DIALOGICAL TRANSFORMATION: EXPLORING THE CREATIVE POSSIBILITIES OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE AS A PRACTICE PROMOTING SOTERIOLOGICAL GROWTH

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"Dialogical Transformation: Exploring the Creative Possibilities of Interreligious Dialogue as a Practice Promoting Soteriological Growth"

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ABSTRACT

In the midst of growing religious plurality and diversity, interreligious dialogue has been an increasingly prominent response to this situation. The present project analyzes the history and significance of interreligious encounter, particularly in the U.S. American context but with implications that go beyond this setting. The special focus centers on the hermeneutical character of dialogue and the transformative element present therein, examining what transformation means primarily through the framework of David Tracy's philosophical work, as well as that of others.

After elucidating the background and elemental conditions for productive interreligious dialogue, it is argued that the transformation that may and often does come from interfaith encounter involves a realized experience of truth disclosure. This even of growth that occurs in dialogue is explicated as transformation by integration – incorporating religious elements of the encountered other into one's own religious identity. This involves a renewal, expansion, enhancement, deepening, of understanding. For further illustration of this transformative element, this project looks at the Buddhist and Christian traditions and the soteriological frameworks for transformation they express. It is forwarded that interreligious dialogue, as a religious practice, engenders and supports the liberating transformation present in each religious worldview.

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CHAPTER ONE

PRESENT RELIGIOUS CONTEXT, THESIS, AND PERSPECTIVE

1.1 Introduction

Currently, the world in which we live is getting smaller. That is, the present context is one in which many people are experiencing rapid globalization. For the present purposes, globalization can be understood as the phenomenon of growing and intensifying interconnection between societies, such that what happens in one part of the world increasingly impacts other parts of the world. Baylis and Smith characterize it well: "A globalized world is one in which political, economic, cultural, and social events become more and more interconnected … societies are affected more and more extensively and more and more deeply by events of other societies."[1] In line with this, sociologist Peter Berger states, "The basic fact about cultural globalization is that everyone can talk to almost everyone else…whether you talk about crime or about politics or about religion…globalization is an enormous increase in international communication."[2] In various respects, people are becoming increasingly interrelated and are interacting with more immediacy now than ever before, largely due to burgeoning technological innovation.[3]

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[1] John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds., *Globalization and World Politics* (Oxford University Press, 1998), 7. For theoretical analyses and various definitions of globalization, see Jan Nederveen Pieterse, *Globalization and Culture: Global Melange* (Plymouth, UK: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009), Ch. 1; and Axel Dreher, Noel Gaston, and Pim Martins, *Measuring Globalization: Gauging Its Consequences* (New York: Springer Science+Business Media, 2008), Ch. 1.

[2] Peter L. Berger, interview transcript on radio program, *Speaking of Faith*, "Globalization and the Rise of Religion," 10/12/06, http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/globalization/transcript.shtml, (accessed 7/8/10).

[3] It can be argued that globalization is not an entirely novel phenomenon in history, but is simply a new name for an old activity in the world. See Baylis and Smith, *Globalization*, 9. For example, the extensive political, economic, social, and cultural interchanges that occurred on the Silk Trade Route could be said to qualify as an ancient version of what we call globalization today. See Annette L. Juliano and Judith A. Learner, *Monks and merchants: Silk Road Treasures from Northwest China Gansu and Ningxia*

Throughout the majority of history people lived in communities that were largely separated (socially or geographically) from other outside communities and which maintained a strong and unified consensus about fundamental cultural norms. Thus, by and large, one's worldview had a given, self-evident character. The cultural and religious situation of most people in pre-modern times had what Berger calls a "taken-for-granted" status; there was little to no choice involved in terms of values, beliefs, and practices.[4] However, eventually following the challenges to conventional norms and consensus that occurred with the Enlightenment and scientific revolution, modernization developed throughout Western society and beyond with an emphasis on reason, science, and progress.[5]

The main movements of modernity – globalization, migration, urbanization, mass education, and mass communication – have generated a situation presently where differing worldviews and lifestyles encounter one another.[6] This development may be called "pluralism," which is taken within this framework here to refer to, as Berger states, "a situation in which different ethnic or religious groups co-exist…and interact with each other socially."[7] When pluralism advances, people are thus presented with the condition

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Provinces, Fourth-Seventh Century. (New York: Asia Society, Incorporated, 2001); Richard Foltz, *Religions of the Silk Road* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999); and Vladimir Liscak, "Eastern Turkestan and Its Role in the Early Contacts along the Silk Road," *Studia Asiatica: International Journal for Asian Studies* 1 (2001): 115-131. Nonetheless, the interaction in the current modern world due to profound technological innovation is more expansive and immediate than in any previous time.

[4] Peter L. Berger, ed., *Between Relativism and Fundamentalism: Religious Resources for a Middle Position* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2010), 3-4; also see Peter L. Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), Ch. 1.

[5] See Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment* (New York: Palgrave, 2001) and Paul Hyland, ed., *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), Ch. 14.

[6] Berger, interview, *Speaking of Faith*, "Globalization."

[7] Berger, *Between*, 4. Besides this sociological meaning of pluralism as the fact of diverse cultural-religious context, it can also be understood as a particular kind of viewpoint or perspective *about* the increasing multiplicity and interplay of cultural and religious traditions. See especially Diana Eck, *Encountering God:*

of choosing among a growing variety of cultural and religious options. The "taken-for-granted" status of culture and religion recedes because people begin to realize that there are other options of belief and practice dissimilar to their own.[8] In other words, modernity constrains people to decide what they believe, how they are to live, and in what manner to define themselves. The historical-cultural progression described by Berger could be characterized as a momentous transformation from destiny to decision, or from fate to choice. These are the circumstances in which we currently find ourselves in the legacy of the modern era.

Globalization and modernity have had a significant impact on the pluralistic circumstances in the U.S. American context. Ever since the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, which eliminated the previous national origin quotas, there has been an enormous inflow of immigrants into the country from every part of the world.[9] As these immigrants have come to settle in the U.S. they have brought with them their cultures, and with their cultures they have brought their religions and spiritual practices. Currently, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, Zoroastrians, as well as new kinds of Christians and Jews have come to inhabit the U.S., which has drastically reshaped its religious landscape.[10] As Eck points out,

> The United States has become the most religiously diverse nation on earth. … nowhere, even in today's world of mass migrations, is the sheer range of religious faith as wide as it is today in the United States.[11]

A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras (Boston: Beacon Press, 2003), 166-199. For more on the usage of pluralism, see Ch. 3 of this work.

[8] Berger, interview, *Speaking of Faith*, "Globalization."

[9] Diana Eck, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Now Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 6.

[10] Ibid, 1.

[11] Ibid, 4-5.

Religious multiplicity is becoming an unavoidable presence in much of the world, but this is especially the case in the U.S. American context, where this diversity is burgeoning and being experienced with a growing intensity.[12] Muslim children go to school with Hindu children, Buddhists and Jews work alongside one another, and Christians and Sikhs participate in political activities together.[13] How U.S. Americans and people all over the world of all religious traditions and beliefs can live, work, and play together in order to create a positive, respectful, and peaceful context of diversity is a critical concern.[14] In this age of globalization, how to deal with our context of religious plurality is an important and pressing issue that challenges people to respond.

In the midst of modernity, globalization, and the resulting pluralism, the question inevitably arises: What are the ways in which people may respond to the fact of cultural and religious plurality? Or, another way to phrase the question: How may people cope with the loss of the "taken-for-granted" status of culture and religion?

One response to the pluralistic situation might be to attempt a restoration of the whole of society to the pre-modern taken-for-granted state. This amounts to a retreat into seclusion or an attempt at ignoring the actual, observable, and measurable pluralistic

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[12] There are numerous surveys and studies in the past few decades that express the increasing numbers, awareness and feeling of religious multiplicity, but see especially American Religious Identification Survey (Hartford, CT: Trinity College, 2008), http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/reports/ARIS_Report_2008.pdf, (accessed 11/8/09); Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" (2007), http://religions.pewforum.org/, (accessed 6/12/10); The Pluralism Project, "Statistics by Tradition" (Harvard University), http://www.pluralism.org/resources/statistics/tradition.php, (accessed 7/21/10); The Public Religion Research Institute, http://www.publicreligion.org/research/ (accessed 1/8/11); Amanda Porterfield, *The Transformation of American Religion: The Story of a Late-Twentieth-Century Awakening* (Oxford University Press, 2001); Robert Wuthnow, *America and the Challenges of Religious Diversity* (Princeton University Press, 2005); William R. Hutchison, *Religious Pluralism in America: The Contentious History of a Founding Ideal* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); and Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

[13] Eck, *New Religious America*, see Chap. 2.

[14] See Diana Eck, "The Challenge of Pluralism," *The Nieman Reports* XLVII.2 (Summer 1993).

context.[15] A correlated reaction would be to interpret plurality as detrimental to one's sense of cultural, national, and/or personal identity and resort to some kind of anger and, perhaps, violence. This particular reply could be termed a kind of "fundamentalism," referring to any "attempt to restore or create anew a taken-for-granted body of beliefs and values."[16] Alternatively, a slightly different (and perhaps more feasible) fundamentalist response might be to seek to establish a *sub-culture* of taken-for-granted beliefs and values in isolation from the wider culture, rather than trying to accomplish this throughout the entirety of society.[17] This sectarian option endeavors to create small cultural-religious groups that are tightly controlled and contained, for the most part segregated from the rest of society.

The possible response with which this project is concerned and of which it is a part involves engaging with the growing and intensifying pluralism, and interacting with the alternatives existing relative to one's own worldview and value system. This deliberate acceptance of and involvement in pluralism and the interface with religious and cultural others is identified as *dialogue*. This response openly acknowledges the observable and experienced current context of plurality and takes it seriously through active communication and involvement with people from different religious traditions rather than resorting to isolation, intolerance, and/or violence.[18]

One of the more important consequences of this pluralistic context is that it has compelled many people of differing religions to begin engaging with one another and to

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[15] See Berger, *Between*, 2-6; and Thomas F. Banchoff, ed., *Democracy and the New Religious Pluralism* (Oxford University Press, 2007).
[16] Berger, *Between*, 7.
[17] Ibid,
[18] See David R. Smock, ed., *Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2002).

start recognizing the intellectual, moral, and spiritual integrity of others. Thus, numerous interactions between people of various religious traditions have been sought and fostered which respond responsibly to the pluralistic situation through an acceptance of the challenges and difficulties it poses.[19]

1.2 Approach and Perspective

Interreligious dialogue is one of the endeavors that can be and has been employed to work toward a productive and sustainable future in an effort for peaceful co-existence.[20] This present project arises out of an acknowledgment of the current circumstances of globalization and religious plurality, and stands as part and parcel of the multifaceted efforts for interfaith engagement and conversation. Specifically, my perspective grows out of concern for a positive, constructive relationship between all religious traditions, though concentrating on especially Buddhism and Christianity (of which this writer is a part), through dialogue and encounter. This study stands in the realm of wider religious scholarship treating the interaction among people from differing religious heritages (especially Buddhists and Christians) concerning issues of doctrine, philosophy, history, scriptural study, and practice through the development of theoretical (yet practically derived and applicable) investigations of interreligious dialogue.[21] My viewpoint is centered on evaluating the personal and interpersonal dimensions of experience found in the practice of interreligious dialogue, employing the relationship

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[19] See Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (London: SCM, 1992).

[20] Muhammed Abu-Nimer, "The Miracles of Transformation Through Interfaith Dialogue: Are You a Believer?," in Smock, *Interreligious Dialogue and Peacebuilding*: 15-32, 15-18.

[21] A representative example of constructive ongoing dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is the interface in the annual journal, *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, a publication of the University of Hawaii Press sponsored by the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies. Also, *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue*, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*, and *Interreligious Insight* are instances of general interreligious engagement through formal scholarly, yet sometimes informal, public discourse.

between Buddhists and Christians as a representative example. How dialogue affects the understanding and religious experience of especially Buddhists and Christians as a result of their encounter with one another is the primary focus of this analysis.

This work stands within the established scholarly discipline of religious studies, also termed "history of religions" and "comparative religion."[22] The academic study of religion has been around for well over a century, but, compared to other sectors in academia such as physics, biology, history, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and philology, religious studies is a relative newcomer.[23] Since its emergence in nineteenth century Western societies as a distinct field of inquiry, religious studies (Ger. *Religionswissenschaft*, Fr. *les sciences religeuses*) has proceeded with the work of describing, explaining, comparing, and interpreting religious phenomena (i.e. beliefs, ideas, practices, rituals, symbols, institutions, etc.) through various methods of systematic and critical analysis.[24]

It has only been in the last half century since World War II that religious studies has established itself as a distinct department of scholarly endeavor in colleges and universities.[25] Due to the influence on it from other different subject fields, the study of religion has never actually had a universal academic approach or viewpoint and has thus tended to be multifaceted and multidisciplinary, employing the techniques of a diverse

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[22] All three of these designating terms ("religious studies," "history of religions," and "comparative religion") are used interchangeably in this work to denote the secular, religiously unaffiliated study of religion(s).

[23] Ivan Strenski, *Religion in Relation: Method, Application, and Moral Location* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1993), 2-3. Also see Walter H. Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 1995); and William E. Deal and Timothy K. Beal, *Theory for Religious Studies* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

[24] Christopher Cheznek, "Our Subject 'Over There'?: Scrutinizing the Difference Between Religion and Its Study," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and the University: Conflicting Maps, Changing Terrain,* ed. Linell E. Cady and Delwin Brown (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2002), 45-64.

[25] Linell E. Cady and Delwin Brown, "Introduction," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and University*, 1.

array of scholarly spheres.[26] Indeed, though religious studies has developed its own internal schools of thought, patterns of scholarship, and prominent theorists, there has been no fixed and certain consensus as to the definitive theoretical method for studying religion(s). The historical-phenomenological approaches of Rudolf Otto, Mircea Eliade, Ninian Smart, and W.C. Smith; the sociological methods of Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx; the philological approach of Max Müller (who held the first professorship of Comparative Religion at Oxford); the psychological mode of William James, Freud, and Jung; and the philosophical techniques of such thinkers as Hume, Kant, Wittgenstein, and Derrida have all offered insightful and influential interpretations of the nature and significance of religion(s), but were all employing methods of inquiry originating outside the disciplinary realm of religious studies itself.[27] The ways that religious studies scholars go about investigating religion(s) are manifold and varied – a far cry from being uniform.

Recently, there has been a significant amount of discussion concerning the relationship between the approaches of religious studies and theology, some arguing that they are different yet congruent and others contending their irreconcilable disparity and incommensurability (and various positions and interpretations in between). There are a great many scholars who consider religious studies and theology to be two contrasting approaches to scholarly religious investigation. They feel that theology is distinct and different from the impartial study of religion(s) at the secular university and are in favor of theology being kept separate from secular religious study to occupy a discipline on its

[26] Capps, *Religious Studies*, xiii-xvi.
[27] Ibid.

own.[28] On the other hand, there are scholars (normally theologians) who view the task of theological examination as being an essential and integral part of religious studies. They understand theology to be a legitimate sub-category of the more wide-ranging study of religion(s).[29] Thus, there is an ongoing and often contentious discussion about how religious studies and theology are related and whether or not they occupy the same spheres of inquiry.

The approach that this project employs can be said to exist somewhere in between or, better, in the midst of both the disciplines of religious studies and theology. That is, it excludes neither, utilizes both, yet does not totally exhaust either mode of analysis. Before outlining the present approach, it will be instructive and expedient to delineate the methodological character of two fundamental positions underlying religious studies and theology to better grasp where this project stands in scholarly investigation.

One of the central methodological questions in the academic study of religion(s) is what to do with one's own viewpoint or personal worldview (ethical, religious, political attitudes). What is the role and function of the scholar's perspective when engaging in religious study? One prominent position, which is often associated with secular religious studies, is what could be termed the *phenomenological* approach to the study of religion(s). This approach asks its practitioners to remain neutral and unbiased about the object being studied. The requisite task is to suspend judgment, to put one's

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[28] For a range of representative examples of this scholarly perspective see Russell T. McCutcheon, "The Study of Religion as an Anthropology of Credibility," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and University*, 13-30; Ivan Strenski, "Why 'Theology' Won't Work," Ibid, 31-44; and William Hart, "From Theology to *theology*: The Place of 'God-talk' in Religious Studies," Ibid, 93-109.

[29] For representative examples of this scholarly perspective see Richard C. Martin, "Other People's Theologies: The New Hubris of History of Religions," in *Religious Studies, Theology, and University*, 65-80; Christopher Cheznik, "Our Subject," Ibid, 45-64; Darrell J. Fasching, "Religious Studies and the Alienation of Theology," Ibid, 155-171; and Paula M. Cooey, "The Place of Academic Theology in the Study of Religion from the Perspective of Liberal Education," Ibid, 172-186.

own perspectival commitments in brackets so as to perform a disinterested, unprejudiced depiction and analysis of the religion(s) being examined.[30] This method does not oblige scholars to be caretakers or "undertakers" of religion(s),[31] but expects them to be inquirers who investigate without a theological agenda or religious belief. As Alles states of this perspective, "… rather than seeking to foster religion or destroy it, scholars of religions are to remain neutral toward it."[32]

The phenomenological endeavor is to engage in pure description of that which is being studied without recourse to or intrusion of one's personal views on it. This laying aside of one's own context of views and concerns is what has been named the "phenomenological *epoché*,"[33] where objectivity and impartiality are maximized and subjectivity and preference are minimized.[34] Strenski, a proponent of this method, states that this phenomenological type of study develops a method "free from privileging any particular religious point of view."[35] A critic of a strict phenomenological position, Panikkar asserts that the *epoché* amounts to "putting aside one's personal religious convictions, suspending judgment on the validity of one's own religious tenets; in a word, bracketing the concrete beliefs of individual allegiance to a particular

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[30] Sushil Mittal and Gene R. Thursby, "Introduction," in *Religions of South Asia: An Introduction*, ed. Sushil Mittal and Gene R. Thursby (New York: Routledge, 2006), 10.
[31] By "undertakers" it is meant that the phenomenological perspective does not require the scholar to practice, adhere to, or "undertake" the doctrinal and spiritual disciplines of any particular religious tradition.
[32] Gregory D. Alles, *Religious Studies: A Global View* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 11.
[33] *Epoché* can be etymologically traced to the Greek word *epechô*, meaning "I hold back" and has connotations of "stoppage or disengagement." This is intricately connected to another concept on the phenomenological view, *eidetic vision*, which indicates the ability to observe without prior interpretations affecting one's understanding. See Anis Malik Thoha, "Objectivity and the Scientific Study of Religion," *Intellectual Discourse*, 17.1 (2009): 83-92, 85-86.
[34] Fred Kersten, *Phenomenological Method: Theory and Practice* (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1989), 19-104; and Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*, trans. Fred Kersten (Dordrecht, The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1998), 60-63.
[35] Strenski, *Religion in Relation*, 3.

confession."[36] In the field of religious studies in academia this parenthesizing phenomenological approach has been an important methodological device for historical, comparative, linguistic, and philosophical examination.

The other important position is what might be named the *postmodern* or critical theory approach to the study of religion(s).[37] A relatively more recent development, the postmodern method commences with the supposition that the prerequisites essential for the phenomenological approach are inapt or even impossible altogether.[38] This position calls into question the phenomenological *epoché* and all assumptions or assertions of neutrality. As Mittal and Thursby state, "[Postmodernists] claim that every position either openly displays an evident agenda or masks a hidden agenda…"[39] The postmodern approach emphasizes that, since every scholar is embedded in a historical-cultural context of time and place, it is not feasible to be impartial, suspend judgment, or in any way bracket, parenthesize, or dispose of one's personal perspective in any endeavor, including that of studying religion(s). Indeed, one's own viewpoint has an implicit or explicit agenda with inherent biases grounded in one's contextual situation which influences the treatment of any and every subject of inquiry.

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[36] Raimon Panikkar, *The Intra-religious Dialogue*, rev. ed. (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 75.
[37] "Postmodernism" and "postmodernity" are difficult to define and often vague at best, largely due to the fact that they are terms that have been developed and used in a great variety of disciplines such as art, architecture, film, music, literature, and philosophy. This has generated a multiplicity of meanings of these terms. Postmodernism and postmodernity are understood here as a general and wide-ranging movement and cultural situation after and against many of the principles of the European Enlightenment, also known as "modernity." In the present work, the postmodern refers to "a set of critical, strategic and rhetorical practices employing concepts such as difference, repetition, the trace, the simulacrum [similarity], and hyperreality to destabilize other concepts such as presence, identity, historical progress, epistemic certainty, and the univocity of meaning." Gary Aylesworth, "Postmodernism", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Winter 2009), ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2009/entries/postmodernism/ (accessed 1/10/10). That is, postmodernity is highly skeptical of modern values such as objectivity, certainty, absolutes, and centrality and, rather, celebrates subjectivity, uncertainty, relativity, and the de-centralization of ideas, meaning, and actions.
[38] Mittal and Thursby, "Introduction," in *Religions of South Asia*, 11.
[39] Ibid.

With the postmodern approach, the notion of neutrality and suspension of judgment is not considered a real possibility but an impossible ideal. Commenting on methods in religious studies, Ingram affirms,

> We cannot, of course, do our work without a prior notion of what it is we are seeking to understand. The problem is not one of getting rid of our interpretive framework, but one of reflectively and creatively using our interpretive framework as a point of departure so that we can say something about religious experience that relates to concrete people.[40]

The scholar or writer is embedded in a temporal context characterized by his/her culture, values, understandings, etc. that constitutes an interpretive framework out of which one can never totally escape. Because of this, Ingram further proclaims that scholars of religion(s) must strive to make their perspectives, biases, and assumptions explicit. He states,

> We must not try to "bracket" off these assumptions in some form of phenomenological suspension, for this is not possible. We must recognize them, take responsibility for them, and articulate them within the context of a coherent interpretive framework while knowing that no interpretive framework is absolutely valid or totally adequate.[41]

On the view of the postmodern position, no interpretation or evaluation is impersonal and thus without a contextual background that informs and influences that interpretation or evaluation. The most responsible course of action, and one with which this present project seeks to employ, is to perform a hermeneutics of suspicion and examine one's own preconceptions by asking: What is my perspective? What are my agendas and biases? And how are these impacting what is being studied?[42] Being aware

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[40] Paul O. Ingram, "Method in the History of Religions," *Theology Today*, 32.4 (Jan. 1976): 382-394, 386.
[41] Ibid, 392.
[42] See the articulation of Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche as "master's of suspicion" in Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*, trans. Denis Savage (Yale University Press, 1970), 32-36; also Geoffrey D. Robinson, "Paul Ricoeur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion: A Brief Overview and Critique," *Presbyterion*, 23.1 (1997): 43-55.

of one's personal perspectival situation or "preunderstanding,"[43] making this as forthright and evident to oneself and audience as possible, and recognizing that this standpoint will inexorably influence the object of study are the marks of conscientious scholarship in the current postmodern milieu.

These two fundamental positions reflect two ends of a methodological spectrum of investigation. One of them takes an *etic* (outsider) view, seeking to be as objective, detached, and neutral as possible, suspending the scholar/writer's personal worldview.[44] Religious studies/history of religions/comparative religion has tended to largely (though not exclusively) maintain the principles of this position.[45] It is disinterested in forwarding the claims to truth of one religion over others and therefore executes religious scholarship from outside any particular religious perspective. It does not include faith, spiritual experience, and the truth claims of a certain religious perception in approaching the study of religion and religious people.

However, the other position embraces the subjective standpoint of the scholar/writer, contends that this contextual viewpoint fundamentally affects what is being examined, and holds that this is not necessarily a methodological deficiency or flaw. As Muck has stated, "Everyone comes at their work from some sort of perspective. It is that perspective that makes knowing anything at all possible – but it is also that

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[43] For discussion of the concept and nature of "preunderstanding" in hermeneutics see Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1962), 182-194, 384-400; Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2004), 277-304; Hans Herbert Kögler, *The Power of Dialogue: Critical Hermeneutics after Gadamer and Foucault*, trans. Paul Hendrickson (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1996), 19-35; and Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 47-78.

[44] Carl Olson, "Contested Categories and Issues in Interpretation," in *Religions of South Asia*, 270-271.

[45] For more discussion of the methodological aspects of religious studies see Capps, *Religious Studies*, xiii-xxiii; William Paden, *Religious Worlds: The Comparative Study of Religion* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 15-50; and Hillary Rodrigues and John S. Harding, *Introduction to the Study of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 6-11, 134-140.

perspective that makes knowing everything impossible."[46] In this vein, theological study is an *emic* (insider) view when it comes to religious study and resonates more with the methodological positioning of this latter perspective, proceeding with scholarly inquiry from within and committed to a particular view or, more specifically, a religious tradition.[47]

Alles defines theological study as "any religious claim advanced for serious intellectual consideration, regardless of whether the person identifies herself as religious or only as 'spiritual,' and regardless of whether that reflection occurs in the context of a widely recognized religion or a new … practice …"[48] In theological scholarship, the author comes to the inquiry *as* a religious practitioner or adherent committed to a specific religion using faith, spiritual experience, and his/her own accumulated tradition in addition to logic and historical and philosophical investigation as evidence in the scholarly study of religion. That is, theology does its work admitting and embracing the religious beliefs, practices, agendas, and biases of a certain faith heritage and attempting to examine and build up that very heritage through systematic critical analysis.[49]

While I certainly recognize the validity and cogency of both methodological perspectives and am not prepared to argue *solely* for one way or the other, the viewpoint of the present investigation takes a distinctly "both/and," rather than "either/or,"

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[46] Terry C. Muck, "Theology of Religions After Knitter and Hick: Beyond the Paradigm," *Interpretation* (Jan. 2007): 7-22, 12.

[47] While, of course, not all theological analyses are postmodern, the postmodern quality of affirming the writer/author's subjectivity and recognizing the importance of affiliation, bias, and perspective correlates very well with the faith commitment and normative quality of theological method and purpose. Also, see Carl Olson, "Contested Categories and Issues in Interpretation," in *Religions of South Asia*, 270-271.

[48] Alles, *Religious Studies*, 11.

[49] For further discussion of the nature and task of theology see Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology* (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1964), 1-10; Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. 1 (University of Chicago Press, 1951), 3-68; Gustavo Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation*, rev. ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1988), 3-12; Jürgen Moltmann, *Experiences of Theology: Ways and Forms of Christian Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 2000), 3-27; and Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 101-120.

approach. Instead of understanding these positions as irreconcilable and mutually exclusive, it seems plausible and appropriate to the dialogical subject matter of this project and the current multifaceted intellectual milieu of plurality and ambiguity to understand them as complimentary and reciprocally constructive.

The approach employed here to engage in evaluating transformation in interreligious dialogue is *dialectical*. That is, while a phenomenological description and analysis of the Buddhist and Christian traditions as well as their dialogical encounter with one another is advanced, a postmodernist admittance of my own particular Christian theological perspective informing and shaping the examination is recognized here and throughout. Thus, each end of the methodological spectrum has a place in the present approach. This study is neither an exclusively descriptive enterprise nor an exclusively normative enterprise, but rather contains elements of both.

The present dialectical approach exists somewhere in between a totally secular, a-religious pursuit for "outsiders" of religion (or a particular religion) and an entirely normative, theological inquiry for "insiders." It draws on both ends of the methodological spectrum and attempts to employ them in mutual correction and improvement. Rather than an absolute methodological "agnosticism" (strict phenomenological position) or complete methodological subjectivity (strict postmodern position), this project employs what Faure has termed a "methodological pluralism,"[50] using more than one type of method in approaching the analysis of Buddhist-Christian dialogue and transformation. Faure states, "Methodological pluralism means here an attempt to mediate between – or

[50] Bernard Faure, *The Rhetoric of Immediacy: A Cultural Critique of Chan/Zen Buddhism* (Princeton University Press, 1991), 7-10.

rather hold together – conflicting approaches …"[51] Though the secular and theological, *etic* and *emic*, and phenomenological and postmodern dichotomies are often disagreeing approaches that frequently diverge from one another, there are important facets to each and are thus held together here in dialectical tension so as to employ a technique that incorporates the instructive aspects of each, correcting and improving on one another.

Another way of characterizing the present dialectical approach is through what Sharma terms "reciprocal illumination."[52] Grounding his comparative religious study in Max Müller's celebrated avowal, "He[/she] who knows one knows none,"[53] Sharma defines reciprocal illumination as "… one tradition shedding light on another and … one method doing the same in relation to another …"[54] Religions and religious adherents illuminating one another through dialogue is further developed later in this study, but methodologically this involves the phenomenological and postmodern approaches reciprocally, mutually building each other up, improving on each other's deficiencies, and shedding light on each other's aims, principles, and functions.

The phenomenological and postmodern positions inform and correct each other in a dialectical interplay of the objective and subjective poles of inquiry. Within this project, both ends of the methodological spectrum are considered instructive, useful, and therefore important to incorporate into the critical analysis of Buddhism and Christianity in dialogical relation to one another. The intention is to advance a two-pronged, dialectical approach that pursues a phenomenological description and examination of Buddhism, Christianity, the fundamental principles of their interaction, and the

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[51] Ibid, 8-9.
[52] Arvind Sharma, *Religious Studies and Comparative Methodology: The Case for Reciprocal Illumination* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2005).
[53] Friedrich Max Müller, *Introduction to the Science of Religion* (London: Longmans, Green, 1873), 16.
[54] Sharma, *Religious Studies*, ix.

possibilities and actualities of transformation in this activity but is also qualified and informed by my own theological framework within the context of the Christian tradition.

In this light, the phenomenological position is checked and corrected by a postmodern critical analysis that admits my preconceptions and partiality of perspective as a Christian writer and interpreter, which prevents my phenomenological description from the tendency to forward invalid claims of objectivity, absolute certainty, and pure neutrality. The postmodern side provides a corrective that critically uncovers assumptions and ideological underpinnings within my own Christian perspective and analysis as well as in the texts being examined. However, the inclination towards utter subjectivity and relativism of the postmodern method is countered and corrected by the descriptive, explanatory work of phenomenology. The phenomenological side imparts a methodological countermeasure that prevents my study from being relegated to simply another private, personal subjective opinion without any inter-subjective relationality in a wider social context. The fundamental idea here is that each position critiques the other in an effort to enhance and enrich the study, making it as intellectually honest and responsible as possible. In other words, this study certainly puts forth a phenomenological, descriptive analysis of the subject matter. But this analysis is not some thoroughly neutral, disinterested, dispassionate depiction; it is *my* analysis, which is conditioned and shaped by my Christian heritage and theological concerns.

While the descriptive, phenomenologically-oriented piece of this study is rather obvious and explicit in the treatment of Buddhist and Christian concepts, beliefs, practices, and interactive dialogue with each other, the more subjective or theological aspect is less apparent and thus must be made evident. Therefore, although the

implications of the practice of Buddhist-Christian dialogue grounded in my own experience of personal encounter with the religious other (in my case, Buddhists and Buddhism) is a significant influence shaping the descriptive evaluation, my particular Christian interpretive framework for understanding must be elucidated at the outset so as to lay bare my presuppositions, assumptions, purposes, and religious viewpoint.

The Christian theological paradigm from which I interpret, understand, and evaluate is what has been generally termed "theology of religions." This is an academic theological discipline concerned with taking into account the questions, answers, meanings, and values posed by other religions from a standpoint within the framework of one's own tradition and in response to the current and pressing context of religious plurality and diversity.[55] Kärkkäinen has concisely defined theology of religions in general terms: "Theology of religions is that discipline of theological studies which attempts to account theologically for the meaning and value of other religions."[56] Since my faith perspective as a writer is situated within the theological discourse and spiritual practice of Christianity, the present study is influenced and shaped by a distinctly *Christian* theology of religions. Therefore, in the current religiously plural circumstances, where non-Christian religions are no longer distant or exotic subjects of discussion but have become much more present in everyday life throughout the world, it is important "to think theologically about what it means for Christians to live with people of other faiths

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[55] For further reading concerning the nature of the theology of religions as an academic discipline see Paul F. Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2002); John Hick and Paul F. Knitter, *The Myth of Christian Uniqueness: Toward a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 1987); John Hick, *A Christian Theology of Religions: The Rainbow of Faiths* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1995); Eugene F. Gorski, *Theology of Religions: A Sourcebook for Interreligious Study* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2008); James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999); and Jacques Dupuis, *Toward a Christian Theology of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997).

[56] Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to the Theology of Religions: Biblical, Historical and Contemporary Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 20.

and about the relationship of Christianity to the other religions."[57] Implied in the discipline of the theology of religions is the understanding that Christian theological discourse can no longer proceed in detached isolation from the views, ideas, and customs of other religions. Rather, the principle of dialogue with non-Christian people is assumed, such that in order for Christian theology to be the most intellectually rigorous, ethically responsible, and spiritually transformative it must attempt to honestly and prudently take account of the presence of religious others through deliberate encounter.

Alan Race has stated, "The Christian theology of religions has come to be the name for that area of Christian studies which aims to give some definition and shape to Christian reflection on the theological implications of living in a religiously plural world."[58] Thus, the work of a Christian theology of religions is to critically engage with and reflect on the beliefs, practices, symbols, and scriptures of non-Christian religions from the faith stance of Christianity and in the context of Christian theological inquiry. Theology of religions addresses the theological implications concerning what the presence of and interaction with non-Christian people and religions means for Christian faith and practice in an age of religious plurality and diversity.

Christian theology of religions asks important questions reflecting issues that come out of a pluralistic context: How should followers of Jesus understand the other religions of the world? Will the adherents of Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Islam,

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[57] Ibid. It is important to note here that the challenge of religious plurality and diversity for Christianity is not new. From the very beginning of Christian history, early church communities found themselves proclaiming Christ among a variety of religious perspectives both inside and outside of Christian circles. Throughout the world, Christians have had to make sense of faith in Christ in circumstances of religious plurality. What makes the present context more challenging, and thus pressing, is that the world has seen unprecedented encounter with and access to different people and their cultures through technological and communicational developments. See Kärkkäinen, *Theology of Religions*, 18-20.

[58] Alan Race*, Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1982), ix.

Jainism, Taoism, Sikhism, etc. experience salvation? If so, how? Is God (Father, Son, and Spirit) active and working in these other religions? If so, how? To what extent are the non-Christian religions true? What does it mean for Christians to live with people of other faiths? What is the relationship of Christianity to other religions? And these last two are especially important with regard to the topic of this present project – How ought Christians respond to the religious other? What are the outcomes of deliberately and sincerely interacting with religious others?

These are some of the centrally significant questions posed in a Christian theology of religions. The present approach is conditioned and influenced by these principles and purposes of the Christian theology of religions system of inquiry. As a committed, practicing Christian who is a theologian of religions dedicated to asking the above questions and intently engaging in dialogue with religious others, my approach here cannot but be shaped by these normative assumptions, values, and perspectives. In fact, the very intention and purpose underlying this study of transformation through Buddhist-Christian dialogue is characterized by my outlook as a Christian devoted to personally engaging in the very interreligious interaction that is the subject of this project. In particular, I have been engaged in challenging yet fruitful conversation with Buddhist monastics and laypersons for several years now, studying, working, playing, and building friendships in a context constituted largely by Buddhist perspectives and values. Thus, not only am I a scholar of interreligious dialogue, but I am also a Christian *practitioner* of dialogue with religious others, a practice which offers both challenges and possibilities leading to mutual understanding and religious transformation. In short, I am what Martin

Forward has termed a "dialogician"[59] – one who comes to interreligious dialogue simultaneously as a theoretician and practitioner, engaging in both the theory and practice of dialogue.

My background and perspective as a Christian have been formed largely by the interpretation of Christian teaching and practice of the Unity School of Christianity. Unity is a New Thought Christian denomination, founded in the late 19th century U.S. by Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, which has coupled American Pragmatism with Emersonian Transcendentalism in an effort to re-conceive Christian principles and praxis and create a tolerant, open, and inclusive form of Christianity. It emphasizes the centrality of prayer and meditation, mysticism, receptivity to non-Christian understandings of spirituality, and the practical application of the teachings of Jesus and Church tradition. Although it is not necessary to go into great detail about Unity here, it is important to recognize it as the form of Christianity to which I adhere, one which embraces the religious plurality and diversity of our time and unreservedly opens itself up to non-Christian religions for the purpose of further learning and spiritual growth.[60]

As a work combining phenomenological description with a Christian theology of religions, I seek to employ the most instructive aspects of both methods. On one hand, in studying the beliefs, practices, and scriptures of Buddhism and Christianity as well as sources of their interactive dialogue with each other, this project treats Buddhism, Christianity, and their interaction as religious phenomena or "facts in the world" and attempts to be as balanced, adequate, and fair to each tradition or viewpoint as possible.

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[59] Martin Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue: A Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2001), 3.

[60] For an overview of the history and teachings of Unity Christianity, see Neal Vahle, *The Unity Movement: Its Evolution and Spiritual Teachings* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2002). Also, see resources at www.unity.org (Accessed 3/20/10).

On the other hand, since I am conditioned by my own interpretive framework for understanding, my Christian perspective is necessarily and unavoidably part and parcel of this study. Thus, to produce a responsible and conscientious study, my Christian commitment is admitted and embraced as having an impact on my description and evaluation of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. My goal is to take this even further by incorporating, as a facet of the assessment of Buddhist-Christian encounter, a critical interpretation of the import of the religious phenomena/information evaluated within a horizon of understanding characterized by a Christian worldview. This means that the description and analysis of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is performed under the influence and guidance of the categories, terminology, and perspective of a Christian theology of religions grounded in Western philosophical and theological discourse. Similar to how Ingram puts it in reference to his own method, "…I intend to write as an historian of religions functioning as theologian-philosopher of religion."[61] Therefore, in a mutual dialectical relationship, with a fair description and analysis of each tradition and their interaction, a constructive use of the theology of religions discipline is a crucial aspect of the current study.

One of the 20th century's theological giants, Paul Tillich, in his last published lecture, recognized that the coming future of theological discussion entails the "interpenetration of systematic theological study and religious historical studies," so that "every individual doctrinal statement or ritual expression of Christianity receives a new intensity of meaning."[62] Culling out this "intensity of meaning" from Buddhist-Christian

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[61] Paul O. Ingram, *A Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Two Universalistic Religions in Transformation* (Lewiston, NY: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1988).
[62] Paul Tillich, "The Significance of the History of Religions for the Systematic Theologian," in *The Future of Religions*, Paul Tillich, ed. Jerald C. Brauer (NY: Harper & Row, 1966), 91.

dialogue through a dialectical approach of mutual edification between phenomenology and theology is the underlying, essential intention of this study.

1.3 Thesis: Main Questions and Prospective Answers

Positioned amid scholarship in Buddhist-Christian studies, this project addresses three main interrelated questions of dialogue and transformation. 1) What is the nature of dialogue, especially *interreligious* dialogue, and how does it engender transformation? What is the character of transformation as part of the dialogical process? 2) How has specifically *Buddhist-Christian* interaction cultivated transformation in the lives of believers of both religions? 3) What about interreligious dialogue contributes to the experience of transformation as it is predominantly understood by Buddhism and Christianity? That is, how might the practice of dialogue with the religious other encourage and elicit transformation in the lives of Buddhists and Christians by assisting or reinforcing the process of overcoming the human problematic as conceived and explicated by Buddhism and Christianity respectively? These are the chief, central questions this project seeks to address.

The first question speaks to the possibility of existential change and development in interreligious dialogue. Initially, the transformational character of the dialogical process must be defined and determined. Transformation must be identified as being a real and valid opportunity in the event of interaction during dialogue. To this end, a definitional examination of dialogue, transformation, and the religious dimension of human life is forwarded primarily through a hermeneutical methodology.

The second question addresses the exemplification of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In order to highlight the practical dimension of transformation in

Buddhist-Christian dialogue, it is necessary to trace particular instances of the experience of transformation, recognizing and evaluating any evidence of development and growth in the perspectives of individual practitioners from both traditions. This includes Christians expressing some change of religious viewpoint through encounters with Buddhists or Buddhism, as well as Buddhists conveying some change of religious outlook as a result of their encounters with Christians or Christianity. That is, evidence of transformation in Buddhist-Christian interaction may be found in the efforts of adherents reinterpreting or reapplying doctrines, beliefs, ideas, or practices from the other tradition so as to find new religious insight or knowledge. The published writings of practicing Buddhists and Christians are utilized as foundational resources in considering this practical dimension of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue.

Concerning the final question, the crux of transformative religious experience is grounded in the response to the central human problematic as conceived and articulated by each religion. Each religion conveys a variously expressed yet fundamental predicament that afflicts human life and must be surmounted. Each religion also articulates a variously expressed yet fundamental answer or solution to this pervasive human predicament, which is understood as the primary soteriological objective of human life. Therefore, those characteristics of interreligious dialogue, as well as certain beliefs, practices, and values of the religious other, which are able to help address the problem of the human condition (as it is understood by each respective tradition) can be said to promote transformation. The transformational character of dialogue is elucidated as supportive of advancement in greater understanding and thus fuller appreciation of the other and self, as well as being disclosing of truth and meaning through the incorporation

of other religious elements into one's own worldview. It is argued in the present project that the experience of manifestation and realization of truth about ultimate reality and humanity that arise in the interaction during interreligious dialogue is transformational and thus contributes to progress towards the soteriological goal in Buddhism and Christianity, respectively, in a process of answering the fundamental human problem.

In attempting to answer these questions, this project demonstrates that the possibility for transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue exists because of the inherent human capacity for understanding, but also specifically because of the very nature of the process of interpretation itself. This transformational character of dialogue is analyzed and defined according to a method of philosophical hermeneutics.

The work of modern/postmodern hermeneutical theory has largely asserted the possibility of development of understanding in reading and conversation through conceiving of human existence *as interpretive*. That is to say, it is by virtue of the human capacity of understanding through interpretation that growth in perspective, attitude, values, and/or belief is possible in dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. Indeed, the transformation that takes place in interpretation is not simply a matter of the intellect only, but of the *entirety* of one's being *as human*. The process of interpretation itself, which leads to development in understanding, is explicated itself as possessing a character of being dialogical and transformative. This is accomplished through the use of relevant and current scholarship of interreligious dialogue and the theology of religions.

However, based on an approach shaped by Christian theology, the main methodological groundwork concerning dialogue and the prospect of transformation is advanced largely through employing the relevant scholarly work of Fr. Dr. David Tracy,

which might be seen as a theological re-reading and expansion of the philosophical hermeneutical work of Heidegger, Ricoeur, and especially Gadamer. Using Tracy's hermeneutics as a methodological interpretive framework, it is argued that dialogue between or among religious others leads to greater experience of understanding and appreciation of others, oneself, and truths about ultimate reality and human existence.

A combination of philosophical hermeneutics, interreligious scholarship, and theology of religions is utilized to forward a critical analysis of what interreligious dialogue is and is not. It is argued that interreligious dialogue's purpose is principally about greater learning and understanding of the other, self, and reality, which is part of its transformational character. Concerning specifically Buddhist-Christian dialogue, evidence of transformation is provided first by investigating the experience of individual adherents of each religion as a result of their actual occasions of Buddhist-Christian exchange. It is possible to witness transformational development in the practitioners' understanding of their experience of encounter with religious otherness.

In the course of this study, an examination is forwarded concerning the human problematic and the transformative solution/answer to this problem (including goals and techniques), as expressed by each religion. That is, within both Buddhism and Christianity there is articulated a paradigm of transformational experience from an old to a new way of living characterized by addressing the human problematic within each tradition. This soteriological progress in way of life/mode of being and definitive religious experience is the transformational character and process found in both the Buddhist and Christian answers to the human problematic.

It is also argued that dialogue between Buddhists and Christians can be understood as a type or expression of practice in each religious tradition. That is, dialogue with the other can be seen as an activity in the current context of religious plurality that promotes the liberative process of transformation in the life of the Buddhist and Christian. It is contended that the dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is part of the *solution* to the human dilemma rather than part of the problem.

1.4 Place of the Present Project in Wider Scholarship on Transformation in Buddhist-Christian Dialogue

In the field of religious studies and theology, the study of Buddhist-Christian relations has recently secured an important place due to the considerable amount of attention scholars have afforded it in study of interreligious relations in addition to a growing presence and influence of Buddhism in Western societies.[63] In the area of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, there have been significant studies of the theory and practice of this engagement.[64] However, there has not been a substantial amount of scholarship produced focusing on the nature of the transformational process in dialogue between Buddhists and Christians. In order to illustrate this project's originality and its

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[63] For further information about the increasing presence and influence of Buddhism in the West see Charles S. Prebish and Martin Baumann, eds., *Westward Dharma: Buddhism Beyond Asia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2002); Richard Hughes Seager, *Buddhism in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Stephen Batchelor, *The Awakening of the West: The Encounter of Buddhism and Western Culture* (Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press, 1994); and Christopher S. Queen, ed., *Engaged Buddhism in the West* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2000).

[64] There is a burgeoning, ever-increasing production of scholarship on the relationship between Christianity/Christians and Buddhism/Buddhists. For representative examples, see Hans Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness: Foundations for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* J.W. Heisig, trans. (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); Seiichi Yagi and Leonard Swidler, *A Bridge to Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990); Ingram, *Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*; Frederick J. Streng and Sallie B. King, ed. *The Sound of Liberating Truth: Buddhist-Christian Dialogues in Honor of Frederick J. Streng* (Surrey, UK: Curzon Press, 1999). There are numerous other scholarly treatments of the presence and practice of Buddhist-Christian interreligious dialogue, many of which are mentioned later in the present study. For this dialogue in relation to science see, Paul O. Ingram, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue in an Age of Science* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2008).

situation in relation to other studies of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, it is pertinent and useful to outline a brief review of the scholarship specifically concerning the transformational facet of Buddhist-Christian encounter.

One important work in this regard is John Cobb's *Beyond Dialogue: Toward a Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism*, which is a theological work from a Christian perspective.[65] Cobb points out that the notion of "dialogue" between Buddhists and Christians has mostly been a rather artificial or superficial comparison and contrast of views, a mere exchange of outlooks. There has been no expressed attempt by scholars of Buddhist-Christian dialogue to develop a theory that expects significant changes in attitudes and viewpoints of those involved. Cobb argues that all real interreligious conversations proceed with the intention that one will learn something valuable from the other. That is, he argues that what Buddhist-Christian dialogue should be aiming for is not exactly "dialogue" but the "mutual transformation" of both individuals and the traditions.[66] He examines how Christians/Christianity might be transformed by Buddhists/Buddhism (with special attention to Pure Land) and vice versa by analyzing certain religious concepts. However, Cobb fails to explicitly and specifically deal with how dialogue might fit into the process of transformation in each religion as it offers a salvific answer to the human problematic addressed in each religious tradition.[67]

Another piece of scholarship that has addressed transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation*,

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[65] John B. Cobb, Jr., *Beyond Dialogue: Toward Mutual Transformation of Christianity and Buddhism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).
[66] Ibid, Chap. 2.
[67] Ibid, Chap. 5 and 6.

edited by Paul Ingram and Frederick Streng.[68] This anthology of essays by both Buddhist and Christian scholar-practitioners concentrates on how Buddhist-Christian dialogue might give insight and a conceptual framework for authentic living, contribute to answering some of the basic problems of modern human life, and seek to explore the difficulties and possibilities of religious renewal in genuine engagement with another.[69] Of particular importance in the study of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue are Fritz Buri's article on the history of Buddhist and Christian attempts to solve the human problem and Paul Ingram's article on understanding dialogue as a source for creative transformation, grounded in a process theology perspective.[70] Ingram's essay uses philosopher A.N. Whitehead to argue that Christian process theology is a demonstration of creative development through the practice of dialogue with Buddhism. Fritz's essay is directly concerned with the topic of this proposed dissertation. However, it focuses on the historical development of how Buddhism and Christianity have sought meaning in human suffering. The current study seeks to expand this into a consideration of the ways Buddhist-Christian dialogue may contribute to soteriological transformation as conceived in each religion.

Additionally, Donald Mitchell's theological work, *Spirituality and Emptiness*, contains two chapters that speak to transformation in Buddhist and Christian spirituality. Chapter five examines the similarities and differences between Buddhist *sunyata* and Christian *kenosis* as it pertains to personal spiritual development as understood in each

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[68] Paul O. Ingram and Frederick J. Streng, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Mutual Renewal and Transformation* (University of Hawaii Press, 1986).
[69] Ingram and Streng, "Prologue," *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, 3-4.
[70] Fritz Buri, "A Comparison of Buddhism and Christianity According to a History of Problems," *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*: 15-34; Paul O. Ingram, "Interfaith Dialogue as a Source of Buddhist-Christian Creative Transformation," *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*: 77-94.

tradition.[71] In chapter six the communal and social dimensions of Buddhist and Christian spiritual growth are examined.[72] These chapters certainly compare and contrast the elements of spiritual transformation in both traditions, but do not take this further and particularly address how the interpretive encounter of Buddhist-Christian dialogue plays an influential part in the transformative, soteriological experience of Buddhists and Christians. This study seeks to extend Mitchell's rather comparative treatment of Buddhism and Christianity to include an investigation of their dialogical interaction and the transformational experience that may come about as it relates to the soteriological answer each tradition gives for the human problematic.

Raimundo Panikkar also speaks of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in his influential treatise, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*.[73] This work examines the nature, importance, and actual practice of interreligious relations. Panikkar does dedicate an entire chapter specifically to how Buddhists and Christians attend to the human predicament through respective notions of emptiness and fullness,[74] and explores briefly the category of growth in interreligious encounter.[75] Though he provides his own perspective on Buddhism and Christianity's respective answers to the human problematic and explicates his conception of growth as consisting of both continuity and novelty (or change), Panikkar does not consider in any depth the ways in which the practice of dialogue may help advance Buddhism and Christianity, Buddhists and Christians in reciprocal transformational development. This study intends to make this crucial link

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[71] Donald W. Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York/Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 1991), 109-141.
[72] Ibid, 142-181.
[73] Raimundo Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999).
[74] The chapter entitled "Sūnyatā and Plērōma: The Buddhist and Christian Response to the Human Predicament," Ibid, 77-100.
[75] Ibid, 69-72.

between the soteriological answering of the human problematic and the practice of dialogue with the religious other.

Some of the work of German-born Christian theologian of religions Perry Schmidt-Leukel has also discussed the actual and potential transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. In a recent volume entitled *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity*, Schmidt-Leukel writes a series of essays contending that religions (specifically Buddhism and Christianity) and religious practitioners can go and have gone through a process of transformation in dialogical encounter with each other.[76] Especially in the methodological first half of the work, Schmidt-Leukel argues that this transformational experience comes about through integrating elements of the other religious life (such as beliefs, ideas, practices, rituals, scriptures, etc.) into one's own perspective or identity. He speaks of transformation occurring in dialogue as a process of moving from tolerance of the religious other to appreciation, and then defends the claim of multi-religious identity as a legitimate perspective that has resulted from the experience of transformation through integration of the religious elements of the other.[77] This integration process results in the alteration, expansion, deepening, and renewal of one's religious worldview into something that is still confluent with one's previous perspective and identity and yet is also changed, transformed, and improved.[78] Schmidt-Leukel's categories of the movement from tolerance to appreciation and the integration of the religious elements of the other are employed in the present study as an integral aspect of how transformation in dialogue is

[76] Perry Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration: How Inter-faith Encounter Changes Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2009).
[77] Ibid, Chs. 2-3.
[78] Ibid, 4-6.

understood. However, Schmidt-Leukel's program is concerned primarily with how interreligious encounter transforms Christianity in dialogue with Buddhism and less with how this encounter changes Buddhism. This project deals also with the *Buddhist* side of transformation through interreligious dialogue along with an evaluation of how dialogue contributes to the transformative answers to the human problem extant in each tradition.

Another significant work that is concerned with transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is James W. Heisig's *Dialogues at One Inch above the Ground: Reclamations of Belief in an Interreligious Age*.[79] Heisig, who is director of the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture in Nagoya, Japan and is a Roman Catholic theologian, has written a chapter specifically dealing with the prospect and presence of transformative dialogue among Buddhists and Christians entitled, "Converting Buddhism to Christianity, Christianity to Buddhism."[80] In this chapter he redefines conversion in the context of Buddhist-Christian dialogue to refer to the process of translating the self-understanding of one tradition or practitioner into that of another, which requires neither replacing some beliefs, ideas, and practices with others nor simply harmonizing them. Conversion is the course of action whereby a religion or person encounters a religious other and experiences a "change of heart" or a "new way of seeing" oneself, one's own tradition, the other, and the other's tradition.[81] While this reconceptualization of conversion as a way of speaking of transformation is incorporated into the work of this study, Heisig fails to develop this model in any significant depth and does not deal with

[79] James W. Heisig, *Dialogues at One Inch above the Ground: Reclamations of Belief in an Interreligious Age* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2003).
[80] Ibid, 105-120.
[81] Ibid, 116-117.

the transformative soteriological answers to the human problem in the context of dialogue, which is integral to the purpose of the present project.

Paul Ingram, primarily a religious studies scholar but also a theologian, has written extensively on Buddhist-Christian dialogue. Nonetheless, his treatise entitled *A Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Two Universalistic Religions in Transformation* stands out as addressing the issue of transformation in Buddhist-Christian encounter with depth and clarity from a process philosophical perspective.[82] In particular, the first three chapters focus on dialogue as a process of creative transformation and outline how Buddhists and Christians have responded to dialogical encounter with each other.[83] Although this work is not recent, it is nonetheless significant in that it is a detailed and thorough coverage of the conception and experience of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue from an informed, first-hand perspective. However, Ingram's work does not include an analysis of how transformation in dialogue relates specifically to the answering of the human problematic in each religion, which is the central focus of the present study.

Another important piece of scholarship concerned with spiritual transformation in Buddhist-Christian studies is Frederick Streng's influential article, "Understanding Christian and Buddhist Personal Transformation."[84] Streng presents a critical comparison of Luther's "justification by faith" and *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines*'s "perfection of wisdom" as paradigms of ultimate transformation. Streng forwards

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[82] Ingram, *Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*.
[83] Ibid, x-xi.
[84] Frederick J. Streng, "Understanding Christian and Buddhist Personal Transformation: Luther's Justification by Faith and the Indian Buddhist Perfection of Wisdom," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 2 (1982): 15-44. Streng also published a short talk calling for the mutual transformation of Buddhists and Christians in dialogue, but did not provide any scholarly detail. See Frederick J. Streng, "Mutual Transformation: An Answer to a Question," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 121-126.

his understanding of transformation as the existential movement from inauthentic to authentic living.[85] An explication of what is meant by "transformation" and the human problem as understood by the respective sources is offered and is instructive in helping to shape the understanding of transformation in the present study. However, the analysis is confined only to two specific texts in the space of a journal article and is not specifically situated in the context of Buddhist-Christian *dialogical* encounter, but is rather restricted to more of a *comparative* enterprise.

The Cobb-Abe dialogue of the 1980's had stimulated scholarship concerning the connections between *śūnyatā* and *kenosis*. Yet, in the mid-1990's, a movement beyond this emphasis emerged. One piece of scholarship that makes this move and simultaneously deals with the issue of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue is Cabanne's article, "Beyond Kenosis: New Foundations for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue."[86] Cabanne reinterprets Philippians 2:1-11 according to the broader understanding of the psychospiritual consciousness or "Mind" that is the "heart, soul, and spirit of Christian spirituality."[87] He also suggests that *śūnyatā* is underpinned by the wider concept of "Mind" in Buddhism.[88] He argues that a more appropriate basis for dialogue between Buddhists and Christians is not *śūnyatā* and *kenosis*, but more primary mental categories of spiritual experience – *bodhicitta* and the Mind of Christ.[89] Cabanne feels that a shift to these fundamental characterizations of spirituality will offer a paradigm for dialogue that will better address the transformational aspect (*metanoia* and

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[85] Ibid, 18.
[86] E.B. Cabanne, "Beyond Kenosis: New Foundations for Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 103-117.
[87] Ibid, 105.
[88] Ibid, 112.
[89] Ibid.

metamorphosis) of Buddhist and Christian experience. Cabanne's paper only touches upon how Buddhist-Christian dialogue contributes to this transformational *metanoia* or *metamorphosis*. The present study incorporates the pertinent and novel aspects of Cabanne's article but moves beyond it by providing an analysis integrating Buddhist-Christian dialogue and its transformational character addressing the human problematic in terms of soteriological experience.

Above are the major scholarly works that have considered (to varying extents) the prospect and presence of transformation in Buddhist-Christian dialogue in any significant depth and detail. Indeed, there is not an abundance of academic work on this particular topic and the scholarship that has been published does not extensively explore the possible ways in which dialogue is conducive to advancing the experience of transformation as soteriologically understood in both Buddhism and Christianity.

The originality of the current project is two-fold. 1) It seeks to identify the purpose and qualities of productive interreligious dialogue and the transformational experience that may arise in dialogue, grounded in the important philosophical work of David Tracy's hermeneutics. 2) It also investigates and evaluates the ways in which significant dialogical characteristics are conducive to the advancement of the transformational experience of overcoming the human problematic through soteriological paradigms as expressed in each religious tradition. That is, this project, as situated among Buddhist-Christian dialogical study, intends to build from and advance existing scholarship concerning the transformative power in Buddhist-Christian dialogue by further exploring the ways that dialogical engagement, as a religious practice, may contribute to the progression and enhancement of the experience of soteriological

advancement of Buddhist and Christian practitioners along their respective religious paths.

Therefore, while the present study is situated firmly in the midst of the academic work outlined above (as well as the more broad scholarly study of interreligious dialogue and theology of religions), it expands upon the current scholarship and seeks to elucidate additional means by which Buddhists, Christians, and people of other religious heritages might continually encounter one another and each other's traditions.

CHAPTER TWO

DAVID TRACY'S HERMENEUTICS OF ANALOGICAL IMAGINATION THROUGH CONVERSATION AS AN INTERPRETIVE FRAMEWORK FOR DIALOGUE

2.1 Tracy's Perspective and Work

Roman Catholic priest and theologian, Fr. Dr. David Tracy, arguably represents one of the most extensive and intricate contemporary religious thinkers to propose a way of understanding a particular religious perspective or tradition within the cultural plurality and ambiguity of the current postmodern milieu. As a theologian in the Roman Catholic tradition, Tracy seeks to formulate a specifically *Christian* critically reflective response to the present and rather increasingly pervasive postmodern situation where a multiplicity of perspectives is recognized and no viewpoint is affirmed as being categorically or absolutely more valid than any other in terms of truth and value.[90]

Though Tracy's program is distinctly Christian in character, his work at devising a method of conceiving of and reconciling his theological perspective with the difficulties of the current context can be generalized and applied to other religious viewpoints that recognize the need and import of taking the postmodern challenge of plurality and ambiguity seriously. That is, although his position is particularly Christian, the hermeneutical import and logic of his work is pertinent and applicable for any other

[90] Tracy's career has been principally concerned with theological methodology and hermeneutics amidst the circumstances of religious and cultural pluralism. See especially David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1970); David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, and Hope* (University of Chicago Press, 1987); David Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other: The Inter-Religious Dialogue* (Louvain, Belgium: Peeters Press, 1990); and, the work that is used as the primary methodological resource in the present study, David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981).

individual religious perspective with similar concerns. Other particular religious viewpoints (such as a Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or other Christian point of view) may also adopt and utilize Tracy's program, setting forth a conception of their religious particularity within the context of postmodernity and reconciling their individuality and tradition with the current situation of plurality and ambiguity.

Tracy's theological hermeneutics expresses a dialogical response to the religious multiplicity of our current situation and thus actively engages with this pluralism of perspectives, seeking to come to terms with its problems and envision its possibilities. He intends to make sense of what it means to be an adherent or practitioner of a specific religion and yet genuinely and productively embrace religious pluralism, purposefully encountering religious others in the contemporary postmodern world.

Furthermore, since his work parallels the character and purpose of the present project, Tracy's hermeneutical theory provides an appropriate and instructive interpretive framework used here to ground an approach to understanding interreligious dialogue and the transformational quality possible in and through conversation. Tracy's theological hermeneutics, involving the categories of especially *the classic* and *the analogical imagination*, offers a well-developed, intricate, and sophisticated philosophical foundation upon which this examination of dialogue and transformation is predominantly based. His theoretical model functions as the critical-hermeneutical groundwork with which this study of the experience of growth in interfaith exchange is corroborated and underpinned throughout.

2.2 Tracy's Background for Understanding as Human Category of Interpretation and Growth

Prior to analyzing Tracy's hermeneutics, it is instructive for better grasping his method to briefly probe the Heideggerian-Gadamerian (re)conception of understanding as an inherent human capacity that allows for learning, interpretation, and, therefore, growth. It is this hermeneutical background upon which Tracy stands and through which he further develops his investigations of understanding and interpretation in the religious experience and context of plurality.

In the history of modern philosophical hermeneutics from Schleiermacher and Dilthey to Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur, Tracy represents a culmination and reinterpretation of the tradition. Influenced especially by Heidegger and, most notably, Gadamer, Tracy reaffirms the crucial significance of understanding as the fundamental category that establishes the possibility of interpretation and thus change or growth as part and parcel of human existence.

It was not until the work of Heidegger that the transition to an ontological approach to hermeneutics occurs. With Heidegger, understanding is no longer viewed as a way of decoding texts for acquiring better knowledge about the texts themselves and their authors but rather as an ontological category, an intrinsic characteristic of human existence.[91] Prior to this ontological turn (for example, in the work of Schleiermacher), understanding was conceived primarily as a method of clearing away obstacles for proper analysis and explanation.[92] In the words of Ricoeur, "…*understanding* ceases to appear

[91] Paul Ricoeur, "The Task of Hermeneutics," in Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, ed. and trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1981), 53-62.
[92] Ibid, 43-53.

as a simple *mode of knowing* in order to become a *way of being* and a way of relating to beings and to being."[93] Though Dilthey's work does view understanding as grounded in human being itself as a "category of life,"[94] the bulk of his work is dedicated to developing a critical method for the human sciences that would rival the natural sciences, as well as addressing "the problem of interpretation within the general domain of historical knowledge, for which he sought to elucidate the conditions of possibility."[95] Really, it is beginning with Heidegger, followed by Gadamer, that an ontological turn is witnessed.

Heidegger establishes understanding as grounded in the ontological concept of *Dasein* ("Being-there"), the human's basic nature. He asserts,

> If we Interpret understanding as a fundamental *existentiale*, this indicates that this phenomenon is conceived as a basic mode of Dasein's *Being*. On the other hand, 'understanding' in the sense of *one* possible kind of cognizing among others … must … be Interpreted as an existential derivative of that primary understanding which is one of the constituents of the Being of the "there" in general.[96]

Heidegger develops the meaning of understanding as a constituent of "being-in-the-world" – the human being, *Dasein*. All acts of cognizing (or processing thought) arise from this primordial element of the human being, understanding, which is inherent in *Dasein's* temporal, finite, and historically-embedded mode of being. According to Heidegger, the temporality of human existence (constituted by a horizon of past, present, and future) causes humans to project themselves mainly toward the future.[97] Looking toward the future, humans are always expressing themselves through acts of self-

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[93] Ibid, 44.
[94] Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, "Language, Mind, and Artifact: An Outline of Hermeneutic Theory since the Enlightenment," in *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from the Enlightenment to the Present*, ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer (New York: Continuum, 2000), 25.
[95] John B. Thompson, "Editor's Introduction," in Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics*, 20.
[96] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* 31, in *Hermeneutics Reader*, 215.
[97] Ibid, 216-217.

realization or self-manifestation. Understanding is that fundamental mode of being through which the possibilities and potentialities of one's life are disclosed or unfolded.[98] It is this function of understanding as that which allows for the disclosure of possibilities that Tracy adopts and adapts for a method of doing constructive religious interpretation and engagement in the midst of plurality.

Gadamer, also, feels that since humanity itself is historical or time-bound, understanding is part and parcel of this temporal existence.[99] Resonating Heidegger, Gadamer sees understanding as the mode of being of *Dasein*. He states,

> Before any differentiation of understanding into the various directions of pragmatic or theoretical interest, understanding is Dasein's mode of being, insofar as it is potentiality-for-being and "possibility." …Understanding is the original characteristic of the being of human life itself…[100]

Understanding is that essential quality that allows humans to realize and enact future possibilities and which establishes the ability to interpret and make meaning of life in the context of temporality. He states further, "[Understanding] implies the general possibility of interpreting, of seeing connections, of drawing conclusions…"[101] Tracy particularly draws on Gadamer's development of understanding as involving the disclosure of truth in a realized experience, which occurs as an event or happening in human history and language.[102]

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[98] Ibid, 218.
[99] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, in *Hermeneutics Reader*, 268.
[100] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1993), 259.
[101] Ibid, 260.
[102] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, in *Hermeneutics Reader*, 270-271. Gadamer's conception of the event-character of the disclosure of truth is elaborated and developed with regard to Tracy's hermeneutics later in the chapter.

Ricoeur picks up on Heidegger's rendering of understanding as "a structure of being-in-the-world."[103] Understanding refers to the capacity to project possibilities, which is the process of making meaning in the world, in history. As Ricoeur states, "The moment of 'understanding' corresponds dialectically to being in a situation: it is the projection of our ownmost possibilities at the very heart of the situations in which we find ourselves."[104] Human understanding is simply not possible apart from a temporal context (in language, culture, geographical locale, etc.) and thus consists of the realization of the potential meaning in every event encountered by the individual. Following Heidegger and Gadamer before him, Ricoeur acknowledges that understanding is that historical, temporal, and contextual mode of being which allows humans to create meaning for themselves.[105]

According to the Heideggerian view, understanding is the fundamental category of human being in the world and interpretation is the *active expression* or *manifestation* of this principle of being. Interpretation entails the process whereby understanding is activated and brought forth in lived experience. Heidegger asserts, "This development of the understanding we call 'interpretation.' In it the understanding appropriates understandingly that which is understood by it."[106] Interpretation is the activity of unfolding the innate capacity to understand. Interpretation is not something antithetical to or disparate from understanding, but it rather fulfills the potentialities of the indwelling, innate human characteristic of understanding. Heidegger further states, "In interpretation, understanding does not become something different. It becomes itself. Such interpretation

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[103] Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics*, 142.
[104] Ibid.
[105] Ricoeur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics*, 107-109.
[106] Heidegger, *Being and Time* 32, in *Hermeneutics Reader*, 221.

is grounded existentially in understanding…it is rather the working-out of possibilities projected in understanding."[107] Interpretation is the active expression of the existential capacity of understanding.

As an important sub-topic, in the context of understanding as a category for interpretation, there arises the problem of misunderstanding. How do we make sense of misunderstanding if understanding is the mode of being or inherent capacity through which interpretation occurs? Schleiermacher, within the Romantic tradition, conceives of misunderstanding as ubiquitous in the interpretive endeavor, which arises through distance in time between the author and reader as well as changes in language usage or semantics.[108] He states of the hermeneutical task, "We can…express the whole task in this negative manner: – to avoid misunderstanding at every point. For nobody can be satisfied with simply non-understanding, so complete understanding must be the result if that task is solved correctly."[109] For Schleiermacher, misunderstanding is the norm in human life and the goal is to dispel any and all sources of misunderstanding so as to clear the way for the attainment of understanding.

Gadamer takes on this question of misunderstanding and offers a viable answer. With the ontological turn in hermeneutics, understanding is seen as an intrinsic character of human existence, an innate capacity that is prior to any eventual misunderstanding. That is, understanding has a kind of hermeneutical primacy over misunderstanding in the sense that it is the essential connection or ground of meaning assumed in all human

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[107] Ibid. Also see Ricoeur, "Metaphor and the Problem of Hermeneutics," in *Hermeneutics*, 177.
[108] Friedrich Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics and Criticism and Other Writings*, ed. Andrew Bowe (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 21-29.
[109] Ibid, 29.

relations.[110] Gadamer provocatively asks, "Is it not, in fact, the case that every misunderstanding presupposes a 'deep common accord'?"[111] There is a shared agreement or connective bond in terms of language and being between self and other, I and thou, interpreter and interpreted that is presumed even for misunderstanding to take place. To say "thou" to someone or something in relationship or in interpretation assumes an already existing basis of understanding. In other words, we are always already *understanding* beings, or beings who *understand* as our essential mode of being, and any *mis*understanding is a disruption or frustration within this "deep common accord" of understanding.[112]

Nonetheless, this rupture or disturbance of the presupposed common accord of understanding is not necessarily tragic or disastrous. From the original familiarity and commonality of understanding comes the experience of the strangeness, unfamiliarity, and discord of misunderstanding. Correspondingly, out of the estrangement of misunderstanding there arises the possibility of a renewed and enhanced understanding through the encounter of interpretation. The problem of misunderstanding could then be seen as not so much of a problem since it provides a real occasion and opportunity in the process of interpretation that leads back into the "deep common accord" of understanding. And this is all possible because of the primary inherent capacity of understanding as our mode of being.[113]

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[110] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, trans. and ed. David E. Linge (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 7-8.
[111] Ibid, 7.
[112] Ibid, 8.
[113] For discussion about the importance of misunderstanding in interpretation see William Rasch, "Injecting Noise into the System: Hermeneutics and the Necessity of Misunderstanding," *SubStance* 21.1.67 (1992): 61-76.

Coming now to Tracy, he receives and utilizes these above mentioned hermeneutical analyses of understanding and interpretation and forwards a fresh insight that takes into account theological/religious considerations and the current postmodern situation of plurality and ambiguity. Establishing himself in the Heideggerian-Gadamerian tradition, he declares,

> Every time we act, deliberate, judge, understand, or even experience, we are interpreting. To understand at all is to interpret. … To be human is to act reflectively, to decide deliberately, to understand intelligently, to experience fully. Whether we know it or not, to be human is to be a skilled interpreter.[114]

Tracy establishes interpretation or "understanding-as-interpretation" as part of the very nature of humanity. No matter what we are thinking, speaking, or doing, we humans are constantly in the process of interpretation. Understanding-as-interpretation involves the totality of the human being. Indeed, it is this theory of understanding and interpretation concerning all facets of human being and experience that provides the basis for Tracy's formulation of a method of plurality, conversation, analogy, and transformation.

The process of interpretation has been articulated by many thinkers through what has come to be known as the *hermeneutical circle*. Before the ontological turn in philosophical hermeneutics, and in circles of literary criticism, the hermeneutical circle refers to the idea that one's understanding of a text is, in its totality, ascertained by reference to the individual parts of that text. And, one's understanding of each individual part is discerned by reference to the whole of the text. Neither the whole text nor any individual part can be understood without reference to one another. The interpretive

[114] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 9.

process is such that the interpreter moves back and forth between the whole and the parts. This reciprocal, interrelational dynamic is conceived as a circle.[115]

Heidegger expanded the use of the term "hermeneutical circle" to refer to the existential human condition. That is, the "parts" of a text become the everyday experiences of a human individual, and the "whole" becomes the totality of this individual's worldview. Rather than moving back and forth from the text to its context, Heideggerian hermeneutics applies this to the interpretive dynamic between the individual and the world. An individual can understand and be understood only in the context of the world s/he inhabits. An person's interpretation and understanding of the whole of reality cannot occur without reference to the individual details of her/his experiential circumstances, and vice versa. It is only by means of critical interpretation in the midst of this dialectic between parts and whole that a greater understanding may emerge.

2.3 Otherness, Religious Pluralism, and Response

As has been previously stated, postmodernity or the postmodern situation often indicates a critique and challenge of the modern, Enlightenment values of objectivity, certainty, absoluteness, and centrality, and instead celebrates subjectivity, uncertainty, relativity, and the de-centralization of ideas, meaning, and actions. Among the incredibly abundant ways of thinking about and defining it, postmodernity could be seen essentially as a type of opposition to inclinations that would eradicate *difference* and *otherness*, instead elevating sameness and the independent self. That is, postmodernity seeks to promote and emphasize the importance of difference and the value of otherness. Rather than existing in the Cartesian paradigm of individual autonomy and independence, the

[115] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 148-153.

self is now understood as thoroughly inter-dependent and inter-relational. In the postmodern context more than ever, the human self can no longer circumvent encounter with the presence of "the other" – that which is experienced as radically different from the self.[116] There is no longer a center; there are many centers. The postmodern situation introduces the actuality of our pluralistic, polycentric present.

As with plurality, there are different possible responses to the encounter with otherness. At the very worst, there is the response that denounces or refutes encounter with others. Another response might be a kind of tolerance where the other is perhaps recognized but not acknowledged as worthy of deliberate interface. Yet, this response does not actually engage with plurality. However, at best, the other and the plurality of perspectives are both respected and purposely encountered so that there is cultivated an increased understanding of oneself and one's tradition existing in the midst of plurality, diversity, and otherness. Thus, there is a choice. The plurality of others can be disregarded and/or disparaged through retreat into isolation or it can be accepted and intentionally engaged. It is this latter type of response that Tracy's work embraces and forwards in formulating a theological hermeneutics in the context of a widespread plurality of others.

If the situation of the plurality of others is taken seriously and as authentic, the fundamental question here concerns the tension between one's individual religious perspective and the diversity of other religious perspectives: How can a religious

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[116] For further discussion of the postmodern situation and its characteristics, see Albert Borgmann, *Crossing the Postmodern Divide* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 48-77. For analyses of the postmodern concept of difference and otherness, see Michael Theunissen, *The Other: Studies in the Social Ontology of Husserl, Heidegger, Sartre and Buber*, trans. Christopher Macann (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1984) and Wayne Whitson Floyd, Jr., *Theology and the Dialectics of Otherness: On Reading Bonhoeffer and Adorno* (Lanham, MD: Univerity Press of America, 1988).

understanding or interpretation, with its own claims to universal truth, meaningfully accept and make sense of the actuality that it is *one* religious viewpoint among a *multiplicity* of other equally reasonable and faithful religious viewpoints? How is one, grounded in a particular religious sphere, able to creatively understand one's own religious perspective within the situation of religious pluralism? How does one productively reconcile one's own religious claims with that of others in a context of a variety of other, often radically different, religious claims? In short, how can otherness be affirmed and celebrated within one's own religious perspective? Tracy's project addresses these questions concerning the plurality of others and attempts to critically yet fruitfully answer them through a theological method grounded in philosophical hermeneutics. His fundamental aim is to offer a hermeneutical strategy that "may serve as a horizon for the genuine conversation open to all in our pluralistic present."[117]

Tracy is convinced that there can be no return to a pre-pluralistic, pre-postmodern, a-historical religious understanding, given the present context of plurality, diversity, and thus ambiguity. He states that the current postmodern situation "impels everyone – every individual, every group, every culture, every religious and theological tradition – to recognize the plurality within each self, among all selves, all traditions, all cultures in the face of the elusive, pervasive whole of reality."[118] This acknowledgment of such ubiquitous and pervasive plurality points to Tracy's understanding of it as an opportunity to enhance and positively develop further the human condition rather than as a crisis to be completely evaded.[119] He affirms that plurality presents a challenge "to develop better

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[117] Tracy, *Analogical*, xii.
[118] David Tracy, "Defending the Public Character of Theology: How My Mind Has Changed," *The Christian Century* 98 (April 1, 1981), 355.
[119] Tracy, *Analogical*, xi.

ways as selves, as communities of inquirers, as societies, as cultures…to discover more possibilities to enrich our personal and communal lives."[120]

Rather than simply identifying plurality, Tracy seeks to critically engage it, constructing order and religious meaning out of it. His project is about recognizing the need for a theological method which not only takes plurality and otherness seriously, but which also affirms the *public* (as opposed to private) quality of any particular religious understanding/interpretation in the present postmodern situation. As Vissers asserts,

> In [Tracy's] work he is seeking to form a new and inevitably complex strategy that will avoid the marginalization of religious belief as a purely private option on the one hand and the dissolution of all religious tradition into the lowest common denominator on the other.[121]

In other words, religious perspectives and understandings are not simply matters of taste; they are not merely preferences of convenient selection or private consumer products.[122] Neither can religious perspectives and understandings be boiled down to what they have in common; they ought not to be dissolved into some watered-down similitude. Instead, Tracy's work presents a method by which genuine claims of religious perspectives can be publicly articulated and encountered as unique, particular expressions of faith in our current religiously variegated context. He argues that, in such a pluralistic culture, any theological or constructive religious enterprise must be *public*, which means that it exists in the realm of open, shared, and freely available conceptions and conversations for all to witness, encounter, and interpret via common human experience.[123]

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[120] David Tracy, "Christianity in the Wider Context: Demands and Transformations," in *Worldviews and Warrants: Plurality and Authority in Theology*, ed. William Schweiker and Per M. Anderson (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 3.
[121] John A. Vissers, "Interpreting the Classic: The Hermeneutical Character of David Tracy's Theology in *The Analogical Imagination*," *Calvin Theological Journal* 25.2 (1990): 194-206, 196. See also Tracy, "Christianity in the Wider Context," 2.
[122] Tracy, *Analogical*, 13.
[123] Ibid, 14.

The public character of theological or constructive religious discourse involves perspectives, arguments, and ideas being forwarded in an openly and freely visible manner, which can be recognized, critiqued, and interpreted by anyone willing to critically engage in the conversation. As Tracy appropriately asserts, "Whatever the social location of a particular theology, that common commitment [of public discourse] demands a commitment to authentic publicness, the attempt to speak from a particular social locus in such manner that one also speaks across the range of all three publics."[124] According to Tracy, the three public realms in which constructive religious discourse occurs are society, academy, and church (or, to be more inclusive, religious community).[125] Thus, each particular theology or religious perspective is not kept private or disconnected with plurality and otherness, but is rather publicly involved with other theologies and perspectives in the spheres of 1) the larger society, 2) the wider intellectual/scholarly population, and 3) the religious community of which the individual is a part. This publicness is the milieu through which engagement in open and mutual encounter, discussion, and improvement may arise. The public character of theological/religious interpretation entails the participation and enrichment of *each* by engaging in the plurality present to *all*.[126]

This publicness of religious perspectives directly connects to what Tracy calls "common human experience," which refers to those attributes of human experience and language to which all of humanity can appeal. These not only include sense data, but also "that immediate experience of the self-as-self which can be reflectively mediated through…art, history, cultural analysis, human scientific analysis, and philosophical

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[124] Ibid, 5.
[125] Ibid, 6-28.
[126] Ibid, 30.

analysis."[127] Humans across different cultures, languages, historical and geographical locations, and religious beliefs have produced expressions of lived experience (i.e. symbols, images, metaphors, myths, and ideas) that convey a common human situation or condition. These expressions of lived experience must be openly, freely, publicly reinterpreted and understood anew in each historical-cultural context so that novel possibilities for individuals and societies are realized.[128] As Tracy states, "If any human being, if any religious thinker or theologian, produces some classical expression of the human spirit on a particular journey in a particular tradition, that person discloses permanent possibilities for human existence both personal and communal."[129] The public, common experiential quality of theological and religious viewpoints, understandings, and lived expressions necessitates critical, reflective reinterpretation in order to create the potential for new value, meaning, and application for the present. This leads directly into Tracy's centrally important hermeneutical concept of *the classic*.

2.4 The Classic

The category of the classic is very much central to Tracy's hermeneutics. The classic belongs to the public realm as an expression of human experience; it exists in a way that it is open and available for all to witness and interpret. The classic is a *particular*, *individual* cultural expression of personal and communal experience which exists in every culture and religious tradition. Rather than simply referring only to textual expressions, as is the focus of many theories of hermeneutics, Tracy expands his category of the classic to include "events, images, persons, rituals, and symbols which…disclose

[127] Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 69.
[128] Tracy, *Analogical*, 14.
[129] Ibid.

permanent possibilities of meaning."[130] As human expression in a particular context, the classic includes *any* articulation of human experience that can be publicly interpreted and made meaningful.

These classical expressions are first characterized by two basic features: excess of meaning and permanence. As Tracy says, the classic "both demands constant interpretation and bears a certain kind of timelessness."[131] Excess in meaning is a trait that points to the many different potential ways to discern and make meaning out of a classic through the process of interpretation. It is this very feature of excess in meaning that gives rise to the durability of classics. That is to say, due to their surplus in meaning possibilities (or what Ricoeur calls *polysemy* or *multivalency*),[132] classics have an enduring quality such that they remain relevant to and are able to be interpreted by successive generations in their cultural contexts.[133] Classical expressions are not characterized by a narrow singularity of meaning, applicable only in one cultural context or generation, but rather exhibit a rich multiplicity of possible meanings to be gained, understood, and practically applied by humans across time and space, through successive cultural contexts in history. As aptly put by Vissers commenting on Tracy, "Only those events, texts, persons, images, or rituals that assert themselves as public in nature, endure through time, and render meaning beyond what may have been originally intended deserve to be recognized as classics."[134]

As examples, Homer's *Iliad* or Bach's *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* are cultural classics because they 1) exist in the public realm and are open for anyone to encounter, 2)

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[130] Ibid, 68.
[131] Ibid, 102.
[132] See Ricoeur, "Metaphor and Problem," in *Hermeneutics*, 166-171.
[133] Vissers, "Interpreting the Classic," 197-198.
[134] Ibid, 198.

retain the capacity for multiple and various possible interpretations of their meaning, and 3) have displayed durability by remaining relevant and important for people to experience across cultures and through history unto today. Hence, the *Iliad* is not read and made meaningful only in ancient Greece or solely in culturally Greek locales. Rather, the *Iliad* is read, re-read, interpreted, and deemed valuable in many different cultures throughout the world and has been celebrated by people in nearly every historical era. The *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* is also played, listened to, enjoyed, and made meaningful by people across time and various cultural contexts. The *Iliad* and the *Toccata and Fugue in D minor* are not private options with a single possible meaning and pertinent to only one time and place. On the contrary, it is their publicness, excess of meaning, and permanency that make them classics.

The pivotal interpretive significance of the classic is expressed in its function as being disclosive of truth. Classics are "certain expressions of the human spirit [that] so disclose a compelling truth about our lives that we cannot deny them some kind of normative status."[135] That is to say, classics become so important that they help to create meaning in people's lives and shape the worldview or understanding of reality for both individuals and societies. Classics have such potent import for those who interpret them that they become normative; they reveal meanings which become norms or guiding principles in people's lives individually and communally.[136] Tracy further states, "My thesis is that what we mean in naming certain texts, events, images, rituals, symbols and persons 'classics' is that here we recognize nothing less than the disclosure of a reality

[135] Tracy, *Analogical*, 108.
[136] T. Howland Sanks, "David Tracy's Theological Project: An Overview and Some Implications," *Theological Studies* 54 (1993): 698-727, 714.

we cannot but name truth."[137] During the encounter with a classic a world opens up and one becomes aware of something *in* that very experience that one feels compelled to call truth. There is something – some occurrence or presence of authenticity and veracity – within the encounter with a classic that grasps the interpreter and reveals a reality that cannot be named anything other than truth.

This disclosure or revealing reflects and builds upon Heidegger's conception of truth as *aletheia*. In his lectures on "The Origin and the Work of Art," Heidegger makes a connection between art and truth, arguing that the essential meaning of an art piece is not merely its facility to represent something but rather its capacity to uncover and reveal a world.[138] Thus, to use Heidegger's own primary example, the Greek temple produces the "Greek" world and therefore lets phenomena assume a certain appearance within that particular world.[139] This world-opening may be applied to any other situation or context in human life. For Heidegger, a piece of artwork "sets up a world and keeps it in force," which is the occasion of a disclosure of truth.[140] This sense of truth as *aletheia* or "unconcealment" is conceived by Heidegger as a more fundamental understanding on which other earlier views of truth are based.[141] The previous understandings of truth as "correctness" demonstrate a correspondence or coherence between individual statements and the empirical world. However, Heidegger argues that this sense of truth as

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[137] Ibid.
[138] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1975). For further discussion of Heidegger's re-interpretation of truth see also James J. Di Censo, *Hermeneutics and the Disclosure of Truth: A Study in the Work of Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur* (University Press of Virginia, 1990); and W. B. Macomber, *The Anatomy of Disillusion: Martin Heidegger's Notion of Truth* (Northwestern University Press, 1967).
[139] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 41.
[140] Ibid, 44.
[141] Ibid, 50. Also, see Jeff Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2009 Edition)*, ed. Edward N. Zalta, http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2009/entries/gadamer/ (accessed 8/2/2010).

"correctness" is grounded in the more basic truth as "unconcealment," which indicates that truth is not an attribute of statements in regard to their relation to the world, but is instead an occasion or process whereby both the statements and the world in which they are stated are *uncovered* or *revealed* to the interpreter.[142]

Just as with art in Heidegger's work, encounter with the classical expressions of human experience in Tracy's hermeneutics (of which artwork is definitely a part) opens up a world of meaning potential and thus occasions the disclosure or "unconcealment" of truth. In other words, the interpretation of a classic engenders new possibilities and prompts a revelation of meaning and truth that becomes significantly influential in how one understands oneself, others, and the world.

2.5 The Religious Classic

In his elucidation of the hermeneutical category of the classic, Tracy forwards a sub-category which he calls the "religious classic." The religious classic possesses all the previously mentioned attributes of the cultural classic and yet also exhibits features that are distinctively "religious" in character. In conjunction with an examination of the religious type of classic, it is instructive to explicate Tracy's understanding of "religious," for it has important implications that support the current study concerned with *religious* experience and inter*religious* dialogue.

The religious classic is differentiated from the cultural classic due to its status as that which has the quality of being *religious*. This religious dimension of human life is unique for Tracy because it speaks not simply to particular facets of existence and experience but rather to the *entirety*, the *totality* of reality. Religion and the religious are

[142] Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 50-56; also see Ricoeur, "Hermeneutical Function," in *Hermeneutics* 140-144.

concerned with the holistic encounter with all of existence, not merely its discrete and individual components. Tracy states,

> …whatever else it is, religion is not just another cultural perspective alongside morality, art, science, economics and politics. From a functional viewpoint…"religion" is precisely that: one more perspective to be studied in unraveling the complexity of an individual, a society, a culture… And yet, in its own self-understanding, a religious perspective claims to speak not of a part but of the whole; without the sense of that reality of the whole, I believe, there is no "religion"…A religious perspective…articulates some sense of the whole; it must inform, transform, even sometimes form the rest of our cultural lives with that sense or it loses its properly religious character.[143]

Tracy recognizes the importance of religion and the religious as another subject of inquiry or study so as to gain a more advanced knowledge about humanity as a species. However, religious experience as it exists from the inside, from *within* a religious perspective, involves and encompasses all the various different parts of human life. The religious dimension does not locate and address a singular central aspect of human being, such as morality, art, science, politics, etc., but rather expresses a sense of the *whole* of reality.

Tracy proposes certain conceptual structures to help interpret the religious dimension. The "limit-to" aspect refers to that element of the religious dimension which restricts life to a basic horizon of experience and gives people a sense of mortality, contingency, order, justice, and so forth.[144] The limit-to aspect is reflected through fundamental questions and concerns which identify limits and boundaries in life. This

[143] Tracy, *Analogical*, 159.
[144] Ibid, 160.

particular facet of the religious dimension reveals the temporality and finitude of human existence.[145]

The religious dimension of human experience can also be seen in what Tracy calls the "limit-of" aspect of life, which can also be referred to as the "ground-of" or "horizon-to" aspect. This limit-of aspect refers to the experience of a reality that is the foundation upon which all reality relies, the grounding that allows for anything and everything.[146] For Tracy personally, the referent of such limit-of experiences is the Christian God. However, in attempting to maintain the public character of the classic and a universal understanding of religious experience across traditions, he also acknowledges that this referent may be termed differently depending on the religious context. Nonetheless, the referent of the limit-of is the ultimate or absolute reality upon which all religious experience is based.[147] The limit-of aspect articulates that dimension of religious life which encounters this fundamental ground of all reality and can make meaningful sense of the challenging, often troublesome *limit-to* experiences of limits, boundaries, and finitude.

As illustrative of the religious dimension of humanity, the religious classic is different from the cultural classic precisely because it 1) points not simply to particular areas of human existence, but to *the whole of reality*, and 2) expresses the limit-to and limit-of experiences of life. Interpreting Tracy, Vissers aptly states,

> The religious classic discloses the limit of the whole of reality – thus, resonating with the "limit-to" experiences of life. Religious classics are those texts, events, images, rituals, symbols, and persons that interpret the

[145] Ibid. Also see Vissers, "Interpreting the Classic," 200-201; and Sanks, "Tracy's Theological Project," 715.
[146] Tracy, *Analogical*, 160.
[147] Ibid, 160-161.

> "limit-to" experiences of life. They explain and help us understand the reality we experience.[148]

Thus, when Tracy speaks of the religious classic, he is speaking of those classics which convey the human experience of the whole of reality and also assist us in interpreting and understanding this experienced reality.

Through its expressive and interpretive ability, the religious classic makes a claim to truth that both *discloses* and *conceals* the whole of reality. Tracy argues that, "unlike the classics of art, morality, science, and politics, explicitly religious classic expressions will involve a claim to truth as the event of disclosure-concealment of the whole…"[149] In religious experience, and through the religious classic which conveys this experience, the whole of reality is partially disclosed, uncovered, or revealed (limit-of) and simultaneously partially concealed, covered, or hidden (limit-to). In Christian language, this would be the experience and expression of God as 1) manifest in human life, incarnate in Christ, immanent in the world, and partially knowable through revelation (kataphatic, *via positiva*), yet 2) transcendent and infinite mystery (apophatic, *via negativa*). That is, according to Tracy's understanding, human religious experience is felt as real, powerful, and meaningful but also equally beyond any discursive understanding or conceptualization. Religious experience is an experience of truth about the whole of reality where there is concurrently participation and distanciation, clarity and obscurity, comprehensibility and incomprehensibility in this direct experience of the whole. Hence, during the encounter with religious classics, truth or the whole is partly revealed and partly concealed.

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[148] Vissers, "Interpreting the Classic," 201.
[149] Tracy, *Analogical*, 163.

One last important feature of the religious classic is that it not only discloses-conceals the whole of reality but is done so *by the power of this whole*.[150] That is, religious classics reveal and conceal the whole of reality, and the origin and cause of this disclosure-concealment of truth possibilities comes from the power and influence of this very whole itself. Precisely because the religious classic is experienced as having come from the power of the whole it contains an "aura of factuality" or authority that pervades it.[151] In experiencing a truly religious classic, religious persons are "convinced that their values, their style of life, their ethos are in fact grounded in the inherent structure of reality itself … religious persons seem to sense that there exists an unbreakable inner connection between the way one ought to live and the way things really are."[152] It is this powerful, holistic, meaningful, and authoritative experience of the whole (and thus truth), which has come from and is activated by the power of this whole, that gives religious classics their unique and important place in Tracy's hermeneutics. We now turn to the actual process of the interpretation of the classic/religious classic.

2.6 Interpretation of the (Religious) Classic as Conversation with Other

As mentioned previously, every classic unfolds a world of truth and meaning possibilities. Accordingly, a classic exercises an influence on the interpreter that Tracy calls a "claim to attention."[153] This refers to the ability of a classic to reach out, grasp people's awareness and interest, and therefore speak to people coherently and meaningfully. However, this claim to attention is only able to accomplish this if one is willing to encounter the classic through the activity of interpretation.

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[150] Ibid.
[151] Ibid.
[152] Ibid.
[153] Ibid, 105.

Extensively drawing on Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Tracy understands interpretation as an *event* and employs the analogy of art to illustrate what occurs in the interpretive transaction with a classic. The experience of art is not merely an aesthetic sensibility; it is much more than simply the perception of beauty and attractiveness. The most meaningful and true experience of a piece of art occurs when one is grasped by its claim to attention and drawn into its unconcealed realm of existence – its world. Tracy explains, "We find ourselves 'caught up' in its world, we are shocked, surprised, challenged by its startling beauty *and* its recognizable truth…"[154] One is amazed and awed yet also confronted and maybe even disturbed by its beauty and truth; there is a distinct feeling of the disclosure of something real, enduring, meaningful, and truthful.[155]

For Tracy, following Gadamer, the actual encounter with a piece of art may be called a *realized experience of an event of truth*.[156] One does not come to the experience with a kind of self-conscious reflection of the piece as simply an object over and against the self. Rather, the work encounters the self with the dynamism, surprise, and impact of reality itself. One recognizes a truth that is fresh, compelling, and challenging such that one is caught up in a relationship with the piece and transcends normal self-awareness, including any desires to be in complete control of the experience.[157]

Indeed, analogous to the experience of art, the interpretation of the classic has an event-character where the interpreter is not manipulating or dictating the experience but rather experiences the "coming to pass" of an occurrence of truth disclosure. The

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[154] Ibid, 110.
[155] Ibid.
[156] Ibid, 107-115; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 101-164.
[157] Tracy, *Analogical*, 111-112.

encounter with a classic is an *event* where the interpreter undergoes a realization of truth which is unconcealed and recognized in this occasion of experience. As an event, this encounter *happens*, *occurs* and one is caught up in the emergence of a world that discloses meaning for the interpreter.[158] In this realization, one transcends one's normal, everyday awareness of oneself and a new world opens up that manifests truth. Tracy explains the event-character of the realized experience of truth,

> …I experience the impact of a realized experience, an event character of truth as a glimpse into the essential that is real. I find I must employ words like "recognize" to describe that impact. Such actual self-transcendence…is not my own achievement. It happens, it occurs, I am "caught up in" the disclosure of the work. I am in the presence of a truth of recognition: recognition of what is important, essential, real beyond distractions, diversion, conventional opinions, idle talk, control and use of objects, techniques of distancing myself and manipulating others…[159]

It is this realized experience of truth, allowing oneself to get caught up in the disclosure of the classic's world, and being grasped by its claim to attention that constitutes the event-character of the act of interpretation.

Tracy states further of the specifically religious classic,

> The realized experience of the truth-character of the religious classic is an experience of its purely given character, its status as an event, a happening manifested *to* my experience, neither determined by nor produced by my subjectivity. Insofar as I honor experience itself, I may accord this experience the status of a claim to truth as the manifestation of a "letting be seen" of what is, as it shows itself to experience.[160]

The interpretation of a (religious) classic is an event where the interpreter is grasped by the claim to attention of the classic, encounters a manifestation/disclosure/revealing of meaning as given to or shown to his/her experience, and thus undergoes a realization of understanding of the classic's claim to truth. Building on Heidegger and Gadamer, Tracy

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[158] Ibid.; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 102-106; and see Kögler, *Power of Dialogue*, 45-49.
[159] Ibid, 112.
[160] Ibid, 198.

constructs a conception of understanding through interpretation as an event of the manifestation of truth by means of an encounter with something outside of one's subjectivity – an *other*.

For Tracy, it is careful and intimate attentiveness to the classic expressions of humanity *as representatives of otherness* that holds significant liberating, life-altering potential. Classics (both cultural and religious) disclose new resources of meaning and truth to anyone willing to risk allowing that manifestation to show itself in and through one's encounter of its provoking and sometimes challenging claim to attention. For Tracy, truth manifests or shows itself to experience in encounter with the otherness of the classic through *conversation*. That is, conversation is the primary hermeneutical model for conceiving of and practicing interpretation.

Conversation as a hermeneutical paradigm is not original with Tracy. Again, this is adapted from an intimate and informed reading of Gadamer, re-applied to theological endeavor in the postmodern and religiously pluralistic milieu, which is a mark of Tracy's distinctiveness.[161] Tracy argues that "without genuine conversation, no manifestation" of truth and meaning.[162] Conversation is the device or contextual framework through which truth is disclosed. It is precisely through one's entry into conversational engagement with the classic *as other* that truth becomes unconcealed. Due to Tracy's concern for addressing the postmodern challenge of otherness, the interpretive model of conversation involves oneself actively, deliberately, and honestly entering into dialogue with another. On this hermeneutical view, the definitive other is the classic.

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[161] For Gadamer's treatment of conversation as a hermeneutical model, see Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 367-369, 383-388 and Kögler, *Power of Dialogue*, 113-157. For commentary on Tracy's theological hermeneutics and plurality see Sanks, "Tracy's Theological Project," 699-708.
[162] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 28.

The question becomes: how might conversation with the classic produce such manifestation of truth? What is the nature or character of truth-disclosure in the process of conversation? According to Tracy, conversation is an exploration of possibilities in search for truth by way of interaction between 1) the other's manifestation and revealing of truth and 2) the subject's experience and recognition of this very claim to truth.[163] Following Gadamer's insight, Tracy perceives this conversational exploration to be analogous to the playing of a game. The game becomes an important metaphor that signifies the nature of what occurs in the process of conversation with a classic. Thus, it is possible to see conversation as a hermeneutical game, albeit a game played with sincerity and seriousness.

The significance and value of games is that they are able to "liberate our ability to understand ourselves by facing something different, other, and sometimes strange."[164] To actually play a game one must turn oneself over to the subject matter of the game that is being played, such that entering the game amounts to entering its particular world of play within its distinct system of rules, margins, arrangements, movements, and purposes. As Ricoeur puts it, "…play has its own way of being."[165] When in the midst of playing a game, when fully immersed in the subject matter, one opens oneself up to the game and allows the play to take over, resulting in a loss of conscious self-awareness. That is, during play the players become engrossed in the game so that their normal, everyday self is replaced by a self constituted by the to-and-fro relational activity of the play. As Tracy maintains,

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[163] Ibid, 20.
[164] Ibid, 18.
[165] Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics*, 186.

> In playing, I lose myself in the play. I do not passively lose myself. In fact, I actively gain another self by allowing myself fully to enter the game. Thus do I allow myself to be played by the game. I move into the "rules" of the game, into the back-and-forth movement, the experienced internal relationships of the game itself. The game becomes not an object over against a self-conscious subject but an experienced relational and releasing mode of being in the world distinct from the ordinary…one. In every game, I enter the world where I play so fully that finally the game plays me.[166]

Tracy identifies the experience of what happens during the play of a game. Playing a game allows entrance into a new world characterized by the self becoming caught up in a relational mode of being where there is manifested an experienced participation in the life of the other (other players and/or the subject matter of the game itself). This dynamic, interactive mode of being consists of sharing in a mutual playing such that not only does one actively engage the game but the game actively engages oneself. That is, when entering a game, if one insists upon a self-conscious control of every move or action, then one is simply not playing the game. Rather, one would be playing some unusual game of one's own personal preference where one's self-conscious control, egoistic dictation, and subjective influence are the exclusive rule, disallowing any possibility for self-transcendence or relationality.[167] Instead, playing a game is about opening up and allowing oneself to enter into the otherness of the game's world, experiencing the relational mode of being that is disclosed or revealed to the player during play. Ricoeur corroborates, "The subject is not the player himself, but rather what 'takes place' in play."[168]

The to and fro of play is much more than simply the activity of a subjective self; it is inter-subjective. The players become a part of something greater than their individual

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[166] Tracy, *Analogical*, 113-114.
[167] Ibid, 113.
[168] Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics*, 186.

subjectivities. Their selves become enlarged or expanded by the world of the game in play. As Ricoeur further states, "In entering a game we hand ourselves over, we abandon ourselves to the space of meaning which holds sway over the reader [the interpreter, the self]."[169] Only when the subject matter of the game, rather than one's own self-consciousness, is allowed to take over and become the central, guiding factor can there be authentic conversation. Indeed, when the only question or concern allowed in the play is one's own, then productive, truth disclosing conversation is not possible.[170]

Tracy contends that this experience of self-transcending relationality is a *liberating* event where the play activity itself turns the player over to the dynamic give-and-take, to-and-fro, back-and-forth movement of playing and opens the player up to the truth disclosing possibilities of otherness. He states, "Here the back-and-forth movement of every game becomes the buoyant dialectic of true freedom: surprise, release, confrontation, shock, often reverential awe, always transformation."[171] In the very process of interaction during play one undergoes a realized experience of truth manifestation. Tracy states further, "When we leave a realized experience of entering the game of an authentic work…we are transformed. There we have witnessed ourselves caught up in a disclosure of the event-character of truth itself."[172] Indeed, in the game of conversation "we can free ourselves from ourselves, however briefly," through becoming receptive to otherness.[173] During conversation one learns to give in to and become a part of the movement of question and answer, assertion and response with the other, so that one is released by this dialectical, relational movement of the subject matter.

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[169] Ibid, 187.
[170] Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 95; *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 18.
[171] Tracy, *Analogical*, 114.
[172] Ibid.
[173] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 17.

Now, it is possible, after the experience, to attempt to deny or repudiate the importance, impact, and truthfulness of the realized experience in play or conversation through naming it merely "subjective," "illusory," or even "false." However, in the midst of the lived experience of playing a game or entering conversation with a classic the force of import, meaning, and truth-character is undeniable. Tracy asserts, "We can control, manipulate, deny, the truth…We can refuse to play. More subtly, we can turn the whole experience into yet another experience of my 'aesthetic' self-consciousness and its limitless taste for the control of all truth."[174] It is certainly possible to refuse to engage in conversation with a classic, to not take the encounter seriously or with sincerity, or to simply reject the realized experience upon later consideration. These are potential critical decisions performed after the fact and according to a self-conscious need to be in command of truth. Yet when we *do* have a realized experience of truth in play/conversation/interpretation, we find ourselves letting go of the felt need to be in charge of the experience, being grasped by "an event, a happening, a disclosure, a claim to truth which we cannot deny and can only eliminate by our later controlled reflection."[175] That is, when truth does manifest itself to us and is experienced by us in and through conversation, its truthfulness and meaningfulness is recognized and understood as incontrovertible in the moment of the event.

Thus far, there can be discerned three relevant components in Tracy's hermeneutical model of conversation with the classic as other: 1) One comes to any conversation with a preunderstanding that is informed and shaped by the historical-

[174] Tracy, *Analogical*, 114.
[175] Ibid.

cultural context in which one exists.[176] Anyone or everyone who enters into conversation is a temporal, social being embedded in and conditioned by a particular language, culture, and history, which is brought into and becomes a part of the conversation. 2) Once one has entered into the conversation of interpretation, the classic as other exerts a force on oneself, grasping or demanding one's notice. In the encounter, the classic confronts, provokes, or challenges one's understanding, perception, or worldview through the otherness of its claim to attention. As Tracy states it: "My *doxai* are suddenly confronted with a *paradoxon* demanding attention."[177] That is, one's beliefs are met with something different, unfamiliar, and other, thus creating a paradox that challenges these beliefs, requiring one's consideration. 3) Just as in a game, the dynamic back-and-forth, to-and-fro movement between the interpreting subject and the classical other allows truth to be disclosed in and through an event of realized experience. In other words, conversation engenders an opening for the experience of *the whole of reality*, which is Tracy's way of articulating truth and meaning according to the religious dimension of life. As Tracy asserts,

> When we deliver ourselves over to the subject matter produced through…a classic text, we discover what is other than and beyond ourselves…we discover ourselves as a finite part, participatory in, belonging to…some essential aspect of the whole... In the paradigmatic expressions of the human spirit…we find in our experienced recognition of their claim to attention the presence of what we cannot but name "truth."[178]

The fundamental point here is that the likely potential outcome of conversational encounter with a classic is a direct, compelling, liberating experience of truth or (with a religious classic) truth about or relation to the whole.

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[176] Ibid, 118.
[177] Ibid, 119.
[178] Ibid, 130.

Summarizing his analysis of interpretation, Tracy sets up some basic, elemental principles for conversing with the other. That is, his hermeneutical model of conversation is a game with some specific rules of engagement:

> …say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can; listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other; be willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner; be willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded…to change your mind if the evidence suggests it.[179]

Genuine, productive conversation that discloses truth and transforms understanding necessitates 1) honest intentions aimed at conveying accuracy, 2) receptivity to and respect for the other's claim to attention, 3) readiness for self-correction or change of mind upon evidence from confrontation by the other's claim to attention, and 4) willingness for self-respect or to argue for and defend one's own beliefs or positions if necessary. These are the basic principles of conversation that Tracy forwards as conducive to truth disclosure and liberating transformation.

This last principle of argument can play an important role in conversation. That is to say, the value of argument is that it serves as an important corrective to total inert and uncritical acceptance of the classic's claims. Indeed, Tracy points out that theoretical methods, techniques, and explanations, which usually involve argument, are important in a critical interpretive endeavor since they ensure that the response to the classical other is active and investigative, not merely passive and naïve.[180]

In the wake of the critical work of Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx, a hermeneutics of retrieval and construction must be matched by a hermeneutics of suspicion and

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[179] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 19. These are a reformulation of the principles of Tracy's teacher, Lonergan: "Be attentive, be intelligent, be responsible, be loving, and, if necessary, change." See Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Seabury Press, 1972), 231.
[180] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 107.

deconstruction.[181] Suspicion and retrieval in conversation are mutually corrective. This establishes Tracy's important dialectic between respectful openness to the classic and critical freedom to possibly contend against its claims in the open back-and-forth process of conversation.[182] On the one hand, there is the need for receptivity to the possibilities of meaning in the classic, and, on the other hand, there is the need to be able to dispute or disagree with the classic, when necessary. The manifestation of truth can only occur through the risking of change, alteration, and transformation in the process of engaging in conversation itself, a process involving both aspects of the dialectic.[183]

The crucial point is that during conversation, embracing self-respect (critical argument against other's claim) and self-correction/self-exposure (openness to other's claim), the dynamic and participatory context is conducive for liberating truth-disclosure. Tracy argues that genuine conversation demands the fundamental willingness to engage in the activity of conversing, which involves both opening up to the classic's claim to attention and also responding to this claim – responding critically and even suspiciously when necessary, but *responding* nonetheless.[184] Argument is not to be jettisoned as some kind of an "impolite negativity," but is rather to be included as a corrective moment of freedom in the dynamic playing of the conversational game.

2.7 The Transformative Power of Conversation with the Classic as Other

Since a central theme in the present work on interreligious exchange is concerned with the prospect of transformation in dialogical conversation, the question now explicitly becomes: What exactly is the nature of transformation in the process of

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[181] David Tracy, "Hermeneutical Reflections in the New Paradigm," in Hans Kung and David Tracy, eds., *Paradigm Changes in Theology*, trans. Margaret Kohl (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 43-45.
[182] Tracy, *Analogical*, 171-172, 452-453.
[183] Ibid, 166-167, 452-453.
[184] Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 4.

conversation with the classic as other? That is, what are the features of the transformative power in conversational relationship?

Tracy's hermeneutics of conversation involves the dynamic process of one engaging with the classic as truly other, being grasped its claim to attention, allowing the subject matter to become directive, and giving oneself over to the back-and-forth, to-and-fro, giving-and-receiving movement of interaction. Through this conversational activity an event of a realized experience occurs such that truth/the whole is disclosed to the interpreter.

It is important to recognize the primary authority that *experience* must maintain in order for this event of truth-manifestation to transpire. Experience is the fundamental ground of truth and meaning in all human understanding, and therefore the basis of the conversation that leads to further understanding. Speaking especially of the religious classic, Tracy asserts,

> The realized experience of the truth-character of the religious classic is an experience of its purely given character, its status as event, a happening manifested to my experience, neither determined by nor produced by my subjectivity. Insofar as I honor experience itself, I may accord this experience the status of a claim to truth as the manifestation of a "letting-be-seen" of what is, as it shows itself to experience.[185]

One might question the validity of this immediate experience of truth/the whole afterwards through analysis and reflection, and this is acknowledged as useful and important in a critical hermeneutics. However, in order for there to be any understanding at all, the primary authenticity and authority of all human experience must be upheld, including this truth-disclosure experience. If we do not put any trust in something as direct and elemental as our experiences of ourselves, others, and the world, then on what

[185] Ibid, 198.

basis do we put our confidence in anything in human life? The legitimacy of experience is what validates the manifestation of truth/the whole. That is, what allows for the possibility of the event of truth-disclosure is the reality and authority of *experience itself*.[186]

There are four basic stages to the transformational power in conversation. 1) First, one must *enter into engagement with the classical other*. Until one holds the disposition of readiness and willingness to delve into the relationship of honesty, receptivity, self-respect/self-defense, and self-correction/self-exposure with a classic, productive conversation is not possible.

2) In addition, during this encounter *one is confronted and challenged by the difference and otherness of the classic's claim to attention*. One's current worldview, perspective, understanding, awareness, and experience are faced with new possibilities of truth and meaning made evident by the claim to attention of the classical other.[187]

3) Moreover, the dynamic back-and-forth, giving-and-receiving movement engenders a *disclosure of truth/the whole to one's experience*. When truth or truth about the whole is unconcealed, one recognizes and engages the newness presented to one's experience as the difference and otherness of the classic. By means of the encounter with a classic, *one's existing experience is met and succeeded by the formation of a new experience of truth/the whole*. One enters into conversation with a great risk – the risk of discovering that one's current mode of being or living in the world is revealed to be

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[186] For more in-depth analyses of the primacy and authority of experience see especially John Dewey, *Experience and Nature* (New York: Dover Publications, 1958), 1-39; and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, trans. John Bowden (New York : Seabury Press, 1980), 27-39.
[187] Tracy, *Analogical*, 170-171.

finished, incomplete, limited, or perhaps in need of change or expansion into something new and different, something more "true, real, or whole."[188]

The entirety of past experiences form one's worldview or perspective (interpretive framework, horizon of experience) in which new experiences are undergone and interpreted.[189] In the midst of conversation with a classic, this interpretive framework becomes open to alteration, where it is corrected, adjusted, augmented, or supplanted entirely. Thus, as a result of new experiences, one's interpretive framework or horizon of experience up to that point is perceived in a new context and therefore understood in a different way.[190]

Indeed, as Tracy states along these lines,

> …we may find some manifestation of another style or ethos of living bearing the redescriptive power of a manifestation that this is what reality itself in its sheer actuality is, along with the prescriptive force of a demand that our present mode of living be changed.[191]

One's current interpretive framework (consisting of the whole of one's past experiences, current awareness and worldview) is confronted by the difference and otherness of a classic. As a result, this present horizon of experience is changed, expanded, deepened, and developed further by the new realized experience of truth-disclosure. The manifestation of truth/the whole is taken up and integrated into one's interpretive framework bringing about transformation into an improved and enhanced understanding of oneself, the other, and the world.

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[188] Ibid, 171.
[189] See Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad, 1990), 15.
[190] Ibid.
[191] Tracy, *Analogical*, 171; see also Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics*, 191-192.

4) Finally, this realized experience in conversation involves *the newness, difference, and otherness of the classic becoming appropriated and made familiar*. In his exposition on the hermeneutical meaning of appropriation, Ricoeur offers a model of the transformative power of conversation by describing what happens during the process of interpretation. To appropriate is "'to make one's own' what was initially 'alien.'"[192] The purpose of all interpretation is to move from distance and alienation to proximity and familiarity. Ricoeur states, "Interpretation brings together, equalizes, renders contemporary and similar."[193]

As part of the transformative process in conversation, appropriation is about discovering understanding at and through distance or difference between oneself and the classic. The differentiation between self and a classic enables and actualizes the process of coming together, uniting, and thus understanding. It is through the distance and distinction of oneself and a classic that the unifying process of appropriation (actualizing the meaning of a text, following and being grasped by the world of the classic) happens. For Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Tracy, the understanding that occurs through interpretation is fundamentally about overcoming the distance between self and other in one's awareness through making the unfamiliar familiar, the unknown known, the foreign native. This unifying activity of understanding is transformative via encountering, familiarizing, and acquainting oneself with that which is unencountered, strange, alien – other.

2.8 An Analogical Imagination

In advancing his conversational hermeneutics, Tracy establishes the term "analogical imagination" to depict the type of approach to otherness needed in the current

[192] Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics*, 185.
[193] Ibid.

postmodern milieu of plurality and ambiguity. Analogical imagination refers to the capacity to envision a type of relationship where there is conversation between two distinct yet connected entities. For Tracy, this category of relationship is imagined and understood through the linguistic expression of analogy.

Grounded in Aristotelian metaphysics and building on the medieval Scholastic tradition, Tracy applies Aquinas's discussion in his *Summa Theologiae* concerning the way in which language about God works to the interpretive activity of conversation. Aquinas differentiates between utilizing univocal, equivocal, and analogical language when speaking of God. *Univocity* is a case where a term has an identical meaning when used in different statements.[194] That is, the word is the same; the meaning is the same. For instance, in the statements "Socrates is a *man*" and "Plato is a *man*," the word "man" is being used univocally, which is to say that it means exactly the same thing in both instances. *Equivocity* is a case where a term has a totally different meaning when used in two discrete statements.[195] Thus, the word is the same; the meaning is different. For example, when referring to "the *bark* of a dog" and "the *bark* of a tree," the word "bark" is being applied equivocally, which is to say that it carries a completely different meaning in each instance.

Aquinas argues that words cannot be used univocally to refer to both God and humanity, since the chasm between God and humanity is too immense for any word to apply identically to both God and humanity. Yet words cannot be used equivocally either, since there is some connection or relation between its use for God and in the human

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[194] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* Ia q. 13, aa. 5-6, in Alister E. McGrath,ed., *The Christian Theology Reader*, 2nd ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 22.
[195] Ibid.

situations. Rather, *analogy* is the most suitable way to use human language to speak of God. Aquinas states,

> We must say, therefore, that words are used of God and creatures according to analogy, that is a certain proportion, between them… This way of using words lies somewhere between pure equivocation and simple univocity. The word is neither used in the same sense, as in the case of univocation, nor in totally different senses, as with equivocation.[196]

Tracy draws on this Thomistic philological analysis to formulate the kind of language most appropriate for cultivating an analogical imagination in the understanding of otherness in our current religious circumstances of plurality and diversity. He suggests that *analogical* language best conveys and communicates the relationship of otherness in the postmodern context because it includes both similarity and difference in its meaning. Tracy explains that analogical language

> …is a language of ordered relationships articulating similarity-in-difference. The order among the relationships is constituted by the distinct but similar relationships of each analogue… A principal aim of all properly analogical languages is the production of some order, at the limit, some harmony to the several analogues, the similarities-in-difference…[197]

Tracy is asserting the need to retain the differentiating, "negative" element in analogy while also retaining the connecting, "positive" element. In speaking analogically, it is necessary (for it to be true analogy) to preserve both the similarity and the difference between the two analogues (those entities being related). This ability of recognizing the connective similarities among the diversity of differences constitutes the analogical imagination – the capacity to envision and acknowledge similarities-in-difference.[198]

This analogical imagination can be found in Aristotle's celebrated declaration in his *Poetics* that the mark of genius is being able to discern resemblances and likenesses

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[196] Ibid, 22-23.
[197] Tracy, *Analogical*, 408.
[198] Ibid, 409-410.

among variation and multiplicity.[199] Tracy aptly points out that this resonates with the medieval Scholastic ideal that endeavors to "distinguish without separation in order to unite without confusion."[200] This creative, imaginative ability to hold together that which is distinct without reduction into sameness and to recognize differentiations without rendering complete severance is re-appropriated and applied in the current postmodern context as the analogical middle way in relating oneself to otherness in fostering genuine, productive conversation.

Tracy asserts that this powerful analogical ability to spot the similar in the dissimilar allows for the relation of oneself to the otherness found throughout our life experiences. Relating this specifically to the realized event of truth-manifestation in conversation, he states,

> That same power – at once participatory in the originating event of wonder, trust, disclosure and concealment by the whole and positively distancing itself from that event by its own self-constituting demands of critical reflection – releases the analogical imagination…to note the profound similarities-in-difference in all reality.[201]

It seems Tracy is indicating that an analogical imagination is necessary to truly engage in the activity of conversation with a classic (or any form of otherness), opening up oneself to the classical other's claim to attention, and allowing oneself to be grasped by the back-and-forth dynamic of conversation where truth manifests and the whole discloses itself. In addition, it is an analogical imagination that is cultivated and exhibited through the conversational process. That is to say, an analogical imagination is both part of the interpretive tools needed for conversation and a product or result of this engagement.

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[199] The exact quotation is as follows: "…the use of metaphor is unique in one respect: it cannot be acquired, but is the mark of genius. To use metaphor well is to see likeness." Aristotle, *Poetics*, trans. N.G.L. Hammond (Copenhagen: Museum Tusculanum Press, 2001), 48.
[200] Tracy, *Analogical*, 414.
[201] Ibid, 410.

2.9 Analogical Imagination, Conversation, and the Plurality of Traditions

According to Tracy's model, for authentic conversation to unfold, "the real similarities and dissimilarities, the continuities and discontinuities present in the contemporary pluralist situation should be allowed their necessary emergence."[202] In the back-and-forth, to-and-fro, giving-and-receiving dynamic of conversation one confronts the other as genuinely, perhaps radically, different from oneself, yet perceives the likenesses within and despite that differentiation. The analogical imagination 1) preserves the real otherness of the other rather than a projected self onto the other and 2) discovers valid resemblances and correlations in that relationship of otherness and difference. That is, despite the tendency to shape one's consideration of the other through one's own beliefs, worldview, or value-system, it is important to experience the other *as other* as much as possible. Otherwise, the conversation becomes one-sided, insular, relegated to one's own horizon of awareness, and, consequently, not truly conversation. Furthermore, if the other is not encountered *as other* there is no possibility of an actual provocation, challenge, or confrontation of one's perspective and current understanding, and therefore no opportunity for the truth-disclosure and growth in understanding that is essential to Tracy's hermeneutical model of productive conversation. Nonetheless, once the other is recognized as really other, then genuine conversation occurs, similarities may be perceived amid the difference, and a liberating realized experience of truth and the whole becomes possible.

Tracy further develops the vision of an analogical imagination in conversation by tying it to relations among the plurality and diversity of human cultural and religious traditions. Just as an analogical imagination recognizes the similarities-in-difference in

[202] Ibid, 447.

conversation with the classic as other, this is also the case in associations and interactions among the plurality of traditions. What is needed among traditions is a relationship typified by a situation somewhere in between 1) an indifferent, intolerant attitude toward otherness that relegates traditions into absolute separateness and 2) an "anything goes" tolerance or "lazy" pluralism that dilutes all religions to a monotonous, insipid sameness.[203]

In our current context of plurality and ambiguity, Tracy advocates that the uniqueness and particularity of each tradition be respected so as to recognize their real divergences and avoid undifferentiated identity.[204] It is also vital that the similarities be acknowledged in order to appreciate their real correlations and avoid total disparity.[205] Conversational interaction among traditions that is guided by an analogical imagination is the hope for a greater understanding and liberating experience of truth since it rejects the extremes of a relaxed pluralism of undifferentiated identity (all traditions are really the same, no true distinctions) on the one hand and an isolating, alienating intolerance of absolute separateness (all traditions are really unrelated, no convergences) on the other. Both of these extremes must be avoided through an affirmation of similarities within authentic difference. During the conversational encounter of traditions through an analogical imagination, the meaning, value, and worldview of each tradition becomes more understandable. Tracy states,

> …the particularity of each tradition will gain in intensity as its own focal meaning becomes clearer to itself and others… Each self-identity, in the self-respect of its own participation, will find itself anew by releasing

[203] Ibid, 449.
[204] Ibid. Also see Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 29-30, 41-44.
[205] Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 41-44.

> itself to a self-exposure of conversation with the others. That each will be changed by that conversation seems assured.[206]

Each individual tradition is able to discover fresh insight into itself and the others through the process of encounter via conversation. But this insight can only occur if each tradition is *truly* distinct, unique, and different from the others. That is, the otherness between each cultural and religious tradition must be maintained so that then legitimate parallels and connections may be discovered. Thus, understanding arises in conversation through the recognition and acknowledgment of similarities-in-difference in dynamic relationship.

Tracy maintains, "Each of us understands each other through analogy or not at all."[207] His point is that we understand each other and our traditions only through analogy since it is only analogical affiliation that can adequately account for the real distinctions in the current plurality and diversity while simultaneously perceiving similarities (not sameness) within this difference. Each understands the other through analogies – similarities-in-difference – to his/her own self or tradition. One may gain insight into the experience and worldview of another only by finding correlations to one's own experience and worldview through a relationship of true difference between oneself and the other. Without affirming the other as *really other* and the different as *genuinely different* there is no authentic conversation or understanding, only the projection of oneself and/or one's tradition onto the other.

According to Tracy's hermeneutical model, when one enters into conversation with a real (not a projected) classical other through an analogical imagination that recognizes similarities-in-difference, one inevitably leaves that event transformed. By opening oneself up to the world of the classic's claim to attention and encountering its

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[206] Tracy, *Analogical Imagination*, 450.
[207] Ibid, 449.

challenge of otherness, one undergoes a new experience involving a disclosure of truth about the whole that corrects, expands, improves, and develops one's present interpretive framework. The transformation in conversation amounts to a revealing of truth that enlarges, enhances, and enriches one's present understanding through the newness/difference imparted by the other becoming more familiar and integrated into one's awareness and horizon of experience.

Tracy's hermeneutical model of conversation through an analogical imagination serves as a philosophical-theological methodology underpinning this work's development of an understanding of the transformative quality of interreligious dialogue. Having expounded Tracy's incisive elucidation of the *religious* dimension of experience, the dynamics of interpretation as *conversation*, the *transformative power* of conversation, and the importance of an *analogical imagination*, this project now utilizes and applies this hermeneutical paradigm to the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue and its transformative possibilities.

CHAPTER THREE

INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE: ITS BACKGROUND, PRINCIPLES, CONDITIONS, AND TRANSFORMATIONAL POWER

Having illustrated David Tracy's hermeneutics of conversation, it is now possible to utilize this theoretical basis as a foundation for interreligious dialogue and the prospect of transformation that lies therein. Tracy's methodology provides a viable interpretive framework in which to analyze and understand the nature and principles of interfaith encounter, in particular the transformational power of this exchange. Indeed, though Tracy's hermeneutics serves as a nuanced and critical philosophical underpinning, the consideration of interreligious dialogue being developed here is furthered through the corroborating scholarship of thinkers, theologians, philosophers, and practitioners of various worldviews and traditions. The intention is to apply Tracy's hermeneutical categories toward formulating a model of the theory and practice of interreligious dialogue and elucidating these categories of interpretation through relevant and significant critical reflection on the meaning and practice of encounter between people of different religions. Appropriating Tracy's central hermeneutical concepts in the context of interreligious conversation, there can be established an understanding of dialogue that includes a quality of real transformational possibility.

3.1 Development of the Interfaith Movement

Before translating Tracy's hermeneutics into the interreligious setting, it is useful to provide a brief overview of the development of the interfaith movement (which includes Buddhist-Christian encounter) as a background and context for a fuller, broader

picture of the matter. Although this historical outline is limited to the Western milieu (in particular, U.S. America), it moves forward with the recognition and affirmation that there are active and flourishing interfaith movements in numerous other parts of the world.[208]

There has been religious interface among people of differing worldviews and traditions throughout history, both in times of stability and instability. In the ancient world, one may think of the fruitful exchanges opened up between the Mediterranean world and India during and after Alexander the Great's eastward conquests, where goods, ideas, and customs were shared between people of various religions.[209] For instance, Gandharan art displays signs of creative-aesthetic exchange between West Indian Buddhist and Greco-Roman cultures.[210] Perhaps one may think of frequent, various religious and cultural interactions all along the Silk Road from Rome to Chang'an or the relatively tolerant co-habitation of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Spain as occasions of interchange.[211] As a further example, the early Christian theologian Clement of Alexandria mentions the Buddha in his writings, admiring the philosophical profundity

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[208] For further research and study of interreligious dialogue in the non-Western world, see especially Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Amal Khoury, and Emily Welty, *Unity in Diversity: Interfaith Dialogue in the Middle-East* (United States Institute for Peace: Washington, D.C., 2007); Gary D. Bouma, Rod Ling, and Douglas Pratt, *Religious Diversity in Southeast Asia and the Pacific: National Case Studies* (London: Springer, 2010), Part IV; Prince Sorie Conteh, *Traditionalists, Muslims, and Christians in Africa: Interreligious Encounters and Dialogue* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2009); Marcus Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope: One Hundred Years of Global Interfaith Dialogue* (London: SCM Press, 1992); and Lucien F Cosijns, *Dialogue Among the Faith Communities* (Lanham, MD: Hamilton Books, 2008), Part II.
[209] Ian Worthington, *Alexander the Great: A Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 148-176.
[210] Frank Raymond Allchin, *Gandharan Art in Context: East-West Exchanges at the Crossroads of Asia* (Regency Publications, 1997).
[211] See Luce Boulnois, *Silk Road: Monks, Warriors, and Merchants on the Silk Road* (Hong Kong: Odyssey Publications, 2004) and Susan Whitfield, *Life along the Silk Road* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California, 1999). For more on medieval Muslim-ruled Spain (approximately 8th – 15th centuries), see Maria Rosa Menocal, *Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews, and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2002).

and ascetic austerity of Buddhist monastics.[212] Undoubtedly, many other historical examples of interreligious relations could be cited, but suffice it to say that encounter between peoples of distinct religious traditions has occurred since antiquity.

Later on, with the onset of missionary work and colonization at the dawn of the Modern era (ca. 16th century), frequent exchange occurred between European Christians and people of non-Christian religions from various parts of the world, though it was often accomplished through and accompanied by the exploitation of the local inhabitants.[213] There are certainly historical instances of hospitable encounters during this missionary-colonial period, such as the Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and his relatively diplomatic missions to China, where he and his companions donned the garb of Buddhist monastics, referred to themselves using the Chinese word for Buddhist monk, and lived in or around Buddhist monasteries.[214] With an increase in trade relations with non-European societies there was inevitable encounter with religious teachings and practices. This can be witnessed, for example, in the manuscripts of Engelbert Kaempfer's *The History of Japan* (1727), which contains the earliest European-language accounts of Zen Buddhism.[215] It was during this era of mission, colonization, and world exploration that unfamiliar, non-Western religions and cultures first came to the attention and interest of people in the West.

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[212] Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* I.71.6 in *The Fathers of the Church: Clement of Alexandria,* Stromateis *Books 1-3*, trans. John Ferguson (The Catholic University of America Press, 1991), 76.
[213] For deeper discussion of European Christian missions to Asia see Christopher Dawson, ed., *Mission to Asia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980); Elizabeth Harris, "Crisis and Competition: The Christian Missionary Encounter with Buddhism in the Early Nineteenth Century," in *Buddhism and Christianity: Interaction between East and West*, ed. U. Everding (Colombo: The Goethe-Institut, 1995); and Frederick P. Brandauer, "The Encounter between Christianity and Chinese Buddhism from the Fourteenth to the Seventeenth Century," *Ching Feng* 11.3 (1962): 30-38.
[214] Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2001), 69-71.
[215] Arthur Versluis, *American Transcendentalism and Asian Religions* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 17-18.

By the 19th century, the Western world had begun to encounter the beliefs and practices of Indian and East Asian religions through archeological analysis and scholarly study and translation of the sacred texts of these traditions. An early example is linguist Eugène Burnouf (1801-1852), considered to be the founder of Buddhist Studies, who translated the *Lotus Sutra* (1852) and wrote the influential *Introduction to the History of Indian Buddhism* (1844).[216] These scholarly endeavors allowed for the advent of the Religious Studies discipline, producing a much greater accessibility to the ideas and beliefs of non-Western religions through such immense translation projects as F. Max Müller's series, *Sacred Books of the East*.[217] While much of the historical and theological analysis of this time was accomplished through an outlook of Christian superiority, it nonetheless brought about an increased awareness of non-Western religions and compelled many scholars and theologians to deal with the existence of very different and various religious claims.

Turning now specifically to the U.S., by the middle of the 19th century and amidst significant economic and industrial growth, an optimistic, romantic climate emerged that encouraged interest in nature, the exotic, mysticism, and Asian religions.[218] Movements such as Transcendentalism, which were influenced by German Romanticism, began integrating concepts from Asian religions into novel interpretations of Christianity.[219] Leading figures such as Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) and Henry David Thoreau

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[216] Charles Prebish, "The Academic Study of Buddhism in America: A Silent Sangha," in *American Buddhism: Methods and Findings in Recent Scholarship*, ed. Duncan Ryuken Williams and Christopher S. Queen (Surry, UK: Curzon Press, 1999), 185-187.
[217] F. Max Müller, ed., *Sacred Books of the East* (Oxford University Press, 1879-1910). This is a monumental 50-volume series of English translations of sacred writings from Hinduism, Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, Zoroastrianism, Jainism, and Islam. The entire series is available at the Internet Sacred Text Archive, http://www.sacred-texts.com/sbe/ (accessed 11/8/10).
[218] Lai and von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 197-198.
[219] Ibid.

(1817-1862) became familiar with especially Hindu, Buddhist, and Taoist scriptures through the earliest translations and began to popularize these traditions through their rather widely disseminated writings.[220] The newly founded Theosophical Society was interested in Eastern mysticism and propagated Asian mystical ideas for many American intellectuals looking for religious sensibilities unlike those of familiar Christianity.[221] Additionally, Unitarian ideas such as the radical oneness of God behind all religious expressions and Universalist belief in universal salvation for all humankind contributed to a more inclusive and open disposition to learning about other religions and fostered an emerging culture of religious diversity.[222] It was this 19th century period of U.S. America that began to introduce a significant number of people to religious traditions other than various forms of Christianity and, to a lesser extent, Judaism. Here, we see the beginnings of an awareness of religious systems of belief and practice that are different from those to which people were accustomed, pressing scholars, theologians, and literate populations to start dealing with the existence in the world of religious others. The scholarly and popular access to knowledge about especially non-Christian religions was burgeoning and the floodgates of information were flung wide open.

One specific event in this budding era of multi-religious awareness was the World's Parliament of Religions held at the World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago in 1893, often considered the commencement of the modern interfaith movement.[223] This

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[220] Versluis, *American Transcendentalism*, 51-98.
[221] Lai and von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 200.
[222] Peter W. Williams, *America's Religions: From Their Origins to the Twenty-first Century*, 3rd ed. (Champaign, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 221-226.
[223] The most detailed histories of the 1893 Parliament can be found in Richard Hughes Seager, *The World's Parliament of Religions: The East/West Encounter, Chicago, 1893* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995) and Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, 5-42. See also Kate McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters in America* (Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 16-19; Forward, *Inter-religious Dialogue*, 28-29; and Lai and von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 201-204.

conference was certainly situated in a colonial context, yet represents the culmination of the 19th century's growing interest in non-Western religions as well as a romantic optimism concerning human progress and the potentiality of a universal kinship of cultures.[224] Organized by Presbyterian minister and theology professor John Henry Barrows (1847-1907), the Parliament attracted thousands of participants and, at a time when the majority of Americans were conscious only of Christianity and its self-evident truth, was quite ahead of its time in providing a forum for the onset of encounter between persons of differing religions.[225]

Although there was resistance and criticism from many Christian churches, the liberal Protestant organizers of the Parliament portrayed Christianity as one religion among many and stated that the purpose of the event was to radiate harmony, dispel antagonism, and endorse understanding among religions.[226] Considering that the demography of the U.S. was largely white and Protestant, there was a significant diversity of representatives from different religious traditions in attendance. There were representatives from Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, and Judaism, yet no delegates from Taoism, Native American religion, African religion, Jainism, Sikhism, or Paganism, and African American churches, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, and Protestantism were treated separately.[227] As McCarthy states, "The participation of non-Christians at the parliament, especially those from Asia, was pronounced and

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[224] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 16.
[225] John Henry Barrows, ed., *The World's Parliament of Religions: An Illustrated and Popular Story of the World's First Parliament of Religions* (Chicago: The Parliament Publishing Company, 1893). The entire compilation of presentations given at the Parliament is available at Google Books, http://books.google.com (accessed 12/1/10).
[226] Barrows, "Address of Chairman John Henry Burrows of the General Committee," in *World's Parliament*, 72-79.
[227] Ibid, xv-xxiv.

provocative."[228] That is, even though the Parliament was dominated by Christianity,[229] which is a mark of its limitations, the impact that the Eastern religious leaders had on the mostly Christian audience was profound.

The result of the 1893 Parliament was two-fold. Firstly, the Parliament initiated immediate, personal exposure to a considerable range of divergent religious leaders, ideas, beliefs, and practices. This was an experience almost completely novel in the U.S. Face-to-face, intentional conversations between people from differing faiths as well as discussion about the issues of religious pluralism commenced at and arose from this event. The Parliament initiated a felt awareness of religious plurality for Americans and gave rise to questions about religious difference and diversity with which people have been struggling unto the present.[230]

Relationships and friendships were established, information was exchanged, and a few Hindu and Buddhist teachers even remained in America for a time to travel the country on speaking tours afterwards.[231] The Indian Hindu Swami Vivekananda made a noteworthy impact at the Parliament and traversed the U.S. giving talks, eventually founding the now widely recognized Vedanta Society.[232] The two most influential Buddhists represented, Sri Lankan layman Anagarika Dharmapala and Japanese Zen monk Shaku Soen, also traveled widely throughout the U.S. and introduced people directly to Buddhist teachings and established the first American Buddhist societies and organizations.[233] Indeed, the later 20th century flowering of Zen Buddhist ideas and

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[228] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 17.
[229] Of the 194 papers presented, 78 percent were given by Christians. Braybrooke, *Pilgrimage of Hope*, 27.
[230] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 17-18.
[231] Lai and von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 202.
[232] Amiya P. Sen, *Swami Vivekananda* (Oxford University Press, 2000), 29-32.
[233] See Charles S. Prebish, *American Buddhism* (North Scituate, MA: Duxbury Press, 1979), Ch. 1.

practice through practitioners such as Suzuki Daisetsu (1870-1966, Soen's personal secretary), Senzaki Nyogen (1876-1958, teacher of the widely known Robert Aitken Roshi), and others can be traced back to the influence of Ven. Soen's participation at the Parliament.[234]

The second lasting result of the Parliament is that it created a normative model that has inspired and shaped interreligious encounters in the Western world. It established a representation of the ideal exchange in the modern interfaith movement: "…formal encounters between clergy and scholars of diverse religions, in a spirit of openness and tolerance, with the goals of promoting mutual understanding and enrichment…"[235] The Parliament fostered both scholarly and religious-spiritual exchange between the participants, which helped to initiate a greater interest in religious study as well as personal encounter with people, beliefs, and practices of religious others. Although the event itself did not have a level of diversity, equality, and religious knowledge comparable to much of today's dialogical standards, it nonetheless paved the way for the eventual eruption of religious plurality and interfaith activity prevalent in 20th and 21st century America.

There have been a few crucial developments in American society that have contributed to the extensive growth of religious diversity and the interfaith movement in the present. Inspired by the intrigue of non-Christian traditions in the wake of the Parliament, there arose in the early 20th century an increasing interest in the comparative study of religions, which advanced further scholarly understanding of non-Western

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[234] See Samu Sunim, "A Brief History of Zen Buddhism in North America," in *Zen Buddhism in North America* (Toronto: The Zen Lotus Society, 1986).
[235] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 18.

traditions.[236] Beginning around World War II, not only was there a surge in scholastic study but also an escalation in attraction to the contemplative practices of Eastern religions.[237] For example, Alan Watts (1915-73) popularized Suzuki's philosophical interpretation of Zen as a spiritual lifestyle, influencing writers and participants of the "beat generation" who were drawn to the alternative religiosity and exotic culture that Zen represented.[238]

Furthermore, the 1960's brought about 1) more flexible legislature such as the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 that eliminated the previous national origin quotas and fostered unparalleled waves of immigration from non-Western cultures, and 2) the counter-culture movement with the "baby boom" generation that developed the Civil Rights movement, where the voices of ethnic minorities and women were increasingly heard and which generated socio-political activism against the Vietnam War.[239] These forces came together to produce a context of expanding religious and cultural diversity during a time of radical change in American values and mores. There was a general "loosening" of the culture, which produced a greater pluralistic situation that opened up even more of the population to encounter with the beliefs and practices of Eastern religious teachers and traditions.

Since the 1960's there has been a burgeoning of study, encounter, and (increasingly) practice of Eastern religions. With the establishment of world religion courses and programs in colleges and universities, an ever-expanding context of religious

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[236] While writers like D.T. Suzuki opened up a wide audience of educated readers to the thought and practice of Japanese Zen, other influential scholars of Buddhism, such as Edward Conze and T.R.V. Murti, moved beyond a former emphasis on the intellectual and rational side of Buddhism, stressing its mystical and meditative elements. See Lai and von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism*, 204-206, 213-219.
[237] Ibid, 207-208.
[238] Ibid.
[239] Eck, *New Religious America*, Ch. 1.

plurality, and the proliferation of technology that allows for faster and immediate communication, there has been a momentous spread of ideas, customs, and practices among people of diverse religious affiliations. It has been during this time period from the 1970's into the early 21st century, post-9/11 world that the modern interfaith movement has arisen and flourished.[240] Through a concise examination of the various approaches to interreligious encounter (both theoretical and pragmatic), a relatively clear picture of the present interfaith movement may be formulated.

3.2 Types of Encounter within the Interfaith Movement

The 1893 Parliament set the stage for the current and growing interfaith movement both in the U.S. and elsewhere around the world. It advanced the idea that the world's religions should cooperate to promote the common good and offered a prototypical norm of deliberate, open, equal, and non-proselytizing exchange on which many interreligious relationships and institutions are based today.

Presently, the term "interfaith movement" refers to a wide-ranging conceptual category in which many various activities occur between and among people of differing religious heritages.[241] The term "movement" is employed in order to avoid any inaccurate implication of there being a centralized or hierarchical structure to these rather wide-ranging, loosely affiliated endeavors. The diversity of particular organizations and

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[240] Several journalists and scholars point out that, in the wake of 9/11, awareness of and interaction with religious others (especially concerning Islam) has considerably increased, both in terms of contention and cooperation. On the side of cooperation, many religious individuals and organizations reached out to support one another in the aftermath of 9/11, which helped to accelerate the growth of the interfaith movement. See especially Gustav Niebuhr, *Beyond Tolerance: Searching for Interfaith Understanding in America* (New York: Penguin Group, 2008), Liyakatali Takim, "From Conversion to Conversation: Interfaith Dialogue in Post-911 America," *The Muslim World* 94 (July 2004): 343-355, and Ally Ostrowsky, "Beyond Belief(net): Interreligious Dialogue and Trauma Communication," Unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, San Francisco, CA, 2007, http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p168919_index.html (accessed 1/27/11).

[241] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 18.

pursuits constitute a movement held together by values, purposes, and work strategies that has been spreading horizontally and is not dependent on any one leader, group of leaders, party, faction, or center. As Pedersen so fittingly puts it,

> The thousands of interfaith projects and organizations found all over the world today are not sponsored, coordinated, or directed by any single organization or bureaucracy. The overall picture of interfaith work, rather, shows thousands of groups and activities that are loosely related by a cluster of shared methods, aims, and values.[242]

This interfaith activity often thrives and prospers whenever three influential conditions are present: a religiously plural and diverse population, religious tensions/conflicts, and active scholarly discourse on religious and interfaith issues and questions.[243] When motivating factors such as these come together, vigorous interreligious activity is produced, as has been the case in the U.S. and Canada, as well as other parts of the world.

It is also important to note that the modern interfaith movement is grounded in a belief in the "dignity of all religions and the value of open exchange."[244] This type of interreligious encounter can only flourish, as Ursula King states, "in a free, open and democratic society where traditional hierarchies and leadership based on ascription are no longer the norm."[245] Without a social context that promotes individual freedoms, vigorous public discourse, and cultural and religious diversity it would be very difficult for a robust interfaith movement to manifest and maintain.

Assessing the interfaith movement is rather difficult largely due to the fact that no comprehensive systematic study exists to date. Some sectors of interreligious work are

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[242] Kusumita P. Pedersen, "The Interfaith Movement: An Incomplete Assessment," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 41:1 (Winter, 2004): 74-94, 75-77.
[243] Pedersen, "The Interfaith Movement," 77.
[244] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 18.
[245] Ursula King, "Feminism: The Missing Dimension in the Dialogue of Religions," in *Pluralism and Religions: The Theological and Political Dimensions*, ed. John May (London, Cassell Academic, 1998), 45.

well documented by participating organizations, while in others there is little to no documentation at all.[246] Nonetheless, within this wide-ranging movement it is possible to identify different organizational structures and types of exchange through which people of different religions interface.

There exist three fundamental structures of dialogue through which the interfaith movement operates: offices through religious institutions, independent organizations and community projects, and university projects or centers. Firstly, there are religious institutions that have developed offices or committees dedicated to interreligious work. For instance, in Roman Catholicism there is the well established Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue (PCID). The PCID posits the goals of 1) understanding and respect between Catholics and followers of other religions, 2) encouraging the study of world religions, and 3) advancing the formation of persons dedicated to dialogue and also engages in such activities as welcoming visitors from other religious traditions, sending delegates to visit and dialogue with other communities, organizing dialogues, and publishing books and pamphlets on various aspects of interreligious relations.[247] Another example can be found with the ecumenical World Council of Churches' Team on Interreligious Dialogue, which aims to "make theological sense" of non-Christian peoples, "find new dimensions of our own faith," and "discover our neighbours in a new light, and so learn to live with them in closer community."[248]

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[246] Pedersen, "The Interfaith Movement," 78.

[247] The Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue was formerly and originally known as the Vatican Secretariat for Non-Christians, established in 1964 Pope Paul VI and changed to the current title in 1988 by Pope John Paul II. See official website of the Council, "Profile," http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/ (accessed 2/21/11).

[248] The World Council of Churches' Team on Interreligious Dialogue was first established in 1971 as the Sub-Unit on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies under the direction of Stanley Samartha and was later altered to the current designation. See WCC website article "My Neighbor's Faith and Mine," (WCC, 1986) http://www.oikoumene.org/en/resources/documents/wcc-programmes/interreligious-

Besides these larger offices, there are many independent organizations that have been formed to bring multiple religions into dialogue and engagement, such as the International Association for Religious Freedom (1900), World Congress of Faiths (1936), Religions for Peace (1970), North American Interfaith Network (1990), United Religions Initiative (2000), Global Ethics and Religion Forum (2001), Interfaith Encounter Association (2001), Interreligious Engagement Project (2006), and Interfaith Youth Core (2002), just to name a few. These independent and religiously affiliated associations typically involve facilitating interfaith events (e.g. conferences, workshops, prayer services) and coordinating communities for action on particular matters of concern.[249] In addition to these more national and global organizations, there are many local community councils and groups engaging in interreligious solidarity and learning, which also contribute significantly to the burgeoning of the interfaith movement.[250]

Another structure of the interfaith movement includes participants in largely university or college-associated organizations committed to pursuing scholarly research and resources toward further interfaith understanding. One example is Common Ground, which is a not-for-profit establishment dedicated to educating people about world religions and interreligious relationships, offering a multifaceted curricula in history, philosophy, religious studies, and spirituality.[251] Also, there is the Global Dialogue Institute, founded by Leonard Swidler of Temple University and Ashok Gangadeen of Haverford College, which organizes international encounters among scholarly

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dialogue-and-cooperation/christian-identity-in-pluralistic-societies/study-guide-my-neighbours-faith-and-mine.html (accessed 2/21/11).

[249] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 19.

[250] See Rebecca Kratz Mays and Leonard Swidler, *Interfaith Dialogue at the Grass Roots* (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2009).

[251] See the Common Ground website, http://cg.org/default.aspx (accessed 2/18/11).

representatives of world religions and oversees the publication of the *Journal for Ecumenical Studies*, an academic publication dedicated to critical research on ecumenical and interreligious relations.[252]

While the Global Dialogue Institute might be said to represent significant but lofty theorizing about how and why people of different religions should engage one another, there is a third structure of interfaith encounter. This is could be represented by Harvard University's Pluralism Project, directed by Diana Eck, and which engages in a more "bottom-up" model, where the purpose is to offer detailed assessment of the ever-evolving shapes of American religious life.[253] The unique work of the Pluralism Project is that it sponsors detailed, systematic studies of religiously diverse populations as well as individual communities within those populations, paying special attention to the influx of immigrant populations across the U.S.[254] The Pluralism Project has produced a CD-ROM resource, "On Common Ground: World Religions in America," which collates their research on pluralism and interfaith relations in America in a technologically current and user-friendly format that is designed for educational contexts.[255] The scholarly and academic interest in interreligious dialogue and engagement is advocated not only by the increasing number of book publications by historians, philosophers, anthropologists, theologians, and sociologists, but also by the different journals dedicated to the topic: *Studies in Comparative Religion*, *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue*, *the Journal of Inter-*

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[252] The *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* was founded in 1964 and was the first peer-reviewed journal in the field of interreligious dialogue. See the Global Dialogue Institute's website, http://institute.jesdialogue.org/ (accessed 2/18/11) and the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies*' website, http://journal.jesdialogue.org/ (accessed 2/18/11).

[253] Diana L. Eck and the President and Fellows of Harvard College, "The Pluralism Project: Mission" (2005), http://www.pluralism.org/about/mission.php (accessed 2/21/11).

[254] Ibid.

[255] Diana L. Eck and the President and Fellows of Harvard College, "On Common Ground: World Religions in America CD-ROM, Third Edition (Windows Only)," http://www.pluralism.org/ocg/index.php (accessed 2/24/11).

Religious Dialogue, the previously mentioned *Journal for Ecumenical Studies*, and even the recently formed *Evangelical Interfaith Dialogue*, as well as those concerning more focused, specific engagements, such as *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, *Studies in Christian-Jewish Relations*, *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations*, *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies*, *Journal of Hindu-Christian Studies*, among others.

In addition to these overarching structures of interreligious engagement there are different forms that dialogue takes. There have been developed various typologies of interfaith relations that overlap and intersect with one another. For instance, Pedersen organizes dialogue according to three motives: 1) dialogues intending to help different religious communities live together harmoniously; 2) dialogues addressing a common issue in the wider community, such as pollution, violence, poverty, or racism; and 3) dialogues seeking to reconcile religious truth with the growing pluralistic situation.[256] Also, Ingram conceives of dialogue as being *conceptual*, *interior*, and/or *socially engaged*.[257] Heim employs Hindu categories to speak of different forms of dialogue: *jñāna* (knowledge-based), *bhakti* (devotional), and *karma* (action-oriented).[258] Swidler uses body images in referring to types of engagement, speaking about dialogues of the "*head*," "*heart*," and "*hands*."[259] Additionally, Sharpe distinguishes four forms of dialogue: *discursive* ("intellectual inquiry"), *human* (among people *as human*, regardless

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[256] Pedersen, "The Interfaith Movement," 75-76.
[257] Paul O. Ingram, "'Fruit Salad Can Be Delicious': The Practice of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue," *Cross Currents* (Winter 2000-2001): 541-549.
[258] Mark S. Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1995), 99-100.
[259] Leonard Swidler, "Interreligious and Interideological Dialogue: The Matrix for All Systematic Reflection Today" in *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, ed. Leonard Swidler (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1987), 13-25.

of belief system), *secular* (programs of "joint action"), and *spiritual* (contemplatives and monastics).[260]

These typologies of dialogical form largely coalesce with one another, using special terminology to explicate similar modes of conducting interfaith relationships. Maintaining the three coinciding types and adding two additional ones, a more extensive typology can be forwarded.

First, there is *socially active* dialogue, where people from differing religions come together to work toward a shared civic concern. With this type of interreligious engagement practitioners draw on their respective religious resources to address humanitarian or environmental concerns. Dialogue thus becomes a way to come into partnership with other religious traditions to further a particular social problem. Multi-faith activism and community interfaith work would fall under this category. For example, the Chicago-based Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) unites people of divergent religions to promote fair wages and benefits, safe working conditions, and adequate healthcare for workers.[261] Also, the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) is dedicated to bring faith communities together to help mobilize local resources helping families regain lost housing.[262] The politically oriented Interfaith Alliance and its local chapters is also representative of socially engaged interfaith activity. In addition, there are many dialogues throughout the world addressing conflict-resolution in areas of strife and turmoil, such as Israel and Palestine, the former Yugoslavia, and Northern Ireland.[263]

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[260] Eric J. Sharpe, "Dialogue of Religions," *Encyclopedia of Religion*. Ed. Lindsay Jones. 2nd ed. Vol. 4 (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005): 2342-2345, 2344.
[261] See Interfaith Worker Justice website, www.iwj.org (accessed 3/3/11).
[262] See Interfaith Hospitality Network website, www.familypromise.org (accessed 3/3/11).
[263] Smock, *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, Ch. 4-6.

Second, there is *conceptual dialogue*, which is the work taken up often, though not exclusively, by scholars and academics who are seeking truth and meaning through the intellectual exchange of ideas about beliefs, doctrines, values, and practices. This type of dialogue engenders academic conferences, workshops, and other forums where a space is fostered for engaging in critical and analytical discourse about each others' religious commitment and tradition. An example of this is the previously mentioned Pluralism Project at Harvard, which uses scholarly resources to catalogue and inventory the many various centers of religious presence in the U.S. American context. Also, the many university sponsored organizations facilitating conversation among different religious traditions are instances of this conceptual dialogue.[264]

Thirdly, there is *contemplative* dialogue, where the focus is on the interior spiritual life of practitioners. With this mode of dialogue people of different faiths come together to share their contemplative insights and techniques of prayer and meditation. Participants often learn from one another through actively engaging in the contemplative practices of each other's traditions and exchanging experiences of this involvement. Although this type of encounter occurs often between monastics, it may also include any contemplatives interested in the inner spirituality of religious life.

There are many examples of contemplative dialogue. One is the meetings at Gethsemani Abbey in Kentucky, the former home of Trappist monk Thomas Merton, in 1996, 2002, and 2008 where Buddhist and Christian monastics held a retreat to

[264] For example, the University of Southern California's Center for Muslim-Jewish relations, Saint Mary's College of California's Center for Engaged Religious Pluralism, Rice University's Boniuk Center for the Study and Advancement of Religious Tolerance, and Cambridge University's Woolf Institute of Abrahamic Faiths.

experience and dialogue about the contemplative life in their respective traditions.[265] Another instance is the twenty year ongoing interreligious dialogue (1984-2004) convened by Fr. Thomas Keating called the Snowmass Conference, which brought together Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, and Native American representatives together to converse about and engage in spiritual practices from the various traditions.[266] Besides these specific meetings, there are organizations that bring together and promote contemplative encounter. Among these are the North American Benedictine and Cistercian Monasteries of Men and Women, The Chaudhuri Center of the California Institute of Integral Studies, The Merton Institute for Contemplative Living, and the Fetzer Institute, all of which advance contemplative dialogue among diverse faith practitioners.

Fourthly, there is the situation of *interfaith marriage/families*. In a growing pluralistic society, the number of people marrying those of another religion is greatly increasing. Indeed, in 2001, 22 percent of Americans married outside their own religious tradition.[267] Unlike other modes of encounter where religious dialogue is intentional, most Americans who enter interfaith relationships "come to this dialogue experience with no particular interest in interfaith dialogue…only in loving a particular person."[268] For some couples the difference in religious identity poses no significant problems, but for

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[265] Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, O.S.B., eds., *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics* (New York: Continuum, 1999); Monastic Interreligious Dialogue website, "Gethsemani Encounter I: About the Conference," http://www.monasticdialog.com/gethsemani1/about.htm (accessed 4/2/11); Monastic Interreligious Dialogue website, "Gethsemani Encounter II: About the Conference," http://www.monasticdialog.com/gethsemani2/about.htm (accessed 4/2/11); and Monastic Interreligious Dialogue website, "Gethsemani Encounter III," http://monasticdialog.com/conference.php?id=117 (accessed 4/2/11).

[266] Netanel Miles-Yepez, ed., *The Common Heart: An Experience of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York, Lantern books, 2007).

[267] American Religious Identification Survey, 2001, http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/ (accessed 2/18/11)

[268] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 126.

others this discrepancy raises profound issues about identity and family.[269] Interfaith marriage is a unique type of dialogue that involves the domestic interactions that occur between couples of different faiths and their children. For interfaith couples, the work of dialogue arises in the issues of everyday family life – how to celebrate holidays/festivals, what to eat at dinner, how to bless special occasions, how to raise children. It is a multi-faith circumstance where the dialogue *as religious* is secondary to their intimate relationship as partners in marriage.

Lastly, there is *online dialogue*, which is a forum for religious interaction on the web via websites, blogs, and other social utilities. In the current age of technological innovation, internet access and usage has burgeoned throughout the world, but especially in developed countries like the U.S. Using the internet for so many other activities in life, people have come to also use it as a way to learn more about others' religious beliefs and practices. Online dialogue may include any of the other types of dialogue, using the internet as a medium for mobilizing social change, conversing about religious doctrines and concepts, sharing contemplative techniques or creating online religious rituals, and finding support with others online who are also in an interfaith relationship.[270] There are many various websites dedicated to providing a environment for interreligious engagement. Besides websites of particular organizations that offer information about themselves, there are discussion groups such as Beliefnet (www.beliefnet.com), Religion Depot (www.edepot.com/religion.html), ReligiousTolerance.org (www.religioustolerance.org), Faith of Choice (www.faithofchoice.com/index.php), Interfaith Online (www.interfaith.org/), the Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue

[269] Ibid, 126-168.
[270] Ibid, 169-197.

(http://irdialogue.org/), and the religion groups hosted by MSN, Yahoo!, AOL, and Google. Although online dialogue lacks the face-to-face experience of encountering another physically and concretely, it does present the possibility of instantaneously interacting meaningfully with a vast diversity of religious others from all over the world.

3.3 Defining Interreligious Dialogue

Having employed the term "interreligious dialogue" frequently already, it is necessary to clarify its meaning in the present project. Drawing on insights from different spheres of inquiry, including Tracy's hermeneutics and other dialogicians, a working definition of interreligious dialogue may be formed.

That dialogue is "interreligious" suggests that it is specifically concerned with dialogue between and among people of differing religious perspectives. Dialogue can be intercultural, which refers instead to exchange between people who come from dissimilar cultures, maintaining distinct customs, mores, values, etc. Here the focus is on the cultural identification of the individual participants. Also, dialogue may be, more generally, interpersonal. However, interreligious dialogue is distinguished from interpersonal dialogue by virtue of the religious worldviews and loyalties of the persons in dialogue. As Cornille aptly affirms, "Such [religious] commitment marks the difference between a genuinely interreligious and a strictly interpersonal dialogue."[271] While conversations may come in various forms, *interreligious* dialogue is exchange that takes place among those who have some kind of *religious* commitment. That is, the "coming together" in interreligious dialogue is concerned particularly with, at least in part, the participants' religious standpoints and allegiances.

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[271] Catherine Cornille, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008), 60.

Beginning with the Greek etymological roots of the word, dialogue is a compound term that can be divided into two parts – *dia* and *logos. Dia* is a prepositional prefix that means "through" in a variety of senses (place, time, agency, and cause).[272] Logos has a variety of meanings, including "word," "speech," "assertion," "meaning," "reason," "reasoning," "consideration," and "subject matter."[273] Drawing on David Bohm's interpretation of this etymology, dialogue is the "reasoning through," the "meaning in-between" subjects in relation. Dialogue is about the "stream of meaning flowing among and through us and between us."[274] Thus, it involves more than one self or subject; it necessitates more than one individual in relationship. As perceived by co-founder of the Organizational Learning Center at MIT, William Isaacs, dialogue "is about a shared inquiry, a way of thinking and reflecting together."[275] It is not something one does *to* another, but is rather a practice in which one engages *with* others.

This resonates with Tracy's hermeneutics since, as previously explicated, he views dialogue/conversation (he uses these technical terms interchangeably in his works) as the conscious and critical encounter with otherness and difference in the process of understanding.[276] Under the influence of Gadamer, he understands dialogue/conversation as that back-and-forth, question-and-answer movement between others where each is

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[272] William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 178-179.
[273] Ibid, 478-480.
[274] David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, (New York: Routledge Classics, 2004), 7.
[275] William Isaacs, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together: A Pioneering Approach to Communicating in Business and in Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 9.
[276] Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 1-8, 27-47, 68-94, and 95-99; Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 28-29; and David Tracy, "Western Hermeneutics and Interreligious Dialogues," in *Interreligious Hermeneutics*, eds. Catherine Cornille and Christopher Conway (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2010), 1-43.

grasped by and follows the logic of the subject matter in the shared world created by the interlocutors.[277]

In the work of defining what dialogue is, it can be helpful to designate what it is *not*. Social scientist Daniel Yankelovich sets out a helpful discrepancy between debate and dialogue. Debate is quite the opposite of dialogue. He states that meaning of debate is "to win an argument, to vanquish an opponent."[278] Debate is about trying to prevail over and against an antagonist and winning debating points at the expense of another. It involves presenting one's viewpoint and defending it at all costs.[279]

This stands in contrast to dialogue, which is not a win-lose circumstance. Rather than viewing the other as an antagonist or opponent over which one must triumph, dialogue is about people coming together in a shared journey where the other is seen as a partner, companion, and colleague with whom one co-creates an environment for mutual exchange. In Buberian terms, this is the difference between the I-It and I-Thou basic relationships, or monologue versus dialogue. The I-It or monologic relation involves the objectification of the other as an impersonal thing and thus corresponds to debate, whereas the I-Thou or dialogic relation experiences the other as an immediate personal subject or presence to which one relates in freedom, mutuality, and openness.[280] That is, dialogue involves speaking *with* rather than *at* or *to* others.[281] As Isaacs puts it, "Dialogue…is a conversation with a center, not sides."[282] It includes not only sharing

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[277] Tracy, *Analogical*, 107-115.
[278] Daniel Yankelovich, *The Magic of Dialogue: Transforming Conflict into Cooperation* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1999), 38.
[279] Martin Buber, *Between Man and Man* (London: Routledge, 2002), 22-23. Also see Bohm's differentiation between discussion and dialogue in Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 6-8.
[280] Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996), 54-55, 62. Also see Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 22-24.
[281] Buber, *Between Man and Man*, 40-41.
[282] Isaacs, *Dialogue*, 19.

one's own viewpoint with the other but also encountering the other's viewpoint, not in order to subdue, dispel, or devastate the other's position and advance one's own, but rather to discover new insights about the other as well as oneself.

Using hermeneutics to establish a philosophical grounding for interreligious dialogue is predicated on the notion of interpretation being a fundamental category not only of understanding written scriptures but also of any text, image, symbol, word, sound, or person.[283] In Tracy's work, the classic can be any kind of otherness that stands in differentiation from the interpreter and has lasting excess of meaning. Conversation with the classic is this process of interpretation, which involves coming to an enhanced understanding of the classic's claim to attention.[284] Thus, in applying his hermeneutical framework to interreligious relations, it is necessary to translate his terminology into the interfaith situation. Therefore, interreligious dialogue is essentially a particular instance of the very activity of interpretation itself. In the interreligious context, *the classic becomes the living religious other* (and her/his religious tradition) with whom one encounters in dialogue. One engages with and thus interprets another human individual and her/his religious worldview. Conversation with the classic effectively translates as dialogue with the living religious other in an interpretive exchange. The process of understanding the classic is fundamentally equivalent to understanding the religious other in interreligious dialogue. That is, Tracy's underlying hermeneutical principles of conversation with the classical other are applicable to the inter-subjective relationship between living persons of different religions.

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[283] Paul Ricoeur, "What is a Text? Explanation and Understanding," "Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics," and "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 145-196.
[284] Tracy, *Analogical*, 108-110.

At base, dialogue might be conceived as an important and distinct type of communication that exhibits very special, particular characteristics which make it distinct from common discussion. Indeed, it is the purpose and fundamental qualities of interreligious dialogue that indicate its unique and significant activity.

3.4 Purpose of Dialogue

Besides the more social goals of creating an environment of further tolerance and harmony among communities, dialogicians agree that the primary purpose of interreligious dialogue is for each person to learn from the exchange.[285] In Tracy's work in particular, he does not employ the term "learning" to describe the purpose of dialogue, but rather uses "understanding" as that technical term in philosophical hermeneutics which refers to the aim, intention, or occupation of all interpretation.[286] Thus, learning or understanding in interreligious dialogue involves an exchange of information, which elicits a process of increased insight or knowledge about the other and her/his tradition as well as oneself and one's own tradition. This involves a deliberate effort in maintaining the position of receptivity and discovery rather than teaching and conferring of information.

Referring to dialogue in general, Bohm asserts that dialogue is fundamentally about creating shared meaning, which indicates coming to a better understanding of one's own as well as the other's assumptions and viewpoints rather than attempting to force these onto any dialogue partner. He maintains, "Therefore, you simply see what the assumptions and reactions mean – not only your own, but the other people's as well. We

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[285] Panikkar, *Intra-Religious Dialogue*; David Smock, "Introduction," in *Interfaith Dialogue and Peacebuilding*, 6-8; Cornille, *Im-Possibility*, 3; and Paul Knitter, *One Earth, Many Religions: Multifaith Dialogue and Global Responsibility* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995).
[286] Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity*, 7-10.

are not trying to change anybody's opinions… The object of dialogue is not…to win an argument."[287] This is corroborated in the study of interfaith dialogue by Swidler, a prolific writer on the aim of interreligious encounter, who states, "The general goal of dialogue is for each side to learn and change accordingly."[288]

The long-time interfaith dialogue practitioner and scholar, Raimon Panikkar, also speaks of the dialogical goal as learning/understanding. He aptly and eloquently asserts,

> The aim of intrareligious dialogue is understanding. It is not to win over the other or to come to a total agreement or a universal religion. The ideal is communication in order to bridge the gulfs of mutual ignorance and misunderstandings between the different cultures of the world, letting them speak and speak out their own insights in their own languages.[289]

Panikkar indicates the significance learning has for overcoming ignorance and misunderstanding. Through dialogue, one is able to journey into another's religious environment to experience growth in understanding about the life, beliefs, and practices of this religious other.

Cornille agrees that the primary reason for engaging in dialogue is to discover more about the religious other and to come to greater knowledge about other traditions in a context of plurality. For Cornille, learning is not a mere detached, impersonal acquisition of mere data about the other religious person or tradition; learning refers to an even deeper purpose concerned with a more penetrating experience of the other religion with one's whole being. She claims,

> At the most basic level, dialogue between religions may be regarded as an exchange of information, and as a means to mutual understanding and

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[287] Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 23, 30.
[288] Leonard Swidler, "Understanding Dialogue," *The Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 43.2 (Spring 2008): 9-24, 13. Also see Swidler's work cited and employed in Smock, *Interfaith Dialogue*, 6-8.
[289] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 10. Panikkar would rather speak of *intra*religious rather than *inter*religious dialogue because *intra*religious more adequately conveys that I-Thou relationship between oneself and the other who is a personal subject intimately connected to oneself at the deepest level of being. See Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue,* xvi-xvii.

> tolerance… However, beyond this accumulation of facts about the other, dialogue may also include the possibility of learning from the other religion. Here dialogue becomes part of a continuous religious pursuit… [R]eal understanding of the religious other involves more than an intellectual grasp of the teachings and practices of the other religion. It also presupposes a willingness and ability to penetrate into the religious mind-set of the other and understand him or her from within.[290]

The important point here is that learning consists of going beyond only the intellectual or conceptual acquirement of particular pieces of information about the religious other. Learning involves one's entire being – encountering, experiencing, and understanding with as much of oneself present as possible and from as much within the other religious mindset as possible. The learning in dialogue is intellectual, emotional, physical, spiritual/religious, and any other facet of life of which one may speak. That is, learning in dialogue is holistic.

Learning involves growth in understanding about the other tradition. This can often be gauged in the course of the exchange by the dialogue partner being able to recognize her/his self and tradition in one's communicated interpretation of the other's beliefs and practices.[291] In other words, if you cannot identify yourself or your religion in the content of what I speak about you or your tradition, then I have not come to a full enough understanding and further clarification is necessary in the dialogue. This process of constant refinement and modification of one's understanding of the religious other is part and parcel of dialogue's purpose of increased holistic learning.

As a consequence of learning more about the other, one also attains further understanding about one's own tradition and worldview. The learning in dialogue is not only about gaining education about one's interlocutor and her/his religion, but also

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[290] Cornille, *Im-Possibility*, 3, 138.
[291] Leonard Swidler, "The Dialogue Decalogue: Ground Rules for Interreligious Dialogue," *Inter-Religio* 5 (Spring 1984): 30-33, 32.

growing in insight about one's own religious perspective and heritage through the process of dialogical exchange with the other. In interreligious dialogue, one certainly gains facts, information, and thus a greater knowledge about the religious other and her/his tradition. Nonetheless, the definitive and critical purpose of interfaith encounter is continual development of one's total being in learning, understanding, and insight about the other, oneself, and the world/reality.

The idea here, concerning the purpose of dialogue, is that I converse with you primarily so that I may learn something, not so that I try to teach you or compel you toward learning. That is to say, when each party enters the relationship chiefly to learn from the other, then the other becomes the teacher, and therefore mutual learning has a greater chance of taking place. However, if each or either side comes to the encounter principally to teach, this can create the perception of domination, proselytization, or coercion, which tends to close people up, create distrust, and thus reciprocal learning is less likely to come about.[292] Thus, dialogue's aim is not only to learn *about* the other, oneself, and the world, but also to learn *from* the other in dynamic relational encounter.

3.5 Conditions of Productive Interreligious Encounter

Successful or productive interreligious dialogue is predicated on the presence and cultivation of certain fundamental characteristics of dialogical exchange that promote mutual holistic learning. Drawing on Tracy's hermeneutics and other dialogicians' explication of significant qualities found to be crucial for learning, the character of interreligious dialogue may be elucidated through three external and five internal conditions. External conditions are those concerning the exterior context or environment

[292] Swidler, "What Is Dialogue?" (article on The Dialogue Institute website), http://institute.jesdialogue.org/resources/course (accessed 3/12/11).

in which productive exchange takes place, and internal conditions are the inner dispositions or attitudinal qualities that must be fostered when encountering the religious other in order to maximize the development of reciprocal learning and understanding.

It should be noted, before going any further, that these characteristics of religious interchange are grounded in the *practice* of dialogue itself. Formulating qualities of dialogue prior to the actual engagement with others can lead to uninformed and often impractical principles. In order to attain the most knowledgeable and skilled understanding for formulating dialogical principles, it is important to dialogue first and then develop theory later, based on the practical experience gained in the interreligious encounter.[293]

External conditions are not specifically found in Tracy's hermeneutics, but can be ascertained in the work of other dialogicians. The first external condition for dialogue is *equality and reciprocity*. In order for growth in learning to take place for all participants, a shared environment of fairness and mutuality must be cultivated.[294] A major proponent of this principle is Swidler. Grounded in dialogue's primary purpose of learning, not teaching, Swidler's seventh "commandment" of his often-acclaimed "Dialogue Decalogue" is, "Dialogue can take place only between equals."[295] Therefore, if one participant views another (or her/his religion in general) as inferior, in any way, then the equality and reciprocity of the relationship has been compromised. Genuine learning is far less likely to take place in such an atmosphere. When dialogue partners come together, in the words of Vatican II, as *par cum pari* or "equal with equal" then a one-

[293] See McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 36-38; and Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 37.
[294] Abu-Nimer, "Miracles of Transformation," in *Interfaith Dialogue*, 21.
[295] Swidler, "Dialogue Decalogue," 32.

sided relationship is mitigated in favor of a two-sided, reciprocal dialogue between equals.[296]

Swidler further states, "Dialogue must include a common understanding that no one side has a monopoly on the truth of any given subject."[297] That is, regardless of the content of the conversation, the context must be one where everyone is viewed as having the same status concerning claims to truth and reality. In other words, everyone is on a "level playing field," as it were. Striving toward viewing and treating each other as equals begins to create a safe, shared space where trust grows and people feel more able to freely communicate, question, and inquire in the pursuit of mutual learning.

One example of an internal resource of reciprocity and equality within many of the world's religious traditions is what has been termed "The Golden Rule." Phrased differently throughout the scriptural traditions, the fundamental premise is that one does unto others what one would want done unto oneself.[298] The underlying premise is that of fostering a relational context where all involved are treated with equivalent regard and responsibility toward one another. This ethic of reciprocity supports and has the potential to advance jointly respectful, forbearing, and inspiring inter-personal relationship.

Another important external condition for productive dialogue is *contextuality*. That is, the content and agenda of the encounter is governed by the participants' immediate situation. The thought here is that, in order to engender the most interest, attention, and thus learning in a dialogical relationship, the specific subject matter ought

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[296] See Vatican II website, "Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions, *Nostra Aetate*," (Oct. 28, 1965), http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html (accessed 4/19/11).
[297] Swidler, "Understanding Dialogue," 11.
[298] See Jacob Neusner, ed., *The Golden Rule: The Ethics of Reciprocity in World Religions* (New York: Continuum, 2009); and Patricia A. Keefe, "The Golden Rule and World Peace," in *The World's Religions After September 11*, ed. Arvind Sharma (Westport, CT: Greenwood Publishing, 2009), 153-159.

to be selected according to the social, political, cultural, and religious concerns of the participants collectively. Not only does this contextuality serve to promote further interest and focus in dialogue, but it also allows for a way forward in the case of a theological/ideological standstill about a certain issue. That is to say, the participants can always remind themselves of the concrete and practical contextual concern that brought them together in the first place.[299] This principle is applicable regardless of the type of interreligious encounter – socially engaged, conceptual, contemplative, etc. Besides the overarching purpose of mutual learning, every dialogue initiates with a specific concern, interest, or focal point shared by the partners. And this collaboration around a *particular* issue or idea in a *certain* context is what is meant by contextuality.

The last external condition important for dialogue is *linguistic inclusivity and sensitivity*. The type of language used in any communication impacts the character of and experience in the relationship. Therefore, if the aim of the encounter is intended to be continual, mutual learning and understanding, the style of language employed ought to reflect this intention. As productive interreligious dialogue strives for mutual learning with equality and reciprocity, the linguistic universe of this encounter must support and express this purpose through being inclusive of and thus sensitive to religious, cultural, and gender differences.[300]

Authentic dialogue must not arbitrarily exclude any participant solely based on one's religious (including non-religious) affiliation or viewpoint.[301] Any exclusion of

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[299] See Abu-Nimer, "Miracles of Transformation," in *Interfaith Dialogue*, 23-24.
[300] For further discussion of language use in interfaith relations and dialogue, see Rita M. Gross and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Religious Feminism and the Future of the Planet: A Buddhist-Christian Conversation* (New York: Continuum, 2001).
[301] Leonard Swidler, "What is Dialogue?," in *Trialogue: Jews, Christians, and Muslims in Dialogue*, ed. Leonard Swidler, Reuven Firestone, and Khalid Duran (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2007), 11-13.

someone from a dialogue is grounded in a potential participant's refusal to adhere to the external and internal conditions or "ground rules" of fruitful encounter. For example, if a participant begins promoting inequality, intolerance, or insensitivity toward others (behaving in a way that deems their tradition as superior and others' as inferior or using hateful, violent, or disrespectful language), then exclusion may be necessary for the advancement of learning. That is, when there is activity contrary to the aim and qualities of productive dialogue, growth in mutual understanding is likely to be compromised. The fundamental meaning here is about cultivating a context that is not only equal and contextually relevant for all involved, but also welcoming of any and all religious perspectives willing to adhere to the essential aim, values, and qualities of dialogue, as well as being sensitive and respectful concerning the way in which communication occurs.

Besides external conditions, fruitful dialogue is also founded on certain key internal conditions or qualities that are found in the participants' intentions, attitudes, and awareness. Tracy expresses five central hermeneutical qualities that must be present in the attitude and awareness of dialogue partners. The first internal condition is *honesty*. Tracy maintains that dialogue or conversation entails that participants are sincere and truthful to each other and themselves. He states, "…say only what you mean; say it as accurately as you can."[302] In order for dialogue to build trust, safety, and engender learning and understanding it is important that every participant be dedicated to maintaining honest intentions aimed at conveying accuracy in what is communicated to the other. In his experience, Swidler agrees, "Each partner is to come to the dialogue with

[302] Tracy, *Analogical*, 19.

total sincerity and honesty."[303] In fact, Swidler's third point in his "Dialogue Decalogue" is this very personal authenticity. He further states,

> No false fronts have any place in dialogue… [E]ach participant must assume a similar complete honesty and sincerity in the other partners. Not only will the absence of sincerity prevent the dialogue from happening, but the absence of the assumption of the partner's sincerity will do so as well. In brief: no trust, no dialogue.[304]

Therefore, it is not only vital that ones be sincere and truthful but also that one presupposes this same disposition in the other. If I am not being honest with you and/or I do not assume that you are being honest with me, then how can mutual trust and thus understanding be established and cultivated? Indeed, honesty is the source of trust, and trust is the foundation of a relationship of mutual growth in understanding.[305]

One may object that it may not always be in the interest of congeniality to be completely honest about one's thoughts and feelings. Maybe the content of one's thoughts or feelings will be unpleasant to the religious other. Perhaps, but the point is that when one is completely open, sincere, and truthful with one's dialogue partner, and when one expects this also in her/him, then the way is clear for the advancement of reciprocal trust, which creates a closeness or intimacy in the relationship that is grounds for further growth in learning and understanding. With self-awareness and practice, honesty can be established with care, insight, and sensitivity.

A second internal condition for interreligious dialogue is *doctrinal and epistemic humility*. Instilling and increasing an attitude of humbleness concerning one's own religious teachings and assertions of truth and reality is a crucial element for increase in

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[303] Swidler, "Understanding Dialogue," 14.
[304] Ibid, 20-21; and Swidler, "Dialogue Decalogue," 31. Also see Panikkar, *Intra-Religious Dialogue*, 38 for further discussion on the cultivation of trust in interreligious dialogue.
[305] See Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 29-31;

dialogical learning and understanding. Humility includes the ability to be receptive to questioning by the religious other and to be open to the possibility of changing one's mind. Tracy asserts this principle as being "willing to correct or defend your opinions if challenged by the conversation partner…to change your mind if the evidence suggests it."[306] This dialogical quality requires participants' readiness and willingness for self-correction or change of mind upon experienced evidence through confrontation by the other's claim to attention.

Any possibility of learning and understanding presupposes recognition of the imperfection or incompleteness of oneself and one's own religious tradition. That is, being able to learn anything at all assumes limitations to one's knowledge. Otherwise, there would be no room for further increase and expansion. As Panikkar eloquently states,

> In the dialogue we are reminded constantly of our temporality, our contingency, our own constitutive limitations. Humility is not primarily a moral virtue but an ontological one; it is the awareness of the place of my ego…that I am a situated being…[307]

The awareness that each of us is a situated being, bound by historical-cultural-linguistic particularities, creates a sense of humility about the veracity of our religious doctrines and claims to truth, which is a significant provision for learning.

Swidler's ninth point in the "Dialogue Decalogue" is that dialogue partners must be analytical and critical not only of the other and her/his tradition but also oneself and one's own religion. He avers,

> A lack of such self-criticism implies that one's own tradition already has all the correct answers. Such an attitude makes dialogue not only unnecessary, but even impossible, since we enter into dialogue primarily

[306] Tracy, *Analogical*, 19.
[307] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 37.

> so we can learn – which obviously is impossible if our tradition has never made a misstep, if it has all the right answers…Without a healthy self-criticism of self and tradition, there can be no dialogue – and, indeed, no integrity.[308]

The success and integrity of interreligious dialogue rests on a disposition of self-critical humility, recognition of one's own limitations, and willingness to change aspects within one's own religious worldview. Being able to admit the finite and limited means by which the Ultimate Reality (e.g., God, Truth, the Absolute, the Sacred, the Divine) has been grasped, received, and expressed in oneself and one's own tradition is an important condition for fruitful dialogue.[309]

The third condition for interreligious dialogue is *religious commitment*. Tracy claims that a person in dialogue must be "willing to argue if necessary, to confront if demanded."[310] What he is alluding to here is a crucial willingness for self-respect and a readiness to defend one's own beliefs or positions in dialogue. Indeed, in order to learn from the other one must certainly be receptive to the other's beliefs, teachings, and practices. However, at the same time, for one to learn from the other one must also *be oneself*, maintaining a distinct religious perspective from the other and her/his religion. This does not mean that dialogical interlocutors may not share any cultural or religious elements prior to or during the engagement, and it does not preclude the actual possibility of conversion as a result of the dialogue. It does suggest that, as one encounters the other, one begins within the context of some kind of religious commitment, which includes a

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[308] Swidler, "Understanding Dialogue," 22; and Swidler, "Dialogue Decalogue," 33.
[309] See Anantanand Rambachan, "A Diversity of Interreligious Relationships," in *Changing the Present, Dreaming the Future: A Critical Moment in Interreligious Dialogue*, ed. Hans Ucko (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2006), 66-67; and Bohm, *On Dialogue*, 40-41.
[310] Tracy, *Analogical*, 19.

particular heritage of belief and practice.[311] Religious commitment includes, for example, identities of atheism, agnosticism, humanism, or even the more recent category of "spiritual-but-not-religious."[312] Religious commitment does not of necessity entail a complete acceptance of every single element of the tradition, but rather assumes recognition of one's particular religious worldview and belief system and a willingness to affirm its validity in dialogue with persons having different worldviews and belief systems.[313]

It is commitment to a religious worldview which marks the difference between inter*religious* dialogue and the more general inter*personal* dialogue (or inter*ideological* or inter*cultural* dialogue). Without dedication to a particular religion or tradition of faith and practice, one may loose the enrichment that comes from participating deeply in an enduring heritage of wisdom and shared experience.[314] To use the metaphor of a journey, commitment provides the foundational point of departure from which one engages a truly religious other in the dialogical voyage. Religious commitment also allows for a place to which one returns after having encountered the other, a context in which the experiences and insights realized in dialogue may be critically assessed and ultimately applied in one's "home" community as well as the wider religious heritage.[315]

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[311] Swidler, "Dialogue Decalogue," 32.
[312] For detailed studies of the more recently evolving category of "spiritual-but-not-religious," see Robert C. Fuller, Robert C. Fuller, *Spiritual But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (Oxford University Press, 2001); and Mary C. Poole, *Spiritual But Not Religious: The Emergence of a New American Religiosity/Spirituality?* (Tampa, FL: University of South Florida, 2002).
[313] Cornille, *Im-possibility*, 59-60.
[314] Simmer-Brown has an informative discussion of the importance of commitment to a particular tradition and also being receptive to other traditions. See Judith Simmer-Brown, "Commitment and Openness: A Contemplative Approach to Pluralism," in *Spirituality in Education: The Heart of Learning*, ed. Steven Glazer (New York: Putnam, 1999).
[315] Ibid, 59-83; Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 75-81; and Paul Griffiths, *An Apology for Apologetics* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1991). For instance, in dialogue, a Catholic Christian makes a journey from her "home" tradition into another, and then ultimately returns back to share and discuss any insights gained with her local community, Catholicism in general, and perhaps the wider Christian heritage.

This principle of religious commitment leads to a closely connected fourth condition for interreligious dialogue: *openness to otherness*. Tracy exhorts dialogue partners to "listen to and respect what the other says, however different or other…"[316] This principle speaks of a receptivity to and respect for the other's claim to attention, or, in the case of interreligious relations, the other's religious worldview and tradition. It is concerned with the recognition and appreciation of *otherness*. One's interlocutor in dialogical exchange is a *real other*, a person differentiated from oneself in relationship. While the other is distinct from oneself, s/he is not simply an object of knowledge (an *alius*, "It") that is depersonalized and with which one utilizes or manipulates to one's own ends. Rather s/he is a living subject (an *alter*, "Thou/You") who is a different personal self not reducible to one's own self.[317]

As Tracy upholds, in order for authentic dialogue to take place, the other must *not* be a projected other, where one casts one's own religious beliefs, worldview, value system, and/or self-understanding onto the conversation partner. Rather, the religious other must be viewed and understood as a *genuine other* constituting real difference.[318] He maintains that, in dialogue, we "allow the other…to claim our attention as other, not as a projection of our present fears, hopes and desires… Dialogue demands the…ability to struggle to hear another and to respond…in dialogical relationship to a real, not a projected other."[319] Without this real differentiation between self and other there could be no valid exchange, for *dialogue requires relationality between distinct subjects*. Corroborating Tracy's insistence upon the true otherness of the other, Sterkens asserts, "It

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[316] Tracy, *Analogical*, 19.
[317] Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 33-34.
[318] Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other*, 29-30, 41-44.
[319] Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other*, 4.

means restricting one's own narcissistic striving for autonomy and limiting one's own freedom. The other cannot be reduced to one's own identity."[320] The recognition of the otherness allows the other worldview the appropriate respect as a unique and special religious expression of humanity. Interreligious dialogue requires a restriction and minimization of any tendency to unconsciously or consciously push any element of one's own religious identity or worldview onto that of the other. Dialogue values actual otherness, not dissimilarly expressed identicalness.[321]

What is wrong with allowing oneself to project onto the other rather than consciously attempting to prevent it? Dickens appropriately answers, "…when we approach the other looking *for* ourselves, we inevitably misrepresent them *to* ourselves."[322] If real otherness is not affirmed then there is no possibility of growth in learning and understanding, since this goal necessitates the process of the unfamiliar and unknown (the other person, beliefs, practices, etc.) becoming at least partially familiar and known.[323] In other words, projection itself is not learning. To use Ricoeur's terminology, *distanciation* (i.e., otherness) makes understanding possible.[324] To not recognize the alterity of the other is to exclude the possibility of access to new insight acquired through dialogue and thus prevents any kind of real learning. However, perceiving and engaging the other as truly other creates the opportunity to gain further understanding about the other and her/his religion.

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[320] Carl Sterkens, *Interreligious Learning: The Problem of Interreligious Dialogue in Primary Education* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2001), 239.
[321] See W. T. Dickens, "Interreligious Dialogue: Encountering an Other or Ourselves?," *Theology Today* 63 (2006): 203-214, 207.
[322] Ibid.
[323] Tracy, *Analogical*, 447-450; Ricoeur, "Appropriation," in *Hermeneutics*, 185; Jonathan Sacks, *The Dignity of Difference: How to Avoid the Clash of Civilizations* (London: Continuum, 2003), 48-63; and Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2004), xix-xxii.
[324] Riceour, "The Hermeneutical Function of Distanciation," in *Hermeneutics*, 131-144.

The fifth and final important internal condition for productive interreligious dialogue is essentially a *quality of awareness that balances and integrates religious commitment with recognition of otherness*. In interfaith relations, there is often experienced a tension or difficult balance between maintaining commitment to one's own religious worldview while also remaining open to that of the other.[325] This delicate equilibrium is important because neither side of the issue can be dispensed. The question is, "How does one relate to or engage with the other in dialogue such that both commitment and openness to otherness are maintained?"

There are various attitudes with which one may relate to the other. Using a theology of religions interpretive framework, one's disposition can be categorized as *exclusivism*, *inclusivism*, or *pluralism*.[326] In terms of relating to the other, *exclusivism* is the view that one's own religion (religious perspective or claims to truth and reality) is the only one that is valid. There is only one true and authentic religion or faith perspective, namely, one's own. The other's religion is therefore invalid or false. The conception here is, "My religion and my religion alone is valid; your religion has no truth in it."

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[325] Cornille, *Im-possibility*, 4; and Terrence Tilley, *The Wisdom of Religious Commitment* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1995).

[326] This three-fold structure has become common (practically classical) among theologians of religions seeking to make sense of religious difference theologically. See Alan Race, *Christians and Religious Pluralism: Patterns in the Christian Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1983); Eck, *Encountering God*, 166-199; Panikkar, *Intrareligious Dialogue*, 5-11; Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 202-215; Paul J. Griffiths, *Problems of Religious Diversity* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001); Paul O. Ingram, *Wrestling with the Ox: A Theology of Religious Experience* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), Ch. 2; and Paul O. Ingram, *The Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue: Two Universalistic Religions in Transformation* (Lewiston, NY: Mellen, 1988), Ch. 2. There are some substantial critiques of this paradigm and of the idea of "pluralism" as a viable theological position. See especially Gavin D'Costa, ed., *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1990); and James L. Fredericks, *Faith Among Faiths: Christian Theology and Non-Christian Religions* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999).

Inclusivism is the perspective that there may be some measure of truth in the other's religion but one's own religion has the complete truth. Therefore, the other has only partial religious truth and oneself has full and certain religious truth. The idea here is, "Your religion may have *some* validity, but my religion is the best and possesses the whole truth."

Contrary to the usage of pluralism as the observable fact of religious/cultural diversity, *pluralism as a disposition of relating to other religions* is the viewpoint that all religious expressions of humanity have limited validity (humility principle). That is, no religious tradition necessarily and inherently has any superior access to religious truth than any other.[327] The sense here is, "Both my religion and your religion are limited expressions of our experiences of religious truth, so neither of us knows everything about anything." Although there are different understandings of religious pluralism, this is the underlying principle. Interreligious dialogue can be conceived as the language and practice of pluralism. Pluralism is an attitude that recognizes and appreciates diversity, holds that no one religion has a monopoly on truth and reality, and actively promotes dialogical participation with others in order to gain further understanding of truth and reality.

Some have criticized pluralism, equating it with intractable, debilitating, valueless relativism, undermining loyalty to one's particular religion.[328] However, pluralism is a paradigm which does not dislocate or eradicate religious commitments; it involves the

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[327] McCarthy, *Interfaith Encounters*, 26-28. Compare Knitter's ethically and dialogically motivated/grounded form of pluralism with Hick's more philosophically oriented and "monistic" (all religions are different expressions of the one, same reality) form. See Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religion*, 202-215; and John Hick, *An Interpretation of Religion: Human Responses to the Transcendent* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 233-298.

[328] See the collection of essays in D'Costa, *Christian Uniqueness*.

deep encounter of commitments.[329] It is about engagement with religious particularities and real differences.[330] Concerning this friction between commitment and openness, Tracy forwards a valuable expression of pluralism that he terms an *analogical imagination*. It is this analogical imagination that serves as the fifth and final internal condition for interreligious dialogue. As previously discussed in detail, an analogical imagination involves envisioning and recognizing the importance of preserving both similarities and real differences between religions.[331] That is, interreligious dialogue advances an appreciation of similarity and difference, where one maintains committed to one's own religious worldview while simultaneously becoming open to evolution in learning through encounter with the religious other.

An analogical imagination employed in interreligious dialogue entails the ability to dispel any notions of total sameness, identity, synchronicity among religions and between oneself and the other, and yet retain confidence that the other and her/his religion is nonetheless related to and relevant for oneself and one's own tradition.[332] Without an acknowledgment of similarities and some kind of commonality among religions there is no context or common ground on which to actually encounter the religious other. And yet, without recognition of genuine differences and otherness of the other there is merely more of the same, which disallows any possibility for growth in further understanding. Tracy aptly states,

> To recognize the other *as* other, the different *as* different is also to acknowledge that other world of meaning as, in some manner, a possible option for myself. …"an analogical imagination"…must not only be wary

[329] Harry L. Wells, "Taking Pluralism Seriously: The Role of Metaphorical Theology in Interreligious Dialogue," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 30.1 (Winter 1993): 20-33.
[330] Paul O. Ingram, *The Process of Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2009), 3-4.
[331] Tracy, *Analogical*, 408.
[332] Cornille, *Im-Possibility*, 95.

> but downright suspicious of how easily claims to "analogy" or "similarity" can become subtle evasions of the other and the different. Similarity cannot be a cover-word for the rule of the same. Hence we still need to remind ourselves linguistically of this great danger by speaking not of "analogies" simply as "similarities" but…as always similarities-in-difference.[333]

This is to say, interreligious dialogue necessitates an imagination of analogy, where similarities and differences, interconnection/common ground and otherness/irreducible uniqueness, and openness and commitment are concurrently held in (oftentimes uncomfortable) tension.

3.6 The Transformational Power of Interreligious Dialogue

When all of these external and internal conditions are present, dialogue's primary aim of mutual learning may be attained and experienced. Part and parcel of this dialogical process is the possibility of transformation. As previously affirmed, the kind of learning that occurs in interreligious dialogue involves more than simply procuring information or facts about the other religious tradition. Rather, it is transformational, which entails an experiential growth that is holistic, including every facet of one's being (not simply the intellect). The transformational growth in dialogue is thus more penetrating and religiously meaningful than the mere acquisition of data about the other religion. As Wach states, "Religious experience is a total response of the total being to what is apprehended as ultimate reality… [W]e are involved not exclusively with our mind, our affections, or our will, but as integral persons."[334] Indeed, since the religious dimension of humanity is not limited to one particular part of life, but rather includes every facet of

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[333] Tracy, *Dialogue With the Other*, 41-42; also see Tracy, *Analogical*, 91-154, 405-457.
[334] Joachim Wach, *Types of Religious Experience: Christian and Non-Christian* (University of Chicago Press, 1951), 32.

human experience, then the transformation in dialogue among people of differing *religious* worldviews is likewise all-encompassing and holistic.[335]

The transformational power of dialogue refers to the experience of growth, change, and development in understanding that participants undergo during, and as a result of, the dialogical exchange. This transformation that may occur can be comprehended and elucidated through several different manners, using different linguistic frameworks or formulations. Tracy's hermeneutical explication of what occurs when one enters into conversation with a classic serves as solid interpretive grounds for conceptualizing and explicating what takes place within and in-between participants in dialogical interface. His hermeneutics adequately establishes the philosophical basis and the interpretive categories for this task.

Building upon Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics, Tracy's framework for conceiving what happens during dialogue is that 1) one encounters a classic, 2) opens up to and is grasped by its claim to attention, and 3) which then allows for one to undergo a realized experience where truth and meaning becomes unconcealed or manifested to oneself. The crucial transformational aspect of this process is that happening which is *the realized experience of truth manifestation*.[336] In the back-and-forth, to-and-fro of dialogue with the classical other one grasps and becomes aware of some newness of meaning that cannot but be deemed truth. That is, during the interpretive process of conversation, some realization is disclosed that is new, powerful, moving enough to be experienced as truth about the other, oneself, and/or reality/the world.

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[335] Tracy, *Analogical*, 159-163.
[336] Ibid, 105-110; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 101-164.

Tracy's hermeneutics of dialogue/conversation describes and reveals an underlying process of transformation that may be applied to the interfaith context and exemplified using different linguistic categories of understanding. As previously alluded, in interfaith encounter, interpretation of the classic becomes dialogue with the living religious other. One 1) engages the other and his/her religious perspective, 2) opens up to and is grasped by the religious other in a back-and-forth movement of exchange that creates a shared world of meaning, and 3) undergoes a realized experience of truth manifestation that concerns one's entire being. Tracy's hermeneutical process of interpretation as conversation explains a fundamental experiential process of transformation of truth and meaning disclosure that can be elucidated in various ways, according to different conceptual frameworks or categories of understanding.

This experiential realization of truth manifestation can also be described as an expansion, enlargement, enhancement, or further development of one's consciousness (awareness, perspective) during and as a result of interface with the religious other. This transformational process is skillfully and insightfully illustrated according to Schmidt-Leukel's work concerning interreligious dialogue.

Schmidt-Leukel makes an important distinction between tolerance and appreciation in interfaith relations. When there is some aspect of the other religion that one does not like or something that one cannot regard as good or true, then tolerance is called for. As he states, "[T]o tolerate [a different lifestyle or opinion] means that we accept and allow that people choose lifestyles which we deem to be false."[337] For instance, a Muslim may dislike and not accept the Buddhist lack of a belief in a personal creator God (or, contrariwise, a Buddhist may not accept the Muslim belief in a personal

[337] Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration*, 30.

creator God), but, in order to live peaceably and respectfully in a pluralistic and diverse culture, s/he must tolerate it. Toleration is about living with that of which we disapprove. However, it is important to point out that there are boundaries to toleration. As Schmidt-Leukel argues, "Not everything we disapprove of can or should be tolerated."[338] The behavior of people, at the individual and communal levels, may become so harmful, inflicting of suffering, and evil that it is no longer tolerable. Although ethics is normative, cases of intentional harm, violence, or attacking another person's individual freedom are instances where limitations to tolerance might come to the fore.[339]

On the other hand, when there is some aspect of the other religion that one does like or something that one is able to regard as good or true, then appreciation is called for. That is, appreciation involves accepting facets of another's religious tradition as significantly relevant for and appropriable into one's own religious worldview.[340] For example, a Hindu may find the Christian "Sermon on the Mount" to be good and true, appreciating it as a valid religious teaching to bring into or corroborate his/her own ethical understanding. Or, perhaps a Christian is grasped by the Hindu belief in karma, accepting it as a good and true religious conception of the orderliness of the created universe. With these cases, appreciation becomes the attitude and action that is employed.

Interreligious dialogue is fundamentally a process of moving from toleration toward genuine appreciation of the religious other. Although not every single piece of the other religious worldview encountered is likely to be appreciated as valid and meaningful for oneself, nonetheless one may appreciate certain beliefs, doctrines, practices, or

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[338] Ibid, 37.
[339] Ibid, 37-38.
[340] Ibid, 39-41.

ideas.[341] Upon being confronted by them, particular religious features may appeal to and resonate with oneself. As one continually encounters the religious other, with the dialogical conditions present as much as possible, a movement from simply tolerating to truly appreciating facets of the other worldview may potentially occur. And, as one becomes more appreciative of the religious other, one grows in receptivity to the discovery of something new, good, and true about the other, oneself, and the world in a realized experience.

Appreciation moves beyond tolerance into the realm of *transformation by integration*. There is somewhat of a consensus among historians of religion that religious traditions form and develop their beliefs, doctrine, and practices through "syncretistic processes" in relationship to other religions.[342] Indeed, religions do not exist in a vacuum. They exist (and have throughout history) in relationship with other religions and cultures, and thus are shaped through the influence and incorporation of various features from these other heritages. Van der Veer states, "[E]very religion is syncretistic, since it constantly draws upon heterogeneous elements to the extent that it is often impossible for historians to unravel what comes from where."[343] This is to say that religious traditions are by nature constituted by "other" ingredients that have been integrated into their system.

This mirrors the character of religious identity. Within the context of transformation in interreligious dialogue, it is helpful to understand religious identity as

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[341] Ibid, 40.
[342] Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration*, 67; and Wilfred Cantwell Smith, *Towards a World Theology: Faith and the Comparative History of Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1989), 21-44. Also see Anita M. Leopold and Jeppe S. Jensen, eds., *Syncretism in Religion: A Reader* (London: Equinox, 2004).
[343] Peter van der Veer, "Syncretism, Multiculturalism and the Discourse of Tolerance," in Charles Stewart and Rosalind Shaw, eds., *Syncretism/Anti-Syncretism: The Politics of Religious Synthesis* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 208.

religious individuality. That is, religious identity is primarily a matter of the individual engaged in religious belief, practice, and dialogue with others. Just as with religious systems, the religious identity of individuals is not uniform, static, and stagnant but rather manifold, dynamic, and continually modifying and evolving.[344] Although individual persons are often part of a certain religious tradition (which is itself a changing complexity), holding many of its doctrines and participating in many of its practices, the religious identity of each person is unique and special. Individuals may not embrace the entirety of a religious system. Instead, they might adhere to the beliefs, doctrines, and practices preserved in their tradition to a greater or lesser extent, upholding some facets and not others.

Religious identity is a personal, individual character of self-understanding and expression that is multifaceted, multidimensional, and ever-changing, not bound necessarily solely to the specific ideas, beliefs, and practices of a certain religious heritage. There is an analogy here with national or cultural identity. For example, my father-in-law is both nationally and culturally Vietnamese and American. These are two distinct yet integral constituents of his personal identity that cannot be compartmentalized and disparately separated. He does not have two identities, but rather one identity that is made up of different elements. Each individual has a personal identity that is a mixture of various components that have come together to comprise who s/he is as a unique individual, and this is continually changing and developing according to life experiences. In a similar way, although there may be a professed belonging predominantly to a particular religion, the religious identity of a person may include elements from another

[344] Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration*, 46-47.

tradition that have been encountered, experienced as meaningful, and have thus exercised a significant impact on that individual's religious self-understanding.

Specifically concerning transformation by integration, when one encounters the religious other in dialogue, one encounters various different beliefs, ideas, doctrines, and practices of the other's religious worldview and tradition, which confront and challenge one's own horizon of understanding. During the back-and-forth movement of the dialogical process newness is experienced through the otherness or difference of the alternate worldview, which creates the opportunity for a realized experience of truth manifestation. Part of this process involves the *integration* of certain new elements of the other's religion into one's individual religious identity. That is, when one encounters these new beliefs, doctrines, ideas, and/or practices one perceives and comes to an *appreciation* of their goodness, value, and meaning, which is the very disclosure/revelation of their veracity and truth to oneself. Indeed, not every religious element of the other's tradition "speaks to" oneself or can be appreciated, but those that are become integrated into one's identity, changing the constitution of one's religious worldview, self-understanding, and expression.

When one genuinely and honestly experiences the import and power of truth of the appreciated other religious elements one cannot but begin to take in and incorporate them into one's own individual religious identity, ultimately appropriating them into coherence with other established and extant elements of one's current/present identity. The new, other religious elements become integrated into one's self-identity during (as well as after) the realized experience of truth disclosure. Schmidt-Leukel, though

grounded in a Christian perspective, speaks of this compelling, grasping, undeniable experience in a way applicable across traditions:

> If a member of a particular religion gets, in more than just a superficial way, in contact with the manifestations, the teachings, the life of another religion, and finds in it something good, true, and holy, that is, in Christian terms, a reflection of revelation, then, from a spiritual point of view, he or she has no choice. It is simply no option to close one's mind and heart to it.[345]

The integration of other religious elements into one's own individual identity or worldview is this process of transformation which entails individuals uniting "the truth as recognized in the other with the truth as known from their own tradition."[346] It is a development that combines "truth with truth, good with good, and sacred with sacred" within one's personal worldview that prompts "a transformation of identity that is not its loss but its deepening and widening."[347] Indeed, dialogical transformation occurs through the integration of otherness into a new synthesis of truth and meaning in one's individual religious identity.

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[345] Schmidt-Leukel, *Transformation by Integration*, 49.
[346] Ibid, 79.
[347] Ibid, 78, 85. Also see Michael von Brück, "A Theology of Multiple Religious Identity," in John D'Arcy May, ed., *Converging Ways? Conversion and Belonging in Buddhism and Christianity* (St. Ottilien: EOS, 2007), 181-206.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Having illustrated Tracy's hermeneutics, its support of and application to dialogue between persons of differing religions, and the transformative character of interreligious encounter, it is now possible to move into the central theme of this project, which concerns the transformative power present in Buddhist-Christian exchange. This may be accomplished by virtue of handling two thematic issues. First, in order to further understand transformation in interreligious dialogue it is important to recognize the practical, concrete reality of this occurrence in the lives of those who have actually undergone this realized experience. So as to provide substantial support of the argument that transformation may really occur in interreligious dialogue through a realized experience of truth manifestation and the integration of new/different elements from the religious other, it is valuable to identify and examine significant instances of Buddhist and Christian individuals expressing transformation as a result of their engagement with persons, texts, doctrines, beliefs, and practices of the other religion.

Secondly, in order to further express the import of interreligious dialogue in our pluralistic present it is valuable to articulate an understanding of how dialogue and its transformational power relates to the experience of liberative transformation as propounded within specific religions. Thus, taking Buddhism and Christianity as representative examples, it is possible to demonstrate how dialogue (as defined in this work) might help contribute to how Buddhists and Christians experience and understand soteriological transformation (salvation/liberation) in their own traditions, and how

dialogue can be conceived as part of the process of addressing or overcoming the human problematic as its regarded in each religion respectively.

4.1 Expressions of Transformation in Particular Buddhist-Christian Encounters

Previously, the conditions or qualities of productive interreligious dialogue have been outlined, which, when present, allow for a realized experience of truth manifestation and the integration of appreciated elements of the other religious worldview. We now turn specifically to this transformative power of dialogue. The most practical means to better recognize and understand the experience of dialogical transformation in a project such as this is to identify particular examples of individual practitioners of one religion who have encountered persons, beliefs, and practices of another religion, and who express in their writing how they have come to appreciate the religious other and integrate certain elements of the other into their own religious worldview.

Using Buddhist-Christian exchange as an example, two individuals from both traditions are analyzed as representative examples of how dialogical transformation can and does occur, or how it is often understood and explicated by those who have participated in interreligious dialogue and have experienced transformation as a result.[348] Undoubtedly, these practitioners do not speak for the entirety of their respective religious heritages; they are particular persons who embody and express their tradition in unique ways. However, they are employed here as specific instances of adherents who claim belonging to a certain religion, have engaged in intentional and productive encounter with religious otherness and difference, and clearly articulate their experiences and

[348] Certainly there are many individuals from the Buddhist and Christian traditions who can be highlighted and analyzed as exemplars of transformation, but I chose the individuals I did due to the impact and impression their work has exercised in my own personal and academic life. Thus, while other Buddhist and Christian adherents are mentioned in passing as corroborating attestations, nonetheless, two representatives from each religion are used to illustrate transformation by integration.

understandings of transformation through integration. That is, they communicate some pattern of growth or transformation whereby they "pass/cross over" into an exchange with the worldview of the religious other and then "return home" by communicating how they have come to re-understand parts of their own religious worldview by virtue of encountering and appropriating significant elements of the religious other.[349]

Before entering into the realm of individual Buddhists expressing transformation through incorporating Christian religious elements into their identity and worldview and learning from Christianity, it is important to note how much more difficult it is to find Buddhists who have explicitly stated claims to have been influenced and transformed by their interaction with Christians and Christianity than vice versa.[350] Although here two examples are cited from each tradition, when one delves into the literature concerning and produced out of Buddhist-Christian dialogue it is quite clear that there is a significantly greater number of Christians publishing their reflections about what it means to be Christian in relation to Buddhism (and other religions) and, more specifically, how their encounter with Buddhists and Buddhism has impacted and transformed their understanding of self, other, world, and their Christian faith. It is not the purpose here to attempt an answer to this peculiar phenomenon in Buddhist-Christian dialogue. This is mentioned only to explain the fewer number of Buddhist references supporting the two outlined examples from Buddhism in contrast to the larger number of corroborating Christian references for the examples from Christianity.[351]

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[349] This model is explicated well in Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, Ch. 2.
[350] Paul Ingram notes this in his influential work *A Modern Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (1988), 23-25.
[351] Nonetheless, there are significant Buddhist examples not mentioned in detail in this project, an instructive one being John Makransky, "Buddha and Christ as Mediators of the Transcendent: A Buddhist Perspective," in *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue: The Gerald Weisfeld Lectures 2004*, ed. Perry Schmidt-Leukel (Norwich, Norfolk: SCM Press, 2005), 176-199. Grounded in his experiences of participating in Roman Catholic Mass, Makransky speaks of how he has come to integrate Christ as

Considering Buddhist adherents who demonstrate transformation by integration, we first turn to Masao Abe (1915-2006). Abe was a Japanese Buddhist academic in comparative religion and Buddhist philosophy, developing his most sophisticated and mature work within the Kyoto School of Buddhist thought founded by Kitaro Nishida and later developed prominently by the thought of Hajime Tanabe and Keiji Nishitani.[352] He has engaged in extensive dialogue with Christians, studying under Paul Tillich while at Union Theological Seminary and participating in the well-documented, influential, and long-term dialogues with John B. Cobb, Jr. in the 1980's through the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies (often referred to as the "Cobb-Abe dialogues" or "Cobb-Abe group").[353] Through his expertise in Japanese Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophy and a considerable grasp of the Christian theological heritage (its methods, problems, and complexities), Abe has been a formidable dialogue partner for many Christians and other Buddhists.

In a published collection of essays under the title *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue* (1995), Abe dedicates a chapter specifically to reflecting on how his dialogical exchange with Christianity over his lifetime has impacted and changed his self-understanding as a Buddhist thinker and practitioner.[354] One of the significant points of growth Abe writes about concerns new ways of thinking about *śūnyatā*. As a result of encounter with questions and critiques from Christians about the nature of *śūnyatā* (Is it

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mediator of God into a more informed and expanded understanding of the Buddha as mediator of Buddhahood, and how the Eucharist has helped him further awaken him to how Buddhists "commune" with Buddhahood.

[352] See especially James W. Heisig, *Philosophers of Nothingness: An Essay on the Kyoto School* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2001).

[353] The Society for Buddhist-Christian Studies website, http://www.society-buddhist-christian-studies.org/ (accessed 6/14/11).

[354] Masao Abe, "The Impact of Dialogue with Christianity on My Self-Understanding as a Buddhist," in *Buddhism and Interfaith Dialogue*, ed. Steven Heine (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1995).

nihilistic, impersonal, static, thoroughly relativistic?), he begins to understand and explain *śūnyatā* in ways that bring out its more constructive, dynamic, positive character. Abe eventually moves beyond a "traditional interpretation of *Śūnyatā*" and incorporates more "positive and soteriological meanings" into his interpretive model.[355] That is, rather than only speaking of *śūnyatā* as "absolute emptiness" he starts to refer to it as "dynamic *śūnyatā*" and "boundless openness freed from any sort of 'centrism'."[356]

Abe mentions how deeply moved and profoundly grasped he was by the Christ-hymn in Paul's letter to the Philippians 2:6-11 when he first read it.[357] The self-emptying of Christ (or *kenosis*) further supports and illuminates *śūnyatā* for Abe. Under the influence of this scriptural passage, coupled with his encounter with Karl Rahner's emphasis on the self-emptying of God and Jürgen Moltmann's bold assertion of "the crucified God," Abe comes to learn about this kenotic Christology in Christian thought, which re-affirms and deepens the truth and meaning of Buddhist *śūnyatā*.[358] Dialogue with Christians had illuminated the more dynamic, personal, and soteriological dimensions of *śūnyatā*, a different way of conceiving the empty/emptying nature of Ultimate Reality.

The second issue around which a new understanding has emerged in Abe's religious worldview in dialogue with Christians is concerned with the notion of ethics, specifically justice. He claims that Christians have repeatedly confronted him with the question of how ethics and justice (particularly the distinction between good and evil) are

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[355] Masao Abe, "Impact of Dialogue," 55.
[356] Ibid.
[357] Ibid.
[358] Ibid, 56. See Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1978) and Jürgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as Foundation and Criticism of Christian Theology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

possible when grounded in the utter, thoroughgoing relativity of *śūnyatā*. These Christian questions and critiques have prompted Abe to re-evaluate Buddhist ethics and formulate an explicit Buddhist doctrine of justice. Abe recognizes the importance of the good-evil differentiation in Christian thought and formulates a conception of the Ultimate (*śūnyatā*) in Buddhism that allows for this. Abe states,

> The realization of *Śūnyatā*…is not indifferent to the distinction of good and evil. Being beyond the duality between good and evil *Śūnyatā* rather embraces the duality without being confined by it… Buddhist ethics can be established dynamically on the newly grasped distinction between good and evil.[359]

According to Abe's understanding of Buddhist thought and history, Buddhism has been rather reticent in creating a definite and central teaching of justice and social ethics. It is not that social justice ideas are completely absent in Buddhist scripture, teaching, and action throughout history, but Abe admits that it has not been nearly as prominent, visible, and explicit as in Christian thought and practice. He declares,

> …there is no Buddhist equivalent to the Christian notion of justice… Buddhist history shows indifference to social evil, with a few exceptions… We must learn from Christianity how to solve the problem of society and history at large and interpret this in terms of the Buddhist standpoint of wisdom and compassion.[360]

Buddhists can learn (and have learned) to address issues of justice from Christians and Christianity. Abe identifies one significant aspect of the Christian idea of justice as balance and equality between humans and is inspired to forward a Buddhist teaching of justice. Although he never fully develops a Buddhist doctrine of justice, Abe claims to be stirred by Christians on this issue and recognizes the need to more clearly and comprehensively incorporate a robust teaching of social justice into Buddhism. Indeed,

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[359] Ibid, 57.
[360] Ibid, 58.

his dialogue with Christians has allowed him to reclaim and strengthen the notion of justice and social engagement in his Buddhist worldview and heritage.[361]

The last issue that has transformed Abe's religious identity is that of history. Christians have often posed him the question: If *śūnyatā* is the Ultimate Reality, in which everything is understood as reciprocal and reversible, then what is history in Buddhism? How can the uniqueness and novelty of events in human time and space be meaningfully understood in Buddhism? Abe states that history, as conceived in the Western world, has not really been developed in Buddhism. He claims, "…there is no Buddhist equivalent of a systematically organized doctrine of history like Christian eschatology – with an exception of the '*Shōzōmatsu* view of history', which talks about the three periods after the Buddha's death…"[362]

After contrasting the Buddhist understanding of time as beginningless and endless with that of Christianity (linear) and Vedantic/Hindu (circular), Abe attempts a new articulation of history in Buddhism, integrating the Christian strong sense of history (the uniqueness and irreversibility of events in time and space) into his Buddhist worldview. He states that the *wisdom* aspect of the realization of *śūnyatā* sees time, events, etc. as reciprocal and reversible, but the *compassion* aspect of *śūnyatā* realization allows for a more Western or "Christian-like" view of history. Abe claims,

> Although all things and all people are realized in their suchness and interpenetration in the light of wisdom *for an awakened one*, those *'unawakened' from their own side* have not yet awakened to this basic reality… As the generation of 'unawakened' beings will never cease this

[361] Abe never mentions the Socially Engaged Buddhism movements promulgated by Buddhists such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Cheng Yen, Hsing Yun, Sulak Sivaraksa, Bhikku Bodhi, the Dalai Lama, among many others East and West. Some of these leaders do claim to have been inspired by Christian humanitarian and social justice teaching and action or certain exemplary Christian persons or institutions, which has helped them to recognize and renew the doctrinal and scriptural resources for this work within their own Buddhist tradition. See Sallie B. King, *Socially Engaged Buddhism* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2009).
[362] Abe, "Impact of Dialogue," 59.

> process of actualizing the compassionate aspect of *Śūnyatā* is endless. Here the progress of history toward the future is necessary and comes to have a positive significance.[363]

Here it is possible to witness Abe formulating a more teleological or "eschatological" understanding of time using Buddhist philosophical categories. Abe has, through dialogical exchange with Christians, realized the place of importance of a more linear/teleological/irreversible understanding of time and history and has incorporated this conception into a Buddhist paradigm. In the light of the compassion realized in an awakened perspective, one recognizes the religious significance of the experienced progression of time and history into the future. He concludes,

> It becomes a 'history of vow and act' in which wisdom and compassion are operating to emancipate innumerable sentient beings from transmigration. Here we do have a Buddhist view of history...a completely realized eschatology, because in the light of wisdom everything and everyone…is realized in its suchness, and time is overcome… [T]he Buddhist view of history is an open teleology because in the light of compassion the process of awakening others in history is endless.[364]

Through taking seriously Christian concerns and re-appropriating the Christian teachings of kenosis, a strong concern for social justice, and a linear-teleological understanding of history Abe's Buddhist self-understanding and identity undergo a process of transformation by integration.

Another person in the Buddhist tradition who has expressed transformation by integration is Judith Simmer-Brown. She is a professor and former chair of the Department of Religious Studies at Naropa University and is a prominent scholar of Buddhism, concentrating especially on Tibetan Buddhism, women and Buddhism,

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[363] Ibid, 60-61.
[364] Ibid, 61.

American Buddhism, and Buddhist-Christian dialogue.[365] Simmer-Brown is an Acharya (high-ranking dharma teacher) in the Shambhala tradition of Tibetan Buddhism and was a senior student of Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, an influential teacher and emissary of Tibetan Buddhism in the West.[366] She has been actively involved in interreligious dialogue as a Buddhist practitioner, sitting on the board of the Society of Buddhist-Christian Studies and participating as a member of the Lilly Buddhist-Christian Theological Encounter.[367]

Simmer-Brown admits that it is rather cliché to claim that what Buddhism primarily has to learn from Christianity is the robust and powerful emphasis of social justice, but it is nonetheless this area of Christian thought which has had the most significant impact on her as a Buddhist.[368] Along with other Buddhist practitioners and leaders, such as His Holiness the Dalai Lama,[369] Ven. Cheng Yen,[370] Rita Gross,[371] José

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[365] Fabrice Midal, ed., *Recalling Chögyam Trungpa* (Boston: Shambhala, 2005), 480.
[366] Ibid.
[367] Judith Simmer-Brown's Faculty Page, Naropa University, http://www.naropa.edu/distancelearning/faculty/simmerbrown.cfm (accessed 7/28/11).
[368] Judith Simmer-Brown, "Suffering and Social Justice: A Buddhist Response to the Gospel of Luke," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 16 (1996): 99-112.
[369] His Holiness has mentioned this in different contexts. For example, "Buddhists can incorporate elements of the Christian tradition into their practice – for instance the tradition of community service. In the Christian tradition, monks and nuns have a long history of social work, particularly in the fields of health and education. In providing the service to the greater human community through social work, Buddhism lags far behind Christianity." Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, *Essence of the Heart Sutra: The Dalai Lama's Heart of Wisdom Teachings*, trans. and ed. Geshe Thupten Jinpa (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 17-18.
[370] Tzu Chi Foundation, "Biography of Dharma Master Cheng Yen," Tzu Chi website, http://tw.tzuchi.org/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=159&Itemid=198&lang=en (accessed 8/20/11).
[371] In thinking through the feminist perspective within Buddhism, Gross has pointed out that, relative to Christianity, the prophetic element of active social justice and equality has been largely missing. "It is not that Buddhism lacks a social ethic…for Buddhism has an extremely sophisticated set of guidelines for moral interactions. But Buddhists have generally not been willing to engage in social action to see the realization of that ethic in realms of politics, economics, or social organization. …[T]here certainly has been more tendency to accept the status quo of politics, economics, and society than to seek to improve it in most forms of Buddhism throughout history." Rita M. Gross, *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis, and Reconstruction of Buddhism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1993), 137.

Ignacio Cabezón[372] and the previously mentioned Masao Abe, Simmer-Brown recognizes that Buddhism has been comparatively rather faint, quiet, or not as prominent when it comes to actively engaging in societal concerns of justice in the realms of politics, economics, and societal organization.[373] Writing on the Gospel of Luke in an article for *Buddhist-Christian Studies*, Simmer-Brown provides a Buddhist critical reflection on Jesus' life and ministry depicted in this specific gospel account.[374] It offers readers an interesting, insightful opportunity to witness a Buddhist practitioner and scholar engaging, interpreting, struggling, and finding appreciation and meaning in Jesus' compelling teaching on social justice.

After making appropriate distinctions between the historical context and literary situation with the Lukan Gospel and relevant Buddhist scriptures, Simmer-Brown describes her understanding of Luke's Jesus. He is the champion of the dispossessed, ministering to the oppressed and outcaste, and healing and performing exorcisms.[375] Jesus also challenges the hierarchy of his 1st century Judean society (religiously, politically, and economically) through his central teaching and modeling of the Kingdom of God. Simmer-Brown points out the significance of the literal or concrete depiction of Jesus' teaching about the poor and the outcaste, rather than "spiritualizing" these teachings as is done, for example, in the Gospel of Matthew.[376]

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[372] In responding to the person and life of Jesus as compared to that of the Buddha, Cabezón states, "…as a program of social reform, Jesus' must be recognized as being the more radical and far-reaching, and this no doubt is why the Christian tradition to this day, even when impeded by its own institutional forms, has been at the forefront of social transformation…We Buddhists have a great deal to learn from this aspect of the life of Jesus." José Ignacio Cabezón, "A God, but Not a Savior," in *Buddhists Talk about Jesus, Christians Talk about the Buddha*, ed. Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck (New York: Continuum, 2003).
[373] Simmer-Brown, "Suffering and Social Justice," 99-100.
[374] Ibid..
[375] Ibid, 100-102. Lk. 1:52-53; 6:20-26; 18:14, 42; 19:8-10
[376] Ibid, 110-111. Mt. 5:1-10.

Recognizing a general historical and doctrinal lack of centrality about social justice in Buddhist institutions, thought, and practice, Simmer-Brown opens herself (her Buddhist identity and worldview) to illumination and meaning offered by the Lukan Jesus. She maintains that it is not that Buddhism is devoid or absent of any social justice impulse, but that Christianity (in this instance, the Christian Gospel of Luke) is able to strengthen, augment, and/or develop one's Buddhist viewpoint and practice concerning social justice. Simmer-Brown states,

> [Luke's vision of Jesus] provides a strong impetus to the Buddhist to examine the ways in which "engagement" might more literally benefit the dispossessed and might awaken a sense of a new world order or enlightened society that could nurture the awakening of all.[377]

That is, Luke's gospel makes the concreteness of social fairness and integrity quite prominent and thus challenges Buddhists (as well as Christians and people of other or no religious affiliations) to become more receptive to the literal dimension of justice in their communities and societies.

Simmer-Brown's article is an important exercise of an engaged Buddhist encountering the Lukan Jesus' teachings and lived action of human social equality and dignity expressed in a very concrete manner (i.e., not spiritualized or psychologized). Though the essay maintains a more academic and impersonal tone, Simmer-Brown nonetheless conveys having been significantly impacted by this portrait of Jesus' life and ministry. Indeed, she expresses transformation by integration through incorporating Luke's robust physical-material social justice emphasis into her ethical thought as a

[377] Ibid, 111.

Buddhist practitioner, reinforcing and highlighting the extant socially engaged values in her individual Buddhist character.[378]

We now turn to the Christian practitioners. Paul F. Knitter is the Paul Tillich Professor of Theology, World Religions, and Culture at Union Theological Seminary in New York City.[379] Most of Knitter's research and publications have dealt with religious pluralism and interreligious dialogue. Since his ground-breaking book, *No Other Name?* (1985), he has been exploring what it means to make sense of one's own religious identity in the midst of increasing global religious diversity and theological ambiguity.[380]

Besides being an accomplished and prolific academician, Knitter is a Roman Catholic Christian who has participated (and continues to participate) in interreligious dialogue and peace-work. The subject of his most recent major publication, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be a Christian*, is his personal journey of dialogical relationship with Buddhism.[381] Although much of Knitter's scholarly work also reveals the impact of Buddhist belief, doctrine, and practice on his self-understanding as a Christian, this more

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[378] Simmer-Brown also communicates integrative transformation elsewhere in her writing. She participated in a book project where Buddhists read, reflected on, and compared St. Benedict's Rule with Buddhist *vinaya* and *dhamma/dharma.* She relates that Benedict's Rule has renewed and reinforced the importance of the communal life under some religious order or structure as a Buddhist practitioner, giving her a heightened sense of the cross-religious value of rules or guidelines by which to live. See Patrick Henry, ed., *Benedict's Dharma: Buddhists Reflect on the Rule of St. Benedict* (New York: Continuum, 2001), 1-2, 60-62. Additionally, Simmer-Brown claims to have been positively influenced by especially Christian thinkers Diana Eck and Paul Knitter, realizing the importance of making sense out of one's religious identity in the context of plurality. While admitting that specific concerns are different between Christianity and Buddhism, she nonetheless maintains that she has incorporated or appropriated the Christian theology of religion categories of exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism as helpful, convenient terms in formulating a Buddhist pluralism. Judith Simmer-Brown, "Pluralism and Dialogue: A Contemplation on the Dialogue Relationship," in *Buddhist Theology: Critical Reflections By Contemporary Buddhist Scholars*, ed. Roger Jackson and John Makransky (London: Curzon Press, 2000), 311-314.

[379] Paul F. Knitter's Faculty Page, Union Theological Seminary, http://www.utsnyc.edu/Page.aspx?pid=381 (accessed 5/20/11).

[380] Paul F. Knitter, *No Other Name?: A Critical Survey of Christian Attitudes toward World Religions* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1985). Also see Knitter, *One Earth Many Religions*; Knitter, *Introducing Theologies of Religions*; Paul F. Knitter, ed., *The Myth of Religious Superiority: Multifaith Explorations of Religious Pluralism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005); among many other publications that he has authored, co-authored, and edited.

[381] Paul F. Knitter, *Without Buddha I Could Not Be A Christian* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2009).

personal and intimate composition serves as the primary resource for his experiences of transformation by integration.

Knitter claims to have had problems with the orthodox, traditional, or normative understanding of a number of Christian doctrinal points, and several specific Buddhist ideas and practices have helped him to reinterpret and make new, acceptable meaning out of these doctrines. First, Buddhism has aided him in overcoming his aversion to Christian explanations of God as the Transcendent Other. Knitter describes the dominant understanding of God in classical Christian orthodoxy,

> The stumbling stone has to do with the way God is portrayed as different from all the other significant others in my life. He…is the *transcendent* Other. …God is the *totaliter aliter* – the totally Other, infinitely beyond all that we are as human and finite beings. In his transcendence, God is, we were taught, infinitely perfect, infinitely complete, happy unto himself, in need of nothing.[382]

That is, through an overemphasized and ingrained dualism, God is most often thought of in Christianity as an infinitely distant and removed Other, existing totally outside the world God has created out of nothing (*ex nihilo*), and having no need to relate to this creation (including humans). Even though the doctrine of the incarnation (God becoming a human as Jesus Christ) can begin to address this insurmountable rift between God and humanity, Knitter asserts that problems still remain for him in bridging this gulf. He boldly claims,

> So much of Christian belief and spirituality is burdened with what I have called the dualism between God and us. The "God all out there" (C.G. Jung), the God "above me" or "coming down to me" is a God I find hard to believe in… If there is in Christian tradition and experience a God within…we need help in finding such a God.[383]

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[382] Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 3.
[383] Ibid, 8.

The Buddhist teachings Knitter encounters in dialogue with Buddhists that have impacted him and which he has incorporated into his religious worldview are *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā*.[384] One of the three marks of existence in Buddhism is *anicca*, that everything is impermanent and in continual fluctuation and alteration, and Knitter understands that the reason for this is *pratītyasamutpāda* – interdependence or, more technically, interdependent co-arising.[385] That is, everything changes because everything is interrelated with everything else. The other doctrine, *śūnyatā*, is often translated as "emptiness," which means that every thing, phenomenon, and entity is empty of any enduring, substantial existence of its own.[386] Nothing is completely independent; rather everything is interconnected. Together, these principles illustrate a Buddhist worldview where all reality is in a continual, fleeting process of change and development since everything is interdependent and devoid of any permanent, independent essence of its own. During his study of Buddhism and dialogue with Buddhists, Knitter has encountered these teachings and integrates them into a transformed image of who or what God is.

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[384] Besides Knitter, there are a number of Christians who have eloquently illustrated how *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* have transformed their religious understanding and experience of Christianity. See especially John B. Cobb, Jr., *Christ in a Pluralistic Age* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 1999) and Cobb, *Beyond Dialogue*, where Cobb points particularly to *śūnyatā* as illuminating a process theology perspective of the mutability and non-substantiality of God and human selves. Also see the detailed analysis of Donald W. Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist Press, 1991), where he reinterprets the kenotic (emptying) nature of key Christian doctrines in light of his encounter with Buddhist *śūnyatā*; and James L. Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians: Through Comparative Theology to Solidarity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2004), Ch. 4, where he speaks of Buddhist *śūnyatā* as helping to clarify and promote a Christian acknowledgement of God's incomprehensibility.

[385] Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 10.

[386] For further reading about *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* and their intimate relationship, see *Majjhima Nikāya* 79, 115; *Sutta Nipāta* 2.28; Nāgārjuna, *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK) 24.18 in Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 304; Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 45-48, 66; David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 36-38.

For Knitter, *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā* reinforce and illuminate one of the most distinctive doctrinal features of the Christian view of Ultimate Reality – God as Trinity. Knitter points out that the most significant "definition" of God in the New Testament is that "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Buddhist *śūnyatā* underlines and supports the belief that God's nature is love. As Knitter points out, "To love is to move out of self, to empty self, and connect with others. Love is this emptying, connecting, energy that in its power originates new connections and new life."[387] God's very being is kenotic and agapeic love – a love that is ceaselessly and unconditionally self-emptying. Knitter asserts that this *śūnyatā* character of love is the very *meaning* of the Trinity in Christianity.[388] He states, "…to believe in a Trinitarian God is to believe in a relational God. The very nature of the Divine is nothing other than to exist in and out of relationships."[389] When Christians express God as Trinity, they are affirming God as an eternal community of loving relationship of differentiated identities. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three interdependent, self-emptying *hypostases* (individual realities/persons) that live eternally unified as one *ousia* (essence). Buddhist interdependence and emptiness help to illuminate anew the underlying meaning of God as love and, therefore, God as Trinity. Knitter declares,

> Here's where Buddhism has helped me feel or grasp what all this means. To experience and believe in a Trinitarian God is to experience and believe in a God who is not, as Tillich would say, the Ground of Being, but the Ground of *InterBeing*! God is the activity of giving and receiving, of knowing and loving, of losing and finding, of dying and living that embraces and infuses all of us, all of creation.[390]

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[387] Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 18.
[388] For further exploration of how the Christian doctrine of the Trinity relates with Buddhist doctrines, see especially Roger Corless and Paul F. Knitter, eds., *Buddhist Emptiness and Christian Trinity: Essays and Explorations* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990).
[389] Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 19.
[390] Ibid.

As a result of his interaction with *pratītyasamutpāda* and *śūnyatā*, Knitter conceives of God not solely as transcendent, beyond, and outside of all creation, but rather as that Presence of Love or InterBeing that is immanent, pervading all creation.

Additionally, Buddhism has allowed Knitter to resolve difficulties around the use of language about God in Christianity, helping him to balance the dialectic between words and silence. Although he does hold admiration for the beauty of Christian liturgical and metaphorical language, Knitter is uncomfortable and disappointed with the emphasis and priority given to words in Christianity.[391] It is not that he desires to dispel language altogether (for he realizes its utility and hermeneutic necessity), but he thinks that his Christian tradition has tended to dwell in finding the right words, the precise meaning, the exact interpretation. Knitter states,

> What has tripped me up is that these words [creeds, dogma, liturgy, prayer, etc.] make too *much* sense; they have been understood and explained all too clearly or all too definitively. So the crux of my difficulties has been not in a lack of meaning but in an excess of meaning; not in the possibility of meaning but in the determination of meaning.[392]

Christianity, on Knitter's view, has been so caught up in exactness of language and strict definition of meaning that it has neglected the value of linguistic diversity and freedom, multi-valency of religious experience and expression, and silence in contemplative and sacramental practice.

Christianity has inclined toward a prominence of the spoken and written word to approach and express God.[393] Nonetheless, amid the flow of language and utterance, there have existed Christian mystics and contemplatives who reminded people of the

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[391] Ibid, 54-55.
[392] Ibid, 54.
[393] This is due to the presence and influence of the doctrines of creation ("And God said, 'Let there be…'" [Gen. 1:3]) and incarnation ("In the beginning was the Word…All things came into being through him…and the Word became flesh and lived among us." [Jn. 1:1, 3, 14]).

limitations of words and of the human reasoning underpinning them.[394] Knitter claims that the Buddhist continual insistence of the inadequacy of language applied to the ultimate experience of nirvana or enlightenment and the emphasis on silence in meditative practice has renewed and shed fresh light on this Christian apophatic tradition of the *via negativa* ("unspeaking God" or saying what God is not) as well as the importance of contemplative silence.

The Zen Buddhist image of "the finger pointing to the moon" suggests that all words, concepts, signs, and symbols are always means to an end, never an end in themselves, the end being the experience of awakening or enlightenment.[395] The various Buddhist traditions recognize the necessity of language but persistently assert its inadequacy.[396] That is, without the finger we would not be able to see the moon, and yet the finger is not the moon. This has reminded Knitter that without doctrine, liturgy, prayers, scripture, theology, etc. he would not be able to satisfactorily make meaning of his experience of God, but these linguistic and symbolic expressions are nevertheless not the God to which they point.[397] Buddhist linguistic relativity and conditionality has helped Knitter to reaffirm the incomprehensibility of God as Mystery and the ultimate insufficiency of all language about God.[398]

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[394] Those especially important for Knitter are Dionysius the Areopagite, John of the Cross, Teresa of Avila, Meister Eckhart, and Julian of Norwich. Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 56.
[395] Ibid, 59.
[396] For more on Buddhism and language, see José Ignacio Cabezón, *Buddhism and Language: A Study of Indo-Tibetan Scholasticism* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1994).
[397] Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 64.
[398] Knitter references Thomas Aquinas here: "The divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches" (*Summa contra Gentiles* 1:14:3). "He knows God best who acknowledges that what ever he thinks or says falls short of what God really is" (*De Causis* 6). Cited in Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 66.

On a more practice-oriented note, Buddhism has brought Knitter to better appreciation of silence in Christian prayer, contemplation, and ritual.[399] He believes there is an imbalance and neglect of quietude and stillness in most of Christianity. The practice of interior focus and mindfulness in silent meditation within the Buddhist tradition has inspired Knitter to realize the power of silence and to bring more silent contemplation into his own prayer life. In particular, his encounter with and practice of such Buddhist techniques as *Vipassana* ("insight"), *Vajrayana* visualization, and *Metta* ("loving-kindness") and *Tonglen* ("receiving and giving") meditation has inspired him to experience the liturgical language differently and to advocate for what he calls the Sacrament of Silence. Knitter states, "Buddhist practices have helped to clarify my understanding and to facilitate my use of Christian prayer and ritual… Ritually, I feel the language of liturgy differently…a way to be one with the Father, to live Christ's life, to be…an embodiment and expression of the Spirit."[400] Buddhist meditative practices have led him to rediscover and reconstruct the neglected contemplative and mystical elements of the Christian heritage.[401] He would like to see Christians begin to formulate individually and communally a Sacrament of Silence:

> By the Sacrament of Silence I mean...the kinds of spiritual practices that make use of silence – both verbal and mental – in order to hear the deeper, inner meaning of the words we say we believe... If Mystery is the goal and

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[399] There are other Christians claiming Buddhism's focus on linguistic relativity and silence has brought about a transformative resurgence of the Christian apophatic and mystical heritage. For example, see Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 83-91; Tracy, *Dialogue with the Other*, 68-94; Frances S. Adeney, "How I, a Christian, Have Learned from Buddhist Practice, or 'The Frog Sat on the Lily Pad…Not Waiting'," Paul O. Ingram, "On the Practice of Faith: A Lutheran's Interior Dialogue with Buddhism," and Terry C. Muck, "Readiness: Preparing for the Path," in *Christians Talk about Buddhist Meditation, Buddhists Talk about Christian Prayer*, ed. Rita M. Gross and Terry C. Muck (New York: Continuum, 2003).

[400] Ibid, 154-155.

[401] Knitter cites Rahner's insistence that the "Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all." Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, vol. 20 (The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1981), 149.

> content of all religious experience, then Silence is a necessary means of letting Mystery speak.[402]

Knitter's experience with Buddhist meditation has allowed him to integrate a deeper appreciation of the mystical Christian heritage and to attempt to find ways to bring silence into a more prominent role in worship and prayer life.

Turning to the other representative example of a Christian expressing integration of Buddhist elements into a Christian identity, John P. Keenan is Professor Emeritus of Religion at Middlebury College in Vermont and has been a pioneer in reinterpreting Christian scripture, particularly the New Testament, through the philosophical lens of Mahāyāna Buddhist thought.[403] Besides being educated as a Christian theologian, he has extensive training in Buddhist Studies and relevant languages. As an interfaith theologian Keenan has published groundbreaking studies about the use of Buddhist philosophical concepts to re-conceive Christology in the current postmodern age of religious plurality and epistemic ambiguity.[404] Concerning his religious life, Keenan is an Episcopal priest and rector of St. Mark's Episcopal Church in Newport, Vermont.

Keenan has encountered Buddhism through study and dialogue and has found in the Buddhist (particularly Mahāyāna) worldview a philosophical system can be employed to constructively understand Christian belief and practice in new, transformative ways for the present context.[405] Keenan argues that, since Greek Platonism was adopted as the

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[402] Knitter, *Without Buddha*, 154.

[403] See John P. Keenan's scholarly website, Mahayana Theology – Reading the Christian Gospels from a Buddhist Perspective, www.mahayanatheology.net (accessed 5/28/11).

[404] John P. Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahayana Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1989); John P. Keenan, *The Gospel of Mark: A Mahayana Reading* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995); and John P. Keenan, *The Wisdom of James: Parallels with Mahayana Buddhism* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2005). All of these scholarly works seek to shed new light on scripture and thus understandings of who Jesus is in the present pluralistic age of religious and cultural diversity.

[405] Keenan believes that Christian faith need not be interpreted through one philosophy but rather through different philosophical lenses, as with, for example, process theologians using Whiteheadian process

informing philosophical system in the early Church, Christian thought has been primarily understood through a rather strict dualistic subject-object linguistic view.[406] He sees a rift having occurred between theory and practice, such that mysticism and immediate experience have been de-emphasized in Christian theology. Much like Knitter and other Christians in dialogue with Buddhism, Keenan believes certain Buddhist teachings may help Christians retrieve and revive this experiential, mystical, apophatic element of the Christian heritage, and specifically as applied to Christology.[407]

The principal Buddhist doctrine that Keenan integrates into his understanding of Jesus Christ is *anātman* ("no-self"), which directly relates to the central principles of *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* as explications of non-dual awareness or experiential non-duality of reality as it really is – changing, interdependent, and substantially empty.[408] The Mahāyāna tradition, particularly the Mādhyamika school of Nāgārjuna, has understood these individual doctrines as intricately connected, as different facets of the same truth.[409] *Anātman* is fundamentally *śūnyatā* and *pratītyasamutpāda* applied to human personality or existence, such that each individual is *empty* of any permanent substance, "own-being" (*svabhāva*), or "self/soul."[410] That is, every individual is inherently interconnected and *interdependent* with all other individuals and entities.

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metaphysics to re-conceptualize traditional Christian doctrines. See Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ*, 61-62; and John P. Keenan, "The Emptiness of Christ: A Mahāyāna Christology," *Anglican Theological Review* 75:1 (1993): 48-63.

[406] Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ*, 62.

[407] John P. Keenan, "Mahāyāna Theology: How to Reclaim an Ancient Christian Tradition," *Anglican Theological Review* 71:4 (1989): 377-394.

[408] See Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, Ch. 3.

[409] Ibid. See also Ganjin Nagao, *The Foundational Standpoint of Mādhyamika Philosophy*, trans. John P. Keenan (Albany, NY: SUNY, 1989), 3-32. Nāgārjuna uses the two truths doctrine (*satyadvayavibhāga* – conventional/relative truth [*samvṛtisatya*] and trans-conventional/ultimate truth [*paramārthasatya*]) to defend the identification of *pratītyasamutpāda* with *śūnyatā* in the MMK 24:8-10.

[410] See David Burton, *Buddhism, Knowledge, and Liberation: A Philosophical Study* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 11-30.

Keenan appreciates the hermeneutic value of these teachings of non-duality and appropriates them into an innovative Christological consideration.[411] *Anātman*, by Keenan's interpretation, means that neither God nor Christ has any identifiable essence that can be fully grasped and defined, which encourages an apophatic, mystical perception. God and Christ are conceived as being beyond conception and all knowledge of them is thus metaphorical. He asserts that the Old and New Testaments never name the divine substance or absolute nature; God is continually described as "beyond any definition. God dwells in light inaccessible."[412] Concerning Christ, "There is no identifiable selfhood (*ātman*) beyond the dependently coarisen person and his actions described in the Gospels…The Gospels speak of Christ as he relates to human beings, but nowhere do they interpret or define his essence."[413] The meaning of Jesus Christ is understood relationally; he exists relative to humanity and to God. Keenan states,

> [Christ] is constituted by being related to Abba in silent awareness and to humans in commitment to the rule of God on earth… [H]e takes on his meaning through the dependently coarisen circumstances and relationships of his life.[414]

Buddhist teachings about interdependence and no-self clarify and reinforce the thoroughly intimate, relational quality of Jesus' life, teachings, and meaning as they illuminate the Christian experience of God. A Buddhist perspective has helped Keenan to

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[411] Other Christian dialogicians have integrated Buddhist teachings like *anātman*, *pratītyasamutpāda*, and *śūnyatā* into their Christology. See particularly Lynn A. de Silva, *The Problem of the Self in Buddhism and Christianity* (London: Macmillan, 1979); Aloysius Pieris, *Love Meets Wisdom: A Christian Experience of Buddhism* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1988); Teresa Kuo-Yu Tsui, "Seeing Christian Kenosis in Light of Buddhist Sunyata: An Attempt at Inter-faith Hermeneutics," *Asia Journal of Theology* 21:2 (2007): 357-370; and Hee-Sung Keel, "Jesus the Bodhisattva: Christology from a Buddhist Perspective," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 16 (1996): 169-185.
[412] Keenan, "Emptiness of Christ," 54.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Ibid, 55.

understand Jesus as empty of any permanent, unchanging, substantial self (*anātman*) and thus avoid any attempt to limit God's work in the life of Jesus.

Specifically concerning the incarnation, Keenan uses the emptiness of *anātman* to re-conceive the issue concerning the hypostatic union and communication of properties/attributes (*communicatio idiomatum*) of the divine and human natures in the person of Jesus. Using this Buddhist teaching, he moves away from the essentialist conception of the incarnation forwarded at the council of Chalcedon (451 CE), instead arguing that these categories of essence/substance (Greek – *ousia*, Latin – *substantia*) are unnecessary.[415] Christians do not need to use the ancient Greek platonic philosophical linguistic universe of the early Church to make sense of the incarnation. Rather, Christ's divinity or Godhood consists in the self-emptying, kenotic quality of his entire life. Keenan states, "[Christ's] divinity may be seen precisely in the emptiness of his personal identity, whereby he transparently mirrors the presence of Abba, and lives as one with Abba."[416] And Christ's humanity entails being united to his fellow humans as he "describes himself not as distinct from human beings, but as united with them. He is the vine which is united to all the branches. Christ cannot be understood apart from the body of all believers, for that too constitutes his being. That too is who he is."[417]

Rather than possessing two natures in one person, Keenan re-understands the incarnation in terms of *anātman* and *śūnyatā*:

> In the Mahāyāna perspective, then, the being of Jesus is not the outflow of some divine essence into the human nature of Christ. In Christology, this means that Jesus embodies the divine by being truly and fully human, not by participating in a divine essence… In virtue of his abandonment of essence and self-definition, Christ reflects the direct experience of Abba

[415] Keenan, *Meaning of Christ*, 225-229; Keenan, "Emptiness of Christ," 60-61.
[416] Keenan, "Emptiness of Christ," 56.
[417] Ibid, 56-57.

> and calls others to engagement in the tasks of the compassionate kingdom… [I]t is not by clinging to an exalted, divine being, but by emptying himself of being that Christ mirrors the divine and is one with the silent Father.[418]

Grounded in his experience with Buddhists and Buddhism, Keenan's reformulation of the incarnation through the application of emptiness and no-self has is a transformative incorporation of Buddhist elements into his theological understanding of Christ, the center of his religious identity as a Christian.

The four persons considered above are representative examples of religious practitioners from Christianity and Buddhism who have engaged in ongoing interreligious dialogue and express in their work having integrated religious elements from the other tradition into their own worldviews or self-understandings. Paul Knitter and John Keenan are both committed Christians who convey appreciation of certain significant Buddhist teachings as good, true, and meaningful for themselves, and have discovered ways to incorporate these into their individual Christian identities. Likewise, Masao Abe and Judith Simmer-Brown are both dedicated Buddhists who articulate appreciation of particular aspects of Christianity as good, true, and meaningful for themselves, and have integrated or appropriated these into their individual Buddhist identities. Although there are many more persons from both heritages who have shown evidence of transformation by integration, the above individuals are influential illustrative exemplars, indicating that not only is dialogical transformation *possible* but it is also very much an *actual* experience felt and expressed by many people across religious-cultural boundaries.

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[418] Ibid, 61.

4.2 Categorical Framework for Soteriological Transformation

Having identified representative instances of dialogical transformation by integration with both Buddhist and Christian worldviews, it is now possible to delve deeper into the transformational dimension of dialogue through an exploration of the possible ways that interreligious conversation and interaction may contribute to the understanding and experience of the soteriological transformative process present in both religions. That is, we are discerning how dialogical exchange might be conceived to advance Buddhists and Christians on their respective paths of liberation/salvation.

Although there are various ways of assessing the nature and role of religion in or the religious dimension of human life, one particularly significant model that is commonly attested in scholarship of the history of religions is that religions provide a coherent framework of making meaning about the whole of reality in and through which human individuals and communities may come to terms with the fundamental predicament in human existence.[419] Religions offer holistic systems of belief, teaching, values, and practice that deal with and move past the difficulty, dissatisfaction, and obstacles experienced in humanity across time and place. In other words, religions come from a universally felt sense that "something is wrong" with the world and humanity, and they foster the possibility or opportunity for "correcting the wrong" or experiencing liberation from this human problematic.

There have been several thinkers who have forwarded conceptual models of this liberative character or purpose of religion(s), but perhaps one of the most clear and

[419] See Ninian Smart, *The Religious Experience* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996); John F. Haught, *What Is Religion?: An Introduction* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990); and Thomas A. Idinopulos and Brian C. Wilson, eds., *What Is Religion?: Origins, Definitions, and Explanations* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 1998).

coherent formulations has been put forth by Frederick Streng.[420] In analyzing religion as a human phenomenon, Streng discerns a categorical hermeneutic pattern that helps to better understand the process of ultimate transformation found in religious traditions. That is, religions exhibit particular elements that are components of a progression toward the final religious goal, the *summum bonum*, as it were. Though the particular conception and articulation of these is different with each tradition (and often within each tradition), religions convey: 1) the elemental *human problematic*, 2) the *practical means* by which the adherent undergoes transformation, and 3) *the soteriological aim or goal* into which one develops and which is none other than the *liberative experience of overcoming of the human problematic*.[421] It is by virtue of these elements or "moments" in the process of transformation that the human problematic is answered through practical religious means leading to the definitive goal of ultimate liberation.

This three-fold hermeneutical model serves as a method for interpreting and explaining the kind of transformation that occurs within each religion and that constitutes the nature and purpose of religions. Here, the term soteriological transformation is being employed to refer to this liberating process. Soteriology is that discipline in theology and religious studies which is concerned with the character, means, and end of salvation/liberation.[422] Indeed, soteriology and salvation are terms that are distinctly Christian, historically and theologically. However, the warrant for employing particular technical terms outside the original religious context is found in principles of analogy and

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[420] This has been put forth most comprehensively in Frederick J. Streng, *Understanding Religious Life* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 1985).
[421] Streng, "Understanding," 18. Also see Stephen Prothero, *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World – and Why Their Differences Matter* (New York: HarperOne, 2010), 13-16; and Buri, "A Comparison," 15-19.
[422] Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 265. Also, see Orlando O. Espin and James B. Nickoloff, *An Introductory Dictionary of Theology and Religious Studies* (Collegeville, MN: Order of Saint Benedict, 2007).

convenience. That is, if words such as "soteriology" or "theology" are used with balance, carefulness, equal respect for each examined tradition, and a recognition of their historical and religious origins and meanings, it is possible to re-appropriate or re-interpret them in application to comparative religious study.[423] Besides the fact that this present project is informed and shaped by a Christian theological perspective attempting to engage with religious plurality and ambiguity, the use of the term "soteriology" facilitates a convenient linguistic formula by which to illumine understanding about transformation within and across individual religious contexts.

Etymologically, the Greek word *sotēria* is rendered *salus* in Latin and comes into English as "salve" and "salvation," which conveys a meaning connected to healing, well-being, or wholeness.[424] As such, one may reasonably understand soteriology as dealing with what constitutes salvation (liberation, freedom, release, emancipation, etc.) from the human problematic and how this process occurs in any human religious system. Soteriological transformation indicates the progression of resolving or dissolving the basic human problem and is essentially a therapeutic development of healing or mending the dis-ease of human life as it is understood and articulated in each distinct religious tradition.

As soteriological transformation is the purposive occupation of every religious system, both Buddhism and Christianity possess distinct, respective ideas and expressions of this same cross-religious liberative quality. It is acknowledged that there is much

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[423] A more detailed discussion of this justification of using religious terms across boundaries can be found in Robert E. Buswell, Jr. and Robert M. Gimello, "Introduction," in *Paths to Liberation: The Mārga and Its Transformations in Buddhist Thought*, ed. Robert E. Buswell and Robert M. Gimello (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1992). Also see Jackson and Makransky, "Editor's Introduction," in *Buddhist Theology*.

[424] Although this is not the only connotation of the term, it is certainly a central aspect. Ted Peters, *Science, Theology, and Ethics* (Hants, England: Ashgate, 2003), 279-282; and Thomas N. Hart, *Hidden Spring: The Spiritual Dimension of Therapy*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2002), 21-23.

variety and multiplicity of belief and practice within each religion. Yet, there also exist mutual trends or commonalities that can be identified throughout this internal diversity, which unite the variations in a shared tradition or heritage. The intention of this examination of soteriological transformation in Buddhism and Christianity is to attempt a balance between 1) internal divergences in each religion and 2) shared cohesion that differentiates the religions from each other. This is an endeavor to explicate the common teachings of soteriological transformation within each religion that distinguishes them from other traditions so as to relate this to interreligious dialogue. Unfortunately, within the scope and purpose of the present study, this requires some generalization. However, throughout this analysis it is recognized that there are details of inner division and variety that are existent but not explored in the work of this current project.

4.3 Soteriological Transformation in Buddhism

The process of soteriological transformation in Buddhism manifests in diverging specifics according to the particular sect, school, or cultural context interpreting the teachings. Nonetheless, an overarching shared conception of this transformative progression of human problematic, practical means to goal, and experience of Ultimate Reality is adhered to across the multiplicity of distinctions within the Buddhist world. One of the core doctrinal formulations that speak to the nature of reality, the human predicament, and how to surmount this predicament is the Four Noble Truths. Carter states, "All strands of the Buddhist tradition recognize in the four noble truths (Skt., *catvāry āryasatyānī;* Pāli, *cattāri ariyasaccāni*) one of the earliest formulations of the salvific insight gained by the Buddha on the occasion of his enlightenment."[425] That

[425] He goes on to speak of how important the Four Noble Truths have been to Buddhists across traditions, "Early Buddhist schools in India differed in their interpretations of the four noble truths, but uniformly

is, since it is such a widely held and esteemed formula across the spectrum of Buddhist practice, the Four Noble Truths as transmitted throughout the Pāli *Tipitaka* may be utilized as an entry and focal point for an illustration of the process of soteriological transformation in Buddhism.

The human problematic throughout Buddhism is found in the key principles of *dukkha* and *taṇhā*. Both of these are articulated in the Four Noble Truths first taught by Gautama Buddha at the Deer Park in the *Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta* as well as in other discourses such as the *Mahāsatipatthāna Sutta* and *Saccavibhaṇga Sutta*, and the *Vibhanga* of the *Abhidhamma*.[426] *Dukkha* exists as the first truth (Pāli: *sacca*) and has been translated into English as "suffering," "painfulness," "disharmony," and "unsatisfactoriness."[427] Etymologically, the term can be broken down into *du* ("bad" or "low") and *kha* ("to be empty, hollow"), and some scholars posit that this originally made reference to the hole in the center of the wheel into which the axle was placed on the chariots of the ancient Aryans who immigrated to and settled in India (ca. 1700-1300 BCE) such that *dukkha* meant having an unaligned axle and wheel hole causing

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regarded its underlying thematic structure as one informed by metaphors of healing: symptom-disease, diagnosis-cause, elimination of cause, treatment or remedy. The rise of the Mahāyāna tradition the four noble truths became less central as a fundamental statement of the life situation and one's mode of engagement in a soteriological process, but continued to be revered as a fundamental part of the Buddha's early teachings." John Ross Carter, "Four Noble Truths," *Encyclopedia of Religion*: 3178-3180, 3178-3179. Also see K. R. Norman, "Why are the Four Noble Truths called 'Noble'?," in *Ananda: Papers on Buddhism and Indology: A Felicitation Volume Presented to Ananda Weihena Palliya Guruge on his Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. Y. Karunadasa and Ananda W.P. Guruge (Colombo: Felicitation Volume Editorial Committee, 1990).

[426] Four Noble Truths: 1) life is permeated by *dukkha*; 2) the origin of *dukkha* is *taṇhā*; 3) the cessation of *taṇhā* produces cessation of *dukkha*; 4) the Eight-fold Noble Path is the path (*magga*) leading to cessation of *dukkha*. *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 5:420ff; *Dīgha Nikāya* 2:290; *Majjhima Nikāya* 3:248; *Vibhaṅga* 99. See Carol S. Anderson, *Pain and Its Ending: The Four Noble Truths in the Theravāda Buddhist Canon* (Richmond Surrey: Curzon, 1999), 89.

[427] See Walpola Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught* (New York: Grove/Atlantic, 1974), 16-28; Charles Prebish, *Historical Dictionary of Buddhism* (Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, 1993); and Damien Keown, *Dictionary of Buddhism* (Oxford University Press, 2003). Also, see the entry for the Sanskrit *dukkha* in Monier Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 1964), 483.

disruption and discomfort.[428] The Buddha states the first Noble Truth as *dukkha* and divides it into the three forms of physical suffering (*dukkha dukkhatā*), psychological change (*sankharā dukkhatā*), and that caused by the changing nature of reality (*viparināma dukkhatā*).[429] He also states,

> Now this, monks, is the noble truth of suffering: birth is suffering, aging is suffering, illness is suffering, death is suffering; union with what is displeasing is suffering; separation from what is pleasing is suffering; not to get what one wants is suffering; in brief, the five aggregates subject to clinging are suffering.[430]

Dukkha is also named among the three marks of existence (*tilakkhana*): *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha*, and *anattā* (no self).[431] That is, all reality is characterized by change/fluctuation/variation, the dissatisfaction that comes from impermanence, and the insubstantiality or emptiness of any individual reality of an enduring, unconditioned self, "I," "mine," or "own being." Everything is impermanent, evolving, and interdependent (*paticcasamuppāda*).[432] *Dukkha* describes the experiential consequence of a world characterized by transience and interdependence.

Another facet of the fundamental human problematic in Buddhism is *taṇhā*. Expounded by the Buddha as the second Noble Truth, *taṇhā* is often translated as "thirst," "unwholesome desire," or "craving."[433] It describes the origin of *dukkha* or how the dissatisfaction of *dukkha* arises. The Buddha declares, "Now this, monks, is the noble

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[428] Winthrop Sargeant, trans., *The Bhagavad Gita* (Albany, NY: SUNY, 2009), 303.
[429] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 4:259, Bhikku Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha: A Translation of the Saṃyutta Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2000).
[430] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56:11, Bhikku Bodhi, ed., *In the Buddha's Words: An Anthology of Discourses from the Pāli Canon* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 2005), 76.
[431] "The Three Basic Facts of Existence," Access to Insight website, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/various/wheel186.html (accessed 8/2/11).
[432] David J. Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy: A Historical Analysis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1976), 36-43; Paul Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism: The Doctrinal Foundations* (London and New York: Routledge, 1989), 45-48, 66.
[433] T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary* (Hauz Khas Village, New Delhi: Asian Educational Service, 2004), 294-295.

truth of the origin of suffering: it is this craving that leads to renewed existence…seeking delight here and there; that is, craving for sensual pleasures, craving for existence, craving for extermination."[434] There is reference here to three types of *taṇhā*: sensual craving (*kāma- taṇhā*), craving for being (*bhava- taṇhā*), and craving for non-being/cessation of being (*vibhava- taṇhā*).[435] That is, *taṇhā*, as the origin and cause of *dukkha*, indicates many different types of desire or thirst. It is not limited to material objects or sensual desire but also includes thirst for mental or emotional states, social status, life, and death (in the case of suicide). Fundamentally, *taṇhā* is a wide-ranging term denoting the intentionality of grasping for things or wishing to not have things, which inevitably leads to perpetual experiences of suffering.[436]

Also stated as a component of the origin of *dukkha* are the Three Poisons or Three Unwholesome Roots (*akusala-mūla*), which signify the primary mental "defilements" or "afflictions" (*kilesas*) that plague human life. Although there are ten of these afflictions named in the *Dhammasangani* (1229ff.) and *Vibhaṇga* (12) of the *Abhidhamma*, as well as in the post-canonical *Visuddhimagga* (22:49, 65), the first three are considered sources of suffering or dissatisfaction: *lobha* (greed, attachment, clinging), *dosa* (aversion, hatred, anger), and *moha* (delusion, misperception).[437] At the root of these foremost afflictions, along with *taṇhā*, is *avijjā* (ignorance), erroneous understandings and ideas about oneself, others, and the world that foster suffering. The

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[434] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56:11, Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 76.
[435] For example, *Dīgha Nikāya* 15, 22, T.W. Rhys Davids, *Dialogues of the Buddha: The Digha-Nikaya* (Forgotten Books, 2007); *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 22:22, 22:103-105, 38:10, 39:10, 56:11-14. See also Bodhi, *Connected Discourses*, 872, 963, 1298.
[436] Craving or clinging to phenomena is also referred to in Mahāyāna texts as the basic human problem that leads to suffering and dissatisfaction. Refer to Perfection of Wisdom literature for an influential example, Edward Conze, trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines & Its Verse Summary* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2006), 143-145. Also see Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 47-49.
[437] Rhys Davids, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 558, 332, 543.

mind discovers some pleasure, believes it to be substantial and true, and greed or clinging (*lobha*) results from this ignorance of the changing, impermanent character of reality. The desire for gratification amid is frustrated due to fluctuation and transience, which brings about anger and aversion (*dosa*) and thus suffering.[438] One becomes caught up in the struggle with ambiguity and dissatisfaction, which leads one into a maze of delusion (*moha*), preventing an understanding of the true nature of reality, the gravity of the human condition, and thus knowing the way to liberation from suffering.

Additionally, arising out of an Indian worldview, Buddhism perceives existence as *saṃsāra*, meaning "traveling" or "wandering onward."[439] Continuing the Upanishadic concept of life as an unending cycle of creation, destruction, and re-creation, the Buddha asserts that all beings experience this samsaric course of birth, death, and rebirth, which is a process that has no beginning or end for those who are still "fettered by craving" and "deluded by ignorance."[440] Bhikkhu Bodhi states,

> [T]he process [of rebirths called *saṃsāra*] is not only beginningless but is also potentially endless. As long as ignorance and craving remain intact, the process will continue indefinitely into the future with no end in sight…"[441]

The basic difficulty or dis-ease of human existence in Buddhism can be characterized as the experience of *dukkha* within a context of *saṃsāra*, and is caused or engendered by *taṇhā* and *avijja*, which includes the unwholesome mental states of *lobha*, *dosa*, and *moha*. That is, human life is permeated by dissatisfaction brought on by continual craving or thirst for existence in all its range and variation as well as an ignorance of this entire

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[438] See *Aguttara Nikāya* 3:68, Thanissaro Bhikkhu, trans., "Titthiya Sutta: Sectarians," Access to Insight: Readings in Theravada Buddhism, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/an/an03/an03.068.than.html (accessed 8/25/11).
[439] Stephen J. Laumakis, *An Introduction to Buddhist Philosophy* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 83.
[440] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 3:149, Bodhi, *Connected Discourses*.
[441] Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 24. Abe, a Mahāyāna Buddhist scholar, corroborates this. Masao Abe, "Transformation in Buddhism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 7 (1987): 5-24.

condition. And this dismal situation continues indefinitely in a ceaseless process of rebirth into new existences of yet further unsatisfactoriness.[442]

There are a multitude of ways particular Buddhist individuals and communities from different cultures, sects, and schools approach the way to liberation – rituals, meditation techniques, scriptural recitation and study, etc.[443] Nonetheless, the unity of the liberative path (*magga*) is declared well by the Buddha in the *Cullavaga* and *Aṅguttara Nikāya*: "Just as the ocean has but one taste, the taste of salt, even so this Teaching and Discipline have but one taste, the taste of liberation."[444] Indeed, underpinning the great interpretive variance in Buddhism is a central, common paradigm of the *magga* leading toward experiencing the ultimate soteriological goal of freedom from *dukkha*.

As the last of the Four Noble Truths, the Eight-fold Noble Path (*ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo*) has been and continues to be a vital, concise, and coherent explication of this liberative practice as taught by the Buddha in the *Tipitaka*.[445] As Thanissaro Bhikkhu states concerning the significance of the Eight-fold Noble Path,

> The Pali discourses repeatedly cite the Buddha's insights into the nature and scope of action as the primary teachings distinguishing Buddhism

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[442] Ibid, 24-25. For other insightful summaries of the Buddhist conception of the human problematic, see Elizabeth Harris, "Human Existence in Buddhism and Christianity: A Christian Perspective," and Kiyoshi Tsuchiya, "Human Existence in Buddhism and Christianity: A Buddhist Perspective," in *Buddhism and Christianity in Dialogue*, 29-76. Also, Ross Thompson, *Buddhist Christianity: A Passionate Openness* (Winchester: O-Books, 2010), 78-80.

[443] For an advanced study of the diversity and commonalities of the *magga* (path) within Buddhist traditions, see the anthology of essays in Buswell and Gimello, *Paths to Liberation*.

[444] *Cullavaga* 9:14; *Anguttara Nikāya* 4:203, Buswell and Gimello, "Introduction," in *Paths to Liberation*, 1.

[445] Most introductions to Buddhism, both scholarly and popular, contain the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-fold Noble Path as primary teachings of the historical Buddha and as central, universal doctrines in Buddhism as a religion. For examples, see Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*; Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching: Transforming Suffering into Peace, Joy, and Liberation* (New York: Broadway Books, 1999); The Dalai Lama, *The Four Noble Truths: Fundamentals of Buddhist Teachings* (London: Thorsons, 1997); John S. Strong, *The Experience of Buddhism: Sources and Interpretations*, 2nd ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2002); Peter Harvey, *An Introduction to Buddhism: Teachings, History, and Practices* (Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Kaelyn Smith, *An Introduction to Buddhism: History, Central Concepts and Practices* (Webster's Digital Services, 2011).

> from other contemporary religions. The eightfold path, as the expression of these insights, is thus the quintessential Buddhist teaching.[446]

The eight elements of the Eight-fold Path are right view (*sammā- diṭṭhi*), right intention (*sammā-sankappa*), right speech (*sammā-vācā*), right action (*sammā-kammanta*), right livelihood (*sammā-ājīva*), right effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), right mindfulness (*sammā-sati*), and right concentration (*sammā-samādhi*).[447] The *Dhammacakkhappavattana Sutta* introduces this Path as a middle way (*majjhimā paṭipadā*) between two possible extremes: self-indulgence in sensual pleasure and self-mortification, two misguided attempts at attaining release from suffering.[448] Moreover, the eight discrete elements of the Path are not necessarily steps to be undertaken in sequence. As Bhikkhu Bodhi maintains,

> They can be more aptly described as components rather than steps… With a certain degree of progress all eight factors can be presented simultaneously, each supporting the others. However, until that point is reached, some sequence in the unfolding of the path is inevitable.[449]

In terms of practical training and discipline, the sequence of the Path begins with right view, since this cultivates the primary understanding and wisdom needed to uproot ignorance. Once right view is grasped, then right intention will arise. Right intention leads to the arising of right speech, right speech to right action, and so on until one is focusing on the development of right concentration. However, each element supports the others no matter where one stands in development along the Eight-fold Path.[450]

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[446] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Eightfold Path," *Encyclopedia of Religion*: 2737-2739, 2738.
[447] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 5:420ff; *Dīgha Nikāya* 2:290; *Majjhima Nikāya* 3:248; *Vibhaṅga* 99. Anderson, *Pain and Its Ending*, 88-94; and Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 59-60.
[448] Thanissaro Bhikkhu, "Eightfold Path," 2737.
[449] Bhikkhu Bodhi, *The Noble Eightfold Path: The Way to the End of Suffering* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), 14. Also see Rahula, *What the Buddha Taught*, 46.
[450] Bhikkhu Ñanamoli, trans.,Thanissaro Bhikkhu, ed., *The Discourse on Right View: The Sammaditthi Sutta and its Commenary* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), Access to Insight, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/nanamoli/wheel377.html (accessed 9/1/11).

The Eight-fold Path is often subdivided into three groupings, based on their function in human life. Right view and right intention are considered wisdom (*paññā*); right speech, right action, and right livelihood are ethics/moral discipline (*sīla*); and right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration are mental discipline (*samādhi*).[451] It is through the practice and cultivation of these factors of the Path that the Buddhist practitioner advances toward the final goal of "unshakable liberation of the mind."[452]

Central to the soteriological path in Buddhism is to counter ignorance and craving by developing wisdom (*paññа*) that enables one to directly perceive reality as it is in actuality. This liberating wisdom may be developed through conditions that are "mental factors, components of consciousness, which fit together into a systematic structure…a way for movement leading to a goal. The goal here is the end of suffering…"[453] The Eight-fold Noble Path of the Four Noble Truths is a soteriological plan that moves the practitioner through a process of transformation of liberation from suffering by dispelling craving and ignorance.

The soteriological goal in Buddhism may be captured by looking to the life of Gautama Buddha. In the *Tipitaka* the Buddha is depicted as having achieved supreme awakening, conquering the human problematic of *dukkha* – suffering, unsatisfactoriness.[454] The term widely used in Buddhism to denote this pinnacle event in the Buddha's life is also the soteriological aim in the life of the Buddhist practitioner – *nirvāṇa* (Pāli - *nibbāna*). Although the many diverse Buddhist groups may prefer to

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[451] Bodhi, *Noble Eightfold Path*, 14.
[452] *Majjhima Nikāya* 29, Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 224. For a complete translation of the Buddha's detailed analysis of each of the eight elements on the Path in the *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 45:8, see Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 239-240.
[453] Bodhi, *Noble Eightfold Path*, 11-12.
[454] John T. Bullitt, ed., "A Sketch of the Buddha's Life: Readings from the Pali Canon," Access to Insight, http://www.accesstoinsight.org/ptf/buddha.html#awakening (accessed 9/2/11).

utilize terminology more specific to the interpretive bent of their particular sect, school, or tradition when discussing the absolute religious goal, *nirvāṇa* is nonetheless acknowledged and accepted throughout the Buddhist tradition as an expression of the ultimate soteriological aim.[455] It is applied here as a convenient and inclusive category to elucidate a broad Buddhist understanding of liberation.

The etymology of *nirvāṇa* itself offers the meaning of "extinction," "blowing out," or "quenching," much like a fire is extinguished when there is no longer any oxygen and heat to fuel it.[456] The third Noble Truth, the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering, describes the attainment of *nirvāṇa*, accomplished by means of the cessation of *taṇhā* or craving/thirst.[457] Thus, *nirvāṇa* refers, fundamentally, to the experience or consciousness of supreme wisdom (*paññā*), which frees the Buddhist into an unfettered, unbounded understanding of reality (and its functioning).[458] This involves the eradication of blinding, binding ignorance and, therefore, the unraveling of the Three Poisons (clinging, anger, and delusion), the endless rebirth of *saṃsāra*, craving, ignorance, and therefore the unsatisfatoriness that pervades and plagues human existence.[459] By following the disciplined practice of the Eight-fold Path the Buddhist practitioner can attain awakening (*bodhi*) to the true nature of reality as interdependent, impermanent, and non-substantial. When one reaches this state of ultimate realization, one experiences complete freedom or

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[455] See Steven Collins, *Nirvana and Other Buddhist Felicities: Utopias of the Pali Imaginaire* (Cambridge University Press, 1998), 1-120, 135-190.
[456] Monier-Williams, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 30, 797. *Vinaya Piṭaka* 1:34-35, Harvey, *Introduction to Buddhism*, 60-61.
[457] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 56:11, Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 76.
[458] Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 301-302.
[459] Strong, *Experience of Buddhism*, 106.

release from craving and the consequential sting of suffering, which is oftentimes termed "enlightenment."[460]

The Pāli textual tradition delineates four stages toward the final goal: 1) "stream-enterer" (*sotāpanna*); 2) "once-returner" (*sakadāgāmi*); 3) "non-returner" (*anāgāmi*); and 4) "worthy one" (*arahant*) – one who has eliminated all defilements and ties to conditioned existence and is "completely liberated through final knowledge."[461] In the Pāli scriptures and the "Theravāda" heritage, the *arahant* represents the soteriological ideal toward which Buddhists progress, and is the one who has fully experienced the ultimate transformation into *nirvāṇa*. There does exist two types of *nirvāṇa* attained by an *arahant*: *nirvāṇa* "with remainder" (*saupādisesa*) and *nirvāṇa* "without remainder" (*anupādisesa*). *Nirvāṇa* with remainder speaks of the liberation achieved by the *arahant* in this human life, having become fully enlightened and completely free from conditioned, samsaric existence. As Kalupahana avers,

> Such a person has trained [the] mind through meditation and is able to control it as [s/he] wishes…perceiving the aggregates that constitute the psychophysical personality as being nonsubstantial (*anatta*) and preventing the ego-consciousness from assailing [him/herself] when the process of perception takes place…[462]

In other words, *nirvāṇa* with remainder illustrates full insight into the nature of reality, non-attachment to phenomena (external and internal), and thus unreserved freedom from any kind of unsatisfactoriness. Due to the disciplined training of the body and mind through the Eight-fold Path and other practices, the *arahant* remains unmoved by and detached from all sensory, mental, and emotional impressions, creating a calm, serene

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[460] Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 69-71. See also William K. Mahony, "Enlightenment," *Encyclopedia of Religion*: 2792-2795.
[461] Bodhi, *In the Buddha's Words*, 373-375.
[462] Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 72.

consciousness.[463] While remaining in this life the *arahant* perceives reality clearly through wisdom, understands the character and causes of suffering, is not tethered to anything in compounded and impermanent existence, and therefore experiences the peace of freedom. *Nirvāṇa* without remainder signifies the *arahant* who has died and is therefore no longer tied to *saṃsāra* – the continual re-birth, the defilements/fetters, and hence the perpetual unsatisfactoriness that is its essential character.

In Mahāyāna Buddhist texts and sects, the goal of *nirvāṇa* is interpreted in light of the assertion of a different soteriological ideal – the *bodhisattva*. As opposed to the *arahant* who eventually departs from this conditioned world and eventually "goes beyond," Mahāyāna Buddhist practitioners endeavor to become bodhisattvas, beings who are motivated by deep compassion and the cultivation of perfect wisdom or *bodhicitta* (awakened-mind) for the realization of full enlightenment or liberation and for the benefit of all sentient beings.[464]

It is sometimes stated that the bodhisattva's compassion leads her/him to postpone entry into full and complete *nirvāṇa* until all beings have attained it. Williams points out the incongruous quality of this declaration, since 1) there could only be one single bodhisattva if *all* other sentient beings must achieve *nirvāṇa* first, and 2) the infinite number of beings (a widely held Mahāyāna view) makes the bodhisattva's task of helping all reach enlightenment first since this work would be endless and the bodhisattva would

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[463] *Saṃyutta Nikāya* 3:83ff; *Dīgha Nikaya* 3:260; in Kalupahana, *Buddhist Philosophy*, 72-74, 76.
[464] Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 49-51; and Paul Williams and Anthony Tribe, *Buddhist Thought: A Complete Introduction to the Indian Tradition* (London: Routledge, 2000), 96-191. Especially refer to the Perfection of Wisdom (*prajñāpāramitā*) literature for representative examples of descriptions of the bodhisattva. Edward Conze, *Perfect Wisdom: The Short Prajnaparamita Texts* (Totnes, UK: Buddhist Publishing Group, 1993); and Edward Conze, *The Large Sutra on Perfect Wisdom: With the Divisions of the Abhisamayalankara* (University of California Press, 1985).

never actually be able to attain *nirvāṇa* her/himself.[465] Rather, Williams forwards the argument that it is more appropriate in a Mahāyāna context to recognize different *types* of *nirvāṇa*. There is the *nirvāṇa* of the *arahant* or *sāvakabuddha* (enlightenment via teachers and teaching), of the *pratyekabuddha* (enlightenment on one's own, without assistance), and the supreme and compassionate "non-abiding" *nirvāṇa* of Gautama Buddha.[466] That is, the bodhisattva, as the highest ideal, does not postpone or turn away from *nirvāṇa* ever, but rather "rejects the *nirvāṇas* of the Arhat and Pratyekabuddhas, at least as final goals, and aims for the full *nirvāṇa* of the Buddha."[467] The Mahāyāna critique of these other ideals seems to be that avenue to perfect and complete realization of the Buddha is superior to and more desirable than to the rest. This is all mentioned to say that *nirvāṇa* is certainly the soteriological aim in the multifaceted Mahāyāna tradition also, even as it is understood, interpreted, and explicated by means of a different guiding ideal – the bodhisattva.[468]

The trajectory of soteriological transformation in Buddhism may be summarized as follows: 1) humans are plagued with the pervasive problematic of *dukkha* (suffering, unsatisfactoriness) caused by *taṇhā* (thirst/craving) and *avijjā* (ignorance about true nature of reality and the means to freedom from suffering) in this existence of *saṃsāra*; 2) the practical means or avenue by which humans may overcome this problematic is the Eight-fold Noble Path; and 3) this Path leads to reduction of suffering in life and

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[465] Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 52-53.
[466] Ibid. Also see Guang Xing, *The Concept of the Buddha: Its Evolution from Early Buddhism to the Trikāya Theory* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 7-18, 50-68.
[467] Williams, *Mahāyāna Buddhism*, 53.
[468] For further elucidation of *nirvāṇa* as the soteriological goal in Mahāyāna Buddhism, see the representative primary sources of 1) the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature in Edward Conze, trans., *The Perfection of Wisdom in Eight Thousand Lines and Its Verse Summary* (San Francisco: City Lights, 1973); and 2) Madhyamika thought in Jay L. Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way: Nagarjuna's Mulamadhyamakakarika* (Oxford University Press, 1995).

ultimately to the soteriological aim of *nirvāṇa*, full liberation from re-birth in *saṃsāra* and the dis-ease of *dukkha*.

4.4 Soteriological Transformation in Christianity

Again, as with Buddhism and other religious paths, the understanding and articulation of the process of soteriological transformation within the variety of Christian denominations is not unanimously agreed upon. Indeed, soteriology remains one of the primary fissures dividing the different denominations. From the very origins of Christianity there has been a lack of total consensus across sectarian affiliations concerning soteriology and other areas of theology and doctrine.[469] However, there are nonetheless clear and identifiable points of accord shared throughout mainstream or normative Christianity. While recognizing important differences, the unifying soteriological elements are emphasized and elucidated here.

The human problematic as widely attested across the Christian tradition is, in a word, sin. Etymologically, "sin" is a translation of the Greek noun *hamartía* and related verb *hamartánō*, which are the terms most utilized by the New Testament and early Christian writers to refer to the central crisis with humanity or what is wrong with the human condition.[470] In its early Hellenic usage, *hamartía* was originally an archery term meaning "missing the mark" that came to imply falling short intellectually, making a mistake, or erring morally.[471] When appropriated and employed in Hellenistic Judaism

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[469] See Philip Esler, ed., *The Early Christian World*, vol 1 (London: Routledge, 2000); James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press, 2006); as well as Roger E. Olson, *The Mosaic of Christian Belief: Twenty Centuries of Unity and Diversity* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002).

[470] See William Barclay, *New Testament Words* (London: SCM Press, 1964), 119; and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume,* ed. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985), 44-50.

[471] Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary*, 48.

and then Christianity, *hamartía* took on a theological dimension in reference to offense or wrongdoing in relation to God.[472]

Grounded in the New Testament usage, in Christianity sin can refer to specific acts of transgression as well as an inner force within human persons and societies that influences the quality of humanity's being in the world.[473] Thus, sin concerns both external actions of misconduct and the internal defective or flawed character that produces these detrimental behaviors. The conception of this adverse human condition is grounded in the fall of humanity found in the second creation account of Genesis in the Hebrew Bible or the Christian Old Testament (Gen. 2:4-3:24). God creates both man and woman and places them in a garden where they exist in a state of innocence and enjoyment. Only the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is forbidden. Tempted by a serpent, the first humans eat this forbidden fruit and God banishes them from the garden into the world of dissatisfaction, suffering, and death.

This biblical story serves as the founding and guiding narrative shaping the theological understanding of sin within Christianity. Based on this story, the doctrine of sin is explained as humans falling from a state of alignment or harmony with God's being and will and now existing in discord or disharmony with God. Sin indicates the fallenness of humanity, such that humans exist in a state of being estranged or alienated from God.[474] That is to say, humans are not living in right relation to God and fellow humans, possessing a tendency or inclination to think, speak, and do things that distort and

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[472] Stanley J. Grenz, *Theology for the Community of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 182-184.
[473] Barclay, *New Testament Words*, 118-120. See Rom. 3:23, 7:14-17; Gal. 3:22; 1 Jn. 1:8;
[474] See Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2 (University of Chicago Press, 1957), 44-58. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt*, trans. Olive Wyon (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1957); Reinhold Niebuhr, *The Nature and Destiny of Man*, vol. 1 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1941); and Wolfhart Pannenberg, *What is Man?*, trans. Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970).

frustrate a loving, intimate, healthy, and life-enhancing relationship with God and others. As Williamson aptly summarizes,

> Sin is our opposition against life, against well-being, against the freedom to love God with all our selves and our neighbors as ourselves, against the love that frees us to do so, against being loved, against God, and against God's gift to us of abundant life.[475]

The harmful results of humanity's sinful condition are many. For example sin engenders hardheartedness (Rom. 7:18; Eph. 2:3; Heb. 3:13), physical and spiritual death or decay (Rom. 5:12, 17, 6:16, 6:23), dishonesty and deceit (Heb. 3:13), selfish desire (James 1:15), disobedience to God's will or lawlessness (Rom. 7:8-11; 1 Jn. 3:4), and injustice or unrighteousness (1 Jn. 5:17) among other negative consequences. All of these effects of sin concern individual persons as well as the whole of humanity, including social and institutional dimensions.[476]

Ever since the great African doctor of the Church, Augustine of Hippo, Western Christians have often held to a doctrine of *original* sin. Again, grounded in the second Genesis creation story of the fall of humanity, original sin is the idea that through the sin of Adam and Eve all humans since are fallen and exist in a state of sinfulness such that people no longer have the freedom not to sin.[477] While not all Christians claim this doctrine of original sin, Christians nonetheless agree that there is some powerful,

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[475] Clark M. Williamson, "What's Wrong with Us?: Human Nature and Human Sin," in *Essentials of Christian Theology*, ed. William C. Placher (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003), 161.
[476] Walter Rauschenbusch, *A Theology for the Social Gospel* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), 45-56; Stephen G. Ray, Jr., *Do No Harm: Social Sin and Christian Responsibility* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2003).
[477] Tatha Wiley, *Original Sin: Origins, Developments, Contemporary Meanings* (Mahwah, N.J.: Paulist Press, 2002), 13-75.

universal element within the human condition that creates an inclination to behave in ways that separate humans from God's infinite and eternal love, life, and goodness.[478]

Although sin is the fundamental human problematic, in Christianity human nature does have inherent worth and dignity. As beings made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26, Hebrew - *tzelem elohim*, Latin - *imago dei*), humans are *creatures*, thus creat*ed* and not God the Creat*or*. Yet, humans are also distinct from the rest of creation in that humanity imperfectly and finitely reflects God's nature and being through such traits such as free will, reason, self-consciousness, and the ability to enter into intentional relationship with God and others.[479]

While Christians have always acknowledged the edifying moral and inspirational import of Jesus' teachings found in the Gospel texts, for the majority of Christian it is not by virtue of these teachings alone that human beings find salvation. That is, unlike most of the Buddhist tradition that locates liberation in the teaching (*dhamma/dharma*) of Gautama Buddha (perhaps with the exception of the Pure Land sects), Christianity has predominantly situated the means of soteriological transformation in the person and work of Jesus Christ.[480] It is by virtue of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection that Christians are transformed and overcome the human problematic of sin.

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[478] For further, detailed analysis of sin and its effects on the human condition, see especially Tertullian, *De Patientia* V.5-14, in *The Christian Theology Reader*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 386; Origen, *Homilia in Leviticum* xii.4, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 390; Augustine, De Natura et Gratia iii.3-iv.4, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 398; Martin Luther, "Lectures on Romans," in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 422-423; Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol 2, 44-58; Paul Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, trans. Emerson Buchanan (Boston: Beacon Press, 1967), 47-99; Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics IV.4: The Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: T&T Clark, 1956), 358-513; and Jürgen Moltmann, *In the End – The Beginning: The Life of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2004).

[479] See Tertullian, *De Baptismo* 5, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 388; Origen, *De Principiis* III.iv.1, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 389.

[480] David Tracy, "The Christian Understanding of Salvation-Liberation," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 7 (1987): 129-138.

Central to the process of liberative transformation in Christianity is the doctrine of the incarnation. Without becoming entangled in the complex Christological debates of the early Church, suffice it to say that the incarnation reflects the conviction that God the Son (the second person of the Trinity or triune God – Father, Son/Word, and Holy Spirit) became a human being in the person of Jesus Christ. Biblically, this is grounded in the words of the Gospel of John: "The Word became flesh and lived among us" (Jn 1:14). As the Alexandrian Church father, Athanasius (ca 296-298 – 373 CE), summarizes the doctrine, "The Word of God took a human body to save and help human beings, so that having shared our human birth, he might make human beings partakers of the divine and spiritual nature."[481] Thus, by the time of the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE), the majority of Christians claimed that Jesus Christ is one person (*hypostasis*) with two natures (*physis*), divine and human.[482] And it is by virtue of this "hypostatic union" that Jesus is savior in Christianity. In Jesus Christ God's nature and human nature come together such that the divine nature heals human nature and unites it with God. As Gregory of Nazianzus states, "What [God] has not assumed, he has not healed."[483] The union of God and humanity in the incarnation is the underlying theological principle whereby sinful, fallen humanity can participate in and be transformed by the perfect divinity of God.

Although the belief *that* the person of Jesus lies at the heart of the Christian understanding of salvation, there has never been an official position or consensus across denominational lines concerning just *how* this is accomplished, the way Jesus acts as

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[481] Athanasius, *Life of Antony* 74, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 2nd series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 4:215.
[482] Robert W. Jenson, "How Does Jesus Make a Difference?," in Placher, *Essentials of Christian Theology*, 191-202.
[483] Gregory of Nazianzus, "Letter 101 to Cledonius the Priest," in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 7:440.

savior.[484] Early on, several themes from Paul's epistles in the New Testament speak to the liberative work of Jesus Christ. Paul writes of *recapitulation*, where Christ is the "second Adam" correcting Adam's disobedience with obedience (1 Cor. 15:45).[485] He also speaks of the *transformation of humanity* through Christ uniting humans with God's divinity (Rom. 5:18).[486] Lastly, Paul expresses a motif of the *blessed exchange*, where Christ somehow makes humans right with God through vicariously taking on the burden of suffering and punishment that is rightfully humanity's (2 Cor. 5:21).

These Pauline scriptural themes have been developed into three major ways of explaining Jesus Christ's salvific work. 1) Through the theological work of early thinkers such as Origen of Alexandria (ca. 184-253 CE), Irenaeus of Lyons (2nd c.), and Augustine of Hippo (354-430 CE) as well as 20th century Swedish theologian Gustaf Aulén (1879-1977), the concept has arisen that Christ saves or liberates Christians by freeing them from the power and influence of the devil.[487] This is known as *Christ the Victor* model because Jesus defeats the devil and wins the victory of liberation from sin and the devil's control. 2) Likely the most prominent understanding of the work of Christ in Western Christianity is what may be termed the *satisfaction* or *debt payment* model. It was classically articulated by Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109 CE) and grounded in medieval codes of honor and lordship. The logic is that only human beings can justly repay the debt owed to God's honor that was incurred through deliberate disobedience to God. But the debt is infinite because of God's infinite nature. Thus, only God can repay

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[484] Ivor J. Davidson, "Introduction: God of Salvation," in *God of Salvation: Soteriology in Theological Perspective*, ed. Ivor J. Davidson and Murray A. Rae (Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011), 1-14.
[485] See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.21.10, in *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Philip Schaff, 2nd series (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 1:454.
[486] Gregory of Nyssa states, "Having become what we are [Christ]…again united humanity to God." Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius* 12.1, in Schaff, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 5:241.
[487] See Alister E. McGrath, *Christian Theology: An Introduction* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001), 415-419.

this debt. Therefore, God sent Jesus Christ, the "God-human," to satisfy this justice and honor through the crucifixion.[488] 3) The last soteriological model is what might be called *moral influence*, which was notably forwarded by Peter Abelard (1079-1142 CE), a near contemporary of Anselm. The idea is that Christ's suffering and death reveals the greatness of God's love for humanity and therefore liberates through spiritual inspiration to be more loving and lead lives in harmony with God and others.[489]

Concerning the specific means of salvation in Christianity, there are different formulations depending on the denominational tradition. And these discussions about grace, faith, and good works can become tediously complex. Yet, two fundamental positions may be highlighted in order to help better understand the respective roles of God and humans in the process of liberation. These are synergism and monergism.

Synergism is found in such traditions as Eastern Orthodoxy, Roman Catholicism, Arminianism, and Methodism.[490] On this view, salvation entails some form of cooperation between God's divine grace (free gift of saving power) and human free will.[491] Salvation comes through God's saving grace generously offered through Christ but requires free reception and not opposition by human beings.[492] Also, on this view, the free human reception of divine grace involves both faith and good works of love and

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[488] Anselm of Canterbury, *Cur Deus Homo*, ed. Richard D. McCormack (Fort Worth: RDMc Publishing, 2005).
[489] Peter Abelard, *Commentary on the Epistle of the Romans*, trans. Steven R. Cartwright (Catholic University of America Press, 2011).
[490] It is important to note that not all Protestants in any denomination advocate monergism. Ron Rhodes, *The Complete Guide to Christian Denominations* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2005), 95-112, 291-310, 365-376.
[491] For instance, see Norman L. Geisler, *Chosen but Free: A Balanced View of God's Sovereignty and Free Will*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington, MN: Bethany House, 2010), 280-284.
[492] John Wesley, founder of Methodism, called this grace that enables its free acceptance by believers prevenient grace. See Paul Wesley Chilcote, ed., *John and Charles Wesley: Selections from Their Writings and Hymns* (Woodstock, VT: SkyLight Paths, 2011), 115-118.

justice (including participation in the life, rituals, and tradition of the Church) in the edification process of liberation.[493]

Monergism, on the other hand, is advocated in different forms of Protestantism, such as much of Calvinism and some of Lutheranism.[494] This view also asserts that salvation comes through God's grace, but this is accomplished by God alone without human reception or cooperation. Faith is important for salvation but it is not made manifest by virtue of human free will because *it is God alone who determines salvation.*[495] Synergism and monergism might be viewed as being on a soteriological continuum, Christians from various denominations representing different places on this spectrum depending on their particular schools of theological inquiry.

Included in the life of faith are important rituals or sacraments that are understood as bringing the Christian into a greater awareness of and contact with God in Christ. While Eastern Orthodox, Roman Catholics, and Anglicans retain seven sacraments, they share two of these with other Protestants – Baptism and Eucharist, which are practiced throughout Christianity.[496] Underlying the variance within Christian demonstration, Baptism is essentially an initiation ritual whereby the person officially enters into the Christian community and shares in the process of dying and rising with Christ. Eucharist (also Communion or Lord's Supper) means "thanksgiving" and is grounded in the narrative of the Last Supper of Jesus with his disciples found in the Synoptic Gospels (Mk. 14:22-25, Mt. 26:26-29, Lk. 22:13-2). It is a ritual that, for some, allows the

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[493] Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 280-284.
[494] Rhodes, *Complete Guide*, 211-236, 341-364.
[495] Olson, *Mosaic of Christian Belief*, 277-280.
[496] The seven sacraments are Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing the Sick/Unction, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. See Stratford Caldecott, *The Seven Sacraments: Entering the Mysteries of God* (New York: Crossroad, 2006).

Christian to directly experience the real presence of Christ or that, for others, is an expression of faith and conformity to Christ.[497] These practices are interpreted and lived out differently and emphasis is placed on different sacraments depending on the denomination, but they are all ultimately means of living out the Christian life on the path of salvation in Christ.

Despite the differences in detail and emphasis, Christianity affirms God's loving grace, which is offered through the person and work of Jesus Christ in overcoming the human problematic of sin and its devastating effects on human life. Christians largely agree that it is the entire "Jesus event" in history that enables soteriological transformation toward the primary and guiding goal of Christian life.

The soteriological goal that answers the human problematic of sin and its effects in Christianity may be summarized as reconciliation (*katallage*)[498] and redemption (*apolutrosis*)[499], referring to two aspects of the salvific aim. Humanity is afflicted and wounded by living in a fallen state of distorted, broken relationship with God, being alienated or estranged from God's love, goodness, and beauty. Reconciliation describes the ultimate liberative aim of being reunited to God through Christ. In the New Testament, Paul speaks of this as Christians "being justified/made righteous in Christ Jesus" (*dikaioumenoi en Christo Iesou*).[500] Through faith in Jesus Christ and thus participation in his saving work Christians are reconciled into right, harmonious

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[497] See Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009).
[498] "*Katallage*," in William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (The University of Chicago Press, 1957), 415.
[499] "*Apolutrosis*," Ibid, 95. This refers to the "making free" or "release" from sin and finitude that comes from Christ.
[500] David G. Horrell, *An Introduction to the Study of Paul*, 2nd ed. (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 73-78; and N.T. Wright, *Paul: In Fresh Perspective* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2009), 110-122. See Gal. 2:16-17, 3:11, 24, 5:4; Rom. 3:20, 28, 4:2, 5:1, 9.

relationship with God. This is all accomplished by virtue of God's loving forgiveness that overcomes humanity's sin and fallenness.[501]

While reconciliation and justification refer to that aspect of the soteriological goal concerned with human relations to God, redemption is about the liberative experience of new life through Jesus Christ. God not only brings reunion, right relationship, and forgiveness but also sanctification, giving Christians the power to actually live out a new way of being "in Christ" in light of reconciliation and forgiveness (Rom. 8:33; 1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 5:19; Gal. 4:4-5).[502] Through sharing in and being transformed by Christ, believers experience a God who becomes human and shares in the human condition. In the life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Jesus, Christians encounter a God who takes on the power of sin and its effects and transforms it through gracious love into new life in Christ.[503]

Concerning the *ultimate* soteriological goal in Christianity, it is important to recognize that salvation is a process that begins in this life and is eventually fulfilled or consummated in the life to come. Individually/personally, humans begin to experience the benefits of God's grace in this life through prayer, worship, and loving community, but this process finds ultimate completion after the end of this age (*eschaton*) in intimate

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[501] See especially Jürgen, Moltmann, *The Crucified God*, trans. R.A. Wilson and John Bowden (New York: Harper&Row, 1974), 32-81, 160- 186, ; Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus – God and Man*, trans. Lewis L. Wilkins and Duane A. Priebe (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1968), 245-282; Mark S. Heim, *Saved from Sacrifice: A Theology of the Cross* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2006), 107-329; and Anthony W. Bartlett, *Cross Purposes* (Harrisburg: PA: Trinity Press Int'l, 2001).

[502] William B. Barcley, *Christ in You: A Study in Paul's Theology and Ethics* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), 105-136; J. W. Byers, *Sanctification* (Teddington, Middlesex, U.K.: The Echo Library, 2008), 4-8, 30-34, 39-43; and Melvin E. Dieter, et al., *Five Views on Sanctification*, EPub edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011). Especially (though not exclusively) Eastern Orthodox theologians have referred to this redemptive process as *theosis* or "deification/divinization," where the believer is transformed by grace into what God is by nature (2 Pet. 1:4; Rom. 8; Jn. 10:34; Ps. 82:1). See Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 5 preface; Clement of Alexandria, *Stromata* 7.16.101.4; in Schaff, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*; and Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (New York: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 97-98.

[503] Tertullian, *Against Praxeas* 27, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 251-252; Cyril of Alexandria, *Letter XVII.12* (Third Letter to Nestorius), in McGrath, *Theology Reader*,263-264; and Horrell, *Study of Paul*, 55-63.

communion with God and other in life everlasting.[504] Again, Christian imagination understands this variously. The earliest Christian hope for eternal life after death concentrated on resurrection, where the physical body is raised from death into a new, incorruptible spiritual existence (1 Cor. 15).[505] However, through the influence of Greek (especially Platonic) philosophy, the belief arose within Christian thought that the soul and body are disparate such that the immortal soul will be liberated from the body at death (e.g. Lk. 23:43).[506] Ever since, there has existed in Christian eschatology debate concerning the precise nature of individual life everlasting. Despite the specifics, Christianity maintains firm hope in a personal existence after death.

The collective dimension of reconciliation and redemption involves God's transformation of all creation. Christian vision of cosmic regeneration sets the personal dimension in a broader contextual horizon of God's promise of an ultimate new creation where the "new heaven and new Earth" are revealed and God establishes complete divine love and justice collectively (Rom. 8:18-25; Gal. 6:11-18; 2 Cor. 5:11-21).[507] Whatever awaits Christians individually and collectively, the ultimate soteriological aim is that it will be good, that they will dwell in loving communion with God and dear ones, and that all problems and injustices will be overcome and set right.[508]

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[504] Richard J. Mouw, Ted Peters, "Where Are We Going?: Eschatology" in Placher, *Essentials of Christian Theology*, 335-365; and John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1996).
[505] Origen, *De Principiis* II.x.3, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 616; Gregory of Nyssa, *De Anima et Resurrectione*, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 619; and Augustine, *De Civitate Dei* XIII.20, in McGrath, *Theology Reader*, 620-621.
[506] See Justo L. González, *A History of Christian Thought: From the Beginnings to the Council of Chalcedon*, vol I (Nashville: Abingdon, 1987), 47-60, 97-120.
[507] Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 5.32.1-5.33.1, in McGrath, *Christian Theology Reader*, 611-612; John G. Gibbs, *Creation and Redemption: A Study in Pauline Theology* (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 1971); and T. Ryan Jackson, *New Creation in Paul's Letters: A Study of the Historical and Social Setting of a Pauline Concept* (Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 83-172.
[508] Jackson, *New Creation*, 111-112, 136-146, 161-166.

The process of Christian soteriological transformation entails the human problematic of sin (distorted relationship with and estrangement from God), the means of salvation through faith in God's grace in the life of Jesus Christ (and lived out through prayer, worship, and ritual), and the experience of liberation from the bondage of sin (through reconciliation and redemption in Christ, and ultimately a personal and cosmic new creation). Individual/personal Christian soteriological transformation may be appropriately understood as *metanoia*, referring to a deep life-changing conversion of the person's entire being into a radically new life in Christ (Rom. 12; Phil. 2).[509] The Christian experiences and participates in the new being inaugurated and manifested by the person and work of Jesus Christ. The believer no longer lives in alienation and distorted relationship with God, the Source and Sustainer of all being, but enjoys a transformed life united with God through Christ. A therapeutic healing of the person's whole being begins currently and is perfected in the life to come when God establishes a new creation of unending life, love, and peace.

4.5 Interreligious Dialogue as Sacramental Practice

As has been established, *dialogical* transformation refers to 1) the realized experience of truth manifestation that occurs in the back-and-forth dialectic of dialogue and, 2) specifically in interreligious dialogue, the process of integration of new and different religious elements from the encounter of the religious other to form a changed, expanded, and enhanced religious identity or worldview. Additionally, *soteriological* transformation concerns the process whereby an individual practitioner of a particular

[509] *Metanoia* means "a change of mind," "turning about," "conversion," "turning to God." See Arndt and Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 513-514. Also see the use of *metanoia* as a new paradigm for understanding Buddhist-Christian conversation from a Christian perspective: Cabanne, "Beyond Kenosis," 109-114.

religion or tradition undergoes positive existential change. This change involves the answering or surmounting of the human problematic through offering a means or avenue for experiencing liberation/salvation toward the ultimate soteriological aim of human existence.

Previously, it was argued that dialogue is an appropriate religious response to the increasing religious diversity, plurality, and epistemic ambiguity in our current postmodern context. Part of what makes dialogue with religious others significant and imperative across religious boundaries is because it allows each individual and community to begin and continue to grapple with important soteriological questions. These soteriological concerns manifest distinctly and uniquely depending on the religious tradition. That is, doing dialogue and thinking dialogically (under the guidance of practical principles grounded in the experience of dialogue) may be viewed as and included in how people continually make sense of liberation/salvation or freedom from the fundamental human problem. Interreligious dialogue cultivates the appreciation of good, beauty, and truth to be found in the other, the different and thus engenders opportunities for growth and development into further experience of transformation toward the soteriological aim in each religion.

In this light, dialogical transformation may be conceived as part and parcel of the process of soteriological transformation. Both are forms of growth and development, only shaped by distinct contexts: Dialogical transformation is formed by the situation of exchange *between* religions while soteriological transformation occurs *within* the milieu of a particular faith tradition. Nonetheless, they share a concern with intentions and activities that lead to the experience of liberation and truth.

As part of soteriological transformation, interreligious dialogue (and the transformative power extant in it) is a form of *religious practice* that fosters and supports the liberating, healing growth and development experienced within each religious context. That is, when interreligious dialogue is viewed as a religious practice, it becomes a "sacred" activity, a special religiously significant endeavor that helps to move one forward along the path of overcoming the human problematic and thus toward the soteriological aim as understood in one's own religious worldview.

The predominant notion of "practice" within the religious context has been that it is starkly different from "theory" or theoretical knowledge, and that practice is more of a means to an end rather than an end in itself.[510] Drawing on the meaning of practice found in the ancient Greek notion of *askēsis*, which refers to athletic training, Maraldo asserts reinterpretation of religious practice as "disciplined performance."[511] On this view, religious practice becomes not simply a means to an end outside itself but something executed that holds significance in and of itself. Religious practice entails disciplines that are done, in one sense, to work toward an overarching aim or purpose, and, in another sense, are done for the profit and meaning that the practices hold in the very activity of performing them.[512] That is to say, religious practice includes both immediate benefits as a goal in itself as well as action that is inspired by an overarching ultimate soteriological aim that the whole of a person's religious life is progressing toward fulfillment.[513]

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[510] For further discussion of the theory-practice distinction, see Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp (Cambridge University Press, 2000), 1139bff, 1177b2-5; Nicholas Lobkowicz, *Theory and Practice* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1967); and Richard J. Bertstein, *Praxis and Action* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968).
[511] John C. Maraldo, "The Hermeneutics of Practice in Dōgen and Francis of Assisi," in *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue*, Ingram and Streng, 55.
[512] Ibid.
[513] Robert Aitken and David Steindl-Rast, *The Ground We Share: Everyday Practice, Buddhist and Christian*, ed. Nelson Foster (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1996), 63-67.

Practice is more of an activity that includes and actualizes the import and value of the soteriological experience of liberation from the human problematic.

As a religious practice, interreligious dialogue may also be understood as *sacramental* in character. Even though the notion of sacrament or sacramentality originates within the Christian context, "sacramental" can be employed as a universally applicable religious category that speaks to something that mediates, reveals, or makes known to one's direct experience "the Sacred" or Ultimate Reality, in whatever terms this is specially conceived and communicated.[514] As Borg states, "Religion's purpose is to mediate the sacred and, by so doing, to inform, engender, and nourish a transforming relationship to 'the More.' The enduring religions share these characteristics in common. Each is a massive and magnificent sacrament of the sacred, a finite means of mediating the sacred, a 'treasure in earthen vessels.'"[515] Grounded in this principle, a sacramental practice is a conscious repeated activity that holds existential meaning and transformational import in the practice itself and that also allows for progression or development along the path of soteriological transformation. In the present context of religious plurality and discourse concerning interfaith relations, it is possible to see interreligious dialogue as a sacramental practice that cultivates the quality of experience and expression that allows for access to the sustaining, liberating, transforming truth of "the Sacred" or "Ultimate Reality" as understood in each tradition.

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[514] Carl Olson, *Religious Studies: The Key Concepts* (Abingdon, Oxon, U.K.: Routledge, 2011), 210-213; and Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ the Sacrament of the Encounter with God*, 7-10. Also see Louis Marie Chauvet, *Symbol and Sacrament: A Sacramental Reinterpretation of Christian Existence*, trans. Patrick Madigan and Madeline Beaumont (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1995); and Kenan B. Osborne, *Christian Sacraments in a Postmodern World: A Theology for the Third Millennium* (New York/Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1999).

[515] Marcus J. Borg, *The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 215.

The question now becomes: *How* does dialogical transformation support the process of soteriological transformation and move persons from different religions along their respective paths toward the ultimate soteriological goal? This is possible by virtue of two elements – the *value* and *experiential* dimensions. The value dimension concerns the basic conditions or qualities of interreligious dialogue, particularly the internal qualities. Recall that these fundamental significant qualities are *honesty*, *humility*, *commitment*, *openness*, and *analogical imagination*. These dialogical qualities are values that resonate with the practical means for soteriological transformation present in Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions. That is, they cultivate a mindset or disposition within the practitioner that aligns her/him with the process of liberative transformation found within her/his own religious system.

The underlying point here is simply that when a practitioner develops honesty, humility and compassion, commitment to her/his own path, openness to newness, and a vision of similarity-in-difference and unity-in-diversity during interreligious dialogue s/he is engaging in a sacramental practice that is part and parcel of her/his religious life and therefore supports her/his on the path to the soteriological goal. For example, as a Buddhist maintains the five dialogical values, 1) s/he engages in contemplative dialogue with a Christian and deepens her/his impetus for mindfulness for self and other; 2) s/he learns more about Christianity and expands her/his awareness of reality and meaning which reduces fear, anger, and ignorance; and 3) s/he performs peace-work with Christians and helps to jointly dissipate suffering in the world. All of this may be considered religious practice that helps the Buddhist move forward along the path toward enlightenment or *nirvāṇa*.

Moreover, as a Christian upholds the same five dialogical values, 1) s/he engages in contemplative dialogue with a Buddhist and cultivates her/his interior mystical awareness of and experience of God or Christ's presence within; 2) s/he learns more about Buddhist beliefs and enhances her/his knowledge about God's wisdom and presence in other religions of God's creation; and 3) s/he carries out peace-work with Buddhists and thus creatively lives out her/his discipleship of Jesus, working toward a continual establishment of God's Kingdom of love, equality, and justice in the world toward eventual eschatological fulfillment. In other words, dialogue is a sacramental practice that contributes to the redemptive work of God, helping Christians to become increasingly aware of the *imago dei* (image of God) in non-Christian others, strengthening Christian faith by new forms of contemplative practice and good works (James 2-3), and clarifying Christian theological self-understanding through the questions and challenges from Buddhist friends.[516] All of this may also be understood as religious practice that edifies and supports the Christian in the life of faith toward complete redemption of self and all creation through God in Christ.

The experiential dimension concerns dialogical transformation sharing an *orientation toward truth* with soteriological transformation. That is, dialogue cultivates receptivity to and the circumstances for the realized experience of truth, and this is also an essential ingredient of the liberating aim in soteriological transformation. The salvific goal in religious systems is to overcome and transcend the human problematic, which is made possible through the Ultimate Reality discerned and accessed in each religion (*śūnyatā*, God, etc.). And truth is an essential feature or of the very character/nature of

[516] See Fredericks, *Buddhists and Christians*, 103-105. Also, Nathaniel C. Holmes, Jr., "Interreligious/Interfaith Dialogue as Christian Practice: A Practical Theology of Religious Pluralism" (PhD diss., Miami Gardens, FL: St. Thomas University, 2010), 69-78, 126-242.

Ultimate Reality in religious experience.[517] Even though this experience of liberation/salvation may not always be some mystical once-and-for-all totality of encounter, nonetheless, some measure of this truth of the Whole, the Sacred, the Ultimate is felt, grasped, and professed in the process of overcoming the human problematic. That is, for Buddhists, there is a fundamental veracity in the liberation from suffering and the attaining of *nirvāṇa.* For Christians, there is a basic, indispensable truthfulness within salvation from sin into right relationship and union with God in Christ.

The realized experience of truth manifestation in interreligious dialogue supports and harmonizes with the liberating process of soteriological transformation because this very same experiential veracity is present in surmounting the human problematic and reaching the salvific goal. The light of truth is uncovered and discovered in dialogue and salvation alike. Engaging in interreligious dialogue as a sacramental practice discloses truth in the same way that living out one's own religious practice reveals truth. This suggests that truth realized in the dialogical context becomes integrated or incorporated into the religious identity of the practitioner and thus may be expressed and applied toward further transformation in the soteriological context. For example, a Christian might appreciate the good, beauty, and truth of a certain Buddhist meditation practice or, perhaps, the doctrine of skillful means. This transformative realization, this new and edifying awareness is taken into her/his Christian identity/worldview, bringing new and valuable meaning, and lived out in various ways on her/his path of union and redemption in Christ.

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[517] Hendrik M. Vroom, *Religions and the Truth: Philosophical Reflections and Perspectives* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 21-100.

A similar circumstance might unfold with a Buddhist encountering Christianity. A Buddhist may find that s/he appreciates the good, beauty, and truth of a particular Christian belief or practice, such as the Incarnation or *lectio divina*. This realized experience creates a new, emerging understanding that is taken in and integrated into her/his Buddhist identity/worldview, offering fresh and valuable meaning, and lived out in a variety of ways on her/his individual journey of following the Eight-fold Noble Path and progressing toward liberation from *dukkha* and, ultimately, attaining *nirvāṇa.*

Truth is enriching, enlightening, liberative, and thus transformative in every milieu it finds disclosure, though it is certainly interpreted, understood, made meaningful, and expressed in different ways according to the particular religious contexts in which it is experienced.[518] The disclosure or unconcealing of truth, in whatever forms it is disclosed and to whatever extent it is manifested, is nonetheless truth. Possessing its own authority and authenticity as it shows itself to realized experience, truth must be conducive to the furthering of liberation in both the dialogical and soteriological processes. Truth has a central place in all experiences of transformation.

[518] Ibid.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

In a context of increasing religious plurality and diversity, and in an age of the growing influence of postmodernity in Western culture, one significant conscientious and responsible response has been and continues to be interreligious dialogue. This involves recognition of and active engagement with religious multiplicity and variety by means of encountering people from other traditions or worldviews. Interreligious dialogue is accomplished through different modes of encounter, such as intellectual, contemplative, and socially engaged interaction. It is also facilitated by way of particular organizations within the interfaith movement, such as religion-specific associations, multi-religion/interfaith establishments, as well as, foundations affiliated with universities and other academic institutions.

It has been argued here that interreligious dialogue is an attitude and activity that holds a particular purpose and certain important conditions or qualities. The purpose of dialogue (which is a type of *interpretation*) is to promote learning or growth in understanding. The overarching aim of dialogue among people of different religions, concerns the enhancement of understanding about oneself/one's own religious heritage, the other/her (his) heritage, and the world, which can lead to further progress toward the potential for some semblance of peaceable co-existence. The fundamental conditions/qualities of interreligious dialogue include (externally/environmentally) equality and reciprocity, contextuality, and linguistic inclusivity and sensitivity, as well as, (internally/attitudinally) honesty, doctrinal and epistemic humility, religious

commitment, openness to otherness, and an awareness that balances and integrates commitment with otherness recognition. This overarching purpose and these significant qualities constitute the definition and practice of fruitful interreligious dialogue.

As articulated here in this project, the constitution of productive interreligious dialogue is grounded in David Tracy's philosophical hermeneutics as well as the work of other dialogicians – those who both study and participate in interfaith endeavors. Tracy's work serves as a foundational interpretive framework to promote better understanding and for communicating the transformative power of interreligious encounter. Drawing on insights from Gadamer, Tracy formulates a hermeneutics of the analogical imagination, involving the category of "the classic," which is an enduring and meaningful cultural and/or religious expression of human life. Interpreting or dialoguing with a classic involves the use of an analogical imagination to see similarities-in-difference. Tracy asserts that all dialogue is fundamentally a process of interpretation, and thus the creation of meaning and value by human beings.

Applying Tracy's work to the interfaith context, interreligious dialogue, therefore, is also interpretive in character. During the back-and-forth, to-and-fro movement of encounter with a classic, and when the fundamental purpose and conditions/qualities of dialogue are present, the opportunity arises for a *realized experience of truth disclosure*. It is this experiential event in the interpretative nature of dialogue that opens the door to the enhancement of the growth and understanding of one's own worldview. According to this hermeneutical model, truth emerges out of the giving-and-receiving interpretive dynamic of all dialogue, including interreligious dialogue.

In interreligious dialogue, the classic becomes the living religious "other" with whom one engages in a reciprocal, mutual relationship. The transformative power of dialogue generates the recognition and appreciation of the good, beauty, and truth found in the other person or tradition that unfolds during the interaction. Building on Tracy's hermeneutics, here transformation is further expounded in the interreligious dialogical situation as "transformation by integration," employing the terminology of Schmidt-Leukel.

During dialogue, when the aim and qualities are present and active, one may discover aspects of the "religious other" that are experienced as good, beautiful, and/or true. Some other aspects of the interlocutor may remain unappreciated. But, those religious elements of "the other" that are appreciated become integrated into one's own religious worldview, bringing newness and growth to one's self-awareness. This entire process involves appropriating facets of religious otherness into one's self-understanding, a process that challenges commitments, assumptions, and currently-held beliefs and practices within one's own cultural-religious context. This experience may ultimately lead to the harmonizing and spiritually edifying inclusion of certain new and different religious elements of the other tradition into one's individual and cultural religious identity. These other religious aspects become part and parcel of one's continually developing and progressing religious self-understanding.

In order to gain further insight into this transformative power of interreligious dialogue, an examination of individual Buddhists and Christians conveying transformation by integration has been presented. Through an analysis of the writings of Buddhists Masao Abe and Judith Simmer-Brown as well as Christians Paul Knitter and

John Keenan, transformation can be seen through the appreciation, appropriation, and thus the integration of ideas, beliefs, and practices from one religion to another.

In an effort to show the possibility for interreligious dialogue in the life of faith, this project has elucidated the liberating process of soteriological transformation found within both Buddhism and Christianity. The soteriological transformation has been outlined within a three-fold hermeneutical framework used as a method for explicating the kind of transformation that occurs within each religious system: 1) the elemental *human problematic*, 2) the *practical means* by which the believer or practitioner undergoes transformation, and 3) *the soteriological goal* into which one develops and which is none other than the *liberative experience of transcending the human problematic*. It is by virtue of the employment of specific religious beliefs, practices, and events that the human problematic is addressed and through which salvation or liberation, as defined by any given tradition, is realized.

As a sacramental practice (i.e., any activity that brings humans into direct experience of Truth, the Whole, or Ultimate Reality) interreligious dialogue may be understood to have the potential to support and advance the process of liberation in each person's tradition. Fundamental dialogical qualities are those values that resonate with the practical means for soteriological transformation present in Buddhism, Christianity, and other religions. These values enable the individual to cultivate a disposition that aligns her/him with the power of liberative transformation found within her/his own religious system. Also, both dialogical and soteriological transformation share an orientation toward truth, as understood within any given tradition. Interreligious dialogue as a sacramental practice discloses truth in the same way that living out one's own

religious practice reveals truth. This means that truth as experienced within a dialogical context can be integrated into the religious identity of the practitioner and thereby empower the practitioner to progress in a more enlightened and highly motivated way toward the goal of complete life transformation/salvation, or the experience of wholeness. Indeed, soteriological transformation and dialogical transformation convey a progression of growth in understanding, enhancement of insight, and a realized experience of truth about oneself, the other, and the world. It has been asserted that interreligious dialogue is a religious attitude and practice that contributes positively, productively, and meaningfully to the healing, therapeutic process of salvation/liberation in Buddhism, Christianity, as well as, other religious heritages and worldviews.

There is no indication that the burgeoning of religious diversity will subside in the future. In fact, the world promises to become increasingly more populated and cultures more highly diversified and less clearly differentiated through the passage of time. The skillfulness and willingness of people(s) to engage in interreligious dialogue in an open, honest and appreciative way will, no doubt, play a defining role in the maintenance and maturation of all religious traditions in our current postmodern world of plurality and ambiguity. Productive interreligious dialogue has brought and continues to bring opportunities for individual and communal transformation. Through engaging in respectful, mutual, and appreciative dialogue with people from differing heritages religious people and their traditions may find viable avenues for continued enhancement of meaning, growth in understanding, further realization of truth, and thus advancement toward the diminishment of religiously-based conflict and, hopefully, toward a world that ensures equality and freedom for all.

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APPENDIX A

CATEGORIES OF TRANSFORMATION: THE PROCESS OF GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

Tracy's Hermeneutics:	Encounter with classic →	Realized experience of truth manifestation
Interreligious Dialogue:	Encounter with living religious other →	Learning about other, self, and world; Expansion of consciousness/perspective/world-view
Schmidt-Leukel's Understanding:	Encounter with other person's religious worldview or tradition →	Deepened/enhanced appreciation of other/different religious worldview or tradition
	Encounter with other/new/different religious elements →	Integration of these religious elements into individual religious identity in a new synthesis

APPENDIX B

SOTERIOLOGICAL TRANSFORMATION IN RELIGIONS AND IN BUDDHIST-CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

Human Problematic	Practice of means → toward soteriological goal	Realized experience of Truth; Answer to human problematic
Buddhism – Suffering (*dukkha*) due to Attachment (*taṇhā*)	The 8-fold → Noble Path	Nirvana or enlightenment – elimination of suffering
Christianity – Sin (*hamartía*) as Estrangement from or Distorted Relationship with God	Grace through faith or → some combination of this with willful behavior (depending on tradition)	Salvation – reconciliation and restored relationship with God