

*Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue*

PATHWAYS FOR  
INTERRELIGIOUS  
DIALOGUE IN THE  
TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

Edited by  
Vladimir Latinovic,  
Gerard Mannion  
& Peter C. Phan



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FIRST CENTURY

# PATHWAYS FOR ECUMENICAL AND INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

**Series Editors:** Mark Chapman and Gerard Mannion

Building on the important work of the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network to promote ecumenical and inter-faith dialogue, the Pathways for Ecumenical and Interreligious Dialogue series publishes scholarship on ecumenical and interreligious encounters and dialogue in relation to the past, present, and future. It gathers together a richly diverse array of voices in monographs and edited collections that speak to the challenges, aspirations, and elements of ecumenical and interreligious conversation. Through its publications, the series allows for the exploration of new ways, means, and methods of advancing the wider ecumenical cause with renewed energy for the twenty-first century.

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# CONTENTS

Acknowledgments ix

## Part 1: Method and Interreligious Dialogue

- 1 New Pathways for Interreligious Dialogue: Introduction 3  
*Vladimir Latinovic, Gerard Mannion, and Peter C. Phan*
- 2 Cultural-Linguistic Resources for Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue 15  
*Craig A. Phillips*
- 3 Interreligious Dialogue in a Polarized World 29  
*Richard Penaskovic*
- 4 *Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus?* What Has the Catholic Church Learned about Interfaith Dialogue since Vatican II? 41  
*Sandra Mazzolini*
- 5 Reading Together: Revelation and Jewish-Christian Relations 53  
*Michael Barnes*
- 6 Emptiness and Otherness: Negative Theology and the Language of Compassion 65  
*Susie Paulik Babka*

## Part 2: Jewish-Christian Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century

- 7 “Landmines” and “Vegetables”: The Hope and Perils of Recent Jewish Critiques of Christianity 81  
*Peter Admirand*

8	Interreligious Dialogue as Depth and Frontier: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Depth Theology and the Thirty-Fifth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus	97
	<i>Joseph Palmisano, SJ</i>	
9	The Genuine Gains in Twentieth-Century Jewish-Christian Dialogue	111
	<i>Aaron Gross and Kate Yanina DeConinck</i>	
<b>Part 3: Muslim-Christian Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century</b>		
10	The Dominican Friar Serge de Beurecueil's <i>Praxis Mystica</i> and Muslim-Christian Encounter	127
	<i>Minlib Dallh, OP</i>	
11	Maria Pontifex: The Virgin Mary as a Bridge Builder in Christian-Muslim Dialogue	141
	<i>Lyn Holness</i>	
12	Christian and Islamic Conceptions of Public Civility: A Consideration of "The Human Good"	153
	<i>Richard S. Park</i>	
13	Ethics in a Multifaith Society: Christians and Muslims in Dialogue	167
	<i>Patricia Madigan, OP</i>	
<b>Part 4: Context and Interfaith Dialogue</b>		
14	Crosscurrents in African Christianity: Lessons for Intercultural Hermeneutics of Friendship and Participation	183
	<i>Stan Chu Ilo</i>	
15	The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of Its Implications for Peace-Building in Northern Ghana	197
	<i>Nora Kofognotera Nonterah</i>	

16 Religion, Violence, and Public Life in the United States of America <i>Leo D. Lefebvre</i>	213
17 A Marginal Asian Reading of Mark 7:24–30: An Interfaith Filipino Homeless Community’s Encounter with the Syrophoenician Woman <i>Pascal D. Bazzell</i>	231
18 Living in a Pluralistic Reality: The Indian-Asian Experience <i>Roberto Catalano</i>	245
Contributor Biographies	259
Index	265





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PART 1



METHOD AND  
INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

## CHAPTER 1



# NEW PATHWAYS FOR INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

## INTRODUCTION

*Vladimir Latinovic, Gerard Mannion,  
and Peter C. Phan*

The chapters assembled in this volume developed out of a major international gathering held in Assisi, Italy, from April 17 to 20, 2012. The theme of the gathering was “Where We Dwell in Common: Pathways for Dialogue in the 21st Century”<sup>1</sup> (affectionately referred to as Assisi 2012),<sup>2</sup> and it was the sixth international gathering convened by the Ecclesiological Investigations International Research Network.<sup>3</sup> More than 250 participants were registered throughout the entire event, with locally based participants and others taking part in some of the program as well, bringing the numbers to well over 300 at various times across the four days. The gathering was about looking beyond the recent and contemporary ecumenical and interreligious horizon—seeking understanding, sharing differing perspectives, looking beyond the narrow and confined viewpoints that remain divisive, and being inspired by ongoing conversations involving participants from at least 55 different countries and many more different contexts and faith communities.

While a majority of participants came from Christian communities or backgrounds, there were also a great many contributions from participants belonging to other faith traditions and a very large number of contributions indeed that reflected on dialogue between different religions, traditions, and religious communities in relation to the past, present, and future. All these contributions brought so very much to the table and enriched the discourse throughout.

So, during the four days of the event, in addition to exploring ecumenical prospects, as well as stumbling blocks in relation to interchurch Christian

dialogue, a great deal of the program was devoted to the extremely important considerations of interreligious relations, conflict, and dialogue, as well as the equally important challenge of fostering dialogue and greater harmony among members of faith communities and those societies in the wider world in which they live out their faith. We also sought to devote a great deal of attention to the challenge of intrafaith and intrachurch dialogue, for divisions within traditions and even within communities are just as pressing a challenge for our times. Each of these areas was engaged not simply in a stand-alone sense as further challenges distinct from Christian ecumenism; rather, we also sought to integrate the discourse pertaining to these multiple challenges of discerning “pathways for dialogue” so that shared methods, lessons, and aspirations could be better brought together and into interaction with one another. In other words, we were equally concerned with being attentive to the task of “wider ecumenism” (also termed “macro” or “total” ecumenism)—that is to say, of dialogue across the human family with people of all faiths and those who do not identify with any specific religion, addressing a multitude of challenging contexts. In short, we were hoping to foster a collective engagement in thinking outside the ecumenical box in order to help clear and navigate pathways for dialogue in the twenty-first century.

Indeed, our *modus operandi* for the gathering was “thinking outside the box.” This did not mean jettisoning the past or rejecting or neglecting other forms of dialogue and ecumenical and interfaith achievement—quite the opposite. We sought not only to encourage innovation but also to discern how we might better learn from the best of those efforts toward enhancing dialogue from the past. We therefore sought to revisit, learn from, renew, and adapt some of the methodologies employed to great effect in historical dialogical conversations. We also sought to learn from more recent successful dialogical ventures and from different ways of approaching dialogue from both within and without the formal ecumenical and interfaith movements and developments at more official levels. Where particular pathways for dialogue have proved innovative and successful, despite the challenges faced in ensuring genuine conversation takes place, we pledged to learn from these stories.

We were also mindful of the need to engage with and learn from “conflictual” forms of encounter, both historically as well in contemporary contexts. We knew there was much to be gained from being attentive to the experiences of those who have traveled the pathways of dialogue in recent decades with significant measures of success and failure alike, and we especially wished to learn from and encourage dialogue from below and from the margins as much as from the institutions and communities pursuing and promoting dialogue in more formal ways. In all, we hoped to discuss, to enhance, and to promote the “science of bridge-building” for our contemporary communities and their shared tomorrows.

We wished Assisi 2012 to be something truly transformative of the perspectives, methods, and approaches to dialogue that every participant attending held. Our aim was to reignite the ecumenical and interreligious flame of dialogue in a positive fashion that would allow the cause to gather renewed momentum for these times.

In choosing as our theme “Where We Dwell in Common,” we were inspired by the work of the gathering’s final plenary speaker, Fr. Roger Haight, SJ, who, in his 2008 work *Ecclesial Existence*, had offered an extended reflection on this theme (the third volume of a substantial historical and comparative ecclesiological treatise).<sup>4</sup>

That vital focal point, “Where We Dwell in Common,” can be read as both an affirmation and a question. As an affirmation, it assumes that we who gathered there in Assisi do in fact dwell in common. For a few days, Assisi was not only our shared geography but also our shared spiritual home. This wonderful gem of a medieval town was not merely a tourist attraction but the destination of a very special pilgrimage. As a question, however, the title of the conference challenged this assumption and asked whether we do in fact dwell in common, not merely geographically but also spiritually, and if so, what our shared space is and where it is to be found.

But there is a second and deeper sense in which we dwell in common, as we are bound together by our common humanity and our common cosmic home, for whose well-being we are responsible in spite of our racial, ethnic, class, gender, sociopolitical, cultural, and religious differences. Thus concern for this ecumenical, interreligious, and human-cosmic unity—indeed, to use Raimon Panikkar’s memorable phrase, the “cosmotheandric” or “theoanthropocosmic” reality<sup>5</sup>—was a further key motivating factor that brought us together in Assisi. We could conceive of no better place to celebrate our common religiousness, and our common humanity, in ever-widening concentric circles, than that holy place, where, on October 27, 1986, Pope John Paul II gathered (over the objections of some of his closest advisors) leaders of various Christian churches and religions to pray for world peace.

It is this threefold sense of commonality and unity—within religious traditions, between religious traditions, and at the human-cosmic level—that inspired, animated, and sustained the vision behind Assisi 2012. The gathering explored, in turn, what remains divisive among our communities, traditions, and faiths. It then explored those many areas where we dwell in common, hoping to encourage, via a comparative method, a growing realization that the latter significantly outweighs the former in terms of range, reach, and importance, before proceeding to explore specific ways we might reenergize the ecumenical and interfaith cause of our century. The challenge of this gathering was not simply to delve into all the common things that unite us, for, first of all, the gathering sought to probe deeply into those matters that remain divisive both between and within religious communities, as well as between religious communities and the wider societies in which they live out their faith.

The task of unearthing these commonalities, which lie dormant at the depths of our religious and human consciousness, has been made all the more difficult by the advent in recent years of different forms of what has been termed “neoexclusivism,” through which difference and otherness in religious contexts was accentuated and perceived in pejorative terms, undermining the gains of earlier tireless efforts to promote diversity, difference, and otherness as gifts and even virtues. So too has interfaith encounter and harmony been

undermined considerably by numerous declarations, actions, and activities on the part of religious and political leaders around the globe in recent times.

So returning to the title of our gathering “Where We Dwell in Common” as a *question*, we discover it is a deeply unsettling one: Do we really dwell in common in spite of our bonds of common humanity and common religiousness? Are we not, as religious people in general, being riven by conflicts and hatred? At certain points of history, have not wars linked to religion in various ways been among the most frequent and even the bloodiest?

The alarming growth in religious conflicts across our contemporary world is all too sadly well known. Conflicts among different traditions and communities internal to one shared faith have also become rife with an often distressing intensity. If even members of the same religion can foster hatred and enmity toward one another, what hope, some may have asked, is there for greater understanding and commonality to be rekindled between adherents of very distinct religious pathways? Too often, believers in many traditions have fallen into an all-too-easy “forgetting” of the very deep and transformative bonds of commonality and, yes, unity where they dwell in common with those not simply belonging to different branches of the same religions but even more so with regard to the bonds of commonality that unite them to members of other religious traditions and also unite them with people of goodwill who follow no explicitly religious pathway. The challenge at Assisi 2012 was to identify as clearly as possible the unbreakable bonds that unite us in so many positive ways and deploy their full potential for unity within faiths, between faiths, and between religious communities and the wider communities they dwell among.

Acknowledging the decline in positive relations within and between many religious communities, we also tried not to forget the enormous achievements that have been made in terms of ecumenical and interreligious dialogue as well. However, it is necessary to point out that too often the greatest progress in these dialogical interactions has been realized more at the grassroots level and in the periphery—especially in the so-called Global South—than at the hierarchical level and in the center of the organizational structures and leadership offices of many religious communities. There have been multiple positive developments closer to the grassroots in terms of shared cooperation on social and ethical issues, sharing in worship and rituals together, and seeking to understand one another’s traditions, sacred texts, and beliefs and religious practices better.

There are many reasons for the all-too-widely experienced ecumenical and interreligious winter, such as theological and institutional differences and psychological fatigue induced by repeated efforts and few results to show for.

We might here suggest a further reason for consideration: loss of nerve and failure of imagination. Too many Christians have been “boxed” in by our ridiculously narrow vision of the church. We have lost sight of the purpose for which our faiths should exist: building a more harmonious reality together and within our individual lives. All too often, we see that doctrinal and institutional lines in the sand, along with battles over authority and orthodoxy, have not served the soteriological ends of the great world faiths well. Rather, they

have stood in the way of those ends being further promoted. And in few areas of religious life have we seen such factors serving more as stumbling blocks than with regard to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, encounter, and coexistence. By no means should doctrines or forms of faith community polity be denied, but the challenge in our times is for them to be “deabsolutized” or “relativized” in a positive sense—that is, made relative to the soteriological purposes of our faith communities’ core beliefs and practices—in other words, their true *raison d’être*. For example, from a Roman Catholic Christian standpoint, no less than Pope Francis has made it explicitly clear that doctrines and church offices and structures exist to serve the pastoral and soteriological mission of the church and not vice versa, in his 2013 Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium*.<sup>6</sup>

In our contemporary context of religious pluralism, marked by diversity and conflicting truth claims, we must break the strangling narrowness of our own particular religious home, institution, and even community. The way forward opened up by imagining outside the box is neither exclusivism nor inclusivism nor even, indeed, pluralism, as these positions are commonly understood, but a deep intellectual and spiritual humility (*kenosis*, or self-emptying, to use the term common in Jewish and Christian epistemological parlance) that compels one to recognize, gratefully and gracefully, that one’s religion and one’s faith community offers a true but ever partial insight into reality and that other religions and other faith communities can and do correct, complement, enhance, and perfect one’s own.

Toward such ends, the contributions gathered in this volume should be seen precisely in this light of “thinking outside the box”—in this particular volume, the focus is on pathways for interreligious dialogue in our own diverse contemporary contexts. The volume is divided into four parts, which first consider methodological questions before turning to two sections that explore the reality of recent and contemporary Jewish-Christian and Muslim-Christian dialogue; in the final section, we explore how the challenges and realities of interfaith dialogue impact specific and particular regional, national, and local contexts.

Here we offer you, our most welcome reader, an overview of the wealth of sumptuous food for interfaith thought that lies ahead. The first section of our volume features five contributions that seek to explore “thinking outside the box” in terms of what methods may prove more fruitful in the service of interreligious dialogue in our times.

In order to progress further down those much-needed pathways, it has been commonly suggested that we first need to learn to speak the language of the other, and this is the very challenge that Craig A. Phillips examines in Chapter 2 with his essay on “Cultural-Linguistic Resources for Interreligious and Ecumenical Dialogue.” The author suggests that learning the language of the religious other is the most appropriate way to describe and better understand and facilitate interreligious and ecumenical dialogue, arguing that a cultural-linguistic approach to the study of religions and religious traditions, even with the multiple attendant challenges that poses, remains a most promising approach for our times. His essay focuses in particular on the work of



S. Mark Heim and Jeannine Hill-Fletcher, who, in conversation with George Lindbeck, provide insights that assist the rearticulation of a cultural-linguistic approach to interreligious dialogue, and shows that there is no neutral, apolitical ground on which we can begin a dialogue among religions or religious traditions. Although the dynamics of power between dominant and subordinate communities, for example, may entail that discussion and dialogue begin out of political exigencies and may be accompanied by mistrust, this does not preclude discussion, dialogue, and the genuine possibility that from those conversations, mutual understanding might emerge.

Richard Penaskovic chooses to discuss some of the multiple obstacles that lie in the path of successful interreligious dialogue in Chapter 3, “Interreligious Dialogue in a Polarized World.” The essay proceeds by highlighting certain obstacles and barriers and moving onto some reflections on the intellectual and theological levels of interreligious dialogue. The author works toward, as a key example, a discussion of dialogue in relation to the challenges of ecology. He suggests that the need to save the planet, particularly in the face of undeniable global climate change, is a common cause that can be better served by more positive interfaith dialogue and that the experience in working together toward this end (especially in promoting sustainable living and combating the rampant and all-prevailing urge to consume) may in turn may help communities overcome some of the more general obstacles that continue to plague dialogue in a wider sense.

Chapter 4, from Sandra Mazzolini, poses the bold question, “*Extra Ecclesiam Nulla Salus?* What Has the Catholic Church Learned about Interfaith Dialogue since Vatican II?” There, she reflects on when and how the Roman Catholic Church has sought to engage in interfaith dialogue (or otherwise) since the Second Vatican Council. She examines some of the various subjects and levels of this dialogue and identifies significant differences among and oscillations between magisterial teachings, theological contributions, catechistic content, and the common sense of Catholics and people in general. In offering a short overview of the history of that infamous mantra “outside the church [there is] no salvation” (*extra ecclesiam nulla salus*), Mazzolini identifies misunderstandings in relation to this clause—as well as its abuse and misuse. She proposes the salvific presence of the Holy Spirit outside the visible boundaries of the church as a better criterion for serving future Catholic interfaith efforts.

In Chapter 5, “Reading Together: Revelation and Jewish-Christian Relations,” Michael Barnes explores the Christian reception of the story of the self-revealing God who goes on calling people to union with Godself. Barnes explains, in more recent times, the positive way in which Judaism has been understood by Christians as a living tradition that not only formed the religious matrix out of which Christianity emerged but continues to nourish it through its own forms of study of the Bible. Barnes considers Vatican II’s *Dei Verbum*, the Dogmatic Constitution on Revelation, as one paradigmatic example of how Christians have sought to interpret some of the great scriptural and theological themes so central both to the story of Israel and to God’s own story, too. Barnes observes that Jews and Christians nonetheless

interpret these key themes quite differently and considers, in particular, such vital themes as covenant and law, promise and exile.

Susie Paulik Babka's contribution in Chapter 6 seeks to demonstrate how the religious discipline of silence before the being (and nonbeing) of God cannot be fully practiced solely in the terms set by Western Christian theology. Titled "Emptiness and Otherness: Negative Theology and the Language of Compassion," her chapter seeks to show how this discipline can thrive through encounters with non-Christian traditions—in this case, Judaism, as represented by Levinas, and Zen Buddhism, as represented by Keiji Nishitani and Masao Abe of the Kyoto School, who taught that the mutual transformation of traditions is actually the sign of authentic dialogue itself. This chapter explores the affinities of sunyata, kenosis, and *tsimtum* as ways toward enhancing the understanding of the Other as the matrix of one's own existence.

The second section of the volume looks more specifically at aspects of Jewish-Christian dialogue in the twentieth century. The first contribution here, Chapter 7, comes from Peter Admirand. He examines some more uncomfortable aspects of such interaction and engagement—which are nonetheless necessary in order for dialogue to ultimately flourish. With the intriguing title, "'Landmines' and 'Vegetables': The Hope and Perils of Recent Jewish Critiques of Christianity," his chapter's core focus is therefore some of the most particularly hard-hitting Jewish critiques of Christianity from recent times. Despite warming relations among Jews and Christians, some of the critiques are nevertheless deeply challenging toward major facets of Christian belief, such as Christology, the Trinity, and the historical validity of certain Gospel passages. However, in conclusion, the author postulates that these critiques can serve as an important test of the state and future of Jewish-Christian relations and dialogue. The future of such relations will in part depend on how Christians will respond to such critiques of their faith.

Joseph Palmisano, SJ, draws on insights from Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's depth theology in Chapter 8 in order to propose the construction of a "hermeneutic from depth." Entitled "Interreligious Dialogue as Depth and Frontier: Abraham Joshua Heschel's Depth Theology and the Thirty-Fifth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus," his chapter argues that a depth theology can actually be found at work in Christian theology itself. He provides an example of how the language of "depth" and "frontier" employed in the thirty-fifth General Congregation of the Society of Jesus actually constitutes an interreligiously attuned vocabulary with much future potential. This is because such language both ratifies and complements Heschel's depth theology, and vice versa, and hence this all bodes well for how Jewish and Christian insights may contribute to the *aggiornamento* project of interreligious dialogue.

While the previous two chapters both constituted and featured further discursive attention to the Christian perspective on Jewish-Christian relations, Chapter 9, "The Genuine Gains in Twentieth-Century Jewish-Christian Dialogue," comes from a Jewish perspective and is coauthored by Aaron Gross and Kate Yanina DeConinck. Exploring what specific progress can be

discerned in terms of North American Jewish-Catholic dialogue in recent times, it argues that there is actually a major area of gain in such relations that is frequently overlooked: the new spaces of Jewish-Christian encounter, if not always dialogue, that exist in academia. To illustrate this contention further, the essay reports on the results of a study of the proliferation of tenure-track positions in Jewish studies at highly ranked Catholic universities and colleges in North America. This study showed that approximately 45 percent of the 39 Catholic schools documented had a tenure-track teaching position in Jewish studies in 2015 and that many are explicitly tied to the mandate of Vatican II. Additionally, at least another 31 percent do not have tenure-track teaching positions in Jewish studies but do offer courses, lecture series, programs, and major/minors in Jewish studies, comparative theology, Holocaust studies, or interreligious dialogue, which is a very promising and encouraging development. However, despite these sometimes “hidden” gains in Jewish-Christian relations, the authors also offer one specific and related caution—namely, the urgent need for greater attentiveness to disagreement and difference between these traditions.

From the topic of Jewish-Christian relations, we move, in the third section of the volume, to the topic of Muslim-Christian dialogue. Chapter 10 comes from Minlib Dallh, OP, and is titled “The Dominican Friar Serge de Beaucueil’s *Praxis Mystica* and Muslim-Christian Encounter.” It explores the *praxis mystica* in *dār al-Islam* of de Beaucueil, one of the most significant French Catholic scholars of the mystical tradition of Islam. This essay postulates that his radical sense of hospitality to and from the “religious other” was the fruit of his spiritual conversation with and hermeneutics of the life and work of ‘Abdullah Anṣārī of Herāt. In addition, it considers also how the French Dominican’s life among Kabul street children both transformed his orthopraxis and enriched his theological and mystical imagination.

If Muslim-Christian dialogue is to thrive, we must look for the elements that we have in common, and one of these is Mary, who has an esteemed place in Islam, especially for Muslim women’s groups. In Chapter 11, “Maria Pontifex: The Virgin Mary as a Bridge Builder in Christian-Muslim Dialogue,” Lyn Holness examines Muslim perspectives on Mary and highlights her significance for Islam (thus complementing her own 2008 book, *Journeying with Mary*, in which she provided a Protestant perspective on the same topic and its importance for ecumenical dialogue). Here she introduces the idea of Mary’s potential as a bridge builder and as a way into dialogue between Islam and Christianity. Holness draws on personal experiences from her home city of Cape Town, which has a large Muslim population, and where, daily, she enjoyed various levels of exchange with Muslim neighbors. Reflecting on such experiences as well as relevant theological and other literary resources, the essay considers Mary’s position in both Christianity and Islam, discerning points of both contact and divergence between the traditions, as well as seeking to identifying further challenges, opportunities, and limitations that have emerged along the way.

In Chapter 12, “Christian and Islamic Conceptions of Public Civility: A Consideration of ‘The Human Good,’” Richard S. Park examines the recent

emergence of sociological and theological literature on the notion of civil society and postulates that this emergence reflects a need to construct a viable framework of civility within pluralistic societies. While some Muslim scholars question the compatibility of a religiously diverse society with traditional understandings of Islam, others suggest that an Islamic view actually offers theological grounds for the construction of civil society. Park therefore considers contemporary theories of civil society from both Muslim and Christian perspectives, concluding that models of civil society dominant in Western literature are conceptually compatible with Islamic ones, especially when taking into consideration the notions of *da'wa* (invitation to Islam) and *ḥikma* (Muslim integration with wider society). However, the author also warns that any model of civil society in a pluralistic context will prove ultimately inadequate if it is based on the theoretical foundations of “the common good” rather than of “the human good.”

Chapter 13 takes as its focus “Ethics in a Multifaith Society: Christians and Muslims in Dialogue.” Here, Patricia Madigan, OP, invites Christians and Muslims to cooperate both in promoting human dignity and peace and in offering guidance to their governments and legislators. She suggests that a most promising and perhaps most urgent area for ethical cooperation may be found in the development of a philosophical-theological tradition of rationalism in each religion that may be brought to bear positively on the realization of women’s human rights. Such a development would necessarily require both traditions to critique their historical use of Aristotelian concepts that lock women into old biologicistic and hierarchical models of sexuality in favor of more culturally appropriate paradigms such as that of human “flourishing.”

Stan Chu Ilo offers us reflection on “Crosscurrents in African Christianity: Lessons for Intercultural Hermeneutics of Friendship and Participation” in Chapter 14. In doing so, he opens the fourth section of our volume, which focuses on interreligious dialogue in specific contexts. Chu Ilo addresses the cross-cultural forces driving the momentum of Christian expansion in Africa and explains how these forces affect interdenominational and interreligious conflicts alike. He also provides some suggestions on how an African religious-cultural concept of “participation” might ground a Trinitarian theological praxis of intercultural friendship for overcoming differences among churches, people of different faiths, and the wider African society. Participation is thereby presented as a hermeneutic for reconceiving the basis for cross-cultural friendship and dwelling in common where differences and diversities are embraced as potentially powerful transformative variables in pluralistic societies.

A further African perspective comes from Nora Kofognotera Nonterah in Chapter 15, “The Challenges of Interfaith Relations in Ghana: A Case Study of Its Implications for Peace-Building in Northern Ghana.” This essay provides an informative account of the existence of the various religions found in Ghana, some of which date back to the fifteenth century. Unfortunately, this very diversity has also ignited religious rivalries among different religious groups, especially among the three major religions—Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion. The situation in Ghana is also aggravated by the reality of numerous “denominations” within both Christianity and Islam.

Hence there is both interdenominational rivalry and interreligious rivalry. The unfortunate aftermath is that neighbors who hitherto lived in peace are now at loggerheads caused, among other things, by religious otherness itself. This situation has contributed immensely to the escalation of the notorious conflicts in Northern Ghana. Indeed, it is ironic that Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional Religion, each of which has peace as a core value, are now a source of conflict and in Northern Ghana. The chapter concludes by suggesting how the application of appropriate “instruments of religious peace” may potentially ameliorate the situation in Northern Ghana.

From Africa we travel to North America, where in Chapter 16, “Religion, Violence, and Public Life in the United States of America,” Leo D. Lefebure reflects on citizens of the United States sometimes boasting of the freedoms holding up American-style democracy, the separation of church and state, and the freedom and equality of all citizens as models of public life for the entire world. He also examines how some other Americans have warned against the dangers of such a grandiose sense of the national mission. In his view, the historical record concerning religion, violence, and public life in North America from colonial times to the present is complex and conflicted. There is a repeated tension between ideals of freedom and equality on the one hand and continuing structures of domination and oppression on the other. Religion has played a multisided and often ambiguous role in these tensions, which have yet to be resolved.

Chapter 17 has the intriguing title “A Marginal Asian Reading of Mark 7:24–30: An Interfaith Filipino Homeless Community’s Encounter with the Syrophoenician Woman,” offering a perspective from Asia by a European author, Pascal D. Bazzell, who worked in the Philippines from 1998–2014. There, he worked in church planting and community development, as well as serving as a professor of intercultural theology and missiology. In the chapter, he explores Mark 7:24–30 through the exegetical work of a Filipino multiethnic, multilingual, and multireligious homeless ecclesial community. He reviews various approaches and possible interpretations of this biblical text (i.e., traditional, cross-cultural, sacramental, feminist, postcolonial, interfaith, and missiological). He suggests that examining this story from a multidimensional perspective, as well as from a multi-axial frame of reference, both in interaction with a unique marginal Filipino perspective, might reveal a rich and deeper relevance of the text that could offer much for current exegetical, ecclesial, and ecumenical discourses. The story of the Syrophoenician woman and Jesus illustrates a relational dialogue that crosses barriers of geography, ethnicity, gender, theology, religion, cultural value, social roles, and social status. For those at society’s margins and the churches today, this story might therefore provide an example of how to dismantle any exclusive boundaries for the sake of participating in the eschatological fruit of God’s kingdom.

Finally, in Chapter 18, Roberto Catalano examines the phenomenon of religious pluralism with special attention to the Indian-Asian context. He considers how pluralism continues to be a divisive issue in our times, especially among Christians, as the whole world, especially Europe, is becoming more and more diversified, especially through waves of migration. Although pluralism itself can

serve to encourage a more positive attitude toward other religions and cultures, it can also further fuel divisive debates within Christianity, debates that are far from being resolved, in relation to issues such as the mission of the church to announce Christ to the world, the mediation of Christ, and the role of the church in relation to salvation. Drawing on the author's decades of involvement in interreligious dialogue in India, a country with a rich heritage strongly characterized by different ethnic groups and cultural and religious traditions, the essay explores the important contribution that could be offered to such debates that has emerged out of the Asian context—a context where, for a considerable period of time now, bishops, theologians, and lay people have, in an openly constructive fashion, been committed to an understanding of Christ and of the role of the church in a typically pluralistic milieu. Hence Catalano's evocative title, "Living in a Pluralistic Reality: The Indian-Asian Experience."

What all these essays demonstrate, individually and especially collectively, is twofold: On the one hand, the road to greater interreligious harmony is still arduous and challenging; yet, on the other hand, there is more will and energy to continue on the journey toward greater understanding, cooperation, collaboration, and hence harmony than ever before. The realization of the need to spread the word that where members of multiple human communities dwell in common is clearly of so much greater significance and importance than what divides them is a message that is changing our world for the better in so many ways. Its implications are tremendously important for our times, and its transformative power is immense. Truly, there are multiple new prospects for interreligious encounter, engagement, and understanding unfolding before us today. We invite all our readers to join this cause and, through this series and the ongoing work of the Ecclesiological Investigations Network, to help continue the clearing of new pathways for dialogue in the twenty-first century and beyond.

## NOTES

1. The gathering's full program, along with additional information, can be viewed at <http://assisi2012.ei-research.net>.
2. This is the third of three volumes to originate from the Assisi 2012 gathering, all published as part of this new series, which itself was inspired by the Assisi gathering and is designed to be a continuation of the conversations that began there. The other two volumes are *Where We Dwell in Common: The Quest for Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century*, edited by Gerard Mannion, and *Pathways for Ecclesial Dialogue in the Twenty-First Century: Revisiting Ecumenical Method*, edited by Mark D. Chapman and Miriam Haar. There is also a special edition of the *Journal of World Christianity*, edited by Mary McClintock Fulkerson and Elaine Padilla, featuring many excellent essays from the Assisi gathering that had a particular focus on social and pastoral themes, challenges, and contexts. A fuller account of the Assisi gathering and the methodology behind it can be found in the opening chapter of the first volume: Gerard Mannion,

“Thinking Outside the Ecumenical Box: Assisi 2012—Story, Method, and Beyond.”

3. The Network’s website is <http://www.ei-research.net>. Founded in 2005, with roots going back to 2002, some background on the Ecclesiological Investigations Network can be found in Gerard Mannion, “The Open Church Re-Envisioned: *Ecclesiological Investigations*—A New International Research Network,” in *Receiving “The Nature and Mission of the Church,”* ed. Paul M. Collins and Michael Fahey, SJ, vii–xviii (London: T&T Clark, 2008), with some updates provided in “Ecclesiological Investigations: Series Introduction and Invitation” in the revised series introduction to the paperback edition of Gerard Mannion, ed., *Church and Religious Other: Essays on Truth, Unity and Diversity* (New York: T&T Clark, 2011), ix–xiv.
4. Roger Haight, *Ecclesial Existence*, vol. 3 of *Christian Community in History* (New York: Continuum, 2008).
5. Albeit acknowledging that even this concept comes from and is informed by a Christian perspective, for some religious communities do not even employ a concept of theism as such.
6. Pope Francis, Apostolic Exhortation, *Evangelii Gaudium* (November 24, 2013), [http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost\\_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco\\_esortazione-ap\\_20131124\\_evangelii-gaudium.html](http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html).

## CHAPTER 2



# CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC RESOURCES FOR INTERRELIGIOUS AND ECUMENICAL DIALOGUE

*Craig A. Phillips*

### INTRODUCTION

The relationship between the part and the whole, the particular and the universal, is a perennial concern of philosophy, theology, and the human sciences. In ecumenical and interreligious dialogue, we find a tension between approaches that seek to ground dialogue in a larger totality and those that resist totality, focusing instead on particularity.

Totalizing approaches are evident in pluralist theologies that identify putative totalities underlying all religions. They are also evident in particularist postliberal approaches that describe religion in a monolithic manner as if each religion were shaped by only one central narrative and cultural-linguistic community. Some particularist approaches that note the incommensurability of ideas, practices, and traditions between religions have concluded that interreligious dialogue is impossible.

Rarely do we find theorists of interreligious dialogue who identify their respective methods as simultaneously pluralist and particularist. Such is the case with S. Mark Heim and Jeannine Hill-Fletcher.<sup>1</sup> Their work would not be possible were it not for George Lindbeck's pioneering work in articulating a cultural-linguistic approach to ecumenical and interreligious dialogue.

Heim's and Hill-Fletcher's projects, in conversation with Lindbeck's model, provide insights that will assist in the rearticulation of a cultural-linguistic approach to interreligious dialogue.



## LINDBECK'S CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC MODEL

In *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*, George Lindbeck proposed a “cultural-linguistic” paradigm for the study of religion and theology. The intended audience of the book was primarily those engaged in ecumenical dialogue, but the book soon reached a wider audience engaged in all sorts of theological enterprises. In cultural-linguistic approaches, Lindbeck writes, “emphasis is placed on those aspects in which religions resemble languages together with their correlative forms of life and are thus similar to cultures (insofar as these are understood semiotically as reality and value systems—that is, as idioms for the constructing of reality and the living of life).”<sup>2</sup>

The two most important items that hold Lindbeck’s theory of doctrine and his theory of religion together are Geertz’s 1973 essay “Religion as Cultural System,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures*, and Wittgenstein’s seminal work of 1958, *Philosophical Investigations*.<sup>3</sup> *The Nature of Doctrine*, as Hugh Nicholson summarizes, “is a kind of synergic homology between Geertz’s understanding of a religion as a self-contained cultural system . . . and Wittgenstein’s concept of a rule-governed, autonomous language game.”<sup>4</sup>

In recent scholarship, both Geertz’s definition of religion as a cultural system and Lindbeck’s understanding of religion as a rule-governed language game have come under attack. The extent to which Lindbeck’s approach depoliticizes religion is also problematic.

The most influential and telling critique of Geertz’s definition of religion is that of Talal Asad. Asad argues that Geertz’s definition of religion, which purports to be a neutral and thus universal one, is instead culturally and historically specific and based on particular power relationships between the church and the modern state, relationships specific to Europe after the Reformation.<sup>5</sup> No neutral, essential definition of religion as an autonomous essence therefore is possible. Lindbeck shares with Geertz an essentialist understanding of religion.<sup>6</sup> He employs an understanding of religion as a set of cultural patterns shaping social and psychological reality to challenge the “experiential-expressivism” that he locates in the liberal theological project that runs from Schleiermacher through Tillich, Rahner, Tracy, and other modern liberal theologians.

What Lindbeck shares, therefore, with the liberal theologians from whom he hopes to distance his postliberal cultural-linguistic model is an understanding of religion as autonomous from the domain of politics and power. Lindbeck implicitly acknowledges this, at least partially, in his assertion that religion is prior to experience and constitutive of it, but what is missing in Lindbeck’s account is a more fully thematized understanding of those particular relationships of power within communities (including religious ones) that act through fundamental tensions and social antagonisms within the communities themselves to bring cohesion to them. This criticism is more fully developed in Kathryn Tanner’s understanding of the political dimensions of doctrine that “function to mobilize group identity through social opposition.”<sup>7</sup> Lindbeck’s intratextual approach, on the other hand, tends to make religious meaning and truth immanent rather than in reference to external

experience or reality outside of the text, as in a semiotic system. His description of the “Christian way of life as a self-contained whole allows Lindbeck to affirm the essentially social nature of religion without having to acknowledge its oppositional, ‘political’ dimension.”<sup>8</sup>

When we look at the discussion of interreligious dialogue in *The Nature of Doctrine* in light of the postcolonial critiques of Talal Asad and numerous poststructuralist theorists, we see that problems with the essentializing of religion go even deeper. Lindbeck appears to talk about Christianity and Buddhism, for example, as if they are particular cultural-linguistic systems with a central, organizing language game.<sup>9</sup> If an essentialist understanding of religion is to be avoided, talk of particular religions, or religious traditions, as being made up of one central, organizing language game becomes problematic. There are many different forms of Buddhism, for example, each with a multiplicity of language games. It is also true that religions are much more than rule-governed language games.<sup>10</sup>

Because Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic model is far more suggestive than fully worked out, he does not completely develop his proposal as to how doctrine functions as a kind of grammar within specific religions and religious traditions. When he does discuss grammar, Lindbeck focuses on it primarily in terms of rule following. Grammar, however, is much more than rule following. *The Nature of Doctrine*, while based on Wittgenstein’s linguistic philosophy, lacks detailed discussion of how Wittgenstein’s cryptic remarks on grammar—“Essence is expressed by grammar” (§371); “Grammar tells us what kind of object anything is. (Theology as grammar.)” (§373)<sup>11</sup>—might lead to greater understanding of religious communities and traditions.<sup>12</sup>

In spite of these limitations, Lindbeck’s model does provide for particularity. If religions are understood to be cultural-linguistic systems with their own internal intratextual logic and grammar, then Lindbeck suggests one may be incommensurable to the other.<sup>13</sup> To learn about another religion, one would have to study it as one might study a foreign language, with the goal of linguistic competence and a fuller understanding of its larger cultural-linguistic context. To gain such competence requires time and patient effort and thus is not something that can be easily accomplished.

## THE “ORIENTATIONAL PLURALISM” OF S. MARK HEIM

Heim offers a model that lends itself well to a cultural-linguistic approach to interreligious dialogue.<sup>14</sup> His model is not based on the cultural-linguistic theories of Geertz or Wittgenstein but is an application of the “orientational pluralism” of Nicholas Rescher to interreligious discourses.<sup>15</sup> This approach allows Heim to account for the particularities and differences in various religious traditions and for their differing truth claims.<sup>16</sup> Heim’s model affirms that “more than one [religion] may be truthful in their account of themselves, and that these truths are distinct.”<sup>17</sup>

Heim’s model accounts for the multiplicity of religious goals or ends in the religions of the world without the erasure of difference. Whereas Joseph DiNoia

observes, traditional “pluralist and inclusivist positions fail to account for [the] inextricable connection between the particular aims of life commended by religious communities and the specific sets of dispositions they foster to promote the attainment and enjoyment of those aims,” Heim’s model of orientational pluralism does account for these things.<sup>18</sup> Even though Heim, like Lindbeck, essentializes religion and religions, his approach can be easily modified to correct this shortcoming by stressing the multiplicity of ends even within the larger postulated totalities of, for example, Buddhism and Christianity.

Central to Rescher’s model is the assertion that one and only one standpoint seems valid from any given perspective; however, in reality, there is clearly a diversity of perspectives. No one can step outside of his or her own perspectival position and into some place removed from that perspective and “issue metatheological statements about the rough parity of all religions” given their specific differences and particularities.<sup>19</sup> “The way forward in religious pluralism,” for Heim, “is to live positively with otherness, not to suggest that it is too dangerous to be real.”<sup>20</sup>

Heim proposes, therefore, that each religion or religious tradition has its own goals, ends, or, in more explicitly religious language, “salvations” that are particular to it. Although adherents of each tradition “see their tradition’s religious ultimate at the center,” Heim’s orientational pluralist model “entertain[s] the possibility that penultimate goods (from their view) could endure as the religious fulfillments of those who pursue various [and different] religious ends.”<sup>21</sup> It is appropriate and consistent, Heim argues, “for each of us to argue that our accounts are preferable to the others.”

Heim goes further than that. He maintains that different religious ends might be “maintained through the historical and eschatological states of religious fulfillment themselves.”<sup>22</sup> This is confusing. Does this imply that Christians attain salvation, Buddhists attain Nirvana, and Vikings go to Valhalla? The logic of his position allows for the attainment of penultimate ends—that is, religious virtues and character particular to each respective religion—but not, apparently, for the eschatological attainment of separate salvations, one for each community simultaneous with infinite others.

In the overall system Heim constructs, his Christian commitment and interests come to the fore because he links the religious ends of the various religions of the world to the Triune God of the Christian faith in what can only be described as a form of Christian inclusivism. In the end, difference is subsumed within a Christian framework.<sup>23</sup> This may seem contradictory to Heim’s proposal that each religion has its own ends or salvations, but it is consistent with his argument that each tradition can hold that its accounts are preferable to others and that for Heim as a Christian, union with the Triune God is ultimately true.

## JEANNINE HILL-FLETCHER’S *MONOPOLY ON SALVATION*

Much of Jeannine Hill-Fletcher’s book *Monopoly on Salvation?: A Feminist Approach to Religious Pluralism* and subsequent essay, “As Long as We Wonder: