Interreligious Dialogue: Ecumenical Engagement in Interfaith Action

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Interreligious dialogue has become, since the 1960s, a major activity engaging the Christian Church in many and varied contexts. It has not been without its detractors and opponents, of course; nor has the way been smooth for those who have advocated interfaith détente as an alternate to deprecation and diatribe with respect to the Christian attitude towards other faiths. How did this development come about? What have been the salient features? In this chapter I shall outline some of the background, initial impetus and rationales whereby the Christian Church has engaged in interreligious dialogue. The focus will be on the respective central agencies of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). Particular attention will also be given to the various models of dialogue that have emerged. In and through this comparative study, the contours of an ecumenical Christian stance towards – and so engagement in – interreligious dialogue should emerge.

At the end of the nineteenth century a momentous event in the history of religions occurred: the Parliament of World Religions. Held in Chicago in 1893, it was a gathering of those "who believed in the cooperation of religions and who hoped that their respective insights were convergent" (Braybrooke, 1998, p. 9). It marked a development within the nineteenth century that was to become a defining feature of the twentieth century: the fostering of mutually appreciative interactive relations between religions. This was spurred on by the great World Missionary Conference, held at Edinburgh in 1910, since when a multiplicity of events, organisations and movements aimed at fostering beneficial interfaith relations have blossomed. In the opening decades of the twentieth century, as the ecumenical movement was getting underway, re-appraisals of the traditional missionary stance towards other religions emerged alongside concerns over secularism and materialism (cf. Hallencreutz, 1971). Together these prompted, at least from some quarters, the idea of a common cause for religions in respect to addressing such shared concerns. Alongside unambiguous evangelical proclamation typical of early twentieth-century ecumenical discourse, there were admissions of "spiritual values" in other religions and

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calls for cross-religious sharing in the quest for justice and community. A muting of Christian imperialism went hand-in-glove with the emergence of an ecumenical humility. As early as 1912, in the aftermath of Edinburgh 1910, A.E. Garvie (1912) articulated a bold yet cautious and careful approach to other faiths: "To disturb and to destroy the religious beliefs, rites and customs of any people is to make an attack on the sanctuary of the soul" (p. 659).

Although seemingly a modern development, the dialogical option has ever been available and, in fact, has come to the fore from time to time in the history of Christianity. As a *modus operandi* dialogue was advocated and used in the early Church: St Paul at Ephesus (Acts 19:8–10), and at Athens (Acts 17:12), for example. Dialogue had long been a discursive mode within the ancient Greek intellectual world and it has informed Christian intellectual engagement down through the centuries. However, notwithstanding some notable examples of Christian interreligious dialogical approach in the Middle Ages – St Francis in the thirteenth century engaging the Muslim leader Saladin, for instance – by and large Christianity did not take a dialogical stance towards other faiths until well into the twentieth century. The first few decades, as already indicated, displayed some notable openness towards other faiths and their peoples, at least from some quarters of the nascent ecumenical movement. Even as this burgeoning rapprochement was becoming a source of major challenge to all forms of missionary praxis and thinking, a reaction was soon to set in. For as war clouds gathered once again, and a new darkness descended upon Europe then fanned out across the globe, the emerging light of a new dawn in interreligious relations dimmed: resurgent neo-orthodoxy and a reactive Christian exclusivism vied with ecumenical openness and the quest for interreligious détente.

Following the twentieth century's Second World War, the pressing question of a Christian response to the *Shoah* (destruction) of European Jewry, and of rethinking the relationship of Christianity to Jews and Judaism, both eclipsed (at least initially) and then prefigured (by way of implication) the wider question of the relation of Christianity to other religions and their peoples. At this stage, however, a reactive concern for syncretism and relativism was juxtaposed with the primacy of evangelistic outlook and the priority of affirming the lordship of Christ. This led to the situation that, vis-à-vis other religions, exclusivism continued as the dominant paradigm of Christian self-understanding, tempered only by early intimations of inclusivism.[1] With the advent of the 1950s and the emergence onto the global ecumenical scene of Asian Christian leadership, for which people of other faiths and their religions were not so utterly "other", the inclusivist paradigm became more evident: interactive relationship with other religions was promoted in the context of an ecumenical Christological vision. An inclusive Christocentric theology of religions was enunciated, albeit without implying the outright supplanting of other religions

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[1] Exclusivism is the paradigm that says, in effect, my religion is the only true religion; everyone else is wrong. Inclusivism is the paradigm that acknowledges some truth and value in other religions, but that nevertheless my religion is the only fully right or wholly true religion. Further, whatever truth or value there is in other religions is in some sense already included in mine, thus in respect to ultimate meaning other religions are effectively subsumed within my religion.

by Christianity. All religions – including Christian – were seen to be subject to the divine transformation; the Christ-event offers a new salvific opportunity for all. Openness to other religions remained premised on this overriding Christocentrism and was accompanied by an allied priority on discharging the missionary imperative. Nevertheless, even though a clear missionary concern remained to the fore, the emergence of wider interreligious interests became unstoppable. Before the close of the 1950s, interreligious dialogue was well underway within the life and work of the World Council of Churches (WCC) and a parallel mood was emerging within the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).

Paul Devanandan, a keynote speaker at the 1961 WCC Assembly, affirmed other faiths as manifesting authentic responses to the creative activity of the Holy Spirit: "The only alternative is to confess either the Christian ignorance of God's ways with people or the Christian blindness in refusing to believe in God's redemptive work with people of other faiths" (as cited in Thomas, 1987, p. 89). The conjoining of the International Missionary Council with the WCC in 1961 marked a critical juncture for the ecumenical movement, for it reinforced the primacy of evangelical witness: the chief task of ecumenical Christianity, vis-à-vis other religions, was then understood to consist in the witness to the truth of Christianity, not to engage in dialogue *about* religious life and truth. Nevertheless, dialogical interests and activities already underway could not be dismissed; indeed, the pace of dialogical engagement seemed to increase – as did the concerns and resistance of those opposed, or at least sceptical of it. And even as these ecumenical developments were taking place within the orbit of the WCC, the RCC had begun, in its own way, to join in this wider engagement of Christianity with peoples of other faiths.

Following the second Vatican Council (i.e. Vatican II: 1962–1965), the RCC accentuated the notion of the human being as *homo religiosus* on the one hand whilst, on the other, it acknowledged that the "history of religion (was) being interpreted theologically" such that "inter-religious dialogue (became) a discussion of salvation" (Hallencreutz, 1977, p. 20). The decrees and documents of Vatican II – most notably *Nostra Aetate* – that addressed relationships with other religions and the understanding of the place of those religions within a Catholic theological worldview marked the beginning of the Vatican's commitment to dialogical relationship with people of other faiths. Indeed, the opening up of the RCC to interreligious dialogue took place in the context of the "building of a dialogical church": the embracing of dialogue as a relational modality of practice was applied not only with respect to interaction with other religions but as part of wide-ranging ecclesial reform and development initiated by Vatican II (Hinze, 2006; Nolan, 2006).

The seminal *Nostra Aetate* (*NA*) gave succinct focus and clear direction: the former history of exclusivity and rejection was overturned in favour of acceptance and regard of other faiths. Critical recognition of the propensity of other religions to give evidence of the Divine at work within them – albeit in some limited fashion in contrast to that which obtains to Christianity, but nevertheless sufficient for such religions to reflect rays "of that truth which enlightens all" (*NA*, clause 5) – was forthcoming. The possibility of modalities of salvation obtaining within other, or at least some other, religions was also granted. *Lumen Gentium* (*LG*), which

preceded *NA*, affirmed that universality whereby all peoples are bound together in and through "the reconciling and in-drawing mission of the Catholic Church" (*LG* cl. 13). A further direct challenge – on the basis of the advocacy of religious liberty – to the previously prevailing ideology of religious exclusivism was given in *Dignitatis Humanae* (*DH*). Catholic thought in respect to other religions was undergoing significant development across a wide front.

Initial concern for a reappraisal of the relation of the Church to the Jews had featured in the thinking of Pope John XXIII who had convened the Second Vatican Council. But it was under the leadership of his successor, Paul VI, that significant innovations were undertaken. His 1964 encyclical, *Ecclesiam Suam* (*ES*), sounded a note of respect for "the moral and spiritual values" of other religions, advocating openness to them "and a willingness for practical dialogical engagement" (*ES*, cl. 107–108). In *ES* dialogue is seen as denoting "a whole new way of thinking, a way of seeing and reflecting on the world and its meaning" (Swidler, 1990, p. xi). As the work of – and in preparation for – engaging in interreligious dialogue got under way, a distinctive propaedeutical task emerged; that of creating the conditions necessary for dialogue properly speaking (cf. Humbertclaude, 1967). Later, for Pope John Paul II, the pre-eminent role of dialogue would be found in creating a greater unity and friendship among Christians and the followers of other religions: dialogue is a *modus vivendi et operandi* that applies to the Church's relations to the religious other – be that in the ecumenical realm of other Christians or the interreligious realm of other religions per se (cf. Orsuto, 2002). Certainly, dialogue was regarded as necessary in the quest for an improved, more just, free and humane world. This Pontiff was very much an advocate of the dialogues of life and action for whom "dialogue is a matter of acting, an attitude and a spirit which guides one's conduct" and which involves "concern, respect, and hospitality towards the other" (Gioia, 1997, p. 575). Meanwhile, the ecumenical rationale for interreligious dialogue was articulated in terms of

> God's concern for all: the divine love and salvific purpose is universal; human solidarity and human community, born of the *Imago Dei* motif, constitute a further basis for dialogue, as does the universality of the Christ who died for all and the eschatological expectation of the rule and reign of the Kingdom of God as fully encompassing of human diversity, including religion and culture. (Van der Bent, 1986, p. 46)

The purpose of dialogue was not just a matter of co-existence. A deeper theological relationality between Christians and people of other faiths was being sought: a Christian concern for a theology of religions that would embrace the question of God's plan for salvation for all – including those of other faiths – in contrast to engaging in dialogue with the intention, in the end, of incorporating the "other" into the Christian fold of faith as the sole efficacious means of obtaining salvation. So, by the late 1960s – and ever since – the global Christian Church, as represented by the WCC and the RCC, had become actively engaged in interreligious dialogue, both separately and, as it turned out increasingly to be the case, co-operatively. Of what did this latter consist?

The Vatican and the WCC: Ecumenical Co-operation

The Vatican and the WCC as equally, yet differently, meta-structures of Christian church life are quite dissimilar in form and ethos; they have different modes of authority and accountability. They each constitute a different sort of dialogical partner from the perspective of putative interlocutors from other religions. Their distinctive structures and forms of governance make for significant differences to their views of Christian interreligious dialogue. The centrality of the Holy See for Catholic engagement means that lines of authority and representation are strongly hierarchised; parameters of engagement are effectively set from the centre – the relative freedom of Orders of Religious to take their own initiatives notwithstanding. There is clear papal teaching and overarching Church policy to follow. Furthermore, unlike other Christian Churches and organisations, the RCC has, at its structural heart, the Vatican State which is engaged in formal diplomatic relations just like any other sovereign state, and so is subject thereby to the necessary demands of, and adjustments to, wider political considerations. By contrast, for the WCC, as an organ of the ecumenical movement, lines of authority and representation are subject to more diffuse bureaucratic processes in the attempt to maintain a complex set of ecclesial relationships in balance.

For the Catholic participant in interreligious dialogue the primary responsibility is to be cognisant of, and in effective submission to, the Magisterium of the Church; indeed, "No matter how fully open they may be to mutual understanding, they must never yield on any point of doctrine" (Sheard, 1987, p. 37). For WCC participants, however, a mixture of fidelity to denominational representative status and empathy to ecumenical emphases and considerations, which may sit in some degree of tension with each other, will prevail. There is no comparable central teaching or policy reference point. There is no ecumenical magisterium. Of course, this could be taken rather positively. Wesley Ariarajah, for instance, considers that "the WCC, with no theology of its own to protect or defend, was free to explore more boldly what it means to confess Jesus Christ in a religiously plural world" (Ariarajah, 2000, p. 173). This may have been the case in terms of workshops and discussions; the fact remains that it has not issued in any clear and authoritative ecumenical theology as such. Indeed, Ariarajah notes that openness to interfaith exploration was more the province of keen and alert individuals rather than the faith communities that make up the WCC as ". . .the churches themselves, by and large, were stuck with the theology that had been handed down in their specific tradition or of a particular interpretation of the Matthew 28 missionary mandate as non-negotiable" (Ariarajah, 2000, p. 172). Such policy and guidelines that have been produced by the WCC have been designed for the benefit of member churches in *their* interreligious engagements – should they be so inclined to make use of them. Whereas the Vatican may issue policy in expectation of compliance, the WCC is not able to do so. Further, it is not possible for all member churches of the WCC to be directly represented at any given WCC-sponsored interfaith event; hence officers of the WCC, necessarily mindful of that, must ensure that outcomes – by way of Statements, Messages and the like – are able to speak to the widest possible constituency. In the absence of

any clear and substantial ecumenical magisterium vis-à-vis interreligious engagement, WCC participants would seem to be at a distinct disadvantage in comparison to RCC participants.

In respect to the practicalities of ecumenical co-working, the Vatican and the WCC have had shared a history of co-operative activity since the 1960s in the area of interreligious affairs. The Roman Catholic Church is not – and in a technical theological sense cannot be – a member of the World Council of Churches. However, the Vatican has maintained close and cordial ecumenical relations with the WCC since the time of the Second Vatican Council: co-operation between them emerged strongly in the aftermath of that event. As early as 1965 a WCC/RCC Joint Working Group was established. Contacts, exchanges of information and invitations to share in each other's events have continued at different levels and across various functions and programmes, not the least of which has been in respect to interreligious dialogue and relations. Even as its own specifically mandated work was evolving, the ecumenical dimension of Christian interreligious dialogue was being experienced, and actively advanced, by the Vatican's Secretariat for Non Christians (SNC). The SNC had been created by Paul VI during the course of Vatican II. By the end of the 1980s its name was changed to "Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue" (PCID).

Throughout the 1970s there was evidence of a "rapid development" of the *aggiornamento* of the RCC, "and the growing interchange of views, on the question of dialogue as on so many others" between the RCC and the WCC (Hallencreutz, 1977, p. 33). In 1976 it was proposed that these two bodies, through their respective designated offices (the Vatican's PCID and the Dialogue Sub-Unit of the WCC), pursue "a process of mutual theological discussion" with a view to exploring

> their respective understandings of the nature and scope of dialogue and to look for possible common approaches. Given the asymmetry between the two bodies, and the differences that mark both their understanding and method of dialogue, this must be a priority in developing closer collaboration. (Joint Working Group, 1976)

Thus a decade after the collaboration of the WCC and RCC on the work of engaging other faiths began, three main reasons for this ecumenical co-operation could be discerned: for the sake of the world community; for the sake of the Christian community; and for the sake of common witness to the love of God in Christ. Plans to strengthen this avenue of collaborative relationship were laid: the momentum to attain an even closer and more meaningful degree of co-operative effort was growing. It was a living, ongoing exercise in inter-Christian dialogical relationship where the cultivation of inter-personal friendships played an important role. Although bureaucracies and institutional contexts were recognised as being quite different, close collaborative effort was advanced, especially in respect to addressing pastoral needs and issues arising out of the arena of interreligious dialogical engagement. In 1984 a Catholic observer noted a level of ecumenical theological rapprochement to attitudes of Vatican II which would have been unthinkable even at the outset of collaboration. But by 1986 it was noted that pressure of other work was hampering close co-operative activity (Sperber, 2000, p. 19). Nonetheless, at the time, Pope John Paul II stressed his support for interreligious dialogue and for

ecumenical co-operation in this regard. Joint staff meetings, alternating between Geneva and Rome, were held on an annual basis.

Collaborative studies and other growing ties also signalled a strengthening of ecumenical co-operation in respect to interreligious engagement and issues. By 1988 "the sustained relationship" between the Sub-unit and the Secretariat was affirmed within the WCC "as a model that other programmes should seek to emulate" (Director's Report, 1988, p. 3). Following reorganisation of the WCC in the early 1990s, the strengthening of the working relationship with the Vatican was placed high on the agenda priorities of the Office on Interreligious Relations (OIRR), which was newly constituted to replace the Dialogue Sub-Unit. Consequently, at the annual joint OIRR and PCID meeting in 1992, it was decided to undertake a combined study-exercise on two issues: interreligious prayer (Ucko, 1995) and interreligious marriage. The details of such co-operative engagements need not detain us; the important fact is that this ecumenical co-operation has been both evident and significant. Indeed, for the sake of an authentic ecumenicity in respect of Christian involvement in interfaith engagement, it is to be hoped that such co-operation will long continue. But the ecumenical dimension is not only a function of modalities of co-operation: in respect to the reasons whereby the Vatican and the WCC have become engaged in the interreligious dialogical enterprise there has also been an impressive complementarity, to which we now turn.

Rationales for Dialogue: Ecumenical Complementarity

Throughout the process of the development of interreligious dialogue, key basic theological rationales and endorsements have emerged and have been expressed as part of the overall apologia for dialogue. There are six in respect to the perspective of the WCC and ten – in two broad groups, viz., five of a somewhat general nature, and five more specifically doctrinal – with respect to the RCC. I would not wish to claim this is an exhaustive listing; only that these seem to stand out both in their own right and as illustrative of wider trends. And, of course, these trends are often intermingled in terms of their expression in official documents and allied pronouncements. In respect to the WCC, I identify the quest for community, the universality of God as Creator, the inclusive love of God, salvific universality in and through Christ, the motif of service, and responding to plurality as leading motifs of the ecumenical rationale for interreligious dialogue and interfaith engagement.

Quest for Community

The quest for community, in both localised and global senses, was an early reason offered in support of Christian engagement in interreligious dialogue; one which interlinked the dialogical modality to both other religions and ideologies, as well as connecting the dialogical dimension to other agenda elements of the overall work of the WCC. A necessary link between the Christian community and other faith

communities was clearly given in the promotion of "dialogue in community". The statement of theological basis of faith in the Triune God, who calls Christians to human relationship with their many neighbours, adds weight to this quest and so the rationale for dialogue. This relationship is marked by listening and speaking: in both attending to the other, and also bearing witness to self, are dialogue and proclamation properly and in a balanced way equally involved (cf. *Guidelines on Dialogue with People of Living Faiths and Ideologies*, 1979).

Universal Creator

The motif of the One Creator responsible for the creation in all its fullness and diversity can also be said to be a consistently advanced element of theological rationale for dialogue: all are equally creatures of the same Creator. Wesley Ariarajah, in articulating a WCC perspective, once outlined "a potential framework for the development of a theology of and for dialogue" in which the motifs of God as Creator and Sustainer were to the fore (Ariarajah, 1990). On the one hand, "the whole of human life subsists in God's being"; on the other, "the destiny of all is also in God": both are crucial theological motifs. The assertion that "God as creator of all is present and active in the plurality of religions" is understood to lead inexorably to the inconceivability "that God's saving activity could be confined to any one continent, cultural type, or groups of peoples" (Ariarajah). The singularity of creation and the salvific universality of the Creator are drawn upon, implicitly at least, as part of the supporting rationale for interreligious dialogue.

The Inclusive Love of God

The ecumenical rationale for interreligious dialogue has been often articulated in terms of the idea of the encompassing love of God (*My Neighbour's Faith*, 1987). It is a logical corollary of the Creator motif, yet the two are not identical. As Van der Bent (1986) remarked, this impetus and rationale for interreligious dialogue is very much an expression of "God's concern for all: the divine love and salvific purpose is universal" (p. 46). This love is of universal scope; all are included. It comprises the greatest challenge to Christian praxis for, in terms of applied values, even that which is deemed "enemy" is subject to the commandment to "love neighbour".

Salvific Universality in and Through Christ

The purpose of dialogue is not just a matter of co-existence. A deeper theological relationality between Christians and people of other faiths has been sought: a Christian concern for a theology of religions that would embrace the question of God's plan for salvation for all – including those of other faiths – in contrast to engaging in dialogue with the intention, in the end, of simply incorporating the

"other" into the fold of Christian faith as the sole efficacious means of obtaining salvation. In this regard, "the universality of the Christ who died for all", together with "the eschatological expectation of the rule and reign of the Kingdom of God as fully encompassing of human diversity, including religion and culture" yields a further basis for interreligious dialogue (Van der Bent, 1986, p. 46).

Diaconal Imperative

Following the 1991 Assembly of the WCC there was a distinct shift in the rationale for interreligious dialogical work: the fostering of relations took precedence over critical theological reflection and even dialogical engagement (although these did continue). A focus on pragmatic benefits, especially in respect to situations of conflict, came very much to the fore. The Central Committee asserted the role of the Church in seeking resolution to situations of conflict by way of recourse to interreligious dialogue, especially when such conflicts possess inter-confessional or interreligious dimensions (Kinnamon, 1991). The effect of this was deeply felt by the OIRR: interreligious dialogue was seen as a tool to be applied to the goal of conflict-resolution and peace-making. The lead rationale for engagement in interreligious dialogue had become, in essence, diaconal: dialogue is in the service of a greater end – whether in terms of community or in the cause of evangelical mission. The former, more pragmatic, arena of service was given graphic exemplification by a 1994 interreligious team visit to Fiji, organised through the OIRR (Ucko, 1994). Apart from the specific outcomes achieved, it was observed that the success of such a visit, "comprised of people of different faiths, travelling and working together, having the same objective in mind as a common agenda", could well provide a model of interreligious co-operative work for the future (*From Canberra to Harare: OIRR Report*, 1997, p. 6). The promotion of better inter-communal relations as a fundamental rationale for dialogue is here exemplified: the diaconal motive of dialogue concretely enacted.

Responding to Plurality

It is quite clear that the context of religious plurality, and with that the issue of religious pluralism as a paradigm for comprehending and dealing with diversity, has been a longstanding component in the overall rationale for dialogue even as it is also a continuing issue within, and as a consequence of, dialogue (Ucko, 2005). In a 2003 report, the WCC Moderator noted two contemporary general features of religion: that in respect to the relationship between religion and politics, religion continues to be both a "transforming and destabilizing force"; and that the very plurality of religion is viewed as "a source of fear and hope" (*Report of the Moderator*, 2003, p. 1). Syncretism, fundamentalism and pluralism were identified as key issues seen to lie behind and within the many contexts of contemporary social difficulties. Yet the Moderator was clear in his assertion that the "ecumenical vision embraces

the whole of humanity, including other religions", and he reiterated the commitment of the WCC "to foster dialogue and cooperation with people of other faiths in order to build viable human communities" (p. 2). The broader context of, and rationale for, interreligious dialogical engagement is, at least in part, one of the maintenance and promotion of human community in a context of increasingly polarised religious plurality. And in that regard the Moderator was unequivocal in asserting the ecumenical priority of dialogue with other religions. Religious plurality – or the context of multi-faith diversity as the now virtually normative *sitz-im-leben* of contemporary Christianity – continues as a principal element justifying the interreligious dialogical imperative by way of responding appropriately to that plurality.

In respect to the advocacy of interreligious dialogue with regards to the RCC, the first five more general theological elements include advocacy of societal good; the quest for community; the religious impulse for deity; theological anthropology; and the implication of belief in God as Creator.

The Pursuit of Social Good

For Paul VI, a key theological motive for dialogue was the fact of the divine love towards humanity (*ES; EN*). This was given succinct expression on the occasion of a visit to India in 1964 (Gioia, 1997, pp. 125–128). From the inception of the apostolate of interreligious dialogue its fundamental purpose was advocated in terms of the social good of humanity. The corollary requirement was that of mutual learning, and an intentional interfaith engagement, at many levels. In turn, this was understood to issue in pragmatic action in respect to fundamental purpose: thus interreligious dialogue, at the very least, serves the cause of social justice and healthy community relations.

Quest for Human Community

For John Paul II, dialogue was regarded as the modality par excellence for engaging in the quest for improved human community: the engendering of mutual respect; the tackling together of common human problems; promoting the socio-political task of nation-building (*RH; Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, 1994). Dialogue neither supplants mission nor promotes any notion of pluralist relativism. Instead, in recognizing truths and virtues of or within other religions, a platform could be established which enables the Christian and the person of another faith to advance together towards the true, the beautiful and the good – indeed, towards God (Humbertclaude, 1969). Pope John Paul II advocated "a truly dialogical relationship where both sides give and both receive"; where the "beliefs and the moral values of the followers of other religions can and should challenge Christians to respond more fully and generously to the demands of their own Christian faith" (*Recognize the Spiritual Bonds*, 1994, p. 14). It is in the special events of the prayer for world peace at Assisi in 1986, for example, that this rationale is clearly enacted: by papal invitation, a gathering

together of religious leaders in order, not to pray together, but rather together, each in the full integrity of their own religious praxis, to pray for the cause of world peace and, *inter alia*, promote harmonious interfaith and so inter-communal relations.

Human Seeking for the Divine

The new *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, issued in 1992, gave a broad rationale for interreligious dialogue premised on notions of the innate human hunger for relationship with the Divine: the universality and commonality of the inherent human quest found within the variety of religions throughout history. Religions which embody such a quest for and awareness of God are to be recognized by the Church. This wider theological rationale is found also in the 1993 encyclical *Veritatis Splendor* (*VS*) which refers to the motif of the "Seed of the Word" together with a universal "moral sense" as being present within the diversity of human cultures and religions found throughout the entire world, so undergirding the authenticity of the innate human quest for the Divine. This also allows for a measure of validity and veracity appropriately attributable to the non-Christian religions, and so provides a further basis on which to pursue dialogue.

Theological Anthropology

Pope John Paul II often situated interreligious dialogue within the context of the relation between humanity and God. Being open to the other in dialogue is a modality of being open to the God who is present in, with and through the other. This anthropological rationale, which is given expression within a number of documents of Vatican II, and subsequently in papal teaching and other curial documents, means that each person "grows by encountering and sharing with others" whereby seeking after truth "is better attained, understood, and lived through encounter, and by it even one's own faith can be purified and deepened" (Zago, 1984, p. 267). Together with being underscored by the theological anthropology of the likes of Karl Rahner, the anthropological foundations of interreligious dialogue in respect to the deepening and enriching of faith, together with the humanising and improving elements of social interaction, also play a key part (Jukko, 2007). Indeed, theological anthropology emerges as central in many of the documents produced by the Vatican's dicastery on dialogue.

Universal Creator

The affirmation of the unity of the human race as a creation of God is another oft-repeated theological rationale for dialogue. Most typically, it is accompanied by the specifically Christocentric and exclusive affirmation that it is only in and through Christ that the fullness of the religious life can be found. Yet there is also an inclusive dimension: all of humanity shares a common divine origin and eschatological

orientation (Arinze, 1987). Either way, however, it is the implication of belief in the universality of the redeeming Creator that can be said to be a distinctive theological rationale for dialogue. This rationale is held in common with the WCC, of course.

The above five elements are, arguably, directly complementary to the central themes identified in respect to the WCC. However, they are augmented by five other reasons for engaging in interreligious dialogue, which are more directly or specifically of a doctrinal nature, namely the Trinity, salvific ecclesiology, ecclesial imperatives, a pneumatological implicate and a soteriological imperative. Thus the rationale for dialogical engagement with other faiths is further underpinned and extended from the RCC perspective. And these rationales contribute also to a deepening of the wider overall ecumenical Christian approach to interreligious dialogue and interfaith engagement.

Trinitarian Belief

The seminal 1984 document, *The Attitude of the Church toward Followers of Other Religions* (*ACTFOR*) was a major source of reflection on dialogue and mission (Gioia, 1997, pp. 566–579). The principal reason to engage in interreligious dialogue is because of belief in God as Trinity: the universality and encompassing pervasiveness of the love of God the Father; the enlightening Word and Wisdom given in and through God the Son; and the regenerative life-giving Spirit that "acts in the depth of people's consciences and accompanies them on the secret path of hearts toward the truth" (*ACTFOR,* cl. 24). The "other" is not utterly other; the alterity of the other is also a theological point of connection. Dialogue is regarded as a genuine give-and-take of insight and understanding, and at the same time regarded as the opportunity for the Christian to offer to the other the opportunity of engaging with the Gospel and the values it represents.

Salvific Ecclesiology

Pope John Paul II was clear in his enunciation of *sine Ecclesia* (without the Church) there can be no salvation. Although somewhat softer than the earlier "outside the Church" (*extra Ecclesiam*) dogma, *sine Ecclesia* nevertheless continues to maintain a necessary link between salvation and the life of the Church per se: belonging to the Church, however implicitly or even mysteriously, remains as an essential condition for salvation in Catholic understanding. But ecclesial "catholicity" arguably refers to the universality of the body of Christ as such rather than to any denominational or institutional particularity. Nevertheless, it is the view of the RCC that *it* most fully represents and manifests the Universal Church, the Body of Christ. The Church is regarded as the universal sacrament of salvation through which the kingdom of God is made present. The Church is not to be identified with this Kingdom, ontologically; rather the Church is spoken of as "a pilgrim community, ever moving into the fullness of divine truth" (*DP* cl. 37). Thus dialogue with the "other" and salvific Christian proclamation to the other are meant to co-exist without confusion or mutual detraction in the context of a salvific ecclesiology.

Ecclesial Imperatives

Distinctive ecclesiological reasons for engaging in dialogue have also been advanced by the RCC, in particular with regards to the situation of a minority Christian community set within a majority non-Christian religious environment; and also with respect to the demands and challenges of appropriate inculturation (Jukko, 2007). It is the Church which is itself "the sacrament of salvation, the sacrament of the Kingdom of God"; although, because the action of God "is not bound to the sacraments", it is possible that "the grace of the Kingdom can be found outside the visible Church": the Kingdom of God "is wider than the boundaries of the visible Church" (Fitzgerald, 1988, p. 119). Thus the Church is the unique focus and vehicle of that universal Divine Reality she serves; at the same time, as this Reality is itself greater than the institutional church, allowance can be made for "the other" to sit, as it were, alongside the Church; for the "other" is likewise included already within the all-encompassing embrace of the Divine Reality.

Pneumatological Implication

A pneumatological dimension to the rationale for dialogue was introduced by the 1990 encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (*RM*). Affirming the ubiquitous efficacy of the Holy Spirit, understood to be at the very heart of being human, this dimension involved respecting the human quest for answers to deep questions together with an affirmation of the universal empowering and motivating action of the Spirit within human existence. This amounted to a deepening of the longstanding inclusivist perspective wherein all of humanity is viewed as subject to the will and work of divine salvific intention mediated through the dominical means of grace: the Church and its sacramental presence within the world. Both are implicates, or outcomes, of the work of the Spirit.

Soteriological Imperative

Finally, Catholic commitment to dialogue may be understood as a practice and a perspective which is "not merely anthropological but primarily theological" in the sense that it is irreducibly soteriological: "God, in an age-long dialogue, has offered and continues to offer salvation to humankind. In faithfulness to the divine initiative, the Church too must enter into a dialogue of salvation with all" (*DP*, cl. 38). John Paul II declared that, with respect to "the economy of salvation, the Church sees no conflict between proclaiming Christ and engaging in interreligious dialogue" (*RM*, cl. 55). These two elements, which are essential to the overall task of mission, are distinct and non-interchangeable, but are symbiotically and necessarily interconnected. Interreligious dialogue "is witness to Christ. It is dialogue of salvation; it is part of the total mission of the Church" (Arinze, 1987, p. 256). Dialogue is not just juxtaposed with proclamation; it serves, in the end, the greater cause of Christian witness. As Hinze remarks, in Catholic teaching, dialogue "is viewed as

distinct from missionary activity and evangelization, but it can pave the way for both" (2006, p. 2).

In this regard, the significant *Dialogue and Proclamation* (*DP*) document stressed the integral link between the Church's universal mission and the task of interreligious dialogue: dialogue accompanies mission on account of the soteriological imperative of the gospel. The independence and integrity of dialogue may be reasserted, but the context remains always that of mission. Arguably, interreligious dialogue in official Catholic thought is an element of, not an alternative activity alongside, the Church's salvific mission. And a significant 1993 theological colloquium, with some participation from the WCC, focused on ecclesiology along with Christology and the theology of religions, having the further aim of highlighting the theology which underpins "the apostolate of interreligious dialogue" (Arinze, 1994, p. 5).

Although the above reasons for engaging in interreligious dialogue are distinctive to Catholic theology, they yield unmistakable evidence of a considerable measure of ecumenical complementarity in respect to the theological underpinnings of dialogue. A 1967 consultation, for instance, which brought the WCC and RCC together around the table of ecumenical discussions on interreligious dialogue per se, was an occasion of both ecclesial and theological complementarity: on the one hand, the RCC in denoting the relation of the Church and other faiths in terms of the distinction of "extraordinary" and "ordinary" ways of salvation; on the other, the WCC in its clear focus on "common humanity" as the determinant for dialogue (Hallencreutz, 1977). *Prima facie* it would seem that the theological work emanating from the Vatican side of ecumenical co-operation echoes and extends the thinking to have come out of the WCC. I suggest that, together and complementarily, they provide something of a wider ecumenical template in respect to interfaith engagement both theoretically and in terms of practice.

From this analysis and discussion of the rationales for interreligious dialogue that have informed the actions of the Christian Church in recent times, we move now to a brief exploration of the models of dialogical engagement which have been employed. Once again, we will see something of a wider ecumenical complementarity at work. It is significant that, at the official level of policy pronouncements and practical guidelines the WCC and the Vatican, if not speaking with one voice exactly, are certainly singing from the same hymn-sheet.

Models of Dialogue: Ecumenical Compatibility

WCC Models

Three models of dialogue can be said to apply to the interreligious activities of the WCC. I identify these as systemic, communitarian and relational. The first – *systemic* dialogue – refers to the notion of dialogue as a discursive interaction between

faith-systems, mediated through the meeting of minds. This is the arena of discussion, enquiry and debate undertaken by representative experts. In some ways it encapsulates the classic understanding of what dialogue is about: an intellectual exercise and quest. Although it was perhaps one of the earlier models employed, it was relatively quickly eschewed by the WCC in favour of the communitarian and relational models on the basis that dialogue is primarily an inter-personal engagement. Indeed, inter-systemic dialogue was dismissed as an abstract arid exercise, effectively the antithesis of genuine dialogue – for this dialogue was understood to be primarily, if not solely, an experience of communal and personal engagement; a meeting of persons of different faiths, set within a context of community interaction. Thus, the second model, *communitarian*, emerged very much in the context of the community-seeking rationale for dialogue: dialogical engagement as a modality of community-building per se; an inter-personal exercise where the agenda was of a social-enhancing nature – the quest for peace, the promotion of harmony, the agitation for justice, the combating of social ills and so on. The third, *relational*, model is enacted where dialogue is promoted on an educational basis, or for broadly educational reasons: mutual enrichment, deepened understanding, combating ignorance and prejudice; together with the aim of building inter-personal relations of goodwill, especially among leadership personnel.

Whilst it is clear that the latter two models have been dominant since the 1970s, with perhaps the communitarian as the predominant one even so, it is arguably the dismissal of the systemic model which has contributed to problems encountered in respect to addressing theological issues that appear, in turn, to have dogged the work of the WCC towards the end of the twentieth century. In the early 1990s this was seen particularly in the severing of theological reflection and engagement from the work of the OIRR which had been charged with the promotion of interreligious relationships independently of related theological work. This approach governed – and arguably hobbled – much of what then occurred. Nevertheless, interreligious dialogue remains a stated priority for the WCC, and it would seem pressing theological questions are again able to be taken up. This has been underscored by the outcomes of the 2006 WCC Assembly. Perhaps there is a new opportunity to recover the systemic model and interweave that quite intentionally into the other two. In so doing, dialogical discourse would play a proper role supportive of, and extending, the wider field of interfaith engagement.

Vatican Models

It was primarily through RCC developments that the now-standard fourfold "LAED" (Life, Action, Experience and Discourse) model for dialogical engagement was articulated. As well, other distinctive models may also be discerned. The RCC, through the Vatican State, engages in formal diplomatic relations. As an official Vatican organisation, the contacts which the PCID has with the world of interfaith communities tend to be at high social and/or governmental level. The dialogue in

which it is engaged is often a dialogue between leaders. At the same time, the task of interreligious dialogue is a work of the Church at large, supported and nurtured by the Vatican, in particular through its interreligious dicastery to which has been given "the apostolate of promoting dialogue with the followers of other religions. . . and contributing to the formation of people who engage in interreligious dialogue" (Arinze, 1993, p. 17). And wherever there is dialogue, there is also proclamation: the mission of salvific announcement forms the default horizon within which, for the most part, dialogical engagements take place. Therefore, three distinct and mutually interactive models of interreligious dialogical engagement may be identified: ambassadorial, propaedeutic and humanitarian. These may also be seen to mark emphases or stages, or denote types, of dialogical engagement.

In the first place can be found *ambassadorial* dialogue for, as noted, the Vatican is itself a sovereign state with all the diplomatic responsibilities and relationships that pertain thereto. This is not to be underestimated. It influences the means of engagement and relating to any "other" as such. Many countries have ambassadors accredited to the Holy See, and in turn the Vatican has ambassadorial representation and relationships around the globe. So it should not be surprising that this modality of relationship is found to the fore in respect of interreligious relations. In many situations, of course, State and religious relations coincide. A mark of the ambassadorial mode is that steps are taken to maintain long-term relationships: specific dialogical events may be themselves ad hoc, infrequent and irregular, but the relationship between dialogical parties can be nurtured over time nonetheless. The annual goodwill message to Muslims throughout the world during the fasting month of Ramadan may serve as an example. Over the years there has been a steady increase in reciprocal greetings "and expressions of gratitude" by way of response (Arinze, 1997, p. 29).

Since 1995 similar annual messages have been sent to Hindus, in respect of *Diwali*, and to Buddhists on the occasion of *Vesakh*. In the ambassadorial mode of dialogical relationship there is – or at least there is a presumption of – an encounter of equals; the establishment and maintenance of cordial and functional working relations is the order of the day. In this context the undergirding task is the patient and mutual self-presentation of one side to the other in the interest of fostering mutual authentic knowledge and respect. Within the context of interreligious relations the ambassadorial mode is a way of relating that requires clear assertion of identity: Vatican representatives know what it is, and who it is, they represent; Catholic interlocutors in dialogue are unmistakably clear in their Christian identity and concomitant assertions concerning the nature of ultimate reality. Ambassadorial dialogue is the implicit precondition for any dialogue of action: co-operative ventures require, in the first place, a context of mutual respect and functional communication.

The second, the *propaedeutic* model, refers to the style or dimension of interreligious engagement that goes beyond the presenting of credentials to the careful explanation of the self to the other as a means of preparing the ground for further development and deepening of relationship. This allows for mutual invitation and responsive engagement. As with the ambassadorial model, it is premised on the reciprocities and protocols of the host–guest relationship paradigm. Inherent in

this model is the fact that much careful attention is paid to identity explanation. It involves articulating an apologia and bearing clear witness, rather than simply engaging in informative self-presentation. Pains are taken to assert and explain what it means to be Christian – indeed, to be Catholic – in the context of this dimension of engagement. References to it abound with the language of "proclamation", "mission" or "outreach". It is spoken in terms of a clearing of the way for appropriate evangelical "invitation and witness". In this regard Cardinal Francis Arinze, then President of PCID, spoke of a "conversion" that is concomitant to, if not inherent within, interreligious dialogue. There is, he wrote,

> a sense in which we can rightly speak of conversion as a needed mental state and as a result of dialogue. It is the sense of greater conversion to God. Every believer who meets other believers in interreligious contact should strive to be more and more open to the action of God. God can speak to us through our encounter with other believers. Such can become occasions in which we are challenged to become more faithful to the deeper calls of our faith. (Arinze, 1997, p. 41)

Arinze would hold, however, that religion "should be proposed, not imposed". The propaedeutic dialogue model is undoubtedly a valid form of interreligious engagement, one that is premised on both respecting the integrity of the "other" and upholding one's own assertions and truth references. However, it is difficult to see how a genuine mutual dialogue of discourse might proceed in this context; rather it would seem effectively excluded, or at least severely delimited.

The third "Vatican model" is that of *humanitarian* dialogue. This is found, in particular, in terms of the dialogue of action, where engagement is not so much in attending to issues of identity, relationship and understanding – such as would be expected in the context of dialogues of discourse and religious experience, and implied even within the dialogue of life – but rather a coming together of two or more parties in the quest for a common goal, or the commitment to joint action for the greater good of the human community, whether in a local or wider context (Hensman, 1999). Such dialogue, more particularly, is an expression of the local or regional church in action. But a number of PCID-sponsored dialogues, such as conferences on Jerusalem, or on the Middle East more generally, have focussed on socio-political issues and allied humanitarian concerns and questions of justice, human rights, freedom and so on. The humanitarian model stands alongside, and may even intertwine with, the propaedeutic and ambassadorial models.

Conclusion

From relatively tentative beginnings early in the twentieth century to the smorgasbord of activities that now occur under the umbrella of interfaith action around the globe, the Christian Church has been at the forefront. The ecumenical initiatives that prefigured then became a feature of the World Council of Churches were conjoined, from the 1960s, by developments within the Catholic Church that flowed from Vatican II. We have sketched these initiatives and developments and noted the

high level of co-operation that exists which speaks volumes of the ecumenical context and high intentionality of the Church in regards to dialogue with other faiths and their followers. In particular we have identified some predominant theological reasons why the Christian Church has become involved in interfaith action, together with the key dialogical models that have pertained.

Interreligious dialogue – or interfaith engagement more broadly – is of critical importance in the world of the twenty-first century. In an article arising from the ninth Assembly of the WCC, held in February 2006, ecumenical journalist Mark Woods summarised the contemporary perspective on interreligious dialogue. It is, he said,

> now recognized as one of the most pressing needs of our time. In addition to the theological issues arising from the shrinking of the world and the ever more porous boundaries between communities, religion has become an increasingly significant component in inter-communal relations. Faith can make things better, or it can make them a great deal worse.

This "pressing need" has, in fact, been the subject of intense activity and reflection by the Christian Church for half a century and more, as we have seen. The development and promotion of dialogical engagement through various initiatives involving the WCC and the Vatican have been of critical importance. Although Christian involvement in interreligious dialogue and interfaith activities can never be taken for granted in any given local situation, clearly the context for such engagement – historically and theologically – is well-established. Sometimes Christians themselves need to be reminded of these things. And for potential dialogical interlocutors, or prospective partners in interfaith ventures, it can be helpful to know that Christian involvement is not premised on a passing liberal fad. The Church, ecumenically – inclusive of both the WCC and the RCC – continues to wrestle with the implications for self-understanding and the outworking of its identity and mission of the commitment to engage in interfaith relations and interreligious dialogue. But, as this chapter has endeavoured to demonstrate, the commitment itself is in no doubt. And if today universally significant values, such as peaceful living and compassionate concern – as espoused by virtually all religions – are compromised by the juxtaposition of religious jingoism with political hegemony, the advent of a dialogical age means that, as never before, religions and their peoples have an opportunity to make good on shared values for the benefit of all. Nevertheless, as ever, wars and rumours of war abound; religiously motivated terrorism has become a feature of our age: faith can make things worse. Yet people of different religions, in pursuit of dialogical relationship one with another, nowadays have the possibility of transcending past histories of combative clash in favour of a future marked increasingly by co-operative engagement: faith can make things better. At least that is the hope, even if the reality of everyday existence is yet to match. And such hope is engendered by a profound change wrought by the positive possibilities of interfaith dialogical engagement, possibilities that the Christian Church has warmly and actively embraced, both at the formal global level and in the many regional and local arenas, which have their own story to tell.

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