. Such a person will have to be cleansed by a diviner. Respondent E said that through these rituals a person can be reconciled with their community and ancestors.

For Respondent E becoming an ancestor is the equivalent of heaven. According to him the ability to watch over your loved ones is similar to God’s relationship with humanity. Therefore, he maintains that to be an ancestor is a divine state. He is, however, not sure that as an ancestor you could or would come into direct contact with God, but mentioned that no living person can be sure of how life after death will be. What will happen after this life is in God’s hands.

This respondent spoke about how important it is for people from different religions to communicate with one another. This can help the various religious people to dispel some of the negative views about other faiths. He thinks this can be especially important for religious people whose religion is viewed as negative or violent. According to him, religious people are often judged for the wrongdoings or only a few of the violent acts that have taken place in the name of their religion.

He maintained that South Africa can benefit from dialogue across religious borders, because that will allow people to obtain an understanding of one another. Respondent E declared that when we understand one another we can live in better harmony with one another.

The conversation with Respondent E was a positive experience and he spoke with ease. He did not seem to be bothered by the fact that his dialogue partner was not well informed about African traditional religions, and was very informative. He attempted to be as descriptive as possible.

## **□ Comparing the dialogue with Respondent E with Knitter’s mutuality and acceptance models**

It was yet again challenging to distinguish which of Knitter’s models relate to this specific dialogue, as this respondent is influenced by both African traditional views and Christianity.



Respondent E spoke of the important influence that culture has on a person's religious views. This is the reason why one cannot refer to one single religion in the African traditional religions. This relates to the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247), because, as was previously stated, this model focuses on the diversities in the different religions, due to the fact that culture and language shape a person's religious views (see Knitter 2012:10). This respondent seemed to be comfortable with both the diversity in culture and religion. However, he has also experienced exclusivism, as he stated that African traditional religions are often viewed as being barbaric.

The mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157) also relates to some of what Respondent E spoke of. He spoke of South Africa as the shared home of many religions and therefore of the shared responsibility towards this home. This reminds one of the ethical-practical bridge embedded in the mutuality model, which speaks of the shared responsibility towards the suffering of the Earth (and of course the suffering of all living things). This bridge maintains that the Earth suffers increasingly due the expansion of humanity and trying to keep up with this growth (Knitter 2012:138).

In the partial replacement model (Knitter 2012:33–49) Netland states that there are topics which can be discussed amongst religious people from different faiths. These topics include speaking about the essence of each religion. The reason why this can be valuable is because such a dialogue can be conducive to correcting the prejudices and mistrust between people of different religions. Respondent E echoed this view. He said that through dialogue some of the negative feelings towards African traditional religions can be defused. He declared that harmony is important and that dialogue can be used to create some sort of peace between religions. This relates to the acceptance model, which seeks to find ways in which there can be peace amongst all faiths (Knitter 2012:173).

## **Respondent F – Jew**

The last of the respondents was Respondent F, who is a Jewish man in his fifties. He was born and raised in Johannesburg and currently still lives there. The conversation with this Respondent was insightful. However, he seemed uncomfortable talking about his religion at first, but as he would be conversing about his religious views with someone he has known for a long time, he agreed to take part. Respondent F mentioned that he does not find it easy to speak about his religious views.

Respondent F described his religious views by saying that he is Jewish and believes that there is only one God. He refers to this God as *Hashem*. *Hashem* is the creator of all things. Respondent F stated that this creator is beyond all comprehension, but is still part of every person's everyday life.

Respondent F attended a well-known Jewish school in Johannesburg, and grew up in a Jewish environment, amongst other Jews. His close friends are all Jewish and some attended the same school. He mentioned that he works for a company owned by Jews, where only a few co-workers are not practising Jews. He referred to his uncle who married a Christian woman. This marriage created tension between his uncle and the rest of the family. He is, however, still in contact with his two cousins, the children of this uncle. Both of these cousins were raised with many Christian and Jewish traditions, but married Christians. Therefore, Respondent F is mostly surrounded by other Jews, but has some contact with his extended family, who view themselves as Christians. Respondent F has respect for the way his uncle raised his children, but states that it is different from the way he was raised in many ways. Respondent F has never lived with a person from a different faith.

This respondent was comfortable with talking about South Africa as a hub for many different religions. However, he maintained that in many ways the Jewish community in South Africa keeps to themselves and most of the Jews in South Africa live in Johannesburg or Cape Town, with small Jewish communities in other areas such as Port Elizabeth and Durban. He views his own religion as being one of the minorities in South Africa. He described South Africa as a country with two predominant religions, these being Christianity and Islam, and that the rest of the country's religions are formed by only small groups.

When asked about his views on salvation, Respondent F said that salvation is found in living a righteous life. Therefore, it is important to uphold the Torah. Every person has the free will to choose if they will live a righteous life. The Torah states that a person must do good. A person is saved by living a good and righteous life. This is done by making the right choices and living in accordance with the Torah. He maintained that every person has the potential to live a good life, as all people were created in God's image. The Torah urges people to live a good life and live according to the commandments that it provides. Respondent F, however, maintained that every person sins. Therefore, living a good life does not mean that a person can never sin, no person is free of sin. If a person did not sin, repentance would have no use. Respondent F mentioned that repentance is important for one to be saved. Therefore, one is saved by attempting to live a good life and repenting when they sin.

He spoke about how the Jewish community views non-Jews, by saying that all people are part of God's covenant and can have a relationship with God. God is not only the God of Jews and does not only love Jewish people. God reigns over all people, however, Respondent F declared that Jews were called for the specific task to exemplify the covenant with God. Therefore, Jews have to adhere to the 613 *mitzvots* (the commandments of the Torah), to live a good life. Non-Jews also have to live a good life to be saved and therefore

they must keep the new commandments given to Adam by *Hashem*.<sup>38</sup> Respondent F stated that the Jewish community does not believe in trying to convert non-Jews. He stated if someone is not Jewish, they cannot become a Jew – Jews are born Jewish. This does not mean that non-Jews will not receive salvation. If the religious Others live a righteous life they can be saved, but that, he said, is up to *Hashem* to decide.

According to Respondent F dialogue between different religions can be important, but also dangerous. He said that if the dialogue is about the differences in belief or the similarities between religions, it is of no use and can lead to one person trying to convert the other. However, he maintained that interreligious dialogue can be important in the South African context, if it is based on trying to solve the major problems in this country. He maintained that all religions are knowledgeable about the fact that violence and suffering should be ended, and the different religions can help each other to make a bigger impact to relieve some of the societal problems.

The dialogue with this respondent was insightful and he seemed to have felt comfortable with what he shared. He stated that he knew other Jewish people would not agree with all he had said. Respondent F seemed well informed about the traditions and rituals of Judaism and spoke about his faith with ease.

## ■ Comparing the dialogue with Respondent F with aspects of Knitter's models

It became quite clear during the dialogue with Respondent F that what he said did not seem to be confined to merely one or two of Knitter's models. In some ways, various aspects of the four models are involved.

Firstly, it seemed as if some part of the total replacement model (Knitter 2012:19–32) related to this dialogue. This model maintains that dialogue is of no use, and this respondent seemed to shy away from dialogue with the religious Other. However, his approach to dialogue can also be brought into relation with both the mutuality model (Knitter 2012:109–157) and the acceptance model (Knitter 2012:173–247). The mutuality model refers to the ethical responsibility of all religions, and to this shared responsibility as a bridge that connects the various religions. Respondent F stated that from an ethical stance, religions can enter dialogue.

A certain part of the acceptance model is also involved in Respondent F's views, because this model attempts to avoid trying to find similarities between religions.

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38. There were seven new commandments given to Adam these include: the prohibition of theft, idolatry, murder, sexual immorality, blasphemy, eating flesh from an animal who is still alive and lastly maintaining courts to provide legal recourse.

Respondent F echoed this by saying that it would be of no use for religious people to enter a dialogue with the need to find similarities between the different faiths. He maintained that in dialogue the differences between religions must also be avoided, to prevent attempts by the dialogue partners to convert one another to their own way of thinking and believing. This relates to the acceptance model. This model celebrates the diversity in religions and does not provide a believer with a way to convert the religious Other, but instead provides theories for the religious Others to accept one another's views. Respondent F's views on other religions cannot be seen in the light of the replacement model, because he does not think that his religion should replace all other religions.

Respondent F mentioned that he does not spend time with people from different faiths. His lack of exposure to the religious Other inevitably has an impact on the way he views the religious Others and their salvation. His views on salvation are similar to those shared in the fulfilment model (Knitter 2012:63–98). This model maintains that God wishes to save all humanity, but that Jesus is the fulfilment of all religions. Although Respondent F is a Jew and does not see Christ as the fulfilment of his religion, he did state that all people are created in God's image and salvation can be found outside of Judaism. However, the laws given to Jews and non-Jews need to be adhered to for salvation to take place, therefore the Torah is the fulfilment of all religions.

It is interesting to note what an important role a relationship or friendship played in this dialogue. This respondent, being a family member of mine, felt comfortable with a dialogue partner with whom he shares a relationship, and stated that he would not have felt comfortable speaking about his religious views with someone he is not acquainted with. This relates to what comparative theology refers to in the acceptance model: Friendship is important for dialogue<sup>39</sup> to be able to take place (see Knitter 2012:223).

## ■ Conclusion

Although the census data were helpful to some extent, it was through the conversations with people from the different faiths in South Africa that the theories discussed came to life. It was interesting to note how open the respondents were to interreligious dialogue. It was also interesting that even though the census data showed that Christianity is the largest religious group in South Africa, all of the respondents have had experiences pertaining to more than just Christianity. Simply the fact that it was not challenging to find dialogue partners from the different religions brings forth the possibility that religious people can embrace one another, despite the differences they might have.

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<sup>39</sup>It was clear that Respondent F would not have been comfortable to enter into dialogue if there had not been a pre-existing relationship between himself and his dialogue partner.

These dialogues were positive experiences which not only shed light on the various religions, but also on the way some followers of these religions might react towards interreligious dialogue. However, the views of these individuals do not reflect the position of others belonging to the same religion. The openness of these respondents made for an unforgettable experience of the religious Other, and made it easy to celebrate diversity, uniqueness and camaraderie. These respondents have fostered the hope that mutual respect and friendship across religious boundaries are possible in South Africa.

In the next section the focus is on why mutual respect, dialogue and camaraderie can be conducive to relations in South Africa. An approach for dialogue will be provided.

## ■ If dialogue is possible ... why not use it?

Earlier in this chapter Knitter's different approaches to theology of religions were discussed. All but one (the total replacement model, see Knitter 2012:19–32) of these models, in some way or another, suggest that dialogue is possible. Some of these models (the acceptance model and the mutuality model, see Knitter 2012:109–157, 173–247) not only recognise the possibility of dialogue, but maintain that dialogue amongst various religious people is important. In the previous section actual dialogues were incorporated into the study and these seemed to further the idea that dialogue can be enriching.

The focus of this last section will be on why dialogue is important by viewing the benefits of interreligious dialogue. Knitter's (1995) approach to interreligious dialogue will be discussed as a possible approach to dialogue for the South African context. Secondly, the South African concept of ubuntu will be described, to examine whether this can be conducive to interreligious dialogue. The concept of ubuntu was incorporated as it seemed important to add a section which focused on a South African perspective.

In Knitter's models (2012) great emphasis was placed on mutual respect, kindness, openness, trust and patience when entering dialogue. Knitter (1995:136) declares that he is an advocate for dialogue concentrated on concern for and shared commitment to removing eco-human suffering and promoting eco-human justice. This is a possible starting point for interreligious dialogue. This approach can be conducive for peace in the South African context due to the fact that South Africa is a country which has been plagued by injustice, crime and poverty.

Knitter (1995) explains his approach:

[T]his method urges that all our efforts at dialoguing or understanding each other be preceded or accompanied or pervaded by some form of shared practical efforts to remove eco-human suffering. (p. 138)

This further means that dialogue partners would not need to approach a conversation with the religious Other by beginning to speak about rituals or doctrines '[r]ather, the encounter begins on the level of some form of liberative, engaged praxis' (Knitter 1995:138). This allows dialogue partners to have a choice of which particular social or national context and human or ecological suffering the focus must be on (see Knitter 1995:138).

Knitter (1995) gives a compelling reason why this approach to dialogue can be fruitful:

From this effort, even though it will be complex and perhaps unsuccessful, even though the effort will admit of different analyses and remedies, there will result a context, or an atmosphere, or a new sensitivity, on the basis of which the participants in the dialogue will be able to understand themselves and each other in new ways. (p. 138)

With this approach one can see how diversity is being respected and togetherness is being developed (see Knitter 1995:139). Knitter's (1995:139) approach creates the awareness that in a multireligious society (like South Africa, for instance) the various religions play an important role.

Raimon Panikkar's views relate to Knitter's (1995:136–139) approach, as he also speaks of the benefits of dialogue by saying that in dialogue religions can learn, grow and expand their identities. This is beneficial for all participants in the dialogue. Pannikar further maintains that it is through dialogue that religions can deepen both their differences and their togetherness (see Knitter 2012:130). Therefore, what dialogue leads to is unity in diversity, or as Lalonde (1994) stated, 'unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation.' Consequently interreligious dialogue in a South African context will not have to compromise the diversity which is characteristic of this country, but it will also allow unity amongst the different faiths to be deepened. Dialogue is seen as an opportunity to enrich diversity. The question is: Why is it important to enrich diversity? According to Tutu (2013):

We should celebrate our diversity; we should exult in our differences as making not for separation and alienation and hostility but for their glorious opposites. The law of our being is to live in solidarity, friendship, helpfulness, unselfishness, interdependence, complementarity, as sisters and brothers in one family. (p. 50)

In his approach, Knitter (1995) explains where this type of dialogue will have to take place:

The venue of such globally responsible dialogue will have to move out and beyond what are the general meeting places for professional religious dialoguers. The locus of dialogue – the physical, socio-economic setting – and the social class of the participants assume crucial importance for both the process and the hoped for success of dialogue. (p. 139)

Interreligious dialogue must descend from a level where only experts are involved to where ordinary people – ordinary South Africans who experience suffering and injustice – take part in dialogue. Knitter (1995:139) is adamant that, '[t]o begin with praxis, the dialogue has to locate itself where the praxis is taking place.'

Furthermore, when religious people share a common agenda and goal they are able to speak of the same quest for justice. Eventually this will come to a point where religion is spoken of, '[t]hey will have to share what it is that animates and guides them in their determination to heal the suffering of others and of the Earth' (Knitter 1995:139). Knitter (1995) speaks about the effect this will have upon religious people:

The sharing ... of differing faith perspectives will, of course, not only bring a deeper religious cordiality, but will also call the participants to continue the struggle with greater resolve and bondedness. (p. 139)

Earlier other theologians' views about the benefits of dialogue amongst religious people were mentioned. Netland (1991:297–300), for instance, referred to how dialogue amongst people from different religions can be conducive to correcting the prejudices, mistrust and conflict between religions (see Knitter 2012:41). He echoed Knitter's (1995:136–139) approach to dialogue by mentioning how social, environmental and political concerns can be shared amongst religious people, in an attempt to create cooperation amongst different religions to resolve some of the issues concerning these topics. Netland (1991:297–300) and Knitter's (1995:13–139) views echo what is referred to in the ethical-practical bridge of the mutuality model (see Knitter 2012:109–157). This bridge maintains that the ethical responsibility shared by all religions can be a pillar on which an interfaith relationship rests. Ethical responsibility is a topic that can be discussed between the different faiths, which can hopefully lead to action. Dialogue can be beneficial for a country like South Africa if leading religious people take action against injustice, whether it be in the social, political, environmental or economic sphere.

Finally, what must be noted is that Knitter (1995:140–141) bases his entire approach to interreligious dialogue on four important factors, namely, (1) compassion, (2) conversion, (3) collaboration and (4) comprehension.<sup>40</sup> He declares that compassion is the first important characteristic that must be involved in dialogue, because (Knitter 1995):

[U]nless they all [*religious people*], from their varied perspectives and for their varied reasons, *feel compassion* for those who are suffering or for the Earth, the kind of dialogue I am talking about will not take place. (p. 140)

Knitter's (1995) emphasis on compassion leads him to the second important factor, conversion, which he explains as follows:

.....  
40.Note that all four factors start with the Latin prefix or preposition 'cum' (meaning 'with'), as Knitter (1995:140) declares that '[7]he act of understanding is always an act that involves other.'

[T]o feel with and for others who are suffering is to be claimed by them. They not only touch our sensibilities, they call forth our response. Truly to feel compassion is to be *converted*; our life is turned around, changed. (p. 140)

Knitter (1995:141) maintains that it is compassion that converts a person to be one who feels with and for others, that consequently leads to action, which he refers to as *collaboration*. This action is in the form of but one collaboration of all religions acting together, which then leads to comprehension (Knitter 1995):

Having suffered (compassion) with the suffering and come together in response (conversion) to their plight, having laboured with and for them, religious persons can begin – will feel called to begin – the task of comprehending or understanding one another. (p. 143)

In the first section part of the problem was stated as being reluctance amongst Christians to approach the religious Other. Knitter's (1995:136–141) approach attempts to deal with this reluctance by emphasising the importance of shared responsibility. In his later work Knitter (2012:173–247) maintains that the benefit of dialogue is that it can lead to knowledge about other religions, but it can also bring forth change in oneself and enhance self-understanding (Knitter 2012:199, 222). Interreligious dialogue can allow a person to come to a point of accepting differences, celebrating uniqueness and creating an atmosphere of tolerance. These benefits of dialogue can be conducive to resolving some of the problems and challenges (violence, intolerance and uncertainty) referred to earlier.

## ■ Listening to a South African perspective

Desmond Tutu (2013:21) uses the concept of ubuntu to speak about the nature of human community. This South African term can be helpful when one tries to encourage South Africans to take part in interreligious dialogue, and it can also be a guiding thought in how to engage in dialogue. Tutu (2013:21) writes about how the concept of ubuntu is defined in Xhosa tradition, 'in Xhosa we say, "*Umntu ngumtu ngabantu*". This expression is very difficult to render in English, but we could translate it by saying, "a person is a person through other persons".' He further speaks about the role one human plays in relation to another, as one human being teaches another how to be human, 'none of us comes fully formed into the world' (Tutu 2013:21).

As human beings we are taught by others what it entails to be human. It is due to other people that a person knows how to be human, '[w]e would not know how to talk, how to walk, to think, to eat as human beings unless we learned how to do these things from other human beings' (Tutu 2013:21–22). The opinion that a human being can live or learn on their own is, according to ubuntu, is a contradiction to what it means to be human (see Tutu 2013:22). This is why he states that 'the completely self-sufficient human being is subhuman.' The way in which the South African concept of ubuntu



describes what it means to be human can be helpful when speaking of interreligious dialogue (or any form of dialogue for that matter), because ubuntu says that (Tutu 2013):

I can be me only if you are fully you. I am because we are, for we are made for togetherness, for family. We are made for complementarity. We are created for a delicate network of relationships, of interdependence with our fellow human beings, with the rest of creation. I have gifts that you don't have, and you have gifts that I don't have. We are different to know our need of each other. (p. 22)

Ubuntu therefore celebrates diversity, based on the fact that no human being is exactly like another. However, these differences do not weaken the interdependence of human beings.

Tutu (2013:22) maintains that ubuntu speaks of spiritual attributes, '[s]uch as generosity, hospitality, compassion, caring, sharing.' He further mentions that ubuntu is seen as that which distinguishes people from animals, '[t]he quality of being human and so also humane' (Tutu 2013:22).

It is important to know what effect ubuntu can have on a person, so that these attributes can be helpful to someone trying to engage the religious Other. The question is: What are the attributes of a person who has ubuntu? Tutu explains that:

[T]hose who had *Ubuntu* were compassionate and gentle, they used their strength on behalf of the weak, and they did not take advantage of others – in short, they *cared*, treating others as they were: human beings. (pp. 22–23)

What would then be the result of lacking ubuntu? Tutu (2013:23) says that, 'if you lacked ubuntu, in a sense you lacked an indispensable ingredient of being human ... if you had no ubuntu, you did not amount to much.' This leads to the thought that ubuntu can be conducive to dialogue, because what it entails is an ethos which is important for a person's relation to the rest of humanity.

Tutu (2013) notes that ubuntu is to a certain extent in contrast with the importance Westerners attach to individualism:

Westerners have made spectacular advances largely because of their personal individual initiative. They have made remarkable technological advances, for example. And yet that progress has come at a huge cost. The West's emphasis on individualism has often meant that people are lonely in a crowd, shattered by their anonymity ... Ubuntu reminds us that we belong in one family – God's family, the human family. In our African worldview, the greatest good is communal harmony. Anything that subverts or undermines this greatest good is *ipso facto* wrong, evil. (pp. 23–24)

In the concept of ubuntu the South African voice is heard, and it speaks of unity in diversity and views human beings as being of crucial importance to one another. This can be the foundation of a new model for interreligious dialogue in South Africa. Knitter's

(2012) models can be used in relation to concepts like ubuntu to find a way in which an approach for dialogue can be created specifically for the South African context.

At the beginning of this study I hoped that by researching various theologians' (but more specifically Paul Knitter's) theories about religious pluralism I would find a model or theory that would be a perfect approach to dialogue in a pluralistic religious context such as South Africa. Alas, this was a hope which was not realised: I quickly came to the conclusion that there could not be only one model or theory which the South African context would fit into perfectly. The diversity in South Africa cannot be viewed through only one lens. During this study it became evident that it is not necessary for only one approach to dialogue, one way in which religious pluralism can be theorised, or one answer or solution to all the challenges mentioned.

With this realisation came the celebration of diversity, as it also became evident that diversity does not contradict unity. Consequently the aim to find one model which could be conducive to interreligious dialogue in South Africa was transformed into a quest to honour all religions, for all people are created in God's image. This quest<sup>41</sup> allowed me to celebrate diversity, whilst staying true to the uniqueness of Christianity.

The camaraderie amongst people of faith within their own community has always been astounding and inspirational, the hope was to experience some of this camaraderie across cultural and religious borders. I personally experienced this and it sparked a passion which I believe can and should be felt by all other religious people.

The main objective was to write something about dialogue – a specific kind of dialogue – dialogue that declares that people need one another, an approach to dialogue which celebrates mutual respect and which would show that responsible cooperation, interaction and action is possible.

I hoped to show with this study that interreligious dialogue can be a key component to resolve some of the tension and challenges created by living in a country which is characterised by so much diversity. Some past events where dialogue has been productive, open and positive were also mentioned, to show that religious diversity does not have to be that which puts a stop to multifaith interaction. There have been many occasions of cooperation between faiths – the aim was to experience this on a personal level.

The theory behind the practice of interreligious dialogue was discussed. This was necessary as interreligious dialogue is the *praxis*, which cannot be viewed without its *theoria*, which is the theology of religions. To have one without the other would have less value (Hedges 2010:13).

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41. I hoped to learn more about other religions, which I certainly did, but in turn I learned a great amount about the South African context. I also gained more knowledge about Christians and their approach to other faiths.

I took part in the praxis by engaging a few respondents who are from different religions. I hoped to experience interreligious dialogue for myself, as I felt it was necessary for the praxis to be experienced along with some of the theories listed. An objective and quantitative view of the religious make-up of South Africa using the census data was introduced into this study.

In the last section the aim was to emphasise a few of the benefits of dialogue and to discuss the concept of ubuntu, as it is so inherently part of the South African context. It was also important to discuss a possible approach towards dialogue in a South African context.

This study was only the start of my quest in the study of interreligious dialogue, and therefore I cannot call this a conclusion. Rather, it is an introductory conclusion.

## ■ Summary: Chapter 6

A model for the theology of religions within the South African context is presented in this chapter. The problem which is addressed is the reluctance of Christians to engage with fellow South Africans from other traditions. South African Christians seem to be struggling to find a comfortable standpoint about religious plurality and how to engage with people from other religions. The viewpoints on how to go about living and working (co-existing) with people from different religions in South Africa seem to extend from exclusivism and particularities to inclusivism and pluralism. For this study, it is also important that a distinction be made between having *knowledge of* other religious groups, and having *exposure to* other religious groups. There is a difference between being knowledgeable about religions other than your own and having been exposed to different religions. The problem for interreligious relations and dialogue arises when one is exposed to various religions without having any knowledge of the histories, traditions and principles of these religions. It is possible that this exposure without knowledge can create a problem when people from different religions are forced to live and work together. This problem can possibly be cleared up, or at the very least be unravelled, by an openness to dialogue. This chapter argues in favour of an openness towards dialogue between religions in South Africa.

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