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Denise A. Austin
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Interfaith Engagement Beyond the Divide

Approaches, Experiences, and Practices

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Editors
Johannes M. Luetz
Graduate Research School
Alphacrucis University College
Brisbane, QLD, Australia

School of Law and Society
University of the Sunshine Coast
Maroochydore, QLD, Australia

School of Social Sciences
University of New South Wales
Sydney, NSW, Australia

Denise A. Austin
Leaders Institute
Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Adis Duderija
School of Humanities,
Languages and Social Science
Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural
Research
Centre for Interfaith and Intercultural
Dialogue
Griffith University
Nathan, QLD, Australia

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Contents

Contributors

Dave Andrews Community Praxis Cooperative, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Denise A. Austin Leaders Institute, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Emma M. Austin Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Kurt Bangert Bad Nauheim, Germany

Magfirah Dahlan Craven Community College, New Bern, NC, USA

Allan W. Davis Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Adam Dodds School of Ministry and Theology, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Adis Duderija School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Pratima Durga School of Arts and Business, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia;
School of Business and Law, Central Queensland University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

Mark Harlan Dallas International University, Dallas, TX, USA

Philip Hughes Alphacrucis University College, Melbourne, VIC, Australia

Jon Killpack Amman, Jordan

Zulkipli Lessy Graduate School, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Johannes M. Luetz Graduate Research School, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia;

School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, QLD, Australia;
School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Muqowim Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Nigel D. Pegram School of Ministry and Theology, Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Robert Pope Centre for Intercultural Research and Engagement, Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW, Australia

Ungaran Rashid International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

Viktor J. Tóth Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, USA

Chapter 1
Interfaith Engagement: The State of the Art

Johannes M. Luetz, Denise A. Austin, and Adis Duderija

Abstract The planetary-scale problems of our current era make contemporary interfaith research, education and practice a fertile agenda for sustainable human development, locally, nationally, and internationally. The reasons are manifold and compelling and are nurtured by both hindsight and foresight. Looking back, human experience of past interreligious discord reflects a long and harrowing list of disturbing consequences that reverberate across time and space but also offer bright glimmers of hope. Looking ahead, many global challenges now facing humanity can only be mastered if humans from diverse religious backgrounds and faith traditions can meaningfully collaborate in support of human rights, reconciliation, sustainability, justice, and peace. Set against this background, this chapter explores opportunities for interfaith engagement in the twenty-first century. Offering an overview of interfaith approaches, historical examples, and future prospects, this chapter posits that future human well-being, deferential geopolitics, and constructive international relations are, at least in part, predicated on widely shared interfaith consciousness. It also introduces the chapters of this book and thereby showcases both examples of innovative conceptual and empirical research, and fieldwork-informed case studies that invite imitation, application, and multiplication in different settings.

Keywords Interfaith studies · Interfaith dialogue · Interreligious studies · Interfaith practice · Interfaith education · History of interfaith engagement

J. M. Luetz (✉)
Graduate Research School, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: johannes.luetz@ac.edu.au; jluetz@usc.edu.au; j.luetz@unsw.edu.au

School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, QLD, Australia

School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

D. A. Austin
Leaders Institute, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: denise.austin@leaders.edu.au

A. Duderija
School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: a.duderija@griffith.edu.au

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Introduction

Human experience of past and present interreligious discord reflects a long and harrowing list of disturbing consequences that reverberate across time and space. These include discrimination, bigotry, prejudice, persecution, injustice, hatred, and segregation, along with numberless open and concealed conflicts (Armstrong, 2001, 2014; Spencer, 2018). Resultant isolationism, ignorance, extremism and entrenched religious divisiveness have long undermined both interpersonal relationships and international cooperation. Many consequences are beyond description, and the cumulative opportunity costs are beyond measure (Sacks, 2015, 2020). It is against this background that this book aims to create space 'beyond the divide'. It seeks to redress distortions of religious mis- and dis-information and aims to construct interreligious common ground. Importantly, many global challenges facing humanity today can only be mastered if humans from diverse religious backgrounds and faith traditions can meaningfully collaborate in support of human rights, reconciliation, sustainability, justice, and peace (Andrews, 2015; Halafoff, 2013; Sacks, 2009). This proposition also entails the unequivocal duty to honour and respect Indigenous spirituality *en route* to imagining and creating a world that may be equitably and enduringly shared (Atabongwoung et al., 2023; Dueck, 2021; Luetz & Nunn, 2023). In short, the planetary-scale problems of our current era make the purposive exploration of opportunities for interfaith research, education, and practice in the twenty-first century a timely aspiration and agenda for sustainable human development locally, nationally, and internationally.

This edited volume aims to document contemporary interfaith approaches, experiences, and practices beyond religious divides. A unique feature of this book is its strong theory–practice focus. Apart from featuring empirical findings and field projects, the volume also contains a collection of chapters that exemplify various approaches to interfaith engagement from around the world. The chapters showcase examples of innovative interfaith praxis in different geographical and sociocultural settings. The appraisal of contemporary challenges and opportunities makes this interdisciplinary publication a useful tool for teaching, research, and sociocultural analysis, with implications for macro-policy development.

To set the stage, this chapter introduces a range of conceptual, historical, and environmental perspectives that inform interfaith consciousness today. The chapter is structured as follows. We begin by introducing the predominant theoretical approaches that underpin contemporary interfaith engagement. Our focus will be on the post-9/11 period, which in many ways, can be seen as a watershed moment. This is followed by a brief historical overview of selected interfaith experiences and case examples that offer insightful lessons from the past. This brief historical excursion does not aim for comprehensive coverage of all prior or major interfaith experiences but pursues the more modest aim of sketching key historically informed lessons, principles, and prospects. Next, we assume a forward-facing posture and argue that human perpetuity itself seems predicated on interfaith consciousness, widely shared.

Finally, we synthesise the state of the art and introduce the chapters of this book as a way of showcasing and promoting the diversity of innovative interfaith practices taking place today.

The Interfaith Landscape Since 9/11: Overview of Major Trends and Contributors

Recent years have seen an explosion of interest in the academic fields of interfaith research, education and/or practice (IREP), especially in the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.[1] It would be impossible to do justice in this chapter and aim to cover comprehensively the many important theoretical contributions that have been penned in IREP over the last two decades. In what follows, some of the major trends, conceptual currents, and principal contributors to this academic field of inquiry will be identified and briefly described in non-chronological order.

One major development in this area has been the progressive creation of robust theoretical foundations for interfaith and/or interreligious studies, including the establishment of several interfaith/interreligious academic journals and book series dedicated to various aspects of this emerging academic field of inquiry.[2] In this respect important works on theoretical and philosophical principles and conditions for constructive interfaith dialogue, interreligious hermeneutics, and interreligious/comparative theology have been both written (Cheetham et al., 2011; Clooney, 2010; Cornille, 2008, 2013; Oppy & Trakkakis, 2018; Race & Knitter, 2019; Swidler, 2014) and edited (Gustafson, 2020; Mosher, 2022; Patel et al., 2018).

In the specific area of interfaith dialogue, it is essential to mention the enormous contributions made by Leonard Swidler and the Dialogue Institute[3] who have been at the forefront of advancing ecumenical and interfaith dialogue for nearly sixty years. According to Swidler, as detailed on the Dialogue institute website, interfaith/interreligious dialogue consists of a "conversation on a common subject between people with differing views undertaken so that they can learn from one another and grow" (Dialogue Institute, 2022a). For this to occur, certain fundamental rules for dialogue ought to be met, including the following: the idea that the "essential purpose of dialogue is to learn" and that this process of learning necessitates change in both dialogue partners; the idea that the dialogue partners' approach to dialogue is based on complete honesty and sincerity; that one partner's ideals are not to be compared with the other partner's practice or vice versa but that ideals are to be compared to ideals

[1] As one general indicator a search on google scholar on scholarship with the words 'interfaith' or 'interreligious' in the title returned close to 8000 titles at of the time of this writing in August 2022.

[2] For example, https://irstudies.org/; https://poj.peeters-leuven.be/content.php?url=journal&journal_code=SID; https://link.springer.com/series/14838.

[3] Its official journal is named *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* and was founded in 1964. It is the first journal dedicated to interreligious/interfaith dialogue and is currently in its 57th volume. https://jes.pennpress.org/home/.

and practice with practice; and that the dialogue partners ought to have the benefit of defining themselves rather than being labelled by the other. Furthermore, according to Swidler, dialogue partners "must not come to the dialogue with any preconceptions as to where the points of disagreement lie" but allow the dialogue itself to reveal the points of difference (Dialogue Institute, 2022b). Crucially, the comportment of the dialogue partners must be 'as equals' (*par cum pari*) who are genuinely interested in learning from each other rather than approach 'dialogue' in a kind of preaching mode; finally, in order for meaningful dialogue to take place, mutual trust and a healthy degree of self-criticism toward one's own tradition is required, including the willingness to step into the shoes of the dialogue partner's tradition and understand it from within.[4] These principles understandably have important implications at the level of interfaith practice.

The second initiative worth mentioning pertains to scriptural reasoning as theorized and advocated by Peter Ochs (Dialogue Institute, 2022b) and as carried out in the *Journal of Scriptural Reasoning*.[5] Although scriptural reasoning tends to be primarily a scholarly enterprise between the so-called Abrahamic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam), its principles apply to all scripture-based religions. In the journal's Statement of Purpose (2022), the reader is informed that:

> The Society for Scriptural Reasoning (SSR) is a network of Jewish, Christian and Muslim scholars promoting religious readings of scriptures within the Academy. Members of SSR believe that the Abrahamic religions share a common habitus: the reading of scripture—however diverse our traditions and theologies. The SSR gathers religion and text scholars into a conversation in which the richness and depth of these diverse readings can be uncovered, discussed, and interpreted. Philosophical and other disciplines of reasoning have served as essential instruments of our dialog, but they do not set the agenda. The agenda is set by the words of scripture and by the ways they speak to our urgent concerns and reform our personal and communal lives.

Hence, one of the main tasks of scriptural reasoning is to highlight the rich tapestry of various interpretations scripture can sustain and how it can speak to the contemporary needs and conundrums of the practitioners of scriptural reasoning, both as individuals and as members of their religious traditions and communities at large.

One of the most recent trends in the broad field of interfaith activity is the emergence of a 'new' field of academic study referred to as interreligious studies, a kind of successor of comparative theology[6] (Hedges, 2013, p. 1077). Several volumes, encyclopedia entries, and Handbooks bearing the title of interreligious studies have been written since 2015 (Gustafson, 2020; Mosher, 2022; Oddbjørn, 2015; Patel et al., 2018). One such study (Mosher, 2022, p. x) describes the nature and aims of 'Interreligious Studies' as follows:

> [I]nterreligious studies fosters scholarship engaging two or more religious traditions at a time. Inherently multidisciplinary, the field brings the academic consideration of religions into

[4] The work of Catherine Cornille on the constructive conditions for interfaith dialogue (Cornille, 2013) are based on similar principles. See several chapters in this volume for more details.

[5] Peter Ochs is its founding editor. https://jsr.shanti.virginia.edu/.

[6] As theorized by scholars such as Clooney (2010).

conversation with the humanities and social sciences, employing relational, intersectional, experiential, and dialogical methodologies as it examines the interrelationship of individuals and groups with differing alignments toward religion.

Therefore, the idea of relationality and intersectionality of and between religions in the form of exploring their dynamic encounters, both in the past, present, and future, is one of the major characteristics defining the academic field of interreligious studies. Importantly, this exploration of the complex inter-relationality of religions is not just merely engaged for the sake of disinterested and disembodied academic reason but also with the intention of promoting interreligious learning and growth (Hedges, 2013, pp. 1076–1080).

The themes pertaining to interfaith/interreligious education, learning and leadership have also been prominent in the broad space of interfaith engagement since 9/11. Recently, several important works on interreligious education and learning have been published (for example, Barnes, 2021; Engebretson et al., 2010; Kraml et al., 2022; Meyer, 2021; Syeed & Hadsell, 2020). The term interreligious/interfaith education, as employed here, refers to "an interactive process through which people learn *about* and learn *from* a diversity of religions. It aims at the transformation of attitudes and behaviors that may stereotype, demonize or view those of other religions with suspicion" (Engebretson et al., 2010, p. vi). As a subfield of interfaith/religious studies, the field of interreligious education draws upon multiple disciplines ranging from comparative religion/theology, sociology of religion to peace education and critical cultural studies. Practitioners in the field of interreligious education are also practice-oriented in the sense that their deliberations seek to facilitate social cohesion and mutual understanding, and develop solidarity rather than being purely abstract and theoretical in nature (Engebretson et al., 2010). Hence, like other interfaith efforts mentioned above, interfaith education operates across the cognitive, affective, and experimental domains of human endeavour (Meyer, 2021).

Perhaps one of the most well-known and influential proponents in this field of interfaith education (and leadership) is Eboo Patel. Patel is an American Muslim from a minority Ismaili tradition and is of Indian Gujrati heritage. He is described as one of the world's leading educators and thinkers in the field of interfaith education (Patel, 2022). Holding a Doctorate in Sociology of Religion from Oxford University, Patel has authored important works in the space of interfaith education and leadership including a primer on interfaith leadership (Patel, 2016), and a workbook on embracing interfaith cooperation (Patel and Scorer 2013). He is the founder and President of Interfaith America (Faith is a bridge, 2022), which is the largest interfaith organization in the United States of America (USA). Patel is particularly noted for his work on promoting interfaith work among American youth. Significantly, a lot of his work reaches well beyond academic audiences and makes ample use of modern social media technologies such as twitter, YouTube, and Facebook.

In the broader field of interfaith activism, we can point to many high-profile interfaith events that have taken place between religious authorities of the highest ranks, especially in the context of Christian-Muslim relations (Douglas, 2017). Perhaps one of the most well-known and most important initiatives in this respect is the initiative

called 'A Common World', launched in 2007 following an Open Letter written by and endorsed by prominent Muslim religious leaders across diverse Muslim denominations; it outlines a kind of manifesto that is to be adhered by the Muslim community in relation to Christian-Muslim interfaith dialogue that is based on two common principles that are similarly present in both religions, namely love for God and love for one's neighbor (The ACW Letter, 2007). Other examples of promising interfaith initiatives include activities as diverse as interfaith radio programs, which are dedicated to promoting interfaith harmony and social cohesion, and interfaith social media initiatives, which over the last decade or so have become one of the most popular tools and platforms for initiating interfaith dialogue and interfaith meal sharing (Promising practices, 2022).

Lessons from History in Building Mutual Trust and Acceptance

Having discussed a range of contemporary theoretical approaches and practices, this section now takes stock of past interfaith engagements. The selected examples and experiences are provided as beacons of hope for possible future interfaith cooperation. Crucially, these lessons from history highlight the enduring significance of interfaith praxis throughout the ages, thus bending the long arc of diverse interreligious experiences towards the interfaith imperative of our current era.

When asked to define social contribution, Confucius replied, "It is to love all men" (cited in Legge, 1901). Speaking of those in need, Jesus said, "Love your neighbour as you love yourself" (Luke 10:25–37). Such teachings focus on the betterment of society through positive engagement with the 'other'. In the Analects, Confucius further stated that the truly virtuous person, "desiring to be established himself, seeks to establish others; desiring success for himself, he strives to help others succeed. To find in the wishes of one's own heart the principle for his conduct toward others is the method of true virtue" (Arden, 1998, p. 87). Many recent studies rightly demonstrate how religion has been 'weaponized' to inflict atrocities on the 'other' of an opposing religion (Ahmed et al., 2022; Raudino & Barton, 2021; Rowley & Hodgson, 2021; Yilmaz & Albayrak, 2022). While not denying this horrendous truth, this section takes a more positivist approach. We argue that there is an unbroken thread of meaningful and constructive interfaith engagement throughout history that is often drowned out by the loud voices of hate. As Ariarajah (2018, p. 11) states, "The most important dimension of interfaith relations is mutual trust and acceptance of each other."

Setting Scriptural Precedents for Interfaith Engagement

The holy scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam each provide clear precedents for enriching interfaith interaction. In the Hebrew scriptures, Abraham accepts a blessing from and gives a tithe to Melchizedek king of Salem and priest of the god El Elyon (Gen. 14:18–20). The Quran encourages interreligious dialogue with the verse, "Invite all to the way of your Lord with wisdom and beautiful preaching; and engage with them in ways that are best and most gracious" (16:125). During the early founding of Islam, the Prophet Muhammad established several covenants with Christian neighbors, including Christians of the Sinai, Persia, Najran, and Assyria (Morrow, 2018). A pledge by the Prophet Muhammad to Christians states, "So whenever a monk or a pilgrim is on a mountain or in a valley, cave, village, plain, church, or temple—we are behind them and they are under our protection… And nobody of the Islamic nation shall break this obligation until the Day of Judgment and the end of the world" (cited in Makari, 2019, p. 180).

The Abbasid Caliphate (c.750–850 CE) is often referred to as the 'golden age' of Islam (Mansour, 2018). As Muqowim and Lessy (2023) demonstrate in this volume, astronomy, mathematics, medicine, science, and the arts flourished at this time. One oft-told story of engagement was the Abbasid caliph, Hārūn al-Rashıd (c.673–809) of Baghdad, who presented Roman emperor Charlemagne (747–814) with the highly prized gift of an elephant in 797 CE, as an "act of friendship" (Cobb, 2021, p. 73). During the late eighth century, there is evidence of orthodox Syrian Melkite monks engaging in interfaith dialogue in written Arabic, including quar'anic citations (Buys & Nwokoro, 2019). Central Asian Muslims also translated many Buddhist works into Arabic, thus fostering interfaith engagement (Yusuf, 2009). Ninth-century Christian philosopher, John Scottus Eriugena (800–877), enjoyed healthy debate with the Mu'tazilites (Sushkov, 2022). During some (although certainly not all) of the Ottoman era (c.1300–1922), Jews and Muslims interacted closely in everyday life from business dealings, recreational activities, and personal friendships (Jütte, 2021).

Seeking Wealth and Enlightenment from the Fifteenth to the Seventeenth Centuries

Southeast Asia has been a central trade hub for many centuries, with merchants spreading both Buddhism and Islam through ports, urban centers, and rural communities (de Zwart & van Zanden, 2018). Reid (1990, p. 1) coined the term "Age of Commerce" (1450–1680 CE) in Southeast Asia, when Indian, Persian, Islamic, Chinese, and European influences shaped the social, economic, and religious landscapes. However, with the arrival of the Dutch and British colonizers, Reid (1993, p. 325) claims dramatically that, "the positive interaction between international trade, scriptural religion, and expanding Southeast Asian monarchies was at an end—and

with it the age of commerce." de Zwart and van Zanden (2018) counter that the trade routes remained central to vibrant intercultural exchange and religious engagement.

Interfaith dialogue was also generated through economic channels in Europe and the Middle East. Hebraist Johannes Reuchlin (1455–1522) was persecuted by the Dominicans owing to his close relationships with Jewish scholars and merchants (Jütte, 2021). Prosperous German businessman, Hans Ulrich Krafft (1550–1621) had extensive dealings with Turkish and Jewish traders when he resided in Tripoli, Lebanon (Jütte, 2021). Bastin and de Sliva (2020) outline the centuries of historic trade and interreligious engagement between Buddhists and Muslims in Sri Lanka.

During the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries, one of the core features of the so-called 'age of enlightenment' was religious tolerance (Domínguez, 2017). German spiritualists Sebastian Franck (1499–1542) called Muslims his "brethren" (Laborie, 2017, p. 363). While Martin Luther's antisemitic writings are well-documented, there are other accounts of positive interactions between Christians and Jews during the Protestant Reformation (1517–1648) (Sluhovsky & Elyada, 2020). The curious friendship between Enlightenment scholars, Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786) and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781), is the source of much interfaith debate (Kaplan, 2008; Valeur, 2016).

Fostering Religious Renaissance in the Nineteenth Century

An unexpected offshoot of the nineteenth-century Protestant missionary movement was helping awaken the national religion of some host countries. For example, the 'father of Bengal renaissance', Raja Rammohun Roy (1772–1883) was a good friend of the 'father of modern missions', William Carey (1761–1834) (Dasgupta, 2010). Roy was active in interfaith dialogue with Christian and Muslim scholars. Carey is credited with advancing the Bengal renaissance by translating Indian classics into Bangla, as well as developing Bangla prose and grammar (Kopf, 1969).

A turning point in global interfaith dialogue came at the 1893 World's Parliament of Religions in Chicago which included mostly members from Christian denominations, with some Hindus, Jains, Buddhist, and other new religious movements (Fahy & Bock, 2019). It was advertised as "the first formal gathering of representatives of Eastern and Western spiritual traditions" and "recognised as the birth of formal interreligious dialogue worldwide" (cited in Makari, 2019, p. 179). One of the guest speakers was Swami Vivekananda who subsequently propagated his pluralistic reconstruction of Hinduism right across the United States of America (USA) (Stroud, 2018). Unfortunately, the only Muslim guest speaker was heckled by the mostly Christian audience. Still, this gathering did foster new opportunities to rethink traditional theologies.

Institutionalizing Interfaith Movements in the Twentieth Century

The tumultuous events of the twentieth century gave rise to several interfaith movements. In 1900, the first International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers (later renamed the International Association for Religious Freedom) meeting was held in Boston (Fahy & Bock, 2019). A groundbreaking initiative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople was the encyclical of 1920 which opened the way for more formal interreligious dialogue and cooperation with Christian Orthodox communities (Tsompanidis & Ziaka, 2020). German theologian, Rudolf Otto, founded the Religious Union of Humankind (RMB) Religiöser Menschheitsbund in 1921, in the aftermath of World War I and the Spanish flu global pandemic but it dissolved after two years (Kozmann, 2021). In 1924, a 'Conference on Some Living Religions within the British Empire' was held in London as a thinly veiled opportunity to tout Christian triumphalism (Howard, 2018). Nevertheless, one of the guest speakers was Sir Francis Younghusband who later co-founded the World Fellowship of Faiths (later renamed World Congress of Faiths) in 1936. In 1927, the National Conference of Christians and Jews attempted to counter increasing racism and violence in the USA (Fahy & Bock, 2019). A similar Council of Christians and Jews was established in the United Kingdom in 1942 (Fahy & Bock, 2019).

For over a hundred years, many evangelical Christians had equated Judaism, Catholicism, and modernism with the antichrist, but the Cold War era (1948–1990) saw communism take on that title with a parallel flurry of activity in interfaith spaces. The Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa, which was founded in 1959, ultimately expanded to twenty countries (Iminza & Mombo, 2022). During the 1960s, the Temple of Understanding was founded in the USA with the goal to "educate youth and adults both cross culturally and interreligiously for global citizenship and peaceful coexistence; advocate for acceptance and respect for religious pluralism by the world's governing bodies; and actively promote justice and tolerance" (cited in Fahy & Bock, 2019, p. 7). A Committee on the Church and the Jewish People of the World Council of Churches was also held in 1961 (Lehmann, 2021).

Another turning point in interfaith history was the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965), which included endorsement of the interfaith tenant, *Nostra Aetate* ('In Our Time') or *Declaration on the relation of the Church to non-Christian religions* (Fahy & Bock, 2019). Hence, the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue was established in 1964 (Fitzgerald, 2018). Interreligious bodies increased again in the next decade. 'Religions for Peace' was founded in Japan, in 1970, to "advance effective multi-religious cooperation for peace on global, regional, national and local levels…" (cited in Fahy & Bock, 2019, p. 8). The following year, the World Council of Churches established a formal commission for interfaith dialogue with Muslims, and the Roman Catholic Church established a similar group in 1974 (Fahy & Bock, 2019). In 1977, Rabbi Marc Tanenbaum, national director of Interreligious Affairs for the American Jewish Committee, controversially awarded world-renowned Christian

evangelist Billy Graham with the organization's National Interreligious Award for his service to the Jewish people and Israel (Weiss, 2019).

In 1993, the Parliament of World's Religions was held with 8000 delegates to celebrate the centenary of the 1893 Parliament in Chicago. In his keynote address, theologian Küng (1998, p. 92) stated, "No peace among the nations without peace among the religions. No peace among the religions without dialogue between the religions. No dialogue between the religions without investigation of the foundation of the religions." That same year, Oxford International Interfaith Centre opened and soon became one of the most prominent forums for interreligious intellectualism and institutionalized interfaith dialogue.

Striving for Peace in the Twenty-First Century

The early twenty-first century also saw tremendous advances in interfaith dialogue. The "Message of the Primates of the Orthodox Churches" from Bethlehem, in 2000, jointly and without reservation declared:

> It is in… the spirit of peace and reconciliation that we turn towards the great world religions, particularly Judaism and Islam, with the hope to create the most favourable conditions for a dialogue with them with a view to the peaceful existence of all peoples. (cited in Sharp, 2012, p. 88)

The following year, Roman Catholic Pope John Paul II made history, during a visit to Greece and Syria, by apologizing for Roman Catholic treatment of Orthodox believers, including the "disastrous" sacking of Constantinople by Western Crusaders in 1204 (Pilgrimage of Reconciliation, 2001).

The Inter-Religious Council of Uganda was established in 2001 (Omona, 2022). The Universal Peace Federation is a United Nations-affiliated NGO that was launched in 2005, by the late Mun Sŏn-myŏng, self-proclaimed Messiah and founder of the South Korean Unification Movement. Despite ongoing COVID-19 concerns, in February 2022, the Summit for Peace on the Korean Peninsula was chaired by the former United Nations General Secretary Ban Ki-moon, with video addresses by former United States President Donald J. Trump and former Prime Minister of Japan Abe Shinzō. Others in attendance included Mike Pompeo, former United States Secretary of State, and Mike Pence, former United States Vice President (Pokorny & Zoehrer, 2022).

On September 11, 2015, an interfaith service was held in the Foundation Hall of the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in New York City, including Pope Francis, Imam Khalid Latif, Rabbi Elliott Cosgrove, and many other distinguished religious leaders of Buddhism, Sikhism, Hinduism and other religions (Fahy & Bock, 2019). During the April 2022 Bahá'í National Spiritual Assemblies at the International Bahá'í Convention, held at the Bahá'í World Centre in Haifa, Israel produced the "Letter to the World's Religious Leaders" to increase interfaith dialogue and was distributed to over forty countries (Buck, 2019). The Parliament of the World's

Religions continues to gain pace, with its next meeting scheduled for August 2023 in Chicago (2023 Parliament of the World's Religions, 2022).

Orthodox-Pentecostal Intra-Faith Dialogue

Another interesting phenomenon of the twenty-first century is the increasing interest in Orthodox Pentecostal intra-faith dialogue. This is evident by the two chapters by Davis (2023) and Austin (2023) in the current volume. While there is evidence of Orthodox-Protestant dialogue over many centuries of church history (Paulau, 2022), Orthodox-Pentecostal academic engagement is still in its infancy. Kärkkäinen (2004) notes the conspicuous lack of Pentecostal/charismatic contribution to the World Council of Church's *The nature and purpose of the church* developed in 2002. Early papers for the Ecumenical Studies Group of the Society of Pentecostal Studies also tended to focus more on Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue (Kärkkäinen, 2005). Noting very different styles of religious debate, Christina Kayales (2004) states:

> If Orthodox and Protestants intend to risk leaving familiar grounds to walk on a bridge in order to speak frankly with each other, then it may be helpful to look for items on that bridge that can function as a holding or guy-rope… Protestants might have to rediscover a sense of the importance of experience as well as their text (p. 54).

In fact, some scholars argue that classical Pentecostal theology closely aligns with Eastern Orthodox teachings (Kärkkäinen, 2005; Rybarczyk, 2004).

A turning point in Orthodox-Pentecostal intra-faith dialogue came with the 2010 Third Lausanne Congress on World Evangelization at Capetown, South Africa. One network that emerged out of the congress was the Lausanne-Orthodox Initiative which actively works to increase understanding, reconciliation, and cooperation in Christian mission (Dănut & Dănut, 2021). Between 2010 and 2012, representatives of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople and the Pentecostal World Fellowship held informal discussions (Orthodox-Pentecostal Academic Dialogue, 2019). In 2017, the first Orthodox-Pentecostal Academic Dialogue was held at the Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology in Brookline, Massachusetts (Orthodox-Pentecostal Academic Dialogue, 2021). Recent works reflect on the parallels of Eastern Orthodox and Pentecostal theology (Augustine 2020; Castelo, 2017).

Looking to the Future: The Interfaith Imperative

Having covered both contemporary theoretical understandings and past interfaith experiences and practices, this section now contemplates future prospects. It posits that human perpetuity is essentially predicated on interfaith consciousness, widely

shared. Our argument is based on current global environmental, climatic, demographic, and human mobility trends, which point to the unequivocal need for planetary-scale human collaboration on sustainable development.

The need for humans to collaborate across religious divides is informed by sheer scientific and biophysical imperative. There are several global challenges now confronting humanity that will be difficult to tackle in the absence of significant and sustained human collaboration (Leal Filho et al., 2021). Over recent decades concerned scientists have recurrently drawn attention to a range of urgent and building environmental crises (Ripple et al., 2017). For instance, thirty years ago, the so-called Union of Concerned Scientists, comprising more than 1700 independent scientific experts, including "the majority of living Nobel laureates in the sciences" (p. 1026), penned what became known as the 1992 "World Scientists' Warning to Humanity", urging that "fundamental changes were urgently needed to avoid the consequences our present course would bring" (Ripple et al., 2017, p. 1026; cf. Kendall, 1997). In 2017, the warning was reissued, this time signed by a whopping 15,364 scientists from 184 countries:

> humanity has failed to make sufficient progress in generally solving these foreseen environmental challenges, and alarmingly, most of them are getting far worse ... we have unleashed a mass extinction event … wherein many current life forms could be annihilated or at least committed to extinction by the end of this century. (Ripple et al., 2017, p. 1026)

Set against the background of repeated science-informed warnings relating to current global environmental and climatic crises, there is a growing sense that action on these challenges will require no less than unprecedented human collaboration—including across cultural and religious divides. In other words, planetary-scale problems make interfaith cooperation an increasingly inescapable imperative—certainly when contemplated from the premise that multiple billions of humans will continue living together on our planet in the context of a fast-depleting non-renewable resource base (Kates & DeSteno, 2021). As anthropogenic climate change continues unchecked, so do increases in extreme weather events, droughts, floods, heat stress, bushfire risk, human health problems, and rises in the impacts of disasters, among others (Luetz & Leo, 2021). If past gains in biodiversity are to be comprehended as 'creation'—as held by religions all over the world (Leeming, 1995)—then correspondingly current biodiversity losses may be understood as "decreation", a term used by McKibben (2005, p. 8) to denote the undoing of "the natural order we found on this earth." Crucially, the United Nations has warned (IPBES, 2019) that "Humans are driving one million species to extinction" (Tollefson, 2019, p. 171) in what is now described by scientists as the sixth and most devastating extinction event in the Earth's history (Kolbert, 2014). The environmental challenges facing humanity today can only be overcome if humans from diverse religious backgrounds and faith traditions can meaningfully collaborate in support of human rights, reconciliation, sustainability, justice, and peace (Halafoff, 2013).

The sheer extent of required collaboration is truly unprecedented and will require effective and sustained interreligious engagements at the levels of local, national, and international stakeholders. Rabbi David Rosen, who is known for his efforts to

promote reconciliation between the three Abrahamic faiths, posited, "whether it's environmental issues, global warming, or whether it's terrorism and violence… we are so linked today that we either manage to live together, or we basically have no tomorrow, and no future for our children and grandchildren" (cited in Kirkwood, 2007, p. 105).

This rationale for interfaith disposition has been variously and emphatically affirmed over the years, including by Martin Luther King, a Christian, and the Dalai Lama, a Buddhist. As two winners of the Nobel Peace Prize, both used the analogy of a human family to urge more interfaith collaboration in their respective Nobel Prize lectures. On December 11, 1964, Martin Luther King expressed it as follows:

> A widely separated family inherits a house in which they have to live together. This is the great new problem of mankind. We have inherited a big house, a great 'world house' in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterners and Westerners, Gentiles and Jews, Catholics and Protestants, Moslem and Hindu, a family unduly separated in ideas, cultures and interests who, because we can never again live without each other, must learn, somehow, in this one big world, to live with each other. (cited in Kirkwood, 2007, p. 5)

The Dalai Lama expressed it similarly:

> Because we all share the small planet Earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. This is not just a dream, but a necessity. We are dependent on each other in so many ways that we can no longer live in isolated communities and ignore what is happening outside these communities, and we must share the good fortune that we enjoy… As interdependents, therefore, we have no other choice than to develop what I call a sense of universal responsibility. Today, we are truly a global family. What happens in one part of the world may affect us all. (11 December 1989; cited in Kirkwood, 2007, p. 5)

In synthesis, our argument for interfaith collaboration here is nurtured by the increasing scale and urgency of the global crises of our era. If humans wish to continue populating this planet by the billions, they simply have no other choice but to collaborate across religious and ideological divides. In this sense, human survival is genuinely predicated on widely shared interfaith consciousness.

Moreover, the imperative for interfaith collaboration is also informed by the scale of contemporary human migration. Expressed in simple language, there are a lot of people on the move today (Khanna, 2021). More to the point, there are more people living outside their countries of origin today (including among people of faith orientations that are different from their own) than ever before in human history (Olusoga et al., 2022). According to the World Migration Report 2022 of the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021), global human mobility has risen from 153 million migrants in 1990, to 281 million in 2020. Even adjusting for population growth and the onset of COVID-19, which the report acknowledges as "a truly seismic event," global human mobility remains on an unbroken upward trajectory (IOM, 2021, p. 2). Approximately one in thirty humans alive today are international migrants (281 million in 2020). This is in addition to the eighty-nine million refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs[7] who were living in displacement in 2020 (IOM,

[7] Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are people who have been forced to leave their homes because of conflict, violence, human rights violations or disasters, and who have not crossed an international border (OHCHR, 2022).

2021). More recently, UNHCR (2022, para. 2) has estimated the number of forcibly displaced people around the world to have increased to "more than 100 million."

Aside from the staggering scale of individual human suffering that is masked by such statistics, there are additional millions of people who are not even captured by such reporting, such as the forced migrants whose voices are heard in Chap. 16 of this volume (Luetz, 2023). Looking to the future, there is now also the looming prospect of growing environment-related and climate-linked forced human migration, which can be hard to fathom, both conceptually and in terms of likely scale (Luetz & Merson, 2019). Forecasts of future 'climate refugees' stretch to 1 billion people at the upper end (Luetz, 2019). In summary, there is an argument that, based on current global demographic and mobility trends, it makes a lot of sense to promote initiatives that foster interfaith understanding among a global and globalising populace that progressively finds itself migrating and dispersed (Duderija & Rane, 2019; Khanna, 2021; Olusoga et al., 2022). This imperative is accentuated—and accelerated—by both the building climate emergency and global environmental degradation noted above (Ripple et al., 2017).

The State of the Art: Book Focus and Intended Contribution

This final section will synthesise the state of the art in respect of interfaith research and practice and clarify the intended contribution of this book. To begin, it should be noted that the field of interfaith scholarship is not characterised by universally agreed theoretical and definitional approaches. Different scholars apply different meanings to the study and discussion of interreligious theory and practice, and there is considerable diversity in the usage of terms by scholars and practitioners alike. Consequently, concepts typically do not follow uniform and self-consistent terminological patterns, and definitions are not usually articulated and applied congruently across contributions by different authors. This state of play is unsurprising, given that the field of interreligious/interfaith studies is described as a "new field" (Patel et al., 2018, p. 1) that "emerged only recently" (Premawardhana, 2022, p. 63). Major recent works have drawn attention to the need to build this field, characterising it as an "emerging" (Gustafson, 2020, p. 1) and "rapidly developing field" (Mosher, 2022, p. 1).

Relatedly, interfaith scholarship is known to demand considerable conceptual and contextual breadth. While there is widespread agreement that interfaith engagement seeks to promote a better understanding of how worldviews and life intersect and interact, there are various different views on how to initiate and engage in respectful and constructive dialogue (Michel, 2010). More specifically, there is considerable diversity in respect of what terminologies, approaches, and practices may be considered most appropriate in different settings. Given this extent of philosophical and practical diversity, scholars have characterised interfaith studies as a "dynamic and compelling field of academic inquiry" (Howe Peace, 2022, p. 471). Hence, it makes sense to approach interreligious research and practice as a broad,

vibrant and fast-evolving interdisciplinary academic space that reflects a genuine need for field building.

This book aims to contribute to building this field of investigation. It attempts to do this in several ways, including through the use of a range of conceptual approaches, expressions, and methodologies (e.g., Bangert, 2023), national census research (Hughes, 2023), international and inter-institutional survey analyses (e.g., Austin et al., 2023; Pegram et al., 2023), ethnographic field research (e.g., Davis, 2023), new conceptual models (e.g., Killpack, 2023), autobiographical accounts demonstrating various practices and expressions of interfaith interactions and intrafaith reflections (e.g., Durga, 2023), historical reviews (e.g., Muqowim & Lessy, 2023), Muslim-Christian dialogue (e.g., Rashid & Harlan, 2023), iconographic analyses (e.g., Austin, 2023), comparative philosophical essays (e.g., Dodds, 2023), social justice advocacy (e.g., Dahlan, 2023), and scholarly activism (e.g., Andrews & Duderija, 2023), in addition to personal and autoethnographic reflections (e.g., Luetz, 2023).

This book does not see itself in competition with recent ground-breaking edited works (e.g., Gustaffson, 2020; Mosher, 2022; Goodman et al., 2019) but instead aspires to join these and other efforts to advance peace, empathy, mutual respect and (re)conciliatory practices that are conducive to fostering meaningful interreligious relations (Halafoff, 2013). With this goal in sight, our interdisciplinary volume aims to offer novel theoretical, empirical and experience-informed perspectives that point beyond religious divides. This undertaking is both timeless and timely, as Rabbi David Rosen has emphasised:

> There is no question that there has never been an age in human history where there has been as much interfaith cooperation as there is today. This is because there has never been the opportunity for education and communication as we have it today. (cited in Kirkwood, 2007, p. 105)

The unprecedented technological innovation and digital connectivity that characterise our current era have raised unprecedented opportunities for interfaith collaboration. It is our hope that our volume may contribute to building this critical field, both by heightening awareness of pertinent issues and by inspiring other complementary contributions.

We acknowledge that much interfaith scholarship encompasses and focuses on the Abrahamic religions. Hence there is a need to expand the circle and include more non-Abrahamic and particularly Indigenous expressions of spirituality in interfaith deliberations (Atabongwoung et al., 2023). In this vein, we wish to convey that despite our best efforts to recruit interfaith contributions from among First Nations authors, our efforts bore no fruit. This is equally regrettable as it is (almost) unsurprising, given that the field of interreligious studies is marked by an enduring dearth of Indigenous interfaith scholarship (Atabongwoung et al., 2023). Napier (2011) has lamented that "further research is needed to mould and shape interfaith dialogue theory to include the Native/non-Native context" (p. 87). Hence, we expressly highlight Indigenous cosmology and traditional spirituality as fertile areas for future interfaith research to

focus on.[8] Crucially, the significance of engaging Indigenous worldview orientations is additionally accentuated by the perceived contribution that traditional spiritual ideation can make in areas of sustainable development (Dahill, 2018; Luetz & Nunn, 2023; Luetz et al., 2023). In this volume, the absence of First Nations interfaith research is juxtaposed by the numerous non-Western background authors, whose voices provide fresh theoretical and experience-informed perspectives that combine to build this nascent field of investigation. It is our wish that the chapters of this book will redress some of the common distortions of religious mis- and dis-information and instead build interreligious common ground that is characterised by more 'light' and less 'heat'. Finally, we hope that the interfaith approaches, experiences, and practices presented in this book may resonate with readers in a manner that will inspire adaptation, application, replication, and/or multiplication.

With a diverse array of nineteen contributing authors who are affiliated with seventeen institutions on four continents, we now introduce the chapters of this book. Comprising peer-reviewed works by scholars, professionals and practitioners from around the world, this book showcases examples of innovative conceptual and empirical research and fieldwork-informed dialogical and reflective interfaith practice. Six chapters were solicited via a call for papers to the international Beyond the Divide conference[9] in Australia (7–8 July 2021); the remaining chapters were sourced via personal invitations and an international Call for Papers posted at Yale University[10] and disseminated to interfaith institutes and think tanks in countries around the world. The chapters are organised into three parts that feature theoretical approaches (Part 1), empirical research (Part 2), and practice-informed perspectives (Part 3).

Part 1: Theoretical Research and Conceptual Perspectives

The chapters in Part 1 are aimed at developing or innovating theoretical research perspectives.

In Chap. 2, Bangert (2023) sets the scene with an inventory of some of the most common methodological approaches used for framing conceptions of religion. He demonstrates that one can approach religions from several different viewpoints, including philosophically, sociologically, scientifically, and historically. Situating his Christian beliefs within the framework of Hans-Martin Barth's 'non-embracing mutual-inclusivistic' approach, Bangert mentions his own personal experience as an

[8] A call for papers inviting expressions of interest to contribute to a forthcoming book is open https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CFP_Handbook_of_Traditional_Spirituality_and_Sustainability.pdf—Contributions involving authors who represent Indigenous or traditional knowledge-holders are especially encouraged.

[9] Conference Program: Beyond the Divide—Spiritual Education Across Faiths and Cultures (7–8 July 2021).

[10] https://fore.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/CFP_Interfaith_Research_Education_Practice.pdf.

example of how to deal with members of other religions in a respectful and tolerant way.

In Chap. 3, Tóth (2023) discusses matters of ultimate reality as conceived by three major traditions, Zen Buddhism, Eastern Christianity, and Western Christianity. All three traditions recognize the transitory nature of the world. Tóth's goal is to contribute to interfaith dialogue via highlighting interreligious similarities and encouraging extended utilization of neurotheology in the field.

In Chap. 4, Killpack (2023) presents an experiment in comparative theology on the nature of Jesus. More specifically, through a comparative theological study of the concept of the complete human (al-insan al-kamil) as espoused by the Muslim mystic Ibn 'Arabi (1165–1240 CE) and the recent work of New Testament scholar J. R. Daniel Kirk and his notion of Jesus as an idealized human figure, Killpack shows that the doctrinal wall separating Muslims and Christians is more porous than commonly realized.

In Chap. 5, Rashid and Harlan (2023) examine the 'Son of God' in the Gospel of John and its relevance for Muslim-Christian dialogue. Understandings of the term 'son of God' have been a source of confusion and controversy in the history of Christian-Muslim encounters. Writing as Muslim and Christian scholars, the two co-authors synthesise important implications for Muslim-Christian dialogue that accord with Cornille's five preconditions for fruitful interfaith dialogue (empathy; doctrinal humility; commitment; interconnection; and hospitality).

In Chap. 6, Dodds (2023) explores the question of how human beings may respond to divine warnings and promises in Christianity and Islam, thus navigating the puzzle of divine sovereignty and human freedom in both religions. The chapter aims to advance interreligious understanding of shared philosophical and theological issues that affect both Islam and Christianity.

In Chap. 7, Muqowim and Lessy (2023) examine multicultural understandings of the history of progressive science in the classical period of Islam (610–1258 CE). The authors posit that science and technology greatly contributed to the advancement of Islamic civilization during the eighth to thirteenth centuries. They argue that a multicultural spirit was not only present at those times but was implemented in the context of scientific progress. In view of this historical context, Muqowim and Lessy advocate that every Muslim scientist should adhere to an openness and a solid ethos to learn from other cultures and faiths.

In Chap. 8, Austin (2023) investigates the place of iconography in Orthodox and Pentecostal spirituality. In Orthodox theology, icons are approached with *proskýnēsis* (Gr., "veneration, bowing down showing respect to") as windows that allow the worshiper's gaze to pass through in worship of God. From a Pentecostal perspective, prostration before and kissing an icon is indistinguishable from idolatry. Using historical and literary criticism and iconographic exegesis, Austin explores the history and theological foundations that undergird Orthodox iconography. Her re-evaluation suggests ways Pentecostal Christians may learn to enrich their spiritual experience while fostering greater unity across Christian communities.

Part 2: Empirical Research Perspectives

The chapters in Part 2 are aimed at advancing empirical research perspectives to engender constructive and conciliatory understandings and collaborations.

In Chap. 9, Hughes (2023) investigates Australians' attitudes to various religions and interfaith activities. His 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes findings have important implications for interfaith networks. Hughes concludes that bringing people together to work cooperatively on common goals in a context where there is equality may well enhance positive attitudes and contribute to social cohesion in multi-faith societies.

In Chap. 10, Davis (2023) investigates interfaith and intra-faith engagements of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox diaspora in Australia. Using the lens of Berry's taxonomy of acculturation, his study draws on in-depth interviews with members of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Canberra to examine their settlement experiences post-migration from India. Davis' empirical study contributes to our understanding of diasporic consciousness and provides lessons for faith-based communities seeking to engage in meaningful interfaith relationships.

In Chap. 11, Austin et al. (2023) use a comparative case study approach between Australia and Indonesia to investigate spiritual formation in Muslim and Pentecostal higher education. Using a quantitative research instrument, the researchers survey teaching staff across eight campuses of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and six campuses of Alphacrucis University College in Australia. The survey findings point to a range of opportunities for better interfaith cooperation and open-hearted engagement between Muslims and Pentecostals. This is the first chapter of a two-part study that provides new insights into underexplored areas of Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue.

In Chap. 12, Pegram et al. (2023) investigate character formation in Muslim and Christian higher education. Their comparative case study between Australia and Indonesia reveals noteworthy distinctions in character formation approaches within Islam and Christianity. Within Islam, the formation of *akhlaq* (moral character) is often through the disciplines of one's life. For Christianity, character formation is mostly understood as a personal discipleship journey. This study uncovers dissimilarities in relation to character formation at Muslim and Christian higher education institutions. This is the second chapter of a two-part study that provides new insights into underexplored areas of Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue.

Part 3: Practice-Informed Research Perspectives

The chapters in Part 3 present praxis-informed research perspectives on innovative interfaith initiatives, practices, and/or collaborations.

In Chap. 13, Andrews and Duderija (2023) advance their understanding of 'Nonviolent Interfaith Solidarity Jihad'. Offering two autobiographical accounts that reflect

the lived experiences of the Christian and Muslim co-authors and friends, the chapter provides a conciliatory and compelling reconceptualization of the idea of jihad as a form of nonviolent interfaith solidarity that may be leveraged to advance peaceful interfaith understanding and practice.

In Chap. 14, Dahlan (2023) discusses interfaith community gardening as a strategy for growing food justice and social change. The chapter presents interfaith community gardening as a promising faith-based practice for members of different religions to cultivate sacred acts of listening. Community gardening may also promote essential skills that are needed for community members to see themselves as empowered producers, citizens, and activists who can bring about substantial changes to the current food system through democratic means.

In Chap. 15, Durga (2023) reflects on her personal experiences of overcoming religious distance in South Asia. Her chapter is penned from the unique positionality of a novice Australian researcher of Indian descent—born in Mauritius in a Hindu family who later adopted Christian beliefs—who conducted a qualitative cross-cultural study on remote Bhola Island, Bangladesh. Durga's prolonged interreligious and intercultural immersion experience engendered epiphanies on the unique value of human life. Her chapter brings her insights and epiphanies into conversation with interreligious introspection.

In Chap. 16, Luetz (2023) approaches interfaith consciousness from the vantage point of personal lived experience. To this end, he gives an autoethnographic account of living across cultures, countries and communities comprising diverse faith orientations. These lived experiences have formed and informed his interfaith awareness. He concludes that embracing the notion of universal human 'strangeness' may encourage a deferential appraisal and appreciation of the perceived 'foreignness' of others. The reason is simply this: on the face of it, everybody alive today is a stranger in this world—almost everywhere.

With sixteen select chapters as rich in novelty, diversity, relevancy and originality as you are now holding in your hands—and with three parts promising a range of conceptual, empirical and practice-informed research dimensions—it is our joy and privilege to present to you *Interfaith Engagement Beyond the Divide: Approaches, Experiences, and Practices*. We hope its contents will inspire imitation, adaptation, application, and multiplication in different settings.

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Part I
Theoretical Research and Conceptual Perspectives

Chapter 2
Theology of Religions: An Inventory

Kurt Bangert

Abstract A 'theology of religions' looks at other religions from the perspective of one's own religion and seeks to view one's own religion in the light of these other religions. In this chapter, I introduce various methodologies in dealing with religions such as sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, and sciences of religion (including comparative religion). While these methodologies aim at a neutral, objective, non-confessional approach to religions, a Christian theology of religions has, as its core presupposition, the faith in God's revelation in Christ. In terms of a theology of religions, there are at least three different approaches, such as the exclusivistic, inclusivistic, or pluralistic approach. I explore these approaches as suggested by several proponents. I argue that Hans-Martin Barth's 'non-embracing mutual-inclusivistic' approach is the most convincing approach, using my own personal experience as an example of how to deal with members of other religions in a respectful and tolerant way. I also demonstrate that one can approach religions from several different viewpoints: philosophically, sociologically, scientifically, or historically. I concede that other religions offer their subjective avenues to truth and offer vital insights into the ultimate questions regarding life, death, suffering, or a transcendent reality. However, I also assert certain inalienable and indispensable Christian beliefs which for me are non-negotiable and constitute the core of my Christian faith.

Keywords Theology of religion · Sociology of religion · Philosophy of religion · Sciences of religion · Comparative religion · Christian faith

Introduction

A 'theology of religions' looks at other religions from the perspective of one's own religion and seeks to view one's own religion in the light of these other religions (Beyers, 2017). Hence, a theology of religions is partial and biased in favor of one's own religion and remains squarely rooted within one's own tradition, while looking

K. Bangert (✉)
Bad Nauheim, Germany
e-mail: kontakt@kurtbangert.de

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beyond one's own religion and assessing its relationship to other faiths. In this chapter, I briefly introduce various methodologies in dealing with religions, such as sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, and sciences of religion (including comparative religion). While these methodologies aim at a neutral, objective, non-confessional approach to religions, a Christian theology of religions has, as its core presupposition, the faith in God's revelation in Christ.

In terms of a theology of religions, there are at least three different approaches, such as the exclusivistic, inclusivistic, or pluralistic approach. I discuss these and other approaches as suggested by several proponents, namely John Hick, Alan Race, Perry Schmidt-Leukel, Paul Knitter, Wesley Ariarajah, Hans Küng, Francis Clooney, Klaus von Stosch, and Hans-Martin Barth. This chapter argues that Hans-Martin Barth's 'non-embracing mutual-inclusivistic' approach is the most convincing approach to a theology of religions, using my own personal experience as an example of how to deal with members of other religions in a respectful and tolerant way. I also demonstrate that one can approach religions from several different viewpoints: philosophically, sociologically, scientifically, or historically. In terms of my own theology of religions, I concede that other religions offer their particular, subjective avenues to truth and offer vital insights into the ultimate questions regarding life, death, suffering, or a transcendent reality. However, I also assert certain basic inalienable and indispensable Christian beliefs which for me are non-negotiable and constitute the core of my Christian faith.

By thus placing theology of religions in a wider context, this chapter hopes to make a contribution to inter-religious dialogue and interfaith research, education, and practice. It seeks to demonstrate that a theology of religions is an important methodology in dealing with other religions, but of course not the only perspective one can have.

Different Scientific Methodologies to Examine Religions

Before delving into the different approaches to the theology of religions, it will be expedient to first look at other methodologies by which one can perceive other religions, namely through: philosophy of religion, sociology of religion, or the sciences of religion (which may include comparative religion and sometimes the historiography of religion). I apply the word 'methodologies' to these scientific specialties and reserve the word 'approaches' to the different aspects of a theology of religions, which is the main content of this paper.[1]

One of the methodologies to assess different religions—or, for that matter, to assess the general phenomenon of religion—is to 'philosophize' about it. This is often

[1] For a more extended discussion on a *theology of religion,* cf. this author's chapter "Von der Religionswissenschaft zur Religionstheologie" in his book *Gott im liberalen Christentum. Vom gnädigen Gott der Reformation zum Posttheismus des 21. Jahrhunderts*, Springer: Wiesbaden 2022b, pp. 363–401.

termed 'philosophy of religion' (Arnold, 2021). Whenever we ponder about life, its origin, its creator, its purpose, its meaning, we philosophize. When we ask questions about the world and its beyond, about transcendence and ultimate reality, we practice philosophy of religion (Göcke et al., 2020). A philosophy of religion also deals with questions like these: What is religion? What is the object of faith and worship? Is there a transcendent reality? And if so, what can we know about it? What do we make of religious experience? Can what people experience as divine or supernatural also be explained in a natural way? And how do we relate religious experiences with modern scientific knowledge? A philosophy of religion does not presuppose the adherence to a particular religion, neither does it base its thinking on a particular Holy Book or a supernatural revelation. Rather, it renounces such presuppositions, basing its thinking purely on rationality. The main purpose of a 'philosophy of religion' is, in the view of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "the attempt to analyze and describe the nature of religion in the framework of a general view of the world" (1976 XIV, p. 622a). *Philosophy of religion* is not theology. "Theological discussions occur *within* the context of a particular religious tradition, whereas philosophical discussions aim to *transcend* the boundaries between traditions", writes Tim Bayne (2018, p. 2). A philosophy of religion is non-partial, non-confessional, non-denominational. It is neutral. We rank Plato and Immanuel Kant among the finest philosophers of religion. We could also think of individuals such as Georg W. F. Hegel, William James, Karl Jaspers, or Hans Jonas.

Another methodology by which we can examine religions and religious phenomena is the 'sociology of religion' (Altglas & Wood, 2018). This scientific specialty views religions from a purely sociological perspective. It looks at the social causes, contexts, and consequences of religion, taking note of the prevalence of religions and of religious trends—such as its diminishing importance in developed societies or how it relates to economy or education (Furseth & Repstad, 2016). It conducts surveys about beliefs, practices, organizational forms, using the accepted scientific tools of sociology. A sociology of religion is, according to Joachim Wach (1898–1955), the science of the reciprocal relationship between religion and society (Wach, 1951, p. 62). Wach also cites Francis Bacon (1561–1626) who wrote: "religio praecipiuum societatis vinculum" ("Religion is the essential bond of society") (Wach, 1951, p. 62). Sociology of religion may also be defined "as that branch of sociology that is specifically concerned with *how people put their beliefs about the sacred into action as they relate to other people*", in the words of Christiano et al. (2016, p. 3). Sociology of religion does not ask the ultimate questions that may be raised by a philosophy of religion but is interested more in the social and communal significance and perhaps the global impact of religions. Most sociologists of religion pursue their studies from a neutral point of view, without confessing a particular faith. Hence, the sociology of religion is also considered a non-biased overarching methodology. Among the best-known representatives of this field were such scholars as Max Weber, Émile Durkheim, Michel Foucault, and Joachim Wach. One could also enlist Karl Marx here, who wrote extensively about the economic implications of religion.

Perhaps the most important field to examine other religions is what is sometimes called the 'science(s) of religion' or, more recently, the 'study of religion' or

'religious studies' (German: *Religionswissenschaft,* French: *sciences des religions*; Spanish: *ciencias de la religión*). The science(s) of religion seek to describe and understand other religions not from the perspective of Christianity, but from a more objective point of view. The *scientists of religion* do not pose the question of truth as for them there is no higher authority of truth, which would be qualified to judge between religions and their different versions of the truth. A "birds-eye view" is for the birds, wrote Knitter (2002, p. 174). All one can hope for is to understand religions in terms of their phenomenological appearance and how they present themselves in their different denominations or sects. At its core, the *science(s) of religion* seek to understand religions not in a completely neutral way, but in terms of their self-understanding (Szocik & Van Eyghen, 2021). Rather than looking at them from the outside, this perspective seeks to understand religions from within. One has spoken of a "Religionswissenschaft des Verstehens" (religious science of understanding, Tworuschka, 2015, p. 81). "Understanding" here means to look at religions as they themselves wish to be understood. This methodology requires a maximum of empathy for, and intimate knowledge of, the religion under investigation.

In the past, scholars sometimes spoke of 'comparative religion' which emphasizes more the comparison between different religions in terms of their variant beliefs, practices, rituals, ethics, and so on (Jevons, 1930). But today, comparative religion is most often considered a subdivision of the science(s) of religion. The latter may be said to have originated in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the oriental world religions came into the view of European Christianity, but it fully developed only in the twentieth century. Gotthold Ephraim Lessing (1729–1781) wrote his famous play *Nathan the Wise* (1779), in which he propagated utmost tolerance vis-à-vis the Jewish and Muslim religion. Among the earliest representatives of the sciences of religion can be listed the Italian Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) who wrote his *Principles of a New Science* (1725), or the English David Hume (1711–1776) whose *Natural History of Religion* (1757) is often considered the first book on the science of religion. One could also name here Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803) who published extensively on foreign cultures and religions, Friedrich Max Müller (1823–1900) who is sometimes considered the father of religious studies (Tworuschka, 2015, p. 56), Rudolf Otto (1869–1937) whose book *The Holy* (1963), originally published in 1917, dealt with the nature of religious encounter and became an important classic, and Martin Buber (1878–1965) who occupied the first Jewish professorship for scientific studies of religion at Frankfurt/Main. One may also mention Helmuth von Glasenapp (1891–1963) who wrote extensively about the five world religions, and Friedrich Heiler (1892–1967) who wrote a handbook on the religions of humanity (1959). My book *Religion* offers a brief introduction to the phenomenon of religion and the world religions (Bangert, 2017b).

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, there also appeared what in Germany was called *Religionsgeschichte* (historiography of religion) which is sometimes subsumed under the science of religion, but which at the time was considered a new branch of theology. In the wake of the great historian Leopold von Ranke (1795–1886), Christian theology not only discovered the early historical development of the Christian Church and the Christian doctrines (Adolf von Harnack being

the best known among these historical theologians), but it also began to discover the many commonalities between the Christian faith and other non-Christian faiths (for instance, the *Bible Babel Dispute* or what was then called *Panbabylonism*). One of the popularizers of the *Religionsgeschichte* was Ernst Troeltsch (1865–1923) who also questioned Christianity's claim to absolute truth. If Christians claim absolute truth, it is only from their subjective viewpoint, he believed (Troeltsch, 1902; cf. Bangert, 2015). So much for the various methodologies of dealing with other religions. We now return to our main topic: the theology of religions.

What Is a "Theology of Religions"?

While the methodologies described above seek to deal with religions from a purely scientific, objective, and neutral point of view, a 'theology of religions' looks at other religions from the predisposed perspective of one's own religion (Beyers, 2017). A "Theology of religions is that discipline of theological studies which attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions", writes Vali-Matti Kärkäinen in his primer on 'theology of religions' (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 20). A 'theology of religions' is partial and biased in favor of one's own religion and remains squarely rooted within one's own tradition, while looking beyond one's own religious boundaries and assessing its relationship to other faiths. Hence, if you are a Christian, you look at Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, or Hinduism as a Christian, being squarely rooted in your Christian thinking and heritage. You do not deny your being a Christian and belonging to a particular Church. Your starting point is one of faith. It is a decidedly subjective point of view.

A theology of religions attempts to look at other religions especially in terms of 'salvific truth'. Is there truth in other religions? Is there salvation in other religions? Is the Christian religion superior to other religions? If so, in what way? If there is truth in other religions, how do these truths relate to the truth of Christianity? And how are we as Christians to deal with members of other faiths? Are they to be considered ignorant of truth? Do they have an inkling of truth? Or do they have a truth all of their own? Do we consider them lost because they do not know the truth as we know it and have no access to salvific knowledge as we have? These are some of the questions that may be asked. To say it in the words of Perry Schmidt-Leukel, a theology of religions mainly poses two questions: "How does Christianity understand und judge other religions? And how does Christianity understand and judge itself in light of other religions?" (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 34) The attempt to answer these questions is to pursue a theology of religions. While most people may have an opinion about religions other than their own, a conscious attempt to develop a theology of religions has been made predominantly by Christian scholars, and we shall now concentrate on some Christian theologians who embarked on this methodology.

John Hick: God Has Many Names

The origin of a 'theology of religions' is most often associated with John Hick (1922–2012) who published his book *God Has Many Names* (Hick, 1982). In it, he renounced any claim to absolute truth and committed to a pluralistic theology of religions. As a child, Hick attended Anglican Church services, believing in a personal God, without being overly religious. After fancying Theosophism, he was attracted to evangelical Christianity, accepting such dogmas as the verbal inspiration of the Bible, creationism, virgin birth, and the bodily resurrection of Christ. He stopped studying law and resolved to become a minister instead. Influenced by close friends, he joined the Presbyterian Church (pp. 15, 17) and went to Edinburgh where he got interested in philosophy. After the war, he went to Oriel College in Oxford to earn a doctorate in philosophy. He eventually became a philosophy professor at Cornell University as well as at Princeton Theological Seminary, before returning, in 1964, to England where he taught at Cambridge and Birmingham. It was here, where he became interested in the theology of religions.

At first, Hick assumed—as did many Christians—that there was salvation only in Christ—according to Christ's saying in the Gospel of John: "No one comes to the Father except through me." (John 14:6) But if that was taken to its ultimate conclusion, it would mean that members of all other religions are walking in darkness and will be destined to hell. At Birmingham, there were large communities of Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs. Hick visited their services and recognized that all of them believed in some higher power which led them to love their fellow human beings and to treat them fairly and justly. Although Hick never entertained the idea of converting to another religion, he did recognize that people of other faiths were linked in some salvific way with the eternal reality from which we all live. He acknowledged that the different world religions were but different responses to that divine reality (Hick, 1982, p. 20). The task of theology was, therefore, not only introspection into one's own religion but to understand other religions better und work out their differences and commonalities. Since all religions obviously recognized some kind of transcendent reality which were known under a variety of different names (God, Allah, Shiva etc.), Hick decided to call this transcendent reality the 'Eternal One' which in some religions was taken as a personal god while being considered a non-personal reality by others. Hick also recognized three distinct phases in Christianity's relationship to other religions.

In a first phase, Christians believed that members of other religions had no access to salvation (which could only be mediated through Christ) and, hence, were destined to hell (some evangelicals still adhere to this position). In a second phase, Christians were more tolerant, believing that Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, or Hindus could be considered Christians in disguise, if they were earnest God-seekers who simply did not know the Christian truth. Finally, in a third phase, Christians would concede that other religions also had access to God's salvific grace. Sooner or later, they would even become Christians, if given the opportunity (Hick, 1982, pp. 33–43). Karl Rahner, the Catholic theologian, spoke of them as "anonymous Christians"

(Fritz, 2019, p. 57). Hick himself considered this a presumptuous way of looking at other religions. By the same token, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists etc. could also declare honest Christians to be anonymous Jews, Muslims, Buddhists etc. Not only is this an illegitimate embracement to which members of other religions would strongly object (as Christians would surely object if we were declared anonymous Buddhists or anonymous Vedantists). Moreover, such an approach would still work from the assumption that our own religion is still considered the focal point of truth. Furthermore, it overlooks the fact that most of us are what we are based on geographical circumstances: if born in Europe, you are likely to be a Christian; if born in Arabia, you would in all likelihood be a Muslim; if born in India, you would probably be a Hindu, etc.

One of the pivotal questions to be asked, according to Hick, is this: Do the different religions (and their theologies) represent divine truths which were, at some time in the past, revealed to them (i.e., to their founders)? Or are they simply different human interpretations of their religious experiences? If we take the projection thesis of Feuerbach, Marx, or Freud, then the latter would be true. But Hick worked from the assumption that the "Eternal One" represents an ultimate reality which impresses itself, in however different ways, upon all humans for them to become better human beings. To be sure, when following Immanuel Kant, we have no definite empirical knowledge of a transcendent reality (which, according to Kant, can neither be proven nor disproven), but we may still assume that the different religions are different culturally conditioned responses to that ultimate reality. Hence, we ought to renounce, in Hick's reading, any claim to absolute truth and accept the plurality of religious truths. If all would accept this pluralistic approach, no matter to which religion they belong, all could consider each other as believing friends, rather than as infidels or enemies (Hick, 1982 p. 64). While we belong to different religious traditions, what unites us is the precious faith in a divine reality; and by acknowledging that, we could learn to respect each other and learn from one another.

Alan Race and Perry Schmidt-Leukel: Exclusivism, Inclusivism and Pluralism

Alan Race (born 1951), who was a student of John Hick, further developed Hick's approach. In 1983, he wrote *Christians and Religious Pluralism,* in which he introduced the three-point-model of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism, which has since become the foundation for much of the discussion in theology of religions (Race, 1983). This threefold typology was later elaborated upon by Perry Schmidt-Leukel (born 1954) in his book *Gott ohne Grenzen* (2005; cf. Schmidt-Leukel, *God Beyond Bounderies*, 2017). In it, he advocates pluralism as the preferred way to look at other religions, including from a Christian viewpoint. To Schmidt-Leukel, a theology of religions is foremost about salvation and about truth. He poses the

crucial question: Can we as Christians accept the claims of other religions as being avenues of salvation, or must we reject those claims?

Like Hick, Schmidt-Leukel works from the assumption of a transcendent reality which can be given different names. He presumes that this reality transcends our final, limited, given reality in an infinite, unlimited way. This transcendent reality represents the *summum bonum*; and man's salvation depends on man's relationship with that reality. Schmidt-Leukel assumes that all major religions have accepted that transcendent reality in some form or other. But he also contends that people of different cultures approach that reality through different lenses, as it were; hence, they also interpret any mystical experience of the divine in different ways (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, pp. 223–224).

Following Alan Race, Schmidt-Leukel expounds on the three approaches of exclusivism, inclusivism and pluralism. Each religion can define its relationship to other religions in terms of these three approaches. So, in principle there can be a Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Islamic etc. type of exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 68). Of course, as a professed Christian, Schmidt-Leukel (2017) works out his 'theology of religions' from a Christian perspective.

Christian 'exclusivism' (Race, 1983, pp. 33 ff.; Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, pp. 96 ff.) assumes that salvific revelation, or knowledge of transcendence, is available only in Christianity and not in other religions. However, some exclusivists do not deny the possibility that adherents of other religions can still be saved (for instance, through a postmortal encounter with Christ), but they all insist on the claim that salvation is given only through Christ.

Christian 'inclusivism' (Race, 1983, p. 67 ff.; Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 128 ff.) assumes that there can be salvific revelation (or knowledge of transcendence) also in non-Christian religions, albeit in a 'deficient' way. Salvific truth as revealed in Christianity supersedes whatever truth there might be in other religions. This position comes in a variety of shapes and nuances.

Finally, Christian 'pluralism' (Race, 1983, pp. 98 ff.; Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, pp. 163 ff.) assumes that salvific revelation (i.e. knowledge of transcendence) is present in all major religions (not just in Christianity) and that none of these forms of revelation can be said to be superior to others. That is to say, even from a Christian perspective, all other forms of revelation or transcendent knowledge are accepted as equal in rank, even though they may differ in nature (ibid., p. 70). For this approach, too, there exist different types of Christian pluralisms.

Schmidt-Leukel (2005, 2017) himself favors a pluralistic position as he does not accept the superiority of the Christian faith in terms of its salvific claims. He rejects the exclusivistic position because of its fundamentalist nature. He also rejects the inclusivistic position because it implies an embracement approach ("anonymous Christians") which he considers as hybris. Jews, Muslims, Buddhists or even atheists would consider this embracement strategy as arrogant and presumptuous. Also, inclusivism judges non-Christian religions still on the basis of Christian superiority. It would imply, however subtly, that non-Christian religions should at best disappear

from the face of the earth. But to eliminate these other religions would not be a desirable situation, in Schmidt-Leukel's reading. It would be a severe loss for humanity (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, p. 155).

Schmidt-Leukel's pluralistic approach assumes the non-superiority of the world religions and, hence, their principal equality. However, this equality of religions is—in Schmidt-Leukel's (2005, 2017) view—reserved for the world religions, not necessarily for all dubious religious sects and cults. But in my opinion (K.B.), this poses a problem. How can one exclude from this 'equality' small religions which have only a small following? Are we to judge religions by their numbers or by their prevalence? To be sure, from the viewpoint of the scientific methodology (see above), all religions (including minor ones) must be considered as equal on ideological terms. Otherwise, what criteria do we apply to justify the exclusion (from equality) of faiths other than the world religions?

Another problem with the pluralistic approach is, in my view, this: If all religions are considered equal in terms of their salvific potential, then one must define 'salvation' in a way that allows them to be judged as equal. But different religions have very different understandings of "salvation," if they even use the term. By applying 'salvation' as a general criterion, we are presupposing a Christian outlook.

Paul Knitter's Four-Point Model

Paul Knitter, a former Catholic priest, is widely considered a pluralist ever since publishing his book *No Other Name* (1985), for which he was criticized by then Ratzinger (1996), but he offered a slightly different categorization of approaches spelling out the following four-point theory: the replacement model, the fulfillment model, the mutuality model, and the acceptance model (Knitter, 2002). Although this model did not win wide recognition, it is worth highlighting here.

The replacement model, being quite similar to the exclusivistic approach described above, is one that most evangelicals adhere to. It is called replacement model because Christianity should ultimately replace the other religions. God wants there to be only one religion, so proponents of this approach believe (Knitter, 2002, p. 19). Knitter subdivides that approach into two subcategories: 'total replacement' and 'partial replacement'. The former is advanced by fundamentalist Christians who believe that Christianity is the only true religion, and there is salvation exclusively through Christ (citing Acts 4:12; 1 Cor. 3:11; 1 Tim. 2:5; John 14: 6; 1 John 5:12 etc.). The latter—partial replacement—is similar but sees some value in other religions as it accepts the notion of a 'general revelation' by which people of other faiths can know something about God, but not enough to be saved. Salvation is only through Jesus and only made known through him (Knitter, 2002, pp. 33–34). While other religions may provide vital questions, only Christianity can fully answer them. There are different positions especially on the notion of non-Christians being lost. Some evangelicals have a more pessimistic, others a more optimistic view and entertain the possibility of a late conversion (last-minute, after-death and the like).

The 'fulfillment model' presupposes that Christianity is the 'fulfillment' of Judaism. What was as yet incomplete in Judaism, became complete in Christianity. The fulfillment model is also typical for the Muslim religion which believes that Islam is a fulfillment of what Judaism and Christianity were meant to be. It can also be attributed to such religions as the Bahai movement or Mormonism. This fulfillment model is, from a Christian point of view, advanced mostly by mainline churches, foremost by the Catholic Church which has frequently assessed its relationship to other religions. It was the Catholic theologian Karl Rahner who believed that God's world is bigger than the Christian world. Since God is love, He wanted to reach out in love to all peoples and has, therefore, revealed Himself to all, including members of other religions who are positively included in God's plan of salvation. All peoples are conscious of love and are able to love, and consequently are finite beings capable of the Infinite (Knitter, 2002, p. 69). Hence, man can truly experience God. God acts and breathes throughout history. Therefore, these religions are all "ways to salvation" (Knitter, 2002, p. 71). Rahner spoke of these people as "anonymous Christians" (as mentioned above), a phrase that the Vatican II Council (1962–1964) did not adopt however; but Vatican II did admonish Christians to acknowledge, preserve and promote the spiritual goods found among people of other faiths (Knitter, 2002, p. 76). Pope John Paul II. was a strong advocate of inter-religious dialogue, which should serve mutual enrichment: dialogue partners should allow themselves to be transformed by their mutual encounter, and that encounter could eventually lead to a conversion (Knitter, 2002, p. 83). The fulfillment model could allow for certain non-negotiables such as what God has revealed to Jesus Christ.

While the fulfillment model centers around what God does through Christ, the 'mutuality model' puts more emphasis on God's universal love and presence in other religions. While the fulfillment model envisions the final victory of Christianity over other religions in some way, the mutuality model, although still adhering to the uniqueness of Christ, does not want to water down the God-given uniqueness of other religions (Knitter, 2002, p. 111). This mutuality model can be justified based on what Knitter calls "bridges" which beckon Christians to cross over to this model. These bridges are: (1) a philosophical-historical bridge which asserts that there is one 'Divine Reality' behind (or within) our present, visible reality, a Divine Reality which is recognized by all religions; (2) a religious-mystical bridge which asserts that this Divine Reality can be (mystically) 'experienced' as reported by all religions; and (3) an ethical-practical bridge which asserts that ubiquitous 'human suffering' is also present amongst all religions. (Knitter, 2002, pp. 109–148) These three bridges not only make good topics for inter-religious dialogue; but, above all, they bear witness to the general truths of all major religions. While the 'mutuality model' still asserts the uniqueness of the Christ event, it also grants to other religions a maximum of God's revelatory power.

Finally, there is the 'acceptance model' which is more or less tantamount to the pluralistic approach of the three-point model discussed above. The acceptance model 'accepts' the diversity of all faiths. Advocates of this model remind Christians that one cannot really love one's neighbors unless one accepts their otherness. It means tolerating, valuing, and affirming the different identities of people's religions. In

Knitters reading, the acceptance model is an outgrowth of postmodernism which has rejected "universal truths" and makes no attempt of turning diversity into an absolute truth. Truth is dominated by diversity. Truth is plural. "Diversity dominates unity, and we can be happy it does" (Knitter, 2002, p. 175). In his view, the differences between the religions are so great that they are, for the most part, "incommensurable" (Knitter, 2002, p. 176), meaning one cannot "translate" these differences into the language of another religion. They must be accepted in their own right—just as we must accept (and cope with) different languages in different cultures. These differences are even more fruitful than the commonalities. "God loves diversity" (Knitter, 2002, p. 242) Differences can be exhilarating and should be celebrated.

World Council of Churches and Wesley Ariarajah: "Not Without My Neighbour"!

The World Council of Churches (WCC) has also wrestled with the problem. In 1990, several theologians met at Baar near Zurich on behalf of the WCC to formulate their 'theological perspectives on plurality'. This declaration came to be known as the *Baar Statement*, which expressed this opinion: "This conviction that God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions makes it inconceivable to us that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples" (WCC 1990). Unfortunately, the courageous *Baar Statement* was never turned into an official WCC-document, as this ecumenical organization has to accommodate a number of evangelical and orthodox churches. Later declarations soft-pedaled the phraseology and gave way to a more orthodox, evangelical approach.

In 1999, the WCC theologian Wesley Ariarajah from Sri Lanka—a Methodist who taught ecumenical theology at Drew University School of Theology at Madison, New Jersey—published a book entitled *Not Without My Neighbour* in which he recounted his living near some devout Hindu neighbors in Sri Lanka whose pious faith led him to feel at an early age that he could not enjoy heavenly bliss without his non-Christian neighbors (Ariarajah, 1999). He later convinced himself that he could not adhere to a theology that assumed the absence of God in the religious life of his Buddhist or Hindu fellow human beings. While his faith and religious experience was rooted firmly in Christ, he was forced to believe that his Hindu and Muslim friends bore witness to a life in God that gave meaning to their existence (Ariarajah, 1999, p. 123).

Hans Küng: World Ethos

In the same year that the Baar Statement was formulated (1990), the Catholic theologian Hans Küng (1928–2021) published his small but famous book *Projekt Weltethos* (Project World Ethos) in which he raised the question of truth regarding other religions (Küng, 1990). He enumerated three approaches in dealing with the question of truth: (1) The 'fortress strategy' assumes that only one's own religion has truth while others do not. Religious peace is possible only when one's own religion is elevated to a state religion. (2) The 'trivialization strategy' assumes that there is no such thing as objective truth and that each of the religions has its own subjective truth. Religious peace is possible only when ignoring religious differences. (3) The 'embracement strategy' presupposes that while one's own religion is the true one, all other religions in some way participate in that (Christian) truth. Religious peace is possible only through integrating members of other faiths (Küng, 1990, pp. 105–108).

Küng rejected all three of these approaches and believed that the demarcation line between truth and non-truth goes right across the different religions. Religions are not equally true or good. Each religion has its good and its bad side, its merits, and its dishonorable history. And then Küng proposed three criteria of truth which are worth considering: (1) For one, he suggests comparing the current practice of a particular religion (especially one's own) with the original scriptures of the founders. (2) For another, he advises that adherents of different religions engage in a dialogue about their respective criteria for truth and learn to admit that these criteria may apply only to one's own religion, not to other religions. Hence participants of this dialogue are led to recognize the subjectivity not only of their respective truths, but also of their respective criteria for truth. (3) The final criterion Küng advances is that any religious truth must be judged by the criterion of humanity. What does it mean to be truly human? People of different faiths should dialogue about, and agree upon, what constitutes humane behavior. Küng was convinced that such a dialogue would yield some vital common concerns like: protecting human rights, giving equal rights to women, striving for social justice, or declaring war to be immoral (Küng, 1990, pp. 112–122).

Küng (1990, p. 171) summarized his "project world ethos" in these three theses: (1) No human togetherness without a world ethos of the nations; (2) No peace amongst the nations without peace amongst the religions; and (3) no peace amongst the religions without a dialogue between them. Küng (1996) later added another thesis: No dialogue between the religions without basic research into the religions (cf. Website weltethos.org).

Francis Clooney and Klaus Von Stosch: Comparative Theology

The American Francis Clooney (born 1950) and the German Klaus von Stosch (born 1971) have promulgated what has come to be known as 'comparative theology'. Both Catholic theologians wished to go beyond a 'theology of religions' by not so much emphasizing Christian claims to truth but stressing in-depth studies of particular areas across religious borders in seeking "the truth of my faith in light of their faith" (Clooney, 2010, pp. 14–16). Comparative theology gives priority to a thorough inter-religious dialogue. Comparative theology is, of course, not to be confused with comparative religion (see above) which compares religions from a purely neutral position, while comparative theology is an engagement in religious dialogue from a subjective faith-based point of view—which for Clooney and Stosch is the Christian perspective. For Clooney, who teaches at Harvard, comparative theology works best, if one is deeply acquainted with more than one religion while still being rooted in one's own (Christian) tradition. Clooney himself has a deep knowledge of, and has published numerous books on, the Hindu tradition (Clooney, 2001). The aim of comparative theology is comprehension and understanding, rather than judgement.

Klaus von Stosch, who teaches at Paderborn, was dissatisfied with the three approaches of exclusivism, inclusivism, and plurality. He feels that comparative theology is better positioned to seek an open dialogue with members of other faiths while still being true to the claims of one's own faith. Especially the pluralistic position, he thinks, would endanger the unique Christian claim of God having revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Having accepted that presupposition, comparative theology seeks to understand one's own theological positions better in light of the in-depth dialogue with another religion. Comparative theology is more of a practical approach than a theoretical system. It refrains from judgments such as exclusivism, inclusivism, or pluralism and seeks to maintain a principal openness. It must needs be prepared to revise its own theological positions in light of the dialogue (von Stosch, 2012).

Schmidt-Leukel (2005) has pointed out his problems with comparative theology which must, in his view, ultimately lead to the question of truth, at which point one would still have to decide between a true or false position and, hence, between exclusivism, inclusivism or pluralism. If, however, one refuses to make such true/false-judgments, one would enter the field of comparative religion, rather than comparative theology. Nevertheless, Schmidt-Leukel still found the comparative theology approach useful (as I do), but not as an alternative to a theology of religions, but rather as part and parcel of it (Schmidt-Leukel, 2005, pp. 91–94). Pfüller (2012, p. 129 ff.) also criticized comparative theology for similar reasons, and opts for what he calls a "soft pluralism" which, while not granting to all religions equal status, still sees in all religions manifestations of the divine reality which may not, however, be always manifested in the same quality.

Hans-Martin Barth: Mutual Inclusivism

The Marburg theologian Barth (2008) published a systematic theology in the context of the world religions as these religions have in recent decades come to encroach upon Christianity geographically and ideologically. He, too, believes that Christianity can better understand itself in light of these other faiths. Barth (2008, p. 50) states, "The Christian credo must today be interpreted and unfolded in the context of the world religions." But for him as a Protestant Christian, the commitment to God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ is not in question (Barth, 2008, p. 59). However, a position which adheres to the Christian faith's central credos does not, in his view, imply an exclusivistic approach, neither does it constitute an inclusivistic embracement strategy or a pluralistic egalitarian position. It is Barth's aim to reaffirm the truth of the Christian faith even though there do not exist unambiguous and razer-sharp criteria for deciding truth amidst the plausibility struggle between different world religions and world philosophies (p. 170). His own approach is what he calls a '(non-embracing) mutual inclusivism', meaning that non-Christian partner religions are not considered objects of our (Christian) thinking but are valued as subjects of their own convictions and beliefs. Both sides of an inter-religious dialogue should be willing to see their own beliefs in the light of the other side. One problem he sees for the inter-religious dialogue is that while Christian theologians have come a long way to enter into an open dialogue with other religions, theologians of other faiths have not, in his opinion, attained the same level and commitment of inter-religious dialogue which remains largely a Western *desideratum* (Barth, 2008, p. 56). In any case, Esra Akay Dag has described Muslim endeavors toward an Islamic theology of religions (Dag, 2017).

Barth then addresses a variety of Christian doctrines such as: faith, revelation, truth, Jesus Christ, creation, salvation, eschatology etc. In doing so, he looks for commonalities, similarities, overlappings and differences between Christianity and the other world religions. One could even say that he is pursuing a kind of comparative theology without calling it such. Barth believes that the non-Christian religions have a long and precious heritage to offer which they should be encouraged to preserve. On the other hand, he encourages other religions to open themselves up to different religious perspectives and not remain exclusively within their own traditional viewpoints. All religions should discover their responsibility for each other. And all should be seen as being embedded in the salvific grace of the Divine (Barth, 2008, p. 818).

A Personal Approach

We have, on the previous pages, dealt with a 'theology of religions' that approaches other religions from the perspective of one's own religion, in our case: from the Christian viewpoint. We have looked at different approaches, the last one being Hans-Martin Barth's position of 'mutual inclusivism' which I consider the most convincing

approach. Most of these positions have as their starting point the subjective faith in what God has revealed in Jesus Christ.

In the introduction, we briefly touched upon other methodologies such as sociology of religion, philosophy of religion, and science(s) of religion, without elaborating on them, to concentrate our discussion on the *theology of religions*. But can we, even as Christians, disregard or ignore these other methodologies? I think not. After all, our personal identity cannot be confined only to our being Protestant, being Christian or even being a religious person. We are much more than that. Our perspective may not always be a 'theology-of-religion' approach. At least some of the time we are looking at things from a historical, philosophical, sociological, political, or even from a purely holistic-human-humane point of view. We sometimes take different viewpoints for different purposes and reasons. Hence, we can be exclusivistic, inclusivistic or pluralistic, depending on context and perspective. I would like to illustrate this by describing my own personal attitude toward other religions as follows:

Raised in an evangelical Christian home, I have—during my theological studies—developed into a modern-liberal theologian who has also, by living in different parts of the world (America, Africa, Asia) developed a special interest in non-Christian religions. During the early years of my theological studies, I took a course in 'sociology of religion' which sharpened my interest in the different forms, styles, rituals, and practices of religions (including different Christian worship practices). I became interested in tracing socio-religious trends such as secularization processes or relapses into fundamentalism. All this has taught me to view religions in their wider social contexts. A sociology of religion generally makes use of methods applied in the field of sociology (such as opinion surveys, for instance). So that became one of several perspectives of mine.

During my travels to America, Africa, and Asia, I encountered, and lived in, various animistic, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu countries, cultures, and religious milieus. Such encounters taught me to approach religions from a 'science-of-religion' viewpoint (including comparative religion), which taught me to look upon religions not simply from my Christian perspective but from a purely neutral, non-partisan point of view. I also studied cultural anthropology which helped me to see the different value systems of different cultures, ethnic groups, and religions. When assessing and comparing different religions in this way, I learned to treat all religions on an equal footing. For in terms of a science-of-religion approach, all religions, while displaying vast differences, are nevertheless ranked as equivalent belief systems. All have their subjective traditions and their particular approaches to truth. There is no bird's eye view or some lofty vantage point from which to judge religious truths objectively. Hence, from a science-of-religion viewpoint I firmly accept the 'plurality' of all religions.

This plurality perspective has guided much of the religious dialogue in which I was engaged. When meeting with believers of other faiths—say, within the framework of "Religions for Peace" (www.rfp.org or www.rfpeurope.org, 2022) or through my development work—I never engaged members of other faiths in a confrontative manner but rather sought mutual fellowship and togetherness, common devotion, and prayer. The goal was to get to know each other's thinking, become acquainted with

different religious customs, and to treat each other with utmost respect, tolerance, and curiosity. In our Religions-for-Peace meetings, at which members of several world religions were present, we usually discussed a particular topic to which all participants brought their own perspectives. We also organized a round of meetings at which one group (say a Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu host group) invited other believers into their holy place—a mosque, a church, or a temple—to present themselves: their theology (philosophy), their history, and their worship practice. Needless to say, such meetings were marked by a *pluralistic* and *egalitarian* spirit, and it was fully accepted that all participants stood in the tradition of their particular religious faith. These were fruitful and enlightening experiences of inter-religious dialogue and fellowship.

Apart from such endeavors I have also pursued 'historical–critical studies'. During my theological training I acquainted myself with the historical–critical methods such as textual criticism, literary criticism, form criticism, source criticism, redaction criticism etc. (Bangert, *Die historisch-kritische Methode: kritisch betrachtet*, 2022a). I also learnt that one cannot understand a religion fully without retracing its history of origin (*Religionsgeschichte* or 'historiography of religion'; cf. Bangert, *Geschichte*, 2017a). I could apply these methods not only to my own Christian belief system, but also to Judaism and—in recent years—to Islam. My publications on the origins of Islam (Bangert, 2016, 2018) were the result of intense research into the origins of the Qur'ān, the Sira tradition, the Hadith corpus, and other early historical documents. Such historical studies require a thoroughness of scientific research and a maximum of objectivity—such as was first displayed by Ferdinand Christian Baur (1792–1860) in his *Kritische Untersuchungen* (Baur, 1847). Such critical studies sometimes lead to painful modifications of one's own traditional beliefs. For instance, retracing the development of the trinitarian doctrine resulted for me in a massive reshaping of that dogma. Similarly, my publications on the origin of Islam and the Qur'ān are no easy reading, especially for Muslims, as they challenge some of Islam's most cherished presuppositions and beliefs. Hence, historical–critical research can challenge our own faiths, and the faith of others.

I have also, at times, pursued a philosophy of religion. As a curious and reflecting person, one will in the course of time address the very basic questions which lie at the core of religion and religious experience: What is the meaning of religion? What is the meaning of life? Is there a transcendent reality that some call 'God'? What possibilities do we have to experience that divine reality? Can one interpret religious (divine) experience also in a naturalistic way? In trying to answer such philosophical questions, I could not simply rely on my Christian heritage and on my holy scriptures but had to look beyond Christianity and also review the great thinkers of the modern enlightened era. To be sure, from the viewpoint of a 'philosophy of religion' we must leave some of these questions unanswered as we cannot always arrive at ultimate conclusions. Hence, our beliefs will often be accompanied by a measure of doubt, which is the twin brother of faith and gives us ample reason to stay humble.

Finally, I have committed myself to believing in the Christian gospel and am persuaded, on that basis, to pursue a theology of religions (as this chapter illustrates).

As a committed Christian, I do not look at other religions from a neutral, non-confessional standpoint but from a decidedly Christian perspective. I take a firm stand. And when engaging in an inter-religious dialogue, I do so by openly professing my confessional partiality, and I expect my counterparts to do likewise. My liberal outlook precludes me from taking an exclusivistic approach to religion, neither do I consider myself a *pluralist* (at least not from a theology-of-religion perspective). I do not entertain claims of absolute truth or an exclusive claim to salvation. Neither do I think that all religions have equal access to truth; for religions are different avenues to truth. Rather, I follow Hans-Martin Barth's approach of a non-embracing mutual inclusivism as I am committed to my Christian presuppositions.

A theology of religions, in my view, ought to first seek commonalities amongst religions and to celebrate them together. But it should also ascertain differences, appreciate them, and even delight in them. Commonalities are perhaps more numerous than they may appear at first glance. These commonalities may concern what we think of the nature of humankind (good and evil) and the fundamentals of human relationships. It could also include ethical value systems, such as the Bible's golden rule of "Do to others as you would have others do to you" (Luke 6:31). The differences between religions concern mostly their ideologies, their histories, their rituals, and their religious practices, all of which have their respective cultural contexts.

A theology of religions could lead to an open, respectful, and empathetic dialogue about several themes. In that sense, I fully support the comparative theology approach, but not as an alternative to a theology of religions, but rather as an important part of it. Such a dialogue has led me to an appreciation of other religions and has also caused me to rethink a number of my own (Christian) beliefs. The topics that one could dialogue about could be our respective understanding of truth, salvation, ethical standards, the presuppositions that undergird our thinking, and/or the transcendent divine.

Let's take the latter, for instance: the question of an ultimate transcendent divine. Presuming that all religions believe in some form of a transcendent reality (which may be called God, Yahweh, Allah, Brahman, Shiva, universal consciousness, or the like), we could dialogue about the *nature* of that reality. Is it a spiritual, ephemeral, otherworldly reality as opposed to our empirical-material-natural world? Or is it an immanently transcendent reality (that is *not* beyond our present universe) and can be experienced in this world—albeit without absolute proof? Or are we speaking here only of an objective total 'reality' per se as opposed to the reality which we subjectively experience and recognize? Obviously, there are different ways of thinking about a transcendent reality. Such discussions may require some theological and philosophical prerequisites which cannot be expected from every dialogue partner. In most cases, such exchanges might take place on a more rudimentary level. Let me give an example:

When my son, who is a Buddhist, asked me, a few years ago, to wed him in San Francisco to his bride, who happened to be a liberal Muslim, I of course agreed. For the wedding ceremony, I combined Christian elements with some Buddhist and Muslim components. For instance, I asked the bride's father to read the first sura

of the Qur'ān. On the day before the wedding, my daughter-in-law-to-be asked me how I understood God. "Is he up there [she pointed to the sky]? Or is he in here [she pointed to her heart]?" I responded by saying: "In here!", pointing to my heart. It was the answer I think she was hoping for and which seemed to satisfy her. I did not engage her in a philosophical discourse of different versions of an ultimate reality and how it is to be perceived. The point here is that a theology of religions seeks to dialogue with representatives of other religions over topics such as truth, salvation, ethics, transcendence and the like, and that such inter-religious dialogues depend of course on the level of religious education and professional qualification of the respective dialogue partners.

I said above that I follow Hans-Martin Barth in adhering to a non-embracing mutual inclusivism. Such a position concedes to all religions that they have to offer vital truths (which to know may enrich members of other religions) and that they also offer important insights into the meaning of life, death, suffering, and the transcendent reality. That said, my position also upholds certain inalienable and indispensable assumptions about the Christian faith which, at least for me, are non-negotiable and which I cannot and will not sacrifice on the altar of an alleged objective 'plurality'. This has to do with my understanding of 'Christian theology', which in my view is to be defined as the systematic interpretation of the Biblical witness to God's revelation in Jesus Christ as love. What does that mean?

It means that, according to the Biblical witness, God has revealed His true Self in Jesus Christ. And by revealing Himself, He has also revealed what true love is; and by revealing true love He has also revealed what true humanity could, should, or might be. Hence, God has revealed Himself in Christ as love. From this follows that the disciples of Jesus seek to emulate his example as much as possible. He becomes the model for their lives. That is also my subjective Christian conviction and commitment. For Muslims, however, it is Muhammad's life and teachings which to them serve as the preferred model according to which they are committed to live. Unfortunately, the life of Jesus and the life of Muhammad, as they have been handed down to us through our respective traditions, could not be more different. And it is, in my view, not a matter of neutrality or plurality or a 'bird's eye' objectivity, when we are called to decide which model we wish to follow. I, as a Christian, have chosen to follow Christ's example, and I believe to have good reason to do so. So, while I take a firm stand regarding my Christian conviction, I also entertain tolerance versus members of other religions who have the right, and their good reasons, to commit themselves to their religion.

That takes me to the last point. In the final analysis, the relationship between religions is somewhat like a competition. All of them offer—and have the right to offer—their particular ways to earthly and eternal bliss. Religions are competing ideologies for devotional commitments. People should be free to choose which religion they wish to follow. That competition should be fair, peaceful, friendly, tolerant, and respectful. The world religions will not disappear overnight, and they need not do so. They will persist. It is up to all of us to engage in inter-religious dialogue to find common ground and to agree on common ethical standards for living together in a pluralistic world. But each individual must decide for himself or herself which

of the religions to follow. Some will decide against all religions. And others will manufacture their own private freestyle or patchwork spirituality. I, for one, have opted to follow Jesus Christ and his gospel.

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Chapter 3
Ultimate Reality in Three Distinctive Traditions

Viktor J. Tóth

Abstract This research has two primary objectives. In the first part, I touch on some remarkable similarities regarding 'Ultimate Reality' in three major traditions: Zen Buddhism, Eastern Christianity, and Western Christianity. I focus mainly on the teachings of Masao Abe, St Gregory Palamas, and Meister Eckhart. One of the themes draws on the parallels between the Buddhist notion of arriving at *śūnyatā*, the Orthodox notion of seeking union with God through the practice of unknowing (ἀγνωσία), and Eckhart's notion of reaching God via "undifferentiation." Related to this is Buddhism's objective of leaving the false notion of self, the Orthodox aim to be liberated from creation and be united to the Creator, and Eckart's notion of merging the highest part of the soul into non-existence. All three traditions recognize the transitory nature of the world and therefore all affirm that the perfection of humans does not consist in which assimilates them to creation, but in what distinguishes them from the created order and assimilates them to the Ultimate Reality. In the second part, I utilize neurotheology, a relatively new research field, in interreligious dialogue. I comment on some nearly identical practices in Zen Buddhism and Eastern Orthodoxy from a neuro-theological perspective, linking them to the unique religious practice called 'speaking in tongues'. I argue that these similarities not only signify the shared evolutionary past and neurobiological present of every human being but, from a religious point of view, even indicate the same Ultimate Reality as our shared *telos*. My goal is to contribute to interfaith dialogue via highlighting these similarities and encouraging extended utilization of neurotheology in the field.

Keywords Mysticism · Ultimate reality · Religious practices · Nothingness · Neurotheology · *Glossolalia*

V. J. Tóth (✉)
Fuller Theological Seminary, Pasadena, CA, USA
e-mail: vtoth@fuller.edu

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Introduction

Debates about 'who is right' in doctrinal questions have tainted human history from its beginning, so much so that in contemporary society (at least in the West) religion is perceived as something that only divides people and thus should be eliminated from the civic arena. But there are others who believe that religion can unite people across cultural boundaries. My research aims to provide some aid in this unifying effort by highlighting doctrinal similarities in concepts regarding the Ultimate Reality (UR) among three distinct religious traditions, separated from each other both in time and space: Japanese Buddhism, mostly Zen and Pure Land (both belonging the Mahāyāna tradition); Western Christian mysticism (focusing on the sermons of Meister Eckhart); and Eastern Orthodoxy (giving special attention to the teachings of Gregory Palamas).

I have several reasons to use the term 'Ultimate Reality' (instead of God/gods, divine).[1] Most importantly it aids my attempt to remain as neutral doctrinally as I can. Also, using the term helps me to be positioned in the theoretical framework of Catherine Cornille's (2013, pp. 20–33) "constructive conditions" for interfaith dialogue (humility, commitment, interconnection, empathy, and hospitality). Cornille's fifth condition, hospitality, is extremely important for the second part of the paper where I draw on the concept of our shared human traits which, I believe, instinctively leads us toward being more hospitable toward each other's convictions. UR is a term widely used in interfaith nomenclature and thus has proven its potential for connection rather than division. It is especially employed in literature about mysticism, which is central to my project, and also identified by Cornille as a place for interconnection in inter-religious dialogue. My project was informed by the methods of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen's constructive pluralism and its refined relationship to science. He emphasizes the importance of contemporary scientific research in the field of theology. However, Kärkkäinen (2015, p. 239) also cautions that an "important contribution of *theological* anthropology is its role of being *critical*, to persistently remind the scientific community of the need to resist reductionism and seek to combine scientific and social, as well as religious, dimensions in the study of humanity." I especially see the use of cognitive sciences as a suitable way to rethink doctrinal and spiritual similarities in a cross-cultural framework (Czachesz, 2017).

While it is sometimes customary in interreligious studies to a make a nuanced distinction between the terms 'similarity' and 'sameness', this chapter will not make such a differentiation. My argument is not based on similarities between sacred texts in the different traditions, but on our special neurobiological makeup and our shared pre-historic roots. Instead of falling into the 'trap' of early twentieth-century comparative religion, which argued alongside vague similarities and claimed them as defining identical characteristics, my main argument is built around the idea of the homogenous 'roots' of shared evolutionary human traits. Although the chapter starts

[1] The term was first promoted by John Hick (see Kärkkäinen, 2003, pp. 291–293). Although I do not share Hick's concepts, I find the term helpful. Abe (1987), whose importance in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is widely acknowledged, also utilized the term extensively.

with textual testimony of common religious conceptions, I only use such material as an instrument leading to neurological studies and contemporary findings in the rapidly changing field of palaeoanthropology. Moreover, my analysis in relation to Zen Buddhism is best understood in the sense that there is an almost century-old scholarly tradition (most highlighted by the so-called 'Kyoto School', and no lesser names than John Boswell Cobb, Jr., Masao Abe, Keiji Nishitani, Winston L. King, and Amos Yong, among others).

On the following pages, first, I introduce the 'doctrinal' similarities. All three traditions claim that because 'real' existence is beyond existence it must be described as non-existence. For example, in a significantly Buddhist flavor, both Meister Eckhart and St Gregory Palamas claim that everything 'real' is beyond knowledge because of the transitory nature of the world. After dealing with 'doctrinal' similarities, I turn to similarities in spiritual practices. Here I utilize neurotheology to analyze those practices and make assumptions that promote interreligious dialogue. I finish the essay with a proposal about how the concepts discussed in the main body can be further endorsed by linking them to the religious practice commonly called 'speaking in tongues.' Engaging with this spiritual practice further aids to locate my argument within the contemporary ecumenical endeavor.

Similarities in the Concepts of the Ultimate Reality (UR)

Buddhism, with its distinct view of the world, human destiny, and thinking about UR, arrived in Japan in the sixth century CE in the form of Mahāyāna Buddhism. It developed into several distinct sects during the coming centuries, Pure Land and Zen being two major ones. Both traditions focus on human salvation, the first through faith in the saving power of Amida, the latter through self-powering via mediation (Ludwig, 2006). Despite the existence of several different traditions in Buddhism, most scholars agree that the original teachings of the historic figure Siddhārtha Gautama (the founder of Buddhism who lived in South Asia in the second half of the first millennium BCE) did not include the notion of God, gods, or afterlife. However, another, inherently related notion, *śūnyatā*, is a basic tenet in Mahāyāna Buddhism. Although, at first glance, *śūnyatā* might seem alien to Christian teaching that thrives on the idea of personal relationship with the Creator, there are different understandings even within Christianity about how such personal union might occur in the life of the individual believer; and some of them quite reconcilable with the notion of *śūnyatā*. In the following pages, first, I give a brief introduction to the term *śūnyatā*, and then I give examples of how it can be related to Christian teaching.

Śūnyatā as UR

According to the Mahāyāna tradition everything that comes into existence is a manifestation of *śūnyatā* (Abe, 1969). In other words, *śūnyatā* is the ground of existence. There are two primary meanings to the word: (1) the "true" world (or *nirvāṇa*) is empty of predication and there are no real causal connections between events, we only superimpose causality upon the world as we experience it, "[h]ence [it is] one of the ways we 'transform' *nirvāṇa* into *saṁsāra*" (Loy, 1983, p. 361); and (2) "*śūnyatā* means *dharma-nairātmya*, that is, there is nothing 'in' the world that has any self-nature, because all things are conditioned by each other and hence are relative" (Loy, 1983, p. 362). Although the best probable translation of the word is 'emptiness' it is not a negative affirmation, but a positive one. As Abe (1969, p. 25) puts it "Zen affirms the ground of complete Liberation—Liberation from both the secular and the holy, from both morality and religion, from both theistic religion and atheistic nihilism" via "true Emptiness (*Śūnyatā*)." Abe (1969, pp. 25–26) continues to say that *śūnyatā* "transcends both the secular and the sacred (through a negation of negation)," Achieving *śūnyatā* is not equivalent to achieving the state of nothing (*nihilum*), but arriving into "real" existence, and seeing things as they "really" are. Thus, *śūnyatā* means a complete independence because there are no "real" objects that causally intervene (Loy, 1983, p. 362). There is only one "holistic flux of events" (Loy, 1983, p. 363).

Since this existence is beyond existence it must be described as non-existence. This non-existence is called *nirvāna*. Therefore, logically speaking *nirvāna* is the negation of negation, that is, absolute affirmation. And, as Abe (1969) describes it:

> This negation of negation is no less than the affirmation of affirmation… These are verbal expressions of Ultimate Reality, because Ultimate Reality is neither negative nor affirmative, neither immanent nor transcendent in their relative senses. It is beyond these dualities (p. 19).

UR in Orthodox Theology

Orthodox theology claims to be the direct preserver of the apostolic theological integrity (*orthodoxia* meaning 'correct belief'). One of the main causes of the Great Schism in 1054, that officially separated the Christian East and West, was the addition of the *filioque* clause to the Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed by the Pope in 1014.[2] The unique notion of *theosis* as the way for salvation is another, and for this paper even more important, doctrinal difference between the Christian East and West. The Greek word *theosis* is used to define the process of salvation via "participating in the divine nature" (see 2 Pet 1:4) by way of growing in holiness. This notion is

[2] The official declaration that the Holy Spirit proceeds both from the Father and the Son perceived by the Orthodox theologians as not only questioning the primacy of the Father as the principle of the trinitarian unity, but also in violation of a canon of the Council of Ephesus (the Third Ecumenical Council in 431) that prohibited alteration of the creed except by another ecumenical council.

an important tenet of the so-called Pseudo-Dionysian writings. Although modern scholarship proves without a doubt that the author of these works is not Dionysius the Areopagite (mentioned in Acts 17:34), the importance and popularity of these works are unquestionable. Gregory Palamas, a thirteenth-century Orthodox monk, archbishop, and theologian, also draw extensively on these texts. Palamas's works (particularly *The Triads*) have special interest for this study since his focus was to describe (and defend) the spiritual practices designed to lead to direct experience of the UR.

Similar to Buddhist philosophy, Orthodox theology also recognizes the transitory nature of the universe. The perfection of humans does not consist in what assimilates them to creation, but in what distinguishes them from the created order and assimilates them to the Creator (Lossky, 2005). As Kärkkäinen (2004, p. 23) writes, "[s]alvation, then, is not primarily viewed as liberation from sin… but rather as a return to life immortal and the reshaping of the human being into the image of her creator." Although there is an obvious doctrinal difference here between Eastern and Western Christianity (the West perceives salvific work more in the form of dealing with a guilty conscience), as we will see in the example of Meister Eckhart there is still enough 'legroom' in the West to arrive at similar assumptions.

The Orthodox quest for true knowledge of God is also analogous to the Buddhist way through negations (*via negativa*). Negation is described by Nicholas Gendle as a "necessary preliminary process of mental detachment from created things which provides an image of the otherness of divine ones" (cited in Palamas, 1983, p. 123, n. 30). In the Orthodox view, God is unknowable by God's nature, because God is beyond all that exists. Strictly speaking, God has no essence or nature. St John Damascene said, "God does not belong to the class of existing things: not that He has no existence, but that He is above all existing things, nay even above existence itself" (Lossky, 2005, p. 36). Following St Gregory Palamas, Lossky (2005, p. 37) states, "[f]or if God be nature, then all else is not nature. If that which is not God be nature, God is not nature, and likewise He is not being if that which is not God is being." In other words, God is the "absolute other." Orthodox theologians thus describe God in ways startlingly similar to the Buddhist masters' description of the UR.

Meister Eckhart and the UR

Meister Eckhart was born about the year 1260 in Thuringia (modern day Germany). He joined the Dominican order about 1275 where his outstanding gifts for preaching were quickly recognized and promoted. He held various high ecclesiastical and different faculty positions, but he was also a popular preacher. Some of Eckhart's teachings were condemned as heretical by the Inquisition after a controversial proceeding in 1329 (Walshe 2009). However, this paper is not concerned about the doctrinal justification of Eckhart's theology, but about the phenomenon that although Eckhart's audience was half a millennium past that of Pseudo-Dionysius, and more

than five thousand miles away from Japan, they so readily embraced similar theological notions regarding UR. This, again, points toward some kind of shared human religious attitude. The fact that this Dominican preacher was extremely well received not just in his lifetime, but even more so in the following centuries, and, to some extent, continuing today, further strengthens this argument. Let us note some examples of these similarities.

Eckhart (2009, pp. 467–468) articulates very similar sentiments about the relationship between the world and the UR to the above-mentioned Buddhist and Orthodox sources, declaring that "God is one—He is a negotiation of the negation." Several times he calls the place of revelation the "nameless place." In his homily on Paul's conversion experience in Acts 9:8 Eckhart (2009, p. 137) states that Paul "saw Nothing, and the Nothing was God." Eckhart calls God the "Ground of all existence" routinely which is a clear parallel to the Buddhist notion of *śūnyatā* as the base of all existence. The oneness (or undifferentiation) of the Creator in his teachings is, again, similar to the Buddhists' scripts. Eckhart (2009, p. 589) states for example, that, "God is in all ways and equal in all ways… If you take one way, such and such, that is not God. If you take *this* and *that*, you are not taking God, for God is in all ways and equal in all ways." In another place he (2009, 467n9) writes: "It is a property of God to be without differentiation and He is distinguished solely by His lack of differentiation, whereas it is a property of creatures to be differentiated." This statement is close to the earlier notion about the difference between *nirvāṇa* (the undifferentiated "real" world) and *saṁsāra* (the world as humans perceive it—as an endless process of living and dying).

Nevertheless, we cannot ignore the distinctive elements in the two traditions (Buddhist and Christian). Abe (1969) highlights the fact that the essence of Zen is identification with *śūnyatā*, and not with a personal God, Christ or Buddha. Furthermore, Zen does not teach that we come to UR through encountering and believing in God. Yet he also hastens to point out that in Buddhism the problem is not that a personal God may or may not exist, but with the possible attachment to this God. Furthermore, the idea of a Creator God indicates a kind of dualism between the created and the Creator which is (he claims) lacking in Buddhism. However, one might say that (at least in Eckhart's sermons) Christianity offers a common ground. "So, when I am able to establish myself in Nothing and Nothing in myself," preaches Eckhart (2009, p. 74), "uprooting and casting out what is in me, *then* I can pass into the naked being of God and become one with Him." In another place Eckhart (2009, p. 109) says that "[w]hoever would exists in the nakedness of this nature [the original god-like humanity], free from all mediation, must have left behind all distinction of person … [and] must be free of *nothing*." In a somewhat obscure text, Eckhart (2009, p. 109) cautions against even pious practices if it leads to attachment to the pious act itself: "they work purely for God's sake, not for themselves, but they work with attachment." It is clear that the Dominican preacher was against any kind of duality when it comes to the relationship between believer and the UR.

Detachment

Detachment, as the way of 'salvation' ('enlightenment' in Buddhism or *theosis* in the Orthodox tradition) is also embraced by all three traditions. In this subsection I give parallel examples of this concept. According to Abe (1969) identification with *śūnyatā* comes through detachment; detachment even from one's own thought. One must achieve detachment and be completely freed "from the radical and throughgoing rule of the laws of nature" (Waldenfels, 1980, p. 57). Using the notion of "empty emptiness" Keiji Nishitani also ties the Buddhist locus of radical deliverance to Eckhart's *Abgeschiedenheit* (detachment) (Waldenfels, 1980, p. 91). The first two of the *Four Noble Truths* traditionally credited to Siddhārtha Gautama are: (1) all life is suffering, and (2) the cause of suffering is desire (Maguire, 2001). It is a simple realization of the fact that even in the greatest joy on earth one cannot be fully satisfied, because every good experience in this life will be utterly lost. And no good that can be lost is satisfactory. Moreover, sickness, old age and the pains of dying are the common lot of everyone. Therefore, the aim of Buddhism is to be liberated from *saṃsāra* through complete detachment, and by doing it, to attain *nirvāna*, "the blissful freedom from transmigration" (Abe, 1969, p. 7).[3]

In a way similar to Zen monks, the Greek Fathers connected the process of *theosis* to absolute detachment from the world, based on the correct knowledge of the true state of existence. In a passage with a significantly Buddhist flavor, Gregory Palamas talks about the world as "allusions which are adapted to particular circumstances, which come into existence only to disappear again, which at one time exist and at another do not exist… without any true existence" (Palamas, 1983, p. 63). Everything "real" then "is beyond knowledge" (Palamas, 1983, p. 36). Only after one realizes this as the true nature of existence, is one able to see an "image of the otherness" of the divine (Palamas, 1983, p. 123).

On the other side, when it comes to spirituality, we need to acknowledge that although some of the Orthodox practices of prayer resemble the silent mediation of *zazen*, they still have a strong dualistic flavor.[4] Even the so-called "silent prayer" is dualistic in the Buddhist sense, because the subject stands apart from the object and the act itself is centered on the human subject (Unno, 2002, p. 93). Thus, Abe rightly hypothesizes that in the practice of God, as "Nothingness" is objectified and thus becomes "something" (Abe, 1969, p. 23). Yet, one might still admit that the heart of both Zen and Orthodox theology is the desire to be in union with (or disappear into) the transcendent and immanent UR.

For example, in the theology of Pseudo-Dionysius, one is going out from the reality of created beings, crossing the abyss between creature and Creator, into a realm of absolute simplicity where there is no more dualism (Lossky, 2005). One might add to this that since in *theosis* the soul becomes united with God, the soul cannot be part of a body-soul duality since it becomes a kind of non-being (just like

[3] For a more recent discussion on *śūnyatā* and its place in Christian-Buddhist dialog in the works of Keiji Nishitani and Masao Abe see Yong (2012).

[4] Some of these practices are discussed below.

God). Therefore, in this union one realizes the non-beingness of the self which is, in Buddhism, leads to *nirvāna* (Abe, 1969, 1987; Matsunaga 1988; Waldenfels, 1980).

Eckhart (2009, p. 566) wrote a whole essay on this concept, in which he argues that "pure detachment" surpasses all virtues (even love), because "all virtues have some regard to creatures, but detachment is free of all creatures." Thus, I find Abe's worries tenuous in relation to Eckhart's sermons. The Dominican preacher proclaims that "God's natural place is unity and purity, and that comes from detachment" (Eckhart, 2009, p. 566). Furthermore, Eckhart (2009, p. 561) asserts that a devotee must go out "from all forms and from himself, become wholly foreign and remote from them all." He (2009, p. 272) preaches that the goal of human existence is to be detached from all matter and form. Eckhart (2009, p. 573) goes as far as to say that "[o]n earth, this entrance [into divine nature] is nothing but pure detachment, and when the detachment reaches its climax, it becomes ignorant with knowing, loveless with loving and dark with enlightenment." One must strive toward this because purity is emptiness.

There are other notions that reverberate in all three traditions. I will briefly mention two of them here. The first one is the notion of 'No-self.' I find the Buddhist objective of overcoming the false notion of self, the Orthodox aim to be liberated from creation and united to the Creator and Eckhart's notion of merging the highest part of the soul into non-existence closely related. Edward Conze proposes that the translation of *anātman* in English is usually "non-self" (cited in Waldenfels, 1980, p. 11). This term promotes the idea that there is the denial of any permanent substantial entity that can be classified as 'self' ('I' or 'soul'). This notion might be taken as something entirely antagonistic to Christian doctrine regarding the eternal salvation of individual believers.[5] However, Eckhart also acknowledges that the self must be destroyed and/or abandoned to reach true detachment. He (2009, p. 514) proclaims that a "man must learn to give up self" because when the soul is received by God it is "embraced by unity" (Eckhart, 2009, p. 338). Phrases like "detached from self" or "completely stripped yourself of your own self, and all things and every kind of attachment" are not alien to the Dominican teacher (Eckhart, 2009, pp. 51–52). Then the believer changes into the "pure absoluteness of free being, which has no location, which neither receives nor gives: it is bare 'self-identity' which is deprived of all being and self-identity… This is the highest perfection of the spirit to which man can attain spiritually in this life" (Eckhart, 2009, p. 358). In a similar veinEckhart (2009, p. 463) preaches that "You should wholly sink away from your youness and dissolve into His Hisness, and your 'yours' and His 'His' should become so completely one 'Mine' that with Him you understand His uncreated self-identity and His nameless Nothingness." Indeed, this notion has a much stronger place in the Christian West than one would imagine. Reflecting on the teachings of Teresa of Avila Panikkar (1979) writes:

> The aim and end of human life is Union with God, it is the transformation of our being and its divinization. But the creature itself is no-thing, or, as our saint repeats constantly, a *nonada*,

[5] Amos Yong also uses the concept of *anātman* in his Christianity-Buddhism-science trialogue (Yong, 2012).

> a not-nothingness, i.e., the creature is a pure negation of its 'not-yet-being'. It exists, because somehow it subsists outside nothingness—'extra nihilum' being suspended over the abyss of pure nothingness by the creative power of God. Thus, the creature, in order to reach God and be united with Him, must abandon and forsake its own way of being, i.e., its 'not-yet-being', its negativity and negate its own *no*-thingness… That leads us to the famous way of absolute nothingness of our mystic. I cannot trust my senses, nor my feelings, nor my intellect with *its* intuitions, nor my will, nor even my very being. I cannot rely upon any created thing (p. xvi).

Another shared tenet is the 'unknowability of God.' There are strong parallels between the Buddhist notion of arriving at *śūnyatā*, the Orthodox notion of seeking union with God through the practice of unknowing (ἀγνωσία), and Eckhart's notion of reaching God via 'undifferentiation.' As Eckhart (2009, p. 463) says, "God is nameless because none can say or understand anything about Him." Then he (2009, p. 463) goes on to say that "if I say God is a being, that is not true: He is a transcendent being, and a superessential nothingness." In another place (Eckhart, 2009, p. 283) adds, "What is the final end? It is the hidden darkness of the eternal Godhead, which is unknown and never has been known and never shall be known."

Similar Practices

In the next section of this paper, I give examples of similar practices (or at least instructions, in Eckhart's case) in the three traditions. Doing so I turn to the second aim of the project, namely the application of neurotheological research in interfaith dialogue.

Escape from the Transitory Nature of This World

The similar notions in spiritual practices in the three traditions highlight the fact that they all recognize the transitory nature of the world and therefore all three affirm that the perfection of humans does not consist in that which assimilates them to creation, but in that which distinguishes them from the created order and assimilates them to the UR. In a very Buddhist manner, both Eckhart and St Gregory Palamas claim that everything 'real' is beyond knowledge thus it should be defined as non-existence. These similar notions are naturally mirrored by similar practices.

Just as above, I start with Buddhism. According to Abe (1987), true-self is realized to be really formless by going beyond both form (being) and formlessness (nonbeing). Zen Buddhism emphasizes that self-control and meditation lead to the realization of *anātman* (Matsunaga 1988). *Shikantaza* (act of pure sitting), a type of mediation, is focused "straight through the void of the *anātman*" with the aim that at the end "body and mind drop away" (Aitken, 2002, p. 68). This practice is paired with a constant investigation of self, which helps to achieve the most difficult task: the total mental

detachment even from one's own thoughts (Matsunaga 1988). The practitioner tries to focus on *Wu* (Chinese word for nothingness). The goal is that by continually facing with *Wu* the "mind eventually becomes exhausted of its alternatives and jarred out of its daily pattern" (Matsunaga 1988, p. 206). But one must go beyond of the act of meditation into living with the constant thought of *Wu*. If one can maintain this state of mind long enough "its nature ultimately shocks the mind out of relative value judgments, while shipwrecking logic upon the rocks of the absurd reality that constitutes authentic existence" (Matsunaga 1988, p. 206). The most important part of this discipline is the negating of the ego, while at the same time taxing one's reason until it admits defeat, and "then once the fundamental inner nature was awakened and in control, to loosen all restraints" (Matsunaga 1988, p. 208). Carl William Bielefeldt (1980) after carefully studying different kind of Zen meditation techniques, concludes that:

> they [normally] emphasize techniques for entering *samādhi* [concentrated state of meditation], teaching one to avoid the hustle and bustle of the world and dwell in a quiet place, regulate body and breath, sit in silent meditation with the legs crossed, the tongue pressed against the palate, and the mind fixed on a single object (p. 148).

This is the Zen way to learn to experience the UR personally.

The Orthodox approach is similar to Zen, in the sense that UR is accessible to personal experience (Palamas, 1983). In addition, just as in Zen, it is impossible to acquire knowledge about the UR by the intellect. The only way to know God is by personal experience; by being united with God. It is a "personal union" and not "rational knowledge" (Palamas, 1983, p. 37). In other words, "[i]t is by *unknowing* (ἀγνωσία) that one may know Him who is above every possible object of knowledge" (Lossky, 2005, p. 25). It is not a mental sensation (sensing something mentally), but an intellectual one (sensing something by the innermost being). Hence, in the Orthodox view, there is no theology apart from experience (Lossky, 2005). To know God, one must be near to God, and to be able to approach God, one must change into a new human. This process is called *theosis*, and it takes place in one's life through contemplation and constant prayer. St John Damascene expresses this aspect in his classical definition of Christian prayer: "Prayer is the raising of one's mind and heart to God, or the requesting of good things from God" (cited in Mitchell, 2002, p. 101).

The Orthodox fathers carefully developed ways to achieve this goal. One of the most recognized is when the believer repeatedly says a prayer formula (especially the so called "Jesus prayer"), while trying to control breathing (Palamas, 1983, p. 45). The reason for this repetition is to keep the mind from wandering away. Gregory Palamsas (in unison with the Zen teachers) emphasizes the fact that "nothing in the world is more difficult to contemplate and more mobile and shifting than the mind" (Palamas, 1983, p. 45). This praxis integrates bodily posture also. The praying person is seated (rather than standing as was the custom in the Judeo-Christian East) and is advised to direct the eyes, together with the intellect, toward the middle of the body, to the navel or to the heart, the deep center of unity (King, 2002). The goal

is to reach a state of deep inner peace and mystical union by "bringing the mind into the heart" (Palamas, 1983, p. 125). This practice is called the "prayer within the heart" (Palamas, 1983, p. 127) or the "prayer of the heart" (Palamas, 1983, p. 4). As a result of this prayer, the intellect can dispel all thought and search inwardly for the true place of the heart, where inner simplicity, free from all images and discursive thinking, is reached. According to Palamas, the "prayer of the heart" leads eventually to the vision of the divine light (Palamas, 1983, pp. 34–35). But this light only occurs when every intellectual activity has stopped. It is clear then that both *zazen* and the "prayer of the heart" are structured by calmly sitting still in silence and keeping the mind from wandering away. The ultimate goal is total mindlessness (thinking of nothing) (Bielefeldt, 1980; Palamas, 1983). Advanced practitioners of both practices warn against the appearance of images in the mind (Unno, 2002). The two methods are alike, even in minor details, such as stating that the control of breathing or concentration on bodily parts is just for the "beginners" (Maguire, 2001, pp. 122–123; Palamas, 1983, p. 45).

Although Eckhart does not give detailed instructions about how to do it, the tenet of unknowing has an important place in his instructions. Eckhart (2009, p. 50) preaches that "there is no way man can know what God *is*. But one thing he does know: what God is *not*." He (2009, p. 58) also encourages "absolute stillness for as long as possible [because it is] best of all for you. You cannot exchange this state for any other without harm." I have shown above how self-observation is a key element in Zen teaching. In one of his sermons, Eckhart (2009, p. 489) utters something along this line that would make proud any Zen master: "Observe yourself, and wherever you find yourself, leave yourself: that is the best way." His treatise, titled "Good Morning," is a gem of instructions about approaching UR via leaving everting behind. This work encourages believers to "close the doors of [the] five senses and desire God" practicing "[s]itting still and raising [the] thoughts aloft uniting with God" (Eckhart, 2009, pp. 580–581).

The Similarities in a Neurotheological Perspective

In this section, I argue that the above highlighted 'doctrines' and practices, at least partially, can be explained by study of the uniquely human neurobiological system. First, I give a limited introduction to neurotheology and then I deal with concrete research projects in the field.

Spirituality and Neurotheology

Neurotheology researches the neurology underlying of all religions.[6] Many "[n]eurotheologians argue that the structure and the function of the human brain predispose us to believe in God" (Muller, 2008, para. 2). Researchers in this area use different methods for measuring brain activity during religious practices (mostly MRI and fMRI scans, but also EEG and other technologies). This method enables the researchers to detect qualitative shifts in the large-scale dynamics of the brain. In other words, such investigations aim to explain religious behavior and spiritual experiences in neuroscientific terms. Neurotheology is a relatively new field in science and is not embraced by everyone (Aaen-Stockdale, 2010).

However, there is a growing number of scholars from different fields who use the findings of neurotheology to support their own initiatives. One example is David Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 384), the renowned paleoanthropologist, who goes so far as to claim that a "sense of Absolute Unitary Being … lies in the human nervous system." Lewis-Williams also claims that being fully human means that our nervous system and socio-cultural setting not only provide the possibility of 'entering' into altered or 'higher-order' conscious states, but also that such rituals are actually part of our socio-cultural toolset, and thus part of the pattern of modern human behavior (see also Torrey, 2017, pp. 122–125). If he is right, then charismatic experiences, such as speaking in tongues, intense singing, drumming, chanting, and 'shower of blessing' should be seen as welcomed enrichments of a fully lived human life. Van Huyssteen (2006) happily agrees with Lewis-Williams. After surveying an impressive group of scholars from different fields van Huyssteen (2006, p. 261) sums up their views writing that "religious imagination emerged naturally and spontaneously in the course of the evolution of human cognitive systems" and thus can be regarded "as an essential universal attribute of the human mind and human culture." More recently, Kugel (2017, p. xvii), professor of Hebrew Literature at Harvard University, dedicated a whole book connecting the Bible, other ancient texts, archeology, anthropology, and neuroscience to tell us about "the reality of God in ancient times—and in our own." Such projects have several far-reaching implications. One of them is that they show a way beyond the supposedly dividing nature of religions. They signify the unifying power of the universally shared roots of human religiosity, regarding both biological and cultural evolution. Below, I highlight some of the data that supports this view.

Neurological Research on Spiritual Practices

When studying a group of Pentecostals, Newberg and Waldman (2016, p. 90) (using fMRI) found that first, when the group began to sing and dance an increased frontal

[6] Although the term 'neurotheology' is widely used in contemporary literature, 'neuroscience of religion' or 'spiritual neuroscience' are better terms to describe the field since it is the study of all kinds of religious experiences ('theology' is a Western/Christian concept).

lobe activity occurred, but then "when they began to speak in tongues, activity suddenly dropped in the frontal lobe. They immediately felt an intense sense of unity with something beyond themselves—the Holy Spirit." The authors explain that when frontal lobe activity drops suddenly and significantly, logic and reason shut down. During this special spiritual exercise, everyday consciousness is suspended, and this opens the way for other brain centers to experience the world in intuitive and creative ways. An intense feeling of unity of consciousness arises. This is very similar to what I highlighted about the aim of 'doctrine' and practice in the three diverse traditions. Another common experience during intensive mystical states is the altered experience of existence due to the altered experience of time (Ott, 2018). Such experience is also a shared goal of the practices and teachings surveyed in the first part of the paper. It is not a surprise then that Newberg and Waldman (2016, p. 91) reported similar findings with Zen Buddhists during *zazaen* mediation and Franciscan nuns while practicing the so-called "centering prayer." These methods are somewhat different (culturally unique), but the experience of the practitioners (for example 'unity experience') are very similar and affect the same areas of the brain. Other research projects have exposed similar findings (Beauregard & Vincent, 2006; Newberg et al., 2003, 2006).

Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 378) asserts that the uniquely human consciousness emerged from the "Upper Paleolithic nexus of mental states," higher level (mystical) consciousness being one of the most preeminent. One of the most important arguments of his book-length project is that the walls of the caves were perceived by Upper Paleolithic people as a 'membrane' between their world and the spirit world. According to him, altered states of consciousness played a significant role in the final evolutionary stage of *Homo sapiens*. Lewis-Williams (2002) asserts that the ability to develop rituals that helped practitioners to achieve altered states of consciousness and then come back to communicate it to the other members of the group was one of the most important advantages of *H. sapiens* over Neanderthals. Lancaster (2011, pp. 11–22) gives an intriguing argument about how "mystical states" transform into rational accounts based on the analysis of several mystical texts. He claims that they represent a schema of how firing neural assembles during religious practices might achieve a degree of coherence which become correlated with conscious experience. In my assessment, it is very likely that deeply religious devotees in different religions made the attempt to achieve altered states of consciousness to connect to the UR, and then interpreted their experience using cognitive/rational schemas familiar to their cultural settings. To put it in other words anomalous religious experiences become meaningful to a person through her interpretive framework (Livingstone, 2005). Considering that the underling neuro-biological structures are almost the same for every human being, this line of thought might provide some answers to why we find similar "doctrines" and practices in different places and times. As a final remark I bring into the argument a contemporary spiritual practice which bears analogues neurotheological marks.

Final Remarks: Speaking in Tongues

Speaking in tongues or *glossolalia* is a unique spiritual experience and practice mostly embraced by diverse Pentecostal and charismatic movements. Although it is not crucial for the present project, I want to make the distinction here between speaking in tongues and *glossolalia* for theological purposes. On the one hand, I reserve *glossolalia* for the unique *charism* which a disciple of Jesus might receive through the Holy Spirit, and which manifests in the disciple speaking and/or praying in a language which she does not know. This is a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12 and 14) to enhance the disciple's abilities in their service to the Triune God. On the other hand, by using the term 'speaking in tongues' I mean the similar phenomenon that might occur in other religious settings, such as in shamanistic spiritual practices. This distinction is an important one at least for two reasons. First, there is an obvious increase in contemporary literature on different spiritual practices (both in the field of cultural anthropology and archeology), including speaking in tongues, which is outside Christian religion. As a matter of fact, it seems that speaking in tongues is more widespread in different human cultures than one might expect. For example, Lewis-Williams (2002, p. 360) reports that "in the 1920s Isaac Tens, a Gitksan Native American shaman spoke of frequently falling spontaneously into a trance and of how, after he had undergone training, powerful chants forced themselves out of him, the phenomenon known as 'speaking in tongues.'" Thus, there seems to be a universal underling 'ability' for humans for this phenomenon. This leads to the second reason for making a distinction: one must be careful to not to deny a supernatural origin, which might include different spiritual 'sources.'

Neurotheological Research, Eckhart, and Pseudo-Dionysius

I already touched upon the research by Newberg and Waldman on *glossolalia.* Their paper highlights the fact that during this spiritual practice one gives up oneself (self-will), but not the sense of self. Neuroimaging also suggests that it is a non-voluntary action, accompanied with changes in several brain structures, which suggests complex brain activity during the practice. As I mentioned above, during this practice the areas which are responsible for speech shut down while increased activity in other areas occurs. If we consider that the language areas are also responsible for logical thinking, the research suggests that during speaking in tongues the non-logical (non-rational) areas are activated. One might say that a kind of unknowing takes place (which is univocally encouraged by the three traditions). The same is true about mental detachment. It seems that during this practice the 'mind is brought into the heart' so to say.

Another important finding is the unity experienced by the practitioners. Many reports show, that during *glossolalia*, the believer experiences an intense feeling of unity (oneness) with God (the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Godhead, is singled

out as the engaged partner). Although some of the findings are disputed, one study that "involved nearly a thousand clergy members of a British evangelical group… found that the 80% who practiced glossolalia had greater emotional stability and less neuroticism" (Newberg et al., 2006, p. 69). This finding might be due to the self-reported sense of the peace that the oneness with the Spirit provides, and which accompanies the believer for a time even after the actual experience. What I want to highlight here is that these findings show a concrete resemblance to the 'doctrines' and practices mentioned in the second and third sections. It seems that this unique spiritual practice brings forth all (or at least most of) the nuances propagated by the three traditions in the first half of this chapter. Perceiving speaking in tongues as a universal 'natural' ability (which does not deny its supernatural source[s]) that brings forth spiritual fruits cherished by diverse spiritual communities might be used as a venue in interreligious dialogue.

As a final note, I want to point out that we can find echoes of this experience in both Eckhart and Pseudo-Dionysius. Both teach about the unutterable nature of the true knowledge of God. For example, Eckhart's (2009, p. 372) homily on Wisdom 18:14–15 states, "It says in Scripture, 'In the middle of the night, when all things were silent, then, Lord, thy word came down from the royal thrones.'" He explains this text in a way that suggests a kind of 'non-rational' language which can be spoken by a human being, and which nevertheless enlightens the intellect. This "intellect" or *mens* is described by Eckhart (2009, p. 462) as the "spirit" (or highest part of the soul) of a human being. In other words, these are words containing revelation from God, which cannot be uttered because language is attached to the world, but the UR "is above all speech or understanding" (Eckhart, 2009, p. 463). Yet, by God's grace, the believer can receive it. Eckhart states (2009, p. 372), "But no one should think this is impossible: nothing is impossible for the soul that possesses God's grace." Pseudo-Dionysius (1987) expresses very similar sentiments when he writes:

> But again, the most divine knowledge of God, that which comes through unknowing, is achieved in a union far beyond mind, when mind turns away from all things, even from itself, and when is made one with the dazzling rays, being then and there enlightened by the inscrutable depth of wisdom (p. 109).

This quotation provides a nice recapitulation for my project. It is this 'divine knowledge' for which religious people have been striving for in the past fifty thousand (or so) years. It seems that we are indeed created by the same Creator in such a way that we have an underlying urge to search for the UR, and we are equipped with similar bodies to do so. Such knowledge should lead us toward unity even if we do not agree in every doctrinal nuance about the UR.

Conclusion

This chapter highlighted significant doctrinal similarities between three distinct religious traditions. I argued that (at least some) of those similarities can be explained by similar spiritual practices. This led me to my final claim, that all those similarities are rooted in humanity's shared biological and cultural roots. I agree with Cornille (2013) that mystical experience is a likely meeting point between religions. All my cases can be regarded as 'mystical' spirituality since all strive toward 'experiencing' the UR utilizing similar spiritual practices. I find this acknowledgement of the importance of mystical experiences in human thriving extremely important especially for contemporary Western cultures. I trust that this research inspires people to be more open toward traditions that encourage functioning spirituality in everyday life (such as Zen Buddhism) or newer traditions that find new ways to integrate them (such as Pentecostal-charismatic movements). Possibly the most important finding of neurotheological research is that the different spiritual practices are so structured as to produce specifically patterned alterations in brain function that leads to the cultivation of emotional attitudes like humility, equanimity, compassion, and love (Azari, 2001; Ott, 2018). Such findings encourage both further research in this area and devoting more time to practice these spiritual exercises.

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Chapter 4
Complete, Idealized Human: An Experiment in Comparative Theology on the Nature of Jesus

Jon Killpack

Abstract In Muslim–Christian dialogue, an apologetic approach is frequently employed to either affirm or deny the deity of Jesus Christ. For Christians, a confession of the full divinity of Christ is usually understood to be essential to the faith. For Muslims, this claim amounts to the sin of *shirk*, associating partners with God. Understandably, this notion has been a barrier for Muslim–Christian collaboration. In this paper, I offer an alternative path to address this impasse. Through a comparative theological study of the concept of the complete human (*al-insan al-kamil*) as espoused by the Muslim mystic Ibn ʻArabi (1165–1240 CE) and the recent work of New Testament scholar J. R. Daniel Kirk and his notion of Jesus as an idealized human figure, I show that the doctrinal wall separating Muslims and Christians is more porous than commonly realized. Ibn ʻArabi's complete human reveals the goal of humanity, namely, to manifest the beautiful names of God. Kirk's biblical concept of an idealized human figure displays the functional role of humanity as rulers of creation. In exploring the commonality in which these frameworks conceptualize the nature of Jesus, I suggest precedence be given to the implications these categories reveal for Muslim–Christian cooperation, and that normative Christian creedal affirmations be held loosely.

Keywords Comparative theology · Christology · Ibn al-ʻArabi · Ethics · Interreligious dialogue · Theological anthropology

Introduction

The nature of Jesus is a deeply anchored roadblock for Muslim–Christian dialogue. However, a comparative theological investigation of the humanity of Jesus provides a blueprint for a seldom crossed bridge that is constructive for both Muslims and Christians alike. In this paper, I show that the Sufi concept of the complete human

J. Killpack (✉)
Amman, Jordan
e-mail: jonkillpack@pm.me

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and the ancient Jewish notion of the idealized human figure reveal that this barrier between Islam and Christianity is more porous than generally perceived. By comparative theology, I am referring to a theological discipline that aims to be intelligently faithful to Christian tradition while seeking fresh understanding outside that tradition (Clooney, 2010, p. 9). The Islamic idea of the complete human will be used to decenter the traditional Christian understanding of the nature of Jesus. I will then juxtapose the concept of the complete human with the Jewish textual theme of idealized human figures. This lens will then be applied to Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Implications from this study include a challenge to the anathema pronounced in the Nicene Creed of 325 CE as well as human ethics.

Comparative theology, a relatively young theological discipline, is a noteworthy mode of inter-relational learning and interreligious dialogue practice (Avcı, 2018, p. 1). This discipline can facilitate a process of "dialogical discovery" via interreligious engagement. Christian theology that engages with the Islamic tradition, in particular, can serve as "a key resource in the theological quest for a more truthful and just witness to God" (Ralston, 2022, p. 122). Comparative theology takes a step outside the Christian theology of religions debate (Cornille, 2017, pp. 214–215). There is no overarching a priori assessment of the religious other grounded in exclusivist, inclusivist or pluralistic evaluations of non-Christian religions. These assessments generally have a one-sided focus, namely, who is going to be saved (Kärkkäinen, 2003, p. 165). While comparative theology demands a "general theology of religions that affirms in principle the possible validity and truth of other religions," it does so without making sweeping statements about the salvific function of non-Christian religions as such (Cornille, 2019, p. 90). Theology of religions tends toward "intra-Christian theological conversation about the religious other." Comparative theology, alternatively, is a "thoroughly interreligious endeavor" (Moyaert, 2017, p. 186). In our world of religiously diverse neighbors, all Christian theologians are challenged to work toward a "truly comparative theological mode in an authentic dialogue with the teachings, doctrines, and insights of other faiths" (Kärkkäinen, 2020, loc. 211).

The present comparative theological exercise is born out of my personal experience of interreligious dialogue with Muslims. I have lived outside my home country among Muslims for over fifteen years. Through learning Indonesian, Acehnese, and Arabic, I have sought to understand my Muslim neighbors on their terms. I have grown in my own openness to discover new elements of truth in the faith of the other, cultivating "hospitality toward truth in difference" (Cornille, 2008, pp. 178, 205). Consistent dialogue has fostered personal doctrinal humility, yet I remain rooted within my own faith tradition.[1] This has allowed me to see truths of my religion afresh in light of theirs (Clooney, 2010, p. 67).

[1] Cornille (2008) offers the following conditions for fruitful interreligious dialogue: humility (by which she emphasizes doctrinal humility), commitment to one's own religion, interconnection between religions, empathy and identification with the experiences of the other, and hospitality to truth in another religious tradition.

The comparative theological experiment in this paper is not undertaken in a negative sense; to use one religion to critique another. My aim is constructive. I hope to deepen faith, not dilute it (Barnes, 2012, p. x). The Christological friction produced by the juxtaposition of Islamic, Christian, and Jewish traditions has enabled me to more deeply engage with ways Jesus was understood by pre-Nicene Christians, as well as expand my interpretative lenses when reading the New Testament texts. In this paper, I propose that the mystical Islamic idea of the complete human, and the Jewish notion of an idealized human provide an enriching lens with which to consider Jesus and humanity. Wright has compared the story of Jesus to a quadraphonic speaker system installed in a living room. In order to hear a faithful representation of the music these speakers are meant to play, the sound needs to be correctly adjusted. In applying this metaphor to the Jesus story, Wright notes that one of those speakers, "the story of Jesus as the story of Israel's God" has been turned up so loud "that the noise it makes has become distorted" (Wright, 2012, p. 84).

This distortion is problematic, particularly for interreligious dialogue between Muslims and Christians. Joshua Ralston has rightly observed that the space for dialogue between Christians and Muslims has frequently been torn asunder by our divergent understandings of Jesus (Ralston, 2022, p. 118). Yet what are we to understand when divine functions and titles are applied to Jesus? Is the answer as simple as, Jesus is on the "divine side of the Creator/creature divide" (Plantinga et al., 2010, p. 115)? In examining Jewish, Christian, and Islamic texts, I offer a challenge to our assumptions of the categories, 'divine' and 'human.' The Qur'an invites the People of the Book, Christians and Jews, to come together with Muslims around a "common word" between them all (تَعَالَوْا إِلَىٰ كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا Al Imran (3):64). In times of increased fanaticism and fundamentalism, common words can be elusive. Indeed, much ink has been spilled between Muslims and Christians debating the divinity or complete humanity of Jesus, an historic focal point of tension between these two faiths. Below I suggest a potential third way for Muslims and Christians to find a common word in Jesus.

Ibn 'Arabi's Complete Human

A *hadith* of the Prophet Muhammad recalls that before all things, God existed as a treasure without a treasure hunter: "I was a hidden treasure; I loved to be known. So I created the cosmos in order to be known."[2] In the divine desire to be known, creation was spoken into existence. This *hadith* is revealing for understanding various strands of Islamic cosmology and the intimate connection between creation and revelation.

[2] The authenticity of the hadith of the Hidden Treasure is disputed by some Sunni scholars. Nevertheless, it has been influential for the Sufi interpretation of creation as well as humanity.

It is particularly relevant to Ibn ‘Arabi’s concept of the complete human (*al-insan al-kamil*).[3]

The Islamic mystic Ibn ‘Arabi (1165–1240 CE) wrote over 200 books, one of which, *Al-Futuihat al-Makkiya*, includes more than twenty volumes (Sells, 1984, p. 289). His influence in Sufi Islam is unparalleled. Of Ibn ‘Arabi, Rafi Zabor observes:

> In the history of monotheistic spirituality, in particular its Western, Abrahamic branch incorporating Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, you may find an aspected resemblance here and there, but there is really no one, from taproot to topmost leaf-tip, like Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi. In Islamic esotericism per se, especially with regard to its metaphysical and exegetical component, virtually everyone before him is an anticipation and everyone after a commentator or interpreter. (Jaffray, 2006, p. 2)[4]

In his theological work, Ibn ‘Arabi sought to divulge the relationship between God and creation. This relationship centers on the beautiful names of God (*’asmā’u llāhi l-ḥusnā*). In Islamic theology, God’s attributes are communicated by these names. Islamic scholar William Chittick writes, “Practically all of Islamic religious thought goes back to the names and attributes of God” (Chittick, 2011, p. 144). Traditionally there are ninety-nine names of God. These include “the All Compassionate” (ar-Raḥmān), “the King” (al-Mālik), “the Shaper” (al-Muṣawwir), “the Just” (al-‘Adl) and “the Gentle” (al-Laṭīf). The Sufi tradition of Islam asserts that, before the act of creation, these divine names were in a state of nonrealization. They were “the keys to a treasure house without a treasure house” (Sells, 1984, p. 292). When God spoke creation into being, his eternal names and attributes received a referent. The entire cosmos is nothing more, and nothing less, than the manifestation and self-disclosure of God’s names. Chittick (2011) observes:

> To say that ‘God created the world’ means in this context that the world derives its relative and limited existence from the absolute and infinite being of God, and that the characteristics and properties which we observe in the world are nothing but dim reflections of God’s attributes. (p. 144)

Creation reflects, in an imperfect yet revealing way, who God is. While each created form is a dim reflection of a particular aspect of God, for Ibn ‘Arabi, the human being manifests *all* of God’s attributes. A *hadith*, with wording very similar to Genesis 1:27, says, “God created Adam in His own form.”[5] Humans, over and above all other created beings, have been formed after the image of God. This, for

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[3] In translations of Ibn ‘Arabi’s work, this phrase is usually rendered, “Perfect Man,” “Perfect Human Being,” or “The Universal Man.” The Arabic word “كامل” (*kamil*) can be translated, as “full,” “entire,” “whole,” “complete,” or “perfect.” I have chosen to translate Ibn ‘Arabi’s phrase “الإنسان الكامل” as “complete human” to show his insistence that this person is whole in that he manifests all the divine names of God. This seems to more accurately capture Ibn ‘Arabi’s thrust than a moral perfection, which is easily assumed from the English word, “perfect.”

[4] It is worth noting that, while Ibn ‘Arabi is highly revered in Sufi Islam, in contemporary Sunni Islam he is a controversial figure.

[5] “*Khalaq Allahu ‘l-adama ‘ala suratihi*.” See Bukhari, *Al-Sahih*, “Istidhan”, 1; Muslim, *Al-Sahih*, “Birr”, 115, “Jannah”, 28; Ahmad bin Hanbal, *Musnad*, Vol. II, 244, 251, 315, 323.

Ibn ‘Arabi, reveals humanity as the “locus of manifestation” for the names of God in their totality (Chittick, 2011, p. 145). No other form in the cosmos is given such a position. To be “in the form of God” is to have the attributes and names of God (Sayari et al., 2020, p. 277). Adam, as the first created human, is the divine imprint on the world (Sells, 1984, pp. 292–293).

The Qur’an attests that by God’s spoken word, all forms of creation came into existence; God said, “be,” and the cosmos and all that is in it, became.[6] Humans, however, were formed not only with the command “be,” but also by God’s own hands, “created directly of clay by God” (Ibn al-‘Arabi, 2015, p. 109). In Ibn ‘Arabi’s theology, God created the cosmos in respect of the multiplicity of the divine names but created human beings in respect of the unity of those names together. God’s names are multiple, but in focusing them all into one being, the human creature reveals that “each and every name refers to a single Reality” (Chittick, 1994, p. 33). This is the exalted position humans hold; to manifest all the names of God in one single being and reveal the truth of *tawhid*, the Oneness of God. In this role, humanity is intended to function as a prism of the divine in which the light of God’s names and attributes are refracted throughout creation as well as back to the Creator (Ibn al-‘Arabi, 2015, p. 19). Ibn ‘Arabi writes, “All that exists in the divine forms, that is, (God’s) names, appears in the human structure” (Ibn al-‘Arabi, 2015, p. 19). It is humanity’s unique honor and responsibility to perceive the divine names and particularize God’s nature in a material form; to act as a mirror reflecting the names and attributes of God (Sayari et al., 2020, p. 281).

God/Not God

While the manifestation of all God’s attributes is the intended role of humanity within creation, humans rarely reach that lofty mark. Ibn ‘Arabi found the ideal only in *al-insan al-kamil*, the complete human. His work, *The Bezels of Wisdom*, expounds on many of the prophets of Islam as complete humans. The complete human functions as a polished mirror that most fully reflects the divine. To understand Ibn ‘Arabi’s mirror metaphor, it is important to note that he was not privy to the unblemished factory produced mirrors of modern day. He knew only of highly polished metal mirrors created by skilled craftsmen. Austin notes that these mirrors had to be formed perfectly flat and must continually be kept polished to preserve their reflective qualities. The mirrors of Ibn ‘Arabi’s day always had the possibility of distortion. Austin (1980) writes:

> [S]o long as the mirror was perfectly polished and flat, the observing subject might see his own form or image perfectly reflected on its surface, in which case the otherness of the mirror itself is reduced to a minimum in the observing consciousness, or even effaced completely. To the extent, however, that the mirror reflects a dulled or distorted image, it manifests its own otherness and detracts from the identity of image and subject. (p. 48)

[6] Al-Baqara (2): 117, Ya Seen (36): 81–82.

Herein lies the difference between the complete human and other humans. The divine appears and is revealed in humans according to their preparedness and receptivity (Chittick, 1982, p. 45). Most humans reflect an unpolished and distorted image of God. Their manifestation of God is combined with the manifestation of their own otherness. God is not clearly seen in them. The complete human, however, most accurately reflects the divine image. In this case, as Austin noted above, the otherness of the mirror dissolves. In the complete human, then, we see God. The complete human is not ontologically divine; that would violate the Oneness of God. The complete human is a theophany of God. He is a copy (*nuskha*/نسخة) of the divine, a synthesis of all the divine names and attributes (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2006, p. 83). To then call the complete human, this theophany, 'God' would only be incorrect if one believed the complete human was not reflecting the divine, but divine in and of himself.

To illustrate this, Ibn 'Arabi used the term *huwa la huwa*, "He/not He," God/not God.[7] In this way, Jesus, as a complete human, was God/not God.[8] In the Qur'an, Jesus has the God-like ability to create life from clay, by breathing into it with his own breath. He also has the power to raise the dead.[9] In his treatise on Jesus in *The Bezels of Wisdom*, Ibn 'Arabi writes:

> When [Jesus] was reviving the dead, it was said about him: "he/not he." Looking at him induced perplexity, just as the intelligent person became perplexed when contemplating Jesus, because the former saw a human being resurrecting the dead, humans not animals, which is a divine trait. (Hence), the seer became perplexed, for he saw a human form that possesses a divine faculty. (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2015, p. 106)

Jesus, as a complete human, was empowered with a divine capacity. This was not an innate attribute of Jesus; it was bestowed upon him. And yet, in sharing divine functions normally attributed to God alone, those who witnessed Jesus could say, *huwa la huwa*, Him, not Him, he is God, he is not God.

Ibn 'Arabi wrote that the divine names seek their manifestation within creation (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2006, pp. 90–91). This is most clearly actualized in the complete human. Being made of divine breath and clay, the complete human connects the creation to the creator; the soil to the heavens. Adam, God's first vicegerent (*khalifa*/خليفة) on earth, was created from clay, yet fashioned "upon His form" to serve as

[7] Ibn 'Arabi used the phrase *huwa la huwa* not only regarding complete humans but for the cosmos as well. Each entity in the cosmos is identical to an aspect of God, yet different from God at the same time. The complete human, however, is the most accurate reflection of the divine. See Chittick (1994, pp. 24–25).

[8] Jesus is not singled out for the title of *al-insan al-kamil*. For Ibn 'Arabi, the prophets are examples of complete humans, with Muhammad taking priority. Regarding Ibn 'Arabi's view, Avcı writes, "while each created being is a locus of manifestation of the names of God, Muhammad is the most perfect locus of manifestation, as he holds the totality of God's names" (Avcı, 2021, p. 560).

[9] Al Imran (3):49 says of Jesus, "And [make him] a messenger to the Children of Israel, [who will say], 'Indeed I have come to you with a sign from your Lord in that I design for you from clay [that which is] like the form of a bird, then I breathe into it and it becomes a bird by permission of Allah.' And I cure the blind and the leper, and I give life to the dead—by permission of Allah." Saheeh International translation.

a perfect reflection of the creator. Yet once created, the human has the potential to set himself up as an independent arbiter, disobeying the call to reflect the One, and seeking to reflect himself. This distortion separates and distances the human from manifesting the ideal goal for humanity. If the human maintains an awareness of his servanthood and utter dependence upon the divine, he is brought near and accurately reflects God (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2006, p. 91).

This potential for the human to reflect himself and not God is revealed in the following Qur'anic passage. God asks Jesus, "O Jesus the son of Mary! Did you say to men, 'worship me and my mother as gods in derogation of God'?" He [Jesus] will say: "Glory to You! never could I say what I had no right (to say) … I told them only what You commanded me to say" (Al-Maedah (5):116–117). Jesus had the potential to reflect himself in place of God. Yet his response reveals that he speaks only as directed by God. In Jesus's denial of asking others to worship him, declaring "I told them only what You commanded me to say," Ibn 'Arabi writes, it was as if to say, "You are the speaker through my tongue, and You are my tongue" (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2015, pp. 110–111). In his emphasis on the unity of Jesus with God, Ibn 'Arabi applies a *hadith* to Jesus in which God makes the divine essence so similar to the tongue of his servant that it can be said, "You are my tongue" (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2015, pp. 110–111).

The complete human is the ontological prototype of humanity while simultaneously being a copy of the divine (Chittick, 1979, p. 138). God's true *khalifa*, the vicegerent, consists of, as Ibn 'Arabi puts it, "the Dusty-Substance impregnated with Light" (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2015, p. 101). He is a synthesis of all God's names and attributes, and embodies in his created being the goal of humanity (Ibn al-'Arabi, 2006, p. 83). The "Most Beautiful Names", wrote Ibn 'Arabi, seek their "perfect locus of theophany" (*tajalli*) in humanity (Ibn al-'Arabi, 1982, p. 43). The *insan al-kamil*, the complete human, acts as an "all-embracing isthmus" between the divine and creation (Ibn al-'Arabi, 1982, p. 43).

After this examination of the concept of the complete human being and his relationship to God, I turn to the work of a New Testament scholar, Kirk. In his book, *A man attested by God: The human Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels*, Kirk (2016) persuasively argues that Jesus, as he is portrayed in the Synoptic Gospels, is best understood as an idealized human figure, and not an incarnation of the divine or second member of the Trinity. This category, idealized human figure, will have points of overlap as well as departure from Ibn 'Arabi's complete human. I will now turn to a presentation of Kirk's argument, after which I will suggest some implications of these two hermeneutical categories.

Idealized Human Figure

In recent years, numerous biblical scholars have argued for an early high Christology based on the Synoptic Gospels.[10]By 'high Christology', theologians generally intend to convey an affirmation of the deity of Christ. This contrasts with 'low Christology', in which Jesus is seen as merely a human being. Bauckham (1999), who has been influential in the argument for an early high Christology, proclaims that the New Testament authors, who were monotheistic Jews, include Jesus in the divine identity, thereby making Jesus "intrinsic to the identity of the unique God" (Bauckham, 1999, pp. 26–27).[11] Kirk (2016) proposes a third way between these categories; a 'high, human Christology'. He argues that the Hebrew concept of an idealized human figure, which can be found in numerous Jewish texts, offers a sufficient category for explaining the accounts of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. The data that has led other scholars to suggest an early high Christology can be accounted for within this category.[12]

In Kirk's analysis, the identification of Jesus with God in the Synoptic Gospels is not sufficient to claim Jesus's own inherent divinity or preexistence. The insistence on the ontological divinity of Jesus based on his identification with God is due, at least somewhat, to inadequate categories. New Testament interpreters have tended to approach the text with the binary categories of 'human' or 'divine'. These two categories are understood to be separated by a firm barrier. Some New Testament scholars have argued that Jesus appears to be on the divine side of that barrier, and thus reveals Jesus's inclusion in the identity of God by the earliest communities of his followers.[13] Yet, as will be shown below, identification with God does not necessitate ontological divinity. Kirk offers the hermeneutic category of an "idealized human

[10] Bauckham (2008), Hays (2014), and Hurtado (2003, 2015), have been influential in arguing for an early high Christology that points to the ontological divinity of Christ. Kirk's work is in significant dialogue with these scholars.

[11] Bauckham writes, "They include Jesus in the unique divine sovereignty over all things, they include him in the unique divine creation of all things, they identify him by the divine name which names the unique divine identity, and they portray him as accorded the worship which, for Jewish monotheists, is recognition of the unique divine identity. In this way they develop a kind of christological monotheism which is fully continuous with early Jewish monotheism but distinctive in the way it sees Jesus Christ himself as intrinsic to the identity of the unique God" (Bauckham, 1999, pp. 26–27, quoted in Kärkkäinen, 2017, p. 30).

[12] Kirk does not suggest that Jesus is not God in the way confessed by Christians today or as outlined in the Nicene Creed: "Divine and preexistence Christology is attested to in other early Christian literature" (4). His argument, however, is that one need not appeal to a divine or preexistent Christ to sufficiently account for the testimony of the Synoptics.

[13] The Gospel of John is generally appealed to when asserting the preexistence and divinity of Christ. Kirk's study, however, is limited to the Synoptic Gospels. For a somewhat similar approach that includes the Gospel of John, see McGrath (2009). McGrath writes, "in his [John's] world view it was still possible to hold that the Word was 'neither uncreated nor created' or—in John's own terms—both 'God' and 'with God.' It was only after significant changes in world view had taken place, probably connected with the development of a clear doctrine of creation out of nothing, that it became urgent to sort out exactly where the dividing line between God and creation should be drawn" (p. 69).

being" in which God's expectations of and plan for humanity are most fully realized (Kirk, 2016, p. 23). Kirk (2016) demonstrates that the "biblical and Jewish intertexts supply us with tools to recognize a high, human Christology of a man at the turn of the ages who is initiating the restoration of the world's rule to God's appointed human agent(s)" (p. 11). I will offer a presentation of Kirk's view below. I will then explore implications of Ibn 'Arabi's complete human and Kirk's idealized human figure for Christian theology and interreligious engagement.

Idealized Humans in Jewish Texts

Kirk focuses his study on the Synoptic Gospels, with the backdrop of ancient as well as Second Temple Jewish texts. Kirk's (2016) conclusion, to state at the outset, is that the Synoptic Gospels:

> demonstrate humanity, in Jesus as representative, as the Human One, ruling the world on God's behalf as originally intended according to Genesis 1:26–28. They demonstrate this rule extending to spirits and bodies, to nature and society, to speaking for God and hearing God speak. The Gospels disclose a human that is other than the rest not because of ontological distinction but because the rest stand in need of the empowering spirit and fidelity to God that color the entirety of Jesus's ministry … (p. 40)

Reading the Synoptic Gospels with the paradigm developed by Kirk accounts for the Christological claims present without "demanding further inference that he [Jesus] is thought to be preexistent or an earthly apparition of someone who is, inherently, Israel's God" (Kirk, 2016, p. 570). Much can be said about humans without transgressing the boundaries of God's unique divinity (Kirk, 2016, p. 572). To explain Kirk's notion of an idealized human, I now turn to his examination of Jewish texts. While his study of these texts is wide ranging, for the scope of this paper I will offer a brief survey of some of his most significant textual observations.

Kirk's (2016, p. 45) category of an "idealized human figure" refers to human beings "who are depicted in textual or other artifacts as playing some unique role in representing God to the rest of the created realm, or in representing some aspect of the created realm before God." These figures can be depicted as ruling the earth as well as the heavens and the angels, physically bearing the divine image and likeness, sitting on God's own throne, and whose word is the very word of God itself.

The biblical depiction of humanity in general is that of beings invested with divine qualities. Psalm 8 depicts God's creation of humanity as a "little less than God" (*Elohim*) bestowing upon them majesty and glory (Kirk, 2016, p. 58). In the Genesis account of creation, and in a turn of phrase strikingly similar to Ibn 'Arabi, Goldingay (2003) notes that humans have bodies made from the dirt as well as the breath of YHWH, making them into "that strange combination of earthly and divine" (p. 111).[14]

[14] Recall Ibn 'Arabi's above description of humanity: "the Dusty-Substance impregnated with Light."

The human being is depicted as like God, but unlike God. Here we find resonance with Ibn ‘Arabi; *huwa la huwa*, God not God. Humans are situated in a metaphysical position in which they are lower than God but above the animate world (Goldingay, 2003, p. 111). Indeed, Garr (2003) sees the usage of the terms ‘image’ and ‘likeness’ in Genesis 1:26 as employed to reveal the divine presence and divine participation in the world via human beings. “The nouns suggest,” writes Garr (2003, p. 117), that “humanity will resemble, replicate, or mimic God …” On this point Garr comes to the same conclusion as Ibn ‘Arabi: humanity is a theophany.

While sin invariably distorts this divine image throughout the Scriptures, that image is not completely marred. It is the idealized human who most faithfully discloses, indeed actively ‘images’, the God whom he represents (Kirk, 2016, p. 51). In this account, observes Kirk (2016, p. 58), it is quite possible for “a Jewish writer who believes in the unique divinity of God to depict other beings, idealized human figures, as theophanies by ascribing to them a share in nothing less than the creative and sovereign powers of God” functioning as living representations of God. Describing humans in this way does not mean that God has become incarnate in such a figure, but that the idealized human possesses “an ascription, action, or attribute typically reserved for God alone, but which God has chosen to share” (Kirk, 2016, p. 58).

Idealized humans in the Hebrew scriptures have divine roles. In Exodus, Moses is assigned the role of God: “I have made thee a god to Pharaoh” (Ex 7:1 KJV).[15] In the depiction of the plague of blood, Moses is conflated with God in striking the Nile with his rod: “This is what the LORD says: By this you will know that I am the LORD. I’m now going to hit the water of the Nile River with this rod in my hand, and it will turn into blood” (Ex 7:17 CEB).[16] Moses strikes the water with the rod, after which the Nile is turned to blood. Exodus 7:25 then says, “Seven days went by after the LORD had struck the Nile River.” The actions of God converge with the actions of Moses in such a way that the same events are attributed to both of them (Kirk, 2016, p. 79). Philo, an Alexandrian Jew and contemporary of Paul, exposits the Exodus account of Moses in such a way as to declare that Moses “was named god and king of the whole nation” of Israel (Kirk, 2016, p. 83).[17]

Kirk (2016) notes that, in addition to Moses, the prophets Elijah and Elisha are tasked with playing the role of God on earth. Elijah reveals that he is a man attested by God in his ability to control the dew and the rain (1 Kings 17:1), raise the dead (1 Kings 17:21–23), and call down fire from heaven (1 Kings 18:36–38; 2 Kings 1:10–12). Throughout the narrative of Elijah, he is depicted as an idealized human figure whose words and actions are the words and actions of God on the earth. In

[15] Kirk (2016) notes that many modern translations soften the divine declaration that Moses will be God for Aaron or Pharaoh. The NIV reads, “I have made you like God to Pharaoh.”

[16] It is ambiguous, perhaps intentionally so, whose “hand” holds the rod. Is it Moses or Aaron, or is it God?

[17] Meeks (1968) has compiled examples from rabbinic and Samaritan sources that demonstrate that the exalted depiction of Moses as sharing in divinity is not an isolated interpretation to Philo.

his control over nature, Elijah is empowered with capabilities that are typically the purview of God alone.

Elisha, Elijah's successor, continues in the same spirit as Elijah; "Let me have twice your spirit," Elisha says before Elijah is taken up to heaven (2 Kings 2:10 CEB). A group of prophets then see Elisha part the Jordan River. "Elijah's spirit has settled on Elisha!" they proclaim, and they bowed down before him (2 Kings 2:15). The Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew scriptures, says that these prophets προσεκύνησαν Elisha. This same word is used to describe the actions of the Magi who "worship" (προσεκ΄υνησαν) the infant Jesus (Mt 2:11 KJV, ESV). I will return to this notion of "worship" shortly.

The Israelite kings, namely David and Solomon, are placed in an idealized human category as well. Here one finds that the kingdom is David's (2 Sam 7:16) as well as God's (1 Chr 17:14). Psalm 2 declares that the king, upon his enthronement, is begotten of God (Ps 2:7), identifying him as the Son of God. The Davidic king is the Son of God on earth whose kingship will last forever (Kirk, 2016, p. 97). Psalm 45 goes so far as to address the king as God (ὁ θεός, verse 6). Biblical scholar Collins observes, "The king is still subject to the Most High, but he is an *elohim*, not just a man" (Collins & Collins, 2008, p. 15). This status is a result of the office held by the king, and not innate to the king himself. It is functional, not ontological. Psalm 72 also reveals the king as an idealized human figure who receives worship (προσκυνήσουσιν αὐτῷ, LXX 72:9, 11) and whose name shall endure forever; as long as the sun (Ps 72:17). God grants the king authority over the created world; the hand of the Davidic king will be set upon the sea (Ps 89:25). He will be made the firstborn of God and the most exalted of the kings of the earth (Ps 89:27). The king, as God's son, shares in God's rule over the sea (compare verse 9 with verse 25).

To be the Son of God, then, is to hold a royal title. Davidic kings are said to be "begotten" at their enthronement (Ps 2), thus identifying them as sons of God. How one responds to the Davidic king is analogous to one's response to God: "standing against God and God's anointed one are one and the same" (Kirk, 2016, p. 99). Just prior to Solomon becoming king, David commands the assembly to "Bless the LORD your God." In a term frequently rendered "worship," the assembly "bows before" the Lord *and* the king (προσεκύνησαν τῷ κυρίῳ καὶ τῷ βασιλεῖ). Just as the prophets προσεκύνησαν before Elisha, the assembly προσεκύνησαν before God and the king. Solomon, as king, is then seated on "the throne of the LORD" (1 Chron 29:20–23). The throne of Israel's king is the throne of YHWH. Barker (1999), who is cited by Kirk, summarizes what is occurring in this pericope:

> The people worship the LORD and the king. Any possible ambiguity is removed a few lines later when we are told: "Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king." In other words, the Chronicler says that Solomon was worshipped when the assembly worshipped the LORD and that the king sat on the throne of the LORD. The form of the words is important: "They bowed down to the LORD and to the king." There is one verb but two direct objects, for the LORD and then the human king … The king was the visible presence of the LORD in the temple ritual and Solomon's enthronement was his apotheosis. (pp. 94–95)

The king, who is the visible manifestation of YHWH, has received functional divinity (Kirk, 2016). As king, he is included in the worship of the one God. As

king, he sits on God's throne. This king, depicted as an idealized human figure, is also the Son of God. These notions challenge the thesis that a being, namely Jesus, is ontologically divine because he is included in that which has been traditionally thought to be reserved for God alone. Kirk (2016) observes:

> part of the persuasive power of Bauckham's thesis lies in the fact that Jesus is, in fact, someone depicted as sharing in the divine identity. However, what has been too much overlooked is that bearing of divine identity on the earth is a role frequently assigned to idealized human agents. (p. 120)

Indeed, Collins (2007a, p. 63) declares that, "The worship of the God of Israel alone can, in the Second Temple period, be combined with obeisance to God's primary agent, the Messiah." It is to Kirk's application of the idealized human figure category to Jesus as depicted in the Synoptic Gospels that I now turn.

Jesus as Idealized Human Figure in the Synoptics

Thus far, this study has lingered on the exalted role God has given humanity. The reason for this is to counter the popular notion of low Christology that Jesus was 'merely' human. The Hebrew Bible envisions humanity as representatives of God on earth, manifesting the good rule of the Creator within creation. In von Rad's (1972, p. 60) influential commentary on Genesis, he writes, "Just as powerful earthly kings, to indicate their claim to dominion, erect an image of themselves in the provinces of their empire where they do not personally appear, so man is placed upon earth in God's image as God's sovereign emblem." Everything about humanity points to God. Hebrew Bible scholar, Middleton (2005) agrees. The phrase "image of God," as applied to humans in the Hebrew Bible, "designates the royal office or calling of human beings as God's representatives and agents in the world, granted authorized power to share in God's rule …" (Middleton, 2005, p. 27). Humanity, observes Middleton, has been given godlike status in the world. It is from this exalted understanding of humanity as image bearers of God that Kirk (2016) asserts a high human Christology for Jesus.

In their frequently used textbook, *An introduction to Christian theology*, Plantinga et al. (2010, p. 114) write, "There are three major NT lines of argument for Christ's deity: (1) the titles he is given; (2) the divine functions he assumes; and (3) the worship he receives." As has been shown above, idealized human figures can hold divine titles, assume divine functions, and receive 'worship'. At this point it is worth noting that to problematize traditional arguments for Christ's deity is not to propose a rejection of his divinity. However, there is significant evidence to suggest that within the Jewish texts, the Creator/creation divide was not as clear as is often assumed. I will now turn to a brief survey of Kirk's (2016) analysis of Jesus in the Synoptic Gospels. Following this section, I will suggest implications for a comparison between Kirk's idealized human figure and Ibn 'Arabi's complete human.

Mark places the royal title "Son of God" on Jesus at the beginning (1:11), middle (9:7), and end of his Gospel account (15:39). As we have seen above in the coronation of Israel's kings, this title does not signify divinity as such, but can fit within the biblical understanding of exalted humanity. Kirk (2016) observes:

> [F]rom a Jewish perspective it [the title Son of God] draws on the reservoir of biblical precedent in which first Adam and then David were sons of God set apart for the purpose of ruling the world on God's behalf. The various pericopes that employ son of God language to speak of Jesus, and the overall Christologies of the Gospels themselves as they narrate the identity of Jesus using this category, are readily interpreted within the rich biblical framework of Israel's royal theology and its various heirs in post-biblical Judaism. (p. 259)

The title 'Son of Man' is more frequently used of Jesus in the Synoptics than 'Son of God'. This appellation largely draws from the apocalyptic visions of Daniel and 1 Enoch.[18] In these texts the phrase 'Son of Man' is applied to an apocalyptic figure. This human[19] will be seated by God on the "throne of glory" (1 Enoch 61:8, 62:5), rule over all things (Daniel 7:14, 1 Enoch 62:6), execute eschatological judgement, (1 Enoch 61:8–9) and receive worship. Of the Son of Man, it is said, "All who dwell on the earth will fall down and worship before him, and they will glorify and bless and sing hymns to the name of the Lord of Spirits" (1 Enoch 48:5. See also 1 Enoch 62:9).

In Mark (2:1–12), Jesus applies the Son of Man title to himself in his declaration that he has authority to forgive sins. Upon hearing this, the scribes object, "Only the one God can forgive sins" they claim (Mark 2:7). This objection is frequently appealed to as evidence that Jesus is making a statement about his divine identity. Hays (2014, p. 21) writes that "the prerogative to forgive sins is God's alone." Jesus's response, however, is telling: "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (Mark 2:10). In Matthew's rendition of this story, he adds, "When the crowds saw it, they were filled with awe, and they glorified God, who had *given such authority to human beings*" (Mt 9:8). Situated between the scribes who accuse Jesus of blasphemy, and the crowds who rejoice that this authority was given to humans, lies the revelation that Jesus is the messianic Son of Man who represents God on earth. Collins (2007b, p. 189) comments, "the force of this saying, in the context of the healing of the paralytic and in the context of the collection as a whole, was that Jesus has power to forgive sins because he is the chief agent of God, the messiah prefigured in Daniel 7." This occurrence need not be a revealing of Jesus's divine identity, but a declaration that God has authorized the divine agent to hold divine functions. Just as the crowds did in Matthew, one need not appeal to ontological divinity to satisfactorily interpret this pericope and Jesus's use of the title "Son of Man."

Hays (2014) notes that the Matthean disciples worship Jesus (προσκύνησαν αὐτῷ) after witnessing him walk on water. In doing so, Hays (2014, p. 44) claims

[18] The Enochic literature is believed to have been written over several centuries, from the third century BC to the mid-first century AD (Boyarin, 2012, p. 69).

[19] The designation, 'son of man' is clearly synonymous with 'human being' throughout the book of Ezekiel. While commonly translated 'son of man' the CEB translation renders the phrase, ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου, as 'the Human One'.

the disciples acknowledge and declare Jesus' "identity with the one God of Israel, present in the midst of his people." Yet is this necessarily evidence for the inclusion of Jesus within the identity of God? This phrase, προσκύνησαν αὐτῷ, is also used within the biblical texts to show reverence and subservience to one's master. In Matthew, Jesus uses the same phrase in his parable of the unforgiving servant: the servant, who did not have enough to pay his debts came to the king, προσεκύνει αὐτῷ (worshipped him), and begged for forgiveness (Mt 18:26). Clearly this phrase has a broader meaning than worship as reserved for God alone. Additionally, as mentioned above, the king of Israel as well as the Son of Man receive worship. This worship does not find its terminus in the material being present before the worshipper. In these instances, the worship offered is to God through the king; the One whom the human agent represents.

This brief look at the Synoptic Jesus through the lens of an idealized human has not allowed us to examine all the texts relevant to this argument. Yet for the scope of this paper, the above will suffice. In the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus fulfills the role of humanity, evidenced by an "Adam Christology in which Israel's king becomes the idealized humanity that is the image and likeness of God" (Kirk, 2016, p. 191).

Ibn 'Arabi's concept of the complete human is not entirely synonymous to the Jewish category of the idealized human. Ibn 'Arabi places a heavier emphasis on the revelation of God though the complete human. His concept carries a metaphysical weight. Greatly influenced by Neoplatonic thought, Ibn 'Arabi's *insan al-kamil* functions as an isthmus, connecting the creation with the Creator. It is in God's desire to be known that the complete human functions; he most accurately makes God known (Little, 1987, p. 48).[20] Kirk's idealized human figure, while revealing God, leans toward the functional role of humanity as rulers of creation. Yet for both these concepts, certain figures, including Jesus, can be portrayed as having God-like qualities, and be identified with God without infusing them with an ontological divinity. Ibn 'Arabi is thus able to maintain a strict monotheism even though humanity, partially, and complete humans, fully, manifest God. Jesus, as a complete human, fully reveals God and is included in the divine function of creating life from clay and raising the dead. As Chittick (1994, p. 29) notes, "None other than perfect human beings have reached the goal for which people were created: to manifest the form of God Himself." I will now suggest implications based on the notions of the complete human and the idealized human being. While there are numerous implications that could be discussed, I have limited the below to a few I find particularly relevant for Muslim–Christian dialogue.

[20] It is of note that for Ibn 'Arabi, the *insan al-kamil* not only makes God known to creation, but also to God himself, a claim too heretical for many Muslims (Little, 1987, p. 54).

Implications

The concepts of the complete human and the idealized human figure have significant ramifications for both faith traditions. As a Christian adopting a comparative theological approach, I will stress inferences for my own faith community. While the points I offer below have a Christian audience in mind, I will suggest possible implications for Muslims in a cursory manner as well.

A Challenge to the Ossification of Nicene Conclusions

The above exploration of the complete human and idealized human figures has the potential to challenge declarations made by the council of Nicaea in 325 CE. As a professing Christian, I realize the perilous nature of this suggestion. Majid (2007, p. x) astutely observes, "It is always a bit of a gamble to examine well-established traditions critically, for to question their foundations is akin, in some ways, to undoing the structures of our identities and communities." In what follows, my aim is not to undo structures of Christian belief. It is to suggest that the walls of those structures—the walls that have been erected between Christians and Muslims—are more permeable than presumed. Additionally, in approaching the Nicene Creed, my primary concern lies not with the particular conclusions drawn, but with the curse pronounced on those who offered an alternative understanding.[21] The below anathema was included in the authorized form of the creed until the Council of Chalcedon in 451 CE (Schaff, 1877):

> But those who say: "There was a time when he was not;" and "He was not before he was made;" and "He was made out of nothing," or "He is of another substance" or "essence," or "The Son of God is created," or "changeable," or "alterable"—they are condemned by the holy catholic and apostolic Church. (p. 29)

While this curse, composed to exclude those who held an Arian interpretation of Christ (Davis, 1990, pp. 60–63), was later removed from the creed, the social threat of Christian condemnation for those offering interpretations of the biblical texts that do not align with the Nicene Creed remains to this day. For Protestant Christians in particular, it is helpful to be reminded that the traditions and creeds of the Christian church are always subordinate to the Bible. As Schaff (1877, p. 7) observed, "The value of creeds depends upon the measure of their agreement with the Scriptures. In the best case a human creed is only an approximate and relatively correct exposition of revealed truth, and may be improved by the progressive knowledge of the Church …"

[21] Of Jesus Christ, the Nicene Creed asserts that he is, "the Son of God, begotten of the Father [the only begotten; that is, of the essence of the Father, God of God], Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made [both in heaven and on earth]; who for us men, and for our salvation, came down and was incarnate and was made man; he suffered, and the third day he rose again, ascended into heaven; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead" (Schaff, 1877, p. 29).

While the theological writings of a Christian outsider like Ibn ‘Arabi may continue to be seen as just that, outside the Christian purview, the framework proposed by Kirk arises from within the priestly, prophetic and apostolic writings of the Bible itself.

Kirk’s (2016) attention to Jewish texts leads to another implication for his high human Christology. It is highly probable that the earliest followers of Jesus did not hold to the same boundaries most post-Nicene Christians do. Admittedly, this brief study has only touched on the Jesus of the Synoptic Gospels, and not the Johannine Jesus. Collins (2007a, p. 66) writes, “The gospel according to John more consistently and clearly attributes pre-existence to Jesus and perhaps even an eternal character. But it was only in the later Christological controversies that ‘binitarianism’ and eventually ‘Trinitarianism’ emerged in the teaching of Christian leaders.” What does this tell us about our creedal affirmations, namely the ecumenical creeds of Nicaea and Chalcedon? I suggest that these creeds can be posited as *a* way of understanding and following Jesus; one way out of many, that became solidified as *the* way. The earliest Christianities[22] as well as the New Testament posit a variety of responses to who Jesus was and how he was followed.

What later came to be confessed as orthodox Christian belief does not seem to have existed in the early years of the church. Indeed, early Christianity was no monolithic structure; an orthodox system which had to fend off later heresies. It was a “kaleidoscope of varied traditions, beliefs, and hopes” centered on Jesus Christ (Frend, 1989, p. 36). Williams (1989, p. ix) rightly observes, “Orthodoxy is *constructed*, in the processes of both theological and political conflict; which means that understanding it fully should involve understanding these conflicts.” While an in-depth account of the construction of orthodoxy, as well as the theological and political conflicts from which it arose, is beyond the scope of this chapter, Davis (1990, p. 50) offers a succinct summary of pre-Nicene beliefs about Jesus, which provides a glimpse at the variety of early Christological interpretations.

Davis notes that early Jewish followers of Jesus tended to keep their understanding of Christ within certain categories of thought found in the Hebrew Bible, insisting that he was a teacher, prophet, or angel. For many Gentile Christians, much of the Hebrew Bible was nonsense. Some employed Gnostic style symbolic speculation which separated the supreme God from the creator deity and the Christ from Jesus. Adoptionists affirmed one God, but conceived of Jesus as only a human being, adopted by God as Son. Monarchians argued that Father, Son and Spirit were one identical being. There were many western church fathers who recognized a distinction between the three, but held to subordinationist positions. Origen and many in the East affirmed a form of Platonism and conceived of the three as one in harmony of intellect and will, yet each subordinate to the other.

What preoccupied many of these Christological constructions, and the controversies which arose out of the pre-Nicene period, was the vexing issue of how Christians could affirm the divinity of Christ and yet hold to a monotheistic position. Vermès observes that pre-Nicene church fathers were not willing to place the Father and Son

[22] I have intentionally pluralized Christianity here to stress the multiplicity of ways pre-Nicene Christians understood Christ.

on equal footing in the divine hierarchy. Vermès cites Eusebius (c. 260–339 CE), a contemporary of the first council of Nicaea, who grants the titles 'Lord' and 'God' to the Son as long as it was recognized that the Son was ranked below the Father. For Eusebius, and other leading Christians, Jesus was a minister and servant of the Father (Vermès, 2013, pp. 224–225). Vermès (2013, p. 225) writes, "Eusebius, like the whole pre-Nicene church, held a subordinationist view." Hanson (1989, p. 153) agrees: "Indeed, until Athanasius began writing, every single theologian, East and West, had postulated some form of Subordinationism."

Echoing the theological visions of John and Paul,[23] many in the pre-Nicene church held to the notion that the Son was "not true God," but "God only in name" (Vermès, 2013, pp. 226–228). Might we hear, in this assertion, an earlier version of Ibn 'Arabi's phrase, *huwa la huwa*; God, not God? Vermès's assessment of pre-Nicene belief is similar to that of Kirk and Collins. The titles 'Lord,' 'God,' and 'Son of God' suggest a functional divinity, but do not necessitate applying ontological divinity to Jesus.

What might it mean to be ontologically God, in contrast to, as Vermès suggests above, "God only in name"? In the centuries after Christ many non-Jewish Greek speaking Christians wrestled with this question in Greek philosophical terms. In doing so, they introduced the extra-biblical language of substance (οὐσίας) in an attempt to clarify how Jesus, or more precisely, the Son, was ontologically related to God, the Father. For many Christians, this was seen as a necessary step. Davis (1990, p. 71) applauds the Nicene effort to bring in non-biblical language to enunciate a "judgment about reality as revealed in the Scriptures." While I agree that to seek to understand the nature of God and Christ and the relationship between the two is elemental to Christian faith, to ossify the nature of the Son into fourth-century Greek philosophical categories is unnecessary.

Boyarin (2012) argues that the 'orthodox' interpretation of Christianity was effectively created by the council of Nicaea in 325 CE. "By defining the Son as entirely on an equal footing with the Father," the council drove a powerful wedge between traditional Jewish beliefs and practices and the "newly invented orthodox Christianity" (Boyarin, 2012, p. 27). In deeming the specific fourth-century conclusions agreed upon in Nicaea as orthodox, pre-Nicene options for ways of believing and being Christian were forbidden. Of particular note is early Jewish Christianity.

It should go without saying that the earliest followers of Jesus were Jews. They did not join a new religion called Christianity, or cease being Jews once they confessed Jesus as Messiah. Indeed, he was the fulfillment of their Jewish messianic hope. Dunn (1990, p. 239) writes, "it is evident that the earliest community in no sense felt themselves to be a new religion, distinct from Judaism. There was no sense of a boundary line drawn between themselves and their fellow Jews." One such group of early followers of Jesus is known as the Ebionites. These "Jewish Christians"—arguably an awkward title, for they saw themselves as true Jews—confessed Jesus as Messiah and continued to follow the Mosaic Law. They did not, it seems, believe that Jesus was "very God of very God" and "of one substance with the Father," beliefs which the council of Nicaea deemed essential to true Christian faith (Schaff, 1877,

[23] See, for example John 14:28 and 1 Cor 15:24–28.

p. 29). The fourth-century Cyprian bishop Epiphanius, writing against the Ebionites, said of them:

> Christ they call the prophet of truth and "Christ, the Son of God" on account of his progress (in virtue) and the exaltation which descended upon him from above … They want him to be only a prophet and man and Son of God and Christ and mere man, as we said before, who attained by a virtuous life the right to be called Son of God. (Dunn, 1990, p. 242)

Dunn (1990, p. 242) notes that, if Epiphanius's account is accurate, what later was deemed as heretical Jewish Christian belief "would appear to be not so very different from the faith of the first Jewish believers." In agreement, Chadwick (1993, p. 23) writes that, from Irenaeus onwards, Jewish Christians were treated as a "deviationist sect", rather than exhibiting a form of following Jesus "with the best claims to continuity with the practice of the primitive church at Jerusalem."

The Ebionite Christology seems to have firm roots in the earliest attempts to express faith in Jesus. They saw this Jesus as a man attested by God (Acts 2:22), who matured in wisdom and grew in favor with God and humanity (Luke 2:52). God made him both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:36), anointing him with the Holy Spirit and empowering him to do good and heal because God was with him (Acts 10:38). While not a fully developed articulation of an idealized human figure, the Jesus of Ebionite faith was faithful to the scriptures of their time, as well as the Jewish tradition within which they saw themselves.[24]

The Jewish concept of idealized humans calls Christians to go back to their texts to re-examine them without forcing Nicene conclusions. Nicene Christology was not the solitary flower that blossomed from the seed of the Christ event. This event was like seed sown on various soils. It produced a variety of communities of Jesus followers who differed in their notions of who Jesus was.[25] The conclusions agreed upon in Nicaea form one such flower. It blossomed within the new reality these third and fourth centuries Christ followers found themselves in. As seen above, Ebionite believers in Jesus yielded an alternative view. The Nicene interpretations are *a way* to make sense of the apostolic writings. They are not the *only way* to make sense of them. A variety of interpretations of Jesus remain available. We would do well to withhold our condemnation from those offering alternatives.

Without the friction caused by the Islamic rejection of the Christian creeds, we Christians may not seek to critically engage our own tradition. This is one of the gifts of the discipline of comparative theology. It opens our eyes to untapped perspectives within our own tradition. Encounters with the theology of the religious other need not be seen as a potential loss of meaning but rather as a "catalyst to discover new and previously unconsidered meanings" (Moyaert, 2014, p. 161). Comparative theologian Fredericks observes, the "real goal of the exercise [of comparative theology] is to gain a better understanding of the meaning of Christianity." A better understanding of self comes through a better understanding of others (Knitter, 2002, p. 205).

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[24] Most scholars date Mark to the 60s CE or early 70s CE, Matthew and Luke to the 70s CE or 80s CE, and John to the 90s CE. See Gorman (2005, pp. 73–74).

[25] For a sustained argument presenting the heterodox nature of early Christianities, see Bauer (1971).

As is evident in the history of Muslim and Christian engagement, rigid adherence to Nicene categories functions as interpretive barriers that distance Muslims and Christians from one another. Islamic scholar Siddiqui (2005a) writes:

> It would be fair to say that this understanding of Christianity as a religion has ruled out, largely, attempts to explore the uniqueness of Jesus' character. He becomes the central figure in any plural or Trinitarian equation, and both he and the religion are perceived through that prism. (p. 128)

Yet the Trinitarian equation need not be the crux of Muslim–Christian engagement. This examination of Ibn 'Arabi's complete human, and the Hebrew idealized human being, reveals that the distance between the Abrahamic faiths of Islam and Christianity is potentially less cavernous than is commonly assumed. These hermeneutical categories challenge us to explore our assumptions about humanity and Jesus. These seldom considered responses to who Jesus was and is, have the potential to move beyond the divide between Muslims and Christians.

The comparative theological approach taken here may offer some benefit to Muslims who are curious about Jesus but have been put off by Christian creedal assertions. If Protestant Christians remain committed to the notion of *sola scriptura*, might Muslims bypass Christian creeds and approach the witness of the apostolic writers directly? Is Jesus only to be rightly understood through the lens of Nicaea? It could be the case that Christian insistence upon Nicene categories reveal 'pedagogical imperialism' in which any form of discipleship to Jesus is measured not by the biblical witness but by the declarations of that fourth century council. Those who do not measure up doctrinally are assigned the role of perpetual students until they come to the precise conclusions as those who hold the power within the Christian tradition.[26]

Ethical Implications

Sacks observed, "It is when our horizons extend beyond our own faith communities that our separate journeys converge and we become joint builders of a more gracious world" (Sacks, 2005, Kindle Location 2645). Though frequently overlooked, both Christians and Muslims have deep traditions that envision humanity as representing God on earth. On this point, their conceptual horizons overlap. This has significant ethical implications for both faiths. To say that humanity is a theophany is to declare that Muslims are to act in such a way as to reveal the merciful and compassionate Creator. For the Christian to actively 'image' a loving and just God demands an engagement in the world consonant with the character of God. For biblical scholar Dan McCartney, this is what is meant by the kingdom of God. The reign of God comes, not in a reinstatement of "God's sovereign exercise of power to accomplish his purposes (which was always true). The arrival of the reign of God is the reinstatement

[26] For more on the notion of 'pedagogical imperialism' see Jennings (2010, pp. 112–116).

of the originally intended divine order for earth, with man properly situated as God's vicegerent" (McCartney, 1994, p. 2). It is in this way that God reigns, through human vicegerency.

For the Christian, Jesus embodied that reign. This is why a high human Christology resonates with the broader biblical story. An unflinching appeal to the ontological divinity of Jesus, however, can prevent Christians from following his way. Kirk's vision of the humanity of Jesus, and the nascent potential in the humanity of us all, offers a robust concept of what it means to be human. In view of Ibn 'Arabi, the goal of humanity is to manifest the beautiful names of God. This notion reaches every sphere of life; religious and political, in the family home and at work. Manifesting the divine does not make one ontologically divine. It is a restoration to true humanness (Kirk, 2016, p. 199).

At the end of the twentieth century, New Testament scholar Walter Wink said that a spiritual renaissance was beginning in the United States. He noted that this renewal is born out of a struggle to overcome domination without creating new forms of domination. Wink (1999, p. 161) wrote, "To the degree that this renaissance is Christian at all, it will be the human figure of Jesus that galvanizes hearts to belief and action, and not the Christ of the creeds." Likewise, Muslim author Akyol (2017, p. 214) calls for his fellow Muslims to look to Jesus as "a source of inspiration for the much-sought transformation in Islam." After addressing concerning trends he sees within some Islamic societies, Akyol (2017, p. 216) declares, "With Christians, we agree that Jesus was born of a virgin, that he was the Messiah, and that he is the Word of God. Surely, we do not worship Jesus, like Christians do. Yet still, we can follow him. In fact, given our grim malaise and his shining wisdom, we need to follow him." This is the Jesus that both Ibn 'Arabi and Kirk point to. Not one who should be worshipped because he is divine, but one who should be followed because he manifests who God is, and who humans are called to become.

Conclusion

The categories of complete human and idealized human figure provide a response to Hays' question: How are we to understand this Jesus who "is mysteriously the embodiment of God's presence" and who seems to be portrayed as "both the God of Israel and a human being not simply identical with the God of Israel" (Hays, 2014, p. 27). For Ibn 'Arabi, the answer is that Jesus perfectly reflects God. In this, Jesus is given divine functions. He is God/not God. As Dunn puts it, Jesus is an icon, not an idol. Dunn (2010) writes, "An idol is a depiction on which the eye fixes, a solid wall at which the worship stops. An icon on the other hand is a window through which the eye passes, through which the beyond can be seen, through which divine reality can be witnessed" (p. 147). Like Ibn 'Arabi's mirror in which the most faithful reflection obscures the otherness of the mirror, for Dunn to say Jesus is an icon is to say that it is through him in which we see God. Likewise, Kirk (2016, p. 194) notes that, "the

glory with which Jesus will be endowed is not his own native glory but instead the reflected glory of his father."

The way we talk about God within our communities, and with those outside our tradition, matter. Theological language, writes Siddiqui (2005b, p. 1143), "is a living and passionate reality; it travels thousands of miles and echoes within hearts and minds and in so doing affects people's personal, social, and political realities at all levels, local, national, and international." The concepts explored in this paper have the potential to not only enrich dialogue between Muslims and Christians, but open pathways for mutual transformation.

Conversation within the family of the living Abrahamic traditions is vital to know the God revealed therein. Comparative theological experiments, such as the one taken here, offer a way for this conversation to take place without dismissing a particular faith as a corrupt version of another. As Barnes (2012) has compellingly written:

> While learning more about 'them' we also become more responsibly 'us'—not because such encounters fill us with some consoling sense of spiritual togetherness but because, more profoundly, they act as persistent invitations once again to 'come and see' and to engage with Jesus's question: "who do you say that I am?" (265)

If Muslims, Jews, and Christians are all responding to, and attempting to know, the same Creator, there are likely insights from within each of these traditions that can enhance Christian theology (Schwartz & Cobb, 2019, pp. 41–42). This does not mean that we shave off our differences so that we fit together more snugly. We can rejoice in our differences, while also finding unexplored commonality between us. As we engage with one another and then look afresh at our own tradition, we may just find that the boundaries we have constructed between us are more porous than we once thought.

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Jon Killpack (MA Theology) is an American Christian who has lived internationally among Muslims for over fifteen years. After the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, Jon and his wife moved to Aceh, Indonesia, as part of the international relief effort. He has since been involved in interfaith research as well as social businesses in the Middle East that facilitate interaction across religious and cultural barriers.

Chapter 5
The 'Son of God' in the Gospel of John and Its Relevance for Muslim–Christian Dialogue

Ungaran Rashid and Mark Harlan

Abstract The term 'son of God' has been a source of confusion and controversy in the history of Christian–Muslim encounter. Christian tradition regards the gospel according to John as the account which most clearly portrays the deity of Christ and points to his being the 'son of God' as proof of his divinity and equality with God. This chapter presents a Muslim scholar's challenge to this understanding. After examining the term in the Hebrew scriptures, he argues that the term 'son of God' in John's gospel refers to an anointed king (messiah) who, as heir of the Davidic kingdom, has authority to act as God's surrogate on the earth. The equality of the son does not refer to a divine nature but his being God's unique agent possessing full authority from God. It is not a claim to be on par with God or an incarnation of God. A Christian scholar's response, after explaining the broad scope of usage of 'God' and 'son of God' in the Jewish scriptures, agrees with the exegetical emphasis on divinity as referring to Jesus' unique authority as the Christ. Yet there are other nuances of meaning, such as his revelatory relationship to God. He then traces developments from John's usage to those in later Christian theology. Questions over the inner nature of God in Christian Trinitarian theology and Muslim *kalam* debates are a related, but different topic, yet one in which there is much common ground. The final section offers implications for Muslim–Christian dialogue that accord with Cornille's five preconditions.

Keywords Son of God · Jesus Christ · Messiah · Jewish · Christian · Muslim · Theology · Christology · Incarnation

U. Rashid
International Islamic University Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia
e-mail: ungaranrashid@iium.edu.my

M. Harlan (✉)
Dallas International University, Dallas, TX, USA
e-mail: Mark_Harlan@diu.edu

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Interfaith Dialogue: Introduction, Methodology and Intended Contribution

Interfaith dialog has become a common program for promoting better communal relationships and peaceful coexistence, yet Cornille (2013) asserts these aims have frequently not been achieved:

> As the history of religions amply bear out, the encounter between members of different religions leads to tension and violence more often than to peaceful coexistence and collaboration, and the existence of other religious traditions is often regarded as a source of religious disturbance of at best indifference rather than as an occasion for mutual enrichment. (p. 2)

Over the past couple of decades, two interfaith practices aimed at reducing tensions have emerged: Comparative Theology and Scriptural Reasoning. A brief look at them will help situate this chapter's dialogue in the current interfaith context.

Avcı (2018) describes Comparative Theology (CT) as "a comparative enterprise in search of truth and meaning that is based on faith seeking intellectual understanding and/or existential/spiritual experience" (p. 2). Clooney (2010), one of the pioneers of CT, elaborates: "The comparative theologian must do more than listen to others explain their faith; she must be willing to study their traditions deeply alongside her own, taking both to heart. In the process, she will begin to theologize as it were from both sides of the table, reflecting on old and new truths in an interior dialogue" (p. 13).

CT is a practical response to the pressures created by the increase in religious diversity in the twenty-first century which some may prefer to ignore, viewing the study of other religions as a diversion from deepening the knowledge of their own. However, Clooney (2010) emphasizes the benefit of interreligious dialog on areas of theological difference—it not only enables us to better understand the other religious community, but it also provides us with insights into the understanding and practice of our own faith tradition, stating: "Comparative theology is not primarily about which religion is the true one, but about learning across religious borders in a way that discloses the truth of my faith, in the light of their faith" (p. 16).

Scriptural Reasoning (SR), a second contemporary interfaith practice, is described as "an open-ended practice of reading- and reasoning-in-dialogue among scholars of the three Abrahamic traditions. There are no set doctrines or rules of SR, since the rules are embedded in the texts of scripture and their relation to those who study and reason together" (*Journal of Scriptural Reasoning Forum*, 2005a). SR, according to Peter Ochs who coined the term, seeks to facilitate an alternative "academic scriptural theology that avoids the intellectual reductionism of strictly plain-sense studies of Scripture as well as the religious reductionism of orthodox theologies that eschew the plain sense sciences altogether" (*Journal of Scriptural Reasoning Forum*, 2005b). Avcı (2018) illustrates with the "house-tent" metaphor used by SR to describe itself:

> In this case, home signifies each individual's own religious tradition, i.e., Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. Each individual practitioner primarily belongs to her own house, and her relation with the external world originates from there. An SR session is considered to be a "tent" in which the individual is a guest and encounters the "other" tradition. When the

> individual travels out of her house and stays in another's tent for a while, she encounters novel experiences. Finally, on the way back home, she would be filled with new questions, inspiration, and confusion. Consequently, a person who has spent sometime in the tent of the "other" would be existentially/spiritually and/or intellectually challenged and transformed into a different person. (p. 5)

Avcı (2018, p. 3) further observes, "SR does not try to build up an agreement or to reach a common ground among its practitioners in respect to the texts they study. It neither looks forward to reaching a conclusion, nor tries to find easy satisfaction for its members. Rather, SR seeks to gain a deeper understanding of the scriptures in the presence of others." While CT and SR both involve representatives of different faith communities reading texts or traditions together, "the main distinction between the two practices is that SR is extroverted, explicitly conversational, and focuses mainly on scripture, in contrast to CT's inclination toward individual, introverted reading, focusing on secondary theological writings" (Avcı, 2018, p. 1).

The present study values the character and contributions of both CT and SR—and like them involves members of different religious communities reading traditions and texts together. Yet the dialog in this chapter diverges from both in some respects. Whereas an SR study group would typically read religious texts from both the Qur'an and the Bible, this dialog focuses on only one, the Gospel of John. Unlike the neutrality of SR, it seeks to establish common ground and reach definite conclusions on some important points. In addition, unlike CT as envisioned by Clooney, the Muslim scholar enters the scriptural world of Christians, not to acquire a richer understanding of his Islamic faith, but to reveal truth in the biblical scriptures that he is convinced that most Christians are missing or misreading. His study of the theme of the 'son of God' demonstrates that we can gain fresh insights from outsiders who appropriately examine our own scriptures. Outsiders are able to read another's scripture without the theological filtering and shaping of the other religious tradition; they may observe things that have been overlooked or minimized.

Outsiders can approach or interpret another religious tradition's scriptures in ways that are considered invalid or cause offense (avoiding tension is a prime motivation behind CT and SR). Therefore, in *Sacred Misinterpretation*, Accad (2019) calls for theological engagement that employs hermeneutical approaches that are considered legitimate by the other faith community. For instance, when engaging Muslims, Christians might search the Islamic exegetical tradition for Muslim scholars who utilized the biblical scriptures as a valid source of information, rather than arguing for scriptural integrity using Bible verses and Christian sources.

An excellent example of this hermeneutical approach is Cumming's (2001) analysis of the widespread Muslim denial of the death of Christ. Rather than approaching the issue using biblical statements and Christian apologetics, Cumming examined authoritative Muslim commentators of the Qur'an. He demonstrated that though it has been a minority view, there have always been exegetes in the Muslim world who allowed that Jesus might have died and risen. Cumming's (2011) approach led to Al-Azhar University, the prestigious center of Sunni Islamic orthodoxy, to invite him to present a lecture on his study. Cumming (2020) recently employed a similar method on a much larger scale in his analysis of the Trinity according to the Qur'ān

and Muslim interpretation. Running on the same track as Accad, his study follows a hermeneutical approach that Muslims can view as valid. He engages in careful exegesis of the few Qur'anic verses that appear to many Muslims as incompatible with the Trinity and then surveys the interpretation of these verses in the major Islamic commentaries across the spectrum of Islamic sects. Cumming (2020, pp. iii–iv) follows this with an examination of Muslim theologians discussions of the "qualities of Essence" as they relate to the Trinity and then compares these qualities to their discussion by Arab Christians. His conclusions show the value of an outsider studying another's scriptures using a hermeneutical methodology that is acceptable to the insiders.

In this chapter, Ungaran Rashid parallels the methodology of Cumming and Accad, but from a Muslim's perspective. He does not rely upon Islamic sources which carry little weight for Christians—and which typically view the term 'son of God' negatively (due to its usage in the Qur'an to condemn pagan notions of biological, sexual procreation of deities with humans). Instead, Rashid examines biblical scriptures and relies upon Jewish and Christian scholarship to determine the meaning of the term as it applies to Christ Jesus. Christians can sanction his hermeneutical method and his respect for the biblical text, even though his resulting conclusions challenge a common Christian interpretation of the Bible. This enables a Christian scholar, Mark Harlan, to affirm (with nuance) the validity of his interpretation. Citing lesser known Jewish and Christian perspectives, Harlan then presents an alternative biblical understanding of the term's significance which many Christians can find persuasive, and which can be more satisfying to Muslims.

Nevertheless, the use of valid hermeneutical methods does not guarantee a constructive dialog—especially over theological and doctrinal issues which are often passionately held or intellectually difficult. To ensure that interfaith interaction is effective, Cornille (2008) has identified a set of pre-requisites: (1) empathy (viewing another religion from the perspective of its believers); (2) doctrinal humility (belief that one can learn from another religious tradition); (3) commitment (toleration of other faiths without reducing commitment to one's own); (4) interconnection (a sense of commonality with another religious tradition and its relevance) and (5) hospitality (openness to finding truth in the other religion). These pre-requisites will be explained further, but their presence in the dialog which follows are critical for its constructiveness.

This paper is organised as follows: following the introduction (Section "Interfaith Dialogue: Introduction, Methodology and Intended Contribution") is a Muslim study of the term 'son of God' in the Jewish scriptures and its application to Jesus the Messiah in the Gospel of John. This will challenge common Christian assumptions and interpretations (Section "A Muslim Reading"). Next, a Christian's reading and response will first affirm the Muslim study while addressing apparent conflicts with Christian theology. He then examines the notions of 'God' and 'son of God' in the Jewish scriptures. Next, he explores the significance of Jesus as the 'son of God' in the Gospel of John (Section "A Christian Reading and Response"). Last is an analysis of the significance of this article for interfaith practice that draws pertinent implications that accord with Cornille's (2008, 2013) framework of preconditions. It concludes

with a brief statement of the paper's limitations and presents some opportunities for future scholarship and practice (Section "Concluding Synthesis and Implications for Interfaith Practice").

A Muslim Reading

In this section, Muslim scholar of the Bible, Ungaran Rashid, presents the findings of his study of the 'son of God' in the Gospel of John. He examines the term's meaning in the Jewish scriptures, followed by its application to Jesus in the Gospel of John.

The Term 'Son of God' in the Jewish Scriptures

The term 'son of God' is used in the Tanakh and in Jewish tradition. In addition, Jesus, whose name is linked to the epithet 'son of God,' was a Jew. Al-Faruqi (1967, p. 50), a modern Muslim scholar, says, "Jesus was a Jew among Jews. He was brought up under the influence of their spirit, their consciousness, their ethic." Therefore, those who are interested in studying the term 'son of God' should delve into Jewish sacred writings and theology, otherwise, they will not understand it correctly. This researcher examines the term 'son of God' from the Jewish scriptures and theology and its relation to another figure in Jewish community, namely 'Messiah.'

To understand Jewish theology, one must begin with the *shema*,[1] the central declaration of the Jewish faith, especially in Jewish liturgy (Segal, 2008). The *shema* describes the relationship between God and the Children of Israel. To the Children of Israel, *YHWH* is not only their God, but also their loving Father, King, Judge, Sustainer, and Redeemer. Nevertheless, this does not imply that they know God completely; God is beyond understanding and comprehension. Although the Children of Israel may describe God in anthropomorphic terms, they disagree with the Christian concept of God assuming human form (Trepp, 1967).

Monotheism in early Judaism developed in a polytheistic world. The situation of the early Jewish community, as ascribed by Goldenberg (2007), was one in which the House of Israel was entering the land promised to them by their God. That land, however, was occupied by people who believed they had been given the land by their gods. In this situation it appeared that the God of Israel fought against the gods of the other nations. Furthermore, Goldenberg (2007) states that this view was a

[1] "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (NIV translation). The term LORD in this translation is derived from the Hebrew word *YHWH* who becomes the name of God for the children of Israel.

development towards monotheism. It appears that, on the one hand, the early Jewish community was growing in their understanding of monotheism, while on the other hand, from God's side, monotheism was a statute to be always observed and kept in mind by the Israelites.[2]

In Hebrew, the term son (*ben*) means a male offspring of human parents (Harris et al., 2003). In the Jewish scriptures, however, the term is used to express several ideas. Firstly, the term is employed to denote one's profession, for example, *ben hasarpi* is literally son of a goldsmith (Nehemiah 3:31), meaning goldsmith. Secondly, it is used to show a state or condition, for example, *ben nekar*, son of a foreign country (Genesis 17:12), meaning foreigner. Thirdly, *ben* is employed to expose a certain character such as in *ben hayil*, son of valor (1 Samuel 14:52) meaning brave. Lastly, it is used to explain a certain nature, for example, *ben adam*, son of man (Job 25:6), which implies being human.

The term 'sons of God' (plural) occurs several times in the Jewish scriptures. This refers to individuals, nations, and angels who belong to God and have a close relationship with God (Brown, 2000). The term 'son of God' (singular) appears as an appellation from God to the nation Israel, to a king, and to the anointed one (messiah). For example, in Exodus 4:22 God says, "Israel is my firstborn son," whereas in Psalm 2:7 God speaks to a king saying, "You are my son, today I have begotten you."

In Psalm 2 God explicitly calls the king his son, "You are my son, today I have begotten you." Unfortunately, the word begotten in this section creates a problem because it could give the impression that the 'son of God' is the offspring of God or even an incarnation of God as seen in the beliefs of the surrounding nations, such as Babylon and Canaan (Mowinckel, 1954). Clarke (n.d.) in his commentary states that this refers to a wonderful and supernatural birth. He asserts that this verse describes the Incarnation of God. To the contrary, the Interpreter's Bible states that the word 'begotten' in this section should be understood as the legal process of adoption which describes a special relationship between the king and his Lord (Buttrick, 1952, p. 25) Mowinckel (1954) concurs with this understanding explaining that absent from Israel was any notion of a king being divine in relation to Yahweh. The phrase "You are my son; I have begotten you today" is only an adoption formula (Mowinckel, 1954, p. 78).

As mentioned above, this Psalm has similarities with the Egyptian tradition of viewing the king as the 'son of God.' The same formula "You are my son, today I have begotten you" is found in an inscription at the mortuary temple of Hatshepsut (Collins & Collins, 2008, p. 13). Seeing the similarity, there is a possibility that the ritual appointment of the king in the kingdom of Israel or Judah was influenced by

[2] This is expressed in different ways such as God is one, God is a jealous God, and no other God. See Deuteronomy 6:4, Exodus 20:25, 34:14; Deuteronomy 4:24, 5:9; 6:15; Joshua 24:19; Isaiah 45:14; and Daniel 3:29. It is further confirmed by the Qur'an, an-Nahl: 36, "For We assuredly sent amongst every People a messenger, (with the Command) 'Serve Allah, and eschew Evil': of the people were some whom Allah guided, and some on whom Error became inevitably (established). So, travel through the earth, and see what was the end of those who denied (the Truth)" (Yusuf Ali Translation).

Egyptian ideas of kingship, at least from the understanding that the king is expressed as the son of god, or even *elohim* (a god) (Collins & Collins, 2008).

Another passage in the Jewish scriptures that directly links the king to being God's son is 2 Samuel 7:14. This verse describes God acting as a father to the king, "I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men." In this passage God does not use the word 'begotten' in stating his relationship with the 'son of God,' but reveals that the nature of the relationship is one in which God will punish him if the 'son' diverges from the straight path. Therefore, the difference between 2 Samuel 7:14 and Psalm 2:7 is that the Psalm shows the relationship between God and the 'son of God' as a process of adoption, whereas 2 Samuel 7 shows the relationship between the two as a covenant between God and David's descendants.[3] God's covenant in 2 Samuel 7:14–15 is repeated in 1 Chronicles 17:13, "I will be his father, and he will be my son. I will never take my love away from him, as I took it away from your predecessor."

In conclusion, the term 'son of God' in Jewish understanding is God's appellation to whomever he loves and is primarily addressed to the anointed king (messiah) to show that this king has a special relationship with God, but certainly not parity with God. Although the king received a divine title, this did not mean the king had a divine nature. The divine title indicated that the king was authorized to act as God's surrogate on the earth (Collins & Collins, 2008). In addition, it indicated that God was always with him. Thus, in Jewish understanding there is no perception, or at least agreement, that the 'son of God' is a part of God or an incarnation of God.

Jesus as the 'Son of God' According to the Gospel of John

As mentioned above, in the Tanakh the term 'son of God' referred to the nation and an anointed (messiah) king. On the other hand, in Christianity, 'son of God' refers to Jesus, the Christ, God who became human. Christians get this understanding from their New Testament. However, as we delve into the writings of the New Testament differences regarding the term seem to surface. We will now look at one of these differences, the use of 'son of God' in the Gospel of John.

Unlike the Synoptic Gospels, which present Jesus as a person focused on preaching about God and his kingdom, the Gospel of John presents Jesus focused upon himself (Tuckett, 2001). Further, terms that are quite prominent in the Synoptic Gospels, like 'kingdom of God,' only occur twice in John. Conversely, terms which surface often in John, such as 'eternal life' which appears seventeen times, is used only three times each by Matthew and Luke and twice by Mark. Noticing these differences, Clement of Alexandria commented that John wrote a spiritual gospel. The Gospel of John is, therefore, accepted as containing a profound theological portrait of Jesus (Stanton, 1989).

[3] Similarly, in first century Rome, it was through 'adoption' that the next emperor was selected.

Furthermore, the description of Jesus in John's Gospel is very different from that of the Synoptic Gospels. Jesus is described as if he is God and possibly as equal to God. For example, in the prologue the author explains that the word (Jesus) was not just with God from the beginning but was "God" (1:1). Five chapters later, the author records the view of the Jews, with their claim that Jesus was making himself equal with God (5:18); and towards the end of his writing, the author tells the story of Thomas, one of Jesus' disciples who confessed Jesus as "my lord and my god" (20:28). These three references cause a few questions to arise when one compares John with the Synoptics. Is it true that Jesus, in the Gospel of John, claimed to be God? Does the author introduce Jesus as God rather than the 'son of God'? Or does the author understand the term 'son of God' as a synonym to king and Christ as written in the latter part of the Gospel: "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (20:31)?

In the Gospel of John, speaks of the 'Son (of God)' almost thirty times[4] using the terms (the/his/your) "Son" (3:17, 35, 36; 5:19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 26; 6:40, 8:36; 14:13; 17:1), "the Son of God" (1:49; 5:25; 6:69, 11:27; 19:7; 20:31), "the only Son" (1:14, 18; 3:16, 18), and "God's Son" (10:36; 11:4). Of these, only five times is it used by others to refer to Jesus—namely, John the Baptist (1:34), Nathanael (1:49), Martha (11:27), Jews accusing Jesus of using the term (19:7), and the author (20:31). All the other times it is utilized by Jesus, either to show his relationship with God or as his prayer to God. This researcher will not discuss all these passages, but only those that are important for understanding the meaning of the 'son of God' in this Gospel.

The term 'the son of God' was uttered for the first time by John the Baptist in 1:34, "I have seen and I testify that this is the Son of God."[5] John said this in a conversation with some of the priests and Levites who asked him, "Who are you?" He answered, "I am not the Christ." The next day when he saw Jesus, he said, "Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (1:29). Explaining further, John eventually declared that Jesus is the son of God (as quoted above). The conversation strongly implies that the Christ was not John, but the 'son of God'—in other words, Jesus. This shows that 'son of God' is equivalent to 'anointed' (messiah, Christ in Greek), the one who is designated as heir from the royal Davidic line (Collins & Collins, 2008, p. 181).[6]

The epithet 'the son of God' was also used in 1:49 by Nathanael who declared, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the King of Israel." This was Nathanael's response to Jesus stating that he already knew him, even though they had never met before. Although Nathanael did not use 'Christ' to refer to Jesus here, he used two synonymous titles; hence, Nathanael was implicitly confessing that Jesus was the Christ. For John as the author, this conversation revealed the identity of Jesus as the fulfilment of Jewish messianic expectation (Fitzmyer, 2007).

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[4] Some Greek manuscripts contain variants: e.g., 'God' in John 1:18 and 'God's Chosen One' in 1:34.

[5] Some Greek manuscripts have the variant reading "God's Chosen One" (which the NIV prefers).

[6] After David was 'anointed' by the prophet Samuel, years passed before he ascended to the throne.

Two passages in the Gospel of John which explicitly indicate that 'son of God' is synonymous with Christ are the author's statement of his purpose in writing this Gospel (20:31, mentioned previously) and Martha's response to Jesus' declaring himself to be the resurrection and the life, when she confessed, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (11:27). The juxtaposition of the term 'son of God' with Christ/Messiah in the two passages implies that 'son of God' is used for the Messiah in an adaptation of the traditional royal epithet found in Ps 2:7 and 2 Samuel 7:12–16 (Collins & Collins, 2008). By saying Jesus is the Messiah, Martha asserted her dignity as an anointed child who had received the salvation of God (Brodie, 1811).

Furthermore, Jesus' statement that he is the Son (of God), as stated in 5:18–20 is one of the most important aspects to examine whether the 'son of God' is equal to God or not:

> For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God. Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does. For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, to your amazement he will show him even greater things than these" (NIV).

One important question raised from these verses is, in what sense is the 'son of God' equal to God? It seems that the equality between the 'son of God' and God in this respect should be seen from the perspective of the 'sender' and the 'sent' or the 'authority' and 'agent.' Indeed, the sent or agent has full authority to execute a task based on the command of the sender. However, if the sender does not give any order to the agent, then the agent must not/cannot do anything on his own desire (Witherington, 1995). So, the equality between the 'son of God' with God in this sense is that the authority held by the 'son of God' is equal to the authority owned by God since God has given the authority to the Son.[7] This is comparable to an ambassador from a certain country having equal authority and position to the president of that country at the time he brings a message from him to another nation. When he is not bringing a particular message from his president, the position of the ambassador is lower than that of his president, since he is an assistant to the president. Similarly in our case, if God does not give any order to the son, then in this regard, the son does not have any equality with God because he does not possess the authority (Witherington, 1995). This is emphasized by Jesus when he says, "the Son can do nothing by himself." Thus, it seems that John tells the audience that Jesus presented himself as God's unique agent who had full authority from God (Witherington, 1995).

[7] Michaels (2010, pp. 304–305, 317) affirms the emphasis here on the Son as agent, but alleges that readers of John's Gospel would have seen it as Jesus' claim to be "a divine being" as they recalled what was predicated of him in John's prologue (1:1, 18). Our dialog proposes an alternative understanding. There are two audiences to keep in mind. The first are the readers of John who would have known from the Prologue that Jesus is divine (the meaning of which is a focus of our dialogue). The second are the actual participants in the story for whom the Prologue has not yet been revealed and who are hearing and using the terminology with their own understanding.

Though the agency of Jesus is not mentioned explicitly in the Gospel of John, Jesus' testimony in 13:16 demonstrates it: "I tell you the truth, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger (*apostolos*) greater than the one who sent him." The word *apostolos* in the Greek tradition was not solely used in religious terms, but also employed in general to mean 'an agent' (Witherington, 1995, p. 141).

To be sure, many Christian theologians rely on other New Testament scriptures, such as Hebrews 1 and Colossians 1, in holding that Jesus the Messiah is the personification of deity (Bauckham, 2009). However, others have understood those same passages somewhat differently. Dunn (1996) interprets these passages as personified wisdom language. Christ embodies God's wisdom which created all things. Believers came to see Christ as the expression of God's wisdom, power, and fullness, revealing it to and in his creation. Thus, what was said about wisdom could likewise be said of Christ. Nonetheless, our discussion here is bounded by a Jewish understanding of the meaning of 'son of God' in the Gospel of John. I conclude that the term means that Jesus is the anointed king (messiah) who, in a special relationship with God, acts as his agent with the full authority of God. However, the term 'son of God' does not carry the connotation that he himself is God.

A Christian Reading and Response

In this section of this article, Mark Harlan provides a Christian response to the Muslim reading. He first affirms Rashid's study though it raises a question of apparent conflict with Christian theology. Second, he explains the notions of 'God' and 'son of God' in the Jewish scriptures. His final section explores the significance of Jesus as the 'son of God' in the Gospel of John.

Agreement and the Question of Conflict with Christian Theology

Rashid carefully examines the Gospel of John's references to Jesus as the 'son of God' in light of the term's usage in the Jewish scriptures. He concludes that it is synonymous with Messiah/Christ, God's anointed king and agent who is authorized to exercise divine authority. To the surprise of the average Christian, his analysis is essentially correct. The eminent Jewish scholar, Boyarin (2012, pp. 25–26) observes that most Christians think that 'son of God' indicates Jesus' divinity. However, he shows that the title actually refers to a human Messiah, king of Israel. On the other hand, Boyarin (2012, pp. 25–26) notes that Christians commonly understand the phrase 'Son of Man' as a reference to Jesus' human nature; however, in light of Daniel 7, it ultimately points to a heavenly or divine figure (who resembles a human). Jewish traditions developed after Daniel and before the Gospels that combined the

hope of a king descended from David ruling over Israel with Daniel's 'Son of Man' who would be given dominion over the world. This divine/human redeemer was later called Messiah. Jewish views on nature of the humanity and divinity of this son of Man varied widely in the period before Christ. Yet, Boyarin (2012) holds that the Gospel only makes sense if both Jews and Jesus held that the Messiah was a 'divine man.' While we may interpret the nature of divinity as either functional or ontological, Boyarin (2012, p. 55) explains, "It is that former sense to which I refer throughout this book, as I believe that the very distinction between 'functional' and 'ontological' is a product of later Greek reflection on the Gospels." This view is akin to Rashid's emphasis on a representative agent carrying divine authority or his fulfilling divine activities.

If this is the case, then Rashid's study leads to the question: Are not Christians then misinterpreting the term 'son of God' as an indication that Jesus Christ is equal in deity with God as the second hypostasis of the Trinity? I will endeavor to provide support for Rashid's thesis but examine other aspects of divinity as it relates to Jesus Christ and trace developments from John's usage to those in later Christian theology. Christians hold to various views on these issues and they may not agree with my arguments. However, I trust that it will become evident that a faithful reader of John's Gospel may arrive at some conclusions which differ from those of others.[8]

'God' and 'Son of God' in the Jewish Scriptures

First, additional discussion of Jewish monotheism may be instructive. Modern Jews, Christians and Muslims consider themselves to be monotheists, by which they mean that there is only one deity and that all other so-called gods are idols or imagined, angelic or demonic beings. However, many scholars affirm that the early Hebrews were not monotheists in the same way as moderns. Rather they were henotheists—their worship was monolatrous, offered to a single, supreme god while not denying the existence or possible existence of other 'gods' (*elohim*). Hence, by reciting the Shema, Jews proclaimed the LORD (YHWH) as supreme above all other supernatural beings and they were offering their worship and allegiance exclusively to him (Heiser, 2015).

In addition, we must recognize the unusual semantic range of this Hebrew word *elohim.* It referred to Israel's deity (typically translated as God with upper case g), to lower supernatural beings and deities, whether good or evil (translated as god or gods with lower case g), as well as to humans, prophets, princes, rulers and kings. All were named *elohim* and *bene elohim* (sons of God). Thus, Abraham (Gen. 23:6, usually translated as "mighty prince"), Moses before Pharaoh (Exod. 7:1), judges

[8] Rashid will attest to this reality. He once led two groups, one Christian and the other Muslim, in an inductive study of the Gospel of Mark. After reaching the end of the Gospel, he asked each group what they understood it to reveal about Jesus' identity. The Christians enthusiastically replied, "that Jesus is God!" With similar conviction the Muslim group concluded, "that Jesus is *not* God!"

(Exod. 22:8–9; 1 Sam. 2:25), the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 28:13–14 appearing to the witch of Endor), kings and rulers (Ps. 138:1; 95:3; 82:6) are all called *elohim* in the Hebrew scriptures. Rashid correctly points out that calling the king *elohim* does not suggest that he has a divine nature. Rather, he is *elohim* functionally, ruling as God's representative with his authority. We see this in 1 Chron. 29:20 where after David commands all Israel to praise the LORD, they bow down to the LORD *and the king* (David's son, Solomon) who at his second coronation is seated on the throne of the LORD (v. 23). But the sacrifices were offered only to the LORD (v. 21).

Furthermore, Jews believed that the supreme God alone was creator of heaven and earth and that he had chosen Israel for a special purpose by identifying them as his people. The God of the Hebrews, though transcendent, maintained an intimate and active involvement with creation. Wright (1998) presents five primary ways that the Hebrews expressed God's activity in the world without compromising his transcendence: (1) God's *Spirit* hovering over the waters; (2) his *Word* generating life; (3) his *Law* directing his people; (4) his *Presence* (or *Glory*) dwelling among them (in the pillar of fire and cloud, in the tabernacle and then the temple); and (5) his *Wisdom* through which he created everything (Proverbs 1–8). The early Jewish followers of Jesus utilized these terms and images to express the relationship of Jesus and the Spirit to God, as in John's prologue: "In the beginning was the *Word*, the *Word* was with God and the *Word* was God … all things were created by him (1:4); The *Word* became flesh, and *tabernacled* in our midst; we saw his *Glory*, *Glory* as of God's one and only" (1:14); The *Law* was given through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ (1:17). Accordingly, these early Jewish Jesus followers began to use the term *Son of God* as one more description of God's inimitable activity in and through Jesus the Messiah. It became, a new way to express "the one God present, personal, active, saving, and rescuing, while still being able to speak of the one God sovereign, creating, sustaining, sending, and remaining beyond" (Wright, 1998, pp. 42–56).

Regarding 2 Samuel 7, Wright (2019, p. 131) says that the Jewish scriptures expect both "the fulfilment of Davidic promises (of a coming individual son of God)" and "new exodus promises (of a people who would be the corporate divine son)."[9] The New Testament then portrays Jesus as the fulfilment of the former and his followers as the latter (those who follow Jesus become sons of God, spiritual siblings of their elder brother).

[9] The image of corporate sonship seems to arise from the nation of Israel becoming God's "firstborn" son (Exod. 4:22–24) when he reaches into the nation (womb) of Egypt and "delivers" his son by taking "a nation from within a nation" (Deut. 4:34); also Exod. 6:6–7 (Feinberg, personal communication, March 1, 2022).

Jesus as the 'Son of God' in the Gospel of John

Rashid states that in "Christianity, the term 'son of God,' refers to Jesus, the Christ, God who became human." This is true of many Christians; however, others would express the incarnation with greater nuance. The Gospel of John begins its prologue with "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (1:1). In the beginning the Word (of God) was 'with' God (*ho theos*, a noun with the definite article in Greek) and 'was' God (*theos*), a predicate (1:1). The Word was distinct from 'the God'—yet still called God.[10] Then the Word of God (not 'the God' became 'flesh'). God's Word came not as a verbal message, but as a human being, Jesus the Messiah who revealed the glory of God like an only son (1:14).[11] Agreeing with Cullman that v. 1 must be understood in light of v. 14, Barrett (1978, p. 152) sees the Christology of John as principally functional, for "salvation has priority over cosmology." Moreover, when the New Testament applies *theos* to Jesus, it is primarily in the context of his roles—for example, in John, as creative Word (1:2–3), revealer of God (1:18), and Lord (20:28). Hence, more probably, the point is to indicate that God's actions have been accomplished through his agency (Parsons, 2013).[12]

Church councils debated the Word's relation to God in John 1:1 within the framework of Greek philosophy. But Hebrew worldview, observes Kraus (1990, pp. 99–101), views God's Word as "a dynamic act and not a divine being." Jewish writings associate Wisdom with Law and consider it "a preexistent hypostasis, or personification and it was even called the 'daughter of God.'" Read Hebraically (cf. Proverbs 8:22), John 1:1–14 says that as God's Wisdom (daughter) was expressed in the Law of Moses, so his Word (son) was 'embodied' in Jesus. "The Word [rather than Wisdom] was in the beginning with God … it was truly the expression of God himself … [what] we see in Jesus already existed in the creation. It is the same creative, salvific word spoken at the beginning" (Kraus, 1990, pp. 99–101).

Rashid correctly observes that statements in John equating Jesus with God are not indicating identity of being, but rather his being invested with God's authority. McGrath (2010, p. 14) agrees, observing that in ancient Jewish rabbinic literature

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[10] Haenchen (1984, p. 109) notes the significant difference in meaning, citing Philo's statement that the Word (*logos*) is not strictly the same as God, and observing that both Philo and Origin refer to the Word (which is *theos*) as 'divine,' but *ho theos* they identify as 'God.' Michaels (2010, p. 48) acknowledges that *theos* "is virtually an attribute of the Word" (like light, love or spirit) but that it carries greater force, just as saying "God is Spirit" means more than "God is spiritual." He judges 'divine' as too weak and 'deity' too abstract. Keener (2003, p. 379) sees "the Word was God" as meaning "fully deity."

[11] The incarnation personifies the promise of the Davidic covenant that David would never lack a descendent to sit on his throne (2 Sam. 7:12–16). Feinberg's study of *'ĕmet* (2020) demonstrates that *ḥesed wĕ 'ĕmet* (lovingkindness and truth) is the universal principle that operates exclusively in covenant relationships, including God's oath to David which is fulfilled in Jesus the Messiah (Psalm 110).

[12] Similarly, Beasley-Murray (1999, p. 11) holds that the divine nature of the Word is evident in his role in creating, revealing and redeeming, "yet without exhausting the being of God" for John did not say "and God was the Word."

"the one sent is like the one who sent him."[13] God's duly appointed agent carried full authority in representing Him. Hence, God's agent could at times share in the "divine identity." He could "not only carry out divine functions, but also be depicted in divine language, sit on God's throne or alongside God, and even bear the divine name" (2010, p. 14). Related to this, was the use of 'son of God' in Roman imperial theology. Peppard asserts, "Jesus's acclaimed status as 'son of god' was a direct challenge to the emperor's claim to that title" (this is why Pilate acquiesced to Jewish demands for his execution) (Peppard 2019, p. 147).

John's Gospel includes another important meaning of 'son of God.' Kraus (1990, p. 88) states, "Jesus' sonship is to be understood as a relation of complete reliance on and obedience to the Father." Likewise, Dodd (1963, pp. 254–257) affirms, "Entire obedience to the Father is the inseparable condition of the mission of the Son" (4:34) which in turn reveals the words and works of God. The focus on this obedience, says Dunn (1996, p. xxvii), is not subordination, but "a way of expressing the authority and validity of the Son's revelation of the Father, the continuity between the Father and the Son (5.17; 10.28–29, 58; 14.10)." Carson (1991) adds:

> Although Son of God can serve as a rough synonym for "Messiah," it is enriched by the unique manner in which Jesus as God's Son relates to his Father. He is functionally subordinate to him, and does only those things that the Father gives him to say and do, but he does *everything* that the Father does, since the Father shows him everything that he himself does. The perfection of Jesus' obedience and the unqualified nature of his dependence thereby become the loci in which Jesus discloses nothing less than the words and deeds of God (italics his). (p. 96)

This provides insight into Thomas' declaration, "my Lord and my God" (20:28). In non-Christian Jewish literature, the application of divine titles to God's agents was not controversial and the same is true of later Jewish-Christian writings. Pseudo-Clementine *Recognitions* 2:42 states: "The name God is applied in three ways: either because he to whom it is given is truly God, or because he is the servant of him who is truly; or for the honor of the sender, that his authority may be full, he that is sent is called by the name of him who sends" (cited in McGrath, 2010, p. 67).[14] Thus, Thomas' declaration of his faith in Jesus as the Messiah, God's ultimate agent, needs to be understood according to the Jewish monotheism of his time. Additionally, "Lord and God" was used to refer to the emperor; what was falsely claimed for the emperor was legitimately true of Jesus as God's Messiah (Kraus, 1990, p. 83).

Similarly, theologian Brown's (1991, p. 88) analysis "the title 'Son of God' is not in itself a designation of personal deity or an expression of metaphysical distinctions within the Godhead." Brown (1991, p. 88) agrees with Rashid that 'son of God' in the Gospels does not "mean that he himself is God." Brown states:

> Indeed, to be a "Son of God" one has to be a being who is *not* God! It is a designation for a creature indicating a special relationship with God. In particular, it denotes God's

[13] Köstenberger (2004, p. 188) concurs that the Jewish view was "a man's agent is like the man himself."

[14] Readers of John's Gospel are to see Thomas as fulfilling Jesus' words in 5:23, "that all may honor the Son just as they honor the Father" (Beasley-Murray, 1999, p. 386).

> representative, God's vice-regent. It is a designation of kingship, identifying the king as God's son … the term 'Son of God' ultimately converges on the term "image of God," which is understood as God's representative, the one in whom God's Spirit dwells, and who is given stewardship and authority to act on God's behalf. (p. 88)

Wright (2015, p. 107) states that during Second Temple times, "'son of God' functioned as a messianic title, it did not carry in and of itself the overtones of 'divinity' that later Christian theology would hear in it."[15] The question of whether or not he was the same being as God was simply not in view:

> The early Christians had quietly but definitely discovered that they could say what they felt obliged to say about Jesus (and the Spirit) by telling the Jewish story of God, Israel and the world, in the Jewish language of Spirit, Word, Torah, Presence/Glory, Wisdom, and now Messiah/Son … It is as though they discovered Jesus within the Jewish monotheistic categories they already had. The categories seemed to have been made for him. They fitted him like a glove. (Wright, 1998, p. 107)

Likewise, Brown (1966, p. 407) discerns, "It would be the work of later theologians to take this Gospel material pertaining to the mission of the Son ad extra and draw from it a theology of the inner life of the Trinity." This occurred as the Gospel expanded beyond the Jewish world to the language, philosophic culture and worldview of the Greek world where Christian theologians approached the scriptures with different questions and concerns. In the Hellenistic world, followers of Christ employed concepts and categories from Greek philosophy, such as 'nature,' 'substance,' *hypostasis* (person) to understand the inner being of God in relationship to Jesus and the Spirit of God. Unlike Semitic believers, they could not but read the term 'son of God' through the lens of philosophy. Hellenistic Jews perceived the Word (of God) in terms of the Greek word *logos* and its metaphysical associations (Bruce, 1954). Jewish philosopher Philo spoke of the logos as God's "firstborn Word" and "firstborn Son."[16] Athanasius called the Word the "Son" who is the "offspring of the Father," referring "to the very first utterance of God's creative Word" (Cardoza, 2013, p. 457). Greek Christians, like Justin Martyr, understood logos as "reason" which guided the Greek philosophers (Bruce, 1954, p. 305).

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[15] Others concur with caveats. Keener (2003, pp. 296–297) acknowledges, "In none of the Jewish senses listed above does 'son of God' imply 'God the Son,' nor necessarily divinity at all, nor biological relation to God (it is not biological even in Luke 1:35), those senses of the Christian term to which Islam, for example, so strenuously objects." But when John wrote sixty years after Christ's ascension, "Is it not possible that the association of the term with Jesus, who was identified as deity for other reasons, would eventually invest this term with new significance? The expression in the Fourth Gospel means far more than 'Messiah,' although the expression itself is never made to bear the weight of Christ's deity provided by other components of the narrative." Michaels also acknowledges that in early Judaism the terms Christ, Messiah, and Son of God did not convey divinity, but he asserts "in the world of John's Gospel it does"—to John (20:31), to believers (11:27) and perhaps to opponents of Jesus (5:18). But Carson (1991, pp. 87–95, 660–663) makes a strong case that the intended purpose for John's Gospel was evangelistic (20:31), most likely targeting, Jews and proselytes, along with god-fearers, who would have understood 'son of God' according to Jewish senses.

[16] For an argument of mere appropriation of the language of Hellenistic philosophy, not assimilation by it, see (Bauckham, 2009, pp. 30–31).

Christian thinking about the divinity of Christ then developed in connection with his identity as the Word of God, *by* which all things were created (Genesis 1; John 1:1, 3) and the Wisdom of God, *with* which God created (Proverbs 3:19–20). As noted, the Word and Wisdom of God were already called the Son of God in a metaphysical sense. Cardoza (2013, p. 457) observes, "Because they believed that Jesus is he whom the Word of God *became*, Jewish followers of Jesus began to speak about him in ways they would formerly only speak about God's Word." For example, the epistle to the Hebrews (1:8–9) merged the "Son as Divine Wisdom" (Heb 1:6–7) with the royal Messianic son of God from David's line (Ps. 2:7, 2 Sam. 7:14) (Bateman, 1995, pp. 26–27).

Similarly, the Arabic expression *bint al-shafa* (daughter of the lips) personifies what comes out of the mouth as the speaker's offspring, originating from him and revealing him. In Christian theology God's Word originates in and from him eternally as his Son (versus daughter). Thus, for four centuries, Christians referred to Jesus as the Word (*logos*) but later used Son of God in place of Word of God (Brown, 2000, p. 49). This replacement has been so complete that many Christians reading that Jesus is the son of God, see it as indicating his divinity, unaware of any reference to the anointed king of David's line.

Dunn (1996) explains that the meaning of 'Son of God' in John's Gospel is not the same as in Christian creeds (e.g., the Nicene Creed); rather it expresses 'Word Christology':

> It was only at Nicea that the hitherto dominant Logos-Christology gave way to the dominance of Son of God language. With Logos-Christology the emphasis is essentially the same as that in John's Gospel—on the *continuity* between Father and the Son, since the Son is the Word, the self-expression of God … an emphasis on Christ as the Son, independent of that earlier Logos Christology, can easily become in effect an expression of the very bitheism or tritheism of which Judaism and Islam accuse Christianity … If the credal Son of God language is not understood as an expression of Logos-Christology it is misunderstood. (1996, p. xxxi)

Christians commonly see the later developed metaphysical, Trinitarian conceptions of 'Son of God' in these creeds as the meaning of 'son of God' when they read the Gospels. But Brown (1991) warns against taking statements about the Son and his relationship with the Father as expressions of relationships within the Trinity. Instead, they speak about "Jesus' relationship with the Father on earth." Brown (1991) cautions that we must not read John 1:1 as "In the beginning was the *Son, and the Son* was with God, and the Son was God" (1991, p. 89).[17]

Likewise, other elements in John's Gospel are often misinterpreted as demonstrating the metaphysical divinity of Jesus Christ. Central to the argument of the Gospel of John are eight signs (seven miracles plus the resurrection) that point to Jesus' true identity. But their purpose is not to show that Jesus was a supernatural being, but rather that "you might believe the Jesus is the Christ, the son of God"

[17] Similarly, Haenchen (1984, pp. 109–110) states that to use 'son' here in place of 'logos' would have made no sense to readers, neither would 'messiah' or 'son of man' (for even though Jewish tradition held that they existed in the plan of God prior to creation, they did not materialize until after it).

(20:31). Performing these works of God revealed Jesus' unique relationship to God. If they glorify God, then they validate his claims to represent him as his son (10:25, 37), says Kraus (1990):

> However, if they are *his own* works issuing from some innate supernatural power, as the Pharisees assumed, then they are works of a 'law breaker' and 'sinner' (9:16, 24b), not the works of God. Thus on the assumption that the signs are wonders, the Pharisees could argue with some plausibility that such works are magic and have their source in the prince of demons (10:20). If Jesus' works are viewed as wonders, i.e., spectacular displays of his own supernatural power as a deity in disguise, they do not authenticate his relation to God as Son. He can claim sonship only as he can demonstrate complete obedience to the Father's authority and does only *his* works (5:19–20) … they do not glorify Jesus as a supernatural being; rather they glorify God his Father … and establish the genuineness of his relationship to that one. Second, they indicate that Jesus' sonship is to be understood as a relation of complete reliance on and obedience to the Father (pp. 87–88).[18]

Additionally, Kraus (1990, p. 81) maintains that passages such as John 17:5, 21, 24[19] speak of "intimate communion rather than substantial union." Nor do statements of Jesus' oneness with God (John 10:30, 38) refer to essential equality with God, for the same language is applied to believers (14:20): "In that day you will know that I am in My Father, and you in Me, and I in you" and 17:21: "that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me". As Dodd (1963, pp. 195–196) observes, "At every point the unity of the Father and Son is reproduced in the unity of Christ and believers … The triangle of relations is complete: the Father, the Son, and the disciples dwell in one another by virtue of a love which is the very life and the activity of God." This is a primary aspect of Jesus' sonship, as Bauckham (1978, pp. 248, 259) states, "Jesus understood the Fatherhood of God as the eschatological relationship of God to men" and "It is the imperative of his filial mission (and therefore essential to his sonship) to mediate to others his own filial relation to God. His sonship means this."

To review, although many Christians derive their belief in the deity of Christ from John's Gospel, this study has argued that his being the 'son of God' is not the proof that he shares the divine nature or essence, nor is it necessarily a reference to the second *hypostasis* of the Trinity. This is evident in the controversies in three centuries before Nicaea when diverse interpretations of the phrase, though hotly contested, did not disqualify Adoptionists and Arians from membership in the spiritual body of Christ (Jenkins, 2011). Credal formulations like Nicaea were the product of theologizing by monotheists who did not share the worldview of first century Jews and Christians. But McGrath (2010) insists that development of trinitarian thinking indicates neither proof of faithfulness to nor departure from the earlier theological heritage. Instead,

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[18] Cf. Beasley-Murray (1999, pp. 75–76), concurring with Bultmann, notes the Jews misunderstand that Jesus' claim of equality was as a revelation of God and not one of independence from him. The image of vv. 19–20 is that "of perpetual communion of the Son with the Father in his day-to-day life (*not* in his pre-existence)."

[19] John 17:21 is quoted below; 17:5 "And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began"; 17:24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world." (NIV).

it is evidence of life (what is inanimate or dead cannot respond to the needs of new environments or give them life). A religious tradition must adapt to manifest its life. McGrath (2010, p. 101) maintains that the idea of the Trinity was a "spectacularly helpful and inspiring development" that helps to explain how God's nature is both eternal and one of love. But this was not part of either first century Judaism or Christianity.

Yet Christian theologizing that attributes metaphysical/ontological meanings to 'Son of God' in expressing the Trinity does not erect an insurmountable barrier to Islamic thinking about God. Some Muslim scholars see the Qur'an as interpreting the Bible in ways that may be compatible with such views (for example, Galadari, 2016). Moreover, Christian Trinitarian theology actually has a great deal in common with Islamic scholastic discussion of God (*kalam*). This is an immense issue that is beyond the scope of our article, so I refer readers to Cumming's (2020) dissertation at Yale which found a variety of views among Muslims and Christians over the centuries. Notwithstanding, Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars have observed many commonalities between the Christine doctrine of the Trinity and Islamic discussion of the *sifāt al-dhāt* (qualities of the divine Essence). Some see no difference between them; most see them as not identical, but with smaller differences than is commonly thought (Cumming, 2020). Kaster (2001, para. 13) may be near the mark when he asserts, "the only difference between the Christian doctrine and the orthodox Muslim one is that Christians call these distinct persons or things God, while Muslims refuse to call God's distinct attributes by that name."

As a final word, I commend Rashid for his respectful and insightful engagement with the Gospel of John. He shows that we need not ignore or reject sacred scriptures because we disagree with another community's doctrines that arise from their interpretations of those scriptures. Similarly, Jews and Christians revere and read the same Tanakh/Old Testament yet diverge in their interpretations in important areas. Yet Jewish interpretations which conflict with Christian teaching do not compel Christians to shun the Hebrew scriptures. Unfortunately, in the context of a long history of political, cultural and religious conflict, Islamic disagreements with Christian theological thinking have led to most Muslims to ignore or reject the Bible, despite the Qur'an's high regard for it. As Saeed (2002, p. 434) observes, "The wholesale dismissive attitude held by many Muslims in the modern period towards the scriptures of Judaism and Christianity does not seem have the support of either the Qur'an or the major figures of *tafsir*." Saeed (2002, p. 435) declares, "If the texts have remained more or less as they were in the seventh century CE, the reverence the Qur'an has shown them at the time should be retained even today." Even so, such reverence does not require Muslims to accept all Jewish and Christian interpretations of the scriptures, as Rashid has demonstrated.

Concluding Synthesis and Implications for Interfaith Practice

We believe our joint study provides a model for constructive discussion. Not surprisingly, it accords with Cornille's (2008) five preconditions for fruitful interfaith dialog. Though space precludes a thorough explanation of these preconditions and their application, we affirm their validity and offer some examples of how our dialog reflects these characteristics.

1. **Empathy**. This attitude enables one to view another religion from the perspective of its believers. Rashid embodies this quality by examining the term 'son of God' in the Jewish scriptures and according to Jewish understanding. He then analyzes the term's usage in the Gospel of John citing sources that are respected by biblical and Christian scholars. Harlan, being sensitive to the strong Muslim concern to guard the unity of God, focuses on the concepts of 'God' and 'son of God' in the biblical scriptures to show how, despite worldview differences, they do not violate monotheism.
2. **Doctrinal humility**. This admits that, despite the differences, one can learn from another religious tradition, enabling respectful engagement with that religious tradition. Despite the prevailing Muslim prejudice against the Hebrew and Christian scriptures, Rashid humbly examines biblical scholarship, resulting in his elucidating the dominant meaning of 'son of God' to the benefit of both Muslim and Christian readers. Harlan embraces Rashid's critique and acknowledges that many Christians have misunderstood certain aspects of meaning of 'son of God' in the Gospel of John.
3. **Commitment**. Interfaith dialog does not demand compromise of one's commitment to their faith tradition to demonstrate tolerance of other faiths. Rashid's respectful engagement with John's Gospel enables Muslims to understand that the pagan notion of biological procreation is not what the term 'son of God' means in the Bible. Rather, it means that Jesus is al-Masih who is sent by God. Thus, a Muslim does not compromise Islamic teaching by accepting this as a reference to Jesus' messiahship. Rashid seriously engages with the biblical scriptures yet demonstrates that this does not oblige him to accept all Jewish and Christian interpretations of these scriptures. Harlan agrees with Rashid's emphasis on 'son of God' as the representative endowed with divine authority yet explains how this does not require Christians to disavow their theological tradition regarding the divinity of Christ, and the Trinity.
4. **Interconnection**. Some sense of commonality with another religious tradition and its relatedness and relevance to one's own is necessary precondition for dialog. Rashid's engagement with this topic conveys that the Jewish and Christian scriptures are relevant to and worthy of study by Muslims. Despite the widespread dismissal of these scriptures by modern Muslims, Rashid's attitude accords with that of the Qur'an and its leading interpreters. Harlan calls attention to the fact that there are substantial commonalities between the Christine doctrine of the Trinity and Islamic discussion of the "qualities of the divine Essence." His sense

of Muslim–Christian interconnections is evident in other research (Harlan, 2013) and was the basis for his collaboration with Rashid.

5. **Hospitality**. This term expresses the need for "an attitude of generous openness to the (possible) presence of truth in the other religion" (Cornille, 2008, p. 177). Sacred scriptures are not the possession of any one religion, but our reading of scripture is influenced by the teachings of our religious traditions. Outsiders to our tradition will read scripture through different lenses, sometimes questioning our community's interpretations. Dialoging with outsider perspectives can benefit our own faith community. Rashid hospitably accepted the invitation to dialog over this topic and co-author this article. Harlan welcomed Rashid's Muslim reading of the Gospel of John and affirmed his exegetical insights, even though some of them run counter to common Christian interpretations. A corollary is that Muslims might welcome and benefit from respectful readings of the Qur'an by non-Muslims (for example Reynolds, 2010).

Reflecting the above characteristics, our dialog constructively discussed what has been a source of confusion and controversy in Muslim–Christian encounter. We trust that the result will be a lowering of the barriers between our faith communities and a growth in respect and understanding that is mutually beneficial to both. As was stated earlier, this study was limited to the significance of the title son of God as it applies to Jesus Christ in the Gospel of John. Though the other gospel accounts (Matthew, Mark and Luke) should present fewer challenges, joint Muslim–Christian studies of these, as well as the New Testament epistles, could prove useful.

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Chapter 6
How Can Human Beings Respond to Divine Warnings and Promises? Deciphering the Puzzle of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom in Christianity and Islam

Adam Dodds

Abstract Christianity and Islam have long wrestled with how to conceptually relate God's sovereignty with human freedom and moral responsibility. Emphasizing the one potentially undermines the other. This issue is crystalized in how to interpret divine warnings and promises found in both the Bible and the Qur'an. For these to be, respectively, deterring and incentivizing, human freedom is required. However, does not divine sovereignty govern human responses to God? If God determines human responses to divine warnings and promises, to what extent are those warnings and promises compromised? Moreover, how is God's justice to be conceived? In early Islam this was debated by the Mutazilites and Asharites. That debate will be presented and critically evaluated. Christians have engaged in similar debate. Two Christian arguments on this same issue will be examined and assessed. The aim of this chapter is to advance inter-religious understanding of shared philosophical and theological issues that affect both Islam and Christianity.

Keywords Divine sovereignty · Human freedom · Christianity · Islam · Comparative theology · Bible · Qur'an

Introduction

Christianity and Islam have long wrestled with the question how to conceptually relate God's sovereignty with human freedom and moral responsibility. Emphasizing one potentially undermines the other. This issue is crystalized in how to interpret divine threats and promises found in both the Bible and the Qur'an. Both scriptural texts contain frequent warnings or threats of punishment, and promises of blessing and

A. Dodds (✉)
School of Ministry and Theology, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: adam.dodds@ac.edu.au

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reward, pertaining to this life and the next. For these to be, respectively, deterring and incentivizing, human freedom is required. Meanwhile, in both Christian and Islamic faith God is held to be sovereign and omnipotent. Both religions have traditions that suggest that God's sovereignty includes control over human responses to God. If God determines human responses to divine warnings and promises, to what extent are those warnings and promises meaningful? Furthermore, if God governs these human responses, how is God's justice to be conceived?

After providing a framework for my research, this chapter examines some significant Christian and Muslim responses to these perennial philosophical and theological questions. Due to the complexity of the subject matter and the limitations of a book chapter, this study can only outline the respective scriptural and theological landscapes. I hope that comparing these responses will provide a window into greater perception of Christianity and Islam. This study contributes to increased inter-religious understanding by shedding light on key scriptural passages and themes, exposing readers to the theological traditions of each faith, and highlighting distinctive theological trajectories and points of tension.

Fusion of Scriptural Reasoning and Comparative Theology

The framework of this study is a selective fusion of scriptural reasoning and comparative theology. Like scriptural reasoning, a topic and question have been identified, and the Bible and Qur'an are examined for corresponding answers in conversation with their respective theological traditions (Moyaert, 2013). In this study the Christian and Islamic scriptures are prominent, like in scriptural reasoning, for it is recognized that the scriptures are central to the life of faith, theology, the religious imagination, and the moral life. The aim is not to seek agreement but to identify and articulate each religion's distinctive identity, and to enable and facilitate respectful understanding and disagreement. This study importantly differs from scriptural reasoning in two ways. First, it was carried out in solitude and not as part of an inter-religious group (Moyaert, 2013). Second, and in agreement with Moyaert's (2013) concerns, theological and philosophical reflection are not minimized but are a principal focus. In that sense, and others, this study is also an exercise in comparative theology.

Theology is ordinarily carried out from the perspective of faith-commitment; in my case, I am a Christian theologian. Comparative theology, says Clooney (2013, p. 52), "is a robust form of inter-religious learning." This is not detached learning but faith seeking understanding for the purpose of truth-seeking. Kärkkäinen (2020) writes about the necessary connection between monotheism and theology's pursuit of truth. Kärkkäinen (2020, p. 10) states that this "search for the truth of God is eschatological and anticipatory in nature", is ambitious yet humble, and should be carried out "in a peaceful and honoring posture." I hope this short and focused study of two global faiths will help the reader in their own truth-seeking, albeit partially and modestly, but as a work of theology it cannot aim for less.

This ambition is significantly qualified by the limited texts and topics under consideration, as is typical in comparative theology. This chapter does diverge from comparative theology in what Clooney (2013) identifies as the latter's goal: identifying and privileging common ground for constructive dialogue. Clooney (2013, p. 55) contrasts this with absolute theology, which, "in accentuating difference … leads to ongoing conflict about such differences, whereas comparative theology creates a space in which common truths and values can be shared." These goals no doubt have their place, but for present purposes they risk obscuring the integrity and smothering the theological distinctiveness of each respective scripture. Consider, briefly, the Qur'an's relationship to the Bible.

Rippin (1993, p. 250) observes an Islamizing tendency in the qur'anic retelling of biblical stories: "The Qur'an retells stories found in the Bible in a recognisable form but the accounts are always shorn of their overall biblical narrative context." In the qur'anic retelling of biblical stories, Bannister asks whether these references should be understood as *inherited*—and in principal continuity with its scriptural predecessor, or *borrowed*—conveying no intrinsic scriptural continuity. Explaining the examples of Jesus, and the prophets, Bannister argues for the latter. From the Bible "the Qur'an has *borrowed*, extensively and destructively, losing context and meaning in the process." (2021, p. 135 emphasis original) Sinai (2017, pp. 142–143) recognizes the importance of tracing the continuity between the Qur'an and its biblical and post-biblical antecedents, and of also paying careful attention "to the potentially novel inflection and doctrinal purposes that these traditions acquire in their qur'anic guise."

Scholars including Sinai (2017), Durie (2016) and Reynolds (2010) contribute to the task of teasing out the theological purposes that qur'anic materials appear to be designed to serve. Hearing the Qur'an's distinctive voice, both on its own terms and in relation to the Bible, is intrinsically worthwhile. That a distinctive theology emerges does not necessarily create a space in which common truths and values can be shared, nor does it require an ongoing conflict about such differences. Rather than privilege common theological ground, this chapter seeks to explore how Christianity and Islam address common philosophical and theological challenges with the distinct resources of their own scriptures. Where present, common ground will be identified, but so too will divergences in a spirit of learning about the other.

In early Islam, divine sovereignty and human freedom were debated by the Mutazilites and Asharites (Adamson, 2016, pp. 13–15, 107–112), the former representing an emphasis on human freedom, and the latter on divine sovereignty. This debate will be presented and critically evaluated. In Christian history various schools of thought have also emphasized both poles of the issue: two will be examined and assessed. I begin with Islam.

Islamic Accounts of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom

The Qur'an vividly describes *jannah* (heaven) as gardens of bliss with rivers flowing, plentiful food and drink, and other sensual delights (Qur'an 37:48; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22, 35–37). In *jannah* there will be no sorrow or hatred but only peace (Qur'an 37:48; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22, 35–37). The Qur'an also describes "the terror of eternal perdition" (Sinai, 2017, p. 165) in rich detail, especially in the Meccan surahs. Sinai (2017, p. 165) explains that "references to fear and dread abound, and the main purpose of the early Qur'an's gruesome warnings and sketches of hell is evidently to drive home, with maximum literary effect, the horrors of damnation" (Qur'an 37:48; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22, 35–37). The purpose of the early qur'anic proclamations appears to be to instil "an attitude of fearful wariness (*taqwa*, verb *ittaqa*) of God (Q91:8, 92:5.17, and 96:12)" (Sinai, 2017, p. 165). Accordingly, 'the God-fearers' (*al-muttaqun*) are the positive counterpart to 'the deniers' (Q51:15, 52). As a preaching theme, this was likely designed to leverage eschatological terror to turn people to Allah (Cook, 2020, p. 606; Fakhry, 2004, p. 183; Sinai, 2017, p. 165).

Can a person turn to Allah without Allah determining it? If yes, this appears to undermine Allah's sovereignty. If no, then Allah's threats and promises seem ineffectual. This subject was one of several debates in early Islam between two schools of thought: the Mutazilites and Asharites, the latter subsequently being declared representatives of orthodoxy. The debate ultimately stems from two qur'anic motifs that are, *prima facie*, in conflict. The Qur'an affirms that Allah is sovereign over peoples' belief and unbelief. "Whomsoever God intends to guide, He expands his heart to Islam, and whomever He intends to lead astray, He makes his heart narrow (and) constricted, as if he were climbing up into the sky" (Q6:125).[1] Allah states that people who are confronted with irrefutable evidence for Islam's truth, "they would (still) not believe, unless God (so) pleased" (Q6:111). See also Qur'an 37:48; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22, 35–37. In apparent tension with this human inability is the qur'anic affirmation that humans are responsible for their belief or unbelief. In the context of divine threats and promises, Allah says "Say: 'The truth is from your Lord. Whoever pleases, let him believe, and whoever pleases, let him disbelieve'" (Q18:29). Here, as elsewhere (Qur'an 37:48; 38:52; 44:54; 52:20; 55:56, 72; 56:22, 35–37), human ability to believe or disbelieve is implied. How to coherently affirm both qur'anic motifs has been debated throughout Islamic history.

Introducing the Mutazilites and Asharites

The debate started with those who upheld free will, ironically labelled the Qadarites for opposing the divine decree (*qadar*), and those who defended Allah's unilateral control over all events (*jabr* or compulsion), the Jabarites (Fakhry, 2004, pp. 44–46).

[1] All Qur'an quotations are from A. J. Droge translation.

However, the Mutazilites and Asharites took up and significantly refined the debate. The Mutazilites and Asharites were motivated by different theological concerns. The Mutazilites, who called themselves 'people of unity and justice', sought to articulate a more rational basis for Islam. They argued for Allah's unity and justice, human responsibility, and they sought to justify Allah's actions (Adamson, 2016, pp. 12–17; Leaman, 2004, p. 13). The concern for Allah's justice encompassed a *moral* concern that evil cannot be ascribed to Allah (Fakhry, 2004, p. 49). The Asharites' concern was *metaphysical*: "they were concerned to preserve God's untrammeled power" (Adamson, 2016, p. 109). In this debate, qur'anic and philosophical concerns coalesced, and the meaning of Allah's justice and sovereignty was contested.

The history of the Mutazilite-Asharite theological dispute was highly politicized. The Mutazilite doctrine known as 'to order the doing of right and forbid the doing of wrong' (relating to the qur'anic theme found in Q3:104, 110, 114; 7:157; 9:71, 112; 22:41; 31:17) led to the spreading of their doctrine by state authority. In 833 CE, Caliph Al-Māmūn instituted an inquisition (*miḥnah*) against those who rejected Mutazilite doctrine, especially those who denied the createdness of the Qur'an (Adamson, 2016, p. 11). Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal (d. 855) famously suffered but refused to acquiesce to Mutazilite doctrine. Persecution in the name of Mutazilite doctrine lasted for fourteen years under two further caliphs (al-Mu'tasim r. 833–842 and al-Wathiq r. 842–847). The widespread suffering caused "irreparable and lasting damage to the cause of the Mu'tazilah" (Fakhry, 2004, p. 64). The ascension of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, in 847, ended the *miḥnah*. Further, he reversed the situation by publicly denouncing some Mutazilite beliefs (Fakhry, 2004, p. 65). The theology that follows largely stems from this combustible context.

The Mutazilites[2]

The Mutazilites interpreted the truthfulness of Allah's threats and promises to mean Allah's justice necessarily entails rewarding the faithful with eternal bliss and despatching the rebellious eternally to hell (Fakhry, 2004, pp. 45–47, 56–67).[3] The Mutazilites argued that good and evil are not arbitrary categories decreed by Allah but are rational categories that can be comprehended through unaided human reason. This became a premise from which they argued that Allah, though omnipotent, cannot "act in total violation of all the precepts of justice and righteousness, torture the innocent, and demand the impossible, simply because He was God" (Fakhry, 2004, p. 49; cf. Adamson, 2016, p. 13). A leading Mutazilite theologian, al-Nazzam (d. 845), taught that Allah is unable to do anything "to a creature in this world or in the next

[2] For present purposes I will, in general, treat Mutazilite theology as a cohesive whole, even though it was a broad school of thought containing important philosophical and theological differences.

[3] The orthodox agree with the Mutazila that the righteous will go to Paradise and the wicked to hell, but for them it is *probable* whereas for the Mutazila it is *necessarily certain* (Sheikh, 1982).

that would not be for the creature's own good and in accordance with strict justice" (Sheikh, 1982, p. 10). This belief effectively places a constraint on Allah.

These arguments were a response to those who upheld the divine decree, claiming humans do "not play any part whatsoever in the drama of [their] moral activity" (Fakhry, 2004, p. 214). For the Mutazilah, this undermined Allah's justice and was therefore unacceptable. The conviction that evil cannot be ascribed to Allah drove the Mutazilite argument for free will (Adamson, 2016, p. 13). Human beings must be able to respond to divine warnings and promises otherwise Allah would be responsible for their recalcitrance. The founder of the Mutazilites Wasil ibn 'Ata said, "It is absurd that the creature be exhorted to act when it is impossible for him to act" (cited in Thompson, 1950a, p. 213; cf. Adamson, 2016, p. 13). How the Mutazilah conceived of free will was complex.

The Mutazilites affirmed a causal relationship between a person's action and their deed (*tawallud*) that amounted to partial self-determination. Fakhry (2004, p. 50) describes this as "the irreducible minimum of any effective belief in moral freedom." Accordingly, the early Mutazilites were sometimes called Qadarites (Sheikh, 1982, p. 10). Some Mutazilah affirmed that humans created their own deeds. Al-Ash'ari (d. 936) pounced on this irreverent claim, declaring that it denied Allah's unrivalled sovereignty and amounted to polytheism (Fakhry, 2004, pp. 211, 214) He cited qur'anic verses that claimed that Allah creates everything including human actions, for example "God created you and what you make" (Q37:96) and "God is the Creator of everything" (Q13:16). The medieval commentator Ibn Kathir (d. 1373) comments on one such verse (Q37:96) in similar fashion. Citing a hadith from Sahih al-Bukhari, he states "Allah has created every doer of deeds and what he does" (Ibn Kathir, n.d. Q37.96). Allah creates not only human persons but also human actions. To claim that humans create their own deeds would compromise Allah's sovereignty as sole creator.

Wary of saying humans create their own deeds, other Mutazilah affirmed partial and not complete human self-determination. The Mutazilites were not uniform in their views. They distinguished between the inner freedom of volition and choosing, and the outer freedom of causing actions through volition. The Mutazilah generally affirmed the former but disputed the latter. Mutazilite theologian Thumama b. Ashras (d. 828) offered an innovative, intriguing, and unsatisfying solution. He affirmed the inner human freedom of volition but denied human beings had the ability to act in the physical world. For him, human moral action was inscrutable and insoluble. He refused to undermine Allah's sovereignty by ascribing actions to human beings, but to preserve divine justice he also refused to ascribe evil actions to Allah. His solution: generated actions have no author at all. Thumama managed to relieve both Allah and humankind from moral responsibility, but "without advancing a single step toward a rational solution of the ethical dilemma" (Fakhry, 2004, p. 54).

The Asharites

Asharite theology derives from Abu Al-Hasan Al-Ash'ari (d. 936). He has been described as the "greatest theological authority in orthodox Islam" (Goldziher, 1981, p. 104) whose theology is "the most significant statement of Islamic theology" (Rippin, 2014, p. 78). Who was al-Ash'ari? Al-Ash'ari was once a Mutazilite who broke away from their teachings.[4] His overarching concern was Allah's unrivalled sovereignty, which he perceived was undermined by Mutazilite theology. Al-Ash'ari believed Allah's absolute omnipotence included being sovereign over his moral and religious decrees of eternal reward and punishment. If Allah was bound to reward the righteous and punish the wicked this would compromise his sovereignty. Allah's sovereignty means he is unconstrained by anything and can do as he pleases. Allah is completely free to damn the innocent eternally and admit the wicked into paradise (Adamson, 2016, pp. 107–108). Al-Ash'ari's explains, "He (God) is the king of His creation, doing what He wishes and judging as He pleases; if He were to bring all the creatures into heaven, it would not be unrighteousness, and if He were to cast them all into Hell, it would not be tyranny" (cited in Thompson, 1950a, p. 212). Allah's decrees of eternal reward and punishment are "entirely independent of any conditions, moral or other, apart from God's absolute fiat" (Fakhry, 2004, p. 211). Allah could "torment innocent children in the afterlife", "punish those who believe in Him and reward the unbelievers" if he so chose (Adamson, 2016, pp. 107–108). Does this not compromise Allah's justice, as the Mutazilah argued?

The Asharites developed a voluntarist ethic where good and evil are what Allah has declared them to be, rather than having intrinsic meaning. According to this 'divine command theory', good and evil are simply by divine decree as revealed in the Qur'an and have meaning in relation to humankind but are meaningless *vis-à-vis* Allah (Adamson, 2016, pp. 107–108; Thompson, 1950a, p. 212). Fakhry (2004, p. 218) unsympathetically summarizes the Asharite position: "God's power and sovereignty are such that the very meaning of justice and injustice is bound up with His arbitrary decrees. Apart from those decrees, justice and injustice, good and evil, have no meaning whatsoever". Allah remains just because he decrees it so. For al-Ash'ari, Allah cannot be said to be unjust. A claim of injustice suggests that either Allah does that which is beyond his domain, or the contravention of what has been commanded by a superior. It is quite proper for Allah to exercise complete omnipotence over creation, and he has no superior. Therefore, by carefully and selectively defining injustice, al-Ash'ari argued that Allah is just (Adamson, 2016, p. 108; Fakhry, 2004, p. 211). What of human free will?

Allah's unlimited sovereignty was central to Al-Ash'ari's qur'anic hermeneutic. In the Qur'an several verses "exhibit a dazzling spectacle of the unlimited and arbitrary power of God, which can hardly leave scope for any power other than God in the world" (Fakhry, 2004, p. 48; cf. Kateregga & Shenk, 2011, p. 31). As sole creator without rival Allah creates all things, including the actions of creatures. Al-Ash'ari

[4] There is an origin story of how this occurred, with al-Ash'ari rebelling against his former master Mutazilite Abu 'Ali al-Juba'i (d. 915), but its historicity is difficult to confirm (Fakhry, 2004, p. 210).

explains, "We believe that God has created everything, by simply bidding it: Be, as He says [in Koran 16, 42]: 'Verily, when we will a thing, our only utterance is: "Be" and it is'" (cited in Fakhry, 2004, p. 213). Al-Ash'ari continues, "We hold that there is no Creator but God, and that the deeds of the creature are created and preordained by God, as He said [in Koran 37, 94]: "He has created you and what you make"" (cited in Fakhry, 2004, p. 214). Allah guides the faithful and unfaithful irresistibly. Given this divine omnipotence, "how, then, can we understand the human act as really a human act, something for which we are responsible?" (Leaman, 2004, p. 95). In Al-Ash'ari, while Jabarite doctrine is apparently triumphant, al-Ash'ari himself sought a mediating position between Jabarite and Mutazilite theology. The doctrine of acquisition (*al-kasb*) was his innovation and contribution (Adamson, 2016, pp. 110–112).

The Asharite theory of acquisition holds Allah alone has the power to create human actions and compel human actions, but humans have the power to choose between right and wrong. Allah habitually creates human action in accord with the choices people make, though those choices are irresistibly created and compelled by Allah. When Allah creates human action, the human actor acquires that action. People acquire, and thus are responsible for, the actions that Allah alone creates (Adamson, 2016, pp. 110–112). Sheikh (1982, p. 19) explains that for al-Ash'ari, "Acquisition (*kasb*) corresponds to the creature's power and choice previously created in him; he is only the locus (*mahalt*) or subject of his action."[5] Burrell (2008) and Leaman (2004) explain that, for Al-Ash'ari, human beings 'perform' the actions that Allah creates. In acquiring or performing the deed, that person accrues either merit or demerit. Al-Ash'ari explains, "I myself declare that God has the power to compel His creatures to [do] everything, the power to create which *as an acquisition on their part* is attributed to Him; it is even possible that He compel them to [do] injustice" (cited in Thompson, 1950b, p. 278 emphasis original). Allah has eternally predetermined all aspects of creation including human actions, but it is humans who acquire the merit or demerit for deeds done in time (Fakhry, 2004, pp. 214–215). In sum, Asharite theology regards all action, divine and human, "as brought into being ultimately by God" (Leaman, 2004, p. 25).

Asharite theology explicitly rejects creaturely causality. It later came to adopt a particular metaphysical understanding known as atomism, which predated Asharism. Al-Baqillani (d. 1013) is particularly associated with the philosophical development of atomism. According to atomistic metaphysics, everything other than Allah is comprised of atoms and accidents. Neither continue to exist for two successive moments, but rather both are continuously created by Allah otherwise they would cease to be. According to this occasionalist metaphysics "Things possess no stability or continuity in themselves" (Adamson, 2016, p. 108; cf. Fakhry, 2004, pp. 217–218). Thus, in contrast to creaturely causality, lack of food and drink do not cause hunger

[5] Nasr describes a softer version of acquisition. Allah alone creates all that will come to pass, including human action. He does so by creating options, and human beings can "choose among the options that God has created and thus freely choose to engage in or play out the acts that God has created, thereby acquiring the acts" (Nasr et al., 2015, p. 1306). This interpretation appears at odds with Al-Ash'ari's belief that Allah can compel people to do certain actions, even unjust ones.

and thirst, but the latter only follow the former habitually and could be otherwise. "Each event that happens or fails to happen is the result of a particular creative act on God's part. God mostly allows natural events to take their habitual course, but not without exception" (Goldziher, 1981, p. 113). Allah habitually creates human action according to the choices people make but Allah is not bound to do so.[6] Nevertheless, human moral responsibility for human action remains even if Allah created that action against that person's volition. Asharite theology already taught what Fakhry (2004, pp. 220, 214) calls "God's arbitrary power" or "the God-despot" but in atomistic metaphysics Asharism found a congenial philosophy to reinforce this sheer sovereignty.

Comparison and Evaluation

Both the Mutazilite and Asharite positions are a sophisticated outworking of their chief premise, the former interpreting divine omnipotence through the lens of divine justice, and the latter doing the reverse. Herein lies the difficulty: doing justice to the qur'anic witness appears to require a logical incompatibility: divine authorship of, and human responsibility for, human action. Asharism creatively shows how this is not unjust. However, moral intuitions find that solution unsatisfying, hence the Mutazilite charge that the Asharite doctrine of acquisition is absurd. Fakhry (2004, p. 48) says the Asharite view "strips divine justice or human responsibility of any positive meaning, whatsoever." Allah's threats and promises describe the eternal outcomes for all people who are entirely subject to Allah's foreordination. Sheikh (1982, p. 19) concludes, "It becomes doubtful whether the theory of acquisition is any better than the mere cloaking of pure determinism." Akhtar's (2008, p. 303) criticism is stronger: if good and evil are unreal to Allah "then the drama of human history is a lie composed by an imposter." Akhtar rejects Asharite ambivalence toward good and evil as morally inappropriate for Allah; furthermore, "the God of orthodox theology (*kalam*) is unworthy of our modern reverence. His amoral prowess repels us" (Akhtar, 2008, p. 303). According to logic and moral intuition, the Mutazilite objection to Asharism is sustained.

However, Mutazilite theology of divine justice appears to compromise Allah's boundless sovereignty to which the Qur'an bears abundant witness. It is unclear how Mutazilite theology can defend human free will, as seen in Thumama's unsatisfying 'solution'. Mutazilitism is logically coherent and might be more morally satisfying, but is scripturally ill-fitting. Akhtar comments that whilst the Qadarites and Jabarites can justly turn to the Qur'an for support, on balance the Qur'an favours the Jabarite (predestinarian) view (Akhtar, 2008, pp. 177, 303). Can Allah be the sovereign author of all human actions while human beings have genuine moral responsibility for their

[6] The term 'habit' in this context continued to be disputed for centuries. In the twelfth century Averroes criticized al-Ghazali for using "the term 'habit' to explain our expectations of the regular connection between cause and effect" (Leaman, 2004, p. 105).

choices? Neither Asharism nor Mutazilitism adequately accounts for both qur'anic motifs. Neither position satisfies metaphysically and morally. These are main lines of Islamic thought that have issued from the Qur'an.[7] How have Christians addressed these same concerns? Does the Bible offer similar or distinctively different resources for addressing these shared philosophical and theological questions?

Christian Accounts of Divine Sovereignty and Human Freedom

The Bible, like the Qur'an, teaches God's omnipotence and sovereignty (Gen. 1–2, Ps. 115:3; Eph. 1:11; Rev. 21–22). It contains promises of heaven and warnings of hell with accompanying exhortations to choose righteousness and forsake iniquity. For example, Moses said to ancient Israel, "I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live" (Deut. 30:19).[8] Implicit in the biblical warnings and promises is the God-given human ability to respond. Representative of this motif is Galatians 6:7–8: "for you reap whatever you sow. If you sow to your own flesh, you will reap corruption from the flesh; but if you sow to the Spirit, you will reap eternal life from the Spirit" (Gal. 6:7–8). This Pauline maxim is thoroughly Jewish (Prov. 22:8; Job 4:8; Hos. 10:7–8) and applies the undeniable agricultural truth, proved every harvest, to the moral realm. The Apostle Paul has already said that morally depraved behaviour excludes a person from eternal life (Gal. 5:19–21). This is not about earning, for sowing does not earn a harvest; many other factors are involved. Sowing, however, is a prerequisite to enjoying a harvest, so human moral choices are prerequisites that are directly connected to one's eternal state, the 'harvest time' of the final judgement (de Silva, 2011, p. 293; Keener, 2019, pp. 496–497).

More explicitly than Islam (Akhtar, 2008, p. 377), Christians believe that the human free will has been severely injured and compromised by sin. Famous Christian disputes on this include that between Augustine and Pelagius in the patristic era, and between Martin Luther and Desiderius Erasmus in the sixteenth century. Comparatively, these were not as formative for Christian theology as the Mutazilite and Asharite debate was for Islam, for both were internal western church disputes. Regarding Augustine's ideas, Kelly (1985, p. 370) comments that, for the Eastern church, they "had no noticeable impact." As such, what follows is a thematic rather than a historical account. How does Christian theology conceive of divine warnings

[7] Space precludes from given due consideration to other Islamic theological schools, such as the Maturidites, named after Abu Mansur al-Maturidi (d. circa 944), which is generally held to the be the second orthodox Sunni theological school after the Asharite (Madelung, 1987b). Maturidites theology accepts the Asharite theory of acquisition, but it also affirms that God grants human beings both the choice and the power to act (Saeed, 2006, p. 70). Al-Maturidi affirmed that in one sense Allah creates human acts, while in another sense they are really a person's free choice and act (Madelung, 1987a).

[8] All biblical quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version.

and promises, and of human freedom in relation to divine sovereignty? That depends on the Christian theology being considered. The two views investigated in this chapter can be minimalistically labelled deterministic sovereignty—God determines all things, and indeterministic sovereignty—God does not determine all things.

Deterministic Sovereignty

Some Christian accounts are, *prima facie*, strikingly similar to Asharite theology. Arguing what he terms "a moderately Calvinist model," Feinberg (1986, pp. 19, 29) holds that God has predetermined every event, for "God's decree covers all things." He believes that God causally determines all acts and yet God does not coerce humankind. Humans are free to make their own choices and therefore are morally culpable. Other Christians find such theology to be logically problematic and biblically ill-fitting. Geisler (1986) argues that God's causal determination of all acts is in fact coercive, making God morally culpable for evil.

Reichenbach (1986, p. 51) rejects Feinberg's concept of human freedom as an illusion, according to which, a person's "desiring and choosing must be decreed by God," and "there is no instance in which I can desire anything other than that decreed by God." Reichenbach (1986, p. 51) finds this account of human freedom "an empty notion, for there can be no desire independent of God's decree." Undermining human freedom compromises human moral responsibility. This critique echoes the Mutazilite critique of Asharite theology. This study follows Robert Kane: a human action is free when that person is 'ultimately responsible' for that action, including any sufficient causes (Kane, 2005, p. 121). What follows are two reasons why the mainstream of the Christian tradition rejects these elements of Feinberg's account.

Critiquing Deterministic Sovereignty

Biblical depictions of evil typically contrast it with God and his will. God desires shalom for creation, and evil is the "spoiling of shalom, whether physically (e.g., by disease), morally, spiritually, or otherwise" (Plantinga, 1995, p. 14). 1 John 1:5 states unequivocally, "God is light and in him there is no darkness at all." This theological and moral assertion describes "the character of God as good, pure, and holy. Light implies integrity, truthfulness, and authenticity" (Johnson, 2011, p. 31). Darkness and light are antithetically contrasted. While darkness, representing evil, "implies deceit, falseness, and inauthenticity …, in God there is nothing unworthy, undependable, or morally ambiguous" (Johnson, 2011, p. 31). Evil is not merely abstracted but embodied in sinful behaviour, such as theft, lying, slandering, murder, and being a slave trader. These are included in the various New Testament lists (Gal. 5:19–21; 1 Cor. 6:9–10; Eph. 5:5; 1 Tim 1:9–10) of those who "will not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:21). The Bible depicts heaven in terms of the new creation, into which

"nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practises abomination or falsehood" (Rev. 21:27). Those who make a life-practice of such things will remain excluded (Rev. 22:15).

Summarizing the biblical perspective, Wright (2006, p. 89) explains, "Evil is the force of anti-creation, anti-life, the force which opposes and seeks to deface and destroy God's good world … and above all God's image-bearing creatures." In the Incarnation, Jesus revealed God's purposes and God's person. Jesus' entire life and vocation involved confronting and overcoming evil, culminating in his death and resurrection which, says Wright (2006, pp. 89, 114), is primarily understood in this light. In sum, from a biblical perspective, God and evil are antithetical. Yet, for Feinberg (1986), God seems to inescapably become morally culpable for human evil. Consequently, for this reason, Feinberg's account of divine sovereignty and human freedom must be rejected. What of human freedom?

Christian teaching generally affirms human freedom despite a deterministic strand within the western Christian tradition. Against the notion that God determines all acts, Roman Catholic theologian Rahner (1961, p. 111) explains "History is not just a play in which God puts himself on the stage and creatures are merely what is performed; the creature is a real co-performer in this humano-divine drama of history." Briefly, by human freedom is not meant absolute freedom, for there are degrees of freedom. Instead, following Reichenbach (1989, p. 286), "Genuine freedom means that the causal conditions do not determine the person's choice or action." Put in the past tense, though difficult, a person could have done other than they did. The Fall, depicted in Genesis 3, did not remove the human ability to choose. Using the language of monk and theologian John Cassian (d. 435), the human will is not dead but sick (Kelly, 1985). God restrains his power, says biblical scholar Fretheim (2005, p. 272), and empowers human beings "for the sake of a relationship of integrity", such that they can make "genuine decisions", including the possibility of decisions that oppose God's will. Biblically, human freedom remains but it is morally perverted and routinely misdirected. This is why Arminius (1986, p. 700) says, "Free will is unable to begin or perfect any true spiritual good, without Grace." Summarizing the flow of biblical history, Pinnock (1975, p. 107) says "God's activity among people is not a kind of monologue which God conducts on his own; it is on the contrary a dramatic dialogue between God and the creature … There is a working together, and also a working against, of God and the created spirits."[9]

This broad affirmation of human freedom, though injured, was the consistent teaching of the early church (McGrath, 1998, p. 20).[10] In Feinberg's (1986) Asharite-like account of God's sovereignty, that divine coercion eclipses human freedom is biblically and theologically problematic. The reality of human freedom means that divine warnings and promises are meaningful. How might a Christian conception of

[9] The language was updated to be gender inclusive.

[10] Forster and Marston (2001, p. 296) show that, regarding the doctrine of 'free will', "Not a single church figure in the first 300 years rejected it and most of them stated it clearly in works still extant." It was affirmed by leaders of all the main theological schools in diverse locations. Only with Augustine's theology did that begin to change.

divine sovereignty establish and not erode human freedom? In what follows, I sketch a theology of indeterministic divine sovereignty through reflecting on one biblical passage. I also consider one incident from the life of Adam in which the biblical and qur'anic accounts importantly differ. Due to the constraints of this chapter, this selection from the Bible is necessarily restricted. What follows is my own account of what can be called a relational theology of sovereignty.

Indeterministic Sovereignty

Jeremiah 18:1–12 provides insight into the biblically-conceived interrelation of divine warnings and promises with God's sovereignty and human responsibility.[11] In verses 1–4, God tells the prophet Jeremiah to go to a potter's house and observe the potter remaking a spoiled clay vessel. The potter-clay metaphor is an allusion to God shaping Adam (meaning humankind) out of clay in Genesis 2:7–8, suggesting universal human application even though Israel is in view (Craigie et al., 1991, p. 243). I will return to the figure of Adam shortly. In verses 5–11, God prophetically interprets these actions. God is sovereign like the potter, nations are as clay in His hands. The unassailable omnipotence of this metaphor is common to biblical and qur'anic accounts of divine sovereignty owing to similar doctrines of creation (Kärkkäinen, 2015, pp. 84–85). In Jeremiah 18, God takes his chosen 'potter and clay' metaphor, one that conveys unassailable sovereignty, and inverts it. God sovereignly elects to be responsive to human choice. God relates to Israel not impersonally as a Judge toward the accused, but more personally like a parent toward a grown-up son or daughter, or a professor to a student (Goldingay, 2021, p. 392). Quite simply, says Lundbom (1999, p. 817), "Yahweh's covenant and the good it brings are conditional on Israel's obedience." People can be doomed to destruction not by irresistible divine determination but by wilful human stubbornness (see verse 12). The issue, describes Goldingay (2021, p. 389), is not whether God has divinely determined Judah's future but whether, due to human sinfulness, Judah has sealed its own fate. Human sinfulness is the fault of humans who could have chosen otherwise. The good news in this passage is that it is not too late (verses 7–11), repentance that averts judgement remains possible. This biblical portrayal of divine sovereignty strikingly contrasts with a qur'anic perspective.

In the prophetic parable God deliberately violates the metaphor of sheer sovereignty to convey that "the clay [humankind] *can* frustrate the potter's intention

[11] The choice of this passage will be justified by the subsequent exegetical and theological reflections. As a Pharisee it is difficult to imagine that the apostle Paul did not have this passage in mind when writing Rom. 9:20–21 because it is by far the fullest portrayal and most lengthy interpretation of the potter-clay metaphor for God and Israel. (The other instances are Isa. 29:16, which Paul cites in Rom. 9:20, and Isa. 45:9.) This is ironic given that some Christian interpreters appeal to Romans 9 to uphold divine determinism. While the two Isaiah references state the plain meaning of the metaphor in a single verse, Jeremiah 18 offers a lengthy theological reflection and dramatic interpretation that goes beyond the metaphor's plain meaning.

and cause him to change it: as the quality of the clay determines what the potter can do with it, so the quality of a people determines what God will do with them" (Bright, 1965, p. 125). This speaks of divine self-restraint, responsiveness, and patience that is profound, but not endless. If the clay is finally recalcitrant (verse 12), the Potter will finally quit, which means catastrophe for the clay (Brueggemann, 1998, p. 169; Craigie et al., 1991, p. 240). In Jeremiah 19 the clay is destroyed. This Christian account of divine warnings and promises is not compromised by divine sovereignty because God sovereignly determines not to be all-determining. God changes his mind (verses 8 and 10) in response to human responses. While people may believe that they are powerless before God's sovereign omnipotence, totally subject to divine manipulation as clay is by a potter, "Yahweh's challenge makes clear that this inference would be mistaken" (Goldingay, 2021, pp. 391–392).

God's volitional changeability is driven by his moral constancy to reward righteousness and judge wickedness. Divine omnipotence does not overwhelm or negate human freedom but establishes it. God exercises dynamic sovereignty that makes space for creaturely action thereby rendering divine warnings and promises meaningful. Sanders (1998, p. 44) explains, "God sovereignly decides that not everything will be up to God." God desires human collaboration to achieve His goal for creation. This different conception of power reaches its biblical climax in the incarnation and crucifixion of God's Son. Boyd (2000, p. 68) says "This is the omnipotent Creator who 'flexes his omnipotent muscle', as it were, by being born in a stable, growing up with the stigma of being an illegitimate child, hanging out with sinners, and dying a God-forsaken death on the cross!" This biblical understanding of divine ruling differs significantly from a qur'anic depiction. To examine this difference one aspect of the biblical and qur'anic accounts of Adam will be contrasted,[12] after which broader theological reflections will be offered.

Contrasting Divine Sovereignty in the Bible and Qur'an

In the Bible and the Qur'an, God has Adam name creatures. Underlying this superficial similarity is a profound theological difference. In the Bible Adam names the animals, whereas in the Qur'an Allah retains the naming-rights of creatures. Allah teaches these names to Adam (Q2:31), and at Allah's command Adam tells creatures their names (Q2:33). This narrative particularly exalts Allah's "unrivalled knowledge" (Sinai, 2017, p. 149). The qur'anic adaptation of the story from its biblical and postbiblical antecedents[13] changes consequential details in accordance with its own theological convictions (Bannister, 2021, p. 83). This conception fits with Asharite

[12] In what follows I draw on my article (Dodds, 2022).

[13] The qur'anic account seems to follow the postbiblical Christian work *Cave of Treasures*, written in Syriac, which, like Genesis, has Adam naming the animals. The qur'anic accounts of Adam in many respects closely resemble the *Cave of Treasures*, but on this point it departs (Sinai, 2017, p. 146).

theology, according to which Allah is the only causal agent, and humans are Allah's servants, not partners.

In Genesis 2:19, God brought the animals "to the man to see what he would call them, and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name." Sanders (1998, p. 44) says, "God grants to humanity something of his own creative power. God is not a power-hoarding deity." Adam's act of naming is an exercise of creaturely sovereignty and imitates God in bringing creation under his God-given dominion (Waltke, 2001, p. 89). Phyllis Trible comments that God is present "not as the authoritarian controller of events but as the generous delegator of power who even forfeits the right to reverse human decisions" (cited in Fretheim, 2005, p. 58). This forms part of the wider narrative in Genesis 1–2 in which God shares God's power with creation, for God involves creation itself in the acts of creating and ruling.[14] This divine power-sharing with Adam is the beginning of a biblical theology of partnership with human beings as "God's fellow workers" (2 Cor. 6:1). Jesus, the very incarnation of God, desires friends (John 15:15). The God of the Bible shares his power, with humankind, to fashion the future. Fretheim (2005, p. 57) explains "God so values human freedom that God will take into account the free human response from within the creative process in shaping the future."

While this is no more than a sketch of some biblical perspectives on the issues at hand, what has emerged is that God shares power with creation including humankind. Unlike the Asharite doctrine of creation's absolute and continual dependence on Allah moment by moment, the Bible speaks depicts God granting to creation, including humankind, stability, continuity, and a degree of autonomy (Dodds, 2019, pp. 48–50). God sovereignly determines not to determine human action by granting genuine freedom to humankind. Humans can respond to divine threats and warnings. This ability may well be enabled by God, but it is not coerced. God's goal is partnership with humanity, and thus this view can be labelled a relational or "fellowship model of sovereignty" (Sanders, 1998 p. 276). According to this view divine justice rewards righteousness and goodness and judges unrighteousness and wickedness.

The Qur'an asserts continuity with the Bible in claiming to confirm, most especially, the Torah and Gospel (Q3:3–4). Durie calls 'biblical reflexes' those similar materials found in both the Bible and the Qur'an. This includes many characters, such as Adam, and several doctrines that are more closely related to Christianity rather than Judaism, including "the use made of the fear of future judgement to motivate good works" (Durie, 2016, p. 4). Nevertheless, the discontinuity between the Qur'an and Bible on both counts is well known. As noted earlier, the Qur'an reshapes biblical reflexes for its own doctrinal purposes. It appears that the theology of divine sovereignty fits this broader pattern. In Christian theology there is continuity between God's trinitarian relational ontology,[15] the human *telos* of fellowship with

[14] Several times we read a variation of "Let the land produce" (Gen. 1:11, 20, 24, 28), which means God involves parts of his creation in the act of creating. God also shares rulership over creation. The heavenly bodies are to rule (*mashal*) over day and night (Gen. 1:16, 18), and human beings are to rule (*radah*) over the animal kingdom (Gen. 1:26, 28) (Fretheim, 1997, pp. 4–5).

[15] That God's being is in communion was famously argued by Zizioulas (1985).

God, human freedom, and a fellowship model of divine sovereignty. Starting from the Qur'an's doctrine of God, enshrined in the theology of *tawhid*, this relational dimension is elided. Consequently, the fellowship model of divine sovereignty is absent from the Qur'an's Adam stories and absent from both Mutazilite and Asharite theologies. From the limited sample of qur'anic and biblical passages studied, it appears that each scripture has distinct materials that are incorporated into different theological architectonics. *Vis-à-vis* God's sovereignty and human freedom, this study indicates that the prevailing winds of the Qur'an's theology blow in a deterministic direction which limits human freedom, whereas the biblical prevailing winds blow towards an indeterministic fellowship model of sovereignty that establishes human freedom.

Conclusion

Offering a coherent conception of the interrelation between divine sovereignty, divine justice, and human freedom is a challenge for Christians and Muslims alike. The issue is crystalized in how to interpret the frequent biblical and qur'anic warnings of punishment and disaster and promises of blessing and reward. How can humankind respond? In reply, Christians and Muslims both turn to their respective scriptural authority as interpreted through their theological traditions.

Asharite theology, and not Mutazilite theology, has historically been judged as more faithful to the Qur'an and a more traditional interpretation of Islam (Leaman, 2004, p. 13). However, many contemporary Muslim scholars, including Akhtar (2008), Fakhry (2004), and Sheikh (1982), are strongly critical of Asharite conceptions of divine sovereignty and human freedom, preferring instead Mutazilite-like views. Offering a broad-church interpretation, Leaman (2004, p. 14) suggests that the views of neither theological party are incompatible with Islam. Nonetheless, if the Asharite interpretation of Allah's sovereignty is the most persuasive exegetically, then the Mutazilite critique that divine determinism appears to undermine human freedom is compelling, and Allah's threats and promises seem to be illustrative but not instructive. Theodore Abu Qurrah (d. 825) was a Melkite Bishop and an early Christian writer in Arabic whose writings possibly influenced the Mutazilites. He explains the intractable nature of this Islamic problem, "Any way you look at it, constraint [by divine decree] can never be reconciled with the giving of commandments and prohibitions. Those who speak of constraint will either have to deny all divine commandments and prohibitions in order to do so," as the Asharites do by relativizing the meaning of good and evil and undermining human freedom (cited in Beaumont, 2019, p. 152). He continues, "or, if they continue to affirm that God gives people commandments and prohibitions, clearly they will have to reject constraint and advocate freedom" which is the Mutazilite resolution (cited in Beaumont, 2019, p. 152). This view raised apparently insurmountable theological problems including the risk of committing *shirk*.

Some Christians have attempted a theological construal of divine sovereignty and human responsibility that is, in effect, deterministic. While sharing some common ground with Asharism, this view appeared to distort biblical teaching regarding human freedom and God's opposition to evil. Instead, a Christian construal of divine sovereignty and human responsibility was outlined to show how the threats and promises of God cohere with divine sovereignty. Drawing on Jeremiah 18 and the creation of Adam, the Bible conceives of God as a power-sharing God. God's sovereignty serves the purpose of the divine-human relationship, which is fellowship. Shumack (2014, p. 84) explains, "The God of the Bible wants us to know not just his will, but him." This is part of the telos of the "fellowship model of divine/human interaction" (Shumack, 2014, p. 84).[16]

Both Christians and Muslims affirm that God is sovereign, but their conceptions of this differ. They can agree on the same word while disagreeing on its meaning (Hitchcock, 2014, p. 382). Divine sovereignty in the Bible and Qur'an includes the meaning of sheer omnipotence inherent in God being Creator of all. From this shared basic conception, the exercise of that sovereignty diverges. The Christian conception of sovereignty outlined above also includes God being interactive, flexible, and responsive. God grants to humankind a measure of power because God's creation project aims at a divine-human partnership. This aspect of divine sovereignty does not appear to have a qur'anic counterpart. From the perspective of the Qur'an the language of partnership is abhorrent and strictly forbidden, for an unequal partnership is inconceivable, and ascribing partners to Allah amounts to polytheism and is unforgivable (Durie, 2016, pp. 114–119). The biblical conception of divine-human partnership, which is naturally unequal, conceives of the God-human relationship altogether differently. From an Asharite perspective power is viewed competitively and is solely possessed by Allah. God's goal of divine-human partnership is unlike the qur'anic divine-human relationship of master to servant. In the Christian conception, this partnership, and responsive sovereignty, creates the ontological space for human free will. It could be said that Christians secure one outcome desired by the Mutazilah by means of different scriptural resources at their disposal.

Christians and Muslims both affirm human freedom. How, then, are the divine warnings and promises found in the Bible and Qur'an to be understood? Christians largely conceive of their choices as being their own whether or not they are in accord with God's will. For Muslims Allah is the sole creator of human actions, and how humans contribute to their own actions is complex and unclear. Adang (2001, p. 225) notes that many qur'anic verses say that belief or unbelief is a person's choice, but a larger number of verses indicate it is God who makes this determination for people. This apparent contradiction is a disputed matter among commentators. What is clear

[16] Shumack (2014, p. 84 emphasis original) contrasts this with Islam's "legislative model of divine/human interaction under which the knowledge of God's legal requirements is *the* central concern of religious knowledge."

is that the Bible and the Qur'an provide Christians and Muslims respectively with different theological resources with which to address these enduring philosophical and theological questions. Both Christianity and Islam contain a spectrum of theological explanations which fit easily with some scriptural evidence but not so easily with others. Such is the challenge of being scripturally faithful, logically consistent, and theologically coherent.

This chapter has been an exercise in comparative theology. As such, "there is no already settled framework in which its meaning can be adjudicated or the outcome predicted" (Clooney, 2013, p. 57). There is no Archimedean point from which the results of this study can be evaluated. Yet in the spirit of truth-seeking readers are encouraged to evaluate this study, tentatively, respectfully, and with humility, with the means at their disposal. While undoubted commonalities exist in the conception of divine sovereignty, in the Bible and Qur'an the prevailing theological winds blow in different directions in accord with their distinctive architectonics. I hope that this study has contributed to understanding and appreciating "the otherness of the religious other without losing sight of one's own identity" (Moyaert, 2012, p. 26). This study in comparative theology was limited to contrasting a Christian 'fellowship model of sovereignty' with the Islamic theology of the Mutazilite-Asharite dispute. It was also limited to select biblical and qur'anic texts. As such the results are provisional, indicative, and an "exercise that can be repeated, extended, improved, tested in other unanticipated circumstances with other texts" (Clooney, 2013, p. 57).

Since comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue are correlatives, it is envisaged that this study may enrich inter-religious dialogue in several ways. First, by stimulating curiosity of the distinctive theologies that emerge from the Bible and Qur'an, such as their theologies of God and of divine-human engagement. Second, by evoking interest in how the Qur'an and the Bible tell different stories about the same characters, such as Adam, or tell the same story in different ways, with distinctive theology embedded in those differences. Thus, it is hoped that this study stimulates further "acts of study across religious boundaries" (Clooney, 2013, p. 60). This would, third, make the dialogue partners more informed of the respective theologies, enabling them to assimilate this learning and bring "it into dialogue with their own traditions" (Clooney, 2013, p. 60). Fourth, adds Clooney (2013, p. 60), "It may also instigate more depth of study in one's own tradition, so that even prior to inter-religious dialogue, a deepening occurs." In both comparative theology and inter-religious dialogue difference need not be minimized, for doing so would jeopardise the integrity of one or both faith traditions. Paying attention to difference need not mean accentuating difference or fostering conflict. Instead, carefully listening to the distinctive scriptural and theological voices of both faiths will minimise misunderstanding of the other and facilitate improved inter-religious listening and learning.

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Chapter 7
Understanding Multicultural Dimensions in the History of Progressive Science in the Classical Period of Islam (610–1258 CE)

Muqowim and Zulkipli Lessy

Abstract The classical period of Islam is generally considered from the early foundations of the faith until the Mongolian conquest of Baghdad in 1258. This study aims to portray the multireligious-cultural dimensions of scientific development during the classical periods of Islam, with a specific focus on the eighth to thirteenth centuries. Science and technology greatly contributed to the advancement of Islamic civilization during these centuries marked by the establishment of networks among Muslims and contributions to other nations. An additional influencer was that Islam is a religion and an ideology that is concerned with the formation of an independent society because Muslims at those periods had their own government systems, laws, and institutions. The advancement of science and technology was driven by Muslim rulers, kings, or sultans who served as patrons to strengthen political and economic power. Additionally, in Islam, there is the concept of propagating Islam (*dakwa*) to preach Islamic teachings to those who already adhered to Islam or those who had not received Islamic teachings. Muslims in those periods learned from other civilizations and strengthened their collaboration with other nations regardless of their religious, political, and cultural backgrounds. This chapter argues that a multicultural spirit was not only present at those times but was implemented in the context of scientific progress. Given this historical context, therefore, every Muslim scientist must adhere to an openness and a solid ethos to learn from other cultures and faiths.

Keywords Multiculturalism · Scientific progress · Islamic civilization · Golden age of Islam

Muqowim
Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia

Z. Lessy (✉)
Graduate School, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
e-mail: zulkipli.lessy@uin-suka.ac.id

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Introduction

The classical period of Islam is generally considered from the early foundations of the faith until the Mongolian conquest of Baghdad in 1258 (von Grunebaum, 2017). This study aims to portray the multicultural dimensions of scientific development during the classical period of Islam, with a specific focus on the eighth to thirteenth centuries. The progress of science in Islamic contexts is inseparable from the scientific transmission of pre-Islamic civilizational knowledge into the Islamic world (Hodgson, 1974). In fact, Muslim scientists contributed significantly to the transmission and further development of that science. Many religious and cultural factors influenced the development of the Islamic scientific tradition in asynchronous and diachronic ways. The asynchronous method focuses on the study of science at certain points in time [history], while the diachronic method focuses on the chronology of the development of science over time. Science in the classical era of Islam advanced substantially through engagement and cooperation with scientists from other religions. This important lesson can be applied in the present context, especially in the development of science and technology in the Muslim world. This is particularly true in Indonesia which lags behind other nations in terms of scientific discovery and technological innovation.

This chapter argues that the willingness to learn from other civilizations was apparent from the strong enthusiasm of Muslim scientists, who established collaborations with other nations regardless of their religion, culture, faith, or other backgrounds. This involved cultivating a multicultural spirit that was not only discussed at the time but was implemented over time in the context of scientific development. This is an important point to note for the Islamic world today. The implication of this history is that every Muslim scientist should have an open mindset to study with anyone and engage in interfaith dialogue. This was exemplified by other civilizations, including in Europe, who were inspired by and learned from the Islamic civilization in Baghdad. They modeled their scientific ethos on Muslim scientists and applied it in the West. Political patrons today may be reminded of and encouraged by this open and science-friendly paradigm as they design and legislate policies and programs that advance scientific innovations.

This chapter is organized as follows: we set the scene by elaborating on the historical background context for this treatise. This is followed by a discussion of scientific developments during the Umayyad Dynasty, which in turn engendered increased interfaith and intercultural influences during the Abbasid Dynasty. Next, we discuss interfaith cooperation under Caliph al-Ma'mun and then we turn our attention to Arabic as the international language of academia. This is followed by a discussion and critical analysis of the development of science, especially in the modern period. We also refer to examples of integrative-interconnective higher education practices and collaborative programs involving seminars, conferences, publishing and research with overseas academic stakeholders. A brief conclusion recapitulates the chapter's main lessons and recommendations.

Historical Background

Prior to the rise of Islam, the first half of the sixth century was known as the era of darkness. However, this era can be considered only as politically dark because other branches of science developed during this era including literature, agriculture, astronomy, botany, mathematics, medicine, and technology (Hodgson, 1974). These discoveries spread throughout the Byzantine Empire, Syria, India, and China. Mathematics and technology were particularly advanced and had substantial international influence. For example, there was historical evidence of the development of mathematics in Egypt as early as the fourth century BCE (Imhausen, 2016). In China several mathematical figures emerged, namely Hsia-hou Yang, Chen-luan, Chang Ch'iu-Chien (Gillon, 1977). Meanwhile, the medical field developed in Byzantium by Alexander of Tralles (Bouras-Vallianatos, 2016). During the Sassanid Dynasty (224–637 CE) in Persia, alcohol began being used for medicinal purposes (Hamdi et al., 2022).

During the time of the Prophet Muhammad's mission of spreading Islam, both in Mecca (610–622) and in Medina (622–632), the development of Islam was still limited to strengthening faith for its adherents in these two places. The progress of science and technology in Islam, during the classical period, was influenced by strong networks of Muslim scientists with other civilizations, such as Greek, Indian, Chinese, and Persian traditions (Bsoul, 2018). This occurred when the vast territory of Islam politically developed from the East in India to the West in Andalusia, Spain. These regions were under the reign of the first four caliphs or *Khulafa al-Rashidun* (632–661) until the Umayyad dynasties (Su, 2021). Islam rapidly transformed itself with increasingly expanded territories that held vastly different cultural backgrounds and histories (Bonney, 2004). There has been much scholarly debate regarding the motivations for early Islamic expansion (Ibrahim, 2018). Certainly, Islam contains basic teachings which not only have to do with the correlation between humans and God or the vertical relationship and the eternal living after in this earthly world, but also with the formation of an independent society with its governmental systems, laws, and institutions (Al-Ahsan, 2017).

Scientific Development During the Umayyad Dynasty

During, the Umayyad Dynasty (661–750 CE), Muslim territories stretched from India to Andalusia, and Muslim scientists rose to international prominence (van der Krogt, 2011). Hitti (1987) argues that Islamic culture was largely formulated by conquered peoples, unmatched in its literary, scientific, and philosophical brilliance and influence. Mu'awiyah, the first caliph of the Umayyad caliphate, reigned between 661 and 680 (Hodgson, 1974). During this time, the Muslim General Uqbah ibn Nafi conquered most of North Africa. In 670, he founded the city of Qayrawan in Tunisia which later became one of the centers of Islamic culture (Nasution, 1985). The

expansion of Muslims into the West occurred during the era of Al-Walid, the sixth caliph (reigned 705–715). Military General Musa ibn Nusayr attacked and conquered Algeria and Morocco. After subduing the two regions Tariq ibn Ziyad became the Muslim representative whose government was established in Tangier (Hodgson, 1974). In 711, Tariq ibn Ziyad crossed the strait located between Morocco and the European continent and landed in a place that became known as Gibraltar (*Jabal Tariq*) (Donner, 1999). The Mediterranean islands of Majorca, Corsica, Sardinia, Crete, Rhodes, Cyprus, and parts of Sicily were also controlled by Muslims. Ultimately, areas were under Muslim control included Spain, North Africa, Syria, Palestine, the Arabian Peninsula, Iraq, parts of Asia Minor, Persia, Afghanistan, and areas now called Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The vast areas of Islamic power allowed dialogues between civilizations, religions, and cultures (Lapidus, 2002).

Increased Interfaith and Intercultural Influences During the Abbasid Dynasty

After the Abbasid revolution (750 CE), the Abbasid Caliphate established the city of Baghdad as the center of culture, science, and innovation (Nasution, 1985). Al-Mahdi (reigned 775–785), the successor of Caliph al-Mansur and third caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate, boosted the economy of the dynasty. He enhanced the agricultural system by providing irrigation and waterways to double the production of wheat, rice, dates, and olives. Mining products such as silver, gold, copper, and iron also flourished (Bobrick, 2012). During his reign, the transit of trades between the East and West increased, and Basrah became an important port. This intercultural enviroment continued under Harun al-Rashid (785–809) who built hospitals, pharmacies, and facilities of medical education. At the time, it was estimated that Baghdad had 800 doctors. Public bathing places were also established to improve hygene. Harun al-Rashid rose to such world prominence comprable to Charlemagne in Europe. Hence, the Abbasid Dynasty in Baghdad is known by historians as the golden era of Islam (Badeu, 1983).

Somewhat different from the Umayyad Dynasty which tended to be Arab-centric, the Abbasid Dynasty greatly absorbed foreign influences, particularly from Persians, Jews, and Nestorians. The religions of Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and Buddhism became the dominant world religions. Christians were represented by Willibrord and Bede (Sarton, 1927) in the West and John of Damascus, Yahya al-Dimashqi in the Near East. Willibrord spread Christianity to the north of the Lower Rhine and Denmark, while John of Damascus wrote *The Fountain of Knowledge* and other theological works which had a strong influence not only on the Greek Church but also on Islamic and Jewish theology. Because of this condition, inter-religious and intercultural societies flourished. The influence of Persia was particularly pervasive, and as a consequence, the Persians influenced the Caliphate in terms of love for

beauty, urbanity, intellectual curiosity, and enjoyment of discussion. This was very conducive to the advancement of science (Kettani, 1984). Unfortunately, this freedom of thought was often followed by an increase in immorality and disrespect for women. Unlike the Alexandrian era, when most elite still used native languages, during the Baghdad era elites were required to use foreign languages. Hence, they gradually adapted to the expression of new ideas.

The first century of the Abbasid Caliphate (750–850 CE) coincided with the 'golden age' of the Tang Dynasty in China (618–907), so a strong diplomatic partnership developed (Mansour, 2018). Chinese innovations in paper manufacturing spread to Tukharistan and Central Asian papermaking was closely associated with Buddhist institutions (Lin, 2011). During the second half of the eighth century, Jabir ibn Hayyan emerged as one of the leading figures of Islamic thought, undertaking research regarding alchemy, astronomy, botany, chemistry, literature, magic, medicine, Shi'ite philosophy, physics, and zoology. With the help of Alcuin, he carried out a number of educational reforms (Sarton, 1927). Because of development in science, the schools of Islamic law and theology emerged. The Hanafiyyah school was founded by Abu Hanifah in the second quarter of the eighth century, while the Malikiyyah school was opened by Malik ibn Anas who composed the work of *al-Muwaththa'*. Other Islamic figures that emerged in this era included Qadi Abu Yusuf who wrote *Book of al-Kharaj*, and Ja'far al-Sadiq who was also one of the Imams in the Shi'a who wrote treatises on alchemy. Abbasid caliphs, such as al-Mansur and Harun al-Rashid, strongly supported the development of science (Sarton, 1927).

It was in Lower Mesopotamia, Iraqi, and Arabia that the greatest intellectual activity could be seen. A new concentration of culture was achieved with renewed vigor in the created cities of Basrah, Kufa, and Baghdad. These three cities were comparable with Alexandria a few centuries earlier. The flow of knowledge was integrated into the Caliphate of the Abbasid from the Byzantine, Persian, and Indian Empires. According to Huff (2003), the advances of Baghdad in mathematics, astronomy, engineering, and other sciences were the most advanced in the world. However, this new concentration did not emerge as easily as it did in Alexandria where there was a preservation of Greek culture with a slight addition of foreign elements. By contrast, the vehicle of Islam's new civilization was a language that had never been used before for academic purposes. Almost all types of knowledge had to be translated from Greek, Sanskrit, or Pahlavi before it could be assimilated (Sarton, 1927).

Interfaith Cooperation Under Caliph Al-Ma'mun

The successor of al-Rashid, Caliph al-Ma'mun (reigned 813–833), became known as a patron of extraordinary science through interfaith cooperation even greater than Harun al-Rashid. He founded an observatory in the Tadmor plain, Palmyra to advance the science of astronomy (Sayili, 2005). In 829, al-Ma'mun introduced the practice of ancient Greek scholar, Eratoshenes of Alexandria, to measure the circumference

and diameter of the earth. In order to translate books from the Greek civilization, Caliph al-Ma'mun hired translators from the Christian and Sabi classes. He also permitted interfaith literary dialogues in the court (Bertaina, 2007). He established a team of scholars of different religions to collect and store manuscripts which were then translated into Arabic. And in order to accelerate the development of science, al-Ma'mun founded a multipurpose library first in the Muslim world called *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) (Balty-Guesdon, 1994). This educational institution was open to Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals to foster scholarly research through both primary texts and translations of original manuscripts, covering topics such as astronomy, mathematics, medicine, and philosophy (Osman, 2012).

Caliph al-Ma'mun collected as many Greek manuscripts as possible by sending messengers to the Byzantine Emperor, Leon the Armenian (813–820) in Constantinople, and commissioning the translation of these manuscripts into Arabic. He encouraged scholars from all disciplines and a large number of scientific works were placed under his protection. The assimilation of Greek scholarship was accelerated by the earnest efforts of three siblings, and they were children of Musa ibn Shakir, who collected and translated many Greek manuscripts (Sarton, 1927). A vast amount of maps, manuscripts, and books from ancient Greek, Persian, and Indian civilizations were eventually collected, including the writings of Aristotle, Euclid, Claudius Ptolemy, and the Al-Sind Hind book on mathematics (Algeriani and Mohadi, 2017).

Even though this era was referred to as the Islamic renaissance, the role of Nestorian Christian scientists was significant in reaching this stage. One Nestorian at *Bayt al-Hikmah* was Hunayn ibn Ishaq (or Joannitius, 809–877) who was fluent in Greek, Syriac, Persian, and Arabic. Introduced by Jibra'il Bakhtishu, the court physican, Caliph al-Ma'mun ultimately appointed ibn-Ishaq to be in charge of the academy and library, overseeing the translations from Greek and Syriac into Arabic (Samir, 2002). It is through these efforts that great thinkers emerged, especially in the field of science. This was manifested through the critical mindset and openness of al-Ma'mun who adhered to the Mu'tazilah school, which is known to be very rational in Islamic theology. During the Abbasid era (750–1258 CE), Arabic was used as a language of science, replacing Greek and Persian as administrative languages. Arabic was also the language of philosophy and diplomacy. As Watt and Cachia (1977) point out, medieval Christianity modeled its scholarship on Islamic intellectuals.

The Abbasids fostered cohesion within the scientific community and engagement with foreign cultures to advance their political goals (Hamidi and Mahdavian, 2020). The construction of government-funded study centers, such *Bayt al-Hikmah* in Baghdad, *Daar al-Hikmah* in Cairo, and Cordova University in Andalusia, were modelled on academies built by Plato, Aristotle's Lyceum, Alexander the Great's Museum, and Jundeshapur in Persia (Abdul-Aziz and Mohadi, 2020). As a result, Muslim scientists made substantial advances in mathematics, astronomy, chemistry, physics, medicine, biology, and technology. And as a result, mathematics and astronomy then developed in the Islamic world, Latin, Byzantine, and India. Scholars in these times were integrated figures in all sciences because it was impossible to separate mathematics from astronomy, and because almost every mathematician was an astronomer or an astrologer too. Many important steps were made in the field of

trigonometry especially for calculating astronomical tables. One leading and prominent Muslim scientist, al-Khwarizmi, became known as the 'father of algebra' (van der Waerden, 2013). About 830 he wrote the book *Hisab al-Jabr wa-l-Muqabala* (*Calculation by Completion and Balancing*) from which the term *al-jabr* was Anglicized to algebra (Eschenburg, 2020). Muslim doctor al-Razi became one of the greatest medical minds in history, being the first to distinguish between smallpox and measles, as well as pioneering pediatrics, obstetrics, and ophthalmology. He had over 200 publications, many of which became standard texts in European medical universities (Edriss et al., 2017).

Chemistry, physics, and technology continued to develop in China and the Islamic world, while medicine advanced in Byzantium, Japan, Latin, and Jewish culture. Arab scholars studied ancient manuscripts, adding their own innovations in medical science. For example, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya ar-Razi (Rhazes) differentiated smallpox from measles, invented medicinal ointments, and wrote the famous thirty-volume *Al-Hawi* medical encyclopedia (Falagas et al., 2006). Islamic dominance became so pervasive that the ninth century was essentially a Muslim century, unmatched in literature, science, and philosophy (Hitti, 1987). Although intellectual activities in other regions still continued, the activities of Muslim scientists were the standard-bearers of civilization. Islam became the complete code of life for Muslim that impacts all human activities, including economic, social, political, moral, religious, and cultural values. The discoveries of Muslim scientists, attracted the attention of philosophers and scientists around the world (Singer, 2004). The impact was so extensive that European scholars gained knowledge on Greek civilization from Islamic rather than European sources (Al-Andalusi, 2015). In Iqbal's (1981) view, with the advent of Islam, an inductive study of nature emerged, and this has become a characteristic of the development of science using the methods of experimentation and observation ever since.

Arabic as the International Language of Academia

Owing to the polices of the Abbasids, Arabic was increasingly used in academic literature, even by non-Arabic speaking Christians, Jews, and Persians. Thus, Arabic became an intercultural vehicle for the development of science and continues to assist in medical research today (Shoja et al., 2015). In general, the first half of the eleventh century Muslims were preeminent in science, while philosophy was dominated by Jews. The progress of Islamic science was supported by Christian doctors living in Baghdad, such as Ibn al-Thayyib (Omar, 2015). However, in the second half of the century there emerged the figure of al-Ghazali, known as the greatest Islamic theologian who can be compared to Thomas Aquinas in the West.

After the era of Caliph al-Ma'mun, his half-brother, Caliph al-Mu'tasim (reigned 833–842) established a private army of Turkish slave-soldiers and became known as a warrior-caliph (Leiser, 2000). He likewise encouraged the pursuit of literary and scientific achievements through interfaith dialogue with non-Muslims. The nephew

of al-Ma'mun, Caliph al-Wathiq (842–847) maintained the tradition. However, this suddenly was terminated in the era of Caliph al Mutawakkil (847–861) who had a very strict attitude towards other faiths and the Mu'tazilites sect (Melchert, 1996). Even so, Caliph al-Mutawakkil continued to protect scientists, especially doctors. One of the greatest optical scientists was Ibn al-Haytham, or Alhazen (c965–1038) who is considered the father of modern optics and pioneer of the spectacles (Pūyān, 2014). He conducted experiments on light, colors, optic illusions, and reflection. Alhazen's publications were translated into Latin and spread across Europe (Hayes, 1983).

Islamic civilization in the field of science continued to develop in Persia, Egypt, Baghdad, and Andalusia. In Persia, the figures who emerged included al-Biruni (Shah, 2012). The Fatimid Dynasty in Egypt also became a scientific center of advancement (Brett, 2017). Baghdad came under the control of the Buwahid Dynasty (934–1062) also became a patron of science with scientific figures such as Nasr ibn Ya'qub, al-Baqillani, Ibn al-Husayn, al-Karkhi, and al-Kathi (Donohue, 2003). In the second half of the eleventh century, Islamic scholarship was still dominated by Persian tradition. However, it was somewhat different from the first half of which still used Arabic as a medium. Therefore, in the second half of this century Persian language began to be widely used. Scientific centers spread in Toledo, Saragosa, Seville, and Murcia (Sarton, 1927).

Given the above chronological picture of the cultural and religious contexts, it appears that the emergence of the Islamic civilization was greatly influenced by many factors. The increase and decline of civilizations are natural. However, interestingly the rise of a science was greatly driven by rulers who engaged with academics from other religions. These rulers functioned as patrons to extend the breadth of their political networks and financial support. What was done by the Abbasid Dynasty under Caliph al-Mansur, Caliph Harun al-Rashid, and Caliph al-Ma'mun was proof of the political support of the authorities and their willingness to be patrons of science. Even the smaller Islamic dynasties played a role in the progress of civilization in the field of science. What was done by the Buwayhid Dynasty, Fatimid Dynasty, Samanid Dynasty, and Umayyad Dynasty in Andalusia, and several other smaller dynasties is proof that they also played an important role in the advancement of Islamic civilization (Muqowim and Lessy, 2019). It is noteworthy that, unlike in the modern period more scientific advances emerged through individual figures rather than institutions. The emergence of the *madrasa* (religious institutions for training in Islam) was the turning point in the decline of scientific studies because this institution was widely used as a political tool for authorities (Findikli, 2022). In addition, science is based on critical reasoning which was considered a danger to the status quo of authorities. So, scientific exploration was done in secret.

Discussion

In the light of the information above, there are several important points to notice and reflect further related to the development of science, especially in the modern period. The Qur'an teaches the importance of studying the *kauniyyah* verses (the teachings of the scriptures about the universe). During the classical period, the development of science in Islamic civilization was strongly influenced by other civilizations before this religion was born either historically or culturally. The emergence of scientific progress was due to intensive interaction and communication with other civilizations such as the scientific traditions in China, India, Persia, Rome, and Greece. Therefore, learning from this fact, the development of science in the Islamic world should be carried out by collaborating and synergizing with other civilizations regardless of both their ethnic and religious background.

The next point is the importance of attitudes, inclusiveness, tolerance, and moderation in the context of the development of science in the classical period. There was a close cooperation between the rulers and the scientists, regardless of their religious backgrounds. Open and inclusive attitudes for policy makers in those periods greatly influenced the progress of science. In fact, they engaged all scientists with a variety of religion and ethnicity to transfer the field of science to the Islamic world. If this can be applied in the modern context in the Islamic world, the development of science is not only carried out exclusively based on understanding religious teachings. It considers the context of the reality in a plural society as basically the progress of science and technology is used for the benefits and common good of society.

In regard with the science and technology development in the Islamic Higher Education in Indonesia, the institutional transformation from an institute to a university is one of the important events and historic milestones. In 2002 State Institute of Islamic Studies (IAIN) Syarif Hidayatullah Jakarta transformed into Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University (UIN) and in 2004 Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic Institute (IAIN) transformed into Sunan Kalijaga State Islamic University (UIN) in Yogyakarta. Also, this situation happened to IAIN Malang transforming into UIN Maulana Malik Ibrahim in 2004. To put it another way, the three UINs became the pioneers of the development of science and technology at Islamic Higher Education Institutions because scientific traditions in those institutions at the level of institutes (IAIN) mostly emphasized more normative Islamic teachings, such as *tarbiyah* (education), *adab* (history and literature), *ushuluddin* (theology), *da'wah* (preaching), and *shari'ah* (Islamic law) (Muqowim and Lessy, 2021).

This transformation is basically the embodiment of a paradigm shift and a more integrative-interconnective philosophy of knowledge. At the level of institute, there was a tendency to dichotomous views or binary opposition in scientific development, especially in *naqliyyah* (transmission-based) sciences derived from normative scriptures and '*aqliyyah* (rational-based) sciences based on critical and historical rationality. Since the Islamic universities (UIN) have been established, the scientific tradition development is more aligned with an integrative-interconnective paradigm. According to this paradigm there is basically no dichotomy in the development of

science because *naqliyyah* sciences which is based on the *qawliyyah* verse (the text of the Qur'an and the hadith of the Messenger of Allah) and the science of '*aqliyyah* which is derived from the *kauniyyah* verse (natural phenomenon), both come from God (Suyadi and Sutrisno, 2018).

The application of the integrative-interconnective paradigm at UIN Sunan Kalijaga in relating to science and technology development seems clearly in the policies and programs to improve the quality of lecturers to study at universities in the myriad countries such as Japan, China, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, and Canada. This policy is conducted to meet the need of new faculties such as Faculty of Science and Technology, Faculty of Islamic Economics and Business, and Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanity. In addition, various collaborative programs are also executed for scientific development through several activities for instance seminars, conferences, publishing and research. These developments cannot be separated from the role of university managers who are open, inclusive and moderate. However, the impact and achievements of those developments need to evaluate further because after all, the traditional scientific method of science and technology with an integrative-interconnective paradigm is the realm of a relatively new academic discipline.

Conclusion

The narrative on the development of science in Islamic civilization was strongly influenced by a complex network of academics from around the world. The willingness to learn from other civilizations was apparent from the strong enthusiasm of Muslim scientists, who established collaborations with other nations regardless of their religion, culture, faith, or other backgrounds. The multicultural spirit was not only discussed at the time but was implemented in the context of scientific development. This is an important lesson for the Islamic world today. The implication of this history is that every Muslim scientist should have an open mindset to collaborate with anyone regardless of their faith, belief, ideology, gender, sexual orientation, language, and nation, as well as engage in interfaith dialogue. This is exemplified by other civilizations, especially in Europe, who were inspired by and learned from the Islamic civilization in Baghdad. They modeled their scientific ethos on Muslim scientists and applied it in the West.

Political patrons today may be reminded of and encouraged by this open and science-friendly paradigm as they design and legislate policies and programs that advance scientific innovations. The transformation of many institutions from State Islamic Institute tradition into State Islamic University one became a concrete example that Islam is a dynamic system which its teachings can adapt to any situation. Today's phenomena in the state Islamic universities show advantages of being general universities because their elasticity can accommodate science and technology to be taught to students of Islamic teachings backgrounds, such as *pesantren*, to open their horizon to the development of science. Since year 2002, tens of state Islamic

institutions for Islamic studies under the Ministry of Religious Affairs have changed into Islamic universities that offer variety of disciplines and subjects, and the number of student enrollment tends to increase every year.

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Chapter 8
Beyond the Face: A Pentecostal's Re-evaluation of Orthodox Iconography

Emma M. Austin

Abstract Throughout history, differing biblical interpretations of various dogmatic or doctrinal issues have created a tumultuous minefield for Christians to navigate. One issue that has become a clear visual distinction between Orthodox and Pentecostal churches is the practice of iconography. In Orthodox theology, icons are approached with *proskýnēsis* (Gr., "veneration, bowing down showing respect to") as windows that allow the worshiper's gaze to pass through in worship of God. This is clearly distinct from *latreia* (Gr., "worship, adoration"), which is reserved for God alone. From a Pentecostal perspective, prostration before and kissing an icon is indistinguishable from idolatry. Using historical and literary criticism, as well as iconographic exegesis, this paper explores the history and theological foundations that undergirds Orthodox iconography. Through a re-evaluation, it suggests ways Pentecostal Christians may learn to enrich their spiritual experience and foster greater unity across Christian communities.

Keywords Pentecostal · Liturgy · Iconography · Interdenominational · Ecumenical

Introduction

Although some scholars argue that Pentecostalism of the early twentieth century was actively ecumenical (Hollenweger, 1997), hostility and suspicion from traditional Christian groups led to isolation and antipathy (Kärkkäinen, 2000). Narinskaya (2012, p. 139) observes that some Protestant circles still scorn "the redundancy of the [Orthodox] tradition and its entire heritage, including veneration of sacred images." While Nel (2018) draws parallels between Pentecostal and early Orthodox spirituality, the Pentecostal tradition does not typically use and often disapproves of many traditional religious practices (Murphy, 2018). Richie (2011) notes that although

E. M. Austin (✉)
Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: emma.austin@ac.edu.au

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Pentecostals have sometimes been hesitant and even antagonistic towards other religions, there is an increasing interest in interfaith dialogue (Droll, 2019; Hamalainen, 2021; Stephenson, 2018; Wankar, 2018).

Religious icons represent themes, events, and people using visual images and symbols that are intended to connect with people in spiritual and personal ways. From simple symbols, like a fish, anchor, or cross, Christian art developed so that pictures of Jesus, the virgin Mary, apostles, and other saints were used more widely and became what are now known as 'holy' *eikons*. Within Orthodox traditions, they are more than simply stylized religious paintings, but are a critical element of worship that communicate the mystery of salvation. According to Burgess (2013, p. 30), Protestants (which includes Pentecostals), if not willing to wholeheartedly embrace iconography, are "increasingly drawn to icons." The liminal space between the traditions of the Orthodox church and Pentecostal praxis invites a re-evaluation of the biblical, theological, and relational practice of iconography.

I was raised within the Pentecostal tradition in Australia and first encountered the rich world of Orthodox icons while living and studying in Jerusalem (2015–2017). Bringing this perspective, the goal of this chapter is an interfaith dialogue that re-evaluates Pentecostal scepticism towards iconography. According to Cornille (2020), engaging in dialogue requires the humble acknowledgement that one's own tradition could require change or growth and willingness to recognise actual truth in another tradition or religion. Engaging in such dialogue "is not simply a show of Christian interest for the sake of the other; it is an authentic encounter with untold possibilities" (Richie, 2013, p. 115). This does not presuppose adoption or conversion, but rather a willingness to listen. Newbigin (1995, p. 168) argues, "A person meets his or her partner with the expectation and hope of hearing more of truth, but inevitably will seek to grasp the new truth by means of those ways of thinking and judging and valuing that he or she has already learned and tested." For Pentecostals, religious truth claims should be scrutinized and adjudicated with the guidance of the Holy Spirit (Stephenson, 2013). As Yong (2005, p. 201) observes, a critical, charismatic, and charitable "approach to religious others results in our own conversion and transformation, by the power of the Spirit, into the image of Jesus."

Therefore, this chapter considers an interfaith dialogue between the Orthodox theology of iconography and the Pentecostal aversion to icons within worship practices. I begin by examining the Old Testament prohibition against creating graven images, the anti-idolatry polemic in the New Testament, and how icons developed among the early Christians. I then explore theological principles that distinguish between idolatry and appropriate worship. Finally, adopting Cornille's (2020) principles of humility and hospitality, I reflect on how Pentecostalism can engage with iconography and discover how Orthodox theology invites worshippers to look 'beyond the face' of icons to express adoration to God.

Biblical Perspectives

The question of whether the use of icons within Christian traditions constitutes idolatry begins with looking at the roots of monotheism and idolatry in the Hebrew scriptures. The first and second commandments in Exodus 20:3–5 seem to prohibit creating images: "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an image in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God." The command against creating images is bracketed by declarations that Yahweh be the only God of the Israelites and alone receive their worship. The commandments arose within a polytheistic context, which relied on tangible objects representing gods to bridge the divide between natural and supernatural. Strezova (2013 p. 299) argues that the second commandment was a kind of "preventive medicine" to immunize the Israelites from pagan religions. Israel's neighbors believed in the physical presence of their gods within the idols, often connected to natural phenomena, like the sun, moon, harvest, rain, or sea, and developed cultic practices to appease and control the gods.

By contrast, the God of Israel is described as one who cannot be controlled or manipulated. King Saul, for example, tries to manipulate Yahweh by sacrificing the best sheep and cattle after disobeying God's instructions, but is rebuked by Samuel: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (1 Sam 15:22). Throughout the Hebrew scriptures, the Israelites are tempted to create and worship idols. Yet they are called to a different standard, one that "is understandable, but also revolutionary. It is an authoritarian pronouncement of monotheism" (Yandell, 2009, p. 416). Yahweh is declared by the one and only God over Israel (Deut. 6:4–5; Mk. 12:29–30).

To uphold this monotheistic theology, the Israelites were commanded not to limit the intangible Creator God into a depiction of something natural and created, as though God were nothing more than an effigy of wood, stone, silver, or gold. Certainly, they were not to bow down and worship these crafted, lifeless objects (Ex 23:24). In one sense, images and idols used to portray pagan gods "are mere signs, with no unique powers, capable of serving only as reminders and transparent representations of the gods… they are mainly didactic" (Halbertal & Margalit, 1992, p. 39). However, as Marcus (2006, p. 152) notes, "by forbidding not only depictions of foreign gods but also graven images of the true one," the commandments leave no doubt about the only God deserving of worship. Whitlark (2012, p. 386) concurs that, "Covenant loyalty to Yahweh required separation from the gods of the nations and the practices of their adherents (cf. Lev. 19:4; 20:22–26)." The rejection of idolatry was to affirm God's power over other gods (Korada, 2017). At the core of these commandments is not a universal prohibition against all images, nor even against religious images generally, but as a caution against the influence of polytheism and pagan practices, centred on the attitude of the heart.

Echoing the Hebrew scriptures, the New Testament describes idolatry as powerless, deceptive and futile even though, as Greenspoon (2014, p. 339) observes, "There is little if any specific mention of the first commandments, about graven images and idolatry." In the Book of Acts, the Apostle Stephen critiques the Israelites for making the golden calf (7:39–43), the Jerusalem council cautions Gentiles from engaging in idolatrous practices (15:20, 29; 21:25), and Paul's message that God's image cannot be captured by human design (17:21–34) incites a riot of artisans in Ephesus (19:24–34). According to Wilson (2019, 2021, p. 33), the anti-idol rhetoric in Acts echoes the Jewish idol polemic found in texts such as the Epistle of Jeremiah, Wisdom of Solomon 13–15 and Bel and the Dragon, which "mainly functions as a means to differentiate God from foreign deities and to differentiate God's people—Jews and now also Christians—from other nations."

Paul also advises the church in Rome that idolatry is committed by those who trade "the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like a mortal human being and birds and animals and reptiles" (Rom. 1:23). More than this, he writes in Colossians 3:5 that covetousness is idolatry, that is, loving or desiring anything more than the desire for God.At the heart of the first and second commandments, therefore, is not a prohibition against creating or using icons for religious practices. This is providing that in both practice and conviction, first, there is a clear distinction between the finite, tangible creation and the infinite, intangible Creator; and, secondly, that God alone receives all honour and worship. I now turn to the rise of religious iconography within the Church and the theological principles for using icons in worship.

Development of Icons

Towards the end of the second century CE, Eusebius (263–339), bishop of Caesarea in Cappadocia describes Christian symbols and images which point clearly toward Christian acceptance and usage. Eusebius (2005) writes:

> [W]e have observed that likenesses of His Apostles, Peter and Paul, and, indeed, of Christ Himself are preserved in pictures made with colors, since, as is probable, the ancients were accustomed without restraint to honor them, according to a pagan practice, as saviors, in this fashion" (pp. 119–120).

Neo-platonic philosopher, Porphyry (c.234–c.305) used the incarnation to demonstrate the religious inferiority of Christianity. He mocked the aniconic foundation of Christianity, which found itself with "an historical Christ [who] was necessarily visible and depictable" (Porphyry c.275, cited in Meyendorff, 1983, location 51) and compared this with the use of idols in Greek paganism that function merely a means of accessing the divine prototype. Porphyry (cited in Meyendorff, 1983) writes:

> If some Hellenes are light-headed enough to believe that the gods live inside idols, their thought remains much purer than that [of the Christians] who believe that the divinity entered the Virgin Mary's womb, became a foetus, was engendered, and wrapped in clothes, was full of blood, membranes, gall, and even viler things (p. location 51).

Evidence demonstrates that towards the end of the second century CE, Christian symbols and images began to appear.

The earliest symbols used words and letters comprising God's Hebrew name, יהוה, variant abbreviations of Jesus Christ's name in Greek (such as XP, IHΣ, or ICXC) or the Greek symbols alpha and omega (AΩ; see also Rev. 1:8; 21:6; 22:13) as visual signs (Kemp, 2012, p. 19). The most well-known is the fish, *ichthys* (ἰχθύς), which gained popularity as an acronym for the phrase, "Jesus Christ, Son of God, Saviour" (Jensen, 2013). The schematic outline of a fish became a key symbol of the Christian faith (Kemp, 2012, p. 19), spreading across Spain, Asia Minor, Africa, and the Rhine River, with little derivation (Besançon, 2000, p. 109). The spread of these symbols indicates an intrinsic appeal of the early Christians to give visual expression to their faith. Images and icons soon moved beyond the realm of graffiti, sketches, signs, and symbols etched on catacomb walls (Jensen, 2017).

As a result, Christian apologists needed to determine whether icons were appropriate and how they could use them. Idolatry was still a concern. Aristides of Athens (fl. second century) writes that although the Greeks may be commended in manner and reason, "they have gone astray after dead idols and senseless images" (*The Apology of Aristides* 2004, p. 46). He scorns so-called "gods" for being susceptible to rust, rot, insects, and mice. Justin Martyr (c.100–c.165) wrote against statues. Martyr (2007, p. 231) states that they are "lifeless and dead," susceptible to rust, rot, insects and mice, and that the creation and veneration of such objects is "not only irrational" but "even insulting to God…" Lactantius (c.250–c.325), a Christian advisor to Constantine I, had similar objections. Lactantius (1871, p. 76) argues that an image of the living God could not be "fashioned by the fingers of men out of stone, or bronze, or other material," but that the only true image must be "man himself, since he has both perception and motion, and performs many and great actions." Despite the cautions of early apologists, acceptance of religious symbols among early Christian communities was widespread. It was necessary, therefore, to distinguish the increasing use of iconography in the Church from despised Greek idolatry.

Christ as the Ultimate Icon

Within eastern Orthodox theology, there are clear theological principles providing a fundamental distinction between images made by people and the supernatural God. The visual element is foundational, for through it, "many persons who had no conception of the Orthodox Church have received a direct impression of an important aspect of Orthodox piety" (Benz, 2017, p. 2). One of the fundamental defences of images is that Christ justifies icons through the Incarnation since he is the image of the living God. Paul declares in 2 Cor. 4:4 that Christ is the "image [*eikon*] of God." Although the invisible, unknowable God is impossible to represent, he revealed himself, God incarnate, through Jesus Christ. As McFarland (2016, p. 158) observes, while in the West icons "are not viewed as prompting us to *think* differently about

God or the world that God creates and redeems," they are theologically significant within Orthodox theology "as a necessary implication of the *this*-worldly reality of the incarnation."

Christ's humanity offers a temporal and visible glimpse into the eternal and invisible realm in which God dwells. Orthodox Christians believe that through the act of veneration and by the Holy Spirit, worshippers connect with God "in the beauty of the icon's portrayal of Christ" (Goetz, 1993, p. 1221). Hence, according to Ouspensky and Lossky (1982, p. 14), the foundation for the possibility of Christian iconography is the incarnation of the Word since "icons, just as well as the Scriptures, are expressions of the inexpressible, and have become possible thanks to the revelation of God, which was accomplished in the Incarnation of the Son." Germanus I (715–730), the Patriarch of Constantinople, used Christological arguments to demonstrate how the relationship between the incarnation and a depicted image expressed veneration and worship to God. Germanus (c.730 cited in Ranft, 2013) writes:

> In eternal memory of the life in the flesh of our Lord Jesus Christ, of His passion, His saving death, and the redemption of the world which results from them, we have received the tradition of representing Him in His human form—i.e., in His visible theophany—understanding that in this way we exalt the humiliation of God the Word (p. 64).

John of Damascus, who succeeded Germanus I, emphasizes that a change occurred in how the invisible God related to the visible world when he gave himself a material existence as a man through Christ. John of Damascus explains (2003, p. 24), "Therefore I am emboldened to depict the invisible God, not as invisible, but as he became visible for our sake, by participating in flesh and blood. I do not depict the invisible divinity, but I depict God made visible in the flesh." Therefore, the incarnation offers a strong case for the use of icons since they, as images of Christ, reflect how Christ himself became the image of God on earth.

While Jesus is the *eikon* of the living God, depicting God the Father remains controversial (Deut. 4:15–16; Isa. 40:18–19). As Marcus (2006, p. 152) aptly summarizes, the Father remains "so transcendent and dynamic that freezing him in a finite and static form is a trivialisation." Early Christian art often depicts God as a hand issuing from the clouds, a motif notably comparable to the third century frescoes at the Dura Europos synagogue in modern Syria (Couzin, 2021). Camille (2006, p. 20) suggests that the pointing index finger of the hand represents an "acoustical performance, the speaking subject." Other depictions representing God the Father are theophanic, drawing on the interplay between God's divine energy (*energeia*) and essence (*ousia*) (Louw, 2014, p. 133). The former principle is based on the belief that the manifestations in certain biblical passages (Exod. 24:9–11; Isa. 6:1–5; Ezek. 1:26–28; 8:1–5; Dan. 7:9–15) are God's *energeia*, not his *ousia*, since, as Exod. 33:20 declares, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live…" (Bulgakov, 2012, pp. 31–32). The schematic representations of God the Father in this way, therefore, are considered acceptable expressions of his presence and voice in the icons, whereas the full body of Christ may be depicted since it was fully Christ, human and divine, who made himself the incarnate image of God.

Distinguishing *Latreia* and *Proskynēsis*

The English term 'worship' embraces a range of expressions that were distinguished by the Council of Nicaea (787 CE). According to McGuckin (2020, p. 152), "The key terms are: *latreia, douleia, hyperdouleia, proskynesis,* and *aspasia*, which need to be exactly and consistently rendered as adoration, worship or reverence, special worship or reverence, bowing down, and kissing (the hand)." These also express degrees of worship where, for example, bowing, showing respect to or kissing the hand are expressions of honour appropriate for royalty, elders, ancestors, and saints, whereas worship and adoration are reserved for God alone (Zelensky & Gilbert, 2005). Approaching an icon with *latreia* is idolatry (Exod. 20:4), whereas venerating the image by *proskynēsis* is acceptable. Orthodox Catholic philosopher, Marion (2012) suggests that the distinction depends on a person's gaze. Marion (2012, p. 18) states, "The icon summons the gaze to surpass itself by never freezing on a visible… The gaze can never rest or settle if it looks at an icon; it always must rebound upon the visible, in order to go back in it up the infinite stream of the invisible." One must be careful not to allow an image to capture the gaze, satisfy it, and turn back to the viewer like a mirror, with the adoration due only to God.

For Protestants it is often difficult to distinguish what the Orthodox consider to be appropriate expressions of worship from gestures that seem to mirror idolatrous practices of other religions, such as kissing, bowing down before, and lighting candles around the icons. Halbertal and Margalit (1992, p. 207) observe that there are many actions that portray respect and honour, such as "kissing, honouring, sprinkling water for, anointing, and clothing an idol," but are not necessarily indicative of worship or idolatry. They suggest, however, that prostration "is always defined as worship, even if it is not the customary way of worshipping the particular idol." On the other hand, Einhard (c.775–840 CE), in an exchange of letters with Lupus of Ferrières, gave several biblical accounts where adoration in the form of veneration was appropriated to humans or still things (Noble, 2012), Some examples were Nathan and Bathsheba venerating David as a man worthy of honour, the sons of the prophets falling before Elijah, or even Psalms that speak of kneeling before the temple. Einhard (cited in Noble, 2012) further explains that people might prostrate themselves before God in prayer (*proseuchis*):

> …at the same time praying in your mind to God and adoring with an action of your body [*proskynēsis*] him who is everywhere, as if he were in front of you and present. So it happens that even God may be adored, as if for the sake of veneration, just as other things which we said belong to adoration (p. 322).

Even ritual acts before a person or thing do not necessarily signify "the internal intention of accepting a deity" (Halbertal & Margalit, 1992, p. 226).

A contemporary example of this concept is found in some churches when a preacher is cheered and applauded as they stand before a congregation to speak, in much the same expression as when praise and gratitude is collectively offered towards God. Although the action appears the same, the first expresses honor and

appreciation (*proskynēsis*) to the speaker, whereas the latter is a verbal and physical expression of worship and adoration (*latreia*) to God. This is explained well by Theodore Abū Qurrah (c.750–823 CE), an Orthodox theologian during the early Islamic period, who writes that the veneration of Christ and the saints through acts of *proskynēsis* to images, though not commanded of Christians in the Bible, gives adoration to God, who deserves it, and honour to saints, for whom it is appropriate (Griffith, 1985). In other words, *proskynēsis* allows the worshipper to look 'beyond the face' of the icon to express *latreia* to God.

Pentecostal Reflections on Iconography

The purpose of this chapter is to engage, as a Pentecostal, with the practice of Orthodox iconography to understand how worshippers look 'beyond the face' of icons to express adoration to God. I believe that icons could be used to enhance Christian worship outside of Orthodox tradition, even within Pentecostalism. Since Christ brings salvation through the physical, the Orthodox Church utilizes sight, smell, and action to, as Zelensky and Gilbert (2005, p. 13) beautifully describe it, "access the realm of transcendence, the dwelling place of Eternal Beauty and Truth, through contemplation of stylised religious compositions known as icons." For John of Damascus (2003, p. 29), the use of the physical to engage in the spiritual finds its roots in the incarnation, for, "I do not venerate matter, I venerate the fashioner of matter, who became matter for my sake and accepted to dwell in matter and through matter worked my salvation…".

Nevertheless, even after the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843 CE) when icons were restored to the Hagia Sophia in Constantinople (now Istanbul), the use of material elements in worship caused some conflict with Jews and Muslims. In the twelfth century CE (c.1108 or 1110), Alfonsi (2006) published his *Dialogi contra Iudaeos* as a debate between his newfound faith (as Petrus) and his former Jewish self (Moses). Towards the end of the *Dialogi*, Moses accuses Christianity of idolatry for creating carved wooden crucifixes bearing Christ's image:

> …you act against God and all the prophets, namely, that you cut down a tree in a grove, and then afterwards you seek out a carpenter, who chisels it, sculpts it, and forms it into the appearance of a man, smoothes it and paints it, and you place the image in a very high place in your churches and adore it (Alfonsi, 2006, pp. 271–272).

The critique bears a striking resemblance to the prophet Isaiah's attack against idols in Isa. 44:9–20. However, Petrus clarifies:

> …just as Solomon and others, when prostrating themselves before the altar, never adored it but rather adored God only, so, too, even we, when genuflecting before the Cross, never adore the Cross or the image placed on it, but instead we adore God the Father and his Son Jesus Christ (Alfonsi, 2006, p. 272).

Winchester (2020, p. 51) observes that Orthodox believers engage with icons "in ways that led them to imagine what Christ or the depicted saint might feel, think,

and do in their own morally and spiritually trying situation and then to imitate that imagined response." Icons are not intended to keep the worshipper in the present, but to "lead the viewer from delight in the finite beauty of the icon to an encounter with the infinite, transcendent source of all beauty—the triune God" (Goetz, 1993, p. 1120). As conduits between heaven and earth, it is no wonder that Orthodox Christians believe worship would lack richness and potency without icons.

There is much that Pentecostals can learn from Orthodox practices. Stephenson (2015, p. 121) notes, "In a service, Pentecostals are not surrounded by icons fashioned in wood and plaster, but rather icons that are living, active, human, and therefore, embodied." Like icons, neither the leader nor the song itself 'captures the gaze,' but they facilitate an encounter with the divine. Stephenson's (2015, p. 121) description of Pentecostal congregations as "living, active, and human" icons is, however, notably distinct from Orthodox iconography. According to Chan (2019, p. 119), Pentecostal worship focuses on the congregation's response to God, so that worship leaders motivate people to engage as "*we* ascribe praise to God; we express our feelings for God; we tell God how much we love him, etc. Or, more frequently, *I* tell God how much *I* love him."

By contrast, within Orthodox tradition, icons are a conduit between the natural and the supernatural. They function as "intermediaries between the represented persons and the praying faithful, causing them to commune in grace" (Ouspensky, 1992, p. 140). The "timeless and unearthly quality" affirms to many believers that icons function as "windows to heaven" (Kostas, 2008, p. 368). On one side of the window, worshippers gaze into the spiritual world through the icon and through the other side, the spiritual world looks back (Burgess, 2013, p. 30). Unlike worship leaders or the congregation, icons do not depict saints in their humanity, but in their "transfigured flesh, illuminated by grace, the flesh of the world to come" (Ouspensky, 1992, p. 162). The acts of veneration, through kissing, bowing, lighting candles, and the liturgy help both to illuminate the heavenly realm and reveal it to the worshippers (Burgess, 2013).

Pentecostal Music as Iconography

Pentecostals use music to facilitate intimacy and spiritual experientialism (Abraham, 2018). Daniel Albrecht (1999) suggests that for Pentecostals, music functions as an "auditory icon":

> …what an outsider may disdain as sonic dissonance is to these Pentecostals a symphony of holy sounds. These symphonic sounds surround, support and give a sense of security to the Pentecostal worshipers. They symbolize an entrance into the felt presence of God… It embraces the Pentecostal worshipers in an analogous fashion to the manner in which icons visually surround the Eastern Orthodox faithful in their sanctuaries (p. 143).

The congregation is led into worship of God by the song leaders, through the music and lyrics. Music continues throughout the announcements and often through to the beginning of the sermon, then again at the close of the service for the altar call.

We may watch the worship leaders singing or the lyrics on the screen, but we do not worship them for the music leads us to worship God.

Pentecostalism's use of music to facilitate intimacy and spiritual experientialism resembles the Orthodox use of icons, for both function as a window through which we engage in worship of God. This concept recalls Hillsong Worship's *Transfiguration* (King et al., 2015) which expresses in words and melody how Orthodox Christians approach their icons. The lyrics describe how the worshiper is impelled to praise when looking at the beauty of the Lord. Quoting Colossians 1:15, the song describes Jesus as "the image of the invisible God," whose glory, once seen and experienced, evokes ongoing spiritual renewal and growth (King et al., 2015). This popular Pentecostal song finds resonance with the Orthodox experience of worshipping God through the veneration of icons, yet also Albrecht's (1999) idea of a 'Pentecostal icon'. Pentecostal and Orthodox believers can agree that beauty connects people to God, moving beyond the physical and aesthetic to the spiritual. Loverance (2007, p. 6) suggests that the very "purpose of Christian art is to deepen our encounter with God… to catch the imagination, to pen the heart and the mind, so that we may better hear the divine promptings." The Pentecostal tendency towards creative expressions of worship suggest that, with guidance and intentional conversations, iconography could be a spiritually enriching way to enhance Christian worship.

Writing Without Words

Another key value of icons is their ability to portray the message of the Gospel and Hebrew scriptures to an illiterate audience, bringing enlightenment to those in spiritual shadows. As Honorius of Autun famously declared at the Synod of Arras (1025 CE), *pictura est laicorum litteratura*, "pictures are the literature of the laity" (cited in Pentiuc, 2014, p. 276) or "Bibles without words" (Zelensky & Gilbert, 2005, p. 17). The *St Albans Psalter*, an illuminated English Romanesque manuscript, explains:

> For it is one thing to venerate a picture and another to learn the story it depicts, which is to be venerated. The picture is for simple men what writing is for those who can read, for those who cannot read see and learn from the picture the model which they should follow. Thus pictures are, above all, for the instruction of the people (cited in Camille, 2006, p. 18).

The instruction of the icon is written in each detail of the intricate and complex symbolism of the icons, which bear witness to the Incarnation and Christian doctrine (Zelensky & Gilbert, 2005). As Theodore Abū Qurrah (1997), a student of John of Damascus, argues:

> So, then, are not the icons simply a clear writing that anyone can understand, whether he can read or he cannot read? Consequently, in a way they are better than writing, because both writing and icons are memorials for the things to which they point, but in functioning as memorials, the icons are much more eloquent than writing for their purpose of instructing someone who cannot read—on the grounds that for instruction they are more reliable than

> writing. Icons have the power to project difficult concepts while written texts and even sermons have some limitations (p. 64).

Notably, while icons communicate the Gospel without words, "Most of the time, Pentecostal songs are not intended to convey theological arguments or teachings, but emotionally oriented exaltation and praise to God" (Tupamahu, 2015, p. 170). The opportunity to successfully produce biblically and theologically rich charismatic worship is demonstrated through songs such as Hillsong Worship's *This I believe (The creed)* (2014), which gives a musical voice to the Apostles' Creed. Another example is the Old Testament benediction (Num. 6:24–26) reimagined by Kari Jobe, Cody Carnes, and Elevation Worship in *The blessing* (Fowler, 2020). Thornton (2020, p. 210) observes that contemporary congregational songs exist "to serve believers, individually and corporately, in a musical expression of their Christian faith. It has further potential to both mediate a spiritual encounter, through either a sacramental or Pentecostal theological lens, and reinforce (and possibly teach) Christian doctrine." Perhaps Pentecostal song writers can be encouraged to take up the mantle of (more intentionally and clearly) communicating the Gospel and orthodox theology through our 'auditory icons'.

Icons are also a means of 'writing' worship for God. The connection between written and oral tradition and iconography is seen in the *Kontakion of the Triumph of Orthodoxy*, a hymn sung on the day commemorating the victory of iconodules over iconoclasm in 843 CE (Zelensky & Gilbert, 2005, p. 23). The hymn declares:

> To those who know and receive the visions in the forms and the figures that God himself has given and that the prophets have seen, to those who safeguard the tradition, both written and oral, delivered by the Apostles and the fathers and who, for this reason, represent holy things in images and venerate them: to them, eternal memory (p. 23).

McNamara (2009, p. 37) suggests that the *kontakion* appeals to worshippers to partner with the work of Christ in restoring the fallen image of humanity by "uniting it to divine beauty." The *kontakion* expresses the close relationship between written and oral tradition, and icons. Clendenin (2003, p. 34) calls it a "true verbal icon," which conjoins the Church's teachings about icons in a hymn that itself contains the richness and depths one experiences when venerating an icon.

Conclusion

This chapter engages in an interfaith and ecumenical dialogue between Pentecostal assumptions about iconography, Jewish foundational understandings, and the function of icons in Orthodox Christian worship. Through biblical interpretation, early church practices, and historical developments, Orthodox Christians approach icons with *proskýnēsis* (rather than *latreia*) as mystical windows into heaven. My research acknowledges that the practice invites worshippers to look 'beyond the face' of the painted image to encounter God. Pentecostalism's use of music fosters intimacy and spiritual experientialism not unlike the Orthodox use of icons. Both function as a

window through which we engage in worship of God. The Pentecostal tendency towards creative expressions of worship suggest that, with guidance and intentional conversations, iconography could be a spiritually enriching way to enhance Christian worship.

Often, I go to church with my mind full of the week that has been or the week that is to come. Sometimes, the 'Pentecostal icon' of worship is sufficient to center my gaze on God, but when my eyes are closed my thoughts can often drift away. I need to engage my sense of sight to concentrate but, watching the worship leaders or the moving graphics behind the lyrics are not sufficient to draw me into worship. So, in fact, I carry an icon in the front of my Bible, *Christ the Pantokrator*. It is not very common in my church to use icons in worship, but I have found that by looking into the eyes of this painting of Christ, the image distracts me from my worries, like a window to heaven. I see beyond the face into the heart of God.

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Part II
Empirical Research Perspectives

Chapter 9
Australians' Attitudes to Various Religions and Interfaith Activities

Philip Hughes

Abstract Can societies operate cohesively when people have different faiths? Historically, it has often been held that having the same faith means having the same values and that is necessary for cohesive societies. Further, religious people may well find it difficult to accept people of other faiths, particularly if they hold their own faith with a high level of certainty and with a high level of commitment. However, the American sociologist, Gordon Allport has argued that when people work cooperatively on common goals in a context where they have equal status and are support by the society or authorities, they can develop positive attitudes. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018) shows that, among Australians, religious people were generally more positive than non-religious people. However, a general openness to trusting others was the strongest positive factor in positive attitudes to people of other religions. Other results in the survey suggested that greater contact with people of different faiths could also contribute to stronger positive regard. These results have implications for interfaith networks. Bringing people together to work cooperatively on common goals in a context where there is equality may well enhance positive attitudes. Actively encouraging people to trust each other in such contexts may contribute to social cohesion in multi-faith societies.

Keywords Interfaith · Religion · Trust · Social cohesion · Multi-faith society

Introduction

A diversity of religion has long been seen as a threat to the cohesiveness of society. When the Protestant reformers rebelled against the Roman Empire, most of them, such as Luther, Calvin and Zwingli, assumed that it was necessary for the whole state to change. They took their appeals for change to the princes of provinces and the councils of the free cities. In the Peace of Augsburg, which brought to an end thirty years of war between Catholics and Lutherans in 1555, "the principle of *cujus*

P. Hughes (✉)
Alphacrucis University College, Melbourne, VIC, Australia
e-mail: philipjhughes@gmail.com

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regio, ejus religio" (whose realm, their religion) was proclaimed (Latourette, 1953, p. 884).

This principle was retained in the broader Peace of Westphalia (1648), although for the first time people who were of a different faith to their rulers were allowed to worship in private and educate their children in their own faith (Latourette, 1953). While concessions were increasingly made to deal with religious diversity following the Peace of Westphalia (McManners, 2002), there has been a widespread view in Europe that "religious diversity was a problem to be overcome rather than a resource to be used and valued" (Bouma, 1999, p. 7). There are still many countries around the world where a diversity of religious belief is seen as a threat to the social function of society (Evans and Kelley, 2022). However, in most countries, people of different religions do live side by side and governments see it as their role to 'manage' the diversity of religions.

In every society, there must be some common values and ways of seeing the world. If there was no respect for road laws, such as driving on the left-hand side of the road in Australia, our roads would be chaotic and unusable. If Australians had not complied with the pronouncements relating to social distancing and mask-wearing through 2020 and 2021, it is highly likely that the COVID-19 pandemic would have become much worse, the health system would have been more overwhelmed than it was, with high proportions of the population dying. Societies work smoothly when people live according to similar social values and rules, but that does not mean they must all have the same religion.

The issues are commonly discussed around the term 'social cohesion' and it is often argued that a unity of values is an important constituent of social cohesion. However, this argument can sometimes be used to enforce the values and religion of the majority on minority groups. Thus, in its approach to social cohesion the European Union has emphasized the importance of minorities having human rights and dignity and all citizens as having equality of opportunity (Johns, 2014; Walters, 2020). There is a significant difference in approach between the United Kingdom and the United States of America on the one hand which see social cohesion as attained by the assimilation of new arrivals to the dominant social norms, and the approach of Canada and Australia where multiculturalism means accommodating cultural diversity (Economou, 2007, p. 36). Thus, diverse notions of social cohesion and how to attain it have developed, and the extent that unity of values and religious identity, belief, and practice is required continues to be a major issue within and among nations.

There are religious customs and values which can threaten social cohesion. Attitudes that girls should not be educated, for example, directly conflicts with the values of universal education and equality across gender, as affirmed by the United Nations in its agenda for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015, para. 20, goal 5). Religious beliefs which limit the roles that women can take in society may well conflict with the social norms of the equality of males and females and those who define their gender differently. In the discussion of a possible Australian Federal government religious discrimination bill in 2021, the potential for freedom of religion to come into conflict with freedom of discrimination of the "grounds of sex, sexual

orientation and gender identity, race, age—and religion itself" was raised (Liveris, 2022). However, values and attitudes which threaten social cohesion include negative attitudes towards people with different religious beliefs. People who believe that those who do not hold the religious beliefs they themselves hold are not worthy of respect are a threat to social cohesion in a similar way to those who are intolerant of racial or ethnic differences. As Bouma and Ling (2007, p. 83) have argued, there is increased diversity of religions in Australia along with decreased national structures to pattern beliefs and practice, and increased diversity within religious groups. Bouma and Ling argue that this diversity means it has become more difficult "to promote social cohesion through healthy inter-religious relations."

Most societies work when people distinguish between personal values, where people can hold very different views, and social values where there is a need for unity. It is no threat to society if one person believes it is wrong to eat pork, and another person holds it is wrong to eat beef, and a third person holds it is wrong to eat meat of any kind. In multicultural societies, such as Australia, it is held that it is not a threat to society if one person goes to a synagogue to worship while others go to a church, a gurdwara, a mosque, or a temple. People of different religions can live together providing there is a common respect for social values which are foundational to society (many of which will be enshrined in the country's laws) and as long as there is tolerance of people's different beliefs. However, tolerance of other religions cannot be assumed and it is something that governments and civil society need to promote. Even better than tolerance, which assumes that 'I am right but will allow another person to be wrong' are positive attitudes to people of other religions, accepting them and their beliefs as equally valid.

As Halafoff (2013) has documented, an interfaith movement has arisen in Australia as a peacebuilding response seeking to counter global risks such as violent terrorism and to counter processes of radicalisation. She sees them also engaging with other global risks such as those posed by climate change. I am the chair of an interfaith network which was initiated by the Maroondah City Council, one of the thirty-one local government areas in Melbourne, Australia. Most of these interfaith networks were initiated by city councils with encouragement of the Victorian state government following the Parliament of World Religions, which was held in Melbourne in 2009. Thus, the challenge of promoting positive attitudes towards different religions is a personal concern. A starting point is to ask what are the factors which contribute to positive attitudes and which sectors of the population are most hesitant in this regard? This chapter addresses those issues, drawing on survey data that was gathered in 2018 by the International Social Survey Program, which, in Australia, was included in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes.

Factors Which Contribute to a Lack of Positive Regard to Other Religions

What contributes to a lack of positive regard to a variety of religions? A study of the academic literature suggests several different factors, including the following:

1. It is widely suggested that a lack of positive regard arises from the religions themselves. Religions make competing truth claims. While this is true in a general sense of offering different views of the world, it is also true in specific instances. For example, most Muslims reject the Christian assertion that Jesus was crucified (Qu'ran iv, 156; see Guillaume, 1956). Jews and the adherents of most religions, on the other hand, reject the claim that Jesus was the Son of God, a claim that is central in the Christian faith. It has been argued that people with strong religious views or claims of certainty are more likely to be intolerant, whereas tolerance will occur as religious views weaken in the society (Kraft, 2006). On this basis, some philosophers have suggested that 'epistemological humility', the sense that, as humans, we can never be entirely certain about our knowledge of the world in which we live, should lead to tolerance. Jones (2015), for example, argues that this is not really about personal certainty or doubt, but that, objectively, we should recognize that religious truth cannot be 'proven' objectively, and that should lead to tolerance.

In a thesis which involved some empirical studies, Hanson (2007) argues that religion is two-faced. Religious people can be tolerant and, in fact, empirically he found that religious devotion was associated with tolerance and rejection of religious violence. On the other hand, he found that religious attendance and rigidity in religion were negatively associated with tolerance. He argued that when religion functions to set boundaries between the self and 'not self' as it does when it is focused on institutional expressions, it can be intolerant.

2. As an extension of this idea that religion arises from high levels of commitment to religious beliefs, I argue elsewhere that those who are 'spiritual but not religious' might be more tolerant than those who were religious because spirituality does not involve commitment to doctrinal propositions (Hughes, 2013). I found limited evidence for greater positive regard for other religions among the spiritual: primarily because the meaning of 'spirituality' varied greatly in different locations and among people of different backgrounds. In many instances, being 'spiritual but not religious' was shown to be a protest against religion. On the other hand, it can be an openness to picking and choosing from the variety of traditions, rituals and myths which have come to us in religions (Kaldor et al., 2010). In the first meaning, spirituality can be associated with negative attitudes to other religions, whereas in the second meaning of being open to the variety of religious and spiritual expressions, it can be associated with positive attitudes towards the variety of religions (Hughes, 2013, p. 79).
3. It has commonly been argued that some personalities are more dogmatic and closed-minded. Psychologists have seen this as a cognitive style (Shearman and

Levine, 2006). Such people tend to be attracted to religions, and hold dogmatic views in relation to religion, and are less tolerant than people whose personality is open-minded and inclusive (Kossowska et al., 2017).

4. Other studies, however, argue that positive attitudes towards people of other religions has less to do with religion and more to do with other factors. In general terms, people who feel that their economic livelihood or way of life is threatened by people who are different ethnically, politically or religiously from themselves tend to have more negative attitudes. Those people who are not economically threatened and do not feel their security is threatened are more likely to be more positive towards others. A study using data from the World Values Survey of people in nine Middle Eastern countries found that low measures of existential security, which included reported economic status and feelings of physical insecurity, were associated with negative attitudes towards people of other religions (Siegel, 2015).

Other studies have looked at positive factors which may contribute to positive attitudes to other religions, including the following:

5. Positive attitudes have been associated with education, particularly education in the various religions. If people understand the variety of religions, they are more likely to have positive attitudes towards them. A study of undergraduate students who went through a course on comparative religions was compared with another group who had not done the course. Doing a course in comparative religions had a weak but statistically significant positive relationship with religious tolerance (Dickerson, 2006).
6. A major theory in positive attitudes towards people of other religions is the 'contact hypothesis' developed by the American psychologist, Allport (1954). He argued that interaction with members of an 'outgroup' (a group of people different from one's own group) can lead to more positive attitudes towards people of that group. He suggested that four features of that interaction contributed to those positive attitudes:

1. People interacting with each other were of equal status
2. They shared common goals
3. The interaction involved intergroup cooperation
4. The contact was supported or approved by the society's customs and authorities.

This theory was tested recently in relation to positive attitudes of Indonesian Muslims towards Indonesian Christians and found to hold (Sumaktoyo, 2018). Often those people with negative attitudes have simply not had significant interaction with people of other religions. On the other hand, interaction, collaboration and dialogue can all contribute to more positive attitudes.

Methodology

How does this apply to Australians? How open are they and what factors contribute to positive or negative attitudes towards other religions? Responses to questions in the Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018) provide some measures. The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes is conducted by Academic Surveys Australia which is the survey arm of the Australian Consortium for Social and Political Research Incorporated (ACSPRI), which is a consortium of universities and government research agencies. Each edition includes banks of questions which are provided by the International Social Survey Program. There are approximately nine major topics in the International Social Survey Program which are covered in different years in a cyclical pattern. The questions on each topic are developed by an international panel of experts, but often vary little from one cycle to the next so that trends can be identified (ACSPRI 2022).

In 2009 and 2018, the topic was religion. In 2009, a random sample of 1718 Australians responded to the survey and in 2018, 1287 Australian adults responded to similar questions on a range of religious topics. The samples were taken randomly from the electoral rolls, providing a good basis for assuming that the sample represents well the Australian population as a whole. However, as with most English language and written surveys, it is expected that those with poor English literacy would be under-represented. While it is not possible to fully test all these theories using the 2018 data, some of them can be examined.

Levels of Positive Attitudes Among Australians

Table 9.1 presents the responses of the sample of Australians in 2018 to a series of questions about whether they felt positive or negative towards a range of different religions.

Table 9.1 Attitudes of Australians to people of various religions ($n = 1287$)

Religious group about which attitudes sought	Positive (%)	Neither positive nor negative (%)	Negative (%)	Can't choose or missing (%)	Total percentage (%)
Atheists or non-believers	40	41	7	12	100
Buddhists	44	37	7	12	100
Christians	54	30	8	8	100
Hindus	33	43	11	13	100
Jews	38	39	10	13	100
Muslims	23	33	33	11	100

Source Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2018) accessed from Evans (2019)

Table 9.1 shows that a little more than half the population of Australia (54%) had positive attitudes towards Christians. This is interesting as the 2016 Census showed 52 per cent of Australians identifying as Christian (Hughes, 2017, p. 2). Further analysis showed that 16 per cent of those who identified with a Christian denomination said they were neutral towards Christians and an additional 1 per cent were negative. Between 38 and 44 per cent of the adult population were positive towards Buddhists, atheists and Jews. One third of the population (33%) were positive towards Hindus, and a little under one quarter of the population (23%) were positive towards Muslims.

Regarding most religions, a substantial proportion (between 38 and 56%) were neither positive nor negative or did not choose an option. There are several possible reasons for such a position. In some cases, they may have felt they did not know enough about the religion or people associated with it to feel either positive or negative. A general disinterest in religion may also lead to them having no strong feelings in regard to people of various religions. Less than 12 per cent of Australian adults had negative attitudes to any religious group with the exception of Muslims. Three times as many people had negative attitudes to Muslims as they did towards any other group. One additional question in the survey asked people if they agreed with the statement that "people with very strong religious beliefs are often too intolerant of others". A total of 74 per cent of the Australian population agreed with that statement. In other words, the majority of Australians linked strong religious beliefs with intolerance.

Identical questions about regard for people of other religions were asked in the 2009 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes. Figure 9.1 shows the changes in the extent of positive attitudes between 2009 and 2018.

In 2018, a higher proportion of the population had a positive attitude towards people of various religions than they did in 2009, with one exception. The percentage of the population positive towards Christianity has fallen very slightly. However, in relation to most religions, the percentage expressing positive attitudes has risen by

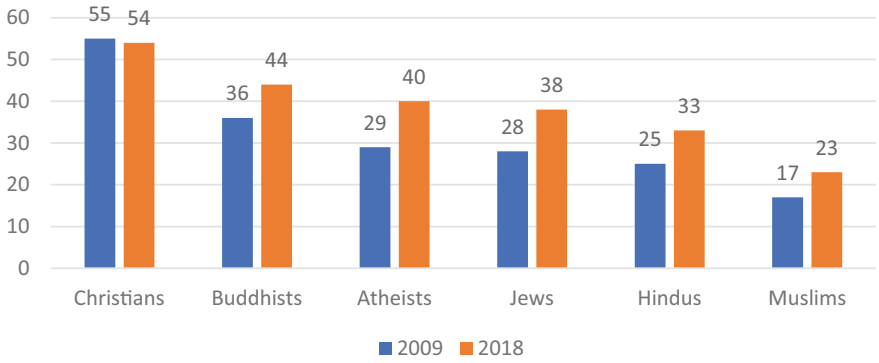

Fig. 9.1 Proportion of Australian Adults Holding Positive Attitudes Towards People of Various Religions 2009 and 2018. *Source* Australian Survey of Social Attitudes (2009) and (2018) accessed from Evans (2009, 2019)

six percentage points or more. Correspondingly, the proportion of the population with negative attitudes has fallen, mostly by two or three percentage points. Fewer people in 2018 felt they could not choose a response to the question.

Factors in People's Attitudes to People of Other Religions

In examining general attitudes to people of other religions, a scale was developed of people's attitudes to atheists, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews and Muslims. It was found that these items formed a strong scale, indicative of the fact that those who were positive to one religion tended to be positive also to the other religions. Attitudes to Christians were excluded from this scale as this was the religion of a large portion of people in the study and it did not relate strongly to the scale as a whole.

Responses to a range of questions were then examined in relation to that scale of attitude to people of other religions. Drawing on the literature, the following questions were included in the study:

1. How people rated themselves as religious;
2. How frequently people attended religious services;
3. How certain people were of the existence of God;
4. Whether people considered themselves to be spiritual but not religious;
5. General level of education, although there was no measure of whether they had studied other religions;
6. Level of personal income and level of household income;
7. How people rated their social status.

Also included in the study were some demographic measures: age and gender. There was no measure of the contact people had had with people of other religions. However, there was a measure of the population density in which they lived: from big cities to individual farms. One might expect that people in sparsely populated rural areas would have had less opportunity to meet people of other religions. Also, there was no measure of people's dogmatism and rigidity in belief. However, a measure of people's general level of trust in other people was included in the model.

Regression analysis allowed all these factors to be examined simultaneously so that one can identify the significance of each factor when all the other factors were taken into account. The standardized beta coefficient is a measure of the strength of the relationship with attitudes to people of other religions. The significance figure is indicative of whether the factor was statistically significant: a score of 0.05 or less indicating that there was a 95 per cent chance that the factor was significant. Table 9.2 sets out the results.

Table 9.2 shows the various factors contained in the model explained about 12 per cent of the variance in attitudes to other religions. It shows that religious factors were not the major factor in positive attitudes to people of different religions: general trust in people was the strongest factor. General trust may be an indicator of personality: of openness to the others and, according to the theories of Eric Erikson (1965), it

Table 9.2 Factors associated with positive attitudes towards people of different religions

Factor	Standardized beta coefficient (measure of strength of factor)	Significance
People can be trusted	0.201	0.000
Year of birth	0.156	0.000
How religious people rated themselves	0.143	0.026
Female	0.108	0.010
Monthly income of household	0.072	0.072
Level of formal education	0.068	0.104
Density of population where the respondent lived	0.063	0.108
Spiritual but not religious	0.028	0.496
How certain was the respondent in belief in God	0.025	0.712
How frequently the respondent attended religious services	0.018	0.740
Personal monthly income	0.004	0.919
Adjusted *R* squared for model	0.12	

Source Australian survey of social attitudes (2018) accessed from Evans (2019)

is rooted in the early experiences of childhood in the child's first relationships with parents or guardians. However, it can also be affected by other factors such as one's economic situation and one's security. Among Australia adults in 2018, 58 per cent said that most people can generally be trusted, up slightly from 55 per cent in 2009.

The second strongest factor was year of birth. People born more recently were more positive to other religions than older people, even when taking into account their relative lack of interest in religion. The culture has changed as younger cohorts are generally much more open to people who have different views than themselves. The regression shows that the greater openness and more inclusive attitudes of younger people is a major factor in the more positive attitudes to people with different religious backgrounds. It may be this factor that has contributed to the general rise in positive attitudes among Australians between 2009 and 2018. Because of the increased numbers of people of other religions in recent years, younger people are more likely to have met people of other religions through school, sporting clubs and in other settings. It is possible that this increased exposure has played a role in the more tolerant attitudes of younger people.

The third factor was how religious people saw themselves to be. As noted by Hansen (2007), but in contrast to the hypotheses of the philosophers such as Gibson (2010), devotional attitudes to religion were associated with positive attitudes to people of other religions. Further analysis showed that those people who described themselves as 'extremely religious' had very positive attitudes towards people of other religions while those who described themselves as extremely non-religious had the most negative attitudes.

Separate analysis showed those who were most certain about their belief in God were most positive about other religions, again contrary to expectations such as those of Kraft (2006). Those respondents who said 'I know God really exists and I have no doubts about it' had a mean score of 1.6 on the scale of attitudes to people of other religions (the scale was from −8 to +8). People who said they believed in God sometimes but not other times had a mean score of 1.0, and those who said they did not believe in God had a mean score of 0.43. However, the certainty in belief about God was not associated significantly with attitudes to people of other religions in the regression analysis. What was more important was people's self-description as religious. Similarly, people who attended religious services scored higher in positive attitudes to people of other religions than people who never attended. But in the regression analysis, attendance at religious services was not associated either positively or negatively with such attitudes when other items were taken into account. This suggests that the factor in positive attitudes is one's subjective sense of the importance of one's religious faith, rather than one's institutional religious involvements, as suggested by Hansen (2007). Thus, in Australia, being religious generally leads people to positive attitudes to people of other religions.

Those people who said they were spiritual but not religious were more positive about people of other religions than those who described themselves as neither spiritual nor religious. But they were not as positive about people of other religions as people who described themselves as religious, and particularly those who described themselves as both religious and spiritual. In Australia, being 'spiritual but not religious' usually indicates a rejection of institutionalized religion and is not associated therefore with positive attitudes to religion. In the regression analysis shown in Table 9.2, being spiritual was not a significant factor in associating with positive attitudes to people of different religions having controlled for other factors.

People with higher levels of household income, and thus of higher social status, were a little more positive than people with lower levels of household income in line with the theory that one's attitudes are related to one's sense of economic security (Siegel, 2015). However, income was not a statistically significant factor when other factors were taken into account.

Education was also associated with positive attitudes to people of different religions. It was only possible to measure general educational standards rather than specifically look at education in comparative religion. Certainly, those who had university degrees, and particularly those with doctoral degrees, had stronger positive attitudes compared with those who had no post-secondary education. It is likely that people with high levels of education would be more secure in their employment and wellbeing and less likely to be threatened by people different from themselves. They may also have more general knowledge about the various religions. However, the level of formal education was not statistically significant when all other factors were considered.

The analysis found that women were more positive towards people of other religions than were men. It has been noted in many contexts that women are generally more positive towards religion. There is some evidence that this has to do with their higher levels of focus on and valuing of relationships with others, values which have

been generally promoted by religions, while men tend to focus more on production and personal success which have often been discouraged by religions (Hughes, 2001). This higher focus on people among women would then relate to more positive attitudes to people of other faiths.

It should be noted, however, that all these factors only accounted for 12 per cent of the variation in attitudes towards people of other religions. The major factor identified by Allport (1954), Sumaktoyo (2018) and others, the 'contact hypothesis', could not be directly tested as there were no questions in the survey which asked about people's contact with people of other religions. This factor may well explain much more of the variance. People who have had the opportunity to interact with people of other religions, such as through school, sport or other community activities, may well have more positive attitudes than those who have not had such opportunities.

However, some indication of the importance of contact may be indicated. The regression analysis found that people who lived in more densely populated areas tended to be more positive in their attitudes towards people of other religions, although this was not statistically significant. Further analysis showed that people who lived in sparsely populated rural areas tended to have negative attitudes, and those who lived in rural villages were also generally negative towards people of other religions. People who lived in large cities tended to have positive attitudes. Because the big cities are more multicultural than the rural areas, one might assume that people living in the cities would be more likely to have contact with people of other faiths than people living in rural areas. However, this indicator is only a weak 'proxy' for the real factor of the extent of contact with people of other religions and does not take into account other factors noted in Allport's analysis such as whether there was collaboration and equal status in the contact.

Discussion

Religion Does Not Necessarily Lead to Negative Attitudes to Other Religions

The analysis of the 2018 Australian Survey of Social Attitudes shows that commitment to one's own religion generally correlates with positive attitudes to people of other religions, even though most Australians believe religious people to be intolerant. However, many people were neutral in their attitudes or indicated they could not choose. Many years ago, Allport and Ross (1967) argued that there are two types of religiosity: extrinsic religiosity and intrinsic religiosity. They found that extrinsic religiosity was linked to prejudice, but intrinsic religiosity was not. People who are extrinsically religious are religious because it promotes their social status and reputation. Because religion is not generally associated with social status in Australia, there is little extrinsic religiosity in Australia. People who are intrinsically religious are religious because of its intrinsic values, the perception of its truth, the link with one's heritage, and the way it promotes wellbeing and peace. These people can see

the value also in other religions. The distinction between extrinsic and intrinsic religiosity may explain the broad acceptance of other religions in Australia. However, it does not explain all the variations indicated in the results.

The generalizations that are produced by surveys hide a variety of attitudes and opinions. In trying to bring people together for the purpose of promoting interfaith dialogue, I have found that most of the people who have responded are religious people, although sometimes on the edge of their own religious organizations. This is in line with the survey findings. At the same time, many religious groups have shown no interest at all and have never responded to our invitations to be involved in dialogue. In general, whose who have not responded have been the more conservative groups theologically, groups which were suspicious of cooperating with other Christian denominations, and even more suspicious of engaging with other religions.

The fact that the belief item in the regression analysis was not significant suggests that negative attitudes to people of other religions does not appear to be primarily conflicting truth claims as claimed by Kraft (2006). Rather, the issue is more one of religious identity, as suggested by Hansen (2007) and Hedges (2010). When groups see themselves as having a special and unique identity over against the rest of the world, they are not likely to want to enter into dialogue. Or, if they do enter into dialogue, it is only to proselytize others. One of the clear examples in Australia is that of the Jehovah's Witnesses who believe that they are uniquely 'saved', who are not interested in any form of cooperation with other groups, and who knock on doors solely for the purpose of proselytization. They have never responded to our invitations to be involved in interfaith activities. As noted in the results, some Christians have negative attitudes to other Christians, and the general increase in diversity of religions that Bouma and Ling (2007) have described exacerbates such problems.

Another point for consideration is that there is some variation in attitudes to different religions. In Australia, there is a lot more negativity towards Islam than any other religion that was named in the survey. It is indicative that particular religions are seen differently from each other. It is highly likely that some Australians feel negatively because they see Muslims as potentially not accepting them and their lifestyles. The fact that some Muslims have decried Western values and a few people in the name of Islam have threatened 'infidels' has made Westerners suspicious. When Muslim women wear distinctive dress, it suggests that they may not be comfortable with Australian patterns of dress and the values associated with it. Positive attitudes towards other faiths are dependent on the belief that those positive attitudes will go both ways: I will be positive towards those who are positive towards me. If I believe that I and my lifestyle are not accepted, then I am less likely to feel positive towards the other.

The Significance of Age and Education

The relationship between year of birth and attitudes to other religions is noteworthy. It is likely that the year of birth is associated with historical cohort rather than age, as it is unlikely that attitudes to people of other religions is related to life-stage. In recent years, our own interfaith network has organized sessions on various religions in

schools. We have generally been well received. However, the Network has generally failed to involve younger people in its activities. This probably reflects the more general fact that younger people have little time for organized religion in any form and few attend any religious group frequently. This then extends to their interest in organized interfaith activities. Younger people are not opposed to such activities and generally have tolerant attitudes, but organized religion is not of particular interest.

Education relates positively to positive attitudes to people of other religions, as does socio-economic status, as indicated by income. However, these are not major factors and were not statistically significant in this analysis when other factors were taken into account. Education has long been related to church attendance (Kaldor, 1987, p. 124). Many mainstream churches virtually require people to be good at reading, singing, and understanding of the complex arguments made by preachers. They are suited to people with high levels of formal education. Churches which attract people with lower levels of formal education are less dependent on reading and have simpler music and preaching. It is likely that who becomes involved in the Interfaith Network is partly dependent on the types of activities held. Recent activities have involved seminars exploring the beliefs and practices of different groups: activities that attract people with higher levels of formal education.

People with higher levels of formal education tend to work in more highly specialized occupations. Indeed, many of these occupations are well protected with their members required to have high levels of training and registration. This is true in the fields of health, education and justice, but also in accountancy, plumbing and electrical work. Thus, few Australians would feel threatened by recent immigrants who may also have different religious backgrounds, particularly people with high levels of formal education.

The Missing Factor: Trust

Given the suggestion above that people become more positive towards others if they feel those positive attitudes will be returned, it seems likely that the 'contact theory' of Allport could well be significant and explain some of the 88 per cent of variance in positive attitudes unexplained in the model above. Having personal contact with people of different backgrounds and collaborating with them on common tasks in a context in which there was equality of status and in which the common activities were approved by wider authorities may certainly promote acceptance of each other's backgrounds.

It is possible that the growing presence over the last twenty years of people of other religions in Australia has led to increasing positive attitudes towards them, in line with the theory. As noted, it also seems likely that increasing contact among young people and people in cities, compared with rural areas, may have contributed to those positive attitudes.

However, while Allport described the contexts in which mutual positive attitudes may develop, he has missed a major ingredient. The major factor identified in the regression analysis was trust. Trust grows as people have contact with each other. But something more is needed: people must be trusted and prove trustworthy, then the

trust is reciprocated. One could imagine employees from different religious backgrounds working side by side in a factory. They have frequent contact with each other and are collaborating on common tasks in a context where they have equal status and they are urged to get along with each other by the employer, fulfilling Allport's criteria. Yet, they continue to dislike each other and ignore each other at break times. They would not dream of asking each other to their homes. But the situation begins to change as one takes the initiative and invites the other to share some food in celebration of a special religious festival, for example. The second person responds positively to the initiative. Over time, trust and even appreciation are built.

Conclusions

Implications for Interfaith Networks

An interfaith network can take the initiative in bringing people together and creating a context in which there is contact between people of different faiths. It can create activities in which there is mutual collaboration. More than that, it can encourage people to take the initiative in sharing something of their lives and in showing not just tolerance but trust and affirmation for each other. According to Allport's theory, it is important that an interfaith network works in such a way that people feel that they are equal, that no one person from one background is exercising authority over others. Indeed, the common activities should be developed collaboratively.

The sorts of activities in which an interfaith network engages will determine, in part, what groups of people become involved. Intellectual dialogue will attract highly educated people. Collaborative entertainment in the form of music or art may attract a different group of people. We have found in our network that events in which foods and handicrafts associated with different faiths were shared attracted a different group of people. Involvement in interfaith activities does not demand that one deny one's own religious faith. It does demand, however, a willingness to respect the other and to trust them. If one approaches interfaith activities with the attitude that I have exclusive access to truth and to salvation, it will be hard to take the faith of another person seriously and impossible to dialogue with the other person as an equal.

Implications for Social Policy

Indeed, there are long histories of slavery, colonialism, war, and oppression which make it hard for people to come together as equals. As Hedges (2010) notes, from the Crusades and through the centuries of colonization from the fifteenth century, people from Christian societies have been the major aggressors and oppressors. Unless Christians from those societies own that history and seek forgiveness for it, recognizing the social and emotional burdens that continue to lay heavy on people, gathering as equals for dialogue is not possible. Trust needs to be earned.

Yet, it is possible for people of different faiths to live together harmoniously. It has happened at many times in history. In 550 BCE, the Persian Emperor, Cyrus, allowed the various people who were his subjects to practice their own faiths. For centuries, until around 1500 CE, Toledo, the capital of Castile in what is now Spain, saw Jews, Muslims, and Christians living harmoniously. Today, extensive immigration across the globe has created many societies in which people of different faiths live and work side by side. Educational policies which include teaching about different faiths and encourage respect for people of different faiths and no faith can promote positive attitudes (Engebretson, 1999). The building of interfaith centers and employment of chaplains who are willing to engage in interfaith dialogue in universities can play a positive role (Blundell, 1999). Just as the Ethnics Communities' Council of Victoria plays an important role in empowering people of culturally diverse backgrounds, so the Faith Communities Council of Victoria plays an important role. It organizes events in which people of different faiths come together as equals and advocates for the respect for the diversity of faiths. As Halafoff (2013) argues, local interfaith movements can provide opportunities for people to contribute to peace building.

The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes reveals that a substantial proportion of Australians have positive attitudes towards people of most other faiths. But it also shows that there is more work to do. Most Australians are either neutral in their feelings towards people of other religions or do not know what to think. A smaller group have negative attitudes. For the sake of social harmony, building attitudes of tolerance, respect and, finally, of affirmation of others remains important for our multi-faith societies to continue to operate with benefits for all people.

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Philip Hughes was the senior research officer at the Christian Research Association for thirty-one years. In that time, he edited the encyclopaedic *Australia's religious communities: A multi-media exploration,* describing 178 religious groups in Australia. He is now an honorary research fellow of the Christian Research Association. He is also an honorary research fellow with the University of Divinity and with the Catholic Pastoral Research Office. He was employed by Alphacrucis University College where he was supervising a number of students in their doctoral studies, chairing the ethics committee and assisting students with research methods. He currently chairs the Maroondah Interfaith Network.

Chapter 10
Interfaith and Intra-Faith Engagement of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Diaspora in Australia

Allan W. Davis

Abstract The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East is one of the oldest Christian communities. The largest branch of the church is the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox community, located predominantly in the south of India. For political, social, and economic reasons, many of its members are now migrating to countries such as Australia. Like other settler groups, they face acculturation challenges. Members of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church are pursuing strategies to support one another and pass on their traditions intergenerationally while purposefully engaging with the 'mainstream' host community in family life, work, and intercultural relationships. Using the lens of Berry's taxonomy of acculturation, this study draws on in-depth interviews with members of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Canberra to assess how they have settled. It contributes to our understanding of what they are bringing to the broader Christian narrative and provides lessons for faith-based communities seeking to engage in meaningful interfaith relationships. My research reveals that shared heritage identity, religious belief and practice, diasporic consciousness, and embracing the host country's multi-faith multiculturalism are helping Jacobite Syrian Orthodox migrants integrate into Australian society.

Keywords Migration · Acculturation · Jacobite Syriac Orthodox · Identity · Interfaith · Intra-faith

Introduction

The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East is one of the oldest Christian communities. The largest branch of the church is the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox community, located predominantly in the south of India. For political, social, and economic reasons, many of its members are now migrating to other countries. Migrants from the Middle East, often classified as "Syrians", "Turks" or "Asians",

A. W. Davis (✉)
Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW, Australia
e-mail: allan.davis@college.ac.edu.au

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have been arriving in Australia for over 130 years (Migration Heritage Centre New South Wales, 2018). The devastating impacts of recent protracted wars in Iraq and Syria on human life, cultural capital, and property, together with new economic opportunities, lend a sense of urgency to ensuring that migrants and refugees from these parts of the world are welcomed into their new homes. Looking past historical divisiveness in religious histories, there are fresh calls for interfaith and intra-faith dialogue (Arya, 2018).

Members of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Australia are pursuing strategies to support one another and pass on their traditions intergenerationally while purposefully engaging with the 'mainstream' host community in family life, work, and intercultural relationships. Using the lens of Berry's taxonomy of acculturation, this study draws on in-depth interviews with members of the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Canberra to assess how they have settled. It contributes to our understanding of what they are bringing to the broader Christian narrative and provides lessons for faith-based communities seeking to engage in meaningful interfaith relationships. My research reveals that shared heritage identity, religious belief and practice, diasporic consciousness, and embracing the host country's multi-faith multiculturalism help Jacobite Syrian Orthodox migrants integrate into Australian society.

Historical Background

First, it is vital to understand the long and complex history of the Syriac Orthodox Church, as well as its efforts in interfaith and intra-faith engagement.

The Syriac Orthodox Church

The Syriac Orthodox Church in India is one of the oldest Christian communities, with Syrian Christians reportedly arriving in Angamaly (Kerala) as early as 384 CE (Granziera, 2017). Hence, it is considered by some to be an indigenous religion. In fact, tradition holds that the Apostle Thomas established Christian churches in the region before being martyred at Mylapore, near Madras. There were several key ancient Syriac fathers of the faith who made important theological contributions, including Ephrem the Syrian (c. 306–373), Aphrahat (c.280–c.345), and Jacob of Serugh (c. 451–521). During the early centuries of Christianity, the nature of Christ was one of the most contested issues. A series of 'councils' attempted to deal with differences over governance and theology as the growing Christian community melded old and new cultures (McGuckin, 2011).

In 451 CE, the Council of Chalcedon settled on a formula stating that Jesus Christ exists in two natures (wholly God and wholly man) in one person and substance and rejected any doctrine that inferred a single (or *monophysite*) nature in Christ

(MacCulloch, 2010). Syriac, Coptic, Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Armenian Apostolic Churches rejected this formula (Freeman, 2009). Instead, they held to the position that Christ was fully God and fully man, miraculously and mysteriously manifest in a single (or composite) nature, without confusion or mixture, both eternal and indivisible. They became known as 'non-Chalcedonian' churches (DelCogliano, 2006). This includes the Coptic Orthodox, Syrian Orthodox, Apostolic Armenian, and Tewahedo Ethiopian churches (Russell, 2021).

During the sixth century, Bishop Jacob Baradeaus of Edessa (modern Urfa in southeast Turkey) was an influential religious figure (Joseph, 1983). He traveled extensively throughout Mesopotamia, Syria, Armenia, Arabia, Sinai, Cappadocia, and many other places, encouraging struggling and persecuted churches (Childers, 2012). Although the term 'Jacobite' is not officially accepted by the Suryoye (Syriacs in the diaspora), it has been adopted by the Syriac Orthodox Church in Malankara (or Malabar), a region on the southwest coast of India in the modern state of Kerala (Weltecke, 2009) which is the focus of my study. This branch of Christianity recognizes the Syriac Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and all the East as its spiritual head.

Syriac Orthodox populations have lived for many centuries alongside Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, and Sikh communities, as well as other minority religious groups. Researchers have explored the "versatile encounters and reciprocities" between the early church and expansionist Islam (Grypeou, 2006, p. 2). Jan van Ginkel (2006) reveals the complex layers of interfaith engagement in Syriac historiography. Under the Islamic Abbasid empire, Syriac Orthodox scholars were integral in translating Greek philosophical works into Arabic (Murre-van den Berg, 2012). Syriac Orthodox Christians in the Middle East promoted interreligious dialogue, peacemaking initiatives, and social contributions in their local communities (LeMasters, 2018). Unfortunately, Roman Catholic missionaries either shunned or proselytized Syriac Orthodox Christians, viewing their non-Chalcedon teachings as heretical (Rouxpetel, 2015). During the late fourteenth century, the Mongols destroyed many Syrian churches and monasteries. The early Ottoman empire offered relative autonomy to Orthodox communities but intensified persecution, the perils of war, and economic hardship saw mass emigration over the last one hundred years into diasporas around the world (Womack, 2022).

The Syriac Orthodox Church in Diaspora

The Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and all the East (also called the Syrian Orthodox Church) has around five million adherents world-wide (Murre-van den Berg, 2012). The largest proportion live in India, with estimated figures ranging from one to three million (Perczel, 2019; Schmollet, 2021). The church's constituency is increasingly being displaced from its place of origin due to conflicts in the Middle East and economically motivated migration from other parts of the world. The Syriac Orthodox sacriscape is faced with the challenges of functioning as a Christian

community that celebrates its past while reproducing itself in diverse new cultural and religious contexts around the world (Brock & Taylor, 2001; Brock, 2004).

As Mollica (2011) demonstrates, Western ignorance of the long history of Syriac Orthodox Christianity can lead to alienation of migrant communities in the host country. However, there have been some positive moves toward interfaith and intra-faith dialogue among diasporic communities. Syriac Orthodox leaders and theologians have been key contributors to the World Council of Churches. The third pan-Orthodox conference (Rhodes 1964) also encouraged dialogue with Catholic leaders. Such intra-faith engagement led to some 'common declarations' regarding Christology with the Roman Catholic Church and the Eastern Orthodox churches. This has been a positive move toward repairing the fifth century separation (Murre-van den Berg, 2012).

One of the greatest proponents of interfaith and intra-faith dialogue was Iraq-born Zakka I Iwas (1931–2014), who had served as metropolitan bishop of Mosul, Baghdad, and Basra, and was a guest observer at the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965). In 1980, he was elected as Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East, based in Syria. Demonstrating his leadership in interfaith and intra-faith dialogue, he served as President of the World Council of Churches (Tveit, 2014). Upon his death, Pope Francis paid tribute to Patriarch Ignatius Zakka Iwas as one of the world's "outstanding spiritual leaders." A media statement from the Vatican read:

> The whole Christian world has lost one of its outstanding spiritual leaders, [who was] courageous and wise in leading people… a man of dialogue and peace with regard to the followers of all religious traditions… an engaged witness of the successive violent conflicts that… brought untold death and suffering to the Middle East, especially to Iraq and most recently Syria… He was simple, compassionate and worked tirelessly for ecumenical unity (Pope, 2014).

During his thirty-four years as Patriarch (1980–2014), Ignatius Zakka Iwas not only strengthened the worldwide Syriac Orthodox Church but was also a leading figure in interreligious and intra-faith dialogue.

Syriac Orthodox migrants to Australia fit into categories as 'migrants' as well as 'refugees' (Migration Act, 1958). The first waves of Syriac Orthodox believers came to Australia in the 1960–1970s as migrants. More recent arrivals have come from the Middle East as refugees or have arrived (since the 1990s) from India as skilled migrants and students. According to Australian Census data, Syriac Orthodox in Australia number around 10,000 persons (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2016).[1] During the 2020–2021 financial year, India was the second high source country of immigration to Australia (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2021a). During 2019–2020 38,209 immigrants of Indian origin (various religious backgrounds) became Australian citizens (Australian Government Department of Home Affairs, 2021b).

There are currently twenty-two Jacobite Syrian congregations in Australia. They seek to preserve its traditions and identity in diaspora, while engaging with people

[1] Disaggregated data about religious affiliation from the 2021 Census are not yet available.

from other faith and religious traditions. Its leaders are confident of managing change because they believe they are rooted in (and custodians of) the original Christian heritage, in terms of precedence (association with the first church in Antioch, apostolic succession from Peter through the Patriarchs, preservation of ancient Syriac hymns and poems), continuity, mission, and liturgy. The Jacobite community in Canberra has fewer than 1000 persons but is settled and growing. There is no resident Jacobite priest and no sanctuary in Canberra. The community is negotiating to acquire land and saving funds to build a facility. Services are held once a fortnight in rented premises. Clergy visit Canberra to hear confessions and celebrate Holy Mass. The Vicar lives in Sydney and the Bishop is in India.

Acculturation Through Integration

The concept of 'acculturation' is used to describe the experiences of people who move from one culture to another. According to Berry (2005), acculturation can be interpreted through four modes. Assimilation involves adopting a new host culture at the cost of abandoning one's original culture. Separation involves rejecting the new culture while retaining one's culture. Marginalization involves giving up one's culture while not embracing that of the host society. Finally, integration involves retaining heritage practices while blending into the new society. While I have argued elsewhere (Davis, 2019) that Syriac Orthodox migrants experience varying degrees of acculturation through all four modes, this chapter focuses explicitly on aspects of the integration acculturation mode reflected in interfaith and intra-faith engagement.

Berry (2005, p. 698) states that: "Generally, those pursuing the integration strategy experience less stress, and achieve better adaptations than those pursuing marginalisation; the outcomes for those pursuing assimilation and separation experience intermediate levels of stress and adaptation." Sam and Berry (2010) explain further:

> The integration strategy is used by individuals with an interest in maintaining one's original culture while having daily interactions with other groups—there is some degree of cultural integrity maintained, while at the same time they seek, as a member of an ethnocultural group, to participate as an integral part of the larger social network (p. 476).

My research reveals that the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox community in Canberra has successfully integrated through identity formation, religious framework, diaspora consciousness, and positive multicultural hosting.

Identity Management

Identity is important for all people. Mana et al. (2009) believe this to be especially so for immigrants, for whom identity and acceptance play roles in helping them establish social capital in countries of settlement. Points of difference can be multifaceted and

include: ethnicity; social identity; religion; economic differentiation (demonstrated by employment, income and assets); acceptance by the host society (evidenced by making friends and 'fitting in'); and a sense of belonging. When individuals in pluralist societies are secure in their own identity and religious beliefs, they tend to be more accepting and tolerant toward others, embracing migrants and ethnic minorities who have different cultural and religious backgrounds. Kim (2011) points out that identity management among ethnic minority and host society groups impacts the extent to which new arrivals gain meaning through community. Pătru (2021) highlights the tension in religious diaspora communities between retaining faith identity, while also engaging with other faith communities in the new environment.

Religious Framework

In many parts of the world, religion is a critical component of culture and identity (Berger, 2003). Religion can play a crucial role in acculturation when adherents settle in new environments as migrants. Berry et al. (2006) observe that religion can be a possible variant in the way migrants acculturate and adapt to a new society. Agishtein and Brumbaugh (2013) and Berger (2008) also note the importance of religion in understanding cultural attachment. Meneses (2012) describes challenges that emerge when churches create sub-groups where ethnicity and cultural differences become markers of segregation and identity rather than encouraging all Christians in the location to meet corporately, irrespective of background.

The nexus between ethnicity and religious belonging has been confirmed in the Australian National Church Life Survey (National Church Life Survey, 2004). Powell et al. (2017) note that intergenerational transmission of religious faith is important to leaders in migrant communities. Jacobite Syrians in Australia face this challenge. According to West (2011), presenter of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's national *Religion and Ethics* program, the Australian character has always had a strong element of religiosity. This makes the receiving society sympathetic to the arrival of groups whose religious features are different on one level but find common ground with their own traditional religious history. Interestingly, research suggests that the COVID lockdowns actually expanded ties within and between different faith communities and increased transnational religious networks (Taragin-Zeller & Kessler, 2021). So, even when religious communities could not gather in person, in many cases online relationships were retained and even increased.

Diasporic Consciousness

In culturally plural societies the dichotomy is compounded as migrants seek to remember their roots and membership of a world-wide community. In 2014, Syrian-born Patriarch Ignatius Aphrem II Karim was elected as the new Orthodox Patriarch of Antioch and All the East. He provides a tangible role model for diasporic consciousness and ecumenicism. Although Syriac Orthodox, he received licentiate and doctorate degrees from a Catholic institution, St Patrick's College in Maynooth, Ireland. In 1996, he was named head of the Archdiocese of the Syriac Orthodox Church for the Eastern United States. He now resides in Damascus, Syria where he survived an assassination attempt in 2016. For those living in the diaspora, this was a strong reminder of the suffering and persecution still faced by their communities around the world.

A counterpoint to the idea of diaspora is the attractiveness of a new citizenship. This status is a step up from permanent residence; it means bestowal of new dimensions of belonging, being counted as part of the host nation. Based on studies of other groups of immigrants and refugees (Arasaratnam, 2013) it may be expected that some migrants will wish to retain their distinctiveness, while others will fully immerse in the host culture. Nesdale and Mak (2000) suggest that cultural, ethnic, physical, and linguistic similarities with the host society lead to higher levels of acceptance and acculturation, whereas dissimilarities in these key areas can work against acceptance and influence the rate of successful settlement. Wilmsen (2013) identifies social networks, counselling, economic opportunities, English language proficiency, family support, permanent accommodation, education, defining gender roles, and citizenship as key variables in refugee settlement. Ernst, et al. (2015) discovers that refugee youth who actively engaged government services and learning English reported positive attitudes about their prospects in Australia.

Multicultural Hosting

Another factor that impacts on interfaith and intra-faith engagement is the host country's policies. Australia is peacefully multicultural: 51.5% of residents are overseas-born or second-generation Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics, June 28, 2022). Australia's official policy of multiculturalism has created enabling conditions for diverse groups of migrants to settle and build their lives in community (Houston, 2018; Jakubowicz, 2018). Clyne and Jupp (2011) posit that multiculturalism is vital for maintaining social harmony in Australia. Collins (2013) proposed that successful integration can be reflected in work participation, managing differences, citizenship, education, health, equal opportunity, and perceptions as to discrimination or social participation. Government policies influence many of these areas, so recognition of the official doctrine of diversity is important. Australian society is multi-faith, largely individualistic and constitutionally secular, compared

with the religious polarisation, collectivism and ethnic divisions that characterise India (the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox homeland).

Furthermore, the individualism/collectivism (Goodall, 2014) dynamic may be challenging. Australian society is multi-faith, largely individualistic, and constitutionally secular. This is in stark contrast to the religious polarization, collectivism, and ethnic divisions that characterize India (the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox homeland). Hofstede (2011) reveals that in Australia, respondents to a survey tended to score around 90% for individualism, whereas scores for collectivism were 65% in Syria, 70% in Iraq and 63% in Turkey, all of which are source countries of Syriac Orthodox migrants to the West. Ayyash-Abdo (2001) discusses differences between people in the West who are predominantly individualist and those who live in the Middle East, who tend to be collectivist, especially in the contexts of religion, language, personal identity, and social ritual. Sabatier and Berry (2008) note that migrant parents helped shape their children's socialization, behavior, responses to feelings of discrimination, and adaptation to the national society, without losing familial cultural identities. Schwartz et al. (2012) find that transmission of culture and values from first generation migrants to their children is strongly linked to the children's personal identification and psychological well-being.

Data Collection

I adopted a qualitative methodology for this research, involving structured interviews and ethnographic fieldwork. The Alphacrucis College Human Research Ethics Committee provided ethics clearance for the research on April 14, 2021. Data collection occurred during April–May 2021. The interview instrument contained 134 questions, focussing on biodata, migration, settlement, strength of religious commitment and association with Jacobite Syrian Churches in India and Australia. For privacy, excerpts quoted herein are anonymized using pseudonyms.

Structured Interviews

Twenty-nine persons (M = sixteen, F = thirteen; average age = thirty-seven years) were interviewed for this study. All were born in India. Six lived in Ireland before migrating to Australia. Six lived in New Zealand, one in the United Kingdom, one in Singapore and ten in the Middle East. Twenty-three respondents were married; six were single; none was (or had been) divorced or widowed. Between them, married respondents had forty-six children. Including schooling commenced overseas and concluded in Australia, all interviewees reported having completed primary and high school, twenty-eight had attended university and one completed vocational training in India. Respondents included one Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) graduate; five others had post-graduate degrees, including three Masters-level degrees.

I used a Directed Content Analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) to analyze interview data, looking for patterns in responses and meanings within data sets, using the lens of Berry's acculturation model. This enabled me to maximise open-ended questions, listen to language used, weigh up responses, and explore issues and themes arising. The interviewees and I were able to reflect on answers in the context of the meaning of input. I conducted all interviews in English, as all the participants were fluent in English before migrating to Australia. All had been exposed to English in school and university. Nine had attended schools where English was the primary medium of education. Five learned English while living and working in Ireland, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, or Singapore before settling in Australia.

Ethnography and Lived Experience

The term ethnography is derived from the ancient Greek *éthnos* (foreign people) and *graphé* (writing) (Müller, 2021, p. 31). Pink (2013, p. 35) defines ethnography "as a process of creating and representing knowledge or ways of knowing that are based on ethnographers' own experiences and the ways these intersect with the persons, places and things encountered during that process." It necessitates leaving one's 'normal' place and moving into a 'foreign' space. Heron and Reason (2006, p. 179) state that "Good research is research conducted *with* people rather than *on* people." Furthermore, the International Organisation for Migration's *World Migration Report 2018* highlights "the importance of understanding migration from migrants' perspectives, principally by listening to and learning from migrants through rigorous research" (p. 172).

In undertaking this ethnographical research, I draw on extensive lived experience in interfaith and intra-faith dialogue. I have been an ordained Pentecostal minister for many decades in the Australian Christian Churches denomination (formerly known as Assemblies of God in Australia). I also served as an Australian diplomat, having been posted to various locations, including Peru, Venezuela, Spain, Lebanon, Singapore, and Kenya. As such, I simultaneously filled professional and pastoral roles, including lecturing in Bible colleges across the world. During my diplomatic posting in the Middle East, I assisted the ministry of the Vicar of All Saints Anglican Church in Beirut. I have maintained lifelong personal friendships with men and women from a wide variety of religious and cultural backgrounds.

Of particularly relevance to this current study, I was an acquaintance of the late Zakka I Iwas, Patriarch of the Syriac Orthodox Church of Antioch and All the East. My PhD dissertation explored the status and future of this ancient church establishing itself in diaspora around the world (Davis, 2019). I spent time in Syriac Orthodox churches in the Middle East, the United States of America (USA), Sweden, India, and Australia. I have strong and abiding friendships with senior leaders of Syriac Orthodox churches in Australia. While I came to this study with considerable experience, I am mindful of Jane Dempsey Douglass' entreaty that ecumenical dialogue should involve:

> persistent, loving, patient, and honest engagement *with all those who preach the gospel of Jesus Christ*… fervently hoping that our witness will be made more efficacious and that before the *eschaton*, we shall come to the day when we can sit together at the table spread by our common Lord, Jesus Christ" (cited in Abdul-Mohan, 2010, p. 11).

Given that this research centers around a migrant interfaith and intra-faith engagement, my focus is on friendship-building, mutually beneficial learning experiences (Müller, 2021).

This research focuses on first-hand intra-faith ethnography based on my participant observation as a Pentecostal minister in an Orthodox setting. I attended several services of St Athanasius Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church in Canberra. The church provided printed and online liturgies with English language translations. I was grateful that the Vicar publicly announced the study and encouraged church members to be available for interview. As a Pentecostal Christian, I found ready acceptance as a fellow-believer by the Jacobite Syrian community in Canberra. On five occasions during the research, I was invited to lead Bible readings and prayers in the homes of interviewees. Discussions about matters of faith, over shared meals, were open and engaging, especially with younger family members. During Sunday Masses, church members explained aspects of the Malankara liturgy. This demonstrates the openness and proactive intra-faith engagement demonstrated by participants in my research. This fieldwork helped me see the church through their eyes, ask questions and invite parishioners to consider being interviewed. I also reviewed web pages and Facebook sites used by the Jacobite community in Australia to see what postings revealed about their interfaith and intra-faith activities and priorities. In May 2021 (during COVID restrictions), I also streamed into a funeral service in Canberra that included all the attendant liturgies.

Results

Responses from participants suggested a staged approach to acculturation, tracing their migration experiences, the importance of religion, asserting their identity, while becoming part of the diaspora, retaining cultural and religious heritage, and how optimistically they regarded the future. These are now examined in turn.

Migration Experiences

The principal reasons interviewees said they migrated were sponsored by Australian employers (twelve), arrived as dependant family members (fifteen), and to study (two). Ten said they migrated because Australia was an attractive destination for people wishing to improve their lives, with good wages and a high standard of living. They possessed business or professional skills attractive to Australia and were confident of settling quickly. When asked how welcome they felt when they first

arrived in Australia responses from interviewees were as follows: "very welcome" (22); "welcome" (two), "did not feel welcome at first" (four); and "arrived too young to remember" (one). One interviewee said, "Working in multicultural England helped me develop global experience, so I did not experience culture shock in Australia" (Rachel, personal communication, April 24, 2021). Nearly half arrived with firm job offers in the health care or higher education sectors and were assisted by companies that had engaged them, so they did not struggle to secure an economic footing. Nine interviewees adopted new career paths because they could not obtain work with the skills or qualifications they had on arrival. At the time of interview, all had jobs.

Three interviewees reported their church helped them establish a base in Australia, including finding accommodation. Five received assistance from Medicare and Centrelink (Australian government health and welfare agencies). Twelve were assisted by their employer sponsors. A further nine received help or advice from family members or friends who had preceded them. Regarding where interviewees made friends, they responded: work (twenty-one); school or university (fifteen); neighbours (five); and clubs (ten). The sum is greater than twenty-eight, as several persons gave more than one answer to the question. Two respondents said, when they have free time, they prefer to meet with members of the Jacobite community. The remaining twenty-seven indicated they had no preference and were comfortable spending time with people outside the church. Seven participants had friends in Australia who were born overseas (other than India). Challenges in settling included the cost of living, entering the housing market without rental histories, social expectations, Australian slang, individualism, Canberra's cold winters, and missing families "back home." Adapting to new systems, such as the labor market, accessing medical services, getting a driver's licence, and understanding changing visa regulations were also difficult. Settling during COVID-19 restrictions created some issues with transitional work arrangements.

Religious Community

All interviewees belonged to the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church and went to Holy Mass regularly in India. All twenty-three married interviewees were married in Jacobite churches. I observed Jacobite church services on March 28, 2021 (Evening Prayers and Hosanna Holy Mass) and May 1, 2021 (Morning Prayers and Holy Mass). *Holy Qurbono*, or 'sacrifice', is usually based on the *Divine liturgy of Saint Jacob bar Salibi* (d. 1171). Services include worship, confession, absolution, benedictions and Bible readings, followed by thanksgiving and the Eucharist. Parishioners participated with reverence, lining up in silence to participate in the sacrament. Women who did not wear veils during the services donned them before approaching the altar. When asked which language they followed in the liturgy, twenty-one said that they preferred Malayalam (spoken in the Indian state of Kerala) and eight said that they preferred 'Manglish' (Malayalam written in Latin script). One respondent, Joshu, believed the church should have shorter services—the 2021 Good Friday service was eight hours

long—involve more youth and remain relevant (Joshu, personal communication, May 16, 2021). Joshu observed that, "In India, your family follows you up if you do not go to Holy Mass. That is not the case in Australia, so some of my friends do not attend as regularly". However, Neha said, "I was OK with the length of the service; I find meaning in the ritual every time I go" (Neha, personal communication, May 17, 2021). Five respondents valued connections with other members of the small "Knananaya community" in Canberra.[2]

All participants attend the church's festivals (Christmas, Holy Week and saints' feasts). The church also has a women's group and Sunday School program; children participate from kindergarten through to Year 10, when they transition to the youth program. The St Athanasius Church Committee in Canberra is keen to strengthen the youth group and diversify its appeal and activities (through teaching, sports-based initiatives, and engagement with other Syriac youth groups in Australia), to keep younger people engaged in the life and worship of the church. Prayer is vital in family life. Each home I visited featured a wall against which religious pictures, texts and Malayalam Bibles were placed. Every day, family members gather at the wall (facing east) and recite the liturgy for the day. When asked what things were important to them in church, answers ranged as follows (some respondents gave multiple responses): their faith community (twenty-nine); maintaining culture and traditions (twenty-two); keeping a strong personal faith (twenty-one); Bible studies (sixteen); prayer (fourteen); connections, identity and meaning (fourteen); learning Christian values (twelve); longevity of the church, with its claims to Apostolic authority (seven); practicing the community's religion (four); serving their church (four); and keeping the language of the church alive (one).

Asserting Identity

When I asked participants how they identified themselves, answers were: Australian-Orthodox-Indian (two), Australian-Indian (six), Indian-(or Indo)-Australian (thirteen), Australian (one) and Indian (seven—temporary or permanent residents, with Indian nationality only at present). Malayalam was the first language of all participants in this study. It contributes to their identity and is a vehicle for shared culture and tradition in the homeland or diaspora. Few of the participants understood Syriac (a dialect of Aramaic), the sacred language of their church history and liturgy. Clergy learn it in seminary. Lay members learn how to recite the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed in Syriac by rote, hearing them repeatedly in the Holy Mass. But all members of this group prefer to speak Malayalam.

Family connection is also vital. Twenty-one married respondents said their families were involved in the choices of their partners ("arranged" marriages); three

[2] Knananaya Jacobite Syrian Christians self-identify with fourth century settlers from Edessa who were of Jewish descent. The community is endogamous and retains distinct intramural cultural traditions.

met at work or university and married with their parents' consent ("love marriages"). Comments such as, "It is our parents' privilege to choose our marriage partners"; and "with so many family members involved we are encouraged to build solid families" were expressed on several occasions. Unmarried respondents told the researcher they will marry from their community in India as prospective candidates in Australia are limited. In all cases, they and their children had been baptized in India, where this rite is regarded as a community celebration (godparents are typically family members). When asked "Do you feel that you are following your normal social behaviours, language and religious traditions without integrating with Australian culture?" and "Do you feel that you have given up your older traditions altogether and become 'Australian', in terms of language, practices and social structures?", all stated "No."

Defining "Home" in the Diaspora

When asked what location first springs to mind when the word "home" is used, twelve interviewees said "Australia." Six persons said "home" was "here, where I am", or similar words. One said, "where my family is." Nine said "India". One person said "either." None of the interviewees indicated a desire to return to their Indian "homeland" permanently. Most had visited since migrating and had extended family there but had no wish to remain. "I am not at home in India; I am not the same person who originally arrived in Australia. I feel much freer here. Life is peaceful and quiet. Whenever I visit India I am considered a foreigner" (Ruth, personal communication, May 12, 2021). Twenty-one interviewees send remittances to family members in India. Seven do not. One who does so explained: "There is no security or pension system for our parents in India. They think we are now wealthy Australians" (Abin, personal communication, May 16, 2021). One person declined to answer this question. Most maintain contact with family members in India through social media. All interviewees felt they had a "spiritual homeland" outside of Australia, linked to their background and religion. Three hoped to be buried in Kerala when they pass away.

When asked how they acculturated, answers were mixed (several gave more than one answer): decided to accept Australia "as is" (ten); learned new rules and expectations (two), respected the leadership (two); bought a house (eight); created a work-life balance that allowed family time (one); concluded that Australia was safe, especially for women (one); determined to become citizens when eligible (eight); and finished school and entered university (six). Three respondents detected some racial stereotyping. One said he did not need to make any changes. Another said residing in Canberra has made her more patient, courteous, positive, and open to others. More than half volunteered that living and working outside India before moving to Australia made the adjustment easier. All twenty-nine interviewees answered "no" when asked, "Are there important cultural traditions you have changed or stopped since arriving in Australia?" One respondent stated, "I come from a multi-religious country (India). My Christian heritage defines my purpose, who I am. Australia does

not pressure me to change, but it gives me opportunities to meet people from other religious backgrounds" (Aby, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

Incorporating Heritage into Modernity

Interviewees identified the following elements of religious heritage as ones that should be passed to the next generation: involvement in community (fourteen); liturgy and rites of the church (ten); Christian belief (ten); family and personal values (nine); prayer (nine); Bible knowledge (seven); culture (five); the church's historical legacy (five); and retaining the language of ritual (one). All twenty-nine interviewees stated that their church and community were "very important" in terms of their decision making. One interviewee said, "We have our continuing Apostolic tradition; our Patriarchs sit in Peter's place" (Varghese, personal communication, April 24, 2021).

While retaining their religious heritage, participants said that they did not see any conflict with attending other churches outside Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church. In fact, most interviewees in my study go to local Roman Catholic churches in weeks when there is no Jacobite Syrian Holy Mass. One interviewee admitted to having visited a youth group in a Protestant church. "We know there are Christians in other denominations, so I went with a friend" (Susmi, personal communication, April 26, 2021). Others had Protestant friends. Regarding church attendance, one respondent estimated only 60% of young Jacobites in Canberra attend services regularly. "When our youth go to university in Australia, they need a strong commitment to belief because of the atheism they find there. Some of my friends are not committed to church values" (Sunil, personal communication, May 11, 2021). Eighteen respondents believed their children will continue in the church; three said they "hoped so" and eight did not yet have children but anticipated bringing up their children in the church environment. "Our children are key to our future; if they stop attending, the church in Australia as we know it will cease to exist" (Pria, personal communication, April 24, 2021). Paulose added: "I want to pass the traditions of the church on to my children. I am doing that, but I also have several Catholic friends" (Paulose, personal communication, May 2, 2021).

Future Expectations

Twenty interviewees have acquired Australian citizenship and nine indicated an intention to do so when they qualify. When asked to indicate, on a scale of 1–5 (1 being "not very happy" and 5 being "very happy") how happy they felt living in Australia, nineteen participants stated "5," one respondent said "4.5"; seven stated "4"; and two stated "2." Issues that generated lower scores included visa uncertainty, "missing friends and family in India" and (in one case) racist attitudes encountered

in Canberra. When asked, twenty-three could not recall instances of perceived religious or racial discrimination in Australia. Five said they had been exposed to low level forms of racism, such as: "I saw racist stereotypes on TV"; and "a patient in the hospital told me to go back to where I came from, but accepted my care" (Jiny, personal communication, May 16, 2021). Only one said she had been subjected to discrimination, including attitudes that potentially impacted her career.

When asked to indicate, on a scale of 1–5 (1 being "not very confident" and 5 being "very confident") how confident they felt about their future in Australia, twenty-two out of twenty-nine interviewees selected "5"; seven selected "4" (less certain because they were awaiting the outcomes of permanent residence applications). All interviewees answered "Yes" to the question, "Do you feel that you are able to maintain some of your original traditions while enjoying a high level of interaction with the Australian culture?"; two added that it was their "hope." When asked whether they would consider committing their lives to an official role in their church in Australia, two interviewees said "Yes", fourteen said "No" and the remaining thirteen said that they were already involved to some extent and would continue to do so.

Discussion

The following discussion reveals how interfaith and intra-faith engagement of Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Christians living in Canberra assists this community to integrate into Australian society through identity formation, religiosity and fluidity, home making in the diaspora, and the incorporating the multicultural, multireligious attitudes reflected in the host country.

Identity Formation for New Arrivals

The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church reaches out to members of their faith who arrive in Canberra as immigrants. Participants reported encountering a welcoming church community that helped them understand the context of their experiences and provide continuity. Church meetings and social events provide a place to meet regularly with people from their ethnic and religious background and a 'place' to meet emotional and spiritual needs under focused leadership. Interviewees did not evince a sense of separateness or detachment. Their religion is part of their identity, as participants of a particular religious tradition in a culturally diverse nation, in which they are now invested. All respondents stated they made friends inside their church after arriving in Australia, and these relationships have proven highly valued and enduring. All respondents affirmed the importance of religious and family sanction in their marriages—or would seek it when they married. Respondents expressed pride in their individual, ethnic, and national identity.

However, most interviewees also noted the significance of making friends in the host society through work, study, neighborhoods, and social clubs. Almost all respondents preferred to spend social time with people of other faiths outside the church. Working or studying with Australians from a variety of religious and cultural backgrounds contributed to this fluidity. Jimmy told me that at the hospital where he works he has friends of Muslim, Hindu, and Sikh backgrounds (Jimmy, personal communication, April 24, 2021). There were no suggestions affinity with people from their own background limited their engagement with the social space of the host country. Participants indicated a strong desire to retain their heritage language but speaking proficient English made it more likely they would be accepted in social circles outside their families and church. Parents said bringing up their children in Malayalam-speaking home environments and turning to English when they started school helped them become proficient in both cultures. Fluency was paramount for the integration of these migrants. The interfaith/intra-faith engagement of respondents demonstrates the successful integration of this community into Australia.

Religiosity and Fluidity

Attendance at Holy Mass is a central component of Jacobite Syrian individual and corporate life. Participation in church life enables migrants to belong to a supportive web of social and intracultural relationships. Young people growing up in Jacobite families in Australia are taught routines such as praying, vegan fasting during Lent, and going to Sunday School and Masses. They are also exposed to religious role models, including community leaders and priests, who reinforce the ancient mysteries. However, the lack of a resident priest in Canberra and uncertainty as to the next generation's commitment to church dogma were identified as two factors that may influence the strength of this community in Australia. While interviewees are committed to maintaining their heritage culture (religion, language, food, dress, family values, cultural narratives and diasporic consciousness) at home, they still participate in a diverse culture in school, the workplace, and business.

The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church is narrowly defined culturally but seeks to remain connected and dynamically relevant for members, with a commitment to ecumenism. Shibu emphasised to me that "our Patriarch Aphrem II is a strong advocate of inter-church unity" (Shibu, personal communication, May 4, 2021). This is an important recognition by an ordinary church member living in the diaspora, as it acknowledges an ecumenical drive within the church from the top down. Church leaders stressed their growing links with other Christian denominations, especially Canberra's Roman Catholic community. Furthermore, Canberra's St Athanasius congregation regularly meets in a local (Protestant) Church of Christ facility. The Vicar told me that their relationship with that church is strong. Respondents were happy to move freely between church denominations and attend Catholic and Protestant church services. One interviewee was quite open about going to another church "some Sunday nights, with a friend" (Susmi, personal communication, April

26, 2021). While most interviewees had personal friendships with people of other faiths, none of them had visited a place of worship outside the Christian tradition. This is not surprising, as the same could be said of most Christians in Australia. The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church is a member of the World Council of Churches and the National Council of Churches in Australia. These organizations actively assist refugees from worn-torn countries and there is some interfaith dialogue participation in that context.

Home Making in Diaspora

My research also reveals that diasporic consciousness was a significant factor in helping the Jacobite Syrian Orthodox adherents to retain their religious identity while building interfaith and intra-faith relationships. The Jacobite Church in Australia is an heir of a long tradition centred on a spiritual 'home' in India. However, almost all respondents consider Australia as their home in line with Berry's (1997) integration category. None matched the assimilation, separation or marginalization categories. Only one person could potentially be described as 'border-line', due to the impacts of perceived racism. However, that participant scored very highly in terms of other markers of integration and was 'very optimistic' about the future. Several families included aged parents (visitors or permanent residents living with them), who fitted the separation mode.

Securing a regular income and home ownership were important to participants making Australia their 'home'. Financially and educationally, this group appears well established and considered this vital to successful integration into Australian society. Participants reported they maintain their heritage culture at home and within church circles, while engaging with the wider community at school, university, in the workplace, in business, and at social events. They relate without difficulty with people from many different religions, as well as those identifying as having no religion. Interviewees accepted they are living in a religiously diverse community where people they meet are from different parts of the world. Another challenge that families face is ensuring that their children retain their religious heritage while growing up in the diaspora. One of St Athanasias' members said that she had been invited to share with a children's group in a Protestant church. She reported that she "felt that we had a lot in common" (Nitha, personal communication, May 4, 2021).

Multicultural, Multireligious Hosting

Most interviewees were comfortable in retaining their heritage culture while embracing Australia's multicultural multi-religious culture. They were already familiar with this from their experience in India, as well as other multicultural countries where they had lived. As one interviewee noted, working previously in

multicultural (which include multireligious) England "helped me develop global experience" (Rachel, personal communication, April 24, 2021). Participants did not wish to forsake the traditions of their community, but they also did not want to be alienated or disrespected by peers outside the church. They are exposed to a wide range of religious faith communities at school, university and work, social media and in advertising spaces in their neighbourhoods. They can hear and see where normative Australian values are similar or different from their own. Except for two student visa holders, the interviewees do not see themselves as foreigners. Participants also reported they did not have to compromise their beliefs or identities to become 'Australians' and acquire citizenship. Throughout the research, interviewees emphasized that their collective religious commitment enables them to maintain their ancient traditions while engaging with the pluralistic Australian host culture around them.

All participants reported high levels of confidence in Australia and their future. The fact that many interviewees nominated hyphenated identities exemplified this sense of duality in the construction of their self-identity. The Jacobite Syrian Church's local leadership encourages members to put down roots and contribute to Australia. Participants believed Australia accepts their 'differentness' and acknowledges their desires to blend their values and beliefs in a pluralist society, so they engage the host culture with intentionality. Berry's (1997) observation that integration involves reciprocal acceptance is relevant here, as is his conclusion that a multicultural society where intercultural relations are mutually recognised is amenable to integration.

Conclusions

The Syriac Orthodox Church is one of the longest surviving Christian communities in history. Adherents have faced brutal oppression but have also proactively sought to engage with people of other faiths and doctrinal views. A willingness to do so has helped the church survive in times of adversity. Roman Catholic, Eastern Orthodox and Protestant churches owe a debt of gratitude to Syriac Orthodox churches, as custodians of rich insights anchored in early Christianity. Applying Berry's taxonomy of acculturation, Jacobite Syrian participants in my study have integrated into the religiously diverse host culture of Australia. They are integrating and thriving in a multi-faith society where they honour their culture and identity, support one another, and embrace newly arriving migrants from their community in India. At the same time, their leaders are dialoguing collaboratively with other Christian denominations on the basis of equality.

An enduring faith-based identity has created a stable environment for their settlement and future in Australia and their ability to build interreligious and intra-faith friendships. Religious identity, affiliation, and loyalty are salient in their settlement experiences; they do not feel obliged to give up their heritage or values, but they are open to interfaith dialogue. Diasporic consciousness impacts how they define themselves and how they reach out and make supportive relationships with one another

in Australia. All interviewees had a sense of cultural connections to their places of origin, links with Jacobite Syrian churches in other parts of the world and with new arrivals. They are optimistic about the future and enjoy Australia's multicultural environment.

The Jacobite Syrian Orthodox Church has much to add to our understanding of interfaith and intra-faith engagement. As co-custodians of one of the oldest Christian denominations, members of the Jacobite community are reaching out to non-Syriac churches and bridging a divide between ancient traditions and contemporary cultures as they establish self-sustaining congregations in the West. I trust that insights from this study will provide a foundation upon which studies of similar diasporic communities, and their contributions to interfaith and ecumenical dialogue, can grow and impact the wider community.

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Chapter 11
Spiritual Formation in Muslim and Pentecostal Higher Education: A Comparative Case Study Between Australia and Indonesia (Part One)

Denise A. Austin, Nigel D. Pegram, Robert Pope, and Muqowim

Abstract Islam and Pentecostalism are two of the largest religions in the world today. Historically, Pentecostals steered away from inter-religious dialogue but increasingly pluralism and multiculturalism call for a more cooperative and integrative approach. Furthermore, there is growing academic interest regarding the impact of Islam in the Asia Pacific region. Spiritual formation in higher education is also a rapidly emerging field as students seek personal faith to provide meaning in life. While forums such as the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies at Oxford, have fostered inter-religious dialogue, little research has been undertaken regarding Islam-Pentecostal connections. This case study explores interfaith training in higher education. Using a quantitative approach, we survey teaching staff across eight campuses of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and six campuses of Alphacrucis University College in Australia to compare the approaches to spiritual formation and character formation. Part 1 (this chapter) explores the spiritual formation of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who identify specifically as Pentecostal and how they inculcate spiritual formation in students. Part 2 (the following chapter) reveals noteworthy distinctions regarding character formation approaches of lecturers who

D. A. Austin (✉)
Leaders Institute, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: denise.austin@leaders.edu.au

N. D. Pegram
School of Ministry and Theology, Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW, Australia
e-mail: nigel.pegram@ac.edu.au

R. Pope
Centre for Intercultural Research and Engagement, Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Sydney, NSW, Australia
e-mail: robert.pope@ac.edu.au

Muqowim
Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University Indonesia, Sunan Kalijaga, Yokyakarta, Indonesia
e-mail: muqowim@uin-suka.ac.id

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identify as Muslim and lecturers who broadly identify as Christian, including their teaching strategies to see character formation in students. In Part 1, we find that greater interfaith cooperation and integration in higher education could result in producing future leaders who engage in more frequent and open-hearted engagement between Muslims and Pentecostals.

Keywords Pentecostal · Muslim · Higher education · Spiritual formation · Australia · Indonesia

Introduction

Islam and Pentecostalism are two of the largest global religions today (Lipka & Hackett, 2017; Vijgen & van der Haak, 2015). Indonesia is the largest Muslim country with around 87% of the population, or 260 million people, identifying as Muslim (Hefner, 2019). Of the world's 644 million Pentecostals/charismatics, around 125 million live in Asia (Wariboko & Oliverio, 2020). Historically, Pentecostals steered away from inter-religious dialogue but increasingly pluralism and multiculturalism call for a more cooperative and integrative approach (Richie, 2011). Furthermore, there is growing academic interest regarding the impact of Islam in the Asia Pacific region. Forums such as the Centre for Muslim-Christian Studies at Oxford, have fostered inter-religious dialogue, but little research has been undertaken regarding Islam-Pentecostal connections. This is surprising since, as Kamau (2018) points out, both the Qur'an and the Bible outline how interfaith dialogue should be embraced and practiced. This case study explores interfaith training in higher education spiritual formation.

Using a quantitative approach, we survey faculty teaching staff across eight campuses of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and six campuses of Alphacrucis University College in Australia to compare the approaches to spiritual formation and character formation. Part 1 (this chapter) explores the spiritual formation of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who identify specifically as Pentecostal and how they inculcate spiritual formation in students. Part 2 (the following chapter, see Pegram et al., 2023) reveals noteworthy distinctions regarding character formation approaches of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who broadly identify as Christian, including their teaching strategies to see character formation in students. In this chapter, we argue that greater interfaith cooperation and integration in higher education could result in producing future leaders who engage in more frequent and open-hearted engagement between Muslims and Pentecostals. Our research aims to provide new insights in underexplored areas of Muslim-Pentecostal interfaith dialogue.

Literature Review

This study is situated within three key fields of current academic enquiry. There is increasing discussion regarding the definition of spiritual formation and its pedagogical application in higher education. Strategies for positive Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue continue to attract interest, including in Indonesia. There have also been some studies on Muslim-Pentecostal dialogue in Indonesia, but there has been little attempt to examine the spiritual formation of students at Islamic and Pentecostal higher education institutions.

Higher Education Pedagogy of Islamic and Pentecostal Spiritual Formation

Muslim spirituality is defined as submission to God which then promotes closeness to God (Ghorbani et al., 2018; Anwar et al., 2020). Islamic education cultivates physical, moral, social, aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual advancement through nearness and submission to God (Alavi, 2008). Therefore, the application of religious knowledge is a central feature of higher education in Islamic universities (Rafidah et al., 2019; Mas'ud et al., 2019; Sahin, 2018). Chanifah et al. (2021, p. 197) note that "Islam and spirituality must complement each other, and Islamic education is based on spirituality." For traditionalists, this would prioritize the memorising and reciting of the Qur'an, as well as learning Arabic, however in many modern universities, Islamic educators are incorporating critical thinking skills as an essential part of this process (Altinyelken, 2021). For example, the State Islamic University in Yogyakarta uses an integration-interconnection or multi-disciplinary approach to Islamic studies which is built upon its interaction with other religions, science, civilization, and culture. This includes self-reflection, self-evaluation as well as spiritual application. For over ten years, the university's Faculty of Islamic Thought has been hosting an interfaith workshop in partnership with Christian universities, including Universitas Kristen Duta Wacana. Some Muslim university students studying abroad also adopt heightened spiritual awareness as a form of enculturation (Aarvik, 2021).

Frank Macchia (2020, p. 45) describes Pentecostal spiritual formation as "a lifelong growth in the sanctified life through the instruments of core practices (such as proclamation, sacraments, and fellowship) and spiritual disciplines (such as personal prayer, fasting, Scripture reading, and meditation)." Formative self-reflection and structured guidance are often utilized in Christian institutions to promote spiritual formation in students (Sartor et al., 2018; Tan, 2018). Lu (2021) agrees that both theological knowledge and self-awareness are vital for holistic spiritual formation. White (2021) adds that training in spirituality should be practical as well as theoretical in nature. Pentecostal spiritual formation is an affective practice centred on an experience of the love of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit (Vondey, 2018). Revelations from God guide decision-making and penetrate every sphere of daily life

(Harris, 2021; Riches, 2020). The challenge remains of how to measure and assess Pentecostal students' spirituality, particularly (Davis, 2018).

Muslim and Christian Interfaith Engagement

While there is a long history of interfaith engagement between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia and Australia (Saeed, 2004; Wiyono, 2019), this has grown significantly over the last two decades to counter radicalization, violence, racism, and misunderstanding (Green, 2019; Kayaoglu, 2015; Smith, 2007). Recent interfaith academic dialogue focuses on philosophical and theological discussions (Accad, 2019; Cohn-Sherbok et al., 2019; Zygulski, 2022). Pratt (2021) draws out the challenges and themes emerging in two recent Muslim-Christian dialogue initiatives—Building Bridges and the Christian-Muslim Theological Forum. Josef Meri (2021) suggests innovative approaches to interreligious studies in Arab Middle East higher education.

There has also been worthwhile Muslim and Christian interfaith engagement, such as local community initiatives (Cholil, 2014; Qurtuby, 2012). This includes interreligious literacy programs (Sofjian, 2020). Hadi Kusuma and Susilo (2020) explore how young people navigate the challenges and sensitivities of interreligious communication. Harmakaputra and Rahamn (2021) provide a fascinating analysis of how the COVID-19 global pandemic is influencing interfaith attitudes. Interestingly, Wiwin Rohmawati (2020) reveals the vital role that women play in interreligious dialogue in Indonesia. Contemporary interfaith dialogue in Indonesia continues to attract interest.

Muslim and Pentecostal Interfaith Engagement

Globalization and internationalization have led to a more intentional focus on interfaith leadership skills in higher education curricula (Cotton et al., 2019; Giess et al., 2020; Reda, 2018). Evidence suggests that religious literacy is critical to developing an inclusive worldview in students, thereby improving social cohesion, self-consciousness and global connectedness (Mayhew & Rockenbach, 2021; Snipes & Correia-Harker, 2020). Interfaith cooperation helps students strengthen their own faith, demonstrate intellectual maturity, appreciate diversity and build resilience (Daddow, et al., 2020; Gill, 2017). Embedding interfaith dialogue within co-curricular activities can also be beneficial for spiritual formation (Rockenbach et al. 2018).

For many Muslims, Islamic interfaith engagement is influenced by the following Qur'anic short chapter (sura) 109:1–6:

> O you disbelievers! (Arabic كَفْر Kafr = pagans), I do not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship. I will never worship what you worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship. You have your way, and I have my Way (Translation: Mustafa Khattab).

This has been one of the verses used in Islamic tradition to encourage a distancing of Muslims from Jews and Christians, as well as their teaching. However, some Muslim scholars argue that these verses do not relate to the Muslims' attitude towards 'The People of the Book' (Christians and Jews) who are honored in the Qur'an, but to idolaters, who are referred to as pagans (*kaffirun*) (Donner, 2012).

Historically, Pentecostals have been reluctant to engage in interfaith dialogue, including with Muslims, viewing other religions as demonic deception (Kärkkäinen, 2019). However, research specifically focused on Muslim and Pentecostal interfaith engagement is starting to emerge, particularly in Africa (Obadare, 2016; Janson, 2020; Dulin, 2020). In Indonesia, the rapid growth of Pentecostalism has led to conflict with some Islamic groups (Au, 2017). However, Chao (2017) provides evidence of constructive Muslim and Pentecostal cross-religious interactions in Indonesia. All school and tertiary students in Indonesia receive formal religious instruction according to their respective faiths. As Chao (2017) explains, this helps construct the centrality of religiosity in individuals and society. Simatupang (2019) explores the junction between Pentecostal and Muslim hospitality in Indonesia. Simatupang argues that Pentecostals should accept the invitation to participate in *'Id al-Fitri* and *halal bi-halal* as an identity-forming practice. Furthermore, Jesus himself epitomized the redemptive hospitality of God.

Methodology

We selected a quantitative approach for this research as the purpose was to compare the approaches to spiritual formation in this chapter (Part 1) and character formation in the next chapter (Part 2) in Muslim and Pentecostal higher education. While it is possible to characterize this as a comparison of religious perspectives, we decided that the broad influence of religion on a person's worldview suggested a cross-cultural approach was more appropriate. Ember and Ember (2009) assume that cross-cultural comparison is quantitative:

> The basic assumption of cross-cultural research is that comparison is possible because patterns (kinds of phenomena) that occur repeatedly can be identified. These patterns or variables can be measures as present or absent, or in terms of the degree to which they are present. Even the most qualitative phenomena can be measured, often ordinally" (p. 183).

While the assumption of quantitative data in cross-cultural analysis is not required, using a quantitative approach allows the generalization of results (Ember & Ember, 2009), allowing a comparison of the two groups rather than reporting on individuals. An online survey was the most pragmatic approach given the geographical distribution of participants, nationally and internationally (see below). The use of an online

survey also mitigated some ethical concerns. Completion of the survey was taken as implied consent. In addition, given that the researchers included insiders (academics) in each institution, the online mode also reduced the potential for coercion and/or response management in the case of the researchers being supervisors of respondents.

The State Islamic University (known in Indonesia as Universitas Islam Negeri or UIN) has campuses in 24 cities throughout Indonesia. Of these, eight campuses were a part of the 100 responses from lecturers. These campuses include UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta; UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta (Solo); UIN Lombok; UIN Ambon; UIN Sultan Syarif Qasim, Riau (Sumatra); UIN Raden Intan, Lampung (Sumatra); UIN Raden Fatah, Palembang (Sumatra) as well as UIN Sunan Ampel, Surabaya. Alphacrucis University College in Australia has campuses in Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. We chose these two institutions because of our close collegial connections. Limiting the participants to academic faculty helped reduce confounding variables, such as levels of education.

We used a consensus approach to develop an initial set of questions. The content was based on the researchers' expertise as insiders to their faith. From a more extensive set of initial questions created through a brainstorming process, we developed the final instrument by reducing the number of questions based on the researcher's agreement on those which interrogated what were likely to be core areas of, or influences on, differences in interfaith cooperation. This process was modeled on similar techniques in developing psychological scales such as the PANAS or MSCEIT (Mayer et al., 2003; Watson et al., 1988). The questions are listed in the results below. While Part 1 only includes responses from Pentecostal faculty members, Part 2 includes responses from all Christian lecturers.

We developed both English and Indonesian language versions of the surveys. All questions took the form of a scale from 1 to 10, with one indicating "not at all," five "to some extent" and 10 "to a great extent." Some questions were adjusted at run time to make them more appropriate for the target audience. For example, for a question about the other faith's holy book, those who identified as Muslim were asked about the Bible and those identifying as Pentecostals were asked about the Qur'an. The survey included various demographic questions given possible factors impacting on interfaith cooperation. These questions included gender, age, faith identification, faculty and length of time teaching in higher education.

Ethical approval was obtained in Australia through the Alphacrucis University College Human Research Ethics Committee and in Indonesia through the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University, Sunan Kalijaga. We emailed all 315 faculty members from Alphacrucis University College campuses and emailed 200 faculty members from the State Islamic University campuses to invite participation, including a link to the online survey. Data collection occurred from October 20, 2021 to October 27, 2021. To minimize intercultural misunderstandings, both the State Islamic University and Alphacrucis University College had their own trained faculty members facilitating the survey. After we received the responses, we transferred the data into SPSS 27 for cleansing and analysis. Rather than using institutional identification for analysis, we chose to use faith identification because the focus of this research is on spiritual formation. Most of the analysis consisted of a

comparison of the mean responses of respondents (Analysis of Variance or ANOVA) from either Islamic or Pentecostal faith positions.

As noted above, the research team consisted of faculty from both institutions and, therefore, are insider researchers. The use of a quantitative instrument helps to avoid bias inherent in this positionality. However, some benefits did accrue in interpreting the results, as noted below. Space in the survey allowed for textual comments. As revealed in the discussion, these comments helped interpret some of the results.

Results

Demographics

A total of 200 responses were received, including seventy-one partial responses. Participants were asked about their religious identification. We received 160 valid responses. Of these sixty-six (41%) identified as Christian and ninety-four (59%) identified as Muslim. Christians were further asked if they identified as "Pentecostal", with forty-one (70%) of respondents answering "yes". Given Alphacrucis University College is a Pentecostal institute this result is unsurprising. Excluding Christians who did not identify as Pentecostal, 70% of respondents were Muslim and 30% were Pentecostal. These latter two groups are the focus of the analyses below.

The gender distribution was relatively even, with forty-four (43%) female and fifty-eight (57%) male. Age was largely distributed in the middle years, with the largest cohort being those in their thirties (see Fig. 11.1).

The majority were employed full-time (71%), with the remainder being part-time (19%) or contract staff (11%). Most had been in higher education between one and five years (33%), with a further (29%) between six and ten years. The next largest

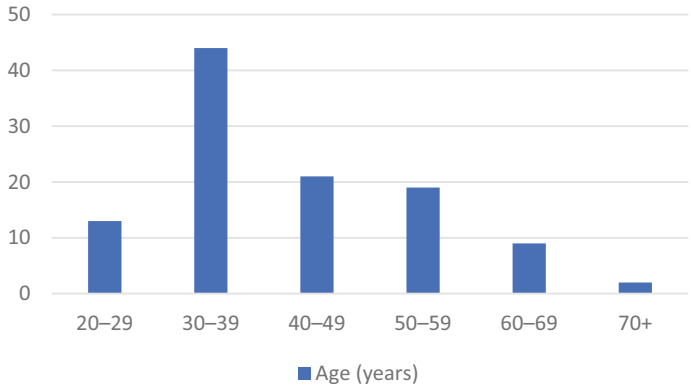

Fig. 11.1 Participant age

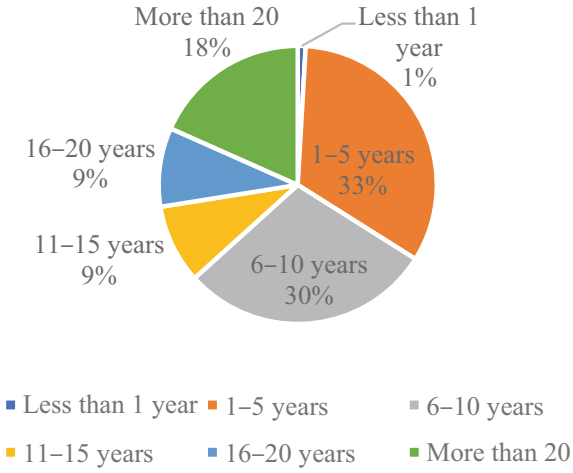

Fig. 11.2 Years of experience teaching in higher education

cohort had more than twenty years' experience (18%) (see Fig. 11.2). The vast majority (85%, n = 86) had been participating in their religion for more than twenty years. The next largest group was one to five years, with 7%.

Most academics were involved as undergraduate (84%) and postgraduate (28%) lecturers, with few being researchers (13%) and academic administrators (9%). The faculty involvement was education (45%), religious studies (30%), social sciences (11%), business (8%), law (8%), leadership (5%) and arts (4%).

Comparison of Faith Groups

Respondents were asked a series of nine questions regarding interfaith education and cooperation. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for each question to determine if the average responses between the two groups were significantly different. Additional comments were provided by some respondents. These comments will be integrated into the discussion below (Table 11.1).

Many of the responses were quite low, with most means falling below the midpoint "to some extent," value, suggesting a generally low emphasis on or commitment to interfaith cooperation. Pentecostals rated six of the nine questions more highly than Muslims, suggesting that Pentecostals perceive themselves as being more familiar of Islam than Muslims familiarity with Christianity. Both groups respond similarly to one of the remaining three, *Question 5 To what extent do you encourage your students to read the Holy Books of other faiths as a source of knowledge about those faiths?* Two other questions saw Muslim respondents give a higher mean response than Pentecostals. When asked *Question 4 To what extent do you read the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity as a source of wisdom?* the Muslim mean (M = 2.0) was higher than that of the Pentecostal (M = 1.5). However, both were quite low, and the

Table 11.1 Interfaith cooperation ratings

Question	Pentecostal Mean	Muslim Mean	ANOVA
1. To what extent are you familiar with the spiritual teachings of other religions?	6.2	4.3	$F(1, 107) = 18.09^{***}$ $\eta^2 = 0.145$‡
2. To what extent are you familiar with the moral teachings of other religions?	5.9	4.5	$F(1, 107) = 10.35^{**}$ $\eta^2 = 0.088$†
3. To what extent are you familiar with the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity?	3.9	2.4	$F(1, 106) = 14.65^{***}$ $\eta^2 = 0.121$†
4. To what extent do you read the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity as a source of wisdom	1.5	2.0	$F(1, 104) = 2.67$
5. To what extent do you encourage your students to read the Holy Books of other faiths as a source of knowledge about those faiths?	2.4	2.4	$F(1, 103) = 0.02$
6. To what extent do you agree that it is important to understand other faiths?	6.7	5.0	$F(1, 105) = 8.93^{**}$ $\eta^2 = 0.078$†
7. To what extent do you incorporate the spiritual teachings of other religions into your curriculum?	3.3	2.4	$F(1, 104) = 3.16$
8. To what extent do you incorporate the moral teachings of other religions into your curriculum?	2.8	2.4	$F(1, 104) = 0.59$
9. To what extent do you work cooperatively with other faiths?	3.0	4.7	$F(1, 104) = 1.79$

** *Significant at 0.01 level*
*** *Significant at 0.001 level*
† Medium effect size
‡ Large effect size

difference was not statistically significant. Similarly, *Question 9 To what extent do you work cooperatively with other faiths?* saw Muslims responding more positively (M = 4.7) than Pentecostals (M = 3.0). Again, both were below the midpoint and the difference was not significant.

Four of the questions demonstrated a statistically significant difference between the responses of Muslims and Pentecostals. For *Question 1 To what extent are you familiar with the spiritual teachings of other religions?* Pentecostals rated their familiarity much higher (M = 6.2) than did Muslims (M = 4.3), with the difference being significant at the p = 0.001 level. Similarly, in response to *Question 2 To what extent are you familiar with the moral teachings of other religions?* Muslims rated themselves lower (M = 4.5) than Pentecostals (M = 5.9). This was significant at the p = 0.01 level. While the scores were lower in response to *Question 3 To what extent are you familiar with the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity?* a similar pattern was

observed. Pentecostals' mean rating (M = 3.9) was higher than Muslims' (M = 2.4), with the difference being significant at the 0.001 level.

Each of the questions where there was a significant difference displayed either a large (Questions 2, 3 and 6) or very large (Question 1) effect size. The question about familiarity with the other faith's spiritual teaching (Question 1) had the greatest effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.145$) and the question about familiarity with the other faith's holy texts had the second largest effect ($\eta^2 = 0.121$). Both questions addressed engagement with core elements of the other faith. Whereas the other two significant questions (questions 2 and 6) did not have as large an effect. Both Question 2 ($\eta^2 = 0.088$) and Question 6 ($\eta^2 = 0.078$) seemed to address less-central issues, such as understanding the other faith's moral teachings and agreeing that understanding other faiths is important.

One surprising finding was the relationship with respondents' age. Overall, ratings were higher as age increased, except for those aged seventies years or greater. One possibility is that the low numbers in the seventies age group could be skewing the results. Significant differences appeared in three of the questions. In response to the question about familiarity with the spiritual teachings of other religions, those aged 60–69 years (M = 6.69) were significantly different from ages twenty to twenty-nine years (M = 4.0, p = 0.023) and ages thirty to thirty-nine years (M = 4.59, p = 0.026) ($F(5, 125) = 3.08$, p = 0.012). The same pattern emerged when asking about familiarity with the moral teaching of other religions. Those in their twenties (M = 4.2, p = 0.032) and thirties (M = 4.7, p = 0.028) rated the question significantly lower than those in their sixties (M = 6.7) ($F(2, 125) = 2.73$, p = 0.023). Finally, the question concerning familiarity with the other religion's holy book showed the most significant difference, again with those in their sixties rating the highest ($F(5, 123) = 4.02$, p = 0.002). Those aged in their twenties (M = 2.0, p = 0.015), 30 s (M = 1.7, p = 0.001) and fifties (M = 1.8, p = 0.025) all rated this question significantly lower than those in their sixties (M = 2.1). One final analysis was done, integrating two variables, age and faith identification. A factorial ANOVA revealed no significant combined interaction between the variables ($F(4, 129) = 0.061$, p = 0.993). This finding is also interesting given that older people are often characterized as less flexible and tolerant, yet this survey consistently showed the opposite in this area.

Two related variables, years in the faith, and years of teaching in higher education, returned no significant differences or patterns. Neither were significant differences found when comparing faculty school (ministry/theology was compared with education and other schools).

Interfaith Cooperation Constructs

A final issue is whether the above questions represent multiple constructs around interfaith cooperation, or do they represent one construct. To investigate this, the nine questions were subject to principal components factor analysis (Eigenvalues > 1). Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy (0.842) and Bartlett's test

of sphericity ($\chi^2(36) = 675.25$, $p < 0.001$) demonstrated the data was amenable to this type of analysis. As may be seen from the scree plot below (Fig. 11.3), two factors were found. The first factor showed high levels of correlation with questions 1–8, with correlations of 0.70 or greater. The results in *Question 9 To what extent*

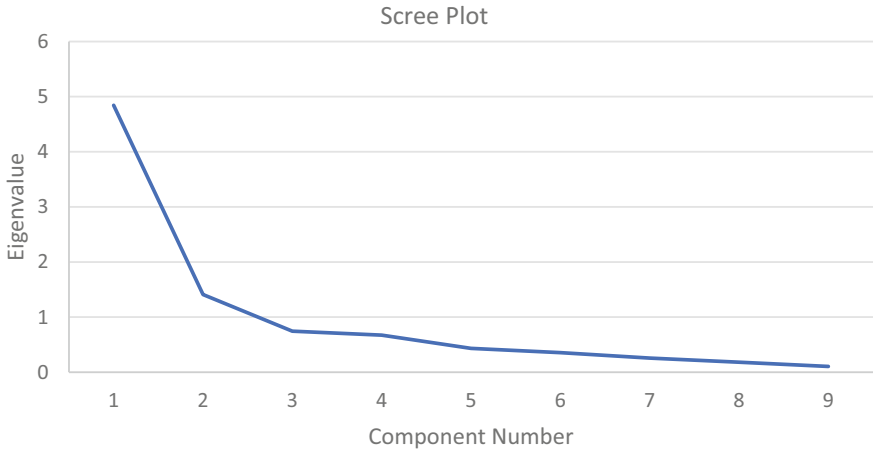

Fig. 11.3 PCA scree plot

Table 11.2 Component matrix (PCA)

Component matrix (PCA)		
	Component 1	Component 2
1. To what extent are you familiar with the spiritual teachings of other religions?	0.79	− 0.52
2. To what extent are you familiar with the moral teachings of other religions?	0.77	− 0.56
3. To what extent are you familiar with the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity?	0.82	− 0.31
4. To what extent do you read the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity as a source of wisdom	0.70	0.32
5. To what extent do you encourage your students to read the Holy Books of other faiths as a source of knowledge about those faiths?	0.74	0.29
6. To what extent do you agree that it is important to understand other faiths?	0.76	− 0.12
7. To what extent do you incorporate the spiritual teachings of other religions into your curriculum?	0.73	0.29
8. To what extent do you incorporate the moral teachings of other religions into your curriculum?	0.75	0.33
9. To what extent do you work cooperatively with other faiths?	0.49	0.60

do you work cooperatively with other faiths? correlated most strongly with a second factor. These two factors accounted for over two thirds of the variance (69.5%). For details see Table 11.2.

These figures suggest that this survey has identified two related, but distinct factors which describe interfaith cooperation. The first factor covers a wide range of questions, which tend to focus on more passive, attitudinal, thought-based types of interfaith action. We describe this factor as interfaith attitudes. However, *Question 9 To what extent do you work cooperatively with other faiths?* specifically asks about action. We therefore describe this factor as interfaith action. While the correlation of 0.49 with component one suggests that attitude is an element here, the greater correlation with component two suggests that interfaith action is linked with but different to interfaith attitudes.

Detailed Discussion

Personal Interfaith Engagement

Machouche et al. (2019, p. 24) explore the importance of "tapping inner human capabilities" of Muslim academics by nurturing their personal spirituality. Analysis of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and Alphacrucis University College in Australia suggests that underlying cultural and theological factors are important influences in personal interfaith engagement. Pentecostal participants demonstrated a reasonably high level of assent to questions concerning familiarity with other religions and a moderately high response agreeing that it is important to understand other faiths. Yet, this might be more mental assent than a lived practice. This was demonstrated in the low-level response to questions which involved actions or practices of engagement with other faiths and their texts. Both groups value interfaith engagement, yet personal attitudes seem to be an ongoing challenge, as indicated by the overall low levels of evaluation. Few rose above the "to some extent" middle level of agreement.

In response to *Question 3 To what extent are you familiar with the Holy Books of Islam?* one Pentecostal responds: "I have lived and worked in many countries… I have friends who belong to other faiths, especially Muslim friends. My answer… is tempered due to the fact that the holy books of Islam need a functioning knowledge of Arabic." In response to *Question 6 To what extent do you agree that it is important to understand other faiths?* both groups agreed it was somewhat important. One Alphacrucis University College faculty member writes: "My field of research is disability theology, which is very much a multi-faith discipline. I have great respect for other faith journeys." Another Pentecostal responds: "My experience is only in one faith that is not Islam. I also work ecumenically often."

However, this respect for other faiths did not seem to translate into action in many cases. A respondent from the State Islamic University commented: "To understand is important but not essential." Another Muslim respondent simply quoted the Qur'an Surah 109:6: "you have your religion and I have mine." This reflects a traditional approach to interfaith dialogue. A Pentecostal from Alphacrucis University College admitted: "I am not opposed to this, but it isn't part of my life." Much work apparently needs to be done to improve personal interfaith engagement. A potential path forward is found in the strongest response among the behavioral questions which was *Question 9 To what extent do you work cooperatively with other faiths?* The general nature of this question makes it hard to define in what context readers would practice such cooperation. While not statistically significant, both *Question 4 To what extent do you read the Holy Books of Islam/Christianity as a source of wisdom* and *Question 9 To what extent do you work cooperatively with other faiths?* had Muslims scoring higher on questions that have an element of practical ecumenism. This is quite surprising given that many Muslim communities, especially in rural areas, would strongly oppose and denounce anyone who reads Christian scriptures. It is likely that in an academic university context, accessing Christian scripture is more permissible for Muslims. This could be an area for further research to see if this is a real difference.

The findings surrounding the role of age in personal interfaith engagement were unexpected. Given that most respondents were between the ages of 30 and 39, we anticipated more openness to interfaith dialogue and engagement. Studies have shown that the older people become, the more rigid (Schultz & Searleman, 2002) and conservative (Grant et al., 2001) their thinking becomes. What might explain the finding that on the whole older cohorts were more open and active, and that this peaked in the 60 s? Even further, how might one explain that a longer time in education or the religion did not similarly correlate with increasing tolerance? These results may reflect a wisdom or attitude which comes more with life experience, rather than with years of involvement in education or the faith. Perhaps their years of living has allowed them time to explore more widely, leading to a greater understanding of the 'other'. It would be worthwhile conducting further study in this area.

Interfaith Curriculum Integration

Spiritual formation in higher education is an emerging field of interest as students seek personal faith to provide meaning in life (Fuertes & Kelley, 2021). An interesting finding of this research is that most Muslim and Pentecostal respondents believe that intentional integration of interfaith content in the curriculum is beneficial in the spiritual formation of students. A Muslim lecturer affirms: "partnership in social interaction is best." Another states: "The best approach is to educate Muslims to be moderate." A Pentecostal respondent says: "These questions challenge me to incorporate reading Holy Books into my classes on world religions." Another explains:

> As my subject is Inclusive Education and Indigenous Education… we do explore Indigenous spirituality, but this religious persuasion is not based on a religious text, but rather connection to land, Country and the dreaming… In my field, exploring theological reasons for teaching students with disabilities and Indigenous education helps students to identify their spiritual values and beliefs. I see lots of students having their assumptions and beliefs challenged and many reconsider their stance on certain Christian practices such as healing and social justice.

This demonstrates that interfaith dialogue can become part of the discussing values and motivations for students in their own spiritual formation.

Bowling (2021) recommends interdisciplinary and inter-departmental cooperation for a truly holistic interfaith experience. However, while our survey results suggest that many Muslim and Pentecostal lecturers see value in interfaith teaching, there are personal or institutional hindrances to making this happen. A Muslim scholar admits: "I still worry about teaching what is not correct to the students, especially causing confusion relating to religion." Some Pentecostal academics express interest in interfaith integration but lacked the opportunity or skills to achieve this. One Alphacrucis University College lecturer states:

> There is no encouragement or obvious opportunities to do so. If these opportunities were presented, they may be taken up. I have no qualms about engaging people of other faith and would find it interesting to do so. I'm not sure how that could be incorporated into the classroom though.

These comments build on the survey results and reveal lecturers do not incorporate interfaith dialogue into the curriculum owing to community or institutional concerns.

Some respondents were adamant that interfaith dialogue is not relevant or important in their context. A lecturer from the State Islamic University explains: "Because I live in an area which is very strong in religious practice, it is not important to incorporate teachings and text of other religions into the curriculum." One Alphacrucis University College lecturer states: "It depends on the context. Where I can encourage students to think about other faiths, I do, but my teaching does not often touch this topic." Another says: "I only teach a business course. There is little faith content of any type." There was further agreement from another Pentecostal lecturer: "In classes where spiritual formation is not part of the subject matter, it is difficult to incorporate and prioritize spiritual formation amongst competing objectives." It appears that lecturers in all disciplines would benefit from professional development that helps them see the benefits of interfaith engagement which equips them and their students with the vocational skills required in a multicultural, multi-faith world.

Institutional Context

There has been increasing support for interfaith education in many higher education institutions (Carter et al., 2020). Of particular interest in our survey results is that while Pentecostals scored higher on the assent to interfaith knowledge and cooperation, Muslims recorded a higher response to the final question about actions. A State

Islamic University faculty member explains: "In the context of tertiary education, an academic approach will help us to understand other faiths more objectively. But this must be complemented with opening up ourselves interact with other faiths." One possibility here is that the two groups' responses are artefact of response bias or some other factor. In future research, it would help to specify the types of interfaith cooperation which has been engaged in and with what frequency. This finding is even more interesting in that Muslims rated the questions about incorporating the teaching about other religions in their curriculum lower than Pentecostals. Perhaps context is a factor here. Is the lower level of response because the institution is an Islamic university, whereas outside this context is a culture with a wider range of faiths? Is it that it is not seen as relevant to the student population? Is there concern that the wider faith community might react negatively if such content were included.

Similarly, perhaps the observed difference between what Pentecostal faculty know about other faiths and how little they teach about them and use their sacred texts in classes might also relate to the institute being a denominational one. Do these responses reflect Pentecostalism's abovementioned historical antipathy toward interfaith cooperation? Alphacrucis University College being the national training institute of Australian Christian Churches is a factor to consider. Could there be a denominational culture which might not encourage interfaith engagement? As Frestadius (2021, p. 69) argues, Pentecostal colleges "exist to serve the church, as well as the academy and society." Understanding attitudes to interfaith cooperation among the leadership and membership of the denomination would help paint a fuller picture here.

We expected differences in responses based on the type of program or field of education in which the lecturer specialized. For example, since Alphacrucis University College has cross-cultural and intercultural communication subjects as part of its ministry courses, it would seem that there should have been greater engagement with other faiths among the responses. What might we make of the fact that no differences were observed when comparing with other faculties? Whether the ministry courses aim to increase interfaith action would be worth following up. If the subjects increased knowledge but did not emphasize actions, they could lead to the results found.

Flexible Learning Modes

Research reveals that many positive interfaith encounters occur outside the classroom (Rockenbach et al., 2018). It is vital to create a safe space, both face-to-face and online, for students to foster interfaith connections (Daddow et al., 2021). A Pentecostal lecturer reflects:

> Interfaith education is important and needs to be developed more. In the subject I teach, which is Ministry Internship (Bachelor degree level), students are involved in practical ministry in a local church or Christian organization for eight hours per week. Most of the students are out in the community for some of this time and they do meet people of other faiths and

> talk to them… So, Christians involved in practical ministries such as this, (including most of my students) have reasonably frequent interaction with people of other faiths. Deeper understanding of other faiths would be helpful to Christian leaders and Christians.

A positive way to foster interfaith engagement in the spiritual formation of students could be in the wider community during work-integrated learning opportunities. Further research would help identify which contexts might offer the best opportunities. They could be casual marketplace contacts, sporting or cultural events, or neighborhood interactions.

Many researchers have explored the challenges of teaching spiritual formation in an online format. However, emerging research also reveals that the COVID-19 pandemic has opened new global education possibilities, partnerships and interactions between student populations (Chan et al., 2022). One Muslim respondent states that the ability to mentor students is "limited by physical distance and COVID restrictions." One Pentecostal respondent says: "Even during COVID, I have kept up regular contact with peers and seniors in spiritual leadership. But the distance has not been detrimental, because I believe in prayer and relationship with God is present with me." Another Alphacrucis University College respondent explains:

> I teach the Bible online. This is very tricky area to work in in terms of spiritual formation… Only through the feedback forms and the occasional interaction via zoom do I get any sense that their studies are… aiding their spiritual formation. Most of the time I have no idea.

Another states: "My students live in another country, so our contact has been via email and Zoom tutorials. This limits to some extent my capacity to see them grow." Interfaith engagement for both lecturers and students can pose some challenges in an online format.

Limitations and Further Research

There are vastly different variations in the definitions and branches of 'Pentecostal' and 'Muslim' communities, each with their own broad research areas. So, further delineation of these faith groupings would be of interest. Limiting participants to two specific faith groups in two specific institutions provided focus, but further research involving other faith groups and institutions would help to paint a fuller picture of interfaith attitudes in higher education. Similarly, limiting the survey population to academics helped control the variables. However, research comparing the attitudes of a wider group of believers would add to the picture of interfaith attitudes and practices. A comparison of that wider group with academics might also highlight the role higher education plays in attitudes and actions toward other interfaith cooperation. The impact of the faith university context in interfaith action could also be explored by including believers who attend other universities. While our positionality as insider researchers gives some insight concerning reasons for the findings,

qualitative research could investigate further the reasons for interfaith cooperation, or lack thereof. Finally, research to clarify the suggested difference between attitudes to interfaith cooperation and actions in interfaith cooperation would help paint a clearer picture.

Conclusion

This quantitative research explored the interfaith engagement of Muslim scholars from the State Islamic University in Indonesia and Pentecostal scholars from Alphacrucis University College in Australia. Both the survey results and additional comments by respondents demonstrate that Pentecostal academic staff believe they have a reasonable familiarity with other religions and agree that this is important. On the other hand, Muslims believe they are somewhat less familiar with other religions. However, when it comes to acting on these affirmations, Pentecostals are less likely than Muslims to read the Holy Books of another faith. Interestingly, those who were older were more open to interfaith engagement. Most Muslim and Pentecostal respondents agree that it is beneficial to incorporate interfaith content into their curriculum, but they seemingly lack the institutional opportunity, support, and/or skills to do this effectively. Work integrated learning situations offer the ideal context for interfaith and intercultural relationship-building. With the rise of online higher education, since the global pandemic, there are also increased opportunities for students to access safe spaces to engage in global interfaith dialogue.

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Chapter 12
Character Formation in Muslim and Christian Higher Education: A Comparative Case Study Between Australia and Indonesia (Part Two)

Nigel D. Pegram, Denise A. Austin, Muqowim, Adis Duderija, and Johannes M. Luetz

Abstract Religious education in contemporary society faces several challenges, including globalization and the morphing of traditional moral values. Using a quantitative approach, we survey teaching staff across eight campuses of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and six campuses of Alphacrucis University College in Australia to compare the approaches to spiritual formation and character formation. Part 1 (the previous chapter) explores the spiritual formation of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who identify specifically as Pentecostal and how they inculcate spiritual formation in students. Part 2 (this chapter) reveals noteworthy distinctions regarding character formation approaches of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who broadly identify as Christian, including their teaching

N. D. Pegram (✉)
School of Ministry and Theology, Alphacrucis University College, Perth, WA, Australia
e-mail: nigel.pegram@ac.edu.au

D. A. Austin
Leaders Institute, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: denise.austin@leaders.edu.au

Muqowim
Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University Sunan Kalijaga, Yogyakarta, Indonesia
e-mail: muqowim@uin-suka.ac.id

A. Duderija
School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith University, Nathan, QLD, Australia
e-mail: a.duderija@griffith.edu.au

J. M. Luetz
Graduate Research School, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

School of Law and Society, University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, QLD, Australia

School of Social Sciences, University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

J. M. Luetz
e-mail: johannes.luetz@ac.edu.au; jluetz@usc.edu.au; j.luetz@unsw.edu.au

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strategies to see character formation in students. Within Islam, the formation of *akhlaq* (moral character) is often through the disciplines of one's life. For Christianity, character formation is mostly understood as a personal discipleship journey. While there are some differences in thought and practice at Muslim and Christian higher education institutions, we argue that character formation in both should prioritize reading scripture, remain open to God's leading, stay accountable to community and family, model mentoring, and make positive contributions to society. Both Part 1 and Part 2 aim to provide new insights in underexplored areas of Muslim-Christian interfaith dialogue.

Keywords Christianity · Islam · Higher education · Character formation · Australia · Indonesia

Introduction

Religious education in contemporary society faces several challenges, including globalization and the morphing of traditional moral values (Kozhevnikova et al., 2019). Recent research examines government policy issues (Allen & Bull, 2018) and interfaith dialogue regarding character formation (Hill, 2019). Within Islam, the formation of *akhlaq* (moral character) is often through the disciplines of one's life. For Christianity, character formation is mostly understood as a personal discipleship journey, following Jesus in "life and character" (Botha, 2021, p. 5). Using a quantitative approach, we survey 160 teaching staff across eight campuses of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and six campuses of Alphacrucis University College in Australia to compare the approaches to spiritual formation and character formation. Part 1 (the previous chapter, see Austin et al., 2023) explores the spiritual formation of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who identify specifically as Pentecostal and how they inculcate spiritual formation in students. Part 2 (this chapter) reveals noteworthy distinctions regarding character formation approaches of lecturers who identify as Muslim and lecturers who broadly identify as Christian, including their teaching strategies to see character formation in students. While there are some differences in thought and practice at Muslim and Christian higher education institutions, we argue that character formation in both should prioritize reading scripture, remain open to God's leading, stay accountable to community and family, model mentoring, and make positive contributions to society. By engaging two institutions in Indonesia and Australia jointly, this empirical interfaith study extends previous research on religious education and character formation beyond religious divides (Lie, 2014; Wilson, 2020).

We commence this chapter with a review of pertinent literature, which contextually grounds our research approach and situates our study in the areas of scriptural foundations and training in character formation. We then elaborate on the methodology used for this cross-institutional survey research and present the results. Thereafter,

we critically discuss key findings considering the literature, covering the significance of scripture reading and recitation, accountability to community and family, modelling character formation and mentoring, and making positive contributions to society. Following this we discuss the study's limitations and opportunities for future research. Finally, a succinct conclusion recapitulates the study's key findings and synthesizes its contribution to the field of interfaith research.

Literature Review

Given the complexities of interfaith, inter-institutional, international and intercultural research on the character formation in faith-based higher education, some conceptualizations, definitions and literary context are required.

Research Approach

While there is a strong foundation of interfaith engagement between Muslims and Christians in Indonesia and Australia (Lattu, 2019; Saeed, 2004; Safei et al., 2022), our research explores character formation through the prism of progressive Islam, which utilizes contextual rather than a literal interpretation of the Qur'an. As in other religions, many progressive scholars argue that Muslim beliefs and practices regarding, among other things, character formation did not suddenly appear in early Islam but evolved over many centuries (Ayubi, 2019; Sirry, 2019). Hence, the historical background relating to character formation we present may not necessarily reflect the views of most Muslims. Beyond this, Islamic studies is a diverse field with numerous perspectives and viewpoints (Stenberg, 2022).

As the survey respondents are from the Islamic State University in Indonesia, this framing is appropriate. Its Yogyakarta and Jakarta campuses have been at the forefront in Indonesia of a progressive approach to Islamic studies for more than forty years, including via internationally integrated and funded partnerships, such as the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). A progressive approach to Islam is, among others, based on the idea of openness to creative, modern and innovative thought and applying it to, if need be critically, to the Islamic religio-cultural heritage (*turath)* and the normative sources of Islamic teachings, the Qur'an and Sunna (Duderija, 2017). The partnership between the Islamic State University and CIDA has contributed to over 100 Indonesian Muslim graduates (mostly post-graduates) and 1400 other staff and students studying at McGill University from 1970 until 2010. Many of these graduates have progressed to accept roles within the Indonesian government, including two Ministers of Religion (History of the McGill IAIN relationship, 2022). Therefore, our research should be understood within the context of an Indonesian institution that is at the forefront of progressive Islamic higher education.

The Christian approach for this research centers on "characterological" formation which Porter et al., (2019, p. 8) refer to as "the development of habituated, virtuous dispositions," such as kindness, generosity, compassion, and love. The authors of this chapter come from diverse religious backgrounds, cultural ethnicities, academic disciplines, and professional practices. Hence, we present both emic (from the perspective of those within a social group) and etic (from the perspective of an outside observer) viewpoints (Gaber, 2017). For communities and cultures to obtain a deeper understanding of their own identities, critical engagement, and dialogue with those beyond their borders can offer much value. Arising from this background, and set within this overarching frame of reference, this chapter investigates perceptions of character formation in higher education as conceived by Muslim and Christian academic faculty in Indonesia and Australia (respectively). Importantly, framed by an exploratory paradigm of inquiry, this quantitative survey research explores terminological and conceptual distinctives that the paper analyzes and synthesizes for interfaith theory building.

Scriptural Foundations

Character formation in the Qur'an[1] encompasses the requirement for Muslims to follow the righteous ethico-behavioural values and practices (*sunna*) traditionally associated with the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the early Muslim community (Duderija, 2015a). For example, followers are instructed not to lie (QS 22:30) or spread gossip (QS 24:15). They should feed the poor (QS 22:36), turn away from ill speech (QS 23:3) and forgive others as God forgives them (QS 24:22). Adherence to such moral standards typically constitutes good character (Rahim, 2013). The *sunna* is a repeated practice and example (usually positive) of a leader or at times a community of righteous believers that creates a legacy and lifestyle for others to emulate (Duderija, 2015a). Character formation in Islamic literature often uses two key Arabic terms: *khuluq* (plural *akhlaq*, ethical character) and *adab* (socially and morally appropriate behavior) (Zartman, 2018). The doctrine on character formation derives from Hadīth, such as the Prophet Muhammad's (SAW), "The only reason I have been sent is to perfect good manners [*Akhlaq*]" and "the best among you are those who have the best manners and character" (78 Good manners & form: Al-Adab, 2022). Zartman (2018, p. 4) argues that "character development requires self-control which is gained through training and disciplining from parents and teachers." Furthermore, the Arabic term *tarbiyah* describes the educational process and *ta'dib* refers to moral disciplining (Sahin, 2017). Unlike indoctrination, *tarbiyah* implies the acquisition of moral principles through the mutual engagement of the educator and the learner (Sahin, 2015).

Memorization of the entire Qur'an is a common practice among Indonesians, despite Arabic not being a native language. Courses offered by Islamic institutions

[1] This chapter uses the referencing format QS XX:XX to refer to "Qur'an Surah XX:XX.".

are promoted throughout Indonesia offering techniques to enable the memorization of the Qur'an within a year; the Indonesian National Television has designated annual celebrity contests based upon Qur'an memorization. Based upon texts from the Qur'an and Hadith, Latipah (2022) of the State Islamic University, Yogyakarta explains the motive for Muslims memorizing the Qur'an as:

- A source of salvation for the world and the hereafter, saved from the fire of hell, receiving a high degree in heaven;
- The Qur'an itself will provide intercession on the day of judgement for those who read, memorise and practice it;
- The memorizer of the Qur'an will receive the crown of honour placed on the head, and both parents will be dressed in clothes that do not exist in the world (p. 655).

For those who are successful in memorizing the entire Qur'an, the special status is applied to them of Preserver of the Holy Text (*hafiz*) (Gade, 2004). The individual achieving this is viewed as one of exceptional character and piousness.

Regarding Christian character formation, Thompson (2014) holds that it should take place within community, as demonstrated in the New Testament. The Hebrew rabbinic model was embraced by Jesus. He fulfilled Jewish laws "honorably, truthfully, and faithfully" (Mattison, 2017, p. 64). Jesus is called "Master" (*Rabbi*) (Lk. 7:40; Matt. 19:16). His disciples were required to commit to travel, learn, submit to, and imitate the Master. Even important family matters such as burials did not supersede the allegiance and need to follow the *Rabbi* (Lk. 5:28, Lk. 9:59–62). The goal of the Christian life is to be conformed into Christ's image (cf. Matt. 11:28–29; Rom. 8:9).

Being raised a devout Jew, the Apostle Paul was educated "At the feet of Gamaliel" (Acts 22:3). Yet, it was Gamaliel, a teacher of the law held in honour by all of Israel (Acts 5:34), who opened the door for Paul to become Jesus' most prominent disciple. As Paul committed to sit at the feet of Christ, instead of Gamaliel, the principles of the Arab *sunna* are reflected in, as he declares "Imitate me, as I imitate Christ" (1 Cor 4:16, 1 Cor 11.1). In 2 Cor. 3, Paul uses the word 'transformed' (*metamorphoomai*) to explain the Holy Spirit's work in every aspect of the life of the believer (Collicutt, 2015). In fact, the New Testament is replete with long lists of virtues. For example, Matt. 5; 2 Cor. 6:6–8; Gal. 5:22–23; Eph. 4:32; Phil. 4:8; Col. 3:12; 1 Tim. 4:12, 6:11; 2 Tim. 2:22, 3:10; Jm. 3:17; 1 Pet. 3:8; and 2 Pet. 1:5–7. Clearly, character formation is central to the Christian scriptures.

Training in Character Formation

The concept of Islamic moral education (*tazkiyatun nafs*) was utilized by Persian philosopher, Imam Al Ghazali (c1058–1111), and Islamic theologian, Ibn Qayyim Al Jauziyyah (1292–1350), to draw closer to God through "soul education" (Arifin et al., 2022, p. 96). During the twentieth century, a growing number of Muslim and non-Muslim scholars queried and re-interpreted the foundation for the traditional

interpretation of the *sunna* (Duderija, 2015b). Fazlur Rahman, one of the pioneers of the Near Eastern Studies Program at University of Chicago, promoted the concept of 'living *sunna*' as organic and evolving, adaptable to different contexts and generations (Rahman, 1995). With a departure from a strict conceptual foundation of the meaning of character for modern Muslims, a contextual and more flexible approach to understanding the Qur'an is typically applied by progressive Muslims (Duderija, 2017; Saeed, 2014).

While this research focuses on character formation training in higher education, many Indonesians already learned scripture as a child (*santri*) through Islamic boarding school (*pesantren*) (Zulaili, 2018). There are an estimated five million young Muslims in *pesantrens* in Indonesia (Assa'idi, 2021). Parents view character formation as one of the primary functions of Islamic boarding schools and may send their children there from as young as five years old, entrusting them to a religious leader to learn disciplines and religious traditions. Regarding Islamic higher education, Sahin (2017, p. 127) calls for character formation which facilitates "human flourishing through adopting the principles of person-centred pedagogy and nurturing civic values and virtues." Sahin (2017, pp. 128, 130) argues that "to revive the humane, transformative and inclusive character of education… compassion needs to become a central feature of contemporary higher education… [C]ompassion for self-awareness and care for the well-being of the 'other' constitutes the core of the moral thrust of Islamic Education."

Early Christian theologians held that Christian character is formed over time through discipleship rather than a singular event (Blowers, 2019). As Palmer (2016, p. 117) comments, "If character reflects one's fundamental vision of reality, the ultimate vision for the Christian is a life centred on God and oriented in such a way that intellect, will, and affections are all aligned with God's purposes." Porter (2019) adds that "our fallen characters have mixed desires—desires to be holy/to submit to God and desires to sin/to be one's own god" (p. 90). Arthur (2020) explains that character is fluid, visible in behavior, shaped by social contexts and individual principles, involves choice and autonomy, and is enacted regularly "which requires a certain stability in moral attitudes and a persistence of effort" (pp. 10–11). Arthur (2021, p. 86) argues further that "character formation entails intentional instilling of certain motivational elements in the student."

Hansen (2020) suggests creative ways to aid Christian character formation for students at public universities in the United States of America (USA). Verhoef and Badley (2021, p. 270) hold that Christian universities concerned with character formation "must aim to provide an integrated experience in and out of the classroom." Scholars also identify a need to foster dialogue regarding how Christians understand issues related to diversity and inclusion, sexual ethics, and sexual identity (Coley, 2018; Glanzer et al., 2020). While this chapter encompasses a wide variety of Christian traditions, Alphacrucis University College is the national training institute of a Pentecostal denomination. Pentecostal leaders tend to see character formation as part of "godly character" (Chapman, 2021, p. 303). Macchia (2020) focuses on the development of theology around sanctification and its effects on Pentecostal theology today. Current debates around many of these positions signal the tension

Pentecostalism holds at present regarding the work of sanctification, and therefore, character formation (Chan, 2020).

Methodology

We selected a quantitative approach to compare the approaches to spiritual formation (discussed in the previous chapter as Part 1) and character formation (discussed in this chapter as Part 2) in Muslim and Christian higher education. Part 1 intentionally compared Muslim and Pentecostal respondents, while Part 2 takes a broader approach in comparing Muslim and Christian respondents. The quantitative approach provides a generalization of results (Ember & Ember, 2009), allowing a comparison of groups rather than reporting on individuals. The survey was developed with an exploratory spirit. As faculty members of both institutions are widely dispersed geographically, we chose an online survey format. The use of an online survey also mitigated some ethical concerns. Completion of the survey was taken as implied consent. In addition, given that the researchers included insiders (academics) in each institution, the online mode also reduced the potential for coercion and/or response management in the case of the researchers being supervisors of respondents.

We approached the specifics of character formation in two sections of the survey. Other sections covered areas of spiritual formation and interfaith engagement which are discussed elsewhere in this volume. In creating the questionnaire, we decided to focus primarily on the faculty experiences and perceptions of those experiences, rather than on theoretical opinions regarding the topic. Involving researchers from both institutions, the questions were refined multiple times through a collaborative process. The final questionnaire was approved by the Alphacrucis University College Human Research Ethics Committee and the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University, Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta.

The State Islamic University (known in Indonesia as Universitas Islam Negeri or UIN) has campuses in 24 cities throughout Indonesia. Of these, eight campuses were a part of the 100 responses from lecturers. These campuses include UIN Sunan Kalijaga in Yogyakarta; UIN Raden Mas Said Surakarta (Solo); UIN Lombok; UIN Ambon; UIN Sultan Syarif Qasim, Riau (Sumatra); UIN Raden Intan, Lampung (Sumatra); UIN Raden Fatah, Palembang (Sumatra) as well as UIN Sunan Ampel, Surabaya. Alphacrucis University College in Australia has campuses in Adelaide, Brisbane, Hobart, Melbourne, Perth and Sydney. We chose these two institutions because of our close collegial connections. Limiting the participants to academic faculty helped reduce confounding variables, such as levels of education.

We used a consensus approach to develop an initial set of questions. The content was based on the researchers' expertise as insiders to their faith. From a more extensive set of initial questions created through a brainstorming process, we developed the final instrument by reducing the number of questions based on the researchers' agreement on those which interrogated what were likely to be core areas of, or influences

on, differences in interfaith cooperation. This process was modeled on similar techniques in developing psychological scales such as the PANAS or MSCEIT (Watson et al., 1988; Mayer et al., 2003). The questions are listed in the results below. While Part 1 (Austin et al., 2023) only includes responses from Pentecostal faculty members, Part 2 (this chapter) includes responses from all Christian lecturers.

We developed both English and Indonesian language versions of the surveys. All questions took the form of a scale from 1 to 10, with one indicating "not at all," five "to some extent" and 10 "to a great extent." Some questions were adjusted at run time to make them more appropriate for the target audience. For example, for a question about the other faith's holy book, those who identified as Muslim were asked about the Bible and those identifying as Christians were asked about the Qur'an. The survey included various demographic questions given possible factors impacting on interfaith cooperation. These questions included gender, age, faith identification, faculty and length of time teaching in higher education.

Ethical approval was obtained in Australia through the Alphacrucis University College Human Research Ethics Committee and in Indonesia through the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, State Islamic University, Sunan Kalijaga. We emailed all 315 faculty members from Alphacrucis University College campuses and emailed 200 faculty members from the State Islamic University campuses to invite participation, including a link to the online survey. Data collection occurred from October 20, 2021 to October 27, 2021. To minimize intercultural misunderstandings, both the State Islamic University and Alphacrucis University College had their own trained faculty members facilitating the survey. After we received the responses, we transferred the data into SPSS 27 for cleansing and analysis. Rather than using institutional identification for analysis, we chose to use faith identification because the focus of this research is on spiritual formation. Most of the analysis consisted of a comparison of the mean responses of respondents (Analysis of Variance or ANOVA) from either Islamic or Pentecostal faith positions.

As noted above, the research team consisted of faculty from both institutions; therefore, all investigators can be considered insider researchers. The use of a quantitative instrument helps to avoid bias inherent in this positionality. However, some benefits did accrue in interpreting the results, as noted below. Space in the survey allowed for textual comments. As revealed in the discussion, these comments helped interpret some of the results.

Results

Demographics

Of the 160 completed responses received, ninety-four (59%) identified as Muslim and sixty-six (41%) identified as Christian.

Most respondents were employed full-time (71%), with the remainder being part-time (19%) or contract staff (11%). Most had been in higher education between one and five years (33%), with a further (29%) between six and ten years. The next largest cohort had more than twenty years of experience (18%), with the remaining groups all being less than 10%. Most respondents from both institutions were aged between thirty and fifty years old. Most academics were involved as undergraduate (84%) and postgraduate (28%) lecturers, with fewer being researchers (13%) and academic administrators (9%). The vast majority (85%, n = 86) had been participating in their religion for more than twenty years. The next largest group was one to five years (7%). We cannot make any significant distinction between Australia and Indonesia regarding the length of time as an adherent to a specific religion, with Indonesia requiring each of its citizens to adhere to one of the officially recognized religions. Usually, this is the religion of birth.

Personal Character Formation

Respondents were asked a series of twelve questions regarding personal character formation, with all rating responses on a scale of 1–10. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for each question to determine if the average responses between the two groups were significantly different.

All questions in the survey received overall positive responses from the respondents, with all questions' means being above the mid-point of the rating scale "somewhat = 5". The only exception was *Question 12 To what extent has COVID-19 been detrimental to your character formation?* Both groups rated this below the mid-point (Christians M = 3.5, Muslims M = 3.9). Similarly, in response to *Question 11 To what extent does online teaching or preaching help your character formation?* both groups indicated that online teaching was a moderate factor in their character formation, both scoring it around 6 out of 10 (see Table 12.1).

Scripture played a significant role in both faith groups personal character formation. For *Question 1 To what extent does scripture define your understanding of moral character?* both rated the role of scripture in understanding moral character highly (M = 8.9), with this being the highest rated question for Christians and the second highest for Muslims. Responses to *Question 2 To what extent does reading scripture help in your character formation?* rated highly for both, though it seems more important to Christians as this was the second highest rated item for that group, while Muslims rated several other items more highly. Memorizing scripture (*Question 3 To what extent does memorizing scripture help in your character formation?*) did not rate particularly highly for either group, although both did give it more than middling importance. Muslims (M = 7.7) gave memorizing significantly greater importance than did Christians (M = 6.5) ($F(1, 139) = 11.02$, $p = 0.001$). This element had a moderate effect size ($\eta^2 = 0.07$). For *Question 8 My character is formed through experiencing hardships in life*, both groups rated the impact of hardships similarly highly (Muslims M = 8.1, Christians M = 8.0).

Table 12.1 Personal character formation

Question	Christians' mean	Muslims' mean	ANOVA
1. To what extent does scripture define your understanding of moral character?	8.9	8.9	F(1, 139) = 0.00 p = 0.975
2. To what extent does reading scripture help in your character formation?	8.8	8.7	F(1, 139) = 0.52 p = 0.471
3. To what extent does memorizing scripture help in your character formation?	6.5	7.7	F(1, 139) = 11.02 p = 0.001***
4. God leads me in doing what is right	8.3	9.4	F(1, 138) = 20.33 p = 0.000***
5. My family is the most important influence in my character formation	6.0	8.8	F(1, 139) = 74.52 p = 0.000***
6. I demonstrate moral character through acts of service toward others	7.8	8.7	F(1, 139) = 16.02 p = 0.000***
7. I demonstrate moral character through submitting to my leaders and elders	6.3	7.4	F(1, 138) = 9.40 p = 0.003**
8. My character is formed through experiencing hardships in life	8.0	8.1	F(1, 138) = 0.21 p = 0.650
9. My character is formed through repenting of ungodly actions	7.3	5.9	F(1, 136) = 12.53 p = 0.001***
10. To what extent does your community help your character formation	6.8	7.2	F(1, 138) = 2.08 p = 0.152
11. To what extent does online teaching or preaching help your character formation?	5.6	6.2	F(1, 138) = 3.05 p = 0.083

(continued)

Table 12.1 (continued)

Question	Christians' mean	Muslims' mean	ANOVA
12. To what extent has COVID-19 been detrimental to your character formation?	3.5	3.9	F(1, 138) = 0.71 p = 0.400

* Significant at 0.05 level
** Significant at 0.01 level
*** Significant at 0.001 level

In response to *Question 4 God leads me in doing what is right*, Muslims rated God's leading in doing right most highly (M = 9.4), this was significantly higher than Christian responses (M = 8.3) (F(1, 138) = 20.33, p < 0.001). While lower than Muslims, it is nevertheless still quite highly rated. The effect size for this question was high ($\eta^2 = 0.13$). Similarly, *Question 6 I demonstrate moral character through acts of service toward others*, was more important for Muslims than Christians. Both acts of service toward others (Muslims M = 8.7, Christians M = 7.8, F(1, 139) = 16.02, p < 0.001), and *Question 7 I demonstrate moral character through submitting to my leaders and elders* (Muslims M = 7.4, Christians M = 6.3, F(1, 138) = 9.40, p < 0.01) were areas of significant difference. The reverse was seen for *Question 9 My character is formed through repenting of ungodly actions.* Christians (M = 7.3) rated this much more highly than did Muslims (M = 6.3) (F(1, 136) = 12.53, p = 0.001). This might reflect an emphasis on concrete action as important in Islam.

Both groups rated *Question 10 To what extent does your community help your character formation* around 7, giving it approximately equal weight. However, for *Question 5 My family is the most important influence in my character formation* there was significant difference. Muslims gave this a high level of importance (M = 8.8), while Christians gave it a fairly moderate level of importance (M = 6.0) (F(1, 139) = 74.52, p < 0.001). The effect size for the family question was very large ($\eta^2 = 0.35$).

Student Character Formation

Respondents were asked a series of seven questions regarding the character formation of their students, with all rating responses on a scale of 1–10. Again, ANOVA was performed for each question to determine if the average responses between the two groups were significantly different. The average responses to the questions about students' character formation were all positive, with an overall average rating of 7 (see Table 12.2). Additional comments are included in the discussion below.

Both groups were equally very positive for *Question 19 To what extent do you feel that you have seen students change in character over the time you have been teaching them?* Similarly, *Question 20 To what extent do you feel that the character*

Table 12.2 Student character formation

Question	Christians' mean	Muslims' mean	ANOVA
14. To what extent does your institution incorporate character formation into the curriculum?	7.3	7.5	F(1,0.125) = 0.22 p = 0.637
15. I help students in their character formation by modelling good character in my own life	8.5	7.8	F(1, 124) = 5.43 p = 0.021*
16. I help students in their character formation by including scripture reading during class	6.9	6.6	F(1, 124) = 0.51 p = 0.475
17. I help students in their character formation by mentoring students one-on-one	6.5	5.4	F(1, 124) = 5.64 p = 0.019*
18. I help students in their character formation through morality teaching in class	6.3	7.6	F(1, 125) = 14.74 p = 0.000***
19. To what extent do you feel that you have seen students change in character over the time you have been teaching them?	6.9	6.9	F(1, 122) = 0.00 p = 0.985
20. To what extent do you feel that the character changes you have seen in the students better prepare them for religious leadership?	7.3	6.5	F(1, 123) = 5.94 p = 0.016*

* Significant at 0.05 level
** Significant at 0.01 level
*** Significant at 0.001 level

changes you have seen in the students better prepare them for religious leadership? were positive, with Christians (M = 7.3) being significantly more confident than Muslims (M = 6.5) about this ($F(1, 123) = 5.94$, $p < 0.05$).

The overall means of the Muslims (M = 6.9) and Christians (M = 7.1) were also similar. Mostly, Christians rated the questions slightly higher than their Muslim counterparts. For two questions, however, this pattern was reversed. In response to *Question 14 To what extent does your institution incorporate character formation into the curriculum?* Muslim academics (M = 7.5) rated inclusion in the curriculum higher than Christians (M = 7.3). The difference, though, was not significant. Muslim academics (M = 7.6) also rated *Question 18 I help students in their character formation through morality teaching in class* more highly than Christian academics (M = 6.3). This difference was significant ($F(1, 125) = 14.74$, $p < 0.001$). It is noteworthy that for Christians this was their second lowest response.

Muslim (M = 7.8) and Christian (M = 8.5) respondents both rated highest for *Question 15 I help students in their character formation by modelling good character in my own life.* The difference between the two groups was statistically significant

($F(1, 124) = 5.43$, $p < 0.05$). This finding suggests that Christians place a somewhat higher value on lived morality than Muslims, although both rate it highly.

The final question where differences rose to the level of significance was *Question 17 I help students in their character formation by mentoring students one-on-one.* Christians (M = 6.5) rated this higher than Muslims (M = 5.4). For both groups this was either their lowest (Muslims) or second-lowest (Christians) rating among the questions in this group. *Question 16 I help students in their character formation by including scripture reading during class* on average seems to be rated only moderately and reasonably similarly (Christians M = 6.9, Muslims M = 6.6). However, when examining the frequency distribution this seems to be something which is somewhat polarized (see Fig. 12.1). Yet a split file analysis comparing the histograms for each of the faith groups, shows that some Christians tend to do this a lot more than others (see Fig. 12.2), while the patterns among Muslims is more even (see Fig. 12.3).

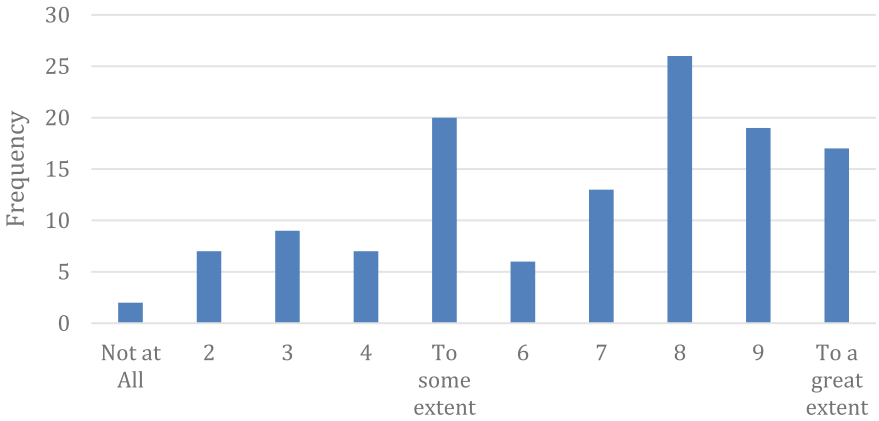

Fig. 12.1 Character formation by reading scripture during class

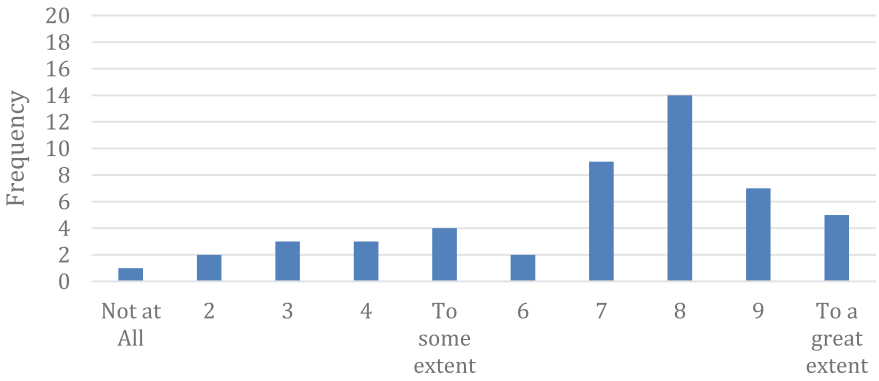

Fig. 12.2 Character formation by reading scripture during class—Christians

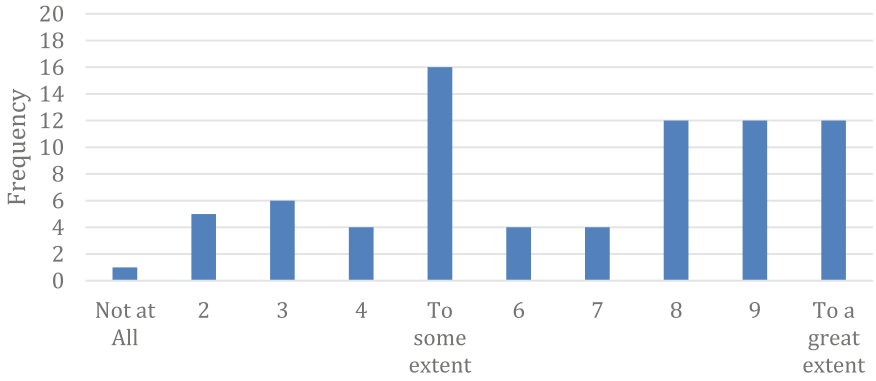

Fig. 12.3 Character formation by reading scripture during class—Muslims

Detailed Discussion

Prioritizing the Reading of Scripture

It is interesting to note that responses to *Question 1 To what extent does scripture define your understanding of moral character?* were similar for both Muslims and Christians. Responses may be influenced by social and psychological factors. For instance, a response indicating that the Qur'an does not significantly contribute to the formation of character might be considered immoral itself. The Qur'an is central to Islam, and to detract from its significance in character formation might reflect negatively upon the individual. This psychological factor could perhaps be relevant for lecturers at the State Islamic University, and particularly for those who are outside of the progressive influences of the Yogyakarta campus. In Christianity, there is usually an emphasis on every believer being able to engage with scripture, without needing any mediation. Still, our interfaith research appears to have already reaped some rewards. One Australian Christian lecturer admitted, "These questions challenge me to incorporate reading Holy Books into my classes on world religions and to focus more on moral teachings of other faiths."

Question 3 To what extent does memorizing scripture help in your character formation? was rated much higher for Muslim respondents. For Muslims, the actual actions of memorizing (*taḥfīẓ*) and reading scripture aids character formation (Arif & Nggolitu, 2019). These are perceived as acts of obedience. Although research does demonstrate that the level of cognitive understanding of the Qur'an often determines the level of transformative impact (Nayef & Wahab, 2018). Muslim responses to *Question 4 God leads me in doing what is right* were also higher than Christian responses. This is logical, given the higher emphasis on knowledge of scripture. Although spiritual experiences while reading scripture are conceivable in some Christian communities, particularly Pentecostal groups (Mather, 2020), Christians are more likely to imitate moral exemplars in scripture and apply relevant principles

in daily life (Nasuti, 2018). More surprising was that there were very low scores for all Indonesian and Australian faculty to *Question 16 I help students in their character formation by including scripture reading during class*. So, while Muslims and Christians agree that they should prioritize scripture reading for their own development, they do not seem to be bringing that same conviction into the classroom.

Staying Accountable to Community and Family

Another theme drawn from the responses is the role of community and family in staying accountable for character development. Muslims rated higher than Christians for *Question 7. I demonstrate moral character through submitting to my leaders and elders*. There is a prominent Qur'an theme within Islamic education called *Sami'na Wa Atha'na*, which is to listen, observe, imitate, and obey the instructions of the religious leader (4:46; 24:47). Muslims are also influenced by the community of faith (*jama'ah*), whereby lifestyle, interpretation of moral standards, and even outward appearance reflect the standards of their community (Jomma, 2021; Masud cited in McClean & Ahmed, 2012, pp. 156–175). Both groups rated *Question 10 To what extent does your community help your character formation* around 7, giving it approximately equal weight. One Indonesian respondent stated, "Character formation can occur if they have the support of the community and social relationships." Christian responses seemed much more incidental. One Australian lecturer observed that character formation is "primarily is self-taught with resources outside of my immediate community. It is not a topic in which many in my community are interested in discussing."

For *Question 5 My family is the most important influence in my character formation*, Muslims gave a significantly higher level of importance than Christians. It is common in Indonesia, especially if parents lead a *pesantren*, for all children to be a part of the same religious program. The *pesantren* network was traditionally founded upon extended families, under the guidance of *kyai* (clerics or leaders) and *ustadz* (teachers) as role models for character formation (Sauri et al., 2018). This demonstrates the integral role of Muslim parents in teaching Islamic traditions to their children, especially Qur'an recitation. There is often much more of an individualistic approach to life not only in the Australian culture but also within Christian thinking, owing to the theology of personal salvation. Character development then is viewed as a process that tends to be removed from the family. Wilson (2020) notes that Christians may reclaim this area as they learn from Muslims. He says,

> socialization within families and community tend towards embodiment and creation of a particular *habitus*, a shared social and cultural space in which practising Islam is normalized … There is particular power in a learning community, or a community of practice, where participants recognize their need of others and share struggles in living out faith … Crucially, faith is enacted in community; it is arguably impossible to be a Christian in isolation because love requires a concrete object of affection (p. 194)

While this view is straightforwardly promoted in the Book of Acts, where there is an emphasis on the family unit (See Acts 11; 15; 16:31), research by Wilson (2020) suggests that Christians may pay even more attention "to the importance of community as a means of learning how to follow Jesus" (p. 194). Relatedly, Potts (2020) argues that Christian leaders in Australia should take care not to accord work a higher priority than their own children to prevent causing unintentional damage to their families.

Modeling Character Formation and Mentoring

Both Muslims and Christians rated highest for *Question 15 I help students in their character formation by modelling good character in my own life.* The COVID-19 global pandemic has proven disruptive to training students in character formation, particularly for educators in Indonesia (Najmuddin & Aprilianty, 2020). Although Christians rated higher than Muslims for *Question 17 I help students in their character formation by mentoring students one-on-one,* it was very low for ratings in both groups. Yet, the interesting anomaly was that it elicited more than average optional response feedback. The time commitment seems to be one issue in mentoring. A Muslim lecturer observed, "character formation is something that occurs over a long period of time. Also teaching students over a year doesn't mean I know their character well. Ethics based studies, in reaction, can help in dealing with character issues." Another Indonesian faculty member wrote:

> I would love to mentor but I do not have time. I do not teach morals, rather we explore and challenge assumptions about morals. Students can come to their own conclusions as they learn critical thinking. Some students are not of my faith, so it is also important that we learn from each other. I like to encourage Islamic and Hindu students to share their perspectives and even write about them in their essays where relevant.

Another Indonesian lecturer added: "It is best to illustrate from real living examples. There should be protocols and boundaries in character formation in the classroom so that errors are not discussed amongst others."

Bentley and Buchanan (2016) highlight the importance of Christian mentors in Christian higher education institutions. However, Alphacrucis University College also struggle with time constraints. One lecturer wrote:

> Character formation is formed over a long time. Teaching students for two papers through one year does not allow me to assess accurately their character growth. Ministry ethics lectures and long class discussions on this topic, does help highlight issues when 'character' may develop or expose 'flaws' which may at times bring disastrous results to ministers/ Christian leaders and to the church and in family lives. Real life examples are used to illustrate points. Protocols and boundaries required to help prevent a minister/Christian leader from a 'fall' are discussed at length and supported by academic sources.

Another Australian academic explained, "I so rarely interact with online students. Most of them only know me through my comments on their assessments. If I supervise

a student at the MA or M.Phil level, then character, prayer, discussion on ethics and theology come into play. That's when my own character and experience becomes, I hope, an example for my students." While lecturers feel that they are being positive role models for students in class (on campus or online), there is insufficient time allocation for one-on-one mentoring.

Making Positive Contributions to Society

Muslims scored higher than Christians for *Question 6 I demonstrate moral character through acts of service toward others*. This is closely connected with the Islamic understanding of divine rewards (*thawab*) (*or pahala* in Indonesian) for good deeds (Mittermaier, 2019). Some Christian writers are attempting to shift the emphasis towards actions and habits being formative as well as resultant (Smith, 2016). Both groups rated *Question 8 My character is formed through experiencing hardships in life* highly. However, Christians rated higher than Muslims regarding *Question 9 My character is formed through repenting of ungodly actions*. Personal character formation is key to making positive contributions in society. As Echelbarger (2017, p. 162) rightly points out, Christians in academia need "constant reminders of God's transcendence" to ensure sustainable humility.

The pedagogical questions were particularly revealing in terms of how academics in faith-based higher education equip students for service and leadership in society. Muslims scored higher than Christians for *Question 14 To what extent does your institution incorporate character formation into the curriculum?* Muslim academics were significantly more confident than Christians in responding to *Question 18 I help students in their character formation through morality teaching in class*. It is noteworthy that for Christians this was their second lowest response. Yet, both groups were positive in response to *Question 19 To what extent do you feel that you have seen students change in character over the time you have been teaching them?* Apparently, despite little intentional curriculum or teaching focus on Christian character formation, lecturers still feel that the content itself assists students in building character.

Christians were significantly more positive regarding *Question 20 To what extent do you feel that the character changes you have seen in the students better prepare them for religious leadership?* One Alphacrucis University College lecturer stated:

> Character formation in terms of growth and maturation as a Christian means that, no matter what career they enter, each individual will model Christ, and be a positive constructive person in the community. Some may enter 'religious' leadership, but so long as they are surrendered to the Lord, they will live and behave honourably, with integrity, sharing Christ's love, compassion, practical support and, especially, being in prayer—interceding to Lord—on their behalf.

Limitations and Further Research

Despite the meaning of questions being synchronized, we recognize that differing religious paradigms inevitably mean that some questions might be interpreted slightly differently. The narrow survey grouping of higher education faculty members creates limitations in conclusions that can be drawn regarding the broad communities of Islam and Christianity. We suggest extending the reach of this survey to additionally include students, clerics, and religious adherents. This could greatly broaden and enrich the quantitative data, while at the same time allowing for more complex comparative analyses. Although undertaken with care and consultation across cultural and linguistic barriers, there are always limitations in the translatability of text from one language and context to another (Klingenberg et al., 2021). This must be considered within all the results of this study. With one sample being from Australia, whilst the other sample was from Indonesia, we recognize the possibility of cultural impacts on the findings. This creates opportunities for further interdisciplinary research among Australian Muslims and Indonesian Christians that examines ethnocultural capital and religious matters in tandem (for example Luetz & Nunn, 2020, 2021).

Moreover, given the Christian emphasis on internal transformation and motivation regarding character formation, this study might be improved by adding questions exploring external actions and influences. This survey was only conducted in two institutions, thus creating fertile opportunities to investigate faculty perceptions of character development across a wider spectrum and range of institutions. With many lecturers at the State Islamic University in Yogyakarta (and Jakarta) having completed postgraduate studies overseas in Western countries (especially McGill University in Canada), there will be a variation in responses from Yogyakarta compared to other more conservative Islamic State Universities. With progressive scholars, such as Fazlur Rahman (Fathonah, 2019), being generally esteemed by academics based at the Yogyakarta campus, this would likely affect the viewpoints of the faculty. With the diversity of respondents, such as having both conservative and progressive Muslim respondents, the subtle variables in interpretation of the questions, as well as the diversity of views within Australian Christianity, there is both an opportunity and even a need for further qualitative and quantitative research.

Conclusion

This research has compared and contrasted Muslim and Christian approaches to personal character formation and the higher education pedagogy of character formation. We are grateful for the generous cooperation of the State Islamic University in Indonesia and Alphacrucis University College in Australia for facilitating this valuable interfaith research engagement. The results of our survey reveal that faith-based higher education institutions benefit from prioritizing the reading and knowledge of

scripture—both for the lecturers in their personal devotions, as well as proactively demonstrating this to students in the learning context. While Indonesian culture places far more importance on community and family learning, both groups benefit from the accountability measures that close intergenerational relationships engender. Both Muslims and Christians agree that while it is vital to be a positive role model to students in class, it can be challenging to find the time for one-on-one mentoring of students. Faith-based higher education should produce graduates who will have a positive impact on society. Perhaps a more intentional incorporation of character formation in the curriculum would further this goal. The findings of our research provide an expanded set of fields and data for analysis and theory building regarding character formation for Muslim and Christian communities. This was made possible through a fruitful collaboration in research which moved beyond the traditional religious divide.

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Part III
Practice-Informed Research Perspectives

Chapter 13
Nonviolent Interfaith Solidarity *Jihad*: Two Autobiographical Accounts

Dave Andrews and Adis Duderija

Abstract The main aim of this chapter is to provide a reconceptualization of the idea of *jihad* as a form of nonviolent interfaith solidarity as embodied in the autobiographical accounts of the two authors to highlight how the term *jihad* can be employed for the purposes of advancing interfaith understanding and practice. The first section explores the central arguments, major points, and justifications for the classical military doctrines of *jihad* in the context of laws of war (*siyar*), including theories of *jihad* that are compatible with international humanitarian law. This is important since the concept of *jihad* is being primarily debated in this sense. In the second section, alternative reframing of the doctrine of *jihad* in contemporary literature on Islam in a non-military context is examined. In the third section we introduce the concept of 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*'. Finally, the autobiographical accounts of our own engagement in nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* are outlined.

Keywords *Jihad* · Interfaith solidarity · Progressive Islam · Network of Spiritual Progressives · Process-relational theology

Introduction: *Jihad* as an Obstacle to Interfaith Understanding and Practice

Probably one of the most contentious ideas, with a long and controversial historical pedigree, is the doctrine of *jihad*. It is considered a major threat to international order by the global north and a civilizational threat to western-liberal democracies (Cook, 2005; Egerton, 2011; Kepel, 2009; Li, 2020; Polk, 2018; Turner, 2014). Moreover, the term *jihad* has been used as one of the constellations of concepts that

D. Andrews (✉)
Community Praxis Cooperative, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: dave@communitypraxis.org

A. Duderija
School of Humanities, Languages and Social Science, Griffith Centre for Social and Cultural Research, Griffith University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: a.duderija@griffith.edu.au

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are emblematic of the threat (some) Muslims residing in the West are considered to pose to the liberal-democratic order of western societies (Egerton, 2011; Kepel, 2017; Tibi, 2014). As noted by Afsaruddin (2022), the term *jihad*, especially since the 9/11 terrorist attacks, has become ubiquitous in non-academic mass media and popular discourses, as representing the image of the Muslim 'other'. Since 9/11, the term *jihad* has been primarily employed to personify forces of civilizational and religious division, violence, and conflict. As such it would be fair to state that the term *jihad* quintessentially has functioned as a discourse that poses a major obstacle to inter-cultural and interfaith understanding and practice.

While not denying the many historical, civilizational, and doctrinal difficulties that the idea of *jihad* poses, this chapter provides a reconceptualization of *jihad* that can be employed for advancing interfaith understanding and practice, as embodied in our autobiographical accounts. The first section examines the central arguments and justifications for the classical military doctrines of *jihad* in the laws of war (*siyar*), including theories of *jihad* that are compatible with international humanitarian law. This is important since the concept of *jihad* is being primarily debated in this sense. In the second section, we outline alternative reframing of the concept of *jihad* in contemporary literature on Islam in a non-military context. In the third section, the concept of 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*' is introduced. Finally, we provide autobiographical accounts of our own engagement in nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*.

Military Concepts of *Jihad*

According to Al-Dawoody's (2011) comprehensive discussion of classical Islamic jurisprudence and modern Islam, the term *jihad* is a general term for war. Etymologically, however, its meaning is much broader as it connotes "striving to achieve a laudable goal, either by doing something good or by abstaining from doing something bad" (Al-Dawoody, 2011, p. 76). *Jihad* is, therefore, "a broad concept that refers to acts related to both oneself and others" (Al-Dawoody, 2011, p. 76). Al-Dawoody (2011) provides various definitions of military *jihad* among major classical Islamic schools of thought (Hanafis, Malikis, Shafi'is, and Hanbalis) formulated around a millennium ago as follows:

> According to the Hanafī jurists, *jihād* means exerting one's utmost effort in fighting in the path of God either by taking part in battle or by supporting the army financially or by the tongue. For the Mālikīs, *jihād* means exerting one's utmost effort in fighting against a non-Muslim enemy with whom Muslims have no peace agreement in order to raise the word of God, that is, to convey or spread the message of Islam. The Shāfi'īs define *jihād* as fighting in the path of God, while the Hanbalīs simply define it as fighting against unbelievers (p. 76).

These approaches to the doctrine of military *jihad* were premised upon a particular understanding of the nature of international relations. It was assumed that the default state of affairs between politically sovereign entities was premised on war, unless

there were explicit agreements stating otherwise. Moreover, the near complete conflation of political and religious identities as a marker of the period in which the classical doctrine of *jihad* was formulated also greatly affected the way in which classical Muslim jurists defined the doctrine of *jihad* (Al-Dawoody, 2011, pp. 78–102).

In addition to formulating a concept of a defensive war (*jihād al-daf'*) as a personal duty of every capable person, all mainstream Sunni schools of thought also subscribe/d to the idea of *jihād al-talab* (offensive or pre-emptive war initiated by Muslims in non-Muslim territories) as a collective duty of Muslims (Al-Dawoody, 2011, p. 76). Jackson (2002) terms this type of *jihad* as "pro-active *jihad*" or "aggressive *jihad*" and, furthermore, argues that it "according to the majority, constituted a communal requirement to be carried out at least once every year" (p. 15).

There are two main viewpoints used by classical Sunni jurists to justify engaging in war with a non-Muslim entity (*casus beli*). A majority view is shared primarily by Hanafis and Malikis who consider only acts of aggression against Muslims as the operative cause. By contrast, Shafi'is and some Hanbalis ground it based on unbelief (*kufr*). Al-Dawoody (2011, p. 81) argues that the eponymous founder of one mainstream Shafi'i Sunni schools of thought, Al-Shafi' (d. 204 AH), formulated the view that "a permanent state of war exists until non-Muslims accept Islam or submit to Muslim rule." Therefore, the two mainstream Sunni classical positions regarding the legal justifications for recourse to war both have doctrines pertaining to "aggressive *jihad*" (Jackson, 2002, p. 15) or the term we prefer, namely 'expansionist *jihad*.' This type of *jihad*, as evidenced from the definitions and justifications provided, is always directed in relation to the non-Muslim other and was embedded in a broader Machiavellian political theology (Al-Dawoody, 2011, pp. 71–106).

While the classical approaches to military expansionist *jihad* still strongly resonate with a plethora of *jihadist* groups, modern Muslim scholars, such as Abu Zahra (d. 1974), have rejected the doctrine of expansionist *jihad* rooted in the unbelief of the non-Muslim other. They have developed an Islamic international law which, in many ways, reflects international humanitarian law. Abu Zahra held that, in both times of peace and war, Islamic teachings, including *jihad*, are to operate within the confines of the following principles: safeguarding of human dignity; premised on the idea that all humans are one nation; any efforts that facilitate human cooperation, forbearance, freedom, including personal or group freedom, freedom of religion, and freedom of self-determination; efforts that encourage virtue either in time of peace or, specifically, during the conduct of war; efforts that are just, based on reciprocity, in accordance with *pacta sunt servanda* principle, advance forming of friendships and preventing tyranny (Al-Dawoody, 2011; cf. Afsaruddin, 2022). In this conceptualization by Abu Zahra, the *jihad* doctrine would be considered only valid if it abides by the above-outlined values. Needless to say, some of the classical formulations of military *jihad* doctrine in classical Islamic jurisprudence and political theology, unlike the one espoused by Abu Zahra, leave little to no room for an interfaith-based solidarity *jihad*.

In addition to providing definitions of *jihad* in the context of warfare, a useful way of understanding the nature of 'military *jihad*' in classical Islam is to divide it in reference at whom it is directed, namely non-Muslims and "heterodox" Muslims

(Al-Dawoody, 2011, pp. 71–107). In this latter sense, there is a less well-known type of 'military *jihad*' in classical Islam that is aimed at Muslims. Al-Dawoody (2011, p. 77) terms this as "domestic *jihad*" which includes four types: fighting against *bughah* (rebels, secessionists); fighting against *muharibun* (bandits, highway robbers, pirates); fighting against *ahl al-riddah* (apostates); and religious fanatics/extremists. This domestic *jihad* is very much reflective of the nature of early Islam and the various political and sectarian schisms among Muslims that left an indelible mark on Islamic intellectual history in general and Islamic jurisprudence and theology. This concept of 'domestic militant *jihad*' is important because it problematizes the idea that military *jihad* is always oriented toward the non-Muslim other which would prevent any viability of the concept of 'interfaith solidarity *jihad*' that we advocate.

Non-military Concepts of *Jihad*

Afsaruddin (2022) identifies and discusses a wide range of non-military alternative forms of the meaning of *jihad* that punctuate the Islamic intellectual tradition, including the idea of *jihad* as spiritual, moral, activist, or intellectual-based struggle. In this section we provide a brief overview of additional usages of alternative, non-military meanings of *jihad* in recent academic literature before discussing the concept of 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*.'

There is the idea of 'sexual *jihad*' (Rinehart, 2019) in the context of understanding some of the motivations that saw the flocking of some Muslim women around the world to the so-called Islamic State as their sacred duty to support 'military *jihad*' and the establishment and expansion of the Caliphate. However, scholars such as Wadud (2006) and Shirazi (2009) use the concepts 'gender *jihad*' and 'velvet *jihad*' to convey the idea of the struggle for gender-just interpretations of the Islamic tradition that provide an alternative to traditionalist and fundamentalist approaches to gender issues in Islam. The idea of 'e-*jihad*' discussed by Brunt (2003) points to the everyday efforts and struggle of Muslims in cyberspace to 'fight' for their cause however this is conceptualized. There is also literature on nonviolent, civilian-based, social justice-orientated *jihad* that describes efforts by ordinary Muslim citizens in places like the Middle East, Indonesia, and West Africa to bring about greater democratic transformations in their respective societies and for the purposes of peacemaking (Afsaruddin, 2022; Stephan, 2009).

The Concept of Nonviolent Interfaith Solidarity *Jihad*

The tragic events of 9/11 and subsequent developments triggered a widespread loss of life, multiple humanitarian crises, the significant flow of Muslim refugees and migrants into the West, the rise of Islamic extremism, increasing racism and xenophobia, and the rise of right-wing extremism. As a result, questions are being raised

pertaining to the role of interfaith dialogue and solidarity in dealing effectively with these issues. This is evidenced in the exponential growth of academic literature regarding the role of faith/religion in multiculturalism/politics/peacemaking/international relations. There are also significant interfaith initiatives at local, national, and global levels that have been bringing together religious leaders, political leaders, policymakers, and academics (Patt, 2021). These interfaith dialogues and solidarity efforts are grounded in the belief that religion can be used as a source for achieving the common good and are conceptualized here as 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*.' We conceptualize 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*' as encompassing two foci: (1) academic efforts to bring about a greater understanding of different faiths for the purposes of providing better understanding and harmony between the adherents of various religious traditions; and (2) activist endeavors to bring faith communities together to explore the practical possibilities of peaceful faith-based interfaith-shaped social justice-orientated activities to serve the common good. In what follows, we discuss examples of this 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*' in the context of post-9/11 Australia from autobiographical perspectives.

Adis Duderija's Nonviolent Interfaith Solidarity *Jihad*—An Autobiographical Account

My involvement in interfaith dialogue in Australia goes back to my undergraduate days during the 1990s. At the age of eighteen, I settled in Perth, Western Australia, as a Bosnian refugee, with my parents and older brother. Over time, I became active in the Muslim Student Association at the University of Western Australia and various interfaith initiatives at the local level. My involvement in interfaith activities intensified after 9/11. While engaging in my postgraduate studies in contemporary Islam with an emphasis on interfaith and gender-related issues, I co-founded a local interfaith group called Abrahamic Alliance (AA) in 2005. I co-led this for five years until the completion of my Doctor of Philosophy.

During that time, with my Christian, Muslim, and Jewish colleagues, we engaged in a variety of interfaith solidarity-based *jihad* activities, including organizing regular monthly meetings that attracted groups of twenty to thirty people, to larger and more official gatherings that attracted 150–200 people including religious leaders and clerics. In the spirit of nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*, the main aim of these initiatives was to bring Jews, Christians, and Muslims to meet face to face and eventually develop sufficient levels of trust that would enable the participants to discuss a variety of sensitive topics of both religious and political/activist nature.

My own interfaith solidarity *jihad* has been underpinned by the theory of progressive Islam that I have been developing in an academic setting for about fifteen years. This has resulted in many publications, most notably two sole authored monographs

on the subject (Duderija, 2011, 2017). The main pillars of progressive Islam can be summarized as follows:

1. creative, critical, and innovative thought based on epistemological openness and methodological fluidity;
2. rationalist and contextualist approaches to Islamic theology and ethics;
3. a human rights-based approach to Islamic tradition;
4. contemporary approaches to gender justice;
5. affirmation of religious pluralism;
6. Islamic liberation theology; and
7. Islamic process theology.

These pillars of progressive Islam align closely with the philosophy, vision, and mission of the Network for Spiritual Progressives (NSP) described below.

I left Australia in 2011 due to professional and personal reasons and upon my return, in 2017, with my co-author of this chapter, Dave Andrews, we co-founded an Australian chapter of the Network of Spiritual Progressive or NSP-Australia (The Network of Spiritual Progressives, 2022a). The mission, visions, and principles of NSP-Australia were adopted to our own local context. The NSP's philosophy is succinctly described as follows:

> Most people yearn for a world of love and real human connection and to live meaningful lives that transcend material well-being, that tie us to the ongoing unfolding of spirit and consciousness, and that connect us with the inherent interdependence and love that permeates and inspires all being. To achieve this world, we need a multifaceted revolution—political, moral, cultural and spiritual—that awakens us to the dignity and value of all peoples, regardless of race, creed, gender, religion, class, where they've come from or what they've done, and helps us connect with the beauty and awe of the universe. This revolution must be grounded in love for all people, for life, and for the planet. (The Network of Spiritual Progressives, 2022b)

NSP's vision is described in the following manner:

> Our well-being depends on the well-being of everyone else on the planet and the well-being of the Earth. We seek a world in which all of life is shaped by peace, justice, environmental stewardship, love, care for one another, care for the earth, generosity, compassion, respect for diversity and differences, and celebration of the miraculous universe in which we live. (The Network of Spiritual Progressives, 2022c)

Its mission statement says:

> To build a social change movement—guided by and infused with spiritual and ethical values—to transform our society to one that prioritizes and promotes the well-being of the people and the planet, as well as love, justice, peace, and compassion over money, power and profit. (The Network of Spiritual Progressives, 2022d)

NSP's intellectual outlet is the magazine, *Tikkun Olam*, edited by Rabbi Micheal Lerner, to which I have had the pleasure of contributing on two occasions (Duderija, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c). Although the magazine is 'Jewish' in its core, it has a strong interfaith orientation and most of its contributors and editorial board members are not Jewish. The magazine is published by Duke University Press and has already

reached thirty-five volumes and over 100 individual issues. The aim and nature of the magazine is described on its website as follows:

> *Tikkun* is the voice of all who seek to replace the materialism, extreme individualism and selfishness of Western societies by creating the psychological, spiritual and intellectual foundations for the Caring Society: Caring for Each Other and Caring for the Earth. *Tikkun* offers a lively and easy-to-read critique of politics, mass culture, many of the debates in academia, and the still-deepening environmental crisis. And it is the preeminent North American magazine providing analytical articles on Israel and Palestine, latest issues in Jewish, Christian, Muslim and Buddhist religious theory and practice, and the intersection of religion and politics in Western societies, as well as the inheritor of the hopefulness and commitment to an end to racism, sexism, homophobia, Islamophobia, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. We seek inner healing and radical nonviolent transformation of our globalized capitalist society. We are the magazine of liberal and progressive Jews, but also of every religion or none (atheists welcomed)—a universalism of the Judaism we affirm leads us to embrace all humanity—and that is reflected in the wide diversity of our readers and authors. (Tikkun, 2011)

Given the above, we consider the philosophy, vision, and mission of the NSP and *Tikkun* as exemplars *par excellence* of nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*. These tenants of progressive Islam as I theorize (Duderija, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c) are also in harmony with the fundamental premises of process-relational, open-relational theology that I will discuss next.

Since 2019, my interfaith solidarity *jihad* has been increasingly influenced by processes—relational and open theism-based theologies associated with the scholarship of scholar-activists including John Cobb Jr, David Ray Griffin, Jay McDaniel, Patricia Adams Farmer, Bruce Epperly, Thomas Jay Oord, and Andrew M. Davis (Center for Open & Relational Theology, 2022; Center for Process Studies, 2020b).[1] On its main website the Centre for Process Thought (CPS) lists religion and interfaith dialogue as one of its areas of focus and describes its approach as follows:

> Process thought has had a significant impact in the area of theology, religion, and spirituality. From the work of theologians like John Cobb and Marjorie Suchocki, and the emergence of Process Theology (as well as Open-Relational Theology), the process worldview has inspired new formulations of the nature of God—including special attention to notions of power, love, and God's relation to the world. As an organization committed to the promotion of the common good, CPS also has a long history as a leader in interreligious dialogue; understood as a practice toward mutual transformation and peace. (Centre for Process Studies, 2020a)

This description is consistent with our definition of nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* with its focus on interfaith-based commitment to solidarity, peacemaking and the common good.

[1] For a brief description of cross-pollinations between progressive Muslim thought and process theology please see Duderija (2020).

Dave Andrews' Nonviolent Interfaith Solidarity *Jihad*: An Autobiographical Account

My name is Dave Andrews. I am a community worker who, over the last fifty years, has been committed to the practice of faith-based, interfaith-shaped, community engagement. Over the last twenty years I have worked as a Christian with Muslims. After 9/11, I went to visit the local mosque. I had never been to the mosque before and was quite nervous. I said to the Imam, "I'm not a Muslim, I'm a Christian, but we both belong to the same Abrahamic family of faith, and in the face of the upcoming propaganda storm that threatens to tear us apart, I would like to show my solidarity with you publicly by praying with you this Friday." So, that Friday I went to the local mosque to pray.

I looked for what Jesus called "a person of peace" (Matt. 10:11), a counterpart with whom I could work to rebuild the bridges of communication between our communities, which the extremists on both sides were blowing up. It did not happen quickly, but Jesus says, "seek – and keep on seeking – and you will find" (Matt. 7:7). Eventually, after six years, I found Dr Nora Amath, who had been awarded the Australian Muslim Achievements Awards, a kind of status similar to Australian Muslim Woman of the Year. She invited me to join the Australian Muslim Advocates for the Rights of All Humanity, a group that she and her friends had started.

From that point on, I began to partner with Nora. In terms of our Christian-Muslim engagement, we decided to do everything we could together, and we would not do anything on our own that we could do with others. One of the first interfaith events we organized was a gathering of Christians and Muslims who we invited to an evening meal during Ramadan to learn from one another how our respective traditions understood the role of prayer and fasting as a spiritual practice. This required a radical reversal of the usual way many people engaged in interfaith dialogue because we were expected to listen and learn from one another rather than lecture and correct each other.

Together, Nora and I have arranged many authentic, empathic, and appreciative interfaith engagements. Sometimes our meetings turned out to be a debacle, such as the time we went to an Anglican church to talk about "How Christians and Muslims can live in peace" and were met by an angry mob with clenched fists wrapped in Aussie flags, demanding through gritted teeth for Aussies to "resist Islam." On that occasion, all we could do was pray for grace to absorb their hostility and animosity. Other times, our meetings have been a 'miracle', such as the time we went to a Pentecostal church to talk about "How Christians and Muslims can live in peace" and were greeted with a barrage of searching questions. At the end of the session, the senior pastor walked down the aisle to the front of the church, knelt at Nora's feet and asked her to forgive him for his prejudice. On that occasion, all we could do was rejoice in an amazing triumph of grace over bigotry.

Through Nora I met her husband, Halim Rane, through whom I met Adis Duderija, his colleague at Griffith University. We have done many things together, but perhaps the most important thing is to encourage Christians and Muslims to critically analyze

how our respective theological traditions have been used to rationalize violence against one another. Also, on the other hand, our respective theological traditions could be used as an inspiration for faith-based and interfaith-shaped conflict resolution and community collaboration, that we call 'nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad*'.

In Christianity, Augustine and others developed a set of criteria to call those in power—who make war—to temper the use of violence with 'wisdom, mercy, justice and equity'. They argued that for a war to be conducted according to the principles of justice it would need to meet eight specific conditions. First, it would need to be motivated by a 'just' cause—and the only cause considered 'just' was to stop the killing of large numbers of people. Second, it would need to be administered by a 'just' authority—duly constituted authorities had to proceed carefully according to due process before taking action. Third, it would always need to be a last resort—after all means of negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and nonviolent sanctions had been exhausted. Fourth, it would need to be for a 'just' purpose—to secure the welfare, safety, and security of all parties in the dispute, including the enemy. Fifth, it would need to be a reasonable risk—not a futile gesture, but a realistic venture, with a reasonable hope of success. Sixth, it would need to be cost-effective—the outcomes of victory would outweigh the human costs of battle. Seventh, any government intending to go to war should announce its intentions—articulating the conditions that would need to be met to avert it—in order to avoid going to war if at all possible. Eighth, if the war were to go ahead, not only the ends but also the means would need to be 'just'—non-combatants must be protected; once combatants surrender, they too must be protected from slaughter; and all prisoners must be protected from torture (Mattox, 2022). According to these criteria, we concluded that none of our current wars are 'just wars'; they are just 'wars'. We decided that if we are to struggle for justice with integrity, dignity, and grace, we needed to encourage people to reject all calls to a violent *jihad* but to instead embrace the call by Qader Muheideen to nonviolent *jihad*.

Qader Muheideen (cited in Satha-Anand, 1993, p. 10), the Thai Muslim academic and activist, writes "the purpose of *jihad* ultimately is to put an end to 'structural violence', and we must choose means consistent with that end." Muheideen said for *jihadists* to end violence we must choose nonviolent means. He said there are eight cogent Islamic reasons to reframe *jihad* as a nonviolent struggle: First, for Islam, the problem of violence is an integral part of the Islamic moral sphere. Second, any violence used must be governed by the 'rules of engagement' in the *Qur'an*. Third, if any violence used in modern warfare and/or terror campaigns cannot discriminate between combatants and non-combatants, it is unacceptable to Islam. Fourth, modern technologies of destruction, used in modern warfare and/or terror campaigns, like drones and bombs, render discrimination virtually impossible. Fifth, in fighting today's battles, Muslims cannot use violence. Sixth, Islam teaches Muslims to fight for justice against injustice in the light of the truth that human lives are genuinely sacred and taking human lives is a grievous sin. Seventh, to be true to Islam, Muslims must use nonviolent strategies and tactics in the struggle, such as submission to the

will of Allah and civil disobedience. Eighth, Islam is a strong resource for a nonviolent struggle because of its tradition of personal discipline, social responsibility, robust perseverance, and self-sacrifice (Satha-Anand, 1993).

While I lived in India, I was introduced to the dynamics of nonviolent *jihad* advocated by Abdul Ghaffar Khan (Alvi, 2021; Easwaran, 1999) and by Khan (1999, 2009) whom I met in Delhi in 2017. Other Muslim scholars who advocate nonviolent *jihad* include Engineer (2011), Jahanbegloo (2021, 2022), and Mokrani (2022).

The *Jihad* of Jesus

Based on my conversations with Muslim friends, I wrote *The Jihad of Jesus: The sacred nonviolent struggle for justice* (Andrews, 2015). I did not write as an expert. I am not. I did not write as a specialist. I am not. I simply wrote *The Jihad of Jesus* as a Christian community worker, in conversation with Muslim community workers, seeking to find a way we could engage in a struggle for love and justice in our faith communities, and between our faith communities, that was true to the best in both our faith traditions.

Lest anyone think this reference to Jesus is a not-so-subtle Christian plot to co-opt Muslims, it ought to be noted that Jesus, or the prophet *Isa*, is mentioned more often in the *Qur'an* than even the prophet Muhammad and, according to the *Qur'an*, this Messiah, or *Masih*, is a "messenger from God" whom both Christians and Muslims alike see is a "sign to the worlds" (Surah 21.91). Hence many Muslims, like Ahmad Shawqi, already see Jesus as a model of nonviolent *jihad*. After all: "Kindness, chivalry and humility were born the day Jesus was born. No threat, no tyranny, no revenge, no sword, no raids, no bloodshed did he use to call to the new faith" (cited in Cragg, 1999, p. 41). *The Jihad of Jesus* is a handbook for reconciliation and collaborative action, a do-it-yourself guide for all Christians and Muslims who want to move beyond the 'clash of civilizations' and imitate Jesus's example of promoting nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* for justice and peace.

There are seven core (*cœur*) messages in *The Jihad of Jesus*. First, humanity is caught up in a cycle of so-called 'holy wars'. Second, although inter-communal conflict is endemic, it is not inevitable. Third, depending on our theological understanding, our religions can either be a source of escalating conflict or a resource for overcoming conflict. Fourth, to be a resource for overcoming conflict, we need to understand the heart of all true religions as open-hearted and compassionate spirituality. Fifth, in the light of an open-hearted, compassionate spirituality, we can reclaim *jihad* from traditionalists, who have defined it in solely military terms and reframe it in *Qur'anic* terms as a 'sacred nonviolent struggle for justice.' Sixth, we can also reconsider *Isa* or Jesus, as he is referred to in the gospels, not as a poster boy for Christians who are fighting crusades against Muslims, but as a strong-but-gentle *Masih* or Messiah, who can bring Christians and Muslims together. Seventh, many Christians and Muslims, like James Wuye and Imam Muhammad Ashafa, have found

Isa or Jesus, and the *Bismillah*[2] he embodies, as common ground on which they can stand together and struggle for the common good.

The inner dynamics of this nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* involves:

- emphasizing spirit—over and above politics;
- practicing prayer—in the spirit of *Bismillah*;
- listening to God—declare '*As-salam-o-alaikum*'[3];
- distrusting labels—go beyond the stereotypes;
- taking initiative—move out of your comfort zone;
- meeting people—get to know Others face-to-face;
- extending grace—towards friends and enemies;
- having faith—in the compassion of a 'common God'.[4]

The outer dynamics of this nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* involves:

- seeking peace—in every situation with everyone;
- making contact—by visiting your 'enemies';
- expressing empathy—care for them and their family;
- increasing connections—ask them for a return visit;
- nurturing mutuality—make 'friends' with your 'enemies';
- honoring friendship—as the model for reconciliation;
- creating agency—to train people in conflict-resolution;
- releasing volunteers—to mediate in conflict situations;
- facilitating dialogue—between Christians and Muslims;
- negotiating agreements—for formal peace settlements.

I have advocated for this strong-but-gentle interfaith solidarity struggle or *jihad* in countries around the world: in Australia, at a Muslim youth camp on Mount Tamborine and the Masjid Al Farooq in Kuraby; in Germany, at the Omar Moschee in Wiesbaden; in the United Kingdom at the Muslim Training College in Cambridge and the grand London Central Mosque in Regent's Park, London; and in the United States of America (USA) at the Apex Mosque in Raleigh, North Carolina and the Islamic Center of Boston, Massachusetts.

While in the USA, I took part in a conference of Islamic Organization of North America (IONA). Professor Bob Shedinger and I were special Christian guests among around a thousand Muslims. Bob and I had never read one another's writings, but we had both published books on the same topic at the same time with the same publisher, Wipf and Stock (Andrews, 2015; Shedinger, 2015). We were invited to launch our books together at the conference. Bob and I both presented copies of our books to Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid, one of the most influential Muslim leaders in the world,

[2] '*Bismillah*' is short for the Arabic '*Bismillah ir-Rahman ir-Rahim*' an invocation which starts every *surah* (or chapter) in the *Qur'an* (except one), which in English means 'In the name of God, the most Gracious, the most Compassionate.'

[3] '*As-salam-O-alaikum*' is an Arabic greeting which in English means 'Peace be upon you'.

[4] '*Allah*' is not the Muslim name for God, still less the name of a Muslim God, but the Arabic name of the One God. The Semitic roots of the word '*Allah*' extend back thousands of years to the Canaanite '*Elat*', Hebrew '*El*' and '*Elohim*' and Aramaic '*Alaha*'. From this point of view there are not many gods, but One God and that One God is not Muslim or Christian, but the One to whom we belong and who belongs to us all, whether Muslim, or Christian or Jew.

who serves as the chair of the Parliament of World Religions. Imam Siraj Wahhaj, an African American Muslim who is Imam of Masjid al-Taqwa in Brooklyn, called on conference participants to remember the example of Dr Martin Luther King Jr and to engage in *jihad* "without violence, without violence, without violence." IONA has published a helpful booklet by Afzaal (2010) called *Jihad without violence*.

While we were visiting the Islamic Centre of Wroclaw in Poland, which is the largest Islamic center in Lower Silesia, my wife, Ange and I were special guests of Imam Ali Abi Issa and his wife, Iwona. We had a great conversation with them about Christianity, Islam, interfaith dialogue, and *jihad*. It so happened that Imam Ali's doctoral thesis was a critique of the concept of 'offensive *jihad*,' so over a wonderful *Eid* dinner we talked about 'defensive *jihad*' and the nonviolent '*jihad* of Jesus.' Before we left, I presented the Imam with a poster as a memento of our meeting, which he said he would be more than happy to hang on the wall of the Islamic Centre. The poster of *Our sacred nonviolent struggle*, which I wrote, outlines our vision of strong-but-gentle *jihad* as a framework for faith-based, interfaith-shaped community development. It states:

Our Sacred Nonviolent Struggle

We dream of a great society
of small communities co-operating
to practise spirituality, empathy, and harmony.

We dream of vibrant neighbourhoods
where people relate to one another
genuinely as good neighbours.

We dream of people developing
networks of friendship
in which the private pain
we carry deep down
is allowed to surface,
and is shared in a culture
of acceptance and respect.

We dream of people
facing our difficulties,
discerning the problems,
discovering the solutions,
and working together
for personal growth and social change
according the example of *Isa*,
in the spirit of the *Bismillah*.

And we dream of every congregation,
church, mosque, temple, and synagogue,
in every locality, acting as a catalyst
to make our dream come true.

Each of us, who feel inadequate,
need to realise our capacity to act;
and each of us, who feel afraid,
need to realise our courage to act.

Each of us, who feel impotent,
need to recognise the potential of our actions;
and each of us, who feel insignificant,
need to recognise the importance of our actions.

Every act of truth is a victory over deceit.
Every act of love is a victory over hatred.
Every act of kindness is a victory over violence.

And every risk a person takes to make a stand,
with grace, for justice and for peace,
is a victory in our strong-but-gentle *jihad*
to make our dream of a better world a reality (http://www.jihadofjesus.com/#welcome).

Dream and Reality: A Case Study of Interfaith Collaboration

Making this dream a reality in an anything-but-ideal world is the core challenge of a faith-based, interfaith-shaped community development practitioner. In a series of training manuals I wrote for *Moulavis* in Sri Lanka, I cited an Indonesian case study (Suyanto et al., 2015). In the mid-1990s, Paulus Hartono, an Indonesian Mennonite pastor, resolved that his church would become an agent of reconciliation. Mennonites are a nonconformist Christian denomination committed to spirituality, simplicity, community, and peace. Hartono and other Mennonite peacemakers decided to take some serious risks to seek to transform the bitterness in the city of Solo where he lived, a city that he said was "stricken with religious and sectarian tension" (Lehman, 2017, para. 4).

To deal with this antagonism, Hartono tried to understand the reasons for the animosity between Christians and Muslims. Hartono realized that "the arrival of European colonialism and Christianity aroused deep suspicion from the existing Muslim communities, as though another crusade was (being) waged against Islamic nations" (Suyanto et al., 2015, p. 27). Also, Hartono came to realize Muslims suspected a close association between American Christians and American imperialism. The US support of Israel over Palestine, publicly advocated by Christians in America, made Muslims suspicious of Christian minorities, like the Mennonites in Indonesia. This was only aggravated by USA-led military interventions in Muslim lands (Lehman, 2017).

One of the most militant anti-Christian radical Islamic groups Hartono came across was *Hizbullah*, or the 'army of God', who had been involved in numerous anti-Christian campaigns in Solo. This Indonesian Sunni group is not related to the more

famous Lebanese Shia group but is a formidable paramilitary organization in its own right. For Hartono to make contact with *Hizbullah* commander, Yani Rusmanto, to start with, was a step too far. Instead, Hartono started by connecting with Muhammad Dian Nafi, the leader of *Nahdlatul Ulama*, Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, who was also committed to reconciliation. Hartono and Nafi co-founded the Solo Peace Institute and the Forum for Peace across Religions and Groups. Nafi introduced Hartono to *ta'arruf*, a Qur'anic approach to inter-religious dialogue and peaceful conflict transformation, then urged him to reach out to Yani Rusmanto.

The initial meeting did not go well. Hartono, a director of Mennonite Diaconial Services, who ran their own radio station, approached *Hizbullah* to offer a hand in mediating disputes over the group's radio station (known as Hiz FM) (Suyanto et al., 2015). However, when the pastor first came to the headquarters of *Hizbullah*, the commander refused to speak with him, telling him only: "You are a Christian and infidel, and therefore it is *halal* (legitimate) for us (Muslims) to murder you" (Suyanto et al., 2015, p. 65). Despite the rude response, the pastor did not give up. He returned again and again to *Hizbullah*'s office to drink tea, chat, and offer help. Hartono believes that at the most basic level militia members are no different from anyone else; they are, above all, human beings who share similar hearts and feelings, hates and loves. After frequent meetings, Rusmanto finally agreed with Hartono's bid to make a new radio station, knowing that the pastor had both skills and resources. Rusmanto was pleased because *Hizbullah* now had its own radio station to spread Islamic *dawah* (propagation). (Suyanto et al., 2015).

After establishing trust with one another there came the key moment that transformed the relationship between Hortono and Rusmanto—the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami. In response to this tragedy, Hortono suggested to Rusmanto that Mennonites and *Hizbullah* join forces together, to go to Aceh, the area hardest hit, to undertake post-tsunami reconstruction. This would be supported by the Mennonite Central Committee, a North American relief and development agency. Remarkably, *Hizbullah* agreed and joined the Mennonites, working together to rebuild broken houses. They also shared the same meals and tents for accommodation.

Aceh did not mark the end of this interfaith relief effort. When huge earthquakes and volcanic eruptions claimed thousands of lives and destroyed tens of thousands of homes in Yogyakarta and parts of Central Java, they worked together again, assisting thousands of people and preparing sites to rebuild 100 Christian and Muslim homes. They also collaborated to rebuild damaged mosques and churches. After years of growing collaboration and friendship, one day Rusmanto said to Hartono, "I have realized you Christians are good infidels" (Al Qurtuby, 2019). Their cooperative community work for peace and development continues to this day.

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter was to introduce the concept of nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* as a spiritual, intellectual, moral, and practical struggle in the context of interfaith dialogue and collaboration to bring about the common good. The chapter outlined the problems with the idea of *jihad* as by default denoting only a military, often expansionist form of struggle for Islam's supremacy in the world. This is a common theme in classical Islamic jurisprudence and political theology. We then outlined alternative non-military, non-violent forms of *jihad* as employed in modern Islamic studies literature before introducing the idea of nonviolent interfaith solidarity-based *jihad*. The viability of this concept of *jihad* is clear based on our respective autobiographical accounts. These draw upon manifold engagements and experiences that align with the idea of nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* as a spiritual, intellectual, moral, and practical struggle. We illustrated how people of different faiths can work together for the common good, thereby illustrating how the concept of nonviolent interfaith solidarity *jihad* may be fruitfully applied and implemented in contemporary interfaith practice.

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Chapter 14
Interfaith Community Gardening: Growing Food Justice

Magfirah Dahlan

Abstract This research explores the role that interfaith community gardens can play in developing understanding of food justice and fostering social change. Secular discourse on food justice addresses the problems of, and therefore the need to transform, the current global, industrial food system via collective action. These problems include exploitation of the workers, inhumane treatment of the animals, the degradation of the environment, as well as unequal access to healthy and affordable food. In previous works, I analyze a conception of Islamic food justice, as well as interfaith food activism as a praxis to challenge both essentialized religious identity and neoliberal subjectivity. In this chapter, I argue for the need to reimagine a possible solution to the current industrial food system—one that goes beyond individual choices but is feasible enough for individuals to make a tangible difference. I draw from contemporary studies on urban gardens and farms built specifically as part of a larger attempt on educating and mobilizing congregants in faith-based food justice movements. After examining global food systems and related religious dietary laws, as well as the complexity of global food ethics, I then examine the question of what precisely constitutes food justice. I present interfaith community gardening as a faith-based practice for members of different religions to cultivate sacred acts of listening. Finally, I note the role of community gardening as a challenge to neoliberal subjectivity. They can promote essential skills that are needed for community members to see themselves as empowered producers, citizens, and activists who can bring about substantial changes to the current food system through democratic means.

Keywords Food justice · Food ethics · Political ethics · Interfaith food activism · Community gardening

M. Dahlan (✉)
Craven Community College, New Bern, NC, USA
e-mail: dahlan-taylorm@cravencc.edu

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Introduction

Today, more and more people are part of a global food system where food is grown in mass quantities on large monoculture or single-species farms before being transported using fossil-fuel intensive means to consumers across the globe. This food system can be attributed to the reshaping of the world over the last 200 years into a kind of urbanism that is unprecedented in the history of humanity. During the 1950s, less than one third of the world's population lived in urban areas but, by 2050, the United Nations predicts this will rise to eighty per cent (Steel, 2008, p. 8).

This chapter draws from literature in multiple disciplines, namely religious studies, political theory, as well as ethics. While food is a topic explored in each of these disciplines, the different discourses are often disconnected. The topic of food and religion often focuses on religious dietary laws and practices as markers that distinguish one religion from another (Freidenreich, 2011). While food certainly plays an important part in religious identity, it is not limited to such a role. The contextual problem of the current industrial food system is a shared challenge to people of different faiths that arguably requires an appropriately shared solution. Theories and concepts, such as food justice, that have been developed without references to any religious framework can still be useful when the focus is on the universal values found across religious boundaries.

In previous works, I analyze a conception of Islamic food justice, as well as interfaith food activism as a praxis to challenge both essentialized religious identity and neoliberal subjectivity (Dahlan-Taylor, 2012, 2015). In this chapter, I argue for the need to reimagine a possible solution to the current industrial food system—one that goes beyond individual choices but is feasible enough for individuals to make a tangible difference. It is not based on empirical research; rather, I shape my arguments conceptually to advocate for food justice via interfaith community gardening approaches that are nurtured by different theories, practices, and disciplines. First, I provide an overview of global food systems and related religious dietary laws, as well as the complexity of global food ethics. I then examine the question of what precisely constitutes food justice. Next, I present interfaith community gardening as a faith-based practice for members of different religions to cultivate sacred acts of listening. Finally, I note the role of community gardening as a challenge to neoliberal subjectivity. They can promote essential skills that are needed for community members to see themselves as empowered producers, citizens, and activists who can bring about substantial changes to the current food system through democratic means.

The Global Food System and Religious Dietary Laws

This book chapter discusses global food distribution and religious dietary laws from the positionality of the industrialized Global North. It duly recognizes that approximately forty per cent of the world's population is still rural and that the Global South can be subject to food production processes (such as subsistence farming) that may be quite distinct from the industrial-scale agribusiness practices of the Global North (Gray & Nuri, 2020). Contemporary industrialized urbanization has had major consequences on the relationship that we have with our food. Whereas people living in pre-industrialized cities were still surrounded by the sources of and have intimate knowledge about the food they consume, the same cannot be said about those living in contemporary cities. For more and more people in the world today, what is involved in the production and transportation of the food we consume daily has become increasingly hidden or concealed. As Steel (2008) explains:

> The modern food industry has done strange things to us. By supplying us with cheap and plentiful food at little apparent cost, it has satisfied our most basic needs, while making those needs appear inconsequential … By the time it reaches us, our food has often travelled thousands of miles through airports and docksides, warehouses and factory kitchens, and been touched by dozens of unseen hands. Yet most of us live in ignorance of the effort it takes to feed us (p. 6).

Furthermore, the design of our modern global food system is predicated upon the concealment of the suffering of the workers, the exploitation of the animals, and the destruction of the environment involved in the production and transportation of food, as well as the disposal of the wasted foods that are left unconsumed. Many of the essays in Rawlinson and Ward (2017) and Barnhill et al. (2018) analyze the different problematic aspects of the modern food production. In our modern food system, oftentimes, the only knowledge that consumers have is price. This ignorance of the other costs incurred in the production and distribution of food ultimately leads to carelessness. As an investigative journalist who studied the food system in the United States of America (USA), Pollan (2006) states:

> Our food system depends on consumers' not knowing much beyond the price disclosed by the checkout scanner … And it's a short way from not knowing who's at the other end of your food chain to not caring—to the carelessness of producers and consumers (p. 245).

Knowledge about one's food, however, is central to many faiths. Faith-based dietary laws and food traditions are a fundamental part of the way many people practice and embody their religious teachings and values. In some religions, such as Judaism and Islam, there are dietary laws that explicitly delineate the boundaries between the permitted and the forbidden. Beyond the letter of the dietary laws, there also exist underlying values that are arguably universal and shared across religious boundaries. These universal underlying values are what makes possible interfaith efforts to bring about change, such as the interfaith community gardening explored in this chapter. For example, in her discussion on Jewish *kashrut*, Kalechofsky (2004) outlines the religious values that underline the religious dietary laws as being:

> *pikuach nefesh* (the commandment to guard your health and life); *tsa'ar ba'alei chaim* (avoid causing pain to any living creature); *bal tash-chit* (the commandment not to waste or destroy anything of value); *tzedakah* (to help the needy and work for a more just society); and *klal Israel* (to work for the welfare of the community) (pp. 173–174).

Similarly, in his discussion on Islamic dietary laws, Foltz (2004, p. 220) explores the importance of contextualizing halal with regards to "human health, social justice, ecological stewardship, and compassion toward nonhuman animal creation." Although religious dietary laws do not play the same role in Christianity as they do in Judaism and Islam, many scholars argue for a need to contextualize food-related issues in view of religious values. Halteman (2013, p. 386) argues that the standard American diet (which he characterizes as "unrestrained omnivorism") is not spiritually beneficial because it is not consistent with the Christian values of "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness (mercy), and self-control."

Historically, food plays an important role in defining religious identities. Freidenreich (2011) analyzes in detail the way ancient and medieval Jewish, Christian, and Muslim food practices functioned to delineate communal boundaries between those considered to be 'us' and 'them'. Freidenreich (2011, p. 5) writes, "A statement about Our food practices is only a marker of communal identity when accompanied, explicitly or implicitly, but a contrast with Their food practices." In addition to ingredient-based regulations (for example, "We do not eat the meat of pigs"), Freidenreich (2011, p. 6) identifies commensality-based regulations (that "prohibit the sharing of meals with certain people") and preparer-based regulations (that "prohibit eating food made by certain people") that demarcate the boundaries between religious insiders and foreigners. This work is important for analyzing the way each of the three religious communities of Abrahamic traditions defines their own communities as well as their respective foreigners.

Understanding others as they understand themselves (rather than the way we imagine them to be) is key to interfaith dialogue and collaboration. This, according to Freidenreich (2011, pp. 225–226), "may require a significant change in the ways we imagine our own distinctive identities—a shift from the oppositional 'Us' and 'Them' to a more cooperative 'We' and 'You'." His work demonstrates that these food regulations are by no means singular or static; instead, there has always been diversity in the way religious scholars interpret and apply those regulations as well as the changing context within which the regulations are practiced. Freidenreich (2011, p. 225) opens and closes with a scenario in which a rabbi, a priest, and an imam are sitting together in a restaurant to share a meal: "Such a cordial interfaith gathering would have been inconceivable until quite recently." The shift toward a greater understanding of how others see themselves in our contemporary world may allow us to focus on our shared ethical concerns, rather than what separates us from one another.

Global Food Ethics

In addition to acknowledging that different religious communities may share the same ethical concerns, there are other opportunities for interfaith dialogue and collaboration. Bretherton (2011) identifies three specific civic practices needed for interfaith activism, namely: listening; a commitment to place; and building institutions. Similarly, Cornille (2013) specifies five conditions that allow different faith-based groups to learn from one another: humility ("the recognition of the very possibility of change or growth within one's own tradition" p. 21); commitment to a particular religion (which "involves a sense of representing a particular tradition, being accountable to that tradition and submitting one's judgment to that of a larger whole" p. 23); interconnection (the belief that religions "somehow connect in common concerns" p. 24); empathy ("some capacity to stretch one's religious imagination beyond the categories of one's own religion" p. 26); and hospitality ("recognition of actual truth in another religion and hospitality toward integrating that truth in one's own tradition" p. 28).

The past decade has witnessed an increase in discussions on religious approaches to socially just food practices. One work that examines the reimagining of religious food practices in terms of a comprehensive, multifaceted social ethical approach is Van Wieren's (2018) *Food, farming, and religion*. In it, the author draws from the teachings of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam to present a comparative religious environmental ethical approach to food within the framework of the Abrahamic religions. Another is *Religion and sustainable agriculture: World spiritual traditions and food ethics* (LeVasseur et al., 2016) which is a collection of essays that examine food productions from the perspectives of Western as well as Eastern religious traditions. Despite the growing discourse of faith-based approaches to food justice, there is little discussion on interfaith approaches to these issues. This chapter examines interfaith community gardening as an example of interfaith activism that addresses the issue of food justice. It begins with a discussion of the concept of food justice, which developed as a secular concept, and examines community gardens as part of the larger goal of food justice.

While the disconnect between secular and religious approaches is obvious, the disconnect between approaches that focus on individual choices (ethics) and those that focus on systematic change (politics) also needs bridging. Many contemporary works on food ethics—both religious and secular—focus on the ethical choices that individuals should make given the myriad of unethical practices surrounding our contemporary food system. One area that has been much discussed is the ethics of meat-eating. Given the deplorable conditions of industrial animal farming in many regions, scholars rightly argue that it is difficult—if not impossible—to ethically justify meat-eating when there is an abundance of plant-based food available to sustain healthy lives (Foltz, 2005; Linzey, 1995; Regan, 1983; Singer, 1975). Arguments for modern ethical vegetarianism were first developed in the fields of secular ethics and later adapted to different religions. Sapontzis (2014) notes ethical arguments for vegetarianism from different religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Native American traditions, as well as Hinduism, Jainism, and Buddhism.

Other more contemporary research analyze the compatibility of modern secular ethics with different religious teachings concerning vegetarianism and veganism (Ali, 2015; Dahlan, 2021; Donaldson, 2016; Labendz & Yanklowitz, 2019; Stewart, 2015).

Abstaining from meat-eating may be more in line with one's larger religious values. However, that individual choice is not sufficient given the complexity of the multifaceted problems of the overall food system. While some argue that vegetarianism (or veganism) is the most ethical food choice, others argue that eating locally grown food (locavorism) or organic food grown without pesticides that can harm both the workers and the environment are the more ethical choice. Furthermore, there are limits to changing individual choices alone. Rather than bringing about necessary changes to the overall system, individual consumptions are often co-opted and turned into niche markets that reinforce social and economic inequalities. For example, Guthman (2011) explores the limitations of capitalism as a framework to bring about systematic change to the food system.

What Is Food Justice?

My research focuses on the issue of social justice as one of the values that is entwined with faith-based food practices. Food justice is a concept that began as part of the environmental justice movement. The environmental justice movement sought to address the inequality of environmental harms faced by marginalized groups of people. In his seminal work on race and environmental justice in the USA, Bullard (1993) argues that structural inequalities, such as systemic segregation in housing through zoning as well as inequality in wealth distribution, all contribute to environmental racism, which he defines as "practices that place African Americans, Latinos, and Native Americans at greater health and environmental risk than the rest of society" (p. 319). Using case studies, Bullard demonstrates how an environmental justice movement that brought together environmental groups and civil rights activists could challenge different governmental attempts to place disproportionate environmental burdens on the marginalized communities. He also argues, however, that as long as these marginalized communities continue to suffer from other inequalities, such as poverty and acute unemployment, the overall problem of environmental racism is unlikely to be resolved because of the marginalized people's lack of political power.

Just as the environmental justice movement frames environmental inequalities in terms of "how the structural inequalities harm people as they relate to the environment" (Sbicca, 2018, p. 4), the food justice movement focuses on the structural inequalities that exist in the food system. The main goal of food justice is to ensure that "the benefits and risks or where, what, and how food is grown and produced, transported, and distributed, and accessed and eaten are shared fairly" (Gottlieb & Joshi, 2010, p. 6). This comprehensive and multifaceted goal can be overwhelming. It is important to not only understand the significance of the different aspects involved but also to feel empowered to take a concrete step toward this lofty goal.

One aspect of the food justice movement is the fight to make good and healthy food accessible to marginalized groups of people. Places of worship oftentimes already function as a space for congregants to pool together resources to provide food for members of the community who are not able to provide for themselves. For example, Sack (2016) discusses the development of modern soup kitchens in Protestant churches in the USA, while Singer (2002) provides an historical analysis of the Ottoman public kitchens beginning in the fourteenth century. Food justice scholars, however, argue that short-term solutions such as faith-based food banks can often perpetuate or exacerbate the existing inequalities and injustice in the long run. Winne (2008) argues that charitable projects often carried out by religious or other non-governmental organizations do not fundamentally address the problem of social inequalities that create the problem in the first place. He claims that "there was an opportunity cost associated with choosing to collect and distribute other people's leftovers rather than fight the public policy battles that should have been fought more vigorously" (p. 29). In other words, these short-term solutions can distract from, and hence make it more difficult to form a more substantial response to the problem that takes the form of public policy changes that address the reasons why the marginalized group of people cannot afford good food to begin with.

Guthman (2008, 2011) also extensively problematizes short-term solutions that involve providing food for those who are not able to provide for themselves. She argues that projects where people "bring good food to others" often lack resonance in the target community because they perpetuate the racial dynamic and white privilege that pervades the main food movement discourse in the USA (Guthman, 2008). A better alternative, according to her, is to have projects that seriously take into consideration what the community wants and are designed with a substantial involvement of the community.

Guthman's (2011) other work *Weighing in: Obesity, food justice and the limit to capitalism*, specifically addresses the injustices on the production side of the food system that is often overlooked in the discussion of food justice. Guthman (2011) argues that:

> [T]he existing food justice perspective, which emphasizes the absence of fresh fruits and vegetables in neighborhood venues, can obscure the sources of injustice in the food system … particularly those arising in food production: exposure to toxic chemicals, poor working conditions as they apply to health and safety, and disparities in wages and employment (p. 153).

She is particularly critical of the fact that many attempts to address the problem of unequal access to good food are largely limited to solutions within the neoliberal framework, which assumes that real changes can be brought about through market mechanisms rather than through public policies. Overall, instead of short-term solutions such as charitable projects that focus on bringing good food to low-income people through charitable actions, these food justice scholars argue for the need to bring about institutionalized change through changes in policies, such as by working through public policies to improve wages of low-income workers so that there will be more equal affordability of good food.

Heine and Brooke (2010) address ways in which faith communities can address inequalities and issues of justice involving interfaith workers. Interfaith Worker Justice is an organization that aims to educate and mobilize different religious communities on issues that improve low-income workers' wages and working conditions. These include, for example, supporting farm workers to form unions that protect them from high exposure to pesticides, giving them rights to get access to drinking water and bathroom breaks, or addressing the injuries that many workers suffer due to repetitive motion. The distinction between faith-based food programs that focus on non-political solutions (such as providing food through food banks) and those that address the fundamental problem of social inequality through institutional changes (such as lobbying for laws and policies that improve wages and working conditions) can be understood in terms of interfaith relations as a civic practice.

Bretherton (2011, p. 346) reconceptualizes common action between different faiths as "directly political rather than as humanitarian service provision." He distinguishes inter-faith relations as a civic practice from interfaith dialogue and volunteerism. Bretherton (2011, pp. 357, 359) argues that the latter tend to ignore "questions of political economy" while inter-faith relations as a civic practice would be located specifically "within the context of … establishing the limits to the market and the state."

Like Winne's (2008) criticism of religious charities that potentially exacerbate problems of inequality, Bretherton (2011) cautions against the co-optation of religious groups by limiting interfaith activism to projects that deliver social welfare. Instead, Bretherton argues for three important civic practices that enable interfaith activism that is political in nature, namely: listening, a commitment to place, and building institutions. In the next section, I outline some of the ways in which interfaith community gardening can serve to cultivate these civic practices, as part of a development of a particular kind of political subjectivity needed to address the complex problems of the current industrial food system.

Why Interfaith Community Gardening?

In his work, *Public produce*, Nordahl (2009) analyzes the importance of growing food in public and semi-public places. He argues that growing fruits and vegetables in community parks and gardens can be a part of a larger goal of food justice by providing the public with access to not only the produce they can consume but also the knowledge needed as a prerequisite for such consumption. Nordahl (2009, p. 11) explains that "educational programs are needed to reacquaint us with food, to help us recognize which plants are edible and which are ornamental, and to teach us how to plant, how to care for, and how to harvest food." In other words, one of the benefits of a community garden is that growing fruits and vegetables is a way to reclaim basic knowledge of food—a knowledge that has been made nearly impossible to gain in the contemporary global food system. Although Nordahl (2009, p. 51) focuses on "truly public" places owned and maintained by the municipality, he also discusses the

role that "perceived public" spaces such as churches and other places of worship can play in providing a site for growing produce that is accessible to the public. Places of worship, in general, are designed to bring people together as well as providing them with educational programs.

In their study on embodied pedagogy in Christian educational curricula, Buxton et al. (2021) analyze a growing number of international theological seminaries and bible colleges that have begun to reclaim embodied pedagogical practices, which include growing vegetables via sustainable farming practices. These practices are part of a larger way to teach and learn about creation care to address today's environmental challenges. According to them, the idea of embodied pedagogy can be traced back to the ancient Hebrews as well as the early church. Together with scripture, embodied pedagogies target the senses, imagination, intuition, and human affective functions and thereby constitute "sophisticated and holistic methods of communication and learning" (Buxton et al., 2021, p. 360). The authors argue that the value of embodied pedagogy lies in its focus on "raising not only awareness but also much-needed action with regards to care for God's creation" (p. 350). With regards to community gardening as a pedagogical tool, its value lies in not only raising awareness about the problems of the global, industrial food system but also—and perhaps more importantly—creating opportunities for local actions that have the capacity to address the problems.

One aspect of developing an interfaith community garden is to ensure that it is accessible to the community so that it can provide the benefits that it intends to provide (Nordahl, 2009). Currently, in many cities around the word, interfaith community gardens have the potential to provide a (semi-) public space to grow food justice movements in various capacities. More specifically, interfaith community gardens can serve to cultivate a sense of political subjectivity whereby people view themselves not simply as individual consumers of food but also, and more importantly, citizens with the power to engage in collective actions that contribute to the transformation of the food system. In this sense, interfaith community gardening is not valuable as an end, but as a pathway to cultivate knowledge of the different aspects involved in the current food system in general, and to render visible the concealed exploitation within the system in particular.

Barron (2016) analyzes the ways in which community gardens can cultivate counter-neoliberal subjectivities. She argues that the prevalent neoliberal subjectivities that are pervaded by market logic are the sense of self as entrepreneur, consumer, and volunteer. In contrast, counter-neoliberal subjectivities are the sense of self as producer, citizen, and activist. Community gardens can either reinforce or challenge neoliberal subjectivities. When community gardening is undertaken as part of a project that frames the problem in terms of lack of access to food and solving it through charitable volunteerism, it reinforces neoliberal subjectivities. However, community gardening can also be carried out in a way that de-commodifies food to "re-cast it not in terms set by the private market, but in terms of rights, equity, and citizenship" (Barron, 2016, p. 13). This kind of community garden serves as a site that provides social and political skills that allow community members to see

themselves not only as consumers but also as citizens who can shape the larger food system through democratic engagements.

Similarly, McClintock (2014) notes the potential that gardens have to cultivate a sense of political subjectivity by distinguishing between different types of urban gardens. He explains these different types (neoliberal, reformist, progressive, and radical) in terms of the multiscalar process that can shape community gardening. More specifically, he argues that a community garden that can contribute to the food justice movement must be designed with that goal in mind. McClintock (2014) explains:

> To successfully challenge the structural forces that gave rise to the urban agriculture movement in the first place ultimately requires embedding urban agriculture within a broader framework of justice and structural change. Urban agriculture alone cannot usher in food justice … Rather than an end unto itself, we should instead view urban agriculture as simply one of many means to an end, one of many tools working in concert towards a unified vision of food justice, and of just sustainability, more broadly (p. 166).

A community garden, in itself, does not necessarily lead to the kind of knowledge and sense of political subjectivity required to bring about the desired institutional changes. However, having this awareness in mind can help orient such gardens more purposefully to achieve the goal of meaningfully contributing to the food justice movement.

One example of an interfaith community garden is the Inter-Faith Food Shuttle in North Carolina (Carlson et al., 2018). This community garden is part of a larger goal of the organization to battle food insecurity in low-income communities. In addition to recovering and distributing food, the organization teaches food-related skills, including growing food, cooking, and budgeting. The community garden is used primarily to provide education on growing food as well as access to fresh produce. It is a valuable resource for educating marginalized communities about the health benefits of consuming fresh produce and—to a certain extent—giving access to such produce. It is not, however, meant to provide the kind of political education desired to bring about institutional changes through food-related policies. The kind of subjectivity that is cultivated in this type of community garden is neoliberal subjectivity whereby individuals see themselves mainly as consumers, entrepreneurs, or volunteers, rather than as producers, citizens, and activists. To achieve the latter, an interfaith community garden must be designed explicitly with these different types of subjectivity in mind and be oriented towards the de-commodification of food. This requires both scholars to conceptualize subjectivity within the framework of any faith, as well as religious leaders who can guide their communities to translate them into practice.

Currently, there have been a growing number of faith-based initiatives that seek to address the issue of food justice through the medium of community farming and gardening. Van Wieren (2018) critiques different faith-based (or religious community-based) farms, such as Mother Carr's Organic Farm in Lynwood, Illinois (an outreach ministry of Vernon Park Church of God), The Abundant Table in Ventura, California (an affiliation of the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America), and Coastal Roots Farms in Encinitas, California

(associated with Hazon, a progressive Jewish environmental organization) and the San Diego (north county Jewish Hub). Van Wieren (2018) explains:

> faith-based farms may also be interpreted as sacred spaces for how they focus fundamental questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world and for how they narrate the significance of certain types of environment and relationships. This includes reinterpretations about what it means to be a faithful person, and about what faithful practice entails (p. 118).

Faith-based farms provide an opportunity for people of common faith to come together and practice their faith through the act of farming. They are a way to infuse religious values into farming practices in a world where the latter has become distant and concealed for many people. These farms fulfil the religious demands to foster knowledge of one's food.

Furthermore, contemporary practices of faith-based farms are not confined to a particular religious belief or tradition. What is common among these different farms is the way they are framed using a blend of spiritual and ecological language that allows for flexibility. Van Wieren (2018, p. 114) notes that because of this, "the sacred is neither confined to a particular religious tradition nor excluded from the broader public, rather it is out in the open and hybridized, relocated, and reinterpreted in relation to the universal human experience of the need to grow food to eat." Owing to humanity's universal need to eat, faith-based community agricultural practices such as farming and gardening can be practised in a way that intentionally bridges across different faiths. I argue that an interfaith community garden can share the many benefits of sacred farms compounded with added benefits that can come from its interfaith dimension. More specifically, an interfaith community garden can provide the space and opportunity for a kind of interfaith activism that cultivates three specific civic practices, namely: listening, a commitment to place, and building institutions. Bretherton (2011) notes:

> [I]t is listening to God, primarily through their sacred texts, that furnishes [people of faith] with the intellectual and moral resources beyond the popular consensus. And it is this external word that places limits on politics itself, reminding each tradition that politics and economics do not have to bear the full weight of meaning and action (p. 367).

This act of listening to God is similar to what Van Wieren (2018) describes in relation to faith-based agricultural practices. It allows people of faith to reinterpret spaces and activities (such as farms and farming) as sacred spaces and activities. As Van Wieren (2018, p. 118) explains, "faith-based farms may also be interpreted as sacred spaces for how they focus fundamental questions about what it means to be a human being in a meaningful world and for how they narrate the significance of certain types of environments and relationships."

In interfaith activism, as opposed to activism based on singular faith, the act of listening to God is done simultaneously with the act of listening to neighbors. These are other people with whom we share our common lives, with whom we may not share the same faith. Bretherton (2011, p. 367) notes: "A practice like Scriptural Reasoning is exactly the kind of practice that enables listening to *God and neighbor*

simultaneously … It was an exercise in discerning what are the goods in common among these people, in this particular time and place" (emphasis mine).

Bretherton (2011) also argues that the act of listening cultivated through interfaith activism is only possible when the important institutions within a community (including faith-based institutions) are built and developed to allow individuals to come together. This coming together to bring about the common good, in turn, is only possible with the kind of commitment that is rooted in a particular place. Moreover, Bretherton (2011) promotes the idea that:

> within anchor institutions (such as religious institutions, schools, universities, youth clubs, workplaces and community centers, etc.) a mobile population can be captured, however temporarily. The negotiation of a common life between such institutions, rather than between individuals, allows for a listening, place-based politics to emerge … it is institutions not individuals that sustain traditions of belief and practice through time in particular places (p. 371).

Interfaith community gardens can serve as a site where faith-based institutions bring together individuals from different faiths to practice this sacred act of listening to discern the common good for people who are rooted in a particular place. They can provide basic knowledge of one's food, which is required as part of the observance of one's faith but concealed by the modern, industrial food system. Such knowledge can be obtained through embodied pedagogical practices, which aim to go beyond raising awareness of food-related problems while at the same time also empowering people to take actions to address them. Furthermore, as part of a larger network of food justice movements, interfaith community gardens can be designed with the goal of cultivating the kind of political subjectivities that bring about awareness of our sense of self beyond what is framed by the market logic.

Conclusion

Food rituals and practices are an integral part of one's religious identity. To fully embody that identity, a fundamental knowledge of one's food is necessary. Such knowledge has been made difficult to obtain given the current global, industrial food system that, by design, conceals much of its inherent exploitations and injustices. While many studies have examined the different alternatives to ethical food choices that one can make as an individual (including but not limited to ethical vegetarianism), there is currently a lack of discussion on possible solutions that go beyond individual choices to address the issues more systematically. More specifically, this chapter proposes interfaith community gardening as a possible avenue in which people of faith can draw from the fundamental values of different faiths to cultivate a certain kind of political subjectivity through cooperative agricultural practices.

While there are extensive studies on community gardens in general, and an increasing number of faith-based gardens, there are few studies on interfaith community gardens. In this chapter, I have discussed how interfaith community gardens can serve as sites for developing a particular sense of political subjectivity that can bring

about the necessary social change to address the complex and multifaceted problems of the current global, industrial food system. More specifically, as a faith-based praxis, interfaith community gardening can provide knowledge of the many forms of exploitations and injustices that are generally designed to be concealed by the system in the production and distribution of our food.

Moreover, I argued that interfaith community gardens can also be designed specifically to empower community members to act collectively to bring about substantial changes beyond individual consumption. I addressed the importance of moving the discourse of food ethics in general, and religious food ethics in particular, beyond arguments that focus on individual choices (that can often be co-opted by the market) to include solutions that address the food system as a whole. I also discussed how faith-based food programs that focus on non-political solutions such as charitable giving are short-term solutions that can perpetuate or exacerbate existing inequalities and injustices. In contrast, interfaith community gardens have the potential to address the inequalities and injustices by cultivating both the practical knowledge regarding our food system as well as the civic practices that empower community members to act on such knowledge.

Finally, I acknowledged that there are different forms that community gardens can take and that to have one that can grow the desired political subjectivity, it should be designed with that goal in mind. I discussed how interfaith community gardens can either reinforce or challenge neoliberal subjectivity. Interfaith community gardens that challenge neoliberal subjectivity should be designed as sites that provide skills that are needed for the community members to see themselves as producers, citizens, and activists that can bring about substantial changes to the current food system through democratic means. Both scholars and religious leaders have important roles to play in guiding religious communities through the process of cultivating this subjectivity. I formulated my argument for interfaith community gardening by drawing from existing studies on food justice, faith-based food activism, and post-secular politics. More explorations on interfaith community gardens will benefit not only the field of interfaith research but also the larger discourse on food justice as a space for interfaith education and practice, as well as the role of inter-religious dialogue in multicultural politics.

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Chapter 15
Overcoming Religious Distance: Epiphanies in Cross-Cultural Settings

Pratima Durga

Abstract Researchers carry innate philosophical assumptions into their work, which may entail and perpetuate prejudice. Theoretical paradigms act as a kind of guiding compass of the research process, providing the analytic lens through which human experiences are understood or constructed. This chapter presents the axiological reflections of a novice Australian researcher of Indian descent—born in Mauritius in a Hindu family who later adopted Christian beliefs—engaged in a qualitative cross-cultural study in a remote region of Bangladesh, Bhola Island. The prolonged engagement at the research site with people of a different background, culture, language, and faith, and the reflexive approach throughout the journey caused a turning point in the Christian worldview of the researcher who returned to Australia deeply challenged in her philosophical and spiritual worldviews by the interreligious and intercultural immersion experience. This chapter brings her insights and epiphanies into conversation with interreligious introspection and thereby aims to inspire deeper interfaith dialogue.

Keywords Cross-cultural research · Intercultural · Interreligious · Interfaith · Vulnerability · Axiology · Ontology

Introduction

> Doing research is always risky, personally, emotionally, ideologically, and politically, just because we never know for sure just what results our work will have. (Becker, 2000, p. 253)

Qualitative research inevitably involves philosophical assumptions and paradigms that can be understood through two main branches of philosophy: ontology, the nature of reality; and epistemology, the views on truth and knowledge (Creswell & Creswell,

P. Durga (✉)
School of Arts and Business, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: pratima.durga@ac.edu.au

School of Business and Law, Central Queensland University, Brisbane, QLD, Australia

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2017; Slevitch, 2011; Wahyuni, 2012). Kuhn (2012) defines the term paradigm in social sciences as the analytic lens through which the human experience is understood. Paradigms provide the primary framework for research and encompass beliefs, assumptions, values and practices (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011).

In addition to the ontological and epistemological assumptions, Heron and Reason (1997) propose that theoretical paradigms should include another element: axiology, also known as the theory of value. Axiology is the branch of philosophy that relates to moral judgements and concepts about the nature of good and bad (Sullivan, 2009) and axiological assumptions comprise values that researchers bring to their study (Hallebone & Priest, 2017; Killam, 2013; Lincoln et al., 2011).

Intercultural research involves operating across cultures that transcend ethnicity, and hence there are multiple ethical implications to be considered, especially in the current climate of post-structuralism. Such research entails attention to ethical praxis as a cross-cultural research relationship fundamentally involves a dynamic of power (Marshall & Batten, 2004). Unsurprisingly, ideological dimensions impact qualitative research in numerous ways (Al-Natour, 2011), however the effect of the research on the researcher's personal and emotional foci can sometimes be unpredictable. As such, intercultural studies always generate a range of challenges, from researcher bias to ethical dilemmas to axiological assumptions (Ellis, 2007; Hall, 2014; Sarmento, 2014).

In the academic world where there is growing emphasis on accountability of research activity, it has become vital to explore the ways in which research affects the researcher (Åkerlind, 2008). This chapter considers the impact of field research on a middle-aged non-native female academic researcher's Christian worldview. More specifically, her perspectives expanded in the wake of prolonged engagement with people of a different background, culture, language, and faith in a male-dominated sociocultural setting.

This treatise has been approached from the positionality of a novice Australian researcher of Indian descent who was born in Mauritius into a Hindu family and later adopted Christian beliefs. I was born the seventh in a line of nine children and my childhood was marred by dysfunctional family dynamics. We were dirt poor. We often went without food. We grew up with no electricity, doing our homework with the help of kerosene lamps, and we did our laundry in the nearby river. My stay on Bhola Island reminded me of my early years in my native village in Mauritius except that it was decades ago, and even though I had experienced dire deprivation in my childhood, the dismal poverty that I experienced on Bhola Island was utterly shocking—poverty and all its effects, such as malnutrition, disease and sickness that are easily preventable in many other countries in the world.

I am a dense blend of straddling cultures, languages, and religions that are often at odds with one another. My outward appearance is Indian, but I lean more towards French culture (Mauritius has a deeply entrenched French colonial past) (Issur, 2020; Waters, 2017). In written and spoken communication, I alternate among four languages—French, Creole, Bhojpuri, and English, depending on my interlocutor. Since I became a follower of Jesus Christ, my sense of self has been deeply enmeshed with my Christian identity.

Many years later, my research brought me to cross a geographical and philosophical divide. The process led me to not only interview participants for data collection, but to live solely with and among Muslims on a remote island with overall underdeveloped sanitary conditions (Sultana & Luetz, 2022). The engagement was profound, leading me to question much of my epistemological paradigm and reassess my personal beliefs about the Muslim faith. As I traveled around for interview purposes, I often had to face ecologically harsh environments and trudge through mud to reach little chunks of dryness. Metaphorically, my thoughts were also muddy and my spirit was troubled as I would often ask: God, where are you in this situation? I felt disheartened by the visibly grim conditions of the people engulfed in a cycle of desperate poverty with little prospect of a less dark future (Islam et al., 2020).

I returned to Australia disoriented by the unsettling experience. I could not stop thinking of the people in the resource-deprived and ecologically uncertain settings I had encountered. After much soul-searching, out of the mental disarray, I saw the light. The fundamental epiphany moment was recognizing the presence of God where I least expected Him—in people, the bearers of the image of God. The experience of qualitative cross-cultural field research on a remote rural island in Bangladesh thus raised interesting experience-informed perspectives that have influenced my Christian worldview and pedagogy.

I have divided this chapter into four segments. First, I present the research setting to contextualize the paper. Then, I place myself as a researcher in context because my multi-layered background allows me to look at life with an idiosyncratic analytical lens. Thereafter, I describe some of my challenges experienced during the fieldwork, in particular the tensions arising from the personal engagement in 'dirt research'. The term 'dirt research' relates to the concept developed by Canadian political economist and communications theorist Harold Innis (1894–1952) and describes the experience of a researcher who expands the boundaries of research (Acland, 2014; Rossiter, 2012; Stanbridge, 2014). I conclude by describing the reverse culture shock implications on my return to Australia, in particular the 'spiritual dissonance' which was a catalyst of learning and of change. My intention is to keep the narrative short and simple while bringing personal insights and epiphanies into conversation with interreligious introspection.

The Research Context

Bangladesh is a unique laboratory. With an estimated population of over 172 million (World Population Review, 2023), and a density of more than one thousand three hundred people per square kilometre, it is one of the most densely populated countries in the world. The United Nations defines it as a Least Developed Country based on three criteria: low income, resource deficiency, and economic vulnerability (World Health Organization, 2016).

In the south-west of Bangladesh lies the study site for my research project—Bhola Island, also called Dakhin Shahbazpur Island, the largest island in the Ganges

delta. Bhola means 'forgotten place' (Hasan, 2016). Almost two million people live on the island; the density is higher than the national mean (Trading Economics, 2020). Poverty is widespread and disease is rampant, including malaria, dengue, diarrhoea, respiratory infections, and tuberculosis, along with malnutrition and neonatal mortality (Bangladesh Planning Commission, 2015). Maternal, infant and childhood mortality rates are higher than the national average (Cash et al., 2013; Chowdhury et al., 2013). Due to its location in the estuary of the Bay of Bengal and the very low elevation of the land, the island is extremely vulnerable to violent monsoons and tidal incursions from the Bay, accelerated sea level rise and associated disasters (Fig. 15.1). Bhola's problems are further compounded by the Bay of Bengal being one of the most cyclone-prone regions on the planet (Islam et al., 2015).

In Bhola district, the main religion is Islam (96.55%), followed by Hinduism (3.44%). The remaining 0.01% percent consists of Buddhists, Christians (mostly Roman Catholics), and Animists (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2013). Bangladesh is the world's fourth largest Muslim country in terms of population size and the third largest Muslim-majority nation. The country's official state religion is Islam and religion plays an essential role in Bangladesh. For Bangladeshis, religious attendance at mosques is indispensable. In recent years, public display of religiosity has increased (Riaz, 2022).

In 2019, I spent four weeks in Bangladesh, collecting primary data for my doctoral thesis (January 3–30, 2019). The overarching aim of my project was to assess health

Fig. 15.1 One of the many houses affected by erosion

Fig. 15.2 The road leading to an interview site

deficits in rural and remote regions, with a view to delineating better models of healthcare that reduce the disadvantage faced by vulnerable communities in the developing world. Accompanied by an experienced translator-interpreter with extensive local language and cultural awareness of the Bhola region, I visited over thirty small remote villages inhabited by the very poor and landless communities to interview local participants in situ (Fig. 15.2). The participants in the research were identified by grassroots contact, such as in village marketplaces (Durga et al., 2022).

The Researcher in Context

> Midway upon the journey of our life
> I found myself within a forest dark,
> For the straightforward pathway had been lost. (Dante Alighieri)

I developed a profound interest in my research topic because of my own experiences of growing up in a disadvantaged rural community in a low-income country. I was born a Hindu in a poor family in the then British colony of Mauritius, a tiny island in the Indian Ocean off the southeast coast of Africa. I am of Indian descent. My grandparents left (British) India as indentured laborers to settle in Mauritius

where they met and married. My childhood in a deprived family in a rural disadvantaged community in the 1960s was fraught with experiences of societal inequities and their dire consequences. My family adopted Christianity after hearing the Gospel brought to the island by a French missionary, Cizeron (1992). As new Christians, we had to face fierce persecution from the local authorities and Hindu sociocultural groups, leading to more severe economic poverty. However, although we renounced the Hindu religion, we retained part of the customs and practices of the culture.

In 2008, I left Mauritius—my first ever trip overseas—and settled in Australia, a strikingly different English-speaking country (English is my fourth language after Mauritian Creole, French, and Bhojpuri). My mixed identities and the color of my skin add additional dimensions to my 'belonging' and 'unbelonging' continua. When I decided to carry out my doctoral research project in Bangladesh, this added a third country to the mélange. Bangladeshis being of Indian heritage, I felt a measure of affinity with the people even before I met them. I did not realize that active engagement in the fieldwork would add another layer to my already complex mix of identities and multicultural viewpoints.

As an immigrant now living in Brisbane, I stand at the confluence of several cultural spectrums. I am of Asian origin and ethnicity, African by birth, and Australian by adoption. Additionally, as an emerging researcher engaged within a Western paradigm and methodological framework, my multi-layered identities open the door to contextual relationships in interfaith and intercultural spaces where I navigate between being an insider and an outsider. The insider–outsider debate is not new in the social sciences (Emerson & Pollner, 1988; Garfinkel, 1984; Lynch & Woolgar, 1988; Pollner & Emerson, 2001). The debates revolve around researcher positionality, and how the researcher's status is assigned throughout the research processes (Al-Natour, 2011; Råheim et al., 2016). Milligan (2016) puts forward the potential for the use of participative methods to enable new insights and mutual understandings and suggests a new positioning of 'inbetweener' in cross-cultural research, joining a group of other scholars (Hellawell, 2006; Katyal & King, 2011; McNess et al., 2015) discussing the static dichotomous concepts of 'insiderness' and 'outsiderness'.

Owing to my own complex mélange of original roots and learned practices constituting my cultural identity, I have a natural interest in cross-cultural, interreligious and interfaith research. Given this context and personal heritage, I did not anticipate the extent of repercussions that conducting research in cross-cultural settings would have on my multifaceted and intricate identity elements.

The Research Experience

My journey began in January 2019 when I saw Bangladesh for the first time. I stepped out of the airport in Dhaka and although it was around 11.00 p.m., I was met with a deafening cacophony of indescribable sounds. Nothing could have prepared me for the unique experience of the assault on my senses. Before I embarked on

Fig. 15.3 Bamboo bridge

the Australia—Bangladesh journey, I had researched the implications of the cross-cultural immersion. I understood that Bangladesh is not for the faint-hearted—its capital city, Dhaka, has consistently been ranked over the years as one of the least liveable cities in the world (Paul & Sen, 2020). In 2019, the Global Liveability Index named it the third worst city on earth (Ahmed, 2019).

I travelled from the mainland to Bhola Island to the *upazila*[1] of Char Fasson where I lived for the following weeks in the office of an Australian non-profit organization called Co-operation in Development (Fred Hyde Schools in Bangladesh, 2022). Every day we covered long distances, traveling sometimes in a rented van, or in rickety rickshaws, and even on a rented motorbike as a pillion passenger, or crossing rivers and creeks on unsteady bamboo bridges (Fig. 15.3) to visit villages not accessible by paved road. Many times, we travelled on foot, often trudging in sticky mud (Fig. 15.4). Small isolated *chars*[2] were visited with the use of fisherman boats (Figs. 15.5 and 15.6).

It is common for researchers to undertake cross-cultural research which often reveals epistemic differences relating to worldviews, sociocultural norms, ethics and principles between the researcher and the study population (Durham, 2014). Culture

[1] An *upazila* is an administrative region in Bangladesh functioning as a sub-unit of a district.

[2] A *char* is a riverine tract of land or 'island'.

Fig. 15.4 A muddy track on a *char*

is complex. Culture is multi-dimensional. It includes *inter alia* aspects such as beliefs, morals, customs, and habits (Halkoaho et al., 2016).

In the past, many researchers typically approached their studies bound by their philosophical assumptions and perspectives. Increasingly, investigators have come to value different worldviews and consider ethical concerns more seriously (Cleary, 2013), and taking care not to allow their theoretical base to affect the research findings (Moch & Gates, 2000). The research process is enhanced and positive relationships are enriched by the way in which participants are treated (Gordon, 2021) with honesty and respect as essential components to build trust (Özerdem & Bowd, 2016). Concurrently, conducting research with head and heart through a focused lens of reflexive self-awareness implies a degree of researcher vulnerability. Personal and emotional dimensions deriving from an interactionist approach in a cross-cultural context can affect the researcher unpredictably (Muller & Gubrium, 2016; Presbitero, 2016).

Qualitative research encourages reflexive writing in the form of journaling and memoing (Birks et al., 2008; McGrath, 2021; Razaghi et al., 2020). Reflexive self-study is a *sine qua non* for relational accountability (Latulippe, 2015), however the effects of reflexivity on the researcher, from the researcher's perspective are rarely addressed (Haynes, 2006). During my research journey, I used the practice of taking detailed fieldwork notes in a diary to record thoughts and emotions as I kept track of every element of the journey, from the arrival in Dhaka until I returned to Australia. Reflective notes facilitate introspection and contemplation of the wide-ranging scope

Fig. 15.5 Fisherman boat used to visit an isolated island

of the research processes. This practice enabled the identification of a chasm between research outcomes (the anticipated bearing of the research), and researcher affect (Åkerlind, 2008).

Cross-cultural encounters, especially for research purposes, entail meticulous prior preparation. This research obtained ethical clearance from the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at Central Queensland University (CQU), Australia. During the ethics application process, the question of perceived power imbalance between the (Western) researcher and the local (Asian) participants was evoked. What if, because of the Bangladeshi culture and community dynamics, unexpected anxiety or undue pressure to participate were to arise? However, it was felt that my skin color and ethnic background being similar to the local cultural and ethnic context, would mitigate the risks related to power imbalance. Taking into consideration the cultural sensitivities of the Muslim population, I was concerned that the fact that all the respondents of my project are male (and I am female) might cause some hesitancy or unease. However, this proved to be an unnecessary concern, and no such problem was encountered in the field, including in highly conservative remote locations. In addition, I wore traditional locally appropriate clothing to minimize any possibility of offence. During the interview process, it was found that participants were honored by the opportunity to contribute to the research conducted by an Australian research team.

Fig. 15.6 Crossing a river in a fisherman boat

On the personal front, I learnt the local cultural customs and practices of the Muslim communities, such as dressing codes for women, eating only halal food, mandatory prayer times. I got down into the fabric of the people in active engagement, eating the same food and same sleeping conditions as the local residents. The more I engaged with the villagers, the more I was submerged in the inter-cultural and interreligious aspects of my research experience.

Findings and Conclusion: Lessons Learned

> Without the quest, there can be no epiphany. (Scaros, 2018)

While I collected data on medical and public health practices for my doctoral thesis, I also gathered the unspoken data, the data with a soul—what is seen and felt, based on lived experiences (Nadar, 2019). During my stay on Bhola Island, there was neither a television nor a radio set and no access to newspapers. In the evenings, I had long intense discussions on many facets of Islam and Muslim culture as well as the troubled history of the country, both with my translator/interpreter and the male Muslim 'companions' (local staff working for the NGO) who shared the accommodation on the premises. I spent most of this time listening rather than

speaking, although I had the opportunity to share my testimony as a Christian believer. My interlocutors were particularly intrigued by my conversion from Hinduism to Christianity. These animated interfaith discussions widened my horizons and altered my Christian worldview in a profound way.

Acknowledging philosophical assumptions of epistemology, ontology and axiology is required in research design (Leavy, 2017) as an intellectual practice. On a practical level, cross-cultural and interfaith journeys involving research with head and heart lead to deconstructing stereotypes and biases. Nevertheless, learning about other faiths and cultures can also be a mere intellectual exercise, which does not necessarily involve the love of God or neighbor. Through ignorance, entire ethnic groups are often categorized from our side of the world. Contrastingly, Christianity challenges us to cross the divide to engage with the 'other' (McCord, 2012), bridging the rift of epistemic differences.

On another level, the welcome extended to me—the Christian sociological stranger—by the Bangladeshi Muslim villagers was significant. I was moved by the dignity, the kindness and generosity of the poorest among the poor. As Christians, we are exhorted in the Bible to show hospitality to strangers (Matt. 25:31–40; 1 Peter 4:9). However, I personally found it difficult to be on the receiving end of hospitality from the people who had so little. Additionally, I often wondered about the kind of welcome that the destitute villagers would receive in our homes if they were to disembark in Australia as I had disembarked in their environment.

I felt rather disoriented when I came back to Australia, noticing what is often described in the literature as reverse culture shock (Gaw, 2000; Moore et al., 1987; Presbitero, 2016; Wang, 1997). I was emotionally drained, surprised and scarred by the living conditions I had encountered. It was noticeably difficult to readjust—the previously familiar and comforting culture, even religion, had become unfamiliar. Such quandaries are not unusual—researchers often report impact of the research on the individual researcher, possibly resulting in transformation in personal and/or theoretical viewpoints (Åkerlind, 2008; Brew, 2001). Another study found that research often results in new ways in seeing not only the world, but oneself (Kiley & Mullins, 2005).

My innermost turmoil caused my helplessness to turn into hopelessness and I struggled to see where God was to be found. It had been easy for me to see God's power and divine workmanship in the beautiful wondrous creation around me—beaches, mountains, forests, wildflowers, and starlit skies, among others. However, I did not initially feel any sense of awe and wonder when the landscape was different, when there were not any beaches or mountains, or when the stars in the sky were obscured by high rates of air pollution resulting in heavy haze.

It was extremely difficult for me to sense God in the dire situation of the helpless and vulnerable villagers living in huts on government land close to the protective embankments circling the island, engaged in a constant battle against the forces of nature. Land erosion is a major concern as it imposes a cycle of dire plights on the subsistence-level society that is heavily reliant on farming and fishing for its sustenance (Luetz, 2018; Luetz & Sultana, 2019). The resilience and endurance of the inhabitants amid destitution are life lessons.

This part of my journey fundamentally altered my perceptions, my assumptions, and my analytical lens. It changed the way I live and the way I love, the way I spend time and the way I work. The way I see people and the way I treat people. In the light of this unique experience, I reflect on how my intellectual and emotional engagement in the fieldwork contributed to my own changing positioning in the field. My value system and ontologies have been redefined. Research is always a kind of journey, perhaps not always as far as in my project, but nevertheless so (Haynes, 2006).

Subsequent to the research, I have been invited to share my intercultural experience in church settings and this has given me the opportunity to critically engage and communicate. I have raised my researcher profile and my credibility as an academic has increased. I have also obtained more opportunities for networking (Fearfull & Haynes, 2006). The cross-cultural part of the research carried some confronting elements—in that perspective, the research was cathartic, and part of my own "project of the self" (Giddens, 1991). My epiphanies were not 'a-ha' moments. It took some time to unravel the tangle in my head and my heart. It was difficult to navigate the intricacies of intentionally integrating 'the other' into my conceptual framework, which is the antipode of the patronizing pity for the needy. I understand that there is no point in feeling guilty about the privileges that I have, but it is essential to take responsibility for the talents that I have been given and bring transformative learning to my vocation.

Transformative learning theorizes that experiences may cause individuals to challenge their existing belief system and acquire new perspectives (Nerstrom, 2014). To acquire transformative learning, Mezirow (2018) explained that adults experience various phases including a disorienting dilemma, self-examination of and critical reflection on assumptions, recognition of dissatisfaction, exploration of alternatives, acquisition of new knowledge, and reintegration of new perspectives into one's life.

As an educator, I have embraced transformative learning as a means of teaching for change, not only in classrooms but also in workplaces, community and informal educational settings (Fisher-Yoshida et al., 2009) and integrated it in my pedagogy aiming to engage students in challenging their philosophical assumptions and theoretical paradigms. In a world increasingly fragmented by distance, ignorance and fear, my fieldwork-informed research-built bridges that reach beyond the divide. More bridges are needed, and I am open to playing my role in building them. I have changed my teaching praxis, espousing models of change and development that transcend the classrooms—the main pivot is overcoming distances—cultural and religious—and acknowledging the essence of humanity as it shines through the eyes of the other. My simple yet momentous epiphany was not about seeing the light—it was about seeing people as bearers of the image of God.

Intercultural and interreligious experiences are significant factors that may help navigate the complexities of different perspectives, values, and beliefs. My lived experiences have fostered in me a greater understanding and respect for people from diverse cultural and religious backgrounds. It is my hope that this chapter may provoke and inspire educators and researchers to transcend the challenges of interreligious and intercultural communication and thereby open new possibilities for deeper interfaith dialogue.

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Chapter 16
"All Humans Are Strangers—Almost Everywhere": Reflections on Human Belonging

Johannes M. Luetz

Abstract This chapter is an attempt to approach interfaith consciousness from the vantage point of personal lived experience. To this end, I give an autoethnographic account of living across cultures, countries and communities comprising diverse faith orientations. These lived experiences have formed and informed my interfaith awareness, which was nurtured over a lifetime of what I call 'longing for belonging'. I complement this autoethnographic account with biblical reflections on home and homelessness and conclude that my own sense of 'strangeness' can lead to a deferential appraisal and appreciation of the perceived 'foreignness' of others. This implies extending intellectual hospitality to adherents and proponents of other faiths as a conduit for nurturing and propagating interfaith awareness and practice. The reason is simply this: on the face of it, everybody alive today is a stranger in this world—almost everywhere.

Keywords Autoethnography · Third culture kids · Interfaith consciousness · Migrants · Homelessness · Belonging · Intellectual hospitality · Strangers

> I don't feel that I belong anywhere.
>
> (Samīr Naqqāsh, 1938–2004, Arab–Jewish writer; cited in Snir, 2019, p. xii)

J. M. Luetz (✉)
Graduate Research School, Alphacrucis University College, Brisbane, QLD, Australia
e-mail: johannes.luetz@ac.edu.au; jluetz@usc.edu.au; j.luetz@unsw.edu.au

School of Law and Society, The University of the Sunshine Coast, Maroochydore, QLD, Australia

School of Social Sciences, The University of New South Wales, Sydney, NSW, Australia

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Introduction

This chapter is dedicated to the homeless, the drifter, the lonely, the awkward, the displaced, the uprooted, and the migrant. It is penned in the hope that the lessons drawn from the lived experiences I share and synthesize may in some small way facilitate and invigorate human collaboration on the big issues of our time, such as war/peace, un/sustainability, in/equity, in/sufficiency, in/equality, lack/excess, poverty/opulence, and climate chaos, among others. Herein, interfaith engagement can play a constructive role (Chia, 2016; Cornille, 2013). Collaborations across religious divides stand a better chance of being effective and sustainable if fellow humans are not threatened by other faiths but can rather recognize and esteem in each other "the irreducible, glorious dignity of difference" (Sacks, 2009, p. 42). To this end, the chapter may be most appropriately understood as a kind of manifesto for interfaith consciousness that grapples with the big issues of our era (Küng, 2009; Luetz & Nunn, 2023; Sacks, 2020; Singer, 2018). To advance its argument, the chapter draws on a talk that I gave some years ago to a group of listeners at the Crown Hotel in Lutwyche/Brisbane as part of a series of invited monthly talks convened by Theology on Tap[1] (Alexander & Ringma, 2021). The talk was announced to the public as follows:

> Welcome to my colorful and confused world. We are five, between us we speak five languages. My wife was raised between Bolivia and Italy and spent extended periods of time in Mexico and Germany. I was raised in Sierra Leone, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Germany, and Australia, plus extended periods of time in Singapore, United States of America (USA), Costa Rica, South Africa, Estonia, Bolivia, among others. Our most dreaded question: "Where are you from?" When we got married, we had to choose a 'family name' and opted for the Bolivian naming convention.[2] It seemed to make sense—or so we thought. In hindsight, I often wonder … we now have three different last names for the categories father, mother, and children. In synthesis, we are a blend of five, multiple backgrounds, multiple cultures, multiple languages, multiple last names. Are we confused enough? Come and find out. Hear a talk where the speaker tries to explain all this to himself. His talk includes biographical and biblical reflections on longing and belonging, home and homelessness. He also draws on findings from his Ph.D. research, which was about (you guessed it)—international migration.

[1] First published in *Pub Theology* through Piquant Editions (Luetz, 2021). The organisers describe the Theology on Tap format as follows: "The words 'theology' and 'pub' don't normally go together. For many a pub is the place where you hang out with your colleagues after work on a Friday night … Theology, on the other hand, usually belongs to the seminary classroom and the church … Here are some reasons for making this strange connection: (1) theology does not belong only to the church, it also belongs to the public sphere; (2) theological discussion need not occur only in the classroom. It can take place anywhere, including the pub; and (3) theology does not belong only to theologians. All Christians, and people of other faiths, can engage in rigorous reflection." (Alexander & Ringma, 2021, p. xv).

[2] As in most Latin American countries, Bolivians usually have two legal surnames: the father's surname (first) and the mother's surname (second). Upon getting married, a woman adds her husband's first surname to her first surname with the connector "de". For example, if María Lopez Perez marries Pedro Rivera Solis, she will be called María Lopez de Rivera. Her children carry both the father's (first) and mother's (second) surname, such as Ana Rivera Lopez. Her husband retains his surnames unchanged. The members of this family unit will thus de facto have three different last names.

This talk, which is reproduced below as delivered in 2018, forms the autoethnographic 'data' and center piece of this chapter (Section "The Talk (November 4, 2018): Autoethnographic Reflections on Longing and Belonging") and is subsequently analyzed in light of its relevance for interfaith consciousness (Section "Discussion: Autoethnography and Interfaith Consciousness"). All social research is naturally subject to limitations (Bryman, 2016; Punch, 2014), and autoethnographic research is no exception (Adams et al., 2015, 2022). For this reason, Section "Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research" critically appraises the limitations of this autoethnographic discourse and sketches opportunities for future research. Finally, the chapter closes with a succinct concluding synthesis that takes stock of the study's contribution to this nascent field of interfaith consciousness (Section "Conclusion"). To set the scene, the chapter opens with a discussion of autoethnographic research as a method.

Autoethnography as a Method for Interfaith Research

Expressed in simple language, autoethnography comprises three essential elements: 'auto' (self), 'ethno' (culture), and 'graphy' (writing). Simply put, research may be described as autoethnographic if it engages all three areas jointly (Ellis et al., 2011). According to Adams et al. (2022, p. 3), the focus on 'auto' "foregrounds the author's personal experience and reflections" and may entail "intimate and vulnerable experiences that sometimes bring forth shame or sorrow." The focus on 'ethno' "brings together the personal and the cultural" (p. 3) and may rely on "fieldwork in 'natural settings' [to] offer insights about issues and contexts that other research methods are unable to access" (p. 3). The focus on 'graphy' reflects writing and representation that may include "techniques of 'showing' and 'telling' to select, frame, organize, and represent experience" (p. 3) so that it may reveal a "vibrant story that revels in rich description" (p. 4).

In terms of its evolution, autoethnography may be most appropriately comprehended as a research method that evolved in the 1980s in response to the ontological, epistemological, and axiological limitations inherent in other research methods (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). More specifically, social researchers progressively recognized that "perception is reference dependent" (Kahneman, 2003, p. 1454). Just as every place of arrival is reached from some other place of departure (or stopover), every understanding is similarly attained and held in reference to other understandings. It is therefore by inference "impossible to arrive anywhere from nowhere" (Luetz & Nunn, 2020, pp. 295–296). This state of affairs in social research underscores the significance of context, lived experience, and storytelling for meaning-making.

As social scientists became progressively uncomfortable with the epistemology of positivism (as espoused by the natural/physical sciences), which is based on the premise that objective 'truth' exists independently in the world, waiting to be deductively 'verified' by impartial and detached scientists through hypothesis-testing, they

reformed and reconceived new objectives and forms of social science inquiry (Luetz et al., 2020). This paradigmatic shift increasingly privileged the epistemology of constructivism, which is based on the premise that 'truth' about social matters is subjectively 'constructed' by people and must therefore be described qualitatively by locally immersed and socially conscious researchers through a process of inductive theory-generation (Bryman, 2016; Luetz et al., 2020; Punch, 2014). In short, truth and knowledge are "contingent on describing activities of human beings" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 747). Social researchers do not find this state of play unusual or troubling (Bryman, 2016; Punch, 2014). Viewed from a pragmatist philosophical vantage point, epistemological differences between the physical/hard sciences and the social/soft sciences are not issues or problems to be resolved but simply paradigmatic and disciplinary dissimilarities to be lived with (Chen & Luetz, 2020).

Although sometimes circumscribed by different terms (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, pp. 739–743), autoethnography has become over recent years an increasingly popular methodological framework for in-depth qualitative social research (Adams et al., 2015, 2022). There are several reasons for this rise in popularity:

(1) Autoethnography expressly welcomes "stories and storytelling as ways of knowing" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 10);
(2) it conjoins and balances "intellectual and methodological rigor, emotion, and creativity" (Adams et al., 2015, p. 2);
(3) it invites perspectives that "deepen our capacity to empathize with people who are different from us" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 3);
(4) it "bridges the scientific with the affective" (Morsi, 2022, p. 507); and
(5) it is suited to overcome the limitations inherent in canonical research in respect of studying race, gender, sexuality, age, ability, class, education, and/or religion (Clifton, 2014; Ellis et al., 2011; Morsi, 2022).

As such, autoethnography is abundantly suited for interfaith research (Dreistadt, 2022) and typically reflects the following characteristics: The writing is in the first person, resembles a story, is personal, privileges depth over breadth, and is evocative (Jenks, 2021, p. 151). While canonical research beholds "from the outside", autoethnography contemplates "from the inside" (Bochner, 2017, p. 69). Therefore, "fieldwork necessarily includes the observer" (Bochner, 2017, pp. 69–70) and assumes "that the knower is implicated in every knowledge claim." Stories thereby become the central autoethnographic 'data' for meaning-making:

> The usefulness of these stories is their capacity to inspire conversation from the point of view of the readers, who … enter empathetically into worlds of experience different from their own, and actively engage in dialogue regarding the social and moral implications of the different perspectives and standpoints encountered. Invited to take the story in and use it for themselves, readers become coperformers, examining themselves through the evocative power of the narrative text. (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 748)

In short, autoethnography employs storytelling for the purpose of meaning-making (Adams et al., 2015). In the process, it uses "photographs, journals, and recordings" (Ellis et al., 2011; Herrmann, 2005) and "turns life into language" (Bochner, 2017, p. 73). Importantly, aiming to propagate participant or protagonist

perspectives that are both "socially-just and socially-conscious" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 1), autoethnography is cognisant of deferential representation and relational ethics of care (Ellis, 2007, 2017; Luetz, 2019a). True to the maxim "nothing about us, without us" (Charlton, 2000, p. 1), autoethnography is intentional about being inclusive, about "consulting the unconsulted" (Luetz et al., 2019, p. 120), and about giving voice and visualization to hidden, voiceless, and/or marginalized individuals or communities (Adams & Holman Jones, 2008; Clifton, 2014).

With these traits and propensities, autoethnography is suited to frame my narrative as a self-confessed "misfit". My story is heard next. It intersects with the stories of selected contemporaries who have informed my narrative as fellow migrants and willing research participants. These stories are told in the hope that they may inspire interfaith mindfulness and offer the reader a kind of human companionship. Ellis (2007, p. 26) has characterized this as follows: "Writing difficult stories is a gift to self, a reflexive attempt to construct meaning in our lives and heal or grow from our pain … our stories potentially offer readers companionship when they desperately need it."

The perspectives presented in this chapter were derived from years of detailed journaling, field notation, and the systematic collection of data that were analyzed as part of university-sponsored field research (Luetz, 2013). This chapter reports selected research approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the University of New South Wales (UNSW) Advisory Panel B for the Arts, Humanities and Law (Ref. No. 10 121). Research participants gave their consent to being quoted by name and having their photos depicted.

The Talk (November 4, 2018): Autoethnographic Reflections on Longing and Belonging

Good afternoon! Abraham Lincoln famously said: "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool, than to speak and remove all doubt" (Shapiro, 2006/1931, p. 466). It is a tempting prospect indeed to remain silent, close my talk here, sit down, and be thought a fool. This may indeed be preferable to continuing my speech and removing all doubt. Even so, while I contemplate this enticing option, I wish to acknowledge my lovely family, who are here with me today, and who are at least partially to blame—and to thank—for the wonderful potpourri of color and confusion that will be laid bare over the coming thirty minutes—my wife Wendy, and my children Noah, Daniel, and Aurora.

This talk has three parts. Part 1 will present some biographical reflections on my search for belonging and my perceived sense of rootlessness and homelessness in this world. Part 2 will present some examples from my Ph.D. research about displaced people in parts of the world. Part 3 will present selected biblical passages and reflections on home and homelessness, longing and belonging.

Part 1: Biographical Reflections: Growing Up Among Worlds

Welcome to Part 1, where all will be laid bare about my wonderfully or woefully colorful and confused world—well, maybe not quite all. Between us in our family of five, we speak five languages, English, German, Italian, Spanish, and Swiss. If you think Swiss isn't a language, just wait until this talk has progressed enough to address my challenges of adjusting to life in Switzerland. Well, and then there is now also a sixth language spoken in my family, the delightful 'baby-babble' of my lovely one-year-old daughter—perhaps some of you have also come across this language?

My wife was raised between Bolivia and Italy and spent extended periods of time in Mexico and Germany. I was raised in Sierra Leone, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Germany and Australia, and then spent extended periods of time in USA, Costa Rica, Estonia, South Africa, Singapore, Bolivia, and Israel. Our most dreaded question is: "Where are you from?" I am now [harrumph] years old. During this lifetime, I have lived on six continents. The one continent where I haven't lived is Antarctica, and I don't intend to. Moreover, I have also travelled to sixty-nine countries, and I have lived in twelve. Incidentally, this number may go up from twelve to thirteen if we were to count the West Bank in Palestine as a separate country from Israel—but now it gets political and protracted—and Part 1 of my talk is not about Israel and Palestine but about my own biography, which has caused me to feel profoundly lost and homeless in this world.

Recently I attempted counting the number of times I have had to move house. This was a difficult exercise. I counted around fifty addresses where I have lived over the short period of my [harrumph] years. Over the course of my life, I have met few people with such a level of rootlessness. Except perhaps my wife, who has also lived on four continents, has travelled to twenty-six countries, and has had to move a total of forty-one times. I think it is true to say that while both of us feel profoundly homeless, we have been blessed to have found a home in each other. As so-called "Third-Culture Kids" (TCKs) (What is a TCK?, 2022), we have had similar experiences. According to Pollock et al. (2017), the concept 'third culture' can be understood as a new kind of interstitial space between the home culture or passport culture ('first culture') of the parents, and the host culture ('second culture'), into which the family has moved. Accordingly, the term 'third culture' then refers to a new kind of neither/nor cultural world: "a way of life that is neither like the lives of those living back in the home culture nor like the lives of those in the local community, but is a lifestyle with many common experiences shared by others living in a similar way" (Pollock et al., 2017, p. 17). This acculturation is acquired during childhood, which is why the conceptualization was initially coined to apply to children—TCKs—although this acquired identity endures into adulthood. According to Pollock et al. (2017):

> A Third Culture Kid (TCK) is a person who has spent a significant part of his or her developmental years outside their parents' culture. The TCK frequently builds relationships to all of the cultures, while not having full ownership in any. Although elements from each culture may be assimilated into the TCK's life experience, the sense of belonging is in relationship to others of similar background (pp. 15–16).

In short, you know you're a TCK when the question "where are you from?" has multiple reasonable answers. Do they mean my passport country? Or where I live now? Or where I was born? Or where I lived the most years? Or where I feel most at home?

You know you're a TCK when you flew before you could walk. In my case, I was born in Berlin, Germany, and I was five weeks old when my parents packed up and moved to West Africa to live and work as missionaries 'in the bush' (no electricity or running water) in the beautiful country of Sierra Leone.

You know you're a TCK when you feel odd being part of an ethnic majority. In my case, I was nearly seven years old when my parents moved from Sierra Leone to Switzerland, where for the first time in my life I no longer stood out as having a different skin color, and yet for the first years, I felt completely strange and out of step with everything around me. Even though we 'blended in' with respect to looks and skin color, as German and Krio speakers we couldn't understand a word of Swiss—until eventually we became fluent and could fool even the Swiss as being 'one of them'.

You know you're a TCK when you feel like a stranger in your 'home' country. In my case, I was fourteen when my parents told us children that we were moving again from Switzerland and were now going 'home' to Germany, a country where I had never lived. Now I felt even more out of step, because although I had never lived in Germany, presumably I was now 'home'. Being 'German' by passport, looks, and language, of course people expected me to play the part and frowned, sighed, laughed, or gasped when I couldn't.

Finally, you know you're a TCK when your life story uses the phrase, "Then we moved to …" three, four or five times. I was seventeen when I moved yet again from Germany, this time to live in Australia for one year as an exchange student with friends and church members of well-known social justice advocates Rev. Tim and Merridie Costello. The year in Australia was life-changing in that it kindled my faith in God. At the same time, it also sealed my fate as someone who had lost any sense of belonging to one place. Years of travelling the world with Youth With A Mission (YWAM) later on, did not make matters any easier.

If you're not feeling exhausted yet listening to all this, I am! Even so, there may perhaps be a redeeming element to so much movement, as Mark Twain famously quipped: "Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness, and many of our people need it solely on these accounts. Broad, wholesome, charitable views of men [women] and things cannot be acquired by vegetating in one corner of the earth all one's lifetime." (Twain, 1869, Conclusion, para. 3).

Who would be able to put up with so much culture, color, complexity, changeability, and confusion? Who would comprehend all of this, if not someone with a similar life background? And so, it is true in my lived experience that TCKs only ever feel truly at 'home' when they find themselves in the company of other people

with a similar 'cultural' background, that is, people who understand that there are multiple valid perspectives or ways of doing things.

When we got married, Wendy and I had to choose a family name and opted for the Bolivian naming convention. It seemed to make sense—or so we thought. In hindsight, I often wonder. We now have three different last names for the categories father, mother, and children. I cannot tell you how often a confused doctor gasps, "wow", when we present our Medicare card depicting our three different last names! Or imagine booking a flight and travelling together as a family and stressing to the travel agent to be "aware of the names!" In synthesis, we are a blend of five, multiple backgrounds, multiple cultures, multiple languages, and multiple last names.

In mentioning our three different family names, I am not even counting the variant spellings of my German surname 'Lütz'. When I first opened a bank account in the United States, the clerk replaced 'ü' with 'u', thus evolving my surname to 'Lutz'. This easily solved his problem that day as he did not have the key 'ü' anywhere on his computer keyboard. One can easily guess how this minor innovation of my name caused me trickle-down trouble whenever I needed to verify my identity in subsequent visits to the bank ("Sorry bro, your name there is different from the account holder"). Years later, living in Australia, my surname 'Lütz' was alternatively changed to 'Luetz' in official documents ("Sorry mate, we don't do Umlauts Down Under"). All those interested to discover more about German Umlaut usage may revel in the research literature (e.g., Chapman, 1994; Wiese, 1996). All others may agree with Mark Twain, who is well-known for his beef with the German language, once jibing that it must surely be the language spoken in heaven as it takes no less than an eternity to learn. In one of his notebook entries (July 29, 1878), he remarked: "Never knew before what Eternity was made for. It is to give some of us a chance to learn German." (Twain 1878/1975, p. 121). Elsewhere, he observed:

> My philological studies have satisfied me that a gifted person ought to learn English (barring spelling and pronouncing), in 30 hours, French in 30 days, and German in 30 years. It seems manifest, then, that the latter tongue ought to be trimmed down and repaired. If it is to remain as it is, it ought to be gently and reverently set aside among the dead languages, for only the dead have time to learn it. (Twain, 1880, p. 618)

On another occasion, Twain commented on his stay in Berlin in 1891–1892: "Berlin is a wonderful city … They teach everything here. I don't believe there is anything in the whole earth that you can't learn in Berlin except the German language." (Twain, 1935, p. 219). If it is true, as Twain asserts, that German is exceedingly difficult to learn, then Wendy can be forgiven for not acquiring perfect mastery of it while she lived—and we met—in Berlin.

The peculiar thing is that Wendy and I don't even share a robust proficiency in any one language that we use in common. My strong languages are German and English. Her strong languages are Spanish and Italian. Her German? So-so. I will probably give her a "satisfactory!" My Spanish? So-so. She will probably give me a "satisfactory!" And sometimes the inability to speak the same languages well has been frustrating, even exasperating. Even so, at the heart level, there is a depth of understanding that transcends language.

Of course, we've practiced each other's languages. What could be worse than studying each other's languages and yet not understanding them perfectly? I can tell you what's worse than studying each other's languages and still not understanding each other perfectly. *Not* studying these languages, and perfectly *mis*understanding each other! Or think of couples you know where a profound lack of comprehension may arise occasionally despite being able to speak the same language fluently.

So, then, there we have it: A German who speaks German, English, Swiss—and has a working knowledge of Spanish and French—and who has previously lived as a child in Sierra Leone, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Germany, plus extended periods of time as an adult in USA, Costa Rica, Estonia, South Africa, Singapore, Bolivia, and Israel, and now finds himself living in Australia … and … a lovely Latina from Bolivia who speaks Spanish and Italian—and has a working knowledge of German and English—and who has previously lived in Bolivia, Italy, Mexico, and Germany, and now finds herself living in Australia … and … our three lovely kids, who have visited their grandparents twice in Germany and twice in Bolivia, and are now being raised in Australia as trilingual children in the beautifully *sui generis* "fair dinkum bonza mate" Aussie lifestyle!

So then, are we confused enough? Rather probably so, some of you may be thinking. And is this a recipe for a perfect family or for a perfect storm? Before you reach your verdict, please allow me to progress to Part 2 of my talk, where I tell you a few stories from my Ph.D. field research, which I conducted in Papua New Guinea, Bolivia, Bangladesh, India, Maldives and the Philippines.

Part 2: Perspectives from Ph.D. Research: Migration as Adaptation to Change

My research was covered a few years ago by ABC Radio National, the Science Show (ABC, 2013). For the purposes of this talk, may it suffice that my Ph.D. focused on people made homeless by the adverse impacts of climate change; people who find themselves looking for a new home and belonging; people who more often than not find themselves in very difficult situations and insecure places.

In Bolivia, we went to the Chaco, a region ravaged by years of terrible drought. Scientists claim that climate change is increasingly implicated in droughts, intensifying evaporation and evapotranspiration as rising temperatures suck up more and more moisture from the drying ground, rendering agricultural practices more and more challenging (Díaz et al., 2010; Vicente-Serrano et al., 2015). As a result, thousands of smallholder farmers are migrating to cities, looking for work and a new lease on life. More often than not, they are overwhelmed by the difficulties they encounter there as they search for a new sense of belonging (Luetz, 2013, pp. 89–166).

Let me share about Doña Candida, who I met in her small rural village of El Cruze (Fig. 16.1). She shared with me the difficulties that the drought had presented in her village, and how she had to leave her children in the village in the care of relatives

Fig. 16.1 At the home of Doña Cándida (pictured in Luetz, 2013, p. 154) in the Bolivian village El Cruce (photo by author)

while she went looking for work in the city of Santa Cruz, only to return again eight months later when she could no longer bear the pain of separation from her children. She said:

> We left in March or April and returned in December. We left the children in the care of an uncle. My husband worked in the sugarcane harvest, I worked as a domestic worker. The work was hard. We were unable to save anything because we used up the earnings. We would prefer to stay here in El Cruce – if there were rains. But here there is nothing … right now we have nothing, no maize, nothing to sow … And the rains don't come like in the past. Dwindling agricultural yields is the number one reason why people migrate. Separating … from the community was very difficult … I came back twice to see my children … if I could have seen my children more often, like every two weeks, it would have been easier. This experience taught me it is better to stay … I really don't want to go anymore, no matter what! (Doña Cándida, cited in Luetz, 2013, pp. 153–154; cf. Luetz & Barrón Pinto, 2012, p. 52).

I heard dozens of very similar accounts that were underpinned by many abandoned village houses (Fig. 16.2). A background video documentary on aspects of the Bolivia field research was published by the University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney) on June 13, 2011 and elaborates pertinent issues (UNSW-TV, 2011).

There is more that can and should be said about my time with these precious informants, but time constrains me to move on from Bolivia to Bangladesh, to tell you of other encounters.

In Bangladesh, we went to Bhola, the country's biggest island. Thousands of islanders are progressively uprooted from their land as erosion eats away the very land underneath their feet. A background video documentary on aspects of my Bangladesh field research was published by UNSW Sydney on February 18, 2015 and is publicly available (UNSW-TV, 2015).

Fig. 16.2 Abandoned houses in out-migration affected Guaraní communities visited during field research in Bolivia's Gran Chaco region (photos by author; Luetz, 2013, p. 98)

Scientists say that climate change is implicated in the cyclones and erosion problems afflicting coastal communities in Bangladesh (Agarwal et al., 2023; Luetz, 2018; Luetz & Sultana, 2019; Sultana & Luetz, 2022). Many of the communities I visited in 2011 no longer exist, having disappeared on account of erosion and land loss. One field research site was geotagged in 2011 and shows that the place where interviews took place in 2011 has since disappeared due to coastal erosion.[3] As a result of land loss, thousands migrate to the cities, including Bangladesh's megacities, Dhaka and Chittagong (Figs. 16.3, 16.4, 16.5 and 16.6). Most migrants end up in informal settlements, where they crowd together with millions of other urban poor who share a similar fate. According to a World Bank study, between 1,000 and 2,000 new migrants arrive each day. Although they are very capable survivors, migrants are often forced to put up with appalling and subhuman conditions, chiefly because they have no alternative options (Muriel, 2012; World Bank, 2007, pp. xi, xiii; cf. Luetz, 2018). Having grown by more than 700,000 people in 2022, Dhaka's 2023 population is estimated at more than 23 million (UN World Urbanization Prospects, n.d.).

In one of these slums, I met Khaleda Begum with her baby (pictured in Luetz, 2013, p. 191). She described to me the hardships of living in a Chittagong slum and explained why she had migrated. She said:

[3] https://goo.gl/maps/byN0F; exact location in https://youtu.be/PBJeelgnadU?t=347.

Fig. 16.3 Bangladesh on the move; rickshaws in Dhaka. Many migrants arrive in Dhaka and Chittagong, Bangladesh's largest cities (photo by author)

Fig. 16.4 With more than 23,000 people per km^2 (UN World Urbanization Prospects, n.d.), Dhaka is one of the most densely settled conglomerates in the world (photo by author)

Fig. 16.5 Urban sprawl; Dhaka and Chittagong abound with both formal and informal human settlements (photo by author)

Fig. 16.6 Informal settlement in Dhaka. Dozens of migrants warmly welcomed me into their new neighborhoods and homes, expressing heartfelt hospitality (photo by author)

> Everybody in this slum is a migrant, many from Barisal, most are here because of floods or cyclones. Rent in the slum is expensive. One room is 2,200 Taka,[4] two rooms are 4,000 Taka. I migrated from Bhola where multiple villages disappeared due to erosion. The main reason I migrated is erosion. (Khaleda Begum, cited in Luetz, 2013, p. 190; cf. Luetz, 2018, p. 78)

In the same slum, I also met Hanufa Sheik with her family (pictured in Luetz, 2013, p. 192). She described livelihood loss following Cyclone Sidr in 2007 as the tipping point that triggered her migration. She said:

> Three years ago, I came here with my husband and family. Cyclone Sidr destroyed all household and other properties. At that time, we had no income opportunity there and so we moved here. After Cyclone Sidr, we stayed on for one more year. It was a struggle period. Then we moved. We moved when there was nothing to earn, when we felt completely helpless. This was the tipping point. (Hanufa Sheik, cited in Luetz, 2013, p. 191; cf. Luetz, 2018, p. 79)

What do these stories have in common? Three things: First, climate change adds to the heavy burdens many people are already carrying. Second, the migrants are very capable survivors and have a profound sense of agency. Third, the protagonists are all characterized by a strong longing for belonging. And yet, there is a huge difference in "capability"; this is a well-known concept in development studies (Luetz et al., 2019; Sen, 1999). For example, "an affluent person who fasts may have the same functioning achievement in terms of eating … as a destitute person who is forced to starve, but the first person does have a different 'capability set' than the second (the first can choose to eat well and be nourished in a way the second cannot)" (Morrison, 2009, p. 242; attributed to Sen, 1999). Expressed in simple language, not all migrants have the same capabilities. As colorful and confused as my own family background may be, we have had more choice about where and how to live than millions of poor migrants whose only option is to eke out a living in a slum.

In one Chittagong slum, I received a tap on the shoulder by a man who said that the garment factory where he was working produced the brand of jeans I was wearing that day. This was most interesting to me. I had bought the blue jeans at a well-known Australian department store. You would all know it. And the brand was a popular label. Despite having been on sale at the time of purchase in Sydney, with the price reduced by about fifty percent, my pair of blue jeans had still not been cheap to buy. When I questioned him, the man revealed that he was earning the equivalent of two to three dollars per day. He was essentially living and working in slave-like conditions.[5] In short, not all migrants have the same capabilities, options, and choices.

Before closing my talk with biblical reflections, let me recap. Part 1 seemed to conclude that my family is feeling rather homeless in this world, longing for a home,

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[4] On the day the interview took place, 2,200 Taka was equivalent in value to approximately US $29 (Luetz, 2013, p. 190).

[5] Thankfully, worker exploitation in the garment industry is coming under growing scrutiny from organisations such as Australian Baptist World Aid, whose Ethical Fashion Report seeks to empower buyers to purchase only from companies that treat their workers ethically: www.behindthebarcode.org.au.

which we have found, in part, in each other. Part 2 seemed to suggest that there are millions of other migrants in the world who similarly yearn for a 'home', but most of them do not have the capability to choose how and where to settle. And chances are, that there are also people in this room today who may still be longing and looking to find their true home.

Part 3: Biblical Reflections on Longing and Belonging, Home and Homelessness

Let's listen to the Bible. It is replete with examples of people on the move. People who felt out of step. People who lived as strangers, even though they were seemingly in the centre of God's will. Let's note some examples. For instance, there is Abraham, of whom it is said that he lived like a stranger:

> By faith Abraham made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Heb. 11:9–10).

Note that Abraham lived "like a stranger in a foreign country", even though he was in fact "in the promised land" itself. Two verses later the passage talks about Abraham and "countless" others who were all living as aliens and strangers on earth. It says,

> All these people … admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Heb. 11:13–16).

Moving to the New Testament, let's remember that Jesus' own mother Mary, "gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in bands of cloth, and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn" (Luke 2:7). This is how Christ's life on earth began: as one who was de facto without permanent abode from birth. At the end of his life, hours before his death, Christ reiterated his earthly "homelessness" status before the Roman governor Pontius Pilate, saying: "My kingdom is not from this world" (John 18:36). In other words: "My home is somewhere else."

In short, from the time of his birth, through to the time of his death, Christ reportedly lived as a stranger on earth, variously affirming that he was de facto anchorless on earth. One time he said it like this, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). It seems, Christ was acutely aware that his true home was elsewhere. Philippians 3:20 is even more explicit, emphatically stressing that our citizenship is not here on earth. It says, "But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20).

The Book of Revelation expands on this heavenly citizenship, as the Apostle John recounts his heavenly vision: "After this I looked, and there was a great multitude that no one could count, from *every* nation, from *all* tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, robed in white, with palm branches in their hands" (Rev. 7:9; emphasis added). Here the Bible paints a picture wherein heaven is apparently full of all sorts of homeless earthlings, people who come from every nation, tribe, people group, and language, whose earthly longing will give way to heavenly belonging, whose homelessness will be exchanged with an eternal home of glory in the presence of the Creator of the universe. Importantly, in this context, the word 'nation' does not signify political nation, but rather *ethne*, or 'ethnic' people group, which includes groups of so-called 'First Nations' and First Peoples'. Hence, Australians will not be present chiefly as people from the one political nation of this Great Southland of Australia, but rather from "hundreds of groups that have their own distinct set of languages, histories and cultural traditions" (AIHW, 2023, para. 1; Horton, 1996). Heaven is inclusive—migrants are welcome, refugees are wanted, Indigenous Peoples are esteemed.

So then, where does this leave us? We live on earth, but our home is in heaven? How can we make sense of it? I think we need to take care that we maintain balance, lest we become so heavenly minded as to be of no earthly good. Just like riding a horse, we can fall off to the left or to the right. So, we need to take care that we are sufficiently balanced to be 'salt and light' on earth, and yet at the same time sufficiently heavenly minded to remember that we are all temporary residents here, earthly sojourners, merely passing through, en route to a different and final eternal dwelling place.

Six weeks ago, a For Sale sign was erected outside our rental property. Having only lived in the house for less than a year, the looming prospect of being forced out and moving—yet again—has driven us to tears and to prayer. For all those of us, who find themselves longing for belonging, who yearn for a home in place of homelessness, may you—may we—find hope in the words of Jesus, who comforted his disciples with the following words: "Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you?" (John 14:1–2).

Discussion: Autoethnography and Interfaith Consciousness

Considering the above autoethnographic account with its gesture towards theological meaning-making, this section now seeks to offer some critical synthesis. Part 1 presented my self-perceived homelessness, along with the longing for belonging, which I found, in part, in my family. Part 2 presented the perspectives of selected migrants in countries of the developing world who expressed similar sentiments of yearning for a home, albeit many admitted feeling constrained in their capability to choose how and where to settle. Part 3 assembled selected biblical scriptures to

remind the reader that the experience of human homelessness is in some way the normal and normative human experience—it is the central theme of some of the greatest literary and religious writings, including, for example, the Old Testament, Homer's Odyssey (eighth century BCE), St Augustine's City of God (c. 413–426), Dante Alighieri's Divine Comedy (c. 1308–1320), John Milton's Paradise Lost (c. 1658–1663), and John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress (c. 1678), among others (Mangalwadi, 2012). In short, the autoethnographic talk may be synthesized as reflecting the timeless human yearning for a home as experienced by myself (Part 1), other migrants (Part 2), and other humans since time immemorial (Part 3).

Set against this background, this section will develop three arguments for interfaith disposition. These arguments are drawn from the storytelling above and will be elucidated below. Thereafter, the discussion will note some limitations in respect of autoethnographic research, whereafter the chapter will close with a succinct concluding synthesis that recapitulates its contribution to the nascent field of interfaith consciousness.

The first argument for interfaith disposition is simply that based on current global demographic trends it makes a lot of sense to engage in this area. There are a lot of people on the move (Khanna, 2021). Today there are more people living outside their countries of origin (and frequently among people of faith orientations that are different from their own) than ever before in human history (Olusoga et al., 2022). According to the World Migration Report 2022 of the International Organization for Migration (IOM, 2021), global human mobility has risen from 153 million migrants in 1990, to 281 million in 2020. Even adjusting for population growth and the onset of COVID-19, which the report acknowledges as "a truly seismic event" (IOM, 2021, p. 2), global human mobility remains on an unbroken upward trajectory. Approximately one in thirty humans alive today are international migrants (281 million in 2020). This is in addition to the eighty-nine million refugees, asylum seekers, and IDPs[6] who were living in displacement in 2020 (IOM, 2021). More recently, UNHCR (2022) has estimated the number of forcibly displaced people around the world to have increased to "more than 100 million" (para. 2). In short: "Never before has there been so much human movement" (Mehta, 2019, p. 6).

Aside from the staggering scale of individual human suffering and yearning for a home that is masked by such dispassionate statistics, there are additional millions of people who are not even captured by such reporting, such as the forced migrants whose stories are told in Section "The Talk (November 4, 2018): Autoethnographic Reflections on Longing and Belonging" above. Looking to the future, there is now also the looming prospect of growing environment-related and climate-linked forced human migration, which can be hard to fathom, both conceptually and in terms of likely scale (Luetz & Merson, 2019). Forecasts of future 'climate refugees' stretch to 1 billion people at the upper end (Luetz, 2019a, 2019b). In synthesis, there is an argument that based on current global demographic and mobility trends it makes a

[6] Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) are people who have been forced to leave their homes because of conflict, violence, human rights violations or disasters, and who have not crossed an international border (OHCHR, 2022).

lot of sense to promote initiatives that foster interfaith understanding among a global and globalising populace that is progressively migrating and dispersed (Duderija & Rane, 2019; Khanna, 2021; Mehta, 2019; Olusoga et al., 2022).

The second argument for interfaith disposition is related to the first and is underpinned by current global environmental and climatic trends. In short, planetary-scale problems make interfaith disposition an increasingly inescapable imperative—at least if viewed from the premise that multiple billions of humans will continue living together on planet Earth in the context of a fast-depleting non-renewable resource base (Dalai Lama, 2020; Kates & DeSteno, 2021). As planetary boundaries are overstepped and human-induced global warming continues unchecked, so do increases in extreme weather events, droughts, floods, heat stress, bushfire risk, human health problems, and rises in the impacts of disasters, among others (Luetz & Leo, 2021; Richardson et al., 2023). If past gains in biodiversity are to be comprehended as 'creation'—as held by religions all over the world (Leeming, 1995) —then correspondingly current biodiversity losses may be understood as "decreation", a term used by McKibben (2005, p. 8) to denote the undoing of "the natural order we found on this earth."

In 2019 the United Nations warned (IPBES, 2019) that "Humans are driving one million species to extinction" (Tollefson, 2019, p. 171) in what is known among scientists as the sixth and most devastating extinction event in the Earth's history (Kolbert, 2014). In this context, it seems self-evident that the gargantuan challenges facing humanity today can be overcome only if humans from diverse religious backgrounds and faith traditions can meaningfully collaborate in support of human rights, reconciliation, sustainability, justice, and peace (Kärkkäinen, 2013; Luetz & Nunn, 2023). Rabbi David Rosen, who is known for his efforts to promote reconciliation between the three Abrahamic faiths, posited, "whether it's environmental issues, global warming, or whether it's terrorism and violence … we are so linked today that we either manage to live together, or we basically have no tomorrow, and no future for our children and grandchildren" (cited in Kirkwood, 2007, p. 105). In synthesis, the second argument for interfaith disposition is nurtured by the building scale and urgency of the global crises of our era. If humans wish to continue populating this planet by the billions, they have no choice but to collaborate across religious and ideological divides. In this sense, human survival is predicated on interfaith consciousness, widely shared.

The third argument for interfaith disposition is based on the premise that the experience of human homelessness is, in some way, the normal and normative human experience. All humans are in some way strangers on earth who yearn for a home. Their joint 'strangeness' unifies them and holds important implications for their capacity to welcome other strangers and offer them hospitality, both practically and intellectually. This idea will now be briefly presented.

There are at least two ways in which all humans can be said to be strangers who do not fully belong. First, all humans are strangers in the sense that their belonging is spatially delimited. This means that even individuals who express that they fully

belong *in situ* are by inference strangers *ex situ*, namely everywhere else. Stated differently, on the face of it, all humans are strangers in this world—almost everywhere. The simple act of traveling can remind humans that in most places they are strangers, not natives. Thus, traveling can be profoundly formative (Nelson & Luetz, 2021) because "much of who we are is where we have been" (Langewiesche, 2011, p. 60). Travel promotes broadmindedness and may function as a quintessential antidote to human ignorance—when humans are and remain unaware of their unawareness ("I don't know that I don't know"). Second, all humans are strangers in the sense that their belonging is temporally delimited. This means that even humans who express that they fully belong *in situ* will admit—if they are honest—that they are strangers in light of their temporality and transience. Stated differently, human mortality limits any sense of belonging *in situ* to a temporary state, wherefore all humans may be conceived as temporary residents rather than true permanent belongers.

Cultivating an awareness of the universality of human 'strangeness' has important implications for interfaith consciousness. Self-aware strangers tend to be inquisitive and teachable. Self-aware strangers tend to recognize that they have much to learn and are ready to listen. Self-aware strangers are more often than not students of life rather than lecturers of it. They tend to listen, learn, and add to their learning. In short, embracing the dispositions of a stranger can be conducive to cultivating inquiry, curiosity, learning, and ultimately, humility. Relatedly, strangers are typically needy and thus more readily prepared to offer and receive hospitality, both practically and intellectually; this informs their capacity to act as intellectual hosts and guests and holds important ramifications for interfaith interactions. Cornille (2013, p. 20) has referred to this human capability as "epistemological humility" and "hospitality towards the truth of the other." Conceptualizing the idea of "intellectual hospitality", Stephens (2021) has cast hospitality as a scripture-shaped[7] appeal to love and welcome the stranger: "The application of hospitality to the domain of thinking involves conceiving of other minds as strangers to whom we can offer welcome as guests. Their membership at the table is not predicated on their ideas, but on their common unity with us" (p. 39) as fellow strangers. Hence, hospitality is not based on agreement but rather on relationship and genuine intellectual generosity; "intellectual hospitality deliberately seeks to think with those whom we disagree, just as we might eat with those whom we do not know" (p. 40). It conceives of listening not as an act of agreement or endorsement but as an essential element of loving and welcoming the stranger, wherein genuine "welcome" goes well beyond mere tolerance or agreeing to disagree agreeably:

> one cannot critique a position one does not understand, … the best kind of understanding is to first articulate my guest's perspective in their own dialect and to their satisfaction. A theological ethic of intellectual hospitality posits that if one cannot discern the logic of an alternative position, indeed if one cannot appreciate and articulate why an idea is persuasive and compelling to our guest, then we have not truly welcomed them to the intellectual table. (Stephens, 2021, p. 40)

[7] See, e.g., Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 3:2; 5:9–10; Tit. 1:8; Heb. 13:2; 1 Pet. 4:9; 3 John 8 (cf. Stephens, 2021).

Duderija (2017) has singled out intellectual hospitality as "the most critical or sole sufficient condition for constructive [interfaith] dialogue" (p. 313). In synthesis, the third argument for interfaith disposition is based on the premise that all humans are in some way joint strangers who find themselves assembled around a kind of buffet table, both offering and savoring dishes of diverse religious nourishment. Their common "strangeness" enables them to assume both the roles of intellectual hosts and guests (givers and receivers) with ease, while their intellectual hospitality moderates dogmatic "critique, refutation, and dispute" (Gallagher, 2007, p. 137). In this panorama, all humans are inherently strangers in time and space and, therefore, inherently capable of welcoming—and being welcomed by—other fellow strangers and sojourning companions (Cornille, 2013; Siddiqui, 2015). Crucially, to be able to offer true intellectual hospitality to others, human strangers must also be *self-aware* of their own 'stranger' status as conceptualized above.

Further to this universal sense of human homelessness, wherein all people can be conceived as 'strangers' who do not fully belong spatially or temporally, anthropologic consciousness of transience may also point to the possibility of transcendence and otherworldly belonging. The Jewish people were dispersed for millennia, but it only made their sense of identity stronger (Gilbert, 2010; Greenspoon, 2019; Hodes, 2019). Their experience of exile was a constant reminder of a transcendent yearning for a true home beyond the border of history and geography (Berg, 1996; Elimelekh, 2013; Snir, 2019). This is affirmed by countless returning Jewish exiles who upon coming 'home' to the earthly state of Israel affirmed an overwhelming sense of lingering strangeness and homelessness (Berg, 1996; Greenspoon, 2019). The Arab–Jewish writer Samīr Naqqāsh (1938–2004) made no secret of his feeling profoundly estranged in his new 'homeland' Israel following his emigration from Iraq: "I don't consider myself as belonging to any one place or society ever since circumstances uprooted me from Iraq and these same circumstances refused to replant these roots in Israel" (cited in Elimelekh, 2013, p. 69). Snir (2019, p. xii) quotes him as having bluntly lamented, "I don't feel that I belong anywhere." Sentiments of non-belonging are widely reported in the literature by many returning exiles (Berg, 1996). For example, Jewish returnees from India were reportedly so disillusioned by what they found in Israel that they returned to India, only to find that they did not really belong there anymore either, thus resulting in a kind of circular migration from India to Israel, back again to India, and back once more to Israel (Hodes, 2019). Concordantly, Wuthnow (2000) conceptualizes spiritual belonging not as 'a place' but rather 'a journey' where faith and migration go hand-in-hand.

Human yearning for transcendent belonging is also reflected in the traditional Jewish way of saying goodbye: "Next year in Jerusalem". Although *L'Shana Haba'ah B'Yerushalayim* (Hebrew: לשנה הבאה בירושלים), literally "Next year in Jerusalem," evokes memories of living in exile, it also expresses the timeless hope of eventual homecoming (Berg, 1996, p. 11)—but it is always the same, always 'next year', because the true Jerusalem is ideational, spiritual, and eschatological (Greenspoon, 2019). This understanding of 'home' embodying transcendental or even eternal qualities resonates with biblical wisdom literature that affirms God "set

eternity in the human heart" (Ecc. 3:11). The British academic and lay theologian C. S. Lewis (1898–1963) expressed it like this:

> Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing. If that is so, I must take care, on the one hand, never to despise, or be unthankful for, these earthly blessings, and on the other, never to mistake them for the something else of which they are only a kind of copy, or echo, or mirage. I must keep alive in myself the desire for my true country, which I shall not find till after death; I must never let it get snowed under or turned aside; I must make it the main object of life to press on to that other country and to help others to do the same. (Lewis, 1952/1996, pp. 120–121)

In other words, if there exists in humans a widespread longing for belonging and yearning for a home, as experienced by myself (Part 1), other migrants (Part 2), and all humans (Part 3), then according to Lewis' logic, there will also be a corresponding home to satisfy this longing. The seeds of this possibility of otherworldly human belonging are lodged in the Latin etymology of the word 'stranger' (lat. *extraneus*), which literally means, 'of external/outside belonging'.

Limitations and Opportunities for Future Research

It is appropriate to critically acknowledge some limitations in respect of autoethnographic research. As noted above (Section "Autoethnography as a Method for Interfaith Research"), autoethnography emerged around the 1980s in response to the perceived limitations inherent in canonical research (Bochner, 2017; Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Rather than considering the researcher as an impartial 'outsider looking in', autoethnography perceives the investigator as a personally invested and immersed 'insider looking around'. Through reporting personal experiences of culture/s from within and over time "the researcher becomes the research subject" (Pinner, 2018, p. 97). This unique author positionality also distinguishes autoethnography from autobiography (Ellis et al., 2011). Furthermore, it ascribes social research in general, and autoethnography in particular, a well-known subjective coloration (Chen & Luetz, 2020). This can open it up to criticisms of being "too artful and not scientific, or too scientific and not sufficiently artful" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 36) or make it vulnerable to being dismissed as "nonanalytic, self-indulgent, irreverent, sentimental, and romantic" (Denzin, 2014, p. 69).

Notwithstanding, social research is by nature "reference dependent" (Kahneman, 2003, p. 1454), cannot arise from "nowhere" or in isolation of context (Luetz & Nunn, 2020, p. 296), and is "contingent on the describing activities of human beings" (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 747). According to Kenneson (1995, p. 159), truth and knowledge "are inseparably bound up with human language." Accordingly, even if truth exists 'out there' as an objective entity waiting to be discovered, the very act of

human description will render it a construct of human perception. Kenneson (1995, pp. 155–170) adds, "There's no such thing as objective truth, and it's a good thing too." Dressed in human language, truth and knowledge must invariably be perceived and described 'from somewhere' rather than 'from nowhere'. Hence author positionality may be considered both an advantage and inherent limitation of autoethnographic writing. Viewing 'from *some*where' invariably implies not viewing 'from *else*where'. Furthermore, as noted by Bruner (1993),

> there is no such thing as a 'life as lived' … a life is created or constructed by the act of autobiography. It is a way of construing experience—and of reconstruing and reconstruing it until our breath or our pen fails us. Construal and reconstrual are interpretative … Obviously, then, there is no such thing as a 'uniquely' true, correct or even faithful autobiography (pp. 38–39).

Relatedly, it is obvious that an autoethnographer "retroactively and selectively writes about past experiences. Usually, the author does not live through these experiences solely to make them part of a published document; rather, these experiences are assembled using hindsight" (Ellis et al., 2011, para. 5). Hence autoethnography is limited in scope to those stories and people an author has selected to construct the text. "Telling stories as research" (Morsi, 2022, p. 507) naturally assumes the agency of the author's subjectivity and selectivity. Correspondingly, this autoethnographic writing is limited in scope to those family members and migrants who are mentioned explicitly. Of course, this limitation does not negate my sincere sense of gratitude towards the numberless 'silent' informants who are gratefully albeit namelessly recognized in the acknowledgments below.

The inter-religious theologian Knitter (1985) affirmed the interrelationship between biography and theology stating, "All theology, we are told, is rooted in biography" (p. xiii, cf. Kirkwood, 2007, p. 42). It may therefore be acknowledged as a further limitation that the biblical scriptures in this text were assembled not by a theologian but rather by a self-perceived sojourning "misfit" in an attempt to construct inter-religious common ground. This autoethnography is therefore best not held up to conventional standards of theological exposition but may be viewed more appropriately and modestly as a kind of experience-informed mini-manifesto for interfaith disposition.

One additional caveat must also be mentioned. The experiences of people who migrate in search of a new home can vary significantly. The experiences of some people (who thrive) are juxtaposed with the experiences of others (who suffer). Some people who find themselves caught in a 'strange' place may not feel inquisitive, teachable, and/or hospitable but rather frightened, overwhelmed, and/or resistant to the differences around them. As Moltmann et al. (1998, p. 17) pointed out, "We are always inclined to perceive God, the Absolute, only in whatever is like ourselves. What is like us confirms us in our identity, what is alien to us makes us uncertain. That is why we love what is like ourselves, and are afraid of what is strange."

While I cast the story of grieving my own rootlessness as an exercise in meaning-making, my experiences should not be misunderstood as being universally normative. There is a huge disparity in different people's capacity to respond to grief and

suffering, just as there are varied examples of autoethnographic researchers who similarly use "writing as a form of grief therapy" (Clifton, 2014, p. 1828). While the experiences of migration, loss, grief, and suffering can totally crush one person, they may strangely elevate another. Hence there is an opportunity to conduct "further qualitative study" (Clifton, 2014, p. 1828) into the linkages between human resilience and the formation of human 'belonging', including 'dual' and 'multiple' belongings (Berry & Hou, 2019; Klingenberg et al., 2021).

Moreover, while autoethnographic accounts may present the raw human experience of grieving as something meaningful, faith may provide a framework that opens viewpoints outward toward transcendence. In this sense, faith can play an important role in giving 'strangers' a sense of identity and 'home', even in strange environments. At the same time, Siddiqui (2015) reminds us to also expect the 'stranger' in familiar and nearby places:

> The polyvalent meanings of stranger in urban spaces today also demand that we think carefully how the stranger today is no longer the wayfarer of ancient scripture. Whereas the wayfarer or traveller was one with whom we would have a chance encounter, the one who might ask for food, water or shelter, the stranger today is often one who lives quite near us, with whom we share physical space in our more cosmopolitan societies (p. 15).

Finally, some closing comments are in order about generalisability. Ellis et al. (2011, para. 34) promote the idea that in autoethnography, matters of reliability and validity are best captured in the concept of "verisimilitude"—readers develop a sense that "the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true." For this to occur, it is necessary that "the story enables the reader to enter the subjective world of the teller—to see the world from her or his point of view" (Plummer, 2001, p. 401). To illustrate the idea of readers entering the story of a storyteller, Morsi (2022) tells the following tale, paraphrased below.

Legend has it that a Muslim Sultan used an art competition to settle a dispute between Greek and Chinese artists about which group should be considered the more skilful artisans. Ordering the creation of art to reflect the grandeur of God's creation, the Sultan left both sides to work on opposing walls in his palace, separated by a curtain. As the days passed, it emerged that the Greek artists used only bright dazzling paint, whereas the Chinese artists used only light-shimmering water. When a servant blew the trumpet, the Sultan inspected the respective creations, starting on the Greek side. The Sultan was awe-struck with wonder as he beheld the intricate beauty of rich and colorful handiwork, akin in ornate artistry to the Sistine chapel. The painting reflected gems and precious stones that glistened as stars, stretching history's canopy from the early days of creation to our current era. Melted gold and silver bestowed richness, grandeur, and majesty. Following his inspection of the Greek side, the Sultan drew back the curtain to behold the Chinese wall. At once, he stood shocked to gaze at himself. A luminous water-washed wall reflected his appearance like a giant mirror. His bodily reflection integrated into the Greek artwork behind him—the Sultan had entered the artistic scene as a protagonist. In Morsi's account, the Sultan had become "part of the storytelling" (p. 508).

In like manner, it is hoped that the stories told above have enabled the reader to enter the subjective life world of the storyteller as he has sought to make sense of human yearning for a home—his own (Part 1), that of other migrants (Part 2), and of humans since time immemorial (Part 3). Accordingly, the reader is entreated to overlook the limitations of this chapter and rather leverage them as opportunities for future interfaith research and practice. In this sense, the chapter ends with an invitation for humans to join together as active participants and protagonists in the timeless quest to create a world wherein inter-religious respect, dialogue and collaboration become more normative and formative (Atabongwoung et al., 2023; Chia, 2016).

Conclusion

This account has been penned from the positionality of a self-professing 'stranger' who examines his 'longing for belonging' through the lens of lived experience. My autoethnographic account includes selected autobiographical details, selected migrant accounts, and selected biblical scriptures. By bringing these sources into conversation with inter-religious perspectives and possibilities, this mini-manifesto for interfaith disposition advocates its central thesis: all humans are essentially strangers in a spatial and temporal sense ('all humans are strangers—almost everywhere'). Notwithstanding this state of affairs, human 'strangeness' may also be viewed as an ideational resource to inspire interfaith fellowship. Self-aware strangers tend to be inquisitive, teachable, generous, and hospitable. By recognizing their own temporary resident- and joint stranger status, humans are endowed with the capacity to adopt a posture of loving and welcoming other strangers, both practically and intellectually. In this sense, cultivating a consciousness of the universality of human 'strangeness' holds auspicious possibilities for interfaith interactions. If all humans are inherently strangers in time and space, then they are also inherently capable of welcoming—and being welcomed by—other fellow strangers. This understanding allows fellow strangers the liberty to offer and accept practical and intellectual hospitality as both guests and hosts with similar ease. It also implies that fellow humans need not be threatened by other faiths but may be free to esteem in others "the irreducible, glorious dignity of difference" (Sacks, 2009, p. 42). In today's age of planetary-scale problems, increasing human movement implies increasing human interdependence; and increasing human interdependence points to the progressively inescapable imperative to collaborate together beyond religious and ideological divides. In this sense, human perpetuity is predicated on interfaith consciousness, widely shared.

Fig. 16.7 Theology on Tap presentation on November 4, 2018 (photo by Wendy Barrón de Lütz, used with permission)

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Johannes M. Luetz (Associate Professor, BA/USA, MBA/Germany, Ph.D./Australia) is a senior social scientist based in Brisbane, Australia. He is the Director of Research Development at Alphacrucis University College and an Adjunct Professor in the School of Law and Society at the University of the Sunshine Coast (USC Maroochydore). In addition, he is affiliated with the University of New South Wales (UNSW Sydney), where he is an Adjunct Associate Professor in the School of Social Sciences. He has lived and worked across countries and continents

and conducts interdisciplinary humanitarian research at the science-faith, interfaith, and science-policy interface. He has consulted for World Vision on research raising awareness of the growing effects of climate change on vulnerable communities in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. His integrative research has led to several authored and edited books, including *Interfaith Engagement Beyond the Divide—Approaches, Experiences, and Practices* (Springer, 2023), *Beyond Belief—Opportunities for Faith-Engaged Approaches to Climate-Change Adaptation in the Pacific Islands* (Springer, 2021), *Innovating Christian Education Research—Multidisciplinary Perspectives* (Springer, 2021), *Reimagining Christian Education—Cultivating Transformative Approaches* (Springer, 2018), and *Planet Prepare* (WVI, 2008), among others. His research has featured in national news and documentaries. He has spoken at the UNSW Town and Gown annual signature dinner and has been a guest on ABC Radio National The Science Show. His research has attracted grants, prizes, scholarships, awards and distinctions, including best thesis prize (2006), UNSW UIP Award (2009), UNSW ASPIRE Award (2012) and best paper awards (2017, 2018, 2023), awarded at the World Symposium on Climate Change Impacts and Adaptation Strategies in Coastal Communities (Apia, Samoa), World Symposium on Social Responsibility and Sustainability (University of Edinburgh, Scotland), and World Symposium of Climate Change and Sustainable Development Centres (HAW Hamburg, Germany), respectively. International research highlights include involvement as author and Section Editor on *Quality Education—Encyclopedia of the UN Sustainable Development Goals* (Springer, 2020), the largest editorial project on sustainable development ever undertaken, and the world's most comprehensive publication on the United Nations SDGs. Recently he served as an editor on the Major Reference Work *Handbook on Climate Change Management—Research, Leadership, Transformation* (Springer, 2021). With 229 chapters and 600+ authors, and spread over a set of 6 volumes, the "Handbook" is the largest non-publicly funded editorial project on climate change adaptation ever produced. It was launched at the UN Climate Change Conference COP26 in Glasgow in November 2021. Dr Luetz is AC Chair of Human Research Ethics, Deputy Editor *International Journal of Climate Change Strategies and Management* (Emerald, Q1) and serves on the editorial boards of international journals *Christian Higher Education* (Routledge Taylor & Francis, Q1) and *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications* (nature portfolio, Q1), among others.