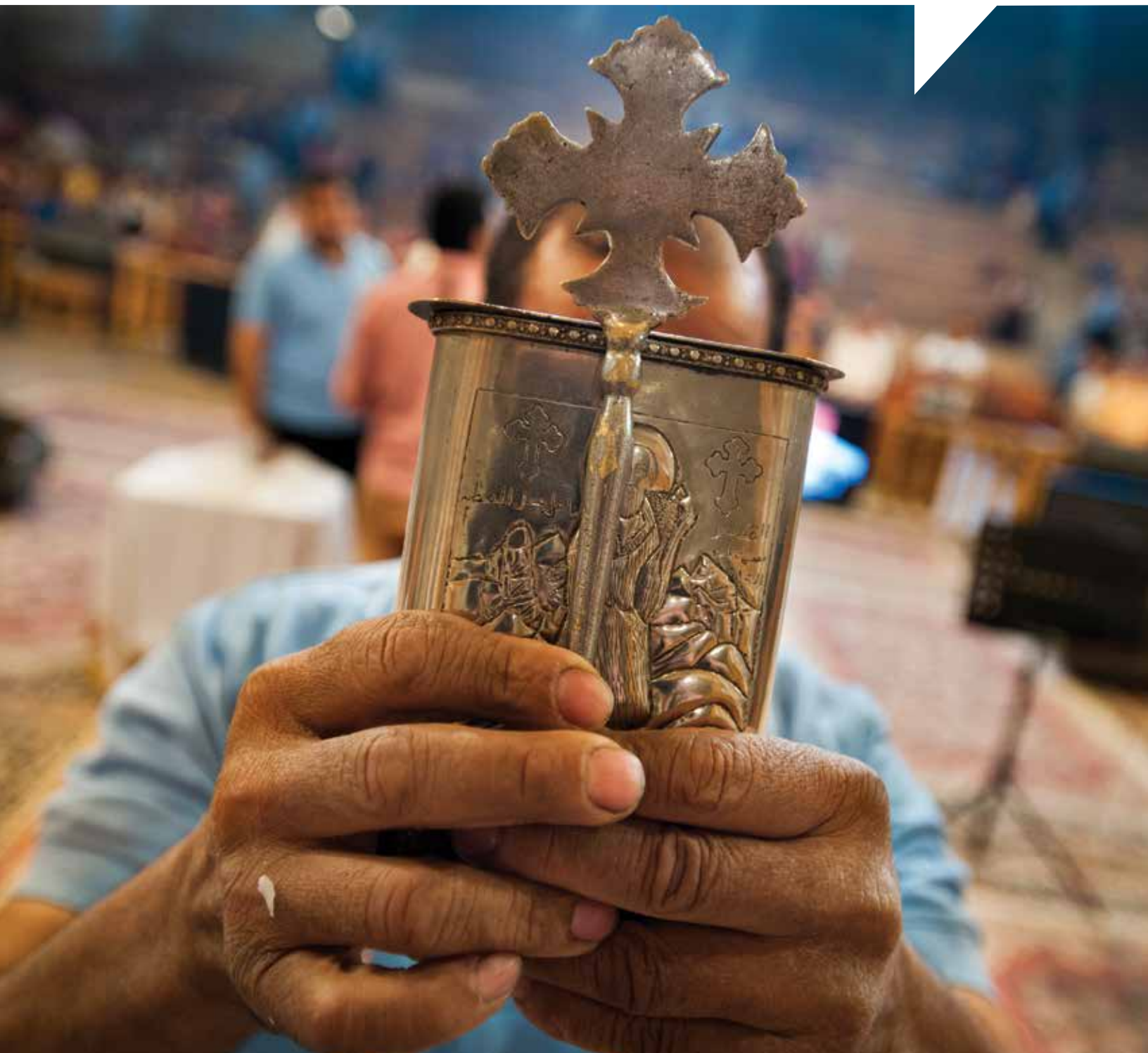


EVANGELICAL INTERFAITH

# *dialogue*

Fuller Theological Seminary



MISSION AND DIALOGUE: Critical Conversations for a Global Church

FALL  
2014

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### Vision Statement

This journal seeks to create space for evangelical scholars and practitioners to dialogue about the dynamics, challenges, practices, and theology surrounding interfaith work, while remaining faithful to the gospel of Jesus and his mission for his Church.

*Views expressed in Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the editors or the seminary. Produced in limited quantities.*

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### Summary Statement

The essays in this edition of the journal address the following question: what is the relationship between interfaith dialogue and Christian mission? The essays reflect contributions from authors on six continents. The images by photographer Mark Kauzlarich (on the front and back covers) of Coptic Christians in Egypt remind us of the contextual rootedness of the Christian faith as well as the various realities communities face around the world.

### On the Cover:

Mark Kauzlarich, “*Copts: Between Revolutions*” (2013)

See back cover for more on the artist.

## **MISSION AND DIALOGUE:**

### Critical Conversations for a Global Church

Since our inaugural issue of *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* in Winter 2010, there has been a consistent interest in the topic from scholars and practitioners around the world of how to understand the relationship between interfaith dialogue and Christian mission. Indeed many contributors over the years have advocated different ways of engaging these two issues.



As editors of a journal on interfaith we are often asked about the purpose of the journal. A primary concern is the fear of compromising the evangelistic mandate as expressed by the following encounter with a local pastor who said: “We are called to preach the gospel so why should we engage in dialogue with people of other faiths?” While this question is a legitimate one, it begs for deeper theological reflection with regards to what we mean when we use terms such as “Mission”, “Interfaith”, and “Dialogue.”

Yet another legitimate concern raised is that dialogue is an unrealistic and idealistic notion promoted particularly by Christians in the West where religious relations are quite different than in the Balkans, Egypt, or central Nigeria. Furthermore, religious plurality is part and parcel of the historic foundation and lived experience of many non-Western societies. In keeping with the contextual and global emphasis of this journal, we have invited scholars from six continents to address the following question: what is the relationship between interfaith engagement and Christian mission? The diversity of experiences, cultural contexts and ecclesial traditions of the contributors provides wisdom from important voices of the global Christian community.

It is our hope that evangelicals will soon come to see these two obligations—mission and interfaith engagement—not as mutually exclusive but rather as an opportunity to embody a holistic witness that bridges religious divides for the sake of “loving our religious neighbor as ourselves”, through conversation, cooperation, and proclamation.



## MISSIOLOGY AND MISSION THEOLOGY IN AN INTERFAITH WORLD

### A (Humble) Manifesto

Evangelical mission theology and praxis is implausible in the present time unless it is attentive to the opportunities and challenges of interfaith engagement. Although we live in an increasingly secular global context, non-Christians are mostly people of faith rather than atheists or agnostics. Credible Christian mission in a religiously pluralistic world, then, must be fundamentally alert to interfaith complexities. There are three interrelated modalities and rationales for interfaith interaction: *orthodoxy*, *orthopraxy*, and *orthopathy*.

First, the orthodox trajectory foregrounds the human quest for and witness to the truth. There is a dialogical character to such witness bearing. The missional thrust of Christian and specifically evangelical faith motivates confession of Christ. Here, orthodox confession denotes less the affirmation of specific creedal formulations as the commitment to engage with religious others at the discursive level. Such “truth encounters” insist that in the meeting between people of living faiths, there are not only similarities but, more importantly, inevitable differences that identify what is at stake. Hence the interfaith encounter includes both negative and positive apologetics: the former defending the plausibility of Christian faith against the polemics of others, and the latter involving interrogation of other faith claims from the Christian standpoint. Interreligious dialogue at this level is crucial for clarifying what the interlocutors in other traditions affirm so that Christian apologetics speaks truthfully about, rather than bears false witness against religious others. At a deeper level, Christian mission in such interreligious contexts appropriately contextualizes faith claims in order to more effectively engage those in other traditions. Just as the Christian stream includes dogmatic traditions that various Christians receive differently, so also other faiths include variations that inform their adherents across the spectrum. Effective Christian witness must thus be attuned to traditional, regional, cultural, linguistic, and personal dynamics in an interfaith world.

Yet Christian enthusiasm for proclaiming and sharing the truth must be matched by their quest for truth. There is a fine line here, one that involves the Christian conviction that the truth is found in Christ on the one hand, but also recognizes that our knowledge of “the mystery of Christ” remains partial in some respects (Eph 3:4; Col 4:3; cf. 1 Cor 13:12; 1 John 3:2). While people in other faiths certainly do *not* testify to the truth of Christ (that is the point of *non-Christian* faiths), who is to say that their own quests for the truth might not also somehow refract the light of Christ that shines somehow in every heart (cf. John 1:9)? If on the one side Christians interact dialogically with people of other faiths in order to understand them and thereby witness truthfully and effectively to them, on the other side, Christians also ought to expect nothing less than such committed approaches from others. The result would be a standoff—one in which both groups dig in their heels convinced of their own corner on the market of truth and of the others’ misguided beliefs. But Christians have theological warrant to believe both that the conversion of others is ultimately God’s responsibility and that their own transformation might indeed be mediated through substantive encounters with others. After all, as evangelical missionaries consistently testify to, participation in God’s mission involves not only witnessing to others but also being





Lesslie Newbigin (1909–1998) served as a missionary in India for almost forty years. Upon his retirement and return to his home country of England, Newbigin continued to write and his books from this latter part of his life continue to be some of the most influential sources for the contemporary missional movement. Perhaps

more than any other writer, Newbigin has helped a current generation of pastors and theologians in Western countries to shed the old paradigm of missions as primarily what is done “overseas” in other countries. Following Newbigin, missional thinking emphasizes that wherever the church is it exists on mission to that culture. Following Jesus’ commission in John 20, “As the Father sent me, so I send you . . .”, all Christians are missionaries by virtue of being a disciple of Christ, and all contexts are places to which Christians are sent—whether home, work, or neighborhood.

The best entry into Newbigin’s approach to interfaith engagement is his essay, “The Basis, Purpose and Manner of Interfaith Dialogue” (1977). In this essay Newbigin offers a powerful metaphor of dialogue as occurring at the bottom of a stairway rather than at the top. Grace runs downhill, he argues, and the Christian meets his religious neighbor not at the height of his or her moral or theological achievements but at the bottom of the stairway, at the foot of the cross. The Christian is fundamentally a witness, not a judge or lawyer, who proclaims a testimony to having been changed by the grace of God. The Christian gospel always has a word of “yes” and “no” to every culture and every person. Consequently, in interfaith encounters the Christian must be prepared to hear a word of judgment on his life and apprehension of the Christian gospel. This creates an opportunity for repentance amidst dialogue, which is a vital witness to all those present.

<sup>1</sup>Available at <http://www.newbigin.net/assets/pdf/77bpmi.pdf>.

shaped by the living witness of others in turn. Hence there is not only the hope of influencing and impacting the lives of others, but there should also be every expectation that authentic interfaith interaction will result in personal transformation as well. At the more general level of communal faith identity, Christian thinking theologically, doctrinally, and constructively in a pluralistic world will then be informed by in-depth reflection on and with those in other faiths. Theology by and for the church in the twenty-first century cannot proceed in isolation as if others were absent.

Second, the orthopraxic domain focuses on the human need for and the collaborative fostering of the common good. Such missional thrusts vis-à-vis those in other faiths have both theological and pragmatic aspects. Theologically, Christian mission is increasingly being recognized as multifaceted inasmuch as Christian salvation is understood in more holistic terms. If the latter includes not only the spiritual but also the material, communal, social, political, economic, and environmental dimensions, then the former must engage deeply with these multiple layers in order for the message of Christ to be good news to the world. Christian mission participates in the redemptive work of God to heal, restore, and renew what is fractured by sin. Hence, concrete impact in many of these arenas involves bringing faith commitments into the public square. In a post-secular world, then, people of faith walk a fine line that both refuses to blur the lines between “church and state” (or synagogue and state, etc.) and yet recognizes that meaningful human efforts in the public realm cannot be achieved if *homo religiosus* has to check their deepest values at the door before making such contributions. If that goes for Christian believers, then it applies *mutatis mutandis* also to those of other faith persuasions.

Simultaneously, it ought to be recognized that people of other faiths are also motivated by their faith traditions to work for the common good. Other religious ways have nurtured human flourishing in cultures and civilizations for millennia long before our current age of globalization. The difference today is that all humans tend to draw from their own wells in order to collaborate on matters that impact the common good, not just for their own specific faith communities but for all. Response to the environmental crisis, for instance, has to be an interfaith effort, and members of the various faith traditions will need to muster all resources available to them—religious or otherwise—and then work cooperatively with people of no or any faith in order to make a difference for succeeding generations. Christian mission work,

**“But herein lies the deepest and most profound challenge for Christian mission in a pluralistic world. If the beauty of Christian faith derives from its being experienced by others, so also is the beauty of other faith traditions incomprehensible apart from some kind of performative engagement with them. Just as the mysteries of the incarnation and the Trinity are captivating only to those who have immersed themselves in a lifetime of spiritual disciplines, so also the beauty of other faith traditions are fully available only to those who have walked in those pathways.”**

therefore, now proceeds *with* people of other faith rather than merely *to* them. On the other end, Christians also reap the benefits of the work of religious others in the public sphere.

Third, the orthopathic sphere highlights the human orientation toward and desire for the beautiful. The point here is not only that other religions are also in search of the beautiful; in fact, if the glory of the new heavens and earth will be constituted in part by what kings and nations bring into the New Jerusalem (Rev 21:24, 26), it is inconceivable that such will be bereft of the beauty found in other faiths. But more importantly, what is being discussed concerns the affective dimension of the human constitution: the beautiful is what we hope for, long for, and love. This aesthetic vision, however, can be reduced neither to cognitively construed propositions (orthodoxy) nor pragmatically resolved constructions (orthopraxis); rather, it operates at the interior level of the human will, imagination, and heart. It is for this reason that religious conversion is both about being caught up by something beyond the self (this is the point about grace) and about choosing to make a commitment (this is the point about religious freedom). Hence, at the end of any kerygmatic declaration of the gospel's content or after any manifestation of works of mercy regarding the gospel's

commitments comes an invitation to “taste and see that the LORD is good” (Ps 34:8 NRSV). Christian testimony (orthodoxy) and holistic witness (orthopraxy) here culminate in an appeal to the heart (orthopathy).

But herein lies the deepest and most profound challenge for Christian mission in a pluralistic world. If the beauty of Christian faith derives from its being experienced by others, so also is the beauty of other faith traditions incomprehensible apart from some kind of performative engagement with them. Just as the mysteries of the incarnation and the Trinity are captivating only to those who have immersed themselves in a lifetime of spiritual disciplines, so also the beauty of other faith traditions are fully available only to those who have walked in those pathways. Yet evangelicals cannot give their hearts to other faiths in these ways for that would be akin to selling their souls to other deities (the temptation to idolatry). However, in the image of the triune God who sent his Son incarnationally into the far country and poured out his Spirit pentecostally upon all human flesh, so also are Christians invited to be both hosts to and guests of those in other faiths. In the former role, Christians welcome those in other faiths to experience the gracious hospitality of the triune God; in the latter role, Christians enter into other ways of life following in the footsteps of Jesus and empowered by the Spirit who enables human solidarity across otherwise constructed boundaries (i.e., of race, gender, class, culture, language, and even religion). While hosts maintain a certain level of control over the (interfaith) environment, guests are vulnerable amidst the parameters established by others. Evangelical Christians will disagree on how much to risk in venturing affectively, performatively, and practically along the road with their neighbors of other faiths. Yet their own faith commitments suggest that their own transformation in the process pales in comparison to the glory to be revealed in the grand scheme of things when and where all creatures—“us” Christians and “them” of other faiths—are guests in the beautiful presence of the triune God. **EIFD**

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## **“GOOD MISSIOLOGY” AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE** A Latin American Perspective

In the evangelical atmosphere in which I grew up in Perú in the 1950s, a distinctive mark of a bona fide Evangelical was that he or she did not believe in or practice dialogue. We were people with convictions that were to be proclaimed, not questioned or discussed. At that time there were two major religious persuasions in Perú: Roman Catholicism and Marxism. Yes, Marxism was embraced and practiced with religious fervor. Catholicism was more the official religion to which, according to the national census, 90 percent of Peruvians belonged.

When I entered college (1951–1957) I realized that not only were very few of my classmates practicing Catholics, many of them had become agnostics. Marxist students, on the other hand, were militant, always trying to win converts and ready to go to jail for their convictions.

And then a group of us evangelical students started to share the gospel on campus through Bible study groups, films, and lectures. I discovered that the best way to share my faith in public was dialogue. We brought speakers to campus—warning them that after their lecture they should be ready to answer questions. Some of them did not like the idea, but others did, and I myself developed a way of lecturing that would allow for questions. This dialogue after lectures was what attracted more students. Marxists would attend, and during the question time, they took the opportunity to preach short sermons on Marxism. Actually, the core and decisive points of my lectures were what I shared in responding to students’ questions. As time went on I became a staff member of the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students in Perú, later in Argentina and Brazil.

I started to write my lectures about the Christian view of history, work, race, and social change. My colleague Pedro Arana published half a dozen of them in Perú in a book entitled *Dialogue Between Christ and Marx*. He included the most frequently asked questions by students and my responses. Ten thousand copies were sold during the “Evangelism in Depth” program in 1967, which resulted in the printing of a second edition. However, when the 1964 military coup in Brazil was followed by similar coups in Argentina (1966) and Chile (1973),



The Mihrab of Córdoba. A Mihrab is a semicircular niche in the wall of a mosque that indicates the qibla; that is, the direction of the Kaaba in Mecca and hence the direction that Muslims should face when praying.



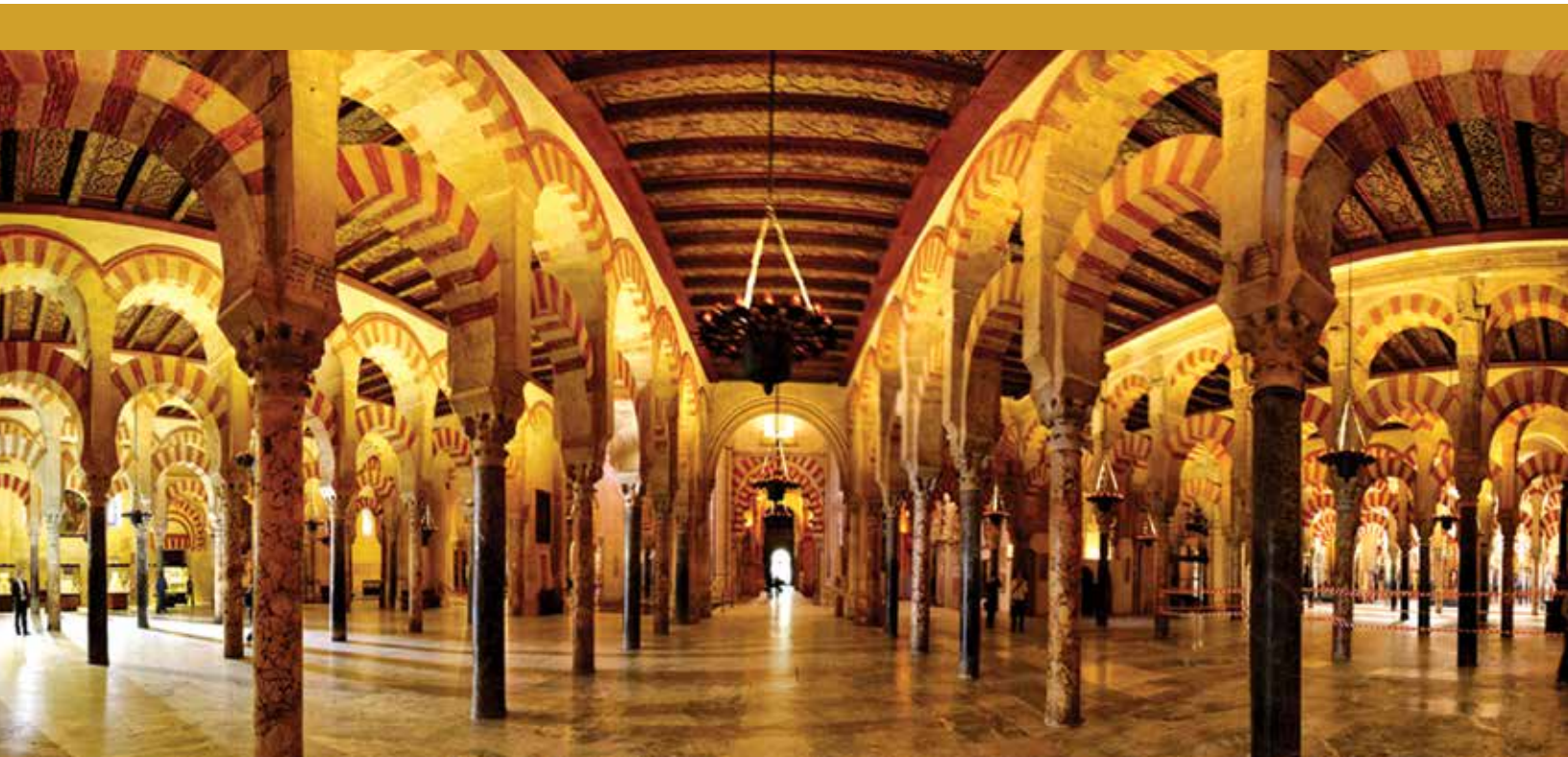
those books had to be hidden or destroyed. Police or army officials who searched homes and schools looking for “communists” could not understand the subtleties of dialogue with Marxists. In that cold war atmosphere, there was no room for dialogue.

In Latin America where the Catholic Church felt threatened by the presence and work of evangelical missionaries, interfaith dialogue between Catholics and Protestants was unthinkable in the 1950s and 1960s. But then came Vatican II (1962–1965) with winds of change and renewal, including renewed attention by Catholics to Scripture. The Bible became a ground on which dialogue was possible. We were surprised to realize that there had been a biblical movement within the Catholic Church whose work became prominent with the Vatican II reforms. Dialogue became more frequent, and even Protestant Bible societies entered with Catholic publishers into common projects of translation and publication of the Bible. Thus dialogue was placed at the service of mission.

Between 1972 and 1975 I was General Director of InterVarsity Christian Fellowship of Canada, which has work among college and high school students. High school student groups needed a believing Christian teacher with a degree of conviction and commitment who could serve as an official sponsor. In some

schools that had a student group, some Catholic teachers acted as sponsors, and I came to know and respect them. It was another form of dialogue for mission.

When I went to teach in the United States, I became a member of the American Society of Missiology (ASM), which was an enriching and formative experience. The ASM is made up of Conciliar Protestants, Roman Catholics, evangelicals, and Pentecostals, and its programs, publications, and governance are supposed to express this plurality. Thus, I came to know and respect many Roman Catholic missionaries and missiologists that were committed to Christian mission. I have a vivid memory of sharing meals in ASM meetings with Maryknoll women and men who had been missionaries in Latin America. They shared with me stories of their years of ministry, sometimes with tears in their eyes as they recalled the difficulties of serving and defending the poor and taking sides with them—a position that officially came to be known as the “preferential option for the poor.” Some of them had met evangelical missionaries and come to respect them in ways that the average Latin American bishop would not find acceptable. Thus together we explored the depths of our common Christian faith and came to respect one another and found that we could say that at



The Mosque-Cathedral of Córdoba, Spain: originally built as a Catholic Church by the Visigoths (572) this building was converted in the 8th century to a mosque under Islamic rule of that region (786-1236). Since the Reconquista in the 13th century, it was made a Catholic Church once again.



our basic core, we had a common mission. I have to acknowledge that our common missionary background and activity gave us a kind of openness to dialogue that is far more difficult to find among the average parish priest or evangelical pastor in either Perú or the United States.

Through theological study and reflection, our convictions are formed, but historical awareness contributes to a deeper understanding of them, which in turn facilitate dialogue and enriches our fundamental perceptions. For instance, I still continue to explore the meaning of the following historical fact. The Protestant missionary movement is less than three centuries old. For centuries before the Moravian Pietists and William Carey, most Christian missionary work was carried out by the Roman Catholic orders. In spite of my Protestant suspicion of monasticism, I have much to learn from the centuries of mission history that preceded the Moravians and Carey. It would be naïve to jump from the Apostle Paul to William Carey as some evangelicals seem to do.

The best document, in my opinion, that summarizes the findings of interfaith dialogue for mission is the report about the dialogue between Evangelicals and Roman Catholics (ERCDOM), edited by John Stott and Basil Meeking: *The Evangelical-Roman Catholic Dialogue on Mission (1977–1984)*. In quintessential Stott-style theological precision, clarity, and even beauty we can see the points of agreement and disagreement reached during the seven years that the dialogue lasted. In the introduction to the document we find a description of the process of dialogue that serves as a helpful precedent.

Presently, after thirteen years in Spain, I have become aware of a serious deficiency in my missiological outlook. I must have a basic understanding of Islam if I am going to understand properly Spanish culture and Spanish Roman Catholicism. The eight-hundred-year presence of Islam in Spain left a deep mark in all aspects of life, including agriculture, architecture, and industry, as well as religious attitudes and concepts about the role of institutionalized religion in society. Again in this regard, historical awareness is decisive. We cannot avoid the influence of our current bombardment by our Western media that creates stereotypes of Muslims and Islamic religion and culture that is unfair and simplistic. Though I have not taken part in any official academic dialogue with Muslims, I have had conversations with Muslim persons in different places, and I have often been intrigued, surprised, and humbled as I later reflected on those encounters.

I am now learning valuable lessons from Latin American missionaries in Islamic lands who take time to write and reflect about their experiences. One of them has written about the team's first visit to the town where they intended to carry out evangelistic

**“Presently, after thirteen years in Spain, I have become aware of a serious deficiency in my missiological outlook. I must have a basic understanding of Islam if I am going to understand properly Spanish culture and Spanish Roman Catholicism.”**

work. Their car broke down and they had to spend the night in town, and to their surprise, the local Muslims they had come to evangelize offered them hospitality, comfortable beds, and humbly shared their food. As a result, some of their preexisting stereotypes had to be abandoned, and in turn, new and unexpected ways of sharing Christ were to be imagined.

Interfaith dialogue at the academic level is one thing. It requires a respectful familiarity with texts from different faiths and a disposition to listen to one another. Historical awareness is also very important in the process as it represents an attempt to situate and correct contemporary popular media stereotypes. For example, realities such as globalization influence the way in which those who speak on behalf of the faith communities express their understanding of their faith.

On the other hand, missionary interaction at a grassroots level is a different thing. It is filled with moments in which God's power manifests itself, sometimes in unexpected ways, in the daily life of people and local communities. To the degree to which missionaries are ready to listen to local people (in the same way in which Jesus did), and willing to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit, their understanding of their own faith will grow and deepen as they find new, creative ways of responding to those questions, in word and deed. Good missiology, I believe, has to benefit from these two kinds of dialogue. **EIFD**

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## “GIFTIVE MISSION” AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Although often seen as being in opposition, Christian mission and interreligious dialogue complement each other. Linking them requires moving beyond two stereotypes: First, that mission is a we-they activity; that is, mission involves Christians ministering to the foreigner and the strange culture, the other religion, the needy, and so forth. The second understands dialogue as an encounter that involves comparing differing views about the divine, usually with a stated openness to changing one’s own beliefs.

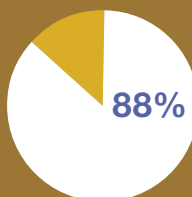
Understanding the complexity of Christian mission today can relieve us of the first stereotype. Besides traditional activities of service and preaching, Christian mission includes accompaniment, incarnational presence, working with the poor, and being ministered to by those a missionary serves. Even when Christians disagree about forms of mission, they can honor others’ ways and learn from them.

My recent book, *Graceful Evangelism*, outlines seven forms of Christian mission and shows differences and overlapping motifs among them.<sup>1</sup>

Actually, mission is more like giving and receiving gifts than a one-way outreach to others. In *Christianity Encountering World Religions*, Terry Muck and I describe gift-giving and receiving practices in different parts of the world.<sup>2</sup> Cultures exhibit different ways of understanding gifts and therefore their giving and receiving practices also vary. We emphasize that Christian mission is a two-way street—receiving gifts from others and offering the priceless gift of salvation through Jesus Christ. “Giftive mission” thus becomes a metaphor for contemporary Christian mission.

Interreligious engagement also mirrors the giving and receiving of Christian mission. It offers multifaceted ways of being with people of another religion. Formal interreligious dialogue about beliefs by proponents of different religions represents

### Muslim Population of Indonesia



**88% of the total Indonesian population are Muslim, which makes up 13% of the total world Muslim population.**

Data from Pew Forum’s report on the world’s Muslim population, 2011 Pew Research Center’s Forum on Religion & Public Life.

only one form of dialogue. It is an important forum that engenders deeper understanding of both theological nuances of different religions and varying beliefs within denominations and sects of a particular religion. Increasingly this form of dialogue seeks an honest encounter with others whose convictions are held as deeply as one's own. Participants need not be open to changing their religion but must be clear about their own beliefs and open to listening and respecting the beliefs of others.

Moving away from those two stereotypes reveals many forms of engagement with persons and communities of religious difference. Some focus on theological conversation, some on project building, some on civic action, and some on friendship. One of the best ways to engage people of another religion is through friendship. It offers a kaleidoscope of experiences that expands understanding and fosters mutual respect. Friendship offers experiences of another religion that one cannot gain through academic study. It offers

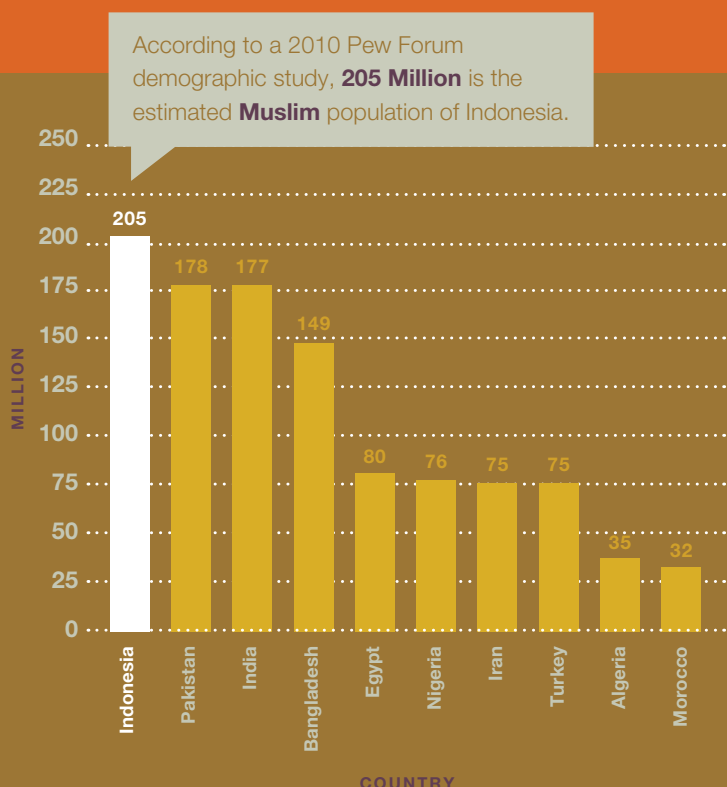
opportunity to witness to the gospel, to be Christ's hands and feet for others. And it offers the chance to receive.

When I taught at Jakarta Theological Seminary in Indonesia, in the early 1990s, I chose to live in a Muslim neighborhood instead of on campus. Within a few days I had been introduced to the family next door. A mother and her twelve-year-old daughter appeared at my door with a sumptuous meal. "I see that you are living alone," the woman said. "You have no mother here. I will be your mother." Faithful to her word, Masooma turned up at my door at least once a week with a meal for me. She frequently invited me over for milk-tea in the afternoon. Sometimes I would sit nearby while she instructed a group of youngsters in reading the Qur'an in Arabic. I also got to know Masooma's husband and daughters, aged twelve and seven.

After a few months, our appearance in the other's house seemed natural. We spoke of our religions—how they overlapped, how they differed. One day Masooma scolded me for leaving my bible on the floor next to my low bed. "It is wrong to put the sacred book on the ground," she admonished. I asked about the mosque and the fast during Ramadan. She requested the Christmas cards I received after the holidays. Masooma and her husband taught at the Pakistani International School in Jakarta. I taught at the Christian Seminary. Yet we found time in our busy schedules for friendship.

The girls especially liked sitting on my front stoop playing with my kitten, Bib. The Muslim idea of a pet's "place" is outside. Masooma appreciated the wonder her children felt while playing with Bib, but she would never have a cat in her home. The kitten's playful companionship was a gift that I could give. I too received gifts of hospitality—learning about their family life through visiting, observing religious practices, and sharing meals.

Another way to do interreligious engagement is through teaching and learning. Courses on mission, world religions, and social ethics provide opportunities for interreligious dialogue in the classroom while preparing students to encounter those of other religions in their daily life. The classroom context provides a forum for questioning one's beliefs as well as learning from the beliefs and practices of others. In a course on world religions at Trinity College in Singapore in 2002, a student from a Hindu background became concerned about the foundations of her Christian faith. Was she a Christian because her mother believed in Christ and because she was alienated from her Hindu father? Her final paper, comparing Hinduism and Christianity, helped this student to better understand why she believed in Christ and how Hinduism provided religious meaning for her father.





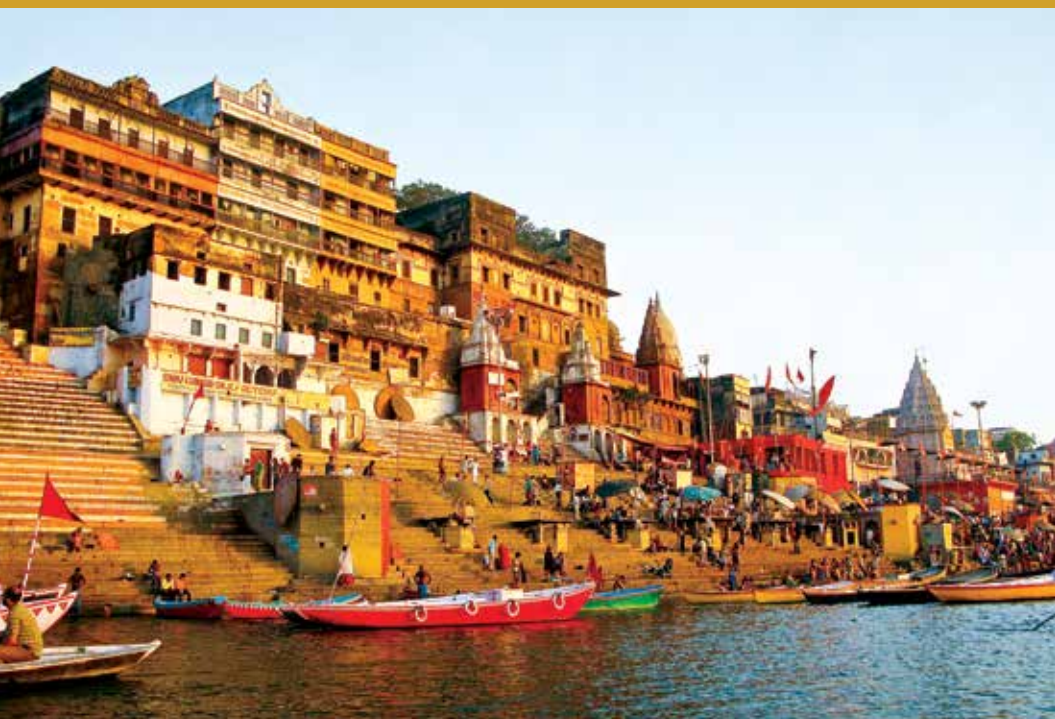
*Asbury Journal*, published by Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky, devoted an issue to teaching and learning practices that can be helpful to Christians teaching in an interreligious context.<sup>3</sup> In that issue, professors shared the most meaningful practices that shaped their own teaching. Those salient experiences can provide tools to a teacher who is learning about other religions and respectfully engage students of other religions in one's classes.

Travel offers another venue for linking mission and interreligious dialogue. As my husband and I hiked the Anna Purna Trail in Nepal in 2002, we met Westerners taking up the challenge of trekking and seeking knowledge of nature. Our Hindu guide Rishi had questions about Christianity. He shared with us his own Hindu practices and beliefs. We even met a Tibetan Lama who told us miraculous tales

of sustenance on the trail given by his prayers and the prayer beads he offered to others.

New ways of practicing Christian mission and interreligious dialogue make this an exciting time to do both. Formal interreligious dialogue presents opportunities for deepening theological understandings of different religions. "Giftive" mission and informal theological conversations can expand interreligious engagement. Experiences of interreligious engagement through building friendships, teaching and learning in the classroom, and travel have enriched my own life as a scholar and a Christian. **EIFD**

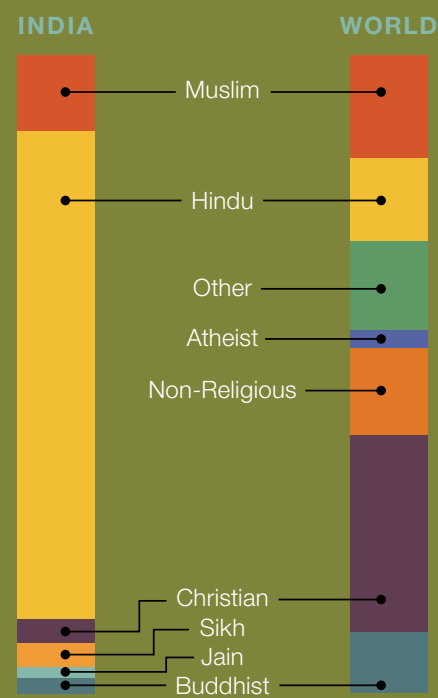
Frances S. Adeney is the William A. Benfield Jr. Professor of Evangelism and Global Mission Emerita at Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky. Her teaching and scholarship focus on issues at the intersection of Christian mission and culture. She is the author of five books, including the forthcoming *Women and Christian Mission*.



With 4,635 different people groups, eighteen officially recognized languages, and a long and complex history that dates back to the Indus Valley Civilization (around 3,000 BCE), India is anything but homogenous. As the world's third largest religion, Hinduism is by far the largest religious group in India, making up 80 percent of India's total population of 1,171,000,000.\*

\* "World Hindu Population," *Mamandram Magazine* (Official Publication of the Malaysia Hindu Dharma Mamandram), posted October 3, 2008, <http://www.mamandram.org/magazine/2008/10/world-hindu-population/>.

## Religious Diversity





## INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT AS PROPHETIC DIALOGUE

When the editors of the journal sent me the invitation to reflect on the relationship between interfaith engagement and Christian mission I was quite surprised. My surprise was not that I had been asked to reflect on the topic—I certainly have something to say in this regard. My surprise, rather, was to be included, as the invitation note put it, “in a select group of evangelical scholars from around the world”! I am, after all, not an evangelical. I am a Roman Catholic.

My surprise, however, turned almost immediately into a sense of being honored. Through the years I have learned much from my evangelical brothers and sisters, and a good number of years ago I even wrote an article about what Catholics can learn from evangelical mission theology.<sup>1</sup> In many ways, I see myself as an “evangelical Catholic,” especially in the sense that I have a strong sense of mission and a need for my faith to be deeply heartfelt and experiential. For other evangelicals to include me among their ranks, therefore, was truly an honor, and something for which I am profoundly grateful. More important, I believe, than our denominational or ecclesial differences, we are sisters and brothers, members of the Body of Christ, called to bear witness in word and deed to God’s love in the world revealed in Jesus Christ.

I hope that what I write here about the connections between interfaith dialogue and Christian mission will make sense to evangelicals. On the one hand, I believe, what I say will be very Catholic, thoroughly informed by our Catholic teaching office. Some of what follows may therefore differ quite significantly from mainstream evangelical positions. On the other hand, much of what I say here as a Catholic will dovetail very closely with mainstream evangelical positions as well.

### Salvation Outside Christian Faith?

Any reflection on the relationship between interfaith engagement and Christian mission from a Catholic perspective needs to take into account Catholic teaching on the possibility of salvation outside the boundaries of Christian faith. Although much motivation for Christian mission has been given by Mark 16:16, Acts 4:12, and Cyprian of Carthage’s dictum that “outside the church there is no salvation,” the actual teaching of the Christian tradition has been much more open to the possibility for nonbelievers of good will being saved. Several times Jesus remarked in the Gospels on the faith of those considered unclean or unworthy of forgiveness or healing (e.g., Mark 7:24–29; Luke 19:1–10; John 4). Justin Martyr, Origen, Thomas Aquinas, and Bartolomé de las Casas, all with roots in the biblical witness, taught about the saving presence of God outside of explicit Christian faith and baptism.<sup>2</sup> The Second Vatican Council, however, explicitly and officially taught that “those also can attain to everlasting salvation who through no fault of their own do not know the gospel of Christ or His Church, yet sincerely seek God and, moved by grace, strive by their deeds to do His will as it is known to them through the dictates of their conscience.”<sup>3</sup> Even further, the Council taught that the religions of the world “often reflect a ray of that Truth which enlightens all peoples.”<sup>4</sup> This teaching has been repeated by papal teaching and other official documents, from Rome and from regional episcopal conferences, in the fifty years since. It is the basis for the church’s claim that interreligious dialogue is an essential, even constitutive part, of the church’s missionary work.<sup>5</sup>

## The Necessity of Mission

On the other hand, the Council and subsequent official teaching have spoken strongly and forcefully about the need for Christian mission to preach God's salvation offered in Jesus Christ. Every one of the four Constitutions of the Council begins with some kind of missionary motivation. The Constitution on the Church's first lines read: "Christ is the light of all nations. Hence this most sacred Synod, which has been gathered in the Holy Spirit, eagerly desires to shed on all peoples that radiance of His which brightens the countenance of the Church. This it will do by proclaiming the gospel to every creature (cf. Mark 16:15)." Along the same lines, Pope Francis has recently stated unequivocally that "evangelization is the task of the Church," and, quoting John Paul II, who is alluding to his predecessor Paul VI, insisted that "there can be no true evangelization without the explicit proclamation of Jesus as Lord."<sup>6</sup>

## Contradiction or Creative Tension?

Is there a contradiction here, as noted evangelical theologian of religions Harold Netland once asked me? Is the Catholic Church trying to have it both ways? I do not think so. On the one hand, Catholic teaching acknowledges the constant presence of the Holy Spirit that continuously seeks ways to lead all women and men into the Paschal Mystery.<sup>7</sup> But on the other hand, it acknowledges

“Perhaps a good way to speak about this Catholic approach to interfaith engagement and mission is to borrow the beautiful phrase of David Bosch that he uses when he himself talks about interreligious dialogue: “bold humility.” We need to be bold in our proclamation, but humble too: “We know only in part, but we do know.”

that “rather often women and men, deceived by the Evil One, have become caught up in futile reasoning and have exchanged the truth of God for a lie, serving the creature rather than the Creator (cf. Rom 1:21, 25).” Salvation is *possible*, but possible, not a certainty—a conviction that obtains for Christians as well. Indeed,

as the Council insists, Christians’ “exalted status is to be attributed not to their own merits but to the special grace of Christ. If they fail moreover to respond to that grace in thought, word, and deed, not only will they not be saved but they will be more severely judged.”<sup>8</sup> It is because of the possibility that people will not be saved that “the Church painstakingly fosters its missionary work.”<sup>9</sup>

So rather than a contradiction, we have more of a creative tension between God's saving presence in people of other religious ways (or those of no faith) and the missionary obligation to preach the gospel. This is why, among those who are Christians and those who are not, an attitude and practice of dialogue should flourish. Dialogue is in no way a tactic to eventually convert a person to Christ, however. Dialogue is its own end. It allows each party to discover the truth of the other in a process that Doug McConnell, in the article that called for these short reflections, called a “truth encounter.” It should be an occasion for each person in the process to wonder at the richness of God's grace and the beauty of that grace as it appears in various cultural traditions. It should lead to God's praise for the Spirit's active presence in the world.

Dialogue, however, also leads to witness and even proclamation. When Christians share their convictions with women and men of other faiths, they do it with a deep desire to bring the other to the truth as they understand it. I remember reading an article by the great Catholic comparative theologian Francis X. Clooney in which he stated that he had never been in a real dialogue where his dialogue partners were not totally convinced of their particular faith. In fact, as Pope Francis puts it, “true openness involves remaining steadfast in one's deepest convictions, clear and joyful in one's own identity, while at the same time being ‘open to understanding those of the other party’ and ‘knowing that dialogue can enrich each side.’ . . . Evangelization and interreligious dialogue, far from being opposed, mutually support one another.”<sup>10</sup>

## Interfaith Engagement as Prophetic Dialogue

Perhaps a good way to speak about this Catholic approach to interfaith engagement and mission is to borrow the beautiful phrase of David Bosch that he uses when he himself talks about interreligious dialogue: “bold humility.”<sup>11</sup> We need to be bold in our proclamation, but humble too: “We know only in part, but we do know.” Another way this creative tension might be expressed is in the phrase that Roger Schroeder and I have borrowed from the official documents of our own missionary congregation, the Society of the Divine Word: “prophetic dialogue,” a basic attitude or even spirituality that we believe should pervade all of our mission reflection and practice.<sup>12</sup> On the one hand, and fundamentally, mission should be lived out in a stance of dialogue—openness, readiness to learn from those among whom we work, respect for





In May 2014, Pope Francis asked two long-time friends from Argentina to accompany him to the Holy Land, Rabbi Abraham Skorka and Islamic studies professor Omar Abboud. This represented the first time an official papal delegation included members of other faiths in a visit to the region.

people's cultural and religious traditions. On the other hand, however, mission is not just "being nice," being open and respectful of others. We come to share with people—as did Israel's prophets and the women and men of the early Christian community—a message of profound hope, of radical forgiveness, of almost unbelievable joy, of a consistent commitment to justice, of deep inner healing: the message of God's love incarnate in Jesus, whose Spirit has stirred in the heart of all women and men.

There are times when dialogue needs to be the order of the day—when we are in situations where we cannot preach openly, when the best thing to do is to show our concern for people by learning their language and culture, by letting ourselves be nourished by the ancient wisdom of their spirituality. But there are other times when we must speak a word of prophecy—when people who have become fascinated by our joy in Christ ask us to tell them more, when in dialogue we share our innermost convictions, when a situation of injustice impels us to denounce the evil that is keeping people in a dehumanized state. I imagine the practice of mission as a kind of continuum, with dialogue on one side and prophecy on the other. Only the context, only the situation, can tell us when dialogue is more in order than prophecy, or when prophecy emerges out of dialogue.

### A Generous God

Our God is a generous God. We see this in Jesus, who preached a message of mercy, who performed mighty deeds of healing, who

showed the depth of God's love in his passion and death, who saw goodness even in those on the margins and outside of his religion, who has shared his mission with us. Such a generous God finds ways to lead the women and men of this world into the peace and joy and life of God's Reign. We Christians need to be open to God's generosity as we engage actively, respectfully, and lovingly with those who believe in God differently, or who do not believe at all (sometimes rightly rejecting images of God that are dehumanizing and monstrous, some even presented by Christians!). But this generous God, we Christians believe, is indeed fully present and active in Jesus, and we must be witnesses to Jesus' truth and God's saving power in him through the Spirit. Christians meet our generous God as they engage the women and men of other religious ways in friendship and dialogue, and they witness to the fullness of this generous God as they engage in evangelizing mission. **EI**

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## COMPETING NARRATIVES IN THE NETHERLANDS

It seems an unfavorable time to be discussing interfaith dialogue and mission. Throughout the world we encounter unrest about the situation in the Middle East, where the announcement of a caliphate has captured the hearts and imaginations of many of the younger generation in the region. The prospects for the Christian community in the Middle East are dim, due to the fact that militant forms of Islam have enlarged their basis of power. The overthrow of old dictatorial regimes did not pave the way for modern forms of democracy, but rather created a power vacuum within which radical Islamic groups have multiplied. The modern call to jihad even attracts youngsters from different western countries.

What is it that attracts and fascinates them? One of the major draws is a compelling “grand narrative.” This is an attractive vision of a caliphate, and centers on devotion to Allah and a pure life according to the *sharia*. Such a vision gives form and meaning to life. This narrative offered by the caliphate awakens memories of powerful Islamic empire that dominated much of the world. For Christians in the Middle East this all has devastating consequences as many of the Christian communities that have existed for centuries in the region are facing near extinction.

The Middle East is not the only place where the prospects for interfaith dialogue between Muslims and Christians seem poor. Stories of Boko Haram in Nigeria and reports from Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia also point to the endangered situation of many Christians. What does this all mean for Christian mission and interfaith dialogue? In order to explore this question I would like to focus on the grand narrative that we live from and from which we draw our hope. Taking this narrative approach affords a way into the larger religious imaginations that differentiate Muslims, Liberals and Christians.



A converted Catholic Church, now Faith Mosque of Amsterdam.

## The Context of The Netherlands

The reports of a growing militant Islam have ripple effects on numerous social and political contexts. In my country, the Netherlands, official institutions try to keep a sharp eye on the young men who have served as soldiers and warriors in the jihad. Due to these war experiences, training and the possibility of being traumatized, these men are regarded as a risk factor to society. Their existence fueled the anxiety, unrest and turmoil that found its fevered pitch in the public debate over the murder of Theo van Gogh by a Muslim extremist in 2004. In the days following the murder, my country found itself wrestling with serious questions: How should society react to this religious radicalism? What can a modern secularist society offer those who belong to such groups? The Islamisation of a growing number of youth in the Netherlands comes as a shock to the liberal majority and runs against the grain of the values and norms of the dominant forces in Dutch society. The grand narrative advocated by the caliphate challenges the (largely assumed) grand narrative of secular liberalism. What is this liberal narrative? The liberal narrative is one of self-determination and offers a vision of a free individual who is able to manage his or her own life like a modern day Robinson Crusoe in the midst of challenges. It tells the story of equality in which all members of society have the rights and access to education, medical care, economic opportunities, political freedoms and a network of social care. The integrity of the human person and equality of gender and sex are among the achievements of this modern liberal society, which regards itself as the apex of human development. But what does an individual do when society leaves them jobless and does not seem to need them? The dark side of the liberal narrative is that it requires you to be successful for in the end it is only the winners who count in this evolutionary view of society. It turns out that for all its claims of equality and advancement, this narrative is cold, empty and often cruel.

## The Christian Narrative and Interfaith Engagement

But does the Christian faith offer a different narrative that draws from different values? Or has the church succumbed to the values and norms of their cultural habitat, and allowed the Christian story to become hidden and veiled? The grand narrative of the gospel, and more generally, the drama of the covenant, is the source of the life for the church. It is this narrative after all that is the source of the values and norms to guide our way of life as followers of Jesus

**“Despite the limitations of the underlying data for Europe, it appears that Germany is home to more than 4 million Muslims—almost as many as North and South America combined. This means that Germany has more Muslims than Lebanon (between 2 million and 3 million) and more than any other country in western Europe.”**

Logo, Luis. 2009. *Mapping Global Islam: A Report on the Size and Distribution of the World's Muslim Population*. Washington DC Pew Research Center, page 26.

in society. And it is exactly this narrative that we bring with us in our encounter and dialogue with other faith communities.

It is important to first examine what we mean when we speak of interfaith dialogue. Does this refer to official dialogues about theology between religious leaders? Granted, such things are important and indispensable. In the aftermath of his Regensburg Address in 2006, Pope Benedict XVI launched an important high-level dialogue on the commonalities and differences between the Christian faith and Islam. Additionally, this inspired Miroslav Volf to write his book, *Allah: A Christian Response*. As important as such advanced discussions may be they nevertheless have their limitations when viewed from the perspective of Christian mission. In light of a broader view of mission the effects of such dialogues are mostly restricted to a group of elite scholars. The highly appraised book of Volf is itself an example of the fact that mission is not the aim of such projects. Volf's concern was the earthly coexistence of Christians and Muslims.<sup>1</sup> Of course official dialogues and critical assessment do have a role to play in mission as they can create a framework and legitimization for political pluralism and peaceful coexistence between religious groups. But as helpful as such official dialogues may be there is a level that is more decisive for mission: the level of communal life and shared societal practices. Interfaith engagement occurs where people share their lives, neighborhoods, and office spaces. The lived life of every day



is at the forefront of mission. Dialogue and theological reflection play a role, but they are on a limited registrar, and often remain at a purely academic level.

This is why we must also be attentive to the contextual location in which dialogue and encounter takes place. Circumstances differ between continents, countries, cities, neighborhoods, and families. For many people the existence of Jews, Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists is not part and parcel of their daily life. They rarely meet adherents of other religions and so this issue of interfaith engagement remains at a distance. Interfaith engagement often comes as a challenge to people when in the routines of their everyday lives they become inescapably intertwined with people of other faiths within the realms of the work environment, shared public spaces, or even the family such as when a daughter marries a Muslim, or a brother converts to Buddhism. On such occasions the question of mission and the communication of the gospel take on new urgency and relevance, as it becomes an everyday life question.

As previously discussed in Doug McConnell’s essay, interfaith dialogue is also bound up with intercultural dialogue. For example, someone born in the Middle East will, when living in the Netherlands, likely find the Dutch celebration of Sinterklaas peculiar and foreign. At the same time, this person might find that they miss the communality of the Ramadan and the celebration of the Sugar Feast. We all are profoundly shaped by the upbringing of our native culture, although we are hardly aware of how deep we are formed



Due to labor recruitment agreements between West Germany and Turkey in the early 1960s, Turks comprise the largest ethnic minority in Germany today (est. 3.5 million).

### Percentage Population that is Muslim in European Countries


|                         |         |
|-------------------------|---------|
| • Kosovo                | 89.6 %  |
| • Albania               | 79.9 %  |
| • Bosnia-Herzegovina    | 40.0 %* |
| • Republic of Macedonia | 33.3 %  |
| • Bulgaria              | 12.2 %  |
| • Russia                | 11.7 %  |
| • France                | 6.0 %*  |
| • Netherlands           | 5.7 %   |
| • Germany               | 5.0 %*  |
| • United Kingdom        | 2.7 %   |
| • Rest of Region        | 1.1 %   |

\*Data for Germany, France and Bosnia-Herzegovina come primarily from general population surveys, which are less reliable than censuses or large-scale demographic and health surveys for estimating minority-majority ratios. As a result, the percentage of the population that is Muslim in these three countries is rounded to the nearest integer. Kohut, Andrew, 2006. *The Great Divide: How Westerners and Muslims View Each Other*. Pew Research Center, page 3.

and determined by it. However, these important cultural and religious differences notwithstanding, there are certain shared situations—especially those related to the lifecycle, life and death, sorrow and joy, and celebrations of marriage and the birth of children—that present opportunities for sharing life and faith across these divides. This type of interreligious and intercultural engagement is powerfully captured in an experience that my wife, Margriet, had as hospital chaplain with an Iraqi woman named Farasha. It is a story that points to the ways in which an interfaith encounter involves helping a person to cope with grief. And it points to the power of the Christian narrative to offer tangible ways to bridge these divides and help a fellow human in need. Farasha had recently given birth to a son with severe disabilities. Tragically, he had no chance of survival. Margriet relayed the following conversation with Farasha.

Farasha sat with her very sick little boy on her lap. We both knew that he had a short time to live. She said, 'My mother pressed me to the heart that I must be a good Muslim and not cry.' She told me that 'I must bow and be silent' for 'everything comes from Allah, and therefore everything is done correctly.' But Farasha questioned her mother, 'Did not the prophet weep over his dead baby son? Why would she not be allowed to cry?' I felt very connected to this mother. As a Christian I know of a similar story about the Son of God who wept at the grave of his friend. Reading in John 11 that Jesus wept and groaned over his friends' death, I strongly believe that the death of a child, bombed cities, tortured people, drowned people off the coast of Lampedusa, or the story of an abused woman—are never to be 'accepted.' When the Church proclaims that its chief witness, Jesus, has conquered the enemy of death, you cannot at the same time say that you have to accept death as a friend. That should be called, 'collaborating with the enemy.'

In this interfaith and intercultural encounter mission takes the form of sharing in the grief of the mother and at the same time being mindful of the hope offered by the gospel. God is faithful to humanity in its lost and fallen condition. This faithfulness became concrete in the love of Jesus, in all its vulnerability. It is by the work of the Holy Spirit that the reality of this love imbues our lives and cultures. The Book of Acts shows what happens when the gospel

crosses the borders of language, race, culture, class, and gender. The grand narrative of the Christian gospel has a trickle-down effect that transforms life in unexpected ways. When people have the courage to share their lives, their anxieties, hopes and doubts, space will open up by the power of the Spirit for the communication of the gospel. Interfaith engagement therefore should not be viewed as the suppression of the gospel but as an expression of its power in our lives with others. Let us be reminded of Jesus, his love and life—how he was confirmed by God the Father as a servant (ebed) and his exaltation is "a sure pledge that he, as the Head, will take us, his members, up to himself" (Heidelberg Catechism Q/A 49). That narrative is the treasure that was passed on to us as followers of Jesus. And through the empowering of the Holy Spirit it has the power to transform our discipleship in our contemporary religiously pluralistic society. 

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Pioneer

## HENDRIK KRAEMER



Hendrik Kraemer (1888-1965) served in the Netherlands Bible Society in Indonesia from 1922-1937. Upon his return to the Netherlands he was appointed professor of the history and phenomenology of religions at the University of Leiden (1937-1947). He was later appointed the director of the World Council of Churches' Ecumenical Institute (1948-1955).

Kraemer was an early advocate of the view of the "incommensurability" of religions. This view contends that each religion is an entire world unto itself and religious ideas and rituals cannot be understood from an "outsider's" perspective. Not surprisingly, he was critical of the dominant approach to the study of religion that sought an impartial vantage point for inquiry. In its place Kraemer advocated a confessional

stance as the starting point for religious inquiry and interfaith engagement. A fundamental assumption of his approach is that there exists no point of contact between Christian revelation and other religions. Attempting to find common ground through comparative religions approach is a fools errand. But if there exists no point of contact in terms of revelation, there is a human point of contact with persons of other faiths. Embedded within non-Christian religions are aspirations, needs, and desires with which Christians can identify. The task of interfaith dialogue is to attend to these points of human contact and identify ways in which the Christian gospel offers a "subversive fulfillment" or redirecting of these human needs towards Christ.

*Religion and the Christian Faith* (1956) provides a good point of entry into Kraemer's theology of religions and interfaith engagement.

Executive Director of the Louisville Institute in Louisville, Kentucky.



## COMPLEXITY, COOPERATION, AND COMMITMENT IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

When Christians come in contact with people of other religious traditions, should we evangelize them or should we dialogue with them? The editors of *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue* journal asked me to prepare a short essay on “dialogue and mission,” and my experience is that evangelicals often phrase the question in that way. So I would like to frame my short essay around two reasons why I think that the question as I have stated it—“Should we evangelize or dialogue with people of other religions?”—is an inadequate way to state the question.

I have two reasons for this opinion. First, the question assumes that evangelization and dialogue are mutually exclusive. Rather than making it an either/or question, we can see it as a both/and question—or as a first/second question. Second, the question seems to ignore the complexity of interreligious interactions. Evangelism and dialogue are two of the possible ways Christians and Hindus, Christians and Buddhists, Christians and Muslims, for example, interact, but there are many other forms as well. For example, what about debate, argumentation, cooperation, collaboration, or just plain neighborliness?

### Beyond Either/Or

It may be a commonplace observation to say that not all theological issues can be boiled down to a statement of “this is true and that is not true”—in short, an either/or proposition. But even if that is not the case, let me remind readers that the Bible uses other ways of resolving theological issues.

One of these ways is both/and thinking: perhaps the prime example of both/and thinking is the Incarnation. Two truths that could easily be seen as an either/or choice—Jesus is human; Jesus is divine—are instead seen as both true. Not only is the Incarnation an example of both/and thinking, but to try to reduce it to either/or thinking is heresy of the highest order. Another form of biblical thinking is what we might call first/second thinking. In first/second thinking, the order of what we believe, feel, or do is essential. We cannot be reconciled to all peoples until we are first reconciled to God. Loving our neighbor as ourselves follows from loving God first.

How might these observations apply to the relationship between evangelism and dialogue? Instead of assuming that we must choose one or the other as the way the Bible teaches us to relate to people of other religious traditions, perhaps we should think about both of them being part of the biblical requirements of Christian mission. Or perhaps they should be seen in a first/second relationship, with one preceding the other in order to be faithful to Scripture.

My fifty years of involvement in both interfaith dialogue and evangelism prompts me to suggest which pattern of thinking we should use in trying to relate the two. I have found all three to be valid ways of relating dialogue and evangelism.



My experience has taught me that it is the context of the encounter that determines how one views that relationship at any point in time. Some situations clearly call for evangelism, while others call for dialogue. In some cases both are appropriate, and it is almost as if we vacillate back and forth between the two modes of relating.

### Complex Relationships

It is possible, of course, to reduce interfaith interactions to two simple choices: evangelism and dialogue. But limiting interfaith interactions to just those two does not seem to accurately reflect what many of us experience in relationships with people of other religious traditions. And because it does not “square” with lived experience, framing the question in this way seems to be a rather sterile academic exercise.

For 35 years I have participated in interfaith dialogue specifically between Christians and Buddhists. The Society for Buddhist Christian Studies was formed in the late 1980s, and has met annually as an additional meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR) conference held in late November. I have been to all of the meetings of the Society, and I suppose I could talk about instances of dialogue (conversations in search of understanding one another) and instances of evangelism

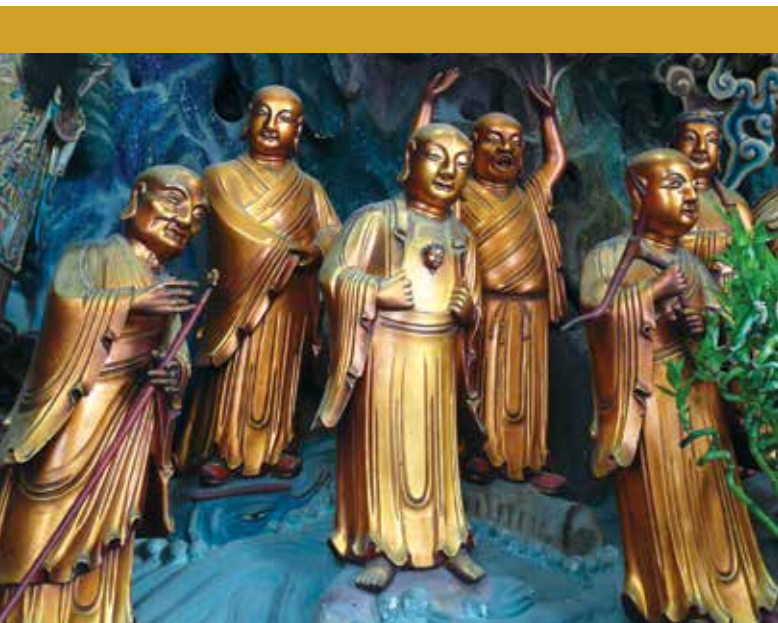


(faith statements of intention as to the truth of our respective religious traditions)—carried out by both Christians and Buddhist members of the Society. And I would be lying if I said that those contacts were unimportant.

But I could also reflect on all of the debates we have had, including an ongoing discussion regarding whether it is possible to be both a Buddhist and a Christian at the same time. Another option is to tell you about one another’s truth claims that occasionally emerge during discussions (e.g., Is Jesus really the only way to salvation? Is Gautama’s teaching really the only way to enlightenment?). Having said that, I am also eager to tell you of the positive personal relationships that have formed for me as a result of the Society. I am not overstating the case when I say that the closest friendships I have developed as a result of contacts made at the AAR meetings have come from engagement with Buddhists at the Society meetings.

One of the most essential findings I discovered when I wrote the book *Those Other Religions in Your Neighborhood*<sup>1</sup> was that neighborliness only occasionally has anything to do with either evangelism or dialogue. It most often has to do with the practicalities of cooperation in living together peacefully and fruitfully. For example, creating positive crime-free and drug-free neighborhoods is something people of all religious traditions can work on together.

Interreligious relationships are much more common in the world in which we all live these days. One does not have to belong to a formal interreligious dialogue group such as the Society for Buddhist Christian Studies in order to have frequent contact with people of other religious groups. It happens every day in most of the neighborhoods in the United States. But interreligious relationships are not just more common—they are also more complex. As a result, one of the twenty-first century’s challenges



Group of statues in the Jade Buddha Temple in Shanghai, China. The temple was founded in 1882 and draws from various traditions in Mahayana Buddhism.

## Pioneer

# E. STANLEY JONES



E. Stanley Jones (1884–1973) was a Methodist missionary to India who was known as an evangelist to the intellectuals of society. Jones found that the engagement between Christians and those of other faiths was too often characterized

by an atmosphere of debate and competition. If Christianity was to take root as an authentically Indian religion rather than as a Western import, a different approach would be needed. In order to understand the deepest and richest parts of a religion a sympathetic and experiential atmosphere needed to be established. Jones is perhaps best known for his Round Table Conferences which brought together fifteen Indians from diverse religious backgrounds with five Indian Christians. The focus of these conferences was to get at the heart of the respective faiths through the personal experiences of those present. As such, the topics of discussion had more to do with what parts of the participants' faith offered light and life, brought about peace and tranquility, or contributed to social harmony. This "Round Table approach" to interfaith dialogue fostered the sympathetic atmosphere Jones deemed necessary for getting at the heart of religion.

A good introductory essay on the life and work of Jones by Bishop Samuel Mathew can be found on the Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue website. Jones' book *Christ at the Round Table* (1928) is a helpful introduction to his approach to interfaith engagement.

for Christians is learning how to navigate relational complexity effectively and faithfully.

## Cooperation and Commitment

The challenge of being a faithful public Christian in a twenty-first-century Western context is to be able to balance cooperation with people of other religious traditions with a commitment to the truth—the exclusive truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I do not use the word *challenge* lightly. Balancing cooperation and commitment is not a particularly easy task. But it is what we are called to do and be. To be cooperating and committed public Christians means to continue to navigate further along two spectrums of relational behavior.

The first is the love-spectrum, one that moves from suspicion to tolerance and then to a love of people of other religious traditions. To be sure, there is plenty to be suspicious about in the forms of religious extremism and even terrorism that sometimes seem to surround us. Yet in the face of these aberrations of the human religious urge, we must move beyond mere toleration of those with whom we disagree to a place where we can love our neighbors—all our neighbors—as ourselves. We must move from fundamentalist suspicion, beyond liberal tolerance, to evangelical love.

The second is the belief-spectrum, one that moves from isolation to apologetics and then ultimately to respect. The temptation to throw up our hands in despair and retreat behind our walls of belief has never been greater. Burying our talents in the sand has real appeal in a world full of confrontation and risk. We have learned that apologetic confrontation usually leads to more confrontation, not less. And the confrontational stakes keep getting higher.

Yet instead of retreating to isolation, we are called to engage the world in increasingly loving ways. A willingness to respectfully learn from people of other religious traditions lays the foundations that enable us to gracefully witness to our own religious traditions. It may seem counterintuitive, but the gospel has never conformed itself to human logic. The challenges of interreligious relationships do indeed mean we must learn how to evangelize gracefully and dialogue respectfully. But it also means many other things, and for faithful Christians, one can think of few issues of greater importance in an increasingly religiously complex world. **EIFD**

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## **AT THE INTERSECTION OF MISSIONARY ZEAL AND INTERFAITH PASSION<sup>1</sup>**

My own biography could reasonably be considered a kind of case study for exploring the question that organizes this issue: “What is the relationship between interfaith engagement and Christian mission?” Born in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa, the daughter of missionaries,<sup>2</sup> I am now the assistant professor of Interfaith Studies at Andover Newton Theological School in Newton, Massachusetts, where I also codirect the Center for Interreligious and Communal Leadership Education (CIRCLE), a joint program with the Rabbinical School at Hebrew College. While this might seem like a uniquely long journey, the common thread that connects my story and my current vocation is a lifelong concern for what it means to be a person of faith living in a multifaith world.

The enduring question that emerges from my experiences is this: “How do I hold together the paradox of strong religious convictions with openness to those who hold different beliefs, sometimes incompatible with my own?” Perhaps a variation of this same question might be: “What does it mean to see irreducible differences not as a threat to solidarity but as the foundation for it?”

Max Stackhouse, a Christian ethicist who taught for years at Andover Newton, once said something to the effect that if we are to truly call ourselves Christians, we must constantly be open to conversion. That phrase has stuck with me. Years later when I was doing field work at a Benedictine Abbey, I took special note of their vow to “Conversion of Life.” They vow to remain constantly open to change—to being remade and unmasked daily. They vow to be available for those moments when the veil is lifted and we see perhaps a shade more clearly the complex, inexhaustible mystery of creation—God, our lives, and the connections among us.

I do not conflate interfaith understanding with “watered-down” convictions, a muddy middle ground where no one dares to use the first-person possessive to address God. My God knit me together in my mother’s womb. My God so loved the world that S/he meets us, incarnate, in the midst of our deepest human need. And at the same time, I do not want a world without the Islamic golden age, the Jewish Kabbalah, or the Sanskrit chanting of Brahmin priests.

“Is there a way,” I asked a colleague of mine from solid Baptist roots, “that missionary zeal can be compatible with a passion for interfaith dialogue?”

He looked at me. “Do you want the answer to be yes?” he asked.

“Yeah, I guess I do,” I said.

"Well," he said. "The way I approach it is this; I don't want to convert anyone and I don't want anyone to convert me." He paused. "And the second way I think about it is, 'I want to convert everyone and I want everyone to convert me.' More paradox. He explained with an analogy saying, 'When I listen to a Peter, Paul and Mary song, I expect to be moved. And if I create something powerful, I want it to move others, to change them.'"<sup>3</sup>

One of the great intellectual revelations for me after years of seminary education and a doctoral program in comparative religions is that given the inescapable complexity of it all, we are called to cultivate a tolerance for ambiguity. We are called to find a way to simultaneously hold seemingly irreconcilable opposites, resisting the desire to push one or the other position out for the


sake of a shallow comfort. We are called, in fact, to embrace paradox. It is the way we move closer to the nature of God.

We seem to be able to do this on a small scale. Take love for example. I love my husband because of all the ways we are similar—our mutual curiosity, our values, and so on. At the same time, I love my husband because we are so different. How many of us have given up trying to convert our parents, spouses, children, or friends to seeing the world exactly as we see it, yet without this surrender lessening our love for them? The difference seems to hinge

on relationships. When we are in relationship, when we feel known in all of our faults and contradictions, we tend to be more gracious about allowing for the faults and contradictions of others.

In many ways, this is what animates the interfaith work CIRCLE does at Hebrew College and Andover Newton. As neighbors we began to ask what it would mean to take seriously this idea of loving one another. The slow, careful work of getting to know one's neighbors is an ongoing work in process, and its demands are constantly changing. There are no short cuts. No vicarious experiences will substitute for the real thing. You have to show up and bring food that everyone can eat and think about how you speak. While this seems simple on one level, it is not easy. Relationships, as we all have anecdotes to back up, are in fact hard. They take willing partners with honest intentions.

When it works, where there is trust and good intention and each partner stands solidly in his or her own identity while reaching out to the other—listening and speaking with genuine curiosity—interfaith learning can shimmer with that Spirit-filled sensation that says to me, God dwells here. Deep conversation with the religious other can be transformative and satisfying without pushing either partner to the periphery and without diminishing one perspective for the other.

This brings me back to my opening question. If I could imagine an evangelical approach to interfaith work, it would have to include a rich mix of qualities and capacities including justice, passion, humility, strong religious identity, a vow to remain open to change, commitment to building relationships, tolerance for ambiguity, and a capacity to embrace paradox. These are the qualities we want to cultivate in the next generation of religious leaders who will be called on to help communities foster connections of peace across faith lines. 

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Sharing food is perhaps the most universal and cross-cultural expression of hospitality. This meal comes to us from Uganda (photo by Kurt Simonson: <http://www.kurtsimonson.com/>.)



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## DIALOGUE AND WITNESS “THROUGH THE EYE OF THE OTHER”

Muslims and Christians in Ghana have always lived and shared their lives together at all levels. This shared life is both dialogical and missional. At various levels, there is cooperation for common concerns, there is the everyday living and sharing lives as neighbors from different faiths, there is the participation in theological exchange for mutual enrichment, and also there is sharing of spiritual experiences during interaction at festivals. Dialogue theologians refer to these forms of dialogue as dialogue of social action, dialogue of life, dialogue of mind, and dialogue of heart. Admittedly these forms of dialogue are only possible in a pluralistic society where there is openness to the religious other.

This article is not just about how dialogue establishes trust, mutual respect, tolerance, and hope, as important as these are. To some, this is the main goal of dialogue and anything beyond it ceases to be dialogue. My interest here is how one relates interfaith dialogue to witness (for the purpose of this discussion I prefer the term *witness to mission*). While dialogue is an engagement intended to change the perception of and attitude towards the religious other, witness is sharing the biblical stories with the intent of changing belief, thus inviting the religious other into a relationship with Jesus.

Dialogue theologians tell us that there are four ways to relate dialogue and witness.<sup>1</sup> There are two so-called extreme positions: in the first, dialogue replaces witness, and in the second, dialogue is used as a means of conversion. There is also a third, middle position, which tries to keep witness and dialogue apart. However, the fourth option relates witness and dialogue dialectically, where each influences the other.<sup>2</sup> In my predominantly Muslim context this approach is most relevant.

It is my thesis that Christian witness and dialogue with other religions are inseparable and that they are in essence two sides of the same coin. As a matter of fact, witness without willingness to engage in dialogue is arrogance, while dialogue without willingness to witness to our faith is naivety. I also believe that for both witness and dialogue to be constructive they have to be seen through the eyes of the religious other. In my work, for instance, I have not only been witnessing and educating believers to witness to their faith, but I have also been engaged with Muslims in constructive dialogue for social action. We work together to fight malaria and malnutrition in a rehabilitation center for malnourished children and in a school where we give Muslim children the opportunity to have an education. This form of dialogue is not the end in itself, but a part of the whole picture of what dialogue should be. In both these places our engagement moves beyond mere cooperation in which we understand one another, establish trust, mutual respect, and tolerance to witnessing to our respective faiths with a goal to open the other to changing one's religious position, or if I may say, toward conversion.

### A Short Autobiographical Note

Two principles can be drawn from my personal journey from Islam to Christianity and my day-to-day living in a predominantly Muslim context. In my story dialogue and witness coexist dialectically.

Born into a Muslim family, I am the eldest child of my mother, who is the third of my father's four wives. Together with my thirteen brothers and sisters and a few dozen relatives, we shared the same house. Everyone in the family at least identifies with the Islamic faith and publicly professes the *shahada*. My mother comes from an African Traditional Religion background and my great-grandmother was a priestess of the village where she was born. This means that my mother has allegiance to both Allah and the god of her village. I became a follower of Christ in my early teens. Although disappointed at my change of allegiance, the family still loved me and did their best to bring me back to the family faith.

Within my family three different faiths coexist peacefully. Apart from those who strictly follow either Islam or Christianity, there are also those who practice a hybrid of Islam and the traditional religion. As a family, we celebrate our religious festivals together, share family traditions, live out our faith openly, and also each share our respective faiths with a view to possibly converting the other.<sup>3</sup>

The two principles I draw from my personal story I term the *incarnational principle* and the *principle of reciprocity*.

### The Incarnational Principle

Christian witness has always been incarnational. In the person of Christ, God came to dwell among humans to serve and redeem us. Incarnation is based on relationship—one based on shared lives and traditions. Jesus' encounters with Pharisees were both an open dialogue and a challenge to change perceptions and outlook towards others. It seems to me that in most of his encounters, Jesus not only listened but also challenged people to change.

If indeed witness is concerned with a change in belief and dialogue and is concerned with a change in attitude,<sup>4</sup> then in my view Jesus' ministry was both dialogical and missional. If this is the case, then the incarnation is a process of both dialogue and witness, which should be exemplified in our lives and ministry as Christians.

### Principle of Reciprocity

By reciprocity I do not mean for Christians to accept the truth claim of the religious other as a precondition for dialogue to take place.<sup>5</sup> Rather, I am referring to the admonition of Jesus that we should do to others what we would have them do to us (Matt 7:12 and Luke 6:31). These verses should serve as a guide as Christians engage with Muslims.

According to the principle of reciprocity, dialogue needs the open space for authentic witness to take place, and conversely, witness needs the open space for honest dialogue. This implies understanding the other in a way that he/she can recognize him/herself in my perception. Second, it signals bearing witness and sharing the best of one's faith with one another. This double commandment of interreligious dialogue<sup>6</sup> is very relevant to the way Christians relate witness and dialogue in their daily lives. We become vulnerable both towards the other's faith as well as our own faith community. This is a necessary component because both vulnerability and conviction are part of dialogue and of Christian witness. We will only be taken seriously when we share our faith convictions and yet allow ourselves to be questioned in the same way we question the other. Both Christians and Muslims should have the right to persuade and be persuaded in dialogue while maintaining the freedom to remain firm in their religion or to change.<sup>7</sup>

### African Continent



The African continent consists of 55 countries (54 in the African Union, Morocco not included) with four family language groups encompassing over 2,000 separate languages. Geographically, the total land mass is large enough to fit the United States, China, and India within its borders.

## Implication

In my context of living and sharing life with my Muslim family and neighbors (i.e., dialogue of life), Muslims are always zealous to call Christians and Traditional Religionists to embrace Islam. They integrate Islamic *dawa* (the preaching of and invitation to accept the message of Islam)

in sharing their daily lives with them. This is also the case in all other forms of dialogue. For fear of causing offense, sometimes Christians fail to witness during dialogue. However, since both Muslims and Christians zealously believe in their God-given mandate to witness to their respective faith (Qur' n 5:48; Matt 28:19–20), it is therefore inconsistent—from the perspective of both faiths—to avoid witness in the name of dialogue. In my context, for example, when Christians and Muslims meet at ceremonies such as naming ceremonies and funerals, Muslims are usually the first to call Christians to embrace Islam. If they are so quick to do so without seeing it as offensive, it seems to me that inviting them to follow Christ (witness) in dialogue is both incarnational and reciprocal.

To illustrate this point, I recently was invited to participate at our local District Assembly (or town council). The imam was asked to open with prayer, and as a pastor I was supposed to close the meeting with prayer. After my prayer the imam felt the need to speak again but instead of praying he began to preach. His sermon was actually geared towards Christians in the gathering, evidenced by the fact that during his concluding remarks he said that Christians are trying to find God, but do not know the way to God. Since it was during Ramadan, he invited Christians to say the *shahada* and to accept Islam. As readers will determine, this particular setting was not necessarily meant as an occasion for either Christians or Muslims to share their faith. Yet the imam did not consider it offensive to invite Christians to Islam, and thus his call to accept the faith.

Perhaps Christians need to see dialogue and witness through the eye of the religious other, not in its content, but in its method: there need be no dichotomy between witness and dialogue. Indeed, the two are mutually inclusive. Christians and Muslims need to be engaged holistically by moving beyond understanding



This photo, taken just outside of Kampala, Uganda, is part of a larger body of work in which photographer Kurt Simonson has been engaged for several years. The project focuses primarily on the work of one family to address the needs of the many orphans within their larger family (<http://www.kurtsimonson.com>).

and appreciation of the religious other and proceed to questioning. It is only in questioning that genuine witness can take place. After all, if our dialogue partners do not separate *dawa* and dialogue, why should we? **EIFD**

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## A “POETICS” OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE IN AUSTRALIA

As an Australian Pentecostal interested in liturgy (or at least explicit use of the word), I often find myself late to the party, so to speak. If my issue is not geographical (we’ve improved from a three-month sea journey to a fourteen-hour flight to Los Angeles), it is denominational. Our liturgical history is assembled largely in well-told stories. So after enrolling in Fuller Theological Seminary’s PhD program to engage the topic of Aboriginal reconciliation, I was surprised to receive a number of loving warnings from well-respected nonindigenous leaders. Many referenced demonic encounters during Pentecostal camp meetings, and similar activity at the World Council of Churches’ Canberra assembly in 1991, where (as relayed to me) many Pentecostal pastors left highly disappointed.

However, the demonic was far from my mind. I had learned that more indigenous Australians identified as Christian than the wider Australian population (73 percent versus 61.1 percent in the 2011 census),<sup>1</sup> while in contrast, 1 percent identified with traditional religion(s) (6 percent in “very remote” areas).<sup>2</sup> With all self-identification, high nominalism can be assumed, and in the case of Australia, its history of mission by force has contributed to a negative perception of mission. Yet since the 2006 census, the indigenous figure rises (from 69 percent), while the nonindigenous one is falling (from 63.9 percent).<sup>3</sup> Even so, the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Christian leaders is minimal.<sup>4</sup> Peggy Brock recognizes the regional contribution of Maori and Solomon Islander evangelists who travelled into the Australian outback preaching the gospel, sometimes well before white colonizers.<sup>5</sup> And Hutchinson and Wolfe note Christianity as the “dominant” religion of indigenous Fijians,<sup>6</sup> in contrast to immigrant Hindu and Buddhist populations. Moreover, in Tonga, Methodism is “intrinsic” to the kingdom’s identity.

Interestingly, Aboriginal congregations are often viewed as a mission field. Most indigenous pastors I have spoken with emphasize the need for continuing support to reach communities suffering Australia’s “Indigenous Disadvantage” of social exclusion—a term used to reflect lowered life expectancy, education, and employment, and increased incarceration, alcohol/drug abuse, and suicide. However, conversation on inequalities within the church is often short-circuited by misperceptions regarding indigenous religiosity. Historically, Western Eurocentric assimilation policies suppressed Australian language, music, and cultural artifacts. Because Aboriginal theology is under construction, there is no Christian interfaith appraisal of original indigenous religiosity.<sup>7</sup> Highlighting the wisdom found in indigenous religion(s) would be greatly fruitful (1 Cor 2:14).

The thesis of my article is that many Australian Pentecostals conflate indigenous religion(s) with indigenous culture. Therefore, there is need to reexamine Christian engagement with Australian religion(s). However, some Pentecostal Aboriginal pastors model interfaith dialogue ritually in embodied poetics, utilizing discernment to note the Spirit’s universal work in the land while preserving the distinct message of the saving power of Jesus Christ.



### Interfaith Dialogue as Poetics

Before colonization, Australia had over five hundred nations, each with a spirituality centered in customary maintenance of the land.<sup>8</sup> Often called “the Dreaming,” this is described as the ancestors’ creative action that enchanted the earth along Dreaming tracks (i.e., this land is still sacred today).<sup>9</sup> Stanner emphasizes that Dreaming is not illusory but in fact “a poetic key to reality.”<sup>10</sup> Fiona Magowan sets out a poetics of Christian worship in the Northern Territory.<sup>11</sup> Interestingly, indigenous pastors in Anglican, Baptist, Uniting, and even Catholic churches display a strikingly



Rebus is a well known dancer and leader in the Ganggalah Church.

Pentecostalized approach to liturgy. I estimate as many as 60 percent of indigenous Australian Christians may be Pentecostal or charismatic, defined by a theological emphasis upon lay participation, glossolalia (speaking in tongues), and rites of healing.<sup>12</sup> However, other markers such as a hermeneutic of experience and emphasis on testimony are also displayed. These characteristics were explained to me as stemming from the influence of Dreaming spiritualities.

The New Testament worship practice that emerged after Pentecost interlinked leadership roles of preaching the Word and interfaith dialogue with concrete social manifestations, separated from Acts 6 onwards.<sup>13</sup> Later, the church’s stewardship of the world was epitomized in Christendom, the notion of “Christian nations” preaching the gospel abroad, beginning in Europe and eventually reaching “The Great Southland.”<sup>14</sup> Australians now assess a tangled aftermath of religious and commercial endeavor fueled

by the “doctrine of discovery” that carved Oceania into its current form.<sup>15</sup> Many Aboriginal pastors express *both* thankfulness and distress at what came “across the seas.”<sup>16</sup> In the book of James we see such human tensions: “from the same mouth come blessings and cursing—how can this be?” (3:10). In Australia, witness to Jesus the Word was entwined with cultural superiority, exploitation of the land, and an “otherizing” exclusion of original inhabitants.

Mission scholar David Bosch promotes a three-strand association between Christian witness and worship in the context of mission; not just God’s truth (*theoria*) or social justice (*praxis*) but also poesis in the Greek sense of making or forming the cultural imagination. He states:

People do not only need truth (theory) and justice (praxis); they also need beauty, the rich resources of symbol, piety, worship, love, awe, and mystery. Only too often, in the tug-of-war between the priority of truth and the priority of justice, this dimension gets lost.<sup>17</sup>

These are wise words. If we look a little closer, *poesis* not only interconnects truth speaking and justice practices, it is highly useful in interfaith engagement. It was borrowed Greek poetry that Paul used in public dialogue at Mars Hill (Acts 17). Similarly, an ignited cultural imagination propelled boats from England over rough seas towards the distant islands. For some, it was the simple allure of a mysterious Southern continent said to balance the world. For others, it was the thought of destitute natives living in bark houses, or knowledge these peoples did not share the comfort of eternal salvation. It is now the responsibility of the Australian church to discern the blessings and curses within our inherited cultural imagination.

### Aesthetics of Inclusion

In the Pacific islands, influential poetic images and thoughts were transmitted through song. In Australia, this practice continues, and perhaps one could posit that Hillsong Music, Planetshakers, and other Australian Christian music publishing houses could be said to borrow from indigenous song-sharing rituals. Music plays a significant part in mission and cultural imagination, but is largely westernized in both sound and in language. Creative indigenizing of American and British hymns was documented in Polynesia as early as 1828.<sup>18</sup> Missiologist Alan Tippett notes new religious movements that travelled in song later in the 1970s, also citing resistance to cultural emblems,

... “Onward Christian Soldiers” swept around the [Solomon Islands] Lagoon like a song “hit”. The elders and old women felt that some of the Christian *mana* [power] was coming from these hymns, which were regarded as magical; and therefore they banned their use.<sup>19</sup>

For many, song popularity is evidence of the Spirit’s anointing. I make no claim against songs carrying biblical (or salvific) revelation. However, in many cases, our understanding of anointing is based within cultural values, as the example from Tippett shows above. Should Sabine Baring-Gould (the author of “Onward Christian Soldiers”) face accusations that this song held Christian magic, many would consider this laughable. Yet, many indigenous Australians face such accusations when they attempt to integrate language or the sounds of “the bush” into worship. This raises the question of whether song-sharing practices should be considered interfaith dialogue.



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### Values and Virtues

My goal is not to make a mockery of Pentecostal spiritual practices. In fact, it is the opposite—we need to foster values and virtues that promote discerning of a divine absence from the merely anthropological, as Amos Yong suggests in *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*.<sup>20</sup> Experience is important for human spirituality. Other than through bodily senses (such as sight to read), I cannot encounter the Word. The potential for Australian Pentecostals to extend poesis beyond a simple one-way missional communication into respectful interfaith dialogue is vast.

Recently, I met two liturgists involved in the Canberra WCC event, Swedish Per Harling and Brazilian Simeí Monterio. I sat transfixed as Per described the committee’s intentional involvement of indigenous Christians. This service fell in Pentecost season, with the text of Acts 2. These Christians chose to integrate smoke as an echo of traditional welcome ceremonies in honor of the land and people. Participants walked through fragrant smoldering eucalyptus branches as a purifying symbol. These liturgists saw smoke as analogous to the Holy Spirit in Christian worship tradition. Both spoke of surprise at rejection of this element by Pentecostal Christians. They also relayed stories I had never heard. Per mentioned that as they read of the Holy Spirit’s descent upon the Upper Room, a magpie entered the tent and flew over worshippers heads, reminiscent of gospel passages in which Jesus received the Holy Spirit like a dove (Matt 3:16, Mark 1:10, Luke 3:22, John 1:32). He also mentioned that an African American participant was astounded at the significance of the bird’s black and white markings—for him, a symbol of racial unity poured out at Pentecost. Per denied orchestrating this moment. But perhaps it was a prophetic symbolic act organized by God who has been present in the land before Christ’s name was spoken. And perhaps the art of interfaith poesis is not an effort to promote Christian images, but the ability to see the Spirit when dialoguing with the cultural symbols of the world.

Within the urban environment, the Indigenous Disadvantage is often described as spiritual, with increasing indigenous efforts to recover indigenous religious practices.<sup>21</sup> But is Australian Christianity capable of dialoguing in dance? Or does Western aesthetic and culture demand that while ideas should be shared, practices should not? Perhaps the key to all this is the reality that while writing may change minds, poetics changes hearts. EIFD

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## INTERFAITH EARTH CARE AND DIALOGUE IN ZIMBABWE

My most memorable experiences of interfaith dialogue came in the context of accompanying my husband, Inus Daneel, in his ministry among Indigenous Churches and Traditionalists in Zimbabwe. The 15-year civil war (1965–1980) and its aftermath were accompanied by massive deforestation, erosion, and the destruction of ecologically sensitive areas such as river beds. To combat this situation, in the early 1980s Inus allied with a group of chiefs and spirit mediums to launch what became ZIRRCO, the Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation. This groundbreaking ecumenical environmental movement among poor rural people in Masvingo Province aimed to reforest denuded communal lands and to teach sound ecological practices.

Among the remarkable aspects of the “War of the Trees” was its basis in religion. At its height, 180 African Indigenous Churches (AICs) representing an estimated two million people conducted joint tree-planting eucharists, in which participants confessed their sins against nature. After taking communion, church members planted seedlings and provided them follow-up care. The Traditionalist wing of ZIRRCO, on the other hand, was led by chiefs, war veterans, and spirit mediums who held beer libations and summoned the ancestors to protect newly planted seedlings.<sup>1</sup> Over eighty women’s clubs conducted income-generating projects and activities for earth care, such as gully reclamation.<sup>2</sup> Children’s groups held tree-planting days with the seedlings raised in our dozens of nurseries. Through the 1990s, ZIRRCO was the largest tree-planting movement in southern Africa. Together the Christian and Traditionalist wings of ZIRRCO planted hundreds of thousands of trees a year, before political upheaval destroyed the movement in the early 2000s.

My own position as wife of “Bishop Moses” gave me a bird’s eye view of practical interfaith activities.<sup>3</sup> In addition to serving for several years as vice president of the board of trustees of ZIRRCO, I accompanied Inus to outdoor church services in which he functioned as a Ndaza Zionist bishop, dancing in a circle with the men and laying on hands to heal people. Later I conducted research among ZIRRCO-related senior women about their theologies.<sup>4</sup> Probably my most important role was to support the theological education by extension program (TEE) that accompanied the Christian wing of the movement and that continued to exist for several years after its demise.

One of the most interesting aspects of my time with ZIRRCO was the long discussions Inus and I had about interfaith issues. As “amateurs de l’Evangile,”<sup>5</sup> we lived in the tension between Acts 4:12 (“there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved”) and Acts 14:17 (“yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good”).<sup>6</sup> As a Christian, just how far should Inus go in participating in non-Christian religious rituals? He was the only white person to be admitted into the cave sanctuary of the Shona god in the Matopo Hills. He led delegations of

ZIRRCO leaders to the oracular cave sessions for the high god to bless the movement. When interviewed about his knowledge of their religion and customs, leading chiefs indicated that he was a spirit medium who knew their ancestors.<sup>7</sup> At the same time, Inus was a child of Dutch Reformed missionaries, scion of the famous missionary family of holiness spiritual writer Andrew Murray, and senior professor of missiology alongside David Bosch at the University of South Africa.<sup>8</sup>

The first condition of interfaith collaboration is the conviction that witnessing to the gospel required the mutuality of respecting persons whose understanding of culture, practices, and religion do not match one's own. After a long history of colonial and racial

oppression, AICs had firmly rejected white tutelage. Similarly, Traditionalist spirit mediums had led multiple uprisings against the white political regime. To work among them required a constant attitude of patient listening. Dialogue could occur only in the context of deep respect—and witness could occur only in the context of dialogue. Just as Jesus respected the woman at the well through establishing a relationship of mutual dialogue (John 4), despite their different religious traditions and genders, so Inus respected Traditionalist beliefs and practices. After attending oracular cave sessions as a respectful listener, he had earned the right to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. Following his attendance at high god rituals, Inus indicated that now it was his turn to share his own

## Pioneer

# SAMUEL AJAYI CROWTHER



Ordained as the first African Anglican bishop in 1864, Samuel Ajayi Crowther (1809-1891) was probably the most widely known African Christian of the nineteenth century. Crowther presided over “the first sustained missionary engagement with African Islam in modern times.”

Within the Western missionary movement the encounter with Islam

involved an approach that typically focused on (1) confrontational debate, (2) polemical defense of Christian doctrine, and (3) denunciations of Islam as a false religion. Crowther's approach to Christian-Muslim engagement was strikingly different. He had learned from painful experience among Muslims in Sierra Leone that confrontational debate simply did not work; that the noble effort to win arguments by promoting or defending Christian doctrine only succeeded in arousing hostility, bewilderment, and rejection. Over time, he developed what might be termed a uniquely African Christian approach to Islam that incorporated three elements.

First, it was non-confrontational.<sup>1</sup> Crowther was careful not to attack Islam and he determined (in his own words) that “our missionary operations under Mohammedan government should

not be disputes about the truth or falsehood of one religion or another, but they should aim at toleration.”

Second, it was almost exclusively Bible-based, which is to say that in his interactions with Muslims, Crowther insisted on using actual words from Scripture (quoting specific passages) in response to all queries rather than take a stance on “traditional formulations of Christian doctrine.” He was convinced that the Bible should be allowed to speak for itself. As he put it, “after many years of experience, I have found that the Bible, the sword of the Spirit, must fight its own battle, by the guidance of the Holy Spirit.”

Third, Bishop Crowther's approach to Islam emphasized vernacular translation. Crowther was wholly committed to the principle of vernacular translation. He spent almost all his life involved in the translation of the Bible into Yoruba. He made the translation of Scriptures into African languages a centerpiece of his mission strategy. In the Niger, where the local languages were unknown to him and his agents, he emphasized the need to collect words and sentences in the local dialects “so as to be able in the course of time to make a primer and a vocabulary of the language.”


<sup>1</sup>See Jehu J. Hanciles 2008. *In the shadow of the elephant : Bishop Crowther and the African missionary movement*. Oxford: CA Church Mission Society. See also Andrew F. Walls. 1992. “The legacy of Samuel Ajayi Crowther.” *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* no. 16 (1):15-16,18-21.



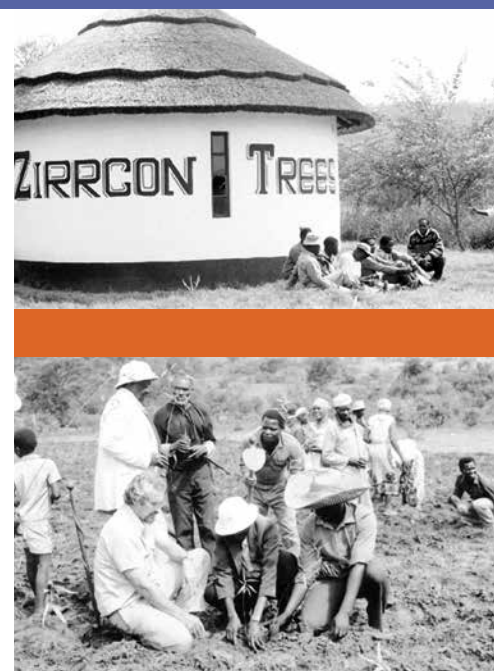
beliefs in Jesus Christ. He opened his Bible, read from the Scriptures, and testified to his belief in salvation through Christ. The sympathetic relationships established through respecting Shona religious rituals allowed for an ongoing contextually based witness to the gospel.

While mutuality was a precondition of interfaith dialogue, such a path was never easy. In 1993, a meeting of Christian and Traditional leaders was nearly derailed when the Traditionalist spirit mediums went into trances, and the Christian prophets began exorcising the evil spirits. Inus intervened in the mutual anathemas in order to save the movement. Traditional and Christian leaders agreed to hold joint ceremonies: Traditionalists sat and listened to Christian sermons, and Christians respectfully observed the beer libations. Following the different religious ceremonies, Traditionalists and Christians united to plant trees together. Interfaith action did not require capitulation to non-Christian beliefs. At beer libations, for example, all the Christians refused to drink the sacrificial beer that signified the summoning of the ancestors. Like his teacher the great Dutch missiologist J. H. Bavinck, Inus both saw God's presence among non-Christian people and was sensitive to the "unmasking" of spiritual evil. Thus he appreciated but did not necessarily approve of everything in Traditional, or for that matter AIC, practices. An added challenge for me was the need to navigate unbiblical and patriarchal gender roles and to relate to my counterparts in the movement, who were often wives ranked by hierarchy in plural marriages. Ultimately our task of missionary identification required that mutuality and respectful personal relationships be the foremost principle for interfaith dialogue. Common concern for God's creation, for the "rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy" (Acts 14:17) remained a higher goal than imposing one's own Christian beliefs on others—although witness always remained a happy privilege.

A fruitful text that characterizes evangelical principles of interfaith dialogue is Matthew 5:17: "Do not think that I have come to abolish the law or the prophets; I have come not to abolish but to fulfill." A century ago, "fulfillment theory" was a prominent theme in mission praxis. Missionaries argued that just as Jesus Christ fulfills but does not displace Jewish law, so he fulfills the deepest aspirations and most noble sentiments of other religions.<sup>9</sup> The appeal of fulfillment theory to missionaries of the 1910s–1920s was that it provided an alternative to the failed negativity of colonialist displacement theory, which in its efforts to proclaim Jesus Christ had discarded the customs and worldview of indigenous people as so much useless garbage. Some Western missionaries argued that disdain for people's customs, including their indigenous religions, shut off rather than opened pathways to Jesus Christ. Such insights by the 1930s merged into the discovery of mission anthropology.

Due to its overly optimistic and naïve view of continuity between Christianity and other religions, fulfillment theory proved inadequate as a systematic missiology. However, I believe that at a practical level its insights continue to influence mission praxis. If Jesus Christ came to fulfill rather than to destroy, then it is not the task of the missionary to displace the customs of the people among whom he or she sojourns. It is Jesus Christ who embodies the mystery of salvation, not the missionary or transcultural agent. As a product of my own limited culture, I cannot dictate to other people what it means to follow Jesus Christ in all his fullness, in their own context. My task is to witness to transformation in Christ, but not to determine the terms of the encounter for persons of other cultural and religious backgrounds. Thus, while we fought for ZIRRCO to keep providing Bible study and TEE—against the secularist opposition of European development agencies that funded the movement!—interfaith earth care required mutual respect, continuous collaboration, and participation. The creative tension between personal faith in salvation through Jesus Christ, and the knowledge of God as Creator of the whole world, was maintained in the official key text of the tree-planting movement, Colossians 1:17: "He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together." For lovers of the gospel, for amateurs de l'Evangile, earth care proceeds in the conviction that the God of salvation and of creation is one. 

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*Top: Zimbabwean Institute of Religious Research and Ecological Conservation (ZIRRCO) tree nursery. Bottom: ZIRRCO tree planting ceremony (photos by ML Daneel).*

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## DIALOGUE IN EGYPT: From the Elite to the Street

Muslims and Christians have lived together in Egypt for fourteen centuries, and their interactions have taken a variety of expressions across the spectrum, from hostility to dialogue. However, what has happened in the last four years is a departure from historical practices. After January 2011, Christian-Muslim dialogue witnessed dramatic changes that transformed it from being a practice of the elites to a daily street interaction.

### Dialogue before January 2011

Egyptian Christians were pressured by a corrupt regime from 1952 to 2011, and they often suffered as a religious minority in an Islamic country. Egyptian Christians experienced discrimination and persecution from both the state and society. Having experienced centuries of hostility from the dominant Islamic majority, Egyptian Christians developed a “battered-minority syndrome.” Largely withdrawing from public life, they felt a sense of inferiority and suffered from a heightened sensitivity to persecution and discrimination. Furthermore, the necessary outward acquiescence to orders enforced by the majority and the lack of participation in the political decision-making process has been a profoundly humiliating experience.

Christian-Muslim dialogue is one of the practices that Egyptian Christians initiated to overcome their isolation and begin to engage in the social and political life of their country. Numerous dialogue programs have been initiated between Christians and Muslims, but they have generally been dialogues between religious leaders—that is, dialogues between elites. For example, the dialogue between Al-Azhar University<sup>1</sup> and the Anglican Church is one of the strategic dialogues that has been maintained for many years and has contributed to more understanding between Christian and Muslim leaders. The Coptic Evangelical Organization for Social Services (CEOSS) has held many meetings over the years between Christian and Muslim scholars and leaders, resulting in numerous publications. The Coptic Orthodox Church has also established its own forums for dialogue, where both Christian and Muslim leaders meet for official occasions such as “The Breakfast” (*Iftar*) during Ramadan. Likewise, numerous international nongovernmental organizations and church groups have sought to study Islam and foster dialogue between the two religions.



Al-Azhar Mosque is located in Cairo, Egypt. After its dedication in 972, the mosque slowly developed into what is today the second oldest continuously run university in the world.



As was the case in other Northern African and Middle Eastern countries, Facebook and other social networking sites in Egypt facilitated grass roots communication and political protest, including the January 25, 2011 revolution.

While dialogue programs were an important expression of Christian engagement in society before January 2011, there were also reasons for concern. All dialogues have been initiated and financed by Christians. Furthermore, these dialogues tended to concentrate on issues where there was common ground between the two religions, but they failed to discuss contentious theological issues. Unfortunately, these dialogues also occurred almost exclusively between elite scholars and leaders, with little to no impact among the common people or upon public debate. Moreover, the relationships between Christians and Muslims were not influenced by these kinds of dialogues. Hostility, polemics, and misunderstandings remained common among people in the street.

#### Dialogue after January 2011

After the revolution that began on January 25, 2011, Egyptian Christians hoped that a free, modern, and democratic country would be birthed. They made notable contributions to the political life of their country, emerging from behind the walls of their churches and into the streets to participate as full citizens in calling for the rights of all Egyptians. Many Christians led demonstrations and some were among the martyrs of the revolution.

The Kasr el Dobra Church, an Evangelical Presbyterian Church located near Tahrir Square,<sup>2</sup> played a leading role. It is the largest Protestant church in Egypt (and in the Middle East) with 10,000

worshippers each week. Its members participate in mercy ministries, evangelistic teams, mission work in many countries, and leadership training programs. During the revolution, the leaders and regular members of the church were active among the crowds. The church opened its doors to all people, regardless of background, providing a refuge for tear-gas victims, care for the wounded, and a place for all to rest and pray. The church also held a number of “open air” services in Tahrir Square.

In general, the Christian voice was heard loud and clear during these days. Before former President Mubarak stepped down, the Council of Protestant Churches released a statement in support of people's rights. This statement, the only one issued by a Christian church during the revolution, helped to maintain a public Christian witness in Egyptian society during uncertain times and opened the door for greater Christian contributions in the public life of the country.

The years 2012 and 2013 witnessed the rise of political Islam to rule the country. The Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist parties took over the parliament and dominated Egyptian political and social life with their radical Islamic agenda. The presidential election brought the Muslim Brotherhood leader Mohamed Morsi to power.

It was obvious that the Egyptian people were angry due to the very poor performance of the Muslim Brotherhood during the year of their rule. They failed to fulfill even the minimum goals for which the nation revolted in January 2011, evidenced by the fact that after one year the Egyptian people lacked bread, freedom, dignity, and social justice. People's anger escalated due to the deterioration in basic services such as security, health, education, and meeting daily needs for gas, water, and electricity. The frequent attacks on the media, political opposition, and the judicial system frustrated people. This led them to feel they had not succeeded in escaping a dictatorial, inefficient, and corrupt regime.

These were times of uncertainty for the Christians in Egypt as well. In its long history, the church has often flourished under pressure, and such is the case with the Egyptian church today. Nevertheless, thousands of Christians have emigrated to the West, and those remaining in the country have tended to withdraw from participating in public political life, returning to their old habits of hiding behind the doors of the churches. Generally speaking, Egyptians now yearn for a political savior to solve their problems, and this is especially true of Egyptian Christians.



## June 30, 2013

The 30th of June, 2013, marked one year since President Morsi had come to power. In the weeks leading up to this anniversary, random unaffiliated young people, who did not represent any particular political party, started a campaign inviting each unsatisfied citizen to sign a “Tamarod” (i.e., “rebellion”) petition against Morsi and his regime. They aimed to gather fifteen million signatures to outnumber the voices that voted for Morsi in the 2012 presidential election. Surprisingly, Tamarod’s campaign succeeded in gathering over twenty million signatures, including the majority of

the Christian population. Most of those who signed the petitions were determined to demonstrate in the streets on the 30th of June. Millions gathered in and around Tahrir Square and marched on the presidential palace across town. This chain of events led the army, civil organizations, and liberal parties to take power. Pope Tawadrous II of the Coptic Orthodox Church was present during the announcement of this action. The Islamists became angry and caused a great deal of trouble, including demonstrations in Rabaa and Alnahda squares in Cairo and Giza.




The Egyptian Revolution of 2011, locally known as the January 25 Revolution, was a popular uprising of millions of people from a wide range of backgrounds.

started to issue warnings to the pro-Morsi demonstrators to leave Rabaa and Alnahda Squares and go home, assuring those who wanted to leave the squares peacefully that the security forces would not pursue any of them as long as there was no arrest warrant against them from the justice system. Some complied and left quietly; others responded violently. Some who were heavily armed started to fire at the police forces and at random civilians. Others burned cars and private property. Muslim Brotherhood snipers fired machine guns and threw Molotov cocktails at the

police from surrounding rooftop buildings. At the same time that the security forces were clearing Rabaa and Alnahda squares, the Muslim Brotherhood initiated their plan B, attacking private property and civilians across Egypt, especially churches and Christians.

Pope Tawadrous II made a statement about the attacks on churches that week, saying that “this had been expected, and as Egyptians and Christians, we consider our destroyed church buildings as sacrificial offerings made for our beloved Egypt.” Other church leaders made similar statements, stressing that church buildings do not make the church; rather the church is the body of Christ which is comprised of people who have their faith in him, and that this body grows in strength as it faces these challenging times. Some Muslims came to protect churches, and in response, many Christians sent messages to their fellow Muslim citizens saying, “Buildings can be rebuilt, but you are priceless, so stay safe and do not worry about the churches.” Soon after the destruction of church property, the Egyptian government announced that it would take financial responsibility for rebuilding damaged churches.

While the old form of dialogue between elite scholars and religious leaders remains, recent events have added something new. Now ordinary Christians and Muslims in the streets of the nation’s cities, towns, and villages have become engaged in a daily dialogue. Having discovered each other, they now eat together, protect each other’s homes, and talk about their faiths. This has helped to foster a more open and secure environment in which people can live and work together while pursuing the common good. This democratization of dialogue tends to focus on practical issues of common concern, and it sometimes results in joint action. If it continues, perhaps it will lead to more intentional daily interaction between Muslim and Christian neighbors.

There have been a number of welcome outcomes from this new form of dialogue. Moderate Muslims have found in Christians friends and fellow citizens who work for the good of the whole society, not only their own people. More surprisingly, opportunities to share the gospel and to plant new churches have greatly increased since the revolution, and the number of Muslim converts to Christianity has also increased. Clearly the recent informal dialogue among the common people of Egypt has far exceeded the influence of traditional elite dialogues. 

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## **INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT AND CHRISTIAN MISSION:** Dialogue, Cooperation, Conversion

Interfaith engagement is a serious business. People who want to be involved in it need to be willing to take up the challenges that the community of one faith presents to the other community. A genuine and meaningful engagement will necessarily lead to witnessing to one's faith while fully respecting the other one. Christian partners in interfaith engagement must first consider a threefold challenge that Jesus himself demonstrates with his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. Understanding this example then will enable us to address the following threefold challenge of Islam: theological, political, and missionary.

### **The Threefold Challenge of Jesus to His Disciples**

In Mathew 7 Jesus puts to his followers a threefold challenge that can be defined as follows. First he demands that they take a critical look at themselves (vv. 1–5). This includes scrupulously examining our turbulent history with Muslim peoples, our divisions, and even our theologies. Second, Jesus advocates taking a critical look at other faiths (vv. 15–20). Once we have accepted to see ourselves in the mirror, we are probably better equipped to assess Islamic doctrines and claims, without being judgmental or arrogant. Third, Jesus advises the disciples that they not be deluded about their faith; if it doesn't lead to obedience to God's will, it is useless (vv. 21–23). Evangelical Christians who rightly believe that salvation is by God's grace through faith often overlook those New Testament texts that highlight the need to produce good deeds to authenticate faith. This is one of the main points Jesus makes in the parable of the sheep and the goats (Matt 25:31–46).

The Golden Rule for interfaith engagement is this: "In everything do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets" (Matt 7:12). This means respecting Muslims as human beings and as religious people, appreciating their monotheistic faith, studying Islam without prejudice as much as possible, removing misunderstandings and building bridges between the two faiths, but also acknowledging their differences, even their contradictions. It also entails explaining the Christian faith without denigrating Islam, seeking to commend the truth of the gospel to Muslims in a way that fully



Women worshipping at the al-Karaouine Mosque in Fes, Morocco. Founded in 859, it also functions as a religious school and is often referred to as the oldest university in the world.



honors their freedom of conscience, being open-minded and willing to learn from others, staying humble and acknowledging one's failures, and appealing to God's mercy for all of us—Christians, Muslims, Jews, people of any faith and of none.

## 1. The Theological Challenge: Understanding Islam

Engaging theologically with Islam involves considering Islamic teaching, the prophetic credentials of Muhammad and the status of Islamic Scriptures. For Muslims the core of Qur'anic teaching is found in the first sura, *al-Fatiha*, seen by Muslims as the greatest sura. Muslims say this prayer seventeen times a day during their five ritual prayers.

### *Islamic teaching encapsulated in Al-Fatiha (Qur'an sura 1)*

In the Name of God  
The Ever-Merciful, the All-Merciful  
Praise be to God  
The Lord of the Worlds  
The Ever-Merciful, The All-Merciful  
King of the Day of Judgement.

You alone we worship  
And You alone we ask for help.  
Guide us on the straight path,  
The path of those who enjoy Your grace,  
who are not under Your wrath,  
and who do not go astray.  
Amen

To be fair to Islamic faith we need to understand it the way Muslims do, not the way we often tend (or even desire) to see it. Are there

any parts in this prayer that Christians cannot accept? How does it compare with some of the Old Testament Psalms? As a monotheistic faith, Islam is remarkably similar to Christianity. Christologically, however, the two faiths are irreconcilable, as the Islamic account of Jesus Christ makes no room for his divinity and for his historical death and resurrection.

### **Muhammad**

Muslim scholars put forward four main proofs for Muhammad's prophethood: his miracles of which the Qur'an is the greatest, the perfection of Islamic law, the fact that Muhammad was foretold in the Bible, and his military achievements. These proofs are not compelling when carefully examined from a Christian perspective, which explains why Christians do not accept Muhammad

as a prophet, let alone the greatest and the last prophet. Having said this, Muhammad was undoubtedly a great religious, social, and political reformer.

Many Christians examine Muhammad's career in the light of Jesus Christ's mission. They blame the Prophet of Islam, among other things, for his military career and his many wives. But they forget that in the Old Testament we find many polygamous prophets (including Patriarch Abraham and King Solomon). We also find violence carried out by respected prophets (e.g., David conquered Jerusalem through a holy war in 2 Samuel 5:6–10, and Elijah slaughtered four-hundred-and-fifty false prophets in one day, 1 Kings 18:40).

### **The Qur'an**

The fact that Muhammad cannot be seen as a prophet from a Christian point of view means the Qur'an cannot be considered God's word either. This does not imply, however, that we have to reject the Qur'an completely. A balanced approach to the Qur'an (see 1 Thess 5:21–22) has to take into account both the similarities and the differences between the Qur'an's and the Bible's messages. There are truths in the Qur'an, and we need to identify them and see how they relate to those in the Bible.

## 2. The Political Challenge: Working with Muslims

Muslims are first and foremost our fellow human beings. Those who live in our country are also our fellow citizens. As fellow monotheistic believers, they are God-fearing people as well. The parable of the Good Samaritan invites us to see them as our neighbors and to love them as ourselves (Luke 10:25–37).

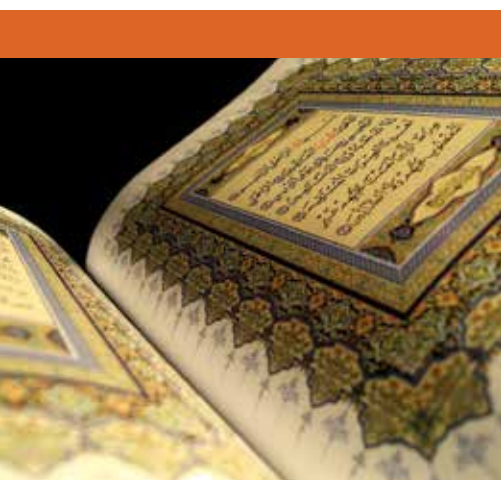
The political challenge should be understood in the sense that we need to work with Muslims for the common good of the city (“polis”), of our society, for the benefit of people of all faiths and of none. Rather than ignoring our faith identity, we need to make the most of the commonalities between our faiths in order to enhance cooperation. After all, we have received from our Creator a similar mandate, and we are called to fulfill this mandate with all our fellow human beings, including Muslims, based on our shared values.

### **Our God-Given Mandate**

Christians and Muslims see themselves as God’s servants whose duty and privilege is to obey their Creator, to worship him, to acknowledge his greatness, and to bear witness to him and to his mercy, forgiveness, justice, sovereignty, and so forth. We have been honored by God who appointed all his human creatures as stewards over his creation and his representatives on earth (in Arabic, *caliph*). Our task is to rule over and to look after God’s creation (see Gen 1:27–30; Qur’an 2:30).

### **Our Shared Moral Values**

The values that Christians and Muslims have in common are numerous and include the following: respect for human life from beginning to end; sexual chastity for unmarried people; marital faithfulness for couples; family life; and solidarity with our fellow human beings, especially the most vulnerable, including children, orphans, the poor, widows, the elderly, travellers, strangers, the sick, disabled, jobless, prisoners, and so on (see Qur’an 2:177; 9:60; 76:8–9).



Engaging theologically with Islam involves considering Islamic teaching, the prophetic credentials of Muhammad and the status of Islamic Scriptures.

### **3. The Missionary Challenge: Witnessing to Christ**


Working hand in hand with Muslims to further the cause of justice and peace in society and in the world doesn’t mean ignoring the distinctives of our respective faiths. For Christians it means bearing witness to Christ in a context where this

witness is more likely to be heard, understood, and hopefully received.

Some Christians are inclined to ask questions such as, Do Muslims really need to know the gospel? Isn’t Islam as good for Muslims as Christianity is for Christians? Should the gospel be shared with Muslims? To the extent that the Islamic Jesus is no more than a prophet, it is our duty and joy as Christians to make known—as well as the right of all Muslims to have the opportunity to know—that Jesus is much more than a prophet; he is the Savior of the world.

Muslims expect Christians to live up to their faith and not to shy away from the teaching of Christ. What they do not want us to do is to share the gospel arrogantly, using unethical means including despising and demonizing their religion, seeing them as target for evangelism, and the like. Before he ascended to heaven, Jesus Christ appointed all his disciples to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). We may not be gifted evangelists or preachers, and we are not all called to be missionaries. Yet Jesus Christ wants all—not just a few—of his disciples to be involved in mission. Ordinary but committed Christians are key to Christian mission. The Great Commission (witnessing to Christ) must be carried out within the context of the Great Command (loving our neighbor). Effective Christian witness needs to be holistic. In its mission statement, World Vision, a Christian development and relief NGO, defines Christian witness comprehensively as follows: “[We bear] witness to Jesus Christ by life, deed, word and sign that encourage people to respond to the Gospel.”

If (or when) people respond positively to the gospel, they become followers of Jesus Christ. Thus, conversion is to be seen as an expected outcome of interfaith engagement. It is important for new converts to remain loyal to and active in their community in order for them to witness to their family and society. They need to remain positive in their relationships with their culture and not to offend their people unnecessarily.

In summary, theological dialogue is an important aspect of interfaith engagement. It is meant to gain a better biblical understanding of Islam and to make it easier for Christians to engage in more practical ways with Muslims as fellow citizens and God-fearing people, for the good of the wider community. “Political engagement” represents the context that is likely to lead to spiritual sharing as the uniqueness of Jesus Christ can be explained to Muslims starting with his Qur’anic portrait as a stepping stone to understanding his full revelation as disclosed in the New Testament. 

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## THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION IN THE URBAN CONTEXT: Engaging the Children of Anowa, Sarah, and Hagar

*(Please note: this is an abridged version of the article. For the entire article, please visit [www.fuller.edu/eifd](http://www.fuller.edu/eifd).)*

This essay argues that not only is interfaith engagement an invaluable form of Christian mission wherever Christian and other faith communities live together and share common social and geographical space, but it is also perhaps one of the most valued forms of Christian mission operable within dynamic multireligious urban contexts in North America.

What follows is an overview of the Interdenominational Theological Center's (ITC) work to equip theological students for ministry in the dynamically religious contexts of urban USA. ITC's unique approach toward interfaith competence supports and offers current and future Christian leaders opportunities for engaging three religions—African, Jewish, and Islamic—and their faith systems based on a more relational model of interfaith engagement.

### Context



Located approximately five minutes from the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in southwest Atlanta, Georgia, is the West End, a multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious community that often serves as a dynamic living classroom without walls for courses in missiology, evangelism, and religions of the world. It is often acknowledged that the defining characteristic of West End is its wide array of religious institutions, from the historic West Hunter Street Baptist Church to an old-fashioned spiritual reader to the

Shrine of the Black Madonna Cultural Center and Bookstore of the Pan-African Orthodox Christian Church. For at least 15 years, the West End community has played a significant role in providing ITC students with a dynamic learning context to discover and practice what it means to be a Christian leader with interfaith competence in a religiously dynamic community. Students engage the following religious faith communities:

- *The Children of Anowa* (African Indigenous Believers): Anowa is a mythical woman representing Africa and the continental values of “love and respect for life, of people and of nature.”<sup>1</sup>
- *The Children of Sarah* (Judaism): The African Hebrew Israelites of Jerusalem, sometimes referred to as the Hebrew Israelites, or the Black Jews, are very active in urban cities of the United States.
- *The Children of Sarah* (Christian): Diverse Christian congregations have had a long and active presence in the West End.
- *The Children of Hagar* (Islam): The West End Islamic center, known as the Community Masjid, has functioned for more than 25 years, dedicated to the establishment of Islam in the West.

A key component of ITC's theological education is developing an intercultural competence among students that is holistic, multidisciplinary and integrated, and honors missiology with a bifocal concern for both mission as evangelism and mission as dialogue with religions of the world.



### The Methodological Components of an Interfaith Engagement as Theological Praxis of Christian Mission

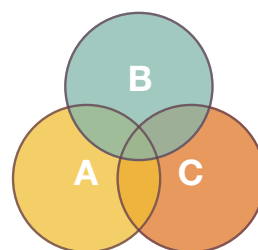
Recognizing that there is no religion that has not been influenced by culture and no culture that has not been influenced by religions, theological institutions should actively and effectively prepare students to engage in intercultural and interfaith ministries, identifying and utilizing key resources (sacred Scripture, tradition, culture, and social change) that have served to promote the Christian faith as an intelligent inquiry into God consciousness. This is crucial if Christian mission is to be perceived as useful and necessary by those living and working within the West End, as a heritage capable of embracing purposeful, creative, holistic, and healing human interactions. Because the contemporary struggle for human dignity and human rights within the United States is profoundly personal and communal, theological education has to take the first step in this recommended engagement of assisting local churches and their leaders in transforming their spiritual and theological resources in ways that ignite their sense of vision, purpose, and mission. Local churches situated in multireligious contexts need shepherding as they overcome ignorance, hesitations, and the fear of change, and in providing a moral compass as they grow in their discovery of who they are and how powerful they can become without the need to demonize self or others who are different. Only when theological institutions can help churches and ministries embrace what church historian emeritus Gayraud Wilmore refers to as a “pragmatic spirituality”<sup>2</sup>—an active demonstration of the Christian faith—are leaders able to respond meaningfully, authentically, and faithfully to twenty-first-century realities facing African American communities.

This third circle involves bringing into focus the narrative of the theological education institution and its capacity to dialogue with the student who is engaged in interfaith activity for the purpose of shaping convictions, policy, and procedures. Defining and accessing demonstrations of effective implementation of Christian mission as interfaith engagement is not an easy task. Competence can be measured, but because interfaith competence involves more than knowledge of other religions, attention must be given to a larger and deeper educational process that involves the comprehension and development of one’s self and attitudes in effectively and successfully engaging with persons of diverse backgrounds.

Higher theological education institutions must begin by relying on their theological, historical, psychological, sociological, and creative

resources as they seek to develop students with interfaith competence. There are six areas related to intercultural competence efforts that every institution of higher religious education must address:<sup>4</sup>

### The Tripartite Nature of Interfaith Engagement as Christian Mission Praxis<sup>3</sup>



**CIRCLE A**  
**THE INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER**

**CIRCLE B**  
**SACRED TEXT**

The ultimate definer of the meaning and value of human diversity

**CIRCLE C**  
**INTERFAITH COMPETENCE**  
Christian mission as Intercultural (Interfaith) Competence

- *Curriculum:* What is taught, and how? The curriculum must address the broader goals of theological education: to form church leaders among God’s people, to inform them about their faith and its application to modern life; and to equip them to become agents of transformation in the churches and multireligious communities where God has placed them.
- *Collaboration:* Who are our partners? Emphasized is the need for various denominations, organizations, and community programs to work together in cooperation and genuine sharing as we recognize a common sense of mission and purpose for doing education for ministry.
- *Confession (Spirituality):* How do we celebrate and affirm the rich distinctive of our theological and ecclesiastical history? Spirituality speaks both to the personal and social dimensions of the student’s religious journeys.
- *Contextualization:* How do we imagine ourselves planted or situated in the context of our teaching ministry? The theology, curriculum, teaching methods, academic policies, and administrative structures are informed by the context of ministry and teaching.

- *Constituency*: This addresses the basic questions related to the students we are educating. It implies the “whole people of God” because it is the whole church that must witness to the whole gospel through word, deed, and lifestyle.
- *Community*: What relationships are important to our institution, our cultures, and the social and religious ethos? Certain religious persons and leaders of the West End have become important to our academic programs. Community implies educational cooperation with other existing organizations, social and educational, in our common life.


Because it is the mandate of theological institutions to not only guide but also accompany through education Christian clergy and lay leaders who seek the reign of God and desire to minister effectively in the rapidly changing, diverse, multiethnic, multicultural, and multireligious communities within the United States, these six categories related to the notion of interfaith engagement must be addressed.

### The Overlapping, Integrating, Shaded Spaces of Reflection

The three circles I have presented are linked by shaded spaces that represent intentional, guided periods of theological reflection, sometimes in solitude, but most often communal. This is important in discovering the level of interfaith competency of the student as an anticipated outcome of theological education. Michael I. N. Dash, professor emeritus of the Ministry and Context Department, would stress again and again the importance of engaging in theological and ministry reflections that examine “one’s faith in the light of experience” and “experience in the light of one’s faith.” Aimed at pressing the question about the presence of God in the experiences of cross-cultural life and intercultural realities and the implications of that presence, Dash would utilize a four-source model of theological reflection that encourages attention to exploring the worlds of tradition, personal position, cultural beliefs and assumptions, and implications for action. It is through dynamic theological reflection on interfaith engagement that the student is lead to self-identify areas of personal responsibility and to take responsibility for personal growth and spiritual maturity as discerned necessary to accomplish a given purpose. Individual traits (flexibility, empathy, sincere listening, etc.) as well as attention to the nature of the relationship between individuals involved in an interfaith encounter are significant. Because there is no prescriptive set of individual characteristics or traits that guarantee compliance in all intercultural situations, relationships and the quality of relationships formed are also emphasized.

1. *Setting the stage*: Who (define with specificity) is attending to this encounter, and what assumptions are undergirding the encounter?
2. *The story*: What narrative is identified as a significant interfaith or interreligious learning incident?
3. *Reading the context*: What contextual dynamics are at play, and how do you understand them?
4. *Rereading the sacred text*: How might a refocus on the Bible as sacred text shed light on the particular story or narrated incident?
5. *New Mission or interfaith insights*:<sup>5</sup> What new insight gained might help to shape a better outcome in light of integrated theological reflections?
6. *Mission action*: What interfaith competence action is required as a sign and symbol of the reign of God?
7. *Retelling the story*: How might a new ending result? As a result of engaging in this particular methodology aimed at discovering God’s will and God’s ways, how can we envision a different response, one that speaks of “love and respect for life, of people and of nature”?

### Conclusion

As students prepare seven academic papers responding to the seven steps identified in the recommended methodology above, it becomes clear that through interfaith encounters, they serve the church in variety of ways: as public theologian, innovative faith leader, community activist, ecumenical global networker, creative educator, contextual communicator, prophetic social justice minister, and asset-based community developer. By suggesting a particular methodological paradigm, attention is given to how the interfaith engagement of students may become an analytical outcome of Christian mission that points toward a process that enables us to learn how to provide students with the attitudes, skills, and behaviors that will lead to effective, successful, and faithful leadership in contexts of religious diversity. 

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## DISCUSSION, DEBATE, OR DIALOGUE:

### Mission as Witness in an Interfaith Context

The invitation “for an afternoon discussion” from Swami Tadatmananda of Arsha Boda Center<sup>1</sup> stated the purpose of the meeting with the following question: “How can people with apparently different beliefs live harmoniously on planet Earth?” Yet, during the question and answer session, young Hindu intellectuals in attendance did not hide their strong aversion to Christianity, particularly the legacy of its missionary enterprise. From my perspective, most in the audience were up-and-coming young Hindus.

A Hindu businessman and philanthropist Rajiv Malhotra moderated the meeting,<sup>2</sup> and the speakers were Swami Tadatmananda, two Christian scholars, and a Muslim leader. The Christian speakers, Francis Clooney of Harvard University and my friend Cleo Kearns did very well in responding to some accusatory questions from the audience. Swami Tadatmananda was the first and only Western (white) Hindu monk-teacher (or priest) I have met, and his Arsha Boda Center seemed to be doing very well among young intellectual Hindu migrants.

As was clearly indicated, the meeting was for “discussion” and not for dialogue, if the two are to be differentiated. Having said that, I now see how the discussion morphed into to a debate. The two Christian presenters graciously and wisely prevented it from veering off course. The meeting demonstrated, in my view, the need for interfaith dialogue and a deeper understanding of each other’s faith. Dialogue is hard and difficult, but is becoming indispensable for co-existence among people of different faiths in today’s globalizing and increasingly pluralistic world. For Christians, interfaith dialogue is a fair and just means to engage in the mission of proclamation. In a world filled with information and misinformation, where the politics of religious identities often incite communal conflicts, religious people are challenged to give account to their faith truthfully. The globalizing postmodern world of ours demands a just and intentional witness of faith from religious communities. If Christianity has a hope to offer to our world, Christians are called to give an account of that hope (1 Peter 5:15).

A few weeks after the meeting at Arsha Boda Center, Rajiv Malhotra and his wife invited three Christians (including myself) for lunch and an afternoon conversation in their home in central New Jersey. What started as a casual encounter became

“No one denies religious plurality as a condition of co-existence within nations, societies, and neighborhoods. Such co-existence increasingly requires fairness to each religious faith and mutual respect among them. But pluralism has been used more prominently to denote a theology of relativism, a theology that deliberately relativizes the truth claims of different religions.”

a rich dialogical conversation, which led to subsequent meetings. The deeper the conversation between us the stronger the trust we developed. The more honest we became, the more enriching the conversation. When the thoughts and ideas we shared flowed naturally and when we listened to each other with intensity and seriousness despite our differences, the dialogue was fruitful. Looking back, I think it was the Malhotras' openness and seriousness that helped to foster a dialogical conversation.

I remember Rajiv's rather negative description of the history of Christian missions in India, which resonated with what I had heard from another Hindu friend a few months before. I first thought his story was an intentional ploy against Christianity in India, but later realized that it represented how these Hindu friends honestly understood Christianity in that region. I had to consider their perspective seriously and knew that discrediting should not be my first step. In response, I acknowledged the truth in the description of the story and then described what I thought was the larger picture. I chose a few historical examples to substantiate my point, some of which contrasted his claims. In succeeding conversations, I sensed Rajiv's assent to my main point and a broadening of his



Sadhuis in Rajasthan, India. Sadhus are holy men and women (called Sadhvis) who have renounced everything in search of liberation from the cycle of birth and death. Most of them are wandering sages who devote their lives to higher learning, memorization, meditation, and preaching Hindu precepts of life based on Hindu scriptures.

understanding of Christian missions. Similarly, I also came to realize that many of my assumptions about Hindu perceptions and beliefs were rather simplistic and as a result I developed a deeper appreciation and respect for the Hindu faith and practices.

Previously, I participated in several formal inter-religious “dialogue sessions” in India, some of which could be characterized as simply

“sharing niceties.” In such sessions, faith sharing was limited to what we thought our dialogical partners wanted to hear. Other sessions such as the one with the RSS<sup>3</sup> Chief K. S. Sudarshan in 2002,<sup>4</sup> could not move beyond debating. These encounters have led me to conclude that until we reach a point when we can be honest and listen to one another with sincerity, we have not begun interfaith dialogue.

Since the second half of the twentieth century, Protestant churches' missionary thought can be summarized under the following three rubrics: the conciliar, the evangelicals, and the Charismatic-Pentecostals. These broad categories serve as a way of classifying popular theological and missiological perspectives. The theological difference between the second and third categories is relatively marginal; but it is the tension between the last-two and the first that polarizes the church today. In broader social categorization, one might call it a progressive-conservative tension. Because they both conserve and progress the categories are not absolute, but fluid. This polarity has also been captured under the rubrics of liberalism and evangelicalism, both of which have their own limitations. The polarization seems as much political as it is theological.

There is a tendency among conciliar churches to often oppose ideas and values embraced by evangelicals. For instance, the theology of “holistic mission” or “holistic ministry”—popular among evangelicals today as a way of merging or resolving the tension between evangelistic proclamation and social services—is not very different from the socio-theological tensions resolved by the conciliar fellowship in the 1930s around Life and Work and Faith and Order movements.<sup>5</sup> The two movements merged and formed the World Council of Churches (WCC). Evangelicals were quite vocal in their objection to interfaith dialogue in the 1970s and the 1980s when the so-called “Pluralists” were spearheading it. But today, interfaith dialogue is emerging as a significant missiological theme among evangelical theologians. To conclude that evangelicals are merely slower in the pace of their progress would be a gross oversimplification.

Early proponents of interfaith dialogue among Protestants and Catholics made headway under the rubric of pluralism—a slippery word indeed. No one denies religious plurality as a condition of co-existence within nations, societies, and neighborhoods. Such co-existence increasingly requires fairness to each religious faith and mutual respect among them. But pluralism has been used more prominently to denote a theology of relativism,<sup>6</sup> a theology that deliberately relativizes the truth claims of different religions. This controversial theology denies the finality of any religious truth claim and yet the denial itself is a final truth claim. For Christians, it questions the finality of Jesus Christ, or God in Jesus Christ.





Much of what Richard J. Mouw teaches and writes on deals with the public issues that divide society and that keep people awake at night. From him, Christians learn to identify the hopes, fears, desires, and values prevalent in their culture. Whether the issue is same-sex marriages in dialogue with Jewish Rabbis

or discussing Trinitarian formulations in dialogue with Latter-day Saints, Mouw refuses to let the public square become a battlefield and his interlocutor an enemy. Instead he sees interfaith engagement as a venue to learn from and sometimes collaborate with others even as he finds ways to embody the gospel through word or deed with conviction and civility.

Engaging culture with “convicted civility,” or what Lesslie Newbigin called “humble confidence,” is perhaps the greatest skill Christians can learn from Mouw. Equipped with a posture of humility, Mouw models a unique way of addressing popular critiques of Christianity by acknowledging where the church has gone wrong while re-articulating the gospel in fresh ways without defensiveness. His writings help readers grasp fundamental Christian philosophical and theological resources necessary for articulating the gospel in a winsome and compelling way that speaks to the hopes, fears, questions and objections present in the broader culture.

A good point of entry into his writings is *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World, 2nd Edition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2010), and *Talking With Mormons: An Invitation to Evangelicals* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012). In addition to these books, Mouw has published numerous articles in print and online in magazines and journals like *Christianity Today*, *First Things*, *Books and Culture*, *the Washington Post* and *Belief Net*, to name but a few.

The point here is that because interfaith or inter-religious dialogue was first propounded as the project of pluralism it has been interpreted in intricate relation to pluralistic theology,<sup>7</sup> and thus, confused with a theology of relativistic pluralism. In WCC circles, proponents of pluralistic dialogue contrasted mission with witness to relate dialogue with the theology of witness. In the process, the concept of mission was narrowed and inappropriately divorced from Christian witness.<sup>8</sup> Because of this confusion, interfaith dialogue first experienced significant resistance among evangelical Christians. By evangelical Christians, we refer to those actively involved within conciliar fellowships and those jelling in opposition to liberalism, crystalizing in separate organizations. With the claim for pluralistic theology as “the crossing of theological Rubicon”<sup>9</sup> in the mid 1980s, pluralistic theology seemed to reach its own zenith. Since then, a more objective analysis of its logic and arguments led to the questioning of its theological integrity. Many, including liberal scholars, questioned this pluralistic theology of religions. In the meantime, a more logical, biblically viable and consensual theology of dialogue is emerging.

The globalizing world stipulates a dialogical existence. Closer proximity among different religious faiths and the demand for fairness and justice between different faith communities necessitates interfaith dialogue on a practical level. Christian mission needs to function in the global religious marketplace, not with a domineering posture, but—to borrow David Bosch’s words—in “bold humility.”<sup>10</sup> Only through a fair and honest sharing of our faiths dialogically, can we participate in the inter-religious marketplace. Outside the four walls of the church, mono-logical proclamation as a way of sharing faith hardly works. We should also note that dialogical sharing of faiths is also risky. In a dialogical process, I could be converted to another faith as much as my dialogue-partner could be convinced of mine.

It is important to note that Jesus’ inter-religious encounters were also conducted in a dialogical manner. The dialogue with the Samaritan woman at the well (John 4) appeared deliberate on the part of Jesus. Against many social and cultural odds, he both initiated and engaged the Samaritan woman, boldly. Other instances such as the dialogue with a Canaanite (Matt. 15:22), a Syrophenician woman (Mark 7:26) and a Centurion (Luke 7:1-10, Matt. 8:5-13) were wedded to the faith of the dialogue partners. In all these recorded dialogues, declarations of faith in Jesus as the Savior were the outcome. **EIFD**

# End Notes

## “Giftive Mission” and Interfaith Dialogue

- <sup>1</sup> Frances S. Adeney, *Graceful Evangelism: Christian Witness in a Complex World* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010).
- <sup>2</sup> Terry C. Muck and Frances S. Adeney, *Christianity Encountering World Religions: The Practice of Mission in the Twenty-First Century* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2009).
- <sup>3</sup> See <http://place.asburyseminary.edu/asburyjournal/>.

## Interfaith Engagement as Prophetic Dialogue

- <sup>1</sup> Stephen Bevans. “What Catholics Can Learn From Evangelical Mission Theology,” *Missiology: An International Review* 23, no. 2 (1995): 155–64.
- <sup>2</sup> See for example, Jacques Dupuis, *Towards a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997), 29–157.
- <sup>3</sup> Vatican II, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium* [LG], paragraph 16. This and the following documents of the Roman Catholic Church are available on the Vatican website: <http://www.vatican.va>.
- <sup>4</sup> Vatican II, Declaration on the Relationship of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*, paragraph 2.
- <sup>5</sup> See, for example, John Paul II, *Redemptoris Missio*, paragraph 55.
- <sup>6</sup> Pope Francis, *Evangelii Gaudium* [EG], paragraph 110.
- <sup>7</sup> See Vatican II, Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, *Gaudium et Spes*, paragraph 22.
- <sup>8</sup> LG, 14.
- <sup>9</sup> LG, 16.
- <sup>10</sup> EG, 51.
- <sup>11</sup> See David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 489.
- <sup>12</sup> See Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Constants in Context: A Theology of Mission for Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2004); see also Stephen B. Bevans and Roger Schroeder, *Prophetic Dialogue: Reflections on Christian Mission Today* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2011).

## Competing Narratives in the Netherlands

- <sup>1</sup> Volf, *Allah*, 187

## Complexity, Cooperation, and Commitment in Interfaith Dialogue

- <sup>1</sup> See Terry C. Muck, *Those Other Religions in Your Neighborhood: Loving Your Neighbor When You Don't Know How* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

## At the Intersection of Missionary Zeal and Interfaith Passion

- <sup>1</sup> A version of this essay first appeared in the Spring 2010 issue of the *BTJ Magazine* under the title, “An Evangelical Interfaith Imperative?”; available at <http://www.bostontheological.org/pub/Main.php?MagID=2&MagNo=2>.
- <sup>2</sup> My father, Richard Peace, is the Robert Boyd Munger Professor of Evangelism and Spiritual Formation at Fuller Theological Seminary.
- <sup>3</sup> Conversation between the author and Rev. Dr. Gregory Mobley, Professor of Christian Bible at Andover Newton Theological School and cofounder of CIRCLE.

## Dialogue and Witness “Through the Eye of the Other”

- <sup>1</sup> Cf. Volker Kuester, “Towards an Intercultural Theology: Paradigm Shifts in Missiology, Ecumenics, and Comparative Religion,” in *Theology and the Religions: A Dialogue*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 179.
- <sup>2</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>3</sup> This is a very common reality in sub-Saharan Africa. Cf. Lamin Sanneh, *West African Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 1983), 221; and J. Osei Bonsu, ed., *Ecclesia in Ghana: On the Church and Its Evangelising Mission in the Third Millennium*, Intrumentum Laboris, First National Catholic Pastoral Congress (Accra: Catholic Bishops' Conference of Ghana, 1997), 157.
- <sup>4</sup> Cf. Notto R. Thelle, “Interreligious Dialogue: Theory and Experience,” in *Theology and the Religions: a Dialogue*, ed. Viggo Mortensen (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 130.
- <sup>5</sup> John Azumah, “Issues in Christian-Muslim Relations and Their Implications for Theological Formation in Africa,” *Journal of African Christian Thoughts* 7, no. 2, ed. Gillian M. Bediako (Accra: Type Company Limited, 2004), 31.

- <sup>6</sup> Kuester, “Towards an Intercultural Theology,” 179.

- <sup>7</sup> Cf. Rahman Yakubu, “Christian-Muslim Relations in Ghana: A Reflection on the Documents of Christian Council of Ghana and Catholic Bishop's Conference,” Master of Theology Thesis, Kampen University, The Netherlands, 2005, 75.

## A “Poetics” of Interfaith Dialogue in Australia

- <sup>1</sup> The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) footnotes indicate indigenous responses were as high as 74%, with statistics adjusted due to concerns that these Australians misinterpreted the survey (ABS, *Year Book Australia: Religious Affiliation—1301.0*, Canberra, 2011).
- <sup>2</sup> The ABS classification “very remote” is one of six indicators. It measures remoteness in terms of accessibility along road networks to urban service centers for populations above 5,000. The term “very remote” covers regions including Australia's deserts, the Kimberlies, tropical Arnhem Land, Cape York, and the Torres Straits. While traditional ways of life are observed by some communities, the statistics show very low self-reporting of traditional spirituality, even in these areas.
- <sup>3</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Year Book Australia: Religious Affiliation—1301.0* (Canberra, 2006).
- <sup>4</sup> This is noted by both Mark Hutchinson and John Wolffe (*A Short History of Global Evangelicalism* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012], 236) in the historical literature and by Carolyn Schwarz and Franciose Dussart (“Christianity in Aboriginal Australia Revisited,” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 21 [2010]: 2) in the anthropological literature.
- <sup>5</sup> Peggy Brock's first volume (*Outback Ghettos: Aborigines, Institutionalisation, and Survival* [Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993]) outlines three Australian mission stations in the state of South Australia, charting three types of engagement with indigenous religious practice, and the contribution of indigenous Christians. Her second edited volume (*Indigenous Peoples and Religious Change* [Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2005]) outlines a broader picture of the Oceanian continent and cites the contribution of Maretu from the Solomon Islands and an Arrernte man from Central Australia, Moses Tjalkabota, “a teacher, preacher and itinerant evangelist” (101).
- <sup>6</sup> Cornelia Versluys, in her dissertation, “Creative Interaction between Aboriginal Spirituality and Biblical Spirituality” (Pastoral Studies, Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, 2002), notes Dreaming corroborees in the Central Desert region that incorporated the unknown animal of a lamb before European settlement. Her fieldwork describes indigenous practices consistent with Catholic charismatics in Australia's cities. Noel Loos (White Christ Black Cross: *The Emergence of a Black Church* [Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007]) notes the charismatic features of Anglican Bishop Malcolm's spirituality. This adds to my fieldwork observing indigenous churches in Perth, Cairns, Sydney, and Tweed Heads.
- <sup>7</sup> The most well-known attempt at Aboriginal theology is by the Rainbow Spirit Elders, *Rainbow Spirit Theology: Towards an Australian Aboriginal Theology* (Blackburn: Harper Collins, 1997). However, various other oral contributions are emerging.
- <sup>8</sup> M. Rolls, M. Johnson, and H. Reynolds, *Historical Dictionary of Australian Aborigines* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2010), 146; Gary D. Bouma, “Globalisation and Localisation: Pentecostals and Anglicans in Australia and the United States,” *Sydney Studies in Religion* 2 (2008): 83–92.
- <sup>9</sup> Danièle M. Klapproth, *Narrative as Social Practice: Anglo-Western and Australian Aboriginal Oral Traditions*, vol. 13: *Language, Power and Social Process* (Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton, 2004), 67.
- <sup>10</sup> W. E. H. Stanner, *Religion, Totemism and Symbolism*, in *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*, ed. Michael Lambek (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002), 82.
- <sup>11</sup> Fiona Magowan, “Dancing with a Difference: Reconfiguring the Poetic Politics of Aboriginal Ritual as National Spectacle,” *Australian Journal of Anthropology* 11 (2000): 308; Fiona Magowan and Karl Neuenfeldt, *Landscapes of Indigenous Performance: Music, Song and Dance of the Torres Strait and Arnhem Land* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2005); Fiona Magowan, “Globalisation and Indigenous Christianity: Translocal Sentiments in Australian Aboriginal Christian Songs,” *Identities* 14 (2007): 459–83.

<sup>12</sup> Bouma, "Globalisation and Localisation," 82.

<sup>13</sup> These connections are outlined at length in Alan Kreider and Elanor Kreider, *Worship and Mission after Christendom* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 2011).

<sup>14</sup> For a history of this term and its use on Australia Day, see R. Hardiman, "Celebrating Australia Day: Unwrapping 'The Great Southland of the Holy Spirit,'" *Pastoral Liturgy* 39 (2009): 9.

<sup>15</sup> Some of the best outlines of the "doctrine of discovery" and its impact upon the Americas are found within the edited volume by A. Yong and B. B. Zikmund, *Remembering Jamestown: Hard Questions about Christian Mission* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> This phrase, "for those who've come across the seas," is a line in the Australian national anthem that evokes Australian migration patterns but excludes the first Australians, "Advance Australia Fair." P. D. McCormick, *Advance Australia Fair: Patriotic Song*, Written and composed by "Amicus" (Sydney: Reading & Co., 1879).

<sup>17</sup> David Jacobus Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*, American Society of Missiology Series 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991), 431.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Stillman, "Prelude to a Comparative Investigation of Protestant Hymnody in Polynesia," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 25 (1993), 91.

<sup>19</sup> Alan R. Tippett, *Solomon Islands Christianity: A Study in Growth and Obstruction*, World Studies of Churches in Mission (London: Lutterworth, 1967), 58.

<sup>20</sup> A. Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology, Supplement Series 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 24.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Marmot, "Social Determinants of Health Inequalities," in *The Lancet* (U.S. National Library of Medicine, National Institutes of Health, 2005), 1102.

#### Interfaith Earth Care and Dialogue in Zimbabwe

<sup>1</sup> See Marthinus L. Daneel, *African Earthkeepers*, vol. 1: *Interfaith Mission in Earth-Care*; and vol. 2: *Environmental Mission and Liberation in Christian Perspective* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1998, 1999); also see Daneel's article on dissolution of the movement, "Zimbabwe's Earthkeepers: When Green Warriors Enter the Valley of Shadows," in *Nature, Science, and Religion: Intersections Shaping Society and the Environment*, ed. Catherine M. Tucker (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2012), 191–212.

<sup>2</sup> See Sophie Chirongoma, "Karanga-Shona Rural Women's Agency in Dressing Mother Earth: A Contribution Towards an Indigenous Eco-Feminist Theology," *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 142 (March 2006): 120–44.

<sup>3</sup> In the early 1990s, the Ndaza (Holy cord) Zionists made Inus a bishop. They named him "Moses" because he led them in theological education during the 15-year Zimbabwean liberation war and afterward into a ministry of earth care. Traditionalists called him Muchakata, or "wild cork tree."

<sup>4</sup> Dana L. Robert, "Gender Roles and Recruitment in Southern African Churches, 1996–2001," in *Communities of Faith in Africa and the African Diaspora: In Honor of Dr. Tite Tiénou*, ed. Casely B. Essamuah and David K Ngaruiya (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 116–34.

<sup>5</sup> This early French term for "evangelical," meaning "lovers of the gospel," was proudly carried by my Swiss Protestant ancestors in the 1530s.

<sup>6</sup> NRSV used throughout

<sup>7</sup> "Interviews with Chiefs Chikwanda, Chivi and Murinye, 'Muchakata and the War of the Trees,'" in *Frontiers of African Christianity: Essays in Honour of Inus Daneel*, ed. G. Cuthbertson, H. Pretorius, and D. Robert, African Initiatives in Christian Mission 8 (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2003), 43–54.

<sup>8</sup> At Unisa, Bosch taught the A stream, Western theology; Daneel taught the B stream, African theology. Inus Daneel was thus the first professor of African theology and missiology at the University of South Africa.

<sup>9</sup> E.g. see J. N. Farquhar, *The Crown of Hinduism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1920); Kenneth Cracknell, *Justice, Courtesy and Love: Theologians and Missionaries Encountering World Religions, 1846–1914* (London: Epworth Press, 1995); see also Edwin Smith, *The Christian Mission in Africa: A Study Based on the Work of the International Conference at Le Zoute, Belgium, September 14th to 21st, 1926* (New York: International Missionary Council, 1926).

#### Dialogue in Egypt: From the Elite to the Street

<sup>1</sup> Widely considered the oldest Islamic University in the world: <http://www.azhar.edu.eg/En/u.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Also known as "Martyr Square," Tahrir is a major public town square in downtown Cairo, Egypt. The square has been the location and focus for political demonstrations in Cairo that saw the resignation of President Mubarak in 2011 and the ousting of President Morsi in 2013.

#### Theological Education in the Urban Context: Engaging the Children of Anowa, Sarah, and Hagar

<sup>1</sup> See *Daughters of Anowa: African Women and Patriarchy*, by Mercy Amba Oduyoye (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 10. Oduyoye further describes how Anowa is meaningful in the Ghanaian culture and makes references to other sources where Anowa is described as a priest (see *Anowa* [London: Harlow, 1970, and Longman-Drumbeat, 1980]) and a prophet (*Two Thousand Seasons* [Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1973]) who represents Africa.

<sup>2</sup> *Pragmatic Spirituality: The Christian Faith through an Africentric Lens* by Gayraud S. Wilmore (New York University Press, 2004) is the book referenced here.

<sup>3</sup> This methodology (and the related figures presented) are adapted from the work of an international research and writing team in which I participated, resulting in *God So Loves the City: Seeking a Theology for Urban Mission*, edited by Charles Van Engen and Jude Tiersma Watson (MARC, 1994).

<sup>4</sup> See *Transforming the City: Reframing Education for Urban Ministry*, by Eldin Villafañe, Bruce Jackson, Robert Evans, and Alice Frazer Evans (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002). Although this work was originally presented as categories utilized in the academic subdiscipline of urban missiology, because of its commitment to people, the categories speak to key phenomena impacting intercultural and interfaith competence.

<sup>5</sup> Essential principles of womanist religious scholars, pastoral care givers, and womanist methodologies that are applicable and offer extremely helpful insights are as follows: the promotion of clear communication (verbal, physical and/or spiritual); multidialogical approach; liturgical intent that has implications for life and living; didactic intent that has implications for teaching and learning; commitment to both reason and experience; holistic accountability (rejects bifurcation between sacred and mundane); and a concern for healing.

#### Discussion, Debate, or Dialogue: Mission as Witness in an Interfaith Context

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.arshabodha.org/> (last accessed July 20, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Founder and President of Infinity Foundation. For details, see <http://infinityfoundation.com/index.shtml> (last accessed July 11, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Patriotic Organization) is a Hindu charitable, voluntary, right-wing nationalist group. The organization's chief (or *Sarsanghachalak*) from 2000–2009 was K. S. Sudarshan who was an out-spoken critic of Christianity.

<sup>4</sup> At the initiative of the National Commission of Minorities (of the Government of India), several rounds of talks between the RSS and Indian Christian leaders were organized between 2001 and 2003. The session where I participated as a Christian representative was held at the United Theological College's campus in Bangalore on March 22, 2002.

<sup>5</sup> See William Adolf Visser 't Hooft, "The Genesis of the World Council of Churches," in *A History of the Ecumenical Movement, 1517–1948*, eds. Ruth Rouse and Stephen C. Neill, 4th ed. (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1993), 698–708.

<sup>6</sup> As David Bosch has rightly substituted "pluralism" with "relativism." David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 481–483.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, Paul Knitter insisted that, "Dialogue must be based on the recognition of the possible truth in all religions." *No Other Names?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes Toward the World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 208.

<sup>8</sup> See my "Missiology in a Pluralistic World: The Place of Mission Study in Theological Education," *International Review of Mission* 89, No. 355 (October, 2000): 539–555.

<sup>9</sup> Paul F. Knitter, "Preface," *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, eds. John Hick and Paul F. Knitter (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), viii.

<sup>10</sup> Bosch, 489.





## COPTS: BETWEEN REVOLUTIONS • 2013

These photos are from a 2013 photo essay by Mark Kauzlarich about Coptic faith during the months prior to the Second Egyptian Revolution. On New Years Day 2011, weeks prior to the revolution, a bomb exploded outside the Alexandria Coptic Orthodox Church killing 23 and injuring more than 70 people. In the chaos following the January 25th Revolution, violence continued to escalate against Copts, culminating October 9, 2011 during a march on the Maspiro television station in protest over the destruction of a church. The reaction by the army was violent, with armored personnel carriers crushing protestors to death and soldiers firing into crowds indiscriminately.

Before the 2013 revolution, members of the Coptic community in Cairo told me they felt things were “better under Mubarak” and were uneasy at the fact they could be targeted at any time. That concern was heightened as the community approached the celebration of Easter in May of 2013, necessitating a balance between celebration and cautiousness.

Though the holiday passed without violence, dozens of churches in Egypt would be burned months later during the country’s second revolution in just over a year.

### About Artist

Mark Kauzlarich is a photojournalist, Arabic linguist, and U.S. political aficionado currently based in Columbia, Missouri.

Mark is currently attending the University of Missouri, pursuing a Masters of Arts in Journalism. His clients include *The New York Times*, Reuters, and various U.S. and international newspapers. His work has been published online and in print by the *Washington Post*, *Wall Street Journal*, Yahoo!, *El Nuevo Día*, *Wisconsin State Journal*, and numerous other publications.

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