The im-
Possibility
of
INTERRELIGIOUS
DIALOGUE

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religions, empathy may, however, function as a basic principle of orientation. Teachings and practices of the other religion that elicit absolutely no empathic resonance or else negative empathy will probably not lead to a constructive dialogue or religious growth. On the other hand, the experience of profound empathic resonance with the religious other may point to similarities or compatibilities between religions and may open the way to religious growth and change. Even though one's own religious life and experience always remains the basis for empathic understanding of the religious other, empathy may still lead to an expansion of one's religious horizon and to a discovery of religious feelings and experiences hitherto unimagined. These experiences may then become the basis for an enrichment of one's own religious tradition.

Even though empathy may offer some indication of the compatibility of the teaching or practice of the other religion with one's own religious tradition, the possibility of religious growth will ultimately be determined not on epistemological but on theological or religious grounds. At the end of the day, whatever one gains by way of empathic resonance with the religious teachings and practices of the other religion, unless those teachings and practices are thought to contain a certain degree of truth, there can be little or no motivation to respond to them, let alone impulse toward change in oneself. The very possibility of dialogue itself, as an activity oriented to exchange and enrichment, depends finally on an attitude of theological openness by which one welcomes the presence of the other as a potential source of goodness and truth.

CHAPTER FIVE
HOSPITALITY

When all of the necessary conditions are fulfilled, the possibility of interreligious dialogue still ultimately depends on the ability of one religion to recognize truth in the other. This attitude of generous openness to the (possible) presence of truth in the other religion may be called hospitality. This term designates a recognition of the other as other and openness to learning from the other. Such hospitality constitutes the sole sufficient condition for dialogue. The very possibility of discovering authentic truth in the other should automatically awaken the desire for dialogue. And conversely, the denial of any truth beyond the boundaries of one's own tradition would eliminate all desire for dialogue, even when all of the other conditions are met.

In the context of the dialogue between religions, the term "hospitality" is often used to designate the need to welcome the religious other in spite of religious differences. Here, however, we use it to imply an attitude of openness and receptivity to those very differences as a possible source of truth. The possibility of growth and change in dialogue indeed depends on the recognition of truth in difference.

In the practice of dialogue, hospitality may be seen to have a special relation to humility: hospitality toward the truth of
the other requires recognition of the limitation or the partiality of one's own understanding of truth, while humility in turn is reinforced or enhanced by the discovery of new elements of truth in other religions. Though openness toward the possibility of discovering truth in teachings and practices different from one's own thus constitutes an essential condition for a constructive dialogue, religions are not on the whole inclined to such hospitality. Most religious faith is based on a belief in the fullness and sufficiency of one's own religious teachings and practices. The very idea that other religions might harbor truth that has not yet been captured within one's own tradition may thus be experienced as a threat to one's epistemic and religious confidence. This is why religions tend to deny the presence of truth in other religions, or else extend hospitality only to those beliefs and practices that are the same as or similar to their own. Against this, true hospitality — hospitality in its most robust form — involves the recognition of the other as other and openness to the possibility of being transformed by that difference. This recognition of distinctive truth beyond the boundaries of one's own religious perspective, however, often presupposes considerable hermeneutical creativity and effort.

Within the Christian tradition, it is primarily in the area of theology of religions that this effort has been attempted, with an appeal to any number of theological resources. It is to be noted that beliefs that at one time have been used as a basis for denying truth in other religions may at other times be used to open the tradition to the presence of truth in difference. For example, while the symbol of the Cross has often been understood as an expression of Christian uniqueness and exclusivism, it may also be seen to point beyond itself to the other, as reflected in the words of Stanislas Breton:

The weight of the Cross is identified with the weight of the other as other, with the mysterious weight that draws us to the region of our dissemblance.\(^3\)

In marking the specificity of Christianity, the Cross may thus be seen to open the tradition to that which is different and which must be engaged in pursuit of the fullness of truth. Given the fact that religious symbols and teachings may be used to deny as well as facilitate hospitality to the truth of other religions, we will need to review the different degrees and kinds of hospitality that may be found within any one religious tradition, and their effect upon the dialogue with other religions.

**NO HOSPITALITY**

It is probably no exaggeration to state that few religions are spontaneously inclined toward much generosity or hospitality toward the truth of other religious traditions. As an a priori attitude, this lack of hospitality may at times apply to all religions equally or to certain religions in particular. Religions often tend to develop negative prejudices toward so-called new religions, or religions that have emerged at a later date than their own.\(^4\) And the attitude of hospitality is often paradoxically more difficult with regard to family religions than with regard to religions with no historical or religious connection. Some of the reasons for this are obvious: new religions by their very existence challenge the truth of existing ones, and in the case of religions bearing substantial similarities, any difference comes to be experienced as a direct threat to one's own claims to truth. At times, religions also come to develop negative attitudes toward the truth of other religions in response to external pressures or threats. The Christian expression *extra*
ecclesiam nulla salus (outside the church, no salvation), for example, was only used with explicit reference to non-Christians at the Council of Florence (in 1442), at a time when the tensions between Christians, Jews, and Muslims ran high. And many of the pronouncedly exclusivist truth claims found in fundamentalist ideologies must probably be regarded as a direct reaction to the pressures of the modern world, including its religious diversity.

Though instances of explicit and blanket denial of truth in other religions are in fact relatively rare, most religions develop strategies of exclusion meant to juxtapose their own beliefs and practices with those of the other. In some cases, these strategies focus on the content of the other religion, singling out its conception of ultimate reality for attack. Thus, for instance, Justin Martyr's denunciation of pagan religion refers to their gods as fallen angels (angeli fornicatores) or as “evil demons” who “both defiled women and corrupted boys, and showed such fearful sights to men, that those who did not use their reason in judging of the actions that were done, were struck with terror; and being carried far away by fear and not knowing that these were demons, they called them gods, and gave to each the name which each of the demons chose for himself.”5 In other cases, however, a subtler strategy of exclusion may focus not on the content of the other religion but on its nature, which is then accorded a different, i.e., lesser status. Within Christianity, this has been accomplished by introducing oppositional categories such as “religion” versus “revelation,” and “faith” versus “belief.”

Faith versus Belief

A well-known Christian instance of exclusion by way of differentiation is found in the work of the famous Swiss theologian Karl Barth, and in particular in his manner of distinguishing between religion and revelation. For Barth, religion contains the whole of human forms of groping toward the divine, while revelation is defined as “the act by which in grace God reconciles man to Himself by grace.”6 While Christianity also contains certain characteristics of a religion, it is for him the only one that may be regarded as revelation. For Barth, this unique status is based not so much on the content of its teachings as on the reality of its divine election:

For the Christian religion is true, because it has pleased God, who alone can be the judge in this matter, to affirm it to be the true religion. What is truth, if it is not this divine affirmation? And what is certainty of truth, if not the certainty which is based solely upon this judgment, a judgment which is free, but wise and righteous in its freedom, because it is the freedom of God?7

It is thus the unmerited grace of God that renders the Christian religion both true and fundamentally distinct from all other religious traditions. One element that confirms or expresses the status of Christianity as a true religion is its emphasis on faith and grace as the means to salvation. Clearly aware of the fact that religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism also contain such devotional strands, Barth moves on to argue that it is not faith itself, but faith in the person of Jesus Christ that renders the Christian religion true:

Beyond all dialectic and to the exclusion of all discussion the divine fact of the name of Jesus Christ confirms what no other fact does or can confirm: the creation and election of this religion to be the one and only true religion.8
Barth's theology offers a clear example of the fact that the denial of truth in other religions is generally based on a priori religious grounds and can be maintained only through isolation from other religions. Recognizing that a commitment to Christianity is rooted specifically in faith, Barth discourages comparison with other religions, believing that it would “always and very quickly mean uncertainty regarding the truth of the Christian religion,” and that Christians would maintain confidence in the unique truth of its own revelation only insofar as they “can look away from themselves to the fact of God which alone can justify them.” In light of the revelation in Christ, all other forms of religion cannot but be regarded as “unbelief.” While extreme, this theological position is internally consistent, according to a logic that is particularly suited to religions based on divine revelation. If all truth is ultimately seen to derive from a single transcendental source, all forms of religion that do not acknowledge this source cannot but be regarded as deficient or false, or of an altogether different nature.

A second and somewhat related form of exclusivism by way of differentiation is found in Christian texts that emphasize the difference between faith, which is the proper Christian response to divine revelation, and “belief,” which may be found in other religious traditions. This distinction comes to the fore in the Vatican document Dominus Iesus, which, without denying that there may be elements of truth in other religions, nonetheless insists that “the distinction between theological faith and belief in the other religions must be firmly held.” Here faith means “the acceptance in grace of revealed truth which makes it possible to penetrate the mystery in a way that allows us to understand it coherently,” while belief is “that sum of experience and thought that constitutes the human treasury of wisdom and religious aspiration, which man in his search for truth has conceived and acted upon in his relationship to God and the Absolute.” As a result, the document emphasizes that only the canonical scriptures of Christianity may be referred to as “inspired texts” and that while there may be some elements of truth in other religions, “it is also certain that objectively speaking they are in a gravely deficient situation in comparison with those who, in the Church, have the fullness of the means of salvation.”

There can be little doubt that such an attitude of limited hospitality in Barth and in Dominus Iesus may be understood in part as a reaction to the threat of religious relativism emerging from liberal and pluralistic theologies. Barth underlines the form in which that threat appeared in his day when he acknowledges that a purely historical comparison between Christianity and other religions could never in itself support the superiority or uniqueness of Christianity. And in the introductory paragraphs of Dominus Iesus, we find a pointed and insightful discussion of the various challenges to traditional Christian self-understanding posed by “relativistic theories which seek to justify religious pluralism, not only de facto but also de jure (or in principle).” Even though it is under duress that religions often come to emphasize their own uniqueness and turn away from the truth of other religions, there is no denying that such absence of hospitality resonates with much religious self-understanding.

**Dialogue as Apologetics**

Strategies of exclusion render the teachings and practices of the other radically alien, so that the attitude of religious hospitality and the practice of dialogue appear either futile or pointless. While belief in the election of Christianity to be the
true religion should not give Christians a sense of superiority or arrogance with regard to other religious traditions, Barth also discourages all forms of engagement with other religions. Instead, he advocates an attitude of "tolerance," understood not in terms of acceptance of the validity or legitimacy of the teachings of other religions, but in terms of "forbearance" and recognition of one's own unmerited election. In the end, Barth believes that it is the responsibility of Christians to bring members of other religions to the true religion, for "it alone has the commission and authority to be a missionary religion, i.e., to confront the world of religions as the one true religion, with absolute self-confidence to invite and to challenge it to abandon its ways and to start on the Christian way."14

While this absence of hospitality toward the truth of other religions is unlikely to lead to dialogue, it may generate a form of mutual apologetics. We have already seen that apologetics forms an integral part of all serious interreligious dialogue.15 As such, the rejection of truth in other religions may shed some light on at least one dimension of dialogue. Religious apologetics first of all requires a profound understanding of the other religion. As such, Barth's arguments for the superiority of Christian revelation are all the more impressive for also demonstrating an awareness of the Buddhist and Hindu traditions of grace, which he nonetheless rejects. Likewise, Henri de Lubac's confession of the uniqueness of Christ is particularly striking, or perhaps unsettling, when cast in a book-length study of the figure of Amida, the heavenly Buddha of the Pure Land. Having evoked the image of Amida in the most laudatory terms, de Lubac concludes:

All of this, however, remains far from the Christian supernatural. Disengaged from the puerility of its fable,

Amidism remains profoundly driven in the crepuscular thought and spirituality belonging to all "natural" religion as to all "natural" mysticism.16

While Barth and de Lubac may have acquired a — for their times — impressive understanding of the other tradition, one's knowledge of the other religion can always be deepened and enhanced and arguments against the truth of the other will be all the more convincing if based on genuine expertise. Francis Clooney thus points out that "if a disciple of Barth today dismisses the Srivaisnava understanding of grace, Hindu theologians who know that theology well can dispute the point and argue against it persuasively if they also know Barth's theology."17

Though the exercise of apologetics may lead to a deeper understanding of the other tradition, and occasionally to a rectification of misconceptions of the other, there is little chance that it will lead to any form of religious change or growth. Barth's position is a powerful case in point. Whatever his knowledge of Hindu and Buddhist forms of devotion, it did little more than strengthen an argument for the superiority and uniqueness of Christian revelation that was for him never in doubt. Insofar as his attitude toward other religions was based on a faith commitment rather than on historical evidence, it is difficult to see how any amount of counter-argumentation could ever change his point of view. At best, it would seem capable only of stimulating a sharper awareness of the confessional source of one's own rejection of the presence of truth in other religions.

This does not mean, however, that interreligious dialogue has nothing to learn from theological apologetics. Apart from
the fact that the latter has long been, and remains, a useful feature of reflection within most traditions, and without denying the fact that apologetic approaches have often been highly biased and poorly informed about their interlocutors, it remains the case that some arguments appearing here are theologically sound, and in some cases still quite pertinent. After decades of religious deference, itself hardly unwarranted, the unscripted and unabashed judgments on the teachings or practices of the other religion sometimes reawaken us to areas of religious incompatibility or conflict that had been neglected or suppressed. Likewise, though the vocabulary used in some forms of traditional apologetics is no longer adequate or constructive in the contemporary context, a raw religious reaction to the teachings and practices of other religions, or an adamant defense against some of the critiques and accusations of other religions, may also remind us of some of the most genuinely challenging dimensions of the dialogue with any particular religion. And this holds both for the view looking out at the other and for the one looking within oneself: attention to the nature and intensity of some apologetics may point directly to elements in the other religion that are difficult to reconcile with one’s own, but also to elements within one’s own tradition that stand in the way of genuine dialogue.

Dialogue as Mutual Affirmation/Suspicion

While resistance or limited inclination to dialogue with other religions may be based on confessional beliefs in the exclusive truth of one’s own tradition, it may also derive from more philosophical conceptions of the nature of religious truth as such. Confrontation with the reality of religious plurality has indeed led to various new approaches to the truth of religions, some with the unintended consequence of inhibiting genuine dialogue. Such is the case, for example, with George Lindbeck’s cultural-linguistic approach to religious truth. In an attempt to overcome the problem of competing religious claims to truth, Lindbeck situates the truth of religious claims not in their correspondence to external states of affairs, but in terms of their internal coherence. This, however, may lead to the conclusion that the teachings of one religion are unintelligible, or at least irrelevant, to individuals of a different religion. Needless to say, this is not a concession Lindbeck is willing to make: discussing the implications of his account of religious truth for the dialogue between Christianity and other religions, he states that these religions may contain “highly important truths and realities, of which Christianity as yet knows nothing and by which it could be greatly enriched.” Yet one searches in vain for an explanation of how such enrichment might actually take place. Moreover, everything else here seems to urge against that possibility. If different religions and doctrinal systems are truly incommensurable, as he certainly seems to think, then dialogue could never go beyond mutual affirmation (or denial). Lindbeck also admits this much when he states that the goal of dialogue is for “Jews and Muslims to become better Jews and Muslims, and Buddhists to become better Buddhists.” Now, the meaning of such a notion, often encountered in the dialogue between religions, remains notoriously ambiguous. Its intention is clear enough: the goal of dialogue is not to convince other religions of one’s own superior truth or still less to convert individuals from one religion to the other, but to allow each participant to realize more fully the truth of their own religious tradition, and integrate that truth into their own lives. There is, of course, nothing objectionable about this. Even so, the term “better” can be somewhat equivocal. Whether one realizes it or not, suggesting that the other might become a
better member of their religion often implies a greater conformity to the ideals and goals of one's own tradition, or at least realizing what is best about that tradition as viewed from the perspective of one's own. It would indeed seem disingenuous to wish for the realization of ideals that diverge from or oppose one's own. A simple example makes this plain. If, hypothetically, my own religion emphasizes the fundamental personal and spiritual equality of all human beings while another openly supports the subjugation of one gender to the other, it would be incongruous for me to wish that members of that other religion realize more fully ideals that I myself oppose. What we may take from this, then, is that in actual interreligious dialogue, the idea of becoming a "better" Muslim, Christian, Jew, or Buddhist is most often informed by a certain judgment of what that would entail, based on one's own beliefs, or else by a belief in the unity of all religious goals.

Rather than to mutual affirmation, John Milbank's emphasis on the internal coherence and mutual incomparability of different conceptions of truth leads to a suggestion to replace dialogue with "mutual suspicion." Reacting against various pluralist proposals for a possible meeting point between religions in ethical concerns, and to religious conceptions of unity beyond religious differences, Milbank emphasizes the irreducibility of each religion to the other. In the encounter between religions, each religion can at most aspire to resist any hegemonic movement or universalizing pretense on the part of other religions. Whether or not this position is philosophically cogent, the theological position it stakes out does bring into view another important feature of interreligious dialogue, this time contained within the notion of mutual suspicion — that of a mutual challenge in which the possible discrepancies and limitations of each religion are exposed in the confrontation with the beliefs and ideals of another. One of the fruits of interreligious dialogue is undoubtedly a more critical self-understanding.

**HOSPITALITY TOWARD SIMILARITY**

While the wholesale rejection of truth in other religions is rare in the history of religions, hospitality generally begins — and often ends — with the recognition of truth in teachings and practices which mirror or resemble one's own. If such hospitality is rather common in the encounter between religions, this may well be due in no small part to the fact that it poses little or no threat to traditional religious self-understanding. It also places less pressure on the data of empirical reality. As Paul Griffiths points out, rejection of all truth in other religions "commits anyone who holds it to the claim that no alien religious teaching is identical with any teaching of the home community. For if there were any such instance of identity, it would immediately follow that if the relevant teaching of the home tradition is true, that of the alien religion must also be." Under a qualified form of hospitality to the other, one may still adhere to the absolute or ultimate truth of one's own religious teachings while avoiding the logical inconsistency of denying the truth of teachings of other religions that might be identical to one's own. Accordingly, one's own tradition remains the basis from which similarities in the other are discerned, and all truth may be seen to ultimately derive from one's own tradition. In short, the epistemic advantages of this position are considerable.

Similarities may take the form of direct or structural correspondences, external resemblance, or semantic equivalence.
It is of course true that surface similarities often reveal profound semantic differences, while seemingly different religious teachings or practices may at times point to remarkably similar religious contents. The discernment of similarities in another religious tradition thus requires an extensive knowledge and profound understanding of that religion. Since all similarities between religions are qualified by the distinctive religious context in which they are embedded, the recognition of truth in similarity also always entails a certain negotiation of difference. Either those differences are disregarded and considered inferior to one's own religious truth, or they are seen to contain certain elements from which one may learn something new. Either way, the other religion is regarded as a mirror in which one recognizes truth only insofar as it corresponds to one's own beliefs.

Insofar as each religion believes itself to be in possession of the truth, that truth functions as the natural point of orientation and departure for building bridges and generating hospitality toward other religious traditions. In meeting the religious other, the discovery of similarities often signals a moment of recognition and assurance. These similarities may derive from common historical origins, from mutual or unilateral influences, or from historical contingency and the finite nature of religious imagination. They may involve similar worldviews, the same ethical teachings, analogous conceptions of the divine, similar ways of theological reasoning, or analogous sets of religious virtues. In any case, the appearance of similar elements logically calls for a recognition of at least some truth in the other religion.

Of course, the many beliefs shared by religions with common parentage (e.g., the Abrahamic religions) cannot but be some of what provides for religious hospitality. But religions with no direct historical relationship also often display important similarities in segments of beliefs as well as modes of theological reflection. Here, it is of course less the object of devotion than the religious attitude or insight itself that may be regarded as an expression of truth. But it is predominantly in the domains of ethics and spirituality that religions have moved most easily to recognition of similarities and to an affirmation of truth in the others. As Hans Küng has shown, all of the great religious traditions of the world call upon their adherents to abstain from killing, from stealing, from lying, and from adultery or sexual immorality. Numerous other correspondences may be found between the ethical teachings of any two or more religions, from the Golden Rule that appears in positive or negative formulation in the sacred texts of most religions to the call to love of neighbor that is also expressed in various ways in many of them. And remarkable similarities exist between the monastic disciplines of the various religions, as well as among the qualities of individuals practicing such disciplines. Perhaps the consonance in their basic intentions is enough for those principles to become the ground and starting point for religious hospitality, even if the difference in context and orientation might complicate the task significantly.

The Other as “Preparatio”

It is clear that in the recognition of truth in similarity, one's own religious beliefs always remain the basis and norm for recognizing such truth. This perspective defines an inclusivism that is operative in all religions, even as their theologians labor variously to refine, reject, or redefine it. In its natural attitude, each religious tradition tends to evaluate and affirm the truth of the others according to its own religious principles.
A corollary of the possibility of recognizing truth in similarity is the idea that truth found in another religious tradition is partial and provisional in comparison with the truth of one's own religious tradition. The most common or familiar version of this idea may be found in the Christian church father Eusebius of Caesarea’s conception of the truth of Greek philosophy as preparatio evangelica. The general Christian inflection is captured in the image of the elements of truth in other religions as “seed of the word” (logos spermatikos) awaiting fulfillment in the truth of Christian revelation. Other religions, Buddhism for example, or at least particular schools within that tradition, developed hierarchies of truth, predicated on the proximity of the teachings of the other to one’s own. Here, all truth in other religions is seen to be derived from or oriented toward one’s own conception of ultimate reality, thus safeguarding the ultimate truth of one’s own tradition.

One of the main proponents of this attitude within the Christian tradition is Karl Rahner. Against the traditional Christian belief that there is no salvation outside of the church, Rahner argued that other religions may be “a positive means of gaining the right relationship with God and thus for the attaining of salvation, a means which is therefore positively included in God’s plan of salvation.” However, remaining fast to the Christian notion that all truth is derived from the grace of God in Christ, he still insisted that whatever truth was to be found in other religions could only be understood as derived from Christ:

If there can be a faith which is creative of salvation among non-Christians, and if in fact it may be hoped that it in fact is found on a large scale, then it is to be taken for granted that this faith is made possible and is based upon the supernatural grace of the Spirit. And this is the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and the Son, so that as the Spirit of the eternal Logos, he can and must be called at least in this sense the Spirit of Christ, the divine Word who has become man.

In focusing on the presence of truth in similarity, teachings and practices that differ from one’s own tend to be regarded as false or as deficient when compared to one’s own, or as valid until the moment when the fullness of truth of one’s own religion encounters the other. Other religions are thus looked upon as a mixture of truth and error. Whereas the Vatican Document Dominus Iesus recognizes elements of truth in other religions, regarding them as “preparation for the Gospel,” it also states that “it cannot be overlooked that the other rituals, insofar as they depend on superstitions and other errors constitute an obstacle to salvation.” Other religions are thus regarded as merely partially and provisionally true. For Rahner, other religions are valid or lawful only “until the moment when the gospel really enters into the historical situation of the individual.” This conception of the truth of other religions as fulfilled or completed within one’s own is far from unique to Christianity, even if the specific language of preparatio almost certainly is. Whether in the form of crude religious supersessionism or alloyed to a vision of personal spiritual progression from one religion to the next through one or many lifetimes, any number of religions have addressed the riddle of plurality in the context of a positive vision of fulfillment in time: whatever truth is present in other religions is grasped in its fuller context and is opened to its deeper meaning when it is defined from within one’s own religious tradition.
Dialogue as Monologue

Recognition of elements of truth in teachings and practices of other religions similar to one's own certainly represents a first step toward a fruitful dialogue between religions. It may lead to a more open and respectful attitude toward the other religion and to a rediscovery of neglected or forgotten dimensions of one's own religious tradition. It is indeed through the appeal of beliefs or practices of another religion that one may recover teachings or practices buried in history or left in the margins of the tradition. This is the case, for example, with some features of the resurgence of interest in the Christian Hesychast tradition in the West, which has been awakened largely through encounter with Hinduism and Buddhist forms of meditation. And much of the attention to the apophatic mystical tradition has likewise been inspired by contact with similar strands of thought in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. As such, focus on similarities in the dialogue with other religions may certainly bring about some degree of growth insofar as it leads to a reawakening to the richness of one's own tradition.

Moreover, insofar as all similarities between religions are couched within different religious contexts, the meaning of particular teachings and practices is never seamlessly the same, and these differences also come into play in the dialogue between religions. Even when understood from within a different religious context, the teachings and practices of a religion tend to preserve at least some of their original meaning and flavor. This comes into view in the practice of verbal translation the moment one detects a semantic slippage from the word by which a tradition expresses the meaning of an experience or insight, and to the word by which another tradition tries to take that original meaning into itself. The result is almost inevitably a hybrid term in which some of the original meaning makes its way into a new language while that new language is changed to the degree that it admits a certain newness. In the inculturation of Christianity in non-Western cultures, indigenous religious terms have often been used to express the Christian message, thereby also often enhancing and at times even challenging it.31

Even though the attitude of hospitality toward truth in similarity may thus lead to a certain degree of religious growth, it still falls short of an open and reciprocal exchange between religions. Insofar as the other religion is viewed as a mirror of one's own, dialogue remains narrow, devoid of much challenge or surprise. One of the main critiques of this type of hospitality, and of the attitude of inclusivism in which it appears, is that it tends toward a domestication of the truth of the other religion. This is clearly expressed in Gavin D’Costa’s account of what transpires in inclusivist approaches to other religions:

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If religious traditions are properly to be considered in their unity of practice and theory, and in their organic interrelatedness, then such “totalities” cannot simply be dismembered into parts (be they doctrines, practices, images, or music) which are then taken up and “affirmed” by inclusivists, for the parts will always relate to the whole and will take their meaning only in this organic context. Hence, what is included from a religion being engaged with is not really that religion per se, but a reinterpretation of that tradition in so much as that which is included is now included within a different paradigm such that its meaning and utilization within that new paradigm can only perhaps bear some analogical resemblance to its meaning and utilization within its original paradigm.32
This process of domestication of the religious other may thus be seen to erase religious differences, thereby minimizing the opportunities for learning from the other.

In judging the truth of another religion solely on the basis of one's own religious framework and norms, dialogue also tends to become a monologue, and part of a larger missionary agenda. Insofar as one's own religious tradition is regarded as the ultimate truth and the norm against which the truth of the other may be discerned, dialogue becomes primarily a means of rendering the other aware of the actual truth of its own tradition. Proposed as a matter of constructive criticism, this approach to dialogue involves presenting oneself and one's own tradition as the occasion by which the other religion can recognize and overcome its own errors and obscurities. As a matter of solidarity and compassion, it involves the promise to lift the truth of the other, itself imperfectly or incompletely understood, and bring it to its rightful place and full meaning. In short, one's own religion becomes the norm, not only for the meaning and truth of one's own religion, but also for that of the other. Thus, a dialogue between Christians and Hindus might take the form of Christians pointing out to Hindus that it was Gandhi's life of self-giving love (rather than, e.g., his worship of Ram or his vegetarianism) that reflected the highest truth, while Hindus might in turn attempt to convince Christians of the superiority of a figure such as Meister Eckhart over less congenial Christian figures. In such a dialogue, each tradition in fact speaks across the other, engaging the truth of the other only insofar as it fits one's own religious aspirations and system of beliefs. Here, the goal of dialogue would appear to be the edification of the other, rather than one's own enrichment and growth.

HOSPITALITY TOWARD DIFFERENCE

While hospitality or receptivity toward the truth of the other religion may be relatively effortless when limited to those teachings that are similar to one's own, hospitality in difference forms an important challenge to most religious traditions. It involves a recognition that there might be elements of truth in the other religion of which one's own tradition has no previous knowledge or understanding. This may lead to a questioning of the attitude of self-sufficiency and epistemic security that characterizes most religious traditions. It also challenges religions to account for the presence of distinctive truth in another religion and to determine its status relative to one's own. Is this truth to be regarded as autonomous or as somehow dependent on one's own religion? And how is one to discern the presence of truth in difference?

These two sets of questions are related, and answers to them line up in a manner that defines the basic positions on the matter. The affirmation of the autonomous nature of the truth of the other is generally consistent with a call to recognize the truth of the other on its own terms, while on the other hand the proposal that the truth of the other can be countenanced only according to the conditions of one's own tradition is consistent with a call to apply one's own criteria to such alien truth. The former position has generally come to be identified with pluralism and the latter with "open" inclusivism. We shall here attempt to ignore these labels and focus instead on the way in which religions — in this case Christianity — may come to open themselves to the possibility of finding truth in religious teachings and practices different from their own. Such openness often requires a great deal of theological creativity and hermeneutical effort. But it is only in discovering such
resources for affirming truth in difference that dialogue may lead to genuine change and growth.

Accounting for Truth in Difference

There is no denying that Christian teachings are not essentially predisposed to recognizing truth in teachings and practices that differ from its own. Christian faith in the fullness of truth and salvation in the person of Jesus Christ would indeed seem to leave little room for elements of distinctive truth beyond Christian revelation. While the understanding of the meaning of Christian revelation may grow and develop through time, all of the basic elements for such development are believed to be contained within the tradition. On some rare occasions, however, one may find texts—even official documents—suggesting the presence of distinctive truth in other religions. While Catholic theologians have debated the question of whether or not the Vatican II document 

Nostra Aetate

recognizes the possibility of salvation in other religious traditions, few have paid much attention to the remarkable fact that the document expresses “high regard for the manner of life and conduct, the precepts and doctrines which, although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless often reflect a ray of that truth which enlightens all men.” This short clause thus appears to recognize the possible presence of truth in difference, thereby opening the way for constructive dialogue.

In coming to terms with the reality of religious pluralism and with the exigencies of genuine dialogue, Christian theologians have generally turned to the Trinity as the basis for recognizing truth in difference. While some (Jacques Dupuis and Gavin D’Costa) have focused primarily on the Holy Spirit, others (Mark Heim) take their bearings from the dynamic relationship among all three persons of the Trinity. Without denying the inseparability of the Spirit from the Son, Dupuis emphasizes the distinctive role of the Holy Spirit in an economy of salvation capable of admitting the presence of distinctive truth in other religions. “It is,” he states, “from this permanent integrity and continued ‘distinction’ of the divine action of the Word that the possibility of a continuing action of the Word as such is derived, distinct from that which takes place through the humanity of Jesus Christ.” On this basis, Dupuis describes the relationship between Christianity and other religions as one of “mutual complementarity” by which “an exchange and a sharing of saving values may take place between Christianity and the other traditions and from which a mutual enrichment and transformation may ensue between the traditions themselves.”

Unlike Dupuis—and partly in reaction to him—D’Costa insists that the divine revelation in the Spirit is inseparable specifically from the historical incarnation in the person of Jesus Christ. Still, he too regards the Holy Spirit as the basis for recognizing the presence of genuine truth and goodness in other religions. Though the working of the Holy Spirit in other religions cannot, according to D’Costa, denote the presence of any new revelation in them, it can express itself distinctively according to the different forms in which the grace of God works in other religions. And this may lead to a “non-identical repetition of the revelation which is given” and to a “mutual fulfillment” between religions:

If one were to retain and utilize the category of fulfillment in a very careful sense, then it is not only the other religions that are fulfilled (and in one sense, radically transformed) in their preparation being completed through Christianity, but also Christianity itself that is
fulfilled in receiving the gift of God that the Other might bear, self-consciously or not.57

As distinct from the positions of Dupuis and D'Costa, Heim's focus on the inner complexity of the triune God grounds an approach that sets out first to avoid reducing the religious ends of all traditions to one and the same goal. It is an interesting achievement of Heim's work that it emphasizes the distinctiveness not only of the ultimate religious ends of every religion but also of the teachings and practices leading to such ends, and yet grounds the capacity — even the desire — to do so in something as quintessentially Christian as Trinitarian theology. For Heim, the very dynamism of the Trinity models and endorses an affirmation of the integrity and truth of these diverse religious ends, each of which must be regarded as "an intensified realization of one dimension of God's offered relation with us."38 Each of the distinctive religious ends may thus contain elements of truth that have not yet been integrated or explored within the Christian tradition. As such "Christians need humble apprenticeship to other religions in regard to dimensions of the triune life that those faiths grasp with profound depth."

Now as far as each of these Trinitarian models goes toward opening the Christian tradition to the distinctive truth of other religions, it must be clear that none actually affirms the equality or equivalence of the truth of other religions. It should also be pointed out that openness toward the truth of other religion entails a certain qualification. In the end, Dupuis, for example, comes to speak of an "asymmetrical" complementarity,40 while D'Costa's notion of "mutual fulfillment" does not indicate anything like complete reciprocity between religions, but rather the possibility for Christianity too to be fulfilled by learning from what it finds in the other.

The force of a Christian center of gravity can be felt elsewhere in D'Costa's account of dialogue. While seeking to attend to the "auto-interpretation" of religious traditions, he nonetheless eventually concedes that on his analysis all that can be hoped for is that the Christian "hetero-interpretation" (interpretation of the truth of a tradition from a perspective outside of it) might sometimes coincide with their auto-interpretation. A similar force is noticeable in Heim's position. While he plainly does attempt to grant the maximum amount of distinctive truth to the different religious goals of each tradition, in the end his model must set a recognizably Christian theological limit on that effort. Whereas every religious tradition of course regards its own goal as "ultimate," from within a Christian perspective, as Heim himself observes, those ends can be regarded only as "penultimate."41 Moreover, given the fact that one thus always views penultimates from a perspective that must be considered ultimate, it is probably not by chance that there is in his work little discussion of the problem of conflicts or irreconcilability among the differing religious ends, as well as among their attendant teachings and practices.

None of this serves to discredit the Trinitarian models for dialogue, but only to draw attention to a point where the theological impetus for openness, hospitality, and finally growth becomes precisely that: theological. Their important differences aside, each of these models outlines and exemplifies the creative possibilities to be found within the tradition itself for recognizing the presence of distinctive truth beyond its own boundaries. And though the recognition of the truth of the other may not fully coincide with the self-understanding of the other, still the appreciable movement that can be made in
that direction is already enough to stimulate a positive attitude toward newness or difference, and thus a real chance for growth.

**Normativity and Difference**

If religions are able to recognize some degree of truth in difference, the question remains how that truth is to be discerned. The issue of normativity is contested in the dialogue between religions. Out of concern for the equality and integrity of all religions, some have come to reject the legitimacy of all religion-specific criteria of truth, or the process of subjecting the teachings of one religion to the criteria of another. Instead, they propose criteria that are neutral or common to all. John Hick, for example, proposes as such a criterion the degree to which a particular teaching or practice "makes possible the transformation of human experience from self-centeredness to Reality-centeredness," while Paul Knitter centers his judgment of the truth of religion on the extent to which it promotes "eco-human well-being." Perhaps sensing that these notions are too abstract to be joined to specific religious criteria, Roger Haight has developed the notion of "mutual normativity," arguing that "Christians may regard Jesus as the normative revelation of God, while at the same time being convinced that God is also revealed normatively elsewhere." While this may be true from within a generally descriptive account of religious normativity, it is difficult to see how the religious criteria of another religion may become normative for one's own. Moreover, it cannot be denied that in a dialogue between religious traditions, religious criteria will always take precedence over neutral ones, and neutral criteria will be normative only insofar as they correspond with religious ones. For believers, religious norms are, after all, derived from divine revelation or sacred teachings and not from human discretion or from a lowest or even highest common religious denominator.

Resistance to the idea of confessional criteria of truth or religious normativity often lies in the fact that it tends to religious arrogance, subjecting the truth of one religion completely to the criteria of another, thereby precluding any genuine dialogue or growth. However, the notion of normativity may be understood in a more dynamic and open way. Rather than representing the fixed and final truth against which the teachings of other religions may be judged, religious norms may themselves be open to change and growth and represent a minimum, rather than a maximum, criterion of truth. Roger Haight, for example, proposes distinguishing a "positive" norm that "positively rules out what does not agree with it" and thus "implicitly denies alternatives" from negative norms that rule out "only those alternatives which contradict it." The latter leaves considerable room for hospitality to truth in difference, insofar as any teaching or practice that is not directly opposed to, or not discontinuous with, one's own basic religious norms may be considered as possibly true. While from a Christian perspective the person of Jesus Christ is thus the norma normans (Dupuis), this normativity may well permit Christian hospitality to a wide variety of religious practices and beliefs, from the Muslim names for God to the Confucian cardinal virtues, from the Hindu practice of yoga to the Buddhist notion of the bodhisattva, all of which do not in and of themselves contradict the basic teaching and conception of the person of Jesus Christ.

The distinction between positive and negative norms may be complemented with a distinction between static and dynamic approaches to the normativity of one's own tradition. Religious norms are often regarded as fixed and final. Etched
in stone — fixed in timeless doctrines and unchangeable ritual gestures — one's norms are then regarded as the immutable criteria against which the world and other religions are judged. Against this, a more dynamic understanding of normativity favors the notion that one's own basic set of normative principles may evolve and indeed improve over time. As such, while representing the basic criterion against which the truth of the other religion is discerned, dialogue may itself also lead to a deepened understanding of the criterion itself. Insofar as dialogue may allow for the recognition of teachings that are not in contradiction with one's own, these teachings may in turn come to affect the understanding of one's own criteria. If, for example, the Buddhist Madhyamika philosophy is judged compatible or not incompatible with Christianity, dialogue with this philosophical tradition might significantly affect the Christian understanding of the meaning of Jesus and of his teachings.  

Considered together, the distinction between positive and negative normativity and the distinction between static and dynamic normativity — or rather the possibility of focusing on negative, dynamic normativity as a central component of dialogue — defines a hospitality that does extend beyond one's own established beliefs to truth in difference, but not without limit. The Christian engaged in genuine and vital dialogue does have at her disposal resources for at least considering the possibility of truth in principles and practices that remain beyond her Christian reach, but only insofar as they are not evidently discontinuous with, let alone opposed to, what can be reasonably extrapolated from her basic beliefs. This leaves aside numerous teachings and practices that are either incompatible with or irrelevant for her own Christian tradition as she understands it. Such teachings and practices may commonly relate to the particular symbolic and ritual expressions that distinguish one tradition from the other (names and images of gods, dietary rules, commemorative religious festivals and feasts). But they may also involve teachings that are directly mutually exclusive (such as the eternity or temporality of the soul, etc.). There may be relatively few religious beliefs that must be considered as radically incompatible. And religious texts and teachings tend to be hermeneutically flexible, as well as open to forms of interpretation far beyond those which have been explored within any particular religion. Yet every true dialogue must also come to terms with the reality of fundamental religious differences and the existence of teachings and practices that are unlikely ever to become the occasion for change. Part of the art of dialogue must surely consist in a capacity to recognize and set aside the latter, so as to devote oneself more fully to what remains.

**Dialogue and Growth**

If hospitality toward truth in difference may lead to growth, it remains to be seen what types of religious change and growth one may reasonably envision through the process of dialogue. It is of course impossible and against the very grain of dialogue to determine a priori the possible outcomes of any particular dialogue. The parameters of growth will always depend on the particular context and focus of any dialogue. But allowing for the necessary vigilance against what is irrelevant or opposed to one's own basic convictions, there are a number of avenues along which growth may exceed both the dull abstraction and mutual ethical edification so often envisioned in interreligious dialogue.

First, hospitality to truth in difference may lead to a more profound self-understanding. That is to say, it may carry one
beyond an enhanced awareness of the specificity or the particularity of one's own religion to a genuinely new understanding of what one is, now informed by the teachings of the other. This may have a humbling effect on those who undergo it and come to recognize with new and greater lucidity that at least some of what was previously thought to be unique turns out to have any number of corollaries elsewhere. But more than this, it may also yield an enhanced capacity for engagement of one's authentic identity and, indeed, responsibility. "In the recognition of its limits," writes Stanislas Breton, "Christianity [or any other religion] regains a precision of its outline, and by that very fact the possibility of an effective presence in the world." However, the new self-understanding gained through dialogue may involve not only a sharper view of what was always there to see (though occluded through the power of habit or arrogance). It may also involve radically new elements, provided by the teachings of other religions. For example, whereas the Christian belief in the uniqueness of Jesus has traditionally been understood purely from within the Christian conception of salvation history, the dialogue with Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism may provide Christian theology with new accents, connotations, and even full-fledged conceptions of what remains the central category of Christian faith. The dialogue with Judaism, for instance, has called for new reflection on the distinctiveness of the person and teachings of Jesus in comparison with other charismatic prophets of his time, whereas the dialogue with Hinduism has shed new light on the relationship between his humanity and his divinity.

A second, and related area of possible growth is that of an increased capacity for healthy self-criticism. Of course, religions have long mustered critical self-reflection in response to a confrontation with various social and historical realities, but it is through the encounter with religious others that specifically religious lacunae or distortions may come most easily to light. This may include a sudden realization or direct awareness of the ways in which one's religious teachings have contributed, consciously or not, to the suffering and denigration of other religions. Much of the dialogue between religions to date has indeed focused on the healing of historical memories. But it may also entail critical awareness of certain areas of underdeveloped insight and expression within one's own religion. Here the lesson can be made almost automatically, since it will arise from a contrast between areas where the other tradition appears vital and sophisticated while one's own is plainly wanting. Thus, for instance, a widespread commitment to social action in the teaching or practices of one religion may, when placed alongside a comparative lack of that commitment in the other, spur members of the latter to probe their tradition for untapped resources. Likewise, the advanced spiritual practices of one may shed light on the other's lack of attention to particular forms of spiritual life, long since forgotten and submerged beneath other practices, or maybe simply never developed. The powerful self-critique of one religion may also serve the other in this way. This may be seen in the ways in which forms of feminist critique developed within one tradition have inspired feminists in other religions. Or in the ways in which the critique of certain forms of mysticism within one religion may inspire critical self-reflection within another.

In addition to enhanced self-understanding and critical self-reflection, the growth resulting from interreligious dialogue may on some occasions involve the integration of genuinely new religious insights and practices. The fact of interreligious borrowing of symbols, teachings, and ritual practices is of course nothing new. But while in the course of history, such
religious appropriation has typically occurred unconsciously and without recognition of the other religion, dialogue between religions offers a chance for more deliberate and reflective integration of religious teachings and practices originating in other traditions. This may involve the adoption of new forms of prayer and practice or the integration of new categories of interpretation. And, at least occasionally, a borrowed category or practice may transform the tradition in which it arrives. A vivid and well-known example of this is the Christian relation to the Buddhist notion of “emptiness” (śūnyatā). For various Christian thinkers, this term has become the basis for a purification of traditional Christian conceptions of God (O’Leary, Cobb), the foundation for a new Christology (Keenan), or the name of an insight that sheds new light on the Christian notion of kenosis (Abe). As Cobb points out, it is through the integration of such categories that “our own heritage may be illumined in new ways” and that we may come to a “richer and purer grasp of the meaning of the God we have come to know through Jesus Christ.”50 While the Christian concept of God may be purified and chastened by encounter with a notion as profound as the Buddhist notion of emptiness, one can scarcely expect Christian theology to go all the way to abandoning its belief in a personal Creator God. Whether or not the effort to learn from what is expressed in the Buddhist category meets its limit precisely there, it is incontestable that religious growth of that sort certainly will meet some such limit eventually. On the other hand, those limits are probably far less predetermined than we are often inclined to think, and the hermeneutical possibilities of religions always exceed their present self-understanding.

In the second half of the twentieth century, at the height of the burgeoning excitement about interreligious dialogue, some of the pioneers of this dialogue nurtured high hopes that such dialogue might eventually lead to a convergence of religions. Inspired by Teilhard de Chardin’s notion that “everything that rises must converge,” Frank de Graeve proposed that “convergence” did not mean annihilation of differences, but separate and distinct inner conversion of religions, along lines that draw ever closer without actually meeting.51 Perhaps Bede Griffiths had something similar in mind when he suggested that “in each religion, as you go deeper into it, you converge on the original source.”52 Griffiths did not anticipate or hope for the dissolution of all religious differences any more than de Graeve. But both of them did see the differences between religions as “a sign of the creative abundance that is supposed to enhance unity, and not necessarily a sign of particularism that precludes it.”53

Few would still share the optimism of these pioneers of the dialogue. After some decades of significant effort at interreligious dialogue, there is little noticeable growth within religious traditions. In fact, one too often notes a contrary tendency to sharpen and reassert the boundaries of one’s own distinctive identity in the face of religious diversity. Interpersonal hospitality between individuals belonging to different religions does not often translate into doctrinal hospitality. The meeting between leaders or representatives of different religions often has only a ceremonial function, and initiatives toward more serious and searching dialogue are often met with passivity, indifference, or even active resistance.

Yet as good people of faith know well, not every fruit is immediately visible. It need not be otherwise with dialogue. In the meantime, individuals from a large and growing number
of traditions engage in theology of religions and comparative theology with a view to pursuing avenues for hospitality toward the distinctive truth of other religions and to exploring both the vital possibilities and the basic limits of dialogue for their respective traditions. Their efforts may seem daunting no less than promising. Beyond the immediate task of simply understanding one another (and there is not always anything simple about it), they meet each religious text and tradition as an occasion to stretch the imagination and to consider the possibility of forms of religious experience hitherto unexplored within their own traditions. And where they succeed, however briefly and however minimally, they exhibit an interreligious hospitality that can inspire others. With the inspiration comes the challenge: the actual discovery of truth in the distinctive teachings of other religions may itself put pressure on traditional religious concepts of hospitality or the refusal thereof. Successful dialogue, after all, is an incitement to bolder efforts. To make progress — to grow — is to immediately push the limits of religious hospitality toward still greater openness to truth in difference, which is also to say, to a truth that makes a difference.

Each of the five conditions I have identified for dialogue challenges traditional religious self-understanding, or — for various reasons — falls short of perfect realization. In the Christian case, some conditions appear to be directly at odds with traditional teachings, while others create institutional tensions or else test the very limits of understanding itself. With regard specifically to doctrinal or epistemic humility, there is no mistaking a serious challenge to the traditional belief in the ultimate and final truth of Christian teachings. Such belief does not typically include a sense of the limited and finite nature of one's own teachings and practices or openness to change or growth. Humility, as commonly understood, characterizes an attitude to be adopted toward, rather than about, the truth of one's own tradition. Rather than doctrinal humility, it thus tends to generate doctrinal pride and attachment to the truth of one's religious teachings and practices. Insofar as such attachment defines religious commitment, commitment to a particular religious tradition also seems to be at odds with the attitude of openness necessary for dialogue. Exceptions notwithstanding, strong identification with a particular religious tradition seems to bring about an attitude of indifference or hostility toward other religions, while profound interest in other religions often derives from or leads to greater religious autonomy. The need for a proper balance between openness and commitment
37. Ibid.
40. Perhaps Heidegger is an exception. In *Being and Time* he says that “of the two modes of self-temporalization, only recollection goes over into empathy, not expectation” (159).
42. In Scheler, *The Nature of Sympathy*, 47.
43. Ibid.
45. Ibid., 105.
46. *Issues in Husserl’s Ideas II*, 274–75.
47. This is developed in detail much too elaborate for me to even sketch at this juncture in Husserl’s *Cartesian Meditations*.
50. Theodore Lipps, “Einfühlung, inner Nachahmung und Organempfindungen” I, Iff. The example he used was that of watching a person walking a tightrope and experiencing the anxiety and excitement of the other in the process of perception.
51. Yet it must be said that the particularities of unfamiliar cultural expressions often appeal to the imagination, rather than hinder it. Christians interested in Zen Buddhism, for example, may have been enticed by the aesthetic beauty of Japanese rock gardens or the serenity of tea ceremonies as much as by the particular content of Zen teachings. In the same way, the appeal of Christianity to Hindus at times derived precisely from its Western forms and associations.
52. Spranger, *Types of Men*, 370.
54. Ibid., 113.
55. Van der Leeuw, *Religion in Essence and Manifestation*, 671–72. For van der Leeuw, however, this applies as much to one’s own experiences as to those of others, and, given the proper historical and religious knowledge, it would be no more difficult to reconstruct his experience of the other than it would be to reconstruct one’s own past experience.
56. It is of course possible that individuals belonging to one religion may develop a genuine assent to the truth or devotion to the God of the other religion. However, here we enter into the domain of religious conversion or multiple religious belonging.
57. It is not certain that this can be said of one who feels the joy of a friend in love, and even some of what it is to be in love, though not love for her beloved.
60. Quoted from Mikhail Bakhtin’s *Toward a Philosophy of the Act in Flood, Beyond Phenomenology*, 163.

Chapter Five / Hospitality

4. Often, the terminological distinction between “religion” and “cult” is used to mark the difference between religions that are worthy of respect and dialogue and those that are not. However, most uses of such terminology tend to be highly arbitrary and reflective of certain religious or ethnic prejudices rather than of differences that are fundamental, or at least logical.


7. Ibid., 350. In other words, it is not dependence on grace as such that forms the basis for truth, but rather “the reality of grace itself by which one religion is adopted and distinguished as the true one before all others” (356).

8. Ibid., 356.

9. Ibid., 357.


11. Ibid., 8.

12. Ibid., 22.

13. See Dominus Iesus, 4, which states that “as a consequence, it is held that certain truths have been superseded; for example, the definitive and complete character of the revelation of Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian faith as compared with that of belief in other religions, the inspired nature of the books of Sacred Scripture, the personal unity between the Eternal Word and Jesus of Nazareth, the unity of the economy of the Incarnate Word and the Holy Spirit, the unity and salvific universality of the mystery of Jesus Christ, the universal salvific mediation of the Church, the inseparability — while recognizing the distinction — of the Kingdom of God, the Kingdom of Christ, and the Church, and the subsistence of the one Church of Christ in the Catholic Church.”

14. Barth, Church Dogmatics 2/1, 357.

15. See our discussion of the relationship between dialogue and mission in Chapter 2.


19. Ibid., 61.

20. Ibid., 54.

21. In “The End of Dialogue” in Gavin D’Costa, ed., Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1990), 190. It should be noted that unlike the confessionalist exclusivism of someone like Barth, Milbank’s position is fundamentally philosophical, bearing the early stamp of Alasdair MacIntyre’s theory of narrative.


23. See, for example, Francis Clooney’s books Hindu God, Christian God (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Divine Mother, Blessed Mother (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005).


25. In The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2000), Gavin D’Costa convincingly demonstrates that this is the case even for such seemingly open and pluralist thinkers and religious leaders as Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan and the Dalai Lama (53–95).

26. Karl Rahner, Theological Investigations, vol. 5 (New York: Crossroad, 1966), 125. Throughout history, Christianity has acknowledged the existence of “pagan saints,” individuals who, while never having encountered the fullness of Christian truth, nonetheless did exhibit a life of unquestionably high spiritual and moral value, even by Christian standards. Yet until recently, these individuals were regarded as saintly not because of their own religious traditions, but in spite of them. Emphasizing the social and historical nature of individual life and religious awareness, Rahner argued that the presence
of truth in other religions was to be regarded as an indication of the
fact that the religions themselves were “lawful.”
28. E.g., Dominus Iesus, 12, 21.
30. Theological Investigations vol. 5, 121. This not merely implies
a knowledge of the existence of Christianity, but rather a deep
personal encounter with its truth.
31. I have tried to demonstrate this with regard to the use of the
Hindu term guru in the inculturation of Christianity in India. See
Catherine Cornille, The Guru in Indian Catholicism: Ambiguity or
32. D'Costa, The Meeting of Religions and the Trinity, 22-23.
33. “Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian
Religions,” art. 2, in Vatican Council II: The Conciliar and Post
Conciliar Documents, ed. A. Flannery (Northport, N.Y.: Costello
The ambiguity regarding the relationship between the Spirit and
Christ is one of the points noted in the Vatican Notification (2001),
or call for clarification, of Dupuis's work. The Notification states
that “the Church's faith teaches that the Holy Spirit, working after
the resurrection of Jesus Christ, is always the Spirit of Christ sent
by the Father, who works in a salvific way in Christians as well as
non-Christians. It is therefore contrary to the Catholic faith to hold
that the salvific action of the Holy Spirit extends beyond the one
universal salvific economy of the Incarnate Word” (III).
35. Jacques Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious
37. Ibid., 114. D'Costa’s notion of fulfillment thus departs from
that of Rahner insofar as Christianity itself may come to be fulfilled
in the other religion.

38. Mark Heim, The Depth of the Riches: A Trinitarian Theology
of Religious Ends (Grand Rapids: Wm. Eerdmans, 2001), 179.
39. Ibid., 213.
40. Dupuis, Christianity and the Religions, 136. Dupuis’s notion
of “complementarity” not only evolves, but also changes location
slightly. At times, it characterizes an implication of the seeds of “truth
and grace” present in other religions while at other times it refers to
sacred scriptures as a whole.
41. Heim, The Depth of the Riches, 128 and 289.
43. Paul Knitter, Jesus and the Other Names (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis
44. Roger Haight, Jesus, Symbol of God (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis
Books, 2000), 393.
45. Ibid., 409.
46. Dupuis, Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism,
294.
47. This is particularly evident in John Keenan’s work The Mean-
ing of Christ: A Mahayâna Theology (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books,
1989), where he reinterprets the person of Jesus from the perspective
of the Buddhist category of emptiness and the two truths.
48. Breton, Unicité et monotheisme, 153-54. For a more ex-
panded discussion of Breton’s contribution to the theology of
religions, see my article “Stanislas Breton on Christian Uniqueness”
49. An example of this may be found in Mysticism, Buddhist
and Christian (New York: Crossroad, 1995), where Paul Mommaers
and Jan Van Bragt develop a dialogue between Buddhist and Chris-
tian forms of mysticism, adapting Ruusbroec’s critique of quietistic
currents in Christianity to strands within the Buddhist tradition.
50. John Cobb, Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transfor-
mation of Christianity and Buddhism (Philadelphia: Fortress Press,
1982), 113.

52. Quoted from various sources by Judson Trapnell, Bede Griffiths: A Life in Dialogue (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2001), 188.


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